

LEARNING TO BE: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE IDENTITY MAKING AND
CURRICULUM MAKING OF INDIVIDUALS POSITIONED BY DOMINANT STORIES OF
GENDER AND SEXUALITY

By

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Abstract

This narrative inquiry explores the composition of diverse stories to live by, a narrative conception of identity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), of four participants positioned by social and familial understandings of gender and sexuality. The research, conducted over an 18-month period, told of multiple and diverse stories around gender and sexuality and the shaping influences of relationships and context for educative experience (Dewey, 1938/1997). Drawing on a view of curriculum as a course of life (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992), this inquiry sought to better understand the complexities of identity making in the process of curriculum making (Schwab, 1969). Research literature on individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality in schools are bounded by simplex categorical understandings of gender and sexuality and are focused on the negative experiences and consequences for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) youth in heteronormative contexts. However, these studies have provided little understanding for the complexities of diverse identities around gender and sexuality and the varied experiences that lead to the composition of diverse identities around gender and sexuality. Through the inquiry, several narrative threads emerged; diverse stories to live by around gender and sexuality are: (a) complex, multiple, and diverse; (b) negotiated through social dominant stories of gender and sexuality; (c) shaped by context; (d) negotiated through relationship; and (e) interwoven and nested with the stories of others.

Keywords: narrative inquiry, experience, identity, curriculum, gender, sexuality

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Chapter 1

Narrative Beginnings

Having just returned from lunch, I instructed my students to work on their innovation day proposals. Innovation day was a school-wide project that allowed each student the opportunity to develop a research plan to explore any subject of their choosing for an entire day of school. With only one month left of the school year, I felt like I had come to know Lee¹ fairly well; I was surprised and excited to see Lee eagerly working on his project.

Lee had struggled with schoolwork throughout his fifth-grade year, consistent with his previous teachers' reports. It seemed to me that Lee had little self-confidence in his learning and thinking abilities. Lee often chose to distract himself with social concerns, but that strategy did not seem to work well for him. Lee did not generally relate well with his peers. He often antagonized other students by making disparaging remarks or distracting them during work time. When his classmates would respond negatively, Lee tended to escalate his efforts.

Other tensions emerged for Lee that school year. Only a month prior, I noticed that Lee looked a bit different from how he had normally presented himself. There were protrusions from his chest area, and he seemed to be adjusting straps on his shoulders; I was unsure, but I suspected that Lee was wearing a bra. I chose not address the issue with him directly because I did not want to make assumptions about the situation, and if he were wearing women's undergarments at school, I did not want to embarrass Lee. However, later that day, my speculations were confirmed when another student announced to me during recess that Lee had indeed worn his mother's bra to school. For me, at that time, Lee's life had become a distraction

¹ Throughout this text, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of people and places.

from the formal school curriculum. I hadn't yet come to understand or value the ways Lee was making meaning of his own life and experience.

This event had begun to fade in my mind as I tried to refocus Lee's and my own attention on the standards-aligned intended learning outcomes that constituted school-based learning. I was pleased to see Lee's interest in learning through his innovation day proposal, perhaps because I felt like he was finally being attentive to academic activities. I believed that if Lee could find something that interested him, he would be motivated to put forth the effort needed to learn the objectives and standards developed by well-learned persons, curriculum designers, and perhaps politicians. In my mind at that time, Lee, like every other student, needed to learn the concepts the state educational agency considered important. I realize now, though, that those who established the formal curriculum of Lee's schooling knew nothing of him or his unfolding life.

As I sat at the worktable in the front of the classroom, I invited students to share the ideas they were developing in their proposals. I could tell that Lee was working intently. When I called him over to the table to discuss his project, he eagerly accepted my invitation. Lee held out his work for me and announced that he wanted to research "beauty shops." Previously, the class had worked on business proposals as we studied economic concepts. My first inclination was to assume that Lee wanted to research starting a beauty shop business. He quickly corrected me, stating that he did not want to research a business, but rather, he wanted to learn to "do hair." Before I could formulate a verbal response (maybe I had already responded with my body), Lee continued, "Some people think it's weird for a boy to do hair." I did not respond to Lee's

suggestion, but told him that I was interested to see his finished project proposal. I sent Lee back to his seat to continue working. (Memory Reconstruction², Spring 2014)

Tensions emerged within my thinking around this experience as I replayed my conversation with Lee over in my head in hopes of making sense of it. I wondered why I had not responded differently (or at all) to Lee's suggestion that some might consider his desire to do hair to be weird. Although I did not see Lee's interests as strange, I wondered if my initial assumptions about his interests or my eventual lack of response reinforced dominant stories of gender and sexuality in his experience. I wondered if I, as an educator, had attended to Lee's learning, his attempts to make sense of the world and who he might be in it, and why my own stories of school and school stories³ (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) seemingly failed to account for Lee's learning beyond formal curricular expectations.

Dominant stories in education around standardization and achievement testing in the American public school context reverberated through my own stories of school. I taught, for the first two years of my teaching career, in underserved schools. Through the teacher preparation program in which I had been trained, I was taught that good teaching was regimented. With student achievement on standardized assessments as my goal, I learned to plan methodically and execute lessons that would lead students to master the content outlined by state educational standards. I was told that everything in the classroom must drive towards the classroom

² For me, the term *memory reconstruction* is used to signify a field text, reconstructed from memory, of an earlier event or situation.

³ Clandinin and Connelly (1995) made distinctions among the types of stories that shape the professional knowledge landscape. Teacher stories, they suggested, were the stories that individual teachers lived and told, while stories of teachers were the stories that were told by others about teachers. Likewise, school stories, they argued, were the stories of lived experience within a school context, but stories of school were the stories that others outside the specific school landscape about a particular school or schools in general.

achievement goals of passing the state assessments. In this paradigm, classroom management, student and familial relationships, and teacher planning and models of instruction were tools to be used in pursuit of student achievement on standardized assessments. These teaching stories and school stories shaped the stories I lived by⁴ as a teacher. I lived out my story of teaching as a manager, carefully executing objective aligned lessons and assessments and ordering classroom behavior so that students could most effectively meet mandated learning objectives.

Other stories I lived by around gender and sexuality and experiences at school surely shaped the way I perceived and responded to Lee. My elementary school colleagues and students, I can assume, knew that I identified as gay. Although I never talked about it directly with students or families, the notable absence of a wife or girlfriend, which seemed to be the norm for male teachers, signaled something was different. In my initial years of teaching, students started a rumor that I was gay, presumably because of the aforementioned clues. My response was to question the appropriateness of such questions for the classroom environment; we were there, after all, to learn. My stories of school did not allow for, Lee's life or my own. I interpreted Lee's words and practices through the lenses of my own experience. I wondered about the ways Lee was positioning himself around gender and sexuality at school but attempted to avoid the stories I understood Lee to be composing because I saw them as distractions from the pursuit of student achievement goals. I had learned that stories to live by around sexuality, at least those that are dissonant with dominant stories of sexuality, had no place in public. As Lee's and my own stories emerged in the classroom setting, they interrupted the dominant narratives for identity in our community and made it difficult for me to maintain a narrative with singular

⁴ Connelly and Clandinin (1999) used the narrative term *stories to live by* as a way to understand the connection between knowledge, context, and identity. In their conception, identity "is given meaning by the narrative understanding of knowledge and context" (p.4).

focus on student achievement on assessments. Undoubtedly, the stories I lived and told around school, teaching, and sexuality shaped my response or lack thereof to Lee.

Lee interrupted a dominant story of school for me, a story that “privileges the curriculum-as-plan” (Aoki, 1993, p. 257). “Curriculum-as-plan,” Aoki suggested, is work “imbued with the planners’ orientation to the world, which inevitably include their own interests and assumptions about ways of knowing and about how teachers and students are to be understood” (p. 258). The goals, methods, resources, and assessments detailed in these plans are meant “for faceless people, students shorn of their uniqueness or for all teachers, who become generalized entities often defined in terms of generalized performance roles” (p. 258). Lived curriculum, on the contrary, emerges from the “multiplicity” of student lives, a uniqueness that teachers come to know “from having lived daily life with” students (p. 258). I wondered why I, by attending to curriculum-as-plan, had chosen to see Lee from a detached perspective that stripped him of his particularities and uniqueness. Had I perpetuated dominant stories of schooling and helped write Lee’s story as one of disruption to the important matters of school?

As I considered Lee’s learning (and my own) around sexuality, Dewey (1938/1997) reminded me of my responsibility as a teacher to attend to the unique learning of students when he wrote,

He must, if he is an educator, be able to judge what attitudes are actually conducive to continued growth and what are detrimental. He must, in addition, have that sympathetic understanding of individuals as learners which gives him an idea of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning. (p. 39)

With Dewey's writings as a guide, I thought about the ways that learning and curriculum are much broader than formal curriculum in schools. I began to see that Lee's learning about himself and the world shaped the way he experienced school and learning formal curriculum.

I wondered what consequences my inattention to Lee's experience might bring; how might Lee's unfolding life and experience have shifted had I attended to what was actually going on in Lee's mind and what he needed for educative experiences? How might have my own stories to live by around sexuality have shifted if others had attended to my unfolding life? How had Lee had come to view his curiosities, affinities, and behavior as weird for a boy? How had Lee seemingly come to adopt dominant narratives for boy identity and see himself as weird? How had Lee's relationships and contexts been complicit in shaping an understanding of the world and him in it? Who did Lee see himself being and becoming? I certainly had never taught direct lessons about expected behaviors in our culture based on gender and sexuality, but this was the curriculum Lee had made.

A Research Puzzle Emerges

My stories of Lee led me to wonder about the experiences of others as they make curriculum around gender and sexuality. I wondered about the ways people and contexts create educative experiences so that I and other teachers could understand and attend to the unique learning and identities of our students. These thoughts have shaped my research puzzle and justification for the inquiry into the experiences across a life, in diverse contexts, around identity making for individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality and gender. More specifically, the primary purposes of this inquiry include the following:

- describe and understand the life stories of individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality and gender, including their accounts of the experiences that shaped their stories to live by around gender and sexuality;
- examine the shaping influences of personal, family, cultural, social, and institutional contexts for individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality and gender.

Additionally, there was one ancillary purpose for the inquiry:

- conceptualize experiences and identify influential people/relationships and places/context of individuals positioned differently by understandings of identity, sexuality and gender around identity formation.

One might suggest all individuals are positioned to some extent by dominant stories and understandings of gender and sexuality. However, throughout this text I refer to the participants as individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality to connote individuals whose stories to live by around gender and sexuality are dissonant with dominant stories and are thereby incongruously positioned (in relation to those individuals who compose stories to live by that are resonant with dominant stories of gender and sexuality) within communities and societies on the basis of those dissonant stories. I use this language intentionally to resist the reification of categorical understandings of gender and sexuality (e.g., cisgender, transgender, lesbian, gay, straight), in favor of a narrative understanding of identity making. Moreover, this language is a continual recognition of the ways these understandings of difference are socially constructed and composed.

A Path Forward

This inquiry began with my classroom experiences with a student. I wondered about his curriculum making in and out of school around gender and sexuality. I proceed by conceptualizing Lee's experience as learning through the work of Dewey and inquiry into my own experiences, which shaped my interest, perspective, and engagement in this research. Furthermore, I explore the stories around gender and sexuality that exist on our larger social and cultural contexts that might shape the stories others and I compose around gender and sexuality. I detail the methodological process I used to inquire into the narratives of individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality and gender; then, I present the consequent narrative accounts of the four participants: Olivia, Calle (cah-yey), Mr. CEO, and Jamie. Finally, I pull the emerging ideas from their stories together as I look across the narrative accounts for places of resonance.

Thinking about Experience as Education

The wonderings, which emerged from my experience with Lee, led me to reconceptualize my narrow understandings of curriculum and learning. Dewey's (1938/1997) theory of experience reframed my thinking around education. His theory is situated in a familiar educational context that emphasized the curriculum-as-plan (Aoki, 1993). He contended that under the guise that "education consists of bodies of information and of skills that have been worked out in the past; therefore, the chief business of the school is to transmit them to the new generation" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 17). Dewey critiqued learning in this manner, viewing "what is taught...as essentially static" (p.19). To the contrary, Dewey insisted, "that amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference; namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience" (p. 25). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reflected on the

connection Dewey described between education and personal experience when they wrote the following:

For Dewey, education, experience, and life are inextricably intertwined. When one asks what it means to study education, the answer—in its most general sense—is to study experience. Following Dewey, the study of education is the study of life—for example, the study of epiphanies, rituals, routines, metaphors, and everyday actions. We learn about education from thinking about life, and we learn about life thinking about education. This attention to experience and thinking about education as experience is a part of what educators do in schools. (pp. xxii-xxiv)

From this perspective, we might come to see curriculum similarly to Clandinin and Connelly (1992), “curriculum as a course of life” (p. 393).

Dewey (1938/1997) further described a framework for thinking about experience and education using the criteria: continuity, interaction, and situation. For Dewey, continuity meant that individual experiences could not be extracted from the continuum of experiences. That is to say, experience is always embedded in a life of experiences. Furthermore, he differentiated experience as educative or mis-educative in relationship to the subsequent experiences toward which our current experience moves. Dewey contended that educative experiences “create conditions for further growth” (p. 36). Mis-educative experiences are disconnected—the continuum interrupted; they have the “effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience (p. 25). I began to wonder about the experiences that led to my conversation that day. What people and interactions had helped compose his story as one of difference? I also wondered where this experience might lead for Lee; what stories of self and of school had I helped Lee write?

Dewey (1938/1997) described the criterion of interaction as the “interplay” (p. 42) of the objective or external conditions with the internal conditions of the learner. Dewey wrote, “...experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience” (p. 40). The people, objects, and community in which the learner is situated constitute these external conditions, or environment. Internal conditions, then, can be described as the feelings, dispositions, attitudes, desires, or needs of an individual. Reflecting on Dewey’s concept of interaction, I began to wonder about Lee’s external conditions at home, in the community, and at school. How had these environments shaped Lee’s perception of his own internal conditions as weird?

The final criterion of experience Dewey (1938/1997) described is that of situation. Dewey described situation in relationship to interaction when he wrote,

The conceptions of situation and interaction are inseparable from each other. An experience is always what it is because of transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment.... The environment, in other words, is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had. (pp. 43-44)

He conceived of living in a world to mean that people “live in a series of situations” (p.43). In other words, as individuals, we continuously interact with other people and objects—and we learn from these situations.

As I reflected on Dewey’s (1938/1997) epistemological and ontological argument for understanding experience as educational, I returned to my experience with Lee. I knew little about what was going on in Lee’s mind and even less about the environments in which he interacted at home and in the community. I began to wonder about his school environment; what

external conditions had I created for Lee in the classroom? I thought about my inattention to Lee's experience. I had never asked Lee about his prior experiences, but I could imagine a life full of people, relationships, places, and situations that were present during our short conversation. What have I, his parents, his school, and his community taught him about the world and about himself through the external conditions we have created in which he interacts? What will we continue to teach him? What will Lee continue to learn? As his teacher, I wondered how I might come to attend to and understand Lee's experience.

The Worlds I Carry with Me

My experiences and composition of stories to live by around sexuality have shaped the ways I think about Lee's and the inquiry participants' stories. Lugones (1987) helped me to think about the worlds I carry with me into this inquiry; she suggested world travelling as a metaphor (p. 3) for thinking about the complex ways experience is situated within context and the ways we understand ourselves differently within those contexts. She wrote,

A 'world' in my sense may be an actual society given its dominant culture's description and construction of life, including a construction of the relationships of production, of gender, race, etc. But a 'world' can also be such a society given a non-dominant construction.... As we will see it is problematic to say that these are all constructions of the same society. But they are different 'worlds.' Lugones, 1987, p. 10.

Lugones called to my attention the ways that my stories about others and myself shift in other worlds; through travelling, we "have the distinct experience of being different in different 'worlds' and of having the capacity to remember other 'worlds' and ourselves in them" (p. 11). Thinking narratively about Lugones' work, Huber (2008) suggested that through our "'world'-travel" we carry with us our stories of ourselves and others, saying that

As we “‘world’ –travel” across “worlds” we construct images of who we are and what we are about as well as images of who others are and what they are about. Carrying forward these images from across worlds, we gain understandings of ourselves, of others, and of the contexts we live in. (p. 6)

As I reflected on my conversation with Lee, I wondered about the stories I have carried and continue to carry with me as I travel to and through worlds. Thinking about Lee’s experience, I can’t help but wonder about my own experiences of being and becoming. How had my stories about the world and myself been shaped by my experiences? I thought about the “worlds” I had inhabited and the stories of others and myself I had constructed in those “worlds.” I began to think about a time and place, during my college experience in early adulthood where I became aware of my own composition of stories around sexuality and gender. Using the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as a framework, I intend to, like Huber (2008), “reconsider my narratives of experience and explore the stories I carried in me” into my shared context and interactions with Lee (p. 5). I began to think about the stories that existed on my landscapes and the ways these stories shape the stories I cling to about knowledge and being in that world. My mind was drawn to an experience that has shaped the ways I have composed my stories to live by around sexuality.

A Trip to the Bookstore

Even though I felt sure about who I was when I was twenty-one, there were desires that I did not understand but desperately wanted to figure out—or fix. Having grown up in a conservative home and church community, I understood the expectations. For university, I attended a small Christian Liberal Arts school with the motto: “Esse Quam Videri,” (to be, rather than to seem). As the student body president, I was well known to the students, faculty, and staff

from the various meetings and events we planned and attended together. It was to my surprise (read terror) that I might see one of them in this new world of desires I had begun to explore. Feeling rather curious one night, I built up the courage to visit an adult bookstore in a different part of the city. I feared being caught in such a place because the rules of my school forbade and punished immoral and unsavory activity; however, I did not really see this as a dangerous venture. No one that I knew would have been there; or, at least so I thought. Just as I entered the gay section, downstairs in the basement, I bumped into a man trying to go upstairs; this man worked at the university. We knew one another, having met several times because of various student government association events and I knew that he had children and had even previously met his wife.

In this present time and context, the situation seems quite comical to me—but it certainly did not for me at that time and context. I remember seeing his eyes widen and his face cringe; I am sure my reaction was something similar. I hoped if I kept walking, then he would not recognize me, but I knew that was ridiculous. I could see in his eyes that he was as scared as I, and that fear (if like mine) came from the understanding that our identities, as we knew them, were in danger; the cover stories that we held up around our secret stories allowed us to have jobs and go to school in that context may have come to an end (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Perhaps feeling similarly, saying nothing, and refusing to give a second glance, he stepped aside, continued walking, and left the store immediately. The next Monday, I saw him again in the cafeteria. He kindly waved and nodded as I passed, as he would in any other situation. We never spoke to one another again. (Memory Reconstruction, Winter 2015)

As I returned to this story, 14 years removed from the experience, I felt as though I were, as Lugones (1987) says, a world-traveler (p. 3) as I was traveling to a different time, a different

place, and a different life, that while my own experience seemed foreign. The feelings of shame and fear that so transfixed my mind at that moment on the stairs felt like a distant memory, almost as though I was telling someone else's story. Dyson (personal communication, February, 24, 2015) reminded me of the distance that can be felt between the present and the past through the words of Hartley (1953) in *The Go-Between*, "The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there" (p. 17).

In my recount of the experience, I made my way to a store in a different part of the city, to the basement. Clarke noted the geography of deviance expressed in the story (personal communication, February, 22, 2015), a place to keep what I saw as a shameful story of sexuality a secret. Sadly, at the time, this was the only story of sexuality I had. I had learned to publicly conform to the dominant stories of my landscapes, but there were consequences to the stories to live by I composed. I believed at that time that there was something wrong with me and that I was in some ways a deviant to the norm. It became necessary to continue to publicly compose stories of sexuality resonant with dominant stories and I attempted, unsuccessfully, to hold these dissonant stories in tension. I cannot change my experience, thoughts, or feelings of that time, but as I had access to new stories of sexuality and as I entered new contexts away from my family and college landscapes, I was able to make sense of my experiences differently and to compose new stories to live by around sexuality. My return to this story allowed me to think about the ways that I made sense of my life in that context and what I learned about myself and about the world through my experiences. I thought about my own experience around sexuality in new ways as I revisited my past stories. I began to see the ways I learned who I was and was becoming in the world as I negotiated the curriculum of my life.

Curriculum Making and Identity Making

Curriculum making and identity making are narrative terms used to understand the dynamic, relational, and on-going process of making meaning about people, things, contexts, and identity through experience. Using the work of Dewey (1938/1997) and Schwab (1969) to support their broadened understanding of curriculum, Connelly and Clandinin (1992) understood curriculum “as an account of teacher’s and children’s lives together in schools and in classrooms.... [In this view of curriculum making] ...teacher, learners, subject matter and milieu are in dynamic interaction (p. 392). As such, teachers were not seen solely curriculum makers, but a part of the process of curriculum making as we “imagine a place for contexts, culture (Dewey’s notion of interaction), and temporality (both past and future contained in Dewey’s notion of continuity)” (p. 365).

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) understood contexts in light of the complexities of lived experience, which shape and are shaped by context with the term “professional knowledge landscapes” (p. 4). They wrote,

A landscape metaphor is particularly well suited to our purpose. It allows us to talk about space, place, and time. Furthermore, it has a sense of expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships.

Understanding professional knowledge as comprising a landscape calls for a notion of professional knowledge as composed of a wide variety of people, places, and things.

Because we see the professional knowledge landscape as composed of relationships among people, places, and things, we see it both as an intellectual and moral landscape.

(pp. 4-5)

Many stories exist within the professional knowledge landscape. These multiple and diverse stories of people, places, and things on the professional knowledge landscape are composed by those both in and outside of that context. As Clandinin and Connelly (1996) considered their work on the school professional knowledge landscape, they began to make distinctions among the stories they heard as “teacher stories, stories of teachers, school stories, and stories of schools” (p. 25). Their thinking helped me to consider the ways that stories of experience (personal), situated in a context, exist among many other stories (familial, institutional, social, cultural) about people, places, and things within that context. These personal stories can be resonant or dissonant with the many other stories on the landscape.

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) found that the dominant stories within a school context shape the stories to live by composed by teachers. Teachers often composed secret stories because they were incongruent with the dominant story of school lived out in the school context. Their secret stories were told in safe places to safe people where teachers are “generally free from scrutiny...free to live their stories of practice” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25). In such a case, a teacher might compose a cover story to “maintain a sense of continuity with the dominant stories of school shaping a professional knowledge landscape” (Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Murray Orr, Pearce, & Steeves, 2006, p. 7). Concerning cover stories, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) wrote, “[c]over stories enable teachers whose stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practice and sustain their teacher stories” (p. 25). I contend that the same holds true for others.

As I considered these types of stories on school professional knowledge landscapes, I could see the ways these many types of stories emerged on my knowledge landscape at college; and I understood that my composition of stories to live by was shaped by my knowledge and

practice in that context. In this sense, I came to compose stories that reflected my understanding of a good and faithful student at my university. The dominant stories around gender and sexuality on the storied landscape of the university institution I attended necessitated the composition of this cover story. My personal stories and the sacred stories of the university were “conflicting stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 125). As Clandinin et al. (2006) suggested, “Conflicting stories are often short-lived as teachers are unable to sustain them in the face of the dominant stories of school” (p. 8). Upon enrolling, I was asked to sign a Christian conduct contract, which enabled the university to expel, refuse housing, or employment or leadership on campus if a student did not conform to Christian behavioral standards as determined by the denomination affiliation of the school. I knew that being gay in that context meant the end of my university and leadership experience in that place along with the embarrassment of being kicked out of school. In that context, I felt a deep conviction to seem, to compose, and live out a story incongruent with my personal experience, because being different from the dominant stories in that community was too costly. The school’s motto asked me to be rather than seem, although, offered only punishment for behaviors not fitting with their ideals of Christian living. I learned, in that school context, the beliefs and practices that were expected and so composed a life in accordance with the curriculum I made.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) wrote about the ways that the stories teachers told about their personal practical knowledge and their professional knowledge landscapes were “intimately woven into their stories of who they were and who they were becoming” (Clandinin, et al., 2006, p. 8). From their perspective, knowledge can be understood as “embodied, relational, temporally composed, and lived out in particular times and places” (Clandinin, et al., 2006, p. 5). Clandinin and Connelly (1995) described this “personal practical knowledge” as “that body of convictions

and meanings, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience (intimate, social, and traditions) and that are expressed in a person's practices" (p. 7). Personal practical knowledge can be understood as "a dialectic between the personal and social within an individual's life" (Clandinin, et al., 2006, p. 6) as we begin to understand the ways what we know and practice is shaped by the contexts in which we learn, know, and practice.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) developed the term "stories to live by" as a way to "understand how knowledge, context, and identity are linked and can be understood narratively" (p. 4). The stories we tell and live out are those stories that constitute who we story ourselves to be, our identity understood narratively. These stories are not static, but rather are continually shifting:

Teacher identity is understood as a unique embodiment of each teacher's stories to live by, stories shaped by knowledge composed on landscapes past and present in which a teacher lives and world. Stories to live by are multiple, fluid, and shifting, continuously composed and recomposed in the moment-to-moment living alongside children, families, administrators, and others, both on and off the school landscape. We do not wish to imply that teachers' stories to live by are floating or ungrounded or easily changed. Stories to live by are threaded by plotlines shaped by teachers' personal practical knowledge and the landscapes on which they live. Teachers' stories to live by offer possibilities for change through retelling and reliving stories. This retelling and reliving is a restorying that changes their stories to live by. (Clandinin, et al., 2006, p. 9)

Drawing on the work of Carr (1986), Connelly and Clandinin (1999) began to attend to the ways that teachers lived and told their narratives to make their experience coherent. As Carr (1986) noted, "[t]hings need to make sense" (p. 97). Teachers, Connelly and Clandinin (1999)

noted, work to construct and live up to the narratives they construct. Restorying, retelling, and reliving our experience becomes necessary as competing, conflicting, and even contradictory stories to live by come into tension (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Clandinin et al. (2006) wrote,

In reliving their stories, teachers may begin to imagine themselves in new ways and to change their practices, the ways they live in the world. As they gain deeper awareness of their stories to live by, they begin to shift those stories as they continue to go about their days. (p. 10)

I began to understand restorying in my own life when I inquired into my own experience expressed through narrative. A story, that once seemed so dark and shameful, now appears comical because my relationship to that experience shifted as I retold the story and relived the experience. Given the new experiences, relationships, and contexts I have encountered after that moment, I now understand my stories to live by differently. This inquiry led me to think about my shifting stories and the experiences and contexts, which enabled me to make sense of my stories to live by. My wonderings led me to a time when I began to compose my stories differently around gender and sexuality.

Upon completing college studies in Religion and Philosophy, I was awarded a full scholarship to a theological seminary in the religious denomination in which I had been raised. Still trying to make sense of the dissonant ontological stories of life, faith, and morality and the curriculum provided by my family and faith tradition and my own experience of desire and sexuality, I completed my degree in Christian Education at this seminary in the Midwestern United States and moved west to California to do further graduate work in theology outside of Los Angeles, California.

Although the graduate school I attended in California was generally in the same religious tradition as I had been raised and educated, many varying and diverse stories of being existed on this storied landscape. This school, like many parts of California, was comprised of multiple experiences and stories of race, ethnicity, nationality, language, and most surprisingly to me, at the time, sexuality. I remember being surprised as one of my theology professors told her own stories of tensions between faith and sexuality. Her remedy had been to change her religious affiliation to a denomination that accepted her relationship with another woman. At the same time, the school context we shared was open and supportive of her personal relationship. I remember feeling a great deal of tension upon hearing her story, her school story of acceptance conflicted with my story of school. My story of school required that I hide my stories to live by around gender and sexuality and tell cover stories more in line with the dominant stories of faith in that context. Hearing her stories of faith and sexuality began a process of open questioning and reflection in my life that I had never had space to imagine. Access to these new and diverse stories led me to reconsider the stories I lived by. I began to wonder if there could be a place for me to compose a diverse story of sexuality and still compose other stories to live by that I held dear, stories of faith, morality, and family.

In Southern California, I was asked to become a youth pastor for a local church of about 500 people. This church was situated within the religious denomination in which I had been raised and educated, which was conservative and Evangelical. I had been at the church for about a year and the youth group I led had grown to over 100 students. One Wednesday evening, one of the teenagers in my group, Mark, approached me and asked to talk to me privately. When we had arrived at my office, he explained that his mother had insisted that he come talk to me. Mark

explained that his mother had caught him engaging in sexual acts with another boy who had slept over.

Although I know there were only a few seconds that had passed after he had explained the situation, time seemed to stop in my head. My mind was flooded with ideas and questions that seemed never ending and my pulse began to pound. I understood the stories that the church for which I worked expected me to tell (I am imagining that Mark's mother assumed the same and that is why she sent him to me). I was supposed to tell Mark that he had sinned, but that God would forgive him and that he could overcome these feeling and desires if he would let God deal with them.

I also knew my own stories I had lived, secret and shameful stories of sexuality that led me to tell conflicting stories to live by. My own shifting stories of sexuality brought about by new knowledge landscapes led me to think about the ways that I might help this teenager compose new stories to live by not characterized by difference or shame, but of acceptance and love. In that moment, I told him that I too struggled holding tension between my stories of sexuality and faith. I explained that I didn't have any definite answers, but that I had been trying to make sense of these conflicting stories. Mark was the first person I ever told that I was gay. Knowing that I could no longer hold the conflicting stories in tension, I, soon after resigned my position as a youth pastor and discontinued my doctoral studies in theology. It took another year or so to tell the new story I was composing around gender and sexuality to my friends and family; however, the life I had composed, holding these dissonant stories in tension, became untenable (Memory Reconstruction, Spring 2015).

Lindemann Nelson (2001) helped me to think about the world in which I had been raised in terms of a "found" community, "the communities into which we are born and reared—

families, neighborhoods, nations” (p. 9). Lindemann Nelson understands found communities to be “constitutive of self-identity and the source of binding moral norms” (p. 9). The stories of my found religious community, for me, were accepted and unquestioned because they formed my ontological understanding of the world; I had no other stories or contexts through which to understand my experience or myself. As my curriculum-making worlds⁵ shifted, making, at least, some space for my stories of sexuality to be told, new communities or contexts of “choice” (Lindemann Nelson, 2001, p. 9) were made necessary. Communities of choice, according to Friedman (1992) are those toward which I gravitate based on my “own needs, desires, interests, values, and attractions, rather than...what is socially assigned, ascribed, expected, or demanded” (p. 94). These chosen communities create a context in which members can “relocate and renegotiate” identity (Friedman, 1992, p. 94). In reflection, my need to choose a different community or context to compose my story around gender and sexuality was necessitated because of my inability to sustain my story coherently in the context in which I lived. I wonder what my life might look like now had I been able to compose my story in my found community, in the curriculum making worlds in which I had been raised.

