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**Teens Educating and Confronting Homophobia:
Space, Anti-Oppression Education and Identity**

by

Ian Rutherford

**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto**

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Master of Arts, 1998

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Abstract

The thesis is a study of the Toronto-based Teens Educating Against and Confronting Homophobia (TEACH), a peer-based youth program focused on addressing issues of homophobia. The study examines the ways in which participation in TEACH permits youth to actively challenge homophobia, and how the space of the project nurtures a critical analysis of the construction of identity. The study demonstrates some of the ways in which a peer-based model generates personal narratives and challenges diverse discourses within an anti-oppression framework. It shows how youth have taken up their identities as gay, lesbian or bisexual youth in spaces of the school, the mainstream gay, lesbian and bisexual community, and TEACH itself. The research suggests the need for a combination of trust and reliability, supportive adult facilitation, and reliable structures that support youth in exploring complex issues. It also suggests a possible connection between adolescent development and the acquisition and use of varying theoretical constructs.

Dedicated to the youth at TEACH

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1.0 Introduction: “Straight” into Invisibility

Youth who are gay, or lesbian, or bisexual, are most likely to conceal their orientation. Intolerant and often hostile responses to homosexuality and bisexuality do not encourage disclosure and, subsequently, many youth conceal their identity through intricate strategies so they can pass as “straight”. At the expense of enjoying balanced, self-accepting lives secrecy affords a safe haven (Uribe and Harbeck, 1992, 11). Yet at the same time that invisibility protects youth from being hurt, it simultaneously hurts them by preventing their being seen: “Death by visibility, death by invisibility - the catch-22 of our tribe” (O’Connor, 1995, 14). Isolation does little to remove the process of stigmatization or the effect this stigmatism has upon the personal and social development of homosexual and bisexual adolescents. Studies (see Fine et al, 1997; Herdt and Boxer, 1993; and Uribe and Harbeck, 1992) show that although official school policies espouse equality they are not, in reality, implemented. Consequently, even though youth often report positive feelings about school, these settings typically do not offer guidance and the youth undergo pressure to conform and to individually negotiate their participation in an environment that negates their sexual identities. The space of education, where the nurturing and development of healthy, critically-minded people takes place, is typically a circle that does not curve around gay, lesbian or bisexual youth.

Herdt and Boxer (1993, 223) found that two-thirds of the youth in the United States felt they had to hide their sexual orientation partially or totally in school, and that less than a quarter of the group felt that there was no one from whom they had to hide from being gay or lesbian. A predominant concern about revealing themselves centred more around their peers than it did teachers most likely because of a need to belong and be affirmed in their age group. Elaborate concealment strategies become a means for handling sexual feelings and identities in school environments that reflect the homophobia of the wider society. Interestingly, even in communities

where structures have been put into place to encourage positive gay and lesbian expression, youth still report that the assumption of heterosexuality predominates and that this assumption is most often put upon them. Campey et al (1994, 97), summarize it this way: "Perhaps, more than any other system of oppression, homophobia, heterosexism, and sexism work together to reinforce each other. All these systems have expectations of how "real" women/girls and "real" men/boys should feel and behave. All have serious consequences for those who step outside of their prescribed gender roles". For these reasons they advocate that educators focusing on gender equity draw the links between sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia, and that those engaged in anti-oppression work include gay and lesbian issues.

Yet the limitation of anti-oppression work, or of any work by people working with and alongside marginalized constituencies, is its lack of frequency in the formal education system. Gains made by activists in the Toronto Board of Education (Campey, 1994), for example, are fragile and precariously sit in the balance as the amalgamation of school boards brings fears of a less progressive body of trustees into the wider conservative arena of the current provincial Progressive Conservative government with its commitment to neo-conservative restructuring under the New Right language of 'Family', 'Tradition' and 'Religion'. Any work done to address homophobia and to provide a venue for gay, lesbian and bisexual students to pursue and explore their sexual orientation are limited. Where affective disclosure and analytical frameworks are nurtured in an ongoing supportive environment, however, the chances that gay, lesbian and bisexual will develop in positive ways should increase. Such environments typically exist outside of the school environment although agencies that serve gay, lesbian and bisexual youth establish vital connections within the education system. The subject of my study is one such environment. It involves a group of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth encircled in the support of an organization that supports youth in the process of identity and advocacy work.

The Toronto-based TEACH (Teens Educating About and Confronting Homophobia) presents workshops to educators and students on issues of homophobia and heterosexism. Much of their work is done in the high schools in the Toronto School Board although the program itself is not funded by the school board. Several initiatives by the Toronto Board of Education's Human Sexuality Program have also contributed to an environment where this kind of activity has been able to congeal. These include the setting up of the Toronto Board's Lesbian and Gay Employees group, support from NDP trustees for gay-positive initiatives; the election of an openly gay trustee; and provision for a student support group through the board's Human Sexuality Program (Campey, 1994, 90-91).

1.1 The Research Question

My research was aimed at examining the ways in which participation in TEACH assists lesbian, gay and bisexual students gain an increased understanding of who they are and how they identify themselves. Specifically, I examined how the space given to gay, lesbian and bisexual youth by the organization assists them in working through their personal understanding of oppression within an anti-oppression framework, and the extent to which participants understand and incorporate various theoretical models as part of that project.

As these youth go about the work of simply making schools a place in which students can be "out" and where people respect one another, they have necessarily engaged themselves in a process of politicization well beyond the audiences they work with. For most students, the work TEACH youth do with them is groundwork or an entry point for these students to begin examining issues of homophobia and heterosexism. Yet, as the TEACH youth engage in this work their own awareness and political understanding increases. As the following literature on gay, lesbian and bisexual youth reveals (Bass and Kaufman, 1996; Herdt and Boxer, 1993; Watney,

1991), a lack of spaces where gay, lesbian and bisexual youth can mobilize and actively pursue issues around sexuality and homophobia has left most youth isolated and stigmatized with severe effect.

Witnessing the activity of young people in positive queer spaces should help point the way to transform environments like schools that have not typically provided tolerant spaces for, nor constructed positive images of, gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. My research, therefore, has been directed at examining how participation in TEACH affects the kind of framework or understanding of the world and self that gay, lesbian and bisexual youth want to build for themselves, and how the beneficial aspects of that space might be transplanted in other educational settings. I will elaborate upon this point in the next section.

The essential focus of my thesis centred in finding a response to the following question: In what ways does the space of TEACH affect how lesbian, gay and bisexual youth understand their sexual orientation and incorporate it into various working identities of themselves and the kind of activism they engage in? Research involved an examination of TEACH in which a series of supplementary questions guided me in responding to the main research question. These questions included:

- * How do the procedures, structures, methodologies at a planning and organizational level facilitate a deepened understanding of the participants and their ability to work more effectively in anti-homophobia education?
- * How does inter-group contact amongst youth during workshops and training sessions affect participant perception of self?
- * What has contact with this space provided youth that has been absent in other spaces?

1.2 Practical Implications for the Field of Education

Investigating the ways in which participants in TEACH use their space as a venue to actively challenge homophobia has shed some preliminary insight as to how this organization nurtures and promotes a critical analysis of the construction of knowledge generally and the construction of sexuality in particular. The results of this study should contribute to transformative pedagogical work in its demonstration of the ways in which a student-based training model generates personal narrative within the context of a critical anti-oppression framework that links affective and personal investigation with anti-oppression theoretical models. Research reveals some of the ways in which youth might be positively affected by participating in projects of this sort and how TEACH's organization and practice could also be applied to creating similar structures within schools that provide open space to explore identity, gain support and challenge the homophobic structures within the school environment.

Research has also illuminated how an elimination of invisibility and silence with respect to sexual orientation might inform a healthy interrogation of identity while also addressing societal homophobia in tandem with any internalized homophobia. It has also yielded some indication as to how consideration of other youth "constituencies" (race, gender, ableism) in anti-oppression work might contribute to further understandings of self and society.

2.0 Critical Ethnography in Anti-Homophobic Spaces

As discussed above, the experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth most often occur in silence due to heteronormative structures that make coming-out a dangerous prospect. Yet to tap into silence necessitates that the researcher him or herself be disposed to being silent. A project that seeks to understand how youth have been able to develop in a homophobic society asks the

researcher to listen, observe, discuss, then listen, and listen some more. The choice of ethnographic methodology suits the disposition since it seeks to listen and reflect back the voices (s)he hears:

The goal of ethnography is to provide a description and an interpretive-explanatory account of what people do in a particular setting and what meaning their interactions have for them. To accomplish this goal, the ethnographer carries out systematic, detailed observation in the research setting and analyses the social organization of people's behaviour (Goldstein, 1997, 69).

In this chapter I aim to ground the methodology of the project and to outline specifically the process I followed.

2.1 Legitimizing Youth Discourses

Being a teacher implies an ability to interact with students in ways that reflect an understanding of their particular position as students, as youth, as sexual beings - as individuals engaged in a continuous process of development and identification within structures and systems that seek to shape and determine who they are and what they become. Given this, it seems to me that any project that positions its subjects as active participants in the production of their lives must also place them at the centre of the research within a dialectic model: the participants and the researcher must actively engage with each other if the project is sincere in its claim to be transformational. Critical ethnographic work acknowledges this importance and is underscored by the critical pedagogue Paulo Freire (1987, 127) who writes of our need to take the

students' cultural universe as a point of departure, enabling students to recognize themselves as possessing a specific and important cultural identity.

The successful usage of the students' cultural universe requires respect and legitimation of the students' discourses, that is, their own linguistic codes, which are different but never inferior. Educators also have to respect and understand students' dreams and expectations.

Quite clearly, critical ethnographic research seeks change as an identified goal thereby admitting its mission to criticize and replace the status quo for greater equity. It is openly ideological research which accepts that interest-free knowledge is logically impossible and contends that

openly value-based research is no more or less ideological based than positivist research, except that it is more open about it (Lather, 1986; Carspecken, 1996; Mies, 1987; Wolcott, 1990). It is in this “conscious partiality”, as Mies (1987) puts it, that I choose to work because it puts my research participants into the wider social picture and acknowledges them as researchers themselves. It also integrates the need for the active participation of the researcher in the struggle if the project is to move beyond an academic exercise, that is, if it is to integrate praxis. On this point I concur with Mies (1987, 124) when she writes that:

the demand to link praxis and research consistently follows an historical, dialectical and materialist theory of knowledge. According to this concept, the “truth” of a theory is not dependent on the application of certain methodological principles and rules, but on its potential to orient the processes of praxis towards progressive emancipation and humanization. This potential, however, is not acquired in the sheltered world of academic institutions but in participation in social processes and in reflection about them.

Ideologically my research identifies with areas of feminist scholarship. Feminist research according to Lather (1986, 68) has the overt goal “to correct both the invisibility and the distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women’s unequal social position (which) entails the substantive task of making gender a fundamental category for our understanding of the social order, ‘to see the world from women’s place in it’.” In this project I claim the need to understand sexuality as a fundamental category for understanding the social order and work with theory that criticizes the binary of heterosexual/homosexual in which heterosexuality emerges as natural in dominant discourse.

Methodologically, critical ethnography offers strategies to ensure that the project remains central to the project and that it does not become “high-jacked” by a theory driving the data. My research employed the strategies outlined by Lather. These include:

- ◊ Triangulation of Methods, Data Sources, and Theories
- ◊ Reflexive Subjectivity (some documentation of how the researcher’s assumptions have been affected by the logic of the data)

- ◊ Face Validity (established by recycling categories, emerging analysis, and conclusions back through at least a subsample of respondents)
 - ◊ Catalytic Validity (some documentation that the research process has led to insight and, ideally, activism on the part of the respondents)
- (1986, 78)

In keeping these four strategies as part of my ongoing research I achieved a more conscious involvement with the research participants which have brought me closer to effectively capturing the position of the youth at TEACH, and to devising ways in which the results will allow them to further enable their development as young gay, lesbian and bisexual beings. Wolcott (1990) aptly points out that critical ethnography does not often get the story right. Yet it seems to me that rightness is less important than positive change. Whereas it's difficult to quantify how much my research methods affected the overall gains in the group to reflect and consider various issues around identity, it is clear that the group found the interviews useful in organizing thoughts, in trying out ideas. The transcriptions of taped sessions available to group members also assisted some of the youth as they revisited sessions and reflected on their content. If the catalytic validity of the project nurtures and produces a heightened awareness of sexuality on the part of the youth at TEACH, and if it leads to more effective activism then therein will lie the "rightness" of this work.

I want now to turn to the methodology of my research keeping in mind each of Lather's categories.

2.2 Methodological Process

I worked with TEACH over a six and a half month period as a participant-observer. In early December I began work with Joanne Bacon, the project supervisor for TEACH over the last two years. I met with her weekly for one hour which provided an opportunity to discuss the project,

to read background material, and to make contact with some of the senior youth members. In early February, Joanne and I interviewed and selected candidates for the project and established a tentative training schedule for the new group. From February to the end of June I participated in one weekend training session (six hours), twenty weekly training sessions (60 hours) and attended fifteen workshops conducted by various group members (22 hours).

Joanne Bacon facilitated the weekly training sessions with support from senior TEACH members and outside resource people. I facilitated three meetings in late May and early June while Joanne was on vacation. All of the meetings sought to give participants a place to meet and discuss their experiences, to address concerns, share reflections and, principally, to receive training. In part, the meetings provided a space to give ongoing feedback on my observations and to record and report further observations of participant development. Time restrictions - as I will address later - meant that I often gave feedback to people outside of meeting times informally, through written comments or during the individual interviews. Informal debriefings after the workshops were also intended to give an immediate space to discuss and respond to participant work and responses. The objective here was to evaluate and reflect on the experiences while also giving immediate support, particularly after difficult sessions.

In addition, I conducted eight personal interviews with eight of the new participants and one interview with one of the third year members. These interviews gave a more in-depth sense of each person's involvement with the project, and its effects, while also giving a sense of how the space of TEACH differed from other spaces in their lives. The interviews also helped to corroborate each person's actions and words at other points throughout the five months of training, thereby adding to the triangulation of data. I also intended for the interviews to help people in their own reflection processes and to help ensure face validity. To this end,

transcriptions of interviews, as well as sessions, were made available to participants and all participants had an opportunity to be involved in offering feedback on how I used their voice(s) and how I interpreted the data.

2.3 How do I Write Thee?: (Re)presenting Voice

The act of choosing a segment of life to transcribe implies decisions about the significance of the strip of talk or the speech, which, in turn, implies that the talk or event or the speech event, has been interpreted from some point of view...Thus, choosing a unit of talk to transcribe is a political act: From whose point of view will the selection be made - the researcher's etic perspective and goals or the emic perspective and goals of members of the group? (Green et al. 1997, 172).

The tension between accuracy and readability on the one hand and the politics of representation on the other (Roberts, 1997, 169) arose as I moved through my transcribed data. Accuracy, as I have come to understand it, is not about having caught all the words and the emotive forces behind them. Rather, it lies in capturing the essence of participants' thoughts and emotions - to return to Freire (1986, 127) - in ways that legitimize their discourses.

Ruth Behar refers to the process of editing transcriptions as having "to cut, cut and cut away at our talk to make it fit between the covers of a book, and even more important, to make it recognizable as a story, a certain kind of story, a life history" (Behar, 1993, 12). In my cutting I have chosen passages from the transcripts that I feel represent the shared and distinct realities of the project. Participants checked the way I (re)presented their narratives against transcriptions and I've tried to address points in response to them. I have deleted many of the 'false starts' as well as many 'ums', 'ahs', 'rights', as most of the participants felt it diminished accessibility to the key content of the discussion and made them appear lacking in communicative skills. Doing so has also created a higher degree of intelligibility for readers. I have, however, maintained a preponderance of these as I feel their placement and use establishes something of the

speaker's character and contributes to the rhythm of the dialogue and maintains the cadence and character of each person's speech.

I also think it's important for the voices of the youth in this project to predominate as much as possible since this project is about listening to gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. Too much is heard from adults: too few questions punctuate their phrases, and too little listening marks their pauses. There are many long narrative passages in the text of this thesis which serve to reveal the articulate, knowledgeable voices of youth who, given the right space, will communicate with colourful clarity the nature of their condition. Ultimately, then, an ethnographer's accountability to his or her participants comes in a listening that gives space to speaking.

I also speak in this project for reasons I need to make clear. I can only know what is revealed to me by others and I can only represent those revelations within the context of who I am. The theory, the discussions, the observations and the critiques of the youth in the project helped orient me to gain a wider and more valid reading of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. So, too, did the self-reflective work I undertook before and during this research: Knowing more fully the questions around my own identity helped bring greater clarity to my work with this project. Aware of my position I have been more able to consider it consciously in my analysis. As a critical narrator, then, I want to reveal some of the voice in/through which the narrative of TEACH is being told so that my own frame of reference might be read within the analysis of this project.

3.0 Self-Reflexivity: Locating Myself in This Critical Ethnographic Project

Linda Brodkey (1987, 71) writes that critical narrators are:

narrators whose self-consciousness about ideology makes it necessary for them to point out that all stories, including their own, are told from a vantage point, and to call attention to the voice in

which the story is being told. In critical narratives, it is from the narrative stance or conceptual vantage point of critical theory that a story of cultural hegemony is generated. That means that the events related have been conceptualized by a narrator who sees, organizes, interprets, and narrates social events in terms of critical theory.

Let me claim my presence on the scene.

For much of this chapter I give an account of growing up and of the ways in which I coped and worked through the reality of being gay. Working back through my memory I pull out fragments of what I remember, and felt, that influenced how I understood/understand what it meant to be gay in my adolescence and later as an adult and as an educator. The footnoted text is a broken essay that comments further upon the narrative that references current theories and examples. It is the theory that frames the story I recount in the main text. In a way, it is a way to expose my narrative to an analysis just as I will later expose the narratives of the TEACH youth to theoretical research.

The main text largely contains the analysis I remember holding at particular times. It is not so much “concerned with accuracy of details as...with evoking, in writing, the state of mind, the spirit of a particular moment” (hooks, 1995, 5). The footnoted text, on the other hand, reflects an analysis of the present as I re-possess my past and interrogate it more fully with the insight of other experience.

This process of seeing who I was, and what I thought and felt then, helped prepare me for work with the youth involved in TEACH. By interrogating the different constructions of my own adolescence from the vantage point of the present, and how I’ve remembered my past, I gained further insight to the gaps that blocked and caused some of the pain I experienced, particularly as a teenager. It was also a way for me to experience the development of a narrative, a task which all TEACH members undertake as part of their work to educate others about how their

identity has developed in the presence of homophobia. It helped me understand their process and their realities more fully and allowed me greater understanding of myself as an educator.

Knowing how I identify myself now and exposing my own understanding/interpretation of my adolescence and early adulthood provided a further means for checking the validity of my research; exposing my past and being aware of current issues around my identity as a gay, White man helped guard against any tendency to impose my life and my “solutions” onto others. Like many of the participants in TEACH I involved myself in this project because I want youth to have more positive queer space to explore sexuality and consider new boundaries for themselves. I want more of that space for myself as well. In joining up with this project I have also opened a similar space for myself – a space to share, to challenge and to engage in questions around the contentious categories of identity and community.

Out of my past and my present emerged a crossing point with the youth involved in this project. I concur with Bersani (1995, 9) who writes that even “(t)he most varied, even antagonistic, identities meet transversely. These intersections of divergent lines of identity and experience give a pleasing instability to the ‘we’ of this book.” My hope is that the telling of my story(ies) will reveal some of the process of my shifting identity out beyond the closet. It will contribute/join with the narratives constructed by the youth involved in TEACH as they unfold later in this thesis to reveal some of the interconnections between youth, educators and the project of sexual identity in a heterosexist world.

3.1 No Closet Big Enough to Hold the Terrain of My Life

By writing the autobiography, it was not just this Gloria (of my tormented and anguished childhood) I would be rid of but the past that had a hold on me, that kept me from the present (hooks in Blair, 1995, 3)¹

¹ Thompson, citing Whiting, suggests that certain rituals in the coming-out process people can move ‘beyond traumatic events and meanings that have interfered with their living in the present (Thompson, 1996, p 211). In

See:

When I am told not to speak, not to utter anything that would divulge my most intimate truth; when I am told that what it is I would say is not an act of affirmation but of degradation, of abnormal proportions equal in evil to that of murderer, rapist; when I am told that what I am is a phase, a sin, a genetic disorder; when I am slapped, threatened, live often in anxiety of being beaten, fired; when I feel forces around me and the force of my history say that that which I am is not worthy; when all of these accusations collect and surround me - why would I want to speak? Why would I let loose a truth that would kill me and see me alienated from the community in which I have always had a place in silence? What is the value in being seen when I risk being diminished and wiped out of the places where I once held a promise of power? Why would I not want to enshroud this one part of me in a sheet of invisibility so that all the other parts of me might be seen?

Unless, perhaps, I knew I was not alone.²

writing this piece – in doing all of this research too, really - I've been able to confront significant parts of my past. Residual issues, sadness and pain linger and surfaced several times throughout my research. But, understanding more of my past gave me a heightened capacity to engage with the youth in this project and with youth I will encounter as I continue my work as a high school teacher.

² I came back to this paragraph several days after writing it and was struck by the fact that I had written 'you' where you now will read 'I'. I had sought an objective and universal voice as a departure point for talking about how I have come to this kind of work instead of placing my "I" at the forefront. I pulled out 'The Vulnerable Observer' and found what I had underlined a month ago: "No one objects to autobiography, as such, as a genre, in its own right. What bothers critics is the insertion of personal stories into what we have been taught to think of as the analysis of impersonal social facts (Behar, 1996, 12)" I think I am possibly one of those critics even though I argued consistently in my ethnography course for the placement of the author in his/her research. But then I dug up the transcription of our session on writing ethnography where I questioned the need for autobiography and fiction writing to be labeled as ethnography. My colleagues responded:

V: I think I'm trying to deal with that whole hierarchy of Truth and the whole notion of authority of Truth - That ethnography has a real sort of claim on factual evidence even though you know the (James) Clifford article (reveals) that we write, that (our research) is written, that it is interpretation, that there are elements of fiction in it. And yet the fictional aspect of ethnography is seen as less fictional than say a play from personal experience. And I'm just saying that those boundaries between fiction and non-fiction (are) not quite so clear. And what is that boundary? Is it really based on fact or is it based on authority?

See:

One day television introduced someone “like” me - Unquestionably like me but for being wealthier, more handsome and “out”. And even though I never saw him kiss another man, or sleep with another man, I heard him announce himself gay - even though a confused gay - and pronounce his love for another man. And even though I had played with other boys sexually, and felt ‘crushes’ for my older brother’s buddies, none of this made me feel affirmed or hopeful like I felt now seeing this man who loved someone of the same sex. Someone out there beyond the space of my rural life was now made concrete through Stephen Carrington on “Dynasty”, an ABC nighttime soap.³

K: It may require a different thinking of face validity and it may require a different thinking through of what we consider to be performance in ethnography. ‘Cause we are in this class and this discussion is sticking very closely to the notion of an “Other” as an informant and the play really subverts that and says either you come to this play - I mean who are the informants. Is it the actors? Is it the author? Is it the playwright? Is it the audience? It really mixes up a lot of certainties in ethnography that are tied up in Truth.

