

**On Dangerous Ground:  
Working Towards Affirming  
Representations of Sexual Diversity  
for Students in  
Two New Zealand Secondary Schools**

**A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for**

**The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education**

**at**

**the University of Canterbury**

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University of Canterbury

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores what's possible in terms of affirming sexual diversity in two New Zealand case study schools, Takehe High School and Kereru Girls' College, between 1996 and 1998. The research process was characterised by a number of shifts that arose in the interests of theoretical width and also because of methodological necessity.

Initially the research project was developed within an affirmative action model. However over time, the study increasingly became informed by Foucauldian, queer and feminist post-structural frameworks. These theoretical paradigms provided a way to move beyond framing lesbian and gay students in schools as a disadvantaged minority group with personal deficits. The frameworks were also helpful in focusing on the ways in which heteronormative discourses are produced and destabilised within the two case study schools.

In addition, Foucauldian, queer and feminist post-structural frameworks provided ways to explore the complex and mutable nature of sexuality, and possible pedagogical directions for students to be able to explore the discursive construction of sexuality and gender in the classroom. Foucauldian analytical tools such as genealogy also proved helpful in accounting for the constraints that arose in the second case study school because of the presence of the project in the school.

The final stage of the research process led to what I am describing as an informed action approach. Foucauldian, queer and feminist post-structural frameworks may provide helpful (if challenging) directions in terms of addressing sexual diversity within the formal curriculum. However, I also suggest that affirming sexual diversity in schools should also involve having an understanding of the ideological, structural, and micro and macro contextual constraints that will arise when issues of sexual diversity are explored within school contexts. This joint approach may go some way to ensuring that action to affirm sexual diversity in schools can be well informed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been completed without the ongoing support and assistance of a wide range of people who guided me carefully and kindly through what became a long and challenging research process.

Firstly and most importantly thanks to my partner Linda, for her astute and considered take on the world. I have appreciated the capacity that she has for helping me to see things in wider ways. She has also challenged me when I have lapsed into self-indulgence. Thanks also for the cartoons, all power to your paintbrush!

I want to express my deep thanks to my supervisors, Elody, Jean, Lynne and (in the early stages) Missy. Elody, I have appreciated your sustained support over what has proved to be a difficult and challenging project and ongoing commitment to feminist theoretical frameworks and their implications for educational practice. Your belief in my ability to see things through has meant a lot to me. I have also benefited from your ongoing feedback, especially in terms of my writing. Jean, I have appreciated the ongoing level of engagement and respect you have shown towards my work. I have enjoyed your capacity for radical thought and the passion and vision you have for educational change. Lynne, you have an astute ability to locate my current thinking and push it theoretically sometimes beyond where I felt able to go. I have enjoyed your risk taking capacity and your ongoing support and level of engagement with my work. Missy, I have learnt a lot from you about qualitative research methodologies and rigour.

I also want to thank my family. I owe an extraordinary amount to my mother, Audrey. She has given me unconditional love and support throughout my life, encouraging me to take on tasks that often felt daunting. She is smart, tenacious, loving and great company. I feel proud to have her as my mother. Without her ongoing emotional and practical support I never would have been able to start this project, let alone finish it.

My father David died in the early stages of the research project. He was an unusual man, combining extraordinary tenacity, and an enquiring mind, with a light touch and a capacity for enthusiasm and laughter. I miss the arguments we used to have together. I

wish he was still around to enjoy celebrating the completion of this work (despite the fact that he thought I was crazy to take it on in the first place!). My brothers Hamish and Duncan have also been supportive throughout the process of the research.

Thanks also to my friends. My friend and colleague Shane Town died of AIDS in the last two years of this project. I miss the collaborative work that we undertook together and the ongoing support he provided in terms of my work. We achieved a great deal together and my working world holds a little less gloss without him around. Helen has provided moral support over the course of the research project. Thanks especially to Jackie and Ria who put up with all my moaning and groaning and picked me up and dusted me off when I fell. I am particularly grateful for their practical help with referencing at the end. Sue, I enjoyed sharing an office with you for a while, I enjoyed our ongoing conversations. Thanks also to Pauline for casting her eagle eye over early drafts of the work. I am grateful to Denise who did the formatting, to Roy who scanned the cartoons, to Roger for his help with diagrams, and to Murray for help with the referencing.

Last but not least I would like to thank Takehe High School and Kereru Girls' College for allowing me access to their schools to undertake this work. Without their assistance, this research project would never have been undertaken, or indeed completed. I wish to thank Richard for helping me to gain access to Takehe High School, and for reading and responding thoughtfully to a number of early drafts of the work. I also want to acknowledge the staff and students at Kereru Girls' College for participating in what has sometimes been a tense and unsettling research process. In particular I want to thank the member of the planning group, Nellie and most especially, Sylvie. She stuck with the research process at her school through thick and thin, and still affords me the time to engage thoughtfully with the work and provide me with her responses.

This thesis is dedicated to Melissa and the tenacity, humour and strength she has shown in the face of some formidable obstacles.



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**PROLOGUE**  
**AFFIRMING SEXUAL DIVERSITY IN SECONDARY**  
**SCHOOLS: CHALLENGES, CONSTRAINTS AND**  
**SHIFTING GROUND**

You're not yourself at school if you're not 'out' kind of thing, you can't scratch on the desk, 'Melissa 4 Rebecca' so you have to keep part of your life secluded in a way and you'd want to because otherwise you'd get teased and picked on (Melissa Year 11 student, Kereru Girls' College, First Interview, 1996).

... you could see discussing the needs of lesbian and bisexual students as too in your face because it's about sexuality ... I wonder if how many of those ideas lurk around that if we talk about it too much then they might all go out and do it, whether that be heterosexual or homosexual. (There's)... a feeling that schools are on dangerous ground with 'private areas' such as sexuality, so the less in your face it is the better (Sylvie, guidance counsellor, planning group member, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning (Foucault, 1988, p. 9).

This thesis explores what is possible in terms of affirming sexual diversity within the context of two New Zealand secondary schools: Takahe High School and Kereru Girls' College<sup>1</sup>, between 1996 and 1998. It is a complex and multifaceted story that brings together two spheres, which sit together uneasily: same sex desire and schooling. Two main features have emerged during the research process. The first of these is a greater awareness of the complex challenges faced by schools in undertaking work to affirm sexual diversity and the extent to which, as Sylvie commented, schools can be seen to be on 'dangerous ground' when undertaking work on sexual diversity. A second feature which has characterised this project is the series of shifts in thinking and action that I have undergone as to how best to accomplish changes given the constraints within schools which emerged during the research process. These constraints include: the ways in which sexuality and same sex desire are framed in schooling contexts, how the roles of schools and teachers are understood, the structural realities of schooling institutions, the micro culture of the school and the wider educational context. Shifts in theoretical understandings have been tightly interwoven with the way that the project proceeded methodologically. For intertwined theoretical and methodological reasons, the research process and myself as a researcher became something different from what they were in

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<sup>1</sup> Takahe and Kereru are the Maori names for two New Zealand birds.

the beginning. This thesis relates both the story of the research process and what it means for schools to work towards cultures in which Melissa can 'be herself' at school without having to hide her sexuality for fear of being harassed. In the prologue I outline the major shifts the research project moved through and I introduce the theoretical and methodological issues I grappled with as part of the research process.

A growing amount of overseas and New Zealand research has documented the experiences of lesbian and gay students in secondary schools (Khayatt, 1994; Quinlivan, 1994; Stapp, 1991; Town, 1998; Vincent & Ballard, 1997). Several studies and texts have recommended strategies that schools could take to create safer schools for queer youth and to affirm sexual diversity more widely (Laskey & Beavis, 1996; Quinlivan & Town, 1999a, b; Sears, 1997; Thonemann, 1999). While Australian states such as New South Wales have introduced legislation that encourages schools to address the bullying and harassment faced by queer youth, the New Zealand Ministry of Education has provided no such guidelines or models. Hence, the design of my project was experimental. The process of the study reflected an evolving and ongoing dialogue between how sexualities are understood and the implications of those understandings in terms of working to create change within schooling contexts in New Zealand.

The shifts in terms of thinking and action which characterise the process of the study emerge as a result of the conceptual and methodological challenges which school communities and researchers inevitably face when undertaking work on sexual diversity. Some of the changes in my approach occurred in response to what I observed as the limitations of current school practice. Another realisation occurred when an unexpected pedagogical opportunity arose during the course of the research, which I considered might hold some possibilities in terms of educational practice. Many of the changes occurred because of the difficulties I encountered in my research. There were problems experienced gaining access to schools, systemic problems related to school change issues, time and teacher workload constraints, and the resistance to and containment of a study that was seen to be ideologically contentious in terms of schooling. Looking back, I think I could define the realisations and changes that characterised the process of this research as an exploration in 'the art of the possible'. The constraints that emerged as part of the research process played a role in determining those possibilities.

The changing titles I gave to the thesis at different stages of the process capture the shifts I have undergone. Originally the research proposal was titled "Creating Inclusive Secondary Schools for Lesbian and Gay Youth: Documenting Best Practices". Currently my angle is very different. My working title is "On Dangerous Ground: Working Towards Affirming Representations of Sexual Diversity for Students in Two New Zealand Secondary Schools". The changing titles also represent my own theoretical development during the research process, and the implications of different conceptual frameworks for understanding sexuality in terms of

creating educational change. A change from creating inclusion for lesbian and gay students to affirming sexual diversity more generally, represented a shift from framing lesbian and gay students as a disadvantaged minority group whose status could be improved in schools through affirmative action within a social justice framework. As I became aware of the limitations of the affirmative action model, I became more interested in queer and post-structural frameworks of sexuality which worked in more strategic and less structural ways to widen representations of sexuality generally. I am now interested in the possibilities inherent in laying bare and problematising the discursive normalisation of heterosexuality rather than in arguing for the needs of a disadvantaged group, which, as I explain in more detail shortly, just seemed to have the effect of reinforcing their 'otherness'.

The changing titles of the research project illustrate the extent to which initiatives to affirm sexual diversity are actually feasible in schools, and the extent to which I underestimated how working towards affirming sexual diversity within schooling contexts can be seen as legitimating 'dangerous knowledge' (Britzman, 1998). My original notion of 'documenting best practices' became a much more tentative exploration of 'what was possible' on what I increasingly came to see as the 'dangerous ground' of schooling sites.

Over the course of the project I have increasingly recognised the importance of understanding the wide range of complexities and tensions which schools have to address when they participate in work that affirms sexual diversity. The presence of the project to affirm sexual diversity within the second case study school, Kereru Girls' College, appeared increasingly challenging. Understanding and documenting the ideological, structural and macro and micro contextual constraints which emerged, and exploring the discursive construction of sexualities appeared more possible to achieve than the challenges inherent in developing a school wide model of change.

However, focusing on the challenges and difficulties schools face undertaking this work and the discursive construction of compulsory heterosexuality means that it is easy to lose sight of the material realities which face lesbian, gay and bisexual youth in schools (Ussher, 1997a). I suggest that a dual 'informed action' approach which takes into account an understanding of both the material and discursive production of heterosexualities, (Apple, 1996; Ussher, 1997a; Walkerdine, 1997), along with an understanding of the challenges and tensions which face schools that undertake work to affirm sexual diversity and gender in the current climate (Hargreaves, 1994; Kenway & Willis, 1997; Thonemann, 1999), may provide some necessary directions for further research in this area.

Throughout the research process it has become clear to me that a wide range of ideological, structural and macro and micro contextual difficulties faced the two case study schools as they

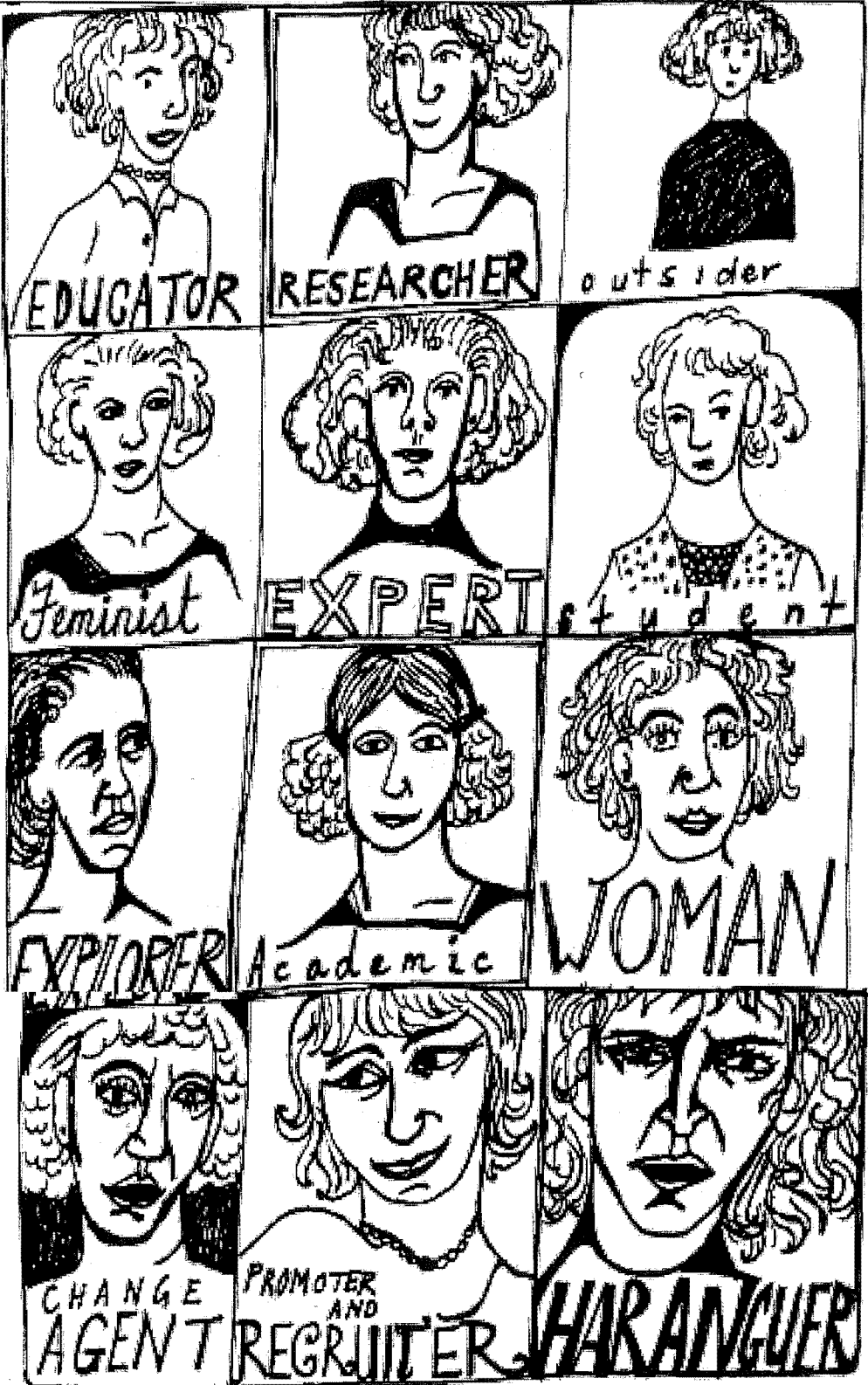
worked towards creating school cultures that affirmed sexual diversity in the current educational climate. Given those almost insurmountable difficulties, I suggest that feminist and post-structural models of strategic change may provide some way forward in interrupting the dominant heteronormative culture of many schools. While not unproblematic, the use of post-structural pedagogical strategies such as deconstruction and discourse analysis, and concepts such as performativity and the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990; 1993), particularly in specific subject areas such as the new Health curriculum, are worth considering.

In line with the writings of other post-positivist researchers I make no claim in this text to authorial neutrality. My own multiple positionalities as researcher/ teacher/ feminist/ lesbian have played a fundamental role in informing and influencing the shifts which characterised the study (Fine, 1994a). I make these positionalities explicit in the text through the interpolation of journal entries into the body of the text. These extracts make explicit my multiple positionalities in relation to the study and provide a way for me to position myself as an active participant in the research process (St Pierre, 1997). The journals provide me with a venue through which I can explore my relationship with the process of the project and chart the changes in thinking that I went through over the course of the study. I also use the research journals as a venue to explore some of the ongoing tensions and dilemmas that emerged throughout the study.

Now I want to turn and explore in more detail the way that interwoven, shifting, theoretical and methodological turns were played out over the course of the project. I begin with an overview of the process of the study. This provides an opportunity to explore the wide range of theoretical tensions and methodological complexities inherent in what it means to undertake work to affirm sexual diversity in schools. It also shows how the school administrators, the teachers and students at both Takahe High School and Kereru Girls' College, and I as a researcher grappled with these tensions and attempted to find a way through them, sometimes successfully and sometimes not.



# THE MULTIPLE POSITIONALITIES



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## Beginnings

My original motivations for undertaking this research project grew out of earlier research I had undertaken that documented the experiences of ten young lesbians in secondary schools (Quinlivan, 1994). The findings of this research confirmed overseas studies which suggested that for many lesbian and gay students schools were unsafe places to be anything other than heterosexual (Khayatt, 1994; Rogers, 1994; Sears, 1991; Trenchard & Warren, 1984). These studies showed that both lesbian and gay youth felt isolated and often experienced verbal and physical harassment as a result of their sexuality. Consequently, many lesbian and gay students denied and repressed their sexual feelings, attempted to pass as heterosexual and in some cases colluded with other students in verbally and physically harassing other students who were perceived to be lesbian or gay. Students' academic performance was frequently adversely affected. They coped with this situation by adopting a number of different strategies. Some became chronic truants and used drugs and alcohol to deal with their feelings. Other coping strategies included withdrawing into books, over-achieving academically, heterosexual promiscuity, and overeating (Quinlivan, 1994; Sears, 1991; Stapp, 1991; Town, 1998; Trenchard & Warren, 1984). Most seriously, a 1992 North American Health and Safety Report maintained that lesbian and gay youth were two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (Due, 1995).<sup>2</sup>

At the time I framed young lesbians in schools as an at risk population who needed affirmative action within schools to enable their needs to be met. Viewed through the pragmatic eyes of an active secondary school teacher (as I then was) it seemed the next step was to try and develop some strategies and resources which would enable schools to become more inclusive environments for lesbian and gay students. At that stage the process appeared fairly straightforward. It was clear that the needs of lesbian and gay youth were not being met in schools. Documenting how some schools were attempting to meet the needs of queer youth, and undertaking a research project which worked towards creating a more inclusive school for lesbian and gay students seemed a reasonable approach to use in assisting schools to more fully meet queer students' needs.

In the first phase of the study I planned to document current practices which met the needs of lesbian and gay students in two secondary schools. Phase two of the study would consist of an intervention in one school in which strategies to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students would be developed, trialled and evaluated. There was no legislation or acknowledgement from

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<sup>2</sup> Historically, the experiences of young lesbians and gay men have been conflated, so that gendered differences between the two groups have been difficult to determine. My 1994 study suggests that identifying as lesbian was only one of several factors which contributed to the participants contemplating suicide.

the New Zealand Ministry of Education that inclusion for lesbian and gay students in schools was an issue worthy of concern. So, initially, I thought that developing a school wide model of change based on a range of initiatives suggested in the literature and seen to be feasible within the context of the school itself might be a possible way of proceeding. That was the experimental design with which I began.

While I have alluded to the fact that I am an experienced teacher, I now want to interrupt the narrative of the research story here in order to situate myself and the role I envisaged playing in the research process. This is because my interests, perspectives and motivations throughout the research project drove the process of the study.

### **Kathleen's Writing Journal June 2000: Situating Myself**

I want to begin by talking about the kind of teacher I was because it has had an effect on why I undertook the research and how I operated as a researcher throughout the process of the study. In the last ten years of my teaching I found myself (unlike my heterosexual colleagues) 'marked' in the Derridean sense of the word (Sedgwick, 1990) as a lesbian teacher. Coming to grips with the fact that overnight I had become the 'Other', and that both the students and the teachers I worked with now perceived me in a different light was a curious experience for me. This experience was exacerbated by the fact that I was relatively open about my sexuality with both colleagues and with students. The decision to do this wasn't an act of heroism. As a feminist, I could see that there was a political dimension to my personal actions, so it just appeared a logical thing to do. I thought then (and still do) that denying your sexuality gives a message that being a lesbian was somehow wrong. I discovered over time that many lesbian teachers choose not to be open about their sexuality because they don't feel safe and also because they frame their sexuality as a personal issue that has nothing to do with their working life. In some cases I was surprised and sometimes hurt that they considered my openness a threat to their position in the school.

Working as an English teacher meant that I had the opportunities to explore the permutations of issues such as gender and (sometimes) sexuality with students. I had run workshops with my colleagues on the issues facing lesbian and gay students in schools and these had been well received. Despite the occasional fracas with students I didn't know, I was accepted and supported by most of my colleagues and the students. My position as a Head of Department and my expertise as a teacher probably contributed to that acceptance (Khayatt, 1982). Looking back on my role as a teacher, I think I worked as a change agent in terms of my practice. The motivation for undertaking research to document the experiences of young lesbians in schools was affected by my own experiences as a feminist, as a lesbian and as a teacher. In light of the challenges I had experienced in what I saw as the predominantly heteronormative cultures of schools, I wondered how young women who were questioning their sexuality in schools would survive. Once I had established that young lesbians do negotiate enormous difficulties within predominantly heteronormative school cultures, it appeared logical to me, as a pragmatic teacher and a feminist, to do something about the issues that lesbian and gay students face in schools. At the time it appeared a small step to take. However what I had not banked on confronting in the research process was what it

would mean to work with issues of sexual diversity and schooling outside the comfort zone of my school. But that was all to come...

The challenges that schools and researchers face in undertaking work towards affirming sexual diversity in schools emerged early on in the process of the study. It became clear that while there were some informal initiatives supporting lesbian and gay students, (that operated in a discontinuous and intermittent form) describing them as forms of 'good practice' was a little optimistic. I thought that documenting practices was challenging, but finding a school that would be interested in developing a project to work towards inclusion for lesbian and gay students felt increasingly like looking for a needle in a haystack. The difficulties I experienced in attempting to gain access to schools was an early indication of the dangers involved in a school participating in a project which could be seen to be controversial by parents, the wider school community and potential students and their families.

Of the five schools I approached, three felt that participating in the project would jeopardise the reputation of the school. This was a concern that became particularly apparent for low decile schools who saw themselves to be in competition with wealthier schools for students (Gordon, 1993). Concerns about the reputation of the school in the current deregulated educational climate was one of the factors which affected schools working towards (as I framed it then) creating more inclusive schools for lesbian and gay students. This was an ongoing issue of concern in the two case study schools. In the case of the first case study school, Takahe High School, it played a role in determining the strategies used to 'manage' and contain the issues facing lesbian and gay students in the school. In the second phase of the study, the reputation of the school was also an alleged ongoing concern and tension for the school.

However Takahe High School did (somewhat reluctantly on the part of the school administration) agree to participate by describing how they worked towards creating a safe school for lesbian and gay students. Just as I did at that stage, the school generally positioned lesbian and gay students as a disadvantaged group of individuals who required reparation within an equity framework. As such they were seen to be 'at risk' in terms of having a personal deficit or problem that could be remedied through the counsellor and referral to outside gay and lesbian youth support agencies. This approach allowed the school to provide support to individual students from counselling staff. The role that an openly gay teacher played as a catalyst for change in the school was particularly significant (Thonemann, 1999). The approach also enabled the school to 'contain' and safely manage the issues faced by lesbian, gay and bisexual youth through being seen to meet the needs of individuals (Apple, 1996; Fine, 1991). This meant that the school's position in the marketplace was not jeopardised.

This strategy, while supportive for individual students, can also be seen as problematic.

Adopting an 'affirmative' approach towards addressing the needs of lesbian and gay students necessitates a revaluing of gay and lesbian identities. The process of building that cohesive identity can, however, result in defining lesbian and gay students as 'at risk' and reinforcing their othered status, by labelling them as having a personal problem (Fine, 1991; Fraser, 1997). In this way, the process of labeling queer students within a deficit framework at Takahe High School was problematic. It ran the risk of the students being attributed with a set of characteristics that pathologised and abnormalised them in relation to what was assumed to be the heterosexual norm. Ironically this process had the effect of reinforcing the normality of heterosexuality within schooling contexts by taking attention away from the fact that the 'problem' was not the individual student but the heteronormative culture of the school. However, it also needs to be acknowledged that in the current school environment, the reality is that lesbian and gay students are very much 'at risk' and that their wellbeing needs to be assured by both students and the school in some way. Indeed Takahe High School did more than many schools in this regard.

As a result of some of these emerging complexities, I was also conceptually coming to see that framing sexuality as an either heterosexual or homosexual choice was playing a role in the process which labeled lesbian and gay youth as having a deficit or 'problem'. I began to think about other ways of framing sexuality, which moved beyond framing sexuality as an either/heterosexual or homosexual choice. So while my research plans for the school proceeded within an affirmative action framework (Fraser, 1997), from a theoretical position I was becoming more interested in exploring ways of working in schools which could provide a framework within which the discursive meanings that circulate about sexuality and gender could be explored and destabilised. Fraser would describe this development as a transformative rather than an affirmative approach for achieving social justice. Looking back, I can see that the tension between these two ways of viewing sexuality and affecting change underscored the project. Whereas the affirmative model could enable structural factors to change, it held the problem of leaving the deeper meanings which circulate about sexualities and genders intact. The transformative model was strategic but did not address creating structural change. I will be developing the discussion of these tensions in Part 1.

While some of these ideas were germinating in my mind I finally gained access to a single sex girls' school to undertake the second part of the study. At that stage, even though I was thinking about ways to frame sexuality more widely, those thoughts hadn't percolated down into thinking what they would mean in terms of actual practice in a school. A group of staff volunteered to work with me on the project<sup>3</sup> and we began to talk about ways to go about it.

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<sup>3</sup> While I approached students and parents to participate in the group, none felt able to. The students felt too vulnerable, and the parents felt that their participation may adversely affect their child's progress at school.

Once I had undertaken preliminary interviews with teachers and students I fed the information back to the staff and students, and elicited their suggestions on ways of proceeding.

The conditions at Kereru Girls' College facing lesbian students were similar to those that had emerged in other studies (Hey, 1997; Khayatt, 1994; Quinlivan, 1994; Vincent & Ballard, 1997). Silence and invisibility surrounded the issue of same sex desire in the formal curriculum. When it was mentioned, students whom I interviewed felt that it was constructed in a negative sense by both teachers and students. Melissa, a lesbian student, remembered how a teacher's negative response shut down the possibility for discussion in one class:

Someone was talking about it in class and then they asked the teacher... "What do you think?" she was "Ugh if they want to" sort of thing. (It was like) if we don't talk about it then it won't happen (Melissa, lesbian Year 11 student, Kereru Girls' College, First Interview).

Lesbian and bisexual students mostly appear to survive in the school by choosing to hide their sexuality. The strategy protected them against the rumour and talk about same sex desire, and to some extent the verbal harassment which saturated the peer culture. As Heidi, a bisexual fifth former noted:

... you hear them talking, experiences at school where someone's walked past and they've shouted out, 'Faggot'. Rachel, she was walking with this group of people and she didn't want to turn round (Heidi, bisexual Year 11 student, Kereru Girls' College).

The invisibility and silence which characterises many lesbian and bisexual students' school experiences makes undertaking work to create more inclusive schools for queer youth problematic. Any project which aims to work towards inclusion for queer youth faces the difficulty of how to address an issue of a frequently silenced and invisible group of students (Misson, 1996; Quinlivan, 1994). The prevalence of gendered understandings that construct female sexuality as non-sexual (Fine, 1992a) contributes to the silencing of lesbian and bisexual young women (Khayatt, 1994; Quinlivan, 1994; Renew, 1996; Rogers, 1994). Advocating for a silenced group is a challenge because their invisibility means that the issues that face them can be ignored and not seen to be worthy of addressing because they are not seen to exist. This is a catch 22 situation. If schools are not safe places queer students will remain invisible and their invisibility in turn means their needs can be ignored (Misson, 1996). In the back of my mind I was thinking that perhaps working towards addressing issues of sexual diversity in ways that moved beyond framing lesbian and gay students as a minority group may be a way to make the issue more relevant to a wider group of students. However, I could also see that adopting this approach meant that there was a danger of the students' needs becoming lost in the process.

The silence and denial of the lesbian and bisexual students came at the price of denying their own feelings and reinforcing the sense that there was something wrong with them. In Melissa's case she took it out on herself:

I never thought it would affect me that much and it was really horrible, it's been horrible carrying it around all that time. I do remember sometimes if I did think about it I would get scared, I'd just start to think about it and block it out ... I'd get on with it and forget about it, that's all I could do (Melissa lesbian Year 11 student, Kereru Girls' College, First Interview, 1996).

The fear that Melissa chose to block out was fed by the silences and invisibilities that frequently surround same sex desire. The silences which reinforce the abnormality of same sex desire also mean that fears about lesbian, gay and bisexual people can be both strongly felt and sometimes irrational (Misson, 1996). I suggest that silence perpetuates constructions of sexual deviance which rely on pathologising notions of queer sexuality that many people hold. The use of notions of sexual insatiability and 'promotion and recruitment' as ways to frame same sex desire were evident from some participants in the project. These constructs provided some indication of the extent to which undertaking this project was challenging because it legitimised something considered by some to be dangerous knowledge (Britzman, 1998). As one of the staff observed in the initial interviews:

It would probably be hard work (working within the school towards affirming representations of a range of sexual diversities for students), how many would resist knowing? (Nellie, English teacher, Kereru Girls' College).

The concerns that Nellie identified early on in the study were to emerge more strongly as the project progressed.

### **Finding Ways to Make it Work: The Middle Stages of The Project**

Despite the emerging challenges the project proceeded. On the basis of a wide range of initiatives described in the current literature, the group of teachers who volunteered to work with me at Kereru Girls' College on developing the project (hereafter known as the planning group) and I developed a school-wide model of change to work towards creating inclusion for lesbian and bisexual students. The model incorporated professional development with teachers, development of inclusive policies and procedures, working to integrate lesbian and bisexual perspectives into the emerging Health curriculum, providing a range of literature addressing sexual diversity in the library, and the possibility of working in another curriculum area to

explore lesbian and gay issues.

At the same time, my reading influenced the ways in which I understood and analysed the initial data I had gathered. Queer and feminist post-structural conceptual frameworks that focused on exploring ways of seeing sexuality other than through a binary framework were beginning to influence my thinking. I became increasingly interested in understanding sexuality in ways which allowed students to become active participators in making meaning. Rather than just framing lesbian and gay students as fixed as an oppressed abnormal 'other' within a binary framework (Sedgwick, 1990), I became more interested in understanding, explicating and interrupting the process through which meanings of sexuality and gender were intertwined, and how the two constructs were in a constant state of production and contestation (Butler, 1990; 1993; Davies, 1995; Renew, 1996).

These frameworks came into play when I began to analyse the student data from the initial interviews. The data from the lesbian and bisexual students suggested that some of them saw their sexuality in much more complex ways than as an either/or choice. So while I had undertaken the interviews initially to find what it would be like to be a lesbian or bisexual student at the school, when I actually looked at the student data it seemed to reflect the process by which heterosexuality was normalised and contested, and also the role that hegemonic constructions of femininity played in that process (Butler, 1990; 1993; Hey, 1997; Epstein & Johnson, 1998). I began to think about what an emphasis on discursive constructions of same sex desire might offer in terms of educational practice.

As time went on I became increasingly interested in exploring frameworks for understanding sexualities and pedagogies which had the potential to destabilise the normality of heterosexuality. The ways in which queer and postmodern conceptualisations of sexuality provided a way of looking at sexuality in more complex and fluid ways appealed to me. I saw the possible potential in moving beyond binary constructions which locked understandings of sexuality into an either/ or framework within which same sex desire would inevitably be constructed as other. Increasingly I become interested in Foucault's (1988) notion of sexuality as 'becoming', rather than as arrival.

I was provided with an opportunity to think about what a potential 'queer pedagogy' might mean when I presented a group of Year 13 students with my reading of how they had understood what it was like to be a lesbian or bisexual student at their school. While the intention of the session was set up to gain their feedback, it unexpectedly also provided a venue to explore the discursive process through which they saw themselves as gendered and sexualised. Interrogating the heteronormalising process provided opportunities for discussion and exploration of the complex and shifting ways in which all the students, not just lesbian and



bisexual young women, made sense of sexuality and gender. Understanding sexuality and gender as constructed through discourses involves unpacking the assumptions and belief systems which underpin meanings. Drawing on this tool provided students with an opportunity to position themselves in relation to these discourses, rather than just accept sexuality and gender as 'givens' (Davies, 1995; Kenway, 1996). There were possibilities inherent in the unpacking of the processes by which the students came to see themselves as 'becoming' (Foucault, 1988) sexualised and gendered that could widen representations of sexuality in a more general way for all students. Rather than just requesting tolerance for a disadvantaged minority, this approach problematised the restrictive nature of compulsory heterosexuality. In Chapter 4, I examine the pedagogical potential of these frameworks more fully.

While queer and post-structural theoretical and conceptual developments proceeded and I mused on how this approach could be applied in the classroom, it was becoming clear that the idea of developing a school-wide model of change was increasingly unfeasible.

There are a number of reasons for this. The first was the structural constraints inherent in undertaking any change within a schooling context. My own reading in the area of school change emphasised the huge challenges involved in working towards school wide change. Hargreaves (1994) discusses how cultures of individualism and the 'balkanised' or fragmented structures of schools made it difficult for teachers and schools to engage in change practices and minimised risk taking and experimentation.

Lack of time emerged as a key constraint in the process. Lieberman (1995), along with others (Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1996), emphasises the importance of time for teachers to reflect on their practice in the change process. As it was, the planning group who volunteered to work on the project found it hard to find time to meet together. Finding time to work with the rest of the staff was even more demanding. I was also starting to see that change was a long term process. Fullan (1992) suggests it takes five years or more before schools begin to see results from any new initiatives. Given the 1-2 year frame of the project, it seemed to me that developing a school wide model of change would not be feasible. It was also becoming apparent that the way schools operated actually mitigated *against* change happening, (Skrtic, 1995) and that as Fine (1991) suggests the structure of schools actually curtails collective reflection, active critique or democratic participation.

Bearing these rather subduing factors in mind, I began to consider re-focusing on the new Health curriculum,<sup>4</sup> as a way to introduce issues of sexual diversity. I thought that this might also

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<sup>4</sup> The newly developed national Health curriculum became compulsory to teach from Years 1 to 8, and an optional subject for Year 11-13 students in 2001.

provide an opportunity to explore discursive constructions of sexuality. While members of the planning group were disappointed, they too could see the lack of feasibility in the first model. However there was resistance from Health teachers on the basis of workload, the fact that Health was very much a new subject area, and that most of the teachers felt uncomfortable working with me in the classroom because they felt nervous about an 'expert' observing their classroom practice. So, initially no-one opted to work with me on that front. However later, Helen, a Health teacher agreed to let me observe her Year 12 Health class. While we talked about what happened in the classes, unfortunately, due to lack of time and the short nature of the course, there was no time to work together.

### Ideological Constraints

Discourses of sexuality and schooling along with the constitution of binary understandings of sexuality also made the presence of a project which explored inclusion for lesbian and bisexual students in a school problematic. The first and probably the most deeply ingrained challenge in working to explore inclusion for lesbian and bisexual students, or in affirming sexual diversity, can be seen to be legitimating 'dangerous knowledge' (Britzman, 1998, Epstein & Sears, 1999). The presence of this project challenges the ways in which a school operates as an institution to legitimate and normalise dominant heterosexual hegemonies. By participating in this project school administrators and teachers are placed in the sometimes uncomfortable position of legitimating the sexual 'other', and in that process giving the impression that same sex desire is just as normal as heterosexuality.

I would suggest that schools in particular are challenging institutions in which to undertake this work because they are sites that represent what Watney (1991) describes as a 'double threshold' between the privacy of home and public space, as well as between categories of child and adult. A project which addresses same sex desire is dangerous because it challenges commonly held notions which construct childhood as a time of sexual innocence. Acknowledging the needs of lesbian and bisexual students and working to affirm sexual diversity acknowledges that students are sexual beings. Because childhood has been constructed developmentally as a time of sexual innocence (Silin, 1995, Watney, 1991) there is an ongoing tension in how schools are seen to address (or not address) issues of sexuality (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). As one teacher candidly commented to me in the initial interviews:

There's also another school of thought that students active in the sexual sense shouldn't be something that schools even have to contemplate anyway (Teacher, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

Sexuality and schooling, then, sit uncomfortably together. There is often controversy

surrounding the extent to which schools should be seen to address issues of sexuality with students and how sexuality education might be achieved (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). This can be seen vividly in the commonly expressed notion that providing students with knowledge about sexuality might be construed as actively encouraging sexual behaviour amongst students. As a teacher suggested to me in the preliminary interviews:

A lot of people fear (sexuality) information, they see it as a threat, as if somehow it would have coercive affects on students, put ideas into their heads you know it's like people talking about teaching kids about contraception, teach them about it, they do it (Teacher, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

In many ways participating in the project was challenging because it called into question the role of schools and of teachers. I think that this is particularly the case within secondary schools where teachers work in strictly defined specialist subject areas and are trained within rational humanist frameworks that tend to privilege notions of rationality and mind over body (Silin, 1995). What is seen as the personal area of sexuality is placed in the domain of the counselling and guidance network rather than with the classroom teacher. It became clear that some of the teachers at Kereru Girls' College simply did not feel that addressing sexual diversity was their role, and they felt ill-equipped as all knowing experts in their own specialist fields to open themselves up to what many of them perceived to be dangerous knowledge (Britzman, 1998).

These concerns were expressed by teachers in the early stages of the project, and as the project progressed an increasing amount of resistance and careful containment from teachers and some school administrators occurred. Concerns were expressed by Health teachers about possible negative parental reactions to the school's participation in the project. It was felt that being seen to legitimate the dangerous knowledge of same sex desire could adversely affect the reputation of the school. As Melissa, a lesbian student who attended Kereru suggested:

(teachers) just don't want to think about it I think maybe they're scared to ... just say at school the principal said, lesbians can come here, I don't mind maybe that some parents of the older generation might not send their kids there because if you're a parent and you're against it, this big lesbian thing, their paranoia might not want them to be round because they might turn them, like a disease or something ... (Melissa, Year 13 student, Kereru Girls' College, Second Interview, 1998).

The new curriculum implementations taking place at the time of the research project were a contributing factor that increased teacher workload. In addition, these changes were also tying up professional development time and making it difficult to find a time that could be used for

some training with staff on the issues of sexual diversity. As one overloaded teacher commented:

I think that now teaching's got to the point where there are so many issues over and above classroom teaching that impact on your job. I think that sometimes you're talking about overload and it doesn't necessarily suggest that they're not supportive or don't care there's just so much else to have to consider (Helen, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

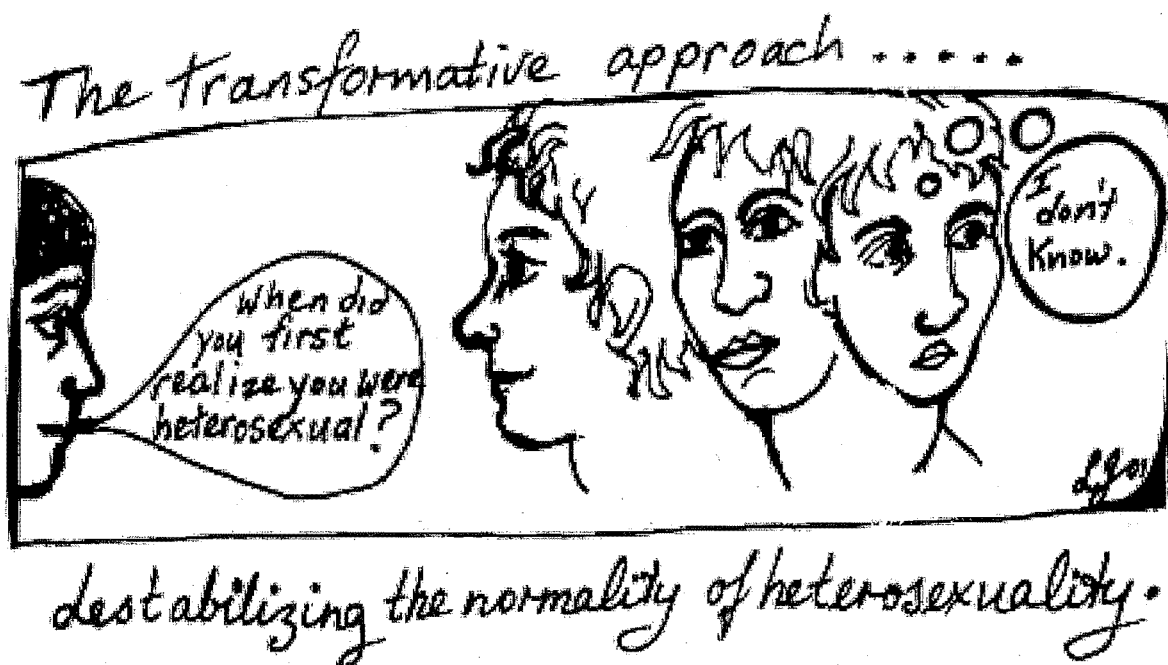
The initial idea to focus on working together with a Health teacher to develop a curriculum focus didn't materialise. Among the primary reasons were: workload, discomfort about being seen to legitimate lesbian and bisexual sexuality by talking about it, and a nervousness about teaching a new subject from inexperienced Health teachers. I explore these constraints more fully in Chapter 8. In consultation with the planning group I then decided to limit the focus of the project to three main areas: the development of anti-harassment policies and procedures, staff professional development and observation of a Health class.

With Sylvie, a counsellor and member of the planning group, I continued to participate in a staff and student working party to develop policies and procedures that would address issues of bullying and harassment in the school. Even though this initiative was inclusive of issues facing lesbian and bisexual students, it had a much broader focus. The planned work in Health classes consisted of participant observations and feedback to the Health teacher but proceeded no further. The opportunity for staff education was something that was being actively sought by planning group members and myself, but it seemed difficult to arrange. This was due to competing professional development demands, and what I felt was a certain degree of carefully managed containment so that the research project didn't adversely affect the reputation of the school. In addition, more open forms of resistance towards the project were emerging from staff, who in many cases, did not see dealing with sexual diversity as part of their role as teachers.

As the difficulties and constraints of undertaking the project became more apparent, I could see that (at best), the presence of the research project in the school was operating as a disruption and interruption to the dominant heteronormative culture of the institution. So as a way to see myself through the challenges of the process as a researcher, my focus increasingly shifted to adopting an approach that would enable me to document the challenges of undertaking the project. Adopting a genealogical approach in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault, 1980) provided me with a model which could explicate the operation of the power dynamics inherent in the research process. Recording the operation of the discourses that came into play enabled me to understand the various ways in which the school culture operated as a heteronormalising

institution. This process also gave me a fuller understanding of the challenges and constraints faced by schools when they agree to participate in a project of this kind. I became interested in 'transformative' approaches which critically interrogated the normalising effects of heterosexuality and revealed their construction, rather than affirmative action approaches which posed the danger of queer youth being re-pathologised and in the process, legitimating heterosexuality (Fraser, 1997). This shift reflected an emerging theoretical interest and a methodological necessity!

The thesis is underpinned by a shift from 'affirmative' strategies of inclusion for a minority group towards exploring the ways in which schools could become venues within which a wide range of sexualities could be explored, engaged with and affirmed. The story is explained theoretically in Chapter 1, methodologically in Chapter 2, and the three data chapters that follow, mirror the shift to illustrate the key points in the process. I thought that this approach could work towards addressing the complexities of sexualities in a wider sense and in the process, work towards meeting the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual students in schools. As suggested earlier, a transformative approach has the effect of drawing attention to the discursive meanings that circulate about sexuality.



There are many reasons why schools and teachers face profound challenges if they decide to adopt a transformative approach. Interrogating and deconstructing the heteronormalising process has the potential to destabilise both the normality of heterosexuality and the abnormality of same sex desire, and to open up the possibility of a range of sexual differences

by revealing the inconsistencies in meanings. This is because it clears a space within which to create other possible meanings. In this way, working towards affirming sexual diversity generally rather than attempting to create inclusion for lesbian and gay students can be seen to cater to the needs of all students, not just queer youth.

Conceptually, the process entails moving beyond how binary thinking posits same sex desire as abnormal in relation to the heterosexual norm. In effect, it means moving away from feeling pity for a group of disadvantaged others and engaging with the 'dangerous knowledge' (Britzman, 1998) that same sex desire can be seen to be just as 'normal' as heterosexuality. Destabilising the normality of heterosexuality calls into question assumptions that are taken for granted. This can be a challenging prospect for teachers to consider, because it brings the normality of heterosexuality into question. If they begin working towards affirming sexual diversity, schools and teachers are placed in the curiously problematic position of being seen to be legitimating knowledge which 'we cannot bear to know' as Felman (1982, in Silin, 1995) and Britzman, (1998) observed. As Helen, a Health teacher and counsellor acknowledged:

Tolerance is a bit different from experimenting with it (Helen, counsellor and Health Teacher, Kereru Girls' College, Interview August 1997).

Pedagogical strategies such as discourse analysis and deconstruction involve destabilising taken for granted knowledge (Davies, 1993). This can be challenging for teachers who may prefer to position themselves as all-knowing experts within their subject areas. These pedagogies require teachers to question their own authority and that of 'authoritative' texts, and to be able to move out of their role as 'expert'. Davies (1993, p. 40) acknowledges that utilising post-structural pedagogies requires some sophisticated pedagogical work:

the teacher must achieve an extraordinary balancing act between being one who does have a wealth of information and ideas to pass onto students (including the idea of learning how to interact with a text differently) and creating a situation in which that greater store of knowledge does not interfere with, or interrupt the students' immediate involvement in the text).

This approach is problematic in other ways because an emphasis solely on the discursive production of sexualities and in broadening representations of sexualities can mean that the material effects of what it means to be a lesbian or gay student in school can be forgotten in this process. Therefore it is important that any analysis of discursive practices takes into account that the language which constitutes discourses has a material and lived reality (Apple, 1996; Lewis, 1993; Misson, 1996; Morgan, 1997; Ussher, 1997a).

While I have alluded to the kind of influences that were coming through in my reading in terms of different ways of conceptualizing sexuality and same sex desire and how they were starting to influence the research project, I want to turn now to look at my multiple positionalities within the research project.

#### **Kathleen's Writing Journal June 2000**

I was unprepared for the ways in which my multiple positionalities were played out over the course of the research project. Because there was an emphasis in the project on change, I played the roles of both educator and researcher in the project. However, unlike my previous experiences working within a school community with colleagues and students who knew me, for the first time in my life I was seen as an academic and an outsider. For a teacher (and a feminist) like myself this change in role was unnerving. Sometimes despite my best intentions to want to work collaboratively with teachers and students, it frequently failed to come about because I was positioned as the person with the knowledge and the expertise. Because of the exploratory nature of the project this wasn't always the case. While I was conversant with a wide range of possible initiatives to affirm sexual diversity in schools, reading Thonemann, (1999) and other school reform literature (Hargreaves, 1994) made me increasingly aware of the role which the wider educational climate and culture of the individual school played in determining what would be possible to achieve.

Framing me as a researcher as an outsider, and sometimes as an academic out of touch with the realities of teaching, could also be seen as a way for some sectors of the school community to resist the presence of the project in the school. Hey (1997) discusses the complexities of doing research in the real world in relation to her research on understanding the gendered culture of young women in schools. In particular she drew attention to the difficulties that you pose to a school when you are problematising the way that the school treated its girls (or young lesbian and bisexual women in the case of my study). Hinson (1996) also suggests that change agents undertaking work on heterosexism and sexual harassment in schools can often be vulnerable. Being positioned as a lesbian researcher increases the likelihood of you being even more 'outside' the culture of the school.

Sylvie, the guidance counsellor and planning group member noted that being framed as a lesbian researcher opens you to claims of promoting and recruiting in a way that being heterosexual wouldn't. She suggested that it can be used as a way to discredit the research:

... because you were an outsider coming in, I think it's just that if people want to marginalise the whole thing that's an easy thing to do to say that, 'Oh well it's just this lesbian woman coming into the school who's got all these ideas and trying to tell us what to do and what to think'. And I think if you were coming in to research anything in that capacity people would give you that impression that you were an 'out' if people want to marginalise the whole thing that's an easy thing to do to say that (Sylvie, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

When things grew difficult towards the end of the project and more and more obstacles appeared in relation to achieving the work and I got frustrated, those feelings of isolation increased and I felt very personally vulnerable. There is no doubt that as a lesbian myself, undertaking this work at times was a painful process for me as a researcher because I was aware of what it meant to be marginalised and invisible in school and the effects it can have on both lesbian teachers and students. As time went on the culture of the school felt ironically increasingly 'dangerous' and unsafe for me as a researcher and as a lesbian.

All of the challenges which characterised the project in the school were amplified in a particularly potent way at a professional development workshop with staff towards the end of winter in 1997. It was an occasion where all the tensions which characterised the process of the study spilled over. Teacher overload, confusion over teachers' roles, the role of the school (in particular the public/private binary), discomfort and resistance to the topic of the project, heteronormative constructions of same sex desire, time pressure, structural obstacles which prohibit change in schools and concern about parental and community reaction were issues which emerged during and after the session. I explain the dynamics of these constraints fully in Chapter 8.

After a lot of lobbying (and at very short notice), the planning group and I were presented with the opportunity to undertake a one hour professional development session with staff on issues of sexual diversity titled "Strategies To Enable Teachers To Respect Students' Sexual Diversity". Despite some qualms from some people in the planning group, I was interested in exploring the potential of some post-structural pedagogies with staff as a way to explore discursive representations of sexualities. Sylvie the guidance counsellor and I facilitated the session. While I explore the complex dynamics of this 'critical moment' more fully in Chapter 5, I want to just describe some factors that made me aware that it might have been the time to exit the field as a researcher.

I began by summarising the progress of the research so far, then I moved the session on to consider individual and group responses to dealing with common experiences facing lesbian, gay and bisexual students in schools. This was followed by group work in which a range of scenarios were addressed through the use of deconstruction by teachers. These exercises were then debriefed. In the written feedback there was a wide range of responses. Some were very positive, however, there was also a lot of resistance expressed. Some of this was in relation to factors such as the perceived role of the teacher and the school in relation to issues of sexuality:

I'm not interested in students' sexual orientation and this subject has no place in my classroom (Anonymous teacher's written feedback, Kereru Girls' College staff professional development session, 1997).



Some of the factors which combined to make teachers resentful about the session were beyond my control and unrelated to the topic of the research. The session was held on a 'Teacher Only Day' when they had been promised time to do their own work. The session on sexual diversity began at 8.30 am and it had been snowing so some people were late arriving. There was a very short amount of time, and knowing that this session had been so hard to arrange I really "went for it". I think it was a combination of having to lobby so hard just to get that one hour and the need to try out a range of strategies. Also time was so tight and strictly rationed, that combined with teacher dissatisfaction and overload and the weather was just too much. It was ironic that both Sylvie and I, but particularly me, had succumbed to that same panic over lack of time that many overloaded teachers feel, and we rushed things. There was resistance expressed by some teachers to what they saw as the academic focus, and to what they saw as "a haranguing presentation". As one teacher complained in anonymous feedback:

I resent being hammered at by an academically orientated lecturer at 8.30am on a teacher only day when we have a pressured work life and look to teacher only days as a relatively relaxed day! (anonymous teacher's written feedback, Kereru Girls' College staff professional development session, 1997).

I wondered whether this was a way to minimise the project by positioning me as an academic, promoting and 'recruiting' (in a hammering way). I also found working with a large group of sixty teachers to be intimidating and I wondered whether this was a difficulty that emerges when you are working with a group of people who see themselves as impartial and rational knowledge knowers within a functionalist framework (Skrtic, 1995). Perhaps it was also because their legitimacy to transmit certain 'ways of knowing' was challenged (Britzman, 1998).

However, despite all of the constraints, just as with the student session, creating a venue which provided people with an opportunity to explore the issues also provided the opportunity for understandings to shift. One teacher told me that she found the strategies interesting, and relevant to approaches to teaching recently advocated in her subject areas of History and Geography. Members of the planning group gained a lot from the session. The Principal also received some favourable responses from her teaching colleagues:

... At least one teacher said to me after the teacher only day that they'd stopped and thought about it and realized they had to do something differently... (interview with Felicity, Principal, Kereru Girls College, Interview, 1998).

As a researcher and as a teacher though, the process had left me feeling shattered.

### **Kathleen's Writing Journal July 2000**

What I had not been prepared for was the extent to which I would feel so personally vulnerable in the session. Although Sylvie was with me at the front of the lecture theatre, I felt very much alone in front of sixty or so teachers. It felt like being thrown to the lions. I can remember going over to the staffroom after the session and feeling very much on the outside. Looking back now some of that was to do with having felt like I'd failed somehow at learning and teaching, something I had always been good at... I felt very sorry for myself. On that particular day I went home and cried.

I realised later that I needed to recognise that I was only one of many factors that contributed to what happened in that session. I realised that I needed to understand and document the complex issues that had arisen as a result of the presence of the project in the school. I also wanted to understand the extent to which the culture of the school played a role in both constraining and enabling the process (Thonemann, 1999). Using a Foucauldian genealogical model provides me with a framework for doing this. It allowed me to document the power dynamics and how they operate in schools to normalise heterosexuality, and how those discourses can be challenged and resisted (Redman, 1994; Mac an Ghaill, 1994a).

Perhaps most importantly it also provides me with a model of understanding power that could lead to a more strategic and contingent approach to change. In Foucauldian terms power circulates, therefore opportunities will always arise to destabilise heteronormative constructions of sexuality. As I recognised that developing a school based model of change wasn't feasible, increasingly I framed the project as an interruption and a challenge to the dominant heteronormative culture of the school. Framing the project in that light was one way to see the process of the research project through, and to understand all of the dynamics which come into play when the heterosexual hegemony is interrupted within a school.

I was also interested in the pedagogical possibilities inherent in drawing on genealogies as learning and teaching tools in the classroom, as a way to work towards widening representations of sexuality generally rather than position same sex desire as a deficit. I explain this in more detail in Chapter 2. The unexpected experience with the Year 13 students caused me to consider the ways in which excavating the process by which meanings are produced in relation to sexuality and gender could provide a venue to explore the dynamic discursive construction of sexualities and their effects (Connell, 1996; Davies, 1995; Kenway, 1996; Renew, 1996).

### **Here and Now**

So the shifts and changes in thinking and action which occurred throughout the project came

about as a result of both methodological necessity and in the interests of theoretical 'width'. A genealogical approach allows me to account for the complexities inherent in undertaking work in schools on issues of sexual diversity. It also provides me with some possible pedagogical approaches which hold some potential as ways of working to widen representations of sexuality with students more generally and in the process, address the issues which face queer youth in schools.

However, I think it is important not to see queer and post-structural forms of analysis and pedagogies as panaceas which will make the issue of addressing sexual diversity in schooling contexts any easier to deal with. In addition to the rigours of engaging with 'what they cannot bear to know' (Felman, 1982 in Silin 1995), many teachers do not consider sexual diversity the domain of either the classroom or the school. There is also a challenge in making (sometimes obtuse) theoretical understandings relevant and practicable within the functionalist worlds of schools (Apple, 1996; Dilley, 1999).

Sometimes, in acknowledging the difficulties and complexities involved in undertaking work which seeks to affirm sexual diversity in schools it has been easy for me to lose sight of the reasons why undertaking work to affirm sexual diversity in schools is worth attempting. Queer youth in schools deserve to live and work in a safe environment where they are free from harassment, and feel valued for who they are. This is what has kept me going.

Providing venues within classrooms to engage students with the complexities of gender and sexuality in a thoughtful and considered (yet more risky) way has the potential to extend people's thinking beyond binary frameworks and open up, rather than shut down possibilities to think about sexual difference 'differently'. Perhaps it also has the potential of enabling sexual diversity to be understood as something which could be seen to be rich and interesting rather than threatening and fearfilled (Britzman, 1998).

**PART ONE**  
**SHIFTS IN FRAMING SAME SEX DESIRE WITHIN SCHOOLING CONTEXTS:**  
**THEORIES IN PRACTICE**

... I've heard other (lesbian and gay youth) talk about their experiences ... they felt like committing suicide, they don't have any friends, or the only thing they do is interact with gay people and it doesn't seem to be me and I don't want to get picked on and always have to be shoved into some big adult category, when you haven't lived your life properly, your teenage years (Heidi bisexual student, Year 11, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

“... the problem of curriculum becomes one of proliferating identities not closing them down ... but ... more is required than simply a plea to add marginalised voices to an already overpopulated site”. (Britzman, 1995b, p.158)

### **Introduction**

In Part One I explore a range of theoretical lenses drawn on over the course of the project as I engaged with what it means to affirm sexual diversity within the context of secondary schools. The theoretical adventure underpinning the study reflected the wider experimental nature of the project. Theorising the study proved to be a dynamic and evolving process that shifted in response to what I observed as current practice in schools, and to the conceptual and methodological realities emerging as the project progressed in the two case study schools.

The theoretical shifts that underpinned the project moved through three major stages. I see the theoretical stages more as stepping stones occurring within an ever enlarging spiral rather than being sequential or progressive in a linear sense. While each phase roughly approximated to the twists and turns characterising the theoretical shifts within the project, each of them was not finite. They tended to slide messily over each other in a rather tense and uncomfortable way and were in a constant state of flux. Each of the stages was informed by a range of theoretical voices and frameworks that shifted and changed over the course of the project.

The original design of the study was informed by radical feminist and affirmative action models that viewed lesbian and gay rights as a social justice issue. However, as I observed current practice in schools, it appeared that the affirmative action framework was problematic in that it tended to reinforce notions of difference and otherness and reinforced the separateness of students marked by their sexuality. Lesbian and gay youth were framed as an 'at risk' minority group, pathologised as Heidi, for example noted, by their suicidal tendencies

(Quinlivan & Town, 1999a). In order to move beyond that model I experimented with queer and post-structural theoretical frameworks that explored the discursive constructions of sexuality and gender. These frameworks emphasised the interrogation of the normality of heterosexuality. I was interested in their potential to move beyond framing lesbian and gay youth as a marginalised group. As I shall explain, affirming sexual diversity more widely and engaging with the complexities of sexuality and gender seemed to hold the promise of more 'theoretical width'.

As the project proceeded, the queer theoretical approaches I was drawing on (along with other contextual factors, such as teacher workload and the structural constraints of educational institutions) appeared to be increasingly challenging within Kereru Girls' College. The final theoretical phase of the project drew on what I describe as an 'informed action' approach. My current theoretical position is that the analytical and strategic strengths of queer and feminist post-structural discursive frameworks (along with the recognition of the disruptive potential of such frameworks), need to be accompanied by a comprehensive understanding of the material, structural, ideological and contextual realities of schools within the current educational climate. I suggest that this dual approach may hold some (albeit risky) potential in working towards affirming sexual diversity in schooling contexts.

Of course the theoretical shifts which informed the project did not just occur in relation to what happened in the field. My reading and thinking has played an important role in stretching and expanding the conceptual boundaries of what I think it might mean to affirm sexual diversity in schools. In this way, my own positionalities have played an important role in the theorising process and I situate myself in relation to the theoretical frameworks I discuss throughout the chapter.

Theoretical frameworks played a dual purpose throughout the study, firstly as analytical and thinking tools, and secondly in terms of informing action. In terms of analysis, theoretical frameworks provided me with some ways of understanding why and how same sex desire is framed as dangerous knowledge (Britzman, 1998) within schooling contexts. Queer theoretical lenses with their attention to sexual complexity and fluidity have encouraged me to widen representations of sexuality and to explore what it might mean to work towards proliferating identities as Britzman suggests at the beginning of the chapter. These frameworks have also been helpful in understanding the role that heteronormative understandings of sexuality play in defining normative constructs of gender (Butler, 1990, 1993). Heteronormativity (Warner 1993) is a queer theoretical concept used to describe the process of normalising sexuality through discourses which render lesbian, gay and bisexuality as abnormal and heterosexuality as normal.

Foucauldian and queer theoretical perspectives frame power as productive, and emphasise the shifting discursive production and contestation of sexuality and gender. These approaches proved useful in negotiating the institutional and philosophical challenges posed in terms of working towards affirming sexual diversity in the current educational climate of market rationalism (Kenway & Willis, 1997). In response to the challenging nature of undertaking the work in the second case study school, I was also able to draw on discourse analysis which enabled me to document and understand the discourses which made undertaking work to affirm sexual diversity in schools problematic. These frameworks also enabled me to understand how the presence of the project at Kereru Girls' College to some extent, disrupted and destabilised heteronormative discourses. However, thinking of theory in terms of both analysis and action also resulted in some tensions.

The emphasis on change in the study has proved to be theoretically demanding and has raised some thorny conceptual dilemmas. The conceptual 'problematics' which arose during the project occurred in relation to what happened during the research process, and also the limitations inherent in framing queer youth as a disadvantaged minority group. These dilemmas, while frustrating, also proved to be interesting conceptual 'stepping stones' into new theoretical zones. These theoretical problematics included: the way that social justice models of inclusion reinforce heteronormative constructions of sexuality (Fraser, 1997; Sedgwick, 1990; Young, 1990); an ongoing tension between exploring the material realities and discursive constructions of same sex desire (Ussher, 1997a); the limitations of queer and feminist post-structural frameworks in terms of creating structural and institutional change; and the threatening nature of destabilising heteronormativity within schooling contexts (Seidman, 1996).

So the project has shifted theoretically from creating change for a minority group of lesbian and gays through liberal humanist models of inclusion to affirming sexual diversity through interrogating the heteronormalising process and widening representations of sexuality as a way to shift discursive understandings. I have become interested in what it might mean to work towards "proliferating identities not closing them down" as Britzman (1995b) suggested. However, I also discovered that working with queer theoretical frameworks within secondary schools is risky work. Calling into question the 'normality' of (hetero)sexuality is considered to be dangerous knowledge for schools (Epstein & Johnson, 1998).

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY: LIBERAL HUMANIST APPROACHES TO INCLUSION AND LESBIAN FEMINISM

In this chapter I focus on the theoretical beginnings that underpinned the initial development of the project and how they informed both analysis and action in the initial development of the study. I also describe how social justice models of inclusion and lesbian feminist frameworks proved problematic for framing the issues which faced lesbian and gay students in schools, in light of the prevalence of nineteenth century models of deviance.

#### **Lesbian and Gay Rights as a Social Justice Issue**

I begin this section by exploring what has been referred to by Sedgwick (1990) and others as the 'minority' model of inclusion. The minority model arose in a contemporary sense in the mid twentieth century with the emergence of the homophile and subsequently the gay liberation movements. I give a brief description of the principles of these movements, and explain how, in the case of gay liberation, the radical analyses and action they began gradually lessened over time to become what has been described as the gay ethnicity movement by the end of the 1970s (Epstein, 1992; Seidman, 1993). The ethnic minority model formed the basis for viewing lesbian and gay people as a small disadvantaged group whose rights need to be recognised and addressed in wider society. The social justice model for framing lesbian and gay sexuality provided the basis for drafting and enacting legislation designed to ensure that lesbian and gay people were not discriminated against. In New Zealand the 1993 Human Rights Act made discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation illegal. The gay ethnicity model also provides a framework within which the rights of lesbian and gay students and teachers can be addressed in schools as an equity issue.

The historical 'birth' of contemporary affirmative action for lesbian and gay people centred around the desire to revalue and affirm gay and lesbian identities, albeit in different ways. In the United States of America the homophile movement arose in the repressive context of the early 1950s, and focused on the importance of gaining social acceptance and respectability. It wavered between viewing homosexuality as a secondary psychological disorder akin to a personal pathology, and seeing it as a normal desire that existed to varying degrees across society (Seidman, 1996). The assimilationist strategies of the homophile movement centered on removing the stigma surrounding homosexuality, emphasising similarities rather than the differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals, and preventing institutional discrimination. These strategies fostered the development of lesbian and gay communities and

provided the first steps towards creating a new and different identity for lesbian and gay people (Weeks, 1996).

The assimilationist line of the homophile movement was strongly challenged in the more militant social context of the 1960s by the gay liberation movement in the United States. The gay liberation movement reached Australia and New Zealand later than this, however Jagose (1996) has suggested that the early aims and objectives of the groups were very similar to their United States counterparts. Both were more interested in gaining societal acceptance than in re-defining gay and lesbian identity as something to be proud and open about. The emergence of gay pride as a self labelling device contrasted strongly with the negative and pathologising labels applied to lesbians and gays in the past by the medical, legal and psychoanalytic professions (Weeks, 1996). The later gay liberation movement in both Australia and New Zealand was ideologically driven by a mixture of radical feminist and Marxist philosophies in which explanations for social/sexual/economic oppression were sought (Alice, 1994).

Within a social constructionist framework, modern categories of sexuality were framed as social and historical creations (Seidman, 1996). Social constructionist studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s, focused on excavating the social factors that produced a homosexual identity in order to legitimate lesbian and gay identities. Seidman suggested that social constructionist studies legitimated the view of lesbians and gays as an ethnic-like minority (Epstein, 1992).

Fundamental to a rights oriented notion of lesbian feminism and gay-ethnicity was an assumption of a unitary identity. The gay liberation movement focused on seeking public support for decriminalisation of homosexual acts in order to attain equal rights in law. The groups also aimed to reclaim a hidden gay and lesbian history and to work towards the development of publically visible lesbian and gay cultures (Weeks, 1996). The definition of unitary lesbian and gay identities enabled lesbian and gays discursive access to social justice and equality, as a 'disadvantaged minority' group. Lesbian feminist and gay-ethnicity groups wanted to supplant the 'deviant identity' paradigm developed in the mid-nineteenth century with what they saw as a more positive and affirmative gay and lesbian identity. An important part of the shift brought about by lesbian feminist and gay-ethnicity groups was identifying the 'compulsory' nature of heterosexuality which characterised the wider society as the 'problem' rather than lesbian and gay individual as being problematic themselves. Homophobia is defined as prejudice, discrimination, harassment or acts of violence against sexual minorities which are exhibited through a deep seated fear or hatred (phobia) of those groups. The notion of homophobia refers both to a fear of homosexuality directed towards homosexual people, as well as an internal fear of lesbian and gay people's own homosexuality. The latter is generally referred to as internalised homophobia. Homophobia tends to be framed as a more



individualistic form of enacting heterosexual hegemony than heterosexism which can incorporate institutional structures. I will discuss heterosexism more fully in the next section.