My thinking around my stories of Lee and the curriculum-making and identity-making experiences, relationships, and contexts that shaped the composition of my stories to live by around sexuality led me to wonder about curriculum making and identity making of others. More specifically, I began to consider the ways that communities and contexts shape the composition

⁵Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2012) noted the ways in which curriculum making is shaped by differing contexts. Through this work, they identified “two places of curriculum making: in the home/community and in the school (p. 139). As they returned to the work of Lugones (1987), they thought about children’s home and school lives as separate worlds; they wrote, “we see that not only are children’s worlds of familial and school curriculum making shaped by differing physical places but also by differing ways of being and interacting and, therefore, of knowing and knowledge” (p. 108).

of stories to live by of individuals positioned differently by dominant stories of gender and sexuality. I wondered how I might think about or perhaps imagine communities that allow for shifts in dominant stories around gender and sexuality and create open-ended curriculum-making places for the composition of stories to live by that are resonant with personal experiences rather than dominant stories. With these wonderings framing my thinking, I turn to the greater body of literature that situates this inquiry into the experience of individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality.

Chapter 2

Situating the Inquiry

As the inquiry proposal began to unfold, I attended to the current research pertinent to gender and sexuality in schools as a means of situating this inquiry in an existing body of literature. In my literature search, it became evident that research around gender and sexuality was constrained by categorical understandings of identity. Taken as a given, gender and sexuality categories were often described and studied in simple and finite ways. In this way, these dominant stories around gender and sexuality categories and the composition of identity for individuals in and through said categories have largely been left unexamined by the research literature. Moreover, I contend that the research being done around gender and sexuality in schools has served to further delineate individuals based on gender and sexual identity. Consequently, the research literature focus on difference about normalized identities around gender and sexuality has been manifest, in many ways, as a deficit-based understanding of gender and sexuality diversity. The research reflects this focus on deficits and inequality around gender and sexuality difference. Taken as a whole, I suggest that these deficit-based notions of difference shape the dominant stories around gender and sexuality diversity.

Framing the Literature Review

A difficult part of this literature review has been determining the literature, more specifically, the participants of the research, on which to focus. This literature as a whole, grounded in categories, constantly wrestled with what individuals or groups to include. Some studies focus solely on sexuality (e.g., gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons); others focus on diverse categories of gender (e.g., cisgender, transgender, intersex); and additional studies attempt to be inclusive of many other expressions of gender and sexuality (e.g., queer,

genderqueer, pansexual, questioning, etc.). All of these categories fail to encompass the breadth of those individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality. I have, throughout this inquiry, become more attentive to the ways that categories serve to silence complex understandings of identity; in this way, one story of identity becomes the only story by which people are understood and positioned by others.

The discursive composition of gender and sexual categories have become dominant stories through which many interpret identity (Butler, 2007; Foucault, 1990; Halperin, 1995; Jagose, 1996) and therefore shaped cultural understandings and scholarly discourse around gender and sexuality in schools (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). These understandings are reflected in recent research that has focused on school climate, school culture, and the educational, social, and emotional outcomes for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer (LGBTQ) students in those school environments (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks 2006; D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; O'Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub, 2004; Pascoe, 2007; Rivers & D'Augelli, 2001;). These studies relied heavily on gender and sexuality categories in order to see trends in American schools; they see experience in what Greene (1995) called “small” ways:

To see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviors from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life. (p. 10)

I argue that these categorical understandings of gender and sexual identity are inadequate and inappropriate for understanding the complexities of experience and identity making (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Minh-ha, 1989). Then, I argue for the use of narrative inquiry as a methodology in order “[t]o see things or people big” (Greene, 1995, p. 10). Greene argued that from this

perspective,

one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularly instead. One must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face.

When applied to schooling, the vision that sees things big brings us in close contact with details and with particularities that cannot be reduced to statistics or even the measurable. (p. 10)

In reflection, my thinking is drawn to the complex ways I want to be understood and seen as a person. My friends and family have many stories of me that add many nuances to the ways they understand me. Categorical understandings of identity (e.g., gay, straight, white, black, cisgender, transgender, etc.) carry with them dominant stories. Being gay, for me, carried with it many dominant stories of what it means to be a gay man, many of which do not resonate with my own experience. It is only people who have access to multiple and diverse stories of me, who have shared life with me to some extent, who can understand who I am apart from that label. The same was true for me in deciding to come out, as I began to wrestle with both who I was and was becoming as a gay man. The only stories I had of gay men were the dominant stories in my community. I wondered if I would always be known by my sin, as many people saw it. As silly as it sounds, I wondered if I would have to learn to be a hair stylist or work in retail at the local mall—because the only openly gay people I knew through my limited experiences and stories had these jobs. It took meeting others who had many diverse experiences of being gay that helped me understand my own experience in complex ways. In the words of Greene (1995), I want others to see me big.

Likewise, I think it was important for me to see Lee and the participants of this inquiry in big ways. It is from this perspective that I wish to engage in the lives of individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality. Rather than viewing experience through the limited lens of categories, I understand experience through narrative in which the researcher holds the story open to multiple and diverse complexities of experience and possibilities for future stories and attempts to view the multiple fluid and shifting stories of gender and sexuality that individuals hold among the many other stories to live by. These understandings guide my thinking as I turn now to research regarding gender and sexuality.

Developing Categories and Research around Gender and Sexuality

Scant educational research exists prior to 1920 around persons positioned by dominant stories of gender and sexuality. The lack of attention toward sexual and gender categories within schools is unsurprising given the relative novelty at that time of sexual categories and the dominance of stories that defined knowledge, practice, and identity around gender in modern western thought. French philosopher Foucault (1990) posited that sexual identity categories began to emerge in medical writings near the end of the 19th century. Jagose (1996) added that at this point,

The notion of the homosexual as an identifiable type of person begins to emerge. No longer simply someone who participates in certain sexual acts, the homosexual begins to be defined fundamentally in terms of those very acts...although same-sex acts were condemned in both religious and civil law before 1870, they were regarded as temptations to which anyone might succumb. Sinful and illegal, those forbidden acts were not understood to constitute a certain kind of individual. After 1870 same-sex acts began to be read as evidence of a particular type of person about whom explanatory

narratives began to be formed. (p. 11)

As these sexual identity categories became increasingly codified in social and institutional narratives, educational research around sexuality and gender identification began understand those positioned by these understandings as threats to children in school (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). Because of these beliefs, it was not uncommon for school administrators to investigate for the purpose of identifying and dismissing homosexual teachers in the 1950s and 1960s (Harbeck, 1997).

In the broader culture outside schools at this time, laws forbidding homosexual sex were enforced in many places across the United States (D’Emilio, 1983; Faderman, 1991). These policies led to police raids into homes and gathering places where homosexuality was suspected in hopes of prohibiting homosexual practice and culture. During one such raid in New York City, at the Stonewall Inn on June 27, 1969, “police...met with resistance, which culminated in a weekend of riots” (Jagose, 1996, p. 30). On the impact of this event, Jagose wrote:

The twenty-seventh of June continues to be commemorated internationally—most enthusiastically in the United States—as Stonewall Day, a date which marks the constitution of lesbian and gay identities as a political force. Stonewall functions in a symbolic register as a convenient if somewhat spurious marker of an important shift away from assimilationist policies and quietist tactics, a significant if mythological date for the origin of the gay liberation movement. (p. 30)

Jagose argued that the seeds of the liberation movement had been sown before Stonewall Inn, but this event marked a public shift away from efforts for persons positioned by dominant stories of gender and sexuality to quietly assimilate into the larger culture. As Jagose noted, it was not unusual for a bar catering to persons positioned differently by understandings of gender and

sexuality to be raided, but this time, “acquiescence to authority gave way to resistance” (p. 31). Gay pride parades began a year later to commemorate the uprising at the Stonewall Inn, and many people continue to celebrate gay pride events in the month of June for this very reason (Wythe, 2011).

Jagose (1996) suggested that the liberation movement rejected the notion of assimilation tactics as a way of finding cultural acceptance. Rather than avoiding an identity of difference, which might be narratively understood as composing cover stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), the liberation movement emphasized the importance of “‘coming out’ and consciousness raising” (Jagose, 1996, p. 38). Jagose further elaborated,

Gay liberationists promoted the coming-out narrative—an unambiguous and public declaration of one’s homosexuality—as a potent means of social transformation.... Here the logics of coming out assume that homosexuality is not simply a private aspect of the individual, relevant only to friends and colleagues. Instead, it is potentially a transformative identity that must be avowed publicly until it is no longer a shameful secret but a legitimately recognized way of being in the world. (p. 38).

Griffin and Ouellett (2003) traced the shifting “perspectives in education practice and literature” (p. 106) around gender and sexuality. In the same year as the raid on the Stonewall Inn and the Stonewall riots, 1969, the California Supreme Court ruled that teachers could not be dismissed solely based on sexuality (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). Further shifts in public policy came in 1973 when

several states adopted the Model Penal Code, which decriminalized private and consensual sex between adults. Also in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. These changes marked a

dramatic shift in the controversy over the rights of lesbian, gay, and bisexual teachers.

Rather than carrying an assumption of deviancy, researchers began to view lesbian and gay people as normal and focused on their ability to assimilate into society. (p. 107)

Shifting cultural stories led to educational research that first identified “lesbian and gay youth as a population at risk” (p. 108), and then focused “on schools as a risk environment for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth” (p. 109).

These shifts are reflected in cultural understandings of gender and sexuality as well as the current research around gender and sexuality in schools; they therefore affect the research in which I engage. As gender and sexual categories have become dominant cultural narratives, identities have been shaped around these understandings, often times silencing the multiple stories people live by. In this way, we often see persons only as representations of categories. For example, if an individual identifies with or is identified by a sexual category then this categorical identity begins to shape the way the individual is seen by others. Rather than a behavior, being gay is a type of person (Foucault, 1990).

This simplification of identity through categories singularizes stories of being and keeps us from a deeper understanding of experience. Adichie (2009) reminded us there is a danger of having a single story. She wrote, “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (Adichie, 2009). By reducing the complexity of human identity and experience to monochromatic perspectives, we simplify complex experience. The existence of multiple stories allows persons, communities, and institutions to live multiple, perhaps even conflicting stories, which reflects the reality of identity and experience. In my own life, I have begun to see the many stories to live by that I compose, not simply those around gender and sexuality. These

many stories shape my stories of identity, the person I and whom others understand myself to be and am becoming, and are inclusive of my gender and sexuality but are not solely composed of those stories. While I seek to understand experience and identity in individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality, I am reminded that the participants of this study compose multiple stories of identity beyond those of gender and sexuality. My inquiry into the experience and identity making of my participants cannot be limited by single stories of gender and sexuality.

I have purposefully chosen a research puzzle that reflects a desire to focus on experience rather than categories of gender and sexuality. As a researcher, I do not wish to reify the categories and single stories of gender and sexuality that have positioned the participants with whom I will work. Rather, I seek to understand their unique experience and composition of identity, which, when viewed among many other diverse stories of identity around gender and sexuality, represent diverse and complex understandings of lives instead of labels.

Current Research Around Gender and Sexuality in Schools

Research concerning the experiences of persons positioned by dominant stories of sexuality and gender in schools began to emerge around the year 1980 (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003) as changing social conditions began to allow formerly silenced stories to emerge. These shifts in social and institutional policies and stories around difference gender and sexuality categories might lead some to believe that the negative social and institutional impacts on individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality have ceased to be of concern. However, current research would suggest that there still exist tremendous consequences for those positioned by dominant stories of gender and sexuality. As such, we have seen, as Griffin and Ouellett (2003) suggest, the focus of educational research around gender and sexuality shift from

the effect of individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality on students and the school environment to the effect of the school environment on individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality. Current educational around gender and sexuality has largely focused on school culture and the resulting experiences as reported by these individuals.

Multicultural educational scholar Banks (2013) described the ways schools perpetuate stories of gender and sexuality through a mainstream-centric curriculum that “focuses on the experiences of mainstream Americans and largely ignores the experiences, cultures, and histories” (p. 181) of those who differ from the mainstream. As Mayo (2013) pointed out, including issues of gender and sexuality in curriculum are complicated because “not everyone thinks that LGBTQ, queer, and gender-nonconforming people should exist or deserve respect” (p. 166). When stories that reinforce our own identities are missing, it can be a struggle to find legitimization of our own experiences. Banks (2013) posited the lack of representation within curriculum “marginalizes their experiences and cultures and does not reflect their dreams, hopes, and perspectives” (p. 182). Banks’ (2013) discussion of representation in curriculum led me to think about the stories we tell and allow to be told in school. Stories validate our experiences and give our lives value (Atkinson, 2007), but we often deem that some stories are unacceptable to be told at school. What stories, then, do we tell and live at school?

Pascoe (2007) argued that gender and sexuality norms are central to the culture and climate of schools. Pascoe connects gender and sexuality, seeing “heterosexuality as central to masculinity” (p. 7). She found that adolescent boys frequently asserted their masculinity through their communication and actions through “repudiation rituals” that reject forms of perceived femininity, what she calls the “specter of the ‘fag’” (p. 157). This repudiation took the forms of

humor—jokes or imitations of the feminine or gay. Pascoe also examines confirmation rituals, through which masculinity is affirmed (p. 158). According to Pascoe, these instances generally focused on expressions of heterosexuality and aggressive sexual conversations or actions towards females. In Pascoe's perspective, being perceived as a homosexual transcended any other form of femininity or weakness.

Aspenlieder, Buchanan, McDougall, and Sippola (2009) connected gender non-conformity to peer victimization. The researchers argued that the victimization can take many form, including physical, verbal, or relational. They posit "multiple regression analyses showed that for both boys and girls peer-reported gender nonconformity was uniquely predictive of peer-reported victimization" (2009, p.3). Furthermore, they argued that victimized children and adolescents are "more generally and socially anxious, depressed, lonely, and lower in self-esteem as compared to those who are not victimized" (p. 4).

Similarly, Rivers and D'Augelli (2001) connected sexuality with victimization; they found that peers more often victimized lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth than other students. More evidence exists that recognizes that students who do not conform to gender norms are victimized (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; O'Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub, 2004). D'Augelli, Pilkington, and Hershberger (2002) found that "openness about one's sexual orientation in high school and being gender atypical were significantly correlated with direct victimization due to sexual orientation" (p. 162). D'Augelli, Grossman, and Starks (2006) connect victimization of lesbian, gay, and bisexual children and youth to gender-nonconformity. They found correlations between "past reports of gender atypicality" (p. 1472) to current mental health issues including emotional trauma like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

In the most recently published bi-annual national survey from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, and Boesen (2014) examined school climates for individuals who identified as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgendered (LGBT). The study surveyed “a total of 7,898 students between the ages of 13 and 21. Students were from all 50 states and the District of Columbia and from 2, 770 unique school districts” (p. xvi). The survey focused on experiences at school, which threatened emotional and physical safety. For example, Kosciw et al. (2014) understood “indicators of a negative school climate” (p. xv) to include derogatory or biased comments, harassment, assault, discriminating policies and practices, feeling unsafe, among others. Additionally, the researchers examined (a) negative effects of a hostile school climate on LGBT students’ academic achievement, educational aspirations, and psychological well-being; (b) reported experiences of victimization to responsible adults and how these adults address the problem; and (c) differences between school experiences of LGBT students and personal and community characteristics. Moreover, the researchers attempted to understand the access to and benefits of support structures within the school (teachers, staff, curricula, and school clubs) available to students.

The data collected in this research composes a story inconsistent with the social and institutional shifts previously described. Kosciw et al. (2014) found that over a half of respondents “felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 37.8 % because of their gender expression” (p. xvi). Many of these students missed school and/or avoided “gender-segregated spaces in school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (bathrooms: 35.4%, locker rooms: 35.3 %)” (p. xvi); furthermore, the majority of the respondents avoided school sponsored activities outside of the school day because they felt unsafe.

Kosciw et al. (2014) reported that a majority of respondents heard negative or derogatory remarks in school (by students, teachers, and staff) about sexuality and gender expression, with nearly three-fourths (74.1%) of respondents reporting verbal harassment based on “sexual orientation and 55.2% because of their gender expression” (p. xvii). More than one-third of students were “physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) because of their sexual orientation and 22.7% because of their gender expression” (p. xvii). Of the respondents to the survey, “16.5% were physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 11.4% because of their gender expression” (p. xvii). Over half of the student respondents indicated that they “did not report the incident to school staff, most commonly because they doubted that effective intervention would occur or the situation could become worse if reported” (p. xvii). Nearly two-thirds (61.6%) of those that did report an incident to school staff indicated that school staff failed to respond to the report.

According to Kosciw et al. (2014), students who had experienced “higher levels of victimization because of their sexual orientation...were three times as likely to have missed school in the past month than those who experienced lower levels” (p. xviii). These students also had lower grade point averages, were less likely to pursue school beyond secondary education, and had “higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem” (p. xviii). The study showed similar results for student respondents “who experienced higher levels of victimization because of their gender expression” (p. xviii) and LGBT students who experienced discrimination towards themselves or other LGBT students.

Consistent with the work of Banks (2013), Kosciw et al. (2014) found that students who had access to resources like inclusive curriculum resources, student clubs that supported gender and sexual diversity, supportive teachers or staff, and/or supportive school policies on bullying

were more likely to feel safe at school and less likely to report victimization or discrimination.

Kosciw et al. (2014) concluded that

It is clear that there is an urgent need for action to create safe and affirming learning environments for LGBT students. Results from the 2013 National School Climate Survey demonstrate the ways in which school-based support—such as supportive staff, anti-bullying/harassment policies, curricular resources inclusive of LGBT people, and [Gay-Straight Alliances]—can positively affect LGBT students’ school experiences. (p. xxiv)

The researchers recommended a variety of strategies for improving the conditions for LGBT persons, including providing access to inclusive curriculum and educational resources, supportive school staff, supportive student groups, and comprehensive school policies that protect students from bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence due to sexuality and gender expression. Similarly, Griffin and Ouellett (2003) advocate the inclusion of LGBT persons within the curriculum as a way of validating LGBT identity for all students.

Additionally, Toomey, McGuire, and Russell (2012) “found that when schools included lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) issues in the curriculum and had a Gay-Straight Alliance, students perceived their schools as safer for gender nonconforming peers” (p. 187).

These stories are helpful to understand aspects of experience around gender and sexuality in schools. As Clarke reminded me in a communication, we have a story that says we are past the problems of discrimination because there are no more raids or riots, people are no longer in prison because of their sexuality, but if you look at the experiences of persons positioned by dominant stories of gender and sexuality, that information suggests that we are not past it, and it requires us to stop and pay attention (C. Clarke, personal communication, June 18, 2015).

I contend that these stories of experience, although told in support of LGBT persons and communities, adopt dominant stories of gender and sexuality and continue to compose lives defined by difference around gender and sexuality. Moreover, these stories create single negative stories of complex and diverse school contexts, further entrenching relationships bound by categorical understandings of persons. It is difficult from this literature, to understand the ways these experiences have shaped the lives these individuals are composing. Even more so, through this research, we compose understandings of persons and contexts grounded in marginalization and brutalization, perhaps mis-educative experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997). What experiences have led to educative experience for these persons? Still little is known about the lived educative experiences, context, and knowledge by which individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality come to compose their identities.

From Categories to Experience

Post-structuralist thinkers like Foucault critiqued reality as defined by societal structures; he defined knowledge, from the structuralist perspective, as the power to define others (Sarup, 1993). Foucault (1990) used the emergence of sexual categories and identities from behaviors to define and exhibit power over others. Foucault questioned the use of binary categories (heterosexual and homosexual) to define sexual expression and experience because prior to the emergence of these categories, persons' identities were not based upon these behaviors. Sexual categories developed, he argued, as a way of privileging some behaviors over others, and therefore, some people over others. Foucault asserted that the creation of categories through language, and not inherent difference, is responsible for the marginalization of persons positioned by understandings around sexuality. In this way, the binary categories created to marginalize persons based on sexual expression are arbitrary. Consistent with that understanding,

queer scholar, Sedgwick (2008) pointed out the arbitrary nature of sexual categories by suggesting that many other sexual behaviors could be used to define identities. She wondered, for example, why our society does not define sexuality based on the roles of dominance or submission rather than the gendered object of desire.

Feminist scholar Butler (2007) continued Foucault's (1990) critique of sexual binary categories, by applying this metaphor to gender categories, as well. She argued that gender binaries (male and female) categories exist as a means to privilege one category, male, over the other, female. Beyond privileging one category over another, these binaries serve to exclude identities that do not fit into existing categories (bisexual, asexual, transgender, genderqueer, etc.), further privileging specific normative categories. This discursive social construction of reality is developed through the language we use to define others and ourselves in relationship to others; by creating oppositional categories, we, as a consequence, privilege one category over another (Butler, 2007; Foucault, 1990; Kang, 2009; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011). At the heart of these assertions is a critique of structuralist categories inherent power structures therein.

Further complicating our understanding of categories is the absence of appropriate categories for emerging experiences and identities that do not adequately represent the diverse experiences and identities of persons. Jagose (1996) described the emergence of the term "queer" to represent the growing diversity of individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality; she writes, "The post-structuralist theorization of identity as provisional and contingent, coupled with a growing awareness of the limitations of identity categories in terms of political representation, enabled queer to emerge as a new form of personal identification and political organization" (pp. 77-78). While this term unites many different

gender and sexual categories, it still confined categorically in relationship to normalized gender and sexual categories and the privilege inherent to such a construct.

Queer theory, then, is a reaction to “dominant theories related to identity” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 32). In this way, queer theory may be more easily defined by what queer theory is not. Halperin (1995) argued that “queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (p. 62, emphasis in original). In this sense, queer theory is a post-structuralist attempt to deconstruct modern positions around gender and sexual identities. Queer theory is often used in studies around gender and sexual identities because it provides a language framework to understand non-normative experience around gender and sexuality in western cultures. By claiming queer identities that are defined against normative understandings of gender and identity, queer theorists reify the very categories they seek to deconstruct.

In this way, post structuralist categories are insufficient for understanding the depth and complexity of experience. As Clarke stated, reliance on categories keeps us from understanding experience because the categories themselves hide experience behind a categorical representation (C. Clarke, personal communication, June 18, 2015). In other words, the use of a category signifies a meaning that is then presupposed on the identity and experience of a person. When one invokes the term gay, it may lead to understanding those identified as gay through similar experiences and identities. However, these defined identities are insufficient to understand the multiple and diverse experiences of those who are positioned by dominant stories of gender and sexuality. It is difficult to discern or define where one definitive boundary of the category ends and another begins. As Minh-ha (1989) suggested, “Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak” (p. 94).

Likewise, Anzaldúa (2012) thought about the ways the border “bleeds” (p. 3). She

wrote, “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary.... The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (p. 3). She understood herself as one that lives in the borderlands, living between cultures and identities that transcend the categorical boundaries culture, religion, gender, and sexuality. She, at once, embodied many categories:

For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions; sexuality and homosexuality. Being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, I made the choice to be queer (for some it is genetically inherent). It’s an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. In and out of my head. It makes for *loqueria*, the crazies. It is a path of knowledge—one of knowing (and of learning) the history of oppression of our *raza*. It is a way of balancing, of mitigating duality. (p. 19)

Our experiences and identities are much more complex than a category can hold. Anzaldua’s experience provides a story that interrupts our understanding of identity as defined by categories.

Pinnegar and Hamilton (2012) led me to think about the inconclusivity of narrative, as experiencing stories, even our own past stories, leads us to more stories. Pinnegar (2006) addressed inconclusivity as an aspect of temporality. She wrote,

The researcher holds the reader in a narrative space of inconclusivity. Though stories are told in the research study, the researchers artfully hold open both the beginnings and endings...plotlines of the research extend backwards and forward in time...In this way, time is never stable, characters and milieus are dynamic rather than static and the reader

often stops reading to consider how a particular future would lead to a reinterpretation of this past or how this present moment supports many futures. (p. 179)

My entry into Lee's life at the beginning of fifth grade did not signal the beginning of his experience and my exit at the end of fifth grade did not signal the end of his story. Situating myself as a teacher and a researcher in the midst of Lee's experience led me to wonder what the future holds for Lee. It was tempting to take my stories of Lee and draw conclusions about where his experiences might lead him. My initial thoughts about him caused me to wonder about his sexuality or gender identity; however, to draw conclusions about Lee is to limit his experience to perceptions I have of him mediated through categorical understandings of gender and sexuality. As a narrative inquirer, I sought neither to analyze or pathologize past experience nor predict what experiences may follow for Lee or the participants in this inquiry. Rather, my work is to hold the narrative open, realizing that for now there are many different futures supported in their stories.

Attending to Experience through Narrative Inquiry

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) described themes in the turn toward narrative in scholarly research. In doing so, they noted the ways this turn to narrative also shifts understandings of (a) the relationship between the researcher and the participant, (b) words/stories as data, (c) research on the particular experience rather than reliance on generalizability, and (d) multiple ways of knowing. More specifically, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) constructed an argument for the use of narrative in research when they wrote the following:

We...began to reflect on the whole of the social sciences with its concern for human experience. For social scientists, and consequently for us, experience is a key term.

Education and educational studies are a form of experience. For us, narrative is the best

way of representing and understanding experience. Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it. (p. 18).

Embracing this understanding, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) “located the conceptual roots of narrative inquiry in a Deweyan ontology of experience” and explored “the conceptual border between narrative inquiry” and post-structuralism (p. 43). In doing so, Clandinin and Rosiek illuminated “both the similarities and differences between post-structuralist social analysis and narrative inquiry” (p. 55). Namely, they both understand that “experience has a linguistic structure...that some knowledge is narrative in form” (p. 55). However, post-structuralism interprets experience through its “re-presentation. Representations depend on other representations and discursive systems for their meaning” (p. 55). In other words, experience cannot be interpreted without examining the relationship of the experience to the societal structure that has given rise to the experience. The discursive realities created through categories, which are critiqued by post-structuralism, are determinative of the experience itself. Narrative inquirers, on the other hand, begin “with pragmatic ontology that treats lived experience as both the beginning and ending points of inquiry” (p. 55). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted, “formalists begin inquiry with theory, whereas narrative inquirers tend to begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories” (p. 40).

In this review of literature, I have uncovered some of the many stories that exist on the storied school landscapes around gender and sexuality. These stories shape the ways in which research has understood gender and sexuality in the broader cultural context. At the same time, I have attempted to make a theoretical argument for the use of narrative to inquire into the experiences of individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality

rather than research that relies primarily on theoretical understandings through gender and sexual categories. While these understandings undoubtedly shape the experiences of my participants and my understandings of social structures, they limit the understanding of experience. In the work that follows, I develop a theoretical and methodological understanding of narrative inquiry, specifically as it emerges in my proposed research.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Thinking Narratively About Experience

To inquire into the experiences across a life, in diverse contexts, around identity making for individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality and gender, I selected narrative inquiry as a methodological approach. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained, narrative is a way of thinking about experience “beyond the notion of experience being irreducible so that one cannot peer into it” (p. 50). Grounded in a Deweyan ontological and epistemological framework (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), Clandinin and Connelly (2000) presented narrative inquiry as a way of seeing the world and exploring experience through story. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) further explained,

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 375)

Clandinin (2013) argued, “narrative inquiry is a way of studying people’s experiences, nothing more and nothing less” (p. 38). Narrative is not seen merely as a tool or representation, but rather “experience itself is an embodied narrative life composition...Thinking narratively about a phenomenon—that is, about people’s experiences—is key to undertaking narrative inquiries” (p.38).

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) situated narrative inquiry ontologically as a method when they wrote,

Narrative inquirers study an individual's experience in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others.

Viewed in this way, we can see that not only is a pragmatic ontology of experience a well-suited framework for narrative inquiries, narrative inquiry is an approach to research that enacts many if not all of the principles of a Deweyan theory of inquiry. In fact, we offer that narrative inquiry as we describe it is a quintessentially pragmatic methodology. What genealogy is to post-structuralist Foucauldian sociology, what critical ethnography is to critical theory, what experiments are to positivism, narrative inquiry is to Deweyan pragmatism. (p. 42)

The work of Jerome Bruner (1986; 1990; 1991; 2004) provided valuable theoretical framing for understanding narrative as a way of knowing in the world. Bruner exposed modern ontological and epistemological assumptions by arguing modern conceptions of reality have been dominated by empiricists and rationalists. Bruner posited that these assumptions have been manifested in western educational research through understandings of knowledge as a “more or less linear and uniform” process (Bruner, 1991, p. 1). This “paradigmatic mode,” according to Bruner (1986), is a “formal, mathematical system of description and explanation... and in their establishment, and make use of the procedures to assure verifiable reference and to test for empirical truth” (pp. 12-13). Bruner (1991) asserted that epistemological shifts led to questions about the universal nature of learning and knowledge as proposed by both empiricists and rationalists. Critical voices were able to link “man and his knowledge-gaining and knowledge-

using capabilities to the culture of which he and his ancestors were active members,” suggesting, “knowledge is never ‘point-of-viewless’” (p. 3).

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) echoed these shifts in their discussion of the four turns towards narratives; they described the point-of-viewed knowledge as “blurred knowing” (p. 25). Pinnegar and Daynes described this turn towards narrative as “a movement away from a position of objectivity defined from the positivistic, realist, perspective towards a research perspective focused on interpretation and the understanding of meaning” (p. 9). Bruner (1991) pushed this discussion further by describing the communal nature of knowledge that reflects the vast array of social, circumstantial, and experiential influences that construct knowledge for communities and individuals. In short, reality construction has a much more dynamic and complex evolution than modern linear models had previously acknowledged.

Consequently, as a narrative inquirer, I cannot interpret such experience through a single interpretive frame, but through rich and complex perspectives that are as diverse as the persons who tell the stories. As Huber, Caine, Huber, and Steeves (2013) suggested, “narrative is a primary way of knowing and that we construct worlds from our own perspectives, living by story” (p. 218). The stories people tell are meaningful. Narratives serve as an incredibly important set of lenses with which we view experience. Consequently, attempts to understand human experience must attempt to account for human story through narrative research. In his argument for the study through narrative, Polkinghorne (1988) wrote, “experience is meaningful and human behavior is generated from and informed by the meaningfulness. Thus, the study of human behavior needs to include an exploration of the meaning systems that form human experience” (p. 1).

Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space

As a narrative inquirer, I think about experience narratively. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) framed the exploration of experience through narrative inquiry by imagining “a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along the second dimension, and place along a third dimension” (p. 50). Clandinin and Connelly connected their work to a Deweyan theory of experience when they wrote,

our terms are personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation). This set of terms creates a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, and place along a third. Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places. (p. 50)

Clandinin and Connelly thought about “research into an experience” (p. 50) through the metaphor of movement within the three-dimensional inquiry space. As an inquirer, I ask questions that move me inward to “the internal conditions such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions” (p. 50). With my wonderings, I move outward “toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment” (p. 50). I move backward and forward from the experience as I attend “not only to the event but to its past and to its future” (p.50). Additionally, thinking about experience requires attention to place, “the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes” (p. 51).

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) used the term commonplace to frame the complex ways these dimensions of inquiry manifest themselves within narrative; they noted, “Schwab developed four commonplaces—teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu—to deal with the complexity of curriculum. An adequate curricular argument needed to deal with all four” (p. 479). Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin identified three commonplaces of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place. Furthermore, in doing so they also differentiated narrative inquiry from other forms of qualitative research. As they explained, “the study of any one or combination of these commonplaces might well take place in some other form of qualitative inquiry. What makes a narrative inquiry is the simultaneous exploration of all three” (p. 479). At this point, it may be helpful to develop a more thorough understanding of the commonplaces. In doing so, I will attend to my own experience with Lee.