It struck me when I reread the transcription how much I hug the notion of an ‘other’ as an informant and as the container in which I will find Truth more closely than I had acknowledged. But it’s not, as I had thought, because of ‘reigning paradigms’ which ‘have traditionally called for distance, objectivity, and abstraction. No. it stems from naming myself in full view of academic scrutiny with a vulnerability to issues I am openly struggling with. I know this project with TEACH. in part, comes out of deep personal issues around my marginalisation and the sometimes bitter feelings I have for having lived under cover for so long. I know it’s so because when I read “I” in the place of a previous imagined “you” who may not be able to see or imagine the weight of my story, the sound of all of those words contained my voice.

³ My feeling of kinship to Steven Carrington probably has much to do as much with his being gay as with the fact that I identified with his Whiteness, his similarity to the straight characters in the show and because I also longed to escape the working class background that I lived in. I saw no difference between him and those around him except that he felt attracted to men just as I saw no difference between me and those around me but for my attraction to men. It is, as Bersani (1993) has pointed out, an identity that is formulated - and dangerously so - solely on sexual behavior. He argues (1993, 3) that ‘sexual behavior is never only a question of sex, (but) that it is embedded in all the other, nonsexual ways in which we are socially and culturally positioned.’ Central to his contention that there are many ways of being gay is his holding in suspect any attempts to ‘enclose human subjects within clearly delimited and coherent identities.’ Doing so he argues leads to exclusionary categories like the one I describe in the early unfolding of what it should be like to be gay (white, male, upper-class): ‘While conceived as an act of resistance to homophobic oppression, the project of elaborating a gay identity could itself be discredited. For hasn’t that identity been exclusionary, delineating what is easily recognizable as a White, middle-class, liberal gay identity? And wasn’t the delineating act itself a sign, or rather an intellectual symptom, of the very class it described?’ And yet I claimed all of these categories openly but for being gay. If I had been Black, or a woman, I doubt I would have taken such an interest in Steven.

My admiration remained hidden, a choice mediated by the audience around me. My family didn't like Stephen; he wasn't a man to them and they cringed at the fact that he might just do 'something' on TV with his 'boyfriend' - "*If only he would,*" I pined. And like my family, this man's family didn't like the thought of it either. The father hurled accusations, the sister warned the ex-boyfriend to stay clear, the son was taunted at work, and when his father saw them locked in an embrace he hit the lover with a fatal blow and, later, disinherited his son. The result: The confused Stephen was pulled back into the realm of the heterosexual and his off-and-on attraction to a woman (with whom I did see him making love) is cemented. In a later episode, he married yet another woman.

That was the first season. I was almost 16. It wasn't until near the end of the sixth season when I was almost 20 that I saw him once again confused and caught between a man and a woman. The decision was once again made in favour of his heterosexuality when his male lover got killed in a massacre at a family wedding in a fictitious European country. And so, here was one lesson offered up to me: Homosexuality is a result of confusion and with time and the right partner (in tandem with the deaths of the same-sex temptations?) heterosexuality will take its natural course. This being the case, it's best to keep quiet about your "confusing" urges lest they bring about alienation and torment from family, friends, and colleagues. It's also best to pursue the opposite sex for the natural course of things to progress and it's certainly advisable to keep quiet about any homosexual encounters since acknowledgment would endanger your lover's safety and any access to material wealth. It continued to remain clear that my "confusion" was a matter best keep secret. Yet, despite the show's influence on me to keep quiet (or was it my

family's response to it?), it did not prevent me from seeing his face and imagining the words that his very presence on television had let me hear: "You are not alone."⁴

I stop because I see someone (Is it me?) say:

"But only an idiot would allow an evening soap to influence his thinking, the way he thinks about himself."

But from where else does counsel come? From the other boys you find from time to time, the ones that leave you feeling guilty after the nameless encounters. From your sister whose greatest attack is to label you "faggot". From your mother who chides you for not being more like your other brothers, hanging over the car engine with your father instead of closing yourself off in your room, writing, writing, all the time. From one of your brother's drawers where you find his Playboy and Hustler magazines. From your father who speaks of the "homosexual disease" and the abnormality of homosexuality at a party for one of your uncle's wedding (ironic?) anniversaries. From these points in your real immediate world the same counsel is mirrored but with a physical presence stronger than that of your hero and words more palpable than his imagined whisper: "You are alone".

Fast-forward to late 1997, long after Dynasty the cancellation of Dynasty.

I scanned the litany of gay films I have seen in the last decade - either secretly when I house sat for my sister when on vacation - or - in my twenties - in full view at the theatre. I add them to the Prime time line-up and my list is impressively long. Lengthy enough to think that if I had had this

⁴ The "You" I imagined then was a universal "you" profoundly based in assumed notions of a humanity that was White. But at the same time even in reading my 'you' as White, I was also making sense of the cultural form of Stephen against the dominant attempt of the show to portray him as negative. There are, as Dyer (1993, 2) has demonstrated, multiple ways in which audiences make use of text even though we still must acknowledge that

list available through my puberty and adolescence I might have seen a chorus of faces in the silence I maintained, faces that chanted: “We are not alone.”⁵

The 1997-98 fall line up for the American networks had a total of 30 lesbian, gay or bisexual characters in its primetime line up, an increase of 23 % from the previous year’s historic record. (GLADD website, October 1997). Most of these characters are secondary characters and several are dysfunctional or very unhappy with their sexual orientation. Yet, many more are content or as malcontent as their shows’ stars when it comes to love and relationships, and Ellen Degeneris’ lesbian character on “Ellen” is the show’s focus and a strong character⁶. Gone is the presumption of abnormality, and although confusion still remains it is not the confusion of a Steven presumed by all those around him to have momentarily fallen out of the heterosexual net. Rather, it comes from an anxiety caused by societal hostilities or, simply, the quotidian problems faced by people who seek to understand themselves and forge relationships with others. Those people “like” me who watch TV in 1997 seemingly see many more people like “themselves” than I ever did.⁷

If I’d seen “Ellen” and “Philadelphia” in my life at 16 would I have come to understand myself better and had more courage to come out and challenge heterosexism much more directly than I was ever able to? The media has exposed gay, lesbian and bisexual characters to a wide audience and has, by and large, helped to promote a kind of “normalcy” - a normalcy that albeit problematic has helped remove some of the negative stereotypes associated with gays, lesbians

“the complexity of viewing/reading practices in relation to representation does not entail the claim that there is equality and freedom in the regime of representation.”

⁵ In this move from an I to a We (“We are not alone”) I imply that much work has been done by gays and lesbians to increase our visibility. Yet as Bersani (1995, 31) states “If we are indeed everywhere, it is by no means clear who the ‘we’ is. Unless we define how the specificity of being queer (a specificity perhaps common to the myriad ways of being queer and the myriad conditions in which one is queer) gives queers a special aptitude for making that challenge, we are likely to come up with a remarkably familiar, and merely liberal, version of it (Bersani, 72-73).

⁶ “Ellen” was not, however, renewed for the 1998-98 season.

⁷ I vaguely remember an episode of the “Love Boat” with a gay character but apart from this one episode and the character of Steven Carrington, that was all that was out there. I don’t remember seeing lesbians except on television movies where lesbians fought - and lost - custody for children begot in heterosexual marriages.

and bisexuals.⁸ Youth who struggle with their sexual orientation and with coming out might find similar solace in seeing a variety of gay, lesbian and bisexual characters on television.

But although the solace of seeing Steven Carrington gave me hope, his number wasn't on my speed dial - I couldn't count on him to send a plane ticket so I could escape the realities of my rural route life to his classy apartment in Denver. Knowing I was not alone gave me hope, but it didn't give me support in openly identifying myself nor in taking action to create a space where I could explore my identity. I went through most of my late teens and early twenties involved in subtle projects of deception and denial about who I was. Without a tangible community to support me I didn't have the courage to leave the only one I knew. Without a community to support me I wasn't able to understand and explore what it might be like to live a gay life. Instead I wondered what I could do to be "like" everyone else (yet still gay).

3.2 "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" - King Lear

In my first year at Queen's we were required to write a semester essay for Canadian Politics 110. The intent was to have us explore agents of socialization and how our own lives had been shaped in relation to them. I produced an A+ paper in which I reflected upon my route to who I am. I invoked King Lear and, by examining the institutions of Education, The Family, The Church, The State, and particular experiences, I tried to find the narratives entangled in my construction. That essay underlined three characteristics about how I perceived myself; first, that my sense of responsibility to those in weaker positions than my own came from my parents charitable work

⁸ The Globe and Mail's Arts Section held this headline on November 8, 1997: "We're here. We're queer. You love it." It proclaims that the straight media has a "crush on us" and have "made (us) so mainstream (we're) almost - shudder! - ordinary." I feel a sense of irritation and uneasiness in this kind of celebratory, chatty writing. Even though it makes homosexuality visible and acceptable I have trouble with how that visibility looks. It is still produced within a binary of homosexual-heterosexual and is contained within constructions of Whiteness represented through the soft lenses of the television camera that shoots a particular class and a particular "body" (able) of people. Does this signal to the Chinese Canadian grocers' child in Victoria that to be

through the United Church and the way in which they cooperated with others within our farming community; second, that physical “deficiencies” - a shortened left tendon, a missing vertebra, and third degree burns to my right shoulder blade and arm – left me with a strong feeling of difference for which I felt I needed to make up, and which often left me feeling isolated and unwanted; third, that my value for “otherness” was greatly enhanced at The Lester B. Pearson United World College of the Pacific where I grew and found space for my felt difference, and where I came to understand the value of “otherness” through an international body of people who had come together “to know one another” so that they might “understand one another” in order to build peace. I conclude that my activities in social activism later at university, my belief that justice requires political and social responsibility, and that richness produced itself through diversity, came from the convergence of these three broad categories. Sounds noble and good. But this political project of perspicacity is more noteworthy for the lie of omission - its self-perfidy - because I could not bring myself to voice how being gay influenced how I have come to interact with the “cultures” around me and how I perceive myself and my sense of in/justice: I was afraid to disclose my gay identity and truly explain who I was and how I had come to be. I still had little understanding of what it might mean to be gay (other than oppressive) and held many ideas that I’d now categorize as homophobic.

Earlier I mentioned the A+ for this essay. It’s revealing in how I was so highly rewarded for following a format and including content that didn’t radically challenge any dominant social discourse. The assignment did not ask me to lie, but the content of Canadian Politics 110 never examined the terrain inside me (Gays and Lesbians were never posited, for example, as viable “Interest Groups”). The wider community never affirmed that kind of person either. To belong

gay, lesbian, or bisexual means gaining access and acceptance into these categories? Does the exposure of “queers” in this way make “us” like “them” instead of like “ourselves”? .

and succeed meant allowing others to tell me who I was, which meant unquestionably, “naturally”, heterosexual.⁹

My struggle against this defining force largely had to do with relationships with other people who are marginalised and to interactions with young people as an educator. The politics of marginalisation I encountered in later university course work and in my contact alongside people working in various projects for social justice helped me out of the closet several years later. And it’s these contacts that have informed my teaching practice as a high school English teacher.

3.3 Creating Space

...To rid us of our oppression and the AIDs epidemic all Jews and homosexuals should be piled high one on top the other and burned in one enormous bonfire. (Rashad, Creative Writing Journal, ACS Beirut, Winter 1995)

I taught a creative writing course during my first year at the American Community School at Beirut. As part of the writing process I had students keep a journal in which they could explore ideas, write randomly, observe people in different locations, record conversations or wider events that might influence the way in which a story unfolds. It was intended to provide a workshop for experimenting with their writing style and to help them connect seemingly disparate ideas, events and so on. As it was experimental space, I assigned a mark for completion but not for content. On personal entries, when they appeared, I often withheld comment so as to avoid editing and directing their creativity at the early development stage. Rashad’s entry, however, prompted

⁹ This is what Janet Halley (1997, 89 - 90) describes in her investigation of judges and their interpretation of sodomy, as “the bribe” for our “blind spot” the moment where people silently “(mis)read themselves out of the target group” in order to retain the privileges of the heterosexual class. The tutorial assistant for my section wrote at the end of the essay that my experience concurred what she had always thought: that it’s often those who suffer who develop an empathy and an insight to society and who have a desire to make change. The comments had more impact and rang truer than perhaps she (or I) could have imagined given the omission and my conscious deception. Ironically, too, they have had further impact on me in recent years as I reconnected with her and learned that she is lesbian. What discussion, what planning - I wonder - might we have undertaken if we had been able to directly engage in questions of, say, “Heterosexism and the Canadian Corporate State” ?

intervention because - in the creative realm or not - it raised issues of hate that if left unattended would be complicity accepted. There were five of us in the course and we had developed an open environment for speaking about issues, and the students and I valued each other's thoughts and particular abilities at viewing issues.

In discussions before receiving the comments in the entry above, Rashad had revealed a deep sense of hatred for Jews and homosexuals. His hatred for Jews is connected to Israel's role in Lebanon's civil war and to its ongoing occupation of southern Lebanon where little, if any, distinction is made between being an Israeli and being Jewish. Disdain for homosexuality comes from deeper cultural structures and, in particular, a strong traditional sense of what makes family. I drew both of these conclusions from observation and discussion with many Lebanese students and teachers. I knew that Rashad liked me and had a great deal of respect for my opinion and so I used the relationship to make a point by putting my own identity into question: "How", I asked "Do you know I'm not Jewish?" In perhaps a naïve way I assumed that role of an "other" in order to create a tangible presence. I also asked Rashad to consider his hatred in light of the solid relationship we had developed over the first few months of the course by imagining that I could be Jewish - that it could be (and is) possible that Jews are not represented solely by his idea that Jews are a monolithic group uncritically supportive of Israeli policies in Lebanon and uniformly against the Palestinians.

I make no pretenses about being able to change people. The twenty minute discussion which ensued amongst the five of us may or may not have an impact on Rashad, or any of the students for that matter. In that discussion several points of my teaching practice come forward. (Note that they have more connection to my character than to the teaching of English). First, I am known to my students by how I treat them, how I engage them in the course material so that they

can both articulate and understand themselves in relation to the “Other” and the wider structures of the world; and on how I stand on issues that are important to them i.e. Israeli governmental policy in the Middle East. Second, I find it discriminatory, inhumane, and limiting to target people with characteristics that are unchangeable. Third, I think the source of hate must be understood within its own context in order for us to train it i.e. that dominant liberal Canadian notions of multiculturalism cannot be transposed upon people who have come to experience various “Others” within different and historically volatile circumstances.

Here, and in other circumstances like this, we had the opportunity to “subject our own cultural resources to shared scrutiny and, so to speak, redefine ourselves - to disinter our childhoods, to speak our language histories, to tell the stories of those cultural experiences which would not get official blessing: in other words to slip the noose of the cultural definition hung on us...”(Rosen, 61). Rosen refers in this quotation to teachers relating among teachers. I find it additionally useful practice with my students and, in fact, have learned more from this type of interaction with my students than I have with many of my colleagues. So why then did I not choose to query him on his certitude about my sexual identity?

In October, 1997 I wrote a version of this experience in Lebanon. When I came to the example of how I put my religion into question, between brackets I wrote “(Why I did not choose to query him on his certitude about my sexual identity is too complicated to go into here).” But really, this question was more central and in fact more revealing than what I actually did do with Rashad: It was one thing for me to call into question an identity I could disown if the going got tough (although it would go against my ethics to do so) but quite another to hint at one which I had but would not disclose - One which I would find hard to deny since doing so would involve lying.

Although the administration knew I was gay they would not have been able to retain me on staff due to parental pressure and Lebanese law which declares homosexuality illegal. Leaving my sexuality in the balance gave me control. I never directly called it into question but I did indirectly create a space of uncertainty. I instructed, for example, other teachers who received inquiries around my sexual orientation to tell them I said I am whatever offends them most: A point of offense is a point of resistance and it's this point of resistance that most interests me. In confronting it the possibility that greater understanding will emerge is more probable than remaining in zones where students feel comfortable and unchallenged. In this case, as with Rashad, I tried to push thinking by confronting people with their fears or hatreds and then offering support in their unfolding.

I value diversity and acknowledge the complexity of cultures and so I work with my students to listen to voices different from our own. Our communities are composed of people with a multiplicity of divergent discourses and I think a good English classroom will strive to have these voices come forward.

Oddly, I found myself in the very position of my politics 110 tutor who was not able to let her different - her marginal - discourse come forward. It has not meant however that discourse from the gay and lesbian margins has not found space in my English classes. It's only that my personal narrative remains largely silent there. I work, if not entirely enshrouded in a cloak of secrecy, then behind an opaque panel. And I wonder what part of me the gay, lesbian and bisexual students see. Am I invisible? Have I been a presence in their life whose actions have helped them hear: "You are not alone," or "We are not alone", or "Here is someone that is part of a community that can support you"? The need for this approach is why I am so wary in models of personal growth teaching where the exploration of the self and the development of personal opinion

becomes an end in itself. When students need only develop an opinion and argue it using literary conventions then students really only engage in writing about what they think when it is also important to know why they think it, how others think about it and what the effects of any one of those “thinkings” has in the way people carry out their lives. In many instances this process gives the classroom over to dominant culture, and the cloakroom to those who are “Other”. Griffith captures the process of domination through an example of teacher practice that presumably creates a procedure in which “the fair exchange of ideas in the intellectual market place” can occur but where, in fact, the teacher directs discussion in a way that ‘inculcates and endorses the notion of the non-conformist isolate, whilst at the same time confirming that society is overwhelmingly stronger (Griffith, 16 -17). It maps a world where each of us is an island. It’s emphasis on opinion and self expression - although important - does not permit the silence of queer and other marginalized youth to come forward nor does it demand that students account for different ways of seeing. In communities where differences are paramount and where every discourse is decentred, youth come to see the complexity of issues, learning that many maps can chart the same territory. As a teacher, I pushed students into taking various routes on the same territory introduced them to thoughts and ideas they may never have encountered if left to their own opinions. It has been one of my strategies to have young people think more divergently and, as part of that divergence, understand sexuality in its greater complexity. It’s one way in which I work to make school a more open place for those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or just dissatisfied with the stifling categorization of sexuality.

3.4 Mapping Territory

Little of my person ever clearly emerged in the work I did in English class as a student. I often identified with characters and situations but none of them were close to being like me except that

they were in struggle. Discussion in class never brought me closer to people like me and the teacher never sought to represent the absence of “me” in the classroom. We were assumed, by and large, to be rural children with rural realities and expectations. I felt accepted for what I was assumed to be but was not content with it. And it was this discontent for what I was assumed to be - even before I came to consciously acknowledge, some 10 years later, part of who I actually was - that pushed me on through school and in reading. I assumed that if I could identify with the struggle then eventually I would find my struggle, whatever “my struggle” was. The promise of literature held more hope for me than did my teachers, my friends or my family. Yet, by the end of completing the International Baccalaureate I had never, in my 13 years of school, read a novel with a gay character in it.

3.5 “One does not see those who are in the dark” - Brecht

The virtual exclusion of marginalised experiences from the curriculum works to hide certain representations. I see my work as a means to open the classroom to marginalised voices, to present counter interpretations, and constantly challenge the “master text”. I’m particularly concerned about young gay and lesbian voices because they are vulnerable to the attempts in English to keep “your private self your own and clear”. Access to gay and lesbian communities and support is impossible for most youth, and the “invisibility” of being gay or lesbian makes it all the more possible to leave them cloaked. So dressed, the message is “you are peripheral, your lives don’t matter and you are lucky to be alive anyway.”

I said earlier that I don’t know if Rashad felt any different after the discussion. Or Omar. Or Lina. Or Fadi. Or Michael. Their creative writing reflected the historical realities of their country in many cases. Their focus is most likely due to the sense of the “otherness” they often felt living in a culture that, more and more allies, itself with American culture and denies space to the other

part of them that is Arab - the part of them that is misunderstood in the world "out there". I sought only to find their departure point as best I could. When I broadened my understanding of them and their world I was able to help them produce authentic representations of their own communities that voiced their concerns over the growing social and cultural marginalization in Lebanon. At the same time I was able to inject my own concerns about the direction and scope of anger and require a consideration of the wider elements in the current situation. To me, they gave their perspective and an understanding of their placement in events beyond my experience - the "wider elements of the current situation" gained a breadth beyond that which I tried to give Rashad.

Young people need to learn about themselves as whole human beings who value themselves, their world and other people, and who approach that world and its people with a desire to understand them. I often wonder how I might be now if my schooling had sought to bring in a diverse world instead of trying to press me into a singular mold. Seeing versions of "me" and being supported in my orientation through content in curriculum and with teacher acceptance would have undoubtedly lead to an earlier understanding of who I am and in what ways I might challenge dominant ideas of identity. Fundamental, then, to my teaching and what I think all teachers should strive toward is looking to build an English curriculum that looks at how identity and experience can be brought forward in different ways. There are a multiplicity of ways in which all of our paths cross and though the diversity is immense it provides the richness necessary to examine structures of power, history and cultural practice.

When we talked around the table in my creative writing class there was a dialogue. We shared the terrain of our beliefs and I facilitated the probing of their origin. They also pushed me beyond the borders of my neighborhood where I could stand "among people struggling, politically and

culturally, to stay alive and secure in one place, to live and become 'just human beings' (Jamaica Kincaid in Moshenberg, 90)." Issues of foreign occupation, of seeing complexity in the "enemy", of finding gray area, acknowledging the need to confront the past - these complex issues are not resolvable in a classroom. But they are approachable and with their presence there comes visibility and a greater chance for light. My work with TEACH has further informed my practice as an educator. I have also found that the very characteristics of openness and support worked for in that creative writing class manifested themselves amongst the youth in TEACH and the facilitators working alongside them. It is also found in the work of others who have engaged in work with youth (Dei et al, 1997, Fine et al, 1997). Researching the richness of these young people, whose courage and ability to come out and challenge homophobia, hopefully will widen the terrain on which we work to decentre the dominant discourse.

The data collection - the interviews, group discussions, and observations were intended to help participants (of which I am also one) understand and define themselves, provide the project with a means to reflect and evaluate its work and to understand how the process within this anti-homophobic space might be utilized in other places. In what follows I want to reveal some of that discovery. I want to show how the provision of anti-homophobic space, where supportive facilitation and group commitment exist, allows members to navigate some very difficult and emotional territory. First, however, it's important to examine the wider territory of theory and practice that has informed this research. While the last two chapters ground this study methodologically, the following chapter grounds the project theoretically.

4.0 A Review of the Literature

Action and analysis around the marginalisation of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth has not been widely taken up in the area of education despite the amount of increased attention gay, lesbian

and bisexual issues have received in the media and in academia. Societal stigmatization of gays and lesbians makes it difficult for many in the field of education to ally with the issue because they themselves find it too difficult or disturbing to confront.