Rather than framing the discrimination against lesbians and gays as personal pathology, the gay liberation movement suggested that the perpetuation of the institutions of heterosexuality such as marriage and the family and conventional gender roles were oppressive to both lesbians and gay men and to women generally. In their analysis of the institutionalisation of compulsory heterosexuality and their insistence on the transformative effects of claiming a public lesbian and gay identity, connections can be drawn to the radical feminist analyses of Rich (1993) and Bunch (1987) which I will discuss shortly, and also to more recent developments in queer theory (Creed, 1994). The aim of gay liberation was to free everyone from the indoctrination of the nuclear family and challenge the heterosexual status quo. A gay and lesbian identity was seen to be revolutionary because it transformed social institutions that marginalised and pathologised same sex desire. However by the mid-1970s in the United States, the radical transformation proposed by gay liberationists was increasingly replaced by a more moderate model of 'gay ethnicity' which focused on community identity and cultural difference (Seidman, 1993).

The model of gay-ethnicity drew on racial minority models in order to argue for the rights of lesbians and gays as a legitimate minority group. Inherent in the gay ethnicity model was the notion of lesbians and gays as having a similar quasi-'ethnic' status to other racial groups in society. As Epstein (1992, p. 243) explains it: "To be gay, then became something like being Italian, black or Jewish".

Based on civil rights movements, the gay ethnicity movement lobbied for recognition and equal rights within the existing social order under an 'equal but different' banner. The gay ethnicity model was seen as a strategic move to gain equal legal protection for gay and lesbian subjects and to affirm lesbian and gay identities (Jagose, 1996). Ironically the establishment of unitary lesbian and gay identities which were crucial to achieving those aims was later to be contested by sexual minorities who reacted against the notion of a singular or unified identity. I deal with these contestations in the next section of the chapter when I discuss the rise of queer theory and politics.

In terms of analysis, the notions of heterosexism and homophobia that emerged from both lesbian feminist and gay rights movements became fundamentally important as a way to frame the discrimination faced by lesbian and gay people within the wider society. Both movements recognise that lesbians and gays suffer as a result of the privileging of an "unjust cultural valuational structure" (Fraser, 1997, p.18), which privileges heterosexuality. Later I consider the pros and cons of the theoretical and practical tools which were utilised (and still are) by

proponents of the gay ethnicity model. However, before I do that I will discuss the relevance of radical and lesbian feminist theoretical lenses to the research project.

### **Politicising The Personal: Radical/Lesbian Feminist Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender**

An analysis of gender within a radical feminist framework provides a way to understand the relationship between constructions of same sex desire and the operation of socially constructed expectations for women within what is framed by liberal and radical feminists as a patriarchal society.

There are a range of feminisms and they all differ about the ways in which gender inequality can be best defined and challenged. Despite differences, feminist perspectives all generally agree that patriarchy is reproduced in society through socially constructed gender relations: "... the concept of gender is socially constructed ... and women and their experiences have been excluded from the development of knowledge" (Schmuck, 1996, in Blackmore, 1999, p. 50-51).

This analysis calls for action at personal, political and structural levels. As Schmuck explains: "... feminism calls for a change in the balance of power relationships politically, structurally and interpersonally".

While sex as a term refers to the biological characteristics which define male and female bodies, gender refers to understanding how meanings that we attribute to sex such as masculinity and femininity are socially and discursively constituted in society. This important distinction allows social constructions of gender to move beyond the notion that gender specific qualities and characteristics are 'natural', and therefore means that they can be challenged and changed.

Radical feminism which incorporated lesbian feminism was one of the splinter groups which developed as a result of the challenges that liberal feminism faced in addressing issues of difference. While a great deal of unity and initial impetus was created through uniting a wide range of women under the liberal feminist umbrella, the aim to create equal opportunities for women with men became increasingly problematic. As time went on it became clearer that the wide range of differences amongst women was not represented in the liberal feminist approach, which gradually came to be seen as a province of white, middle class and heterosexual women.

Radical feminist theorists such as Rich (1993), Bunch (1987) and Frye (1983) maintained that gender was the fundamental mechanism of women's oppression, and that men's control over

women as sexual beings formed the basis of male dominance in a fundamentally patriarchal society. Lesbian feminist theories take this argument a step further, maintaining it is the heterosexual institution that both defines and confines women's sexuality and lives. Heterosexism then, is perceived to be inseparable from the development of patriarchal structures. Lesbian feminist discourses argue that heterosexuality has been maintained by men because men dominated and positioned women as a peripheral sex. Women's sexual subordination is seen to have been institutionalised in the earliest social codes of patriarchy and reinforced in the practices of the state.

The key tenet of lesbian feminist theories is that lesbianism is a political and revolutionary act. Bunch (1987) argued that heterosexuality maintained the patriarchy because as the basis of male supremacy, it controlled traditional family roles, the sexual division of labour, gender defined child-rearing and education. She maintained that both homosexuals and women experience the same oppression, heterosexism, which she describes as the institutional and ideological domination of heterosexuality and the base of male supremacy. She goes on to assert that neither homosexuals nor women will ever be able to determine their own lives until there is freedom to choose to be a lesbian. Therefore she argued that becoming a lesbian was a political act that would challenge patriarchal oppression "Lesbianism is the key to liberation, and only women who cut their ties to male privilege can be trusted to remain serious in the struggle against male dominance" (Bunch & Myron, 1975, p.54).

This theoretical assumption was to be critiqued later by black and working class feminist theorists, who took issue with the essentialist tendency of feminist theorists to speak for all women and argued that the privileging of sexuality marginalised the issue of race and class (Hooks, 1984; Lorde 1984).

Building on the work of Johnston (1973) and others, Rich (1993) developed a theoretical analysis of heterosexuality, critiquing the dominance of heterosexual relations. 'Compulsory heterosexuality' as Rich termed it, was a process whereby heterosexuality as a political and compulsory institution was developed and maintained under conditions of male supremacy. Arguing that feminists had failed to address heterosexuality as an political institution rather than as a sexual preference, Rich (1993, p. 241) asserted that heterosexuality was systematically imposed upon women through wide ranging forms of physical and mental violence in a range of social practices. These included the ideological construction of heterosexual sex as ideal and normal. Within this heterosexual construction women were seen as tied emotionally and economically to men. Sexuality and social power were bound together to form a male organised, controlled and dominated system. Enforced heterosexuality then ensured men's physical, emotional and economic access to women. Rich suggested that a key feature of enforcing heterosexuality is invisibilising lesbian existence. Rich's notion of the

lesbian continuum framed lesbianism as a political construction rather than a sexual act. It suggested that any woman could be a lesbian, and that in fact in choosing to become a lesbian she was challenging the institution of heterosexuality and therefore patriarchal power systems.

While Rich's (1993) utopian model of a 'lesbian nationhood' provided a personal strategy for feminists to resist patriarchal dominance, it is the wider social and institutional implications of Rich's analysis and the interrelationships between sexuality and gender that are of most relevance to the project.

Rich's (1993) analysis explores the intersections of gender and sexuality and the role that understandings of gender play in making meaning of same sex desire for women. To this end, Rich insists on the specificity of female same sex desire as different to that of gay males. Rich argues that the issues which face lesbian women are different to those which concern gay males and that conflating the issues results in the re-invisibilising of women: "to equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatised is to erase female reality once again" (p. 239).

Understanding the gendered specificities of female same sex desire has been of particular importance in the second phase of the study, set as it is, within the context of a girls' school. Rich's (1993) insistence on understanding the role that gender plays in constructing representations of sexuality for women, and the role that silence and invisibility play in that process has emerged as a key factor in my understanding of how the young women in the study create understandings of gender and sexuality, and the role that heteronormalising discourses play in reinforcing hegemonic constructions of femininity. These intersections have continued to be of importance as the work of Butler (1990, 1993) and others suggests. Drawing a distinction between the ways in which heteronormalising discourses operate differently for women than they do for men is important (Khayatt, 1994; Quinlivan & Town, 1999a). Some work still conflates the experiences of lesbian and gay youth experiences, homogenising their perceptions and re-invisibilising female same sex desire (Friend, 1993).

Rich's (1993) emphasis on framing compulsory heterosexuality as a political institution that operates to oppress woman rather than as a biological identity is also significant. It draws attention to the role that wider social and institutional spheres play as agents of compulsory heterosexuality in society. Lesbian feminist discourses place an emphasis on understanding sexuality as a political and social phenomenon rather than as a bodily attribute. Those discourses have played an important role in challenging biological and essentialist constructions of gender and sexuality. Schools are of course agents in the production of sexualised and gendered identity.

The social and institutional contexts of patriarchal heterosexuality on an individual and structural level are homophobia and institutional heterosexism. Lesbian feminist theorists (Bunch, 1987; Rich, 1993) argue that educational institutions, along with church and state, act as agents of punishment to control, manipulate and coerce women into hetero-patriarchal thinking. In this way, sexuality and social power are bound together and comprise a male organised, controlled and dominated system. The intolerance, homophobia and heterosexism that are part of our heteronormative society then, form the dominant ideology of the institutions. In this way, the legitimisation of compulsory heterosexuality, as this and numerous other studies show, can be seen as a strong feature of schools. Mac an Ghail, (1994b), Sears (1991), Stapp (1991) and Trenchard and Warren (1984) Khayatt, (1982, 1994), and Town (1998) maintain that schools operate to legitimate compulsory heterosexuality and that hegemonic heterosexualities play a role in controlling adolescent sexuality and maintaining social control.

The notion of institutional heterosexism helps to explain the role that schools play in perpetuating the heterosexual conditioning process. It provides a way to understand the heteronormative culture of many schools (Khayatt, 1982, 1994; Quinlivan, 1994; Town, 1998). The concept also accounts for why the affirming of sexual diversity in schools continues to remain such a contested educational arena (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Silin, 1995).

The emphasis placed by Rich (1993) on framing the compulsory nature of heterosexuality as the 'problem' rather than the existence of lesbian, gay or bisexual individuals, is also of significance. An examination and analysis of heterosexuality as a political institution suggests that it is the study of heterosexuality rather than same sex desire which needs to be interrogated. As Rich suggests: "Historians need to ask at every point, how heterosexuality as an institution has been organised and maintained." (1993, p.245)

In advocating a political, economic and structural analysis of the ways in which the state operates through institutions as sites of ideological production to legitimate heterosexuality, Rich's (1993) notion of compulsory heterosexuality prefigures contemporary queer theory and activism (Jagose, 1996). Weedon (1999) suggested that Rich's model provided a stepping stone into feminist post-structural approaches which explore the ways in which heterosexuality is materially produced through a variety of discursive practices which constitute heterosexuality as a 'natural' way to be. However, theorisation of heterosexuality solely as a tool of the patriarchy can be seen to be problematic in its constitution of male power as monolithic and all encompassing. It has the tendency to position women with a lack of agency, and elides gay male sexual identity with male heterosexuality. Such problems are significant because this model can lead to positioning young lesbians and gay men in schools

as either invisible or as victims and passive recipients of heteronormative discourses (Quinlivan and Town, 1999a).

Most of the subsequent critiques of Rich's (1993) model have focused on the desexualising limitations of her notion of a lesbian continuum as a way of defining lesbian identity, along with the lack of attention paid to class, race and cultural differences in defining the material reality of patriarchal practices (Richardson, 1992; Weedon, 1999). In terms of the wider social analysis of compulsory heterosexuality as an institution, several feminist writers have drawn attention to the shortcomings of identifying as a political lesbian in terms of creating institutional change. As King (1994) suggests it certainly wouldn't protect you from heterosexism and homophobia. In addition, as a change strategy it prevents women who identify as heterosexual or bisexual from challenging heteronormative ideologies.

Whatever the limitations of Rich's (1993) model of compulsory heterosexuality, it proved to be more useful as an analytical tool than as a change model. However, the connection of theory and practice was an important tenet of a range of feminisms. Next I want to move on to examine Charlotte Bunch's work in this regard and the way in which it influenced the development of this project in the early stages in terms of providing a model of action.

Within a lesbian feminist framework Charlotte Bunch (1987) emphasised the importance of theory as a tool for both thinking and action. She argued that having a theory about lesbian oppression provided a framework for both understanding situations and for evaluating and initiating possible courses of action. Bunch (1987, p. 243) highlighted the role that theory can play in informing action and change:

Theory keeps us aware of the questions that need to be asked so what we learn will be connected to more effective strategies in the future. Theory thus both grows out of and guides activism in a continuous spiralling process.

Bunch (1987) assumed that theory was an integral part of an educational process connected to feminist political struggle. She suggested a model for using theory to inform practice which moves through four stages. The first stage involved a description of what existed. The second stage emphasised the importance of analysing why that reality existed in order to determine its origins and establish the reasons for its perpetuation. The third stage was referred to by Bunch as vision. In this part of the process what should exist is determined. Principles and values are established and goals are set. The final stage which Bunch called strategy involved hypothesising how to change 'what it is' to 'what it should be' and laying out an approach for achieving those goals. It required an examination of various tools for change, determining

which would be of most use in the particular situations and then experimentation to find out what strategies are most effective.

In many ways Bunch's model characterises how I planned the project. Recognising the issues which lesbian and gay students negotiated in schools was the first step into developing what I originally framed as a model of inclusion informed by social justice frameworks which could meet the needs of those students. Given the lack of current policy and legislation from the Ministry of Education on issues of inclusion for lesbian and gay youth in schools, I thought that development and implementation of a school-wide model of change would be the most feasible way to proceed. It was once I began endeavouring to gain access to undertake this work in schools that issues began to emerge which caused me to think that undertaking the project was going to be much more theoretically and methodologically complex than I had envisaged. However, despite the complexities which emerged, one of the original impetuses for the project was influenced by the emphasis which feminisms such as Bunch's placed not only in terms of an awareness of gendered dynamics and how they operate to disadvantage women, but also on the importance of doing something to change things. As Bunch (1987, p. 241) cheerfully acknowledged, and I rather ruefully was to discover as the study progressed:

... we do not need and neither never will have, all the answers before we act, and that it is often only through taking action that we can discover some of them.

At this point in the narrative I want to pause for a moment to situate myself within this evolving story, both as a feminist and as a lesbian and to explain how these conceptual frameworks have influenced me as a teacher and as a researcher. Radical feminism and lesbian feminism have both influenced the way that I see the world and strongly influenced my desire to undertake research which documented the experiences of young lesbians in secondary schools (Quinlivan, 1994). The emphasis on action which informed so much of Bunch's analysis was one of the impetuses which drove the current project. Once I had undertaken work which explored what was happening to lesbian students, it seemed important to do something to address the situations they were negotiating in schools. Let me explain...

#### **Kathleen's Research Journal April 1998: Living Theories I**

I remember when I chose this Ph.D. topic as a possible one to focus on. I was still teaching and I had broken my Achilles tendon so was lying on my bed with my lap-top just tossing around ideas. I remember (much to my embarrassment as I look back now!) thinking that this one would be relatively easy!!! after all there were a wide range of suggestions as to how to make schools more inclusive of lesbian and gay students (indeed I had optimistically listed them in previous work exploring what was happening in schools for lesbian students). As it appeared to me at the time, the next step was to have a go at trying out some ideas that might make a difference.

Looking back now I also see that the topic I chose was a lot to do with me, and who I am/ was /are/want to be. It had a strong practice element which reflected a feminist commitment to social change and the pragmatism that came from sixteen years experience of teaching in secondary schools and the particular view of the world you tend to gain from not totally swimming in the mainstream. Being a lesbian feminist and a teacher gave me a view of the world that meant I wanted to change things.

When I look back and think about why I wanted to go teaching when I was nineteen or twenty in 1979, I thought that by teaching I could make a difference. I was a product of second wave feminism in NZ in the mid to late 1970s. I can vividly remember representing my single sex girls' school at the International Year of Women conference, and finding it tremendously stimulating and exciting. It was like a whole new world opened up. Leaving school and going to university I took to the white middle class feminism of the mid to late 70s like a duck to water. I was articulate, feisty, wore overalls. I had been involved in university feminist politics, street theatre in the abortion law reform campaigns, organising women's arts festivals, all the heady stuff of the 70s. I was/still am a political animal.

So many times throughout the sixteen years in teaching I wondered how I had lasted so long in schools. I found the regulatory aspect of teaching difficult to stomach. I wasn't interested in whether my classes had their socks pulled up, I was interested in expanding their minds. Looking back I can see that in schools I played the role of a lone ranger change agent, first as a feminist and later as a lesbian. It has been so much a part of me that I haven't even noticed. Because of my radical feminist background I assumed I had always been a lesbian. In my desire to construct a continuous narrative, (Whisman, 1996) with one swift blow I amputated my strongly heterosexual past (bisexuals at that time were fence sitters and seen as traitors to the lesbian cause). As a lesbian feminist I just assumed that I would be open about my sexuality in the workplace with both colleagues and students (well wasn't the personal political after all? and how else is anything ever going to change?!).

I think that my feminist and lesbian subjectivities have driven my work as a researcher. Feminism plays an important role in how I see the world. It has given me an understanding of the importance of gender in terms of analysing the world and the impetus to want to change things. Feminism of course isn't a static conceptual framework. ...





**LIVING THEORIES** ".....this will be easy....."

The radical feminist emphasis on change influenced the development of the research project. It is important to acknowledge that the issues faced by lesbian and gay students in schools have only recently begun to be acknowledged in New Zealand. Any project aiming to explore what it would mean for schools to meet their needs would be exploratory. In light of the fact that there was little written on the development and implementation of school wide models of change which focus on affirming sexual diversity, feminist models of structural change which focused on gender inclusion were of some assistance in the early stages of the project in planning and developing an approach. While I discuss the work of Maher and Tetrault (1993), Sleeter (1993) and Schuster and van Dyne (1984) in more detail in the methodology chapter, I want to note what I consider to be a particularly feminist emphasis on social change in terms of re-dressing gendered inequalities. This is not to suggest that radical feminist models of change are unproblematic. In terms of addressing gendered inequalities for young women in schools, Kenway (1996) and Davies (1995) have drawn attention to the fact that the valuation of 'essential femaleness' suggested by radical feminism is likely to have little effect on the pervasiveness of hegemonic masculinities, especially as they are enacted in multifarious

spheres within schooling contexts. The process of structural change will not necessarily address the deeper discursive meanings underpinning ways of understanding gender and sexuality. As Luke and Gore (1992a, p. 37) suggest:

Critique and action deployed at the classroom level without critique of the meta narratives that theoretically and practically sustain the structures and the discourses of schooling in the liberal state may miss the point altogether. Equal opportunity to speak in the classroom, like equal representation in imagery and language in curricular text, will do little to challenge the outer limits of the epistemological horizon where the masculinist logic of the universal subject and its naming of the other is firmly inscribed. To ... encourage marginal groups to make public what is personal and private does not alter theoretically or practically those gendered structural divisions upon which liberal capitalism and its knowledge industries are based.

While I discuss the limitations of equity discourses in terms of working to affirm sexual diversity in schools in more detail later in this section, the limitations which Luke and Gore identified became apparent through the research process and my own reading. I came to realise that initiatives to create more inclusive schools for lesbian and gay youth would mean little unless the discursive meanings of sexuality and the ways in which those discourses intersected with understandings of gender were addressed.

#### Accommodations and Tensions Between Lesbian Feminism And Liberal Models Of Inclusion

There are some tensions between the challenges posed by radical feminism and the moderate desire for equality and 'normality' for lesbians and gays. In the case of the homophile movement and the later stages of gay liberation, these appeared to be based more on notions of assimilation than destabilisation (Tierney, 1997). I discuss some of these challenges in detail at the end of this section. However, there are some similarities between radical feminism and the more moderate lesbian and gay rights discourses and I want to draw attention to them at this point.

Both radical feminism and lesbian and gay rights can be framed as social justice movements. Within this model the two conceptual frameworks can be seen as revaluing lesbian and gay identities and challenging inequalities of gender and sexuality. The second connecting thread between the two frameworks is an ongoing attention to the contribution of radical feminism and gay liberation in terms of understanding the role that gender plays as an oppressive construction in maintaining hegemonic heterosexualities (Jagose, 1996). This focus was particularly relevant, along with the work of post-structural feminists such as Butler (1990,

1993), in helping to understand the operation of intersections of gender and sexuality in the project, as I shall explain in the next theoretical phase.

The concepts of heterosexism and homophobia provide useful lenses to understand what happens in schools in relation to the construction of same sex desire in this project. On an institutional level schools are sites where heterosexuality is legitimated and sanctioned. An increasing amount of research over the last ten years has demonstrated the extent to which both the formal and hidden curriculum, student cultures, teacher cultures and policies and procedures within schools operate to legitimate heterosexuality and conversely to abnormalise same sex desire (Khayatt, 1994; Quinlivan, 1994; Silin, 1995; Town, 1998; Trenchard & Warren, 1984). The concept of homophobia can be helpful in providing an explanation for the wide range of verbal and physical abuse which can be directed towards students who are (and who are presumed to be) lesbian, gay and bisexual in schools (Connell, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994a; Town, 1998). Fear of homosexuality is therefore cited as one explanation that motivates harassment against lesbians and gay males.

'Teaching against' heterosexism and homophobia are strategies which can be drawn on in working towards challenging heterosexist and homophobic prejudice within a social justice framework (Sears, 1997; Thonemann, 1999). These approaches involve creating an awareness of the ways in which heterosexism and homophobia manifest themselves in contexts and the negative and destructive effects that heterosexism and homophobia have on lesbian and gay people's lives. By targeting participants' thoughts, feelings and actions, anti-heterosexism and homophobia workshops intend to raise awareness of these effects (Sears, 1997) in the hope that people's attitudes and behaviour will become less homophobic and that discrimination against lesbian and gay people will lessen. Another function of 'teaching against' heterosexism and homophobia is an attempt to revalue lesbian and gay sexuality by affirming it. However, the terms of heterosexism and homophobia can also be seen to be conceptually and, therefore, pedagogically problematic and I want to dwell now on some of these limitations.

Raising awareness of heterosexism and homophobia and its effects is designed to reduce prejudice against sexual minorities and increase tolerance and understanding of sexual differences. One of the major concerns in arguing for tolerance and understanding and recognition of the needs of lesbian and gay people as a minority group is that this approach rests on that group making a case for themselves to be included in the (heterosexual) majority. Legal protection and the recent campaign within New Zealand for the legitimation of same sex marriages are examples of some of these demands. Establishing the legally disadvantaged status of a minority group is an important part of establishing the need for inclusion. However, building a minority group status for lesbians and gays can be seen to be problematic for a number of different reasons.

Firstly framing a group as disadvantaged rests on creating their otherness. The defining of lesbian and gay youth for example, as an 'at risk' group has meant that they have been described as five times more likely to commit suicide, prone to drug and alcohol abuse and truancy (Due, 1995; Massachusetts Department of Education, 1996). This model can have the effect of re-pathologising the minority group's status and as a result of the 'deficit' of their abnormal sexuality, the group themselves can be seen as having a problem. Instead of socially constructed notions of compulsory heterosexuality being framed as the problem, the minority group who want access to the same rights as heterosexuals can be seen to be deficient themselves. In a strange and particularly contradictory way, the desire to legitimate same sex desire by establishing a minority group status can end up reinforcing the abnormality of same sex desire while, at the same time, reinstating the normality of heterosexuality (Kinsman, 1987; Sedgwick, 1990).



Because the construction of lesbian and gay sexuality as 'other' fails to undermine the legitimacy of heterosexuality, a gay affirmative approach can not effectively challenge heterosexual hegemonies while also appearing to be an acceptable and more palatable approach. I now want to explain how some of these difficulties were played out in the research project. In the first case study school, Takahe High School, students who were lesbian and gay were referred to the counsellor to deal with what was framed as their personal deficit or problem. The school could be seen to be meeting the needs of a minority group of

disadvantaged students while the heteronormative culture of the school remained largely intact. Because they are always positioned outside the locus of authority and meaning creation, this approach doesn't allow people to be active creators of meanings and show the range of complex ways in which lesbian and gay people destabilise and challenge heterosexism and homophobia. The concept of heterosexism also does not account for ways in which ascribed meanings can shift in different contexts, are in a constant state of change and flux, and over time can be disrupted.

The second and related dilemma concerns the ways in which concepts such as 'working against' heterosexism and homophobia largely leave intact the notions of abnormality and deviance, which have been fundamental in constituting definitions of same sex desire. Underpinning strategies for affirmative action is the assumption that it is fine to be lesbian or gay, and all that is needed is to recognise and positively affirm the previously denigrated and undervalued normality of lesbian and gay sexuality. This assumption fails to take into account that the cultural valuational system through which meanings about lesbian and gay sexuality have been constructed historically rest on understanding homosexuality as abnormal. Sedgwick (1990) suggests that the meanings of heterosexuality and homosexuality are fixed within an interdependent binary operating in such a way as to reinforce the meaning of each of the terms. The normality of heterosexuality then, can best be understood in relation to the abnormality of homosexuality and vice versa. Attempts to positively affirm lesbian and gay identity without addressing deeper discursive constructions such as the operation of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, can run the risk of leaving intact the deeper discursive meanings which operate to abnormalise same sex desire (Fraser, 1997).

Pelligrini (1993) suggests that the concept of homophobia can also be problematic in that it runs the risk of reinforcing the normality of heterosexuality by legitimating the fearful (and hence abnormal) status of same sex desire as something to be afraid of. By positioning same sex desire as a phobia (or an irrational fear), the abnormality of homosexuality is reinforced by framing it as an abnormal condition (or pathology) that normal (heterosexuals) can be afraid of. In this way Britzman (1995a) suggests that the individualistic psychological explanation of homophobia shuts out an investigation of how homophobia centres heterosexuality as the normal. Arguing that the narratives of inclusion are about 'sameness' rather than 'difference' and of marking the limits of heterosexuality, Britzman queries how heterosexual people can possibly identify with same sex desire when inherent in the discursive constructions of lesbian and gay sexuality are notions of otherness and difference. Misson (1996, p.122) echoes these concerns when he suggests that calls for inclusion and fairness will not be enough to disrupt deeply held beliefs of otherness used to construct meanings of same sex desire that many people have a deep investment in retaining:

Certainly rational analysis or calls for humanitarian fairness will not in themselves be enough. It's not particularly logical to resist heterosexism and homophobia if one's constitutive desires and sense of self are bound up with these discourses. Heterosexual people can genuinely ask, "What's in it for me?"

This dilemma manifested itself in the second phase of the project. In the second case study school, Kereru Girls' College, the intention was to develop and implement a structural school-wide model aimed to create inclusion for lesbian and bisexual students. This approach was underpinned by the idea that same sex desire was as normal as heterosexuality. Later, when the project began to falter, it emerged that one of the reasons (amongst others) for the difficulties was a certain resistance amongst some teachers and students in the school to the assumption that same sex desire was just as 'normal' as heterosexuality. Some teachers indicated that they found it difficult to legitimate same sex desire because this process would involve re-defining and re-framing meanings of same sex desire, which had generally been considered by them to be abject and abnormal.

In this way, attempting to develop a school-wide model of change through developing a range of strategies to address the needs of lesbian and bisexual students failed to account for the way in which attempting to shift the material and structural realities faced by lesbian and gay youth in schools left intact the pervasive discursive meanings which constituted same sex desire for woman as abnormal. It became increasingly apparent that finding ways to address the discursive constructions of lesbian and bisexual subjectivities played an important part in creating change. In the face of some of the ideological and methodological constraints that were emerging in the study, this approach would also prove to be more expedient! Tierney (1997, p.168-169) drew attention to the limitations inherent in minority models of inclusion and emphasised the importance of an approach that considers discursive constructions of sexuality when addressing issues of sexual diversity within the cultures of tertiary institutions:

... a danger exists that by reifying identity we reproduce a cheery liberalism that assumes that if we just accept people for what they are, then everything will be okay ... merely inaugurating suggestions... - however helpful and necessary they are - will be insufficient if we do not investigate the structure of cultural identities and their codes of power).

Minority models of inclusion rest on creating a case for a unified group. However building unitary lesbian and gay identities in order to establish a defence against discrimination can also be problematic. Homogenising representations of same sex desire simplifies and reduces the complexities of sexualities, thus eliminating differences and diversity. This can result in narrowly prescriptive and sometimes more socially acceptable and normalising reifications of

lesbian and gay identities, able to be framed as just as 'normal' as heterosexuality. An insistence on unitary identities also runs the risk of rendering wider representations of sexual diversity such as bisexuality and transgendered subjectivities invisible.

Such an approach also ignores the way in which intersections of gender, race, and class with sexuality create different meanings and different lived realities for individuals and groups (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Approaches such as 'working against' homophobia and heterosexism, which do not pay attention to the role that normative constructions of gender play in reinforcing hegemonic heterosexualities, can conflate gendered specificities. Feminist theory demonstrates, for example, that women and men negotiate gender identity with different expectations of what it means to be masculine and feminine in society because gender roles are enforced differently for men than for women (Pelligrini, 1993). Any approach failing to take these differences into account significantly reduces an understanding of the complex ways in which intersections of gender and sexuality operate in relation to race and class, and the role that notions of compulsory heterosexuality play in fixing and normalising constructs of gender (Butler, 1990, 1993).

Despite its conceptual and practical limitations, the ethnic model of sexual identity provided a basis to argue for the rights of lesbian and gay people as a minority group. It also provided a basis to argue for subjectivities of groups whose lives were not reflected by the dominant representations of 'authentic' identities in terms of race, class, bisexuality and sexual practices (Weeks, 1989). These contestations set in train a dissatisfaction with the categories of identification themselves, and down the track these challenges resulted in the destabilisation of unitary categories of lesbian and gay identity, and provided a space within which wider representations of a range of sexualities could flourish.

Sedgwick (1990, 1994a) would describe the ethnic model of sexual identity as a minoritising discourse in that the homo/heterosexual definition is seen as an issue of active importance primarily for a small distinct relatively fixed homosexual minority. She describes universalising discourses on the other hand, as those that see the homo/hetero binary as an issue of continuing determinative importance in the lives of people across a spectrum of sexualities. Queer discourses with their emphasis on understanding the discursive construction of heterosexuality and multiple and shifting sexual subjectivities unsettle the normalisation of minoritising frameworks, and could be considered to be universalising discourses.

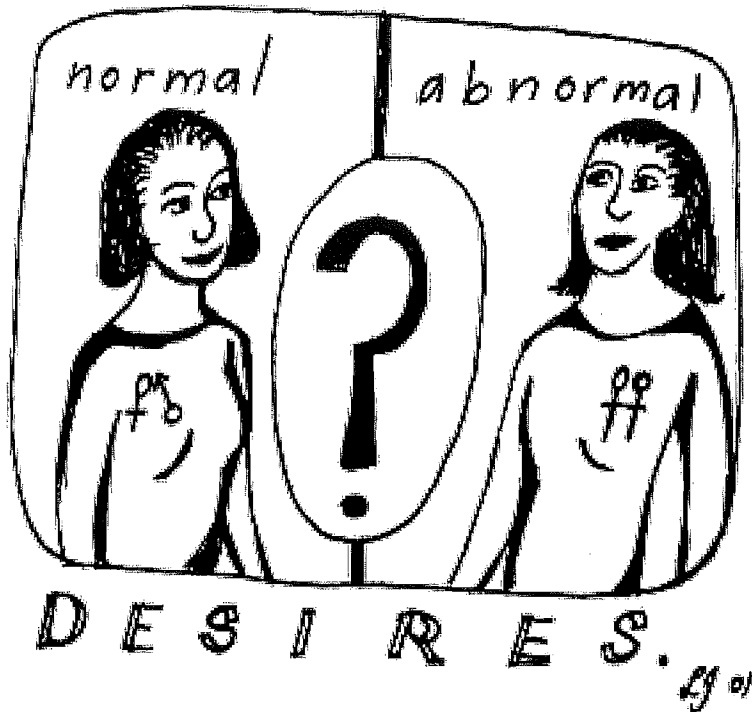
My interest in accounting for complexity of the discursive construction and contestation of sexualities, along with some of the containment of the research project I was experiencing at Kereru Girls' College, was leading me towards exploring the potential of universalising rather than minoritising discourses as theoretical, analytical and pedagogical tools. As Sedgwick

(1990) suggests, this approach does not necessarily involve privileging one discourse over the other. She draws attention to the fact that the development of universalising discourses would not have been possible without the existence of minoritising discourses to build on. One of the deceptively simple features of universalising discourses that Sedgwick identifies is the notion that people are different from each other. She suggests that the axes of categorisation we have such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation and nationality are very limiting and within those categories there is a lot of difference which can disrupt the range of forms of available thinking about sexuality. In order to account for these differences, Sedgwick (1990, p. 26) emphasises the importance of widening rather than shutting down the variety and diversity inherent in sexuality:

The safer proceeding would be to give as much credence as one finds it conceivable to give to self-reports of sexual difference - weighting one's credence, when it is necessary to weigh it at all, in favour of the less normative and therefore riskier, costlier self-reports...to...enclose protectively large areas of ... more active potential pluralism on the heavily contested maps of sexual definition.

I found the notion of universalising frameworks for understanding sexuality to be helpful in that it caters for a wide range of sexual expression and subjectivities, and provides a way to understand sexuality in much more complex ways. In this way, deconstructing the operation of heterosexualising discourses raises interesting questions about what makes sexual categories thinkable and unthinkable and begins to come to terms with a wide range of forms of sexual expression and the strange and multifarious workings of pleasure and desire (Britzman, 2000).





Another universalising discourse which enables representations of sexuality to be widened is the notion of framing sexual identities as multiple and unstable and taking on meanings in relation to other categories such as race, gender, class and binary pairings. While I discuss this notion more fully in the next section I want to note Sedgwick's (1990) interest in the ways in which binary systems of thought operated in tandem with other binary pairings to establish meanings. The interaction of the heterosexual/ homosexual binary with other binary pairings generally operates in such a way as to reproduce understandings which reinforce the normality and abnormality of either side of the heterosexual/ homosexual binary. As Sedgwick (1990, p. 11) explains:

... the now chronic modern crisis of homo/heterosexual definition has affected our culture through its inefaceable marking particularly of the categories secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, private/public, masculine/ feminine, majority/minority (p. 11).

I provide a fuller discussion of deconstruction in the following section.

While I found aspects of Eve Sedgwick's (1990, 1994 a, b) work analytically helpful in terms of providing some ways to come to terms with the complexities of sexuality, critics have noted that processes of deconstruction and 'binary-busting', confined as they are to textual analysis, provide limited opportunities for social change. Seidman (1995) suggests that one effect of deconstructing canonic texts of high culture is that institutional analysis is sadly lacking, weakening the political force of Sedgwick's analysis. Critiques of representation and

knowledges then, result in a collapsing of the social into the textual. Seidman maintains that textual deconstruction runs the risk of too much attention being paid to the categories themselves and not enough to how they were intertwined with each other within social and institutional contexts. Despite these limitations using deconstruction as an analytical tool proved useful in the project in terms of coming to terms with the complexities of the heteronormalising process and in explaining how the process was contested in a range of ways during the research project.

The tensions which are raised between universalising and minoritising discourses in terms of institutional practices in schools raise some complex issues as I now explain.

### **Equity (In)Action?: Redressing Inequalities in Schooling Contexts**

The meaning of equity depends on how the role of education in society is situated. These frameworks shift depending on which ideological lens educational equity is viewed through. Apple (1995) identified tensions and contradictions in the way that different ideologies prioritise different roles for schools to perform. On the one hand schools have a political role in ensuring equality and class mobility, while on the other hand, they perform an economic role in producing agents for the labour market and producing the cultural capital of technical, administrative knowledge. The changing meanings of equity in the last ten to fifteen years reveal an ongoing tension between those two roles. Equity legislation was originally developed in New Zealand in the mid 1980s within a liberal left framework which saw schools as playing a social, political and moral role in redressing societal inequalities. Viewed through this lens, equity was radical policy in that it saw that schools played a role in redressing societal inequalities by aiming to achieve equitable outcomes for disadvantaged groups. This social reconstructionist approach was seen as best achieved through allocating resources which would enable the less disadvantaged groups to achieve at a comparable level with advantaged groups.

Since the late 1980s the influence of liberal right philosophies have defined the work of education as an activity primarily concerned with providing for the economy, equity therefore is related to ensuring that individuals have the ability to freely choose an education which best suits their needs and prepares them for the market. Alton-Lee and Pratt (2000), and Ball (1997) argue that what has been achieved in the shift from a welfare to workplace ethos in schools has been the creation of a new moral environment for both consumers and producers. The market celebrates the ethics of the 'personal standpoint', the personal interests and desires of individuals. The emphasis on individual responsibility is a strong feature of 'at risk' discourses which provided an avenue to address inclusion for lesbian and gay students in schools in the 1990s.

Within a neo-liberal framework, the 'at risk' model requires individual schools to identify disadvantaged students and provide strategies which will enable them to compete more equitably with other more 'advantaged' students. An individualistic approach, the 'at risk' model differed strongly from liberal left models of equity that emphasised the collective responsibility of schools to work towards redressing societal inequalities. Students who have been identified as 'at risk' in a New Zealand neo-liberal context include girls, Maori and Pacific Island students and truants (Education Review Office, 1997; Jones, 1991). Recent research has drawn attention to the difficulties faced by lesbian and gay youth in negotiating the predominantly heteronormative cultures of educational institutions and begun to argue for their needs to be addressed (Khayatt, 1994; Quinlivan, 1994; Stapp, 1991; Town, 1998; Trenchard & Warren, 1984; Vincent & Ballard, 1997). While overseas literature and research clearly establishes the need for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth to be considered as an 'at risk' group in terms of suicide attempts and ideation (Due, 1995; Massachusetts Education Department, 1996), it is only recently in a New Zealand context that the connections between lesbian and gay sexuality and the high rate of youth suicide have begun to be established (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 1997).

While the experiences of lesbian and gay youth in schools have increasingly been documented, they have not been identified specifically as a disadvantaged group in terms of educational policy. The New Zealand Ministry of Education, unlike the New South Wales Department of Education in Australia, has not provided any guidelines for schools in terms of addressing heterosexism and homophobia within schooling contexts, nor for addressing inclusion for lesbian and gay students.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education's National Education Guidelines (1993) specify that it is the legal responsibility of all schools to ensure that programmes should enable all youth to reach their full potential, that equality of educational opportunity should be maintained by schools identifying and removing all barriers to achievement and success in their learning, and that those students with special needs should be identified and receive appropriate support. In addition to the educational goals outlined in the document, National Administration Guidelines were also specified. These required Boards of Trustees<sup>1</sup> to provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students, and to comply in full with any legislation currently in force or that may be developed to ensure the safety of students and employees (Education Review Office, 1997).

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<sup>1</sup>Following the devolution of the New Zealand education system in the late 1980s, Boards of Trustees, as elected representatives of school communities, are legally responsible for overseeing the running of individual schools.

The Education Review Office<sup>2</sup> (1997) has identified a number of school features which may contribute to an unsafe physical and emotional environment for students. While a lack of physical and emotional safety for lesbian and gay youth is not referred to specifically, features which could be relevant to lesbian and gay youth include sexual harassment, loneliness and behaviour of teachers and/or other students which induces fear. The Education Review office points out that although the requirement to address barriers to learning are included in the mandatory guidelines for Boards of Trustees, there is no agreed definition of the term and no guidelines are provided for how schools are to overcome them.

In a de-regulated educational climate, schools only have to address issues for which there is an immediately identifiable and vocal representative group. In the case of lesbian, bisexual and gay youth, who often choose to keep themselves safe by remaining hidden, the possibility of this happening appears unlikely and threatening.

Some of the conceptual and practical limitations of the current equity model arose early on in the research process when I explored how one school, Takahe High School, challenged heterosexism and homophobia within the school culture and addressed inclusion for lesbian and gay students.

Takahe High School was a school that did more than most to address the issues faced by lesbian and gay students in schools. While I dwell in more depth on the approach that Takahe High School took in attempting to address the needs of lesbian and gay students at the school in Chapter 3, I want to spend some time now briefly looking at some of the unintended theoretical and conceptual consequences of the approach that the school took.

Largely due to the presence of an openly gay male teacher in the school (Thonemann, 1999) an awareness of the damaging effects of a heteronormative school culture on students who identified as gay and lesbian had been raised amongst the staff. While I do not want to minimise the benefits of the initiatives, there was a tension between the extent to which the initiatives could be developed in the school, and the extent to which they could be seen as jeopardising the reputation of the school in the marketplace by 'promoting' lesbian and gay issues. These tensions were alluded to by Richard, the openly gay male teacher in the school when he commented:

... what the management is afraid of is that some of those key parents will find difficulty with what they see as promotion of lesbian and gay issues rather than spreading gay and

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<sup>2</sup> The Education Review Office is the auditing arm of the New Zealand Ministry of Education.

lesbian issues through the curriculum (Richard, gay male teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

This tension was carefully managed by the principal by drawing on current neo-liberal models of equity which supported the rights of individuals to maximise their learning opportunities and minimise their personal 'barriers to learning'. Constructing the issues which face lesbian and gay students within schools as those of an 'at risk' and disadvantaged group, enabled the school management to frame those students' sexuality as a personal problem that is best addressed through the guidance network. As the Principal suggested to me:

... where there are students who are suffering stress because of anxiety about their sexuality, we are able to identify those students and suggest actions which would help them resolve their anxiety... (James, Principal, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

The danger within a neo-liberal equity framework is that disadvantage may be framed as the responsibility of individual students, and support for them to come to terms with their personal problem tends to be dealt with on a case by case basis through the guidance system. The framework of the 'deficit model' provides a basis for schools to be seen to meet the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual students. While queer youth are being defined as 'at risk' they can be classified as fitting within a deviant model which argues that they 'need help'. As Richard's comment suggested, this solution neatly side-steps the issue of 'promotion' which could be levelled at schools who address issues of gay/les/bisexuality (Silin, 1995).

I would suggest that in using the current 'at risk' label a school can claim to be addressing inclusion for lesbian and gay youth in a way that doesn't affect the marketability of their institution but has the unfortunate consequence of lumbering individual students with a personal deficit. The use of the deficit model as a way to label individual students with a personal 'pathology' is not a new problem. Skrtic (1995) notes the extent to which redefining school failure as student disability means that schools do not have to question their conventional practices. Fine (1991) also draws attention to this problem when she notes that deficit discourses have been used as a common way to contain low income students within schools. She suggested that labelling students with personal problems and in need of psychological and counselling assistance enabled real social concerns to be constructed as personal and individual problems of the student. The counselling arena within schools is seen as the most appropriate way in which to deal with the student's 'problem'. Because the wider social issues are not addressed through the curriculum, the divide between the student's background and their educational experiences is exacerbated. As Fine explains:

... The privatising and psychologising of public and political issues served to reinforce the alienation of students' lives from their educational experiences ... an unwillingness to infuse these issues into the curriculum helps to partition them as artificially and purely psychological (p. 44).

Fine argues that in the process of marginalising the interests of community and family, the hegemony of the dominant social class is preserved. I would suggest that there is a danger in referring lesbian and gay students to the counsellor in order to resolve what is framed as their personal problem. Within this framework schools can be seen to represent themselves as neutral, tending to reframe the 'problem' as a private responsibility of the family as opposed to an issue to be addressed within the (public) sphere of the school (Watney, 1991). Referring lesbian and gay students to the counsellor can largely leave the dominant heteronormative culture of the school intact and re-pathologises the student.

So while there is no doubt that queer students in schools are 'at risk' within the heteronormative culture of schools, how this is translated into the school environment and the avenues for dealing with the issue are problematic issues. Feminist and gay ethnicity analyses frame the heterosexist culture and the way that is enacted out in schools as the issue needing to be addressed. However factors which emerged early on in the project suggested that despite Takahe High School having good intentions, framing lesbian and gay youth as a minority group ran the risk of them being labeled as the problem as it is played out through 'at risk' discourses of disadvantage.

These tensions raise questions about how you might proceed in addressing the issue of inclusion for lesbian and gay youth in schools if you are working within a social justice model that aims to redress the inequalities of a disadvantaged group. The limitations of a minoritising model of inclusion in terms of both analysis and action caused me to reconsider and question minority models of inclusion as strategies of change (Fraser, 1997). The unintended consequences of approaches undertaken to counteract homophobia and heterosexism at Takahe High School were accompanied by other methodological glitches.

The fact that five schools declined to participate in the project was an early indication of the extent to which addressing issues of same sex desire within schooling contexts would be challenging. In hindsight, it was also an indication that I would have to draw on more sophisticated theoretical tools in order to account for the complexities of what I had observed so far, and also to inform ways of proceeding in the second phase of the project. However hindsight is a wonderful thing, and gaining access to a school who actually agreed to participate in developing strategies to address issues of same sex desire actually felt like a something of a minor triumph in itself! Flushed with the success and optimism that this event

engendered, I figured at the time that the limitations I had observed at Takahe High School were factors to take into consideration, and, hopefully, to be avoided in the second phase of the study. Both in a conceptual and practical sense, the limitations of minority models of inclusion provided a springboard into exploring universalising ways of framing sexualities (Sedgwick, 1990). This led to the second theoretical phase of the project, what I would describe as 'the discursive turn'.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DESTABILISING HETERONORMATIVITY: QUEERING THE THEORETICAL PITCH

In this theoretical stage I explore the usefulness of Foucauldian, queer and feminist post-structural conceptual frameworks to the research project. I consider the analytical, methodological and pedagogical potential of these theoretical lenses.

#### **Queer Prequels: Social Constructionism and Foucault**

I begin by examining the conceptual and pedagogical relevance of Foucault's work to the project and then show how he provided something of a 'theoretical bridge' into the work of post-structural and feminist queer theorists. While Michel Foucault resisted his work being categorised as part of any wider movement, his ideas can be seen to fit into social constructionist paradigms in that he frames sexuality as a cultural category rather than as a natural or personal condition. Social constructionism, as we have seen, frames understandings about lesbian and gay sexuality as actively constructed through social norms and attitudes. It focuses on documenting and understanding the processes through which understandings about sexuality are created. Such approaches involve interrogating many of the categories considered to be 'natural' and 'normal' (Burr, 1995).

Because social processes differ according to time and place, social constructionism emphasises the importance of context in determining meanings. In this way understandings of sexuality are recognised as being culturally specific rather than universally applicable. Understanding how meanings about sexuality are constructed involves an exploration of the historical, social and geographical contexts within which understandings about sexuality and sexual practice are produced. Specific contexts such as schools, produce understandings about sexuality and same sex desire in ways that are different from other social institutions. Discourses of childhood innocence and predatory adulthood (Silin, 1995), and the way in which schools are institutions which bring the private and public spheres together in a unique way (Watney, 1991) are two features of educational institutions which mean sexuality and school sit somewhat uneasily together. These factors, combined with the role that educational institutions play in legitimating knowledge, (Apple, 1995) may help to understand why it is that the issue of same sex desire in schools has been considered to be 'dangerous knowledge' (Britzman, 1998). Social constructionist frameworks have been of assistance in exploring what same sex desire means and how those meanings are constituted within the specific context of a school.



In addition to drawing attention to the ways in which the culture of schools as institutions can inhibit change around issues of sexual diversity, social constructionist frameworks also emphasise the role that wider social and political contexts play in determining meanings. Recent educational reforms in a New Zealand context and the creation of a climate of new 'rationality' (Kenway & Willis, 1997) have affected the extent to which schools can address issues of sexual diversity in a number of ways. As I have explained, recent neo-liberal reforms frame the role of schools as addressing issues of standards, achievement and accountability rather than equity (Gordon, 1993). Social constructionist frameworks enabled me to understand the importance of context in determining what was possible in terms of a project that focused on affirming sexual diversity in schools.

In a conceptual sense, social constructionist frameworks provided me with a way to think about data differently. Rather than looking at the experiences of lesbian and gay and bisexual students as a minority disadvantaged group, gradually I became more interested in the complexity of the processes through which the participants made meaning of sexual categories such as lesbian and bisexual and heterosexual, and how those meanings entwined. In particular, I became increasingly aware of the extent to which understandings of heterosexuality and same sex desire depend on each other to fix their respective 'abnormal' and 'normal' meanings (Sedgwick, 1990). I could see that the ways in which meanings were fixed about sexual categories needed to be addressed as a part of the project in the second case study school. However, that did not really fit with the common sense affirmative action 'strategies to challenge homophobia' approach that I had begun with, which tended to leave the underlying meanings which constituted understandings of same sex desire intact. So as the project progressed, my focus shifted to exploring strategies that focused on the discursive production and contestation of sexualities. In a schooling context such approaches primarily appear to rest on creating venues within schools where opportunities are provided to interrogate and hopefully destabilise the taken for granted discourses which constitute understandings of sexualities (Davies, 1995; Morgan, 1997; Quinlivan & Town, 1999b).

Social constructionist frameworks for understanding sexuality have been critiqued for both conceptual and practical reasons. Several writers have drawn attention to the fact that while social constructionist theorists may be accounting for the origins of same sex desire in different ways to biological and essentialist models, both frameworks tend to focus on the anatomy of lesbian and gay sexuality at the expense of placing the social construction of heterosexuality under the same microscope (Namaste, 1996; Seidman, 1996). It is suggested that neither framework takes into account the ways in which

framing homosexuality as an area of study constitutes same sex desire as abnormal while legitimating and heterosexual hegemony. Other writers have drawn attention to the political paralysis inherent in battles that pitch essentialism and social constructionism in opposition to each other (Lipkin, 1999; Stein, 1992). They suggest that such a standoff inhibits change and provides limited opportunities for coming to terms with what is probably a complex mix of both factors in determining the meaning of sexuality.

Foucault's work differed from previous social constructionist work which focused on ways in which same sex desire has been socially constructed within specific historical contexts (Faderman, 1981; Halperin, 1995). Foucault (1990) focused on the bigger picture in that he saw the discursive production of sexuality as part of the wider way in which constructions of selfhood can be seen as an effect within networks of power. Sexual categories can be seen as products of particular ways in which power and knowledge come together in what Foucault referred to as a power/knowledge nexus (Epstein, 1996). He suggested that sexual desires and erotic attractions covered a diverse set of practices, strategies, discourses, institutions and knowledges that were situated within particular historical points in time and played out on a dispersed and shifting field of power.

Foucault (1990) saw sexuality not as a biological or physical drive but as an effect of discourses, as a product of modern systems of knowledge and power that he referred to as bio-power. He identified four strategies of power which characterised the construction of sexuality in Western societies since the eighteenth century. These included; the pedagogisation of children's sex, the hysterisation of women's bodies, a socialisation of procreative behaviour and a psychiatrisation of perverse pleasure. Foucault (1990) saw that these practices formed micro mechanisms of power which were used by western societies to discipline and control their populations. In that way, understandings about sexuality formed; "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power" (p.103).

One example of understanding sexuality as an effect of discourses can be seen in the role that nineteenth century medical and legal discourses played in constructing same sex desire as a pathological abnormality which was seen to be in need of controlling through the concept of normalisation. As Foucault, (1990) explains:

The sexual instinct was isolated as a separate biological and psychical instinct; a clinical analysis was made of all forms of anomalies by which it could be

afflicted, it was assigned a role of normalisation or pathologisation with respect to all behaviour; and finally a corrective technology was sought for these anomalies (1990, p.105).

The operation of discourses and their conceptual and pedagogical relevance to the project lies in how they operate to fix understandings about sexuality. Belsey (1980) defines a discourse as 'a domain of language use, a particular way of talking' (and writing and thinking). A discourse involves certain shared assumptions, which appear in and become enacted through the formulations of language, behaviour and symbols. Morgan (1997) identifies a number of features of discourses. Firstly, discourses constitute and are constituted by social practices, including institutions. Individuals have agency in relation to discourses, they can position themselves in relation to discourses rather than be positioned by them. Hence discourses offer us a subjectivity (a position as a subject of a discourse) to take up in both ourselves and our social interactions. Discourses are interrelated and imbricate each other through enactment and expression in lived experience. Discourses work in relation to others, offering something that is alternative to what other discourses offer. People operate within a number of discourses and they are able to negotiate how they position themselves in relation to those discourses.

The third characteristic of discourses that Morgan (1997) identifies is that they do ideological work. She explains that: "Any discourse organises our knowledge our beliefs and our desires and our conscious or unconscious thoughts and attitudes in such a way as to maintain particular social and cultural arrangements" (p.16).

So discourses are never neutral, they constantly promote a particular set of values and knowledge over another. Since they never operate alone, their promotion of the interests of a particular social group can be all the more powerful if the knowledge promoted is perceived to be natural and 'common sense'.

Discourses are inherently ideological in that they are connected to how social power is distributed and hierarchical structures maintained. Particular knowledges and behaviours are promoted by ideological interests within discourses, while others are rejected. Different discourses provide varying degrees of access to social status and material goods. So discourses underpin the language which people use. Whether it be spoken, written or thought, discourse analysis examines taken for granted assumptions which lie behind articulated understandings.

Foucault (1965) used the term genealogy to describe the process by which he traced the conditions that constituted discourses. These conditions include contextualising discourses both historically and within their local conditions, and accounting for the power relations within which they operate. Foucault (1990) identified sexuality as a key theme to study from the many items on his agenda for researching the broader workings of disciplinary power across the separate but intersecting professions and institutions of modern societies. Key factors in this process are the defining and policing of 'deviant' sexual behaviours and the role that normalisation played in this process as a way of regulating and controlling sexual behaviours. The notion of normalisation in terms of understanding sexuality is very relevant to this project because it provides an opportunity to understand the processes through which understandings of heterosexuality are normalised. In this way, the 'anatomy of heterosexuality' and the way in which normalising representations of heterosexuality are constructed become the object of examination, rather than the issue of same sex desire itself. This is a significant shift because it identifies the compulsory nature of heterosexuality, rather than lesbian and gay individuals themselves as the issue that needs to be addressed. This approach also opens up the possibility of exploring the ways in which the normalisation process is intimately bound up with the abnormalising process, in that it reinforces the normality of heterosexuality while simultaneously abnormalising same sex desire (Sedgwick, 1990).

Foucault (1980) argued that in order to understand the effects of disciplinary power, that it is most beneficial to study the effects of discourses at the micro level of institutions such as schools. He suggested that analysts should be:

... concerned with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, that is in its more regional and local forms and institutions ... at the extreme points of its exercise, where it is always less legal in character (p. 96-97).

In a schooling context, an analysis of disciplinary power would be concerned with the nature and effects of the practices and discourses educators employ to define normalisation in schools and to constitute as subjects those students who deviate from it. The aim of the analysis would be to understand how the normalising process happened, the effects of the techniques, and to contextualise the knowledge tradition that gave rise to those practices and discourses. Exposing the inconsistencies, contradictions and silences contained in the power/knowledge nexus, provides an opportunity to question and subvert discourses, and can enable meanings to be

reconstituted. In this way opportunities for contestation of discourses are opened up, as Halperin (1995) explains:

By analysing modern knowledge practices in terms of the strategies of power immanent in them, and by treating sexuality not as a determinate thing in itself but as a *positivity* produced by those knowledge practices and situated by their epistemic operations in the place of the real, Foucault politicises both the truth and the body: he reconstitutes knowledge and sexuality as sites of contestation, thereby opening up new opportunities for both scholarly and political intervention (p. 42).

The shift from conceptualising understandings of sexuality as a 'natural' act and as an object of study, to framing sexuality as the cumulative effect of discourses within a power/knowledge nexus is very significant. Foucault imagined power as a series of capillaries and veins, through which it could be both exercised and resisted. Power then, is more of a relation than a substance. It is something that is exercised rather than possessed. Therefore it is not the property of a person who can be identified and confronted, neither is it embedded in particular agents and institutions. Foucault doesn't deny the domination of power, but because of its dynamic circulation, he understood power as coming from 'below' as well as 'above'. In this way, power can be seen to be productive. It can make possible actions, provide choices and create conditions for exercising agency. Power then is everywhere, resistance to power takes place from within the networks of power, and freedom is a potential inherent to power, rather than a zone outside power. Rather than being attached to or expressive of an identity, Foucault (1988) understood sexuality as a 'process of becoming', and as part of a wider social process of the disciplining of knowledge and freedom. Because power circulates within these social processes, strategic opportunities for self-transformation can arise. As Foucault (1990) suggests:

Where there is power there is resistance ... a plurality of resistances ... spread over time and space ... and it is doubtless the strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes a revolution possible... (p. 95-96).

Framing power as both a repressive and productive force, as circulatory and contingent means that opportunities arise to exercise agency rather than be solely positioned as oppressed by a monolithic system. This notion is conceptually significant in the study especially in relation to analysing student participants' understandings of what it meant to be lesbian and bisexual within a school. It allowed me a way to move beyond

constructing them as victims within a monolithic system of heterosexism and to see them as being able to exercise some agency in relation to the discourses of compulsory heterosexuality that they negotiated in their school. In that way, the lesbian and bisexual students whom I interviewed in the initial stages of the project could be seen to be positioned by normalising discourses of heterosexuality as well as actively challenging and resisting those normative understandings. The overlapping nature of discourses enabled me to account for the ways in which the complexities of sexual meanings were negotiated by the young lesbian and bisexual participants I interviewed at Kereru Girls' College. Analytically, Foucauldian frameworks provided me with tools which proved helpful in understanding the operation and contestation of heteronormalising discourses, and also in coming to terms with the complexity of sexualities and their constantly shifting state.

I discovered that Foucauldian frameworks for understanding sexuality as an effect of discourses were also methodologically useful in the research project because an emphasis on the process through which meanings about sexuality are constituted prevented me getting stuck in whether same sex desire is morally 'right or wrong'. When Foucault was asked where he stood on the essentialism versus constructionism debates in regard to whether he saw same sex desire as innate or socially conditioned he replied; "On that subject I have absolutely nothing to say, no comment" (Foucault, in Halperin, 1995, p. 4). Foucault's work avoided the essentialist vs. social constructionist deadlock (Seidman, 1996) by focusing on the process by which understandings about same sex desire were produced, and the effect that they had on people's lives. As Halperin (1995) suggested, Foucault was:

... concerned less with refuting homophobic discourse than with describing how these discourses have been constituted, how they function, how they have constructed their subjects and objects, how they participate in the legitimation of oppressive social practices and how they manage to make their own operations invisible (p. 43).

Foucauldian frameworks were also helpful in understanding the challenges and resistances expressed to the ongoing development of the project in the second case study school. The difficulties I experienced could be understood as a part of the wider role that normalising sanctions played as a technique of power within the school to normalise heterosexuality. Discourse analysis made me aware that a 'genealogical' excavation of the heteronormalising processes as they operate in schools may be a useful tool in understanding, dismantling and transforming discrimination against gay

and lesbian students. This analysis was to inadvertently provide the opportunity to explore some of these constructions with students later on in the project as I explain more fully in the next section.

On a critical note, several feminist writers have noted the lack of gender specificity in Foucault's work (Diamond & Quinby, 1988; Khayatt, 1992). However Foucault's understanding of power, the role of normalisation as a technique of power, and the role that discourse played in constituting subjectivity were all aspects of his work which were built upon by feminist post-structural and queer theorists (Seidman, 1996). His work provided a theoretical bridge for feminist theorists such as Rubin (1984) and Butler (1990, 1993) and Sedgwick (1990, 1994a) amongst others to re-conceptualise the intersections between gender and sexuality. I discuss the contribution of these queer and feminist queer theorists next.

### **Twist And Shout!: Theoretical Adventures In Queerland**

Pinning down queer theory and activism is no easy task. Its multiple meanings as well as the ways in which it intersects with post-structural conceptual frameworks mean that queer theories and practices work against, rather than with, definition. Sedgwick (1994a) notes that one of the Latin derivations of queer is "torquere"- to twist. The notion of twisting seems to move towards much of what I found both conceptually valuable and pedagogically disruptive in drawing on queer frameworks to understand sexuality. The idea of twisting and perhaps stretching sexual categories hints at some of the widening analytical and pedagogical potential of queer concepts, and also how squirmingly uncomfortable the process of interrogating heteronormalising discourses can be.

In the early 1980s the notion of unitary lesbian and gay identities which had been an important factor in attempts by lesbian and gay groups to gain legitimacy through ethnic identity models increasingly came under attack. Groups who felt themselves to be on the outside of what they considered to be white, middle class and sexually prescriptive models of lesbian and gay identity began to destabilise the notion of a unitary sexual identity which had proved to be so necessary in arguing for inclusion into the mainstream and in building lesbian and gay cultures. Lesbians and gays of colour began to critique the extent to which their voices and perspectives were absent from what they saw as white middle-class mainstream lesbian and gay culture. Lesbian feminism also experienced fundamental challenges to the ways in which a lesbian feminist identity

was framed as a sexual and social identity which had been represented as a counter to oppressive and dominating masculine sexuality (Seidman, 1996).

In what has become known as the 'sex wars' (Duggan & Hunter, 1996) lesbian feminism was critiqued for theorising lesbianism independently of sexuality and regulating and denigrating a range of expressions of same sex desire amongst women, labelling them as male-identified and deviant (Jagose, 1996). Lesbians engaged in many different expressions of sexuality including butch femme role-playing, sadomasochism, fetishism, having sex with men and bisexuality. Many began to contest what they considered to be the prescriptive asexual and political nature of lesbian feminism. Jagose (1996) suggests that intensity of the debates within lesbian feminism were not replicated in gay male communities because sexual variation was already accepted as a feature of gay male cultures.

These challenges began to call into question the notion of a unitary identity and increasingly on both an intellectual and activist level, an interest in grappling with what a politics of difference might consist of gave rise to what became known as queer theoretical frameworks. The emphasis on paying attention to difference in constructing identities and an interest in framing identity as open to conflicting and multiple meanings situates queer theory within wider post-structural theoretical contexts which understand identity as provisional and contingent. Post-structural thinking suggests that our understandings of our identity as unitary and stable are a consequence of the framework of Enlightenment paradigms within which we have constructed our understandings. Jagose (1996) suggests that the emphasis on the rational and autonomous self, emerges from within philosophical frameworks which privilege those constructions. Destabilisation of identity categories does not mean however that identity categories disappear altogether, as Seidman (1996, p.12) suggests:

... the aim is not to abandon identity as a category of knowledge and politics but to render it permanently open and contestable as to its meaning and political role. In other words, decisions about identity categories become pragmatic, related to concerns of situational advantage, political gain and conceptual unity. The gain, say queer theorists, of figuring identity as permanently open as to its meaning and political use is that it encourages the public surfacing of differences or a culture where multiple voices and interests are heard and shape gay life and politics.





One way of addressing the complexities of identity is to have an understanding of the meanings through which identities are constituted. Shortly I will return to look more closely at the work of Butler (1990, 1993) who provides some ways of thinking about the discursive construction of sexuality and gender which enables an examination of those constructions. However, first I want to look more broadly at the emphasis queer theoretical frameworks place on interrogating the discursive process through which heterosexuality is normalised.

## **When Did You First Know That You Were A Heterosexual?: Problematising Heterosexuality**

The notion of interrogating the discursive construction of normalising discourses of heterosexuality builds on a rich legacy of theoretical frameworks such as Rich's (1993) influential lesbian feminist notion of compulsory heterosexuality. Rich's focus on understanding heterosexuality as a political institution is built on in queer theory with an emphasis on the discursive construction through which understandings of heterosexuality are normalised and in Warner's (1993) queer notion of heteronormativity. However unlike Rich's (1993) model, the notion of heteronormative discourses draws on social constructionist and Foucauldian notions of power which allow for discourses to be contested and also to be open to renegotiation. In this way, queer frameworks twist traditional epistemologies to frame the (hetero)normal rather than the deviant homosexual as an object of study.

Foucault's (1980) notion of normalisation as a form of social control has also been utilised by queer theorists. The operation of heteronormative discourses, for example, explores the discursive construction of the normality of heterosexuality and the corresponding abnormality of same sex desire, and, also, how these discourses have been enacted and resisted as forms of social control within in social, political and economic spheres. Warner's (1993) concept of heteronormativity frames the normalising discourses of heterosexuality, rather than the 'abnormality' of same sex desire as the issue which needs to be addressed. Heteronormalising discourses are those which constitute heterosexuality as a fundamental feature of what we understand as 'normal' in society. Warner explores how discourses of normalisation legitimate and sanction discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people. Warner argues that heteronormalisation moves beyond gay-ethnicity constructs framing the issues which face queers as those of a minority group whose situation requires tolerance from the dominant heterosexual majority:

For both academics and activists "queer" gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual ... the insistence on queer - a term initially generated in the context of terror - has the effect of pointing out a wide field of normalisation, rather than simple intolerance, as the site of violence (1993, p. xxvi).

The queer notions underpinning heteronormativity move away from an assimilationist view that represents lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered sexualities as just as

'gayly normal' as heterosexuals. Placing the emphasis on an exploration of how heterosexuality is constructed as normal means that queers can no longer be framed as politely requiring tolerance for their 'abnormal' sexuality from 'normal' heterosexuals.

Understanding the operation of the heteronormalising process involves an analysis of the discourses which have constructed heterosexuality as normal. It explores how (hetero)normalcy becomes produced and sexualised as heterosexuality. This process provides a different focus for framing same sex desire from the previous humanist psychological discourses of homophobia and heterosexism. As Britzman (1998) points out, the concept of heteronormativity provides a political critique of the production of normalcy and its sexualisation as heterosexuality:

The term heteronormativity begins to get at how the production of deviancy is intimately tied to the production of normalcy. Normalcy can only be understood through the construction of its other, the deviant. In such a relation, normalcy must always make itself normal, must always normalise itself (p. 152).

Britzman's (1998) comments draw attention to the discursive process through which heteronormalising meanings are constructed and the role that binary systems of thinking play in that process. In this way, the field of analysis for queer theorists is the production of cultural meanings, in particular linguistic and discursive structures. Same sex desire is an issue arising in the cultural politics of knowledge, rather than personal identity in a quest for equal rights. The heterosexual/homosexual binary is understood as a category of knowledge, as a way of defining and categorising people's desires, behaviour and social relations (Seidman, 1995). Understanding how the heterosexual/homosexual binary operates as a discursive construction to normalise heterosexuality and abnormalise same sex desire helps in understanding how individuals and institutions are constituted. As a tool of analysis, Seidman suggests that this deconstructive process shifts issues of homosexuality from the margin to the centre.

The notion of deconstruction draws on a long line of philosophical thought that attempts to come to terms with how we make meaning of the world by analysing how meanings are made, or constructed. Understanding how we make meaning of the world and our position in it goes right back to the beginnings of Western philosophy with the work of thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle. Caputo (1997) explains how Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher who developed the contemporary form of critical thinking known as deconstruction, was particularly interested in the ways in which thinkers such as Plato

explored how a range of intended and residual meanings can be excavated about a particular concept.