Temporality. Using Geertz’s (1995) parade metaphor, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested, “Geertz reminded us that it was impossible to look at one event or one time without seeing the event or time nested within the wholeness of his metaphorical parade” (p. 16). This perspective allows us to acknowledge as researchers that we enter into lives of participants who are “in the midst of living their stories. Their lives do not begin the day we arrive nor do they end as we leave. Their lives continue” (pp. 63-64).

I am reminded that Lee’s life is in continuous making—my entry into his life at the beginning of fifth grade did not signal the beginning of his experience and my exit at the end of fifth grade did not signal the end of his story. Situating myself as a teacher and a researcher in the midst of his experience leads me to wonder about Lee’s past experiences that shaped him prior to being in our classroom and shaped the way he interacted with his classmates, learning, and me. Entering into the midst leads me to see Lee, not as the one distracting the class from

more important issues of learning as I did previously, but as one who is trying to make sense of a life in the midst. I also wonder what the future holds for Lee. It is tempting to take my stories of Lee and draw conclusions about where his experiences may lead. My initial thoughts about Lee led me to wonder about his sexuality or gender identity, but to draw conclusions about Lee is to limit my understanding of his experience to the categories I use that are shaped by society and the perceptions I have of him.

Sociality. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) reminded us that narrative inquirers are concerned with personal conditions and social conditions “at the same time,” which helps “narrative inquirers to distinguish their studies from studies that focus mostly on social conditions that may treat the individual as a hegemonic expression of social structure and social process” (p. 480). For Connelly and Clandinin, personal conditions refer to the “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions” (p.480). Social conditions, according to Clandinin (2013), refer to the “milieu, the conditions under which people’s experiences and events are unfolding. These social conditions are understood, in part, in terms of cultural, social, institutional, familial, and linguistic narratives” (p. 40). It should also be noted that the relationship between the participant and the researcher is a significant part of understanding the sociality commonplace. As Clandinin suggested, “Narrative inquirers cannot subtract themselves from the inquiry relationship” (p. 41). The relationships built between the participants’ lives and my own life shape the stories each of us live and tell. I cannot minimize or ignore my own presence in the narratives I come to know and understand; I will become a part of their landscape.

In reflection on my experience with Lee, I am struck by the interest and excitement he showed in regards to studying how to do hair. His experience is shaped by his personal stories of

himself, his interests, and desires to learn about cosmetology; at the same time, I wonder how Lee's many familial, institutional, social, and cultural stories about gender, sexuality, and school shape his experience—leading him to suggest that his personal desires were weird for a boy. Lee's reflection pushed me to think about dominant stories and my own stories of gender. Although I did not agree that Lee's interests were weird, I understood why he might understand himself that way considering my own experiences of feeling different. My mind shifted to the students who had started the rumor that I was gay; I saw their conversation as a distraction because I saw my own sexuality as a disruption to my other stories of learning and sexuality in that school context. My fear of being storied differently than other teachers led me to dismiss the students' conversations, but perhaps that very dismissal helped write my own story of difference for my students and myself.

How do we story difference? How and why do dominant stories for boy identity exclude stories about doing hair; what made this interest or curiosity gendered? How do I, with multiple stories of gender and sexuality, make sense of the many dominant, cultural, social, institutional, and personal stories that exist within my experience? These sometimes congruent, sometimes conflicting, sometimes silent narratives complicate my simplified understandings of gender and sexuality. These multiple and varied stories led me to think about the complexities of experience through narrative. Like Lee and my future participants, I live in the midst of sociality. Perhaps, in the same way Aoki (1993) differentiates between a faceless and impersonal curriculum-as-plan and a lived curriculum, we might also differentiate between nameless and faceless visions of identity, an identity-as-category, and the unique stories and expressions that emerge from lived identity.

Place. The narrative commonplace of place refers to “the specific concrete, physical, and

topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events take place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, pp. 408-481). As Clandinin (2013) suggested, “people, place, and stories are inextricably linked” (p. 41). Basso (1996) thought about “place-making” as a way of conceptualizing the connection of experience, narrative, and place. He wrote,

In modern landscapes everywhere, people persist in asking, “What happened here?” The answers they supply... should not be taken lightly, for what people make of their places is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of a society and inhabitants of the earth.... If place-making is a way of constructing the past, a venerable means of doing human history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions, and, in the process, personal and social identities. We are, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine. (p. 7)

The stories of our experiences, therefore, fill places. We construct meaning around stories of experience, which exist in a place, amid the many other stories that continually shape the stories we compose.

Palmer (2005) reminded us of the ways European colonists denied “the importance, and knowledge, of place for First Nations in British Columbia by the people who came afterward” (p. 162). Europeans colonists who only valued the places of First Nations people for the resources to be gained silenced the many personal, communal, and social stories that made that land a place for First Nations people. A place is a place because of the stories that fill it. The stories, nested within a place, help construct meaning around a place, experience, and people. Separating experience from place is an act of silencing the lives and stories that exist within that place. Palmer (2005) further argued that seeing people in terms of their relationship to their place(s) is “a starting point for developing an understanding of members of other cultures” (p. 163). The

places I inhabit also inhabit me. I make meaning and ascribe significance to my experience in and through the landscapes in which I live. Attending to this in the experiences of the participants with whom I will work will be an important consideration to support understanding.

What stories of that place shaped who we were and were becoming? My thoughts drifted to the many landscapes that shaped the stories I composed and continue to compose around sexuality and gender beyond the school context. What stories existed on Lee's landscapes, at home and in the community, and which shaped the ways he composed his stories about himself and others? I began to think about my own home and community landscapes beyond our shared school contexts and the ways those experiences shaped the stories I composed around gender and sexuality.

Through her conceptualization of a "world" and "'world' travelling," Lugones (1987, p. 3) reminded me of the ways our stories are shaped by the commonplaces of narrative inquiry in complex ways. Thinking about a world requires us to recognize the contexts (place), relationships (sociality), and series of events (temporality), which construct such a world; I cannot think about place without thinking about the personal, social, cultural relationships and the past, present, and future, which construct that world. In the same way, I cannot think about the relationships within a world without attending to the contexts and continuum of events, which shape those relationships. Finally, I cannot think about the past, present, and future of a world without attending to the contexts and relationships that are embedded in the temporality of a world.

A Methodological Plan for Inquiry

The aforementioned theoretical perspectives shape my understandings of narrative inquiry and the ways in which I engaged with the participants in this research. Subsequently, I

will discuss the methodological plan of this narrative inquiry into the experiences across a life, in diverse contexts, and around identity making for individuals positioned differently by understandings of, sexuality and gender.

Identification and Selection of Participants. In this research, I wrestled with the terms culture uses to strictly define and categorize persons based on gender and sexuality. At the same time, the identification of research interests, puzzles, and participants for this inquiry was in itself an act of definition. I sought to hold this story of research in tension with the multiple and diverse stories of identity the participants composed around gender and sexuality, it was important for me to allow their experiences, rather than my research goals, to guide the inquiry. In this work, I lifted out the social, cultural, institutional, familial, and personal categories that shaped the experiences and identities of my participants; however, I refrained from allowing those categories to confine or define the multiple and varied stories my participants live and tell.

The nature of research required that I narrow the parameters of my research puzzle and criteria for participation in this inquiry. The participant selection criteria I determined for this inquiry included that prospective participants (a) identify as being positioned by dominant stories of sexuality and gender in their contexts and (b) are older than 18 years of age. It was necessary in my thinking that participants understand themselves to be positioned differently in their contexts, rather than being defined by me as positioned differently around gender and sexuality. This perspective opened the inquiry to any individual that understood him/herself as being positioned by dominant stories of sexuality and gender. This could have included prospective participants that composed stories to live by around gender and sexuality resonant with dominant stories but who understood themselves as positioned by social stories of gender and sexuality.

I chose a minimum age of 18 years for participants for a few reasons. Primarily, I wanted to ensure that participants were able to legally and ethically consent to participation in the inquiry without the permission of a parent or guardian as there could be potential conflicts between parents or guardians who may story persons who are positioned by sexuality and gender in a negative way. Persons under the age of 18 would have required parental or guardian permission to participate in the inquiry; obtaining permission from parents or guardians may have been an act of disclosure for some persons who may not have shared the way they have positioned themselves around issues of sexuality and gender. Conflicts around this disclosure could have led to negative consequences for participants dependent on parents or guardians.

I was able to identify and retain the participation of four participants. Initially, I planned to work with three participants, but decided to work with four participants in case one or two participants were unable to complete the research. I was able to connect with the four participants by building relationships with the individuals and institutions with whom individuals positioned differently by understandings of, sexuality, and gender share life. I posted flyers (see Appendix A) in public spaces (e.g., coffee shops, community organizations, etc.) in diverse parts of nearby cities. In addition, I sent digital versions of the flyer to local community organizations that were open and affirming to diverse stories of gender and sexuality in multiple communities. The term open and affirming is often used in diverse gender and sexuality communities to represent people and/or places that are physically and emotionally safe for persons to live out those diverse stories—apart from dominant familial, institutional, social, and cultural stories. I was able to connect with student groups at local universities as well as community support organizations that support persons with diverse stories of gender and sexuality. Through these

strategies, I was able to identify four inquiry participants, all of whom elected to participate in the inquiry.

Challenges to Recruiting Participants.

I considered possible challenges to recruiting participants for this research. First, in some contexts, being positioned by dominant stories of gender and sexuality could carry a social stigma. Even though the participants would not be specifically identifiable, some persons might have feared physical or emotional violence by making themselves visible in this work. This tension may have been heightened if the individual had not shared their diverse stories of gender and sexuality (colloquially, come out to) with friends, family, or co-workers. It was important to note that many states (including the states where I have lived, worked, attended school, and participated in the research) do not have civic or work protections for persons who are positioned by dominant stories of gender and sexuality. Although local protections are offered in some municipalities, persons who are known to live out diverse stories of gender and sexuality can have their employment terminated and housing or other services refused. Second, like my own story of sexuality, diverse stories of sexuality could often be secret stories, silenced by dominant narratives. I am reaching out to people and organizations to connect with prospective participants that have told their stories, so some extent, to others. I am aware that many diverse stories of gender and sexuality continue to be untold.

Narrative Inquiry with Participants. The narrative inquiry methodology assumes a relationship between the researcher and participant: “Relationship is key to what it is narrative inquirers do” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189). As a researcher, I attended to the relationship being developed. The structure and method of this research directly impacted the ways that participants feel about the work in which we engaged together. Regarding their work

with early school leavers, Clandinin, Caine, and Steeves (2013) wrote, “It was crucial that participants felt comfortable in telling what, for some, were hard to tell stories” (p. 48). This understanding helped me to think about the needs of the participants in the method of inquiry I employ. My relationships with the participants unfolded over the course of 18 months. I had an initial meeting with each participant in November 2015. Shortly after they each agreed to participate, I began to negotiate acceptable times and places for participant interviews. Over the course of the following ten months, I met with each participant between eight to ten times to engage in research conversations. My relationship with the participants shifted as I moved from collecting data through research conversations to writing in summer 2016. I negotiated exit from the inquiry after having participants approve final narrative accounts in December 2016.

To meet personal and institutional ethical requirements, I began my first meeting with participants by working through informed consent forms with each participant. Being mindful of the creation of safe and comfortable spaces, initial and subsequent meetings were held in locations chosen by the participants and ranged from coffee shops to public meeting spaces. I worked to create a conversational tone that developed out of relationship and mutual interest. Clandinin (2013) reflected on the use of conversation in narrative inquiry when she wrote, “Conversations create a space for the stories of both participants and researchers to be composed and heard. Conversations are not guided by predetermined questions, or with intentions of being therapeutic, resolving issues, or providing answers to questions” (p. 45).

As discussed previously, the conception of this research is predicated on a broad understanding of education as experience, curriculum as the course of life (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As such, these research conversations were meant to elicit participant experiences from across a life. I asked participants to share experiences from “early years, early

schooling, and home and family experiences...to understand the whole of their life contexts” (Clandinin, Caine, & Steeves, 2013, p. 48). The conversations, like lives, took turns, moved forward and paused as the participants and I told, listened, reflected, and inquired into the experiences shared. In the time between meetings, the participants’ or my reflections on the transcripts or field from our conversations provided opportunities for wonderings, reflections, and further inquiry in subsequent conversations.

In addition to research conversations, participants were asked to create an annal or chronicle of their lives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described these timelines as “annals and chronicles” (p.112). They wrote,

Through the process of composing annals and chronicles, participants begin to recollect their experiences and to construct outlines of a personal narrative. Annals and chronicles may be thought of as the rudimentary shaping and narrating of personal and social histories.... We think of *annals* as a list of dates of memories, events, stories, and the like. Students or participants construct time lines beginning, for example, at birth; at some distant, important period or date in the past history of the person’s family; or at some more recent date, as a kind of beginning benchmark. We think of *chronicles* as the sequence of events in and around a particular topic or narrative thread of interest.... (p. 112)

Additionally, it may be important to note that the relationships developed in the context of research may not be limited to research conversations.

It is important to note that the relationships developed between the participants and me were not bounded by our conversations. As Clandinin (2013) wrote,

When we situate our inquiries primarily in the living of stories, we go where participants take us; we meet their families and/or friends; we go to the places they take us. In living alongside participants, we enter places that are important to participants. The places and relationships we become part of when we being with living alongside participants call forth the stories we, and they, tell. (p. 45)

Entrance into the lives of participants through relationships obligates me ethically to do so in meaningful and authentic ways.

Field Texts, Interim Research Texts, and Final Research Texts. All conversations and interactions with participants were recorded, and each audio recording was transcribed. Along with voice recordings, I used field notes: my own observations and reflections from our conversations as well as any additional documentation, artifacts, or other materials provided by participants to serve as field texts. Multiple readings of the field texts, hearings of the audio recordings, and readings of conversation transcripts served as the foundation of the creation of interim research texts.

Interim research texts are “situated in the spaces between field texts and final, published research texts...most of them designed to be shared and negotiated with participants” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 133). These texts are part of the ongoing interpretive process in narrative inquiry. Clandinin (2013) explained, “Interim research texts are often partial texts that are open to allow participants and researchers opportunities to further co-compose storied interpretations and to negotiate the multiplicity of possible meanings” (p. 47). In this case, I created word images to serve as interim research texts. Drawing on the work of Richardson (1992), word images are an interpretive act of taking words or phrases that emerge as important from field texts and putting them into an interpretive text. These interim research texts were shared with the

participant in order for the participant to offer feedback on the ideas, events, or persons I found important in the texts. This negotiated process allowed us to acknowledge importance that I might have missed or misinterpreted in the process. The word images, created from the transcripts of our shared research conversations, permitted me to think about the stories of my participants that honored the narrative quality of experience. From the word images and the resulting conversations with participants, I, with the help of each participant, constructed narrative accounts. These accounts are narrative expressions of the participants' experiences of curriculum making and identity making around gender and sexuality.

As I prepared the final research text, I brought the narrative accounts into conversation with the original research puzzle, while attending to the ways the narratives help me to understand the wonderings that began this research. Through this process, I described the “resonant threads or patterns” (Clandinin, Caine, & Steeves, 2013, p. 50) that emerged as I looked across the narrative accounts of individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality. These narrative threads, along with the narrative accounts will constitute the final research text.

Ethical Considerations. *Relationship.* Holding relationship as a key to our work, narrative inquirers continually come to understand and negotiate ethical considerations with participants as they emerge throughout the course of the research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested, “Ethical matters need to be narrated over the entire narrative inquiry process. They are not dealt with once and for all, as might seem to happen, when ethical review forms are filled out and university approval is sought....” (p. 170). Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) reflected on the ontological shift in research practice from traditional research methods nature, they wrote,

“narrative inquirers recognize that the researcher and the researched in a particular study are in relationship with each other and that both parties will learn and change in the encounter” (p. 9).

Lugones (1987) drew my attention to ethical issues in narrative inquiry; through her metaphor of world travelling, I began to conceptualize the relationship between the researcher and the participant in narrative inquiry. For Lugones (1987), the term world refers to a social construction “of relationships of production, of gender, race, etc.” (Lugones, 1987, p. 10). Her use of world connoted, for me, the three-dimensional inquiry space as we learn to see experiences in light of the commonplaces of narrative inquiry; in other words, we come to see a world as we understand experience situated within a context, among a continuum of experiences and interwoven with a tapestry of relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Lugones (1987) also suggested that we must learn to travel to other worlds, entering playfully, and perceiving others lovingly rather than arrogantly. Lugones helped me to imagine a way of conceptualize entering into the midst of someone else’s story through narrative inquiry, using the idea of playfulness. Our travel there requires reverence that Lugones (1987) termed as loving perception as opposed to arrogant perception. Her descriptions in this work oozed of relationship and care as I begin to understand my responsibilities to those with whom I work as a researcher, but beyond that, to my fellow humans as I encounter them in their various worlds.

As a narrative inquirer, I acknowledged and embraced the relationship with my participants: acknowledging my responsibility to be reverent of their experiences, stories, and identity. I was a world-traveler, and sought not to conceive someone else’s experience arrogantly, from my own world, but rather I entered into their world in order to understand their experience in their world from their perspective. The privilege of experiencing another’s story

comes with the responsibility of reverently (with loving perception) engaging with those stories, playing, not in a way that minimizes the importance of the story but that allows for conversation and exploration of experience. In addition, as a narrative inquirer, I opened myself up to be changed by the relationship, as I allowed for the vulnerability of my own story to emerge for my participants.

Whose story? Whose voice? I composed narrative accounts of my participants. This composition was within itself interpretive of the experiences shared by the participants. The narrative accounts I composed were shared with the participants as we negotiated the representation of their experiences through story. This research was grounded in relationship. The research texts were negotiated as I made sense of the participants' stories and elicited their feedback through the member-checking process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) framed this tension as "relational responsibility" (p. 177). In my conception, I was responsible as a researcher to my participants in the ways I represented their experiences through story. Together, we negotiated meaning as the participants added context and detail to my understanding of their experiences, and I added insight and a different perspective to their understanding of their experience. We re-storied their experience in a way that opened the possibilities for new stories to be told.

Anonymity. As a part of ethical approval at the University of Kansas, I was required to maintain the anonymity of my participants. Given the sensitive nature of some of the stories shared in this work, it was important to protect my participants from possible negative consequences related to their identities. Each participant selected a pseudonym for themselves, other persons, and places that may appear in their narrative accounts.

Data Collection and Storage Security. Research conversations with participants were

recorded digitally. In accordance with University of Kansas policies on secure data collection and storage, the digital recordings were captured by a password-secured digital device. All conversations were stored digitally on a password-secured laptop computer. Transcripts were made for data collection and analysis and were stored on a password-protected laptop computer. Digital recordings and transcripts will be deleted after the dissertation has been submitted and defended; printed transcripts will be shredded and disposed in secure document disposal.

Justifying the Inquiry

Clandinin (2013) outlined

three ways in which we need to justify our studies: personally, in terms of why this narrative inquiry matters to us as individuals; practically, in terms of what difference this research might make to practice, and socially or theoretically, in terms of what difference this research might make to theoretical understandings or to make situations more socially just. (p. 35)

Accordingly, I offer the following justifications for this inquiry into the experiences of individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality.

Personal Justifications. In her thesis, Cardinal (2010) contemplated what it meant to make a space for herself in the world. She wrote, “I am very likely not the Indian you had in mind. I am often not even the kind of Indian I myself had in mind, and this story to live by...impacts the way I see the world and my place in it” (p. 1). Through her work, Cardinal composed a life (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) inclusive of her multiple stories to live by. Cardinal relived and retold (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) her stories in ways that allowed her to be both Aboriginal and scholar. Although from vastly different contexts and experiences, I resonated with Cardinal’s struggle to make sense of dissonant life curriculum. I have struggled to

reconcile my sexual feelings and desires with the familial, institutional, and cultural stories around sexuality, morality, and myself that have, and continue to, shape my contexts and relationships. I, perhaps, was not the man many had in mind—or even the man I had in mind.

As I have experienced differing and diverse stories on differing and diverse landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), I have come to compose different and additional stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). The tensions that emerged for me during in these shifting stories shaped my research puzzle and justification for an inquiry into the experiences across a life, in diverse contexts, and around identity making for individuals positioned differently by understandings of, sexuality, and gender. Clandinin (2013) suggested that narrative inquirers begin with personal justifications for research, “justifying the inquiry in the context of their own life experiences, tensions, and personal inquiry questions” (p.36). As I considered my own experience, I was awakened to the significance of personal, family, cultural, social, and institutional contexts in the composition of my life. From a Deweyan (1938/1997) perspective, it seems that these experiences were, in some cases, mis-educative. I wonder about the ways I make sense of the conflicting stories and the ways my contexts shaped the stories I lived and told around gender and sexuality.

This research was a continued effort to understand my own experiences of being and becoming. Just as I wondered about my own identity making, I also wondered about the identity making of other individuals around gender and sexuality. My experience with my student, Lee, led me to consider my own identity making and the ways my students composed their stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). I wondered where Lee’s life curriculum (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) would lead and how I, as his teacher, could have purposefully created contexts that led to educative experience for Lee.

Practical Justifications. Clandinin (2013) wrote, “[t]o justify a particular narrative inquiry, a researcher needs to attend to the importance of considering the possibility of shifting, or changing practice (p. 36). Much of the research around the experiences of individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality in schools are limited to the negative or marginalizing experiences of persons identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT). This body of research was problematic and incomplete because it focused on negative experiences and consequences for LGBT individuals in schools with the intention of helping practitioners understand what should not be done, but it provides little understanding around the types of contexts and experiences schools should provide for individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality. Through this inquiry, I sought to develop understandings grounded in lived experience that allowed for increased understandings of significant experiences, persons, and contexts in identity making for individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality. This inquiry has been done for the purposes of composing supportive educational staff and contexts in order to allow for multiple and diverse stories of identity and educative experiences for individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality.

Social and Theoretical Justifications. Categorical understandings of identity are dominant stories in educational research around gender and sexuality. This inquiry interrupted these simplified understandings of identity by focusing on lived experience and providing multiple and diverse accounts of identity making around gender and sexuality. As mentioned previously, Adichie (2009) reminded us of the need for multiple stories when she cautioned, “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.” The single story keeps us from a deeper understanding of

experience and leads us to think about experience through a false lens of objectivity, seeing truth, knowledge, and morality as fixed, perhaps a static view of knowledge, according to Dewey (1938/1997).

The social justifications of this work included the possibility for the telling and retelling additional stories of gender and sexuality. These stories serve to add complexity to the understandings of gender and sexuality and invite even more stories of identity making around gender and sexuality that continue to disrupt categorical understandings of gender and sexuality and validate the lived experiences of individuals that defy categorical definition. Access to additional stories of gender and sexuality fundamentally shifted my understanding of stories by which I lived and allowed me to compose a different story to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). In this inquiry, I sought to acknowledge the many complexities and tensions of lived experience and identity, and in so doing, I challenged normative understandings of identity and the dominant stories that are told and lived out and that reify those normative understandings. It is my hope that this research might lead to the educative experience, curriculum making, and identity making of all students with regard to the complexities of unique unfolding lives, like those of Olivia, Calle (cah-yey), Mr. CEO, and Jamie.

Chapter 4

Olivia

Olivia contacted me a couple of days after I began recruiting participants. I sent a recruitment flyer to a community group; she saw the advertisement and responded quickly. Within a day or so, we had set a time to meet in order to introduce the details of the inquiry and to provide her with a consent form. From our first meeting, I was taken by her insightful reflections, spirited personality, and acerbic wit. Our shared conversations came easily, often without me asking many questions. Olivia freely spoke about her experiences and reflections, and as was often the case, I was enamored with her perspective and found myself chuckling through our talks.

As I began to read the transcriptions of our conversations and re-listened to our conversations, I became concerned that Olivia's narrative did not look like I had anticipated. I had expected that our conversations would lead to the uncovering of a few important experiences that had shaped her deeply, perhaps even in a succinct and delineated form, into which I would inquire. This was not the case as our conversations often meandered through our mutual sharing of reflections and wonderings. Our shared connection and conversation led this inquiry. It was not until I began to compose interim research texts through word images that narrative storylines began to emerge. Word images are a collection of words and phrases used "to create brief but evocative ways to represent the lives" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 206) of participants. As I looked across our conversation transcripts, I highlighted, collected, and shaped Olivia's words and phrases into images, of sorts, that begin to tell Olivia's story. For example, in our second research conversation, Olivia described her experiences with the ways others story her expressions of gender and sexuality; she remarked,

“I hope you don’t mind, I’m going to do my eye makeup.”

They say, “what’s your boyfriend’s name?”

Because I kinda look straight.

I looked feminine.

It’s not readily noticeable, you know what I mean?

(Interim Research Text, Olivia, Research Conversation, December 15, 2015)

In the arrangement of her words, I thought about the experiences she described as well as my own experience with Olivia in the conversation. These ideas began form narrative images of the stories Olivia lived and told about herself, and her experience of the stories others told about her. These collections of words provoked my thinking and served as a guide as I began to shape Olivia’s narrative account. Her story of femininity was lived and told as she reapplied her eye makeup and shared the ways she did not fit into the dominant cultural stories of what it means to be a lesbian; these notions provoked my thinking and interrupted my own stories of sexuality and gender as I reflected on her experiences through the word images. I have included parts of the word images used to create these narrative accounts in order to evoke the reader’s thinking, with the hopes that their experience of these stories may lead to new thinking and provide insights into the experience of participants.

I’ve Never Gotten Normal

Once we met, she pretty much showed up at my room and never left.

It was going to be a phase I was going through in college.

So, that’s my excuse,

I was just experimenting.

I’ve never gotten normal.

(Interim Research Text, Olivia, Research Conversation, November 14, 2015)

Olivia made her way to a large state university in the Southwestern United States from a small city in the same state. In high school, she excelled in academics and in extracurricular activities. Olivia had not had much time for relationships, although she dated a few men in high school and in college. During her junior year of college, she met Mandy, another woman on her hall in the university dorm. Olivia described the genesis of their relationship thusly,

Once we met, she pretty much just showed up at my room and never left because we just started hanging out. We lived on the same floor. It was actually funny because it was the first co-ed floor they had and they were worried about...guys and girls dating. They didn't see us coming at all. You know, they're just like, 'We don't even have rules for this.'

(Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015)

At that time, Olivia understood her own experiences and identity to be resonant with dominant stories of gender and sexuality. She suggested, "I, at the time, was straight.... And we just started hanging out and tried to be friends but...I don't know if you've been there. You just meet someone who's so cool..." (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015).

Although Olivia did not tell her friends at first, they soon noticed the amount of time that she was spending with Mandy. They made playful comments about her relationship with Mandy and the ways she looked at women; Olivia played along. In the end, Olivia's relationship with a woman did not bother her friends, but instead they were relieved to some extent. As Olivia suggested, "My straight friends were just so glad it wasn't my ex-boyfriend I was dating, because he was terrible..." (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015). At the same time, even as the relationship began to develop with Mandy, she did not understand herself differently in terms of the ways she composed her identity around sexuality: "It was going to be

a phase I went through in college. So, that's my excuse.... That's how everybody kind of took it" (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015). Olivia did not connect her relationship with another woman to her sexual identity in the ways that dominant stories around sexual categories might dictate. She explained,

It was just easy to hang out with her and I was just always like, 'I don't label things...'

It's kind of liberating actually.... It wasn't something I had to think about. I was just hanging out with my best friend basically for 11 years.... (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015)

As we conversed, Olivia and I reflected on some of the cultural stories about sexuality in college. Many in our society story university as a place of transition and freedom away from parents and before the responsibilities of adulthood; they see it as a place of experimentation and self-exploration unavailable in childhood homes, among the communities and families with whom and through whom we have composed our identities over a lifetime. Olivia acknowledged these stories in her own understanding and experience of college, but she suggested that eventually people get married, have kids, and settle into a life familiar to many. "I've never gotten normal," she quipped (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015).

Olivia's friends and new context allowed for, even facilitated, the composition of a new relationship with Mandy, although understood in an ephemeral way, a passing fancy. She made sense of her world through the life she composed. As Bateson (1989) reminded us, "Each of us constructs a life that is her own central metaphor for thinking about the world. But of course, these lives do not look like parables or allegories. Mostly, they look like ongoing improvisations..." (p. 241). Olivia took up the story of college exploration and developed a relationship with Mandy. She held these cultural stories around sexuality, college, and personal

feelings of attraction and affection in tension among her relationships and college context without interrupting her own heteronormative story of sexuality. Olivia continued to hold these stories in tension until her relationship with Mandy ended.

Not Even for Free Food

After she left, I went on a couple of dates [with men],
and I was like, “No.”
I don’t like doing this.
We’re not going to get past dinner, because I can’t,
I got 60 responses overnight...on a dating website.
I called my sisters, they said “you’ll never have to pay for food again.”
I can’t, not even for free food.
It’s not my deal, so.
I’ve had two boyfriends,
I was definitely attracted to them.
The sexual attraction with the guys wasn’t the problem,
it was all the rest of the stuff.
As far as relationships go, I kind of need an intellectual connection
(Interim Research Text, Olivia, Research Conversation, November 14, 2015)

After 11 years of relationship, two academic degrees, and four states, Olivia’s relationship with Mandy ended. As Olivia explained,

We chose to move...to be near her family, and then she met somebody at work that she liked better than me. And stayed out with her all night the night of my birthday.... So, she was like, “Yeah, I like her better. Bye.” She wasn’t even sorry. She didn’t cry. She didn’t

say anything. She just was like, “Yeah, I’m done.” (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015)

At the end of the relationship, Olivia started to think about life without Mandy. Now in her early thirties, she tried to make sense of who she understood herself to be apart from Mandy. The two had spent their entire young adult life together; as Olivia quipped, “I wasn’t even old enough to drink when I met her. So, [the breakup] was a shock to say the least” (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015).

As we talked, I could hear the way that Olivia was beginning to re-story her relationship with Mandy in her reflections on their relationship.

We got along and probably about five years ago is when it stopped being a romantic relationship and we just became friends which I think, you know happens. And so yeah, we were doing it for way longer than we should have, but I have no regrets at all. I think 11 years is successful and it was hard to let go, but well I guess it wasn’t that hard I’m kinda bothered by that. It took me about two months to kinda get ground under my feet... (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015).

They still lived in the same town at the time of our conversations, and a few days before we talked, Olivia saw Mandy while she was driving; “she walked right in front of my car. I didn’t even want to hit her with it, so that’s pretty good” (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015), Olivia joked. Healing, it seemed, was a process.

Olivia struggled with understanding the composition of her own stories to live by outside of her relationship with Mandy. For 11 years, Olivia and Mandy were partners, even though it was circumstantial in Olivia’s mind in many ways. Over the course of their lives lived together, through their shared experiences and spaces, Olivia’s stories to live by around sexuality were

composed in relationship to and through her relationship with Mandy. After Mandy left, Olivia went on a few dates with guys. Prior to her relationship with Mandy, Olivia had a couple of boyfriends. Olivia had always been physically attracted to men, so she decided to go out on dates with a couple of guys, although she figured out quickly that this was not a story she wanted to continue to compose. Olivia remarked, “The sexual attraction with guys wasn’t the problem, it was all the rest of the stuff.” (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015). “Guys, they’re kind of all the same. That’s fine and I can be attracted to them, but as far as having an intellectual, emotional relationship with a male, that I can’t deal with” (Olivia, research conversation, December, 15, 2015).