Desai, (1996, 20) points out that the “structural processes of schooling and education provide unequal opportunities, and create differential outcomes for students, according to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, culture, class and disability.” Most revealing, however, is the lack of specific research in gay, lesbian and bisexual youth experiences in comparison to race, gender and class. Work by feminist and anti-racist educators certainly include sexual orientation in their projects, and the framework in which they examine and theorize the position of the school serve the interests of the gays, lesbians and bisexuals as well. A review of their work is included here. Lacking in feminist and anti-racist work, however, is empirical study and analyses that examine the particular struggle of adolescent gay, lesbian and bisexual youth operating within a system that negates their sexual identity, often with grave consequences. Those few studies that have been undertaken, are also represented here.

This chapter examines the construction of heterosexuality and how it unfolds in educational settings where heterosexuality is assumed and homophobic discourse goes uninterrupted by staff. From there I present the results of three studies where heterosexism is challenged and where students are assisted to “imbalances privilege, incite community, to both value and pluralize difference.” (Fine et al, 1997, 247). Finally, I will offer an overview of anti-oppression literature that conceptualizes the framework in which my research with TEACH in my role as a participant-observer ethnographer will occur.

4.1 Hostile Spaces: Homophobia, “Normalcy” and Youth Development

In their study of gay youth in California, Uribe and Harbeck (1992) show how the process of stigmatization and its effect upon the adolescent homosexual's personal and social development in school. They demonstrate how institutionalized homophobia exerts itself within schools and how it damages adolescent gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth in personal and academic ways. Since the development of a person's sense of self is a presumed objective of schools, they argue that the expansion of a homosexual adolescent's ego identity is negatively affected because their social placement as a member of a stigmatized minority group goes unexplored and they receive minimal, if any, support.

A second issue raised in their work is that gay youth are further isolated - in ways that other minority group members are not - because they do not have access to “the support of and enculturation by other family and community members.”:

... they quickly come to realize that the mere expression of sexual confusion or same-sex attraction can be grounds for intense parental and peer hostility and/or rejection. Thus, while many minority groups are the target of prejudice (beliefs) and discrimination (actions) in our society, few persons face this hostility without the support and acceptance of their family as do many gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth. (Uribe and Harbeck, 1992, 12 -13).

Because homosexuality produces a stigma that often denies gay, lesbian and bisexual youth their other identities, it means that the primary developmental task for these individuals is “adjustment to a socially stigmatized role in isolation without adequate, honest information about themselves, or others who are like them, during a tremendous physical, social, emotional, and intellectual change” (Uribe and Harbeck, 1992, 13).

Third, the invisible nature of a person's sexual orientation affects the possibility of being able to hide one's status as a member of a stigmatized minority group which can cause incredible anxiety

for gay youth as they decide whether to hide, attempt to change their stigma, or accept it. Each has its problematic outcomes:

Adolescents who accept the negative images attached to a homosexual identity are at risk for incorporating them within their own repertoire of behaviors. For example, they may assume the affectations of the promiscuous lifestyles they believe are socially expected. Those who hide typically experience damaged self-esteem, distancing from family and peers, and self-conscious attempts to avoid disclosure. This strategy of deception distorts almost all relationships the adolescent may attempt to develop or maintain and creates an increasing sense of isolation... Finally, those who attempt to change the stigma face the possibilities of conflict with parents and school authorities, social ostracism, and even threats to their physical safety (Harbeck and Uribe, 1992, 14).

Most gay, lesbian and bisexual teenagers choose to conceal their sexual orientation because that social identity contradicts the other social identities to which they want to be affiliated largely because they posit them as "normal". Harbeck and Boxer's work (1993) shows that even in centres like Chicago where the emergence of the AIDS epidemic ended the silent treatment on the topic of homosexuality, youth still opted to remain hidden.

Structures put in place to encourage positive gay and lesbian expression have not prevented these youth from exposure to heterosexist assumptions, around dating in particular. Even though programs and agencies exist to support youth, their work only minimally affects youth who predominantly function in environments hostile to them. Concealment often constitutes a way to cope. These range from allowing the assumption that they are "straight" to pass unchallenged to what I call "partial engagement" exemplified by "Sarah", a high school girl who "permits her girlfriends to tell her that she should go out with "Freddie" because they share an interest in horses, and because "Freddie is so cute." Her smile and promise to "think about it" deflect the issue and she never returns to the topic (Harbeck and Boxer, 1993, 226). There will be, however, other situations in which "Sarah", and youth who self-monitor in this way, will need to respond to similar suggestions. And, as Uribe and Harbeck (1992, 16) state, "each successful act of deception, each moment of monitoring which is unconscious and automatic for most

heterosexuals, serves to reinforce the belief in one's difference and inferiority." In addition, the choice to remain hidden often places students in a "double bind" because although parents and teachers promote truth and honesty, remaining true to themselves often means facing discrimination and harassment (Herdt and Boxer, 1993, 226).

In her study of English women who identified as lesbian while still at school, Rogers (1994, 31) found that schools - reflecting the microcosm of society at large - discriminate against pupils who do not conform to the expected norm often find themselves discriminated against. Her work underlines the fact that schools tend not to deal openly with issues of sexuality, let alone lesbian and gay sexuality. Schools still operate, however, in a climate of what Adrienne Rich (as cited in Rogers, 34) calls "compulsory heterosexuality" where heterosexuality is reinforced and "promoted" while lesbian (bisexual and gay) sexuality is punished. Gender roles, for example, that fall within sexist norms are assumed and encouraged. Consequently, macho stereotypes were seen as "boys" and any boy considered poor in athletics were called "pansy boys" among other words that re-enforced the notion that a gay boy is not a proper boy and that sensitivity is unacceptable: Deviation from the heterosexual norm, then, is punished partly through derogatory references to gay sexuality.

Work by Epstein (1994) also illuminates the power of name-calling to control and make others conform. In her discussions with gay and lesbian adults reflecting on their school experiences, two participants revealed that derogatory words against gays lacked any real connection between the words and what they implied. One woman commented that "it's just like another game you play in the playground and if you don't play it then you're the one who gets abused"(Epstein, 1994, 18). One of the men claimed that this name-calling was part of a whole other set of insults which were commonplace (Epstein, 1994, 17 -18). His admission, however, that in their late middle

teens they made a clear association between the words and being gay exemplifies how words learned at a young age socialize and later become used with a conscious knowledge of their meaning and their impact.

Personal stories from students who chose to come out in school overwhelmingly illustrate that disclosure brings with it hostile and isolating results (see for example, Bass and Kaufman, 1996; Heron, 1994; Sears, 1990). Many of the respondents in Roger's study (1994) described how within the school context, they felt ignored and isolated. One woman, for example, told of being asked by her form tutor not to talk about her sexuality in front of other girls because it was upsetting some of them. Her actions reveal the oblivious state of the teacher to the tolerations of the lesbian student with her friends, discussions of boyfriends, for example. The assumed normalcy of heterosexual girls' activities prevented any of their actions or behaviours from being put into question (Rogers, 1994, 35).

Mary Louise Adams' (1997, 10) historical research into sexual meanings of delinquency in the Canadian post-war period helps to inform discussion on heterosexuality and the notion of normalcy. Her work seeks to show how over the course of a century the notion of heterosexuality has changed as an idea and practice to where sexual desires and behaviours are now viewed as central to identity, where it informs the personality of the individual and where it marks the normality of the individual. The category of "normalcy" came to be most rigorously applied in the area of sexuality and gender which were assumed to be fragile, that is, easily swayed from what were deemed proper behaviors for men and women in terms of roles and sexual activity. She emphasizes the ongoing concern over sexuality in this regard noting that "in western cultures, the hierarchical opposition between appropriate and inappropriate sexualities has proved, historically, to be a common means of organizing the distribution of power where

only those who assumed established rigid heteronormative identities would gain access to social and political capital” (Adams, 1997, 84). She argues that to be on the side of the normal is to be assured the privileges accrued through inclusion in the social order while those on the abnormal side are excluded and relegated to the margins. At the same time she positions the definition of each within the other:

The one is what the other is not. The terms themselves are relative, making sense to us only as a dyad. If there was no abnormality, the concept of normality would not make sense. Nor would there be such fuss about continually shoring it up (Adams, 1997, 84-85).

Her research also seeks to reveal how adolescence itself was posited as a sexual category in which the fear of being labeled delinquent was an effective form of self-regulation to maintain established sexual standards. In order not to be ejected, then, adolescents would either simulate heterosexual behavior and/or engage in homophobic activity. In this way, they could still “belong”.

Herdt and Boxer’s (1993) work further contributes to the notion of the regulatory nature of sexuality. They describe the way in which the youth culture of the schools affirms its heterosexual position by placing homosexuality as its undesirable opposite. Derogatory references to homosexuality then become a means to bolster the category of heterosexuality and to “bribe” those who would be different to hide their difference and live within heterosexual norms. They conclude that

[g]ay and lesbian culture is in intense competition with the youth culture of high schools - which emphasizes the heterosexual norms of dating, sports, and conformity to fashion. The high school is of such enormous influence in the lives of the youth; it provides the context for their problems and prospects...The effects of being identified as “queer” or “fag” or “dyke” or with “the pollution of homosexuality” in high school is immense; official school policies espousing equality have a nice ring, but little meaning to high schoolers struggling to survive the trials of daily harassment (Herdt and Boxer, 1993, 222-223).

4.2 Heterosexuality: In Search of a “Coherent Social Category”

Janet Halley (1993) connects hostility toward homosexuality to heterosexuality's need to be seen as a “coherent social category” even though it is “heterogeneous, unstable, and provisional” (86). Her analysis of three law cases demonstrates the ways in which the category of homosexual is controlled and defined through the discourse of heterosexuality. She contends, for example, that legal definitions of the class of homosexuals include practices of constituting a class of heterosexuals, a more privileged class that hides its position as a class. Furthermore she demonstrates that although heterosexuality presents itself as monolithic in its non-homosexuality, it operates in federal equal protection cases in the United States as “highly unstable, default characterization for people who have not marked themselves or been marked by others as homosexual” (83). The threat of expulsion from the heterosexual class and all the benefits that accrue to having membership works to bribe members into “complicity with a pervasive representation of the class as coherent, stable, exclusively loyal to heterosexual eroticism, and pure of any sodomitical desire or conduct” (83). The case of Marjorie Rowland versus the Town of Mad River, for example, illuminates part of how the process Halley criticizes occurs. It is particularly instructive as it occurs in the space of education.

The case involved a challenge by Rowland over her dismissal by the school board when she revealed her bisexuality after counseling the parent of a student confused over his/her sexual identity. The ruling reveals an understanding of sexual orientation that relegates it to the realm of the private and not the public sphere.

In their decision the court “designated Rowland as having a sexual orientation that is personal and intrinsic to herself, that emerges from her alone without the intervention of any public entity, and that exists without creating any implications for understanding the class of heterosexuals” (84 -

85). As a result her two “disclosures” - one to a colleague, the other to the vice-principal - were deemed as “private utterances on matters of personal interest” and therefore laid outside the purview of protection granted to public speech. This claim underlines similar positions in educational spaces that see sexuality as a private matter not to be engaged in the public space of education. In effect this means an absence of public space for gay and lesbian youth to have space to understand and explore their sexuality since heterosexuality occupies all spaces as the unspoken normalcy.

Following Halley’s work, the mere negation of homosexuality asserts and bolsters the dominance of heterosexual discourse. The struggle between Rowland and the town of Mad River reveals in this way a struggle for self-definition on both sides where “Rowland’s discursive exertions were made in interaction with a class of heterosexuals *also in the process of self constitution*” (85).

When the student is situated into this struggle the influential power of heterosexuality over identity becomes more apparent. Any ambivalence over where his/her sexuality lay became mediated by the struggle that removed Rowland from her position - a struggle which makes clear that living in Mad River means concealing any sexual ambivalence. In this way, the political entity (here the town of Mad River) emerges heterosexual:

...assuming the student heeds his lesson in silence, the class of heterosexuals is a default class, home to those who have not fallen out of it. It openly expels but covertly incorporates the homosexual other, an undertaking that renders it profoundly heterogeneous, unstable, and provisional. (85-86)

Silence on the part of the student, then, guarantees that the class of heterosexuals maintains its desired position as “a coherent social category”, a category which persists due to “its members’ own failure to acknowledge its discursive constitution, the coercive dynamics of its incoherence” (86).

Research by Watney (1991) informs the discussion on heterosexual discourse in government decisions that relate to homosexuality in both Britain and the United States. He locates the response of government to an ongoing debate around what are touted as “family values”. He argues that an increasing recognition of culture as an aspect contributing to the construction of sexual identities has brought with it political intervention in the field of cultural production to protect an imagined vulnerability of heterosexuality.

Watney sees the implementation of Section 28 and the Wolfenden strategy, in Britain, - which prevented any display of “homosexuality” as the norm in school curricula - as well as the Helms Amendment - which banned Safer Sex education for gay and lesbians in the United States, in the late 1980s - as controls by the State to monitor and channel people into an “acceptable” sexuality defined role. It is a role “in strict relation to reproductive sex between married couples (that) contain(s) all forms of non-reproductive sex, from homosexuality to prostitution, in a legally defined private sphere where they are permitted to exist, but not to be culturally validated in any way” (Watney, 1991, 389). Here, unlike in Halley’s work, Watney defines some of what heterosexuality presupposes as part of its class and how the State has worked directly to name these “values” in opposition to homosexuality. They revolve around the fantasy of a past “family life” that should be resurrected. Central to this focus on family is sex¹⁰:

Sex is the central and heavily overdetermined focus of such fantasies, which involve a sharp distinction between the world of marriage and the home, and the lives of lesbians and gay men. 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. (Watney, 1991, 391)

¹⁰ Mary Louise Adams (1997), in her research into post-Second World War era in Canada reveals many of the same elements in the need to define a static and heterosexual category of family: “the symbolic positioning of teenagers as ‘the future’, as those who would carry the 1950s forward, made them a likely target of interventions meant to maximize normality and therefore maximize stability and social order against the uncertainties of modern life. Sex, as the basis of family life - that ‘psychological fortress...[that] might ward off hazards of the age’ - was too important to be left to nature or circumstance. In their attempts to ‘shape’ teenagers, adults tried to assuage their own insecurities” (87). Although differently historically and geographically placed, Adams’ work reveals the same necessity to delineate sexuality through a heterosexual lens that worked to create normative standards that influenced ‘the context of that behaviour and the meanings that would eventually be ascribed to it. “ (88)

The need to constitute “family” within the realm of heterosexuality where both family and heterosexuality are seen - to use Halley’s terminology - as “coherent social categories” lends itself to a defense that brings forward legislation like Section 28 which aims to prevent the promotion of homosexuality in schools. Watney interprets this bill as one which assumes that “‘the vulnerable’ may be easily seduced into sexual experimentation, and into a rejection of supposedly ‘natural’ heterosexuality” while it simultaneously “targets representations in any medium that depict lesbian or gay relationships as equivalent to heterosexual families”. This reading credits the pedagogic value of gay culture in developing and sustaining gay identities wherein heterosexuality (not young people) is imagined as “vulnerable” to the “power of homosexual pleasure to corrode the “natural” order of social and sexual relations” (1991, 392).

Despite the fact that public opinion polls reveal a lessening in prejudice related to homosexuality (Watney, 1991; see also McCleans/CBC poll, December 1997) the area of education remains an area targeted by anti-gay forces tied to “family values”.¹¹ These people, however, face

¹¹ In the April 18, 1998 edition of the Globe and Mail, a full-page advertisement appeared in the front section (A17) with the headline: “CANADA’S SUPREME COURT HAS NO BUSINESS IMPOSING ‘BATHHOUSE MORALITY’ ON THE CHURCHES AND IN THE NATION’S LIVING-ROOMS!”. It was paid for by “Choose Life Canada”, “Civilized Majority” and “Homosexuals Opposed to ‘Pride’ Extremism” (HOPE), all of which are based in Toronto. The content suggests that the ad was prompted by the April 2, 1998 Supreme Court of Canada’s ruling in favor of Delvin Vriend, who had been dismissed from his job at King’s University College in Edmonton because he was gay. The ruling requires that Alberta’s Individual’s Rights Protection Act (IRPA) must include sexual orientation in its Act so that it complies with Section 15 (1) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (the equality-rights section of the Charter). The following part of the advertisement underscores the relation between “family values” and education. It comes under the heading “A Manifesto of Hope”:

-4. We believe that the legal definition of **marriage and spouse** must remain in the context of opposite sex. Therefore we strongly affirm the traditional family unit and vigorously oppose same-sex parentage and same-sex adoption.
- 5. We recommend that all homosexual youth “support” organizations be prohibited from disseminating their propaganda (disguised as “compassion”) into the school systems. Instead, Dr. Santiover’s **Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth** (the most scholarly and lucid book available on this subject,) should be compulsory reading at the Secondary School level. **Also, the primary and final authority on sex education must always be the parents.**
- 6. We unequivocally support **Parliament’s Bill C-225**, which seeks to insure that marriage remains a legal union between an unmarried female and an unmarried male...(emphasis is that of the authors).

contestation by forces of radical sexual pluralism such as single-parent families and pro-abortion campaigners. Watney (1991, 394) argues that :

Insofar as school represents a double threshold, between the privacy of the home and public space, as well as between the categories of child and adult, it was inevitable that education would find itself caught in the cross-fire between fundamentally incompatible definitions of what it means to be a man or a woman in the late twentieth century, an adult or a child. In this context it is imperative that we appreciate the new significance of the discourse of "promotion" whether it is employed to justify attacks on gay culture as in Britain, or on Safer Sex education, as in the United States.

His conclusions about Section 28 mirror those of Halley in the Rowland case. Both analyses reveal a loss of space for homosexual desire to explore and establish an integrated sense of self. In its place is a force - in these cases through law and legislation - that relegates homosexuality to a place of silence where it is unable to reveal the actual diversity and complexity of sexual choice; and where "'(h)omosexuals' are thus envisaged as a discrete number of invisible individuals, who preferably do not act on the basis of their desires" and who are seen as "a uniform type, an abstract, generalized, and thus dehumanized menace - especially dangerous because they cannot necessarily be readily identified" so as to constitute the position of Otherness against which Heterosexuality can positively position itself (Watney, 1991, 394 - 395).

4.3 Spaces for Resistance

Roger's (1994) study concludes that the context of "liberal", "progressive" educational discourse is a problematic structure in which to challenge heterosexism. She cites the tendency in these kinds of discourses to allow students to work out their own ideas in free discussions which ultimately result in reinforcement of homophobic attitudes. This kind of setting makes it difficult to counter homophobic comments because it places gays and lesbians in a space of vulnerability. Since heterosexual students also want to avoid the stigma attached to challenging homophobia

they, too, will remain silent or engage in homophobic activity as well (Rogers, 1994, 41; see also Fine et al, 1997, 259). Desai (1996, 20-21) puts forward a model that seems to address Roger's criticism. In it, focus falls on how the structural processes of schooling are mediated by oppositional cultures and individual and collective forms of student resistance. He acknowledges the role of schools in reproducing the dominant ideologies of society due to differential power relations within society but also insists that "schools are not only agencies for cultural, political and economic reproduction, they are also sites of contestations between groups differentially situated in terms of power relations."

Assertion that the dominance of a heterosexist discourse has to be decentred in order to eliminate the exclusive privilege heterosexual culture has had to define itself as a society where: "Het (heterosexual) culture thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist" (Werner, 1993, xxi).

I want to now turn to two projects that have tried to decentre dominant discourses in school settings. The first has a focus on a decentring of Whiteness which parallels and informs the second case which focuses primarily on creating places that privilege gay and lesbian youth voices. Collectively they offer examples of projects that prevent dominant discourse - those of Whiteness and Heterosexism - from possessing the power to as Halley (1993, 89) writes "know the truth about their inhabitants, to label indelibly, and to expel unilaterally."

4.4 Spaces of Inclusion: Communities of Difference

A recent study by Fine, Weis and Powell into desegregated spaces (Fine et al, 1997) shows how power relations might be shifted in order to create a space in which youth can challenge

Whiteness and where students can examine the implications that “social construction of Black and White, good and bad, male and female, is intertwined with the construction of straight and gay” (Fine et al, 259). They studied three high schools along a continuum from desegregated-but- racially-separate to integrated communities of difference with an objective to see how the latter worked. Although their research is principally focused on “inventing and sustaining multiracial intellectual and social sites for everyone”, their research also includes categories of gender and sexual orientation.

The researchers take as their premise that three political and social conditions must be intentionally put into place: community, difference, and democracy. By community they mean a union where its members feel an investment in a diverse group larger than self. They cite examples of successful projects where designed cooperation has produced positive outcomes in creating “a sense of self, a more empathic view of other, and a reduction of stereotypical attitudes” while at the same time claiming that

what we don't know is how a structured community of such relationships can be initiated, much less supported over time, for and by adolescents in actual communities that are porous and vulnerable to surrounding politics. Nor do we know much about how adults -enthused, hostile, ignorant, frightened, or merely unsupported -can create and sustain such communities (250)

Their work implies that in spaces where a binary of Black and White exists a construction of self as White will occur that is absolutely dependent on “the co-construction of African American students as the opposite other, and on White female students as subordinate to White male students” (256-257). Where curriculum does not exist to expose and deconstruct assumptions of Whiteness, they conclude, Whiteness is left to define itself in the “constructed negative in the other” that disallows anything good to be connected to Blackness nor anything bad being associated with Whiteness. In an incident where White male students constructed female students as people in need of protection, for example, Weiss demonstrates her finding:

What is at issue here is that Black males are invading White females, the property of White males, not a broader statement about the treatment of females. In addition, the discursive constructions of Black males as oversexualized enables White males to elaborate to themselves and others their own appropriate and civilized heterosexuality. At a time of heightened concern with homosexuality, by virtue of their age, the collective nature of their lives, the fear of being labeled homosexual, and the violence that often accompanies such labeling in high school, these boys are able to assert virulently their own heterosexuality and their ability to take care of their women by virtue of the co-constructions they are engaged in. (Fine et al, 259)

Quite clearly, the intersections of race, racism and acting straight are occurring in this response demonstrating that no one demographic box can define a person nor any situation. This interaction occurred in the first school of their study - a school with no structural or informal acknowledgment of race or racism within the school. In a similar way, the demographic box of homosexuality arises as a category against which heterosexuality can define and police itself.

In the second and third schools reported in the study research shows that interventions can be made that prevent the creation of co-constructions as inevitable outcomes in desegregated schools. In the second, the implementation of a student support mechanism called "Family Group" met with a degree of success. Here, in response to positive findings about children's contact with caring adults, space was created in which each student was assured regular and continuous contact with a single adult in an enhanced advisory setting.