In an acknowledgment of the constructed nature of knowledge and the role that historical and social context plays in making meanings, deconstruction as a form of thinking critically also has a resonance with theoretical paradigms which include, amongst others, hermeneutics, social constructionism and discourse analysis.

Deconstruction is an interrogation of the meanings of constructs such as gender and sexuality in ways that reveal their construction. Caputo (1997) likened Derrida's concept of deconstruction to cracking a nutshell in order to explore the nature and form of the nut: "Nutshells close and encapsulate, shelter and protect, reduce and simplify, while everything in deconstruction is turned towards opening, exposure, expansion" (p. 35).

The comparison illustrates the way in which deconstruction operates to unfix meanings which are in a continuous process of being assumed to be foundational or fixed. In the process of cracking the nut, then, the form and shape of constructions can be understood and new thinking may emerge. Deconstruction 'unpacks' how meanings are contextually constructed. The meaning of the terms 'lesbian' and 'homosexual' for example, are dependent on historical definitions that have preceded them. However, social understandings and, therefore, the meanings of these words can and do change. In this way, the process of thinking critically and deconstruction can be seen to engage with the politics of knowledge.

Lather (1991, p. 93) describes the following steps in the deconstructive process. The first is to identify the binary systems of thought which structure meanings, seeing the relevance of the second term for the first, and understanding how each term takes its meaning through the exclusion of the other. The next step in the process is to reverse and displace the dependent term from its negative position to a place that locates it as the very condition of the positive term. An example of this would be the critique of heterosexuality rather than making homosexuality the object of study, in effect, 'abnormalising' the 'normal'.

Heterosexuality is then seen to be the 'unmarked' construct in the heterosexual/homosexual binary. In its position as the unmarked part of the binary, heterosexuality is not perceived to be a problem that needs to be studied and understood. Its invisibility indicates its privileged position. It is the object of knowledge itself, never needing to be legitimated or critiqued. Homosexuality, on the other hand

can never be a non-partisan or legitimate position. More often than not it is seen to be a devalued stance.

An example of the way in which both sides of the heterosexual/homosexual binary reinforce each terms 'marked' and 'unmarked' status can be seen in the way that many people regard heterosexuality as the norm, as a legitimated form of sexuality which then forms a legitimate and important foundation of society; the family (the unmarked, heterosexual family, that is...). Heterosexuality is so 'natural' that is unremarked upon, it is seldom that anyone enquires, "When did you first know you were a heterosexual?" On the other hand, same sex desire tends to be perceived as an object of study, which frames same sex desire as the Other. For example, at Kereru Girls' College in the second phase of the research project, there was a certain nervousness expressed about what was framed as my desire to "promote and recruit" young lesbian and bisexual women. The endemic compulsory policing of heterosexuality in the school went unnoticed and uncommented on, in fact, it was openly encouraged because it was seen to be a 'natural' rite of passage to adulthood.

Sedgwick's (1990) seminal queer text *Epistemology of the Closet* suggests that the operation of the heterosexual/homosexual definition informs sexual definitions both on and between individuals and groups. The normality of heterosexuality is maintained only in relation to the abnormality of same sex desire and vice versa. So the operation of the heterosexual/homosexual binary reinforces the notion of sexuality as an either/or choice. The homosexual part of the binary then is not a stable or autonomous term but a supplement to the definition of the heterosexual. It operates to stabilise the meaning of heterosexuality (Butler, 1993). These understandings are sustained by socially sanctioned discursive and institutional practices. Through interacting with other binary pairings such as private/public and, masculine/feminine and others, the heterosexual/homo binary also shapes through broad categories of thought and culture.

Sedgwick draws our attention to the instability of binary systems in constructing categories of knowledge. Drawing on Foucault, she advocates a genealogical approach to understanding how binary systems of thought operate in order to legitimate heterosexuality while simultaneously abnormalising same sex desire. Sedgwick's (1990) interest was to: "... ask how certain categorisations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating, rather than what they essentially mean." (p. 27).

Sedgwick asserted that the centrality and marginality of each aspect of the binary would always be unstable because heterosexuality is constructed as simultaneously internal and external to homosexuality. Sedgwick (1990) suggested that in order to deconstruct those terms you need:

... to reverse the rhetorical opposition of what is "transparent" or "natural" and what is "derived" or "contrived" by demonstrating that the qualities predicated of "homosexuality" (as a dependent term) are in fact a condition of "heterosexuality"; that "heterosexuality", far from possessing a privileged status, must itself be treated as a dependent term (p.10).

Deconstructive methods also include understanding the ways in which a range of identity vectors intersect with sexual identity in order to create finer grained and more specific understandings of what sexual identities mean in relation to identity categories such as race, gender, and class. I am particularly interested in the way in which operation of the discursive constructions of sexuality and gender work together in an interlocking fashion, and how these operations are played out amongst young women in schools. I have found the work of Butler (1990, 1993) helpful in providing some directions in understanding these processes. Now I want to turn to examine her ideas in more detail and show how they have proved useful both analytically and methodologically in the second phase of the research project at Kereru Girls' College.

Butler's work (1990, 1993) explores the role that compulsory heterosexuality plays in fixing gender norms. She draws on and expands Foucauldian frameworks that understand sexuality as a historical and social construction rather than a biological inevitability. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler suggested that feminists need to think about gender differently and to challenge the notion of a core and essentialised, gendered being. Rather than reclaiming essentialist constructs of gender, Butler is interested in developing a process whereby feminism becomes a process that is self-critical about the processes that produce and destabilise identity categories. So rather than see gender as an essential core which forms itself into an internalised self-concept through social conditioning and observation, Butler sees it as a series of reiterations, or performative acts which produce the illusion of an inner gendered self:

Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being (p. 33).

The reiterative acts are modelled on the dominant images and discourses of what it means to be a man or a woman. They call us into being and our reproductions operate at a symbolic and concrete level through the body. Gender norms feel normal, so when we fail to reproduce them, we don't feel like 'real men or real women'. We lose our referents for our subject positions and have a sense of being either incomplete or non-existent. It is in this situation of constraint and threat that gender norms are inscribed. An important part of the discursive process through which meanings of gender are reiterated concerns the role which hegemonic constructions of heterosexuality play in stabilising gendered norms. Butler sees that compulsory heterosexuality is essential for the production of a coherent gender, and emphasises the pivotal nature of the intersections between the discursive production of gender and sexuality. She suggests that the reproduction of heteronormativity is gender's ultimate purpose and through its discourses, gender is made intelligible. In this way compulsory heterosexuality and the production of gendered identities are intimately, symbolically, materially and ideologically linked. Butler (1990) called the interlocking process through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalised the heterosexual matrix. She described it in her own words as:

a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense, there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (p.151).

Butler's notion of the heterosexual matrix proved to be a useful analytical tool in understanding the ways in which students whom I interviewed at Kereru Girls' College early in the research project drew on notions of compulsory heterosexuality in order to build their understandings of gender. A strong interdependency operated between heterosexual and lesbian and bisexual students' data as gendered and sexual beings. The students consistently equated being female with being heterosexual and for them and the majority of their peers, that was what was considered to be normal. The consequences of normalising heterosexuality are that lesbian sexuality in particular and to a lesser extent bisexuality, are framed as abnormal. They fell outside what the students understood being a 'normal' female meant.

Heidi, a bisexual student I interviewed identified the narrow and limited 'ways of being female' open to young women. She explained the threat presented by lesbians who don't conform to stereotyped constructions of femininity, and, also, how these representations widen constructs of femaleness, while simultaneously threatening them. Any lesbians

who look like men can't be female, and, therefore, are constructed as abject/males. Heidi explains:

For people who are really feminine who do have a feminine image of things, this big butch lesbian comes along (and) no longer (are) all the women in the world feminine but you've got the ones that look like a man as well ... (Heidi bisexual student, Year 11, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

Analytical tools such as Butler's (1993) notion of performativity and the role that the heterosexual matrix plays in the process, proved helpful in rendering the complexities of the discursive construction of sexualities, and exploring the ways in which intersections of gender and sexuality for young women operated to reinforce normative constructions of gender and legitimate heterosexuality. In this way, the deconstructive process provides a means of interpreting the complex relations between knowledge, desire and identities.

Because the performative process of enacting gender and sexuality is always under construction, opportunities constantly arise for the making of "gender trouble", or destabilising gender constructions. Making explicit the processes through which understandings of gender and sexuality are constructed discursively also has the potential, in classrooms particularly I suggest, to create a venue within which the constructions can be contested and destabilised. Understanding the process can reveal the transparency of the tropes, and simultaneously provide a venue to create new understandings of sexual and gendered difference.

Several writers have critiqued Butler's (1990, 1993) theories. Walters (1996) points to the queer political activism of performativity as an aesthetic practice that fits easily into the consumerist referential framework of late 20th Century capitalism. She suggests that the comfortable consumption of queerness in terms of its theatricality poses no challenge or threat to entrenched political structures or material social relations. Seidman (1995), Walters (1996), and Warner (1993) amongst others, have also critiqued Butler for what they consider to be her under-theorisation of the political ramifications of performativity.

In her defence, Butler (1993) points out that many people misread the concept of performativity by equating performativity with performance. She pointed out that performance does not equate necessarily with voluntary theatricality because it is a process through which a subject is constituted rather than an activity that a person does



(Jagose, 1996). Despite some of the reservations that have been expressed about the ways in which Butler has theorised gender and sexuality, she has pushed the boundaries of how women can understand themselves as gendered and sexual beings, and the complex ways in which those two understandings interrelate with each other in order to normalise heterosexuality. So as a theoretical way to understand how constructs of gender and sexuality are enacted, Butler's theorising offers a way to move beyond the problematic unitary category of women and attempts to complicate the discursive construction of sexuality and gender in new and interesting ways.

I have also found the notion of performativity useful in terms of seeing it as a way of working through a major dilemma/ conflict/shift at Kereru Girls' College in terms of thinking about how change happens. Butler's (1993) theory of performativity emphasised the extent to which reiterations of understandings about sexuality and gender can be seen to be fragile, fragmented and at risk, in need of constant maintenance and repetition to ensure their survival. According to Butler (1993), the theory of performativity is simultaneously able: "... to invoke the category, and hence, provisionally to open the category as a site of permanent political contest" (p.222). Rather than see change happening within a linear, positivist framework, change can be strategic. So every time a construction of gender or sexuality was articulated through the research process, simultaneously, the opportunity to explore and subvert that understanding arose. Let me explain...

**Kathleen's Research Journal: May 20th 1998: shifts in thinking about change which draw on Butler's notion of performativity**

Change can occur strategically, at moments when an understanding about sexuality or gender is articulated. What this means in terms of the work is that when I started out I saw change within a linear positivist framework, as occurring within the frame of a planned intervention. I saw it as having three distinct sections that followed on consecutively from each other; assessment of current practice, trial of strategies and an evaluation. Things didn't happen in that way.

However as time went on I began to see that each moment of articulation of an understanding of sexuality and gender was an opportunity to critically examine the construction which presented itself. And in that way changes happened. Most of these moments presented themselves in an arbitrary and unplanned and often spontaneous fashion, a conversation in the staff room or an interchange during participant observations in a Health classroom. Sometimes they occurred as a result of an event that was intended for a totally different purpose. One example of that was the member check that occurred with Year 13 students at the beginning of 1997. It provided a venue for the students to explore the ways in which they

and their peers constructed understandings of sexuality and gender and the effects of those constructions on themselves and their peers. It was not until I received the students' written feedback that I saw the session in that light. It had provided the students and myself with the opportunity to critically examine their understandings and shift them.

If Phase two of the project at Kereru Girls' College was viewed on perhaps many levels as a series of articulations of understandings, things shifted. Professional development was undertaken with the staff in order to explore what strategies such as deconstruction and discourse analysis might offer in terms of affirming sexual diversity in terms of their own practice in the classroom. And there was some understandable degree of resistance to these strategies expressed by the staff at the time (which I explore in more detail in Chapter 5). However, it emerged in the final set of interviews that some of the staff had obviously considered the strategies of discourse analysis and deconstruction to be viable and feasible methods which they saw as being useful in exploring students and colleagues understandings of sexuality and gender.

### **Living Theories: My Queer Attractions**

A dissatisfaction with unitary categories of sexual identity wasn't just an issue which emerged through reading queer theoretical texts. It emerged initially in earlier work when I interviewed young lesbians about their secondary school experiences (Quinlivan, 1994). As the participants talked I gained the impression that the young lesbians understood their sexuality in more complex ways than available categories of unitary sexual identity provided for them. Several of them saw their sexuality in much more fluid and contingent terms and felt dissatisfied with what they perceived to be the limited sexual categories available to them. These frustrations were also experienced by young lesbian and bisexual and heterosexual students I talked to at Kereru Girls' College. As Melissa, a lesbian identified Year 11 student explained:

There's that stereotypical thing of lesbians who're butch with short hair... I thought that the second I kissed a girl or something my hair would be short and I thought I don't want people to have that image of me ... and if that was what I had to be then I didn't want to be (lesbian) (Melissa, Year 11 lesbian student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

The students' responses started me thinking about what it had meant to me to identify as a lesbian feminist in the mid 1980s. Their dissatisfaction struck a personal chord with my own life experience and caused me to think about the ways in which I built a 'continuous narrative' (Whisman, 1996), which failed to account for the complexity of

my feelings and experiences. In this way, aspects of queer theory which attempted to come to terms with the notion of sexual identities as unfixed and always under construction resonated strongly with my own life experiences. I want to spend a moment here exploring my own positionalities in this queer theoretical process.

#### **Kathleen's Research Journal May 1997**

Investigating queer theories and pedagogy and what it may mean for educational practice reflects to a certain extent, my own path as a feminist, a lesbian/queer woman, an educator and a researcher. I had been heavily involved in feminism from my school days and it was through that political lens that I came to identify as lesbian in the mid 1980s after having my first sexual relationship with a woman. At the time I felt as if I was making a choice about becoming a lesbian after having had satisfactory relationships with men, rather than acting on what were perceived to be innate same sex desires that my friends told me that they had felt from an early age. I intuitively felt this was not something to talk about amongst the separatist lesbian community in the remote South Island rural area in which I lived.

Within the social and historical context of that time, radical lesbian feminism was constructed as strongly essentialist and as a political act. Separatism and being anti 'the system' were strong manifestations of that and I felt an enormous pressure on me to give up my teaching job in a nearby town and live within a community which was perceived by my peers as a rural utopia for lesbians. In my bleaker moments, I felt that the lesbian community which I had become a part of, was just as politically and socially constraining as the 'heterosexual' world I had left. Looking back now this time was one of those moments when I felt that fixed categories of sexual identity didn't fit me.

Ten years later another of these moments occurred. For my Masters thesis in Education I interviewed ten young lesbian students about their secondary school experiences. Collaborating with gay male researcher, Shane Town was something that would have been unthinkable for me to contemplate ten years earlier within lesbian feminist communities. The experience brought into sharp relief the ways in which my understandings of lesbian as a fixed identity category impacted on my understandings and analysis of the perceptions the young lesbian participants had of their schooling.

My experience of gendered constructions as a lesbian/queer educator/researcher and the differing approaches that Shane and I brought to the research questions helped us both to acknowledge not only the silences being perpetuated by our research, but also the binary frameworks and constructions in which we were operating. The limited constructions of passive female sexuality with which I framed the research questions for my 1994 project became explicit. Asking the young women "When was your first relationship" was in contrast to Shane who asked the gay male participants in his parallel project; "When was your first sexual experience?" It interested me how I focused on notions of intimacy and emotional

involvement whereas Shane was interested in the constructions surrounding 'active' male roles in sexuality. When several of the young lesbian participants expressed an interest in constructing their sexuality in more diverse ways I became interested in exploring what these prescriptions might mean in terms of interrogating fixed gender categories. Then I began to read more queer and feminist theorists who explored constructs of gender and sexuality and explained how these two concepts were mutually intertwined in order to normalise heterosexuality.

The queer collaborative alliance with Shane has enabled me to explore the limited representations of fixed gender/ sexual categories and the role these play in constricting opportunities for lesbian and bisexual students in schools. It has also provided a way into thinking about what it may mean to re-conceptualise understandings of sexuality within more universalising frameworks. Sexuality then, can be conceptualised as more fluid and mutable. I have also become interested in exploring the benefits that queer frameworks may hold for teaching and learning about sexualities in secondary schools.

So in many ways, queer theoretical frameworks provided a way to reconcile disjunctures I had encountered through undertaking research and through my own lived experience in feminist and lesbian feminist communities.

Queer deconstructive frameworks, proved useful both as analytical and methodological tools throughout the project, as I will now move on to discuss.

### **"Hit it Louise!"<sup>1</sup>: Exploring Queer Pedagogies In Secondary Schools**

The jump from using queer theoretical frameworks as analytical tools, to trying them out as learning and teaching tools in order to widen representations of sexuality within secondary school classrooms is paradoxically both a small footstep and a wide leap. At first glance taking queer analysis into the classroom appears disarmingly simple, in that the classroom becomes a site of analysis for exploring the discursive construction of compulsory heterosexuality and the complexities of multiple sexual identities. However, I discovered that undertaking such work within the context of secondary school classrooms has big implications. Like Thelma and Louise driving over the cliff, working with queer and post-structural pedagogies involves both teachers and schools moving into unknown territory. Enacting queer pedagogies in secondary schools is a big jump and a dangerous and risky one because it involves destabilising and up-ending the politics of knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup>Thelma's command to Louise to drive over the cliff rather than be captured by police at the end of Ridley Scott's girl buddy film Thelma and Louise

Calling into question the normality of heterosexuality involves taking risks for both teachers and schools because it interferes in the process of knowledge production and unsettles the legitimacy of compulsory heterosexuality. This is not a comfortable process, and the issues it raises need to be acknowledged and understood. In my mind, queer theoretical frameworks such as discourse analysis and deconstruction hold some interesting opportunities to widen representations of sexuality. Before I look more closely at discourse analysis, I will briefly situate emergent queer pedagogies within the broader framework of queer activism.

The queer movement was far from being a solely intellectual activity, it originated as an activist approach to creating change. Organisations such as ACT-UP in Britain and Queer Nation and Queer Planet in the United States in the mid to late 1980's sought to create political structures which facilitated the empowerment and politicisation of lesbians, gays and bisexuals as an alliance. The development of these groups working collectively together arose out of a need to challenge attacks on gay and lesbian people in society through government legislation such as Clause 28 in Britain, fundamentalist Christian movements in the United States and governments' inability and unwillingness to take the AIDS crisis seriously. Attacks on the gay male community spurred gay, lesbian and bisexual groups into a recognition that some sort of working alliance was necessary. Organisations such as Queer Nation aimed to represent all sexual minorities in society and rallied to confront all repressive forces that create differentiation between the margins and the centre and perpetuate the construction of 'other'. The lesbian, gay and bisexual communities were not so much aligned through a common bond of sexual identity but through a recognition of the heterogeneity of their communities. Queer activists opposed the normalisation of the modern 'gay' and 'lesbian' person and were therefore equally opposed to both the heterosexual and homosexual mainstream. In so doing queer politics rejected traditional liberal goals of equal treatment and tolerance, seeing them as assimilationist.

Queer political activity centred on an examination of the operation of the heterosexual binary. It tended to do this by inverting notions of heterosexual normality and public and private spheres through enacting what would be considered to be private acts such as same sex kiss-ins in shopping malls. It was hoped that these 'inversions' would interrupt heteronormativity and in doing so create an opportunity to shift understandings (Dilley, 1999).

Most of the early queer activist groups no longer exist in their original form. Escoffier (1998) suggests that it proved challenging work to reconcile so many diverse interests.

These internal issues combined with their anti-normalisation stance meant that queer activism was ill equipped to involve itself at the institutional and economic level. For these reasons Escoffier suggests that the initial impetus of queer activism has declined and queer ideas have found a more comfortable home within academia, where the cultural impact of heteronormalisation can be explored theoretically. Despite the limitations of queer activism, Escoffier suggests that the strength of the movement was in its ability to acknowledge the range of diversity which exists within in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities. Because the kind of radical thinking proposed by queer activists doesn't address structural issues and structural change, I suggest that queer theoretical frameworks (admittedly risky and challenging) thinking would be more useful in informing thinking and learning in classrooms.

The process of making discourses explicit and examining them is commonly known as discourse analysis. Discourse analysis provides an opportunity to hold those understandings up to the light, to examine them and to enter into some dialogue about the constructions which underpinned them (Butler, 1993). Lewis (1993) described the strategy of discourse analysis as an opportunity for critical exploration which can be linked to social change:

... the development of a critical perspective through which individuals can begin to see how social practices are organised to support certain interests. It is also the process whereby this understanding is used as the basis for active political intervention directed toward social change with the intent to disempower relations of inequality (1993, p.151).

Through an analysis of discursive practices it is possible to identify the discourses which produce understandings of sexuality and gender (amongst other constructions) and to position yourself differently in relation to them. As Lewis (1993) suggested, that understanding can be drawn on to undertake political intervention directed towards social change. Exploring what discourse analysis offers as a pedagogical tool is one of the strategies which I suggest holds some potential in interrogating and widening constructions of sexuality and gender. However in order to deconstruct discourses and to place them under erasure, you first have to examine the discourses and the contexts within which they operate and how they shift and change.

Davies (1995) also suggests that deconstruction may be a helpful teaching and learning tool which could be applied in classrooms by both teachers and students. Davies has undertaken research with both primary school children and tertiary students which uses

deconstruction and discourse analysis in order to teach students to deconstruct/understand the constructions that underlie concepts such as maleness and femaleness and heterosexuality/homosexuality. She suggests that along with discourse analysis, deconstruction makes discursive processes and their lived effects on people visible. This process can allow students agency to position themselves in relation to those understandings and destabilise them. Davies (1995) emphasises the importance of:

(making)... that process visible to the students and develop(ing) ways to give them a speaking voice, ways that make visible the coercive power of discourse and structure and also make visible both the ways in which people are silenced and marginalised and the ways in which that silencing and marginalisation can be disrupted. At the same time the multiple possible ways of thinking that become available once binary thinking is disrupted make it possible for students to see the marginalised categories in which they were previously located as providing only one of the many positionings they might take up or refuse. It is also possible for them to put the categories themselves 'under erasure' (p.77).

Morgan (1997) has critiqued Davies approach saying that while the students she has worked with have had no difficulty in deconstructing texts, the process has proved of little relevance to students' own lives. She advocates blending oral history work with collective biography/ memory approaches (Haug, 1987). This approach involves the writing of stories that are in the first instance autobiographical, but which become the basis of collective biographies. These stories which encapsulate a truth for everyone in the group move beyond a statement about a particular individual who wrote the story, to make explicit the social and discursive processes through which we become individuals. An example of how this may work in the classroom could involve asking students to recollect a moment/time when they experienced themselves as gendered or sexualised. Using this as a point to move out from the teacher could then explore the discursive processes that constituted the moment in order to understand ways in which minoritising and universalising discourses of sexuality work to define people. Not privileging any one viewpoint over another, this exercise could provide students with the opportunity to explore difference and diversity as well as understand the roles which discourses lay in constituting our understandings of sexuality.

A Year 13 student member check carried out with students at Kereru Girls' College that was originally designed to check that I had interpreted the participants data in line with their intentions (Lather, 1991). However the session, unexpectedly created a venue within which representations of sexuality and the intersections of gender and sexuality

for young women could be deconstructed and explored. The session is explained in more depth in Chapter 7. In many ways it placed the students in the position of what Britzman (2000) filtering Foucauldian paradigms through Freud, described as 'little sex researchers':

... if sexuality can be thought about as the basis of curiosity, the force that allows one to make and have ideas, and the desire to be loved and valued as one learns to love and value others then the context of the discussion becomes very open ... sexuality (should) be viewed as the conditions for adventure in crafting ideas, in theorising questions of love and loss of love, and in noticing the large issues that attach to our sexuality (p. 44).

While I am not suggesting that the dizzy heights Britzman described were reached in unforeseen ways in the student member check, I do think that the small stumbling beginnings of the potential of what she alludes to became possible in that hour. The material that we were engaging with during the session began with the students' own understandings. Drawing on their own words and the words of their peers was a very powerful form of engaging their interests. In this way then, an exploration of the operation of the heteronormalising process as a process of 'becoming' rather than arrival (Foucault, 1998) can also provide a way into thinking about how sexuality and gender could be framed differently in order to affirm sexual diversity within schools.

The inclusion of a range of sexual subjectivities under the queer umbrella is also a queer notion which I found useful to draw upon throughout the research process. I found the inclusion of bisexuality as an expression of same sex desire useful in terms of destabilising and disrupting the homosexual/heterosexual binary in the student session. Interview data from students at Kereru Girls' College who spoke from bisexual subject positions played an interesting role in revealing the complexities of sexuality and imploding the notion of sexuality as an either heterosexual or homosexual positionality. I also suggest that exploring bisexual subjectivities can have the effect of destabilising binary constructions of sexuality, enabling sexualities to be conceptualised more as positions on a continuum where you can position yourself at a particular point in time (Quinlivan & Town, 1999a). Models of sexual fluidity have the potential to destabilise and abnormalise current heterosexual discourses, making a range of sexual subjectivities possible.

Sexual fluidity suggests the possibility that individuals do not necessarily lead their lives as fixed identities, as exclusively hetero/homosexual but instead have the potential



to explore their desire/s in a variety of different relationships throughout their lives. Several of the young women I have interviewed saw their sexuality as changing and as something that was more shifting and volatile than fixed. In some cases, participants who identified as lesbian thought later that they might actually describe themselves as bisexual and vice versa. Identifying a range of sexual subjectivities including bisexuality proved useful in terms of coming to understand the complexity of sexuality beyond the limitations of the homosexual/heterosexual binary. The instability of these categories and the lived effects of them can be explored.

It has been in the sphere of popular culture that the majority of queer analysis has taken place. Tools such as deconstruction and discourse analysis have been heavily drawn on to analyse representations of sexuality and gender and to provide queer readings of both mainstream and queer visual and written representations of same sex desire (Fuss, 1991; Sedgwick, 1990). It is interesting to think about how these tools might be useful in terms of 'reading' texts of popular culture which are circulated amongst students in schools. Talking with lesbian and bisexual students at Kereru Girls' College it also became apparent that representations of same sex desire in popular culture played an important role in providing representations of same sex desire which they could identify with. Other educational researchers have also noted this. Britzman (1995) and Epstein and Johnson (1998) among others suggest that working with representations of sexuality and gender as they are played out in popular culture may create a venue for exploring sexual diversity and the way that representations of sexuality are constantly on the move.

### **Destablising Heteronormativity: Challenging Work**

Kenway and Willis (1997) draw attention to the deep psychic and emotional investment in gendered constructions which emerged within the gender reform work they undertook in Australian schools. If that is the case for gender, then I suggest that it would be even more so for sexuality. The intense discomfort many participants (including Health teachers) in the second case study school experienced in discussing sexuality (and same sex desire in particular) lead me to believe that it can still be a deeply taboo subject, and as such a fraught and difficult area for schools to have to engage with (Epstein & Johnson, 1998).

My experience working with students at Kereru Girls' College indicated that queer and post-structural pedagogical tools held some promise in terms of working towards widening representations of sexual diversity. However, a session with teachers on

deconstruction and discourse analysis proved more problematic because it called into question the roles of teachers and schooling. As one teacher maintained:

As teachers this is not for us to deal with, we teach without bias and refer these issues to people trained to deal with it (Comment overheard by planning group member during teacher session noted in planning group members Journal, 1997).

Concerns such as these are understandable because the pedagogical approaches I am advocating raise questions about what 'ways of knowing' are legitimated in schools, and what happens when these knowledges are destabilised and unfamiliar and dangerous 'ways of knowing' are introduced. Davies (1995) draws attention to the ways in which post-structural tools require teachers to give away some of the key aspects of their role within rational/humanist conceptual frameworks. For example, processes such as deconstruction challenge the role of teachers as experts and the notion of the teacher as the 'authoritative knower'. Laying bare the construction of discourses involves a critical examination of constructs and meanings, and also the creation of a venue within which new understandings can emerge. This process can be challenging in that it requires teachers to examine their own attitudes and be positioned as learners in what could be quite an uncomfortable way, especially if they see themselves as experts with knowledge to impart to their students.

Davies suggests that strategies such as deconstruction can pose a profound challenge to teacher authority and this challenge requires a re-thinking of the traditional teacher role of transmission (Davies, 1995). Britzman (2000) suggests that engaging with dangerous knowledge involves schools and teachers taking big risks. In order to account for the complexities of sexuality, it is necessary for teachers to move beyond the rational and humanist frameworks in which they were largely trained. This is a big ask.

So Warner's (1993) suggestion that studying the operation of heteronormative discourses could open a space within which representations of same sex desire which move beyond assimilationist and deviant representations could emerge has some unsettling implications within schools. The process involves questioning and interrogating what could be considered to be some of the most fundamental coding categories that have been historically and socially produced in order to make sense of ourselves and our world.

Working with queer and post-structural pedagogies can be an uncomfortable process that induces high levels of emotionality. These responses featured both in the students

and staff sessions at Kereru Girls' College. The high level of emotionality needs to be expected and acknowledged as part of the research process (Kenway & Willis, 1997).

Language arises as another problem which emerges working within queer frameworks. While the ideas that lie behind post-structural tools are of great interest to me, the philosophical language that they are couched in can be very obtuse and inaccessible (Apple, 1995; Dilley, 1999). I usually counter this comment by saying that complex issues such as sexuality need complex thinking and language to explain them. However, the challenges that I have experienced when reading some of the theory mean I have a certain sympathy with these complaints. The resistance that I have experienced from teachers to post-structural concepts and what is seen to be academic and 'pointy-headed' language illustrates these problems. As Dilley (1999) acknowledges, inaccessible language and deliberately slippery concepts are problematic because taking action requires accessible language:

(The) language gap often prevents lay-people- even queer activists from understanding queer theory... big concepts require big words and if you do not understand these words, you cannot understand the concept. The theory as an emancipatory tool, of course, requires such understanding... how can one utilise queer theory if one cannot even define it, let alone explain it to non- academics? (p. 467-468).

While this problem can be negotiated by using examples and explaining concepts in less complex language, that process in itself can be challenging.

There are also the challenges of engaging with this intensely theoretical and intellectual work within the functionalist world of schools (Skrtic, 1995). I know from my own experience that schools are sites where pragmatism and rationality mostly rule and survival skills, efficiency and control are often the most highly prized *modus operandi*. As I found out working with the staff at Kereru Girls' College, intellectual and analytical work, such as deconstruction and discourse analysis, can appear at the most time consuming and pedantic, and at the worst indulgent, irrelevant and threatening to the ways in which teachers understand their roles. However, I suggest that discarding ideas simply because they are couched in language that appears inaccessible is not sufficient. I think the possibilities of understanding and widening the representations of sexuality and gender which are currently available, and, in the process, providing a venue to actively create new ways of being are worth the effort of thinking and communicating the concepts and ideas in less obfuscating ways.

For these reasons, connecting queer and post-structural concepts to lived realities needs to form an important part of working with queer and post-structural pedagogical approaches (Apple, 1995; Morgan, 1997). Sometimes the complexity of the language and the intellectual allure of the ideas can prevent this connection from being made. At some points in the research process, my increasing interest in the discursive construction of sexuality and in affirming sexuality more widely meant that I was in danger of losing touch with the reason that I began this work in the process; the lived reality of what school is like for many lesbian and gay students.

This concern crystallised itself for me in an experience I had last year talking with young queer university students and I want to spend a moment here dwelling on the implications of what they had to say and its relevance to the research project. There are limitations inherent in focusing solely on the discursive construction of sexualities while failing to pay attention to the material effects of the social and discursive constructions on peoples' lives (Morgan, 1997; Ussher, 1997a). I explain;

#### **Kathleen's Research Journal September 1999**

Today I did a workshop with a number of young lesbian and bisexual university students as part of Queer Pride Week. We talked about representations of female desire and ways of understanding sexualities. They also wanted to know about my work in schools, and were interested in how the young lesbian and bisexual women I had interviewed talked about their time at school. I explained how, over time, I had become more interested in how meanings are constructed around sexualities rather than positioning queer youth as a disadvantaged group in terms of understanding and addressing issues of sexual diversity in schools, and that I had become interested in how discourse analysis and deconstruction could be drawn on as teaching and learning tools to be used by both students and teachers in the classroom .

However, what they had been dying to talk about was what it had been like for them at school. I realised that the session provided a venue for the young women to talk, for many of them this was the first opportunity that they had to tell their stories. The young women represented a range of sexual subjectivities. Several of them talked about how their lack of 'femininity' meant that they were automatically presumed to be a lesbian and had experienced verbal and physical harassment for transgressing gendered norms. Others actively cultivated a feminine appearance in order to protect themselves and appeared to experience less trouble as a result of adopting this strategy.

They had all felt silenced because of their genders (transgendered women attended the session) and because of their sexualities. Their stories were horrendous. They told of their lack of physical safety, how they denied their feelings and amputated their sexualities. One spoke of how her school friends

blackmailed her. Another related how the school she attended refused to stage a play that her and her peers had written because of its underlying themes of same sex attraction. Many of them still felt unable to be open about their sexuality with their families and that made them feel guilty and ashamed. One was training to be a teacher and was terrified of what it might mean to work in a school as a lesbian. As these stories tumbled out, the lived realities of their schooling experiences provided me with the graphic reminder that strategies such as discourse analysis and deconstruction need to be more than an intellectual exercise. Such strategies only mean something when they are connected to lived experiences.

This session was a timely reminder of the need to connect discursive analyses to material realities (Morgan, 1997; Ussher, 1997a) when addressing the constructions of sexuality and gender in schooling contexts. I would suggest that a failure to link discursive practices to material realities reduces notions of discourse analysis (and deconstruction as I shall explain later) to empty and rather hollow intellectual games.

Seidman, (1996) draws attention to the prevalence of textual discourse analysis, and the relative lack of work undertaken in terms of social analysis and institutional critique. As a psychologist, Ussher (1997a) challenged such silences in her call for a joint approach to understanding sexuality and gender that would ensure explorations of the discursive constructions of sexuality for young lesbians being strongly connected to lived experience and material realities:

In studying bodily experience, can we legitimately claim that 'there is nothing beyond the text?' For those who work in the fields of cultural theory, art history, film or literary criticism, the need to look beyond representation may not seem to be an issue of great importance. But those of us who work in the social sciences, in psychology or medicine have to look to the material domain. We are continually faced with the day-to-day impact of the discursive construction of experience on material life ... these are arenas where a great deal of critical thinking has taken place, yet also where regulatory controls are exacted in the material world (p.6-7).

I'm also aware that a romance with intellectual tools can prove to be a seductive diversion from the difficulty of undertaking what amounts to the 'difficult learning' (Britzman, 1998) involved in affirming sexuality within educational institutions. Apple (1995) suggests that employing the strategies of cynical detachment, stylistic arrogance and the 'paralysis of analysis' is replacing our capacity to be angry, and places many educationalists in danger of failing to remember how powerful the structural dynamics in education are. Apple's observation draws attention to the powerful role that

educational institutions play in policing, legitimating and reproducing hegemonies of gender, race, class and sexuality. It is important therefore to have some understanding of the structural complexity of schools and the difficulties inherent in working within educational institutions to initiate change.

In my desire to come to terms with the complexity of what it might mean to address issues of sexual diversity within secondary school contexts it seemed increasingly important to understand what it is about the ideological, structural and contextual nature of schools which makes undertaking work on the issue of sexual diversity problematic and difficult. Having a clearer understanding of the theoretical and philosophical issues which arise when schools are faced with addressing issues of sexual diversity helped me to account for the tensions which arose during the project and led to my current theoretical position, which I am calling an informed action approach. In the final chapter of Part One, I want to explain what such an approach would consist of.

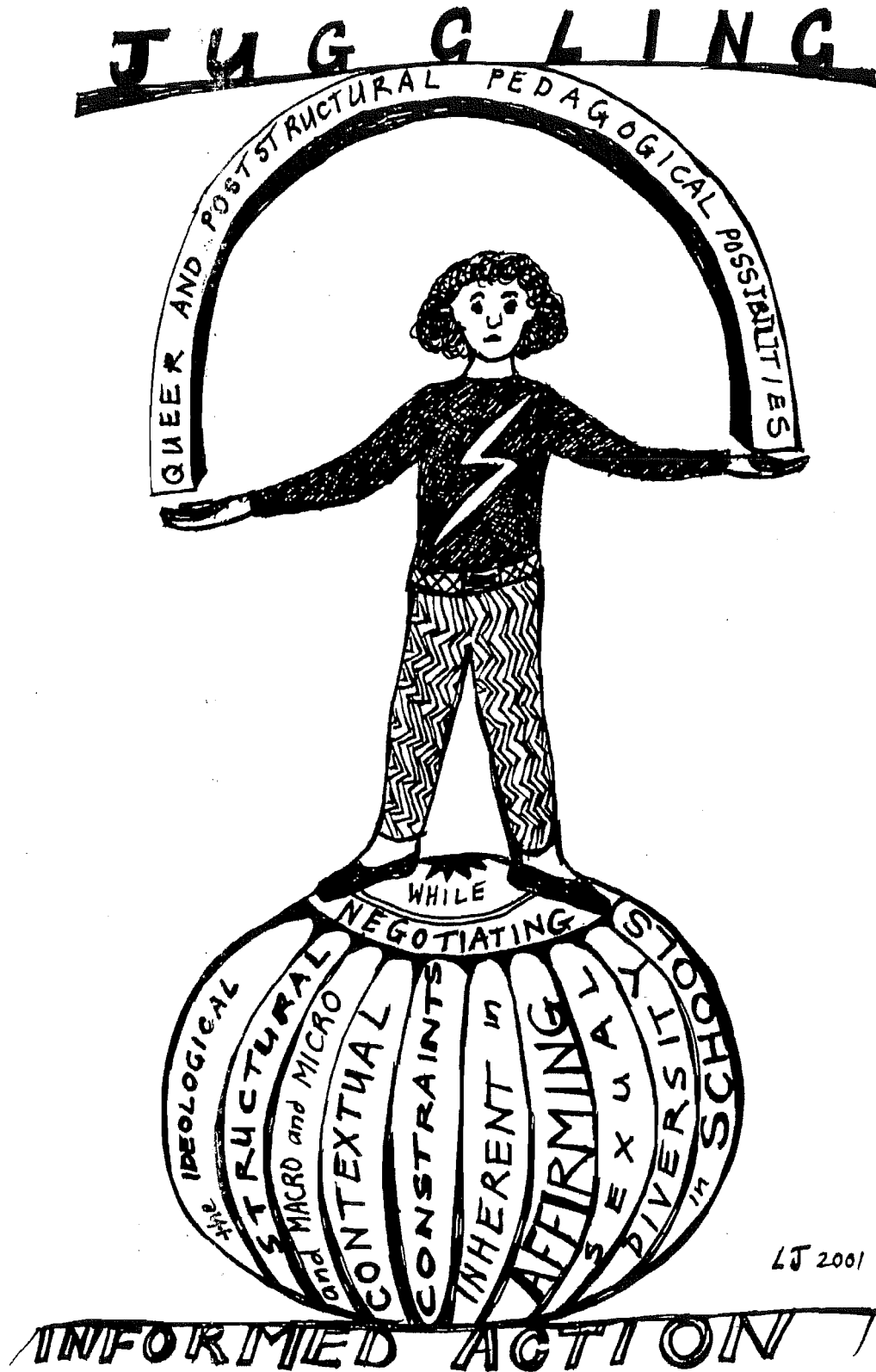
### CHAPTER THREE

## INFORMED ACTION: JUGGLING QUEER AND POST-STRUCTURAL PEDAGOGIES AND CONTEXTUAL CONSTRAINTS

Up to this point I have shown the theoretical transitions I have gone through in exploring what it means to move towards affirming sexual diversity in schools in terms of thinking about theory as both an analytical, methodological and pedagogical tool. I've explained how I moved from my original theoretical base which tended to frame lesbian and gay youth as a disadvantaged minority group requiring inclusion in schools within a social justice framework. Over the course of the research project I have become more interested in the potential which queer and feminist post-structural frameworks offer as a way to widen representations of sexuality, and engage with the complexities of the ways in which they intersect with gender and other 'identity vectors'. Throughout the research process, the tensions and difficulties I experienced both conceptually and methodologically pushed me into thinking of different theoretical ways to frame same sex desire and of addressing issues of sexual diversity within secondary schools.

The final stage of the theorising process arose more out of methodological necessity than anything else. As the project at Kereru Girls' College became increasingly challenging, I realised that there were particular constraints involved in undertaking work to affirming sexual diversity within the context of secondary schools. These involved understanding both the ideological role that schools and teachers play in society, their structural peculiarities as institutions, and the macro and micro contextual climates that schools operate within. So while still thinking that the queer and post-structural tools for understanding sexuality and gender could be of some, albeit challenging, use, at the same time it became increasingly important to understand the ideological and structural issues which make addressing issues of sexual diversity within the context of schools problematic. I describe this dual focus as an 'informed action' approach.

An 'informed action' strategy to affirming sexual diversity in schools is similar to a juggling act, a skilful and challenging performance! It involves accounting for the ideological, structural and micro and macro contextual constraints which make undertaking work to affirm sexual diversity within the context of a secondary school a challenging and problematic process, while acknowledging that the challenges and constraints need to be addressed as an inevitable and integral part of research committed to social change.



I am suggesting that this dual strategy might be helpful in coming to terms with the complexities involved in addressing issues of sexual diversity within secondary schools in terms of proceeding in a more informed way (Beckett, 1996). Part of the process of



understanding the difficulties involved in addressing sexual diversity within schooling contexts involved standing back and looking closely at the ways in which ideological, structural and contextual factors influenced what was possible in terms of undertaking work on sexual diversity in schools.

While the integration and meshing of the discourses of schooling which proved challenging to negotiate over the course of the research project can create a powerful heteronormative dynamic in many schools, it is also important to acknowledge that the discourses I describe can be challenged and disrupted because they are in a continuous state of flux.

Silin (1995) draws attention to the ways in which positivist ideological frameworks such as technical rationality play an important role in defining and maintaining the work of teachers and schools. He suggests that these discourses can prevent educational institutions from exploring issues such as sexuality and sexual diversity. Within a highly rationalised school system addressing issues such as emotionality and physicality and what is often framed as the irrationality of same sex desire is often not seen to be the role of the school. As Silin, explains:

The difficulty of fostering open dialogues, acknowledging uncertainty and respecting multiple perspectives cannot be minimised. It disrupts contemporary liberal models of education, which are grounded in the Platonic paradigm celebrating intellectual development, rational self-control and autonomy... precedence was given to the mind over the body, reason over emotion, individual difference over social connection (p. 128).

Given the prevalence of these discourses, it is perhaps not surprising that schools tend to publicly present as desexualised institutions (Epstein, 1994), despite the fact that outside the formal curriculum, the peer culture of students is highly sexualised (Fine, 1992a; Hey, 1997).

Silin (1995) suggests that the myth of the teacher as a neutral professional also forms part of this positivist paradigm. He suggests that teachers tend to frame themselves as objective and neutral professionals whose teaching position is to keep personal attitudes and beliefs out of learning environments (Fine, 1991; Sears, 1992a), rather than see themselves as actively bringing their own philosophies into their teaching practice (McGee, 1997). So most secondary school teachers have seen their role as to teach as neutral and authoritative experts (Davies, 1995) within a specialised intellectual field of

knowledge, rather than focusing on what can be framed as the 'private' or personal development of the student (Fine, 1991; Skrtic, 1995).

Such discourses contribute towards attitudes that can minimise addressing the personal and emotional development of students within a secondary school environment. As I explain more fully in Chapter 8, many teachers at the school did not see what they framed as personal issues as falling within their role as a teacher. For example, Health teachers felt more comfortable dealing with biological facts and processes rather than issues of emotionality and desire (Fine, 1992a; Whately, 1992).

Another effect of the discourse of technical rationality which needs to be taken into account is the way in which meanings of same sex desire are constituted in relation to discourses of rationality and neutral objectivity (Sedgwick, 1990). The fear which surrounds notions of expressions of sexuality other than heterosexuality position same sex desire as the irrational other in relation to what is considered to be the rational normality of heterosexuality. As Watney (1991) explains:

Since homosexuality cannot be acknowledged within the ordinary workaday world, it must of necessity be thought of as the completely different inversion of the heterosexually known and familiar (p. 391).

So the presence of a project to affirm sexual diversity in a school which involves talking about same sex desire as if it is normal is deeply transgressive because it legitimates ways of knowing which have been historically constituted as other and irrational. A model which works to affirm sexual diversity more widely is more challenging than creating inclusion for a disadvantaged minority group, because it disrupts the abnormal/normal dyad by calling into question the normality and rationality of heterosexuality.

Undertaking work to affirm sexual diversity within schools brings another discourse to the surface, namely fears about the corruption of youth (Britzman, 1998; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Sears, 1997; Silin, 1995; Watney, 1991). Watney has drawn attention to the ways in which schools as institutions represent what he describes as a double threshold between the public site of schools and the private sphere of homes and also between the categories of child and adult. Given these features, he suggests that it is perhaps inevitable that schools will be sites where meanings of child and adult and the role of the family and the school in terms of the politics of knowledge (Foucault, 1990) are deeply contested. Notions of youth corruption are dependent on two binary

constructions to function; the first of these is the "common sense" belief that childhood and youth is a time of asexual innocence, and the second is the notion of the adult as a knowing sexual corrupter. The presence of a project in a school to affirm sexual diversity raises the spectre of the lesbian and gay adult corrupter 'promoting and recruiting' for what is constructed as their abnormal or deviant sexuality. Despite the fact that this construction draws on outmoded nineteenth century models of sexual deviance, these stereotypes are still widely prevalent and make working towards affirming sexual diversity in schools problematic (Thonemann, 1999).

The discourse of the child as innocent, asexual and in need of protection can be a tension in working to affirm sexual diversity within schools because of the (constantly contested) dividing line which frames sexuality as an adult activity and sees childhood and youth as a time of sexual latency. Despite the presence of numerous arguments which would contest this view, Rubin (1984) suggests that the need to protect children and youth from what has been constructed as dangerous adult sexuality has frequently been seen as a source of major social anxiety and panic which has sometimes verged on hysteria. It is a discourse which has operated historically to legitimate heterosexuality while also abnormalising same sex desire. As Britzman (1998) explains:

... when the topic of sex becomes like a curriculum and is stuck to the underage (and here I mean the legal categories of children and youth), one can barely separate its objects and fantasies from the historical bundles of anxieties, dangers and predatory discourses that seem to render some sex intelligible as other sex is relegated to the unthinkable and morally reprehensible (p. 65).

Framing students as sexual innocents raises questions about whether or not dealing with issues of sexuality and sexual diversity is in fact the role of the school and of teachers. The commonly expressed fear is that teaching students about sexuality will encourage them to transgress what is framed as their asexual state to become sexually active. Seeing young people as sexual beings appears as transgressive because sexuality is generally constructed as something associated with narrow definitions of adult forms of sexuality (Britzman, 1998; Silin, 1995). Schools which participate in a project to affirm sexual diversity are placed in the position of legitimating a dangerous form of knowledge; youth sexuality.

The presence of a project in the school to affirm sexual diversity can introduce another element into this already highly combustible equation. Within a non-heterosexual framework the mythical asexual child is protected from what is often constituted as

even more dangerous and corrupting, namely homosexual and lesbian knowledge (Watney, 1991). Because same sex desire is generally framed as abnormal in relation to heterosexual sexualities (Sedgwick, 1990), a school which legitimates sexual diversity for students, is also laying itself open to accusations of 'promotion' and 'recruitment' in terms of same sex desire.

The construction of the abnormality of same sex desire is often underpinned by stereotypes of lesbianism and gay male sexuality which rely on nineteenth century medical models (Weeks, 1989; Halperin, 1995). These stereotypes include the notion of the gay adult as a sexual predator. Unlike legitimated heterosexuality, constructions of same sex desire as 'other' mean that talking and discussing same sex desire with students can be framed as 'promotion' and 'recruitment'. Notions of 'promotion and recruitment' continued to arise throughout the second phase of the research at Kereru Girls' College, in relation both to me as a researcher and, as with Takahe High School, a concern that being seen to meet the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual students could negatively affect the reputation of the school.

Both schools manage the ideological tensions I have discussed through a process of containment. At Takahe High School and Kereru Girls' College a great deal of care was taken to ensure that issues of sexual diversity were framed in such a way as not to adversely affect the reputation of the school. In the case of Takahe High School this was achieved through the principal framing the issues which faced lesbian and gay students as an individual problem which could constitute a barrier to learning. At Kereru Girls' College the presence of the research project in the school was managed in such a way as to minimise the danger of negative parental responses. I describe the specific way in which these discourses were played out in the case study schools in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

While it is important to acknowledge that the ideological discourses I have described can emerge when working within the contexts of educational institutions in order to affirm sexual diversity, these discourses are also in a permanent state of contestation. The prevalence of these discourses in schools depends heavily on the individual micro-cultures of schools and the wider educational and social context (Thonemann, 1999). I provide a more detailed explanation of these factors, along with the ideologies that are prevalent in the current educational climate in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

### **Understanding and Negotiating Structural Tensions In Schools**

Skrtic (1995) suggests that: "Society wants education, but what it gets is a particular kind of schooling, one that is shaped by the nature and needs of school organisations" (p. 190).

I have found understanding theories of school organisation helpful in unravelling some of the institutional peculiarities of schools and explaining why developing school wide models of change within schooling institutions can be some problematic. Skrtic (1995) is interested in understanding how special education and the issue of disability are currently framed as additional extras within schooling institutions. He drew on configuration theory that suggests that institutions configure themselves structurally according to the division of labour and how that labour is co-ordinated. Within this theory, traditionally social organisations like schools have configured themselves as professional bureaucracies in terms of teachers working relatively independently in the classroom. However, throughout the twentieth century they have been managed and governed as if they were machine bureaucracies, which cater to the administrative and hierarchical nature of schools and place a strong emphasis on organisational rationality and management.

Skrtic also draws on institutional theory to explain how schools deal with the two often contradictory roles I have described by maintaining two structures. The first of these, the material structure, conforms to the technical demands of schools' work in the classroom. The second structure, known as the normative structure meets the social norms and the cultural expectations of schools. Skrtic integrated configuration and institutional theories of school organisation to suggest that the two bureaucracies function, one inside the other like two Russian dolls, within school institutions. On one hand the outer normative structure, that closely resembles a machine bureaucracy and privileges scientific management, meets the social norm of organisational rationality. Within the machine bureaucracy work processes are standardised through formalised procedures such as rules, and workers are highly dependent on each other.

Inside the outer machine bureaucracy sits what Skrtic (1995, p. 147) calls the inner professional bureaucracy configuration that actually responds to the technical demands of teachers' work. The inner bureaucracy is characterised by specialisation and professionalisation. Teachers work independently with students, while at the same time, working in a loosely co-ordinated fashion with colleagues. Within the professional bureaucracy teachers actually have a lot of leeway in how they frame the curriculum with students. Often this means that teachers working with students on the same

curriculum area can be taking vastly different approaches. I explain how this was played out at Kereru Girls' College in Chapter 8.

Skrtic suggests that because of the prescriptive discourses of educational administration and social norms which privilege organisational rationality, schools tend to be managed as if they were machine bureaucracies, even though the technical demands of teachers work with students configures them as professional bureaucracies. However, attempts to rationalise and formalise teaching tend not to work in schools because the two types of bureaucracy are actually de-coupled from each other. This means that the rules and regulations which are developed as part of the machine bureaucracy actually have little to do with the daily nature of teachers' work with students. Skrtic (1995) explains:

From the institutional perspective, a school's machine bureaucracy is largely a myth, an assortment of symbols and ceremonies that have little to do with the way the work is actually done. This de-coupled two structure arrangement permits schools to do their work according to the localised judgement of teachers, while protecting their legitimacy by giving the public the appearance of the machine bureaucracy that it expects (p. 201).

Skrtic goes on to say that the de-coupled structure of schools is not totally watertight because the rationalisation and formalisation of the outer machine bureaucracy requires at least overt conformity from teachers. I have found Skrtic's institutional analysis of some use when thinking about some of the challenges that are involved in creating changes within schools.

He suggests that approaches which endeavour to change schools through the rational technical approach of the machine bureaucracies are often difficult to achieve because attempts to change them assume that changes or additions to existing rationalisation and formalisation will result in changes in the way the work gets done. Because teachers' actual work is conducted within the professional bureaucracy configuration there is seldom a way of telling whether a teacher's practice has actually altered as a result of work enacted within the machine bureaucracy. So, for example, while all the teachers at Kereru Girls' College attended the teacher development session on affirming sexual diversity and their attitudes may have shifted, there was no easy way of knowing whether their actual practice in the classroom would have changed as a result of that session (Kenway & Willis, 1997). This was because the machine and the professional bureaucracy configurations within schools are de-coupled from each other.

Lieberman (1995) identified the isolation of teachers as one of the most powerful impediments to changing school cultures. The de-coupled institutional structure and the notion of teachers as balkenised professionals (Hargreaves, 1994) may go some way to explain the protective layer that seemed to surround teachers in their classrooms and the difficulties I experienced gaining access to observe classrooms and work with Health teachers at Kereru Girls' College<sup>1</sup>. Skrtic (1995) suggests that one of the ways in which schools deal with the difficulties involved in needing to be seen to change is by building symbols and ceremonies of change into the outer machine bureaucracy structure of schools, that of course is de-coupled from teachers' actual work. The development of policies and procedures on sexual harassment in schools could be seen as an example of this. The existence of policies and procedures to enable issues of sexual harassment to be dealt with in schools, does not necessarily mean that they will be used (Kenway & Willis, 1997). One way for schools to signal change in the outer machine bureaucracy of schools is the addition of ritual sub-units, separate classrooms and programmes which are de-coupled from the rest of the organisation. For example, the work which the guidance counsellor undertook to support lesbian and gay students at Takahe High School is de-coupled from teachers' practice in the classroom and can be therefore framed as less of a threat to the academic reputation of the school.

The way that schools are structured makes little time available to undertake working towards change. It is an uncomfortable paradox that despite literature on school change identifying teacher reflexivity as a key factor in creating change in schools (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Hargreaves, 1994; Lieberman, 1995), there is little time for teachers to reflect (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Fullan, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994). Because of the highly contested nature of the issue, and the high degree of emotionality involved (Kenway & Willis, 1997), I would suggest that working in areas of sexuality and gender would require more time to reflect on than most. The lack of structural time proved to be an ongoing tension in the second phase of the research project at Kereru Girls' College.

The final constraints which need to be taken into account are the extent to which the micro cultures of schools and the wider educational and social climate inhibit or enable work on sexual diversity to be undertaken in schools. I have found the emphasis in post-structural theoretical approaches on understanding the role that context plays in understanding what occurs, and what is possible to achieve (Appiah, 1995; Hey, 1997;

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<sup>1</sup> This difficulty was exacerbated by the fact that Health was a new subject in the school and the majority of the teachers were inexperienced.

Lather, 1991; Nicholson & Seidman, 1995), particularly helpful in accounting for contextual complexities.

Several researchers working in the area of sexual diversity and gender stress the importance of developing strategies for addressing issues of sexual diversity which are appropriate to the micro cultures of individual schools (Hinson, 1996). Working within equity frameworks, Thonemann's (1999) research is particularly helpful in identifying the enabling and disabling conditions for teaching against homophobia within the context of urban secondary schools in New South Wales, Australia.

One of the enabling features which Thonemann identifies is the role that a politically supportive state environment and progressive lesbian and gay rights legislation plays in encouraging the development of initiatives to address homophobia at state district and school level. Her work echoes that of Ball (1997) and Sears (1997) in calling for an understanding of the role that the wider social, political and historical context plays in determining what is possible to achieve in schools. As I show more fully in Part Two, the research project was undertaken within the political context of neo-liberal educational reforms which conceptualised education as an economic rather than social, political or moral activity (Alton-Lee & Pratt, 2000; Middleton, 1990). The incompatibility between the competitive individualism which characterised the New Right educational reforms and the collectivist notions of social justice or equity which underpinned the development of the project affected how both case study schools managed the research project.

In this theoretical section I have endeavoured to explain how theoretical frameworks formed an important part of this study as both analytical and pedagogical tools. I have explained the various stages that the theorising process went through over the duration of the study in order to arrive at my current theoretical position. This 'informed action' approach suggests that queer and feminist post-structural tools for understanding sexuality and gender may hold some potential in widening representations of same sex desire within the classroom. However, the ideological, structural and macro and micro contextual constraints posed by undertaking work to affirm sexual diversity in schools also need to be understood and negotiated as part of the research process.

To my mind what is required then is something of a skilful feat in regard to juggle the use of these intellectual tools within the wider context of schooling practices. As a researcher, the brightly coloured and alluring possibilities inherent in intellectually seductive ideas dazzle and thrill you with their multiple possibilities. However, juggling



these possibilities while trying to remain balanced on the numerous aspects of the schooling practice ball is challenging work. It involves taking into the lived realities of students who are attempting to survive and learn within educational institutions where they feel as if they have no place and no voice, the structural and ideological complexities of schools, and the multiplicity of contradictory roles which they perform within their wider social contexts. Sometimes of the schooling practice ball emphasises regulatory institutions rather than as sites where critical thinking is encouraged. At other times, while at other times schooling practices can dazzle you with their innovative thinking and optimism.

The current climate in which this juggling act takes place, who in fact is doing the juggling, how courageous they feel, and which costume they are wearing also need to be taken into account. In understanding the limitations along with possibilities inherent in working in schools to affirm sexual diversity, action can be more deeply informed. However you choose to look at the issue of sexual diversity in schools though, juggling both these factors will always be both a risky and challenging feat!

## PART TWO

### THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE: NEGOTIATING THE METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF IDEOLOGICAL TENSIONS, STRUCTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL CONSTRAINTS AND PARADIGM SHIFTS

Can you really change a problem that most people aren't aware of?

(Anonymous Year 13 student member check written response, Kereru Girls' College, 1997).

We only begin to live when we conceive of life as a tragedy

(W.B Yeats quoted by Sylvia Plath as an epigraph to her journal, in Hughes and McCullough, 1982).

#### Introduction

Along with the theoretical journey of the project, the methodology of the study proved to be an evolving process which was characterised by a series of bumpy and often dislocating transitions. The shifts arose in relation to the structural realities of schooling institutions and the ideological challenges posed by a research topic that sits uneasily within the secondary school context. The evolving theoretical frameworks I drew on to situate understandings of sexuality and their implications for changing educational practice also influenced the methodological transitions. This chapter tells the story of the three methodological stages through which the project moved. The emphasis placed on 'process' in the writing of the methodology provided me with a way to explore how a range of ideological, structural, contextual and theoretical factors together determined what was possible methodologically in terms of addressing issues of sexual diversity in schooling contexts.

In some cases these factors proved to be severely constraining, however they also provided an impetus for having to rethink the complexities of what it means undertaking work on sexual diversity in schools. In that sense I was forced to interrogate the challenges involved in addressing "a problem that most people aren't aware of", as the Year 13 student described it to me. I had to develop different ways to understand the issues that were raised, and negotiate that process of raising them. In that sense, the 'tragedies' that Yeats refers to as they were played out in the research process provided the impetus for richer and more layered understandings and pedagogies to emerge.

Negotiating the methodological process often proved frustrating and difficult, but reflexivity on my part provided a way through many of these challenges (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994b; Haig, 1987). Drawing on reflexive research tools such as the writing of field notes, research journal entries, analytic memos and papers, and reading widely in the fields of inclusive educational reform, queer theory and feminist post-structuralism were helpful. These processes helped me to make sense of what was happening and negotiate many of the methodological challenges and constraints that emerged during the research process. In order to introduce some of the methodological dilemmas I was having to negotiate in the research, I want to begin with an entry from my research journal which I wrote to prepare for a seminar I was giving at Massey University in New Zealand in mid June of 1997. Writing helped me to explore some of the constraints that were emerging in the Phase 2 case study school, Kereru Girls' College. I found it a useful tool in beginning to work the complex range of issues which emerged during the research process and the shifting positionalities I played as a researcher/teacher/ lesbian in that process. I explain:

#### **Kathleen's Research Journal June 1997**

I am at Massey<sup>1</sup> for a few days and have been thinking about the constraints around my work in order to prepare for a seminar here tomorrow. In the beginning I thought solely about the structural constraints surrounding making educational change ... Then I began to read through my bibliography about all the elements of structure in an attempt to get some theoretical and ideological grasp of this. I realise that it would be so much easier to do some sort of reproduction analysis of the project through framing heterosexuality as a form of cultural capital, and that fits like a hand into a glove ... but I want it to be something more than that.

(Talking to Lynne) I expressed some of the dilemmas I have been feeling about how schools find it hard enough to take on equity (paradigms) let alone think about re-conceptualising sexuality in terms of queer. I feel as if that would mean that I had to give my passion for queer ideas away and just get into that functionalist mode and do the equity thing. It gets into big issues like what are the reasons for education, is it just a regulating institution or do we want to encourage critical thinking, reflection and deconstruction/ reconstruction?

Am I trying to put two ways of thinking together theoretically that don't fit? What's the point of trying out queer / post-structural ideas within an equity ridden environment, and having begun with a positivist framing of the research framework, will it just result in me dumbing down the thesis and using reproduction theories to situate what I've done? Maybe I need to interrogate the (positivist) categories I

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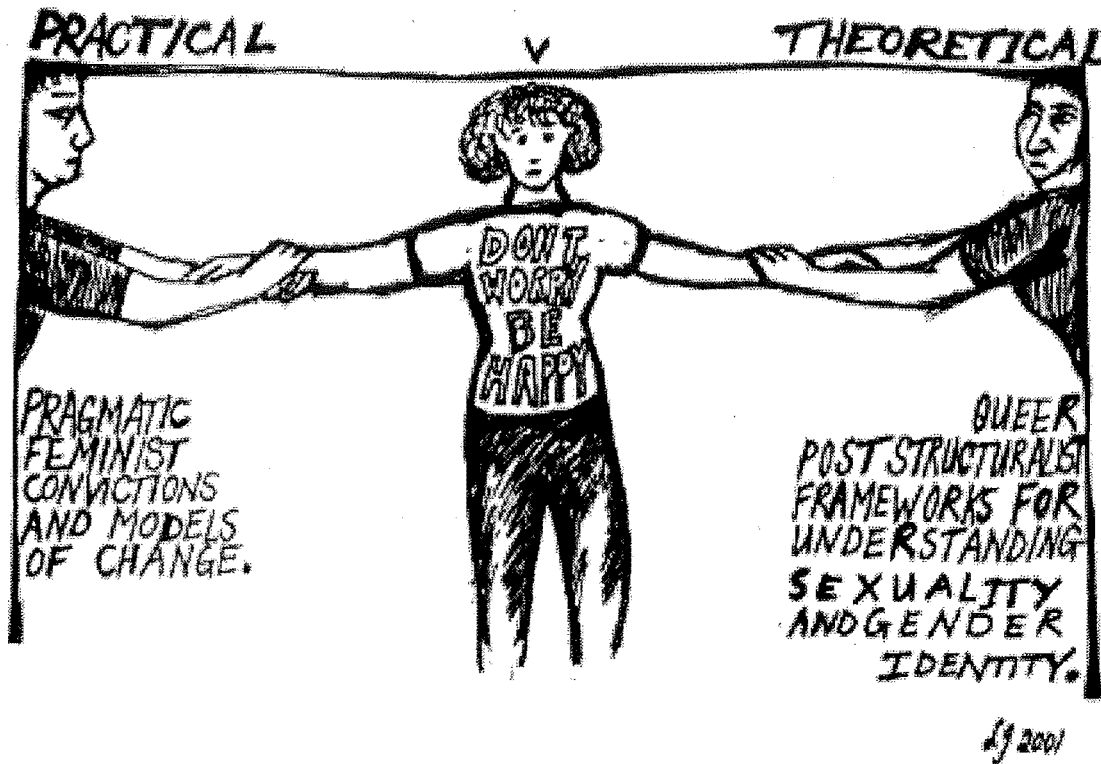
<sup>1</sup> A North Island university.

used to set the research questions up with ... maybe the categories (lesbian, gay, bisexual) themselves needed interrogating and that critiquing heterosexuality would be really valuable for heterosexual students as well as queer ones?

My qualms and thoughts include issues such as these...If I stuck with the queer/poststructural theoretical base, would that mean that this just becomes a theoretical Ph.D. with no practical application? I couldn't stand that! I realise this dilemma in lots of ways ... reflects a mixture of my pragmatic feminist convictions and models of change based on me as a teacher/practitioner as well as my interest in emerging queer/poststructural frameworks for understanding sexuality and gender identity (which effectively destabilise all the identity politics stuff). It's like I feel I am being pulled in two directions all the time and I can't reconcile them. Sometimes it feels as if what is happening in the school and what is happening in my writing and intellectual life are very divorced from each other and cause a lot of tension...

I have come to see through the process of working in the two case study schools that everything that the literature suggests makes for good educational practice in schools; reflexivity, collaboration, vision building, innovation from the bottom-up etc. is difficult to achieve within current educational structures and climate. There is no time, teachers are overloaded implementing the new curriculum, teachers are framed as individuals working with students, departments and subject areas within schools are balkanised and don't communicate with each other widely (Hargreaves, 1994). Educators find it hard enough to deal with equity let alone reframing sexuality as a fluid and contingent.

Discourses surrounding sexuality, youth and schools also influence what's possible in terms of affirming sexual diversity in schools. The construct of childhood as a time of sexual innocence, "teach them about it and they'll do it" attitudes, and nineteenth century models of sexual deviance which frame lesbian and gays as 'proselytising recruiters come into play. Constructs of normality/ abnormality function as a form of social control, framing lesbian and to a lesser extent bisexual students as abnormal and not female (heterosexual). Sexuality in schools can be framed as a private issue, while schools are constructed as a public sphere. The operation of the public/private binary operates to normalise heterosexuality in schools, and schools feel nervous of a community and parent backlash. In the current market-driven educational climate being known as a school that meets the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual students is a marketing disaster.



This research journal entry encapsulates some of the complexities I was juggling in order to understanding the methodological constraints emerging in the research process. As well as to the difficulties of negotiating the structural and material world of schools, the presence of the research project in the school was posing major ideological challenges to the roles of the teachers and of the school generally, affecting what was possible to achieve in both case study schools.