Dominant stories of sexuality and gender lead many to think of identities through the eyes of essentialism; the idea that aspects of identity are innate and immutable. In this framework, sexuality is equated with sexual desire and attraction. These understandings are synthetic and arbitrary. For example, in my first semester as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, the School of Education at the university I attended for graduate studies charged me with the task of leading discussion groups for the Multicultural Education course required for prospective teachers. In this course, students think about diverse identities as they relate to teaching in multiple educational contexts, including identities around gender and sexuality.

I began this course discussion around gender and sexuality with a question for my students: what qualifies someone as gay? I chose to begin with this question, because I wanted students to begin to think about the ways they have storied sexuality (or the ways that others have storied sexuality for them). Their definitional response was uniform and simple, a person that has sex with someone of the same sex. I then began to ask another series of questions, not searching for an answer, but as a way for them to begin to think about the complexities of

sexuality and identities that interrupt their own definition: how many sexual experiences with someone of the same sex is required to be gay; what if you are married to a person of the opposite sex and have sex occasionally with a person of the same sex; what if your partner identifies as the opposite gender of your own, but has similar genitals; what if your partner has different genitals, but identifies around gender in the same way; who gets to decide the boundaries of sexuality? Through our conversations, students began the process of uncovering the ways that these normalized categories are insufficient to understanding the ways stories around sexuality and gender are composed and unfold through experience. Some students began to share their own experiences around the composition of identity around gender and sexuality, which added further complexities and depth to our understandings.

Poststructuralist Foucault (1990) understood the emergence of sexual categories and identities based on sexual behaviors as a way of privileging heterosexual identities over homosexual identities. In this way, these categories normalized dominant stories of sexuality. Likewise, Sedgwick (2008) critiqued the arbitrary nature of sexual categories by suggesting that many other sexual behaviors could be used to define identities around sexuality rather than the gender or biological sex of a partner. Butler (2007) continued Foucault's critique of sexual binary categories by applying this metaphor to gender categories. She argued that gender binaries (male and female) categories exist as a means to privilege one category, male, over the other, female. Beyond privileging one category over another, these binaries serve to exclude experiences and identities (sexual and gender), that do not fit into existing categories, further privileging specific normative identities.

Anzaldua (2012) wrote, "Culture forms our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable,

unchangeable, as transmitted to us through the culture. Culture is made by those in power....” (p. 38). Olivia has been shaped by dominant stories of sexuality based on same-sex attraction. She began, again, to compose her heteronormative stories around sexuality, apart from her relationship with Mandy. However, Olivia interrupted and re-shaped dominant stories of sexuality based on same-sex attraction through the composition of her stories to live by around sexuality grounded in her relationship with Mandy, or as she understood it, “an intellectual, emotional relationship” (Olivia, research conversation, December 15, 2015). As Olivia explained,

So yeah, I am attracted to men. I mean, as far as the physical part, I guess. But, I mean not I guess, I know. But like getting to that stage would never happen because I’m not a random hook-up person--having an actual connection, I think at this age. (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015).

Olivia recalled signing up to meet men on a dating website just after her breakup with Mandy. She called her sisters to tell them that she had received 60 responses from various men overnight.

I was a little freaked out. And they were like, ‘You’re trying to save money on food, you’ll never have to pay for a meal again. Go out with all of them!’ I went on two. And I was like, ‘Okay... I can’t, not even for free food.’ (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015)

Even after an 11-year relationship with Mandy, Olivia continued to negotiate her identity through the dominant stories of sexuality. She attempted to hold the tensions between her own stories of identity, dominant stories of sexuality, and her lived experience with men. It was through this tension, perhaps, that she was came to compose a story dissonant with

heteronormative stories of sexuality. Free food, a benefit in dating men for Olivia, was not enough for her to continue to compose this dominant story in her own life and experience.

Communities, Categories, and Complexities

When I first came out, people were like

“You’re not gay. You’re not gay.”

I got it from a couple of guys.

I went to a party with a bunch of lesbians,

One lesbian, she’s like, “It’s because you’re not gay.” So....

I never felt like I was accepted by that particular crowd.

I fit in with the straight chicks just fine,

but I’m not attracted to males like they are.

People don’t just assume that I am gay by looking at me.

Straight people don’t have to go around declaring their identity.

I’m not trying to make my life a political statement.

Being gay is the least interesting thing about me.

That’s not my whole identity.

(Interim Research Text, Olivia, Research Conversations, November 14, 2015 - January 19, 2016)

Olivia’s relationship with Mandy was significant for many reasons. Not only was Mandy an intimate partner and Olivia’s first serious relationship, but Mandy also became Olivia’s support system as they moved around the country, settling in a place only known to Mandy. Olivia reflected,

When she left...I got on Facebook and most of these people I met through her, which I keep in contact with and just told 'em, "Oh, Mandy left me, can we go have tea or a drink or something? I'm here all alone." 'Cause I had made up my mind that I didn't want to leave my job that I loved. (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015)

The loss of her relationship with Mandy led Olivia to reach out to others and seek community, which she had not done previously. As well as reaching out to friends she had met through Mandy, Olivia told the manager at her place of work about the end of her relationship with Mandy; they offered her a raise to help pay the bills. Olivia recalled, "[my boss] invited me over and cooked for me because something similar had happened to her with her last boyfriend and they really were like my family during this whole thing" (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015).

As Olivia connected with friends, she also reached out to various communities in her area. One such group brought together professionals who were positioned by dominant stories of gender and sexuality. Olivia described, "this really great group of, it's usually women in their 50's and that's another reason I started identifying as a lesbian in this place.... they were just so awesome" (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015). She went to a few events and was able to share her experience with Mandy. The group commiserated with her and shared similar experiences; "that was a community that was so welcoming and so understanding that, it made me rethink maybe I'm a little bit more lesbian than I thought" (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015).

As we engaged in conversation, Olivia recalled when she came to think of herself as a lesbian. She was required to attend training at work. She described her experience thusly,

I was sitting in that training and they kept saying, “Somebody might identify as... Somebody might identify as... Somebody....” And they kept talking about that, and all of the sudden I thought, “I identify as lesbian at this point.” And I was thinking, “I’m old enough that, yeah, I’m sure about that.” But I hadn’t thought about it, that’s not something I think about until they were talking.... (Olivia, research conversation, January 19, 2016)

As I reflected on Olivia’s experiences, I began to wonder about the ways that place, communities, and relationships shaped the stories she composed around gender and sexuality. I also thought about the complexities of her identity in terms of the ways others define her. In many ways, Olivia lived out her stories of identity around sexuality in spite of the dominant stories around heteronormativity and of homosexuality for women. Through multiple tensions, she refused to compose stories of a feminine woman attracted to men or a masculine woman attracted to women. Perhaps fittingly, Olivia described the ways some others reacted when she first came out, while reapplying her eye make-up:

“You’re not gay. You’re not gay.” I got it from a couple of guys. And then I went to a party with a bunch of lesbians and one lesbian...everything I said, she’s like “It’s because you’re not gay. It’s because you’re not gay....” But, I feel like I have experienced a lot of people not accepting me into lesbian culture. And my ex-girlfriend would have agreed with that, too.... But I never felt like I was accepted by that particular crowd. (Olivia, Research Conversation, December 12, 2015).

When Olivia shared her experiences and relationships around gender and sexuality, she interrupted the stories that others had about her because of the way she looked. As Olivia shared, “My girlfriend used to say, ‘Being gay is the least interesting thing about me.’ That’s not my

whole identity” (Olivia, research conversation, December 15, 2015). Olivia understood sexuality as one of the many stories around identity she composed. Her thoughts made me wonder about the ways she composed a counterstory around sexual identity. Like Lindemann Nelson (1995), I understand a counterstory as “a story that contributes to the moral self-definition of its teller by undermining a dominant story, undoing it and retelling it in such a way as to invite new interpretations and conclusions” (p.23). Although she understood that she might be positioned by others based on one of the stories she told and lived out around gender and sexuality, Olivia made it clear that this was not a definitional story for her. Her counterstory around gender and sexuality refused to silence the multiple stories around identity she composed. Olivia wanted to be understood in her many complexities, as a multi-storied person, rather than a single-storied (Adichie, 2009) lesbian.

As I think with the stories⁶ Olivia composed around her gender and sexuality, I am reminded of the nuances of experience and identity that categories are incapable of holding authentically. Minh-Ha (1989) provoked my thinking around categorical understandings of identity when she wrote,

Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories leak. Of all of the layers that form the open (never finite) totality of “I,” which is to be filtered out

⁶ Morris (2002) contrasted notions of thinking about stories and thinking with stories when he wrote,

thinking with stories is meant to oppose and modify (not replace) the institutionalized Western practice of thinking *about* stories. Thinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinker and object of thought are at least theoretically distinct. Thinking *with* stories is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative as take the radical step back, almost a return to childhood experience, of allowing narrative to work on us. (p. 55)

In this work, I have attempted to understand experience from the perspectives of my participants, allowing their stories to work on me. In this way, rather than breaking down stories through one or multiple analytical frameworks, I understand story as a primary unit of analysis (Estefan, Huber, Murphy, Clandinin, Caine, & Steeves, 2016).

as superfluous, fake, corrupt, and which is to be called pure, true, real, genuine, original, authentic? (p. 94)

Of the many stories Olivia composed about herself and the world, she considered her sexuality to be “the least interesting thing” (Olivia, research conversation, December 15, 2015) about herself and yet, she and many other people composed stories around those categories. Similarly, Adichie (2014) thought about the imposition of gender categories and suggested, “The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we *should* be rather than recognizing how we are” (p. 34).

These ideas led me to wonder about the ways Olivia sought to understand her life using categories, although her lived experience transcended any meaningful relationship to those categories. While she proclaimed, ‘I don’t label things’ (Olivia, research conversation, November 14, 2015), throughout our conversations, Olivia consistently storied herself as transitioning from straight to bisexual to lesbian. Even nothing substantively changed about the ways she lived out her stories she lived by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), only perhaps the names/categories she carried around her own identity.

What did change for Olivia? The relationships and communities she composed throughout her life led her to think differently about her identity. Lindemann Nelson (2001) described the ways that our “chosen communities” allow for “relocation and renegotiation” of identity (p. 9). Olivia, it seemed, had not changed or looked for stories to live by but safe places where and safe people to whom she might compose them. Olivia’s experiences called my attention to complexities of her identity making around gender and sexuality. If we begin to imagine curriculum as a course of life, as Clandinin and Connelly (1992) supposed, “Perhaps a curriculum of lives” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 135), then we can begin to see the ways that we learn in multiple contexts across our lives. Olivia constantly negotiated the stories she told and

lived out among the people with whom and places in which she lived. These understandings continue to interrupt stories of identity based on sexual behaviors or those based in fixed categories; smooth understandings of identity fail to attend to the ways, through her ever-unfolding experience, Olivia continues to compose her stories to live by around gender and sexuality.

I'm Not Trying to Make My Life a Political Statement

It's not that I am ashamed of it,
 But it's more like respecting.
 It's meeting people where they're at.
 I feel like I'm trying to be polite,
 It might ruin his day,
 And he might be a total jerk about it,
 So why indulge that?
 Abby, my girlfriend is like
 "You don't stand up for what you believe in."
 I'm like, "No, I don't try to change stupid people's minds,
 There's no mind to change, like that guy...."
 If somebody wants to be ignorant,
 That's none of my business.
 I could be watching Netflix.

(Interim Research Text, Olivia, Research Conversation, January 19, 2016).

Early in our conversations, Olivia told me about her girlfriend at the time, Abby. Over a year after the relationship first began, Olivia and Abby were in a committed and monogamous

relationship. They had exchanged rings in anticipation of their future engagement. One day, Olivia and Abby embraced one another at Olivia's place of work, hugging. Someone walked around the corner to see them and Olivia pulled away from the embrace. Abby felt hurt and suggested that Olivia's response was a sign of her shame over her sexual identity. Olivia understood her private composition of stories around sexuality as a way to show courtesy for the beliefs of others, but acknowledged that she seeks to avoid negative reactions.

I feel like I'm just trying to be polite, and just like, "I don't care about this person." He might just...It might ruin his day and he might be a total jerk about it, so why even indulge that? There's a quote, and I don't know who said it but I quote it all the time, "I don't argue with idiots in public, 'cause people watching may not know the difference." (Olivia, Research Conversation, January 19, 2016)

Abby sees this avoidance as Olivia's inability to "stand up for what you believe in," but Olivia sees no purpose in trying to change the opinions and beliefs of others, when "there's no mind to change" (Olivia, Research Conversation, January 19, 2016). While Olivia understood herself as being courteous to others, she is in some way inattentive to the feelings of Abby, with whom she is far more connected. Olivia chose to carry the tension between public and private stories of sexuality in her own experience and in the relational tensions that emerge with Abby rather than risk negative reactions or tensions socially. I wondered how Olivia positioned herself to others publicly; what tensions existed for Olivia as she considered the ways others may see and respond to her and Abby? Was it easier for her to compose a story of invisibility, or perhaps safety from another perspective?

Although she seems to understand that others might position her differently based on her sexuality, Olivia doesn't understand the stories of sexuality she composes as a defining

characteristic, although it seems to be. She described her sexuality as ‘the least interesting thing’ (Olivia, research conversation, December 15, 2015) about herself. It would seem, Olivia tells and lives out stories of sexuality and gender for others in purposeful ways. Along with the personal dimensions of identity development, there also exists a social dimension of identity making around gender and sexuality made visible when viewed in contrast with dominant stories of gender and sexuality. Olivia is negotiating her own stories to live by around sexuality in tension with the normative stories that exist within her contexts. As McAdams (2008) explained,

The stories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about our struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we were, are and might be in the social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture writ large. *The self comes to terms with society through narrative identity.* (pp. 242-243, emphasis in original)

As I considered the work of McAdams, I wondered about the ways that Olivia made sense of her own stories to live by through the cultural stories of gender and sexuality. I wondered what it meant for Olivia to understand her own experiences and identity in opposition to normalized stories, a complexity of identity making anomalous for those whose identities resonate with dominant stories of identity (e.g., race, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, etc.); always other⁷.

Olivia explained her tension around this public composition of stories, even in her relationship with Abby, “I’m not trying to culture shock people. I’m not trying to make my life a political statement” (Olivia, Research Conversation, January 19, 2016). Her statement drew my

⁷ My mind is drawn, once again, to the work of poststructuralist theorists, Foucault (1990) and Butler (2007), who understand discursively created categories as a means of marginalization and thereby social power by dominant identities.

attention to the ways that stories to live by around sexuality that are positioned by dominant stories are heard and understood by other persons or communities, particularly those with power. This positioning of stories often necessitates the composition of what Clandinin and Connelly (1995; 1996) called cover stories. With their work attending to the lives of teachers in schools, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) asserted that cover stories “enable teachers whose teacher stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practice and sustain their teacher stories” (p. 25). As I considered these understandings, I began to attend to the ways that individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality compose cover stories among landscapes where dominant stories of sexuality, heteronormativity, marginalize diverse stories of gender and sexuality. These unsafe places necessitate cover stories around gender and sexuality to ensure the continuity and supremacy of generally accepted and acceptable stories around gender and sexuality in specific places and among particular groups of people.

Cover stories around gender and sexuality are told with the purpose of not interrupting the dominant stories of identity within a context. For Olivia, the passive cover stories she composed allowed her to be seen by others in acceptable ways. In this way, the composition of stories to live by around gender and sexuality can be silenced, or at least paused depending on the contexts in which we find ourselves; a social camouflage. As Olivia suggested, “I think I’m more timid in my interactions with people until I get to know them, so I’m more about being accepted at first.... Nobody needs to know that right away” (Olivia, Research Conversation, January 19, 2016).

In some ways, Olivia composed a passing⁸ story around gender and sexuality. First used in regards to race, the term passing was adopted by many communities positioned by dominant stories of gender and sexuality to signify the composition of public stories to live by around gender and sexuality which are resonant with dominant stories (categories) of gender and sexuality. In other words, passing is the ability to be seen by others in acceptable and normalized ways. Hobbs (2014) described passing when she wrote, “Passing works as a prism: it refracts different aspects of what we commonly think of as identity and reveals what is left of an ascribed status is stripped away. Behind that veil...is simply the lived experience... (p. 21).

The public composition of stories around gender and sexuality is tension-filled for Olivia and Abby. For Olivia, the concern for privacy, perhaps even fear of the reactions of others, led her to compose cover stories that allowed her to be accepted by others through the dominant narratives on her contextual landscapes. From this perspective, there is the preference to be safe and accepted, to harmonize with the ordered stories of communities, even those stories of identity dissonant from our own. Sanchez and Schlossberg (2001) added to this thinking when they wrote,

⁸ Hobbs (2014) traced the history of racial passing in America; she wrote, “White skin functioned as a cloak in antebellum America. Accompanied by appropriate dress, measured cadences of speech, and proper comportment, racial ambiguity could mask one’s slave status and provide an effectual strategy for escape. Many runaway slaves neither imagined nor desired to begin new lives as white; they simply wanted to be free.”(p. 37)

Hobbs reminded us of the socially constructed nature of difference and the multiple ways our identities are composed and lived out; these embodied stories are often composed by others, but lived out in the experience of those positioned by dominant stories of identity. As Sanchez and Schlossberg (2001) reminded us, “For people of color, gays, lesbians, members of the working class and poor, and people of marginalized religious faiths, the allure of rewriting identity cannot be disconnected from the very real emotional and material advantages of doing so” (p. 14).

Passing is not simply about erasure or denial, as it is often castigated but, rather, about the creation and establishment of an alternate set of narratives. It becomes a way of creating new stories out of unusable ones, or from personal narratives seemingly in conflict with other aspects of self-presentation. (p. 14)

At the same time, Abby is concerned with what it means to be seen by others and accepted, not because the stories she lives and tells are congruent with dominant stories, but precisely because they are in tension with those stories, a counterstory (Lindemann Nelson, 1995). From this perspective, the desire to interrupt the dominant stories around gender and sexuality led Abby to live out stories around gender and sexual identity that provoke and question dominant stories. Sanchez and Schlossberg (2001) described this tension as one between passing and visibility; although they cautioned that “Passing as practice questions the commonly held assumption that visibility is necessarily a positive, pleasurable, even desirable” (p. 13).

Context matters. The concrete and metaphorical places we compose stories can shape the stories we choose or are able to compose. There is a common metaphor used for the public composition of positioning stories of gender and sexuality, “coming out of the closet,” or just “coming out.” The image alludes to a physical space of confinement, or protection depending on perspective, which is then opened to the world. This metaphor breaks down, however, as the iterant acts of composing stories around gender and sexuality, which interrupt dominant stories, continuously unfold with new people and in new contexts. For individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality, the public composition of stories around gender and sexuality is not a singular decision or act but one that continually re-emerges in safe and unsafe places with diverse people. Dominant stories of gender and sexuality lead many to compose predetermined stories of gender and sexuality, strict gender categories, and heteronormative

assumptions are often assumed. Passivity, as seems to be the case with Olivia, allows for acquiescence to these dominant stories, a cloak, to borrow Hobbs' (2014) phrase, of heteronormativity or gender categories. Publicly sharing stories around gender and sexuality that are dissonant with these dominant stories interrupt these pre-written stories. For many, dominant stories around gender and sexuality have become what Crites (1971) called sacred stories; he wrote, "They live, so to speak, in the arms and legs and bellies of the celebrants. These stories lie too deep in the consciousness of a people to be directly told: they form consciousness..." (p. 295). As such, for some, heteronormative stories of gender and sexuality should not and cannot be questioned, challenged, or interrupted.

As I considered Olivia's experience alongside the research literature while making Olivia's experience primary, I thought about the work of Greene (1995), who reminded us that perspective is important; to see experience through dominant stories is, in a way, seeing small: "from a detached point of view, to watch behaviors from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life." To see experience big, from Olivia's perspective, we begin to see identity expressed and lived out.

I wondered what it meant to compose stories around gender and sexuality privately and publicly, and what is the responsibility for those who are positioned by these understandings and must compose stories publicly and disrupt dominant stories? I thought about the ways that these stories, mentioned implicitly but many shaped tacitly, position those who compose them within families, larger communities, and contexts. The act of composing this story is an act of positioning oneself, which shapes the stories that others compose about those persons and the stories those persons continue to compose about themselves. Do persons positioned by dominant

stories of gender and sexuality risk the danger of single story (Adichie, 2009) around gender and sexuality, just by composing it publicly? In what ways does society suffer without access to multiple and diverse stories of identity, including those around gender and sexuality? In what ways can we begin to see stories around gender and sexuality as one story among the many we compose about ourselves, in the same way those who compose stories around gender and sexuality subsumed by the dominant stories of gender and sexuality compose multi-faceted and complex stories? Perhaps Olivia's hesitance to publicly compose those stories around gender and sexuality represents the desire to be understood through the multiple and complex stories she composed around sexuality, rather than one story, defined by others.

Learning with Olivia

The stories Olivia shared with me over the course of this inquiry have reminded me anew of the complexities that exist in the composition of a life. Her experiences led me to consider the ways we negotiate stories to live by around sexuality. Continually, Olivia mediated her own stories to live by through her experiences, her relationships with others, and the dominant stories of sexuality in her contexts. Additionally, I wondered about the dominant stories we take up, sometimes unknowingly, around those for whom we have no access to their stories of experience. In this way, I am prompted to consider the importance of seeing experience big (Greene, 1995), as we attend to the particularities and nuances of an individual's composition of identities around gender and sexuality. It seems that dominant stories around gender and sexuality act as an interpretive lens with which to view our own experiences and the experience of others.

In this way, I am reminded of the importance of communities and contexts in which individuals might live and tell diverse stories to live by around gender and sexuality that are

dissonant with dominant stories. I suggest these communities and contexts might be best understood through the qualities of playfulness described by Lugones (1987) when she wrote,

The playfulness...includes uncertainty, but in this case the uncertainty is an *openness to surprise*. This is a particular metaphysical attitude that does not expect the world to be neatly packaged, ruly. Rules may fail to explain what we are doing. We are not self-important, we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying that we are *open to self-construction*. (p. 16, emphasis in original)

In creating spaces open to diverse stories to live by around gender and sexuality through playfulness, we are, in a sense, opening ourselves and our contexts to self-construction, in that we are willing to question the rules of the game and the dominant stories that shape us.

This idea seems to be more easily said than done because the dominant stories of gender and sexuality that position individuals as other also in many ways constitute and validate normative ways of being, stories to live by that are resonant with dominant stories of gender and sexuality. To suspend these rules of the game (Lugones, 1987) is to also question and open our own identities around gender and sexuality to construction. The complex and intersecting stories to live by we compose around sexuality, gender, religion, or family are often sacred stories for individuals (Crites, 1971). These stories form consciousness; as such, they are so integral to our understandings of the world and ourselves that they are difficult to question. In this way, new communities and contexts may be necessary in order to shift of dominant stories and therefore open spaces for the composition of new and diverse stories to live by around gender and sexuality.

Chapter 5

Calle (cah-yay)

Throughout this narrative account, I have used both masculine and feminine pronouns to represent Calle. This is an attempt to portray Calle's preference for language that honors her experience and expression of gender while also pushing the reader to engage with the complexities of his curriculum making around gender and sexuality, as I think along playfully⁹ (Lugones, 1987) with Calle's stories around gender¹⁰.

I first met Calle at a small and eclectic coffee shop; graffiti and stickers adorned the walls and furniture. The downtown space felt trendy and advertised difference through its mishmash of colors and styles of decoration and furniture. I found him waiting in line to order a drink and I quickly introduced myself; she finished ordering and met me at a table. We scheduled this meeting after being unable to connect a few weeks prior at the same coffee shop. Calle had fallen asleep and missed our appointed time, and I was nervous that her interest in the inquiry had waned from our initial contact. In our initial email conversations, Calle had many questions about the inquiry, specifically concerning the anonymity of participants, before agreeing to meet. She had described, through our initial contacts, a previous experience of participating in a research project that had fallen through. It was evident his experience shaped the ways that she

⁹ Lugones (1987) described aspects of playfulness when she suggested that "the playfulness that gives meaning to our activity includes uncertainty...an openness to surprise. This is a particular metaphysical attitude that does not expect the world to be neatly packaged, ruly." (p. 16). In this way, as I travel to Calle's world, in Lugones' conception, I do so not in a critical way that imposes my own understandings and ways of being; but rather, through relationship seeking understanding.

¹⁰ It should be noted that Calle composes multiple stories of identity, around asexuality, around Mexican heritage, around familial relationships. For the purposes of this inquiry, I have focused on Calle's composition of identity around gender and sexuality.

was thinking about our work together, and I wondered if there was a mistrust of research that was causing second thoughts.

As we met that day, I felt uneasy because I did not want to pressure Calle into participating in the inquiry. We sat down in the crowded coffee shop, and I explained the inquiry with more specificity than I had through email and asked him if she might have any additional questions. I handed Calle the consent form for review and suggested that I would text in a few days to see if there was still interest in participating. Calle nodded and our short meeting ended. A couple of days later, I texted to see if Calle might still be interested. Calle texted back, “yeah, im [sic] still interested” (Calle, personal communication, November 19, 2015) and we scheduled a time to meet for our first research conversation.

Calle came to this medium-sized university city from a small town in a more rural part of the state. Now in the final year of his degree program, she was thinking about next steps after graduation. Calle’s brother had attended the same university, and he thought the city was a “one of the nicer places in” the state (Calle, research conversation, December 1, 2015). I wondered aloud what led Calle to this conclusion. She responded, “Well, I kinda like that it’s more open, and it’s definitely the most liberal place [around]” (Calle, research conversation, December 1, 2015). I had heard this sentiment from several people during my time in the area, although, I was not quite sure why their similar stories of this town were composed in this way. As I considered Calle’s experience of this university context, my mind was drawn to the initial coffee shop meeting in which Calle and I met, a place that came to symbolize diversity for me through its complex tapestry of decoration. I wondered if Calle understood the town in the same way, one welcoming of her differences, in contrast to her hometown in which these expressions of difference might be seen as graffiti, the defacement of ordered and clean spaces. I began to think

of this university town as a playground for Calle that was a safe place, with new rules for being, that allowed her to play with her own identity. I wondered if Calle had considered these ideas as she decided to attend university in this place; was she looking for spaces to compose new stories dissonant with dominant stories of gender and sexuality?

That's Kind of How I Am

Well, I'm not trans and I'm not cis.

I guess I'm just kind of queer or something.

And I really didn't have a name for it....

'Cause I feel that sometimes trans doesn't necessarily describe everybody's experience.

And it doesn't necessarily describe mine either very much.

And so, at least for me,

I kind of feel like I'm both

Very feminine and very masculine.

(Interim Research Text, Calle, Research Conversation, December 1, 2015)

Through our conversations, it became clear that language was inadequate for understanding Calle's experience; as he reminded me, "It's like not having any language and asking for someone to make you some food or something and you can't tell them what you want" (Calle, research conversation, December 15, 2015). As I came to know Calle, I found myself struggling to understand the ways Calle positioned himself through her use of normative stories around gender and sexuality. During our first meeting, our conversation became laden with labels and categories, all of which were insufficient for Calle's experience and yet he seemed bound to these categorical understandings. Calle explained,

Well, I'm not trans and I'm not cis. So, I was kind of like... I guess I'm just kind of queer or something. And I didn't really have a name for it, and that's kind of why...I guess I do have a little bit of that type of label bias think where I don't necessarily like that trans is an umbrella term for all differing gender identities, 'cause I feel that sometimes trans doesn't necessarily like that trans doesn't describe everybody's experience, and it doesn't necessarily describe mine either very much. (Calle, research conversation, December 1, 2015)

Calle constantly negotiated his identity through the dominant stories of our social landscape, never finding the story that made sense, he continued try on categories to make sense of her experience. As Calle's understanding of personal experience unfolded, these categorical metaphors began to break down as her experience unfolded and she sought other categories to name experience. As I thought about and tried to make sense of our conversation, I began to wonder about the ways that wrestling with the labels and categories had, itself, become a shaping experience for Calle. This inability to find a language identity led Calle to compose a story of an identity that was confusing and contradictory to others. As he commented,

a lot of times, even with friends and stuff...you can't share everything, because a lot of things, I think, seem contradictory.... I contradict myself, or a lot of times I'm inconsistent, or I change a lot, but that's just what I do.... (Calle, research conversation, December 1, 2015)

Calle desired to be understood by others but struggled to find ways to share these complex stories of gender and sexuality with others because they so disrupted dominant stories around gender for many. Seeing Calle's new, more complex stories around gender and sexuality solely with regard to the cover stories of gender she composed with family and friends, I could imagine

how her stories might feel inconsistent to others. However, when viewed in relationship to her life, nuances emerge in his story, representative of a complex lived experience. Calle's lived hermeneutical circle¹¹ required him to make meaning of a complex life in light the whole of her experience rather than a comparison or analysis of constituent elements. In this way, we might more appropriately understand Calle's experience, not in relationship to a linear logic, but narratively in relationship to temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In the unfolding inquiry, I sought to attend to the tension between the stories Calle composed around identity. As I came to understand Calle's experience through story, it became clear that the tensions he experienced were not inherent to his composition of stories to live by, although certainly present in the stories Calle composed and the stories others composed about Calle, but rather emerged from the dominant narratives that forced Calle to declare, man or woman, gay or straight. In other words, the tension Calle held between her experience and the dominant stories of gender and sexuality was not created by him, but rather emerged from limited and limiting stories of gender and sexuality through categories. The language of categories around gender and sexuality were insufficient, contradictory, and confusing lenses through which to view Calle's experience. As he remarked,

I feel sometimes, that if you were to pick up a pencil or something, it would be that blue one that you think is black, and then you write with it and you're like, "Oh shit, it's actually blue." That's kind of how I am. (Calle, research conversation, December 1, 2015)

¹¹ The concept of hermeneutical circle is derived from textual criticism and interpretation, particularly of religious texts. It refers to the understanding that textual elements are interpreted in relationship to the whole of the text, and the whole of a text is interpreted relationship to its textual elements. Elements of a text should not be interpreted in isolation (Carr, 1986).

Calle's experience called to mind the work of Heilbrun (1999) who described lived experience through an understanding of liminality. She wrote,

to be in a state of liminality is to be poised upon uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another. But the most salient sign of liminality is its unsteadiness, its lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing, or wants to be doing. (p. 3)

Sometimes there are no appropriate categories for understanding experience, as the metaphorical borders we use as reference points to describe ourselves and others dissolve under the scrutiny of experience. Calle lived in what Anzaldua (2012) called a borderland, not fitting within the prescribed boundaries of gender; Anzaldua described a border as "a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (p. 25). These artificial dividing lines are exclusionary and define what it means to be other-than, those outside the boundaries. In this way, those in borderlands live out stories of marginality, defined by what they are not. Rather than composing her own story, Calle was forced to make meaning of her experience in and of his borderlands. She wrestled with the complexities of gender and sexual identity with the understanding that he was outside those categories. She relied on the rules with which he was familiar, but at some point, she realized that the established rules around gender and sexuality were restrictive and unhelpful. As Calle recalled,

I was thinking about "Well, what if I'm both?" And I started looking into things, and my biggest thing is that I couldn't find a proper label, and at that time, I was very much label-oriented like, you are this, or you are this. And that's the only way I knew how to make

sense of things. Later on, I'm just like, "What if you just don't have any of those?"