Whereas the program did improve drop-out rates and student achievement, research by Powell showed that the activity was not effective in managing people's anxieties caused by the diversity within the school. She concludes that issues of race and racism are avoided even though they present themselves because the leaders see them as dangerous and "not to be learned from" (265). Rather than using "Family Group" as "a sanctioned and protected forum to treat these experiences as opportunities to build a group capacity to explore conflict and to strengthen the racial identity of every student" they closed it down and lost an opportunity to explore the "evaded curriculum of power"(265). Powell argues for adults to prepare themselves to confront "the clash of

differences” with students. She cites her research, as well as others, to show that “relationship is primary and everything is derivative.” In essence this implies that “the quality and content of information shared is a measure of the relationship existent between the participants: the greater the trust and reliability, the more authentic and risky the data shared (265). She concludes her findings by outlining the three factors that create a safe space for open discussion to occur as well as space for framing personal and group-level identities: “one, the values, skills, and attitudes of the adults in their environment; two, the perceived learning task at the given moment; and three, the reliability of structures in place to support them in exploring complex ideas” (266). She also notes how discussions in settings such as “Family Group” diminishes some of the rigidity in peer culture thereby opening up space where learning to express and respect differences is seen as part of community and not as a threat to cohesiveness.

The third school, the one in which Fine worked, sought to decentre Whiteness through a course in World Literature at the ninth grade level. Her findings support the conclusions of Powell and bolster the potential for their possibility by demonstrating how adults committed to assuring that “no race, no ethnicity, no position, no gender, no stance has hegemonic authority, silencing power, or monopoly on truth” (274). By using a variety of texts that cover diverse representations Fine traces the development of the students as they examine the many selves they carry within through adult direction and support:

They practice voices sanctioned and those long smothered. And they listen to others, not always easily, not always gracefully, but always with support from faculty (272).

Safe space is created that allows difference to speak in these classes because the teachers do not allow for incidents of racism to go unexplored. Through their decentring practice - seen both in their choice of literature and the way in which they explore it - they also seek to establish points of connection. Support for students in their struggle and passionate involvement by teachers in

discussion that complicates and shifts identity facilitates the students becoming more open to exploring. Other strategies such as creating groups of “balance” to ensure that students who never would have spoken, do contributes to gaining wider discussion.

All three researchers are careful to point out the hostile space that surrounds the islands of possibility. They note that the opening of these spaces poses a threat to larger systems within which these students also live. Where the grade nine course represents a safe place (a sanctuary) it is also a transgressive site (a site for social change). When it is seen from the outside as the latter the question of its long term viability within the site of schools which have not historically been counter-hegemonic arises.

4.5 PROJECT 10: Working for Safety

Project 10 was the first school-based counseling, intervention, and education programme for homosexual and bisexual youth which continues to operate within the Los Angeles Unified School District. Its principal function is to develop strategies to incorporate school-based intervention programs for gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) students in which self-identified GLB students could receive emotional support, information, resources and referrals. It also aimed to raise school community acceptance of and sensitivity to GLB issues.

Here the strategy of those involved stems from the acknowledgment that schools are hostile places for gay, lesbian and bisexual students and that a space in which they can receive support and acceptance is of prime importance. As a result their project centres around “investigation into the extent and effect of the stigmatization process upon gay, lesbian and bisexual teenagers in the schools” and “a practical approach which involved developing a model program and working with self-identified homosexual youngsters in a school setting” (Uribe and Harbeck, 1992, 19).

The effects of stigmatization mirror those outlined in this first part of this chapter but the model departs considerably from meeting the objectives as set out by Fine, Weiss and Powell above.

Although the project has gay, lesbian and bisexual students as its prime focus and although it works with schools through interventions, it is not contained within them. Project 10 has as its goal to reduce the effects of anti-gay and lesbian discrimination by creating a model counseling programme for both homosexual and heterosexual youth. They do this by breaking the silence around the issue, providing an environment where the students feel supported and safe, and where adults would engage with them in non-judgmental ways. The way in which Project 10 accomplishes this is not well drawn out in the literature but what there is a clear focus upon ensuring that the harmful effects of concealment strategies and/or homophobic attacks are mitigated. They have attempted to do this through the dissemination of corrective information to schools through the guidance departments and health classes in addition to counseling work to support and boost the self-esteem of gay, lesbian and bisexual students.

The project seeks to directly assist and help gay, lesbian and bisexual students to gain a strong sense of identity and much of the work seems to occur around counseling to build a self-esteem that can survive the hostile environment in which they must interact. The project seems to problematize the issue of homosexuality in the school and to then seek support that assists gay, lesbian and bisexual students. It points out the existence of prejudice and seeks to address it through school safety measures, human rights advocacy and drop-out prevention strategies. I do not want to underestimate the importance of support programmes to gay, lesbian and bisexual youth who face dysfunctional growth if left in silence. I do want to point out, however, that the focus of this study and its conclusions were centred around the “extent” and “effect” of the stigmatization process rather than the cause of it. Unlike the research of Fine, Weiss, and Powell

who sought to seek out the cause of racism in schools - and found it in Whiteness - Project 10 does not identify the construction of heterosexuality and the need to decentre it as a transformative goal. Instead it vaguely identifies the need for a commitment to human rights and the needs of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth as necessary for change. In short, it asks for the spaces that Fine, Weiss and Powell argue for without a blueprint on how it might be achieved. In this regard the work of these three women is much richer and offers a framework in which to examine other spaces that work to decentre power. It is their organizational framework of safe spaces that I have taken up my research into gay, lesbian and bisexual processes of identity in the organizational space offered by a Toronto-based project called Teens Educating Against and Confronting Homophobia (TEACH).

5.0 TEACH: A Political History of Underfunded Space

TEACH began meeting in the Spring of 1993 out of an initiative by the East End Community Health Centre (EEHC) in 1992 that sought to respond to the critical health needs of youth, one of which was homophobia. Margot Francis, one of the health promotion staff at EEHC became the coordinator of a group of eight youth who wanted to organize and address “gay/lesbian issues and homophobia” predominantly in the schools where they felt it was most oppressive for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth (Francis, 1995, 2). Since late fall, 1997, TEACH has become a project supported by Planned Parenthood of Toronto.

Funding priorities early in 1997 prevented the project from continuing at EEHC. The shift came at the same time as demand for workshops was more than tripling from approximately 30 requests per year in the first two years of the project to over 100 per year by the end of 1997. For a few months the project continued in an ad hoc basis with the TEACH youth. Fortunately, the youth

involved in the project at this point had had two years of experience and training from the project and were able to act fairly independently and effectively. Joanne Bacon, although not again on salary until October, continued to meet with the peer facilitators and to do the logistical work around booking and follow-up with schools.

After approaching several community health organizations Planned Parenthood came forward in the fall of 1997 and offered to house the project. Their interest in the group centres around a desire to incorporate anti-homophobia work into projects of sexual health promotion and violence prevention as means to promote good health. They also provided a salary for a part-time coordinator based on 10 hours per week which has been extended until the end of August. Funds granted in March, 1998 by the Lesbian and Gay Community Appeal to the Children's Aid Society (CAS) for anti-homophobia training has also meant that youth facilitators for TEACH will receive a small honorarium for their involvement with CAS projects in its "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Youth Program". The TEACH project's future, however, is still precarious since there is no secure funding beyond the end of August, 1998. Yet, even if it were to continue, in its present form it fails to recognize that the current allocation of ten hours per week for coordination does not reflect the actual time Joanne Bacon gives to the project which is between 20 - 30 hours per week. My research shows that time constraints have put unfortunate limits on anti-oppression training, group process skill, and on individual growth.

5.1 The TEACH Constituency

A significant shift in the last year has been the expansion of the project beyond schools. TEACH has offered workshops to various social service providers including the Children's Aid Society. It has also begun to offer workshops to youth who are in group homes or are in some form of protective custody. Youth in these spaces often do not have exposure to resources on gay, lesbian

or bisexual issues and one of the objectives is to help sensitize staff to gay realities so that they might provide the necessary support to their clients by creating a more inclusive environment. Similarly, work with youth is focused on reducing homophobia and in providing possibilities for youth to receive further help.

Although TEACH's most visible function is that of education and advocacy, the group also serves as a forum for support for those who train for and conduct the anti-homophobia workshops. A commitment from the former Toronto Board of Education Equity staff and access to other people working in anti-oppression education have allowed the group to receive some strong training. The (pre-1998 amalgamation) Toronto Board of Education's sexual harassment policy which provided protection to students, teachers and staff on the basis of sexual orientation in addition to a commitment to anti-heterosexism education, has also helped facilitate TEACH presence within the school system. The amalgamation of the school boards in the new Toronto District Board, however, jeopardizes this ongoing support. Equity positions are being reduced and there is great pressure from those school boards which focused almost entirely on race and ethnocultural issues - the majority - to maintain this focus over the more integrative approach of the former Toronto Board from which TEACH currently draws much of its support. These challenges to gains made in anti-homophobia education have been further strengthened through initiatives by Ontario's current Progressive Conservative government. Most notable has been the new ministry guidelines for grade seven and grade eight sex education revealed on June 29 of this year. The curriculum with a strong emphasis on abstinence does not include any material related to gay, lesbian or bisexual youth.

5.2 The TEACH Workshops

TEACH volunteers facilitate workshops as a team. Usually there are three to four participants who are accompanied and assisted by the TEACH co-ordinator, currently Joanne Bacon, or by Tim McCaskell or other adult facilitators from the former Toronto Equity Program. Each workshop consists of a variety of activities of which the personal narratives of the youth facilitators is a key component in exposing concrete examples and experiences of living under homophobia (See Appendix A).

5.3 The Current Group

At the start of the project in February TEACH had nineteen members. In March, another person joined the group. By May two of the new members stopped attending giving the group a core group of eighteen members. Three of these have been with the project since 1995, and one joined last year (1997). Thirteen, however, interviewed with either Joanne or me in late January and began the training in February (1998).

The participants range in age from 16 to 26 but two thirds of the youth are 21 or younger. Although TEACH identifies the need to foster alliances between straight, lesbian, bisexual and gay communities to fight homophobia, straight membership has been very low. Only one person in the current group identifies as straight.

Of the eighteen members, thirteen are White, one is Black, two are South-East Asian, one is Mixed race, and one is Hispanic. Three members are Jewish, and two are half Jewish. One member of the group claims a major physical disability.

6.0 Prioritizing Spaces:

How the youth in TEACH came out and found spaces that supported their sexual orientation gives an indication on how those spaces influenced how youth relate(d) to themselves, their sexuality and their identity(ies). All of the youth in this group found a “queer” space early in their coming out process and, for each, this space had a significant impact. As stated earlier, my research with TEACH served to gain an understanding of how the space this project gives queer youth influences their thinking and development. Part of understanding its influence, however, required that I look at some of the other spaces they inhabit. What unfolds in the process of doing work in TEACH is decidedly connected to the experiences each of its members bring to the group. Because the project is education-based and largely connected to work in the public education system I felt it essential to gain an understanding of the participants’ own experiences of school, and then from there try to get a sense of spaces they moved into that allowed them opportunities to explore their sexuality and gain a fuller understanding of themselves. These spaces occupy the geographical location of Church and Wellesely Streets in Toronto, the city’s gay village.

6.1 School Spaces

The youth in this project seem to reflect much of what previous research into gay youth’s experiences in school shows: that there is little support from teachers for gay students and that, in many cases, teachers exhibit negative behaviour; that derogatory references to being gay are rife amongst students and seldom subject to punitive action by administrative staff; that curriculum is heterosexist; and that any initiative to include gay and lesbian realities has most often come from student initiative.

All of the participants found their school environments to be either systematically hostile or indifferent when it came to addressing homophobia and exploring gay, lesbian or bisexual sexuality. Whereas students found some support amongst one or two teachers, or encountered no resistance with their initiatives to infuse the curriculum with issues around sexual orientation through presentations and independent study projects, none found that their schools as a whole engaged in proactive work around gay, lesbian or bisexual issues. Many spoke of the need to play the hiding game to avoid being targeted (see Epstein, 1994) or revealed the presence of an anxiety within the school to explore conflict and incidents of homophobia as was the case in the second school in the Fine et al. study (1996). Fear and ignorance on the part of the staff also came forward and is represented most clearly in Max's account of a high school gym teacher below.

My research shows that peers played the most significant role in how the participants positively or negatively experienced school life and coming out. There was an expectation of peers that acceptance should not have to be nurtured or directed by adults because friendships were presumed to be mediated amongst and between peers. Responses to questions about school always invariably emphasized peer relations over rapport with teachers or administrative policy, although the latter still held importance. Still, there is a definite role for teachers in nurturing attitudes and sensibilities in their students that promote and sustain healthy relationships. The way in which they guide youth in their relationships and provide spaces for them to collectively examine issues, like sexuality, does much to eliminate fear and prejudice. The lack of mention of teachers as support agents in the following narratives, however, illuminates a chasm in the profession in need of redress.

6.2 Pedagogues, Queers and Peers: The Centrality of Peers in Identity Development

“What, about the teachers?” - Ricardo

Ricardo - a 20 year old, gay, South-East Asian male, gives an account of his school experience that speaks of how youth navigate relationships with peers in the formation of their identity. Although Ricardo spent very little time talking about institutional and systemic restrictions they are marked in his responses. There seem to be few expectations of the school in the process of his coming out as is demonstrated below. Each time I tried to bring him back to the teacher Ricardo excused and dismissed the topic, resuming instead with a more important emphasis on friends:

R: I went to an all boys school for three years then went to a coed school. The brotherhood I had there - But then again I was 'straight'. Everyone else was straight. So if I was 'out' there I would have not enjoyed my time. But that's how - That's the hand that God dealt.

I: When was it that you became aware that - you know - "I'm gay" or "I think I'm gay or I have urges or " - How old would you have been -

R: When was the first time that I realized that friendship really, really matters, and honesty is the best policy? I was like 7. But it came into my face when I was like 18 - 17. I lost a lot of friends. Friends - quote, unquote. And I gained multiple amounts of friends. (Quote,) unquote. People take things differently. Some people saw it as an opportunity to actually have a cool, gay friend and some people saw it as an opportunity to topple me from my pillar of acceptance.

I: Did you have much support from teachers or administrative staff? What about other teachers?

R: What, about the teachers?

I: Did you find that they were supportive? Or what's sorts of things were -

R: It never really came up. I was - I was as flamboyant as ever. It never came up. They always knew me as a flamboyant character. It never really was a problem in high school. I could defend myself. People liked me because of the things I can do. I have power over a substantial amount of ground. ...I had a personality the size of Idaho.

I: So you were able to establish yourself as very strong and were quite central in your school, so that when you came out you had the position you had and so it was not so easy for people to (dismiss you) ...And did you find that teachers were ever supportive or -

R: They were indifferent about it. They were afraid of getting fired or something. What have you. It never really came up. It was only the circle of friends that really mattered. Totally.

I: So the part of teachers wasn't really important to you and they didn't really offer it. Is that what you're saying?

R: I had support from teachers from other things. Like getting into college...Friends. Friends. Having friends is the biggest thing to me. I don't want to lose support from people. Because they shouldn't judge me because of my sexuality. (Personal Interview, March 17, 1998, 10 -14)

Being Catholic and being in a Catholic school - particularly a private Catholic school - meant abiding by heterosexist norms or else not gaining access to social capital (Adams, 1997, 84). For Ricardo, "enjoyment" continues to have much to do with "brotherhood" and a need for friendship - a theme he comes back to over and over again in the group as well. At the same time he connects his realization of being gay so tightly with his realization of the importance of friends and of being honest. The kind of "brotherhood" he had while in Catholic school no longer became acceptable once he became aware that friendships could not occur through deception:

The lies that pile. All the "dates" - "I'm sick." - "I don't have enough money." My angst and torment became a big ball of puss waiting to explode. And it did. Anguish over truth.

Yet when he came out he lost privileges:

I told them I was "this" (gay) and lost friends like Mike. (From Ricardo's coming out story to students, field notes, April 16, 1998)

The loss of friends is all the more devastating when the low estimation of teacher support comes forward. Teachers seemed to just be "there", indifferent and constrained by the school so that getting along in school meant being able to "defend myself" without their support.

Enjoyment, too, is connected to safety. Had his school promoted an anti-homophobic environment then the volatility and loss of many of his friendships may have been replaced with earlier, supportive relationships that valued his sexual orientation.

Ben, a 17 year-old, gay White male, clearly expresses the difference of being in a school in which harassment in schools was left unchecked and where policy was clearly put in place. Teachers were (are) important to Ben but, more significantly, those "good" teachers needed to be within anti-discriminatory structures:

I: I think back to some of my teachers. I (don't) know if I liked them because they were good teachers or because I felt supported by them even though I wasn't out in high school. But somehow I felt that if I were to come out those are probably people I could have come out to and it would have been okay." Did you have any of that sort of sense with them? Or was it just more -

B: I was just like, "I'm not gay", at that time. That's how I felt. Right? Even when I was in grade 10 I still had denial feelings - you know - I didn't really feel comfortable to express myself openly until I came to Luxton where if somebody rejected me - if somebody rejected me as badly as verbal insults- I mean -I could get them expelled if I wanted to - that's what I like. I don't want to be harassed. And I want consequences for people who do harassment.

I: And at (your school now) that - that's there?

B: Yeah

I: And it's followed through?

B: Yeah.

I: Has anything happened to you (there) that's had to be addressed?

B: No. The worse that happens is: "Why do you wear a dress?" I'm like "First of all, it's a skirt." (both laugh) "And second of all, I do it because I like the feeling - you know. It's a different feeling when wearing pants - you know?"

I: How do your teachers take that up?

B: One of the teachers is kind of uncomfortable with it. Her name's Angela, and she's the most hated teacher in the school. Nobody likes her. But Hazel thinks - Hazel who's the women lit. teacher - thinks I'm very, very brave to do it. So there's Hazel. Like I want to start wearing my skirt again but it's been too cold lately. So - I mean like - for a while I didn't want to put up with the harassment because I mean - You walk up the street and - you might get - you know - some crazies on the street - he might just get up and - you know - kill you because you're wearing a skirt. And on the street car, you feel the whole street car staring at you - you know. And it's okay if - um - if there's somebody else on the street car with you. If I have somebody else on the street car with me I don't care - you know - Like on the street car - I mean nobody has the guts to come up to you (when you're with someone else) and say anything really. Right?

I: Right. That's interesting. 'Cause your home is a safe place to wear a skirt and be as you wish, and school is somewhat like home 'cause you can wear a skirt. - although you said that one of your teachers isn't comfortable. But getting from your home to your school is not.

B: (laughing) Yeah.

I: But still, you do it.

B: It was an interesting experience though. I used to do it very often. Last - ah - last year I did it very, very often. But I got tired of the harassment.

I: The harassment on the way to school?

B: um - yeah. And - I don't know - It's just -you know - you walk up the street and you feel apprehensive. Everywhere you go you feel apprehensive...(Personal Interview, Mrch 17, 1998, 8 - 10)

Structural policies with supportive teachers build environments where difference can safely present itself. This school is an alternative community high school of 120 students with an obvious clear policy on harassment and a commitment to serving a wide range of students and needs. With support from one of his teachers, Ben has also developed a gay and lesbian literature course as an Ontario Advanced Credit English elective for next year.

As for all of the participants in TEACH, however, it hasn't been teachers named by students as their key supporters but their peers. Some have served important functions as role models and listeners in the coming out process such as Ben demonstrates when talking about his English teacher, or as Delphine, a 19 year-old, bisexual woman of Mixed race, reveals in quite a different way about her gym teacher. Although she never addressed her gym teacher directly the presence of a lesbian (even though un-disclosed) had an incredible impact on her coming out. While working to develop her narrative for the workshops the following emerged about the importance of her teacher:

D: Maybe I should cut out the stalking (of my gym teacher) part?

I: What's there? Why did you tell it? It's true.

D: I don't know – I was (feeling) very strongly for this woman and showing it in my 16 year old way.

I: Is this before you came out?

D: Yeah. That was - like - basically the thing that - like - forced me to acknowledge that “Yes, I do have feelings for women.”

I: Okay, so then it's important

D: Being obsessed with her?

I: It's important. Why do you think you became so obsessed with her?

D: 'Cause she was like the only lesbian I knew. Like I knew she was lesbian. Not only because of the way she looked. But I just knew it.

I: And she is lesbian?

D: Yeah. She's totally a lesbian. Like she was the only one – like in that Catholic School – like you know – Everybody being so anti-gay. Everything in that school was about being anti-gay.

And having this lesbian gym teacher there who was getting along with everything fine – like you know – She was working there and she was head of the gym teachers and she went there as a kid. So like, I identified with her. And like – she was the only person who was gay that I knew. Like I didn't really know her at all. And then going home there was my homophobic mother and all the Catholic stuff we'd go through - traditions - and then I'd go to school and I'd see the gym teacher and like – you know – I'd see a little bit of me in her. And it was – yeah – and it was like – I was all alone and my friends didn't understand what I was going through so – I don't know – I was hoping that – you know – if I followed her around (laugh) then maybe she'd talk to me or help me or something. But no. She just got scared and ran away (laughs).

I: See, all of those are points that you didn't bring up in your story before. Those are really interesting points because they point to the fact that this person was finally someone with whom it was possible. You didn't have to guess about anybody. She's very tangible. She's lesbian and she's succeeding in a way, because she's teaching in this school and there she is.

D: And she went there as a student too.

I: You said you came out after that incident but was it a week –

D: After stalking the gym teacher?

I: Yeah. Was it the next year? Or was it –

D: Well, like I came out to myself when I was stalking the gym teacher. Like I was – like “Okay, you've got to be ‘bi’” – you know? (laughs) – But I guess I did come out to my best friend at that time.

I: And then, when did you get the question (about being gay) asked of you in class?

D: Two years later. Grade 12

I: So then there was that space of time – right? And that's another question that you might want to think about. You knew (you were 'bi') because that desire became so obvious with that gym teacher and then you were able to divulge it to a friend. Yet it took you two more years before –

D: Like a year later I came out to - like – my other best friends. And that year I came out to more and more people. And the year after that I came out blatantly – like you know, ‘Yeah I'm gay and, get over it’ (Personal Interview, March 19, 1998, 17 - 20).

A lesbian gym teacher - through no apparent intentional actions on her part - facilitated Delphine's confrontation with her sexual orientation. A single unannounced presence of a lesbian adult within a very homophobic space offered a sign that it is possible to be bisexual and have options. Her crush combined with a realization of positive outcomes allowed her to come out to herself, then to a friend, and then other friends until finally coming out to the school two years later. If the mere presence of a presumed lesbian teacher could facilitate such a chain of events then a culture that supported teachers to be anti-homophobic would no doubt increase

opportunities for dialogue between gay, lesbian and bisexual adults and youth. As I will show later, when youth are in environments where adults respect and support them there is typically an increase in the valuation and their expectations of them. Over their time in high school, however, the youth in TEACH found that those environments were not easily available to them. In part, their work in TEACH seeks to carve out such spaces.

TEACH members talk to students in ways that reveal the need to understand and be supportive of issues facing many gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. Their stories try to give some of the realities for students who may be in the room - the effects of isolation, of harassment, of doubt and insecurity and fear. In doing so they work to create a space of support in schools through and amongst the students - a space that teachers and schools overall, have been resistant to doing. Space in the public realm of the school is a vital place for youth to explore issues of sexuality since it's in school where youth have an audience of peers and legitimation through their visibility in the public domain (Anderson, 1995, 17 -25).