In addition it is apparent that my conceptual paradigm shift from equity to queer and feminist post structural frameworks to situate understandings of sexuality and gender was causing me intense discomfort. Looking back, it is interesting to see in the research journal entry the way in which I thought that I had to choose one conceptual framework or the other, rather than see the process as something interesting to interrogate. The pragmatic teacher in me was experiencing the intense discomfort of what it might mean to feel the security of positivist paradigms disintegrate.

Later I was to see that the theoretical shift that felt so uncomfortable and problematic in a school context, also provided me with new directions in terms of working with teachers and students. In one sense the shift and its pedagogical implications proved to be more conceptually threatening for some teachers at Kereru Girls' College than the

equity framework I began with. The equity model called into question the compulsory nature of heterosexuality and questioned 'ways of knowing' many teachers felt comfortable legitimating. At the same time, however, because the discursive production of sexuality and gender was being constantly reiterated, it also provided an achievable, if contingent form of change.

In Part Two I unravel these messy methodological complexities and explain how I negotiated them. Seeing the writing process as a 'method of enquiry' (Richardson, 1994) was helpful in this respect. As the extract from my research journal shows, using writing as a research tool provided me with ways to reflect on what was happening and why.

To begin I want to spend some time exploring the philosophical basis of qualitative research and at some of the contemporary dilemmas which characterise qualitative methodologies.

### **Qualitative Genealogies**

The qualitative methodology I have drawn on sits within a broad interpretivist paradigm which understands reality as constructed through social interaction rather than as a fixed or objective phenomenon. Skrtic (1995) explains the paradigm shifts that have taken place within the social sciences over the last twenty years or so. He describes the way in which the functionalist paradigm predominated up until the end of the 1960s. Grounded in the science of regulation, functionalism studies its subject matter from an objectivist point of view and aims to provide a rational explanation of social action for the purposes of prediction and control. Interpretivism as a paradigm arose during the 1970s and is more interested in understanding the social construction of reality.

Interpretivism draws on the intellectual traditions of phenomenology and Wittgensteinian relativism (Ferguson, Ferguson & Taylor, 1989). Phenomenological approaches place an emphasis on understanding the world as it is experienced or perceived by individuals. Relativism emphasises the importance of context and interpretation in creating meaning and understanding. Ferguson and Ferguson (1995) identify four inter-related features of the interpretivist paradigm. These include the notion that reality is constructed and intentional, and meanings are socially constructed and can therefore differ from person to person and according to context. The interpretivist emphasis on interpretation also challenges the functionalist notion that there is a split between subject and object or the knower and the known, because reality is seen to be subjective. Related to the impossibility of the subject/ object split is the

functionalist notion that splitting fact and value is impossible within the interpretivist paradigm. Social constructions represent values, and cannot therefore be neutral. In this way the interpretivist paradigm presents a challenge to the subjective/objective binary which is woven deeply into Western society. The final feature of interpretivism which Ferguson and Ferguson identify is that the goal of research within an interpretivist paradigm is to describe, interpret and understand, rather than to describe, predict and control as it is within a functionalist paradigm. The emphasis on created and intentional reality that characterises interpretivism means that it is important to discover a range of perspectives within a social setting.

I discovered through the process of undertaking this project that working within an interpretivist paradigm within the functionalist world of schools produces tensions (Skrtic, 1995) which also emerged methodologically. While I discuss these issues more fully later in the chapter, I just want to briefly signal them here. Firstly, because of the primarily functionalist expectations of what research meant within a schooling context, the study was often seen by teachers to be methodologically suspect. Attempting to gain access to schools and throughout the second phase of the study, the most common way that this emerged was that teachers and particularly school administrators constantly attempted to bring the content of the research into disrepute by questioning the validity of qualitative research methodology (Hey, 1997; Lewis, 1993). This continued despite the fact that I discussed the different paradigms which underpinned qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and provided written material to explain them further. My interview with Sylvie, guidance counsellor and planning group member at Kereru Girls' College, draws attention to this:

It's hard to tell isn't it, if you'd come in and did qualitative research on something completely non-controversial would people have said "Oh, (it's) qualitative research as well...", or is it just another way of attacking the topic from a slightly different slant? it's hard to tell and it probably is for some people a bit of both. 'Cos I don't know that anyone in the school has pretty much got a background in research and all the different kinds of research and how valid they are and they aren't so it's an easy thing to say, (that) it's not worthwhile (Sylvie, guidance counsellor and planning group member, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

Because change is generally understood in schooling contexts within functionalist paradigms, the second phase of the project at Kereru Girls' College which was concerned with changing actions through creating attitudinal shifts, was particularly challenging. I think this was one of the reasons why I became increasingly interested in methodological approaches such as discourse analysis. Such approaches allowed me to

understand what undertaking work to affirm sexual diversity within a school context meant to the participants. It also allowed me to account for how the challenges and tensions raised in undertaking a project such as this within the context of school could be understood. In addition, I became interested in the way in which interpretivist strategies such as discourse analysis and deconstruction appeared to provide some way forward for teachers to work with constructions of sexuality and gender through interrogating those constructions in their work with students. I explore these possibilities more fully in Chapter 7.

Qualitative research sits within an interpretivist paradigm in that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. A wide range of interconnected methods are used to gain the fullest understanding possible of the subject in hand. The choice of methodological tools depends upon the research questions asked and the context of the research site. The variety of methods that are drawn on may include case study, personal experience, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994a) explain:

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape enquiry. Such researchers emphasise the value laden nature of enquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning (p. 4).

While on the one hand qualitative research has a commitment to a version of the naturalistic interpretative approach, Denzin and Lincoln suggest that there is another paradoxical feature of qualitative enquiry: its ongoing critique of the politics and methods of positivism. Denzin and Lincoln (1994a) suggest that this paradox has led currently to what they describe as a double crisis of representation and legitimation which calls into question the two assumptions of qualitative research which I have described. Historically qualitative researchers have assumed that qualified, competent observers can with objectivity and clarity and precision report on their own observations of the social world, including their experiences with others. However post-structural paradigms call this belief into question by questioning whether qualitative researchers can actually directly capture lived experience. They suggest that the social text written by the researcher is viewed through the particularities of the researcher's subject positions. In this way, the direct link between text and experience within qualitative research is made problematic.



The inter-related notion of a legitimation crisis calls into question the belief in a real subject or real individual, who can report on their experiences. Post-structural paradigms question the notion of objective observations, arguing that observations are socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed. Denzin and Lincoln (1994a) and others (Lather, 1991) suggest that such critiques involve a rethinking of notions such as validity, generalisability and reliability. In many ways what some of these dilemmas signal is as Denzin and Lincoln (1994a) suggest: "... the age of value-free enquiry for the human disciplines is now over and researchers now struggle to develop situational and trans-situational ethics that apply to any given research act" (p. 12).

As a qualitative researcher, I was faced with working within many contradictions. Negotiating these complexities is no easy task and given the dilemmas that I have described, it is perhaps understandable that I learnt about many of them through the process of undertaking the study. Denzin and Lincoln (1994b) suggest that while traditional methodologies have been called into question, new directions are not yet firmly in place. In beginning to think about and address some of the dilemmas that I have alluded to, it is not surprising that traces of positivism are apparent in many aspects of the methodology of this study. I can identify with Lather's (1997) notion of 'working the ruins' of feminist methodological traditions. In this spirit, I attempt to address some of the methodological tensions in the project. I discuss them as they arise in each of the methodological stages of the research process, and as I explain at the end of the chapter, in the way I have chosen to re/present the story of the research process in writing. I return to the initial stage of the project to explain how many of the ideological and structural tensions involved in undertaking the research were present.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EARLY INDICATIONS OF POSSIBILITIES AND PROBLEMATICS: THE FIRST METHODOLOGICAL STAGE

In this section I describe the first phase of the research methodology. I explore the original aims of the project and the various qualitative approaches I drew upon to build the research design of the study. I also look at how I decided to collect data and the issues that emerged in terms of data collection, preliminary data analysis and ethics.

The research questions that I began with developed in relation to the issues I was initially interested in addressing through the study. An increasing number of studies documented the fact that within a social justice model, lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are marginalised within the dominant heteronormative culture of secondary schools. Studies suggest that lesbian and gay youth are isolated and often experience verbal and physical harassment as a result of their sexuality (Due, 1995; Quinlivan, 1994; Sears, 1991; Stapp, 1991; Town, 1998; Trenchard & Warren, 1984; Vincent & Ballard, 1997). While an increasing amount of research documented their experiences, it appeared that few of the strategies and resources available to assist schools to work towards creating more inclusive environments for these students had been undertaken.

This study was experimental in that research that attempts to work towards addressing issues of inclusion for lesbian and gay students has not been attempted in New Zealand before. It is only recently that the school experiences of lesbian and gay youth have been documented in this country (Quinlivan, 1994; Stapp, 1991; Town, 1998; Vincent & Ballard, 1997). So my first research question was: How can New Zealand secondary schools become more inclusive environments for lesbian, and gay students?

While suggestions of how schools need to change feature as an adjunct to these studies, no systematic school wide models of change have been developed, trialled and evaluated. In New Zealand, despite the 1993 Human Rights Act which outlawed discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation legislation and Ministry of Education guidelines (Ministry of Education, 1993) which state that schools have a clear obligation to ensure the physical and emotional well being of students, the Ministry has provided no leads to educational institutions in developing strategies to meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth. So my second research question was: what would an effective school-wide model of change to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students consist of?

For the last twenty years in New Zealand, there has been vociferous opposition to any

suggestion that information on lesbian and gay sexuality should be available to school students (Ryan, 1986). I also was aware that market-driven educational reforms provide an obstacle to the development of programmes to meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth in schools. Along with other reforms, the abolition of zoning for school entry, has meant that schools have been increasingly forced to market themselves. This has been particularly difficult for schools in low socio-economic areas who have fewer resources. Studies to date suggest that factors which influence the choice of schools for parents are a traditional curriculum and high decile ratings (Gordon, 1994). Alton-Lee and Pratt (2000), Gordon (1993), Kenway and Willis (1997) and Middleton (1990) suggest that the pressures of market competition and a lack of resources are not conducive to schools addressing issues of equity. For these reasons, introducing programmes that cater to the needs of lesbian and gay students could be seen as risky. As I explain shortly, these factors were to emerge as significant in gaining access to schools to undertake the project.

Gordon (1993) suggests that in the current neo-liberal educational climate of the early 1990s, equity issues have taken a back seat to issues of management and financial accountability. The lack of compulsory equity policies in school charters since 1991 has meant that it is now up to local Boards of Trustees to deal with equity issues within their schools. Because many Boards felt ill-equipped to deal with equity issues, and also because schools were short of resources, equity concerns remained unaddressed. The second phase of Gordon's study revealed that although less wealthy schools were concerned at their lack of action on equity issues, they neither had the resources nor the personnel expertise to improve the situation. In addition, even when schools did address equity issues, gender and race were usually dealt with at the expense of what was perceived to be the more contentious area of sexuality.

I was also aware that workload may be an issue which may make schools cautious to participate in the project. The emphasis on decentralisation and accountability which has occurred as a result of the neo-liberal education reforms has also meant that many teachers have now had to take on new management responsibilities, and develop accountability systems. Studies examining the effects of school reform on teachers' work show that the administrative workload, especially that associated with curriculum change has increased considerably since the implementation of the Tomorrow's Schools legislation in 1989<sup>2</sup> (Mitchell & Mitchell, 1993). An awareness of some of these limitations provided the impetus for my third and final research question: what are the

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<sup>2</sup> Tomorrow's Schools (1989) was neo-liberal legislation, intended to devolve responsibility for the running of schools from the government to individual school communities.

obstacles to secondary schools meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students in Aotearoa/ New Zealand in the 1990s?

### **Research Designs**

I drew on a number of research designs in developing the research project. The first of these was critical ethnography.

Critical ethnographic approaches are underpinned by concerns about social inequalities and endeavour to work towards creating positive social change. Describing critical ethnography more as an orientation than a methodological school, Carspecken (1996) points out that a range of approaches informs critical ethnographic studies. One of these approaches suggests that critical ethnographic research plays a role in documenting discrimination in order to challenge and contest it. In this way, the project was initially designed within a social justice framework which identifies lesbian and gay students as a group of disenfranchised students within secondary schools, and attempts to document, develop and trial strategies which would make secondary schools more inclusive of them. Because the project attempted to destabilise the process through which heterosexuality becomes normalised in order to shift and change it, the change aspect of critical ethnographic research approaches proved useful to the study. Critical ethnographic approaches also attempt to identify the complex ways in which discrimination works, recognising the layered and interlocking ways in which identity, forms of thinking and beliefs operate in order to legitimate discrimination. I have found this approach useful in documenting and unpacking the complex spoken and unspoken ways in which understandings of heteronormativity are produced and contested within the contexts of secondary schools.

Critical epistemological frameworks have also played a role in interrogating the positivist notions that truth can be objectively recorded through impartial observation. I mentioned this previously as part of the legitimisation crisis which Denzin and Lincoln (1994a) understood as currently facing the fields of qualitative research. Instead critical epistemological approaches emphasise the importance of meaning being created from the ground up through a range of human experiences and how people communicate them (Carspecken, 1996). This study attempts to show how meanings of same sex desire and heterosexuality were constituted from a range of difference perspectives within the context of two secondary schools, and the intended and unintended consequences of those meanings.

Action Research is another model of qualitative research design that can be used to bring

about social change in educational contexts. The traditional roots of the action research model were political in that it began with citizens attempting to influence the political process through collecting information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Action research is a term used to describe a range of research practices loosely derived from Lewin's action research cycle (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The research cycle is seen to go through a series of stages including planning, acting, observing and reflecting, problem solving and evaluation. Once the initial cycle has been completed, the research cycle begins again taking into account what has been learnt from the previous cycle.

The role of the researcher within an action research model is that of a change agent, who is actively involved in the cause for which the research is conducted. Reflexivity characterises the researcher's role in the process and enables her to critically evaluate her assumptions and practices as part of the research process. As I shall show, this proved to be particularly significant for the role I played as both a teacher and as a researcher in the second phase of the project. In addition, the field notes and research journal provided me with a means to make my value orientations explicit, and deal with many of the feelings that arose as the study progressed.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggest that because social change goals are often seen to threaten the status quo, the stakes in undertaking action research are often high, both for those who are subject to the unjust practices which are documented, and also for those who work in institutions that protect vested interests. Bogdan and Biklen suggest that this means researchers have to be particularly systematic and rigorous in terms of collection of data, taking detailed field notes and remaining in the site for reasonable periods of time. I endeavoured to address these concerns by drawing on multiple forms of data collection and a wide range of participants. I provide more detail on this later in the chapter.

The goal of working towards social change through initiating action research cycles fitted the second phase of the research which originally aimed to document the experiences of lesbian and gay students within a school, and work within the school to develop, trial and evaluate initiatives to create a more inclusive school culture for lesbian and gay students. Due to the time constraints of the Ph.D., I could see that it would be impossible to conduct more than one cycle of the action research process. So to that extent I adopted a truncated version of the action research model.

The final model of research design that I drew on in the initial development of the study were feminist research designs. Reinharz and Davidman (1992) suggest that feminist research is more of a perspective and an attitude that can be brought to bear on research

design and methods, rather than a methodological direction in itself. A multiplicity of feminisms also means that there tend to be numerous feminist perspectives on social research methods. In fact, in my own reading, I have found the debates within the field of feminist methodology to be by far the most innovative and thought provoking that I have encountered. While I was not aware of many of the issues in the early stages of the project, I grew more familiar with them as the study progressed and methodological dilemmas and challenges arose. So while I briefly allude to some of the issues here, I discuss them more fully as I move through each methodological stage.

Many of the issues which have arisen within the field of feminist research have been related to the representation and legitimation crises which have occurred within the field of qualitative research more widely (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a). Lather (1996) suggests that the feminist search for research tools moved outside the hegemonic 'masters voice', setting in train a process of trying to 'do things differently'. While not unproblematic, this may account for the extent to which feminist methodological contestations and dialogue continue to persist. In this section I draw on Reinharz and Davidman (1992) to identify several of the traditional features of feminist research. However, because of the ongoing debate in the field of feminist research methodologies, where it is relevant I have also included feminist contestations of these traditions.

Reinharz and Davidman (1992) identify some broad features of traditional feminist research, several of which are relevant to the study. They suggest that underpinning feminist research is the notion that women's lives are important. To that extent, feminist research is interested both in women's lived experiences and the construction of gender as a social category. The first feature of traditional feminist research that they identify is that feminist research draws upon feminist theory to frame questions, guide the collection of data, and also in order to analyse gender politics and the construction of gender. In retrospect, as I have explained in the previous chapter, I drew heavily on feminist post-structural theory in order to explore how representations of gender and sexuality were produced and contested in schooling contexts (Butler, 1990, 1993). As time went on it became increasingly apparent that representations of sexuality and gender as they were produced and contested in both peer and classroom culture of the schools mutually reinforced and implicated themselves, and played a powerful role in the (hetero)normalising process (Butler, 1990, 1993; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Mac an Ghail, 1994a). Documenting this process and developing ways to destabilise its operation increasingly became my interest and the focus of the study in the single sex girls' school in the second phase of the project.

Reinharz and Davidman (1992) and others (Fine, 1994a) also note that feminist research

designs are often concerned with creating social change that is both practical and designed to create a better environment for women. In this way, the study recognised that young lesbian and bisexual women in schools were forced to negotiate the primarily heteronormative cultures of schools. The second phase of the study was designed in order to explore what was possible in terms of working towards creating a more inclusive environment for them. Fine (1994a) Visweswaran (1994), and others (Patai & Koertge, 1994) question the extent to which feminist researchers can position themselves as the heroines of their own narratives, casting doubt on the extent to which “the university rescue mission in search of the voiceless” as Visweswaran (1994, p. 98) puts it, is possible. She suggests that the feminist ethnographer needs to proceed with research acknowledging the impossibility of speaking with, let alone speaking for, research participants. Moving from a realist towards a more interrogative text that reflects for readers the problems and difficulties of inquiry provides one way through the dilemmas suggested by Visweswaran. I have endeavoured to enact this in the text through the use of asides (St Pierre, 1997) in the form of field notes, research and writing journals. I explain my use of these forms of aside more fully later in the chapter.

Traditionally, feminist research models are also characterised by a relatively high degree of researcher involvement in the research process (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). It is acknowledged that the personal experiences and passions of the researcher play a role in determining the issues the research focuses on and in documenting the ups and down of the research process. I can identify with feminist researchers who have noted the difficulties of being a researcher in a school when your research is problematising the way in which the school treats its students (Hey, 1997). I would suggest that this treatment is magnified when your research calls into question the way in which lesbian and bisexual students are treated. Rogers (1994) notes the extent to which she felt framed as obsessive and eccentric when researching the schooling experiences of young lesbians. She suggests that this is especially the case in schooling contexts because of the connection with youth and education, and the associated stereotypical constructs of the predatory lesbian/manhater/corrupter of innocent youth and paedophile. To that extent Rogers found that her research wasn't taken seriously because it was seen to be feminist and subversive. I concur with Halperin (1995) when he suggests: “... A claimed homosexual identity operates as an instant disqualification, exposes you to accusations of pathology and partisanship ... and grants everyone else an epistemological privilege over you” (p. 8).

Along with Halperin (1995) and Rogers (1984) I discovered that being a lesbian researcher means that your position is inextricably interwoven with how lesbians have been historically understood. As I explained in the previous chapter, this most

commonly manifested itself in the notion from some students and staff at Kereru Girls' College that as a researcher I was 'promoting and recruiting'. Sylvie the counsellor and member of the planning group noted that my 'partiality' as a lesbian can also be seen as a reason to call the 'validity' of the research project into question (Lewis, 1993):

I think it's just that if people want to marginalise the whole thing that's an easy thing to do to say that, "Oh well it's just this lesbian woman coming into the school who's got all these ideas and trying to tell us what to do and what to think" (Sylvie guidance counsellor and planning group member, Interview, 1998).

For all of these reasons, there were often times during the research process when I felt unsafe. While some individual participants I interviewed knew I was a lesbian, (in particular the young lesbian and bisexual women I interviewed) it wasn't something I discussed openly because it just didn't feel safe enough. Despite the fact that I didn't talk about my sexuality I felt that it was often assumed that I was a lesbian. There were no openly lesbian or bisexual teachers or students at Kereru Girls' College. In the latter stages of the project I often felt isolated and vulnerable, despite the ongoing support from members of the planning group, and Sylvie the guidance counsellor in particular.

As Sylvie's previous comments indicate, the feelings of isolation I experienced were also exacerbated by the fact that I was a researcher, and an academic outsider (perceived by some staff as an 'expert' and out of touch with the daily realities of schooling), coming into the school. This was the first time I had been positioned in this way and it was something of a shock (and an insult) to me. In my previous job as a teacher I had generally felt part of a group of people working towards a common goal. My research journal proved to be an important outlet for the lack of safety I sometimes felt working as a researcher in the school. Where it is applicable I have included excerpts from it to show the isolation and the frustration and anger I sometimes felt in response to what I experienced as the containment and resistance to the ongoing progress of the project at Kereru Girls' College. I coped with the way in which I felt positioned in the school by making the resistance and my reactions to it explicit through writing and talking to staff and students of the school to understand why these things were happening. After the second workshop with staff, the experience felt so painful that I delayed writing about it for a number of weeks. I include those excerpts from my journal when I provide a more thorough exploration of the workshop in Chapter 8.





Reinharz and Davidman (1997) and Bogdan and Biklen (1998) draw attention to the way in which traditional feminist research designs make an attempt to involve the participants in the research process and minimise the power dynamics inherent in the research process through consultation and collaboration with the participants. However, Stacey (1984) critiques the idea that feminism provides less exploitative and more honest ways of proceeding within the research process. She draws attention to the inescapable power imbalances of research inquiry situations whether they are feminist or not. Stacey suggests that the attempts of feminist researchers to set themselves up as better intentioned can risk even greater violation of the researched than the more distanced objectivity of traditional research methods. In this regard, Stacey suggests that recognition of the power imbalances inherent in the research process is preferable to naive, if well intentioned attempts by feminist researchers to minimise the power imbalances. In Phase two of the project I attempted to work collaboratively with a group of teachers (called the planning group) within Kereru Girls' College to determine the shape and form of the project within the school. This proved more complex than I had envisaged for a number of different reasons. I address some of Stacey's concerns by making them explicit both in my field notes and in the writing of this chapter.

Given all of these challenges it is perhaps not surprising that the researcher paralysis I experienced in relation to some of these methodological challenges is commonly experienced by many researchers who attempt to work within feminist and post-structural methodological frameworks (McWilliam, Lather & Morgan, 1997). I have largely attempted to address some of these challenges by making them explicit.

One of the features of qualitative research design is that the design of the study evolves and changes in relation to what is discovered in the process of collecting and analysing data, and in terms of making decisions about which paths to pursue and which to discard (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Carspecken, 1996). Considering that the study was so experimental, and because of the structural and ideological constraints I have previously mentioned, it was inevitable that the research design would have to be constantly under review. I envisaged that the findings of the first phase of the project would have a bearing on what was undertaken in the second case study school. I was also aware that the action research process in the second case study school would be subject to modification depending on what members of the school community advocated. However while I had planned for some modification, as I shall explain in subsequent sections, the weight and scale of the structural, conceptual and ideological issues which arose proved more pervasive and difficult to shift than I initially envisaged.

So drawing on aspects of all these models of research design I have discussed, the initial research design was planned as a two phase project and intended to investigate how New Zealand secondary schools can become more inclusive environments for lesbian and gay youth. In the first phase of the study I wanted to document current practices already meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students in two secondary schools. Phase one of the project was theoretically underpinned by the 'documenting best practices' model, which was developed from Doyle's (1990) best practice model for teacher education. He advocated the utilisation of examples of best teaching practice in order to provide models for teacher trainees to emulate and base their practice on. I intended to expand the model beyond the individual to institutional practice, in much the same way that Leiberman (1995) and Fine (1992a) advocate.

The decision to focus on the development of a school wide model of change was made after considering the programmes which were available internationally and considering what would best fit a New Zealand context. The greatest concentration of programmes to meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth has occurred in the United States. These initiatives fall into three main categories; school based programmes, which have spread to many schools over time, alternative schools for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth and government funded state programmes, which aim to create more inclusive school environments for these students. I discuss specific strategies within schools as they emerged in the literature when I discuss the design of Phase Two of the project in more detail.

The oldest and most well known of the school based programmes is Project 10, a dropout prevention and counselling program which operates out of Fairfax High School

in the West Hollywood area of Los Angeles. First established in 1984, it is a school based counselling program that began in response to the un-met needs of lesbian and gay youth in schools. The focus of the model is education, reduction of verbal and physical abuse, suicide prevention and accurate AIDS information. The project aims to improve the self-esteem of lesbian and gay youth by providing accurate information and non-judgemental counselling for them. The services it provides include workshops and training sessions for administrators and staff, informal counselling for students, out reach to parents, peer counselling, substance abuse and suicide prevention programmes (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). The key components of education, counselling and support services have begun to be considered as a model by other American cities. The Director, Virginia Uribe, has assisted schools in Los Angeles county and throughout the United States to establish similar programmes (Rofes, 1989).

The second most common form of programme are alternative schools designed specifically for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students. The most well known of these is the Harvey Milk School in New York City. Operating under the auspices of the Hettrick Martin Institute<sup>3</sup>, it was established to cater to the needs of lesbian and gay students who could not survive within the New York school system due to high levels of harassment and intimidation. Increasingly, parents bring their queer youth to these schools of their own volition<sup>4</sup> The school currently serves the needs of around twenty-four students with an additional two hundred served in outreach programmes for street kids. It offers students a traditional academic curriculum but they are also provided with a wide range of social services. The school offers a family counselling program in addition to a support group for HIV-positive youth. It also assists young people with AIDS. Other schools which specifically serve the needs of lesbian and gay youth include Eagles High School in Los Angeles and the Triangle Program in Toronto, Canada.

A government sponsored state wide program in Massachusetts called Creating Safe Schools For Lesbian and Gay Youth was established in 1993 as a result of a Government funded study conducted into the needs of lesbians and gay youth. Along with a similar program in Minnesota, it is the only state in North America where lesbian and gay youth are receiving support from both the government and the State Department of Education. The goal of the program is to facilitate on-site training in every high school in Massachusetts in order to improve support services for lesbian and gay youth. Schools are being encouraged to develop policies and procedures

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<sup>3</sup> A private organisation which was established to cater to the welfare of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth.

<sup>4</sup> Personal conversation with the Director of the Harvey Milk School, Christopher Roderiguez 4/10/95.

protecting students from violence, harassment and discrimination. They also provide training to personnel in the prevention of suicide and violence, and financial assistance to form support groups and counselling for family members.

New Zealand does not have the high population base of cities such as New York and Los Angeles necessary to sustain alternative lesbian and gay schools. The likelihood of state-funded initiatives such as the Massachusetts Safe Schools Project is very small, given that in the current de-regulated educational climate, it is now up to individual schools to determine what, if any, policies and procedures are in place to protect lesbian and gay students within schools. There has been no assistance provided to schools by the Ministry of Education that would enable schools to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students or to affirm sexual diversity. Given the lack of state support, the most feasible model of change in secondary schools appeared to be the documentation of current initiatives and the development of a school project that aimed to address inclusion for lesbian and gay students.

### **Emerging Ideological Challenges: Negotiating Access**

In November 1995 I began approaching schools to see whether they would be interested in participating in the study. I wrote extensive and detailed field notes that documented the protracted process of gaining access to the schools and my multiple positionalities in that process. The field notes also provided me with a venue within which I could write about what appeared to be reactions and responses that were repeated across sites, as well as hunches and emerging trends. They also enabled me to document my own personal responses to the evolving process. Despite the time consuming nature of the process, the field notes ensured a valuable ongoing record and proved to be useful later in providing some continuity in what was to become a methodologically complex project.

Ethical concerns were addressed as part of the process of negotiating access to schools to undertake the study. The schools were provided with an information sheet about the project that was based loosely on the format of a cover story (Glesne & Peshkin, 1993). It contained information describing myself, the estimated length of time required for data collection and how I would attempt to minimise disruption to the daily running of the school. I provided a rationale for the study and its usefulness. I also indicated that the school would be consulted as fully as was possible throughout the process, and that participants had the opportunity to withdraw from the project at any time if they wished to. The information sheet also described the possible benefits and risks to the school of the study. Finally I outlined how the participants' confidentiality and

anonymity would be protected through the use of pseudonyms and composite blurring categories (Middleton, 1993) which interchanged specific demographic features between participants (see Appendix A). After providing the principal or teacher with the information sheet, I would meet with them to discuss it. These processes were used in all my dealings with participants.

My multiple positionalities as an experienced teacher and as an advisor gave me a certain amount of credibility and meant that I had a great many contacts in schools, many of whom I had worked with previously. Initially when I contacted a school, I would go through individuals whom I knew and who currently worked in the school. My insider status however proved no match for what was perceived to be the contentiousness of undertaking research on this topic in schools.

The difficulties I experienced gaining access to schools to collect data provided an early indication of the contentiousness of the research topic and the extent to which undertaking the study would call into question the ideological and the structural nature of schooling. This concern appeared to be especially pertinent for the schools that I approached in low socioeconomic areas with a low decile rating. In a situation where they were already coming to terms with declining rolls, school administrators openly conceded to me that a project such as this would not be good for the image of their school. The principal of one state co-educational decile six school who decided not to participate in the research told me that:

The falling roll meant that the school was really borderline in terms of marketing itself. He felt that if (the school) was labelled as a gay school then it would be really detrimental in that regard... (Field notes, 1st February 1996).

As Thonemann (1999) has argued, the Principal also suggested that conservative and negative attitudes within the school community towards the content of the research would make the school's participation in the project unlikely:

... The redneck attitudes of the community were also a problem, he said that if he was the principal at (a higher decile school) it wouldn't have been an issue but here it is. Homosexuality was rarely discussed but when it was it was like tapping a rich vein of prejudice... He felt that the Board Of Trustees was very conservative and there would be a strong negative reaction from them, a "What do you want to go getting yourself involved in that for?" sort of response (Field notes, 1st February 1996).



What was seen to be the contentiousness of the topic adversely affecting school enrolments and the reputation of the school also meant that I was unable to gain access to another decile six single sex girls' school in an urban centre. This was despite the fact that I had negotiated access over an extended period of time with the school and met on several occasions with the school administration. I had also attempted to reframe the research proposal, placing more of an emphasis on exploring how the culture of the school enabled young lesbian and bisexual women to feel comfortable enough to be open about their sexuality. Interestingly I had undertaken previous research with a student who had attended the school and who had developed initiatives there to support lesbian students, one of which was a support group for lesbian students.

My own reactions in my field notes to what had been a long and drawn out negotiation process with this particular school reveals the extent to which I felt frustrated and disillusioned:

I feel sort of angry and sad about this, I have put so much energy into getting it up and running and it seems so terribly ironic that what is perceived to be such a liberal school is doing this... I suppose ... it illustrates just how powerful doing work like this is and what huge opposition there is in doing work like this, it's a huge contested minefield. Negotiating access into schools has become much more complex than just arranging to interview individuals, the difficulties have

produced significant data findings (Field notes, 5 June 1996).

These issues proved to be an ongoing concern throughout the research process and were played out in a feeling of 'containment', which I experienced in both of the two case study schools.

I was also exploring gaining access to a suburban state co-educational secondary school that had been attempting to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students. It was through a personal association with Richard, a high profile gay teacher and administrator, that I gained access to the Phase One case study school, Takahe High School. He was also an active member of G.L.E.E, a national organisation of lesbian and gay educators, and we had previously undertaken project work together. After my initial contact with him, I wrote a letter, enclosing an information sheet about the project to the Principal enquiring whether the school would be prepared to participate in Phase One of the study in order to document how they were currently meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students at the school. The Principal agreed.

Actually gaining access to a school felt something of a relief, but I had the strong feeling that I had almost got there by accident. This was mainly due to the communication difficulties I experienced with the principal. Richard, the gay teacher confirmed my feelings and suggested that although the principal felt ambivalent about participating in the research, there would have been pressure from the staff had he turned the proposal down.

Access to what was to become the case study school in the planned second phase of the project was precipitated through my initial contact with the Principal, whom I knew through loose feminist teacher networks in the city. After an encouraging meeting with a school counsellor at Kereru Girls' College, she discussed the research proposal with the guidance network in the school. In a meeting with the guidance network and myself in May of 1996, concerns were expressed about adding to teacher workload and peer harassment which may result from identifying lesbian students in the school. I replied that I would attempt to minimise teacher workload by asking teachers to opt voluntarily to steer the process of the project in the school and protect the identity and confidentiality of lesbian students who participated in the research with the use of pseudonyms and blurring categories (Middleton, 1993) which would disguise their year level.

Board of Trustees approval to proceed with the project was delayed because of the unexpected resignation of the principal. Concern was expressed by the Board about

what they perceived as the controversial nature of the issue and negative parental reactions. Some felt that it would be hard to find out if there were any lesbian students in the school for me to talk to (eventually they decided that would be my problem and not theirs). Like the guidance network, they were most concerned about the extra workload on staff that the project would involve. At that time that issue was very much in the forefront because of the possibility of strike action over a teacher union pay claim in which workload was a crucial issue. Sylvie, the guidance counsellor, thought that meeting the needs of lesbian and bisexual students was an issue that should be addressed in the school and was very vocal in support of the research. She was to prove to be a key informant (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) in the second phase of the research project. She was supportive in all the changing directions and challenges of the study moved, and provided valuable insights into the culture of the school.

The resignation of the current principal at the school was something of a setback. From my own experience in schools and the literature (Fullan, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Leberman, 1995), I was aware that the principal plays an important role in terms of engendering school change, and also that a liberal principal is an important lever in terms of undertaking a project like this in a school (Thonemann, 1999). Given all of the difficulties I had experienced gaining access, I was grateful that any school would agree to participate in the project. In addition I was also really pleased that it was a girls' school because of my own interests in ways in which young women constructed their understandings of gender and sexuality.

Looking back, the process of gaining access to Takahe High School and Kereru Girls' College provided an early indication of some of the themes about to emerge as important throughout the project. The sensitivity of schools participating in research involving (queer) sexuality, concern about parental reactions, 'promoting' and 'recruiting' and 'going too far' became issues in Phase Two of the project. I explore the dynamics of these discourses and how they were played out in the two school contexts fully in Chapter 6, 7 and 8.

Another issue that the prolonged access constraints caused me to think about were some of the demographic features of a school which made it possible to undertake work on issues of homophobia and sexual diversity. These appeared to be: liberal leadership which has an awareness of the issues, a stable roll that is hopefully increasing, a school that has a lower decile rating and a school community which draws on a range of culture and class mixes which perhaps would predispose the school to meet a wide range of student needs (Thonemann, 1999). In the end, the schools who chose not to participate in the study were those which faced a declining roll situation. The two schools who



chose to participate both had stable and increasing rolls (Gordon, 1993).

In addition it appeared that both case study schools framed creating inclusion for lesbian and gay students as a personal issue, and thus the preserve of the guidance network. In this way sexuality was framed as a personal issue and was seen to be separate from what was seen to be the main academic work of the school. It was the guidance network, rather than the wider staff and community at the second case study school who were consulted and agreed to participate in the project. Later it was to become clear that many of the staff at Kereru Girls' College saw the issues facing lesbian and bisexual students as not their role to address.

Carspecken (1996) sees initial data collection methods as similar to a funnel, which starts off with a wide end and then narrows later. I collected a wide range of data to begin with, in order that I made sure not to close off any opportunities for developing new concepts or miss unexpected features of situations. In addition, given the difficulty that I was experiencing gaining access to schools, I decided that perhaps interviewing individuals may be the next best option to documenting practices which were inclusive of lesbian and gay students.

I also began to collect data from other sources in order to document a range of strategies that certain schools were using to create inclusive schools for lesbian and gay students. I discovered that there was a great deal of informal networking going on in schools (rather than official structures) to support lesbian, gay and bisexual students. In some cases the informal networking occurred between queer students and between straight and queer peers. In order to find out about how these processes worked, I approached a range of individuals in schools who I knew had been active in meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students in their schools. They were out lesbian and gay teachers and students who played an important role as change agents in schools (Thonemann, 1999) and a heterosexual counsellor who had experience addressing the needs of lesbian and gay youth in schools.

Two out gay male secondary school teachers, one out lesbian secondary school teacher, one out lesbian secondary school student and one heterosexual guidance counsellor agreed to be interviewed. I was concerned to ensure that the research process was ethical, and followed the guidelines I have described with previous participants.

One and a half hour semi-structured tape-recorded interviews in May and June of 1996 were carried out with Richard, who was a 43 year old out gay male teacher of Science and Technology with 22 years teaching experience in a decile six suburban state co-

educational secondary school. I discussed sexuality education and policies that he had been instrumental in developing and his role as a change agent at his school. Paul was 39 years old and also out as a gay male teacher. He was an English and Technology teacher and taught in a decile seven suburban single sex state boys' school. I discussed the role he played in the school as an informal mentor to gay students.

Jude was a 45 year old lesbian Science teacher who taught at a decile 7 state co-educational secondary school in a dormitory suburb of a large urban centre. She was open about her sexuality with her colleagues, students and parents and had been teaching for about 22 years. I interviewed her about her role as a change agent in the school and the informal networking she undertook supporting students. Belinda was an eighteen year old Year 13 student who attended a decile six urban single sex girls' school and was an out lesbian student there. I discussed peer networking and her role as a change agent in the school with her. Finally I interviewed Joan, a guidance counsellor, at a decile seven state integrated single sex girls' school. She was 42 years old, identified as heterosexual and had been working in the education system for twenty years. I talked with her about her experiences counselling young lesbians.

During the interviews the participants had the option to turn off the tape recorder at any time. None chose to do that. After I had transcribed the interviews the transcripts were returned to the participants to check that I had transcribed what they had said correctly. They had the opportunity to correct the transcript if there was anything that was incorrect. In addition I also asked follow-up questions if I wanted more detail about a particular area we had discussed. If any of the work was published at a later date, I had also agreed to let the participants view and comment on the content of the completed article.

Transcribing the audio-taped interviews provided me with the opportunity to think about what I was learning and record these emerging ideas in field notes as observer comments. Through this process I became increasingly aware of the important role which the culture and personnel of the school played in determining what was possible in terms of meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students (Thonemann, 1999). While individuals played a role in the process of meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students in schools, it was clear that what they could achieve was also determined by the culture of the school in which they were working. It was becoming clearer that a case study of a specific school context, rather than individual interviews with particular people would be the best way to gain a fuller picture of the culture of the school and answer my original research questions (Carspecken, 1996).

In the end two ethnographic case studies were undertaken, one in each phase of the project. The utilisation of the case study design enabled me to conduct a detailed examination of two school settings which took into account the specific context and culture of each school. Next I want to turn to the Phase One case study school, Takahe High School.

### **Possibilities and Problems with Equity Frameworks: The First Case Study**

Phase One of the project intended to document how one school had attempted to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students, and, also, to understand the obstacles to affirming the sexual diversity of students in the school. Multiple data collection methods were drawn on so that I could gain a range of data sources (Carspecken, 1996). These included selected open-ended interviews, observational field notes and collection and analysis of school policies and documents. Given some of the challenges I had experienced gaining access to schools to undertake the research, I envisaged that a constraints analysis (Haig, 1987) which consisted of recording problems in order to provide insights into the nature and scope of the data collected, would be an important feature of the data collection.

Takahe High School is a state co-educational secondary school situated in a dormitory suburb of a large urban centre. It had a stable roll of 700 students, comprising equal numbers of young women and men. Forty-eight full-time staff teach at the school. It is classified as a decile 9 school, indicating that the student population has a high socio economic status. Describing the school as predominantly middle class and monocultural, the Principal drew my attention to a recent survey which indicated that eighty percent of the parents in those areas owned their own home and there was virtually no state housing in the area.

Sixty percent of the students come from the immediate suburbs surrounding the school, while forty percent of the roll is bussed in from more expensive housing areas. Eighty percent of the students are of European origin, while ten percent identify as Maori, and ten percent identify as Asian. The Principal also commented that Takahe was perceived to be the more traditional alternative to more liberal competition.

Selected open-ended interviews were undertaken with key informants who had been closely involved in the establishment of programmes to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students. They represented a range of perspectives and I attempted to gain a range of age, status, gender and cultural perspectives. Graeme was a heterosexual male 46 year

old school counsellor who had 15 years experience in the school. Ryan was a Year 12 gay male student who had attended the school since Year 10. He had become increasingly open about his sexuality over his time at the school. James, the school Principal, 53 years old, male and heterosexual, had been at the school for twelve years. Richard was a 43 year old openly gay male Head of the Maths department who had been teaching for 22 years. Suzanne was a 43 year old Economics teacher who had been teaching at Takahe for the last eight years, and was reasonably open about being lesbian with her colleagues and some students.

As I have described with previous participants, the process of negotiating access and ensuring that the research process was ethical was negotiated. All the communication to set up the interviews was conducted through Richard, the gay male teacher, whom I knew in the school. In mid-June of 1996, despite initial reticence, the Principal eventually agreed to be interviewed. In the end semi-structured tape-recorded interviews were carried out with the participants (see Appendix B). The transcripts were returned to the participants to check for accuracy, and I agreed to let the participants view and comment on the content of the final data analysis and any published material.

Richard provided me with copies of the curriculum, equity, sexual harassment and role model policies that contained direct relevance to lesbian and gay students. I received copies of personnel, Equal Employment Opportunities and HIV policies that had a bearing on queer students. Richard also gave me a copy of the school prospectus and a school newspaper that contained an article about himself as an out gay teacher.

While I was transcribing the Phase One interview transcripts from Takahe High School I kept field notes with observer's comments. These observations were used to develop follow up questions that became data. I experienced some difficulty getting the transcripts of the Principal and the gay male student returned. The Principal eventually returned his in November of that year. I never got a copy of the student's transcript back, although I did eventually receive his signed consent form back in February of the following year (his leaving school complicated this process).

The Phase One interview transcripts were coded manually using Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) coding categories. These categories included: setting and context codes, definition of the situation codes, perspectives held by subjects, subject's ways of thinking about people and objects, process codes, activity codes, strategy codes, relationship and social structure codes and methods codes.

The other form of data analysis that was undertaken while I was working in the field was Bogdan and Biklen's suggestion of memo writing. I wrote a series of analytic, thematic and methodological memos in order to think more fully about what I was learning in the field, and also to identify difficulties and constraints which were emerging in the research process. The writing of memos consisted of one or two page summaries in which I reflected on issues that were raised in the setting and how they related to larger theoretical, methodological and substantive issues. They enabled me to identify emerging themes, narrow and redirect the data design and plan subsequent data collection sessions. Reference to the literature fields of inclusive educational reform, feminist queer and post-structural theory, and pedagogy was also a useful way of enhancing the analysis I was beginning to undertake.

The data I had gathered at Takahe College alerted me to the dilemmas inherent in framing queer students as a disadvantaged minority group requiring reparation under an equity framework (Fraser, 1997). By the end of 1996 I was moving towards thinking that the sexuality of these students (and by association they themselves) was not the problem. The issue that really needed to be addressed was the ways in which schools acted as heteronormalising institutions in order to legitimate heterosexuality while simultaneously abnormalising same sex desire. This was an argument that had emerged in queer theoretical literature and the implications of it were beginning to be considered in educational contexts (Britzman, 1995; Bryson & de Castell, 1993; Eyre, 1993). I began to track down some of those texts and think about their implications in terms of working in schools. While all these movements and changes in thinking were going on, I finally gained access to Kereru Girls' College in order to carry out the second phase of the study.

### **Creating Change Within Equity Frameworks**

Despite the paradigm shifts I was going through theoretically, the original design of Phase two of the project was a school wide model of change within an equity model which intended to develop, trial and evaluate programmes in order to create a more inclusive school for lesbian students and lesbian and gay parents. While I had found some queer and post-structuralist feminist pedagogical work which critiqued equity paradigms in terms of addressing issues of gender and sexual diversity (Britzman, 1995a; Davies, 1995), there were few suggestions beyond the critiques. For these reasons I drew on strategies discussed within the equity literature which explored inclusion for lesbian and gay students. In this section I describe how the inclusion literature, a group who volunteered to work on the project within the school, and staff and student feedback contributed towards the initial research design.

As I explained earlier, both current models of inclusion and school reform literature suggested that a whole school approach was the most realistic approach to engendering change in schools (Fullan, 1992; Hargreaves; 1994; Lieberman, 1995), and the most effective form of change in terms of improving the sexual health of adolescents (Ollis & Watson, 1998). Given the lack of state support, a school model was probably also the most feasible model. Another reason for adopting a school-wide model of change initially was to involve a wide range of members of the school community, including students and parents in the research process.

From my own experience involved in change in schools as a teacher, I knew that a sense of ownership amongst the school community was important when introducing new initiatives, and that the process of change needed to be feasible and appropriate for the school culture (Fullan, 1992; Hargreaves; 1994; Lieberman, 1995). In order to achieve the ownership of the project, I suggested that a range of members of the school community might like to work on the development and implementation of the project. This self-selected group became known as the planning group. They functioned as a focus group, providing suggestions and feedback on how best the project should proceed and evaluating the process of the project as it proceeded (Reinharz & Davidson, 1992).

It was planned that the first stage of the case study would consist of documenting current practice, issues and goals. In the second stage, working with a group of self-selected teachers and possibly other members of the school community, a range of initiatives designed to trial programmes to meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth would be undertaken. It was also planned that educators, students and myself as the researcher/educator would keep a log of reactions to the programmes. The final part of the project was to be an evaluation of the trialed initiatives.

In addition to the statewide and school based models of inclusion for lesbian and gay students in schools which I mentioned earlier in the chapter, I also drew on specific initiatives which underpinned the wider model in the initial research design at Kereru Girls' College. The strategies had emerged in the literature advocating methods by which secondary schools could become more inclusive of lesbian and gay youth within an equity framework. The suggestions most commonly were found as an adjunct to studies that documented the experiences of lesbian and gay youth in schools, and described the current climate of homophobia in secondary schools.

From what I had observed at Takahē High School, I became increasingly aware that this

approach was problematic in that it left the discursive binary constructions which framed same sex desire as abnormal and heterosexuality as normal, intact (Fraser, 1997; Sedgwick, 1990). I explain the possibilities and problematics of the equity model as it was played out at Takahe High School fully in Chapter 6.

Studies in North American, British and New Zealand contexts featured the suggestions of both the researchers and the participants. Underpinned by an equity rationale, the studies advocated that heterosexism should be combated in schools in the same ways as racism and sexism (Sears, 1991; Stapp, 1991; Trenchard & Warren, 1984). The writers suggest that surveys of attitudes toward sexuality should take place with staff, students and parents and that any work undertaken with teachers should include an understanding of the pervasiveness of heterosexism in schools. Numerous studies identified a danger in seeing the 'gay problem' as a need for individual counselling rather than focusing on the structural or political sources of homophobic attacks in schools (O'Brien, 1988; Quinlivan, 1994; Sears, 1991; Scott, 1989; Stapp, 1991; Taylor, 1989; Town, 1998; Trenchard & Warren, 1984). They also maintained that wider power structures, such as school governors, teacher education institutions and education authorities need to combat heterosexism.

Studies which outlined suggestions for initiatives which would create inclusive schools for lesbian and gay students recognised that teachers played a crucial role in effecting the transformation to safer schools for young lesbians and gay men, and provided detailed suggestions for educating teachers. Attention was given to the role that heterosexual staff play in instituting change within schools. Squirrell (1989), Taylor (1989) and Trenchard and Warren (1984) pointed out how important it was for educators to confront their own heterosexism and work alongside lesbian and gay educators in changing the climate and curriculum within their schools. Trenchard and Warren felt that teachers needed to make a commitment to stop colluding with and reinforcing heterosexism and to start challenging and informing their colleagues. Scott, (1989), Stapp (1991) and Taylor (1989) stressed that raising teachers' awareness and training them in the use of new materials was the key to successful change. Quinlivan's (1994) participants also pointed out that providing more information and knowledge about lesbian and gay issues for teachers meant that they in turn could provide information to students enabling them to make informed choices. Uribe and Harbeck (1992) suggested all teachers needed to examine the role of gender socialisation in perpetuating homophobia and heterosexism, and challenge instances of verbal abuse and openly answer students' questions as they arose (Quinlivan, 1994). Trenchard and Warren advocated that teachers receive training in the use of gender neutral terms and in not presuming all people are heterosexual. Uribe and Harbeck point out that any

training needed to be backed up with administrative support from within the institution.

Stapp (1991) acknowledged the difficulty and complexity of the roles that lesbian teachers play in their schools. O'Brien (1988) reinforced these conclusions and along with Quinlivan (1994) and Trenchard and Warren (1984), suggested that until lesbian teachers feel safe enough to be open about their sexuality in schools, the opportunities for young lesbians to have role models and feel safe enough to be open about their own sexuality will be very limited.

Both the formal and hidden curriculum were identified as key areas where change could occur in schools (O'Brien, 1988; Sears, 1991; Scott, 1989; Stapp, 1991; Trenchard & Warren, 1984). Specific areas which needed attention included the ways in which concepts of the family and family life were portrayed, sexual stereotyping and the presentation of gender in students' learning materials. Health and Sexuality Education curriculums were suggested by Sears, (1991), Stapp (1992) and Taylor, (1989) as forums that could offer students information on issues that confront lesbians and gays, legislation that affects them and information on sexual offences. Within the Health curriculum, Quinlivan's (1994) participants felt that the issues that face queer youth should be integrated into the year's programme, not dealt with in a single issue slot which tended to minoritise them in relation to the heterosexual norm. More teacher initiated sexuality discussion in lesson time and increased use of invited panels of lesbian and gay students were other methods advocated (Quinlivan, 1994; Sears, 1991; Stapp, 1991; Taylor, 1989; Trenchard & Warren, 1984).

Stapp's New Zealand study (1991) recognised that the methods used to implement these changes are crucial to their success. The lesbian teachers with whom she discussed this point out that if the training was not undertaken with care, the effect could be disastrous. They advocated contacting the school through the Health teacher and targeting a specific level, such as Year 12. Other student suggestions include taking it slowly at first, using women's networks and trialing the material in one school initially. Taylor, (1989) and Trenchard and Warren (1984) also suggest that teaching resources should be examined for heterosexist bias and positive images of lesbians and gays could be integrated into all aspects of the curriculum. The need for well-stocked libraries containing an extensive range of material on lesbian and gay issues was also highlighted (O'Brien, 1988; Quinlivan, 1994; Sears, 1991; Scott, 1989; Stapp, 1991; Taylor, 1989; Trenchard & Warren, 1984).

The studies emphasised the need for more extensive guidance counsellor training. The



researchers and participants suggested that counsellors should receive specific training in issues that face lesbian and gay youth, establish contacts with lesbian and gay youth support groups and prominently display positive images about sexual choices and alternatives (Quinlivan, 1994; Sears, 1991; Stapp, 1991; Taylor, 1989; Trenchard & Warren, 1984).

Literature which provided directions for how schools could be more inclusive for lesbian and gay youth also highlighted the need for all schools to have equal opportunities policy statements and procedures which included provisions to protect lesbian and gay students and educators in their working environments (Quinlivan, 1994; Stapp, 1991; Trenchard & Warren, 1984). Within schools, it was suggested that equity policies should specifically mention the needs of lesbian and gay teachers and students, and that the idea of respect for all persons should come through clearly in these documents.

While the suggestions in the inclusion literature helped inform the initial design of the project at Kereru Girls' College, looking back now it seems significant that outside of the few North American initiatives I have previously mentioned and Thonemann (1999), few studies are available which put this wide range of suggestions into practice. Nor do they deal with some of the conceptual limitations of the equity model and the ideological and structural challenges which I discovered would need to be acknowledged and addressed in undertaking a project to work towards affirming sexual diversity in schools. This probably should have alerted me to the complexities and difficulties that were about to unfold. As it turned out, these were to become all too apparent, and the lapses between the "hope and the happening" as Kenway and Willis (1997, p. 200) describe in relation to gender reform would emerge. In particular I think I underestimated the deeply ingrained ideological and structural challenges inherent in working with teachers in schools. However, at that stage the pragmatic teacher in me framed them as obstacles that needed to be acknowledged and discussed rather than reasons to prevent change from happening. I deal in detail with these issues in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

As I was aware that consulting with a range of participants within the school community would be helpful in ensuring that the initiatives which were developed had a 'fit' with the culture of Kereru Girls' College. I want to describe the particular features of the Phase Two case study school's culture, and explain how I went about collecting and analysing data at Kereru Girls' College.

The school has recently dropped from a decile six to a decile five urban single sex girls

school. There are 1102 students on the roll which is stable and increasing. There is a teaching staff of seventy-eight teachers. Of the students, 83% are Pakeha, eight percent Maori, 4% Island, 3% Pacific and Asian, and 2% are identified as other<sup>5</sup>. In order to understand what was currently happening at the school for lesbian and bisexual students, I drew on multiple data collection methods in order to gain a range of data sources (Carspecken, 1996).

I thought that interviews would provide me with descriptive data that would enable me to understand the ways in which the participants interpreted the school situation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The process of gathering participants began with me talking to the 'planning group'. They gave me their impressions of what was happening to lesbian/bisexual students and lesbian/gay/bisexual parents in the school and who would provide a good range of perspectives on the situation. The decision was made to interview two lesbian students<sup>6</sup>, two straight students, two lesbian or gay parents and two heterosexual teachers. There were no lesbian or bisexual teachers in the school who were open about their sexuality so I was unable to interview any to gain their perspectives.<sup>7</sup>

The focus of the first set of interviews was to gain a picture of what the participants thought it was like to be a lesbian or bisexual student at the school, and how the school could become more inclusive for lesbian students. The participants in the first stage of the project included four students, two teachers and one lesbian parent. Of the four students I initially interviewed, two were in Year 10; Melissa who was 15 years old described herself as lesbian and Heidi, a sixteen year old, identified as bisexual.<sup>8</sup> The other two students who I interviewed both identified as heterosexual; Zorra who was seventeen years old and then in Year 13, and Gabrielle who was a seventeen year old Year 12 student. The student interviews were the data that I drew on with a group of year 13 students in the student member check. I explore this incident in more detail in

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<sup>5</sup> This information is taken from the 1998 Education Review Office Accountability Report on the school.

<sup>6</sup> One of whom I already knew through my support work with lesbian, gay and bisexual youth in the city

<sup>7</sup> I did however know a beginning teacher who was a lesbian and worked at the school while I was endeavouring to gain access. In conversation, she had indicated to me that a combination of being a beginning teacher and also what she perceived to be the conservative culture of the school meant that she had chosen not to be open about her sexuality in her time at the school.

<sup>8</sup> When I interviewed students at that time, I asked them how they currently identified their sexuality. However, the identification of sexuality is increasingly being viewed as something of a complex question. Recent models of identification move beyond sexual orientation (or who you have sex with), incorporating sexual identity (what you identify yourself as), sexual behaviour (what you do sexually) and sexual orientation (who you are sexually attracted to) (Liggins, Wille, Hawthorne & Rampton, 1993). Interestingly only one student who I interviewed then still identifies as lesbian. One student participant who described herself as heterosexual now identifies as bisexual.

## Chapter 7.

I also interviewed two teachers at the school. Nellie (Mrs Smith) was a heterosexual 44 year old English teacher who had been teaching for 23 years. She was born in England and described herself in that context as upper middle-class. She later became an intermittent member of the planning group. Mary, the second teacher participant was fifty years old and described herself as heterosexual. She had been teaching for nearly thirty years, the last fifteen of those had been at the school. She described herself as middle class, although she came from a working class background. She was of European and Maori extraction. Refer to Appendix C to read interview schedules.

The two lesbian parents I approached to interview were both known to me through informal social contacts in the lesbian community. I interviewed Ellen, a 40 year old lesbian parent who identified as lesbian. While she had a working class upbringing she saw that her work had moved her more into the middle classes. The opportunity to interview the other lesbian parent who had a student at the school lapsed because she moved to another centre.

The planning group was to play an ongoing role in the design and development of the project within the school. While it was initially envisaged that lesbian students and parents should be part of the planning group, none whom I or the counsellor approached felt comfortable about joining the group. They did not feel confident to be identified in the school.

The group ended up consisting of teachers and counsellors who volunteered to work with me to guide the direction of the project in the school. I became aware early on, from both teachers' comments and my own observations, that the majority of the planning group (apart from Sylvie the counsellor and myself) were young and enthusiastic (but relatively inexperienced) teachers, who actually had very little power in the school. So with that in mind I approached Nellie, an experienced teacher who I had initially interviewed and she agreed to participate in the group.

We also made overtures to members of the senior administration team to join the planning group for the same reason. Initially three of them agreed to attend in rotation and also agreed to keep a joint journal, however as time went on their attendance became increasingly rare. The Principal, Felicity, was 45 years old and had taught for 23 years. She described herself as heterosexual. One Senior Manager, Elizabeth, was 58 years old and had taught for thirty years and defined herself as heterosexual. The other Senior Manager, Pearl was 44 years old and had taught for 24 years. She described

herself as straight. Despite attempts to involve older and more experienced staff this was only partially successful for a number of reasons. As I explain later it emerged as a factor in the lack of 'ownership' of the project felt by the wider staff.

The planning group consisted of four teachers who attended regularly. Sylvie, a 49 year old guidance counsellor and Health teacher, Linda the co-ordinator of the Health programme in the school and a PE teacher was a 26 years old and described herself as middle-class and heterosexual. She had been teaching for five years and this was her first job. Briony was a 28 year old Science teacher who came into the planning group in the second year of the project. She had been teaching for three years and this was her first year in the school. She described herself as heterosexual.

Over the two years of the project the members of the planning group met on a monthly basis with me to plan and reflect on progress. They recorded their reflections on the process of the project in individual journals that were used as data. I draw on their perspectives in Chapter 6 and 7.

Field notes were used to record participant observations of a Health day (a day where Year 12 and 13 students attended a variety of workshops on youth health issues conducted by the Family Planning Association and Community Health nurses)<sup>9</sup>. Writing about the multiple roles that I played in the project was an important way to take stock of my own behaviour, actions and decisions especially as I was a key instrument in the research process (Richardson, 1994). This strategy was to prove important very early on because the opportunity arose for me to be involved in in-service training of twelve Health. I facilitated a one hour workshop which focused on exploring integrating lesbian, gay and bisexual perspectives into the Sexuality component of the Health curriculum (for an outline of the content of that session see Appendix D). Realising I needed to gain some feedback on my role as a teacher in the project, I asked the Health teachers to provide written replies to a set of questions and their responses became another source of data. However due to the six week holiday break I didn't receive many responses back.<sup>10</sup>

Formal written documents pertaining to Kereru Girls College were also drawn on to enable me to ascertain the extent to which they provided support for lesbian students,

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<sup>9</sup> The Health day that I observed at the end of 1996 was the final one at the school, it was before the formal Health curriculum was brought into the year 12 programme.

<sup>10</sup> This time lapse was my problem, it took me a while to realise that I needed feedback from the workshops I conducted in order to provide perspectives other than my own on the training work I undertook with groups in the school.

staff and parents.<sup>11</sup> These included, the school prospectus, Education Review Office reports and copies of school policies that were relevant to inclusion for lesbian parents and students such as equity and sexual harassment policies and the current school prospectus.

The Phase Two interview transcripts, along with my field notes and the school's written documentation were coded manually using Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) coding categories. I drafted numerous visual diagrams to identify and clarify emerging patterns and dissonances in the data findings, and, also, to represent the complexities of the emerging themes. The diagrams proved helpful when I presented the information back to the participants in the member checks as I explain shortly.

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<sup>11</sup> The most notable feature of policies was the lack of them, or of procedures about how they were to be implemented. However a survey on bullying and harassment had been conducted which provided some useful information to base policies and procedures on.

## **The Collision of Emerging Queer/ Post-structural Conceptual and Pedagogical Directions and Indications of Ideological Tensions**

Significant disjunctures emerged between the students' and the teachers' perspectives in coding the interview data, writing analytic memos and drawing diagrams (see Appendix E and the diagram on page 191). The teachers raised questions concerning the extent to which addressing the needs of lesbian and bisexual students called into question how they understood their roles as teachers and the role of the school. The students, however, provided me with an incisive account of how they and their peers constructed their understandings of sexuality and gender, and of the complex and shifting interrelationships between these two constructs. I was also undertaking an increasing amount of feminist, queer and post-structural reading concerning the ways in which school sites operated as venues where discursive understandings of gender and sexuality were in a constant state of production and contestation, (Davies, 1995; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Mac an Ghail, 1994b). As a result I became really interested in thinking about the discursive production of constructs of sexuality and gender. These approaches seemed to hold some possibilities in terms of moving beyond abnormal constructions of same sex desire as binary constructions. I explain more about the pedagogical possibilities of these approaches in Chapter 7. What was intended as a methodological formality became an exciting, if somewhat, problematic pedagogical opportunity which consolidated my own theoretical shift at the same time as it brought out into the open some of the ideological tensions raised by undertaking work on sexual diversity in schooling contexts.

The intention of the two separate member checks with the students and staff within the school was to ensure that I had interpreted the perspectives of the participants in line with their intentions (Lather, 1991). Because I was a key instrument in the project as both a teacher and as a researcher (Richardson, 1994), I tape-recorded the two member checks with the participants' permission, and used them to provide a reflexive opportunity for me to be able to document and analyse my role in the study more closely. The process also enabled me to gain participants' spoken responses.

The student feedback consisted of an hour long session with the entire group of Year 13 (about 170 students) in the school hall. Because the emphasis in the student interviews had been weighted so strongly towards their understanding of the ways in which sexuality and gender were constructed and contested in their peer world, I made the decision to focus solely on the student interview data. After presenting my interpretation of the data, I asked for the Year 13 student's group and individual responses to my interpretations, their ideas on what could happen in the school to

create a more inclusive environment for lesbian and bisexual students, and how they saw their role in that process. They had the opportunity to talk in groups and also to provide individual written responses which they gave their permission for me to use as data. The anonymous feedback I gained from the students is drawn on, along with the initial student interview data in Chapter 7. At the end of the session the Head of the Student Council expressed her willingness on behalf of the Student Council to participate in the research and invited me to their next meeting to talk about the project. Because of the short notice of the session I was unable to consult with the planning group over the format of the session, however I did consult with the lesbian and bisexual students I interviewed.

I was aware that the student member check could make the lesbian and bisexual students I had interviewed feel very vulnerable. I talked to them before the session about how this could be minimised for them. They saw the preliminary data analysis before the session and we talked about how I planned to facilitate the session. In order to protect their identities they chose pseudonyms and I altered their demographic details using Middleton's (1993) technique of building a composite picture up of her participants which I have explained earlier. I also de-briefed the session with them later on in the day.

One of the unexpected outcomes of the member checks, particularly the student session, was that in addition to gaining a wide range of responses and reactions to the preliminary findings and gaining valuable data, anonymous feedback from the students indicated that the session also provided the opportunity to explore the construction of sexual and gendered identities. While not an unproblematic process (particularly for the lesbian and bisexual students I interviewed) as I explain more fully in Chapter 7, the member check unexpectedly provided a learning experience for the students as well as for me. As Butler (1990, 1993) and others (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Quinlivan & Town, 1999b) suggest, an articulation of understandings about sexuality and gender often provides the opportunity to explore the limitations and constraints of those constructs. I began to think about what it might mean to work like this in the classroom with students. It had unexpectedly provided me with a working model of the potential of queer and feminist post-structural pedagogies, and I wanted more!

The member check with students reminded me how powerful research can be as a learning and teaching tool and how much I enjoyed working with students. Listening to the tape afterwards, I reflected on my own positionality in the process. During the session I realised how unconsciously I had drawn on my teaching skills. In many ways it reflected my 'outsider within' (Hill-Collins, 1991) status at Kereru Girls' College

generally. While I was framed as a university researcher, I also drew heavily on my teaching experience and skills to get me through what was a challenging pedagogical task. Trying to work collaboratively with 170 students taxed me to the limit. Listening to the tape recording I made of the session, I realised the extent to which I had traded on my expertise as a teacher to break the ice with the students and establish credibility. I did this (totally subconsciously, I realised later) by dropping comments in a low key and humorous way to let the students know that I had taught Year 13 students before.

During the session I did not disclose my own queer/ lesbian subjectivity with the students. This was not a conscious decision I had decided to adopt beforehand. From my teaching experience I was aware that I had tended to read the atmosphere and choose how to manage disclosures about my sexuality depending on how well I knew those people and the particular role I was playing within a specific context. One of the key factors in determining the level of my disclosure was my sense of personal safety. Within the particular context of the session, I had felt too unsafe to do this. Instead, like many lesbian teachers (Khayatt, 1992), I focused on developing my professional credibility as an educator and as a researcher. However, the fact that I wasn't open about my sexuality didn't prevent students approaching their Dean later to query why a lesbian teacher was coming into the school 'promoting and recruiting' as they described it.

While there was some resistance to the presence of a project such as this in the school in the student session, it was during the teacher member check that the ideological and structural constraints faced by a school undertaking work on addressing issues of sexual diversity came to the fore much more explicitly.

The planning group and I collaborated in planning the format of the staff member check session. Unlike the student member check, the findings which I discussed focused on the wider culture of the school from a range of student and teacher perspectives, along with their suggestions of how things could be different for lesbian and bisexual students. In the first half of the hour it was planned to focus on one or two findings from the student and staff data. In the second half hour we would focus on planned action. The planning group thought it would be useful to provide the staff with a summary of the aims and methods of the project and an outline of what had happened so far. We agreed that there should be time for staff to think and comment, both in groups and individually in order to provide us with ideas we hadn't thought about, maybe through the use of focus questions. For an outline of the session see Appendix F.

The planning group agreed to spread themselves amongst the groups in order to



facilitate the sessions. I agreed to provide written material to answer staff queries that had emerged about the validity of qualitative research methodology. As with the student member check, I explained that I wanted to tape record the session to provide a reflexive opportunity for me to be able to document and analyse my role in the study more closely (Richardson, 1994). This was agreed to by both the planning group and the staff in the session on the day.