(Calle, Research Conversation, December 1, 2015)

The unique feature about borderlands is that when there is no pre-written story, we are free to write our own. Calle began to understand that his experience did not fit with existing categories and that she had the freedom to write a new story. The borderlands which Calle inhabited allowed her a metaphorical space of play (Lugones, 1987), where rules were murky, unclear, or non-existent. In this liminal space, the space in-between categories, Calle allowed himself (or perhaps was forced) to think differently about the stories she composed around gender and sexuality. Because no stories existed in her world to describe her experience, she was free to write her own.

As I reflected on Calle's experience, my mind was drawn back to my own identity-making experiences around sexuality. I wondered about the ways the stories of sexuality on my landscapes shaped the stories I composed around gender and sexuality; I understand my own experience through dominant stories of heterosexuality, masculinity, and religious belief. Fears of abandonment, difference, social, and financial survival shape the ways I compose my identity around gender and sexuality. Composing a dissonant story of sexuality meant interrupting the social and familial stories composed for me, and these interruptions were accompanied by consequences that could have included giving up both family and community.

My own stories of homosexual men shaped the ways I composed my own stories of gender and sexuality publicly. Many of my stories of other homosexual men stories were simplistic and monochromatic. I learned to see sexual attraction as categorical, as definitional of others and, at the time, of myself as a person. I feared that a story of being gay might become the only story others composed about me, for the dominant stories of gender and sexuality were the

only stories I had to draw on as I began to compose my own stories around gender and sexuality. In this way, I consistently composed an identity in tension with those stories. I sought a borderland, perhaps even on adult bookstore stairwell, that allowed me spaces to question or even subvert the rules of the game. I needed spaces and people to allow me to think differently about myself and others so that I could experience complexity around my gender and sexuality before I could compose a complex story of identity.

Calle's composition of complex stories around gender and sexuality emerged as she allowed herself to experience the complexities of her own identity, a practice of being. I wondered about the ways we allow for spaces of play and practice in the world. As Richardson (1997) reminded us, "We are restrained and limited by the kinds of cultural stories available to us" (p. 2). Her words led me to think about the ways that our work and our lives are socially constructed-- often reliant on "grand theory" (p. 13). In questioning these dominant stories, by playing, we are able then to construct our own stories. Similarly, Calle's questioning of the clearly demarcated stories of sexual and gender identity, the recognition of her own "unnatural boundar[ies]" (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 25), allowed her to begin the process of constructing her own stories through experience.

Words Suck, End of Story

It's kind of being overprotective of things that I use

Because if they use that thing that way,

Then that means that I can't,

Because there's a misunderstanding on what we're trying to communicate.

I kinda just want to be like, words suck, end of story.

'Cause I know, even with identifying yourself,

a lot of times if someone uses a word in a way that you don't use it.

You start to even question yourself.

Oh, my god, Am I even part of this?

And that's kind of how it starts,

with even questioning your gender or your sexual orientation,

Is when things don't start adding up.

Like I don't feel a part of this.

I really do try to be really patient with people,

But at the same time,

No! This is how I understand reality.

(Interim Research Text, Calle, Research Conversation, February 2, 2016)

A few months into her senior year, Calle returned to his hometown. While there, she visited a coffee shop she described as "the only decent place there" (Calle, Research Conversation, February 2, 2016). This place stuck out to her because it interrupted her stories of her hometown; Calle explained that his hometown was small and tended to be very conservative. She was excited and hopeful to see that a place open to diversity and more progressive thinking, like this coffee shop, had popped up in the town. At the shop, she began talking with a teenager, Toni. Calle's initial question about the gender pronouns Toni preferred led them to a deeper and more complex conversation around identity. Calle felt tension around the ways Toni used some categorical language. More specifically, Calle felt frustrated that Toni used language that he thought did not adequately understand or portray in the identity Toni composed. This experience led Calle to reflect on the ways that categories had become important to his own understanding of herself. In some ways, the legitimization of the categories that resonated with his

understandings of identity, her categories, by others, legitimated her ability to compose that story. In this way, the limited and limiting stories, through categories to which Calle had access impeded the ways in which she felt empowered to compose his own story. Rather than composing new stories to live by around gender and sexuality, Calle took up scripted stories in order to legitimate her own experience. Both Calle and Toni identified with a label rooted in categorical language around gender and sexuality; however, they understood and used the terms differently; this dissonance created tension for Calle around his own stories of gender and sexual identity.

Atkinson (2007) argued that life stories validate our experiences. Similarly, Banks (2013) argued from a curricular standpoint that, the stories we share have important consequences in the legitimization of experience; the lack of diverse stories for individuals “marginalizes their experiences and cultures and does not reflect their dreams, hopes, and perspectives” (p. 182). Calle’s experience reflects the ways that the stories to which he had access shaped the ways in which she understood herself. Calle continually negotiated her identity through the stories she encountered and struggled to understand her own stories when his categorical stories of gender and sexual identity were interrupted by Toni. Calle composed identity in tension with the stories available on his landscape. Having access to multiple and diverse stories of identity allows it to be understood in light of nuanced particularities, rather than in generalizable and normative ways. I wondered how Calle’s experience might have shifted with access to multiple and diverse stories of identity around gender and sexuality.

The One Rebellious and So Lost

Through our conversations, I began to attend to the purposeful ways that Calle presented herself to the world. It became clear to me that Calle cared a great deal about what others thought

and how they might perceive him. A great deal of care went into every aspect of his appearance: her hair, his clothes, her shoes. Calle told me that the ways others interacted with him changed greatly with her appearance; the problem, she explained, was that she could not present as both male and female at the same time. Many tensions existed for Calle around appearance, wanting and needing to express and be perceived in ways resonant with the stories he composed around gender and sexuality but fearful of the ways she might be perceived by the world, her family, and friends. I wondered how these fitting-in stories shaped Calle's view of himself and the ways that she was able to compose stories of gender and sexuality. Did Calle have access to people and places that might welcome multiple understandings of identity around gender and sexuality?

The stories Calle composed about herself and the dominant stories of her landscapes shaped the ways she presented herself to the world. The contexts in which she lived led her to understand herself in contrast to the established and acceptable stories of gender and sexuality. During the research, I asked each research participants to choose a pseudonym. Calle selected a name that emerged from a Spanish song that represented his experience, *Me Llaman Calle* (They Call Me Street) by Manu Chao. The song's refrain became a way of understanding the stories Calle composed around her gender and sexual identity:

Me llaman calle	They call me street
Pisando baldosas	Stepping on the concrete
La revoltosa y tan perdida	The one rebellious and so lost

(*Me Llaman Calle*, Manu Chao, 2007)

In my interactions with him, I came to understand Calle as a responsible and respectful person, who often texted me just to say hello and who always met me with a smile and a laugh, an individual who graduated from high school early and was now headed to a graduate program in

her chosen field of inquiry. I was struck by the contradictory nature of the stories we composed around her who she was and was becoming. What did it mean for him to be rebellious and lost? How did her composition of secret stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) shape the ways she understood himself in relationship to the dominant stories on her landscapes?

I began to wonder about the ways place shaped the stories she composed. I considered Calle's experience using the term professional knowledge landscapes, a term developed by Clandinin and Connelly (1995; 1996). This conception, a way of contextualizing the knowledge teachers live out personally and professionally, reminded me of the ways that what we know and the ways we live out what we know is shaped by the stories that exist within contexts. Calle did not story her experience on a professional knowledge landscape, but instead his experience can be understood as enacted and shaped on a personal knowledge landscape. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) explained that stories of teachers, those stories told about teachers, shape the understandings of who teachers are and should be. Teacher stories, in contrast to stories of teachers, are stories of lived experience. We can understand teacher stories among the personal and professional contexts in which they are situated. Similarly, I could see the ways that stories of gender and sexuality, those normative understandings of gender and sexuality, have shaped the ways that individuals within our social landscapes understand gender and sexuality. Gender and sexuality stories, the lived experiences around gender and sexuality like Calle's, are often unscripted, complex, and exist in tension with the dominant stories of gender and sexuality in contexts.

Like the teachers Clandinin and Connelly (1996) described, whose stories were composed in tension with the dominant stories of teachers, so too Calle composed identity stories in tension with the categorical stories of identity on his personal knowledge landscapes. As such,

the stories she lived out were essentially secret stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) around gender and sexuality, especially with her family. Secret stories, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) explained, are told to safe people in “safe places, generally free from scrutiny, where teachers are free to live stories of practice” (p. 25). Calle began to compose her secret stories of identity around gender and sexuality in safe places. In more public spaces, Calle composed cover stories that were resonant with the dominant stories of gender and sexuality. The tensions Calle felt between her own gender and sexuality stories composed through his experience and the dominant stories of gender and sexuality led Calle to compose a story of rebellion, one who disrupted the experiences of others, even unwillingly, simply through living out the stories he had composed around gender and sexuality.

You Know What I’m Going For

I’ve always had the hardest time with old friends and old family members
‘Cause it feels like all of the sudden
You’re like a completely new person they’ve never seen before,
And you’re just like, maybe I should just keep things the same.
Sometimes I drop a hint, but not necessarily sitting down and saying exactly.
I guess my sister knows about my sexuality pretty well,
Especially since we live together now.
I feel like her maturity level has slowly caught up.
Now she can handle all these complicated things in life,
Maybe she always could.
She seems really positive with me,
And especially when it comes to buying clothes,

She's just like, "Oh, you should wear these shoes"

"You probably want this."

It's like an unspoken agreement.

Like, "You know what I'm going for."

(Interim Research Text, Calle, Research Conversation, December 1, 2015)

As Calle progressed through university, he moved in with his younger sister, Vanessa, who had just begun classes at the same university. Tensions arose for Calle because she had begun to live out stories around gender and sexuality differently at school where she was away from family. As he explained, "she doesn't actually know about my gender identity" (Calle, Research Conversation, December 1, 2015). While Calle did not explicitly have a conversation with her sister about her gender and sexuality, she did find ways to drop hints with her sister, perhaps trying to gauge how she might respond to him. In many ways, Vanessa has interrupted Calle's own stories of family with her response to Calle. A few months prior to our research conversations, Calle and Vanessa had gone shopping. While they never discussed Calle's gender stories, Vanessa seemed to be willing to question "the rules of the game" (Lugones, 1987, p. 17) with Calle. As Calle explained,

She seems pretty positive with me, and especially when it comes to buying clothes. She's just like, "Oh, those shoes are pretty good." She's like, "Oh, you should wear these shoes.... Yeah, it's kind of like an unspoken agreement, like, "You know what I'm going for." (Calle, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015).

This experience with Vanessa has been an important interruption for the stories Calle composes around family. Vanessa's willingness to play with Calle has led her to be more open to

composing her stories around gender and sexuality more publicly, coming out to close friends at the university, and exploring more ways of self-expression through dress at work and school.

Upon reading this narrative account, Calle reminded me that his relationship with Vanessa was complex. While Vanessa supported Calle in important ways as she composed stories around gender, there were also tensions in their relationship that have developed over a lifetime together. Calle hesitated to openly compose his stories around gender with Vanessa and this increased tensions as Vanessa sought to be closer to Calle. Vanessa sometimes made negative comments about Calle to mutual friends or family members that led Calle to be even more guarded with her stories. While her experiences with Vanessa were important as he composed these complex stories around gender, Calle composed them amid this relational tension; she wanted to be accepted but feared being rejected. It seems, in some ways, that Vanessa lived in this same tension as she worked to be accepted and trusted by Calle, while in some ways feeling rejected by Calle's unwillingness to share his stories with Vanessa. At the same time, I wondered about the significance of this experience with Vanessa for Calle: what did it feel like for him, to feel understood, even without explaining? How did Vanessa's playfulness shape the ways that Calle was able to be playful in her own experience and expression?

This experience with Vanessa stood in stark contrast to many of Calle's experiences with her parents. His parents had clear pre-written stories for Calle. For example, Calle, having just finished her undergraduate work, planned to move on to graduate work. He applied and was waitlisted to a graduate program out of state. Soon after Calle let her parents know about this plan to move out of state to attend graduate school, his parents called and let Calle know that they were coming to town. They met to have dinner at a restaurant, during which time they tried to convince Calle to abandon his plans of going to graduate school in her chosen field. They

suggested that this field would not allow Calle to make enough money and threatened to disown him and cut off all financial support. Embedded in this conversation were judgments about the disappointment her parents felt in Calle's choices. His parents composed a story of homosexuality about Calle and blamed this story for his rebelliousness. Calle felt embarrassed and hurt that her parents would express such contempt for his choices in such an overt manner.

Calle was, for perhaps the first time, becoming more resolute in her decisions for graduate school throughout the semester. As she became more determined, her parents began to push back even more on her decisions. Throughout the year, her parents had multiple interventions, in Calle's words, to dissuade him from going to graduate school in her chosen field. As Calle described,

At first I just kind of yielded and then for I guess like a week or a few days.... And so, I ended up talking to my friends, asking them for advice and I actually built up this little network and they're pretty much like, "Yeah, well we'll help you out, if that's the case." And so, I'm just like, "Okay." So, I go back to them and I'm like, "Actually, no, I'm still actually doing this.... My mom didn't want to see me and my dad's like, "Okay, if you do this, your mom will never talk to you again." And I'm like, "I don't want that to happen, but if it does, I guess that's the way it's going to have to be." (Calle, Research Conversation, April 12, 2016)

Calle, resolute on her decision to attend graduate school, began composing a new story for herself and his parents. Still, she has trouble sharing her stories around gender and sexuality with her parents. The strict rules and expectations for being and behavior permeate Calle's relationship with her parents, even in the choice of a graduate school or prospective profession. At the same time, her sister, Vanessa, has generally been a safe person for Calle. Her positive

response to Calle's composition of identity around gender and sexuality has enabled him to begin to open himself up to other friends and family members.

Things Bump Into Each Other

It feels like you have a lot of layers.

I have been having this secret little story to myself,

That nobody else knows about,

And yet, all of my other life events are happening around it,

And then when things bump into each other

That aren't meant to be bumping into each other,

Anxiety of things rubbing together.

And I've been trying to kind of put it all together.

I'm holding all these narratives and I'm just like,

No, they don't relate,

But they do.

I wanna talk more about my experience.

As I do that, it's funny how some things do kind of fall into place.

Sometimes you still hit those things

'Cause those are old walls that were made,

No one's gone by and torn them down.

(Interim Research Text, Calle, Research Conversations, December 1, 2015- May 3, 2016)

While Calle desired to be understood by others, she often composed stories around gender and sexuality privately, or at least not with those who knew him. He began to play with the stories of gender she composed publicly through the representation of her gender. In some

places, she might present himself as a man, and in others, he might present herself as a woman. However, even this was a secret story, playing in spaces and places who did not know him. He described the experience thusly,

I have been having this secret little story to myself that nobody else knows about, yet, somehow all of my other life events are happening around it, and it seems that like... And then when things bump into each other that aren't meant to be bumping into each other....
(Calle, research conversation, December 1, 2015).

Calle felt tension about finding safe places and safe people to whom she might compose secret stories around gender and sexual identity. Carefully, Calle chose outward appearances that represented the way she felt, but he feared that someone she knew might see him dressed differently and her secret story might be found out. In her composition of these new public stories, unfamiliar people and places were safer places for identity play (Lugones, 1987) because the rules of the game had not been established. Existing stories of Calle's identity with familiar people and places became obstacles for her composition of new identity stories around gender and sexuality resonant with the Calle's stories of identity around gender and sexuality¹². Calle's stories in those new places had not yet been composed, although certainly stories of gender and sexuality were continually composed in those places.

I wondered about the ways that Calle's composition of identity was embedded in dominant stories of gender and sexuality. Although he was able to compose stories differently with unfamiliar people in unfamiliar places, Calle presented herself in ways that might still be

¹²Calle's experience brought my mind back to the work of Dewey (1938/1997). Dewey asserted that an educative experience involves the interplay of internal conditions-- the feelings, attitudes, desires, or needs of an individual, and objective conditions, the environment. I began to wonder if the environments in which Calle found herself allowed for his internal conditions to be expressed and understood in meaningful ways.

acceptable to dominant stories of gender. Even as he interrupted the dominant stories around gender and sexuality by presenting sometimes as a male and other times as a female, Calle still composed stories resonant with dominant stories of gender and sexuality, whether male or female. As I consider Calle's experience, my attention is drawn to how powerful these dominant stories of gender and sexuality are for Calle, even though her own experience interrupts the ways the stories are lived out. How might those unfamiliar people and places respond if their dominant stories of gender, and not just their stories of Calle, were interrupted?

I began to wonder about the ways that he made sense of his unfolding stories around gender and sexuality. Calle helped me to think about the ways her experiences led her to bring her multiple stories of gender and sexuality together publicly, as she made sense of her complex experience. Concerning his unfolding experience, Calle reflected,

[I]t does take a toll over a long period of time if nobody else sees you or responds to you the way that you do to yourself, and it does wear you down after a little bit. Also, it feels like you have to have a lot of layers, and it definitely is not very integrated with parts of my life. And I guess that's why I started to reach out to people and talk more about it 'cause I wanted to integrate my life together.... (Calle, Research Conversation, December 1, 2015)

Calle's attempt to integrate or make sense of her stories of experience led my mind to what Carr (1986) called narrative coherence. Carr suggested that a multiplicity of experience

spread out over time and even existing simultaneously in the present, calls for an active reflection that attempts to put the whole together. The most striking occasions...in which a new view of life, of oneself, and of one's future projects and prospects requires a break with and reinterpretation of one's past. (p. 75)

Carr asserts that this reinterpretation is not an invention of a new story, but rather the “events that were lived in terms of one story are now seen as part of another” (p. 76). As new experiences add complexity to or interrupt our current stories of self, we reflect and begin to make sense of these new experiences in light of the experiences across the course of life. For Calle, her new experiences around gender and sexuality necessitated the reinterpretation of her past and forward-looking stories considering these present experiences for himself and for others.

Slowly, Calle has begun to compose new stories around his gender and sexuality publicly, although not always by choice. On her way back from spring break trip his senior year of college, Calle called friends to help with car trouble. Vanessa came to help along with other friends from the university they both attended. Although Vanessa and Calle had never explicitly discussed the stories Calle was beginning to compose around gender and sexuality, Vanessa seemed to understand implicitly some of the complexities around gender and sexual identity that Calle was beginning to compose, and made comments that outed him to their mutual friends. Calle was conflicted about the experience, as she remarked, “Just kinda like that one statement, and I’m like, ‘Is this gonna be a thing? No? Okay, moving past....’ It felt good, but also uncomfortable.... ‘Cause I did like to be acknowledged” (Calle, Research Conversation, March 29, 2016). Calle has lived in this tension between being seen and understood and the fear of how others might react, between the composition of a story that is acceptable to others, one resonant with dominant stories of gender and sexuality, and one that is acceptable to her. Calle thought about some of the tensions that arose for her as friends and family came to understand some of the complexities in her composition of stories around gender and sexuality. She explained,

[W]hether it be that they won't understand or maybe in some cases, one of the biggest ones is that they won't care. Or just not really know what will happen. I think most of it is just coming from having not been more open...and allowing these singular narratives to happen. (Calle, Research Conversation, May 3, 2016)

As I reflected on Calle's experience, my mind was drawn to the ways that tensions arose for Calle, not as she composed new stories around gender and sexuality but rather as he disrupted familiar stories that she and others had composed around her gender and sexuality. Calle picked up and continued to compose the pre-written stories of gender and sexuality that society composes for him from the time of her birth. For many of us, from the time we are born, we are socialized to behave in ways resonant with dominant stories of gender: the colors we wear, the toys with which we play, the language we use. These stories are composed before we have an understanding of our own experiences and are able to compose our own stories of identity around gender and sexuality. The dissonance between these dominant pre-written stories of gender and those she had begun to compose led her to feel separated from herself in some ways. Although she was apprehensive about sharing his personal stories of gender and sexuality with friends and family, Calle began to desire a way of making sense of her experience for herself and others, to bring her stories together. As she explained,

...I've been trying really hard to integrate all of my life together, since I did notice before that everything was very linear, and that if two of these worlds collided, it would just completely flushed with anxiety. So, I'd be like, "Oh my goodness, I'm two different people right now. I can't handle two people at the same time." (Calle, Research Conversation, May 3, 2016).

Calle intended to tell her family first but found it too tension-filled. Her parents were paying for school and had already threatened to disown him and stop paying for school if she pursued her intended career path. The relationship seemed too fragile and costly. In some ways, with the help of his sister, Calle began to tell friends and cousins about the complexities around her gender and sexual identity. Although not all have responded positively, the people about whom she cares have continued to care for him. Calle's story has now become an additional story on her friends' and family's landscapes that they can access. With each new person with whom she shares her stories, Calle has felt empowered to be more open with his public composition of stories around gender.

Learning with Calle

Categories mask experience. Society's reliance on monochromatic understandings of identity can lead us to see ourselves in overly simplistic ways, reducing our own rich experience to familiar tropes resonant with dominant story lines. In this way, seeing experience through the lens of categories, we see life from a distance without regard to the particularities and uniqueness of lived experience. It brings to mind parallels to Aoki's notion of curriculum-as-plan and lived curriculum. "Curriculum-as-plan," Aoki (1993) suggested, is work "imbued with the planners' orientation to the world, which inevitably include their own interests and assumptions about ways of knowing and about how teachers and students are to be understood" (p. 258). The goals, methods, resources, and assessments detailed in these plans are meant "for faceless people, students shorn of their uniqueness or for all teachers, who become generalized entities often defined in terms of generalized performance roles" (p. 258). In the same way, we might view identity-as-category to be concomitant with Aoki's curriculum-as-plan with all the attending characteristics. When we see identity-as-category, we think "in terms of generalized performance

roles” (p. 258) about the types of stories persons compose around gender and sexuality. These categories cannot reflect the uniqueness of lived experience or the complexity of the compositions of stories around gender and sexuality embodied in the lives of people.

In contrast, Aoki understood lived curriculum as that which is lived out in classrooms with real teachers and students. This view of curriculum attends to the complexities of the relationships and experiences within a school context. In the same way, identity-as-experience can be viewed as a lived curriculum of identity that interrupts the dominant narrative of identity-as-category and acts as a counterstory of gender and sexual identity understood by categories. From this perspective, we attend to experience, *sui generis*, as situated among unique relationships and experiences. This view of identity emerges from the multiplicity of a life, a uniqueness known “from having lived daily life with” (p. 258) people positioned by dominant stories of gender and sexuality. Experience cannot be replicated or generalized and therefore cannot be viewed through lenses that resist complexity and promote conformity. Through living and telling stories of identity, like Calle’s, we are “disturbing the traditional landscape” (Aoki, 1993, p. 258), one that privileges identity-as-category.

For Calle, coming to understand his own experience was difficult as she navigated the landscape that privileged identity-as-category, seeking terms to understand and legitimate her experience. At the same time, Calle recognized that those with whom she shared life, his friends and family understood identity in this way. This leads me to question for what purpose? As we disturb the landscape that privileges identity-as-category, we lay multiple and diverse stories of gender and sexuality out, not as a means of generalizing these experiences but for recognizing the unique experiences, contexts, and relationships through which we compose diverse identities.

Chapter 6

Mr. CEO

Mr. CEO found me outside the theater as I waited at a popular shopping location in midtown. Through our initial email interactions, we set our introductory meeting for the week before Thanksgiving. A few weeks prior, I had contacted several civic groups in the area, one of which published the recruitment flyer for the inquiry in its monthly newsletter. Mr. CEO contacted me through email, and after a brief introduction about the inquiry and a promise of anonymity, Mr. CEO agreed to meet in person. He arrived promptly and searched me out based on the limited description I had provided about my attire for the day. When he approached, I introduced myself, and we walked over to a coffee shop about a block away.

I was immediately drawn to Mr. CEO's calm and respectful demeanor. Mr. CEO was soft-spoken and attentive to our conversation. As we sat down, I took out the consent forms from my bag, an attempt to ensure I did not forget any of my main talking points about the inquiry. I asked Mr. CEO if he had any questions, and his response made it clear to me that he had an important story to tell. As I later reflected in my research journal, I was excited to work with Mr. CEO because of the enthusiasm he showed. From our initial conversations, I understood that he saw this work as important and felt that he had a significant role to play.

At the beginning of the inquiry, I asked Mr. CEO to choose a pseudonym, but I was a bit taken aback by his unorthodox name choice. In our next research conversation, I asked him to explain his thinking. He chose the acronym, CEO, to represent three characteristics that he attempts to live out in his life: compassion, empathy, and optimism. He explained,

So, CEO is, we know that that's a status symbol, like if you're a CEO of a company or something like that, you're pretty much it.... I broke it down into this acronym...because

it's my compassion that I have for people and my career that make people want to hire me, or be their friend or things like that. They see something worth, some value of worth in me. Empathetic is, I can't really say that I've gone through everything to sympathize with people, but I definitely have the tools to say, "You know what? I can understand how that would make you feel this way," whether it's happy, sad, upset, or whatever, I'm very good at validating people, because it's like, okay, if I put myself in that headspace, I get that. And then optimistic, is that, even through the worst situations, or if I feel that something could alter my life for the worst, I'm always looking for the best in it, because I know the pain doesn't last forever. Just like joy doesn't last forever. But there's always room for improvement. (Mr. CEO, research conversation, January 9, 2016)

In our conversations, we thought together about the composition of Mr. CEO's life; the course of our interactions made me increasingly aware of the appropriateness of Mr. CEO's pseudonym as part of the stories he composed and lived out. I could see the way that Mr. CEO's compassion, empathy, and optimism shaped his views of the world and the ways he engaged in it. Now a social worker, Mr. CEO spends his time working with children who have faced some of the same difficult experiences he had previously encountered.

I began to understand that Mr. CEO attempted to leave the experiences from his past behind, although in many ways they continued shape the stories he composed now. He wanted to earn the respect of others through his work and life, and in many ways, he has composed his life in reaction to the private stories of his childhood. Mr. CEO remarked that he was even a little "thrown off" (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, January 9, 2016) by how much he had shared with me. As he reflected,

...not everybody knows me, especially on this level. The cosmetic, the outside of me, is so different and unless you really talk to me, you wouldn't think any of this is going on, cause that's just a part of my life I don't flaunt....'cause it's just one of those things where it happened and you just wanna bury it, and to start fresh because it was a really messed up time. (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, January 9, 2016)

As I listened to Mr. CEO, I began to understand why these stories were so personal. Mr. CEO spent much of his life trying to avoid living out the dominant stories composed by society for young black men born into poverty in the United States. I understood through our interactions that Mr. CEO was aware of the ways these stories positioned him in the eyes of others. In our first conversation, he began by telling me about his early childhood. He recounted, "My mother was fairly young when she had me. I was three years old when she graduated from high school, if that puts you in a perspective" (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015). His acknowledgement of how others might attempt to understand his experience through his experience of being born to a young mother led me to see the ways that Mr. CEO understood how others saw him through the dominant stories composed by society. It seemed important for him to compose a life in spite of his childhood experiences. He commented, "I wanted to branch out to see what else is there or can I achieve better. And I did" (Mr. CEO, research conversation, December 13, 2015). As I composed Mr. CEO's narrative account, I continually had to evaluate the dominant stories that shaped my interpretation of Mr. CEO's experiences. At points, I was tempted either to feel sorry for him because of experiences or to cast him as the hero, the African-American man raised in poverty who made it out. However, to do so speaks more to the dominant stories I take up than it does about Mr. CEO. This narrative account is an attempt to

see Mr. CEO's identity making situated in the nuances and particularities of his experience as opposed to fitting his life into simplistic storylines.

It felt natural to position Mr. CEO as one with knowledge to share, because in many ways, he positioned himself that way. Mr. CEO took the role of a participant seriously and sought opportunities to provide insight into his own experience and the understandings that shaped his perspectives on the world. This young man, barely out of college, had many stories to share. Mr. CEO often sent me text messages with links to various videos or interviews with persons that helped him express his feelings around his own identity. The materials¹³ he shared shaped my understanding of his experience and the identity Mr. CEO composes around sexuality. A few months into our work together, Mr. CEO requested that I watch an interview between a young African-American performer, Keke Palmer (2015, May 6), and a radio station in New York. In the interview, Palmer discussed her life experiences and the ways her experiences have shaped her into the woman she is continually becoming. Mr. CEO commented that her interview resonated with his own experience; he texted, "...I identify not as a person who is gay, but as a young person trying to come into my own" (Mr. CEO, personal communication, February 28, 2016).

Nothing to Lose

Since our family's not very close...

I came from the mentality,

That I have nothing to lose.

Even if my mother did not accept me,

I was just kind of like,

¹³ I have interwoven the ideas and materials shared by Mr. CEO throughout this narrative account.

“Well, whatever--

I gotta keep going”

That’s how we are as a family,

We’re fighters,

And we don’t beg,

We don’t make people stay,

You don’t ever stay somewhere you’re not wanted.

(Interim Research Text, Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015)

The first time I met Mr. CEO, he began to recount his experience of coming out to his mother, interrupting the stories she composed about him. At that point, I had only explained the parameters of the research but had not yet given Mr. CEO the consent form for the inquiry. I cut short his retelling and offered him the consent form. I asked if we could meet after the Thanksgiving holiday for our first research conversation. He politely agreed, and we went our separate ways. It was clear to me that this was an important story for Mr. CEO because he presented it in our first meeting almost as a rationale for wanting to participate in this research inquiry. When we came back together a couple of weeks later, I asked him to revisit that story.

Growing up, Mr. CEO was close to his mother, but he was never able or willing to share the stories he was beginning to compose around sexuality, privately, with her. As he explained, ...that was one thing I never did talk to her about. Because I mean you grow up as a black man in the ghetto, you know an impoverished area, then it's really not favored. You have negative role models saying how many girls you should have, what life should be like as a black man.... So, my lifestyle or my choosing to come out was not favored, so I just suppressed it for a long time. (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015)

Others in his community saw Mr. CEO as different because of the way he related with his mother and they began to compose their own stories of his sexuality. At various times community members came to his mother to suggest that Mr. CEO was gay. Mr. CEO described their conversations,

I was always a good kid, I always paid attention to her, I minded her for the most part, and so a lot of people just said I was gonna be gay 'cause I wasn't rebellious.... So, for years on end, my mother kept hearing these things through different times out of my life, three different people. And she always defended me, and I felt really bad. (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015)

It was clear through our conversation that these comments were accusatory in nature. I understood them almost as appeals for his mother to intervene in her son's impending corruption as his mother consistently "defended" (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015) Mr. CEO from these allegations. He described his mother's reactions thusly, "She got tired of hearing it. 'Cause she said, 'My son and I are very close and if he were to be like that then he would let me know'" (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015). Mr. CEO's experience illustrates the ways that socially constructed categories of identity carry stories with them. The stories we embody through our actions or bodily characteristics (e.g., weight, skin color, hair) carry with them stories to view people. Mr. CEO's relationship with his mother signified stories around homosexuality for his community members. Their assumptions were based on simplified stories of how persons positioned by dominant stories of sexuality behave and not on the stories of sexuality being lived out by Mr. CEO. These pejorative narratives around being gay, told by Mr. CEO's community, led him to compose a cover story of sexuality resonant with dominant stories of sexuality in his community. Mr. CEO's mother defended him

from the community's negative stories of homosexuality by retelling the cover stories Mr. CEO composed.