After being called "queer" all through elementary school, and treated as an "outcast" in grade nine, Ben attended his final school which has provided a space for him to be open with his peers and to explore queer issues through some of curricula and in the safe environment of his school. Coming out for him began with a friend outside of the school milieu and with a circle of friends who would accept and support him. Even so, there he still voices a strong need to continue his exploration beyond that circle of peers. School provides one of those places:

B: (My school) may be a great school - right? - but nobody can call it Utopia - right?- You can't - you can't drop racism and sexism and homophobia in that school. Because even though it's more progressive than other schools it still does exist. And we work to refine our ideas. Like - you know - if somebody says 'You don't look Jewish, well, then, at my school, I would say "Well what does a Jew look like?" - you know? But if I go into - um - If I go into - like - a public school and somebody says "Oh, you don't look Jewish" - you know - I would - I might say 'Oh what does a Jew look like?' But - you know - (they might be) like "Oh fuck, I don't care - you know. Big deal. I don't want to talk about it." You know people at Luxton would care. They're caring about refining their skills - right? (Ben, p 26)

Others have found that with personal initiative and peer support a school's silence and indifference can be manipulated, particularly when the school stands on particular explicitly articulated liberal educational principles . When I asked Max, a 21 year-old, bisexual, White female, how it was that she and a number of girls at her school were able to be so vocal on issues of racism, homophobia and religion at her school she referred to its philosophy and gave some qualified credit to her school:

M: No. I don't think that (a push in the direction of anti-oppression thinking) was coming from the school. But I think that the school did - like - It's kind of a paradox. Like I think the school did nurture an environment where we were encouraged to speak for ourselves and we were encouraged to be individuals and we were encouraged to try new things. And I do feel that that part of that education contributed to who I was. Now, unfortunately they didn't like what I did with that - um - but -

I: But they didn't shut it down?

M: They didn't shut it down. Um - The first woman who came out the year before me started a women's issues group at the school - um - which was like eight people the year she was there. The year I graduated it grew to like twenty-five people. Um - And we had one staff advisor - this really quirky, insane woman - a really great woman -um - And so there in that group we started doing some work around queer issues, disability issues - and I mean - and I'm telling you, it was all very simplified. Like it was not was this great thing. Like when I look back on it there were a lot of problems with it. But it was definitely a movement in that direction. But I wouldn't say that that was endorsed by the (school) - Actually, it was so funny - Oh, you're bringing back all these memories. (both laugh). 'Cause I just haven't thought about it much. Like, this one clan chieftan put up this board for her clan and it was all models wearing bikinis. These skinny white women wearing bikinis - right? And so someone from the women's issues group took issue with it and they said "I don't want that board up in my - up in the school" - right? - "It's offensive because of this, this, and this." - Right? And this clan chieftan came back and said "Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And then - like - five people from the women's issues group came and there was - like - this huge yelling match in the locker room. So now that I think about it there was some - like - real confrontation - like - totally around all these politics. Like it was really, really astounding that we were doing that at - like - seventeen years - seventeen and eighteen years old. And like starting to walk down that pathway.

I: Yeah. Yeah. And it was more organic. Like it came out of - all of your own -

M: Yeah.

I: It was not anything encouraged -

M: No.

I: or facilitated by the school.

M: No. I wouldn't say so. Not directly. Like, indirectly. Like we would have speakers sometimes, on - like - anorexia and stuff like that. We did have discussions about feminism in history class. And sometimes it would come up in English. But it kind of depended on the teacher, but it did

not feel like a school - a whole school environment. No. - And the institutional stuff was usually really problematic. Like there was - um - the multicultural -the multiculturalism group or something - Always headed by a White girl. Um - and it was - like - where we'd have the talk once a month by - you know - someone from around the world. - I mean it was just - it was pretty bullshit. Um - that was institutional but I feel it was - like - incredibly problematic (Personal Interview, May 12, 7 - 8).

Most students, however, do not have a network in school if they are out to themselves and to others. They seek community elsewhere since there may not be other gay, lesbian or bisexual youth out at their school, or because youth identifying as straight are unable to understand and/or support them. Max, like many of the others, was able to come out like she did not because her school had an explicit policy in support of gay lesbian and bisexual youth but because it had a philosophy that, if pushed, would tolerate her existence. Her real source of support and courage, however, came from an older female student who came out at her school the year before she did, and from friends in the last two years of high school who nurtured and pushed her thinking more than anything else:

M: (W)e were all either queer or very queer positive. Really coming into our feminisms. Like just discovering it. Playing a lot of guitar. Having a lot of potlucks. Going camping. You know - (laughs) - like the total stereotypical thing. And it was really good. It was really important for me (Personal Interview, May 12, 1998, 5).

Again, however, she too points to two teachers who she felt gave her support as she continued to come out through high school:

M: Okay. I came out to two of my teachers. One of them was the first person I came out to at the school - I think I came out to him before I came out to my father. And - ah - he was great. At the time I was doing an independent study on homophobia (laughs) when I came out. Weren't we all? (both laugh) - Doing studies on homophobia or homosexuality?" Um - And he was my teacher in that. And I just wanted to talk to him about how the project had a different meaning for me because I was just coming out. And he was very supportive. He asked me about - He said - you know - "If you don't want to do it in front of the class, that's okay. We can set up a time. You can do it differently for me if you want." - So he was very good about it. We continued to talk about it throughout my final year at the school. He's got a really interesting personality where he's sort of very standoffish - um - but whenever I came to him, he was - like - "Come in. Shut the door", and we'd have a great conversation. So - and in a way that was nice because he didn't come back to me and expect a follow-up. Like he totally - like - let me come to him when I needed to come to him, and let me sort of fuck off when I needed to.

I: Right. Was there something about him?

M: Um - He was just a - a really interesting - um - Well, first of all he was a great teacher. Probably one of the best I've ever had. His teaching style worked wonders with me. And I really respected that. Um - He was a cynic and I respected that. Um - He wasn't part of the whole

(school) - like - incestuous, happy go-lucky circle of teachers and students and I think that made it easier to go to him. So, I think they were like a number of factors.

I: And what about the other teacher?

M: She helped me through a really hard time in grade 10 - Um - when I was dealing with my mother's alcoholism. And she used to drive me home 'cause we lived close to each other. So I ended up confiding in her a lot when I needed someone to confide in - and it kind of stopped after that year but there was always a connection between us because of that time and I sort of felt that I wanted to share this important thing with her because she'd been so great with me in the past and - yeah (Personal Interview, May 12, 3 - 5).

Several studies (Dei et al, 1997; Lipkin, 1995; Sears, 1992) reveal that students feel that teachers could make a difference in their education. Whether positive or negative, a teacher's influence is lasting. In this group the negative influence weighs heaviest in what lasts in their impressions of teachers, and hence, the pessimism they often felt toward teachers in schools where they conducted workshops¹². Favorite teachers, however, fit some of the descriptions found in Dei's study. They were those who demonstrated the belief that a student can succeed, who have positive perceptions and high expectations of the student and who "seemed to be creating knowledge with their students rather than just passing it on". They were also people who took an interest in the personal life of the student and considered personal problems when assigning deadlines or assessing projects. All of these were part of what students labeled as respectful teachers and were qualities to which the students respectfully responded (Dei et al, 1997, 126). These seem like obvious and agreeable qualities that all teachers would claim in their approach to teaching. Yet, as the following narrative demonstrates these qualities are differently distributed across teachers:

Max: Um - And otherwise - See. it's difficult to talk about it because they (the other teachers) didn't really say anything. It was all very - I don't know - just didn't get talked about. There was nothing outright - Now there was one phys-ed teacher who made some explicitly homophobic comments in a health class. One girl who was dealing with her bisexuality at the time - and was talking to me about it - got really upset in that class and ended up leaving, crying. Um - which was really awful for her because it was kind of like outing herself, even though it shouldn't have been.

¹² A pessimism that was often proved to be valid in many. In most of the 15 workshops I attended, teachers were either absent, present but engaged in marking, or uncomfortably silent at the back of the class.

I: Right.

M: But - I mean - that's the implication. Right? Um - and she tried to talk to the teacher and the teacher was - like - 'Well, what are you? Bisexual?' Like totally put her on the spot. Um - instead of saying - like what - 'what happened in that class room that made you so upset?' She was - like - basically wanted her to out herself. Like that was the school's responsibility. So I went and I talked to that teacher and I said like - you know - "I wasn't in the room. I don't really know what happened but my understanding is that what happened wasn't okay." I'm like "Can we talk about it?" (In the class) she was talking about bisexuality and she was sort of saying "Well, it's not - you know - I don't care if people are gay or lesbian but I - I - I mean - why can't you just make up your mind? Like, what's the problem?" So she was really coming from there and so I talked about it to her - about bisexuality and then I was - like - "But look. Regardless of that, that's not for you to talk about in a health class - your confusion about bisexuality." She was pretty resistant. It was all in the guise of a nice conversation but it didn't go very well in my mind (Personal Interview, May 12, 1998, 3).

It would be interesting to see how teacher confusions around heterosexuality might manifest themselves in classrooms, that is, how any misgivings about heterosexuality might arise in a particular grilling of presumed "straight" students. When heterosexual doubt or fear arises, however, it's generally the gay, lesbian or bisexual students that get targeted.

This teacher's response reveals an insensitivity to these two students. At the same it exposes a disposition that "privileges sexual object-choice as definitive of sexual identity and that neatly assumes identities neatly fold into a heterosexual or homosexual one" (Seidman, 1993, 120). For Max at least bisexuality is a challenge to the very privileging of sexual object-choice. She sees gender preference as only an aspect of sexual orientation:

M: Um - so when I go into a class room (to do a TEACH workshop) - right? - like - it's less about - I think the thing I'm least comfortable with is saying some people are lesbian and some people are gay and some people are bi and you want discover that you are that and that's okay. It's less about that about - like - "You know what? These different attractions, these different desires - they're all out there - and like it's really okay." And it's less about - like "There are these people and these people and these people and you might be one of them and it's okay, and you might not be one of them and you need to think that these people are okay." It's sort of more - generic and underlying - like - for everyone. Just kind of like - 'There's all sorts of whacked out stuff out there and it's - like - good - you know?...I don't so much think about it like I'm there for the gay and lesbian kids in the class. I'm sort of there for all the kids in the class who are - like - struggling with - like - a million different issues around sexuality because we all do. I don't care what our identities end up being...(M)ost people think in terms of "gay", "lesbian", and "straight", including "gay", "lesbian" and "straight" people. And "bisexual" people.

I: Aren't you talking about gender?

M: Yeah. I am talking about gender but I am also talking about sexuality. Like, I'm talking about both. It's not just gender. Um - I'm saying that a lot of the straight people in the world, and I

think a lot of the gay people in the world, have quote unquote “opposite sex attraction” and - um - and they have same sex attraction. And in a million different forms - right? So people say ‘You think everyone’s bisexual?’ Well, I think that’s a simplified way of putting it. Right? It’s more just - like - I think there’s a lot of ambiguous space out there that we all inhabit but that we don’t even learn to recognize because we only think in words. And we’ve only learned these words in these ways of talking about sexuality.

I: So it prevents us from thinking in another way?

M: Yeah. I guess. (Personal Interview, May 12, 1998, 14)

In the policing of “normalcy” it’s the “perversion” that receives the attack. New words are not learned but resisted as is seen in the what Max calls the “polite” (read: disengaged) response of the teacher. A further story about the same teacher, however, shows that not only can these attacks can be countered but that student knowledge of the acts can encourage other students to gain courage and/or be assertive when the need arises:

M: The woman who came out the year before me - um- had another run-in with that same teacher about explicit homophobia in the class room. I think this phys-ed teacher said (to her) - you know - ‘Come on, like you can’t honestly tell me that you know for certain you’re gonna be a lesbian for your entire life.’ And (the student) was so smart. She said, well obviously you’ve never slept with a woman.(laughs) To this teacher. She like totally overthrew the power of this teacher. So I was pretty impressed with that. (Personal Interview, May 12, 1998, 4)

In a similar way, Max called that very power into question when she intervened on behalf of another student with that same teacher a year later. Peer example and peer support build spaces through a direct confrontation that pushes back the restrictions of the institution.¹³ Consequently, peer support is seen to be much more significant and helpful than teacher support or administrative support. This is perhaps due to the importance of peer groups in forging identity during late adolescence and to a sense of belonging (Herdt and Boxer, 1993; Reynolds and Koski, 1995). Students’ comments about school, however, also indicated that teacher support was sadly lacking and that youth were wary and tentative about school environments overall. For them,

¹³ The impact of peer support and action is made even more apparent in a story Max told me. She recounted that one evening at “Buddies” a woman who had been three years behind her at her high school approached her and told her how Max had totally changed her life. She said that when she came out her knowledge of Max and her coming out had made her feel so much better about herself.

therefore, schools were not spaces where youth could have such major expectations from educators.

The unfortunate reality, however, is that when tolerance and support fall largely to the initiative of students, a school environment precariously depends upon a constant source of assertive and courageous youth to challenge the systemic silence and indifference around homophobia within schools. Ironically, the creation of safe spaces is left to the work of the constituency that educators are supposed to be working. The teachers and administrators, meanwhile, by and large participate in practices that reproduce the same heterosexist structures within the school that exist outside of it.

This claim is not intended to place the blame of all failures for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in the school system on teachers. Yet teachers do wield considerable influence on the lives of students. All of the participants revealed prejudicial and homophobic content within the school system and although students may survive it, it should not be a tolerated aspect of professional behavior. Recognition by school systems of the centrality of teachers in this process is vital. So, too, is providing structures that support teachers in interrogating their attitudes and behavior while quite clearly establishing and rigorously creating and monitoring equity policies within boards of education. Well-intentioned attitudes pervade many teachers who want to meet the needs of their students. These do not, however, necessarily address - indeed, they sometimes deny - difference and the deep structures of homophobia. What Dei et al. have written about teachers, race, White privilege and racism similarly applies to teachers, sexuality, heterosexism and homophobia:

While Black students approach the subject of race as part of their everyday lived experience, many teachers are only able to see race from the position of White privilege without a subjective knowledge of racism, they react in response to their own position with feelings of discomfort, avoidance, and resentment of being made to feel guilty (Dei et al., 1997, 89).

Ultimately, to do so requires that they see homophobia as a wider social and systemic issue. How teachers come to “see” in such a way, however, is a process yet to be acquired. But spaces do exist and later I turn to the operation of TEACH to see how “anti-homophobic” pedagogy has occurred. The work by TEACH is in many ways a continuation of efforts to challenge homophobia made by many of its members as high school students. Otherwise, it is now an opportunity to take the action they feel they and others should have been taking when in high school but for which they lacked support. Through TEACH, a structure of support gives these youth the structure and some of the strength that permits them to engage in anti-homophobia work to claim spaces that were once - or continue to be - hostile to them. Other strength has come from contact with the gay, lesbian and bisexual community. The following section explores some of that space and how the youth in the project have taken it up to find support.

7.0 Church and Wellesley: Queer Public Spaces and the Shaping of Identities

The living space of the city exists as representation and projection and experience as much as it exists as bricks and mortar or concrete and steel. That is why rebuilding the living city means taking account of this other sense of space (Donald, 1997, 182).

We do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another (Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*, 1997, 23)

If schools are largely places of negation then the communities that gay, lesbians and bisexuals have constructed offer potential points of affirmation. Built on their own normative standards and identity with enough cohesion to keep it in place these communities have permitted “the idea of continual (self-) reconstruction to be extended into the appropriation of public space”:

Unlike neighborhoods that kept themselves together by acting out the rituals of family based around the church and playground, or that offered integrated places to work, shop, and live, queer communities such as the Castro made themselves real by continually reenacting the very idea of community as a place where people come together to create social connections. That these connections had a sexual base made them only more real, and that they resulted in an exuberant display of sameness strengthened them (Betsky, 1997, 172).

Toronto's gay, lesbian and bisexual space is geographically situated around Church and Wellesely streets in the downtown core of the city. From an enclave offering respite from heterosexism, to a pigeon-holing identity-imposer, to a tentative and partial embrace in a continuing search for meaning and identity - the village asserts a centrality in forming identity(ies) either in embrace or through expulsion. For many of the youth the village holds a progression of meanings that have shifted as they've moved through various experiences in the coming-out process.

Youth search out places of potential belonging and take into those places particular needs and experiences. The reality(ies) of the queer village, then, has as much to say about the reader of its "text" as it does about the place itself. The participants in many ways create space through their narrating of these streets and places; it's not that these streets and buildings that provide an already existing setting for their stories but that that space, in part, is produced by what each narrates as taking place. (Donald, 1997, 182). The steps of the Second Cup where gay men congregate, therefore, is exclusionary "male space" for one female member but a place to hang out for another. Or, as one of the male members sees it, the steps are a tiresome place worthy of satire - "a bunch of old men Leering at everybody who passes by."

The wide range of participant narratives reveals that the village seems to fulfill two needs for those in the group. One is the social interaction it provides and the other is its opportunities to engage with possible sexual partners. There are also signs that as youth come out further and find other supportive queer youth their embrace of the village loosens and they become more tentative and discerning about the village and some of its codes. There is not enough data to suggest that there is a common progression but I would suggest that as youth come out and gain a heightened sense of self-esteem in a developing gay, lesbian and bisexual identity their feelings about the village become more mixed and their use of it diminishes. The village seems to serve as a place

to locate cues for identity and to try on new sexuality(ies). Having gained greater comfort with themselves, they become more independent and critical. As the narratives below show, many members in the group are at different points in their becoming and so narrate the village very differently.

7.1 Lesbian Gay Bisexual Youth of Toronto: Queer Peer Support in the Village

Half of the members in TEACH are, or have been, members of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Youth of Toronto (LGBYT), a peer-lead group at the 519 Church St. Community centre. The group serves as a place to discuss topics and provides a social network for queer youth. All of the youth who have been involved in the project cite many of their close friends as ones they met through the group. For some LGBYT was the first encounter with a queer identified group and other queer peers and for most it became a place to hang out and socialize. Others have tried to make it a place of support for people just coming out and still others a place to examine social issues. The way the youth describe is not unlike the realities of students in their final year of high school: Calvin, a 19 year-old male, renames the group the Lying, Gossiping, Backstabbing Youth of Toronto and Ricardo, expands on some of the dynamics:

R: I went to LGBYT. And I was totally disappointed - you know - because everyone else played the game that every homosexual plays in the beginning. You have to be facetious. You have to don your golden mask in order to be realized. I know, it makes sense. You - you've lost a lot of acceptance from other people because of the way you are. Now that you're in your niche - or your possible niche - you have to make an impact so that no one will hate you. It's a matter of acceptance.

I: And that being, in order to be accepted means to take on a certain role?

R: Yes. That was my understanding of the way it was when I came out for the first time. I mean, full-fledged - you know what I'm saying? So, my friends were the only thing that really mattered back then. Not a lot of them shared my points - my point of views - you know - about the way things should be.

I: So when you - So you came down to LGBYT. Was LGBYT one of the first - sort of - large contact that you had with people who were gay and lesbian?

R: Yes. And a majority of them played the game, but I kind of ignored that, and went through and found people who were actually like me. You know - who didn't care about their sexuality,

per se. That it wasn't necessarily a fundamental thing...No I think it is actually. Let me take that back.

I: Were you maybe focusing on that it's not a role you have to play in order to - You can still be yourself and still be gay. You don't have to realize your -

R: Yeah! Yes. That's what I wanted to say.

I: Okay. And that wasn't your experience in LGBYT - that there people felt pressured -

R: I felt that they were all pressured to be something that they're not. Even though they think they are, you know? But I mean, things change. And after a while they've learned a lesson. Either they turn into bitter queens or they become, actually, good people. (Personal Interview, April 14, 1998, 5 - 6)

Ricardo's and other group member's comments about the group seem to mirror observations of Herdt and Boxer (1993) in their study of Horizons, a support group for queer youth in Chicago. Although many queer youth expect that they are coming to a place where they can be accepted as they are, these same youth often also experience pressures to accept the standards and cultural images of what it means to be a gay or lesbian person in the centre of the community" (Herdt and Boxer, 1993, 234). In the adult-centred gay village, however, the group, with its sometime lack of focus and disagreement is still a welcoming, appreciated space for most:

Elaine: I mean it's just a space basically to hang out and to meet people and to talk and to socialize. You know, you don't have to be an intellectual to go there. And - um - it's not - I mean, it's organized but it's still pretty flexible. So I think it's just somewhere to go. We don't get into great big discussions about - you know - what is gender and stuff like that. We'll talk about things like 'Should gay people be allowed to marry?', but we won't get into all the different theories and other ideas. More like a surface topic (Personal Interview, April 16, 1998, 5)

LGBYT is a place of queer culture-building for young people. The pressures within it to conform and to assume "golden masks" are not exclusive to gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. They also constitute part of adolescent development. Their weekly meetings and their connections to other events in the village such as the PRIDE Day parade, and the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual prom contribute to the creation of new traditions in the wake of losing some of those from the normative heterosexual life they are giving up. In fact, without the existence of a new cultural

entity youth might stay in the closet much longer or not come out at all (Herdt and Boxer, 1997, 240 - 241).

7.2 All the Way Down There for a Coffee: Negotiating Identity and (Heterosexual) Friends

Part of broadening that entity also entails the integration of straight friends into its framework. For Elaine, the village is a place where she feels safe and it's a place where she can meet other girls. It's also, in part, a territory where struggles of understanding occur with her predominantly straight friends who do not share her subjective bisexual position:

E: It's been an important place to look for girlfriends. (laughs) Um - I think that's the main thing why I hang around there. And why I go to clubs and stuff mostly. It's not like it's been successful or anything. But yeah. I go to Buddy's. I go to Tango. You know, the youth group's at 519. Stuff like that. I like it down there. I feel safe. Yeah. It's nice. I found I don't go down there that often a lot of times because my friends are straight. They just won't go. I don't think it's a homophobic thing. It's just like they don't see a point to it really. It doesn't have the - I guess the emotional aspect it has with me - of why I would want to go down - all the way down there to have a coffee.

I: Are you one to hang around on the streets? To walk around, sort of thing?

E: Depending who I'm with - yeah. Like if I'm with someone who's gay then, yeah, we'll just go and - And if it's like during the day we'll stop in the stores and look around. And we'll just go there and spend the day. Or whatever. But if I'm with straight friends we don't. It's more like we have to find a purpose. Like we'll go to the Carlton and we'll park on Church street so then we kind of have to go by it. But it's not a - like it's not a specific thing. You know?

I: Right. You go "Well now we're here. The car's here. We should go for a drink."

E: Exactly. 'Cause when a lot of my straight friends have come down it's been more like we've been in the area and I say "Let's go to this one" And I'd be really passionate about it so then we'd go to that one, or to a different one. Yeah.

I: Strategies

E: (Laughs) Yeah. (Personal Interview, April 16, 1998, 14 -15).