As it turned out there was only three quarters of an hour available at the end of a staff meeting so the session was quite rushed. I felt that the level of engagement that I experienced in the student member check was absent in the staff session. An extract from my field notes shows that the seeds of the structural and ideological tensions that were raised by the presence of the project in the school were present in the session:

There was a lot of talk although I sensed that some people felt uncomfortable talking about it and at the end some rushed out very quickly.... They all handed their pieces of paper in at the end and some members of staff stayed talking and came up to me at the end and reported that some of the groups felt that this issue had nothing to do with school. When I asked if there were any questions at the end there were none, instead I talked briefly about qualitative research methods. The written responses suggested that teachers felt uncomfortable talking about their own ideas and a conflict between representing their ideas and the ideas of the school. There was a lot of material that will be useful when it comes to organising a staff training session in order to meet staff needs. I am beginning to see that deep change in a school is very hard to achieve (Field notes, 24 February 1997).

My field notes show that I was beginning to understand the enormity involved in working to re-culture a school, and some of the fundamental ideological questions which are posed by the presence of a research project such as this one in a school. One of the reasons for this was the amount of reading that I was undertaking in the area of inclusive school reform. It became clear that the project raised philosophical issues about the role of education in society, and ideological questions concerning the role of teachers and the politics of knowledge. At that time I thought that it would be enough to make the challenges explicit and acknowledge them while continuing to develop and implement the project. What I didn't take into account was the extent to which the presence of the project within the school fundamentally challenged teaching beliefs that were deeply ingrained within the culture of the teaching staff. I also underestimated the extent to which what I saw as the interesting and rather exciting theoretical and pedagogical possibilities of queer and post-structural paradigms for addressing sexual diversity and normalising constructs of heterosexuality were to actually prove far more

threatening than the initial inclusion framework I had begun with. However, all that was to come and for the moment the direction of the research design was situated within an equity paradigm.

So students' suggestions together with staff responses, the ideas of the planning group and myself which were informed by suggestions from the literature I have explained previously, formed the basis of the project. The suggestions, which emerged from member checks with staff and students, fell into three main areas; the curriculum, educating educators and developing policies and procedures to deal with harassment. Three additional areas were also included in the school-wide model: working with students, working with the guidance network, and parent information and consultation.

Initial planning in curriculum emerged from current literature on lesbian and gay issues in the curriculum and my own ideas and expertise. It centered on three main areas, the new national Health curriculum, either the English or Social Studies curriculum and on the hidden curriculum which is the learning which occurs informally both inside and outside the classroom (Alton-Lee & Densem, 1992; McGee, 1997). Initially we planned to work through the Curriculum Committee in the school to co-ordinate these projects, but this never eventuated due to the pressing need for the committee to implement the new national curriculum within tight time frames.

The major focus became developing the teaching and content of the Health curriculum so as to reflect lesbian and gay perspectives. It involved me working with the Health co-ordinator to integrate lesbian and gay perspectives in the form of activities into the Year 11 and 12 Health curriculum level, and ongoing professional development with Health teachers to enable their practice to be inclusive of lesbian and gay perspectives. It was also planned that aspects of the hidden curriculum could be addressed through working with the librarians to provide displays of lesbian and gay literature and posters, and making books and resources freely available to students. While the work on the curriculum was undertaken, the library initiatives never materialised.

The second area which the school wide model of change focused on was professional development for the teaching staff. In the member check the teachers themselves had identified three areas of professional development that would enable them to meet the needs of lesbian students better. These included; the provision of information, working on developing teacher attitudes and behaviours that were inclusive of lesbian students and parents. The feedback from both the staff and student member checks indicated that both these sessions had played a role in raising the awareness of the two groups. It was planned to build on that awareness by running future sessions with the staff.

The third area of development was working on the development of policies and procedures to work towards developing safe environment for lesbian students and parents at the school. Initiatives planned in this area included the development of bullying and sexual harassment policies and procedures and equity policies.

The fourth aspect to the model involved working with students. Initially the plan was to liaise with the Student Council (the group was comprised of senior students who facilitated student action and initiatives in the school) in order to find out how students would like to participate in the project. This suggestion emerged from the student member check and the first set of student interviews. There was also the suggestion of forming a Gay/Straight Alliance in the school, training peer support students and working through student representatives on the newly formed Health Council.

The fifth component of the model included undertaking professional development with the guidance network. The guidance network was a strong body which co-ordinated pastoral support within the school. It was comprised of the guidance counsellors and Deans of each level. It was planned to undertake professional development with this group on issues such as counselling issues for lesbian and bisexual students, supporting lesbian and gay parents, networking within the community to support lesbian and bisexual students, and raising the awareness of their class teachers.

The final aspect of the model involved parent information and consultation. The planning group intended to inform parents about the project and also to gain reactions and feedback from them through Parent Teacher Association meetings, Health curriculum consultations, level meetings at the beginning of the year, and the school newsletter. It was planned to maintain informal contact with lesbian and gay parents through the guidance network and my personal contacts. See Appendix G for a diagram that summarises the model.

Looking back I can see that all the ingredients for what were to emerge as key issues in the study were indicated in the first stage of the methodological process. The long and drawn out access process provided an indication of the ideological and philosophical challenges that confront schools who are willing to participate in a project which explores affirming sexual diversity. In addition there was some indication of the massive structural challenges which would need to be negotiated in order to re-culture a school community. Exacerbating all of these factors was the evolving theoretical shifts I was going through in terms of conceptualising understandings of sexuality. All of these factors were to come into more prominence in the second methodological phase.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**JUGGLING CONSTRAINTS AND EXPLORING THE**  
**IMPLICATIONS OF CONCEPTUAL SHIFTS: THE SECOND AND**  
**THIRD METHODOLOGICAL STAGES**

While the research design was loosely adhered to and was moving ahead in some areas, there were a number of methodological challenges and constraints emerging in the project that needed to be addressed. In this stage of the methodology I explain how the structural, ideological and conceptual challenges became increasingly explicit and how shifts in the research design were an attempt to accommodate those challenges. However, some of these constraints couldn't be addressed through altering the research design and I was finding that my own shifting conceptual frameworks provided me with some new ways of thinking about change which enabled me to see my way through some of the challenges that needed to be negotiated.

The first methodological challenge was the tight time frame that I was working under. The more reading about initiating inclusive school reform I did, the more I realised that attempting to develop the school-wide model of change I have outlined would be impossible under the time frame I was working in for the Ph.D. Fullan (1992) and others (Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1996; Leiberman, 1995) suggest that implementing effective school change is a complex and long-term process, the benefits of which may not become apparent for at least three to five years. It was clear that some aspects of the planned research design would have to be scaled down.

The next set of dilemmas I want to draw attention to are the structural constraints that constitute the everyday working world of schools. Skrtic (1995) dwells at length on the inability of schools to actually create a democratic culture within the current school structure. As I explained earlier, he suggests that one of the main reasons for the problem is that the professional bureaucracy of teachers working in classrooms with students remains largely unhinged from the administrative roles that schools perform which Skrtic (1995) describes as the machine bureaucracy in schools. The most obvious example of this process concerns the development of policies and procedures that are generally not referred to unless a specific instance requires it. Most of the time they lie gathering dust in a cupboard somewhere, as was the case at Kereru Girls' College. As a symbol of change which appears to guarantee a democratic or inclusive school for all students they exist, but their existence does not necessarily mean they are used. Skrtic's analysis also helped me to understand what makes it so challenging to actually influence and change teachers' classroom practice. As I knew from my own practice as

a classroom teacher, raising the awareness of teachers does not necessarily mean that they change their practice (Kenway & Willis, 1997), although sometimes they can. As I explain more fully shortly, working with teachers at Kereru Girls' College proved problematic and challenging because many teachers did not see addressing issues of sexual diversity as their role.

The structures of schools and teachers' current workload in Phase Two of the project meant that it was well nigh impossible to find a time for the teachers in the planning group to meet or to develop many of the initiatives which were planned. Because the majority of the participants in the planning group were all beginning teachers, they were teaching five to six classes in one to two subjects. On top of those daily responsibilities they attended regular subject meetings (which were particularly important given the national curriculum change going on at the time). Several planning group participants also had lunchtime subject related work as well as lunchtime and after school duty. It was not uncommon that we could not find a time that suited all of us to meet.

Ironically, everything that the literature suggested made for good educational practice in schools; reflexivity, collaboration, vision building, and innovation from the 'bottom-up' (Fullan, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Leiberman, 1995) was difficult to achieve because of the school structure and teacher overload. The increased teacher workload from implementing the new curriculum and assessment procedures meant many of the teachers I spoke to perceived that there was no time for anything else beyond teaching their subject areas. For example, Linda, the teacher in charge of Health, was currently writing the Health curriculum for Year 9-13 students and training and assisting Health teachers to implement the programme on a time allocation of one hour a week!

In addition to the structural constraints of working within schools, there were also some limitations emerging with the makeup of the planning group. My attempts to recruit teachers with a wider range of ages and teaching experience to participate in the planning group had not proved successful. It was becoming clearer that although the planning group members were interested and committed, (despite the lack of time they had to devote to the group), they had no real 'mana', or social standing in the school. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that the senior administration team presence at the planning group meetings was intermittent. Sylvie the guidance counsellor and planning group member explains in an interview held later with her:

Well I think that part of the problem there was the composition of the (planning)

group was very much people with not a lot of power and say so in the school ... so basically the people who wanted to put the time in were not pivotal really... I think that (the admin team) haven't really actively supported it, particularly this year. In fact, even that is enough to actively unsupport it in some way. I just think if they'd been in there, when I think of the work that we have done and are planning to do just around straight bullying, they'll mention it, it'll come up, I won't be the only one who's saying, "Hey what about this?" (Sylvie, guidance counsellor and planning group member, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

The composition of the planning group and the intermittent presence of the senior administrators were things that it was not possible to do anything more about. Looking back I think they provided an indication of the lack of 'ownership' of the project with the wider staff. However, while these structural constraints couldn't be changed, the earlier factors I mentioned could.

Fullan (1992) suggests that schools attempting to implement innovations which were beyond their ability to carry out can result in massive failure, and that breaking down complex changes into manageable components and implementing them in an incremental manner is one way to deal with this problem. I thought that many of the structural constraints which make undertaking this work difficult would be eliminated if I was able to focus on one area. It would also reduce the logistical difficulties inherent in getting large numbers of staff and students together as well as cut down the considerable personal, hourly or financial resources that were required of me as a researcher to undertake the facilitation and development of a school-wide model of change.

I made sense of these emerging constraints and what could be done (if anything) about them by writing field notes, analytic memos and discussions with the planning group. I was increasingly becoming dependent on these methodological tools to clarify and reflect on what was happening. Developing reflexivity about the research process was providing me with some interesting and valuable data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b) that enabled me to understand the complexities of what it means for schools and researchers to undertake work on affirming sexual diversity. Through these processes it became clearer that focusing on the area of the Health curriculum would be preferable. Let me explain why.

Data from the Phase One at Takahe High School, and feedback from both the staff and students at Kereru Girls' College, suggested that one of the main areas to focus on in

developing inclusion for lesbian and bisexual students is the content and delivery of the sexuality component within the Health education curriculum. There were several theoretical and practical reasons for choosing to focus on this area. One was that the development of the Health curriculum was in its early stages of development within the school, and assistance in writing the programme and assisting professional development with staff could be helpful. In terms of reciprocity, I had already worked with the Health co-ordinator to develop classroom activities inclusive of lesbian, gay and bisexual perspectives which could be integrated in the Year Nine, and Year Ten Health programmes. I had also conducted a training session with Health teachers on how to weave queer perspectives into the content of the curriculum.

I was also interested in the challenge that working in the curriculum area posed. Researchers agree that the content and delivery of the school curriculum in the classroom acts as a powerful legitimator of knowledge (Alton-Lee & Densem, 1992; Apple, 1996), and that schools operate as cultural sites to reproduce understandings and practices about sexuality both in the formal and hidden curriculum (Redman, 1994; Sears, 1992b). Previously many approaches to addressing issues of inclusion for lesbian and gay sexuality within sexuality education had consisted of a predominantly heterosexual focus with a one-off session on lesbian and gay sexuality which tended to minoritise and marginalise same sex desire in relation to the heterosexual norm (Quinlivan, 1994; Sears, 1992b; Town, 1998). Working in a dedicated curriculum area provided the opportunity to develop programmes within which lesbian, gay and bisexual perspectives were woven and integrated into the courses, and, also, to explore what these perspectives might mean in terms of classroom practice.

Data from Takahe High School suggested that developing a Health curriculum, inclusive of a range of different sexual perspectives was the least attempted and most difficult task for schools. I know that integrating lesbian and gay issues into the curriculum can be challenging and problematic within educational contexts because it can be seen to be endorsing a gay 'lifestyle', in effect, perceived as teaching students to be gay or lesbian (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Lipkin, 1999; Silin, 1995; Watney, 1991).

So the theoretical shifts I was negotiating had methodological implications. My own focus and area of interest was slowly shifting from a desire to provide reparation for a minority group within an equity framework, to actually attempting to problematise the process by which heterosexuality is constructed as normal. Research I had read suggested that one of the most important functions of educating youth about sexuality was to provide them with a venue within which to explore the social constructions of

sexuality and the understandings of gender and sexuality available to them (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Hinson, 1996). I also envisaged that undertaking this work in a single-sex girls' school would also enable me to undertake research which focused on addressing and developing representations of desire which Fine (1992a) and others saw as sadly lacking in sexuality education for young women. These developing interests meant that focusing on the area of the curriculum made more sense than what I had planned to do previously.

To that end, spurred on by the potential of what had happened working with year 13 students in the hall that I referred to previously, I was interested to work on developing the potential that queer and post-structuralist feminist pedagogies such as discourse analysis and deconstruction may provide in the classroom to widen representations of sexuality (Davies, 1995; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Kenway, 1996). In this way, learning about sexuality can move beyond being framed as a wholly biological imperative, into considerations which explore the complexities of sexual diversity such as its socially constructed and sometimes mutable manifestations (Britzman, 1995; 1998; Quinlivan & Town, 1999b; Seidman, 1996).

I thought that focusing on the development and implementation of representations of sexuality in the Health curriculum would therefore allow me to address the content and delivery of the formal curriculum in the classroom. It would provide me with the opportunity to work with a voluntary group of both teachers and students to develop classroom pedagogies that could explore sexual diversity more widely. How I planned to proceed at that stage was to approach two students and two staff to ask them if they would consider working with me in order to develop approaches to teaching sexuality which wove in some of the perspectives I have described.

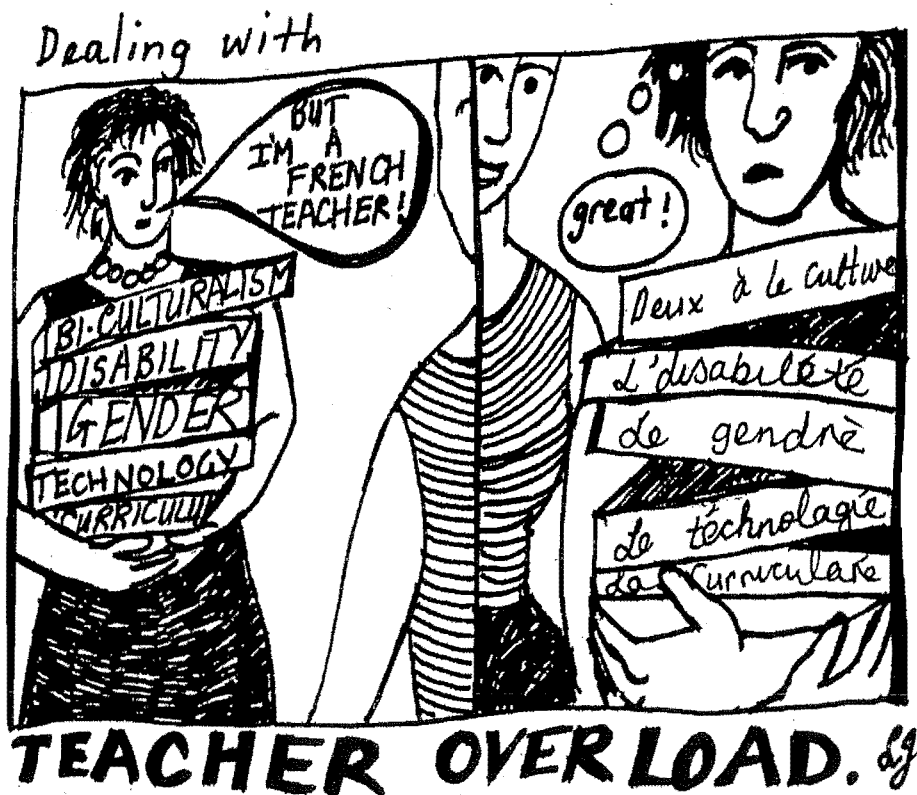
This was the proposal I put to the planning group. While they expressed disappointment at the thought of narrowing the focus of the project, they also understood the need for the project to be realistic and achievable within the available time frame. However, this plan came to nothing because while I could find students who were prepared to work with me on this aspect of the project, no Health teachers felt able to volunteer. The main reasons that they gave were the pressures of their workload and relative inexperience and lack of confidence working in the area of Health education. Several also told me that they were learning how to say "No" due to their workload. A certain amount of ideological resistance from teachers also became apparent at this stage. This primarily consisted of concerns expressed by administrators about parental complaints about the contentiousness of the research project that could adversely affect the



reputation of the school. Sylvie, for example, noted in her journal that these concerns were being more explicit and the resistance greater as the project proceeded:

Worries expressed about "What parents would say if too much came home [which indicated] that we'd been talking about this issue". Kathleen answered this, I answered this but it seems as if the resistance is stronger now than in the beginning. This is because we are now into it and actually doing things - not just talking about it (Sylvie's Journal Health teacher, guidance counsellor, planning group member, 29/5/97).

There was also resistance expressed over me gaining access to classrooms in order to carry out participant observations in Health classes. At Kereru Girls' College there appeared not to be a culture of teachers visiting each other's rooms. Several teachers suggested to me that classrooms were perceived to be a teacher's private domain in which they operated independently and unsurveilled, as professional bureaucrats<sup>1</sup> (Skrtic, 1995).



<sup>1</sup> It probably needs to be pointed out here that teachers going into each other's classes was regarded by me in my previous school and in my work in preservice teacher education as perfectly normal and in fact as something to be encouraged in order to break down what Hargreaves (1994) has referred to as the 'balkanisation' of teachers and teaching.

A range of teachers also suggested to me that their increased workload meant that the preparation time that was put into lessons was reduced. Despite my intentions to work collaboratively with teachers to develop ways of affirming sexual diversity in Health classes, some Health teachers thought that my role as a researcher was to provide them with factual resource material, and in some cases to do the teaching for them. So given that the re-worked proposal had no participants, the design had to shift again.

Because both the planning group and I still wanted to see what was possible in terms of developing a school-wide model of change, it seemed to make sense to build on some of the strategies that seemed most possible. After some discussion, the design of the project returned to the three original suggestions for initiatives that emerged from the staff and student member checks. The development of bullying and harassment policy and procedures had already begun therefore it seemed unwise not to follow through with that initiative. While it had been difficult gaining access to Health teachers and classrooms, eventually it was agreed that I could approach experienced Health teachers in order to conduct participant observations in classrooms. While three teachers agreed to participate, in the end due to time constraints I worked with one. Helen, a 51 year old Health teacher and guidance counsellor agreed to let me attend her year 12 Health classes as an observer. Previously it had been agreed that professional development with the staff on issues of sexual diversity was also a possibility and planned to undertake this. This three-fold design was what was proceeded with as we moved into the third and final methodological stage of the project.

Initially I thought that the constraints and difficulties could be acknowledged while at the same time proceeding with the action. To me it just seemed to be a matter of finding ways to make it work and if it didn't work one way then it we could try another. In that way it isn't surprising that I was sometimes perceived as stubborn and pushy (in addition to promoting and recruiting) by some teachers and administrators. As time went on though, I increasingly found negotiating the challenges frustrating and overwhelming. I dealt with these feelings by writing about them in my field notes.

While it was difficult for me in the school, it was even more challenging for some of the key informants in the project. Sylvie played a difficult role, negotiating between all the competing interests and sometimes feeling as if she could please no-one as she explains in her interview with me:

(I feel) sort of (like) piggy in the middle a lot of the time, just that you would be ringing up and coming in to see me ... I think it often left me thinking that I

couldn't please anybody really, that I couldn't get it right no matter what I did and I couldn't totally get a grip on what other staff people really thought about it, they weren't saying, ... that wasn't so easy for me... (Sylvie, Kereru Girls' College Interview, 29/5/98).

It was bearing all of these constraints in mind that the third and final methodological stage unfolded.

### **New Possibilities Emerge from Structural and Ideological Constraints: the Third Methodological Stage**

Despite the difficulties that had emerged, the three-fold research design model I described earlier proceeded. My role within each group shifted depending on the directions of the group and what skills were needed. Throughout the process I kept increasingly detailed field notes of what went on and the potential and the challenges that arose with each of the three strategies.

Meetings to plan the development of policies and procedures to deal with harassment and bullying began at the end of May 1997. The group was comprised primarily of students. Two staff members attended when they could fit it in between their lunch time commitments. Sylvie and I attended regularly. For a time, a student Health trainee also attended these meetings and contributed. Talking with students, it became clear that they saw that issues of general bullying took primacy over the specific harassment of lesbian and bisexual students and students with lesbian and gay parents. The group decided to focus on the development of policies and procedures to deal with bullying in the school, and the primacy of the project was subsumed by a general focus on harassment and bullying. I noted this shift in my field notes. My role in the group was as a teacher and as a researcher and my presence probably ensured that the harassment policy and procedures were inclusive of sexuality based harassment. Later in the year an hour was spent on professional development issues for teachers relating to the ongoing implementation and monitoring of policies and procedures to deal with bullying at the school. This session was organised by the group who developed the procedures. It involved student input, and was facilitated by Sylvie and me.

I also gained access to undertake participant observations in Helen's year 12 Health classroom. While initially she was unclear about what I was requesting and the level of work it would require from her, (much to my relief) she did agree to let me come and observe one of her Year12 Health classes. At the end of the first observation, she told

me I was welcome to sit in on the class again. I took up the opportunity in five subsequent Year 12 Health classes. However, the focus of the work had shifted from working with a teacher to develop and implement programmes, which is what I had originally envisaged.

Aside from observing what was happening in the classroom, as time went on Helen occasionally called on me to provide an opinion and several times as I felt increasingly comfortable, I interjected myself. Helen also expressed an interest in receiving responses and feedback to what I had observed in terms of content and pedagogy in the classroom. So, in mid-August 1997 we met and Helen gave me her responses to my observations and preliminary findings. She told me that as a result of the process she had decided to make some changes in the way that she taught the Sexuality component of the Health curriculum. I had thought that perhaps some of my comments might have provided a useful focus for some form of professional development for other Health teachers in the school at some point, but I don't know if this actually happened.

On the staff development front, progress was proving to be fairly slow. On several occasions both I and members of the planning group unsuccessfully attempted to arrange time for staff professional development. At that point because of the pressures on professional development, it appeared unlikely that a training workshop could be held until the end of the year. Dealing with the structural and ideological constraints that were manifesting themselves was proving increasingly challenging and frustrating. However, as time went on I began to see that the same queer and feminist post-structural tools which I was interested in exploring pedagogically in terms of widening representations of sexuality in the curriculum, also held some possibility in terms of understanding the ideological and structural challenges posed by the presence of a project to affirm sexual diversity at Kereru Girls' College. Let me explain.

In the first chapter I discussed how I underwent a paradigm shift in the way that I framed lesbian, gay and bisexual students. This shift influenced the methodological direction of the project and along with other mitigating factors redirected the methodology of the study. I moved from what Sedgwick (1990) would call a 'minoritising' to 'universalising' paradigm. In my earlier work and in the early stages of this project I framed queer students as a disadvantaged minority group requiring reparation under an equity framework. By 1997 I was moving towards thinking that the sexuality of these students (and by association they themselves) was not the problem. The issue which really needed to be addressed was the ways in which schools acted as heteronormalising institutions in order to legitimate heterosexuality while

simultaneously abnormalising same sex desire. The member check with Year 13 provided the opportunity to explore the process through which young women normalised heterosexuality and how I discovered that exploring that process using strategies such as discourse analysis and deconstruction provided an opportunity for understandings to shift. I realised that these tools could also be applied to the research process.

Instead of trying to fight the ideological and structural constraints I experienced at Kereru Girls' College, I recognised that the project could only really be a disruption to the predominantly heteronormative understandings of sexuality that were produced within the school. But drawing on Butler's (1990, 1993) notion of performativity allowed me to see that discursive meanings have the potential to shift every time they are articulated. Rather than see change happening within a linear, positivist framework, change could be strategic. So every time a construction of gender or sexuality was articulated through the research process, simultaneously, the opportunity to explore and subvert that understanding arose.

In this way I saw that perhaps documenting the constraints and challenges may lead to a richer understanding of what was at stake in undertaking work on sexual diversity in schools. So while the project carried on attempting whatever it could within a more comfortable equity framework, over a period of time I tended to focus more on documenting the processes I observed and participated in, in order to understand how issues such as lesbian and bisexuality, the intersections between gender and sexuality, sexualities and schooling, the research project and me as a queer researcher were being constructed. I became more interested in documenting what Foucault (1980) called a genealogy; in unpacking the process in order to understand how discourses of schooling and sexuality were constructed for young women, and what this suggested in terms of change.

I thought that framing the project as a disruption to the dominant heteronormative culture of the school had the potential to provide opportunities for achievable change in terms of classroom practice. At the same time, it would be useful to understand the nature of the challenges and constraints that came into play during the research process, because having an understanding of them means that they can be destabilised and changed. This dual pronged strategy is what I am advocating as an informed action approach. It is an approach which pays attention to the discursive construction and contestation of sexual and gendered identities within schooling contexts as well as a structural and ideological analysis of what it means for schools to undertake work to

affirm sexual diversity.

So from that point on I also became increasingly interested in what made a project such as this problematic to conduct in a school, this question frequently became the focus of planning group sessions, conversations with staff and students and my own field notes and writing of analytic memos. While I had been taking field notes steadily throughout the project, these began to become much more detailed and scrupulous and the focus of them shifted more to describing the various twists and turns of the process in order to understand what was happening. My design focus was shifting again. I wanted to document the process by which the school normalised heterosexuality and conversely abnormalised same sex desire, and how that process was disrupted by the presence of the project in the school.

I felt a certain relief in being able to stand back and observe and reflect rather than feeling as if I had to fight against what I increasingly came to see as overwhelming ideological and structural constraints. And interestingly, the process of standing back and observing and documenting the difficulties had the effect of destabilising what was heading towards a very polarised situation between me as a researcher and the resistance and containment that was directed towards the research project from some quarters within Kereru Girls' College. This approach also provided me with a way to see through the second staff workshop in October 1997.

With two days notice the research project was allocated an hour to work with staff on a session entitled, 'Strategies To Enable Staff To Respect Students' Sexual Diversity' on a Teacher-Only Day. While this session is the focus of Chapter 8, I just want to briefly allude to it here. It was planned and facilitated by Sylvie and me. We worked to develop and facilitate a workshop with staff which focused on trialing and discussing a range of strategies including discourse analysis and deconstruction which staff could use to affirm students sexual diversity. Due to time constraints, the planning group only had the opportunity to comment on our approach. They had their qualms and highlighted one of the factors which was emerging as a major ideological challenge within the project, the fact that the majority of teachers did not see their role as addressing issues of sexual diversity in their classrooms. Several of them also thought the session was too full. As it turned out their predictions were fairly accurate. It began with an update on the project and a summary of what had happened so far and the previous staff and student recommendations in terms of directions for the project. Then the staff divided into their own groups to carry out Think, Feel, Do exercises (See Appendix H) and feed that information back to the larger group. Finally some work on

deconstruction strategies was undertaken in groups. This session proved to be problematic for a number of different reasons. I discuss the complexities of this session fully in Chapter Eight.

Written feedback and responses to the workshop and the ideas presented in it were gained from the staff, as well as planning group members' journal entries about the session. These have been used as data<sup>2</sup>. A second workshop on the policies and procedures to deal with bullying and sexual harassment was also developed and facilitated by the two of us on the same day. No data was gathered from that session. I recorded my perceptions of what happened during the workshops in detailed field notes, and also wrote about my personal emotional responses (Kenway & Willis, 1997) to what I experienced as a very challenging session in which I felt vulnerable. I discuss fully the complexities of the session in Chapter 8. I felt that as much as was going to be achieved had been, and the experience of the staff workshop confirmed that it was time for me to exit the school.

Follow-up tape-recorded interviews were held with a range of student and staff participants to discuss their perspectives in December of that year and early in 1998. (See Appendix I). These interviews provided valuable data as to the intricacies of the project's process and also provided a sense of completion. The focus of these interviews were specific features of the project's process and how they worked, in particular the relationship between understandings of sexuality and gender that were played out in the school culture and how these operated to normalise heterosexuality and abnormalise same sex desire for young women. In addition to wanting to understand participants' perspectives of the research process, I was also interested to find out what they saw as obstacles to undertaking projects to affirm the sexual diversity of secondary school students in schools.

I interviewed two Year 13 students, Melissa, who identified as lesbian, and whom I had originally interviewed in 1996, and Margaret who was an eighteen years old Year 13 student and described herself as gay.<sup>3</sup> I also interviewed two teaching members of the planning group, Sylvie and Linda. The Principal, Felicity and the Senior Manager, Elizabeth were also interviewed to gain their perspectives on the process of the project.

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<sup>2</sup> Some staff requested that their comments not be used as data and accordingly I have not used those particular responses

<sup>3</sup> When I asked Margaret how she identified herself she replied that she saw herself as gay rather than lesbian. When I asked her why she replied that she thought that the word lesbian had negative connotations and gay sounded happier.

Finally, I interviewed Helen with whom I had worked in the middle stage of the project as a Health teacher.

### **Analysing Data Through Writing: Process/Re/presentation/ Feedback**

In this section I explore the role played by the writing process as a form of data analysis. I examine how I have addressed the crisis of representation that Denzin and Lincoln (1994a) and others (Lather, 1991; St Pierre, 1997) identify as currently facing qualitative research, and how I have represented the research process in the written form of the thesis. Finally I look at the role that ethics played in the writing process.

Richardson (1994) emphasises the importance of understanding writing as a form of data analysis to find out what you know, rather than as a task that simply records what is already discovered. The notion of writing as an explorative process was helpful in terms of using writing as a research tool to analyse the data. I have explained the extensive and increasingly detailed role that the writing of field notes and analytic memos played throughout the research process. These writing tools enabled me to negotiate the theoretical and methodological shifts the project went through, as well as the structural and ideological constraints which were a feature of the research process. I discovered early on that I could not hope to explore every aspect of the research projects in the two case study schools. Instead I have chosen to focus on findings which provided me with ways to understand the tensions, along with the possibilities inherent in working towards affirming sexual diversity within Takahe High School and Kereru Girls College. The writing of analytic memos enabled me to connect what happened during the project to issues that were being discussed in the literature fields of inclusive educational reform and queer/feminist writing on sexuality and gender. I found this helpful in clarifying implications for framing sexuality and gender in schools, and the effect these constructions would have on creating change in schooling contexts.

Analysis of the data was also undertaken through the writing of numerous drafts and short articles which were periodically reviewed and commented on by supervisors and reviewers in order that I could go back and re-work them. In this process I found that many of the original themes already identified collapsed and in some cases disregarded altogether in favour of interpretations which gradually appeared to become more layered. In many ways it felt a bit like peeling the layers of an onion. I found that the process of data analysis was in a continuous state of flux, informed by what I was reading, discussions and verbal and written feedback on my current interpretation. In this way I have come to see that whatever interpretation I currently hold is provisional,



rather than a definitive representation (Richardson, 1994). The form of the text represents a partial, locational and situational account of the research process that I have endeavoured to create in such a way as to be informed by multiple voices, including mine as a researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b; Richardson, 1994).

The current crisis of representation facing qualitative research also has implications for writers of qualitative research that makes writing more challenging. Rather than position this text as an authoritative or victory narrative, I have endeavoured to show the problematic and frustrating nature of the methodological and theoretical twists and turns of the study, which by necessity, positioned me in a constantly reflexive position in relation to the evolving process of the project (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b).

I have found St Pierre's (1997) notion of the 'aside' has proved a useful device in terms of creating a space which interrupts the dominant narrative. St Pierre (1997, p. 16) describes an aside as a: "mental space for writing and thinking". It performs multiple roles as a venue for play, analysis and also operates to de-territorialise the academic text. In each of the chapters, asides in the form of journal entries also perform a range of functions. I was interested in exploring ways that an 'aside' has the potential to disrupt positivist notions of authorial impartiality and rationality and provide another (parallel) story of the research process. I experimented with this idea by writing a journal which enabled me with a venue for making my multiple positionalities in the study explicit (Lather & Smithies, 1997; St Pierre, 1997). However, it also provided a space to address the high levels of emotionality that I experienced in the second phase of the project. In addition I often use it to show the shifts in thinking that were taking place so the journal entries also provide a space for reflecting and working out dilemmas both during the process of the research and once I had left the schools.

Despite the attempts I have made in my writing to destabilise the legitimacy of the written product, it is also important to acknowledge the extent to which writing is validated as an authoritative method of knowing (Lieberman, 1995; Richardson, 1994). This issue raises ethical responsibilities which need to be taken into account by researchers when writing about change process in schools. Lieberman (1995) draws attention to the dilemmas that researchers face when writing about the challenges involved in change processes in schools:

Schools and classrooms are embedded in a larger context, that may or may not be supportive of the change process... Researchers must be concerned about the effects of their writing on those whom they are researching as well as about the

comprehensiveness and accuracy of their observations. What is written as well as how it is written becomes important. Protecting people who are struggling to make changes, while at the same time, writing truthfully about the uneven and difficult change process becomes a major challenge. Researchers who are rewarded for written work must be sensitive to the fact that such writing creates an authority of its own that can be used to enhance or deepen understandings about schools but can also be used to disclose or punish schools (1995, p. 4).

On the one hand researchers need to explore the problems encountered as part of the process, and, on the other hand and at the same time, avoid blaming teachers and schools. I have attempted to address the complexities of the change process in schooling contexts by emphasising the extent to which the structural and ideological constraints within schools render undertaking work on sexual diversity a challenging prospect. Gaining participant feedback on the way in which I had analysed data analysis was another way of addressing the ethical concerns that Leiberman (1995) highlights. The participants in both phases of the project had this opportunity. For Phase One of the study the material was provided back to the participants at Takahe High School in written form providing the opportunity to review my findings and comment on them. I have included Richard's comments in Chapter 6 when I explore the first case study school more fully.

The Phase Two case study school participants had the opportunity to comment on drafts of chapters before they were published. Several participants have contributed observations that I have included in the text. After discussion with members of the planning group and the school administration team, it was decided that findings from Kereru Girls' College would be explored in a session with staff early in 2001.

In Part Two I have shown how the methodological shifts which characterised the project were necessitated by a complex and interlocking web of ideological and structural constraints that arose through undertaking work on sexual diversity within school contexts. I have analysed the theoretical shifts that I went through myself in terms of framing understandings of same sex desire and gender. These factors all had methodological implications that needed to be negotiated by both the participants and myself.

Lather, (1997) drew on the poet Rilke to reflect that in undertaking research, "... her reach always exceeded her grasp" (1997, pg. 1). Furthermore, she suggested that this state of affairs was even desirable, in that failure can be something to learn from.

Perhaps as Visweswaran (1994) suggests: "... accounts of failure frequently function to suggest better ones" (p.97).

In many ways the challenging, painful and sometimes insurmountable twists and turns of the methodology yielded valuable data that provided me with a fuller and richer picture of the complex range of issues faced by schools and researchers when they agree to participate in research on affirming sexual diversity within their cultures.

The methodological constraints which characterised the progress of the project, emphasise the importance of recognising and working toward addressing the structural and ideological challenges that emerge when the worlds of schooling and same sex desire collide. In addition, the queer and feminist post-structural theoretical directions I moved towards provided me with tools such as discourse analysis and deconstruction. These strategies held potential in terms of pedagogical approaches to address sexual diversity in classrooms, as well as providing me as a researcher with a way to understand, frame and situate the research process.

I suggest that a dual approach which addresses the structural and ideological constraints faced by schools, along with the utilisation of post-structuralist pedagogies to widen representations of sexuality and gender may provides some way forward in terms of working towards addressing sexual diversity in schools. This 'informed action' approach which I advocate addresses both the structural and ideological complexities of schools as well as the discursive construction of sexuality and gender within a schooling context.

### PART THREE

## PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES: A LONE RANGER CHANGE AGENT PUSHES THE BOUNDARIES OF NEO-LIBERAL EQUITY MODEL TO WORK TOWARDS MEETING THE NEEDS OF LESBIAN AND GAY STUDENTS AT TAKAHE HIGH SCHOOL

(Schools) actually defuse the debate over the role of schooling in the reproduction of the knowledge and people 'required' by the society, by defining the ultimate causes of deviance as within the child or his or her culture and not due to say, poverty, the conflicts and disparities generated by the historically evolving cultural and economic hierarchies of the society (Apple, 1995, p. 51).

I agree with the argument that the school can have its cake and eat it by labelling out queer kids as 'at risk' and treating them as such. I also agree that the reason that they are at risk is because of the homophobic environment in which they have to function and not at risk because of their sexuality per se. However the fact remains that they are at risk, and given that it is difficult in the short term to change their homophobic environment, they need to find strategies that will enable them to cope (Richard, gay male teacher, Takahe High School, written feedback on thesis draft, 2000).

### Introduction

In Part Three I examine how ideological, structural and macro contextual constraints of schooling intersect with individual school cultures to produce a space within which the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual students can be met. I explore the strengths and the limitations of the way in which Richard, an openly gay male teacher, facilitated the inclusion of lesbian and gay students through drawing on neo-liberal models of equity at Takahe High School.

Apple (1995) explains the ways in which this approach can limit the possibilities for addressing what I suggest is the real 'problem': the ways that schools act as sites to reinforce the normality of heterosexuality at the expense of other forms of sexual expression. Both Richard's and Apple's comments reflect some of the tensions involved in this approach. On the one hand, the potential for addressing the needs of individual self-identified lesbian and gay students is present within neo-liberal models of equity. However as Gordon (1993) suggests in relation to equity issues, and Kenway and Willis (1997) argue specifically in relation to gender reform, this is likely to happen in a neo-liberal educational climate when there is an individual within a school who identifies the

needs of minority students as an equity issue, and works as a change agent within her or his school. At Takahe High School, an openly gay teacher, Richard, played this role. However, while the potential exists for meeting the needs of self-identified lesbian and gay students, there are also some problems that arise with the use of the neo-liberal equity model in terms of addressing issues of sexual diversity within schooling contexts. The approach runs the risk of re-pathologising lesbian and gay students by reinforcing what is framed as the individual student's abnormality. This can ironically result in the normality of heterosexuality being reinforced and the wider heteronormative culture of the school remaining intact and unchallenged.

Given the paucity of initiatives in schools that attempt to meet lesbian and gay youth, and the fact that I myself operated as a lone ranger change agent when I was teaching in schools in much the same way as Richard does, it is with some reluctance that I venture into critiquing the initiatives of Richard and his colleagues at Takahe High School. While there are considerable benefits to the approach, aspects of the strategies raise some troubling questions. These include: the unintended consequences of framing lesbian and gay students as 'at risk', the viability of the strategies in developing school wide models of change, and the valorisation of particular representations of queer sexuality at the expense of others.

**CHAPTER SIX**  
**DRAWING ON NEO-LIBERAL EQUITY DISCOURSES**  
**TO MEET THE NEEDS OF LESBIAN AND GAY STUDENTS**  
**AT TAKAHE HIGH SCHOOL**

In the late 1980s the liberal left Labour government incorporated the principle of equity into educational legislation in the “Tomorrow’s Schools” (1989) document. Equity legislation as it was developed within the context of the liberal left reforms endeavoured to provide some parity between groups within a pluralist society. Schools were seen as organisations that could effect some justice for disadvantaged groups through the allocation of additional resources to minority groups to assist those groups in achieving more equitable outcomes (Alton-Lee & Pratt, 2000; Middleton, 1988).

Liberal left notions of equity can be seen in the original school charter frameworks developed in the “Tomorrow Schools” legislation. Within school charters, compulsory principles related to equity objectives were seen to be the responsibility of individual school’s Boards of Trustees (Ministry of Education, 1989). Schools were also obligated to develop equity goals and objectives. These mandatory goals included: providing a non-sexist and non-racist curriculum and school environment, ensuring school policies and practices that sought equitable outcomes for students of both sexes, providing role models to serve as exemplars of equity in everyday behaviour, and developing policies and practices to eliminate sexual harassment.

The change from a Labour to a conservative right National government, and amendments to the 1989 Education Act saw the principle of equitable outcomes and mandatory goals related to equity in schools revoked. The neo-liberal discourses that underpinned the decision emerged in the Treasury’s briefing to the incoming Labour government of 1987 (The Treasury, 1987) and the Picot report (Ministry of Education, 1998). It was described by the Ministry of Education as a “move away from the detailed, prescriptive nature of the previous guidelines” so that they would be more “in keeping with the philosophy of self management inherent in the Education Act 1989” (The Treasury, 1987, p. 10). This is a significant shift. Under a neo-liberal ideology, equity takes on a very different meaning from the social justice understandings that underpinned liberal left meanings of equity.

Within a neo-liberal framework, education primarily plays an economic, rather than a social, political or moral role. Neo-liberal understandings of equity are related to the notion of market choice. Equity is framed as an individual’s right to freely choose an

education that best suits their individual needs, and prepare them in the best possible way to compete in the marketplace beyond schools.

A neo-liberal analysis sees an interventionist government as a limiting factor in enabling individuals to freely exercise their rights through choosing educational opportunities that best suit their needs. It was thought that neo-liberal forms of equity would most likely eventuate if the role of government in administering schools was minimised through a devolution of power to schools and communities. It was seen to be the responsibility of individual Boards of Trustees to address equity issues in their school. The expectation was that communities would pressure schools in order to gain the kind of schooling that best suited them, and if they were unhappy with this, then they could move to another education provider where their needs would be more likely to be met. Jones and Jacka (1995) suggest that one of the problems with neo-liberal approaches to addressing issues of equity is that they fail to acknowledge that some groups in society would find advocating for their needs easier to undertake than others. It is highly unlikely that lesbian and gay students and parents who commonly experience the heteronormative cultures of schools as unsafe environments to be open about their sexuality would feel confident enough to lobby for their needs to be met. In addition, Gordon's (1993) study suggests that Boards of Trustees frequently feel uncertain and ill-equipped to address equity issues in their schools.

Gordon (1993, 1994) and Kenway and Willis (1997) have drawn attention to the way in which equity issues tend to be neglected when market models of education take precedence. Kenway and Willis suggests that within a market driven, devolutionary climate, the role of schooling and of educators becomes more conservative and that education becomes increasingly narrow in the way that it is conceptualised. Restructuring initiatives underpinned by notions of corporate managerialism tend to take precedence over equity issues. As a result, there have been severe cuts in financial and personnel support for gender reform and equity issues generally. One example of this is the 1992 dis-establishment of the Girls and Women Section within the Ministry of Education (Alton-Lee & Pratt, 2000).

Gordon (1993) suggests that there is a major tension existing between the development of equity programmes and the pressure that schools feel under to market themselves in a devolutionary climate. This creates an environment where maintaining the reputation of schools is paramount. Kenway and Willis (1997) suggest that in this more conservative climate, schools are less inclined to risk their reputations by being seen to address what are often seen as controversial equity issues. Given the difficulties I

experienced gaining access to schools to undertake this study, I would suggest that this is particularly likely to be the case with issues of sexual diversity.

Establishing the market model of education has also resulted in major educational restructuring and work intensification for teachers. Kenway and Willis (1997) suggest that reform fatigue has made the task of addressing issues of gender equity particularly difficult. In addition, professional development at the individual school level has become an increasingly contested area because of the competing priorities within limited school budgets. Gordon (1993) suggests that developing systems of accountability and marketing tend to be given priority over equity issues for Boards of Trustees because they are more pressing and often easier to achieve.

Both Kenway and Willis (1997) and Gordon (1993) suggest that as a result of these changes and pressures, equity and gender reform are likely to drop off the agenda at the local level. Therefore the responsibility of addressing equity issues increasingly rests with individual teachers. These authors suggest that it will be activists at the school level who will keep those issues on the agenda. However, due to the intensification of teacher workloads, the likelihood of individuals within school communities being proactive is becoming increasingly remote (Kenway & Willis, 1997).

Despite these limitations, in the New Zealand context political pressure has been placed on the government from a range of community groups to demand that the education sector was to be seen to be proactive in terms of working to readdress societal inequalities (Alton-Lee & Pratt, 2000). This need was addressed through targeting additional resources towards groups that were perceived to be disadvantaged. Individual schools were required to identify disadvantaged students, and provide strategies that would enable them to compete more equitably with other more 'advantaged' students. Students who have been identified as 'at risk' in a New Zealand context include girls, Maori and Pacific Island students and truants (Education Review Office, 1997), and more recently, boys. An increasing amount of research documenting the homophobia that lesbian, gay and bisexual students are subjected to within the heteronormative cultures of schools, suggests that they also could be considered as an 'at risk' group (Khayatt, 1994; Nairn & Smith, 2001; Quinlivan, 1994; Sears, 1991; Town, 1998; Trenchard & Warren, 1984).

Legislation that requires schools to legally address the needs of these disadvantaged or 'at risk' students can be seen in the National Educational and Administration Guidelines (Ministry of Education, 1993a), and the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993b). The National Education Guidelines (Ministry of



Education, 1993a) specify that it is the legal responsibility of all schools to ensure that programmes should enable all youth to reach their full potential, that equality of educational opportunity should be maintained by schools identifying and removing all barriers to achievement and success in their learning, and that those students with special needs should be identified and receive appropriate support. National Administration Guidelines were also specified in the same document. These required Boards of Trustees to provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students and to comply in full with any legislation currently in force or that may be developed to ensure the safety of students and employees (Education Review Office, 1997). In New Zealand, the Education Review Office is legally responsible to ensure schools comply with these policies. However Alton-Lee and Pratt (2000) point out that unlike the Australian equity policy, the New Zealand policy was never translated into action plans. In an Australian context, Thonemann (1999) identifies a politically supportive state environment and progressive lesbian and gay rights legislation as factors that enable schools to develop initiatives to address homophobia at a micro level. However, the New Zealand Ministry of Education has not provided Boards of Trustees with a definition of 'barriers to learning', nor has it provided schools with any guidelines that would enable schools to overcome them.

In an attempt to provide some direction to schools, the Education Review Office (1997) has identified a number of school features that may contribute to an unsafe physical and emotional environment for students. While not directly identifying lesbian and gay youth as a disadvantaged group, features that research suggests could be relevant to them include sexual harassment, loneliness, and the behaviour of teachers and/or other students that induce fear. The Education Review Office suggested that in some schools, a relevant and comprehensive Health education programme, run in combination with an effective guidance network and clinical health services has gone some way to overcome these barriers to learning. These three characteristics are features of Takahe High School.

Both the school reform literature (Hargreaves, 1994; Leiberan, 1995) and emergent studies that examine the role of schools in addressing issues of gender reform (Kenway & Willis, 1997) and working against homophobia and addressing sexual diversity, (Epstein & Johnson, 1994; Lipkin, 1999; Thonemann, 1999) emphasise the important role that the culture of the school plays in determining the extent to which it is possible to work towards affirming sexual diversity within individual schools. Next I want to turn to look at the ways in which there is a fit between neo-liberal notions of individualism and school and staff philosophies which focus on addressing the individual needs of students at Takahe High School

## Discourses of Neo-liberal Individualism In Practice

Ball (1997) suggests that what has been achieved in the neo-liberal shift from welfare to workplace ethos is the creation of a new moral environment for both consumers and producers. The market celebrates the ethics of the 'personal standpoint', the personal interests and desires of individuals. The emphasis on individual responsibility and on addressing individual 'barriers to learning' is a strong feature of 'at risk' discourses that provide one form of neo-liberal equity in action at Takahe High School.

The philosophies of the school have a strong emphasis on meeting the needs of individual students and on personal development to enable students to develop their potential. The mission statement of the school (Takahe High School, 1997) emphasised a commitment to developing the potential of individual students and meeting their individual needs:

(The school) ... has a strong community focus and is committed to the philosophy that every student should experience success. The High School believes that all students have talents and should be encouraged to develop their talents to the full (p. 1).

The notion of meeting the needs of individual students fits comfortably with the neo-liberal emphasis on individualism and individual responsibility that has been a strong ethos within the current devolutionary climate. James, the Principal, felt that there was a strong fit between the philosophies that the school espoused and what both parents and students saw as a desirable form of education:

The philosophy of the school gets tremendous community support. The parents who send their kids here basically identify with what the school says it's trying to achieve and ... the students are very comfortable with the expectations that the school has (James, Principal, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

The discourse of individualism contributes to creating support for individually identified students as the primary form of inclusion for lesbian and gay youth at the school. What this means in practice is that the Principal sees Takahe High School's approach to meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students as primarily one of identifying individuals seen to be 'at risk' because of their sexuality and providing personal support for them to address their individual 'barrier to learning' through the guidance network. James explained to me that this was the rationale he provided to

parents who questioned him about the extent to which the school was seen to meet the needs of queer students at the school:

... I was asked about this when we had our high school entrants evening a week ago and I responded that, "It was a guidance matter, that if a school was sincere in its wish to uphold the rights of every individual, then it has to demonstrate that, whatever those needs and aspirations might be" (James, Principal, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

I suggest that drawing on neo-liberal discourses of individualism to frame lesbian and gay students in the school as a disadvantaged minority who received assistance to come to terms with their sexuality through the efforts of the guidance counselling network at the school enabled the Principal to walk the narrow tightrope of being seen to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students, while not running the risk of compromising the reputation of the school in any way. As he explained to me:

I think if a school was known as one that was supportive for lesbian and gay students and staff then I think that probably the community would draw the generalisation that it was a caring school that tried to nurture all of the students and meet all of their needs ... (James, Principal, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

While this approach creates a space within which the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual students at Takahe High School can be met, it also has some problematic aspects that I shall explain in more detail shortly.

Neo-liberal discourses of individualism also fit well with the personal philosophies of several of the staff who have been involved in working to address the needs of lesbian and gay students at the school. Graeme, the school guidance counsellor, explained to me the importance of meeting the needs of individual students, and how well those beliefs dovetailed with school philosophies:

I've got quite strong convictions about meeting the needs of any person. I'm a great believer in the individual... and I have a conviction of assisting any person to meet their needs whatever, they are, not just sexuality but anything ... I'm here to assist someone to meet their needs because they're not necessarily the same as their parents or anyone else. My personal philosophy actually fits in with the school in that way...(Graeme, guidance counsellor, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

Ball (1997) suggests that the shift towards market driven educational practice in schools often contains a mixture of social democratic and neo-liberal philosophies and practices. This mix can be seen in the principles that underlie James's approach towards meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students. His beliefs weave the neo-liberal equity discourses of individualism I have previously described, with egalitarian notions of equal opportunity for all students, that seek to provide individual 'disadvantaged' students with extra resources and attention in order to create a 'level playing field'. James's own background that he identifies as strongly grounded in social democratic notions of equal opportunity for all students, has played an important part in determining what he sees as important for the school:

I'm very conscious of the fact that were it not for good fortune, I would never have had the educational opportunities that I have had. So therefore there is a deep personal conviction that I would like to ensure that every student who comes to this school gets an equal chance (James, Principal, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

While neo-liberal discourses of individualism provide a space within schools where the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual students can be addressed, I suggest that there are some problems that arise when the issues are framed in this particular way. Next I want to turn to examine some of these unintended consequences.

### **Whose Problem Is This? Some Consequences of Framing The Needs of Lesbian and Gay Students Within the Neo liberal Equity Model**

Takahe High School has not formally identified self-identified lesbian, gay and bisexual students as an 'at risk' group. However, I would suggest that this form of the deficit model has underpinned the school's most extensive strategy to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students who James, the Principal, suggests are: "... suffering stress because of anxiety about their sexuality".

Framing students' sexuality as a 'barrier to learning', their 'personal problem' is seen to be best addressed through the guidance counselling network. Within that framework, any disadvantage is seen to be the responsibility of individual students and support for them to come to terms with their 'personal problem' is dealt with on a case by case basis, as they approach the guidance counsellor.

As I explained in the previous chapter, a substantial body of research suggests that lesbian, gay and bisexual students can experience significant barriers to learning. Recently in a New Zealand context the connections between lesbian and gay sexuality and the high rate of youth suicide have begun to be established (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 1997). However, while it has been established that queer students can be 'at risk' within schools, I would suggest that they are not at risk because of their sexuality per se, but because of the way that queer sexuality is framed as abnormal within the powerfully heteronormative culture of the school.

Apple (1995) provides some explanations for the use of the 'at risk' label in order to describe so-called 'disadvantaged' students in schools. He draws attention to a fundamental tension that arises because of the two contradictory roles that schools are expected to play. On one hand schools have a political role in ensuring equality and class mobility. However at the same time, they play an economic role in producing agents for the labour market as well as the cultural capital of technical, administrative knowledge. Apple suggests that in order to cope with that dilemma, schools recreate categories of deviance by stratifying students who cannot contribute to maximising the country's production. Those students are labelled as 'at risk' and consequently in schools within the North American context, they become the recipients of relatively small amounts of state money to address what is framed as their personal deficit or 'problem'. Fine (1991) suggests that 'at risk' or deficit discourses are a common way to contain low income students. She identifies the counselling arena in schools as having become the commonest site within which social concerns have been constructed as personal and individual problems.

Constructing individual students as subjects of difference in compensatory discourses that frame differences within the deficit model emerged in how the gay male student I spoke to made sense of his gayness. When I asked Ryan as a gay male student what was so good about Takahe High School for him he replied:

Well the attitudes and the understanding, like someone said to me "You can't choose to be gay and if you ever want to talk..."(Ryan, Year 12 gay male student, Takahe High School)

Not being able to 'choose' suggests a tolerance based on a 'lack'. The implication behind the person's response to Ryan suggests that if you could choose then you wouldn't be gay. The constructions of homosexuals as diseased sexual deviants (Weeks, 1989) draws on nineteenth century models of lesbian and gay people as pathological deviants. Within a deficit framework lesbian and gay students will always be 'other', the marked and

pathologised other half of the het/homo binary. Positioning lesbian and gay sexuality as a site of suffering serves to reinforce the normativity of heterosexuality.

As I explained in Part One, because the intertwined binary construction of understandings about sexuality tends to reinforce the abnormality of same sex desire in relation to the heterosexual norm (Sedgwick, 1990), framing lesbian and gay students as 'disadvantaged' can also ironically result in the normality of heterosexuality being sanctioned. I intend to discuss how this happens at Takehe High School in more detail later in the chapter when I explore the limitations of privileging normalising constructions of same sex desire. At this point though I want to look in more detail at how the normality of heterosexuality can be reinforced when lesbian and gay students are constructed within the deficit model.

Heterosexuality is legitimated by identifying lesbian and gay students as an abnormalised at risk group, when the heteronormative cultures of schools remains unchallenged. Labelling individual students as 'at risk' means schools are freed from having to acknowledge that the actual problem is the way in that school cultures actively produce and legitimate normative constructions of (hetero)sexuality. In framing lesbian and gay students as 'at risk', the school need go no further in attempting to meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth or address the discursive construction of compulsory heterosexualities (Sedgwick, 1990). Framing the issues that face lesbian and gay students in schools through drawing on neo-liberal models of equity, can result in the wider heteronormative culture of the school being left intact and unchallenged.

Fine (1991) suggests that in the process of marginalising the interests of community and family, the hegemony of the dominant social class is preserved. Within this framework schools can be seen to represent themselves as neutral, tending to reframe the 'problem' as a private responsibility of the family and the individual as opposed to an issue that should be addressed within the (public) sphere of the school:

... The privatising and psychologising of public and political issues served to reinforce the alienation of students' lives from their educational experiences ... an unwillingness to infuse these issues into the curriculum helps to partition them as artificially and purely psychological (p. 44).

Fine's (1991) observations resonate strongly with what I have observed happening to many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered secondary school students whom I have got to know through my teaching, research and through community youth support initiatives over the last ten years. I just want to spend a moment here to reflect on the personal cost of these actions to students that I have known.

**Kathleen's Writing Journal 2000**

The vast majority of queer students I have known have dropped out of school, few have made it through to Year 13. What was seen as the students' personal 'problem' by schools, has been silently exported and expunged, while the heteronormative culture of the schools they attended remained intact and unchallenged. They have left their schools underqualified, not having reached their intellectual and personal potential. I am familiar with this 'management strategy' from my own experiences teaching in schools. I remember if there was a student disrupting the classroom or causing problems then what colleagues encouraged each other to do was document and record all of their misdemeanours in their personal file. The accumulated weight of the evidence was often used as a lever to make students leave school. Seldom, if ever, did anyone ever ask, "How well is the school doing in meeting their needs?" It was easier for the schools to manage the issues by labelling individual students as the problem, than to have to tackle the enormities and challenges involved in re-culturing a school so that it could better meet the needs of the students who had left...

I can see that the queer students I have known who were in this situation are looking after themselves in going, they are finding ways to survive (Khayatt, 1994). They parade in front of me, a silent and accusatory procession. I think of Ben leaving his conservative single sex boy's school to go to a more liberal multi-cultural low decile school on the other side of town because he felt unsafe. Claire, Hamish, Andrew, Dylan, bright students with a keen awareness of social justice who manifested behaviour problems due to the high levels of harassment they experienced in their schools. They too left their schools, underqualified and angry. I remember Caren, staying silent in her single sex girl's school, lacking in confidence and blaming herself for her lack of academic success. Juliet, insisting on being open about her sexuality in her Catholic girl's school, known for her lesbian label rather than her own achievements. Mary felt isolated and afraid in a rural school. She punished herself for her own feelings of difference by mutilating her arms and wrists. John who refused to stay silent, and challenged the single sex boy's school he attended to do something about the harassment he and his gay male peers received. The extent of his activism overshadowed his academic work, and he paid the price by leaving his school angry and hurt, without the qualifications he would have otherwise received. These stories show the lived reality of framing lesbian, gay and bisexual students' sexuality as their personal deficit, they show how students end up paying the price for an issue that is not their problem. The heteronormative culture of the schools they left remained intact.





Returning to Takahe High School, the lesbian and gay teachers I spoke with indicated that the school's primary strategy of addressing what was constructed as the queer students' individual problem through the guidance network didn't begin to address the wider heteronormative culture of the school and limited further work being undertaken in the school to address issues of sexual diversity. Suzanne, the lesbian teacher I interviewed felt that the current approach that Takahe High School was adopting didn't go any way to challenging the heteronormativity that she saw as such a pervasive feature of students' lived culture in secondary schools:

... all those sorts of (homophobic) comments that (some students) ... make, would make some (lesbian and gay kids) feel a little bit hesitant about saying they really were. It is dealt with but it doesn't stop it ... it's like putting out little fires rather than some sort of overall thing (Suzanne, lesbian teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

The approach also resulted in what I would describe as a sense of containment about what was possible in terms of developing further initiatives to address the heteronormative culture of the school. Richard explains how he received a clear message from the Principal that going beyond addressing the needs of lesbian and gay students through the guidance network was unlikely to happen:

I've talked about (the possibility of addressing) heterosexist language in the school and ... the Principal told me at a meeting that countering heterosexism in the school is pushing the boundaries too far... (Richard, gay male teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

Richard and Ryan suggested that a school seen to be meeting the needs of lesbian gay and bisexual students could be perceived by the public as 'promoting' and 'recruiting for' queer sexuality. It is significant the power that nineteenth century constructions of deviance continue to have in the late twentieth century, especially in the private/public locus of schools where childhood is considered to be a time of sexual innocence (Silin, 1995). Both teachers and students at Takahe High School noted that these pervasive discourses (Thonemann, 1999) did not sit easily with the requirements on schools to compete with each other in the current market-driven climate. Ryan explained how discourses of deviance could be drawn on to frame a school that was seen to be meeting the needs of queer students in a negative light, and how this could discredit its reputation:

(This school's) pretty gay friendly. Of course schools can't give that image ... parents wouldn't send their kids here, a gay friendly school's a recruitment agency. People think like, gay people recruit (Ryan, Year 12 gay male student, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

The notion of schools as important sites of cultural reproduction (Apple, 1995) is echoed in the comments of Richard, the gay male teacher. He suggests that 'key' middle-class parents who hold more sway and influence in the school would be more likely to frame any interventions within the school to meet the needs of queer youth that go beyond the deficit model as 'promotion' of a particular standpoint that they would not feel comfortable supporting:

There's an element in this school of the school being particularly sensitive to key families, parents, groups within the school community... the parents of the academic kids who hold more sway than the rest of the student body... and I think that what the management is afraid of, is that some of those key parents will find difficulty with what they see as promotion of lesbian and gay issues, rather than spreading gay and lesbian issues through the curriculum (Richard, gay male teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

Given these concerns, framing individual lesbian and gay students as having a personal problem that the school works hard to address is far less threatening than the idea that the school is advocating that queer sexuality can be as normal as heterosexuality. James, as a Principal, has played an important role in determining the form and parameters of the 'at risk' approach to dealing with the needs of lesbian and gay students at the school. As a principal he has the challenging task within the current market-driven educational climate of weighing up the image of the school with meeting the needs of a group of lesbian and gay students. Richard recognises the balancing act that the principal plays in this regard and the high level of pragmatism that determines his approach:

He filters every decision within the school through a net of, 'Is this good for ... Takahe High School?' ... if in supporting lesbian and gay interests he thinks it's against the best interests of the school, he will be prepared to fight for that ... he's a pragmatist all the way through (Richard, gay male teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

The way that Takahe High School managed the tension of being seen to meet the needs of meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students, while at the same time not

compromising their reputation in the market place, illustrates the tension Kenway and Willis (1997) identify between the marketisation of schools and their role in addressing issues of social justice.

Apple (1995) emphasises the extent to which resistance, contestation and lived culture make the work that schools perform as sites of ideological production complex. He stresses the importance of acknowledging the agency that teachers and students exercise in resisting dominant discourses. While aspects of neo-liberal equity frameworks make addressing the issues facing lesbian and gay students problematic in schools, those discourses are also challenged and de-stabilised. Next I turn to look more closely at the particular cultural context (Ball, 1997) of Takahe High School in order to show how that process happens.

### **Policy in Practice: How is the neo-liberal equity model played out in terms of educational practice at Takahe High School?**

In addition to the philosophical fit between neo-liberal notions of individualism and school and staff philosophies, there are other features of the culture of Takahe High School that make it possible to address the issues facing lesbian and gay students in the school, and raise awareness of issues of sexual diversity. Rather like a chemical equation that creates a particular effect, it is the interaction between a particular range of features within the school that created potential opportunities for addressing these issues. While I discuss the features separately, they are in fact interwoven, and operate together. In this section I explore the way that neo-liberal equity discourses provided a space for Richard and others to work towards meeting the needs of self-identified lesbian and gay students and to raise the awareness of sexual diversity within the context of the school. I explore the implications of these approaches for both the school and the students. I also examine the ways that some of the limitations of neo-liberal equity frameworks were contested.

While equity frameworks provide the potential for addressing issues of sexual diversity in schools, that potential is unlikely to remain unrealised unless there is someone in the school who is prepared to drive the issue (Kenway & Willis, 1997; Gordon, 1993). In her work that explores the enabling and disabling conditions for teaching against homophobia within the cultures of two Australian case study schools, Thonemann (1999) suggests that it is a politically engaged gay and lesbian community within a school that makes the greatest difference in terms of the ability of a school to work against homophobia. She stresses the important role that out lesbian and gay teachers play as change agents to address issues of homophobia in schools.

A lot comes back down to Richard too. If Richard hadn't been here I think things would have been different... (Graeme, school guidance counsellor, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

Graeme's remark acknowledges the role of Richard, an openly gay male teacher and administrator, who has been a catalyst in terms of raising issues of sexual diversity within Takahe High School. I'd describe Richard's role as that of a change agent. Biklen (1992) uses this term to describe the role that parents played in actively seeking the inclusion of their disabled children in North American schools, suggesting that without their work, nothing would have happened. In much the same way, Richard framed himself as a catalyst working towards creating an inclusive school for lesbian and gay youth within the school. He focused on raising staff awareness and creating policies and procedures that could be used to create more inclusion for queer youth. Recently he has become involved in advocating on behalf of individual queer students:

... I've seen myself as an activist and as a catalyst within the staffroom to get things moving so I've seen myself as promoting gay and lesbian issues from a staff point of view and from a board point of view ... I've hoped that things would change for kids as a result of what I've been doing in the school... Recently ... I have had some dealings with kids themselves ... on an individual basis (Richard, gay male teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

Building cultures of collegiality, continuous enquiry and collaborative work across teachers' subject areas and the provision of continuous learning opportunities for teachers are features that have been identified as leading towards schools that function well as learning organisations (Fullan, 1996; Leiberman, 1995; Van den Berg & Slegers, 1996). The relatively high degree of collegiality and collaboration amongst staff has helped in enabling Richard to raise the awareness of the staff about the issues that lesbian and gay teachers and students face. Richard explains the role he has played in initiating this process:

I think before I said anything in the staffroom, gay and lesbian teachers were never talked about at all... I make sure on a reasonably regular basis somewhere as part of meetings there are gay and lesbian issues raised or the word gay and lesbian is raised (Richard, gay male teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

The comments of Ryan, the gay male Year 12 student whom I interviewed, revealed how this process has enabled one of his teachers to attempt to put Ryan at ease in the school and let him know that he has some support. His comments indicate the

important role that Richard has played in providing on going support for Ryan and other students who are being harassed on the basis of their sexuality:

Most of the staff would be alright to talk to about it and that ... my Maths teacher, I didn't even know she knew (I was gay), said, "Oh, have you read the book Am I Blue?, ... I read it the other day and thought it was very good". Most of the teachers here are very gay friendly ... If some teachers hear someone hassling someone then they'd probably go to Richard (Ryan, Year 12 gay male student, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

Richard also shows an awareness of the limitations of the deficit model and has also challenged the heteronormative assumptions of his colleagues. He explains:

... at this interview we had last week when the Deputy Principal said, "What are you going to do when you run up against other problems in the school?" to this (gay) kid ... I had to say, "Well hang on a minute, what are we going to do with the other kids who have problems with Ryan being gay? ... those are the problems of the other kids in the school, they're not Ryan's problems" (Richard, gay male teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

Richard's actions and comments indicate that he is aware of the dilemma of re-pathologising individual lesbian and gay students through labelling them as 'at risk', and the way that this approach can take the responsibility off schools to remedy their situation. However at this present point in time Richard sees the heteronormative cultures of schools as a reality that queer students at the school have to learn to negotiate in order to survive (Khayatt, 1994), as he stated at the beginning of this chapter.