I wondered aloud with Mr. CEO about the ways he storied his own composition of identity around sexuality and the complex emotions he must have felt around a gay identity that was in tension with acceptable stories around sexual identity in his former community. Mr. CEO noted the tension (even frustration) he felt around these complex identity-making experiences. He explained,

I'm black and I'm gay, that's two of the worst things you can be on earth in this time period, because back then God forbid I drink out of the water fountain labeled white.

Nowadays, it's like why are you gay, that's horrible, you're going to hell. It's like I can't win. (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, January 30, 2016)

Icard (1986) noted the complexity of identity making for individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality in African-American communities. Icard described the tension between African-American and LGBT communities and suggested that African-American males can struggle to develop

a positive and comfortable sexual identity, he is faced with the problem of complying with the male gender role expectations of the black community.... male gender expectations of the black community may present pressures so great that they may cause the individual to be confused, alienated, and put in the position of making painful choices. (p. 88)

Being gay in an African-American community, according to Icard, can be seen as a threat to the man's blackness because many in these communities understand homosexuality as "a cultural phenomenon of —whites—a white problem inimical to the interest of blacks" (p. 86). While it is

important not to draw these conclusions about Mr. CEO's experience, Icard's work does add complexity to my thinking around Mr. CEO's experience in negotiating multiple positioning identities within a society that privileges white and heterosexual dominant stories. Icard added, "as a 'double minority,' gay black men are uniquely influenced by racism and anti-homosexual responses" (p. 83) within multiple, often tension-filled, identity-shaping communities.

Loiacano (1989) noted similar tensions among African-American study participants positioned by dominant stories of sexuality. He found that participants that identified as gay often feared being rejected by the African-American community; as Loiacano suggested, "a Black American might place less value on coming out to others than his or her White counterpart, fearing that he or she might jeopardize needed support as a racial minority" (p. 24). At the same time, their racial identities positioned them differently in gay communities where the majority of persons identified as white. Dominant stories of race shaped how they were accepted into or not accepted into the gay community. While many persons positioned by dominant stories of sexuality seek a community grounded in stories of difference around sexuality for identity development, these communities are not always welcoming to African-Americans. For African-Americans positioned by dominant stories of sexuality, often neither the black community nor the gay community are safe places to compose diverse identities.

Mr. CEO's experience of his community provided context for his composition of secret stories of sexuality in his context. He explained,

I was so kept about my feelings in the first place is because... if you know anything about the black culture, or the African-American culture, it is not looked upon as a strength, or as a good thing. Men are supposed to be head of the household, wives are supposed to be submissive. Like old school traditional stuff. I was like, this ain't for me. I just knew then,

because I knew I was always different.... (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, January 30, 2016)

His composition of a secret story of sexuality enabled him to pass in his community, and perhaps allowed his family to avoid negative stories in this community, but at what costs? What did Mr. CEO give up in the silencing of these stories around sexual identity? He was forced to make sense of two stories of experience, which seemingly did not fit together in his experience. Composing his story of sexuality allowed him to negotiate his storied landscapes in educative ways for the dominant story. His secret story of sexuality perpetuated dominant stories of heterosexuality in his community that did not allow for the interruption of those stories through the addition of complex understandings of sexuality through experience. At the same time, this secret composition of identity around sexuality was mis-educative (Dewey, 1938/1997) for him personally. The composition of a story of sexuality so in tension with the dominant stories of sexuality in his community forced him to silence aspects of his own identity and fear rejection from his family and community.

After leaving home for college, Mr. CEO came to the place where he was able to share the stories he composed around sexuality with his mother¹⁴. The tension that he felt around the composition of his stories of sexuality became too great. Being on his own at school, he felt like he had “nothing to lose” (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015). Even if his mother did not accept him, he was prepared to move on without his family. As he shared his sexual and relational attraction towards men with his mother, he apologized to her for having to

¹⁴ It may be helpful to note that his move to college represented a shifting context from a predominantly African-American community to a predominantly white community. Reflecting on the research previously cited, I wondered if this shift might have shaped the different ways he began to understand his stories of sexuality in his new context.

defend him to others in their community; he felt guilty that he had not been completely honest with his mother. He recounted his conversation with her,

"I feel really bad 'cause you defended me all these years, and I just wanna let you know that a lot of people what they were saying it was correct.... I am interested in men; I've been this way for a long time and that's just what it is." (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015)

As I considered Mr. CEO's experience, I attended to the ways Mr. CEO's context shaped the ways he was able to compose these new stories of sexuality. Even though he understood that his mother could be upset about his interrupting of her stories around sexual identity, his new community and financial independence as an adult allowed him to compose these stories openly.

I'm Not Like You

Yeah, when she told me that
it brought me back to the same place.
I used to spend hours, hours in that chapel at night,
either crying, or praying or whatever.
I felt that my feelings are getting stronger to come out.
Then I was like,
okay I've got to pray about it.
That'll fix it.
As she said,
God will change it in the twinkling of an eye.
That twinkle was taking too long.

It's not going away.

I just chose to embrace it instead of running away.

I'm not saying I'm not open to suggestions,

but don't try to enforce your beliefs on me,

because I'm not like you.

(Interim Research Text, Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, January 30, 2016)

Even his new university context, Mr. CEO's experience of his composition of new stories around sexuality was tension-filled as these stories bumped up against not only his community stories around what it meant to be man, or an African-American man, but around the stories around Christian religious belief that Mr. CEO composed. The tensions he felt around his Christian identity and the stories he was composing around sexuality led him to compose these stories apart from one another in different contexts. As he noted in one of our conversations,

Sometimes I can't understand why my life is so divided where I wouldn't think to introduce people into certain aspects of my life.... With the guy that I like I wanted to invite him to church one day, because I feel like I never talk about that side of me. At church, I sing in my choir.... It feels like a separate entity. I never talk about church when I'm at work or when I'm at choir rehearsal, or anything. It's just all separate. (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, January 30, 2016)

Mr. CEO had worked to maintain his stories of faith after he came out, but these stories have been seemingly incompatible and constantly in tension with his first gay community. Mr. CEO had previously shared his experience as a Christian trying to make sense of his conflicting feelings and desires around sexuality. As these feelings were becoming more prominent in his life, he recalled going to a campus chapel: "I would just pray all the time, like, 'Just make me

normal, God. I just want to be who you want me to be” (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015). After sometime, he began to realize that “it wasn't going away. It was just so hard” (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015).

In hearing Mr. CEO's experience and in revisiting his experience for the writing of this narrative account, I felt many emotions. Many aspects of his stories resonated with my own experience and led me to attend to my own stories that I composed around sexuality and religious faith. Mr. CEO's stories worked on me (Morris, 2001). As I considered his stories, I was reminded that thinking requires reason and feeling. Morris wrote, “the ancient Western binary habit that requires us to put reason and emotion into separate words and unconnected categories is, I contend, a neurological mistake, with crucial implications for ethics” (p. 55). I began to think with Mr. CEO's stories in ways that pushed me into deeper understanding of my own experience and began to change understandings of it.

I resonated with Mr. CEO's struggle to hold these stories of identity around sexuality in tension with the many other stories that shaped who I understood my family and myself to be. The stories which had been composed for me throughout my life, what it meant to be a good boy, to be a good son, to be a faithfully religious person, to grow up and have a family, to live a life resonant with dominant narratives—all of these stories seemed dissonant with my own feelings and desires. The only story I had to understand the dissonance was a religious story of sin, and so that is a story I took up to make sense of these conflicting stories. I, myself had prayed Mr. CEO's prayer, the prayer of the sinful man with homosexual desires, hoping to be fixed or cured. After some time, I, too, realized that my experience of sexual desire and identity was not one I could change and I needed another way to make sense of it for myself. I remember vividly a conversation I had with the pastor of the church I attended. I shared with him my struggle to

make sense of my feelings and desires with my understandings of the church and my Christian identity. We talked about my experience in what seemed like coded language: my temptations, the sin with which I struggled, God could help me change I remember the embarrassment and shame I felt when he finally asked, “Why don’t you just stop?”

I found it difficult to compose my own stories around sexuality that were dissonant with the dominant stories of sexuality in that context. The tension was so great between my experience of sexuality and the dominant stories that I often felt powerless. My mind was often filled with questions and doubts around the possibilities of others finding out about my secret story of sexuality. What might this mean for my family; how would they react? Would I disappoint or alienate those for whom I cared? Was I willing to risk my most important relationships and means of support for this positioning story? Though painful, in many ways I am grateful for my conversation with the pastor. His blunt question allowed me to see that he did not understand my experience and I finally felt empowered to find a new context to compose my stories of identity.

These experiences wafted back to me as Mr. CEO shared a conversation he had through social media with a member of a church he had attended during college. Just over a year prior, the Supreme Court of the United State had legalized same-sex marriage (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2014). Mr. CEO put a post on his social media page mentioning the historic nature of the legal events along with a rainbow flag. The rainbow flag is often associated with diverse identities positioned by dominant stories of gender and sexuality. One of the women he attended church with messaged him privately:

Sister L: Please don't tell me you approve of gay marriage.

Mr. CEO: Well, Sister L, I am gay. I've been this way as long as I can remember. I do

support the community I am a part of.

Sister L: But Mr. CEO, you know what the bible says about man being with a man. It's an abomination and God can do anything, but fail. He can change you in a twinkling of an eye. Only if you want to be. I say this because you are my friend and I love you, but if you don't change your ways heaven will not be your home, but you have to make that choice. Hey, I'm gonna be your friend regardless, but I've got to tell you the truth. Think about and decide what's more important, love, Mr. CEO, miss you. (Mr. CEO, Research Artifact, January 30, 2016)

Mr. CEO shared that his experience of this conversation brought him back to the small college chapel. He remembered he used to “spend hours, hours in that chapel at night, either crying, or praying or whatever. I felt that my feelings are getting stronger to come out. Then I was like, okay I've got to pray about it. That'll fix it” (Research Conversation, Mr. CEO, January 30, 2016). No matter how much he prayed about it, his feelings did not change.

My experience of similarly positioned conflicting stories¹⁵ led me to reconsider my beliefs; I began to compose new stories about religion as I began to compose new stories of sexuality incongruent with my previous stories of religion. Similarly, Mr. CEO questioned his religious community's interpretation of these understandings of sexuality. He came to the place that he realized that his feelings were not going to change. Mr. CEO believed that God had the

¹⁵ Clandinin and Connelly (1995) understood conflicting stories as stories composed in great tension with dominant stories within a context/community; these stories are typically unsustainable. Cover stories are composed in relationship to the dominant story as a way of avoiding conflict. Conflicting stories are often hidden by cover stories because they cannot be composed among dominant stories. Competing stories of identity are composed in tension with the dominant stories of a context but can be sustained in that tension, whereas conflicting stories are never successful.

ability to change him in an instant and it had not happened. Therefore, he reasoned that God must not want him changed, for he is as God made him. As he remarked,

It's just like trying to change the color of my skin. No matter how bad I want to be Hispanic or white or whatever, that's not changing. That's how I felt about me coming out. I was like my feelings inside of me, they're not going away. It's impossible. It's like it's not happening. That's why I feel like I give up on trying to chase something that will never go away. (Research Conversation, Mr. CEO, January 30, 2016).

Yet, while Mr. CEO understood that his shifting stories around sexuality and religion helped him to make sense of his multiple identities, others within his multiple communities did not share the same understanding.

Barton (2010) considers the tensions that exist for individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality in conservative religious contexts. Her work helped me to understand Mr. CEO's experience in the context of other religious individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality attempting to make sense of conflicting stories. She found that her participants

learned from family members, teachers, peers, neighbors, and preachers that these same-sex feelings damned them to hell, even though they could not stop their feelings with any force of will. No matter hard they tried...some weeping at the altar in front of their congregations week after week--they could not *pray the gay away*. (p. 477, emphasis in original)

Barton suggested that many persons positioned by dominant stories of sexuality in social contexts with dominant stories of Christian conservatism are unable to make sense of the conflicting stories of identity and “struggle with fear of hell, depression, suicidal thoughts, ex-

gay programs, feelings of worthlessness, and self-destructive behaviors” (p. 477). Others, she wrote, embark on “an intense, personal, often lonely journey integrating socially constructed conflicting identities” (p. 478). Though difficult, they must form a new narrative capable of holding these identities in tension. Mr. CEO struggled to reconcile the dissonance between the dominant stories of his religious community around sexuality, hoping and praying that he might be changed. At some point amid this tension, Mr. CEO interrupted his stories around religion and sexuality as he could not resolve the tension between these dissonant stories. Mr. CEO began to reinterpret his religious belief to make room for his stories of identity around sexuality. Reflecting on his shifting stories around religion and sexuality after his conversation with Sister L, Mr. CEO commented,

...God has the power to do whatever he pleases, so if he really hates something he can wipe it out, hence that's how the flood came about. There was so much going on. He didn't like it. He destroyed it. I mean, it's just that easy. That's why I told her I feel like God has blessed me beyond measure, because if it was really that bad, if he was really that disgusted with me he could have just done away with me.... When she told me heaven would not be a home for me. I was like, how do you really know that though.

(Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, January 30, 2015)

The dominant stories of religion in his contexts conflicted with his personal experience around sexuality. In order to make sense of the tension, Mr. CEO had to reinterpret these conflicting stories. As Carr (1986) reminded me, narrative coherence often requires “a break with and reinterpretation of one’s past” (p. 76). Likewise, Mr. CEO had to break with and reinterpret his past stories around religion, particularly those that conflicted with his experiences around sexuality in order to make sense of his conflicting stories. It is important to note that Mr. CEO

was able to do this as he left the religious context of his childhood and university when he moved to a new city for work.

For others, coherence is difficult or not possible in particular religious or social contexts. Some with conflicting stories of identity around sexuality and religion are forced to choose one story or another to compose, to the detriment of their well-being. Ganzevoort, van der Laan, and Olsman (2011) found that many religious individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality “abstain from the development of their sexuality and experience loss or self or alienation from their body and from significant others. Others experience alienation from their spiritual sources and well-being. Still others struggle with profound feelings of guilt and shame” (pp. 210-211).

Lorde (1984) expressed similar tensions among her diverse, often conflicting, identities as an African-American, lesbian, and feminist. She commented, “I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live” (p. 120). Experience is multi-vocal and complex, and it is difficult pursuit to choose aspects of our identities we might prefer to compose in particular contexts, although persons positioned by difference to dominant stories are often forced to compose identities in relationship to the dominant narratives within various and diverse contexts. Composing an identity in tension with the dominant narrative of sexuality in a particular context often requires a new story in order to make sense of experience. Otherwise, we are forced to silence important stories of identity.

Lorde (1984) reminded me the importance of making sense of multiple, complex, and conflicting identities:

My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without restriction of externally imposed definition. (pp. 120-121)

At reading her words, I was again reminded of my wondering about Mr. CEO's silenced stories of identity around sexuality. When he silenced his stories, he gave up his autonomy and the ability to compose his own stories rather than being defined externally by dominant stories. As Mr. CEO gave voice to his silenced story of sexuality, he was able to openly recognize his multiple and diverse identities and compose his own stories rather than be storied. In doing so, he interrupted stories, in the African-American, religious, and gay communities, but he began to find coherence among his multiple stories of identity.

For Lack of a Better Term

If you like men,

You're just gay.

Straight people are like,

“Well, if you have sex with a dude even one time,

You're just gay automatically.”

And, I'm not your stereotypical,

I'll say “gay man” for lack of a better term

I'm just myself.

A lot of my friends were very surprised when I said

“Oh, I like men.”

They were like,

“What?”

(Interim Research Text, Mr. CEO, research conversation, December 13, 2015)

Although Mr. CEO began to compose new stories of sexuality, his own experience and composition of stories of identity around sexuality are complex. He continued to make sense of his identity. For instance, Mr. CEO noted that he is sexually interested in women, but that this story is difficult to compose for himself in the gay community. As he suggested,

I wouldn't really identify myself as completely gay.... I only told myself that really because it was so hard to explain myself in the gay community because they don't believe in people being bisexual or asexual or whatever. It's just pretty much gay/straight. My personal, the way I am, I prefer men over women most of the time. (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015)

Mr. CEO's reflections added complexity my understanding of his identity making. His sexual attraction to men would lead some to conclude that he is gay, but this category did not reflect the nuances of his experience. When he expressed to some of his gay friends that he is interested in both men and women, Mr. CEO received negative feedback from them; some simply refused to believe that he could be interested in both men and women. Mr. CEO reflected on his perception of the dominant stories of sexuality he experienced when he commented, "Well, how can you like women too if you like men.... Just like straight people are like, 'Well, if you have sex with a dude even one time, you're just gay automatically'" (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015). Mr. CEO's reflection led me to think about the ways that reductionist stories, like those perpetrated by categorical understandings of identity, are incapable of reflecting the complex nature of experience. Even in a community positioned by difference, such

as the gay community of which Mr. CEO was a part, those dominant stories of identity persisted in shaping the ways Mr. CEO negotiated his identity.

Making sense of his experience of sexuality and the dissonant dominant stories around sexual identity was a tension-filled process for Mr. CEO. His conflicting feelings led him to jump back and forth between two stories of identity, gay and straight, an unhelpful distinction created by dominant stories of sexuality of what it means to be gay and what it means to be straight composed by both gay and straight communities. He described his experience in this way,

Well, you know how some men or even some women too, will just be like, "I'm gay," or "No, I'm not. Yes, I am." Then they catch themselves going to the gay bars or maybe looking at a man or a woman and then try to look away, like, "No, that's not what I like." That was too much because that's what I did for a long time. (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015).

Mr. CEO felt torn by the dominant story of the sexual binary. His experience of his own sexuality conflicted with a story that asked him to choose one or the other. As I considered Mr. CEO's identity making, my mind was drawn to a video Mr. CEO shared with me to help understand his identity making. In it, Tillett Wright (2012) suggested,

Human beings are not one-dimensional.... If you have gay people over here and you have straight people over here, and while we recognize that most people identify as somewhere closer to one binary or another, there is this vast spectrum of people that exist in between.

Tillett Wright's words "validated" (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, January 9, 2015) Mr. CEO's experience, almost as if her words gave him permission to compose a different story. He added, "I just felt understood 'cause she gets it that you don't have to be this and you don't have

to do that to be this person...you just are who you are, everybody's different, and it's actually okay” (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, January 9, 2015).

However, even within the gay community, categorical understandings of identity have persisted in frustrating Mr. CEO. Not long after he moved to the city, he began to date men. He recounted the story of meeting a particular man with whom he shared mutual interest. Mr. CEO began going out on dates with him; the man eventually broke off the relationship because the man’s friend expressed concern that he was older than Mr. CEO. Mr. CEO expressed his frustration with the situation when he commented,

I don't get it. The gay community is really starting to just make me bump my head, because I don't understand the whole, I guess, logistics of the lifestyle especially with the categories... there's bears and twinkles and daddies and all.... And it's like, "Okay, I get that." But some people look at the category like, "Well, you don't fit my category, so we can't be together." It's just like, "I don't fucking get that." (Mr. CEO, Research Conversation, December 13, 2015)

As I thought about Mr. CEO’s experience, the image of Mr. CEO bumping his head felt like an apt metaphor for his identity-making experiences. As he navigated his own feelings and desires in multiple contexts, Mr. CEO continually bumped his head, on the dominant stories in his many storied landscapes. Murphy added to my thinking when he suggested that narrative coherence might be about composing one story across multiple landscapes (Murphy, personal communication, September 27, 2016). As Mr. CEO moved among his landscapes, he continually encountered tensions with the dominant stories there as he attempted to make sense of his own experience. Even in the gay community that is positioned by its dissonance with dominant stories of sexuality, the many categorical stories of identity led Mr. CEO to feel frustrated as he felt his

identity composed by the categories. The constraints of categorical understandings of identity, particularly as they are reified through dominant stories, serve to silence dissonant stories of identity; these limitations lead to mis-educative experience. Our lack of openness to diverse stories keeps others and ourselves from further growth.

In a video shared with me by Mr. CEO, Tillett Wright (2012), frustrated by the monochromatic view of gender and sexuality, began a project to photograph and publish multiple expressions of gender and sexuality in women. The purpose of her project resonated greatly with the purpose of this inquiry, to publicly compose multiple expressions of gender and sexuality, and to add complexity to the understandings of identity. Tillett Wright (2012) explained that through this project, she hoped

these categories, these binaries, these over-simplified boxes will begin to become useless and they'll begin to fall away. Because really, they describe nothing that we see and no one that we know and nothing that we are. What we see are human beings in all their multiplicity.

Tillett Wright's words led me to consider the ways that our inability to take up diverse stories of identity leads us to simplistic understandings, and in the case of the gay community, prejudiced views about and within the community and legislation against the gay community. She explained that that when we have limited views of identity, we begin to define others in a simplified way by that difference, and through that justify unfair treatment. As Tillett Wright (2012) reminded us, "once you get past the shared narrative of prejudice and struggle, just being other than straight doesn't necessarily mean that we have anything in common."

Learning with Mr. CEO

Stories to live by are complex, with multiple plotlines, sometimes composed in tension with other stories to live by. While dominant stories within our contexts often lead us to view identity in simplified ways that do not attend to the textured nuances of identity making as a complex endeavor, it is clear that experience is not smooth as we navigate through the various stories on our landscapes. The personal stories we compose around race, religion, sexuality, and personal experience are composed in relationship to, but not in concert with, dominant stories in societies. Their often-dissonant tones shape the ways we compose and live out stories around sexuality. In this way, we cannot talk about sexuality without talking about experience shaped by the many other stories we compose.

Mr. CEO composed multiple, diverse, and often conflicting stories to live by when seen through the eyes of the dominant narratives. However, through the lens of his experience, we can make sense of Mr. CEO's identity making. The dominant narratives of Mr. CEO's multiple worlds provided resistance to the composition of his stories to live by. They led him to compose new stories around religion and sexuality to find coherent understandings of his experience. As I reflected, I was reminded of Morris' (2001) discussion of bioethics. Rather than leaning on absolutist ethical mandates, the formation of a dominant narrative around ethical action, Morris suggested that narrative offers a "means to enhance understanding of the multiple values and conflicting perspectives at stake in medical action or inaction. It offers a way to situate moral thought within a form of understanding that finds stories as valuable..." (Morris, 2001, p. 64). In order to understand Mr. CEO's identity making, our point of reference should not be dominant stories around identity as they only lead back to simplified, categorical understandings. From this perspective, the individual positioned by those dominant stories is tasked with carrying and

resolving the tensions that emerge amidst the irreconcilable dissonance between lived experience around sexuality and the dominant stories of experience around sexuality, often to their detriment.

Instead, we should look to Mr. CEO's curriculum-making experiences as a means of interpretation and understanding of identity. Clandinin and Connelly (1992) reminded us that the composition of stories to live by, identity making, is central to curriculum making. As such, curriculum making can be understood as a "life-making process" (Murphy, Huber, & Clandinin, 2012, p. 221). It is from this perspective that we might view "curriculum as a course of life" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 393). The concept of curriculum making is a way of viewing learning in complex ways. Curriculum making happens when lives meet; we learn as we experience life with others. As Mr. CEO interacted with others on in his multiple contexts, he learned from these experiences in ways that shaped the stories he tells and lives out around his sexuality and his identity. In order to make space for multiple and diverse identities within schools, we must reconsider the dominant stories of identity we compose for ourselves and others and be willing to consider curriculum making from the perspective of those who make curriculum.

Chapter 7

Jamie

I met Jamie through an email exchange. I sent participant recruitment flyers to clubs and organizations, and Jamie, the main contact for his organization, responded with an interest in inquiry participation. I recall the feeling of excitement and anticipation that the research I had proposed was becoming real. I eagerly responded to him and we set up our initial meeting at a local coffee shop to speak about the inquiry. I felt nervous to meet Jamie, as I was unsure of myself as an inquirer and he was the first prospective participant with whom I met; I wanted to do this work well. We met at a coffee shop that was small, trendy, and quite crowded. Jamie arrived early for our conversation and secured a table outside. Upon my arrival, we introduced ourselves and began to chat casually. Jamie's calm demeanor and soft tone eased my anxiety about our first meeting. I introduced the inquiry and gave the consent forms to Jamie for his review. My inexperience as an inquirer showed as I clumsily searched for a pen for him to sign the consent forms after agreeing to participate. We chatted a bit more to become familiar with each other and set up a time and date for our first research conversation as our first meeting came to an end.

Jamie, a graduate student, was first drawn to his mid-sized university city for undergraduate studies. He was born and raised in a "small and mostly conservative" (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015) town in the same state. Regarding his decision to attend this large state university, Jamie reflected:

It was the only campus that I felt...I don't know, I felt excited to be at. It was more liberal, more welcoming. It had a better atmosphere in terms of what I was looking for. Other schools...felt more like my hometown, which is fine, but wasn't what I wanted

out of college. I wanted a different experience than what I had lived for the first 18 years. (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015).

Jamie expressed a sentiment I had heard from other participants who shared Jamie's context. His university and graduate school context gave Jamie access to multiple and diverse stories of identity. Jamie did not come to university seeking a place to compose a new story of sexuality, although he recognized the ways this new context had shaped the composition of his stories to live by; as he reflected, "It wasn't my intention to immediately step on [campus] and come out.... It took me a while.... I recognize that [this] is a much more accepting campus, generally. And so, I think that definitely led me here" (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). As I came to know Jamie better, I was continually struck by his level of self-awareness and ability to think about his own experience in complex ways.

Throughout the course of the inquiry, Jamie embodied thoughtfulness and sincerity about our work together. After the first couple of research conversations, I asked Jamie if he might be willing to prepare a timeline of his life as a tool for reflection. He carefully pieced together several pages and developed an extensive timeline that shaped much of our remaining conversations. I remember feeling appreciative for the attention and care he had invested to participate in this inquiry. As our research relationship unfolded, Jamie often took the responsibility of reserving spaces for our meetings and texting or emailing me to confirm our meetings. He helped me be a better inquirer as his attention to detail, insightful reflections, and thought-provoking questions helped me to think about his experiences in new ways.

Different Than the Norm

I wasn't out in school.

The story I tell myself now is

That I didn't come out
because there was no reason or need to.
I never felt like I had to deceive people.
I didn't ever pretend to be straight,
I just didn't identify as gay.
So, I didn't feel like,
Kind of not highlighting my sexuality was...
something that needed to happen,
And just had a greater potential to be harmful.
So, I just didn't.

(Interim Research Text, Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015)

In secondary school, Jamie started to become mindful that he was “different from the norm” (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). He recounted the first time he became aware of sexual attraction for other men while doing a research project on human body systems. As Jamie looked through the pictures of the anatomy book, he noticed the naked figures, but he also was acutely aware of the way his interest in some of the figures transgressed some of the dominant stories around sexuality for boys in his context. About that experience he remarked, “I remember looking at it and being more interested in the naked male figures than the female. But also, thinking to myself, like, 'I shouldn't be that'” (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). Knowing it was silly but wanting some external rationale for his dissonant feelings, he decided to count the number of female and male images in the book-- he would decide to like the one with the most images. However, this was not an affinity he would share with others, at least not then. As I considered Jamie's awareness of his own feelings and the

world around him, I was reminded of Greene's (1977) work on wide-awakeness, which is the ways we attend to the world around us in meaningfully engaged ways. She wrote, "Aesthetic experiences provide a ground for the questioning that launches sense-making and the understanding of what it is to exist in a world" (p. 124). Jamie's growing awareness of his own feelings allowed him to attend more closely to the expectations of the world in which he lived.

Looking back, Jamie recognized that there were "plenty of gays" (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015) at school and he fit in with them socially. He participated in activities he and others in that community considered stereotypically "gay things" for boys (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015), like theater and forensics. As he commented, "I didn't care if those were viewed in any type of way" (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). Jamie felt comfortable not fitting in with the stories that many in his community composed about the types of activities in which heterosexual boys should participate. He commented, "It was pretty steeped in the community that sports is what boys do. I was okay not meeting those expectations.... I felt more comfortable acting than dribbling a ball" (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015).

At the same time, Jamie recognized that his emerging internal feelings and desires were dissonant with dominant stories of sexuality in his social contexts and so he chose not to compose his stories to live by around sexuality publicly. Although he quickly became comfortable composing his stories to live by around sexuality internally, the dissonance these feelings and desires created with the dominant stories of sexuality in his contexts kept him from sharing these stories with others. As Jamie remarked, "I was pretty sure I liked guys.... But I think for much of middle school and high school, that felt like a very foreign thing" (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015).

I resonated with Jamie's view of his feelings as foreign. Friends have asked me, "When did you know that you were gay?" That question is more complex than it sounds. As a child, before I even began to have sexual feelings or desires, stories around sexuality had been composed for me. The types of toys I played with caused much consternation for my family. I remember the dread my father expressed when my grandmother bought for me, as a young child, a male Barbie doll named Derek. He was convinced that this doll would make me gay; after all, girls play with Barbie dolls. He scolded my grandmother and me and took the doll away. I wanted the doll because it had the same name as me and had dark hair. I imagined that it was me as an adult. This and many other experiences taught me that in my family and in my social context, it is important not to interrupt the dominant stories. Therefore, when I began to experience sexual attraction to men, it was not in a vacuum as I already had a story of what it meant to be a man and to be sexual. My childhood places had customs and expectations with no room for different stories around sexuality; as the old saying goes, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." My own feelings and desires were foreign because I understood them as abnormal, even though they were the only sexual feelings and desires I had known; much of the composition of my story to live by around sexuality as a teenager was done despite those feelings and attractions to men rather than in accordance with them. I had no other stories of sexuality or experiences of diverse contexts that might allow me to compose a forward-looking story where composing a dissonant story to live by around sexuality might be possible for me.

To compose a story to live by that is dissonant with dominant stories of sexuality and that is a conflicting story to live by is to live in tension with and to be positioned by those stories. Categorical understandings of sexuality create an expectation for conformity and therefore socially position those diverse stories as other. The trouble with these perspectives of sexuality is

that they often assume and encourage simplified and homogeneous compositions of identity as a story to live by. Critiques of categorical understandings of sexuality have often been addressed by critical theorists. Foucault (1990) and Butler (2007) critiqued categorical understandings of identity because of the ways these identity binaries create power structures that privilege the majority that fits into one arbitrary category over another. Wilkinson and Pearson (2009) reflected on these distinctions in sexual identity when they wrote, “In the United States, as in most other Western societies, heterosexuality is normative and upheld in relation to other ‘deviant’ sexualities or sexual behaviors” (p. 544). Warner (1991) first used the term heteronormativity to describe the ways that a society normalizes heterosexuality. As Herz and Johansson (2015) suggested, “Heteronormativity points at the everyday and mundane ways in which heterosexuality is privileged and taken for granted, that is, normalized and naturalized” (p. 1011). From these perspectives, the composition of dissonant stories to live by around sexuality is often marginalizing because it requires the interruption of the expected story of sexuality. As Kitzinger (2005) wrote, these understandings point to “the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted, ordinary phenomenon” (p. 478). These critical perspectives help us to think about the ways that dominant stories are composed around identity and marginalize difference.