The disclosure by a youth of his or her sexual orientation to a friend is significant. Over three quarters of the TEACH group first came out to a same-aged peer.¹⁴ Coming into identity means that peers serve as important people in the process. For several in the group it is straight friends -

¹⁴ This corresponds somewhat to Herdt and Boxer's research (1993, 219) that showed that two thirds of the boys and over half of the girls in their group - Horizons - came out to a same-aged and same-sex peer. In the TEACH group, almost all of the girls, however, came out to another girl and almost half of the boys, also, came out to a girl, not another boy.

at least in part - with whom many of these experiences are shared. In some way the village becomes the projected space through which youth work to have their friends gain a deeper understanding of themselves; if Elaine's friends were to go "all the way down there for a coffee" it might signal an understanding of the emotional aspect this space has for her - They might begin to "see the point to it", empathize more with her subjective experience and cultivate a deeper friendship.

7.3 Widening the Territory: Seeking Wider Possibilities of Being

"There must be gay people outside of this one street." - Donald

Donald, a 19 year-old White, bisexual male, came out to himself and some of his friends in the fall of 1997. For him, Church and Wellesley was a brief encounter in which to "acclimatize" straight friends and feel more comfortable with himself:

D: If my friends and I were going out for coffee I'd make it a point to go to either the Starbucks at the - Young and Wellesley, or the Starbucks on Church St. Or - um - I'd find like a convenient reason to stop by work on Church St. so my friends would come with me. And so being there - and like a gay atmosphere - was, was comforting (Personal Interview, March 26, 1998, 7).

He resists the village now, however, because the stereotypes there make him uncomfortable. Even though people may be using the village as a safe space to express - to try on - diverse identities Donald sees those expressions as competitive and judgmental.

D: But after a while, it - it grew tiresome. I mean, we talk about stereotypes and they're all there. Like (laughing) Church St. is littered with them. And - ah - I don't like being categorized - you know. So I thought, "This isn't the only place where gay people exist. There must be gay people outside of this one street."...Like I don't want Church St. to be the only queer space.

And, I mean if you're making a statement about your sexuality I mean - So if a gay person is making a statement about being gay, why are they doing it in the gay community. I think being there in itself is a statement. So if you want to make this big political statement, do it in like the heterosexual community, which is everywhere else. You know - do it - do it there where you'd actually make waves or you'd make an impact (Personal Interview, March 26, 1998, 7 -10).

Once Donald found friends - through LGBYT and through university queer groups he no longer needed Church Street because his support now came from friends. Donald's response to the village seems directly connected to a part of his coming-out story. He talks about never thinking

that he might be gay because the image of homosexuality painted for him were not ones that described him. A marked absence of exposure to tangible gay experiences also kept the issue hidden:

D: - You know - (I lived in) a small suburbabn community. And so - like a homosexual lifestyle is not at all prominent anywhere. Um - and going to a Catholic school - like both elementary and high school - it's not discussed. Not discussed in Religion, or in Health. And when it is it's just - like in Health class it was just anal sex. And in Religion it wasn't discussed unless somebody else brought it up. But all of us either growing up in Thornhill or Richmond Hill - No one's going to bring it up. If I go to the guidance counselor he'd probably start talking about purgatory (Personal Interview, March 26, 1998, 6).

Eschewing the "extremes" of gay life in the village as well as their stereotypes seems very much connected to how the invocation of those stereotypes before he came out clouded and prevented an earlier understanding of himself. To say, "This isn't the only place where gay people exist. There must be gay people outside of this one street", is also tantamount to saying that "There must be other ways of being gay than I see represented here on this street - ways that are more like me." Furthermore, a desire to not want Church St. to be the only queer space combines with Donald's statement that gay people need to be more present not only in the heterosexual community but in a multiplicity of communities:

D: All right. Um - Well, for me it's - like if I'm gay or I'm a student or I'm a youth doesn't make me a part of that community. It's when - for example - when there's a rally to protest - tuition increases then I want to be there as a part of the student community protesting that. Or - I mean, if I have to deal with heterosexism then I want to be a part of the gay community fighting against heterosexism and homophobia. Right? Or if someone is being ageist then I want to be a part of that youth community acting to - to stop that. But then there are times where - um - like with White privilege - I don't want to consider myself as a part of the White community - right? - To sort of step out of that. So sometimes I want to be a part of the community and sometimes I don't (Training Session, June 18, 1998, 3).

Donald is indicative of youth who do not want to "surrender" their individuality in order to assume affiliation with a community. There are hints of Herdt and Boxer's (1993, 239) comments that in celebrating and affiliating with different constituencies there

is a continuous "push" into the gay culture and "pull" back into their diverse lifestyles that poses a continuing challenge for the individual. As they proceed to more positive futures, they begin to integrate their new identities into the mainstream social roles and relationships from the past.

But this integration often requires all the creative energy and resourcefulness they can muster within themselves to achieve the double adaptation of being gay or lesbian in the mainstream and in the gay and lesbian culture (Herdt and Boxer, 1997, 239).

Herdt and Boxer have also noted that in the building of a new network of social relations that some opt for rapid activism that leads them into community activities whereas other cannot tolerate separation from the larger group. As I will show later, Donald - and most others in the group - have opted for activism and the creative energy in making the double adaptation between the mainstream and gay, lesbian and bisexual culture lies in their participation with TEACH.

7.4 Integration and Affirmation: Commonalities and Belonging

“The music is great. The guys love me. I love them. It’s fabulous” - Delphine

For Delphine, the life of the village embraces and celebrates her. Unlike Donald who repudiates the stereotypes of gay men within the village, Delphine has taken them up quite differently and found them useful in exploring her identity. Gay bars and the company of predominantly White gay men, in particular, validate her boisterous character and playfulness, and make her feel safe. She can relax, listen to music and hang out without the pressure of being approached.

D: I love going to the bars. Ah – my best friend is gay. He’s like my boyfriend and my girlfriend, and my mother and my son at the same time. We’re always going down there to meet boys for him, and for me to check out the cute boys even though I can’t have them. It’s just great. It’s like I won’t get hit on and if I do it’s just a lesbian, and if it’s a lesbian I can just - you know – act like I’m not interested and that’ll be it. It’s great. I just love the bars. The music is great. The guys love me. I love them. It’s fabulous. The music is the best. Gay people have such great taste in music. Like our favorite song is by the Weather Girls - ‘‘It’s raining men’’. You’ll never find that song in a straight bar (Personal Interview, March 19, 1998, 2).

At one of our later meetings Delphine spoke about feeling like an outcast and not being able to identify with any community to any extent but the gay community:

D: I don’t really fit into any particular community on a whole except for maybe the gay community. I think that’s the closest thing I’ve ever had to a real - like - to being able to fit into community. But - um- definitely women. Like I - definitely - ah- like when it comes to activism - like for equality rights or - you know - being able to control our own bodies such as abortion rights. Um - I’m particularly interested in any community who - who has been ostracized like - I don’t know. Like Jews, Blacks - ‘cause that’s a need as well. - When somebody looks at me they don’t really place me in any community. So I can never completely fit in. But - um - I guess for the most part (I fit in with) Blacks and Jews - but - that can only go to a certain extent because to them I am - an outcast in those communities as well. To many people in those communities (June 18 Training Session, 3).

When I pointed out that the village is very male and very White and asked how that affected her, Delphine emphasized her experience within that space and how even as a visible minority the village afforded her opportunities that other White spaces did not:

D: Well, I don't know. I can't say it never bothers me – being a visible minority – um – but I don't know. I'm used to being surrounded by Whites and I'm used to society being dominated by masculinity – males – in general. So it's really not much of a difference. That's the way it is. Um – It doesn't really bother me. I fit in quite well. I'm basically one of the fag boys. You know – I fit in so well. And I don't know – Whatever's different about me just adds character and in general my friends love it. They love my character so – I'm – you know – I'm just a fag hag on Church St. (laughs). It's fabulous. I don't know. I love it (Personal Interview, March 19, 1998, 3)

Whereas she feels an outcast in those categories to which she's been assigned (Black, Jewish) Delphine feels affirmed in the mainstream White, gay male culture of the village that many women criticize. Part of that embrace has some connection to her relation with her peer group.

As with Elaine, Delphine also struggles with friends who do not see the village as she does. Unlike Elaine who works to bring her resistant friends into this gay space, Delphine is more content to move between groups. The interview continues:

I: Some people find going down to Church St is a place where you go because it's the community where people can be. But they also find that to be – you know – to sometimes be a place that's not such a great space.

D: Well, all my straight friends are my bi-curious friends. They call themselves bisexual but I call them bi-curious. Whenever I suggest we go down to Church St they'll – ah – "No, we don't want to go down there". And when I ask them why it's because to them it's like a pick-up spot. Like – you know – they see Church St as a pick-up spot. Like gay bars. Like – they told me that the only reason why gay bars exist is so that gay people can pick each other up. Um – and I argue with them. That's ridiculous. Like you can say the same thing about straight bars. The only reason why there's gay bars is because gay people need to feel safe. Um – they need to find a nice spot where they can be safe and have fun. And with people that they have something in common with. You know. I don't know. I just can't stand straight people sometimes. (laughs) I've got gay males and then I have my bisexual friends and I've got a couple of straight friends. My straight friends – they never do anything. My bisexual friends always go to – like straight bars – or I guess you could call them like bars with like bi-curious people too. And then my gay friends which really consist of gay males...I go down there to meet gay men and I think there is a possibility of meeting somebody that I might be attracted to and that might be attracted to as well. But I don't – when I go out, I don't go out for that, in general. I don't go out to pick up. So – um – Church St has what I'm looking for. Like good music. Good friends. Um – good time (Personal Interview, March 19, 1998, 2 - 4).

Delphine occupies gay space over bisexual space in the village. She doesn't identify with the lesbian community there and is quite dismissive of it and the "stereotypes" she sees it engendering. She seeks the social aspects offered by the village that validate her femininity and give her attention. Gay men, not women, fill that need:

I: Do you have any other – do you have any friends who are – women friends or friends who are lesbian who go down to the village and have a different experience, or a similar experience to yours?

D: Other lesbian friends? Well, I'm really, really close with one lesbian and she doesn't like going to the bars I like going to. 'Cause I like going to – like – gay male bars – not lesbian bars. We have different tastes. Like I'm not really interested in being surrounded by – like lesbians wearing those cowboy hats and – I just don't like lesbian bars. It's not me. I don't fit in with lesbians at all. I fit in with gays.

I: In what way?

D: Our attitudes. My personality. Our tastes. Like – I don't know – I guess you could say in superficial aspects. Clothes, make-up, vanity – um – attitude. I don't know. Just being open minded and - um – Like we like to drink and laugh loud. I don't know – lesbians in general – when I meet them – I don't know – I always tend to be too loud for them. I don't know – Too out there.

I: So "Slack Alices" wouldn't be a place you'd go to?

D: I don't know if I've ever heard of that.

I: What about Pope Joan?

D: I've been there and – No, no – Not my thing. A bunch of older women. The music, I hate. Dance floor's small. I don't like it. I don't fit in at all.

I: You're focusing on something about personality – your energy or something that you sense more when you're in male places on Church St – yeah?

D: They're just more outgoing. It's – I don't know - It's just so much more outgoing. I don't know. They seem to be friendlier. I don't know (Personal Interview, March 19, 1998, 3 - 4).

At this point, the village seems to be a supportive queer space in which gay men and gay bars provide a venue for affirmation and it also seems to be a place where she doesn't have to address the issue of race, or does so by assimilating: "I blend in quite well", she says (Personal Interview, March 19, 1998, 3).

7.5 Stifling “Supportive” Environments: Identity and Fixed Categories

“I didn’t realize that you could be a gay male and not be a queen” - Jerry

It is also possible for gay adolescents to feel so comfortable in the first gay supportive environment that they find that a premature foreclosure around a particular kind of lifestyle within the gay and lesbian community may follow. (Anderson, D., 1995, 25)

Jerry, a gay, White 18 year-old male, exemplifies some of the effects coming out has on those who feel vulnerable at the loss of a heterosexual life-course. Jerry came out at 16 to a friend he had met over the internet and through that friend came out to a circle of peers. By Jerry’s own account he came out into an environment where he felt squeezed into a stereotype and pattern of being that was not him and which in the long run made him feel quite disillusioned with the village and dissatisfied with himself. Unlike Donald and others in the group who were more able to “express their own unique desires and goals as individual(s) in the culture they sought to enter” (Herdt and Boxer, 1993, 231), Jerry has continually adapted by adopting what he takes as the “correct” position of his peers. One of the most visibly internally conflictual members in the group Jerry’s story here reveals some of his anxiety. In assuming - at least in part - an identity he labels “bitchy queen”, Jerry said he was able to find a place for himself amongst a group of peers who kept the village as their base. In this account, he relates that the person he “became” was/is not who he is, and only now that he has extricated himself from the village and involved himself in other projects has he been more comfortable with himself. He talks of the village as an active entity with coercive powers while at the same time recognizing some of the vulnerability that permitted it. A need for belonging and acceptance by a peer group underscores much of Jerry’s actions and behaviors:

J: All my queer life - the past year and a half, or the past two years - has been immersed in a community where everything was superficial, materialistic queer issues - you know what I mean? - like - oh, partying, boyfriends, sex, beer, - ah - drugs - youth group, coffee - you know what I mean? My life outside of this village became very quote unquote stereotypical fag-based. Like everything about me was the stereotype fag and I didn’t realize that you could be a gay male and not be a queen. Not be a fag. Not be a - uh - bitch. You know what I mean? So - that’s - Over the past few months that’s what I’ve learned...Everything about me became the village. The village trapped me in. And though I heard about this happening - um - I didn’t think it was ever going to

happen to me. And here it was. And - um - I formed some friendships with these people that were very negative. They were amazing people at some points and at other points they were the worst people I could possibly be around. Um - people that had no ambition - no drive. Everything we did had to be in the village. In those three or four blocks - and that is so restricting and so refraining when that's where you spend four months of your life, everyday. The village protected us. Um - The village was gay and we were gay. And it seemed like everything that was gay had to be us. And that's what I'm realizing recently - Is that you don't need to - you know - I mean - you don't need to be a queen. You don't need to be immersed in the gay community or gay culture if you are gay. Yes, to some level I am - with all my work that I'm doing. But in the same respect, I have an outside life. I have my shows, my theatre that I'm doing...It was like this weird transformation that once I was down in the village (after breaking away from the group) I had to queen-out. I had to flame. And I had to be bitchy. And it was hilarious and I was getting attention. It was wonderful. But then I was realizing this is exactly what I was trying to get away from. This is - I mean it is an aspect of me but it isn't entirely me. I'm on a process right now to not make that entirely my life (Personal Interview, March 17, 1998, 7 - 11).

It's difficult to withdraw from attention even when what gives it is detrimental. It speaks of a great desire of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth to find belonging in a community and escape the isolation of ubiquitous heterosocial behaviors even if it means playing an uncomfortable role. Jerry seemed to find security and community in the village and his friends there. What he lacked, however, was a critical space in which to examine himself and explore some of the issues around identity. He continues to struggle with those issues, as do all of the TEACH members. Yet, for Jerry it seems to be more unconscious and hidden. In the pursuit of affirmation he still works to position a defined "Jerry" - one who is assured and in control - instead of trying to live a Jerry defined by the vulnerability and imperfections of a young man in search of himself. It is, perhaps, part of a coping strategy of someone who does not feel able to ask for support or of someone who has no one to ask. The result is a crisis in identity since it is an identity that seeks to accommodate others rather than evaluate the self and its needs.

Jerry spends an inordinate amount of time explaining to the audience that he does not fit the stereotypes of the gay male. He repeats and emphasizes it with such force that it makes me wonder if he's trying to convince them that he is not these things, or himself. It seems his presence and his actions would substantially reveal aspects of his character more than his insistence would (Workshop Field notes, March 25, 1998).

When I match Jerry's interview with his performance at school work shops in particular, it becomes more apparent that the workshops have been a place for Jerry to oppose the difficult coming out process he has had. He denounces the "stereotypes", rejecting them to make it clear

he is other than the stereotypes he has struggled with/against in his struggle for identity. His need to reject in order to affirm, however, is at a point where those who possess qualities touted to be “stereotypical” feel judged and dismissed. Yet Jerry, not settled enough with who he is has only been able to articulate what he is not, while he tries to fashion other identities for himself.

Discussions with Jerry seem to always end in a “lemonade from lemons” life scenario. He once remarked that he had been referred to as a Gloria Steinem of the gay community and it seems that in his version of her at any rate this means always standing tall, always learning and getting on with life in stoic fashion. Yet in the posturing so much of the unacknowledged vulnerability and contradiction shows:

J: I look back on those situations - the same situations a month later from when I talked to (my friend about them). And I don't regret them. I really don't. I needed them at that point in time. For whatever reasons. And one of the things that I believe nowadays - or to some level I believe - is that we all have choices. But when we make a choice - that's the way it was meant to be. We - you can't think about - “Oh, what if I took this path.” You didn't take that path. You chose this path because this is what you needed at that point in time. And yes, there might be consequences to taking this path but you'll know that if you ever come to this path again you'll choose the right way for yourself. Or, not even so much the right way. You'll choose another way for yourself. I don't think there is so much a right or wrong way. I think that there's some things you can learn.

And I think that's the beauty of the village. That's the ironic part of the village. So many people come down to the village - jokingly say how much they hate it - including myself - and how much they detest the pettiness and detest the bullshit and detest the -ah - and detest the gossip and the superficial culture and the materialistic attitudes of everyone. But in that same respect, why do we keep coming down here? Why do we allow ourselves that? Why do we bother? And - ah - I look at why I do that and - partially - it reflects on those superficial needs. But you know - Yes, I would like to meet somebody down here. This is where an area of gay people are collected. Maybe I can meet somebody down here. Or, here's an area where if I need to be flamboyant I can be flamboyant. Um - If I need to get away from being judged I can get away from being judged.

Now, I'm not saying that I am judged all the time. But by some people, sometimes I am. Um - And also - it's an area where I've learned a lot - I've dealt with so much crap, so much hurt, so much pain, but yet I keep coming back and I keep coming down for more. And for me, the village is an area where I can expect that - but I can expect to come out exactly the way I am right now. And that is, I'm standing on my own two feet. I'm walking proud. I am proud to be gay. I have an accepting family who respect me for who I am. I have accepting friends who respect me for who I am. And most of all I can finally respect myself. I'm finally admitting, to some level, being happy. I don't want to change that I can come down and meet a bunch of gay people in the village and have a very superficial, materialistic time. That's why I'm saying there are aspects that are bad but - there's nothing black and white bad. (Personal Interview, March 17, 1998, 12 -13)

Andrew Sullivan (1995, 167) has written that

those who never seize their own identity among their family, friends, and intimates are forever at the mercy of others' definitions and whims, if not socially and economically or emotionally, then in the depths of their psyches and the quiet parts of their souls. Their interactions with others is different than open homosexuals', because only part of them interacts, because a cipher is operating, not a person, because a victim is at the root of that person's soul and not an individual. And no law will ever change that fact.

Jerry seemed to embrace the gay community in the first two years of his coming out assuming an identity prescribed to him there. His negative experience there seems to have resulted in at least a temporary foreclosure on his identity as a gay male except where that identity is commensurate with the mainstream heteronormative community. Again it seems that Jerry has merely shifted the place in which to be at the mercy of others' definitions and whims.

7.6 Circling Back: Fluid Identity and the Use(s) of History

You can't live a complete - like - present without acknowledging the importance of your past -Sam

Max has a tentative and wary connection to the village. Fluid in the way she takes up identity(ies), she resists the limiting identity boundaries within much of the village. She, in fact, embraces the category "bisexual" reluctantly and on occasion has said she feels more like a "sexual outlaw" since she feels that none of the other categories really include what she's about. Still, she acknowledges its role in the context of her coming out in grade 11, in her membership in the now defunct Lesbian Youth Peer Support (LYPS) group, and in her various social interactions. Her connection to the community reveals a sequence of embracing, struggling, rejecting and selective integration in her identity negotiation process over the past five years.

M: When you're emerging out of - like a - heterosexual, heterosexist, homophobic society - When you realize that you're gay, when you're able to say it out loud, join a group like TEACH - it's the centre of your world - right? But I - it's not the centre of my world anymore. Like it's - Like, other things are. And so I think it also has to do with when being gay's being the centre of the world you're more willing to - to think that anyone else who's gay is also your friend because you need that at that time - you know? And that's completely understandable - right? 'Cause you crave it... I don't feel connected to this community anymore. I mean I - it's kind of a lie. Like if I didn't have it I'd feel pretty fucked up (laughs). But - um I don't feel like I'm a part of the gay and lesbian community or the gay, lesbian, bi community. I don't feel like I'm a part of that community. I feel like I'm part of a community that's - and I don't know if it's new or if it's been

there for awhile or if I'm just discovering it - which is more centred around - um - gender transgression, S/M, polygamy - all of that stuff. Which is all very queer oriented but - like - in a different space, almost. Not in the same way that - like - the gay and lesbian community is. It sort of takes queerness for granted and then goes to a different place with it. The friends that I've been making or the people I've been meeting are like me. That they've moved through the queer community - the gay and lesbian community - They've moved through that kind of identity and they need something more because it's not describing their lives (Personal Interview, May 12, 1998,

A "moving through" and a "moving on" has opened diverse possibilities for Max and in her words there's an echo of Donald's desire that the village not be the only queer space - that there should be spaces in which to complicate and push boundaries as opposed to accepting and living within stereotypes and fixed identities. Both are at different places in envisioning and living in those spaces but, like many youth who grow dissatisfied with the gay, lesbian and bisexual community, they are making attempts to have (make) them.

Max also recognizes that part of the process in moving ahead necessarily involves the need to return to the places that have had an influence over when she first came out. In part, her participation in TEACH is connected to that return:

M: TEACH has been - like - really interesting for me because, in a way it's been good to come back to this kind of - like - political work around lesbian and gay youth issues - right? Because I went away for so long from that that coming back to it has - um - been a growth thing for me. You know how you can't move on without - um- You can't live a complete - like - present without acknowledging the importance of your past - or whatever. Or without - um - acknowledging its value because so often when we move on what we need do first of all is reject what came before. And then when we move a little further on we can accept a bit of what came before. And - you know what I mean? - It's this constant - Well, for me, it's been this constant - like - rejection. Like - for a while it was like "I hate the queer community. I'll have nothing to do with it." - right? - "It's fucked me over and I don't care." Um - and now - I'm kind of coming back and going "Okay, but how has the queer community - like - supported or - like - lead me to this work? And - like - Okay, how am I outside of it?" But - you know - "How is this an important part of who I am? How has this made me who I am?" And - um - I think - I needed to forget about that for a while so that I could go to this next - this new place of like - just like transsexuality and - and gender fucking and - like - um - gross sex discourse, and all sorts of really good stuff. Um - but - so TEACH has been good for me in that way too. Just kind of - like - come back to circle around a little bit. And to kind of check in with myself and go 'Okay, so who are you then?' - you know. So, it's been good that way. It's interesting to circle back to this kind of thing and to see people. - You know - I seen echoes of myself in some people. I see things that I never was. I see things maybe I will be one day. Do you know what I mean? (Max, 12, 27).