The high profile of Richard has served to disrupt heteronormative discourses in the school. Ryan felt that Richard's openness as a gay male provided support for him coming to terms with his own sexuality. In addition, the openness of Richard's presence also served to bring into question the dominant culture of homophobia in the school and to some extent disrupt it:

... last year he was interviewed by the school newspaper... that was good, he was like saying he's here and he's gay and that sort of thing and reading that gave (me) a bit of support ... it's good for the whole school too because it sort of helps squash out homophobic comments... (Ryan, Year 12 gay male student, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

Ryan suggested to me that Richard's work as an advocate for individual self identified gay students and the presence of an out gay male teacher helped to build his resiliency and acted as a personal role model for him:

... It makes me feel good about myself ... he said to me that when he was my age he could never have done anything like that... It's just like having more role models to look up to, being openly gay. (Ryan, Year 12 gay male student, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

The significance that Ryan attaches to Richard as an openly gay male role model for himself is worthy of some discussion. What it means to be openly gay requires some clarification because there are a range of ways of enacting gayness and some of them, as I shall show, appear to be more socially desirable than others. Richard described his gayness in what he framed as 'normal' and therefore unstereotyped terms as:

... someone who is gay, someone who is being successful and someone who is leading a normal life, which is not the stereotype of some (gay) lives they may see in the media (Richard, gay male teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

In Ryan's case, there appears to be a desirable 'fit' between Richard's persona and the kind of gay man that Ryan aspired to become. Ryan described himself as modelling a 'gay normality' in a similar way to Richard:

(I'm) straight acting ... out of a crowded room of people I wouldn't look like a faggot ... I'm sort of proving that not all gay people speak like that (Ryan, Year 12 gay male student, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

Both the principal, the guidance counsellor and the gay male student suggested that Richard's 'normal' and non-stereotypical gay persona is a factor that made it easier for him to raise the awareness of issues facing queer youth at Takahe High School. As Graeme's comments indicate he considers Richard to be so normal that he could almost be considered heterosexual:

(Richard's) up there as a normal person who is doing all the right things and he's an okay person. If (the principal) and the others can see that he's not a pervert and he's not a paedophile and all the rest of it ... I think that the kids have this perception of gays as being effeminate and I think when they see Richard he is as a normal person in their eyes, and this has really helped them. He does everything that'd be normal in school, ... they can see that he's no different than any other

staff member ... (Graeme, school guidance counsellor, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

There is no doubt that Richard provided a powerful model for the kind of young gay man that Ryan aspired to be. Richard's normalising gay male persona appears to have contributed to widening understandings of gay male representations, and enabled members of the school community to move beyond narrow stereotypes that conflate gender and sexuality, and prescriptive effeminate stereotypes of gay men (Mac an Ghail, 1984b, Quinlivan and Town, 1999b). Graeme, in particular placed a lot of importance in contesting those stereotypes as he explains:

I think the (kids) see gay as being non-macho ... so it's really good for them to learn that one of the best League Players in Australia is gay ... so they can actually see these role models coming through ... cos I believe the kids have a stereotype of a gay person, (the men) are camp and effeminate and the female is butch and has short hair and talks like a man (Graeme, school guidance counsellor, Takahe High School).

Other aspects that contribute towards Richard's normalising persona are his seniority and teaching competence. He holds positions of responsibility and key power positions in the school. These include roles such as Head of Department and Board personnel committee representative. These are responsibilities that mean that Richard influences the development of a curriculum area, and influences the choice of teaching appointments within Takahe High School.

Both the counsellor and the principal suggested that Richard is perceived by students to be a good teacher and is protected by his seniority. As he is held in high regard for his abilities he is less vulnerable to criticism on the basis of his sexuality. Graeme, the counsellor, suggests that Richard's skill and position and sheer hard work compensate for the fact that he is gay and enable him to undertake initiatives to make the school more inclusive of lesbian and gay youth:

He's involved in so many things, he's one of the busiest people in the school, you name it, he's involved in it. He's a person who will put up his hand to do anything and I think he's done a tremendous amount to change things just by what he does around the place, he doesn't hide in his shell and just do his job, he does everything (Graeme, school guidance counsellor, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).



I will return later to look at some of the problematic aspects of the role that Richard played at the school as a lone ranger change agent.



While Richard's activism was important, it also intersected with the work of key individuals and structural strengths within the school to create opportunities to address issues of sexual diversity.

Thonemann (1999) draws attention to the important role that pro-active staff and principals who are dedicated to developing and implementing anti discrimination policies and programmes can play to reinforce anti-homophobia initiatives. At Takahe High School Richard, Richard and Suzanne played key roles in establishing and maintaining these initiatives.

Thonemann suggests that policies and procedures designed to protect the rights and safety of individual students and a committee set up to oversee equity issues within the school reflected a school and staff commitment to issues of anti discrimination and equity. James explained that one of the reasons that lesbian and gay students may feel safer within Takahe High School is the strong emphasis placed on developing procedures to deal with harassment:

We take a very strong line against put downs ... we say that everybody has the right to ... be free of harassment and victimisation ... the culture of the school which we endeavour to sustain ... is a culture ... in which every individual has respect... we get agreement on the principle, we negotiate the policy, we implement the policies then we review the policies and modify as required (James, Principal, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

Richard has played a role in ensuring that the needs of lesbian and gay students are included within bullying and harassment procedures. He also plays a role in monitoring the ongoing development of those policies and procedures within the school. In his work as chairperson of the equity committee he has also been able to place the issues facing lesbian and gay staff and students on the agenda as an equity issues and actively work towards addressing them. Richard's work has helped to create a climate where harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation is considered unacceptable. In addition, he has provided an avenue for addressing those issues through the equity committee. These initiatives in themselves are considerable achievements, however they are also problematic.

Hinson (1996) and Kenway and Willis (1997) draw attention to the fact that the existence of policies and procedures provides no guarantee that they will be utilised. Policies and procedures can be used as evidence by schools in order to prove that they are meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students. However, Thonemann, (1999)

suggests that it is the use of policies and procedures by students, rather than the policies themselves, that is a factor in enabling schools to work against homophobia. As Hinson (1996) suggests, policies and procedures are instituted in reaction to situations in schools, they are not proactive strategies to address homophobia. Suzanne, the lesbian teacher described them these strategies earlier in the chapter as, "... putting out little fires". The existence of policies and procedures can mean that the school need not act proactively to meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth. As Richard, the gay male teacher explains in relation to Takahe High School:

(The school's) got a framework in place in terms of its policy to support lesbian and gay students but in fact there's nothing hanging on that structure, there are no official support structures for them, apart from the guidance counsellor (Richard, gay male teacher, Interview, 1996).

The second feature of the school culture that Richard was able to draw on in order to address the needs of lesbian and gay students in the school was a well established guidance counselling network that was open to addressing issues of sexual diversity. Graeme as a guidance counsellor has worked to establish and maintain a guidance network within the school that has provided a venue through which the needs of lesbian and gay students can be met. As James pointed out, he has been able to build up a strong system to support individual students:

We really do have a very fine grip in our guidance network that really does attempt to identify to a remarkable degree any personal or social needs that individual students might have (James, Principal, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

The guidance network at Takahe High School has played an important role in supporting individual self-identified lesbian and gay students. Despite having no formal training in this area, the guidance counsellor, Graeme, has worked to educate himself by attending in service courses. He networks extensively with the lesbian and gay teachers within the school and with outside gay and lesbian youth support agencies in order to support gay and lesbian students. Graeme has also networked with the principal and the Board of Trustees to raise their awareness about the issues facing lesbian and gay youth in the school. Richard admired the extent to which Graeme has taken on board the issues that affect queer youth in the school and attempted to address them through the counselling system:

He has been in my experience extremely good with kids, he is the line sometimes within the school and I think he has acted in an extremely good way with the teachers that have come to him ... I've got a lot of respect for him for that (Richard, gay male teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

Despite the limitations of neo-liberal notions of equity in working towards meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students and addressing the heteronormative culture of the school, it is important to acknowledge that Graeme is aware of the disadvantages of the deficit model. In his work with lesbian and gay students he attempts to reframe the 'problem' of being lesbian and gay, and works with students to deal with homophobic attitudes. As he told me:

That (gay and lesbian) students see their sexuality as being a problem is obviously a concern. And with this particular boy that I've been seeing that was one of the issues we've worked on. He now accepts he doesn't have a problem, the problem now is other people, parents in particular (Graeme, guidance counsellor, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

The final structural area within the school that has created opportunities for addressing issues of heteronormativity and sexual diversity has been the Health curriculum. The development of a Health curriculum that accommodates sexual diversity has been made possible by the strong commitment within the school to meet students' personal and social needs. The programme was established originally by a teacher who Suzanne described as 'forward thinking and liberal'. Another factor was that the curricula was developed in conjunction with the HIV/AIDS national pilot programme designed to assist schools in developing Health programmes that were inclusive of a range of sexualities. Graeme teaches at the Year 9,10 and 11 level in the Health curriculum. He saw one of the strengths of the curriculum as its move away from a predominantly heterosexual focus and the embracing of a non-judgemental approach to sexual diversity. He explains:

... it's always made very clear to them in the Health Education programme that nothing assumes anyone's sexual orientation, that the programme ... cover(s) all sexual orientations, there's no judgements made about people's sexual orientation (Graeme, counsellor and Health teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

## Demographic and Contextual Enabling Factors

I want to briefly consider several demographic and contextual factors that are helpful in enabling Takahe High School to make the needs of lesbian and gay students and explore issues of sexual diversity.

In a North American context, Rienzo, Button and Wald, 1996 (in Thonemann, 1999) indicate that high levels of urbanisation and social diversity in schools can make addressing issues of sexual orientation easier. As I explained in the previous chapter, Takahe High School's geographical position in a dormitory suburb of an urban centre is helpful in that regard.

Another factor to take into account is the relatively small size of the school. Graeme, described the school of 700 students as small enough for students to be able to receive a lot of academic and social development:

This is a very unique little community this school, it's small enough for everyone to know everyone really ... I think that the culture of the school is pretty supportive ... It's a community school. We try and meet students individual needs, with restructuring programmes, making sure they are suitable for them and also in sorts of personal ways as well (Graeme, guidance counsellor, Takahe High, Interview, 1996).

A substantial body of research suggests that smaller schools make it possible for teachers to know students and their families well and that this can result in more positive feelings towards self and school on the part of students (Darling-Hammond, 1995). In a school environment that emphasises these attributes, lesbian, gay and bisexual students are more likely to have their needs met as individuals.

The co-educational make up of the school was also perceived by two of the participants to enable the school to meet the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth to a greater extent than a single sex school would be able to do. Their perspectives are strongly tied to their understandings of maleness and femaleness and illustrate the role that traditional constructions of gender play in supporting and reinforce normative constructions of (hetero) sexuality, especially for males (Mac an Ghail, 1994a; Thonemann, 1999; Town, 1998). Ryan, the gay Year 12 student at Takahe, felt that it would be easier to be gay in a co-educational school because he perceived that female students have more tolerant attitudes than males about gay people. He feels that male students are more

threatened, and more likely to draw on abnormalising models of gay sexuality that focus on deviant constructions of sexual insatiability to reinforce their heterosexuality:

(it's easier to be gay)... in a co-ed because girls are supportive of gay people and think it's really cool, and guys can feel really threatened, like this gay is going to come on to me, which is absolutely not true (Ryan, gay male Year 12 student, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

Nairn and Smith's (2000) research suggested that greater degrees of heteronormative harassment are experienced in single sex boys' schools. Their findings are reinforced by Graeme who suggests that the legitimisation of limited representations of masculinity in a single sex boy's school can make it difficult for students who may be gay to find a place for themselves there:

You take an all male school where there's a big emphasis on sport, on macho behaviour, I think it would be very hard to be gay in a school like that ... you get the big rugby group and the cricket group and the big sporty groups, they do tend to dominate basically. If you play rugby you're not gay (Graeme, guidance counsellor, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

While the participants' observations suggest that attending co-educational schools may be advantageous for young gay men, their comments raise issues concerning the constructions of young women and female sexuality in co-educational contexts. Nairn & Smith (2000) suggest that the range of available representations for young women in co-educational schools can also be limited to notions of tolerant helpmeet or as altogether invisible.

The final contextual feature I want to note concerns the effect of changing social attitudes about gay sexuality upon school cultures, and the venues that have been opened up for schools to attempt to meet the needs of queer youth.

As I explained in Part One, popular culture plays an important role in producing and reinforcing a range of representations of queer sexuality for young people (Britzman, 1995). The increasing incidence of lesbian and gay characters on film and TV provides some indication that queer sexuality is no longer 'the love that dare not speak its name'. Four of the participants felt that the increased visibility of lesbian and gay people in society and in the school made it more possible to address the issues that face gay and lesbian students in the school. As Graeme explains;

In recent years ... the kids (have become) much more accepting and the environment at school's changed to quite an extent because of the whole issue of gay people being more open in society and also the fact that we've got openly gay staff ... ten years ago I would have thought that (an openly gay teacher) wouldn't have been able to survive here (Graeme, guidance counsellor, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

I discuss the way in which changing social attitudes towards same sex desire widen the possibilities for affirming sexual diversity in the second case study school in Chapters Seven and Eight. Finally in this chapter I want to return to explore several troubling aspects of the role that Richard (and indeed I played when I was teaching) as lone change agents in our respective schools.

### **Problematising Richard and Me as Lone Ranger Change Agents**

Richard's role in the school as a 'change agent' raises several problematic issues. These concern the status and respect accorded to him on the basis of his gender and the role that his persona and working habits play in normalising Richard in the eyes of other people. The Principal's comments suggest that Richard's 'normal' persona mean that he is not perceived by members of the school community as an unstable/homosexual other, but as a 'person' who is as worthwhile as any (heterosexual/stable) teacher:

(Richard) is very open about the fact that he is gay but frankly I'm not sure that the students see him as gay, as a gay person. I think they see him as a man who they like. They see him as working his butt off in school productions, variety shows, Year 12 certificate coordinator ... my guess is that a lot of the students see him as a whole lot of things and also maybe some of them see him as gay ... I think that students who are gay in the school see him as a very successful stable senior teacher (James, school principal, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

On the one hand Richard's non stereotyped gay male persona, gender, seniority, work habits and teaching ability make his gayness more palatable, and also possibly make it more possible for him to undertake initiatives designed to create a more inclusive climate for lesbian and gay students in the school. However, there are also some unintended consequences that arise from valorising particular representations of queer sexuality and I want to turn to discuss these shortly. Before I do that though, I want to pause for a moment in order to make some connections between Richard's persona and my own when I was a secondary school teacher.

**Kathleen's Writing Journal 1996**

As I muse over this material, I cannot help but think of the similarities between my persona as a lesbian teacher and Richard's persona as a gay male teacher. Both of us are in G.L.E.E, the National Association of Lesbian and Gay Teachers, and both of us were open about our sexuality with students and colleagues in our respective schools. Looking back, I think that I acted as a lone ranger change agent in the schools in which I taught in much the same way as Richard has done at Takahe High School. Was it also because I was perceived to be non-stereotyped in my physical appearance that I didn't get such a hard time when I was teaching? I remember when I first told colleagues that I was a lesbian they thought that I was joking...

An incident with students that particularly remains in my mind concerned a rumour going around the school that I was a lesbian. A very distressed Year 9 student in my form class came to me and in anxious trepidation told me of the rumours. She and her peers had tried to defend me against claims made by Year 12 and 13 students, insisting that the rumours couldn't possibly be true, that Ms Quinlivan couldn't be a lesbian! I remember telling her with some difficulty that yes, I was a lesbian, and the look of horror and confusion on her face still haunts me. She experienced difficulties putting me and the image of what a lesbian was supposed to be together.

Students used to say to me that I 'didn't look like a lesbian', they asked me why I wore dresses in the summer (they were sure that was something lesbians didn't do!) and told me that I was attractive and were sure that I could get a boyfriend if I really tried. I think that my non-stereotyped appearance was an advantage in my job, it put me in a powerful position where I could play with representations of sexuality because I was less likely to be pigeonholed. I wasn't an immediate target for student harassment as some of the more stereotyped lesbian colleagues I have worked with were. I was aware that my non-stereotyped appearance gave me a degree of power.

I used to joke with friends that the only reason that I survived as an out lesbian at school was because I was so good at my job and worked so hard. I remember feeling like it protected me from accusations about my sexuality, and gave me credibility that I wouldn't otherwise have. I might have been a lesbian but I knew I was a really good teacher; I was aware that my talent and my hard work created a degree of respect for me amongst colleagues and students (Khayatt, 1992). It also enabled me to take big risks. Like Richard, I could push the boundaries as lone ranger change agent in the school I worked, without compromising my job. Once I left the school and there was no longer any one there to pressure for change, the deputy principal of the school told me that challenging homophobia and addressing the issues facing lesbian, gay and bisexual students was no longer discussed. I see this as one of the limitations of change agents in terms of creating school change, when they're not there, what happens? and what if they were never there, what would happen then?



Perhaps it is the similarities between Richard and me, acting as change agents in our respective schools that makes me feel so uncomfortable about problematising the work that out lesbian and gay teachers as change agents accomplish in schools. This is even more the case if, as Thonemann (1999) suggests, it is openly lesbian and gay teachers in school communities who play the most important role in working against homophobia



in schools. In exploring the limitations of this approach, it is as if I am criticising my own *modus operandi* as a lesbian teacher, and in the process criticising people who are actually engendering change. Despite my qualms, I want to look next at why I find aspects of the lone ranger approach to creating school change increasingly troubling.

The usefulness of role models as a strategy for widening representations of sexual diversity can be problematic for a number of reasons. The first of these is the unintended consequences of valorising particular representations of same sex desire. In the case of both Richard and myself, it is normalising representations of gay and lesbian sexuality that give us some 'heterosexual capital' (Britzman, 1995) within the heteronormative cultures of schools.

While there was a fit between the gay male persona that Richard enacted and the kind of gay man that Ryan wanted to become, I don't think that it can be assumed that this is always the case. Given that effeminate males and butch young women receive the most overt harassment at school because of the challenge that they pose to traditional gender constructs (Davies, 1993; Epstein, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994b; Nairn & Smith, 2000; Town, 1999), I question whether normalising representations of gayness would provide them with a role model they desired. I would suggest that a non-stereotyped queer persona would actually have exactly the opposite effect, rendering camp young men and butch young women as stereotypical 'others' in relation to the heterosexual norm. Seen within this framework, the normal/ising and heterosexual/ising of the gay teachers actually reinforces heterosexuality, and further marginalises lesbian and gay subjectivities (Sedgwick, 1990).

Another unfortunate consequence of working within binary frameworks is that representations of sexuality that operate outside the homosexual/heterosexual binary are silenced within this duality. Bisexual and transgendered representations of sexuality and the mutability of desire, to give two examples, are invisible. I would suggest that when representations of sexuality are located within this binary framework, opportunities for exploring the complexities of sexualities are limited (Quinlivan & Town, 1999a). As Britzman (1993) suggests: "... idealised identities do not lend insight into the mobile and shifting conditions that make identity such a contradictory place to live" (p. 25).

Representations of lesbian and gay sexuality that privilege being 'out' as an identity management strategy are also problematic. While Richard, Ryan and I felt that by being open about our sexuality we were modelling that it was okay to be lesbian and gay, in many cases schools are not necessarily safe environments for lesbian, gay and bisexual students or for teachers (Hinson, 1996; Nairn & Smith, 2001; Town, 1998) to be open

about sexuality. Britzman (1995), Khayatt (1994) and Quinlivan (1994) suggest that hiding your sexuality at school might be the most sensible management strategy for queer students to adopt in what is largely a hostile environment.

Given the high levels of harassment experienced by lesbian and gay teachers in schools (Khayatt, 1992; Squirrell, 1989), it is unlikely that there would be a vast number of lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers who would either feel comfortable or safe enough to be open about their sexuality at school. Suzanne, a lesbian teacher at Takahe High School, indicated a certain discomfort with being 'out' at in her school. She expressed her vulnerability dealing with students who were questioning their sexuality and her fears that she could be framed by parents as 'recruiting' students:

I didn't want to place myself in an awkward position if parents or whatever... like sort of recruiting and also overstepping the bounds of being a professional as opposed to personal type things ... you can't get too personal with kids because you might open up yourself to all sorts of accusations and I'm not particularly (safe) being a lesbian with lesbian students. I think that risk's even higher because it is something that is still less acceptable in society (Suzanne, lesbian teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

It is the prevalence of nineteenth century models of sexual deviance that keep many queer teachers like Suzanne silent about their sexuality in schools. Fearful of being framed as promoters and recruiters of the deviant sexuality amongst vulnerable children, it is simply safer to hide. Thonemann (1999) identifies the ongoing production and maintenance of these discourses as a disabling factor in schools working against homophobia.

The final aspect of Richard's persona that I find problematic is the notion of his role as something of a 'super-teacher' at Takahe High School. I suggest that Richard's talents and capabilities and the way that he "does everything" as Graeme earlier stated and "works his butt off" as James also commented makes him more acceptable as a gay teacher in the school (just as I noted earlier it did for me). It certainly gives him the credibility and 'mana'<sup>1</sup> within the school to enable him to work towards addressing heteronormativity and the needs of lesbian and gay students within the school.

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<sup>1</sup> A Maori word meaning prestige or status

Privileging certain forms of gayness over others is problematic then because it raises the issue of all the queer teachers out there who fall outside these normalising definitions. It also has implications for the strategy of out gay and lesbian teachers acting as change agents in schools. I would suggest that a very narrow group of teachers would fit the characteristics that I have outlined and that even those who do, may not see being open about their sexuality as either necessary or desirable.

Given the reasons I have outlined, the role that out queer teachers can play in creating more inclusive schools is both limited and problematic in terms of the valorisation of particular representations of sexuality, and in terms of their own safety and stress levels. I do strongly want to stress though that despite the limitations I have outlined, Richard's presence made possible the initiatives developed at Takahe High School to provide support to lesbian and gay students and colleagues, and challenge the heteronormative discourses within the school.

## **Conclusion**

It is important to acknowledge that, despite the limitations of neo-liberal equity frameworks, Takahe High School has attempted to address the issues facing lesbian and gay youth in schools in a wider social and educational context where the issues facing queer youth in schools are frequently invisible and ignored. It is also important not to underestimate the level of support that does exist in the school for lesbian and gay students. In particular, the presence of openly lesbian and gay teachers such as Richard, plays a particularly powerful role in educating and challenging heteronormative discourses in the school, raising the awareness of his colleagues, and acting as an advocate for lesbian and gay youth (Thonemann, 1999). Perhaps most importantly, the gay male student I interviewed at Takahe High School felt safe and happy attending the school. Richard's cautious response to Ryan coming out at school is belied by Ryan's obvious comfort in returning to the school next year:

After the interview with that (gay) kid last week I said, "Look never mind". He said he'd just started to tell his friends he was gay. I said, "Look it's going to be all over the school on Monday you can't expect this not to ripple out right the way through the whole community and so I said, never mind, we can cope with this, you've only got two terms left at school", he's in the Year 13, and he said, "Oh no, I'm coming back next year" (Laughter) (Richard, gay male teacher, Takahe High School, Interview, 1996).

While the initiatives at Takahe High School were more successful in meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students than in addressing the heteronormative culture of the school, I was shortly to discover that the approach that I observed there would be a great deal easier to achieve and more manageable than the difficult and challenging task of working towards re-culturing the second case study school, Kereru Girls' College.

I had originally expected to go into Takahe High School in order to document what I had envisaged as 'best practice' in terms of approaches that might be to take to the second case study. However, while the strategies were admirable, I found many of the issues had some troubling implications in terms of the negative effects of framing lesbian and gay students through neo liberal equity frameworks, valorising normative representations of sexuality, and limitations in terms of containment and creating institutional change. Along with the difficulties that I had experienced gaining access to Takahe High School, these challenges made me increasingly aware that addressing the needs of lesbian and gay students raised some complex and challenging ideological questions for schools to have to negotiate.

Aware of the limitations that these frameworks posed, I became increasingly interested in finding ways to move beyond the dangers of repathologising which deficit labels such as 'at risk' posed to lesbian and gay students. My thinking led me to explore queer and feminist post-structural frameworks for situating same sex desire that work at the level of discursive construction and contestation. In the next chapter I move on to explore the discursive construction of sexuality as the students at Kereru Girls' College understood it, and the unexpected pedagogical opportunities that arose when I had the opportunity to explore those understandings with them in the venue of a member check.

## **PART FOUR: EXPLORATIONS IN THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE: AFFIRMING SEXUAL DIVERSITY AT KERERU GIRLS COLLEGE**

### **Introduction**

The final part of the thesis explores a series of critical moments that occurred during the second phase of the research project at Kereru Girls' College. I see each of the critical moments as explorations in the art of the possible. In Chapter Seven I explain how a student member check created an unexpected venue to explore the discursive construction of sexuality and gender with students. In Chapter Eight I focus on two critical incidents: a Health teachers' meeting and a staff professional development session, in order to explore the ideological, structural, and macro and micro contextual constraints which arose due to the presence of a research project to affirm sexual diversity within the school.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## TROUBLING REPRESENTATIONS: EXPLORING THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF HETERONORMATIVITY WITH STUDENTS AT KERERU GIRLS' COLLEGE

I think it did a lot of good getting into groups. It was just interesting finding out what people thought about it (Margaret, gay Year 13 student, Kereru Girls' College).

At home there was a game that all parents played with their children. It was called What Did You See? Mara was about Dann's age when she was first called into her father's room one evening, where he sat in his big carved and coloured chair. He said to her, "And now we're going to play a game. What was the thing you liked best today?" At first she chattered: "I played with my cousin ... I was out with Shera in the garden... I made a stone house". And then he had said, "Tell me about the house". And she said, "I made a house of the stones that came from the river bed". And he said, "Now tell me about the stones". And she said, "They were mostly smooth stones, but some were sharp and had different shapes". "Tell me what the stones looked like, what colour they were, what they felt like". And by the time the game ended she knew why some stones were smooth and some sharp, and why they were different colours, some cracked, some so small they were almost sand. She knew how rivers rolled stones along and how some of them came from far away... There seemed no end to what she knew, and yet her father had not told her much, but kept asking questions so she found the answers in herself ... She thought that the game did not change; but one evening she was there when her little brother was first asked, "What Did You See?", and she knew just how much the game had changed for her. Because now it was not just, "What Did You See?" but: "What were you thinking? What made you think that? Are you sure that thought is true?" (Lessing, 1999, p. 23-24).

## Introduction

### Kathleen's Writing Journal June 1998

It is a hot Wednesday afternoon in late February 1997. As I pull up into the car park at Kereru Girls' College, I'm feeling pretty apprehensive. After some to-ing and fro-ing from the school, I have been given the go ahead to carry out a member check with a group of 170 Year 13 students in order to get their feedback on my preliminary data analysis. The analysis is based on earlier interviews with four lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual Year 12 and 13 students about what they thought it would be like to be a lesbian and bisexual student at their school.

I was also thinking that the member check would provide me with some student perspectives on how they thought their school could become more inclusive for lesbian and bisexual young women. I have never done a member check with so many students before and having 170 young women in the school hall last period on a Wednesday afternoon feels like a daunting prospect for a researcher. But of course I'm not only a researcher, I'm also a teacher, and my hybrid role will emerge for the first time in the research project. I was going to need every ounce of my skills to swing this session. Although I didn't realise it at the time my teacher self was going to unconsciously kick in to enable me to do this.

I was also apprehensive because I knew that by associating myself with the research, it would more than likely be assumed I would open myself to claims of being a lesbian in front of a large number of people I didn't know. This factor added a certain vulnerable edge to the proceedings. I was aware that the lesbian and bisexual participants might feel that way too, so along with showing them the preliminary data analysis a couple of days before, we had talked about how they might keep themselves safe in the session. I for one had promised not to look at them!

This chapter tells the story of that hour. I want to explore how the session became something other than an opportunity to check the way I interpreted the preliminary student interviews. Like the What Did You See? game that Mara learnt to play with her father, I suggest in this chapter that Foucauldian, queer and feminist post-structural theoretical frameworks which I drew on to analyse the data unexpectedly provided a venue for interrogating the processes through which understandings about sexuality and gender are constructed and contested. I was interested in the way that both the students I had interviewed and the process of the member check created venues where representations of sexuality and gender could be 'troubled'. Margaret, a gay student who I interviewed in 1998, suggests that the process of finding out what other people think about sexuality and gender and talking about those ideas in the member check was a worthwhile exercise. Creating a space to explore the discursive construction of

gendered and sexual subjectivities made an exploration of the complexities of sexual identities possible, and inadvertently created a space for new and wider understandings of sexuality to emerge (Britzman, 1995; Butler, 1990, 1993).

The story I will tell you is both partial and provisional. I could not be aware of the wide range of responses that occurred in the school hall that afternoon. However, I am going to show you how the hour unfolded from a range of perspectives. I draw on the perspectives of anonymous students, interview participants, as well as a transcript of the session. So that you can get a feel of how the hour unfolded, I want you to imagine yourself as present during the session. You can choose to be whoever you want. It may be one of the lesbian, bisexual or straight identified interview participants whose perceptions I was drawing on to frame the analysis. You could choose to position yourself as one of the disruptive 'popular group' who sat together in the middle of the hall. You may like to position yourself as a silent teacher, or indeed you may want to adopt my teacher/researcher role, or even be a fly on the wall, that is up to you.

At this point it may be helpful for you to be reminded about the data I am drawing on in this chapter. The data that I drew on originally to work with the in the Year 13 student member check came from the four students that I had interviewed in 1996. Melissa at that point identified as lesbian, Heidi, as bisexual and Zorra and Gabrielle as heterosexual. The chapter also draws on anonymous written feedback that came from the Year 13 students in the member check, and Margaret, a gay Year 13 student I interviewed in 1998.

In addition to the apprehensive feelings I described earlier, I was also excited at the prospect of the member check. Before I get into a description of the session I want to explain why...

**Kathleen's Writing Journal: June 2001**

It was the data from the interviews with the students that I found so exciting. My long term interest in exploring what being a girl means has a lot to do with being a girl myself and having to negotiate the way that constructs of gender and sexuality did (and did not) intertwine in my own life. My initial research interest in looking at how young women constructed their understandings of sexuality and gender arose when I undertook a study that explored the experiences of young lesbian women at secondary school. One



of the themes that emerged from that study was the dissatisfaction several of the participants expressed with what they perceived as limited and constraining categories of sexual identification. Several of the participants expressed an interest in exploring more fluid concepts of sexuality where labels were less important. So I'm interested in exploring how representations of sexuality for younger women appear to be changing to accommodate differences. I'm interested in looking at ways that sexuality can be framed as more fluid for women, beyond the normalising constraints of an either hetero(normal)/or homo (abnormal) choice, and how wider representations of sexuality and multiple representations of same sex desire can be made available to young women.

I had been working with the student interview transcripts from Kereru Girls' College intensely over the past week, coding and re-coding the material. The data was gripping and how I read it seemed to fit with my own shifts in thinking. I had undertaken the interviews to gain a picture of what it would be like to be a lesbian and bisexual student at the school. However, when I looked at the data I could see a compelling account of how the students I interviewed positioned themselves in relation to the heteronormalising discourses that emerged in both their peer culture and in the culture of the school. The process through which they constituted their subjectivities was dynamic and productive, in a constant state of change.

Understanding how students positioned themselves in relation to heteronormalising discourses, accounted for challenges, shifts and changes in a way that seemed less possible than with the oppression model that ran the risk of constituting lesbian and bisexual students as victims (Fraser, 1997). I was struck by the fact that the lesbian and bisexual students found ways to survive (Khayatt, 1994) and that their desires persisted despite hostile conditions (Britzman, 1995). The shift in thinking that I had gone through inevitably influenced the way that I interpreted the data, it meant that I read the data differently.

One of the most interesting aspects of the students' understanding of the heteronormalising process were the close connections they identified between understandings of sexuality and gender (Butler, 1990, 1993; Davies, 1995; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Mac an Ghaill, 1996a). Compulsory heterosexuality was seen to be a marker of desirable femininity, and what was generally considered to be 'normal'. Same sex desire within a binary equation was rendered as male, abject and Other in relation to normative heterosexuality (Sedgwick, 1990). However, at the same time, these representations were contested and challenged. For me, this was riveting stuff, it began to get close to accounting for the complex and mutable process through which understandings about gender and sexuality were constructed. While I was interested in finding out what might happen if a venue could be created in a classroom situation that would enable an exploration of these constructions, I hadn't had that opportunity before. Even though I wasn't aware of it until later, the member check was going to provide a space within which those possibilities could occur.

Other factors that influenced the 'discursive turn' for me were the increasingly pervasive ideological and structural constraints that emerged over the course of the research process. In the face of the immensity of these constraints, working with discursive constructions became a way for me as a researcher to negotiate what was fast becoming a fraught and challenging research process, at the same time as providing some

thought-provoking, if challenging, possible pedagogical directions. Perhaps inevitably, my trail was leading me away from affirmative action and social justice frameworks into the much more murky terrain of transformative models that interrogate the discursive construction of sexuality and gender (Fraser, 1997).

I was also excited about working with students again, there was a part of me that missed the cut and thrust world of the classroom. As I walked into the hall then, all these possibilities were bubbling in my mind, I was both nervous and also curious to see what might happen in this hour.

The school hall was a large, dark and cavernous space. The smell was familiar to me, slightly musty and sweaty, and filled with row upon row of wooden forms that had all been carefully arranged. It reminded me of those countless tedious assemblies I had attended when I was teaching. I remembered how the teachers would position themselves around the hall in order to exert some fruitless sense of control over the large and amorphous student body. I set myself up at the front, plugging in the overhead projector and getting my transparencies in order. I had decided to begin with a diagram that summarised the findings before moving onto the data itself. I had brought paper for the students to record their reactions, it was recycled from countless drafts of previous research projects. I used to recycle paper in the same way when I was teaching at school. Old habits die hard ... As I fluffed around, the students began to file through the double doors in dribs and drabs. I took a deep breath, the closest thing I could imagine this would be like was talking to an assembly. I looked out over the expectant sea of faces, somehow I had imagined that there would be more teachers... I was relieved to see Sylvie, the counsellor, hove into view, the Year 13 dean was also there. At the back of the hall I glimpsed the principal watching the scene with interest ... oh well, here we go, I thought to myself...

### **Analysis and Action: The Unfolding Process of the Member Check**

Once all the students were seated I began by introducing myself and asking their permission to tape record the session. I then explained that as part of the early stages of the research project, I needed to get a fuller picture of what it was like to be lesbian and bisexual within the particular context of their school. I explained to the students that I wanted to understand the process through which heterosexuality was seen to be normal, along with the way that those discourses were contested by the young women.

I started by showing them a diagram which summarised my preliminary analysis<sup>1</sup> so that they could give me their feedback. Here it is so you can see it as well.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not the exactly the same diagram I used, it is a later version of it.

Now that I look at it again, it's rather complicated, I remember at the time that it was challenging to capture such a complex process in a visual way. I began by explaining the broad features of the analysis to the 170 Year 13 students in front of me, referring to the diagram<sup>2</sup>. First of all I explained to the students who the interview participants were, and that I had fudged some of their details to keep their anonymity.

### **Gendering Sexuality/Sexualising Gender: Learning to be (Hetero) Normal In Lived Student Culture**

I began by using the diagram to explain that sexuality for the young women I talked to was framed primarily as an either heterosexual/ normal or homosexual/ abnormal choice, and I explained how binary systems of thinking operated to normalise heterosexuality, while simultaneously abnormalising same sex desire. Referring to the diagram, here's how I explained it:

This is how I see what the school's like, okay, and what the school does, is that you get messages from the school and from each other (because you are the school as well remember), of how we understand what being female means. And my picture of what being female means is that there's (understandings) that work to normalise people all the time, okay? Now one of the things about normalising and being normal is that everyone wants to be like that... because being abnormal makes you feel ... bad about yourself ... Now what happens in schools ... is that heterosexuality, relationships with people of the opposite sex, are normal, and then if they're normal then that makes everything else abnormal. So that lesbian relationships and bisexual relationships.. are seen to be abnormal... if you are a lesbian or bisexual student you will be receiving (these) messages. This is what I think is happening and you may tell me if I'm wrong about this so keep looking and saying to me, she may have got this wrong.... (F7 member check transcript, Kereru Girls' College, 1997).

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<sup>2</sup> The headings I use in the text are not labelled on the diagram, however the information is included there.

Next I referred back to the diagram to explain some of the ways in which notions of heterosexual normality are reinforced. I began by identifying the silences concerning lesbian sexuality in official school discourses, and contrasted those silences with the immense amount of talk about sexuality and same sex desire that went on amongst students themselves:

... Now there are a number of ways that reinforcing works and those are the things that are written along the lines up here. The most common thing is that there are huge silences. It's something that isn't talked about (officially) except in your lived culture, where it sounds like you talk about it all the time... you talk about it with each other, you try and work out who is and who isn't, some of you don't care about that; some of you do, some of you try and work out... whether teachers are too... (F7 member check transcript, Kereru Girls' College, 1997).

Next I went on to talk about how the students I had interviewed constructed discourses of abnormality about lesbians through negative stereotypes and pathologisation:

Another thing that happens with the abnormalising is this idea that we see being lesbian as a disease... its called pathologising something. I'll give you an example of it... somebody told me about a situation where they were going into town on Friday night... and someone said "Let's go out to this bar", and then some one said, "No, it's a gay bar" and they said, "Well what's wrong with that?", and there was this whole idea that if you went up to a gay bar that you'd be hit on immediately by these sexually voracious women who couldn't keep their hands off anybody else who was the same sex as them. So do you see the disease thing here? It's kind of like, they're so sort of sexual that's all they ever do day and night. So the stereotyping and the pathologising work together to abnormalise lesbian and bisexual sexualities ... (F7 member check transcript, Kereru Girls' College, 1997).

Every so often, I would interrupt my explanation to encourage the students in the member check to look critically at my analysis. I encouraged them to document and to

voice their reactions to the data and emphasised that I would value their responses. I let the students know that I would benefit from learning about their ways of knowing:

... this is how I saw what was happening ... but what I want to know from you is, have I got the picture right? and if I haven't got the picture right, I want to check out with you and I want you to write down for me where you think I'm going wrong, and in fact how it is as you see it ... So what I'm wanting to do is to pick your brains, first of all about what I think I've found out and how right I am and then maybe some of your suggestions for what you can do about it because those come up as well ... do you have any questions before we go any further? (F7 member check transcript, Kereru Girls' College, 1997).

The final point I made in relation to the diagram emphasised that despite some verbal harassment and rumour, there was also a level of support that lesbian and bisexual students experienced from their close friends:

Now one thing I just want to say at this point before I start showing you the quotes... is that this is nothing unusual, and in fact there's lots of really good things happening in the school, in terms of lesbian and bisexual students in a small group who know each other and support each other, there's also students who identify as heterosexual who support lesbian and bisexual students in the school too... In terms of your lived culture the order of your day is rumour, this is how I see it, rumours are really big... Then there's some verbal harassment going on, and the people who do the verbal harassing are having difficulty, it seems to me, with people that are different... anybody who's different from what that particular group perceives to be what normal is. Can you see that (in the diagram?). It looks complicated but it's not as bad as it looks... (F7 member check transcript, Kereru Girls' College, 1997).

Following my explanation I provided the students with paper so that they could note down their reactions and encouraged them to discuss their ideas with the friends they were sitting next to. The roar of sound at this point was deafening and it was then that

my teacher self kicked in. It wasn't until I went back and heard the tape recording I made of the session that I realised the extent to which I had traded on my expertise as a teacher to break the ice with the students and establish credibility. I did this by dropping comments in a low key and humorous way to let the students know that I had taught Year 13 students before. But that wasn't the only reason for my interruption. My remarks to the students show how I was aware that some of them were 'off task' and were designed to establish some control and get them to do what I wanted:

Okay can you just stop? Right, now when I taught Year 13 students, and they were a very small class, I used to use all my old work, okay, I notice that all of you are doing that now, I used to recycle my paper, and on the back of it would be a whole lot of stuff from previous research projects, which I never found out until last year that they all read very avidly, you might too, but the whole point of this is that you're writing your ideas down on the blank side of paper, okay?, so get yourself a pen. Right, are you ready to have a look at the data now? (Year 13 student member check transcript, Kereru Girls' College, 1997).

My comments did have the effect I intended as, after some initial murmuring, the students recorded their individual reactions to the analysis relatively quietly.

Next I moved on to use the student interview data to illustrate how I saw the heteronormalising process being played out within the students' peer culture. I began with Zorra's comments that showed the way in which understandings between desirable forms of femininity and heterosexuality overlapped:

You have to be pretty, you have to be slim, and you have to be heterosexual I think (Zorra, heterosexual Year 13 student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

I encouraged the students in the member check to reflect on their own ideas. Referring to Zorra's comment I explained:

... being heterosexual then is being equated with normalising ideas of what its considered acceptable for a woman to be, pretty, slim and heterosexual, it's the normalising thing. Can you see that is how in lots of ways being heterosexual is seen as just one more way that a woman should be like? Now you may have different ways of what you think a woman should be like, these are some of the pressures that Zorra identified of being a young woman... (Year 13 student member check transcript, Kereru Girls' College, 1997).

I went on to explain next that the students who I interviewed consistently equated desirable forms of femininity with being heterosexual and for them and the majority of their peers, that was what was considered to be normal (Hey, 1997). The consequences of normalising heterosexuality are that lesbian sexuality in particular, and to a lesser extent bisexuality are framed as abnormal. They fall outside what the students understood being a 'normal' female meant. I showed the students how Zorra explained to me the interdependency of the operation of the heterosexual/homosexual and female/male binaries:

People are always striving to be normal, people are so afraid I think when they're my age that they're not ... having a boyfriend, doing whatever ... it's awful at that age to think you're abnormal ... it must be hard for (young lesbian and bisexual women) (Zorra, heterosexual Year 13 student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).



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I then went on to discuss with the students the ways in which medical and scientific discourses of lesbianism and homosexuality based on nineteenth century medical models were drawn on to equate lesbianism with maleness (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985). I explained how equating same sex desire with maleness represented it as an undesirable and hence abnormal representation of femininity. I used Zorra's comments to show how stereotyped assumptions of lesbians based on undesirable constructs of femininity, played a powerful role in simultaneously reinforcing the abnormality of lesbianism and legitimating femininity/ heterosexuality for the students I interviewed:

People are very concerned about the stereotype that goes with lesbian I think ... I'd find it very hard to come out as a lesbian because of what stereotypes do. I've heard people say, "Don't shave, wear singlets and gumboots!... people are self-

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately I did not have the cartoons to use during the member check. It was a great pity, as they would have been a valuable teaching aid!



conscious of that (Zorra, heterosexual Year 13 student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

I talked to the students in the member check about the discomfort Zorra and her peers felt about allying themselves with the representations of lesbian sexuality and maleness. I explained how the identification of essentialising characteristics of maleness; hairiness, singlets and gumboots with lesbian sexuality, frames same sex desire between women as abject and abnormal, while simultaneously legitimating the heterosexual feminine ideal and reinforcing the normality of heterosexuality.

I explained to the students how Heidi, a bisexual interview participant, bemoaned what she saw to be the narrow and limited representations of femininity available to young women. In the interview Heidi explained the threat presented to constructs of hegemonic femininity by lesbians who don't conform to stereotyped constructions of femininity. She explained how these representations widen constructs of femaleness, while simultaneously threatening them. She also suggested that any lesbians who look like men are not considered as female and therefore are rendered as abject/males. As she explains:

... they do have this feminine image, women, and as soon as this big butch lesbian comes along it blows the whole thing ... (Heidi bisexual student, Year 10, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).



Melissa, a young lesbian I had interviewed also suggested that lesbian sexuality is also framed as primarily and overtly sexual and therefore abnormal for a woman. She explained to me how framing same sex relationships between women as actively sexual collided with notions that active female sexuality per se was not seen as a desirable feature of normative femininities (Fine, 1992a). I used her words to explain to the students in the member check how the dynamic she described marginalised lesbian sexuality. Melissa explains:

I just sort of need to get out and experiment and I don't want to be like this lesbian slut or anything but I want to go out with different girls, I want to go to the movies and all that sort of thing, I'm not sex crazy or anything I just want to be able to have a good time with a girl and I guess that's what I hate (that I can't do that) (Melissa, Year 10 lesbian student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).



I explained the dilemma that Melissa faced as a young lesbian to the students in the member check. While her comment showed that she could see a double standard existed for males and females in terms of how sexual activity is represented, Melissa simultaneously reinforced and perpetuated the negative connotations of the construct by maintaining that she didn't want to be seen as a 'slut' and 'sex crazy' herself. She expressed the desire to have as much freedom to explore relationships as her heterosexual

friends did. However, she felt that was impossible because it would reinforce abnormalising constructions of her as an insatiably sexual lesbian.

Next I went on to use the student interview data to explain to the students in the member check how heteronormativity was policed in the students' peer culture.

### **Policing (Hetero) Normal in Lived Student Culture**

I began by using Melissa's interview data to explain that one way that heteronormativity was enforced was through verbal harassment by peers. Lesbianism is perceived to be an abject pathology amongst students. Being called a 'lessie' was used along with the other forms of female othering as an insult in an instance of verbal harassment amongst students. As Melissa explained:

I think you'd get beaten up at school by the so called popular group, you hear them talking... (There have been) experiences at school where someone's walked past them and shouted out "Faggot!". Rachel, she was walking with a group of people and she didn't want to turn around (Melissa, Year 10 lesbian student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

I also explained to the Year 13 students in the hall that young women who didn't fit the heterosexual 'norm', who didn't have boyfriends, or who were not sexually active were also assumed to be lesbians. The fear of being labelled as a lesbian kept many of the young women I interviewed within the bounds of acceptable (heterosexual) femininity. Zorra, a Year 13 student, explained to me how, in order to avoid the negativity of the lesbian label, she decided to get a boyfriend:

I remember in Year 11; I had no interest in having a boyfriend at that stage and I constantly felt this pressure ... people would say, "Oh yeah, she must be a lesbian" ... cos I didn't have a boyfriend ... and I ended up going out with this guy I didn't particularly want to go out with just to prove to everybody I'm not a lesbian (Zorra, heterosexual Year 13 student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

After I had used more data to illustrate the silences in the formal curriculum concerning same sex desire, I went on to use the student interview data to talk about the effects these understandings had on the lesbian and bisexual students I interviewed. I began with Melissa's comment:

I never thought it would affect me that much and it was really horrible, it's been really horrible carrying it around all the time. I do remember some times if I did think about it, I'd get scared, I 'd just start to think about it and block it out. I'd get on with it and forget about it, that's all I could do (Melissa, Year 10 lesbian student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

Next in the member check I explained how the understandings of gender and sexuality that the interview participants positioned themselves in relation to within their peer culture were played out with/in what the participants understood as female 'ways of operating'. The stereotypical gendered modus operandi included covert gossip and rumours and overt verbal (rather than physical) harassment. Gossip and rumours about teachers and students perceived to be lesbian and bisexual were features of this world (Hey, 1997). Allegations of lesbianism were used as a controlling mechanism through rumour and through a powerful form of peer exclusion. Exclusion reinforces normative values about sex and gender, while simultaneously abnormalising same sex desire. As a Year 13 student pointed out to me anonymously later in the member check feedback:

People do talk about who is or who isn't lesbian or bi, but it's always as though (the person) they're (talking about is) an outsider and the people talking feel 'close', in a group, by talking to someone else they are proving to others their heterosexuality (anonymous Year 13 bisexual student, written response from member check, Kereru Girls' College, 1997).

Next I explained to students in the member check that lesbian and bisexual students did get some support from their friends. As Melissa explained in the earlier interview:

My closest friends do know and they've found it easy to cope with I think. I think some people are really fascinated with it. They think it's really the most

amazingly thing and they want to help out, there's nobody that's reacted badly so far (Melissa, Year 10 lesbian student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

The final part of the data feedback in the member check explored how the interview participants actively subverted and challenged heteronormalising processes.

### **Challenging and Dismantling Dominant Heteronormative Discourses**

In this section of the chapter I draw on data other than that I presented to students during the member check. My intention in including this data is to provide richer and deeper understandings of the discursive construction of heteronormativity amongst students, and how that process was also challenged and destabilised. I draw on anonymous student data I received from the member check, and also from an interview I undertook with Margaret, a gay year 13 student in 1998.

Students suggested to me that representations of bisexuality appeared to operate simultaneously to both widen the discourses of same sex desire for young women, and to shut them down. While bisexuality was seen to be fashionable by some students, others suggested that when the information about the sexual relationships shifted from rumour into confirmed public knowledge, similar abnormalising constructions of same sex relationships to those that I had already discussed arose. Anonymous feedback I received from a Year 13 student during the member check indicated that understandings of same sex female relationships were framed within pathologising constructs of insatiable and predatory sexuality:

I'm bisexual and I don't see it as being fashionable. Last year rumours went around about me and my friend ... some of them were true but a whole lot more was brought into it... But it was when people started asking that it got harder denying the true stuff, or admitting it. In the end I told some people and well I got a lot of shit ... in that way you are correct, it's hard coming out e.g. people step back as though you are going to jump them... (Anonymous Year 13 bisexual student, written response from member check, Kereru Girls' College, 1997).

The student's comment suggested that in the move from silence/rumour to speech, a shift which takes place where articulation equaled legitimation. While supposition and rumour can run rife, the possibility of being (hetero)normal can still exist. Like former North American President Clinton's 'Don't Ask and Don't Tell' policy on gays in the United States military, until that information is made explicit, it is not an issue that has to be dealt with (Sedgwick, 1990). Once the information has been verified, abnormalising constructs came into play.

However, if as Butler (1990) suggested, understandings of gender and sexuality are fixed through constant reiteration, then articulations of understandings about sexuality provide an opportunity to examine the discourses which construct them. In the case of the bisexual student and her peers, those abnormalising discourses were found wanting. The student's friends found out that she wasn't going to 'jump them' and make them have sex with her. In other words the inadequacy of pathologising and sexually insatiable constructions of lesbianism and bisexuality were made explicit, and the opportunity arose to put those abnormalising concepts "under erasure" Derrida (in Davies, 1995, p. 2). Anonymous feedback I received following the member check from a student explains that once her peers got used to the idea of her bisexuality (and perhaps found out that the pathologising stereotype didn't necessarily fit with her persona), her sexuality was no longer such a big deal. She explained how, in this way, meanings shifted:

... walking around the school you could (and I'm not being paranoid) hear... rumours, whispers ... but after a while it's cool, everyone sort of, forgets. (Anonymous Year 13 bisexual student, written response from member check, Kereru Girls' College, 1997).

Margaret, a gay student who I interviewed in 1998 only started having a same sex relationship in her final year at school. While she experienced difficulties with negative reactions from family members, her peers were very supportive of her. She suggests that same sex relationships were much more acceptable amongst her own age group and that her peers' acceptance meant that she was able to integrate her sexuality comfortably into her life:

I think maybe for our age group it's more acceptable and I found like when I told my friends about me and Melissa like they said, that's really good, as long as you're happy. It seems like it's just part of life now (Margaret, Year 13 gay student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

During the member check I explained to the students how in some cases bisexuality was framed by the participants to abnormalise same sex relationships amongst young women and legitimate heterosexuality. Several young women framed bisexuality as being more acceptable than being seen to be lesbian. Gabrielle, a heterosexual Year 12 student, saw bisexuality as more experimental and therefore more acceptable than being lesbian, as an intermediate stage on the way to mature heterosexuality. She saw it as mutable, fashionable and even fun; a less threatening prospect to acknowledge than the abject construction of the butch lesbian as male:

It's kind of a fashion lately to be bisexual ... to experiment or something is fine, that's cool but I'm not sure how it would be accepted if someone came out and said, 'I'm lesbian'... they have stereotypes of butch lesbians and yet experimenting is exciting and natural, it's more okay. (Gabrielle, Heterosexual year 12, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

One of the factors that students felt contributed towards a more relaxed attitude towards young women in same sex relationships was the wider range of representations of 'ways of being' lesbian and bisexual which they saw as becoming increasingly more available. Heidi's comments reveal that this shift is underpinned by the same binary systems of thought, which serve to normalise heterosexual/female constructs and abnormalise lesbian/male representations. She saw herself as someone who could be more acceptably female (read normal) because she didn't conform to abject constructs of lesbian as 'big' 'masculine' 'mean' butches (read abnormal). In one way her acceptability rested on appearing just as 'normal' as a heterosexual. However, it also widened the range of possible 'ways of being' bisexual for herself and provided a venue within which she could situate herself. As Heidi explained:



(These days) it's different. I think more (lesbian and bisexual people) look normal, you don't have to be stereotypical, I'm not big and masculine and I'm not into sport ... I think that if you look normal rather than being stereotypically masculine butch ... I think you're more accepted because people have an image of what a lesbian looks like and it's that butch thing, a bit mean (Heidi, bisexual Year 10 student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

Both straight and queer interview participants identified the role that popular culture played in creating wider representations of same sex relationships for young people. Their reflections echo Britzman's (1995) observation that schools aren't the only venues which produce understandings about sexuality that influence young people. Lesbian actors such as Ellen de Generes and musicians such as Melissa Etheridge and kd laing have played a role in widening representations of what it means to be lesbian and bisexual. Heidi reflects that seeing successful queer women in popular culture who don't conform to stereotyped constructs and look 'normal' encourages her to see herself more positively:

Like Melissa Etheridge and things she's not typically butch and masculine and her lover Julia Cypher, she's not. The fact that they're accepted more if you read about it in the media, yeah, people don't people think, Oh yeah, they are, they're happy and they look relatively normal... It makes it easier to accept yourself as being like that 'cos you've got a role model and maybe you think, well if they've done it, well hey why can't you? If they've survived that long and gone through things then it can't all be bad (Heidi Year 10 bisexual student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

Next I want to return to the session.

In the twenty minutes of the session that were left I wanted to get some suggestions from the students about possible directions that the research project could move towards in creating a more inclusive climate for lesbian and bisexual students within Kereru Girls' College. I was aware at this point that the students were beginning to get restless. In order to gain the information I needed from them, I made the on the spot decision to

change tack slightly and attempt to re-spark their attention and interest through negotiating with them how they could provide me with the information I needed.

My comments show that this strategy (one which I had frequently used in the classroom as a teacher), performed a number of different functions. I had a hunch that the students would prefer to work collaboratively in groups, even though I knew that this way of working would be more difficult to accomplish. While I had a commitment to working collaboratively with students in groups which stretched back into my time as a classroom teacher, I also knew that giving students a choice was a way of ensuring that they all got back on track. As my comments indicate, providing the students with a choice was also a controlling mechanism to ensure that they followed my instructions:

I know that this is last period in the day and that some of you are finding it quite difficult to concentrate, I'll give you a choice now, I want to know what you think students can do about this situation ... Now this is what I want you to decide very quickly now, I want your ideas about what students can do and there's three ways we can do that and I want you to put your hand up about which of the three methods we choose, and we'll go with the majority: one, we brainstorm all of the ideas, you tell them to me and I write them down, two, you get into groups and talk about it for ten minutes and then everybody writes their ideas down and you give them back to me, three, you write your own ideas personally on a sheet... hands up in the air please, don't be afraid, Okay, that's fine, this is what we're going to do and its going to be hard to swing it but we're going to do it. Okay I want you to all get into groups of no more than ten people and sit in different part of the hall and write your ideas down (Year 13 member check transcript, Kereta Girls' College, 1997).

There was lots of loud noise and talking at this point and the sound of furniture scraping across the floor as they arranged themselves in groups. I reiterated on the board what I asked them to do and walked around checking that they were on task and answering any questions. As time wore on the volume of the noise increased, there were shouts, laughs and exclamations punctuated with the occasional scream! Now and again I could hear my voice straining to be heard over this cacophony of sound. It's just as well I had a loud

voice that projected well. Finally, I recognised that the noise level had escalated sharply, and I asked the groups to finish off what they were discussing and recording. We had a few minutes in hand and I asked the students if they had any questions about my analysis to date and the direction of the project in the school.

A Samoan student stood up and challenged me about why it was that no one was working towards creating an inclusive school environment for Samoan students at Kereru Girls' College:

A young Samoan woman stood up and said that she was angry that no one was creating inclusive schools for her and wanted to know why I wasn't doing that. I replied that I thought what she had identified was a very important issue but that sexuality and culture were different issues and that I felt that I would not have the credibility to work within a school in order to work towards making it more inclusive of Samoan students. However, I told her that there was a Samoan researcher in Wellington doing research into the experiences of young Samoan students in schools (Field notes, Kereru Girls' College, 20 February, 1997).

This interaction raised some interesting issues about the nature of inclusion within an equity framework which I have discussed more fully in Part One. I also think that the student's comments highlighted the need for classrooms to be able to explore the intersections between culture and sexuality in more depth.

I closed the session by asking the students' permission to use their verbal and written feedback as data, and indicated that if they chose not to do this to tell me before they went, or to make sure that they held on to their written responses rather than hand them in as they left. The member check hour was over and I was left with a raft of student feedback to consider, and my own thoughts to mull over. In the car as I drove home, I rewound the tape and played it to clarify my sense of what had happened in that hour. Things had happened which I had not expected. Next I want to consider what some of those aspects were.

## Theories and Practices: the Pedagogical Potential of Exploring the Heteronormalising Process

In Part One I described a range of theoretical frameworks which have enabled me to explore what it might mean to move away from what Sedgwick (1990) describes as minoritising paradigms which frame lesbian, gay and bisexual subjectivities as other. The theoretical tools which I drew on to explore and interrogate the heteronormalising process and its effects on students in the member check enabled me to suggest that it is the unmarked nature of compulsory heterosexuality which is 'the problem', rather than same sex desire. Sedgwick describes this approach as a universalising one: it explores the ways in which the operation of the homo/hetero binary continues to be a paradigm which plays an ongoing role in fixing the normality of heterosexuality as well as in reinforcing the abnormality of same sex desire.

Adopting the approach of wanting to understand the process through which discursive constructions of heteronormativity and hegemonic femininities are produced and contested was a powerful pedagogical tool in terms of sidestepping what I had increasingly come to see as pathologising minoritising discourses. I wasn't in the position of having to reinforce the otherness of same sex desire by advocating that more tolerance be extended to a disadvantaged group. Instead the focus shifted to interrogate compulsory heterosexuality, and place it under examination. For the first time I caught a glimpse of the potential of asking the question, "When did you first know you were a heterosexual?", rather than the usual barrage of questions concerning same sex desire which invariably positioned lesbian and bisexuality outside the norm.

Another opportunity created through this approach was that a space was created for exploring the discursive construction of sexuality and gender. Several students noted the invisibility which characterised any mention of same sex desire in the formal curriculum and the lack of ease teachers had shown in dealing with sexual diversity. An anonymous student commented that:

Teachers touch on the subject in Social Education classes but don't go into depth, its treated with kid gloves, no-one seems comfortable talking about it

(Anonymous Year 13 student, written response from member check, Kereru Girls' College, Feb 1997).

As Margaret's comments at the beginning of this chapter indicate, the member check inadvertently provided a space within which the construction of sexualities and gender could be explored, perhaps in a way that was not able to happen in the enacted curriculum in the classroom.

By providing a venue within which the meanings of sexualities could be explored, the member check also made possible a space for students to be able to safely articulate and acknowledge their feelings and desires privately. One student's anonymous response to me acknowledged her feelings while providing a salutary comment on what she saw as the role of the heteronormative peer culture in making it difficult to explore her feelings publicly:

You're dead right in everything you say ... Sometimes I get these feelings and have dreams about the same sex but there is no way I could tell anyone. Not even my best friend. Because I'm scared of what they might think of me and then it would be a rumour around the school. I would be made fun of and accused of being a lesbian (Anonymous Year 13 student, written response from member check, Kereru Girls' College, Feb 1997).

An exploration of the discursive construction of sexuality and gender has other advantages. If as Butler (1990) suggests, gender can be understood as a contingent politically enacted social order which fixes meanings through continuous reiteration, then the performative process can create opportunities for those understandings to shift. Discussing the operation of normalising constructions of compulsory heterosexuality and how these constructs interacted with discourses of hegemonic femininities has the potential to lay bare the process and reveal its instability (Butler, 1990, 1993). Butler's work provides a way to understand how constructions of gender and sexuality operate to legitimate and normalise heterosexuality. She suggests that compulsory heterosexuality is essential for the production of a coherent gender and she emphasises the pivotal nature of this connection, describing it as the heterosexual

matrix. In that sense, Butler's notion draws upon Foucauldian frameworks to emphasise the multi-dimensional simultaneity of power relations under negotiation, and therefore provides gaps and possibilities to move within. In this way, understanding how constructs of gender and sexuality work together to normalise heterosexuality can create a space for new and wider representations of sexuality and gender to emerge, and also for heteronormalising discourses to be challenged and contested.

One of the Year 13 students showed an awareness of the way that socially constructed discourses about compulsory heterosexuality make available certain subject positions:

Society definitely does change our views, even just by everyday things such as graphics on cards etc with a boy and girl kissing for example. (Anonymous Year 13 student, written response from member check, Kereru Girls' College, Feb 1997).

Another student was able to reflect on the operation of the abnormalising process in relation to constructions of same sex desire in the light of her own understanding and experience. Her comment indicated a thoughtful engagement with the complexities of making meanings about sexualities which she was able to apply to her own behaviour in order to understand its implications:

I think what you've showed us is true. Especially about the rumours. When I walk down the corridor I see a girl who is rumoured to be a lesbian. I think to myself, "Oh she's a lesbian!", which is stupid because I don't think she's a heterosexual when I see a heterosexual girl! It's because of course it's different to me- and I don't understand (Anonymous Year 13 student, written response from member check, Kereru Girls' College, Feb 1997).

Drawing on the tools of deconstruction and discourse analysis, along with other Foucauldian and queer tools of analysis also enabled students to exercise agency in the process of positioning themselves in relation to the binary understandings which were explored. These tools provide ways to move beyond essentialising notions of gender and sexuality, and the monolithic and limited identity categories which result from these

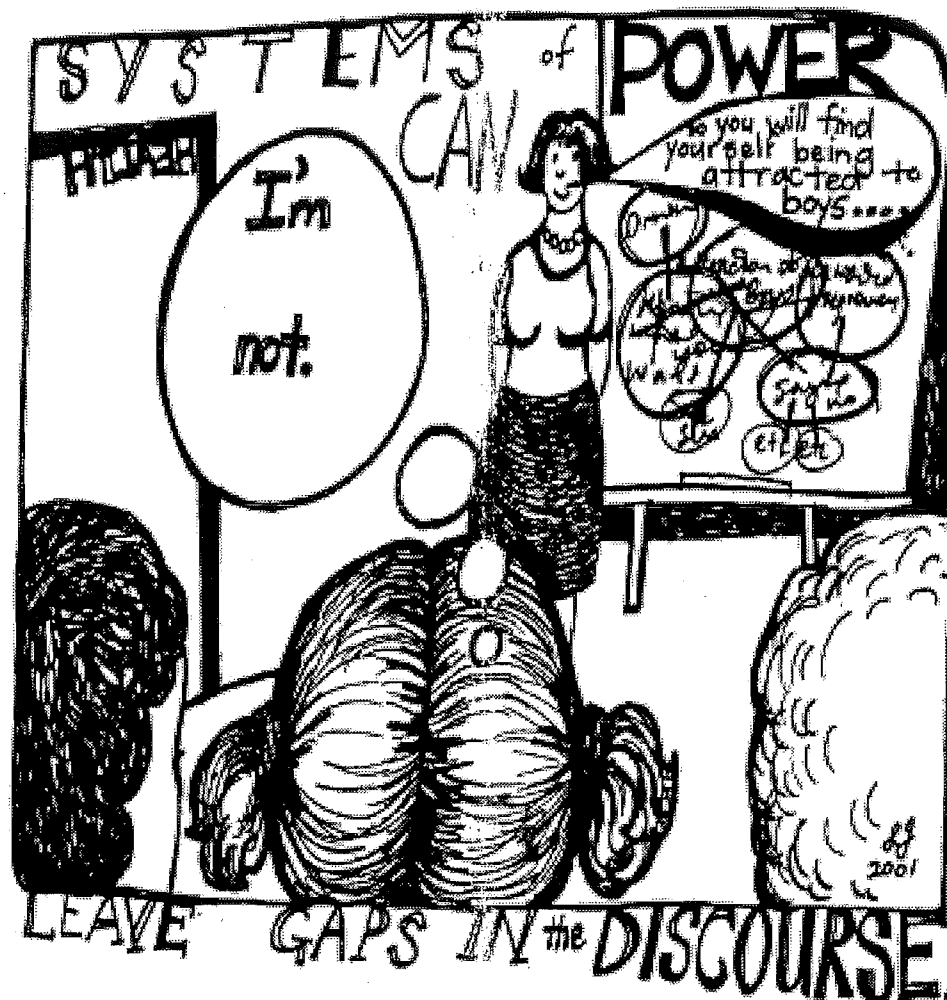
frameworks (Bryson & de Castell, 1993; Davies, 1995; Lather, 1991; Kenway, 1996). Given that binary discourses are in a continuous state of reiteration and contestation, the opportunity is created for individuals to position themselves in relation to the understandings which are expressed. Because articulations of understandings about sexuality and gender can occur randomly and often, this approach can be both achievable and contingent (Davies, 1995). As Kenway (1996) suggests in relation to young women's understandings of gender constructs:

... girls' voices represent the positions in webs of discourse that are offered and their responses to such positions. Such responses amongst individual and groups of girls will include a variety of accommodations, contestations and resistances depending on what they bring to the exchange and the ways in which they read and negotiate the complexity and it's inherent and competing relationships of power (p. 65).

This process can encourage students to see themselves as complex human beings and as active readers of culture within a venue where understandings of pleasure and desire (Fine, 1992a) can be explored.