Jamie’s experience felt foreign because it interrupted the dominant stories around sexuality in his community and school contexts, the only stories through which he had to interpret his experience. These dominant stories created expectations for the stories to live by he might compose around sexuality without regard to the feelings and desires he experienced. Jamie felt comfortable participating in school activities that did not fit with dominant stories of what it meant to be a heterosexual man, but it was a much different thing to identify publicly as gay.

Although he was aware of the identity he was composing internally, Jamie did not feel comfortable composing that story publicly. He suggested, “I definitely was aware of my gayness, because of the attractions I felt... I wasn’t at a point where I wanted or felt comfortable going for that” (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). Jamie was not deceiving anyone by pretending to be straight, but instead he was just being himself. There were no men with whom he wanted to pursue any relationship, so it was safer, in his community to leave dominant stories of sexuality uninterrupted. He was afraid of the reaction of others in his community if he challenged the dominant story of sexuality publicly. As he reflected, “I don’t think there was ever a question in most people’s mind that I was gay, but I feel like saying that in such a small community, like that is the thing that people react negatively to” (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015).

Dominant stories position people differently within communities. In terms of identity, they are often the frames of references used to decipher which stories are familiar and which are foreign. The dominant stories around sexuality in Jamie’s community would have positioned him in that community differently if he had composed his stories to live by around sexuality publicly. Perhaps more importantly, the dominant stories of Jamie’s community shaped the way Jamie positioned himself internally. He understood himself, from the first notice of interests, feelings, and desires that did not fit with the dominant story based on the ways heterosexual boys feel, to be —different, so much so that to live out a story in that way in that community would have been to his detriment. Dominant stories do not just shape the ways dissonant identities are understood by others, but they also shape the ways we understand, view, and position ourselves. Jamie purposely chose not to position himself in his community by not sharing his stories to live by

around sexuality. In doing so, he could refrain from interrupting those dominant stories around sexuality.

You Don't Have to Decide Right Now

“You're only 16,

You don't have to decide right now”

But I kind of saw it as an easy out.

And I was like,

“Okay, Well, I won't decide right now.”

(Interim Research Text, Jamie, Research Conversation, November 19, 2015)

Jamie shared his stories to live by around sexuality with his parents at the age of 16. By this time, his parents were divorced and he came out to them separately. Jamie's father was supportive, but his mother was not. The first conversations with his mother around his sexual identity were difficult for Jamie. As he recalled, “She said a lot of hurtful and ignorant things” (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). Upon reflection on their initial conversation, she was insistent that Jamie see a therapist. “Her analogy was, ‘If you had some sort of physical impairment, we would want to take you to a doctor, so I would like to take you to a therapist,’ as if I had some sort of mental impairment” (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). As Jamie later reflected, her insistence on the therapist was almost more hurtful because she had time to reflect on the first conversations; to him this was not just an automatic reaction. As I considered Jamie's experience coming out to his mother, I began think about the ways that positioning stories around identity difference is seen in a negative way through the lens of the dominant stories of identity. Swartz (2009) suggested that a dominant narrative around difference in the United States is one of deficit, or as Ladson-Billings (1999) wrote, “that ‘thing’

that is other than white and middle class” (p. 219). In the case of Jamie, we might add heterosexual to that list. Adherence to dominant stories around sexuality leads some to think about stories of difference as lacking or impaired.

Jamie understood his mother’s objections to his story of sexuality as rooted in religious belief. These understandings of difference around sexuality can be exacerbated by some religious narratives around diverse stories of sexuality. Barton (2010) explained that in some conservative churches and in larger communities that compose dominant stories around conservative religious practice often also compose stories around homosexuality that claim “homosexuals are bad, diseased, perverse, sinful, other, and inferior” (p. 466). Considering these dominant stories in some contexts and communities, it is not surprising that Jamie’s mother saw his stories to live by around sexuality as dissonant with dominant stories of sexuality in her context and therefore as deficit or pathological in nature. However, these stories to live by, marked by difference with dominant stories, are not rooted in any tangible expression of deficit. In this way, dominant stories can become expectations or standards for the composition of stories to live by; diverse stories in this construct are inadequate. Dominant stories within communities can therefore be limiting to the sanctioning of stories able to be composed in contexts, both privately and publicly.

Perhaps wanting to keep the peace, Jamie agreed to see a therapist from his mother’s church in a nearby city. He met with the therapist a few times; he recalled, “I didn’t know everything about ethical guidelines of therapists, but something about that felt very wrong to me. I was like, even if you don’t buy into whatever philosophy they’re selling, it feels very wrong that you’re the person” (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). For the first couple of meetings, the therapist asked about Jamie’s life as she came to know him; there was

not much talk about sexuality, although they both understood the reason Jamie's mother had brought him. Jamie recalled his third and final visit with the therapist as they began to talk about his sexuality; she counseled him to avoid making any decisions at that moment, he was only 16 after all. Internally, Jamie dismissed her advice because she lacked understanding of his feelings. He remembered thinking, "That's kind of stupid what you just said, 'cause I'm not choosing it" (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). At the same time, he saw appeasement of the counselor and his mother as an easy way out of an uncomfortable situation, so Jamie told her that he would not decide his sexuality at that point. As we reflected on this experience together, I wondered aloud about what his mother hoped to accomplish with taking him to the therapist. Jamie responded, "I think her ideal at the time would have been, I don't know, this woman cures me, but that clearly wasn't happening. So, I think yeah, the appeasement was an okay alternative" (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015).

After his visits to the therapist, Jamie's mother continued to press the issue of sexuality through many of their conversations. Jamie often understood her words as "thinly veiled attacks" (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). As he reflected,

On its surface, 'I am praying for your soul' sounds nice, but clearly there is a secondary sentence of, 'Because I think you're doing something bad.' Or she would say things like, 'Maybe someday you'll have a wife and grandchildren' (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015).

Jamie's mother clung to the dominant stories around sexuality composed in her contexts. She resisted Jamie's attempts to interrupt her stories and tried to compose forward-looking stories for Jamie that were resonant with dominant stories of sexuality. Even if the stories she composed around Jamie were more rooted in the dominant stories than Jamie's actual experience, she

refused to let the dominant stories to be interrupted. In some ways, it seemed that if Jamie refused or was unable to compose a dominant story of heterosexuality, she was happy if they could agree to —pretend—at least for a while. She was happy to compose a cover story for Jamie around his stories of sexuality or at least delay the public composition of Jamie's stories to live by around sexuality so that the dominant narrative could be assumed.

In his home and hometown, Jamie had learned that he should not interrupt dominant stories. As he reflected, “They’re perfectly fine to sweep things under the rug, but once you stand up and say something, then they’re going to react to it” (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). The interruption of dominant stories was tension filled for both Jamie and his mother. Jamie could tolerate his mother’s rejection of his sexuality initially, but he also felt hurt by some of the things she said. Jamie looks back on the experience with empathy for his mother. Jamie understood that interrupting dominant stories around sexuality could be “jarring, if you haven’t allowed yourself to think about that” (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). Woodford, Silverschanz, Swank, Scherrer, and Riaz (2012) suggested that communities “convey beliefs, values, norms, and identities” (p. 301) particularly in regards to the stories people compose around sexuality. Various studies have connected prejudice or negative stories about persons positioned by dominant stories of sexuality (Bosow & Johnson, 2000; Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002). Other studies have demonstrated that having gay siblings or friends has a positive impact on attitudes towards individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality (Woodford et al., 2012). In other words, as individual have access to diverse stories of identity around sexuality through experience with persons positioned by dominant stories of sexuality, they are forced to make sense of the dissonant stories, dominant narratives around sexuality, and personal stories of experience.

I began to think about Jamie's home and hometown as found communities (Friedman 1992; Lindemann Nelson, 1995; 2001). Lindemann Nelson (2001) understood found communities as those "communities into which we are born and reared-- families, neighborhoods, nations" (p. 9). These communities are often "constitutive of self-identity and the source of binding moral norms" (p. 9). Friedman (1992) noted that while found communities do contribute to the constitution of identity, this is "the unreflective, 'given' identity that the self discovers when first beginning to reflect on itself" (p. 92). From this paradigm, Jamie's composition of stories to live by around sexuality was initially constituted by the dominant narratives of his found community. His feelings and desires, dissonant from the dominant stories to live by around sexuality in his community, led Jamie to position himself differently within the community, understanding that he was not like heterosexual boys in his found communities. Sharing his dissonant feelings and desires with his mother led her to position him differently also, as other or perhaps as impaired in some way. At the least, she understood him as deficient in relation to the dominant stories to live by around sexuality. From this perspective, we might come to understand the significance of Jamie's relationships and contexts in the composition of his stories to live by around sexuality. Moreover, through the shifting of dominant stories in found communities, we might imagine contexts that do not position individuals based on the stories to live by around sexuality they compose.

This is not surprising, because as Lindemann Nelson (1995) noted, found communities "have often excluded and suppressed nongroup members while exploiting and oppressing certain members within the group" (p.23) based on difference. Friedman (1992) and Lindemann Nelson (1995; 2001) thought about this positioning of nongroup and group members in terms of women. These women are often distributed in multiple and varied found communities and therefore lack

sustained support within their own community for the composition of their multiple stories of difference. The same could be said for persons positioned within found communities by understandings of sexuality, like Jamie. Within his found community, there existed a lack of stories to resist the dominant narratives around sexuality. As such, the dominant narratives dominated. I suggest that the lack of diverse stories of experience leads to reliance on dominant stories of sexuality for understanding experience. Jamie needed a new community for the composition of his stories to live by around sexuality. His mother needed access to multiple and diverse stories to live by around sexuality as a way of validating Jamie's stories to live by around sexuality in their community.

I Love Boys

We went...and I bought a little pocket hand sanitizer

And it said, "I love boys" on it

Which is so stupid,

But I was like,

"I think I'm gay.

I can do this."

(Interim Research Text, Jamie, Research Conversation, January 21, 2016)

The summer after Jamie's freshman year in college, he decided to work at a summer camp in Minnesota. One of his friends had a summer job lined up there and Jamie thought working there was a better alternative than returning home and working at a fast food restaurant. At this point, Jamie had become more comfortable with being gay, but he did not typically share this openly with others. He had made many friends in his freshman year, but he had not pursued any sort of romantic or sexual relationship at school. As Jamie explained,

I knew I was gay. I knew that I never wanted to lie about it, so if people asked me I was going to say yes, but I wasn't at the point where I was upfront about it without being asked. (Jamie, research conversation, December 8, 2015)

While he was not ashamed of being gay, he also recognized that his approach was “kind of a cop-out” (Jamie, research conversation, December 8, 2015) because most people, for whatever reason, would not come out and directly ask him about his sexuality.

However, one night during the first week, the staff went to one of the staff member's cabins to drink and talk around the campfire. Jamie recalled, one of the men in the group just came right out and asked, ““Hey Jamie, so what's up? Are you gay?”” (Jamie, research conversation, December 8, 2015)? Jamie responded affirmatively, but noted that he was a bit offended by his question “because that's like, ‘I don't know you’” (Jamie, research conversation, December 8, 2015). Even though he was a bit taken aback at the question, the experience was incredibly positive for Jamie as he was beginning to compose his stories to live by around sexuality publicly. It was clear to Jamie that his story to live by around sexuality was positioned differently in this place. His fellow counselors expressed support and care for Jamie's declaration; his diverse stories were welcomed in that place and with those people. The dominant stories at camp allowed Jamie to think differently about himself and the ways he positioned himself in the community.

Jamie came to see the camp as an accepting place, one welcoming of his diverse stories of identity around sexuality. His experience of acceptance began to shape the ways he was living out his stories of sexuality. He began the process of living and telling stories to live by around sexuality in a much more conspicuous way. Later that summer, during a break between groups of children arriving for camp, Jamie went to a mall with another male counselor from camp. In the

store, Jamie chose to buy a hand-sanitizer with “I love boys” (Jamie, research conversation, January 21, 2016) on the side. He saw the trinket as silly, but also as a memorable choice. As Jamie was now willing and able to openly share, or at least signal to others, his stories to live by around sexuality in the camp context in a way that he had never done before.

At this point, it may be helpful to return to the work of Lindemann Nelson (1995; 2001) for understanding the ways his shifting communities shaped the shifting public stories to live by around sexuality. Lindemann Nelson drew on the work of Friedman (1992) who distinguished between found and chosen communities. Found communities, as discussed above, are those which we are born into; conversely, upon entering adulthood, individuals “can form radically different communities based on voluntary association” (Lindemann Nelson, 1995, p. 23); for example, friendships, mutual interest or support groups, political action groups, or relationships of circumstance within larger communities. These communities are important because they “foster not so much the constitution of subjects but their reconstitution. We seek out communities of choice as contexts in which to relocate and renegotiate the various constituents of our identities” (Friedman, 1992, p. 95). From this view, we can see the ways that Jamie’s new contexts at university and summer camp and the communities of choice in which he participated in those contexts allowed for the relocation and renegotiation of identity Jamie’s stories to live by around sexuality. The dominant stories in these contexts and among these chosen communities were different in regards to stories to live by around sexuality, and therefore the composition of his own stories to live by around sexuality began to shift in those contexts and communities.

Jamie’s stories to live by around sexuality continued to unfold when he returned to university the following school year. He began to live out his stories to live by around sexuality

in more public ways as he met other men and began dating. In his freshman year of college, he had not had much time for relationships with other men. He made friends with many people in his residence hall and others he met through school social activities. Largely, he busied himself with all of the activities that come with the first year at university. After summer camp, Jamie returned to university for his sophomore year with a different approach. He wanted to meet other men and open opportunities for starting relationships. As he reflected,

I wouldn't say that I had an outright, like, "Hey, everyone, I'm gay," but I think I cut out some activities, so that I could have a social life. And I was just at a place where I was more comfortable with who I was.... I think that people can sense that and.... So, it was just...more clear to people that I was gay and that I was okay with it and I wasn't going to hide it. I'm sure all this time it was clear that I was gay, but I wasn't owning up to it then.

(Jamie, Research Conversation, January 21, 2016)

Soon after Jamie returned to school, he met another male student, Thomas, at a party. Jamie quickly connected to this fellow university student, and with prodding from friends, they exchanged phone numbers. They began to spend a great deal of time together, and eventually they began casually dating one another. Jamie described this relationship as significant because he “had a decent number of firsts with him” (Jamie, research conversation, December 8, 2012).

After some time of dating, Jamie’s younger sister came to visit the university for a college visit. As Jamie and Thomas were walking through campus, they saw his sister with some friends. Jamie had been open with his sister about his sexuality since high school, but this was the first time his sister saw him with another boy. Jamie experienced tension around the encounter, but not because his sister saw him with a boy. As I began to write the interim research texts for this narrative account, I shared them with Jamie to get his feedback about the ways I

was beginning to construct his narrative. He paused as he read about the encounter between him, Thomas, and his sister. He reflected that I had missed his experience of the event. The story was not about the tensions around seeing his sister, but instead the tensions were because of the relationship he was composing with Thomas. When Jamie introduced her to Thomas, he was unsure if he should introduce him as his boyfriend. Jamie and Thomas had not previously conversed about the status of the relationship and Jamie felt uncomfortable defining their relationship in this way without having previously discussed it.

When I first heard this story, I immediately interpreted Jamie's tension through my own experience. As I began to interrupt my own family's stories of me around sexuality, I felt anxious. I can remember the first time I invited my partner, Sam, to meet my family. I was nervous because I knew that I was positioning myself differently within my family by introducing them to Sam. After avoiding the situation for quite some time, we decided to make a trip to my family's home for the first time. My previous experiences around interrupting stories in my family gave me cause for concern. I wondered how they might respond; would they say something offensive or hurtful to Sam? The tension came not only because they were meeting my partner for the first time, but also because they were seeing me differently for the first time. As I thought about Sam's first meeting with my family, I shared with him some of my concerns. I was surprised to hear his different experience of the situation; Sam felt comfortable meeting my family. As we thought about the experience from our differing perspectives, I began to think about the found communities in which we had been raised. Sam's family was open and accepting of diverse stories to live by around sexuality. Sam began sharing these stories publicly as a teenager, and his family was supportive and caring. He had trouble understanding how his meeting with my family caused me so much tension. Our communities and the dominant stories

within them shaped how we understood ourselves and our relationship. Conversely, upon meeting Sam's family, my own understandings of what families look like and how they respond to stories to live by around sexuality began to shift. Sam's family became a chosen community for me, and their dominant stories shaped how I felt about the stories to live by I was composing and the relationship I was composing with Sam.

I believe these understandings illuminate the ways that shifting experiences of communities and dominant stories within them shape the stories to live by we compose. For Jamie, his experience of a chosen community and the openness to diverse and multiple stories to live by around sexuality shifted the ways he understood himself and allowed him to begin to compose those stories publicly in those communities. Soon after meeting Jamie's sister, his relationship with his first boyfriend ended. However, as one who was just beginning to live out his stories of sexuality in new ways, Jamie could compose his stories in authentic and reflective ways after his experience in his chosen communities at summer camp and university. The experience of acceptance as he shared his stories of sexuality publicly shaped the ways he understood himself in those contexts. These contexts, open to multiple stories of difference differed from the context in which he grew up, shaped the ways that he composed his stories of sexuality publicly.

Kind of Pushing Her Beliefs

I think my mom meeting Brad was pretty helpful for her.

I had been, at that point,

Kind of pushing her beliefs.

I'd kind of reached the point where

I was frustrated with having to push her,

And not feeling like she was making any growth.

So, I kind of started pulling away,

And saying I didn't entirely want a relationship

If she wasn't going to accept me.

(Interim Research Text, Jamie, research conversation, February 25, 2016)

Although he had not anticipated doing study abroad, he discovered an opportunity to spend his final semester of college in Europe. He decided to take the opportunity to get away and spend the spring semester of his senior year in Italy and France. During this time, Jamie occasionally met other men on an online site, Scruff, accessed through a phone app for gay men. Jamie described the smart phone application this way,

They're apps on your phone that connect you with people based on your proximity to them and certain matrix of interests that you have preferenced. They're very, they're generally pretty shallow in terms of people are interacting primarily for hooking-up. (Jamie, research conversation, December 8, 2015)

Jamie saw his time in Europe as a semester away from the university and from the demise of his first serious relationship the previous semester. While there, he began chatting on an app with another American who was in Paris. Brad was a graduate student from a major U.S. city in Paris for spring break. They planned to meet each other one evening. Jamie set out from the pub where he had been with other friends to meet Brad but was unable to find him, and he had no phone connection to the internet with which to get in touch. By the time he made it back to his apartment, it was too late to go out again and Brad was headed back to the United States the following day. Jamie explained the situation and apologized to Brad. They continued to talk even

after they both had returned to the United States, eventually trading cell phone numbers. Their texting became phone calls, and their phone calls became weekend visits.

After a few months of their long-distance relationship, Jamie decided to introduce Brad to his family. Jamie and Brad were going to spend Thanksgiving with Jamie's father's family. Jamie explained that he felt comfortable introducing Brad to that side of his family because his father's family was more progressive in their thinking than his mother's side of the family. As Jamie expounded on his thinking,

I think that [my father's family members] just have different experiences in terms of the kind of people that they're hanging out with, the co-workers that they have and the conversations that they have weekly...I feel like more often in those sort of circles, the conversations tend to be more liberal and more thoughtful and more kind of accepting.... Whereas I think my mom's extended family is more like... most of them still live in [my hometown]. So, there's less exposure and just like it would be more of a departure from their reality. (Jamie, research conversation, February 25, 2016)

Jamie wanted to make sure that his mother did not feel excluded from their trip home, so he and Brad had dinner with his mother the night before the holiday celebration with his father's family.

Although Jamie and his family had gone to church as a child, he did not consider himself or his family to be especially religious. However, after coming out to his mother, she "kind of [stuck] her teeth back into religion" (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). Jamie's disclosure of his stories to live by around sexuality and the interruption of his mother's stories led her to a more conservative and strict story of religious practice. She began to attend a more conservative church, and she held tightly to the dominant stories of her religious belief she

composed. These stories deeply shaped how she responded to Jamie's stories to live by around sexuality.

Since high school, Jamie had lived in tension with his mother over his sexual identity. Their conversations often turned into frustrating interactions or arguments as her reluctance to accept Jamie's story of identity undergirded their relationship. Jamie constantly felt like his mother was judging him because of his attraction to other men; small comments seemed to rub him the wrong way. Jamie often reacted negatively to his mother's comments as his frustration with her reactions grew. In turn, his mother interpreted his frustration over her reactions as a general negativity expressed by Jamie. Based on the stories of sexuality she composed, she interpreted his attitude as a general unhappiness; as Jamie commented, she thought, "that being gay was the root cause of the anger, and it was one of the negative results she saw coming from it" (Jamie, research conversation, February 25, 2016). Jamie's mother wanted him to be happy, but as Jamie put it, "I was just angry when I was talking to her (Jamie, research conversation, February 25, 2016). At some point while Jamie was in college, he decided to pull away from his mother if she was not able to be supportive him and his relationships.

As Jamie's mother met and interacted with Brad, her stories of experience and her stories of sexuality began to conflict; however, as Jamie commented, "I think she also had to do a lot of work in terms of overcoming the root of being okay with me being gay, and reconciling her religious beliefs" (Jamie, research conversation, February 25, 2016). Jamie explained that Brad made it a point to build a relationship with his mother; Brad gave Jamie's mother a religious book of devotions that had been given to him by his own mother. As Jamie explained, "[Brad] is very good at wooing people, he was very charming. Not that I expected any less" (Jamie, research conversation, February 25, 2016). The conversations with Brad allowed Jamie's mother

to have access to new stories that shaped her stories of religion and sexuality in ways that made room for complexity. While her experiences with Jamie and Brad did not completely shift her stories, she was forced to accommodate her dissonant experience between the stories of religion and stories of sexuality she composed. As Jamie commented, “She did plenty of soul-searching, and I wouldn't say that she's fully accepting or anything, but I think she kind of re-evaluated her...driving force behind religion” (Jamie, research conversation, February 25, 2016). When Jamie pulled away from his mother because of her refusal to accept his sexuality, their stories began to conflict. However, with the introduction of Brad, her stories began to shift, making space for the tension between Jamie's stories to live by around sexuality and her own stories to live by around religion. As Jamie reflected,

She'd kind of like grabbed back into it, when I first came out. And so, I think it was like she was using it as a, "I'm afraid this is a thing that I need to really sink my teeth into to make me feel comfortable." And it's just a prescriptive list of rules of things not to do. And as long as I do that I'm okay. But I think through me pushing her and through her recognizing that we weren't going to have a relationship if she didn't change her views, I think she found more of the, what I would call, more enlightened view on Christianity. That it is not about, "Here are these rules that you must follow," and more about living a fulfilling life and having meaningful conversations about what life means, not about, "Well, you're doing this one bad thing." So, I think she is more there and I think that helped her be okay with my sexuality.

Lindemann Nelson (1995) reminded us of the powerful role of counterstories that she called “narratives of resistance and insubordination that allow communities of choice to challenge and revise the paradigm stories of the ‘found’ communities in which they are

embedded” (p.24). In the case of Jamie, we might understand the ways that his chosen communities at summer camp and university allowed him to compose his stories to live by around sexuality in new and more public ways; they also became a counter story within his found community of family. Through their composition of stories to live by around sexuality, Jamie and Brad resisted the dominant stories of sexuality within his found community, particularly with Jamie’s mother. She could not continue to compose these stories of sexuality and religion because her experience with Jamie and Brad conflicted with the stories she composed around religion and sexuality; thus, she began to compose new stories to accommodate the dissonance she experienced between the stories of religion and stories of sexuality she composed.

Learning with Jamie

Lindemann Nelson (1995; 2001) suggested that communities of choice help individuals relocate and renegotiate identity. Dominant stories within communities of choice create space for shifting stories. From this perspective, we might understand the ways the composition of counterstories, which are narratives of resistance and insubordination, might serve to shift dominant stories within found communities. Carr (1986) reminded us of the ways to make sense stories that are dissonant with the stories of our experience. As new experiences interrupt the stories we compose, we begin to see them as a part of a new story that accommodates the new experience.

Extending Carr’s (1986) thinking, I argue that counterstories add layers of experience to dominant stories, which allow for more complex understandings of identity making around gender and sexuality. The addition of new stories of experience necessitate new coherent dominant stories that accommodate dissonant counterstories within communities. I suggest that

these understandings lead us to think about difference from a narrative perspective. In other words, we understand difference as a social construction through dominant narratives; in doing so, we must begin to acknowledge and question, through counterstories, the dominant narratives that exist in our communities. The composition and telling of counterstories are necessary to create open spaces for the composition of diverse stories to live by around sexuality in some contexts. Perhaps we might come practice what Greene (1977) called wide-awakeness towards the dominant stories of our contexts as we actively attend to the multiple and diverse stories to live by being composed by those with whom we share life.

Chapter 8

Thinking with Multiple Stories of Experience

I begin this final chapter by calling attention to that the ways that the individuals represented in this inquiry are amidst lives lived. The participants' lives will unfold and their stories will shift as new experiences shape who they are continually becoming. I am also reminded of the ways that my own life and stories have shifted through the course of the inquiry. The theoretical participants I first imagined in the writing of the dissertation proposal almost two years ago became real in my life: Olivia, Calle, Mr. CEO, and Jamie. They are people with complex lives who have opened their lives to me, and in some ways, to the world. Negotiating an exit from the research, which required shifts in the relationships I had formed with participants, proved much more difficult for me than entering into their lives as I have come to know, respect, and care for them.

As I consider these shifting relationships, I am reminded of what Anzaldua (1990) and Lindemann Nelson (1995) referred to as being self-facing; this is an understanding of who I am becoming as I engage with stories different than my own. I have traveled to the world of my participants and have begun to see myself and the stories I compose in new ways. Clandinin, Caine, Estefan, Huber, Murphy, and Steeves (2015) added to my thinking about this often-uncomfortable process when they wrote, "As we engage in self-facing, as we think narratively with our or others' stories of experience, a space of mutual vulnerability is opened up, a space in which our complicity in maintaining dominant narratives often becomes more clearly visible" (para. 30). My experiences with Olivia, Calle, Mr. CEO, and Jamie have led me to reconsider many of the smooth and linear dominant narratives I have assumed around identity. They have added complexity to my understandings of the curriculum making and identity making of

individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality. In the reflections that follow, I offer insights to what I have learned through this inquiry.

Tugging on Narrative Threads

Throughout the writing of this dissertation, I have presented the experience of four inquiry participants in ways that have allowed for complex understandings of these individuals and their identity making. My thinking has continually been drawn back to the words of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) when they reminded inquirers to refrain from viewing “participants as univocal, not tied to one theoretical structure or mode of behavior that would leave them with the appearance of being unidimensional. We, and our participants, live and tell many stories. We are all characters with multiple plotlines” (p. 147). I looked across the participants’ stories of experience looking for what we might call narrative threads. As Clandinin (2013) further explained,

By intentionally focusing on what we called *threads*, we were interested in following particular plotlines that threaded or wove over time and place through an individual’s narrative account. Then we laid the accounts metaphorically alongside one another, we searched for what we, as a team, saw as resonances or echoes that reverberated across accounts. (p. 132, emphasis in original)

In this process, I intentionally think collectively about the participants’ stories rather than analyze them for data in the same way that western research dictates. In narrative inquiry, the narrative is the primary unit of analysis (Estefan, Huber, Murphy, Clandinin, Caine, & Steeves, 2016).

Morris (2001) illuminated the significance of thinking with stories, “Thinking about stories conceives of narrative as object. Thinker and object of thought are at least theoretically

distinct” (p. 55). In doing so, we rely on reason and objectivity for interpreting stories by divorcing reason and feeling. Moreover, we impose our own context and ways of thinking on the stories we encounter. Conversely, thinking *with* stories allows experience to “work on us” (Morris, 2001, p. 55) as we attempt to suspend the judgment and interpretations of our contexts and allow the learning from situated stories to emerge. Appropriately, Morris framed his discussion on thinking with stories as an attention to ethical matters; he argued that many approaches to ethics rely on principlism, “an offspring of the Enlightenment tradition in which human reason discovers, formulates, and applies a system of universally binding moral standards” (pp. 57-58). However, this paradigm assumes a universal context for experience-- that ethical and rational action is consistent across contexts, relationships, and circumstances. As Morris reflected, “Most ethical decisions do not choose good over evil but rather honor one value or story at the expense of values and stories deemed less urgent” (p. 71). The complexity and situatedness of lived experience interrupts our understandings of universality or generalizability.

To think with stories, I refrain from seeing stories as objects, fixed in time and plotline. Clandinin et al. (2015) reminded us that although thinking about stories fits with “dominant paradigmatic knowledge structures, doing so can shape us into judging and blaming people who are seen as characters in stories. In this way people are seen as fixed and frozen objects rather than people living out experience” (para. 16). Thinking with stories requires the acknowledgement of my own limitations of understanding and perspective as my stories to live by are also situated in the particularities of my unfolding life.

When we think about stories, we see and interpret experience through outside, disconnected lenses. We risk storying our participants in ways that suit our purposes as inquirer, perhaps even simplistic ways as we isolate various aspects of the texts that meet our

predetermined criteria. Thinking with stories allows for the multiplicity of voices within experience. As a narrative inquirer, it would be unethical for me to dissect, parse, or compare the stories of the participants. They are, after all, expressions of experience from complex lives. Instead, I attend to the experience of the participants as I lay their stories alongside one another and the pertinent literature and allow their experiences to bring depth and breadth to our understandings around identity making through curriculum making.

Morris' (2001) notion of thinking with stories is connected, for me, to the work of Lugones (1987), who called our attention to the importance of travelling to the "worlds" of others. She suggested, "By travelling to their 'world' we can understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*" (p. 17, emphasis in original). Otherwise, seeing participants from my own world imposes my understanding of them from my own context, through my own stories, and from the various literature I have read. The participants become objects for deconstruction and analysis, not people living life. In the words of Lugones, "Without knowing the other's 'world,' one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other's presence because the other is only dimly present to one" (p. 18); without travelling to the worlds of participants, we risk their becoming constructions of our making for the purposes of research.

I conclude this research text by looking at the threads of experience that have emerged in the participants' narrative accounts. In doing so, I allow spaces of resonance to emerge among the stories. In this way, I attend to Morris' suggestion to "Get the stories into the open where we where we can examine their values, sift their conflicts, and explore their power to work on us" (2001, p. 71). In turn, thinking with the participants' stories of experience will lead us to deeper understandings of the original purposes set forth for this inquiry: 1) to describe and understand

the life stories of individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality and gender, including their accounts of the experiences that shaped their stories to live by around gender and sexuality; 2) to examine the shaping influences of personal, family, cultural, social, and institutional contexts for individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality and gender; and 3) to conceptualize experiences and identify influential people/relationships and places/contextes for the identity making of individuals positioned differently by understandings of sexuality and gender.