Further research would reveal more about the set of relations between youth and the site of the gay, lesbian and bisexual community. Other factors - race and ethnicity, in particular require further research. Easily concluded here is the heterotopic quality of the Church and Wellesley in its capability to juxtapose “in a single real place several spaces, several sites, that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault, 1997, 25). A longer study of youth and the mainstream gay community would also verify whether or not there is a general pattern amongst youth in the coming out process of embracing, struggling, rejecting, and selective integration. This chapter, however, suggests that the presence of the gay, lesbian and bisexual community has an important role - even through opposition - for queer youth, and that, according to their needs, most have been able to “read” spaces of comfort and meaning into the village.¹⁵ The following chapter takes a much closer look at youth development in the context of TEACH. It examines participants’ expectations and experiences with the group and reveals some of the process of their development as their participation in it unfolded.

8.0 TEACH: Taking on the Challenge

When asked why they are in the group all members claim a key reason is to help create a safer environment for gay lesbian and bisexual youth in schools through confronting stereotypes and having students examine the effects of homophobic attitudes and behaviours. Here’s a part of the list generated by the group at their Thursday, April 30th meeting. They were asked ‘Why do we do what we do?’:

- ◇ to create generational political change - Elaine
- ◇ to share experiences that empower the message - Rachel
- ◇ to create a space in the world where I would feel comfortable - Ben
- ◇ to provide a voice and face for kids who now may not have it - Donald
- ◇ to radically transform the world - Delphine

¹⁵ For a thorough examination of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth experiences in Chicago’s queer village see Herdt and Boxer (1993, pp. 131 - 172).

A desire to actively participate in social change punctuates this list and runs through all of the interviews and group discussions. The commitment to anti-homophobia work has done much to focus and bind the group together when discussing deeper questions of identity and sexuality beyond the anti-homophobia work. Even with the conflict and heated discussions that have arisen, members have found the group to be an intellectually challenging and emotionally rewarding environment. Out of these general conclusions, of course, come specific experiences, a cross-section of which is presented below.

8.1 Support and Visibility in the Coming Out Process

“It’s nice to be around your own kind sometimes” -Ben

The participants identified the TEACH group as a place for various kinds of support and as a place where ideas should be complicated and challenged. Ben, for example, offered the following:

B: ...I don’t know - the friendship - it’s like, everybody in that group is just like - it’s so nice to be around them. I mean - it’s nice to be around your own kind sometimes. It’s nice - especially when you don’t see a lot of them (queer youth). And I’m sad that I don’t have too many friends who are like that. And the friends that I have - most of them are straight...I really thought that it would have been more effective if - um - we had more younger people because the homophobia that happens in early high school is outrageous. Like - that’s when it happens. That’s when it happened to me.

I: People who are at your level in high school at the same time as you?...

B: Yeah. What happened yesterday - you know. What harassment did I deal with yesterday. That’s what I want to hear from queer youth of my age....It’s just - It’s like TEACH is part of - I think TEACH is - like - it’s a great place. I mean there’s a lot of great things in TEACH that are good for queer youth. And it is unfortunate that it’s hard to find queer youth younger than myself. But - um - but I think next time we should make a great effort to do that because early high school is where most people come out, and where most people are facing problems. You know? It would be nice to catch someone and educate them about how to deal with their problems while they’re dealing with their problems. It’s like - you know - we’ve dealt with our problems before we came to TEACH. We built a security layer, right?

This last thought of Ben’s (about having dealt with problems before coming into TEACH) points back to the project’s attempted balance between training youth effectively and selecting youth who show evidence of feeling comfortable with themselves and who have an apparent ability to

speaking about homophobia and its effects. Selecting youth with a “security layer” in some way misleads the project. It assumes that the group and/or the project does not constitute part of an on-going support to participants albeit support in different ways depending upon each participant’s experience. Max’s desire that the group be a place for discussion and disagreement - of “challenging crap” - echoes here. Even below when Ben talks of a need for the group to be open to younger people who have not yet received support to help them feel secure, he seems also to be referring to himself:

B: We built our security layer - right? - It might not have been very well -

I: but you’ve got something.

B: But we’ve got something already. You know - the people back there - they have nothing. They don’t know what to do. And most people feel that - you feel you’re alone when you come out - right? A lot of the time... you feel that there’s nobody trying to make change - you know? There’s nobody dedicated to make change - you know? And - I mean, at - like 14 and 15 years old, they still can be influenced a lot. I mean - if we got into the group that early maybe - ‘Wow!’ - you know - I can make change, right? I can make change with people who want to make change and with people who are like me. Who want to make change. With people who are like me. You know - it’s not only a support group, I know. Right? I mean - it would be good - I mean it’s good that it is, partly. But - I mean - you’ve gotta realize that people out there are - they want to make change too. Just because you’re in grade 9 doesn’t mean you don’t make change. (It) doesn’t mean you’re coming out and you don’t hate what’s going on and you don’t want it to change. It’s like we’re giving them a place where they can feel comfortable and make change - you know? It’s wonderful and it would be much nicer if there were younger people. That’s my point.

**“Even though we get together to educate everybody else, it’s almost as if we’re there for each other.”
- Donald**

Donald, who came out in the fall of 1997, has also drawn support from his participation in TEACH. It has given a focus for his straight friends to understand more about him while at the same time offering a place for him to explore his identity while do anti-homophobia work. Donald was one of the youth that used to go, LGBYT but found that other than his routine of “home and school and work” in straight environments grew tiresome:

D: It became frustrating that it was just like - heterosexuality and so I needed - like - a homosexual space. But those Tuesday night meetings (at LGBYT) were more of a joke than what

I was looking for. I needed something a little bit more serious that I felt like we were making a difference. So I was really glad when you called and said there was a place for me.

I: How would you assess it so far?

D: I think it's great. I'm really glad I joined. I mean TEACH actually has turned into what I was looking for from LGBYT. 'Cause when we had to do our coming out stories. You know - I've heard everybody's coming out story and it's just - it's all very real. And - ah - I hate to use this word but it's almost like a support group. Right? Even though we get together to educate everybody else, it's almost as if we're there for each other. So - um - I'm really glad I joined (Donald, 11 - 12).

Donald's participation in TEACH has also been a source for increasing his relationship with his friends. Like the objective behind Elaine's strategies to pull her straight friends into the village so that they might better understand her, Donald's work at TEACH has widened his straight friends knowledge and understanding of him:

D: Since I've joined TEACH I feel better. Right? Um - Because - you know - I have like this group. And because I'm doing this anti-homophobia work. Ah, my friends actually ask about it. They ask how it's going and they ask what we do. And they - they're really interested. And so now they're questions don't revolve around the sex. They revolve around homosexuality. And -ah - I'm really glad that that has happened as well.

I: What about - around people in the group. And the issues or the experiences that they're bringing - ah - to do the work? 'Cause you've got your story, right? But other people in the room are coming from different experiences 'cause people experience not only being lesbian or gay or bisexual in the room. It's also because they are women or because they are Black or they're Mixed Race or - um - differently-abled.

D: Well, hearing their stories. Um - and them coping with it. It helps me 'cause I can draw strength from that. Right? I can't - I can't say "Oh, I know where you're coming from." Or I can't relate to - Well I can relate to it on some level but - um - I'm not going to pretend I understand fully. But the fact that there is this problem. Like this barrier. And they're working around it - you know - They're coping with it. I draw strength from tha (Donald, 12 -13).

TEACH is one of the "other places where gay people exist" and it the anti-oppression focus of the project has facilitated him in being with people who are different from him although united in the anti-homophobia political project.

8.2 Acknowledging and Invoking Difference

“There’s some of us who - you know - we really don’t have a lot in common, and that’s okay.” - Max

Max joined TEACH because she was missing the work and found the project an opportunity to go into schools and work with kids and get experience because she wants to be a teacher - “And TEACH is doing precisely that work - right? And it happens to be around gay and lesbian stuff which works for me because that’s been a part of my world and it still is a part of my world.” Out for five years now, the priorities of her involvement in the group are not linked to finding comfort within the group. Contact with the queer community for her, and a few others, has also been more extensive and over a longer period and it has involved work with the arts community(ies), exposure to queer theory, and other activist work. These members derive another sort of satisfaction with the group that emphasizes the focus of the work and a recognition of difference. In the previous chapter, for example, I showed how Max acknowledges the different needs within the group while at the same time quite clearly articulating her own. Although she sees herself occupying a very different political space than what predominates in the group she also claims to feel pushed by the differences of some while connecting more closely to the dispositions of others. Contact and learning occurs on various levels: “I think we’re all there for different reasons”, she says. “Some for the same - you know - and some of us, our reasons are more similar than others” (Max, 13). At the same time she points out that “there’s some of us who - you know - we really don’t have a lot in common, and that’s okay. And we can work with that and learn from that rather than try and ignore it” (Max, 11).

Working with and learning from difference has been central to the unfolding of this group. The recognition by many in the group that confronting difference is essential in learning about one another and themselves has been a major contribution to the successes in understanding they have

achieved. Foremost in this process of understanding has been the unfolding and learning of one another's discourse, the focus of the following chapter.

9.0 Finding and Identifying Discourse

Quoting Young, Leck gives a definition to public space: "The primary meaning of public is what is open and accessible. Indeed, in open and accessible public spaces and forums, one should expect to encounter and hear from those who are different, whose social perspectives, experiences and affiliations are different"(1995, 190). Non-heterosexuality or connections to its oppressive effects has brought people into the TEACH group. Here, in this group, it seems that "homosexuality" is relegated to a place of voice where it is able to reveal the actual diversity and complexity of sexual choice. Here, in this group, is space for "homosexual desire to explore and establish an integrated sense of self."¹⁶ The most common point of unity, then, is a desire to overturn heterosexist discourse through anti-homophobia advocacy work. The discourse that should replace it however, is not so clear. Nor is the way in which the youth in this group should be representing themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer youth. In fact, the analysis of each participant and his or her reaction to the TEACH model is inextricably linked. These are further informed by many personal experiences while coming out, some of which were outlined in earlier sections.

Other factors and subjectivities also connect in direct or indirect ways to how issues within the group get taken up. Race and gender, for example, are often prevalent when participants speak. There are, though, other personal experiences and issues not so highlighted but equally important in how members have approached issues - anorexia, divorce, a mother's alcoholism, a father's

¹⁶ I'm playing here with Watney's wording around how Section 28 created a loss of space for sexual desire. See page 44.

death, dyslexia, depression. Such a multiplicity of factors acting upon each person as (s)he participates in the process of TEACH's work makes it difficult to draw generalized conclusions. The interviews, the coming-out stories, the discussions and changing content of the TEACH workshops are constitutive, rather, of a process of becoming. In what follows I chart some of that process and show how a knowledge of the process may offer insight to others wanting to engage in similar work.

9.1 Discordant Spaces

Field notes - April 9, 1998

This perhaps was one of the most difficult of training days. A time where the participants are now in a position to feel comfortable enough to make claims and to challenge those others make. To now, points have been brought forward but they have not elicited such emotion by so many in such an open way. There have been vulnerable and conflictual moments before and I'm wondering if the lack of resolution at these times contributed to the way in which the group operated tonight. We have left unsettled moments unattended to a point that they have now attended us. They have come back and they express themselves in anger, frustration and with little attention to process. To this point the training has focused on skills related to the training. A priority for Joanne has been to work as much as possible on teaching facilitators how to move through the workshop model so that they will be able to conduct workshops as soon as possible. The demand for workshops is steady and it is therefore necessary to equip participants well enough so they feel comfortable doing this work in front of people.

Focus has been on learning how to facilitate, how to tell the coming out stories and how to respond to questions from the audience. Where some of the group have tried to complicate discussion of issues and identities beyond what Joanne calls the basic 'Homo 101' for beginners, there has been some resistance. First, there has been a concern that theorizing and discussion by some has not been accessible to everyone in the group, and therefore alienating. Second, Joanne is conscious that the mandate of TEACH prioritizes the facilitation of anti-homophobia training for the education of the general public. Whereas she acknowledges the need to also be where the participants want to be she is also very aware that workshops must be effectively done. At times, however, these two points are inextricably linked and unless it is openly acknowledged and addressed tension will occur.

9.2 Things (Un)attended

During a slide show on sexuality and its representation (March 3), Max asked that we address how to take up sexuality in workshops:

M: I'm confused about TEACH's mandate because... Joanne, on the first day of training - that we had the full day on the Saturday - sex came up and then you mentioned that sex education was trying to be a little bit more of what TEACH was doing and that sort of shying away from sex

was not necessarily what we were supposed to be doing. But then a couple of times I've heard you say that we sort of avoid the topic of sex. I'm just so confused about sex (laughter) because my -

Joanne: This is the harness girl talking (laughter) You're not confused.¹⁷

M: Because my identity - a lot of it isn't about love and it isn't about who I love. Like - A lot of it has to do with sex and that's okay. So I'm really conflicted by this "Show them we love and it's not just about sex and that it's good that it's about sex and it's all about sex." And I'm just confused about what is TEACH - What is the policy? 'Cause sometimes I'm hearing "We talk about sex. We validate that". And sometimes I'm hearing like "Stay away from sex because it's just -

J: There is no policy and I think what I talked about at the beginning is that we have to be cognizant that we want to build relationships in the community and the fastest way to kill a relationship with an organization is to have them feel that - if it's for example the Catholic school that you're going to go in proselytizing. You're not going to go in -

M: Right

J: talking about "bum fucking" or something - You know. TEACH is whatever we want it to be but it is a leadership training program that is aimed at combating heterosexism, homophobia and sexism in the community. We can do that however we damn well please but we also have to be conscious that we're being as effective as we can with whatever audience. So I understand why you're feeling frustrated....

In this exchange feelings of confusion emerge around what Max could and could not talk about with students. Yet, her ongoing emphasis on the complicated nature of sexual identity implies another question: "How much space is there in this group for me to discuss central issues for understanding my own sexuality?" It is a question that resonates from the first meeting after the day long training in early February where she told the group that she had felt tense around some of the talk around transexuality. Max's question and Joanne's response indicate to me the delicate balance this program seeks: Training youth to effectively conduct workshops on anti-homophobia while simultaneously nurturing the development of each participant's understanding of self and others through the facilitated training space of TEACH. This balance seems to be a pivotal point around which tensions have arisen.

¹⁷ On the first day of training participants were asked to bring and discuss an object that had significance to them. Max brought a leather harness that can be used to strap on a dildo. It was her metaphor for her sexual exploration and putting into question categories to define us, such as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Joanne's response to seeing the harness - "What's a harness?" - revealed from such an early starting point the diverse starting points of all the members.

Much emphasis in the project has been placed on concrete training sessions orientated toward the workshops (storytelling, learning the elements of a workshop, simulations of workshop activities, question period, question periods etc.) The need to prepare participants quickly in order to meet the demand for anti-homophobia workshops with schools and the social service sector resulted in an intense focus on facilitation with a basic support kit on how to handle particular situations. Commitments after workshops - work or school - meant that immediate follow-up or debriefing did not happen very thoroughly, while training needs meant that weekly meetings did not have much space to debrief. Joanne and I spent time individually with participants outside of these meetings and I was also able to give written feedback to some of them. Still, this process was not one that contributed significantly to the overall functioning and growth of the group since much feedback and discussion did not occur collectively. A lack of collective follow-up and a postponement to a later date of personally important issues raised by participants contributed to some of the frustration felt by group members.

We organized so that the following week there was time to discuss the question Max brought up. For the last third of the session, students wrote out what sex and sexuality means to them and in small groups we shared these thoughts.

I am with Max, Ricardo, and Elaine. Max shares her piece. A sense of tokenism and victimization - words she will later use to describe her feelings - punctuate her comments from the previous week:

What Does Sex and Sexuality Mean to Me?

These are concepts I've thought lots about, and it's challenging because in the TEACH context, my commitments are often in conflict with what we do or can do. I feel that I've suffered the consequences of living in a highly sex-negative culture; I feel that I've experienced this as much in the queer community, especially the lesbian community, as in the straight world. I want to celebrate sex - creative sex - "strange" sex - I want to validate the multitude of desires which exist. My sex and sexuality isn't simply based on gender. I find the categories of

les/bi/gay/straight constricting and simplistic. I realize that TEACH needs to work at a basic level and I understand why, but it is sometimes challenging and sometimes emotionally hard. My sex/love relationship with a transgendered person has shattered my notions of “man”, “woman”, and desire as we frame it. Yeah, hi, it’s me Max. I feel a little like I stick out like a sore thumb in TEACH in this respect - and I’m not quite sure how to work all this out. How to be honest with the group about who I am, how to shift my philosophy for workshops, how to work it all out.

I suggest to them that the places we come from have an impact on how we see and act in the group. Max, though, feels that her way of seeing does not parallel that of others in the group. She says that she feels she is always the one to push the boundaries of sex and sexuality: “Of all the spaces where I am challenging people on crap, this should be the space.” But then she asks: “Is TEACH the place to work that out?” By way of response Ricardo talks about the need for having different facets in the group, and Elaine adds that “if we don’t learn on a deeper level then the ‘superficial’ workshop stuff doesn’t happen in the classroom.” She says that she’s found Max’s comments and ideas around the fluidity of sexual identity helpful and that she finds she does identify with what she says at many levels. Although Max feels a need to explore sexual identity more it is clear from Elaine (and from all the candidates interviewed) that they have found her contributions on the issue some of the most influential in their thinking.

When the discussion moves into how we feel during group discussion Elaine admits to often not speaking up because she doesn’t want to offend anyone and because she sometimes feels that she isn’t at the same level of analysis as some of the others. “I don’t care,” responds Max, “about people being at a different place but I want to discuss about it.”

9.3 Common Ground?: The Unsettling Tensions Within Group Discourses

Field Notes, April 9

Not an easy session. I leave knowing that many in the group have left feeling angry, hurt or shut down. We have entered a point where differences are becoming more apparent. Differences in analysis, differences in experiences. And in tonight’s session the notion that people in the group feel they are amongst people “like us” is troubled. The often acknowledged and celebrated claims of our diversity hits a wall as it becomes apparent that analyses around our particular realities and around those of others are incongruent with some members and are, in several

instances, in opposition. That this is a place where people do feel comfortable and can make change is not so readily clear. Expectations are shaping the often aggressive and emotional ways some members in the group are responding to one another and I think they are occurring because there is not yet a reliable set of structures in place to support participants in exploring complex ideas.

Robyn facilitated a workshop on ableism and there was a definite faulting by people in the group for not adhering to or not following a particular understanding of marginality. There is a general low tolerance in the group for what we are expected to have (and do have) high tolerance for in anti-homophobia workshops, that is, a tolerance and patience for questions based in ignorance.

When discussion on disability moves to considering the effects of societal behaviors and attitudes, Robyn asks what someone who is not disabled might do in response. The group calls out. "Fight back." "Try to Fit in". "Become addicted to medicines." "Try to find an identity." "Assisted Suicide". The list brings the Tracey Latimer case forward.¹⁸

The discussion on the case begins with a claim that the court decision in favour of the father puts in place a precedent condoning murder. Pete intervenes suggesting that this may not be a topic the group should take up. He says there are many issues and sides in this case and begins to talk about the suffering of the family. Interventions occur simultaneously and with force. Robyn says that disabled people are afraid of their loved ones. Max - who not a month earlier claimed she didn't care that people were at different places as long as they could be discussed - lunged across the board room table in a raised, tense voice, "You need to listen to disabled people speak about what it feels like to have another disabled person murdered." Several more comments come and then Joanne interjects telling Pete he cannot shut down if it's emotional and that she hears a dehumanizing, devaluing of human beings in the points of view he's voicing.

In response to the tension, Max says she wants to find a way to address sexism, ableism, etc so that when it comes up in the group it can be effectively addressed. "We have to have some common ground," says Joanne "And Pete, you are on the border of that which is not acceptable."

The session continues with difficulty but still, further revelations come forward. Robyn asks what if all the assumptions and attitudes the group has charted on the board through the opening activity were now about gay, lesbian, bisexual youth. It strikes a chord with Jerry. "I now see myself as a person in the classroom who is afraid to make the wrong step," he says. "When you said gay, lesbian, and bisexual, I realized I was seeing disability as something to be helped, pitied, but with gay, lesbian and bisexuals (I saw it being) around anger etc." Pete, a few minutes later comes back to Jerry's point and talks about the need to not be afraid to take the wrong step. He talks about how in the past he's felt uneasy with people who are awkward around his anorexia to the point he says where they say things and then begin "eating their words. Spitting up new ones. People, once they know, worry about saying the wrong thing and therefore they feel they're walking on eggshells."

"Overcoming is painful...but it's part of overcoming," says Max. "We need to allow that we can take the risk of challenging and being challenged." What then is it the group requires to overcome its tensions and move more solidly forward?

¹⁸ Tracey Latimer had cerebral palsy and was killed by her father in October, 1993. He put her in the front seat of his truck and ran a hose from the exhaust into the cab where he let carbon monoxide flow into the chamber for one full hour. In December 1997, he was convicted of second degree murder for which mandatory sentence is 10 years. Judge Noble, however, deemed that 10 years would be "cruel and unusual" punishment and permitted a "constitutional exemption" to the mandatory sentence. He instead ordered that Robert Latimer spend one year in a provincial institution (not a penitentiary) and that he spend a second year on probation on his family farm.

I propose that tensions arise in groups where there are expectations that everyone in the group should be at a “particular” level of analysis. By “particular level” I mean an analysis that is felt by the one judging to be sufficiently close to their own. Second, I propose that there had been to this point an over-expectation that everyone in the group had such a strong base in analysis and that everyone in the group felt sufficiently secure in themselves and with who they are. There has been an assumption that participation in the group implies that members do not hold stereotypes, attitudes and behaviors that others may find oppressive. It’s quite clear, however, that many in the group have said or done things that others have found silencing or hurtful. The April 9 session illustrates that reality vividly. What seems clear up to this point is that this group had not expected to encounter ideas so contrary to what they each individually held. They had perhaps not ever realized that some of the ideas they held could be taken as oppressive by others nor ever considered that comments or behaviors within the group might hurt them.

Here is what Max said on May 12 - one month later - when I asked her why it was that “we’re not so nice to each other when we’re in the group sometimes...Nice in the sense of being tolerant and understanding like we are (with our audiences) when we’re in the schools”:

M: Okay. I’ve gotta think for a second. That I don’t - that I expect more from the people at TEACH in a way.

I: Because - Why?

M: Because - because I just do. Like there’s just certain things that suck and I just hate it when people can’t - like - figure that out. Right? Whereas if it were some student in some school that I don’t even know and whatever, says something - like, of course, they’re going to because there’s lots of shitty people - like - in the world, or whatever. Lots of people are going through a lot of stuff. Not that all the people who say offensive things are shitty people - that’s not what I mean. But - um - I don’t know. You can walk away from that. You can’t walk away from - like - someone’s sexism in TEACH, or if someone’s - like - just ignorant. You can’t walk away but you have to come back and back to it. And you then have to go out and do workshops with this person who you don’t - you’re not even feeling allied with in any way.