Heteronormative discourses 'speak' the student, who can then become aware of gaps in the discourse and the possibilities arising in the silences for other performances of (unspeakable) sexualities. Foucault advocates the usefulness of genealogical approaches to understand the operations of prisons and other institutions. He explains that drawing on tools to understand the operation of dominant discourses, an opportunity arises to disrupt them:

All my books ... are little toolboxes, if you will. If people are willing to open them and make use of such and such a sentence or idea, of one analysis or another, as they would a screwdriver, or a monkey wrench, in order to short circuit or disqualify systems of power... (Foucault, in Halperin, 1995, p. 52)



As I explained in Part One, Warner (1993) values the way that queer theoretical notions of heteronormativity draw upon Foucauldian understandings of power as contingent and shifting and as constructed through discourses. Warner thought that understanding power as circulatory and productive was helpful in providing opportunities to destabilise and short circuit heteronormative discourses. In this way, an exploration of the operation of the heteronormalising process can also provide a way into thinking about how sexuality and gender could be framed differently in order to affirm sexual diversity within schools. One of the Year 13 students emphasised the importance of creating venues to explore the construction of sexualities and gender for young women which move beyond the limitations of heteronormalising discourses. She suggested that incorporating a range of representations of doing sexuality and gender which move beyond the homo/ hetero binary could enable attitudes and behaviours to be widened. She explained:



I think it is very hard for lesbians and bisexuals at Kereru. People feel threatened by them and think they will proposition them. It's not a logical conclusion, rather it is based on ingrained stereotypes and beliefs in our society. Lesbians and bisexuals don't want to be considered abnormal (Anonymous Year 13 member check written feedback, Kereru Girls' College, February 1997).

While the operation of the homo/hetero and male/female binaries were identified in the session, I also explored how students positioned themselves in relation to constructs of bisexuality in order to challenge the binary construction of heterosexual/ homosexual. Framing sexuality in a way which moves beyond binary frameworks to explore the ways in which people constantly negotiate a range of sexual subjectivities, has the potential to destabilise and abnormalise the binary nature of current heterosexual discourses. Heterosexuality then has the potential to become one alternative amongst several, rather than the 'normal' choice within a binary that minoritises lesbian and gay sexuality and makes bisexuality invisible. Models such as continuums which incorporate sexual fluidity are suggestive of the possibility that individuals do not necessarily lead their lives as fixed identities, as exclusively hetero/homosexual, but instead have the potential to explore their desire/s in a variety of different sexual subjectivities throughout their lives (Britzman, 1995; Quinlivan & Town, 1999a).

Several students indicated that they weren't worried by sexual diversity and they and some of their peers were prepared to openly support their friends who were gay:

You are pretty spot on about it, but there are a few exceptions ... some people just don't care what other people are ... One of my friends is gay so I think it's alright ... and I don't know if certain people would stop talking to her or not but a few people I've talked to wouldn't... I know that my friend knows that if she comes out I would support her- and I'm proud of her (Anonymous Year 13 student, written response from member check, Kereru Girls' College, Feb 1997).

While the student responses I have discussed so far frame the session as containing the seeds of some useful directions in terms of classroom practice, I am not wanting to give

the impression that the discussion was a seamlessly successful victory narrative. The whole area of sexualities and schooling is a far more contested scenario (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Silin, 1995). What actually went on in the session was complex and layered, and sometimes personally confronting, especially in terms of the interactions between the students and how I situated myself throughout the session. Next I want to move on to explore some of those issues.

### **Contestations and Positionings**

There were many silences in the session, many of which I remain unaware of. Perhaps the silences that I was most attuned to came from the lesbian and bisexual participants I had interviewed. We had talked beforehand about how I had framed what they discussed with me, and I was concerned that they did whatever they needed to do in order to keep themselves safe. They decided in the end to attend and to sit with supportive friends throughout the session. While Melissa, the lesbian participant, realised that the session could be difficult to deal with, it wasn't until later that she was able to reflect on the extent to which seeing her own words made her feel very exposed:

... I think I never really kind of came to terms with being gay until now, I think whenever it was kind of brought up it scared me. I think I very slowly got used to it so it was a very big thing for the whole school to discuss it ... it didn't last long but that day I felt (vulnerable) ... (Melissa lesbian Year 13 student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

The vulnerability that Melissa experienced was compounded by the fact that Heidi, who had been her partner up until that point, had decided that she was heterosexual. Her overtly heteronormative behaviour during the session proved painful and difficult for Melissa to deal with:

I wanted to sit with Heidi to have someone there but she went off with other people. So I sat with Margaret and them, and they were like support and then we had to get into groups and Heidi was just being a bitch and running everything down. Just like mocking lesbianism in general, she was only doing it to get at me

and I felt like saying, “Look your (words) are up there (on the overhead) anyway!”... (Melissa lesbian Year 13 student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

Margaret, a gay identified seventh former, noted the negative reactions of some of her peers to the material which I was presenting. The reactions from Margaret's peers drew on pathologising constructs of me as a predatory 'promoter and recruiter' which reinforced abnormal constructions of lesbianism:

... I thought it was really good but I found a lot of people were sitting there saying, “Oh my god she's trying to convert us!”, there were quite a few people like that and that they took it to extremes really but I thought ... that it was a good idea ... they were just saying homophobic things. One of the people who said that was Heidi and that was when she was going through that denial stage (Margaret, gay Year 13 student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

Of course because I was mainly at the front of the hall I wasn't party to the majority of the dynamics which were occurring between the students. Heidi was sitting with a particular group of students who were making sarcastic comments and laughing. At one point they became so disruptive that I had to ask them to be quiet. It wasn't until later that I was told by the participants that they were the so called 'popular group', a particular collection of students who the interview participants had previously told me had overtly harassed students who they thought were lesbian<sup>4</sup>.

More direct challenges and disruptions emerged in the written and spoken feedback that I received both during and after the session. As I indicated in the first part of the chapter, representations of sexuality and gender are on the move. One student suggested to me in her feedback that I needed to take some of these changes more into account:

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<sup>4</sup> Exactly who the 'popular' group was became a source of some confusion. I mistakenly assumed that the particular group of students were called popular because they were popular with their peers. In fact (and rather ironically!) the participants told me later that they were called popular because they saw themselves as being popular.

I think you're half-way there but I think that things have changed quite a bit recently over the years. Being the 90s, people tend to be a bit more open about their sexuality... (Anonymous Year 13 student, written response from member check, Kereru Girls' College, Feb 1997).

Another student suggested that drawing attention to the heteronormalising process amongst her peers and exploring the process operated to make lesbianism and bisexuality less acceptable:

Stop talking about it like this because it makes more of an issue out of it - and therefore less normal. That doesn't mean it should be kept hush hush, just don't make a big deal out of it. (Anonymous Year 13 student, written response from member check, Kereru Girls' College, Feb 1997).

A small group of students also provided written responses which strongly indicated that they felt that any discussion of sexual diversity legitimated lesbian and bisexual perspectives. Their concern was that same sex desire was morally wrong and conflicted with their Christian belief system. As one anonymous student commented;

Well I think all you're doing is advertising SEX and LESBIANISM ETC. I think that lesbianism is WRONG! I as a Christian stand strong in what I believe! (Anonymous Year 13 student, written response from member check, Kereru Girls' College, Feb 1997).

I have discussed my persona as a teacher earlier in the chapter. However, one subject position that I wasn't as keen to trade on was my lesbian subjectivity. I did not disclose my own queer/ lesbian subjectivity with the students during the session. This was not a conscious stance I had decided to adopt beforehand. I do know from my teaching experience, though, that much of how I had chosen to manage the disclosure of my sexuality when working with students in the past had operated on a very subconscious and intuitive level. I tended to read the atmosphere and choose how to manage my sexuality depending on the particular dynamics in operation within a specific context.

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One of the key factors in determining the level of my disclosure was my sense of personal safety. Within the particular context of the member check, I felt too unsafe to do this. Instead, like many lesbian teachers (Khayatt, 1984), and the lesbian and bisexual students I had interviewed, I focused on developing my professional credibility as an educator and as a researcher with the students. However, as I showed earlier, many of the students assumed that I was a (promoting and recruiting) lesbian anyway, despite the fact that I wasn't explicit it about my lesbian subjectivity during the session.

In the final part of the chapter I want to sound something of a cautionary note as I situate the session within the wider heteronormative culture of Kereru Girls' College.

### **Disrupting Hegemonic Heterosexuality in Schools: Sounding Some Cautions**

While explorations of the discursive construction of sexuality and gender have the possibility of creating a venue where the complexities of sexual diversity can be explored, it also needs to be acknowledged that drawing on queer, Foucauldian and feminist post-structural frameworks in the classroom is not a panacea. As I explained more fully in Chapter One, these strategies are not necessarily sufficient in and of themselves to shift dominant heteronormative discourses (Sedgwick, 1990) or to create structural change (Kenway & Willis, 1997). I also discovered during the course of the project that drawing on these tools in educational contexts can be a profoundly subversive and uncomfortable process.

Within the context of Kereru Girls' College, I think that the member check with the seventh form can be best understood as a disruption to the prevalent heteronormative discourses within the school. One of the students in the member check incisively drew my attention to the challenges involved in attempting to legitimate what can be considered a dangerous and silenced discourse (Misson, 1996) when she commented;

Can you really change a problem that most people aren't aware of? (Anonymous Year 13 member check written feedback, Kereru Girls' College, February 1997).

In addition to challenging taken for granted knowledge, the tools of discourse analysis and deconstruction also call into question the role of the teacher as an expert knower (Bryson & de Castell, 1993; Davies, 1995; Kenway & Willis, 1997). For these reasons, Davies, (1995) suggests the use of these tools requires a re-thinking of the traditional teacher role of transmission. The difficulties which emerge when working with teachers using these strategies is explored in more detail in the next chapter.

Therefore I am advocating an informed action approach which takes into account the limitations and problematic aspects of queer, Foucauldian and feminist post-structural intellectual tools, as well as an awareness of the possibilities they offer. Along with an appreciation of the ideological and structural and contextual constraints of schooling, I suggest that this approach would enable undertaking work on sexual diversity in schooling contexts to proceed in a more informed way.

Because of some of the difficulties that I have described, I see the uses of Foucauldian, feminist post-structural and queer intellectual tools such as deconstruction and discourse analysis primarily being of use as an interruption to hegemonic heterosexualities on an individual level in the classroom, rather than as a structural form of change. I would also suggest that any use of deconstruction needs to be accompanied by other strategies that actually address the structural nature of change within schools.

Despite the limitations of the tools I have discussed in this chapter, I think it is important to consider ways in which classroom environments can become venues within which understandings of sexuality and gender and the intersections between them can be explored. It is important to create environments where heterosexuality can be discussed and deconstructed, rather than presumed. The tools I have mentioned and conceptualisations of sexuality I have drawn on, have the potential to destabilise discourses of compulsory heterosexuality. Within queer, Foucauldian and feminist poststructural paradigms, heterosexuality can be understood as one alternative amongst several sexual subject positions, rather than the 'normal' choice within a binary that minoritises lesbian and gay sexuality, and renders bisexual subject positions invisible.

The theoretical tools of discourse analysis, deconstruction and performativity that I drew on to analyse the data could be useful (albeit challenging) pedagogical tools for teachers to consider when engaging with understanding gender and sexualities in their work with students in secondary schools. These processes could provide teachers and students with a venue within the classroom that may widen understandings of the relationship between culture and power in terms of sexuality and gender. It may provide a possible pedagogy to enable the classroom as a site to become a place within which the difficult knowledge (Britzman, 1998) of sexuality and gender in all its complexity and permutations, can be encountered.

In the next chapter I move on to consider the ideological, structural and context related constraints which need to be negotiated when undertaking work to affirm sexual diversity in secondary schools.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### EXPLORING AND NEGOTIATING THE IDEOLOGICAL, STRUCTURAL, AND CONTEXTUAL CONSTRAINTS AS THEY WERE PLAYED OUT IN TWO CRITICAL MOMENTS DURING THE RESEARCH PROJECT AT KERERU GIRLS' COLLEGE

I think it's a really really thorny issue and really hard to handle... I mean we still have very deep prejudices against people who are homosexual or gay I think, even if we are trying hard not to, I think the prejudices are definitely there... I think that however accommodating you think you are, deep down there's very big fears about people who are different and what they might do to you, about what they might do to your children, what might happen in society ... deep, deep fears (Nellie, English Teacher, Kereru Girls' College, Interview 1996).

This is a real workload issue. At present I only get one hour a week to do all Health. That is organise 15 staff, train new staff, organise Health Council etc. As much as I want to do something there isn't the time. Meeting with Kathleen and (her) coming to Health meetings is really important. I believe in this but there are so many other things to do at these meetings. There is a lot of resistance by staff, not because some don't think it's important but because they don't have the time (Linda's Journal, Health programme coordinator, Kereru Girls' College, 29/5/97).

(A colleague) always says you can always tell a teacher, but not much... and the longer they've been teaching the harder it is (Felicity, Principal, Kereru Girls' College, Interview 1998).

#### Introduction

As Nellie suggests, fears about same sex desire make undertaking work in a school to legitimate sexual diversity ideologically problematic. Nellie explains how the fears concerning same sex desire are connected to the idea of the dangers of sexual difference and otherness. Discourses of deviance based on nineteenth century medical models position lesbians and gay men as predators on both adults and children, and therefore threatening to the normality of heterosexual society. The presence of a project to affirm sexual diversity in a school involves engaging with dangerous knowledge because it legitimates 'ways of knowing' which have historically been framed as 'other' and 'abnormal'.



Linda's comments allude to the structural constraints that emerged during the process of the research. The current way that schooling institutions are structured, and the different priorities and increased workload of teachers in a de-regulated educational climate, means there is an ideological clash, and a lack of time and space in which to participate in research projects which revolve around issues which many secondary teachers do not see it as their role to deal with. Early interviews with teaching staff cited some of these reasons to explain why working within the context of a secondary school in order to develop and trial a school wide approach to affirm representations of sexual diversity would be a challenging undertaking. Not the least of these reasons, as Felicity suggests, are the challenges involved in working with teachers whose role constructs them as 'expert knowers'. At the beginning of the project I thought that it would be enough to acknowledge these constraints at the same time as the project proceeded. However, as time went on it became clearer that, to a large extent, the constraints overwhelmed the research process.

Through an exploration of a Health teachers meeting and a staff professional development session on affirming sexual diversity, I explore the emergence of ideological, structural and macro and micro contextual constraints which emerged during the research process at Kereru Girls' College.

Becoming better informed about the ideological, structural and contextual constraints which emerged during the research process can help to explain what encourages and inhibits change in terms of working on issues of sexual diversity in school contexts (Thonemann, 1999). Rather like a chemical equation, it is the combination of a number of different 'constraints' working together within a particular laboratory and shaken by a particular group of people at a certain point in time, which produces a reaction. However, it is also important to bear in mind that the discourses which underpinned the constraints are not monolithic. Kereru Girls' College itself challenged the discourses I am about to discuss by agreeing to participate in the project. The presence of the project in the school disrupted heteronormative discourses, and caused them to shift (Butler, 1990, 1993).

## Critical Moment One: The Health Teachers Meeting

**Kathleen's Research Journal, July 2000**

It's the lunch hour, I'm rushing to get to Kereru to sit in on a Year Ten Health teachers meeting in the lunch hour, and I'm late. I've had a lot on my mind. I've been mulling over the connections between raising teachers awareness and changing their classroom practice. I had the opportunity to undertake some professional development with Health teachers at the school to raise their awareness about issues of sexual diversity a few months earlier (see Appendix D). The feedback which I had received informally, indicated that the session had gone well. However, I was becoming increasingly aware that raising teacher's awareness didn't necessarily change teacher's practice in the classroom. Reading Skrtic (1995) I could see that one of the reasons for this was that secondary school teachers tended to work as professional experts, mostly unseen and unmonitored in their classrooms. I was thinking that one way to bridge this gap might be through asking the Health teachers if they felt okay about me observing their classes. I thought that I could find out if raising their awareness about issues of sexual diversity had changed how they worked with students.

My other thought involved a major re-think of the scale of the research project in the school. A lot of thinking and talking has gone on with both my supervisors and the teachers in the planning group who volunteered to work with me on developing the project in the school. It became clear that given the limited time frame of the Ph.D., the structural constraints, and the time it takes to create change within a school (Fullan, 1995), that developing and implementing a school wide model of change (see Appendix G) as we planned wasn't feasible. It seemed more realistic to focus on the curriculum area and to see if there would be any Health teachers willing to work with me on delivering a Health curriculum that would be inclusive of lesbian and bisexual perspectives. While I'm enthusiastic about this possible change in direction, I'm also nervous because I know that for this to work, teachers have to volunteer to work with me. I was to find out in the meeting and over the next few days why this would be such a big ask.

The Health teachers (along with the Guidance team<sup>1</sup>) at Kereru Girls' College hold their departmental meeting in the lunch hour. I want to begin by exploring how it reflected the constraints which hampered the ongoing progress of the research project at Kereru Girls' College. It became evident that there was an ongoing tension in the school in terms of meeting the academic and social and personal needs of students. Like most schools, Kereru Girls' College walked a tightrope in attempting to address both the academic and

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<sup>1</sup> The Guidance Team is made up of the school counsellors and the Head of each Year level. The latter's job is to look after the personal welfare of students in their Year level.

personal/social development of students. The dual role which schools were increasingly being expected to play in this regard was seen as being problematic by the Principal, Felicity:

... I think that's a big issue at the moment for society at large actually because on the one hand I want to try and focus on the idea of the school as a place to learn and to get the skills and knowledge that you need, but it does also have to have a role in people learning to be part of their society and their roles within it and particularly working together and being part of a community ... I do think schools have a part in establishing a framework where everybody does fit and create some sort of cohesion and focus. I don't think we can just teach knowledge and skills in our subject areas and say that we won't do anything beyond that but it's very hard to do and that's what's causing the stresses in schools (Felicity, Principal, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

Apple (1995) and Ball (1997) amongst others have drawn attention to the paradoxical and often contradictory roles that schools are expected to perform. On the one hand schools are seen to play a political role in ensuring equality and class mobility. At the same time schools play an economic role in producing workers for the labour market as well as in producing the cultural capital of technical and administrative knowledge (Apple, 1995). Negotiating these different roles, especially in terms of changing school cultures is difficult work for schools to undertake because, as Felicity explained, the two roles pull in opposite directions (Hargreaves, 1994).

One of the reasons which makes meeting the academic and social needs of students challenging within a secondary school context is the fact that the secondary school teachers are trained to specialise in a particular subject area. Most secondary school teachers see their role as subject-matter specialists who do not need to focus on what they frame as the 'private' or personal development of the student (Skritic, 1995; Silin, 1995). This historical precedent contributes towards attitudes which can minimise addressing the personal and emotional development of students within a secondary school environment. Sylvie, a guidance counsellor, suggested to me that the social and emotional welfare of students is not seen as part of the formal curriculum at Kereru Girls' College:

If it's not curriculum, it's fringe; the social and emotional development of kids (Sylvie, Kereru Girls' College guidance counsellor's comments to me in field notes, June 1997).

Helen who was both a teacher and a counsellor explained that many teachers in the school did not see addressing what they framed as personal and social issues facing students as part of their role. She explained that addressing these issues was seen to be the role of the guidance and counselling staff, not classroom teachers:

... the teacher in the classroom focuses on teaching their subject in the classroom rather than focusing on the whole person ... (some teachers felt) that they were there in the classroom to impart their subject and what people's lives outside the classroom were is not their concern, there are (other) people at school who can deal with that (Helen, counsellor and Health teacher, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

The tension between meeting the academic and personal needs of students was constantly juggled by the school. It raised ideological questions about the roles of schools and teachers. Addressing these 'big questions' is also tied up with the position of the school in the community. One of the reasons which explains some of the tensions between the personal and academic development of students in the school is the fact that some teachers and administrators felt that historically Kereru Girls' College has been perceived as 'less academic' than other single sex state girls' schools in the community. In the current de-regulated macro educational climate, academic standards are the most common measurement of a successful school (Gordon, 1993). As the Principal suggests, the school not being seen to be academically rigorous was a cause for concern for some staff:

I think particularly in the senior school ... staff are really concerned that the girls are not aiming high enough academically and not achieving enough academically ... a lot of the kids are saying well, I'm happy to get three C's so I'm doing three Bursary subjects, I won't get five and go for an A bursary (Felicity, Principal, Kereru Girls' College, Interview March 1998).

One of the ways that the tension between the academic and social development of students at Kereru Girls' College was played out can be seen in the difficulties experienced in the establishment and ongoing development of the Health curriculum in the school. Sylvie, a school counsellor, explained that the decision to initiate the Health curriculum came about through long term and persistent lobbying of the curriculum committee:

.... She talked about how they lobbied for two years to get the curriculum committee to even contemplate introducing the Health curriculum and how hard it

was to get these things through, and she felt that in the end it was only because they ground them down that anything happened (Field notes, June 1997).

Health in the New Zealand curriculum context, is a new, and somewhat contested subject area focusing as it does on the personal and social development of students. Currently few specialist teachers exist in schools, and most Health teachers specialise in other subject areas, perhaps teaching only one or two Health classes. Gaining professional development to train new Health teachers has proved to be challenging at the school because of the low status of what is perceived to be a non-academic subject area with teaching staff. Sylvie explains how these ideological constraints intersect with structural constraints in order to make providing professional development for Health teachers difficult:

One of the factors about the Health curriculum because they're all new teachers, and because we're constantly begging for time to train them, and because there's so many of them... if they're teaching Health just once a week ... they don't see it as such a big thing, and don't want to put the energy and the time into professionally developing them not as much as say Science ... I think it's a really uphill battle the way we've got it structured at the moment, that's just not for sexuality education but for all Health (Sylvie, Interview, 1998).

The somewhat tenuous position of the Health curriculum and the guidance network in the school appeared to be reinforced by the way in which departmental meetings were held. Unlike the other 'mainstream' subject areas, Health and guidance meetings were held in the lunch hour, instead of after school. This meant that teachers were meeting in their own time and often under pressure. I experienced these meetings myself as very stressful:

Sylvie talked about the immense difficulty they have running guidance (and Health) meetings and how they are marginalised by having to be held in the lunch hour when all subject meetings are held in the afternoon after school which means that time is always short to discuss things and they run out of time frequently (Field notes, June 1997).

Despite these difficulties the development and implementation of the new Health curriculum through to Year 13 is a recognition that secondary schools should play a role in educating students about personal issues such as sexuality and gender. Linda, a Health teacher, explained to me that she felt schools did have a role in providing a venue within which issues surrounding sexuality can be discussed and explored openly:

... School's a very small part of a person's life. They've got the home values, they've got the values they see in the media and sometimes school's the only place where they can see a different side and I think that's important ... I think we can make an awareness ... we can have an openness that it's okay to talk about those issues ... I'd like schools to be an open place where we can talk about it... because everyone has different ideas on the topic (Linda, Health teacher, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

Despite the development of Health as a new curriculum area in the school, the constraints which I have discussed were all to emerge during the course of the Health teachers' meeting.

**Kathleen's Research Journal, May 21st 1997**

It takes me ages to find the Health teachers, and when I do, they are all crammed into this admin office, it's hard to find space for me to sit down. They had a huge agenda of material to discuss and then in the last few minutes of the meeting, I had the opportunity to talk. I asked if any of them were prepared to let me go in to observe their classroom practice. I explained what participant observation meant, me sitting at the back of the room and silently observing what was going on and not participating in the lesson at all. I then told them that after discussion with the planning group, I had to decide to scale down my study to focus on the development and implementation of an inclusive sexuality curriculum and asked them if there were any of them that were prepared to volunteer with me to work on that area. I said that the project would involve the teachers working on content and delivery of the sexuality component of the Health curriculum and that there were some students who had expressed an interest in working with teachers as well, one of who was lesbian. I also said that it would provide an opportunity for them to read up on the last and most effective research on teaching the sexuality curriculum and pedagogical directions in the classroom. I had to rush all of this because it was right at the end of the session and finally said that if they were interested in being part of the research that they should mention that to Linda. Then the meeting finished.

My request to observe Health teachers' practice led to discussion which raised a number of constraints. The first of these was a micro contextual issue which related to the fact that the Health curriculum is very much in its early stages of implementation at the school, and that the Health teachers felt under-confident teaching the curriculum and having someone observing their classroom practice.

There were other factors that contributed to this reluctance however. I suggest these are also related to the culture of Kereru Girls' College and also to the wider ideological

discourse of teachers as experts, and the structural features of schools where classrooms are constituted as isolated domains of the individual teacher (Hargreaves et al., 1996; Skrtic, 1995). Thonemann (1999) clearly identifies that the culture of individual schools plays an important role in either enabling or disabling anti-homophobia work to be undertaken in secondary schools. Kereru Girls' College appeared in the main not to be an environment where teachers moved freely in and out of each other's classes. While I could understand why Health teachers may be reluctant to have someone observing their classroom practice given that they were coming to grips with a new subject, it also appeared that moving around classes was not something that occurred very often within the school. As I reflected in my field notes:

There seems to be a huge issue around gate keeping in terms of going into teachers' classes, it is like they are sacrosanct ground or something. There doesn't seem to be a culture of visiting each other's classes in the school, classrooms are perceived to be a teacher's private domain (Field notes May 5th 1997).

Linda, a Health teacher suggested to me that one reason that teachers may feel uncomfortable with having a researcher who was perceived as an 'academic expert', in the classroom observing their practice is that, as Skrtic (1995) suggests, it would challenge the role of Health teachers as authoritative knowers and experts:

... people don't like other people in their classes because they feel really threatened. I think we're very much used to teaching in our own little classroom. From what I've heard in other places peer teaching happens a lot more... we get a little bit nervous of people coming into our class. It takes a while to become comfortable with that... so maybe it's a combination of those two things ... maybe some people felt that I don't want to work with her because what happens if I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing ... and not having enough time to renew and organise and sit down with you and talk about what you're doing and because you couldn't do that they felt, "Oh no I won't do it because I probably won't do it right". Because you'll come in and say you're doing it all wrong. I think everyone feels threatened with that (Linda, Health curriculum coordinator, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

In a planning group meeting Sylvie also suggested that perhaps teachers didn't feel comfortable working with someone else as it would show up the lack of time that they put into planning. Several of the group agreed.

This wasn't the only reason that Health teachers felt uncomfortable working with me to develop a Health curriculum that was inclusive of sexual diversity. Apple (1995) emphasises the important role that the school curriculum plays in sanctioning the knowledge that is considered worth knowing. Participating in a project designed to alter the curriculum to make it inclusive of lesbian and bisexual perspectives is legitimating what has historically been constituted as dangerous knowledge, or as Felman (in Silin, 1995) suggests, the "knowledge that we cannot bear to know". As Sylvie explains, participating in a project to affirm sexual diversity can be seen as dangerous because it destabilises normative heterosexuality:

Resistance to this work... I am not totally sure but I think that part of it is because it is about sexuality and challenging to "cosy heterosexuality" ... it does have to do with the topic (of lesbian and gay sexuality) if I think of how people would react to doing work on disability, I'm sure it would be easier (Sylvie's Journal).

My own theoretical movement away from less threatening affirmative action frameworks to transformative approaches (Fraser, 1997) that interrogated the normative power of heterosexuality was also threatening, and likely to increase levels of discomfort amongst the staff. As Kumashiro (2000) suggests, exploring issues in these ways is a very different approach to the traditional role of teachers as rational and authoritative knowers who transmit information within strongly functionalist school cultures:

Many teachers may not want to enter these unknowable places and do whatever they can to maintain a sense of control over what and how students learn. After all, educators are trained to delineate what they want students to understand, plan a lesson to get them there, and then assess whether they indeed came to this understanding (p. 39).

In the Health teachers' meeting, fears were expressed about the school being seen to condone same sex desire and active female desire. In this way the teachers felt that talking about same sex desire and active representations of female sexuality legitimated ways of knowing which they perceived to be transgressive. In a deregulated educational climate sanctioning unacceptable knowledge can be seen to adversely affect the school's reputation and marketability. I would suggest this is especially the case given recent market reforms that have emphasised the importance of excellence and academic performance within schools, as well as encouraging competition between schools for students. As Sylvie explained in her journal, integrating same sex desire in the curriculum



was constituted by them as advocating and “promoting” lesbian and bisexual perspectives:

Health teachers meeting, Tues lunchtime. Discussion about making Health lessons inclusive of a range of sexualities. Worries expressed about what parents would say if too much came home that we'd been talking about this issue ... it seems that the resistance is stronger now than in the beginning. This is because we're now into it and actually doing things, not just talking about it (May 29th 1997 Sylvie's Journal).

These concerns continued to surface after the meeting. Elizabeth, a Senior Manager, who was also a Health teacher emphasised the difficulty she was having with legitimating knowledge about same sex desire through constructing it as just as valid a form of sexual expression as 'natural' heterosexuality, rather than emphasise it as an 'unnatural' form of otherness:

Elizabeth said that she was concerned that lesbian and bisexual perspectives fitted in 'naturally' into whatever else was going on in the classroom and suggested that it would be an artificial imposition to do that when they were watching a video about childbirth and that in the past that discussions about lesbian sexuality fitted more into values exercises when the focus was more on discussing opinions. She was concerned that trying to fit discussions of lesbian and bisexual sexuality needed to be done 'naturally' not imposed artificially because then it would look like you were attempting to promote lesbian and gay sexuality (Fieldnotes May 1997).

Sylvie suggested to her colleagues in the Health teachers' meeting that perhaps the way through some of these difficulties of being seen to legitimate same sex desire for teachers is to explore the complexities of why lesbian and bisexuality is seen to be so controversial. However, rather than move into what most of the health teachers considered to be dangerous territory, what they said they would prefer to have available to them are safer practical and factual exercises, underpinned by rational discourses of functionalism:

Elizabeth thinks what they need are good practical exercises which are inclusive and that maybe a better way to go, they want **facts**, they said (Field notes May 27 1997).

Another aspect of the Health curriculum which Health teachers expressed some concern at legitimating was active representations of female desire and sexual pleasure. Despite the Health teachers' preference for privileging representations of sexuality which were underpinned by rationality as opposed to emotionality and perpetuating the mind/body binary (Quinlivan & Town, 1999b), several of the students I interviewed had noted with dissatisfaction what they considered to be the predominant focus of the Health curriculum on disease, compulsory heterosexuality, and physical processes over emotions and feelings (Fine, 1992a). As Gabrielle, a Year 12 student explained to me:

It's not to do with your feelings of sexuality, it's this is the way you protect yourself, sexually transmitted diseases, these are the facts, nothing about the way that individual people might feel different or ... you might like someone else... you might not like heterosexual sex, it's not things like that, it's just the facts about sex (Gabrielle, heterosexual Year 12 student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview 1996).

Moving beyond discourses of rationality and biology to consider emotions and sexual pleasure was also considered problematic by the teachers at the Health meeting. Gabrielle, a year 12 student, notes that parents and teachers feel uncomfortable condoning and legitimating teenage sexuality. She thinks that this is because adults think that teaching young people about sexuality will encourage them to become sexually active, a notion which contradicts strong adult-held notions of childhood as an asexual time:

... parents want you to totally deny the fact that, you know that their daughters have got sexual feelings because it's like, I dunno, it's not right for that age or something and yet you've got to accept the fact that people at Year 11 Year 10 are having sex and to talk about it will not make people go and do it, they aren't going to do it... especially parents believe that but I think it's wrong, I think that people have to talk about it and I think there has to be some kind of guidance as to what you'd especially at that age about contraception, cos it's a big deal and people have to know that ... (Gabrielle, heterosexual Year 12 student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview 1996).

The Health teachers also felt uncomfortable legitimating active representations of female sexuality and pleasure. Sylvie notes in her journal that this prospect was considered to be moving into dangerous territory by her colleagues:

Health Teachers seem taken aback at the idea that we might talk about more than the mechanics, dangers, possibly some feelings around sexuality- but the idea of talking about sex being fun!? a bit weird, dangerous, not quite okay... (May 24th 1997 Sylvie's Journal, Kereru Girls' College).

The meeting concluded and while I didn't expect an instant response to my request for gaining access to Health teachers' classrooms, I was still optimistic of someone being interested enough to participate with me. However that didn't materialise. While the teacher I approached was keen and invited me to come in to observe her Year 11 Health class, she felt unable to work with me because of her workload. As I explain in my field notes:

I asked Year 10 Health teachers why they felt unable to opt in to doing this work with me on developing an inclusive sexuality curriculum. They said that the main issue was the huge workload. That there were huge demands from their main curriculum areas and that it was a constant balancing act to maintain the two commitments. Some of them said that they were learning to say no, even though they found that really difficult. Others said that there was so much going on, many of them had other commitments and demands and they felt that it was too much on the top of being over committed anyway (Field notes May 27th 1997).

The issue of increased teacher workload emerged as another contextual constraint which made undertaking the research project at Kereru Girls' College challenging work. It is ironic that while a growing body of research points towards the model of the critical and reflexive practitioner as the most effective model for a teacher (Hargreaves, 1994; McGee, 1997), given current structural and workload constraints there is little time or opportunity to reflect (Field notes June 1997). Helen, a guidance counsellor and Health teacher, explained to me that:

... actually I believe the classroom teacher is pretty hard worked these days. It is not easy in many of the classrooms, there are a lot of quite difficult young people, and it's pretty much all they can do to do their marking, prepare, without actually put much time into other issues. I think that staff would say, yes it is our responsibility and yes we should, but the practice is when have I got time, how am I going to fit it in? ... the practicality of it ... bogs people down (Helen, guidance counsellor and Health teacher, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

Aware of the constraints, one teacher and planning group member offered to let me take her Health class. Despite the teacher's helpful intentions, her suggestion wasn't taken as

I wanted to work collaboratively with a Health teacher, rather than work with students myself:

Linda ... said that she taught Year 10 Health and was just showing the students a video that they really wanted to see because they had heard how good it was from their peers about STDs, she asked me if I wanted to do a session with them. I said No because the whole point was working with teachers not instead of them (Field notes May 1997).

Talking further with the planning group I realised that because the development of the Health curriculum in the school was so new, that a sole focus on the Health curriculum would be unrealistic. So the design of the project was re-jigged slightly to concentrate on three areas which had emerged as suggested areas of focus from the initial student and teacher interviews: professional development with teachers, Health curriculum work and the development and implementation of an anti-bullying and harassment policy and procedures which would be inclusive of lesbian and bisexual perspectives.

### **Interrupting Heteronormativity I: The Art Of The Possible**

Despite the pervasiveness of the constraints I have described, the presence of the research project in the school did provide an opportunity for the critical examination of the constraints to be explored and questioned and the possibility for understandings and practices to shift. In the enactment of a discourse, the opportunity is created to examine it, to play with it, to destabilise it (Foucault, 1990; Butler, 1993). In this way shifts in terms of thinking, understanding and even of practice can occur. Aspects of that course have changed within the contexts of the classroom observations I undertook with the Year 12 Health class, and the feedback and subsequent conversations with Health teachers that occurred as a result. I'll give some examples.

Despite the difficulties I encountered gaining access to Health teachers classrooms, the more experienced Health teachers were open to having me observe in their classrooms. After a conversation with Helen, a guidance counsellor and Health teacher, she agreed to let me observe the sexuality component of one of her Year 12 Health classes. This was an interesting and valuable experience for both of us, and we were able to talk about the issues which emerged from the process. As a result of our discussions Helen decided to address issues of emotionality, active female sexuality and same sex desire in her work with students. She explained to me, however, that working with students to explore this 'dangerous knowledge' is challenging work for a teacher:

I think I'll revamp the relationships side of it because it's not addressed sufficiently, that girls have sexual feelings, that we all have feelings, thoughts, anxieties, that they're not alone. It's just like in that article you gave me, the missing discourse of desire. I need to look at the lesbian things, address HIV/AIDS. You have to feel pretty comfortable to do all this stuff, and pretty confident, it takes unique skills, not all teachers could and you know I had no training, I don't know why they chose me to do it ... (Helen, Health teacher and counsellor, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, August 1998).

After conversations with both Helen and myself, Linda the Health coordinator decided to change the content of the Year 12 Health curriculum to place a greater emphasis on the positive aspects of female sexuality rather than focusing on physical processes and pathologising discourses. Negotiation with students was going to occur over what aspects of sexuality that they wanted to learn about. Attempts are also being made to work on integrating lesbian and bisexual perspectives throughout the whole curriculum rather than confining them to minoritising one off sessions, and plans are afoot to work with teachers so that they feel comfortable about taking that approach. Linda explains:

We've looked at the programme this year and I think it's changed already quite a lot. We're not doing any sessions on contraception, STDs unless the students ask for it. So we're having T.H.A.W<sup>2</sup> coming in, looking at womens' health from that perspective and we're doing a lot more on rights and responsibilities... so we're actually doing different things now...I'd like to look at areas of sexuality for women in a positive way. On the other hand I also think it should be part of everything you do ... and it's just positive stuff, what's good about being a woman, what's good about being in a relationship? and I don't think you can (teach about lesbian sexuality or bisexuality) as a lesson, it has to be all the way through... Teachers have to feel comfortable about that (Linda, Health curriculum coordinator, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

Health teachers from other levels were also indicating that they wanted to do things differently. Elizabeth thought that she would integrate sexual diversity through a range of Health curriculum topics, and draw on strategies such as discourse analysis and deconstruction to explore the discursive construction of same sex desire with students:

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<sup>2</sup>Health Alternatives for women was established in the 1970s as a radical feminist grass roots self help organisation which promoted womens health.

There have been definite benefits, can I speak more as a Health Ed teacher? I think there has been in me a greater awareness of the need to consciously do this, to bring it into a wide variety of topics right from the beginning... in a way it's a bit of a drip feeding thing but drip feeding it over a wider area than I was doing it before. ... but I think by dripping it in to kids at this age and by things like saying, that's unacceptable, why is it unacceptable, let's talk about it, which is terribly school marmish but it's the opportunity of the moment. I think slowly you probably change attitudes (Elizabeth, Senior manager and Health teacher, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

Other teachers such as Linda actively began to challenge heteronormative comments in her classes and discuss the issue of sexual diversity with students:

... I had a girl in my class the other day who said, just one comment to another student, "Oh don't be so gay" ... I just stopped the class and said, "I don't find that appropriate in my class", and we talked a little bit about it and then got on with what we were doing. And when we get into sexuality and we talk about the issues. And maybe it's the right way or maybe it's the wrong way but it's the way I feel comfortable with. And that's what you have to make staff feel comfortable with. And it's a long process, some people never will, some people will always believe it's wrong and that's what society's like and you can just slowly get people to at least ... just feel comfortable with it and at least accept that there are different ideas. So that's what I'm looking for, comfortable, acceptance ... (Linda, Health programme coordinator, Kereru Girls' College Interview, 1998).

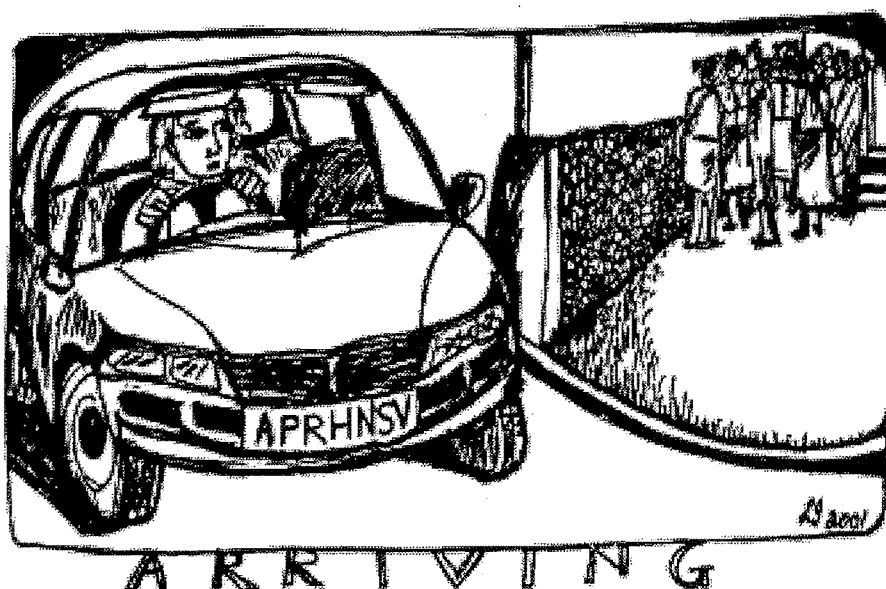
Like Helen, Linda's comment also recognises that working with teachers to encourage them to feel comfortable addressing issues of sexual diversity is no easy task, given the ideological and structural and contextual constraints which teachers work within. However the constraints which I have explored in this section of the chapter are not set in concrete, they are constantly shifting and changing, and within the constraints, teachers and students can exercise agency to challenge and disrupt heteronormative discourses. My experience working with Health teachers at Kereru College created a space within which some of the meanings which circulate about same sex desire and compulsory heterosexuality shifted. Next I want to turn to look at the way in which all the constraints came to a crisis point in the form of a staff professional development session on a Teacher Only Day.

## Critical Moment Two: "I'm a Teacher, Not a Counsellor": The Teacher Only Day Professional Development Workshop

Kathleen's Writing Journal: November 2000

Picture this... It is 8.30 am in a lecture theatre at Kereru Girls' College on a freezing cold mid August morning in 1997. This is a Teacher only day, one of the few opportunities that teachers have during the year to have some time to focus on their curriculum areas. Overnight it has been snowing and it has been difficult for several staff to get here because of snow on the hill roads where they live. That means that several people are arriving late and our starting time will be delayed.

At very short notice, Sylvie got told that the research project could have an hour to work with staff on sexual diversity issues from 8.30 am to 9.30 am. We had been requesting time to work with staff on the research project for some time with no success and were feeling pretty frustrated. Finally though, here was an opportunity. Both of us felt nervous as the staff drifted in to the lecture theatre. The thought of working with sixty or so staff was a daunting prospect. I couldn't believe it was in a lecture theatre, it was so uncondusive to doing the group discussion approach to the workshop that we had planned. An hour seemed to be such an inadequate amount of time to begin to explore such a complex and loaded topic. However, at the same time, I was wired, it had been so difficult to get an opportunity to work with the staff, and if this was all there was then I was determined to get as much achieved as possible. In retrospect that was a mistake. Before the workshop a colleague had told Sylvie that the staff were grumbling about the homophobia one already and what a waste of time it would be. So, all the ingredients were present that morning for things to go wrong, and, with a few exceptions, that's mostly how it was to pan out.



The structural constraints that had emerged in the Health teachers' meeting continued to escalate. My field notes show how frustrating I was finding the lack of time in which to work with staff:

Elizabeth, a Senior Manager, and I talked about what the formats for staff meetings would be from now until the end of the year, they included sessions on Managing Student Behaviour and on setting up professional accountability systems within the school, there were two hours given to departments on Teacher only day ... They have all been mapped out and none of them is for the research project which really fucks me off, I feel like tearing my hair out, she did say that in the last session, towards 1998 they could spare about 20 minutes. I said that for change to occur there has to be a time component involved but what do you do when there is no time!!!!!! ... This is so frustrating (Field notes, June 1997).

I had to learn more about what it was about the structure of schools which made them so difficult to change, because of the structural constraints which were emerging during the research process. I realised that my experience as a teacher was only of limited use in this respect. Let me explain:

#### **Kathleen's Research Journal November 2000**

Because I had been a secondary school teacher for a long time and had experience as both a classroom teacher and an administrator, I thought that I had a fairly good understanding about how schools worked. I thought that I knew it all about schools because after all I had worked in them hadn't I? While I thought I was an expert about schools and all their structural and ideological peculiarities, I realised I knew about these things through experience, but what I didn't know was **why** schools operated in particular ways to make them difficult to change. I came to see that it was important to understand the structural, ideological and contextual constraints of schools because they play such an important role in determining what happens. This is what I mean by an informed action approach.

The short time that we had to get the workshop together made in-depth consultation with the planning group over how we should approach the session difficult. I was keen to find a way to work with staff which drew on some of the post-structural and queer pedagogical approaches that had provided some opportunities for exploring the discursive construction of sexuality and gender with the students in the member check. To that end, we incorporated a deconstruction exercise which encouraged teachers to consider creating venues within their classrooms and working spheres to enable the discursive construction of sexuality to be explored. However, when Sylvie and I did have the opportunity to talk to the planning group about our ideas, they were less sure



about how those approaches would work. The format of the workshop drew upon Sears' (1992b) suggestions, which advocate integrating the participants' attitudes and feelings with behaviours, and carefully attending to the participants' roles. We did this by encouraging the teachers to make connections between a teacher's role and the aims of the research project and then we developed scenarios for discussion which were based on actual incidents which had happened in the school. Teachers were asked to discuss the scenarios in a way that attended to their intellectual, emotional and behavioural domains, through identifying their thoughts feelings and actions to particular situations (see Appendix H).

Despite the time pressure, Sylvie and I had the opportunity to run our approaches past the planning group beforehand. An extract from Linda's journal shows that while she acknowledges the ideas behind the planned workshops were good, and that many staff will gain something from the session, she anticipates, and has already heard, resistance from staff. Linda's feedback identifies ideological constraints such as her colleagues' beliefs that addressing issues of sexual diversity is not their role, and that they consider knowledge of technology and issues such as race are more pressing than the claims of a minority of lesbian and bisexual students. She also pointed to the lack of time in the session to address complex issues and her worries about colleagues feeling overloaded:

#### Preparation For Teacher Only Day: Why The Deconstructing Exercise Won't Work

- Teachers do not perceive this as important. They do not want to know about this
- TOD is an extra day in the year so a lot of teachers will be anti this to start with
- ... In one hour it's going to be a real rush
- (I've already heard) teacher resistance: "What are we doing this for?", "Bloody waste of time".
- Really good but it's such a minimum number of students
- What about technology, race etc

But I'm sure 50% will get a lot out of this (Linda's Journal 21/8/97).

Briony, another planning group member, also pointed out that the Teacher only day is starting earlier than usual with the sexual diversity workshop. She had heard some disquiet amongst the staff about the development of anti-bullying initiatives. In addition, because of the short notice, the new bullying policy and procedures that a group of students and Sylvie and I had been developing had not been read by many staff:

This is an extra workday for us, not a contact necessary workday. Half the staff is willing to come in a day earlier at the beginning of the year and work one day longer at the end in order to have a student-free day at school. The bullying session and the programme beginning at 8.30 a.m, is in itself controversial. The bullying policy went into pigeonholes too late to process before presentation, most would have missed receiving it before the session (Briony's Journal, planning group member, 1997).

We talked through these issues at the planning group meeting and while the workshop plan was not changed that much, we agreed that the constraints that teachers were being placed under to participate in the project needed to be made explicit and acknowledged, especially the connection between the project and the teachers' role. Planning group members chose not to be involved in the session and agreed to spread themselves around the groups and participate as staff members. It was decided that I would facilitate the first session on sexual diversity, and Sylvie would facilitate the second session on the development of procedures and policies to deal with bullying.

The snow and the late start, combined with working within a tight frame, meant that Sylvie and I were pretty tense. Ironically, I realised later that I had succumbed to the most pervasive structural constraint that is a daily reality for teachers: not having enough time. Talking to Elizabeth in a later interview, I recognised that trying to achieve so much in an hour wasn't a good idea:

There were a whole lot of factors that came together in that last staff session ... my panic, I thought, right here's an opening, I'm just going to go for it, I mean how many things can you squeeze in a short period of time? which was obviously not a good idea... (Kathleen talking to Elizabeth, Senior Manager, Interview, 1998).

The nervousness and tension both Sylvie and I were feeling came across to staff as if we were directorial. Given that this was a teacher only day when teachers expected to have more of a relaxed day, and the inclusion of the session was a last minute addition, this was understandably not received well by the staff. Briony, a planning group member noted in her journal:

#### RESPONSES TO TOD MEETING

Observations of other staff- Opening words- "We're starting 5 minutes late", went down like lead

- some mutterings about how does the same sex relationship- lesbian and gay issue fitted in with the expected written schedule for TOD?...

- Comments heard included; "As teachers this is not for us to deal with. We teach without bias and refer these issues to people trained to deal with it".

"We know this already, we've done this... why are we spending time on this again?" (Briony, planning group member Journal, 1997).

However, Briony's observations reveal more than these contextual constraints. The overheard comments of the staff show deep ideological disjunctures that suggest that many teachers at Kereru Girls' College did not see addressing issues of sexual diversity as part of their role as classroom teachers. As Epstein & Johnson (1998), Fine (1991) and Silin (1995) suggest, issues such as sexuality were seen as personal problems that were seen to be the province of the counsellor and guidance networks. These feelings were confirmed by direct written feedback received from several staff:

I am not interested in students' sexual orientation, and this subject has no place in my classroom (Anonymous written feedback from second staff session, 1997).

However as I have argued in Part One, I think there are implications for constructing what are framed as personal issues as the province of the guidance counselling network in school. As Fine (1991) suggested, framing lesbian, gay and bisexual students as in need of counselling results in social issues being constructed as students' personal and psychological problems. Gabrielle explained that being seen to have a problem puts students off going to counsellors:

... people just said to us that they don't go and talk to the counsellors about (bullying) cos it's (seen) like I've got a problem, it's my problem that I'm an individual and this isn't supposed to be my problem and I've gotta deal with it kind of thing and going to the counsellors got those connotations of, I've got a problem... it shouldn't be (lesbian and bisexual students) that have to go to counselling (Gabrielle, Year 12, heterosexual student, Interview, 1996).

Some staff also expressed concern about the consequences of teachers being seen to condone and legitimate same sex desire. As one teacher anonymously enquired of me early on in this project: "Is it okay to talk about this stuff?" Another teacher suggested that in addressing the issue of sexual diversity there could be the risk that students and parents would constitute teachers as 'promoting and even recruiting' for what they allude to as a deviant form of sexual expression:

There is the fear than any response might be misinterpreted or misunderstood by the students and parents and you could get into trouble (Anonymous written feedback from staff Teacher Only Day session, 1997).

When I explored this issue further, the lack of ownership that many staff felt in relation to the research project in the school was indicative of more than ideological disjunctures. It also related to the balkanised structural features of the school (Hargreaves, 1994) where departments operated in isolation from each other, and in many cases were unaware of decisions that had been made by their colleagues. As Helen explains, the decision to participate in the research project was made by the guidance committee whose role was not to consult with the wider school community:

The decision was made at a meeting of the guidance network ... the Principal was very keen, some people expressed reservations ... along the lines of what would be required to do, not really the topic itself ... they weren't completely clear about what was to be expected of them ... the meeting in general supported it ... I don't think it was taken to the whole staff first ... because that is not the usual practice. The appropriate committee usually discusses requests/issues and makes the decision. No, I don't think it had any bearing on the way that the project developed as the process followed normal procedure for the staff (Helen, counsellor and Health teacher, Interview, 1998).

Teachers saw themselves as unbiased and as 'already having done this' as Briony explained, and this was symptomatic of the fact that many of the staff saw the school as a warm and friendly environment where issues of sexual diversity weren't a problem. As Felicity, the Principal, suggested:

... probably because they (the staff) feel the school is a warm, open and friendly place that they feel that we don't need it as much as other things, and I think that's probably why it's hard for the staff to see it as a problem. To be honest I don't think a lot of people saw it as a problem here ... An individual student's experience, I mean there's so many of them, they are going to be different, they may not all see the school as warm, open and friendly at all (Felicity, Principal, Interview 1998).

However there were disjunctures between what the staff felt and what lesbian and bisexual students experienced within the school. The notion of Kereru Girls' College as a warm and inviting school stood in stark contrast to several incidents involving staff both inside and outside the classroom. Margaret recounted a classroom incident where a

teacher drew on stereotyped representations of girls as bitchy and catty in order to indicate her knowledge that two of her students had been in a relationship with another young woman:

In Physics one day, it was the day that Heidi shifted my desk and I'm sure that somehow (our teacher) she knew because she kind of walked in and looked at me and looked at Heidi and then kind of made a hissing noise, like a cat fight kind of thing. She kind of like did it jokingly but I'm sure that somehow she knew (that I had just started a relationship with her ex girlfriend) (Margaret, Year 13 gay student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview 1998).

Melissa told me that she had heard second hand that another staff member had drawn on nineteenth century models of sexual deviance to frame lesbians as male in order to ridicule Melissa's sexuality:

... one day when I had finished school and Margaret was sitting her exams and I was going to sit in the common room and wait for her to finish and Margaret's Mum said that a teacher came in to her and said, "Oh look the boyfriend's here", implying me when I walked in. And I just think that's really rude, I couldn't care less ... a teacher said that anyway, or someone in the office. ... Margaret's Mum refuses to tell ... I didn't really care because I was leaving anyway but if it had been a year ago it would have really depressed me. ... I couldn't believe it, it was really pathetic, not even Year 13 students would have said that (Melissa, Year 13 student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

Kenway and Willis (1997) note the extent to which gender reform is highly disruptive of the social and therefore the power arrangements in schools. They suggest that gender reform is threatening to schools in ways in which other social justice reforms are not because teachers face the possible unravelling and remaking of aspects of their personal and professional worlds. They also note the high degree of emotionality that is generated when gender reformers undertake work with teachers and expect people to change as a result. If as Kenway and Willis suggest, deep psychic sensitivities are engaged with in the process of gender reform, I think that this is even more the case when issues of sexuality and same sex desire are engaged with in schools, particularly with teachers (Kumashiro, 2000). Several emotional responses emerged from the staff session which raise a number of different issues. One teacher told me that she felt angry that given all the structural and workload constraints involved in her role, she didn't appreciate being constituted as ill-informed and bigoted:

I feel very angry that when I have so much work to do and so little time to do it in that I have to spend time being treated as though I'm an ignorant and intolerant child (Anonymous written feedback from second staff session, 1997).

The feelings of anger which were expressed by several staff provide an indication of the extent to which as Britzman (1998) suggests, learning about dangerous knowledge inevitably involves conflict and crisis. Britzman goes further to suggest that this may be an interesting area to explore in learning:

... pedagogy might provoke the strange study of where feelings break down, take a detour, reverse their content, betray understanding, and hence study where affective meanings become anxious, ambivalent and aggressive (Britzman (1998, p. 84).

However over the process of the member check, I realised how ill-equipped both I as a researcher, and the staff at Kereru Girls' College were to acknowledge or interrogate any of the uncomfortable feelings within the context of the functionalist cultures of schools (Kenway & Willis, 1997). Later I will explore my own emotional responses to what happened during the staff session, and the range of ways I was positioned as a researcher by several of the teachers.

Given the workload engendered by major educational restructuring, little teacher development to support change, and reform fatigue, it is understandable that many teachers may view issues of sexual diversity as a peripheral issue which is not high on the agenda and feel angry about having yet another issue to consider. These issues emerged in the professional development session. As Felicity, the Principal explained:

... Not that I think necessarily that this project was going to massively increase people's workload but because so many things are happening all at once, unit standards assessment, new curriculum in this, new curriculum in that, performance management systems, all of those things had to be discussed and introduced and put in place and people do get to the stage when they think they can't cope with one single more thing (Felicity, Principal, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

With these pressures, social justice and equity issues tend to fall off the agenda and are perceived to be more of a luxury than a necessity (Gordon, 1993; Kenway & Willis, 1997). Interestingly however, social issues do not disappear totally within schools. Mac an Ghail (1994b) describes the way in which teachers and school communities often

feel pulled between notions of fault and obligation in terms of addressing issues of gender and sexual diversity:

... there is a real tension here for the gender and/or sexual majority, between not feeling guilty, and not taking responsibility both for the cultural investments one has in oppression and the privileges that are ascribed to you and that you take up as part of a dominant group (p. 179).



Kenway and Willis (1997) identified this tension in gender reform issues, noting that it most commonly manifested itself in the way that gender reformers in schools felt unable to criticise their colleagues. I sensed this amongst several members of the planning group at Kereru Girls' College, and it was exacerbated by the fact that they were young and inexperienced teachers who perhaps felt vulnerable in relation to their older colleagues. The tension between fault and obligation identified by Kenway and Willis, and Mac an Ghaill (1994b) is perhaps what the Principal, Felicity, is wrestling with when she questions the extent to which sexual diversity was seen by the staff at Kereru Girls' College as an issue which needed to be addressed within the school, and the discomfort she felt challenging her colleagues to address the issue:

...well actually is there an issue and what is the issue? Is it the culture in the school or that people chose for whatever reason personally to behave the way we are? Are we really as open and inclusive as we think we are? ... If (people) don't (see this as an issue), well then I haven't got a right to force them to thing (Felicity, Principal, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

Hey (1997) suggests that problematising the way that the school treats students places researchers in difficult positions when working in schools. Rogers (1994) notes that being framed as obsessive and eccentric goes with the territory of a researcher undertaking work on sexuality, and she goes on to suggest that these concerns are magnified working in a schooling context where discourses of education and youth collide with traditional constructs of predatory lesbian, man hater, corrupting gay man and child abuser. Notions of 'promotion and recruitment' continued to arise throughout the project, especially in relation to the role that I played as a researcher. These discourses reinforced the 'otherness' of same sex desire and proved to be a disabling factor in terms of undertaking the project in the school.

In addition to being seen as promoting and recruiting I was also constructed as proselytising and pushy. I experienced first hand what it meant to be constructed as a fanatic who was seen as imposing meanings on others (Flax, 1993). Both Spender (1988) and Kenway and Willis, (1997) suggest that when you are dealing with difficult knowledge (Britzman, 1998), what often happens is that talking even a little is perceived as talking too much. Some staff during the teacher session felt as if I was pressuring them to think in particular ways. As Linda explains:

... I don't think that anybody likes to be told and I think that might've been a bit of a problem. Some staff felt like they were being pressured and told and thought,



I don't want this and I don't like this... if it's too much and too pushy then staff will just click off straight away. I can think of one example where staff were just pushed and I could just see that they were switching off, and I think that's not a good way to go in. I think you have to go in with a slow approach because ... people take a lot of time to change their ideas and attitudes if they ever change them, and I don't think some ever will (Linda, Interview, 1998).

While some staff felt pressured to move too quickly, others wanted to go further, and as Elizabeth suggests felt angry at being 'accused' of something that they saw themselves as not doing:

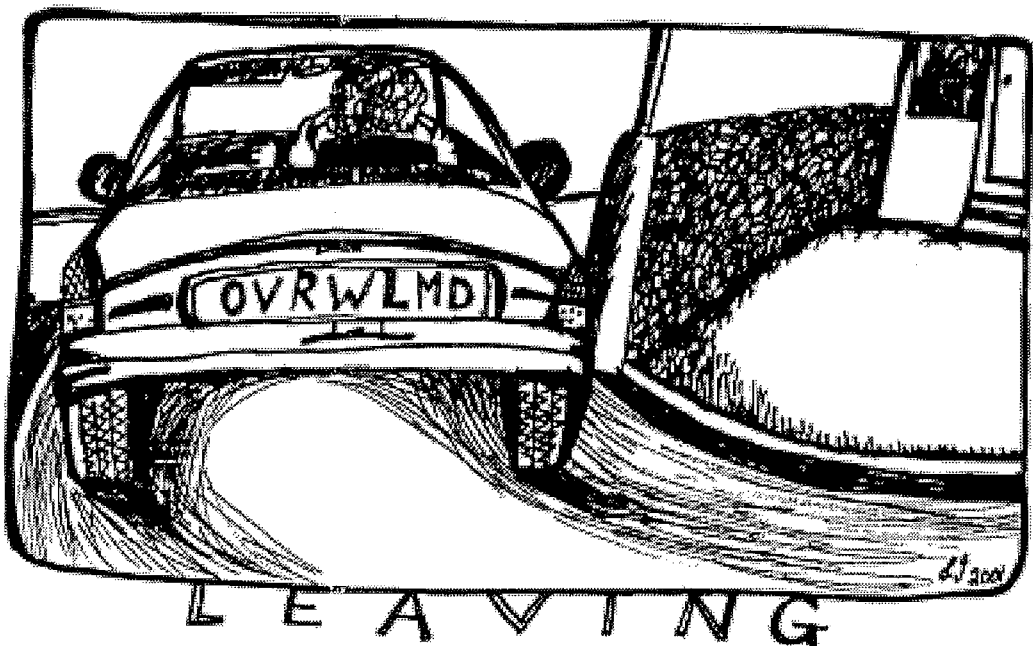
And I think that there might have been a bit of a feeling that to satisfy where you wanted to come from in the research we sort of had to be backwards to be back there where actually we were sort of up here and we needed to go further. That's why it went a wee bit flat with the staff, they sort of felt, the implication of being accused of something we are not doing ... (Elizabeth, Senior Manager, Interview, 1998).

At the end of the session I felt as if I had been 'thrown to the lions', as one of the planning group described it, and felt thoroughly mauled. Like the teachers, I, too, had an emotional response to what had happened. I was so upset at the time, that I couldn't even write about it. For a long time I could hardly talk about it without crying. My research journal written in retrospect reflects some of the vulnerability, hurt pride and anger I felt:

#### **Kathleen's Research Journal February 1998**

Was I easy to shaft as an outsider and be framed as an academic wanker out of touch with the realities of schooling, and as an 'promoter and recruiter'? Afterwards I went over to the staff room and I felt really on the outside and there were some staff who I experienced quite hostile vibes from. Why was I so upset and angry? I think a lot of what happened was very close to the bone for me because I have so much personally invested in the process because of my own sexuality and my own expertise as a teacher. As an educator I'm such an over achiever, I'm used to success, I don't like failing and I am not used to it! I'm used to working in a team, collegially with colleagues, not positioned in this way. I also feel angry because of all the planning and consultation with staff that went into this. What we did was based on their own suggestions for Christ's sake! Maybe working with teachers as a group of people is problematic because they are so used to being positioned as experts and telling other people what to do that they find it difficult to be learners. I couldn't believe how some of them behaved as a group, in the beginning, like naughty school kids. But then, I can remember doing that myself, as part of staff professional

development session with colleagues in schools, when we were presented with new ideas by a person who's meant to know what they're talking about, 'an expert challenging experts'? I guess it's bound to be hard work... Once you get out of the minoritising model (looking at queers as poor deviants who you have to feel sorry for and who should have the same rights as anyone else) what you do is really threatening to people. It is like saying that there is no right or wrong, and also it means that they have to question their own sexuality and their whole basis for being who they are. They could be (and are) queer. When I think of all the ethics approval I had to go through for the protection of research participants, why do they never think of the ethical protection of researchers?, and why am I taking this all so personally, it seems indulgent...



### **Interrupting Heteronormativity II: The Art Of The Possible**

The constraints which emerged as a result of the staff professional development session provided a fuller understanding of what it means for a school to undertake research on issues of sexual diversity. The session had created a venue where issues such as sexuality and schooling could be explored. Both the session and the wider presence of the project in the school did disrupt some heteronormative practices at Kereru Girls' College, and created the possibility for new understandings and practices to emerge.

At the most basic level the session and the presence of the project in the school raised issues of sexual diversity, which had been mostly invisible at the school up to that point. Felicity, the Principal suggests:

I certainly think that it's made people aware of the issue and made people discuss an issue which I don't think they thought was an issue (Felicity, Interview, 1998).

Raising the awareness of staff about issues of sexual diversity was seen to be necessary, especially by the students I interviewed. Margaret suggested to me that without the staff session, the invisibility which characterises female same sex desire in schools (Fine, 1992a), would be perpetuated:

I think it was needed because I think without it everyone would have just gone on pretending that it wasn't there and trying to hide it ... I think the teachers don't see a lot of what goes on at lunch time or what goes on at interval ... they only really see what's in the classroom... I think that if people aren't made to talk about (it) and be educated, they're just going to pretend that it's not happening anyway... (Margaret, Year 13 gay student, Interview, 1998).

However as Kenway & Willis (1997) suggest, Felicity recognised that raising awareness in this way doesn't necessarily lead to teachers altering their behaviour:

... whether they've effectively done that from there on since, they certainly had the intention of changing, and in a way it might almost be easier to change things about what you say, and your attitudes in one sense in the classroom, than to change your whole teaching practice (Felicity, Principal, Interview, 1998). Several verbal responses along with anonymous written feedback indicated that the session encouraged staff to recognise that there was an issue which needs to be addressed in the school and that they could play a part in addressing heteronormative aspects of the school culture.

Despite these limitations, several teachers indicated a willingness to try deconstruction as a strategy to work towards affirming sexual diversity when working with students on the day. One teacher came up to me after the session and said that she really enjoyed the session and that the use of analytical tools such as deconstruction was a current development in her curriculum area and it was useful to see how it could be applied more widely. Another teacher provided positive written feedback on the merits of the strategy:

Deconstruction (exercise) modelled was excellent (I think it has merit and would like to try it) (Anonymous written feedback from teacher session, 1997).

As I envisaged, members of the planning group were already predisposed to support the session. Briony shows in her journal entry her thoughtful engagement with the material and strategies and the self-reflexive way that she was able to connect the issue of sexual diversity to wider ideological discourses around sexuality and schooling and the role of teachers:

Valid and well thought out approach to presenting big issues in a limited time. Really interested in seeing the deconstruction process. The workshop for me: (the) deconstruction model was excellent; ... reminded of public vs private dilemma of schools and the teacher; I need to revisit my own personal definition of my role. It's important to keep the definition flexible to accommodate self and community changes (didn't see this willingness to be flexible in some of my colleagues) (Briony's Planning group Journal, 1997).

Both in the written feedback and verbally, I heard that the staff enjoyed the way in which they were provided with the opportunity during the session to share their responses to particular scenarios together and the ways in which the exercise provided the opportunity for reflection and discussion. As Felicity indicated:

dealing with things in those little groups people seemed to find very positive, and I had heard afterwards that they'd found those things really useful for them to reflect on what they did and how they'd react ... (Felicity, Interview, 1998).

I also got to hear how some shifts occurred within teachers' classroom practice. Margaret, a gay identified Year 13 student, recounted the attempt that one of her classroom teachers made to widen representations of sexual diversity in the classroom. Mrs Smith (Nellie) had participated in the first interviews and contributed occasionally to the planning group for the research project within the school. This event was notable for Margaret because it was such a rare event:

...I remember in English, it was very near the beginning of the year with Mrs Smith (Nellie) and ... we had to describe our ideal man and then after she said that she said, 'Or woman if you prefer' it was really sweet how she said that but that was really the only thing that was ever said I think, that was really about it. I've always liked her as a teacher. I felt that I've always got on well with her ... she was nice, I liked her a lot. She would have been the most likely to be accepting, but it was hard to tell with the others because it was never likely to be brought up so I never talked about it with them (Margaret, gay Year 13 student, Interview, 1998).

Elizabeth, a Senior Manager, also saw that approaches such as discourse analysis and deconstruction would be useful in exploring the issues which lay behind incidents of verbal harassment of lesbian students which it was her task to deal with:

... Until you've grabbed them, pulled them in and said, 'Lets talk about this' and that in itself is a positive ... I used to tear my hair and I actually thought this is a darn good opportunity... it's one that's handed to me on a plate ... a teachable moment ... so it's not a negative, it's a positive ... (Elizabeth, Interview, 1998).