Adding to the Complexities of Curriculum Making

As I described the experiences of Olivia, Calle, Mr. CEO, and Jamie through narrative accounts, I unpacked their stories of experience with attention to identity making through curriculum making. In doing so, I have drawn on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (1992) who understood “curriculum as a course of life” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). Curriculum making can be understood through the work of Schwab (1969), who called attention to the complexity of learning through the commonplaces of curriculum. That is to say, curriculum making is a “curricular process...in which teacher, learners, subject matter, and milieu are in dynamic interaction” (Clandinin and Connelly, 1992, p 392). Individuals negotiate curriculum making as they are situated in particular contexts, through relationships, and around particular experience. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) began to understand the ways that the composition of stories to live by, a narrative understanding of identity, was integral to the curriculum-making process. As Clandinin et al. (2006) later described the connection between curriculum making and the composition of stories to live by when they wrote,

As we played with this idea of curriculum as a course of life, we began to imagine how curriculum could be seen as a curriculum of life, perhaps a curriculum of lives. Thinking

this way, of course, makes the composition of life identities, stories to live by, central in the process of curriculum making. It was in this way that we began to deepen our understandings of the interactions among the teacher, the milieu, and children. And as we attended to children's lives, we attended to multiple plotlines within each life, plotlines of a child as learner, as a learner of subject matter, as a learner of his/her life, of his/her stories to live by. (pp. 12-13).

Curriculum making is about the meeting of diverse lives in diverse and multiple contexts. As lives meet and stories to live by "bump up against" other stories to live by and dominant stories in contexts, "a curriculum of lives is, in part, shaped" (Clandinin, et al., 2006, p. 135).

Thread 1: Stories to live by around gender and sexuality are complex, multiple, and diverse. As I reflected on the curriculum making and identity making of the participants, I was reminded of Olivia's words, "'Being gay is the least interesting thing about me.' That's not my whole identity" (Olivia, research conversation, December 15, 2015). Olivia composed multiple stories to live by around sexuality. While living out an eleven-year romantic relationship with a woman, she had not yet begun to understand herself differently in terms of sexuality. Although dissonant stories, these stories to live by around sexuality were not particularly in tension for Olivia because she understood herself as much more than her romantic relationship. She saw her relationship with Mandy as a part of a complex composition of an unfolding life that transcended sexual categories.

We all live and tell complex stories with numerous plotlines, many of which are composed in tension with other stories to live by we compose. Take for example, the experience of Mr. CEO. He felt tension around his conflicting stories to live by around sexuality and religion. In making sense of his feelings and desires, he was forced to re-narrate his stories of

what it meant to be a Christian. Mr. CEO was reminded of this tension when a friend from church responded to a gay pride flag Mr. CEO posted on social media after gay marriage was legalized across the United States. Sister L reiterated a dominant story of Christianity to Mr. CEO when she messaged him. Mr. CEO was no stranger to these beliefs; he had once held them himself. His curriculum making around sexuality began to shift these stories as he tried to make sense of the rising tension between his dissonant sexual feelings and desires and his stories to live by around religious faith. As he described,

I used to spend hours, hours in that chapel at night, either crying, or praying or whatever. I felt that my feelings are getting stronger to come out. Then I was like, okay I've got to pray about it. That'll fix it. As she said God will change it in the twinkling of an eye. (Mr. CEO, research conversation, January 30, 2016)

However, after some time, Mr. CEO recognized that these feelings were not going away. He had to make sense of his experience of faith, including the dominant stories around religious belief and sexuality that existed in his contexts, and his dissonant desires and feelings that were difficult to reconcile. Barton (2010) called this reconciliation between conflicting stories of religion and sexuality “an intense, personal, often lonely journey integrating socially constructed conflicting identities” (p. 478). From a narrative perspective, we might see the ways Mr. CEO began to question the familiar dominant stories he composed and begin to come to terms with these conflicting stories: “When she told me heaven would not be a home for me. I was like, how do you really know that though” (Mr. CEO, Research Artifact, January 30, 2016). As such, Mr. CEO required a new dominant story of religious belief and sexuality, one that allowed him to make sense of his stories to live by. Mr. CEO reasoned,

If God really hated me for being gay I would not be healthy, I would not have a career. I feel like I would be put to shame or I would already be in hell, because from what we understand that God is, God has the power to do whatever he pleases, so if he really hates something he can wipe it out, hence that's how the flood came about. There was so much going on. He didn't like it. He destroyed it. I mean, it's just that easy. That's why I told her I feel like God has blessed me beyond measure, because if it was really that bad, if he was really that disgusted with me he could have just done away with me...That twinkle was taking too long. I was like I don't think that's happening. It's not going away. I just chose to embrace it instead of running away. (Mr. CEO, research conversation, January 30, 2016)

While Mr. CEO was able to make sense of his stories to live by around sexuality and dissonant dominant story of religious belief and sexuality, Sister L was not willing or able to do so. The dominant stories around religious belief and sexuality she composed led her to dismiss Mr. CEO's story of experience.

As I considered their stories, I began to make sense of the ways the participants composed multiple, often dissonant, stories to live by through Carr's (1986) work around narrative coherence. Carr suggested that individuals make sense of their complex and multi-threaded lives through what he called narrative coherence. As new experience adds new dimensions to stories to live by, one might begin to see "events that were lived in terms of one story are now seen as part of another" (p. 76). In other words, to make meaning of experience dissonant with an individual's stories to live by, an individual might begin to compose new stories that are capable of accommodating both new experience and the experiences of the past. As Carr explained,

“a multiplicity of activities and projects, spread out over time and even existing simultaneously in the present, calls for an active reflection that attempts to put the whole together. The most striking occasions for such reflections are those radical conversions, usually religious or political, in which a new view of life, of oneself, and of one’s future projects and prospects requires a break with and reinterpretation of one’s past.” (p. 75)

In doing so, the stories to live by composed by an individual become more complex and nuanced as one attends to the “multiple plotlines” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 147) unfolding in the course of a life lived.

The multiple plotlines to which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred were evident in the composition of Calle’s stories to live by around gender. Calle composed multi-vocal stories of gender, that of being both a man and a woman. It became evident through our conversations that this multidimensional story to live by around sexuality was not particularly problematic for Calle, but it was difficult to live out his complex story in relationships and places that had smooth and linear stories of gender. Therefore, living out these stories became tension-filled for Calle. Often, Calle chose to live out these layers of complexity around gender in private; however, the tensions that emerged among these multiple lived stories led him to seek narrative coherence, an attempt for synthesis of her stories to live by around gender. Calle described the tension thusly,

I think most of it is just coming from having not been more open or etcetera, and allowing these singular narratives to happen. So, I've been trying really hard to integrate all of my life together, since I did notice before that everything was very linear, and that if two of these worlds collided, it would just completely flushed with anxiety. So, I'd be like, "Oh my goodness, I'm two different people right now. I can't handle two people at

the same time." (Calle, research conversation, May 3, 2016)

As the tension between the multiple stories to live by around gender Calle composed increased, she felt the need to integrate or make sense of her dissonant stories for himself and for others. Slowly, Calle began the process of sharing some of the complexities of his stories to live by around gender publicly, first with friends then with her sister. However, it was clear through Calle's experience that the composition of diverse and complex stories of experience around gender and sexuality are more easily understood in the context of a life, embedded in the situatedness of experience, that enables seemingly incompatible stories to be held in tension rather than in larger contexts that create identity in smooth and linear ways.

Thread 2: Stories to live by around gender and sexuality are negotiated through dominant stories. The stories to live by the participants composed around gender and sexuality were not done so in a vacuum; they were situated in the stories that fill the landscapes of their lives. In this way, their curriculum making was a constant negotiation between their respective experiences, stories to live by that they composed, and the dominant narratives of the contexts and relationships in which they lived their lives. One example is Jamie's story, as he first noticed his sexual attraction for other men while looking through a book about body systems. In taking note of his feelings, he also recognized that this was "different from the norm" (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015). His experiences, dissonant with dominant stories around sexuality, were positioned in particular ways by these dominant stories around sexuality. These dominant stories were the lenses through which he and others in his context would come to see and interpret his experience. As he reflected, "I remember looking at it and being more interested in the naked male figures than the female. But also, thinking to myself, 'I shouldn't be that'" (Jamie, research conversation, November 19, 2015).

To compose a diverse story of identity, one dissonant to the dominant stories of gender and sexuality, is to compose a counterstory: to understand and present oneself differently that what is expected. Individuals negotiate stories to live by through and in tension with dominant stories in contexts, yet dominant stories are often narrow and linear. Through this inquiry, I could see the ways that participant's stories passed back and forth across dominant stories, finding some places of resonance and adding new dimensions of understanding in other places. In this way, dominant stories are always in the peripheral vision of individuals who are positioned by them, because "we know we will have to cross over those mountains again" (Murphy, personal conversation, December 8, 2016).

However, interrupting dominant stories through counter stories can often be difficult and requires a community of support.¹⁶ Without the ability to compose a counterstory, individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality must compose a cover story as a way of passing, publicly presenting stories to live by in ways that are resonant with dominant stories of identity. Sanchez and Schlossberg (2001) reminded us, "For people of color, gays, lesbians, members of the working class and poor, and people of marginalized religious faiths, the allure of rewriting identity cannot be disconnected from the very real emotional and material advantages of doing so" (p. 14). In this way, difference is socially constructed through story and lived out in the ways we present ourselves, through the color of our skin, what we call ourselves, language, dress, hairstyle, relationships, the types of activities in which we engage. Participants shaped the stories they composed publicly around gender and sexuality as a way of negotiating the stories that others composed about them, which are the ways that they were positioned by dominant stories.

¹⁶ I will discuss Lindemann Nelson (1995) further in Thread 4: Stories to live by around gender and sexuality are negotiated through relationship.

Calle negotiated her stories to live by around gender through the dominant stories of gender in her contexts. Calle presented himself in different ways through her hairstyle, dress, and the name she used depending on the context in which she found himself. He consistently looked for places and communities in which he might present herself and be understood as both a man and a woman, although it was difficult to do both at the same time. He negotiated the dominant stories around binary/categorical understandings of gender as he made sense of her multiple diverse and complex stories to live by around gender. In some contexts, she would pass as a man and in others, he would pass as a woman, depending on the stories that had been composed by others about her. In contexts where his birth name and gender were prescribed, like his family and institutional contexts, Calle would present himself in a manner resonant with those dominant stories. In other contexts, she would present herself in ways that allowed for a more nuanced understanding of her stories to live by around gender and sexuality. In this way, Calle consistently negotiated the tension between composing a story acceptable to others and a story that was acceptable to himself. However, even those competing stories were difficult to hold in tension as friends and family members began to see pictures or hear stories about the stories to live by around gender dissonant with dominant stories of gender he composed. Dominant stories of gender and sexuality position Calle's stories to live by around gender and sexuality, and his own curriculum making is an attempt to make sense of her stories to live by in light the dominant stories around gender in his contexts.

Dominant stories are often assumed. The silencing of diverse stories of identity could be understood as a passive composition of a cover story. We could see the passive composition of passing story in Olivia's narrative account as she was hesitant to declare her stories to live by around sexuality publicly because it was more comfortable for her to fit in. As Olivia suggested,

“I think I’m more timid in my interactions with people until I get to know them, so I’m more about being accepted at first.... Nobody needs to know that right away” (Olivia, Research Conversation, January 19, 2016). However, her approach caused a great deal of tension between Olivia and her girlfriend, Abby. Her girlfriend interpreted Olivia’s silence as a refusal or hesitance to be open and honest about their relationship, which is often a dominant story in gay communities around sexual identity. This meant that their identities and their relationship were shaped by the stories that others composed about them.

We can also see the way that Jamie negotiated dominant stories in his family around sexuality. As Jamie made sense of his stories to live by around sexuality dissonant with dominant stories of sexuality as a teenager, he told his parents about his sexual attraction to men. His mother’s strong resistance to Jamie’s composition of stories to live by, dissonant with dominant stories of sexuality, led to a mutual agreement to silence his stories or at least postpone their telling. As his mother and the therapist his mother hired urged Jamie, “You’re only 16. You don’t have to decide right now” (Jamie, Research Conversation, November 19, 2015). Jamie agreed to, at least publicly, not to live out the ways he understood his identity through experience; acquiescing to the wishes of his mother and the dominant stories around sexuality.

As I considered the experiences of my participants with regard to the dominant stories around sexuality, I came to see the ways that the composition of cover stories or passing is a mis-educative experience for individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality. Dewey (1938/1997) noted,

Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may

produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted. (pp. 25-26)

The composition of cover stories is in many ways the silencing of stories to live by and the adoption of dominant stories. In this way, opportunities for further experience around the composition of stories to live by are limited and restricted for the sake of keeping the dominant story uninterrupted, unquestioned, and unexamined. I argue, therefore, that educative experience requires the freedom to compose of stories to live by around gender and sexuality.

Individuals that compose diverse stories to live by around gender and sexuality are positioned by dominant stories in a society. These stories are the lenses through which many in society see difference; they often exist in our minds and shape the stories we compose about ourselves and the stories that others compose about us. Adichie (2009) talked about these smooth dominant stories as single stories. As she explained,

to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

An individual's identity making adds new dimensions and complexity to smooth and linear dominant stories. As curriculum making shifts the stories to live by around gender and sexuality, so too do the understandings of dominant stories for that individual. Building on the work of Carr (1986), I suggest that it becomes necessary for individuals to engage in sense making of dominant stories and these dissonant stories of experience. Composing dissonant stories to live by around gender and sexuality often requires the interruption of dominant stories composed by themselves and others. As individuals attempt to hold the tension between dissonant, even

conflicting stories, they must make sense of one or both stories differently in order to sustain the composition of those stories in tension. Participants and their families and friends made sense of these dissonant stories to live by around gender and sexuality by adding complexity to dominant stories of sexuality. In this way, they were often able to interpret dominant stories around gender and sexuality in ways that accommodated dissonant stories to live by. As people gain access to multiple and diverse stories to live by around gender and sexuality, dominant stories in those social contexts begin to shift as people are forced to make sense of dissonant stories of experience. In short, allowing access to multiple and diverse stories to live by around sexuality allows for curriculum making as stories bump up against other stories and a curriculum of lives unfolds.

Thread 3: Place matters in the composition of stories to live by around gender and sexuality. The stories we live and tell are situated in places; in those stories, our stories to live by, are also narrative constructions of those places. In the same ways that the stories of the individuals who compose stories to live by in those places are multi-vocal and complex, so too are the stories of place individuals compose around place. Basso (1996) considered the ways that through experience, we construct stories of place, and thus we engage in what he called place-making. As Basso stated,

places are perceived in terms of their outward aspects--as being, on their manifest surfaces, the familiar places they are--and unless something happens to dislodge these perceptions they are left, as it were, to their own enduring devices. But then something *does* happen... that inscribes the passage of time--and a place presents itself as bearing on prior events. At that precise moment, when ordinary perceptions begin to loosen their

hold, a border has been crossed and the country starts to change. (p. 4, emphasis in original)

Place-making, then, is a way of making meaning of our lives in the world. Ordinary spaces, in the context of our life-making experiences, become important settings for our unfolding stories. We might begin to understand ourselves differently in light of the places we construct through our experiences there. As Basso further suggested, “place-making is a way of constructing the past...social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities. *We are*, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine” (p. 7).

Through this inquiry, my thinking was continually drawn to the relationship between the stories to live by the participants composed and stories of place. Stories of place shaped the stories to live by composed by participants; and in turn, the stories to live by composed by the participants shaped the stories they composed around place. The stories to live by composed by participants began to shift as new of experience emerged through the meeting of diverse lives and contexts. The university¹⁷ place was important for the participants as it allowed for access to multiple and diverse stories to live by for the participants. Jamie and Calle specifically referred to their university place as a place that was open and accepting, a shift in experience from their home places. Likewise, Mr. CEO’s tensions around religion and sexuality began to emerge in his new university context because stories around sexuality that were once not possible in his home place became possible through his shifting experience of place. Olivia’s stories to live by around sexuality began to shift as she came to her new university context and met Mandy. The participants’ stories to live by around gender and sexuality changed for the participants as they moved to university contexts that were away from the dominant stories and familial relationships

¹⁷ University, in this case, refers to multiple university contexts represented in the participants’ narrative accounts.

that shaped their identity making as children and teenagers. These new university contexts were in many cases more open to multiple and diverse stories to live by, which made space for their unfolding lives. New contexts created spaces to suspend the familiar rules of the game and play (Lugones, 1987) with new stories of gender and sexuality.

Thread 4: Stories to live by around gender and sexuality are situated in and negotiated through relationship. The stories to live by composed by participants are mediated by relationship; those connections that constitute our families and communities. It is through our communities that we compose our stories to live by, and through our stories to live by that we understand ourselves in relationship to those with whom we share life. As McAdams (2008) suggested,

The stories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about our struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we were, are and might be in the social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture writ large. *The self comes to terms with society through narrative identity.* (pp. 242-243, emphasis in original)

As I considered the narrative accounts of Olivia, Calle, Mr. CEO, and Jamie, I could see the ways that they made sense of the world and sense of themselves through the relationships and people with whom their lives were interwoven. Jamie's stories to live by shifted as his life moved away from life with his mother. When he came to summer camp, he encountered people that encouraged and supported the diverse stories to live by around sexuality he was beginning to compose. Those relationships shifted the ways he engaged in the world back at home with his mother and in his university context the next school year. Lindemann Nelson (1995; 2001) reminded me of the importance of communities in the composition of stories to live by. Found

communities like “families, neighborhoods, nations” (Lindemann Nelson, 2001, p. 9), shape the composition of our “unreflective, ‘given’ identity that the self discovers when first beginning to reflect on itself” (Friedman, 1992, p. 92). These communities often marginalize diverse stories of identity that are dissonant with the dominant stories of found communities. Communities of choice, which are those relationships and communities we seek out voluntarily, allow for the relocation and renegotiation (Friedman, 1992) of identity; they support the composition of counterstories to the dominant stories among which we compose our stories to live by. These communities of choice encourage and validate the diverse stories of identity that found communities often suppress.

As relationships shift, so do stories to live by. Jamie and his mother shaped the stories to live by they each composed. Jamie interrupted his mother’s dominant stories around religious belief and sexuality, and in turn, she interrupted his stories to live by around sexuality as they both made sense of dissonant stories of experience. As Jamie developed new relationships in communities of choice that allowed for the composition of counterstories of experience around sexuality, he was able to compose stories to live by which were dissonant with his given identity in his family. In turn, then as his stories to live by shifted, so too did his relationship with his mother. Tensions increased and Jamie pulled away from his mother because she continued to attempt to interrupt his stories to live by around sexuality. Jamie’s new unwillingness to hold the tension between these dissonant stories forced his mother to hold this tension, and she was compelled to make sense of these dissonant stories differently than she had previously. Jamie reflected on her process of sense-making in our work together when he suggested, “I think she also had to do a lot of work in terms of overcoming the root of being okay with me being gay, and reconciling her religious beliefs” (Jamie, research conversation, February 25, 2016). Her

desire to continue to continue to compose a relationship with Jamie led her to make sense of these dissonant stories, which were her dominant story of religious belief and sexuality and the stories to live by Jamie composed around sexuality. As Jamie later described,

I think through me pushing her and through her recognizing that we weren't going to have a relationship if she didn't change her views, I think she found more of the, what I would call, more enlightened view on Christianity. That it is not about, "Here are these rules that you must follow," and more about living a fulfilling life and having meaningful conversations about what life means, not about, "Well, you're doing this one bad thing." So, I think she is more there and I think that helped her be okay with my sexuality.

(Jamie, research conversation, February 25, 2016)

In this way, the stories to live by composed by both Jamie and his mother were negotiated through the relationship they shared. For Jamie and his mother, there was a reflexive relationship between their relationship and the stories to live by the composed. As their relationship shifted, so too did their stories to live by; and as their stories to live by shifted, so too did their relationship.

Calle's shifting relationship with her parents, from his found community at home to her chosen community at school, began the process of shifting his stories to live by around sexuality. Her given identity at home was renegotiated in the context of a supportive university community. Calle's parents struggled to make sense of the stories to live by around gender she composed when they occasionally gained access to his unfolding life on social media or through Calle's sister. Calle's parents were not able to make sense of the tensions between Calle's diverse stories of gender and the stories of gender that were dominant in their community and family. The tension between these dissonant stories led them to reinforce the dominant stories that they were

comfortable with. They met with Calle and other family member to reinforce their expectations about graduate school and warned her about what others might think if she did not live up to the stories they had composed for her. This led Calle to compose secret stories to live by around gender in safe places in the university contexts. Calle slowly felt comfortable with her sister and friends at university; this chosen community has allowed her to live out stories dissonant with the dominant stories of her home. However, Calle is still not able to openly share her stories to live by around gender with her parents. This played out in the ways Calle carefully chose the ways she presented himself in public. The tension she feels between the dissonant stories to live by around sexuality she composed was a reflection, I argue, of the tension that existed in Calle relationship with his parents. Calle carried this tension with him at school because she embodied this relational tension with her parents. Their differing stories to live by around gender and sexuality have been mis-educative for Calle. The resulting tension between the two seemingly irreconcilable stories has, in many ways, arrested the composition of her stories to live by as she is not able, at this point, to make sense of these stories. In some ways, Calle cannot make sense of the stories because his parents cannot make sense of the stories; the stagnation of her stories to live by was mirrored by the stagnation of the relationship Calle held with them as they all continue to live in the tension. The stories to live by composed by participants were shaped by relational tapestries with which their lives were interwoven. As relationships and communities shift, so too do stories to live by; conversely, as stories to live by shift, relationships shift. In the case of Calle, her composition of diverse stories to live by was enabled only to the point that her relationship with her parents was able to shift.

Thread 5: Stories to live by around gender and sexuality are nested and interwoven with many other stories. A few months ago, a close friend of mine confided in me about

her own identity making around gender and sexuality. She has been married for about seven years and has a young child. In the past couple of years, she had relationships that led her to shift her stories to live by around sexuality. She was beginning to understand herself as a lesbian and lamented that there was no space for her to actually compose these new stories to live by. She loves her husband and child and knows that these relationships shape her ability to compose these diverse and dissonant stories. For her, there is not space for her new stories to live by to shift when there are others she cares about who rely on those old stories to live by. The dominant stories of gender and sexuality protect the familiarity of her family, but they also constrict the composition of her diverse stories to live by around gender and sexuality through the positioning of stories.

Likewise, the stories to live by composed by the participants, individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality, are nested among a complex web of stories. The stories they composed live among the dominant stories that exist in their multiple contexts. Often, they composed cover stories to pass so that they remain unharmed by the lived consequences of composing stories to live by that are dissonant with dominant stories. To be positioned differently by dominant stories often carries relational consequences within found communities. As Lindemann Nelson (2001) explained, found communities “have tended to exclude and suppress nongroup members while exploiting and oppressing certain members within the group (p. 9). Composing diverse stories to live by in many found communities means being marked as other, and therefore one reaps the consequences of otherness in that context. As such, the composition of stories to live by around gender and sexuality is made complex by the negotiation of the many stories that exist in the contexts and relationships of a life lived.

In considering Jamie's narrative account, I began to wonder about the many stories he composed as he negotiated his contexts and relationships. As he noticed his teenage desires and interest in male figures in a book, he was at once positioned in his own thinking by the dominant stories of his context. When he sought to make sense of the tension he already felt, he began to feel new tension and negotiate the stories of his found community, particularly that his mother composed around religion and sexuality. He handled this by composing a cover story, one of not "deciding" his sexuality at this point to allow the mounting tension to abate. All of the stories of his life ebbed and flowed as tensions emerged through shifting relationships and tensions of his life. In this way, the participants negotiated not only their own stories to live by through curriculum making but were complicit in the curriculum making of the contexts and people with whom they shared life.

Similarly, Mr. CEO negotiated his own stories to live by through his personal experience, through the stories of his home community contexts that saw overt heterosexuality as part of what it meant to be a man, and stories to live by around religion that understood homosexuality as immoral. In beginning to compose stories to live by around sexuality that were dissonant with dominant stories of sexuality in those contexts and relationships that filled his life, he not only challenged his own thinking and understandings of himself and the world, but he also became a challenge to the stories that others composed about themselves. To compose a story to live by around gender and sexuality dissonant with dominant stories of experience is in some ways to reorient the contexts and relationships of a life. This responsibility is a heavy burden for those who are simply trying to make sense of their own lives. In this way, the composition of stories to live by around gender and sexuality that are dissonant with dominant stories of gender and sexuality require the composition of multiple, competing or conflicting stories as the individuals

try to maintain their own stories, the stories composed for them, and the stories that others compose about the world and their own lives.

Considerations: Learning Alongside

Like the all of our stories, this work does not end. It will continue to unfold as long as diverse stories to live by around gender and sexuality unfold in the lives of individuals who are positioned by dominant stories of gender and sexuality. Or, as I tell my students, the work is never done, but sometimes it is due. As I prepare to transition away from this work, I pause to reflect on some considerations that have arisen through this process and to consider how this research may continue to unfold in my academic life and hopefully in narrative inquiry.

Access to multiple and diverse stories of identity matters. Thomas King wrote,

Once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So, you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told. (King, 2003, p. 10).

The primary purpose of this inquiry was to tell the stories of individuals positioned differently by understandings of gender and sexuality. In doing so, I wanted to give others access to diverse stories of curriculum making and identity making, with the hopes of adding stories of experience to our home, school, and community contexts. The stories we live and tell are powerful for ourselves as we make sense of who we are continually becoming in light of our experience and our relationships; they are also powerful for others. As Atkinson (2007) suggested, “Our life stories connect us to our roots, give us direction, validate our own experience, and restore value to our lives” (p. 224). In curricular terms, Banks (2013) posited the lack of representation within curriculum “marginalizes [individuals’] experiences and cultures and does not reflect their dreams, hopes, and perspectives” (p. 182). So too, the lack of stories marginalizes diverse stories

to live by around gender and sexuality. It is important to tell these diverse stories as a means of shifting the dominance of dominant stories. As more stories fill the landscape, our understandings of dominant stories become fuller, more nuanced understandings of experience. In this way, we might create spaces for others to composed diverse stories to live by.

Finding borderlands. Dominant stories around gender and sexuality are rooted in categories. These socially constructed boundaries serve to position individuals. The participants in this inquiry continually negotiate borders created by dominant stories that shape how they understand themselves and how others understand them. The composition of diverse stories to live by around gender and sexuality is a continual process of weaving in and out of stories that shape who we are becoming.

Anzaldua (2012) helped me think about the complexity of composing diverse stories of identity when described her own curriculum making, negotiating the borders that attempt to tame, constrict, and control difference. She wrote,

For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions; sexuality and homosexuality. Being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, I made the choice to be queer (for some it is genetically inherent). It's an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. In and out of my head.... It is a path of knowledge—one of knowing (and of learning) the history of oppression of our *raza*. It is a way of balancing, of mitigating duality. (p. 41)

Anzaldua described borders as boundaries that “define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. (p. 25). For her, a borderland is a “vague and undetermined place

created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (p. 25). The borderland, a space of liminality, is marked by what it is not—excluded by a boundary. To compose diverse stories to live by around gender and sexuality is to be defined by what we are not, including those exclusions by the boundaries of acceptable stories of gender and sexuality. At the same time, embracing life in the borderlands, outside of the confines of dominant stories, allows space to compose diverse stories of gender and sexuality. Where the dominant stories end, there is space for composing stories of difference; the “prohibited and forbidden” (p. 3) find space to inhabit.

In this way, liminality is inviting to those who are marginalized in spaces dominated by fixed, smooth stories of identity. Heilbrun (1999) described liminality when she wrote, “to be in a state of liminality is to be poised upon uncertain ground... [there is a] lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing, or wants to be doing (p. 3). This lack of clarity around dominant stories allows for the composition of new stories.

Negotiating dominant stories in the re-telling of participant stories. I have chosen not to tell some participant stories in the narrative accounts I have presented in this inquiry. There were some stories with which the participants were uncomfortable sharing in a published form. For other stories, I had to consider carefully the importance of the stories for the curriculum making and identity making of the participants, as some of the stories were so resonant with single stories or stereotypes that they would silence the other stories the participants composed. There were stories around race, poverty, and HIV/AIDS that arose in the lives of participants. It became difficult to include these stories because they often trigger positioning stories around sexuality. Stories around race, poverty, sexual abuse, and sexuality all might shape the participants in some ways but could lead readers to think about their experiences in reductive

ways. As I consider my own stories to live by that I continue to compose through this work, I am drawn back to the tensions I sought to hold as I thought with the stories of the participants. There were times, without reflection, that I thought about the stories (Morris, 2001) of the participants. I began to impose my own composition of dominant stories around race, poverty, abuse, or health status on the experience of participants in ways that led me to think about their curriculum making as a way of explaining how they came to their stories to live by around gender and sexuality. Through reflection and conversations with participants, I attended to the ways I composed narrative accounts in relationship to the dominant stories of experience. I attempted to allow the reader to think with the stories of participants (Morris, 2001), allowing for complex understanding of experience to emerge rather than relying on dominant stories or positioning stories to interpret experience.

Wondering about school places and forward-looking stories of research around curriculum making and identity making. I began this dissertation wondering about the experiences of Lee. His curriculum making experiences led me to wonder about how we create relationships and contexts that allow students to compose diverse stories to live by around sexuality. School was not a focal place in this inquiry, but school was a filter through which the participants understood curriculum making. School often interrupts the stories of family, and school was a site through which the participants made sense of familial curriculum making. Through this inquiry, I believe that a case is made for an understanding as curriculum as a course of life; it can be a perspective that interrupts many dominant stories around curriculum as subject matter in schools. Students' learning is not bounded by the objectives presented in a classroom.

I continue to wonder about the experiences of students and teachers whose stories to live by are dissonant with the dominant stories of a found community, like school. It is worth

considering the ways that our schools “exclude and suppress nongroup members while exploiting and oppressing certain members” (Lindemann Nelson, 2001, p. 9) based on the stories of identity they compose around race, socioeconomic status, health, ability, gender, sexuality, or any other positioning aspect of the stories students compose. In my teaching experience in elementary schools, I have neither shared my own stories to live by around sexuality and gender nor have I allowed or encouraged conversations around gender and sexuality for fear of how other teachers, administrators, or parents might respond. A dominant story around gender and sexuality is that they are not stories for children. At the same time, I wonder how the lack of stories available to children and youth shapes the stories they are already composing around gender and sexuality. I continue to wonder about how teachers can give students access to diverse stories to live by.

As research around curriculum making and identity making continues to unfold, I think it will be important to inquire into the stories of students who are positioned in their school contexts. I have learned that our identity making shapes the curriculum we make, and in turn, the curriculum we make shapes the identities we compose. I wonder how we might begin to attend to identity making as a part of curriculum making in schools. My hope is that we value the diverse stories that students compose in and out of classrooms and begin to position them as knowers and learners, with important stories to share and from which to learn.

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Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Flier

Participants Needed for Educational Research on Gender & Sexuality

Research

Inquiry into the educational experiences of individuals who represent gender and sexual diversity. I am interested in understanding how our experiences and contexts shape who we are as gendered and sexual persons.

Purpose of Research

This research is done in the hopes of creating safe and welcoming schools for gender and sexually diverse students.

Prospective Participants in the Research Should

- Identify with diverse stories of gender and/or sexuality
- Be over the age of 18
- Be willing to share their experiences

Time Commitment

Participants will be asked to meet once or twice a month over the course of about a year. Each meeting should be about an hour long.

Benefits

- Help create safe and welcoming schools and staff for all families and students
- Develop a deeper understanding on your own experience
- Feel empowered to tell your story in a meaningful and reflective way
- Have a written narrative account of your experience

Risks

This study is considered "minimal risk." That is, the research involves no more risk than what is associated with daily life.

Researcher

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Tell your story and make a difference

If interested, please contact
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