Despite her earlier resistance, Elizabeth also acknowledged that approaches to affirm sexual diversity that interrogate the normality of heterosexuality have the potential of addressing a wide range of differences in society more generally:

But you've broken new ground... I can remember saying to you ... this is actually all about difference and I was particularly thinking about racial difference ... (Elizabeth, Interview, 1998).

**EPILOGUE**  
**TOWARDS MAKING EDUCATION A RISKY BUSINESS: AN  
 INFORMED ACTION APPROACH**

I want to share this emptiness with you. Not fill the silence with false notes or put tracks through the void. I want to share this wilderness of failure. The others have built you a highway, fast lanes in both directions. I offer you a journey without direction, uncertainty and no sweet conclusions. When the light faded I went in search of myself, there were many paths and many destinations (Jarman, 1990).

What is philosophy today if it does not consist *not* in legitimating what one already knows, but in undertaking to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently? (Foucault, in Halperin, 1995, p. 77).

I think it should just be seen as a normal part of the whole gamut of human sexuality, as one of those things that you look at, talk about. It needs to be understood that 10% of the population are bisexual or gay and that's normal for them, that sense of normalcy should be explored. (Mary, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

In many ways the shifts and changes which have characterised my research project have been a journey, as Derek Jarman suggests, through a wilderness of failure. Having had a deep investment in being a successful teacher, and having had to work hard to establish my proficiency within rational humanist frameworks, once I would have found the notion of failure a reflection of my own limitations as an educator. Through the process of the research project, I have come to see failures of learning more as a source of insight and even as something to become curious about (Britzman, 1998). The difficulties which emerged over the course of the project provide deeper and richer understandings of the complexities involved in grappling with the dangerous knowledge of same sex desire within schooling contexts. Reaching this point has not come without a struggle. The continuous linear narrative with 'no sweet conclusion' as Jarman suggests, is much less comfortable than the easy answer. This uneasy journey means interrogating some of the primary categories we draw on to make sense of ourselves. It involves charting the emotional landscapes of teaching and learning (Hargreaves, 1994), as well as plumbing the murky depths of fear of difference and desire which sit uneasily within the rational functionalist cultures of schooling institutions (Hargreaves, 1994; Kenway & Willis, 1997).



Addressing the many paths and destinations (Jarman, 1990) which reflect the complexity of how meanings about gender and sexuality are fixed is a challenging prospect. However, in order to move beyond labelling queer youth within the deficit model, it is this uncomfortable journey of exploring 'a queer sense of normalcy', as a teacher from Kereru Girls' College suggests, which is needed for school communities to work towards addressing issues of sexual diversity.

In this epilogue, I want to give my current, and no doubt provisional answer to the question, what does it mean to work towards affirming sexual diversity in schools? As a result of the research project, I have begun, as Foucault suggests, to think differently about this question. In the beginning I would have suggested that there are a range of models and strategies which could be adapted to suit the culture of a particular school and trialed. This response fails to take account of the dangers inherent in the affirmative action paradigm that positions lesbian, gay and bisexual youth within the deficit model and legitimates their otherness by positioning them as outside the norm.

In addition, ideas and strategies developed within North American and English cultures sometimes assume that strategies being advocated are universally applicable. These approaches sometimes fail to take account of the ways in which different cultural contexts or individual school cultures affect what it will be possible to achieve (Thonemann, 1999). Perhaps most significantly, many approaches fail to take into account the inevitable emotional responses which will arise when the politics of knowledge are disrupted by 'queering' the normality of heterosexuality, and calling into question the rational humanist ideologies which underpin schooling and teaching (Kenway & Willis, 1997).

My experiences at Kereru Girls' College highlighted the considerable obstacles and complexities faced by researchers going into schools to undertake change around social justice issues. However, there will always be some initiatives bubbling away in schools which work towards affirming sexual diversity, such as Richard's work as an out gay teacher at Takehe High school that I described in Chapter 6. And other possibilities will arise. One current example in New Zealand is the workshops in secondary schools currently being undertaken by the secondary school teachers union,<sup>1</sup> designed to assist teachers to create safe schools for lesbian, gay and bisexual students. Another initiative is a new Ministry of Education professional development contract that explores the role that secondary school teachers can play in addressing issues of gender.

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<sup>1</sup>New Zealand Post Primary Teachers Association



It is important to acknowledge however, that working within school communities to develop school wide models of change, even when you think that there is school ownership of the process, can be a daunting task. To be part of the research process requires an understanding of the constraints and the possibilities involved in undertaking work on sexual diversity in schools.

This project represents the first tentative steps in exploring the complex process through which students constitute understandings of sexuality and gender. In addition it begins to explore some possible pedagogical directions which may enable teachers to start to engage with these complexities. The interview data I gained from the students at Kereru Girls' College provided some understanding of the role that heteronormative discourses played in constituting hegemonic constructions of gender within the lived culture of the students. However, there are silences concerning how other forms of difference such as culture, socio-economic status/ class, gender, ethnicity, disability and achievement differences intersect with sexuality (Mac an Ghail, 2002; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1996; Tupuola, 1996). Future work in this area needs to address the ways in which these factors intersect with sexuality to create individual subjectivities and sustain social practices within schooling sites.

The study was set up within a modernist affirmative action framework that was underpinned conceptually by the notion of a unitary sexual identity. As the project proceeded I began to see that these conceptual frameworks failed to take account of the complex process inherent in the ways that individuals constitute their subjectivities. In order to begin to come to terms with the more complex processes involved in constituting subjectivities, I became increasingly interested in exploring the construction of gender and sexuality. This can best be seen in the work that I undertook with the students at Kereru Girls College in Chapter 7. However as time moved on I realised that taking into account the important role that culture, socio-economic status/ class, gender, ethnicity, disability and achievement differences play, along with sexuality in constituting subjectivities and social practices, also needs to be understood. Further study that explores the role that culture, socio-economic status/ class, gender, ethnicity, disability and achievement differences play in constructing sexual subjectivities will be vital for researchers working in this area to undertake.

In addition, it is the inter-relationship between these complexities; how they are played out in terms of social and cultural practices in the schools, and the material effects of

those practices on students and teachers lives which need to be made explicit and seen as vital to the role of learning and teaching within schools.

In other words, queer and feminist post-structuralist practices need to draw on social justice frameworks in order to emphasise the important role that teacher and students play in addressing issues of difference and diversity in terms of schooling practices.

A focus on the area of curriculum perhaps may provide a way to explore the complex ways that intersections of sexuality/ gender/ culture/class socio-economic status, ethnicity, disability and achievement differences are drawn on to constitute both student and teacher subjectivities. However, careful links would need to be made to the ways in which these narratives were played out in the production and contestation of social practices within the school, and the material effects of those practices on students and teachers alike. Working in the area of curriculum taps into the nerve centre of schools, and enables an exploration of the knowledge that schools consider worth legitimating, and the roles that teachers play as curriculum decision-makers in that knowledge making process (McGee, 1997). The new Health curriculum which was made compulsory this year, provides scope for undertaking work in this area (Alton-Lee & Pratt, 2000). Pedagogical approaches drawing on the intellectual tools of discourse analysis, deconstruction and performativity would be of use to all teachers in addressing issues of sexual diversity. They would be particularly useful, if challenging, approaches to learning and teaching about Health education in the classroom with students.

For me as a researcher, the research project has developed as an exercise in 'becoming' as Foucault (in Halperin, 1995, p. 123) suggests. The theoretical and methodological twists and turns of the research project have provided me paradoxically with both painful realisations and challenging pedagogical directions. It is only because of the constraints experienced through the research process that the new possibilities arose. Because of the shifts, the answer to the question I initially posed would differ from my first response. I would suggest that working within schools to affirm sexual diversity is a complex and challenging undertaking. It needs to take into account an understanding of the cultural context of the school, as well as an understanding of the ideological, structural and macro contextual constraints which make the prospect of addressing issues of sexual diversity 'dangerous knowledge' for schools to engage with. Crisis and high degrees of emotionality will need to be expected and accepted as part of the process.

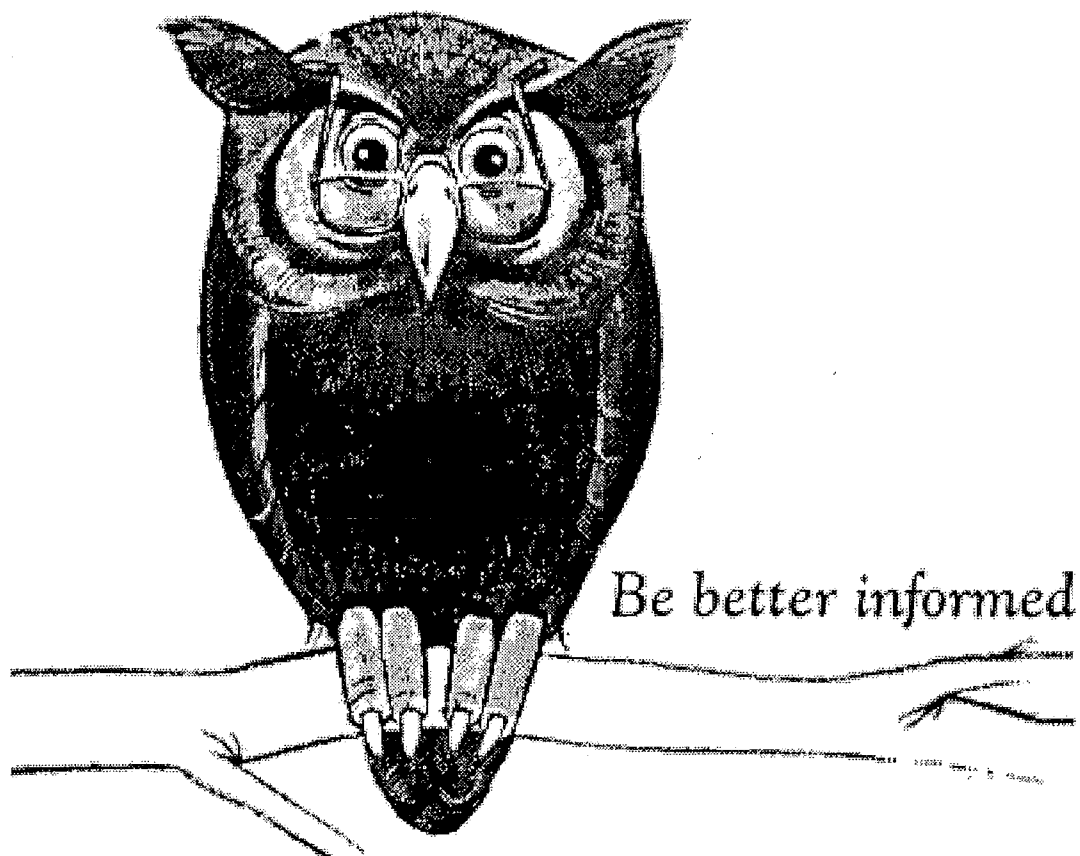
However, at the same time, because discourses are always under construction, meanings can shift and change can happen. Queer and feminist post-structural pedagogical approaches provide some, albeit challenging, pedagogical opportunities to explore the

discursive construction of sexuality. I would suggest that it is also important to link discursive constructions to material realities. This approach is one that I am calling informed action. One of the catalysts for this notion came from close to home.

#### **Kathleen's Writing Journal July 2001**

I got the informed action idea from a OHT of my father's which I have reprinted here. I found it in his briefcase when Mum and I were clearing it out after he died. He used it a lot when talking to farmers and wool growers and people who worked in the agricultural sector. There is an interesting irony for me in how it fits my intentions. The O.H.T. travels into venues that my father would never have imagined it making an appearance in. I have used it in pre-service teacher education lectures and in sexual diversity workshops. I usually haul it out when I am trying to make the point that it's helpful to understand how the discursive construction of sexuality and gender is produced and contested, so that these understandings can be widened rather than closed down. Like me, my father was committed to crossing the line between theory and practice in his own working life. I like the owl. In some ways, I guess, it reminds me of him, looking down over his spectacles, faintly amused and yet at the same time interested, curious, non threatened and wanting to know more...

It's that engagement and sense of curiosity about sexuality that I think would be good for teachers and students to be able to develop in schools. I like the idea of working towards understanding difference as something which makes life interesting and rich, rather than threatening and fear-filled (Britzman, 1998). My experience working with teachers at Kereru Girls' College has made me realise that perhaps this is something of a utopian vision at the present point in time. As I showed in the previous chapters, engaging with issues of sexual diversity in schools is still mostly considered to be engaging with 'difficult knowledge'. So the approach I'm suggesting is not a panacea, it involves taking risks. Let me explain...



An informed action approach is in effect, a juggling act, a skilful and risk-taking feat. It involves juggling the use of queer, post-structural and feminist tools to understand the discursive construction of sexuality and gender, as well as informed understandings of the considerable constraints that surround this work, in order that they can be negotiated. Such an approach acknowledges the importance and usefulness of addressing the discursive construction of sexuality and gender, at the same time as it pays attention to the material and lived realities (Apple, 1995; Ussher, 1997a; Walkerdine, 1997) of meanings of sexual diversity, and the ideological and structural features of schools (Hargreaves, 1994; Skrtic, 1995). An informed action approach provides a way to proceed, while acknowledging and understanding the challenges that are bound to arise through the process. In that sense it could be understood as a form of 'non-stupid optimism' (Kushner, in Lather, 1997). Action is informed by thoughtful and comprehensive understandings of the constraints surrounding the work. I am not suggesting that by providing information, attitudes towards same sex desire in schools will change. Being better informed involves developing wider understandings of the processes through which meanings about sexuality and gender are fixed and contested

and the lived effects of those meanings. So what would an informed action approach offer?



## Eyes Wide Open: The Possibilities and Challenges of An Informed Action Approach

Am I That Name? Kathleen's Research Journal July 2001

Yesterday, out of the blue, I had a tearful phone call from Melissa, one of the key student participants at Kereru Girls' College. She told me how at work that she had been attracted to this woman for ages but felt sure that her feelings would remain unreciprocated. She told me how this woman had said she was

heterosexual, and had been in a relationship with her boyfriend for six years. Then one night, the line between friendship and a sexual relationship was crossed. Melissa told me how panicked and scared her friend is. She told Melissa that she had been so sure about her sexual identity, and yet now everything has slipped for her, suddenly moved sideways. She felt terrified, afraid, grappling with feeling attracted to another woman, and wondering if this means she is a lesbian and all the terrifying historical baggage that label drags with it into the present. I can remember those feelings myself, that sense of slippage, your world being turned upside down when you are suddenly positioned as the Other. I thought about how ill-equipped most forms of sexuality education in schools would leave her to deal with a situation like this.

Melissa goes on to tell me that all of the bisexual and gay identified students I interviewed at Kereru currently identify as heterosexual, while some of the heterosexual identified students are now having sexual relationships with women. These young women continue to reinvent themselves, living their lives as a continuous state of 'becoming'. Why can't the education they receive at school prepare them for these complexities? Surely we can do better than this?...

Drawing on queer, feminist post-structural pedagogical approaches for addressing sexual diversity offers the possibilities for a 'wider-eyed vision'. Drawing on tools such as discourse analysis and deconstruction enables the process through which heterosexuality is normalised to be explored and also 'troubled'. The ways in which understandings of sexuality and gender work together to normalise heterosexuality and sanction hegemonic masculinities and femininities can also be explored (Butler, 1993). In this way our evolving selves can be seen to be a process worth exploring. Instead of already having arrived, these approaches involve framing ourselves in a state of 'becoming' (Foucault, in Halperin, 1995, p. 123).

These pedagogical approaches have the potential to create a venue in the classroom where kaleidoscopic intersections of sexuality, gender, race, and socio-economic status can be seen to mutually inform each other, creating a myriad of possibilities. As with the student member check I described in Chapter 7, an exploration of 'becoming' involves students drawing on their own feelings and experiences and representations of sexuality and gender in popular culture (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Britzman, 1995). There is the potential for students to position themselves in relation to the discourses through which understandings of sexuality and gender are constituted. At the same time students can explore how these constructions are contested and destabilised (Davies, 1995). In this way, the possibility exists for students to explore a range of subject positions, rather than being fixed within a binary framework which locks the abnormality of same sex desire into the normality of heterosexuality (Sedgwick, 1990).

The lived material reality of discursive constructions, along with the power differentials invested in the materiality of the discourses can be discussed (Morgan, 1997; Ussher, 1997a). Through holding those constructions up to the light, looking at them from a number of angles, and exploring their implications, the opportunity arises for those understandings to shift and change. Through an exploration of the process of 'becoming', the classroom has the potential to become a venue for deconstruction as well as reconstruction, (Kenway & Willis, 1997).

As I unexpectedly discovered in the student member check at Kereru Girls' College, exploring notions of subjectivity as 'becoming' also opens possibilities for exploring the contradictions as well as the possibilities inherent in gender constructions. Pedagogical approaches based around notions such as 'becoming' have the potential of enabling the interrogation and destabilisation of dominant constructions of femininity in Health education, many of which position young women as passive and heterosexual. They have the potential to address the missing discourse of desire (Fine, 1992a) as Melissa explains:

... girls are told that you shouldn't sleep around etc cos it's risky and you're seen as a slut whereas guys can get away with it. Girls are shown even in Health Ed as the submissive ones which is just a myth Everyone should be seen as equal e.g. girls are always told you can say No. It's never really an issue that males can be forced into sex or even raped (Melissa, lesbian Year 10 student, Kereru Girls' College).

In order for this to happen, teachers need to be conversant with theoretical approaches to understanding sexuality that move beyond biological essentialism and discourses of heterosexual reproduction, pathologisation and disease, and move into the much more mutable, and challenging, realm of feelings, desires and fears. They need to be aware of social constructionist and post-structural approaches to understanding sexuality which acknowledge that as individuals, we position ourselves as subjects in relation to discourses surrounding sexuality, and that these discourses are invested with power. As Margaret suggests:

Yeah, (if same sex relationships were talked about) because then for the people in the class that may be gay or lesbian and who haven't come out then you get to hear everyone's opinions that way, through group discussions and things, and maybe the more people that you do find are accepting. Maybe it's easier to come out like that, or perhaps it will tell you who are your friends (Margaret, Year 13 gay student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

Framing sexuality and gender in ways which take into account other identity vectors such as gender, race and socio-economic status, and understanding sexuality as a fluid and mutable process of becoming will be a challenging task for teachers. Working as they do within rational humanist frameworks that privilege rationality and facts and have a deep investment in the role of the teacher as an expert knower, emotions, feelings and student knowing will involve engaging with dangerous knowledge. Britzman (2000) recognises these challenges as she poses the question:

Can the educator listen to the little sex researcher and craft a response that does not diminish the curiosity of either party? Can the educator attempt a dialogue where the little sex researcher begins the work of crafting more generous and complex theories of sexuality and where the material of this dialogue resides in how sexuality is made within life's detours, disappointments, pleasures and surprises? (p. 77).

The possibilities I have described provide only half of the picture in terms of an informed action approach. The other half involves taking into account the wide range of constraints that will inevitably arise when explorations of same sex desire are placed within the context of schools. Having an understanding of the ideological, structural and macro and micro contextual constraints which surround undertaking work on sexual diversity in schooling contexts means that you are undertaking such work with your eyes wide open. Being better informed about the difficulties which are likely to arise will hopefully mean that school communities and researchers are better equipped to negotiate their way through the constraints.

I discovered through my experiences at Kereru Girls' College that acknowledgment of the constraints is not enough. The constraints which surround work being undertaken on sexual diversity issues in schools, need to be talked about openly and discussed widely amongst the members of the school community. I suggest that discussion of the constraints needs to be undertaken in such a way that takes into account the importance of the work. There needs to be a willingness for the constraints to be negotiated so that the difficulties don't hijack the process. There is no doubt that juggling constraints is a challenging balancing act. It is important to acknowledge that some of these constraints will be easier to negotiate than others.



While I can envisage the ideological constraints shifting, I am less confident about the structural constraints surrounding school reform changing. The voices of the Kereru Girls' College teachers who are hampered by their excessive workloads and the structural constraints that mitigate against their own learning and the needs of students need to be taken account of. Hargreaves (1994) sounds a warning in this regard:

Teachers know their work is changing, along with the world in which they perform it. As long as the existing structures and cultures of teaching are left intact, responding to these complex and accelerating changes in isolation will only create more overload, intensification, guilt, uncertainty, cynicism and burnout. (p. 261)

In particular I think that more attention needs to be placed on exploring the emotional ramifications of undertaking work on sexual diversity in schools and school reform generally (Hargreaves, 1994; Leberman, 1995; Kenway & Willis, 1997). As Britzman (2000) suggests:

... educators... will have to prepare themselves not so much with gathering more knowledge, but with making experiments that can tolerate the trajectories of learning, the detours made in social encounters, the misrecognitions that invoke or stall reality and pleasure testing, and the workings of anxiety in education. Perhaps most difficult, educators will have to assume the position of philosophers and ethnographers and allow the idea that knowledge can be more than certainty, authority and stability (p. 51).

Getting used to dissent, argument, conflict and crisis will be challenging work within the functionalist culture of schools and the wider national educational climate. As Sylvie suggested to me:

... it is a huge thing to change people's practice in any area and within the current climate of what's happening in schools, it's probably the last thing that anybody is looking at. What they're doing in the classroom with kids with curriculum change and assessment and all the paper work and the time to actually look at my job in the classroom is very minimal... (Sylvie, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

Informed action approaches (and there will be many because each will be informed by the micro cultures of particular schools), will be far from being a panacea. As Hargreaves (1994) suggests, however, coming to terms with crisis and paradox will be inevitable

because schools need to change and something is going to have to give to enable those changes to occur:

As schools move into the postmodern age, something is going to have to give. It may be the quality of classroom learning, as teachers and the curriculum are spread increasingly thinly to accommodate more and more demands. It might be the health, lives and stamina of teachers themselves as they crumple under the pressures of multiple mandated changes. Or it can be the basic structures and cultures of schooling, reinvented for and realigned with the postmodern purposes and pressures, they must now address. These are the stark choices we now face. The rules for the world are changing. It is time for the rules of teaching and teacher's work to change with them (p. 261-2).

It is students who should be at the heart of teachers' work. So when Melissa tells me the extent to which she feels unable to be herself at school and the lengths to which she has gone to disguise her sexuality, I feel very angry and sad:

Well the first couple of years (at school) I wouldn't even count because I couldn't even accept it myself and so that was like nothing, so it was like just hide it. I could never really be me. I guess I could never really be close to friends 'cos there was a big part of my life they didn't know existed. I was so scared I even invented guys I liked to be 'normal'. Also if rumours went a round about someone else being gay I'd go 'yuk' and act real homophobic to try and hide it (Melissa, lesbian Year 10 student, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1996).

Undertaking work on sexual diversity in schooling contexts raises fundamental questions concerning the role of education in society and the kind of society that we want to equip students to live in. Despite her considerable resistance to the presence of the research project at Kereru Girls' College early on, Elizabeth, a Senior Manager noted that the presence of this research project highlighted the extent to which interrogating the notion of normality holds potential in addressing issues of difference and diversity within schooling contexts:

... it does seem to me ... that in that research base there somewhere wherever it goes, there is probably a foundation for looking at all sorts of difference whatever its acceptance by whatever this peculiar thing the norm is (Elizabeth, Senior Manager, Kereru Girls' College, Interview, 1998).

There is no doubt that engaging with dangerous knowledges that explore issues of difference and diversity through problematising the 'hetero(normal)' does involve taking risks for school communities. However, I would suggest that both students and teachers deserve to be equipped with the intellectual, social and pedagogical skills which will enable them to live well in an increasingly diverse society. Difference and diversity need to be seen as enriching and valuable aspects of living, rather than as threatening and fear inducing. For these reasons, the risks involved in addressing issues of sexual diversity in schools are well worth taking.

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## Appendix A

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR PHASE ONE: DOCUMENTING BEST PRACTICES CREATING INCLUSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOLS FOR LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH

#### Who I am

I am an experienced 38 year old educator who has taught in a wide range of secondary schools for the last 15 years, specialising in English. Most recently, I have been acting H.O.D English and prior to that, Assistant H.O.D English for the past six years at Mairehau High School in Christchurch. During that time I was seconded as an English adviser. I am currently a part-time lecturer in English at the Christchurch College of Education.

In 1994 I completed an Masters in Education part-time in the Education Department at Canterbury University. For my Masters thesis I undertook research documenting the experiences of young lesbians in secondary schools and completed two research projects investigating the identity management strategies of lesbian educators. These projects were supervised by Professor Adrienne Alton-Lee and Dr Liz Gordon.

In 1995 I began a Ph.D in Education. In Phase one of the study I intend to document strategies schools have in place to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students. Phase two of the project will consist of conducting an intervention in one school in order to develop, trial and evaluate strategies to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students. This project is being supervised by Ms Missy Morton and Dr Liz Gordon in the Education Department at Canterbury University. Late in 1995 I received a Travel Award from the New Zealand Association of Teachers of English to investigate American and Canadian educational programmes to meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth.

## **What I intend doing**

Phase one of this study intends to document ways in which schools have made themselves inclusive of lesbian, gay and bisexual students. These may consist of formal structures such as policies and programmes that have been put in place for the students, or informal networks and support that exists for them in the school.

## **I would like to document the strategies your school has in place to meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth.**

Data collection would consist of a one tape-recorded interview with people involved in creating the programmes and support networks. These will be semi-structured and one hour long. I will be asking questions which will centre around that person's perspectives of the school culture and the ways in which it contributed towards the creation of support networks within the school for lesbian and bisexual students. Participants will be provided with a list of interview questions before the interviews if they require them. Each participant will be required to sign a consent form which outlines the obligations of the researcher and the participants in the project and guarantees confidentiality and anonymity. These forms indicate that this research has the approval of the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury.

I intend to make the collecting of the data very low key. Disruption to the school day will be minimal, many interviews will of necessity take place outside school. I estimate the period of data collection would take one week.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be an important feature of the research. Pseudonyms would be used for the school and for individuals interviewed as part of the study. Characteristics of the school and individuals can be further disguised by using composite blurring categories. For example, the demographics of one school can be substituted for that of another in the same study. This strategy has been used successfully in previous research to protect the identity of young lesbians I interviewed and their school. No-one will see the interview transcripts except for my supervisors and I.

The school and participants will be consulted fully as far as is possible throughout the process. Participants will receive copies of the interview transcripts to check and have the opportunity to add or to delete material. Both the school and participants will receive a draft of the final report to comment on the findings. Participants have the opportunity to withdraw from the project at any time if they wish to.

### **Why I intend doing it**

My previous research indicated that young lesbians and gay men are an at risk group of students in secondary schools. While teachers have expressed concern about the difficulties these students face, little research in New Zealand has been undertaken to investigate the strategies that schools could use to meet the needs of these students. Documenting the strategies that your school has undertaken to meet the needs of lesbian students would enable other secondary schools to better meet the needs of their lesbian and gay students.

### **What I will do with the results**

In addition to writing up the results of this study for my doctorate and making these available to educational communities through academia, I would like to use this research to provide other secondary schools with resources and strategies to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students in their schools. I envisage that this will take the form of written resources and workshop presentations.

### **How the study site and participants were selected**

Your school was chosen because it has publicly identified sexual orientation as an issue which needs to be addressed in schools. Your school culture has a reputation for meeting the needs of a diverse range of students. As a state co-educational school, the findings will be relevant to many schools throughout the country.

## **Possible benefits and risks to the participants**

The benefits to the school are that the school community will be recognised as being innovative in an area few schools have tackled. The needs of lesbian and gay students in your school will continue to be met, the study will highlight the importance of this issue.

I recognise however, that the intersection of education and sexuality can often be problematic. Recent negative responses to the Y.W.C.A. Sisters booklet and the responses to the draft of the new Health curriculum have provided two recent examples. For that reason, members of the school community should be aware of the implications when undertaking work in this area, informed about the study and the responses that may occur as a result of it and have strategies in place to deal with them. I would be prepared to talk to groups if that was perceived to be helpful. The two following people have agreed to act as referees for me and may be contacted at the following addresses;

Professor Adrienne Alton-Lee  
Victoria University of Wellington  
P.O Box 600  
Wellington  
Ph (04) 4955035 Fax: (04) 4715349  
E-Mail: [adrienne.alton-lee@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:adrienne.alton-lee@vuw.ac.nz)

Miss Jill Ussher (The Principal)  
Palmerston North Girls High School  
Fitzherbert Avenue  
Palmerston North  
Ph (06) 3536913 E-Mail: [jusser@pnghs.palm.cri.nz](mailto:jusser@pnghs.palm.cri.nz)

Please feel free to contact me if you require more detailed information about any aspect of this project.

20 Jefkins Road  
Rangiora  
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**INFORMATION SHEET FOR PHASE TWO: CREATING INCLUSIVE  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS FOR LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH**

## **Who I am**

I am an experienced 38 year old educator who has taught in a wide range of secondary schools for the last 15 years, specialising in English. Most recently, I have been acting H.O.D English and prior to that, Assistant H.O.D English for the past six years at Mairehau High School in Christchurch. During that time I was seconded as an English adviser.

I completed an Masters in Education in the Education Department at Canterbury University in 1995. For my Masters thesis I undertook research examining the experiences of young lesbians in secondary schools and also completed two research projects investigating the identity management strategies of lesbian educators. These projects were supervised by Professor Adrienne Alton-Lee and Dr Liz Gordon.

In 1995 I received a Travel Award from the New Zealand Association of Teachers of English to investigate American and Canadian educational programmes to meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth. I also began a Ph.D in Education. Phase one of the study will consist of documenting strategies two schools have undertaken to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students. The second Phase will involve conducting an intervention in one school in which strategies to meet the needs of lesbian students and students who have lesbian and gay parents will be developed, trialed and evaluated. This project is being supervised by Ms Missy Morton and Dr Liz Gordon in the Education Department at Canterbury University.

## **What I intend doing**

I would like to work with a group of educators in your school to develop, trial and evaluate strategies to make it more inclusive of lesbian students and children of lesbian and gay parents. I envisage that this group would report regularly to staff, the principal and the Boards of Trustees and consult with them as necessary throughout the process of the research. The intervention would involve the following steps;

1. Documenting current school practice in regard to meeting the needs of lesbian students and students of lesbian and gay parents. This would consist of;

(i) Conducting a one hour tape-recorded interview with a range of members within the school community who represent different perspectives. These may include parents, students, educators, administrators and members of the Board of Trustees. The questions asked will be designed to perspectives from a wide range of people within the school community to determine the extent to which the school is meeting the needs of lesbian and bisexual youth and students of lesbian and gay parents. Students will have had to gain written consent from their parents for the interview to proceed (see consent form). Participants will be provided with a copy of the interview questions before the interview if they wish. Following the interview, participants will be asked to comment on the researchers interpretation of their words and how they have been presented in the report. They will receive a copy of the final report. Participants can choose to discontinue their involvement in the project at any time.

(ii) Providing access to written documentation such as school charters and equity and sexual harassment policies in order to ascertain the extent to which they provide support for lesbian students.

2. Working with a group of educators and interested members of the school community to plan programmes to meet the needs of these students. These initiatives may include; educational work with staff, setting up student support, developing curricula and developing inclusive school policies.

3. Trialing the programmes with students and staff. This would consist of;

(i) Trialing out the range of strategies developed in 2. above.

(ii) Educators and the researcher keeping a log of reactions to the programmes.

4. Evaluating the success of the programmes. This would consist of;

(i) Conducting one hour long audio-taped interviews with a range of educators, students and members of the school community in order to determine how successful the participants considered the different strategies of the intervention were. Students will have had to gain written consent from their parents for the interview to proceed (see consent form). Participants will be provided with a copy of the interview questions before the interview if they wish. Following the interview, participants will be asked to comment on the researchers interpretation of their words and how they have been presented in the report. They will receive a copy of the final report. Participants can choose to discontinue their involvement in the project at any time.

(ii) Conducting classroom observations into programmes and curriculum developed to meet the needs of lesbian students.

(iii) Analysis of school documents such as charters, policies and curriculum statements to determine their relevance and use to lesbian students and the students of lesbian and gay parents.

I estimate the entire period of data collection would take ten to twelve months. Recognising the workload of teachers and students, I would endeavour to schedule interviews with them at a time which suited them best and in such a way that it did not interfere with the day to day running of the school. I recognise that there are costs involved in undertaking a project such as this and I am currently investigating avenues of extra funding.

The school and participants will be consulted fully as far as is possible throughout the process. Participants will receive copies of the interview transcripts to check and have the opportunity to add or to delete material. Both the school and participants will receive a draft of the final report to comment on the findings. Participants have the opportunity to withdraw from the project at any time if they wish to.

### **Why I intend doing it**

My previous research confirmed overseas studies which indicated that young lesbians and gay men are an at risk group of students in secondary schools and that children of lesbian and gay parents are often harassed. While teachers have expressed concern about the difficulties these students face, little research in New Zealand has been undertaken to investigate the strategies that schools could undertake to meet the needs of these students. This research would produce findings which should help secondary schools better meet the needs of these students.

### **What I will do with the results**

In addition to writing up the results of this study for my doctorate and making them available to educational communities through universities, I would like to use this research to provide other secondary schools with resources and strategies to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students in their schools. I envisage that this will take the form of written resources and workshop presentations.

### **How the study site and participants were selected**

Your school was chosen because it endeavours to meet the needs of a wide range of students and has demonstrated a commitment to gender equity. Undertaking this project in a state school will also mean the results and findings of this study will be relevant and applicable to a wide range of educational communities throughout the country.

### **Possible benefits and risks to the participants**

The benefits to the school are that the school community will be recognised as being innovative in an area few schools have tackled. Staff consciousness will be raised about this issue and it will provide an opportunity for the school to develop strategies to meet its obligations under the 1993 Human Rights Act and the Ministry of Education Guidelines.

A group of members of the school community will have the opportunity to work together on a short term project which may enhance cohesiveness in the school. Most importantly, the needs of lesbian students and children of lesbian and gay parents in your school will be addressed. In the long run, it is conceivable that addressing issues of diversity and difference within the school may produce a climate of greater tolerance for everyone.

Despite school's clear obligations under the 1993 Human Rights Act and the Ministry of Education Guidelines, the intersection of education and sexuality can often be problematic. Recent negative responses to the Y.W.C.A. Sisters booklet and the Draft Sexuality curriculum have provided two recent examples. For this reason all members of the school community would need to be fully aware of the implications of undertaking work in this area and I imagine that it will be an issue that needs to be discussed widely within the school community. I would be prepared to talk to groups if that was perceived



to be helpful. It is also important that strategies be put in place to deal with negative reactions and problems before they arise.

### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

Pseudonyms would be used for the school and for individuals interviewed as part of the study. Characteristics of the school and individuals can be further disguised by using composite blurring categories. For example, the demographics of one school can be substituted for that of another in the same study.

The permission of parents would be gained before interviewing students. The University of Canterbury Ethics Committee require that all participants read this information sheet and sign a consent form which outlines the obligations of the researcher and the participants in the project. The two following people have agreed to act as referees for me and may be contacted at the following addresses;

Missy Morton  
Department of Education  
University of Canterbury  
Ph (03)3667001 ext. 6271 Fax: (03) 3642418  
E-Mail: [m.morton@educ.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:m.morton@educ.canterbury.ac.nz)

Miss Jill Ussher (The Principal)  
Palmerston North Girls High School  
Fitzherbert Avenue  
Palmerston North  
Ph (06) 3536913  
E-Mail: [j.ussher@pnghs.palm.cri.nz](mailto:j.usscher@pnghs.palm.cri.nz)

Please feel free to contact me if you require more detailed information about any aspect of this project. I do have a detailed research proposal which you are welcome to read.

20 Jeffkins Road  
Rangiora  
Ph. W (03) 3367001 ext 8212 H (03) 3134495  
E-mail: [misc2992@csc.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:misc2992@csc.canterbury.ac.nz)

## Appendix B

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULES: TAKEHE HIGH SCHOOL

#### CREATING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS FOR LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH PHASE ONE: DOCUMENTING BEST PRACTICES

#### PRINCIPAL'S INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

##### School Culture

- Could you tell me about your school, the roll, the number of staff, the communities it draws on, what its aims are?
- Can you describe the culture(s) of the students within your school?
- Can you describe the culture(s) of the staff within your school?
- How would you like to have your school described by students and parents in the school community?
- How have you as a principal gone about creating the current school culture?
- What are the aspects of the culture of the school that mean that it was possible to establish support for young lesbian, gay and bisexual students here?

##### The role of the Principal

- How many years have you been in the education system?
- How many years have you been a principal?
- Can you tell me how you first got into being an educator?
- What made you want to be a principal, what motivates you in your job?
- How do you perceive your role as a principal, what is your style of leadership?
- Can you describe your philosophy of education?
- What is your vision for this school?
- What do you think the role of education is for young women and men is in the 1990's?
- Why do you think that principals in other schools experience difficulty dealing with the issue of lesbian and gays in their schools?

- What sort of pressures do you perceive that schools are currently under which would affect their ability to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students?
- Why do you think that discussions concerning sexuality and education produce such strong reactions in people?

### Current Programmes

- What areas of the school have been developed to meet the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual students?
- To what extent are school policies used to protect les/bi/gay youth from verbal and physical harassment ?
- What support currently exists for lesbian and bisexual students and how successful do you perceive it to be?
- What do you think the role of the school is in educating students about sexuality, how well do you think that your school does in that regard?
- How do you feel about integrating lesbian and bisexual perspectives into curriculum?
- What are the prerequisites for establishing programmes to meet the needs of lesbian and bisexual youth in the school?
- What future directions would you like to see the school take in supporting lesbian and bisexual students?

## Appendix C

### PHASE TWO DOCUMENTING BEST PRACTICES: CREATING INCLUSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOLS FOR LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL STUDENTS INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### A Participant data

- Age now, level at school
- Ethnic identity
- Class background
- How long have you identified as lesbian/ bisexual to yourself and others?

#### B What is it currently like for you to be a young lesbian at school?

- safety
- peers
- teachers
- inclusiveness of the curriculum, the library
- counsellors

#### C How have your school experiences affected your sense of yourself?

#### D Where do you get your support/ positive images of yourself from?

- current images in the media/popular culture
- peers

#### E If you had the opportunity and resources to make your school a better place for young lesbians and bisexual women what would you like to see happen

- in one year?
- in five years?

#### F What do you think prevents your school/ schools meeting the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth?

**PHASE TWO DOCUMENTING BEST PRACTICES: CREATING INCLUSIVE  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS FOR LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH  
EDUCATORS INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

A Participant data

- Age
- years in teaching
- years at the school
- Ethnic identity
- class background

B How would you perceive the innovative capacity of the school?

- flexible reaction to governmental changes
- collaboration between teachers at educational and administrative levels
- Transformational leadership, the school leader creates and stimulates strategies to enable; teachers to continually develop themselves, for teachers to collaborate intensively, the target goal and school mission is collectively worked on.
- the school is a learning organisation, everyone continues to develop and study, policies are formed from the bottom up, key figures coordinate the policy and structures in the school.

C What do you think it's currently like to be a young lesbian or bisexual woman at your school?

- safety
- peer's attitudes
- teacher's attitudes
- inclusiveness of the curriculum, the library
- counsellors
- school policies

D What do you think it's currently like to be a lesbian or gay parent who has a young person at Kereru?

- peers attitudes

- attitudes of teachers

E What do you think prevents schools meeting the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth?

F If you had the opportunity and resources to make your school a more inclusive environment for young lesbians and bisexual women and lesbian and gay parents what would you like to see happen

- in one year?

- in five years?

## **Appendix D**

### **Professional Development Session With Health Teachers 1996**

#### **1. SEARS (1992) QUESTIONS**

##### My Experiences

- \* How do I feel when talking about sexuality?
- \* During my childhood, how was the subject of homosexuality treated?
- \* Did I have any friends who later identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual?
- \* How comfortable am I in expressing feelings towards members of my own gender?

##### Wider Issues

- \* In a democratic society what should schools teach?
- \* Can schools instill knowledge about the world without encouraging self knowledge?
- \* Are democratic attitudes, values of tolerance and respect for diversity and the development of critical thinking fostered in the school curriculum?
- \* Within an effective learning environment, what relationships should exist between educators and students?

#### **2. TALKING ABOUT SEXUALITY**

- Sexual orientation, identity and behaviour
- Sexuality as a continuum

##### Commonly asked questions

#### **3. VALUES CONTINUUM EXERCISE**

Heterosexuals flaunt their sexuality

Bisexuals want the best of both worlds

Real sex involves putting a penis into a vagina

Masturbation is second rate sex

It is natural for young men to experiment with sex

Gay men are more promiscuous than heterosexual men

The main reason for sex is pleasure  
 The main reason for sex is to continue the human race  
 Sex outside marriage is wrong  
 AIDS is self-inflicted by drug injectors  
 I'm not the kind person to get HIV  
 Most lesbians want to be men  
 I'd feel flattered if someone of the same sex asked me out for a date  
 Gay men and lesbians should be allowed in the police force and army  
 Lesbians are good baby-sitters  
 Most New Zealanders think it's OK to be gay or lesbian  
 People with HIV infection should have this recorded on their drivers licence

#### **4. TOWARDS BEST PRACTICE IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL STUDENTS**

##### **(i) Classroom Strategies**

Don't assume your students are all heterosexual. Imagine you are lesbian or bisexual student participating in your class. How well are you meeting their needs? Your aim is to construct a non-judgmental atmosphere in which lesbian and bisexual students can come to terms with their sexuality.

- Use inclusive language throughout, use neutral phrases like partner instead of boyfriend, girlfriend.
- Help the group establish ground rules for discussion which will ensure that the discussion is sensitive to the needs of the participants and encourage participation. Examples are group confidentiality and one person talking at a time.
- Provide an opportunity for students to submit anonymous questions, use post-boxes.
- Ask your students what they want to know about at the start of the session, negotiate to ensure you meet their needs.
- Evaluate at the end of the session to ensure you are meeting their needs and take their suggestions on board.

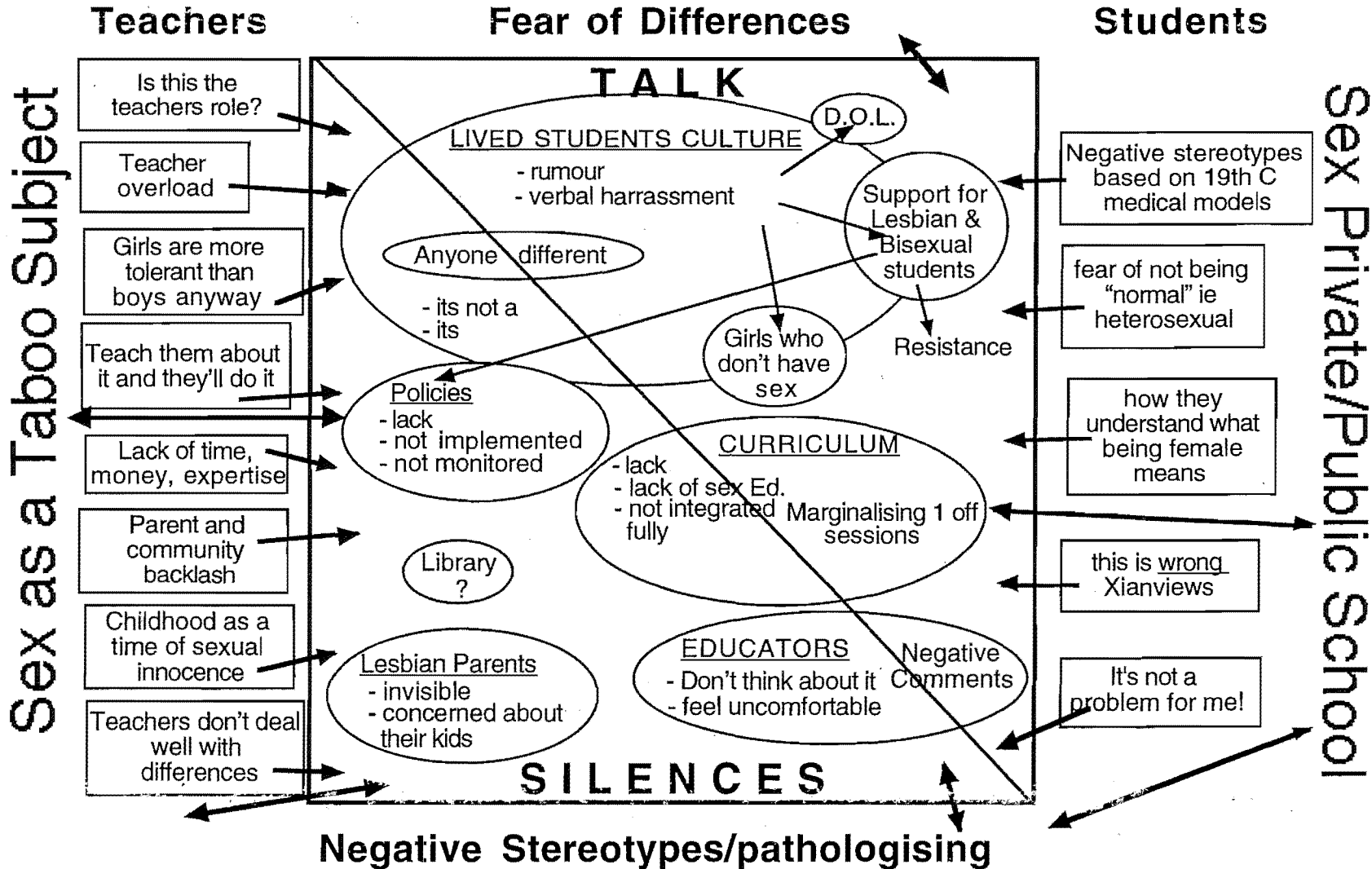


- Make sure that if you are teaching inclusively that someone else in the school knows you are and supports you. 85% of NZ'ers believe that it should not be legal to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation. It is actually a small minority who complain loudly against homosexuality and bisexuality.
- Familiarise yourself with current thinking and research on sexuality.

## **(ii)Curriculum Content**

- **Fluidity of human sexual response and the capacity of people to create and recreate their sexual identities** are integral components of Sexuality education.
- Focus on relationships generally rather than heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual ones.
- Discuss examples of lesbian, bisexual and gay relationships as well as heterosexual ones.
- Use activities/ lesson plans/ resources/ textbooks/reference books which are inclusive of lesbian gay and bisexual perspectives and that don't present negative attitudes and stereotyping.
- In safer sex talk about anal and oral sex as well as vaginal sex.
- Encourage discussion to be personally relevant. Ask your students, 'what if your sister told you she was a lesbian?' Personalise sexuality issues in teaching by asking how people **feel**, not just what they think
- Provide parallel information on lesbian, gay and bisexuality and heterosexuality which focuses on choice, taking control and respecting yourself and others. Effective Sexuality education is based on a whole school experience that encourages decision making, problem solving and self-worth. Take some of these strategies into your subject teaching.
- Deconstruct gender and its connections with sexual practice e.g.. How does being male and female define your sexual options? who is gay and who is straight, how is it that such arbitrary distinctions exist?
- Address sexual pleasure and desire for young women as something that they can achieve and do on their own as well as with a partner. Encourage critical thinking, why is masturbation considered less desirable than sexual intercourse?
- Effective HIV education is built on a continuing appreciation of equity and pluralism in society.

**WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A LESBIAN OR BI-SEXUAL STUDENT AT  
KERERU GIRLS' COLLEGE?**



## Appendix F

### Kereru Girls' College Teacher Member Check 1997

#### WAYS OF TALKING/ NOT TALKING ABOUT LESBIAN/BISEXUALITY AT KERERU GIRLS' COLLEGE: PROBLEMS WHICH ARISE AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

##### AIMS

1. To inform you about the findings of the data that I have gathered on what's happening to lesbian and bisexual students in the school.
2. To collect staff reactions to the data and their suggestions of what could be done about it
3. To fill out a confidential questionnaire about your attitudes

#### SESSION ONE: WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING TO LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL STUDENTS AT KERERU? (30 MINS)

- \* Using quotes, think and write about your reactions to them
- \* Presenting findings in forms of the diagram and quotes
- \* What are the implications of these findings for the school and for the staff? Talk about them in groups, one person records the groups ideas

##### Focus questions;

- What are your reactions to the findings, how accurate to you perceive them to be?
- What sort of issues do the findings bring up for the school and itseducators?
- What do you think could be done about it?

school stuctures

Teacher training

- any other comments

- \* Fill out the questionnaire

- \*Collect in sheets of paper and questionnaires

## SESSION TWO: WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO ABOUT IT (30 MINS)

- \*Brainstorm in small groups;

- what they think that needs to be done about it

- what teachers could do about it

- \* Presenting findings

- what EDUCATORS can do about it

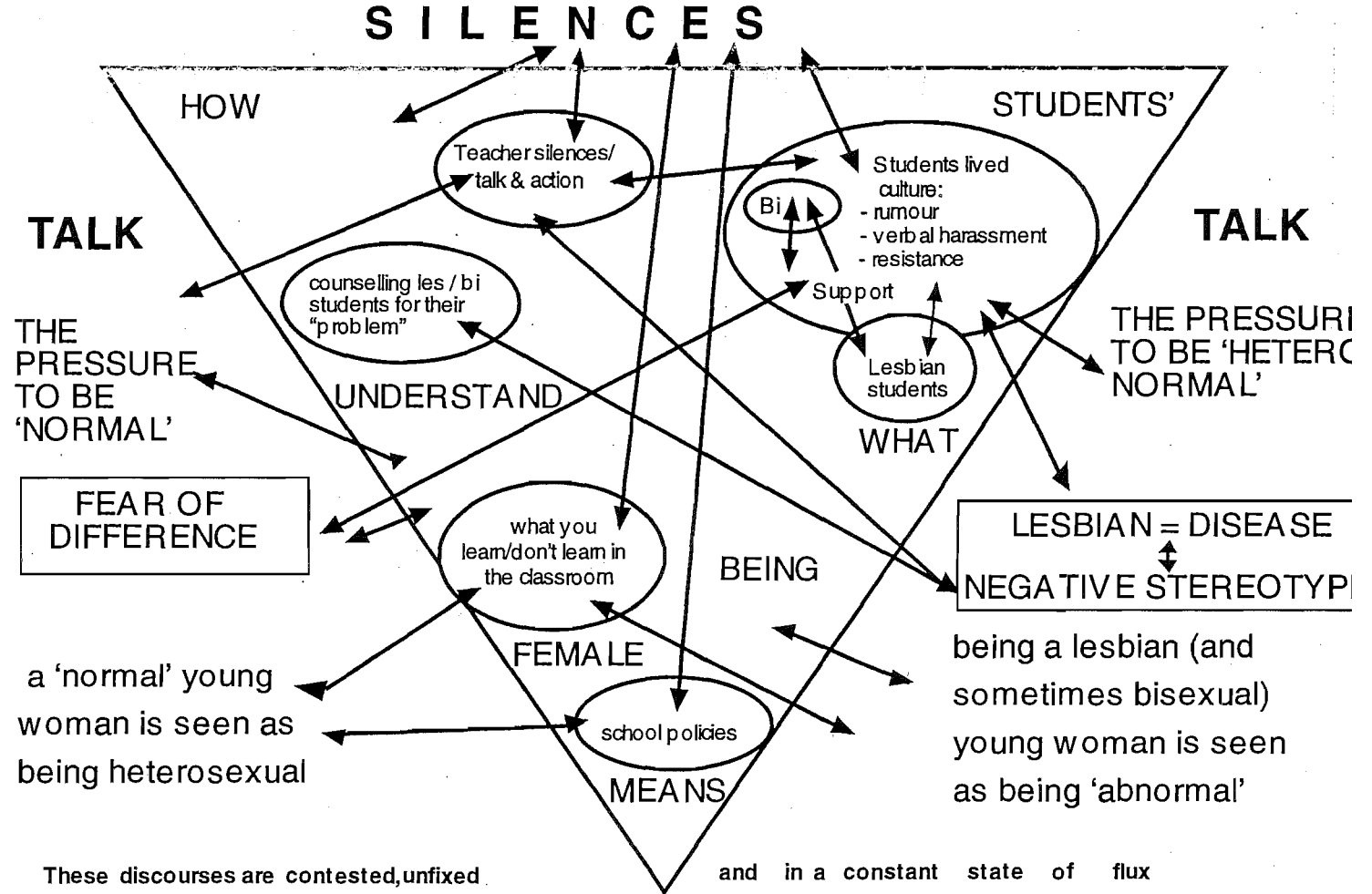
- \* Situations that teachers can find themselves in. Hand them out on cards, decide in groups what you can do about it, report back to main group

- \* Teachers evaluation of non-biased behaviour- fill in silently

- \* Write down suggestions of things the school could do/ WHERE TOO FROM HERE?-  
their suggestions

Appendix G  
First Planning Diagram (i) Kereru Girls College  
November 1996

### Kereru Girls College Students' Perceptions of What It Is Like To Be A Lesbian / Bi-Sexual Student At School



## Appendix H

### Staff Professional Development Session Kereru Girls College 1998

#### Staff Training Workshop: Strategies To Enable Teachers To Respect Student's Sexual Diversity

\* What's this got to do with us?

Brainstorm and record ideas

10 mins

\* Recap on research undertaken with lesbian and bisexual students and your recommendations  
about teacher education

5 mins

\* What can teachers do about it

Situation exercises on cards.

- Teachers in groups are presented with situation cards.
- Decide in groups what they would **Think, Feel, Do** in this situation.
- Report back to the rest of the staff describing the situation and plan of action.

20 mins

#### COMMON EXPERIENCES FACING LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS

Please read each scenario carefully by yourself and note down what **you think, what you feel and what you would do** in each circumstance.

Then discuss your response as a group.

**Scenario One**

You are teaching and the subject of homosexuality comes up as part of your curriculum content. As you write it on the board, students start laughing and snickering. You can see several students in the class feel uncomfortable and blush.

**Scenario Two**

You are out on duty at lunchtime and you hear a group of students call another student, 'lesso' as they walk past the group.

**Scenario Three**

You are teaching in class one day and towards the end of the lesson you overhear a group of students discussing whether or not two students they know are having a sexual relationship. They ask you what you think about that.

**Scenario Four**

A teacher in the school is getting a hard time from a class you also teach because they presume she has same sex relationships and they find this difficult to cope with. She has said nothing to you.

**Scenario Five**

A parent contacts you as Head of Level to inform you that her child is being verbally and physically harassed on the school bus by other students who have found out that her mother is a lesbian.

**Scenario Six**

A student who you have taught for a number of years is falling behind with her work and you are concerned about her lack of progress. You talk to her one day after class and it emerges that she has been struggling with questioning her sexuality, is feeling very isolated from her peers and unsafe in her classes.

**Scenario Seven**

A colleague in the staffroom remarks that, "It's all very well meeting the needs of lesbian and bisexual students in class but what is going to happen when you get parents ringing up the school to complain?"

### Scenario Eight

In class one day the issue of homosexuality has arisen. One student comments that she thinks the reason people can't handle diverse sexualities are that they are insecure about their own sexuality. Another student replies that accepting homosexuality goes against her Christian beliefs.

### Scenario Nine

At a parent teacher evening the mother of a student who you have taught for a number of years says she is concerned and doesn't know who to talk to about an issue facing her sixth form daughter. You encourage her to continue and she tells you that her daughter has started a same sex relationship with another student at the school and while she thought she was always a liberal person, she can't handle this happening to her own child. Her husband is not coping at all and has withdrawn from his daughter as a result. She wonders if her daughter perhaps picked the idea up from a Health class where same sex relationships were being talked about as if they were normal.

### Scenario Ten

There is a rumour going around the school that you are a lesbian. In one of your classes you overhear students egging each other on to ask you if the rumour's true. After asking them if they would like to share their conversation with the rest of the class, one brave soul asks you if it's true what people are saying about you.

## GROUP DECONSTRUCTION EXERCISE

20 MINS

Please read each scenario carefully by yourself and note down what **you think, what you feel and what you would do** in each circumstance.

Then discuss your response as a group.

### Scenario One- For Admin, Dean, H.O.L

A parent rings up the school and expresses her concern at the way she feels the school is promoting homosexuality by suggesting to students in Year 12 Health Ed that thinking that you may be lesbian or bisexual is perfectly acceptable.



### Scenario One- For classroom teachers

You are showing a video to students and at one point an effeminate guy talks on it. One of the students in the class comments that he looks like a real faggot, she and a group of students laugh.

#### THINK...

- What are the underlying and taken for granted assumptions behind what is being said?
- What do the words mean? how can they be interpreted?
- how do the different roles of people in these situations (parent, teacher, student) affect how the situation is dealt with?
- How could you deal with the situations by deconstructing the assumptions behind the situation
- What would be the benefits of using this strategy to enable students to respect sexual diversity?

Factfile sheet (included In the Appendix)

Situation One- For Admin, Dean, H.O.L

Situation Two- For classroom teachers

Brainstorm and discussion

Report back

\* Feedback forms

10 mins

## Appendix I

### Interview Schedules: Final Interviews at Kereru Girls College

#### INCLUSION FOR LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL YOUTH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF THE 1990'S: PHASE TWO FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: TEACHERS

##### Participant data

- Age
- years at the school
- class background
- years in teaching
- ethnic identity
- position

1. Why did the school/ you decided that it would be a good idea for the school to agree to participate in research which work towards meeting the needs of lesbian and bisexual students?

- How was the decision made?

2. What form did you imagine the intervention was going to take/ how did you envisage the research process happening/my role in the research process?

3. What are factors which make it **possible** to work towards creating an inclusive school for lesbian and bisexual students?

- perceived role of the school
- perceived role of teachers
- staff culture
- student culture
- equity

ANY OTHERS?

4. What are factors which make it **problematic** to work towards creating an inclusive school for lesbian and bisexual students

- perceived role of the school
- perceived role of teachers
- parental reaction
- academic vs social development tensions
- school competition and image issues
- workload/ structural constraints
- staff culture
- student culture
- childhood as a time of sexual innocence
- what we understand normality/ abnormality to mean
- gendered constructions of sexuality

ANY OTHERS?

5. What's your impression of how the process went?

- the role of the planning group
- staff responses
- role of the admin team
- the role of the researcher
- student involvement
- staff sessions
- bullying policy and procedure development
- resistance

6. What issues do you think are raised when a school undertakes research involving issues of sexuality and lesbian and bisexual students?

- changing teacher practice, attitudinal change
- do you think the process would have been any different if it had been equity issues other than sexuality which were being addressed?

7. What do you think has been achieved through the process?

8. Where to from here? what will happen next around the issue of addressing lesbian and bisexual students in the school from now on.

Any other responses/ observations you have ...

## 9. Health education

- Can you talk about the process by which the health curriculum came into existence in the school?

- What do you think that the current status and development of Health Education is within the school? Explain

- Do you think that the current status and stage development of the Health curriculum has affected the intervention? Explain

### **Health education**

Do you think that the current status and stage development of the Health curriculum has affected the intervention? Explain

Education sessions with staff

- how do you think that raising awareness changes practice?

- What enables teachers to feel comfortable addressing issues

- Have any of the ideas actually been integrated into Health teachers classroom practice?

\*sexuality continuum

\* differences between sexual identity, orientation and behaviour

\* conceptualising sexuality as a fluid, changeable phenomenon, not limiting sexuality to an either or choice

\* exercises that I developed to integrate into the curriculum as it was being written (are these being used)

\* Think, feel do approaches

\* using deconstruction as a teaching strategy

**Planning group**

How did you perceive the role of the planning group in the intervention?

How did you perceive your role in the planning group?

- How did you see my role in the intervention? How was I positioned?

**INCLUSION FOR LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL YOUTH IN SECONDARY  
SCHOOLS OF THE 1990'S: PHASE TWO FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW  
SCHEDULE: STUDENTS**

Participant data

- Age
- years at the school
- class background
- years in teaching
- ethnic identity
- position

1. Why did you agree to take part in the research process?
  
2. How did you envisage the research process happening/my role in the research process?
  
3. What are factors which make it **problematic** to work towards creating an inclusive school for lesbian and bisexual students
  
4. What's your impression of how the process went?
  - the role of the planning group
  - staff responses
  - role of the admin team
  - the role of the researcher
  - student involvement
  - staff sessions
  - bullying policy and procedure development
  - resistance
  - the intersection of gender and sexuality
  
5. What issues do you think are raised when a school undertakes research involving issues of sexuality and lesbian and bisexual students?
  - changing teacher practice, attitudinal change

- do you think the process would have been any different if it had been equity issues other than sexuality which were being addressed?

6. What do you think has been achieved through the process?

**APPENDIX J****ETHICAL CONSENT FORMS**

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Ethics consent forms for students involved in Phase one of the study  
**Documenting Best Practices: Creating Inclusive Secondary  
 Schools for Lesbian and Gay Youth**

Please read carefully the **INFORMATION SHEETS** accompanying these forms.

You have been invited as a student to participate in Phase one of the research project **Documenting Best Practices: Creating Inclusive Secondary Schools for Lesbian and Gay Youth**. The aim of this project is to document, develop, trial and evaluate strategies to make secondary schools more inclusive environments for lesbian and gay youth.

Phase one of the project intends to document school strategies which are currently in operation to meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth. These sheets outline your obligations and those of the researcher and require your signed consent and that of your parent(s) or caregiver(s) to enable you to participate.

Your involvement in this project will involve;

- (i) Undertaking a one hour semi-structured audio-taped interview to discuss the support you receive as a lesbian or gay student at your school.
- (ii) Reading your interview transcript and making comments.
- (iii) Commenting on your interpretation of my words.

You will receive a copy of the project.

While results of the project may be published, you may be assured of complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation. To ensure anonymity and



confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used for both the schools and the individuals who take part in the research. Any places and names mentioned by you will also be disguised, as will characteristics that might identify particular individuals or a school.

The project is being carried out under the direction of **Kathleen Quinlivan** who can be contacted at **(03) 3134495**. The project is being supervised by Missy Morton, Education Department, Canterbury University **Ph. (03) 3667001 Ext. 6271**. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about the project. The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

## **STUDENTS                      CONSENT                      FORM**

### *Documenting Best Practices: Creating Inclusive Secondary Schools For Lesbian and Gay Youth*

I have read and understood the description of the above named project. On this basis I agree to give my permission to participate in the project and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time, withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Signed ..... (Student)

Date .....

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Ethics Consent Forms For The School Principal And Board Of Trustees In Phase Two Of The Study Documenting Best Practices: Creating Inclusive Secondary Schools For Lesbian, Gay And Bisexual Youth**

Please read carefully the information sheet accompanying these forms.

Your school is invited to participate in Phase two of the research project **Documenting Best Practices: Creating Inclusive Secondary Schools for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth**. The aim of this project is to document, develop, trial and evaluate strategies to make secondary schools more inclusive environments for lesbian and gay youth.

Phase two of the project intends to document the extent to which the school is currently meeting the needs of lesbian students and children of lesbian and gay parents, then develop, trial and evaluate programmes which would meet the needs of lesbian and gay youth and children of lesbian and gay parents.

Your school's involvement in the study would consist of the following stages and activities;

Stage Two: Presenting and Developing Programmes

This would involve working as a consultant with a range of educators and interested members of the school community to work with teachers in order to meet the needs of these students. Undertaking educational work with staff to enable them to carry out educational work with students will be the main focus.

Stage Four: Evaluation

As a result of valuating the success of the programmes. This would consist of;

- (i) Staff completing a short evaluation form at the end of both staff training sessions.
- (ii) 5-10 Staff and students completing short evaluation forms at the completion of the student training sessions.
- (iii) Conducting classroom observations into training programmes. This will consist of the researcher sitting silently at the back of the second staff training session and 1-2 student training sessions in order to observe the process

Later the participants will be asked to comment on the researcher's interpretation of their words in the draft of the report and will be given the opportunity to amend their comments.

Participants can choose to discontinue their involvement in the project at any time.

While the results of the project may be published, you may be assured of complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used for both the schools and the individuals who take part in the research as will characteristics that might identify particular individuals or a school.

The project is being carried out under the direction of **Kathleen Quinlivan** who can be contacted at **(03) 313-4495**. The project is being supervised by Missy Morton, Education Department, Canterbury University **Ph. 3667001 Ext. 6271**. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about the project. The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

## CONSENT FORM

### *Documenting Best Practices: Creating Inclusive Secondary Schools For Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth*

We have read and understood the description of the above named project. On this basis we agree to give our permission to participate in the project and we consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. We understand also that we may withdraw at any time from the project, including withdrawal of any information we have provided.

Signed ..... Chairperson B.O.T

..... Principal

Date .....

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Ethics consent forms for educators involved in Phase two of the study  
**Documenting Best Practices: Creating Inclusive Secondary  
 Schools for Lesbian and Gay Youth**

**Please read carefully the information sheet accompanying these forms.**

You have been invited to as an educator to participate in Phase two of the research project **Documenting Best Practices: Creating Inclusive Secondary Schools for Lesbian and Gay Youth**. The aim of this project is to document, develop, trial and evaluate strategies to make secondary schools more inclusive environments for lesbian and gay youth. Phase two of the project intends to document the extent to which the school is currently meeting the needs of lesbian students and the children of lesbian and gay parents. Then programmes to meet the needs of these students will be developed, trialed and evaluated. The first stage of Phase two will be to determine the extent to which the school is currently meeting the needs of lesbian students and the children of lesbian and gay parents. These forms outline your obligations and those of the researcher and require your signed consent.

Your involvement in this project will involve;

- (i) Undertaking a one hour semi-structured audio-taped interview to describe the extent to which the school is currently meeting the needs of lesbian students and students who have parents who are lesbian and gay. You can be provided with a list of questions before the interview if you wish.
- (ii) Reading your interview transcript and making comments.
- (iii) Commenting on my interpretation of your words.

You will receive a copy of the project report.

While the results of the project may be published, you may be assured of complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used for both the schools and the individuals who take part in the research. Any places and names mentioned by you will also be disguised, as will characteristics that might identify particular individuals or a school.

The project is being carried out under the direction of **Kathleen Quinlivan** who can be contacted at **(03) 3134495**. The project is being supervised by Missy Morton, Education Department, Canterbury University **Ph. (03) 3667001 Ext. 6271**. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about the project. The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

**EDUCATORS            CONSENT            FORM**

**Documenting Best Practices: Creating Inclusive Secondary Schools For Lesbian and Gay Youth**

I have read and understood the description of the above named project. On this basis I agree to give my permission to participate in the project and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Signed .....

Date .....