I: Yeah. Yeah. - Well, how do you connect that to what you said earlier about the fact that a lot of people who are in the group are teenagers? And they’re coming into understanding - you know - the world, and new ideas. And so don’t have the -

M: Yeah. It's a really fine line - it's a balance for me between - like - accepting that different people go through different processes and are at different stages of the process and that we shouldn't punish people for being - you know - closer to the beginning than - whatever. If it's - like - a straight line kind of process. Um - And I do believe that...It's not so much if someone says something offensively or if someone doesn't get something - or if they're ignorant. Um - that - that's okay. Because I'm - like - ignorant - and offensive in more ways than I can imagine. But, it's more about a willingness to sit down...if someone draws attention to it - whether there's a willingness to sit down and really listen to what's being said or whether there's - like - some awareness that - Like, I'm aware that I'm in a part of a process - right? - and I have a lot to learn. I'm gonna make mistakes along the way, and I've made a million and I'm gonna make a million more. And sometimes I feel that people have this false sense - this false arrogance - about their politics or their theory or their space in the world. And that's what I can't respect. It's not so much the ignorance as it is the ability - or lack of ability - to address the issues (Personal Interview, May 12, 1998, 20 -21).

Max pointed out how she felt Pete showed a willingness to learn and address issues and that her final point about false arrogance was not directed at her frustration with his comments.

Elaine's comments also reveal a similar expectation to Max's:

E:... In a workshop I think we kind of pretend that every one out there is 'stupid' - right? So whatever they ask, we accept it right? But, I guess within the group we're seen as being - you know - We're not stupid - right? We're smart and we're tolerant. We're not racist, we're not homophobic, we're not 'this'. So when someone says something that's not the norm it's like "How can you say that?" Not like we should treat people like they're stupid. I don't think it's fair what happened to Pete at all - right? He didn't understand that he was being ableist - right? If he was. Like in the same way that kids in the classroom may ask a question, like 'How come all gay men have AIDS?' or something, and not realize that it's homophobic. Because that's just what they think. That's just what they've learned. That's something they've been told and so believe. I think maybe it's important to realize that we're not all - like - geniuses. We all don't know - like - everything and how to talk about these issues (Personal Interview, April 16, 1998, 8).

When I asked Pete to explain the manner in which the group sometimes approached differences he offered that the group had now reached a point where members had become "personal with each other":

P: Like anything, personal things get involved and it's hard to control what you're saying when you don't realize you're doing it until after you've done it. And so, - like - I understand that it happens. I think it's unfortunate that it's happened, but I know it will. So I wasn't so much upset that it happened as I was the way it happened - it was almost like a "tag team" wrestling match, type of thing going on...

And the whole problem is that I may have answered some of those questions but they weren't questions. They were attacks. It was sort of like if they had given reason behind the attacks so they could say "Okay, wait. That's not needed." And because I wasn't able to finish, they weren't able to hear my explanations. And so, it was just sort of like - "Jump on it."

I: What is it that began that - those kinds of things? Why did Max lunge across the table? So what was it personally for Max? Obviously it touched her. So what was her expectation of you?

P: I think that's almost like the answer of your question. That she has these expectations of me that I'm supposed to live up to, and when I don't live up to them - or when somebody doesn't live up to these expectations that people have, therefore you're sort of breaking everything that they thought about you. So therefore they have the right to attack you for it. And like - "This is how you're supposed to be."...I think that the expectations of people...should be "We don't know what to expect." People are entitled to have their own opinions. Let them have their own opinions. Say your opinion. If someone agrees with you, they agree with you. And if someone doesn't agree with you, they don't agree with you, but you both have the right to it. Because if you start saying "This is the opinion you're supposed to have" or "This is the objective we're trying to meet" then I have a problem with that 'cause I don't think I should have to agree or disagree with anything that I don't want to. I should have the right to choose for myself. And I think we have to realize that...So, I think that if we're gonna start studying objectives then I'm gonna start questioning the actual value of this group, because I don't think we're going out to do these anti-homophobia workshops with the objective of making everyone gay. Whereas we're going out there to make them understand that it's (homophobia) happening. There's nothing you can do about it except help. And if you don't want to help, then you're realizing that you're oppressing people...I mean, I don't go out there saying this is what you should think about (but this is what we think about it. And I think that's what make workshops so effective 'Cause it's us. (Personal Interview, April 20, 1998, 19-21).

The ability and openness of many in the group to reflect and return to issues that affect its members has allowed learning to emerge out of these conflicts. There is still a lingering presumption that this space should be a better space because within it there are people who face instances of oppression because they are gay, lesbian or bisexual. The commonality of their sexual orientation, coupled with a commitment to doing anti-homophobic work, however, has meant that discussion and lively exchange have occurred fairly freely, if not always with understanding and tolerance. Up to this point, rigorous discussion has taken place and differences have arisen with few visible lasting tensions as a result. People have spoken about themselves and their experiences. Where they have generalized they are most often challenged or shown where the generalization falls down. And, when the participants speak they speak from their experience to a group that collectively shares some identification with that experience because they are gay, lesbian or bisexual. In these instances there tends to be a valuing of different "voices" that has nurtured the start of what bell hooks would call a community based upon "a shared commitment and a common good that binds us" (Adams et al., 1995, 36).

Community building in this group seems to suffer most when it departs from issues of anti-homophobia work and begins to integrate other multi-oppressions and express ideological positions in its discussions. Tensions around sexuality and how people in the group identify are evident. In the April 9th session people became less tolerant and more hostile of comments made around disability than around any other discussion point during their first 30 hours of training. It's unclear, however, if the level of emotion derived only (if at all) out of people's comments around ableism or if it was in part (or entirely) driven by earlier conflicts, unresolved incidents or personal attitudes towards other people in the group who as one member said "have a shit load of privilege and don't get that".

Clear, however, is that at this point there was not a strong enough mechanism to channel and focus the emotion. As a result, some members were left feeling misunderstood and hurt which closed the space to deeper and more authentic discussion around complex ideas. Participants did not yet know each other well enough to trust one another and in several instances feel hostile or dismissive toward some members.¹⁹ Group building necessarily goes through it's "storming" phases as it finds a way to accommodate and work with all members. There are, however, other factors beyond the pattern of group formation that have arisen and affected TEACH's work.

Time constraints have meant that information central to facilitation training has taken priority and that the agenda has taken precedent over any "organic" activity that has arisen during meetings. On this day, for example, Robyn had put much time and effort into preparing for the session. Ableism had, to this point, only been a peripheral issue for the group members. Most references and inclusion of ableism into discussion (as well as TEACH workshops) had been done by

¹⁹ See Fine, Weiss, Powell, 1997, for a similar finding on research with Family Groups in one particular high school, pp. 264 -68.

Joanne. There was, then, an obvious investment on both their parts to bringing the issue squarely into the group's work through this session.

9.4 Balancing Support and Bottom Lines in the Process of Change

Noticeable in this meeting, however, was the way in which emotion over-rode issues of safety and how the guidelines the group had established for communication back in February collapsed. Quoting Rothenberg, Adams argues that safety is tied to respect and the expression of emotion, "especially emotions perceived as negative, such as fear, discomfort, threat, pain, anxiety, hostility, and anger":

Students must feel secure that their comments will be treated with respect whether or not the faculty member or class agrees with them. Students must have confidence that faculty members are in control of the discussion and will intervene, if necessary, to prevent personal expressions from provoking personal attacks by some who may find them offensive. At the same time, the faculty members must balance the need for creating a safe space with their obligation to see to it that blatantly false beliefs are subjected to mature and thoughtful criticism. Striking the correct balance is no easy task (Rothenberg as quoted in Adams et al., 1997, 37).

And so what contributed to this charged exchange amongst many in the room? What correct balance needed to be struck and why didn't the group attain it?

(we) know that it isn't information alone that educates people. If it were, we would already have a very different world than we do...Our experience is that, when we focus on process in the teaching of oppression, learning occurs at an unusually deep level. Students are engaged at both cognitive and affective levels...The information students gain through the experience of connection, empathy, and identification is not readily forgotten (Romney, Tatum and Jones. in Adams et al, 1997, p. 38).

This echoes earlier cited research by Powell in her study of "family groups" (Fine et al., 1997,) where she observed that "the quality and content of information shared is a measure of the relationship existent between the participants: the greater the trust and reliability, the more authentic and risky the data shared" (265). Where there may not be total trust amongst some in the TEACH group, there is a disposition by most to trust which stems from goodwill and a desire to make the space effective so that anti-homophobia work will become stronger.

Learning tasks have also been clear in their focus to prepare participants to execute anti-homophobia workshops to largely novice audiences. The participants have for the most part embraced this focus because it is key to why they belong to the group: To actively participate in a process that diminishes prejudice and increases understanding of being gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Second, the participants have expressed a solid respect for Joanne Bacon. They admire her commitment and respect her guidance and experience. Even in moments where questions have been raised about issues some feel are ignored (sexuality and questions of identity, for example) and some have felt she has silenced discussion or dissent at times in order to promote a personal agenda (e.g. the Tracey Latimer incident) there continues to be a trust in her ability to direct them and a feeling that she is beside them.

In interviews subsequent to the April 9 meeting Elaine and Pete, made several criticisms about group process and facilitation while offering supportive and complimentary comments on Joanne's work. In part this has to do with the amount of time she puts into follow-up with the participants but also to her open disposition and her wide experience:

P: And like Joanne - I mean - utterly amazing. I don't know what I can say about Joanne 'cause I have so much respect for her. I mean even when we had that difference of opinions I still had so much respect for her. And when she called that night (after the Tracy Latimer incident), she was like - you know - "I want to apologize for what happened, but I was really happy to see that you could confront me and not back down, and like challenge things that I'm doing." And I think that made me feel good about myself because I realized - you know - I didn't back down from a challenge. And I never really realized that I don't back down. So I was sort of - just like - "Wow". So I have a lot of respect for her and now I have a lot more respect for myself (Personal Interview, April 20, 1998 10).

Max's words echo yet another quality:

M: ...in terms of pushing my thinking...Joanne has just had so much experience and has done so much work that I feel that I have a lot to learn from her. So, it's not so much about pushed my thinking although she has in the sense that I respect her expertise and her knowledge. I think that Joanne and I both come from different places, for sure. But I think that seems to, so far, be working out okay, with us. Also, just listening to her talk about community work in general. Like she just has a lot of good stuff to say about it and - sort of - catering your work to these different individuals - and I just think that she's - she's really skilled... I want to work with youth. I want to teach high school and I think she's a lot to offer me (Personal Interview, May 12, 1998, 17 - 18).

Powell's third factor - the reliability of structures in place to support participants in exploring complex ideas - seems to me to be a primary causal agent of disaffection in the group. After the April 9 meeting, Joanne and two third year TEACH youth worked to address this gap through a structured examination with the group on process and through sessions with professional resource people on conflict, team building, and notions of "community" and "identity". By bringing issues directly forward members had an opportunity to get beyond the statements people make and approach the root of what generates them.

In the next chapter I want to explore how the youth in this project have taken up their voices and how they have expressed them in the group and in the work they do. I think that doing so will illuminate some of the discourses in the group that have remained largely unspoken but which have contributed to some of the frustration and tension felt by many. Unfolding the theoretical positions of the participants within their particular circumstances will sharpen discussion and help make the group more aware of each other's struggles and situations as well as reveal something about the wider development(s) of identity.

9.5 Theoretical Positions and Identity Development

A sense of a common political purpose has helped create a bond of solidarity amongst the members in TEACH. Yet as they delve further into issues of queer culture outside of the workshops the commonalities become more differentiated and sometimes what were thought to be commonalities feel more like oppositional differences. Members in the group, then, are put into a process that requires them to find a meaningful place amongst the diversity. In this way TEACH is very similar to the Horizons group in Chicago with its focus on social justice in the support of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth:

It (Horizons) does so by its values of social justice and participatory democracy in the leadership and organization...It does so directly in the symbolic and psychological nature of the youth group itself, which defines itself as a democracy that deplores discrimination of any kind, whether by race, gender, sexual identity, whatever. Of course not all of its members live up to this utopian ideal, any more than members of our Congress are all scrupulous. But the cultural standard that is set by these utopian moral values, of being just and true to oneself, and of making a commitment to promote social justice as a way of being a real and full person, poses a common challenge to youth from diverse walks of life (Herdt and Boxer, 1993, 231).

Within the context of such a space the youth in TEACH have often been confronted with differences that can be connected to particular discourses that inform a whole range of behaviours and attitudes toward issues and action. By making the frameworks that drive these discourses more transparent we have tried to help members in the group come to a better understanding of the positions of others and of the origins of their own. This process began late in my time with the project but by June the group seemed more aware of their presence and operation.

Some thinking in the group reflects a dominant agenda in the male-dominated gay culture disposed toward assimilation and the adoption of heteronormative practices. This position contrasts with quite another position in the group which advocates a gender-separatist politic while also representing the muffled voices of dissent in the cultural mainstream of these communities. These men and women find that their experiences and interest are not represented in dominant gay identity constructions but struggle to build greater possibilities for them within the queer community.

Although all the youth in the project would denounce any notion of a unitary gay identity there is a marked difference - perhaps even contradictory - in some who acted upon a liberal humanist impulse to dismiss notions of diversity or difference in favor of a sameness achievable in the recognition of a universal humanity. Interestingly, this impulse was most evident in three male youth, two White and one South-East Asian. In the case of the two White youth the attitude seems to originate from experiences of privilege that make it difficult for them to acknowledge

that the universal humanity they want others to “see” is, in fact, the dominant culture which - apart from their sexual orientation - they have access to and power in. It also seems to be connected to the enormous centrality being gay plays in their lives as well as and to some of its heaviness. “My race and my religion are not my issues in my life,” Jerry, one of White males, claimed.

J: My main issue in my life I will admit is one hundred percent me being gay. Caucasian Gay? No. Me, being gay. Probably because I haven't been thought of as being anything else but gay. You know what I mean?...If somebody pulls out being Jewish I will be able to deal with it. But it's not something I'm going to volunteer. 'Cause it's not something I need to volunteer. It's not something I want to talk about. I have other issues that I'd like to cover (Personal Interview, March 17, 1998, 26).

Not ever having thought of being White before certainly speaks of someone who benefits from White privilege. Whiteness - like a fish - moves unaware of the water it swims in. Yet for youth who struggle for identity in the process of coming out, examining, scrutinizing and interrogating everything about the self can be a terrifying experience. The drive to obtaining a grounded sexual identity sometimes necessarily involves a prioritizing of goals and/or a denial of aspects of the self that others want to problematize. Perhaps Jerry is too busy trying “to be gay” to be open or ready to be anything else. His list of “other issues” certainly hints at this:

I: And what are those issues?

J: Equality. Understanding. Acceptance. Sexual orientation. Ah - pride. Um - following dreams, goal, ambition. Success. That has nothing to do with sexual orientation, but - ah - Finding your goals. Finding your - Being goal-oriented and driven. Um - Observing. Listening. Taking in what you need. Don't lose your self. Those are my issues right now (Personal Interview, March 17, 1998, 26).

The discourse of sameness - The “We're all human” that Jerry and some others in the group take up - with its emphasis on individuals to “follow your dreams” fits into a liberal humanist discourse. Such may be a discourse embraced for the entire life of the youth who assume it. It may also be a comforting discourse for those who feel unhinged as they begin a journey into new territory. The universal, normalizing features of liberal humanism may, then, constitute an

important part of identity formation for those who find leaving heteronormative structures in the coming out process a discombobulating experience.

9.6 Ricardo's Cups of Tea: A Discourse on Sameness

Ricardo openly admits to disliking conflict and, neither in the personal interview, weekly meetings or in workshops, did he ever place his ethnicity into his personal history or coming out story (except to equate being Philipino to being a devout, conservative Catholic). Rodriguez (1996, 134), in work related to identity formation for ethnic minority gays and lesbians, notes that a denial of conflicts often arises where "people tend to minimize the validity and reality of discrimination they experience as ethnic persons and believe they are treated the same as others". During this time, "their sexual orientation may or may not be defined, but they feel their personal lifestyle and sexual preference have limited consequences in their life". It seems, too, that with this denial of conflict, the liberal humanist discourse gets invoked to smooth the roughness:

R: I want them (the TEACH workshop audiences) to realize that we all put on our pants one leg after another. That we all drink tea. And though we have different tastes in tea - you know- I like Earl Grey. You probably like raspberry or something - I don't know. Or Orient blend. I don't care, but we all drink tea. This is not going to make any sense to you guys - I don't know.

I: (laughing) No, you make sense.

R: I speak metaphorically.

I: Yeah - you speak metaphorically a lot. But that's fine 'cause it's understandable. What I hear you saying is that we share a lot of things in common and the differences - the differences are there. Maybe your "tea" is "humanity". So we're all drinking different tea but it's all tea.

R: Yes.

I: So we're all gonna realize our lives differently but we're all human beings -

R: Or hot chocolate. What ever's sold in a coffee shop.

I: Right

R: The world is a big coffee shop. (I laughs) People don't like Earl Grey so they insult Earl Grey people - Earl Grey drinkers. You know - people don't like Porshes so they insult the Porshes. They shouldn't be that way. They all have their phobias...(I'd like to) have people realize that we're all the same. That's it. That's totally it. That's how I think of it. Or that's how I make it seem to be. That we're all the same, deep inside. Much like what they show in the media - like

with some cheesy after school specials or television movies, - TV movies...(acting dramatic)
Why can't we all just get along? But then again, it would be boring if we got along.

I: Well it might be boring but it might be a lot easier for people who are oppressed.

R: It's unfair. Totally unfair. We can't have that.

I: But is not part of what you're wanting to do in this group, about making life "more fair"?

R: Yes

I: By having people understand and -

R: Yes. I want them to open their minds. To us. To make them realize - like I said earlier - that we're all the same (Personal Interview, April 14, 1998, 6 - 7).

On another occasion Ricardo claimed that we're all the same in that we are different. The safe part of that statement is that it washes over the difference and seems to assume that we don't really need to examine the differences because they are so similar. After a particularly difficult session in one of Toronto's downtown school's Ricardo mentioned how at one point during the workshop he felt an enormous wave of hatred from the students. He said that it made him remember the hatred he once held for gays and lesbians and then referred to the hatred his brother now feels toward him. His response is revealing in relation to his overall approach to being gay. Walking away from the school he said that he sometimes wished he weren't gay.

When I juxtapose that against "we're all the same in that we are all different", the enigmatic quality of the apparent contradiction fades. There are differences but he does not want to examine them. I was overwhelmed in the emotion of the moment but later I wondered what hurt there must be in exploring the difference and how difficult it must be to be in a group where the insistence of difference is often so strongly articulated. How very much like a conflict that difference must be when it comes forward. Not only amongst and between others but also within people.

Max offered the following about difference being our sameness:

M: Okay. They say "Well, we're all different and that's okay - right? Everybody's different and we all just need to love each other." But, you can say it, but nobody ever does it - right? Like, we can't just - Okay. This is what it is: You can't go "We all just need to love each other. We're all the same inside", and then have that stop the discussion of difference. where I think the discussion of difference should take up - like - 90 % of the time. 95 % of the time. And the discussion of sameness, 5 %, if we need a little comfort at the end of the day. Or whatever we need. Right? Whenever it needs to come up. But I feel that people who sort of use that as their premise often rely too much on this notion of sameness in order to stop talking about difference because it's too scary. And people get scared of difference. (Some in the group are) so terrified of conflict. We've talked about it - you know. And it's sort of - like - 'I don't want to - I don't want to spend so much time talking about difference because it's too scary and too complicated and I can't understand. There's too much pain' - because there is. But to me, that's living (Personal Interview, May 12, 1998, 16).

When gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth try to fit into the dominant cultural notion of sameness they perpetuate structures by naming difference as an individual choice. Individualizing difference alienates and oppresses rather than unites because it mistakenly transfers any feeling of difference as an error on the part of the "feeler" and denies any structural contribution to it. Furthermore, it leads to alienation and depression because the individual - although (s)he can try to change his or her mind - cannot change the institutional structures that continue to communicate his or her difference and, therefore, his or her inferiority. The task to "realize your dreams" - as Jerry puts it - is destined to failure.

9.7 Inhabiting Ambiguous Spaces: A Post-modern Discourse on Identity

Max offered a bit of an overview of the group when I asked her what we had in TEACH. She represents part of the group - most of whom who have been out for at least three years - who want to centre difference in the discussion and approach issues of sexual identity within a postmodern framework of fluidity and fragmentation and aspects of feminist-marxism which emphasizes the systemic forces of oppression. In part, this disposition is one that seeks "the creation of social spaces that encourage the proliferation of pleasures, desires, voices, interests, modes of individuation and democratization" (Seidman, 1993, 106).

M: I think we have a lot of different stuff at TEACH. (both laugh). I don't know - I can't - What do we have at TEACH? Well, we have people who want to be "the same as" in some ways. Who just want kind of assimilation and integration and - Like anything I say is going to be like really

oversimplified because it's the only way I can describe it. So having said that - um - Yeah. People who sort of want assimilation and I think people who just have a shit load of privilege and don't get that. Or they get it in this really superficial way. Um - And - I don't know. I think it also has to do with the fact that a lot of the people in TEACH are still in their teens - right? Like so it's - that's young. That's like the beginning of - like - learning a lot of stuff. So I don't - I don't frown upon it. I see it as part of a process and it's interesting to be part of it...I sort of feel that there's people who want to sit down and have sort of a complicated, complex look at what's going on and a kind of interesting interaction, and who realize that there's lots of weird stuff going on that isn't reconcilable. And then there's other people who want to be - like - a big happy family and go and do the work and that sort of thing (Personal Interview, May 12, 1998, 10 -11).

For Max and others, “the complicated, complex weird stuff” that isn't reconcilable is connected to gender and sexuality issues. It is a response to some of the thinking - outlined above - that is based in individualistic, utopian concepts of emancipation, i. e. that we need to throw off the binaries of heterosexual/homosexual, masculine/feminine and so forth in favour of a polymorphous, androgynous ideal (Seidman, 1993, 129). This latter position suggests a sameness that many resist because it is not their experience and because it often leads back to heteronormative behaviors. It implies “a unitary and homogeneous human nature” which “washes out cultural difference” through the assumption that “European equals universal” (Ashcroft et al, 1995, 55). Instead, the emphasis is on delineating the categories of difference all the while acknowledging their fluidity.

M: I think the thing I'm least comfortable with is saying some people are lesbian and some people are gay and some people are bi and you might discover that you are that and that's okay. It's less about that (and more) like - “You know what? These different attractions, these different desires - they're all out there - and like it's really okay.” And it's less about - like, “There are these people and these people and these people and you might be one of them and it's okay, and you might not be one of them and you need to think that these people are okay.” It's sort of more - generic and underlying - like - for everyone. Just kind of like - “There's all sorts of whacked out stuff out there and it's - like - good” - you know? So I don't so much think about it like I'm there for the gay and lesbian kids in the class. I'm sort of there for all the kids in the class who are - like - struggling with - like - a million different issues around sexuality because we all do. I don't care what our identities end up being. Most people think in terms of “gay”, “lesbian”, and “straight”, including “gay”, “lesbian” and “straight” people. And “bisexual” people. And I don't - ah -

I: But isn't a gender? Aren't you talking about gender?

M: Yeah.

I: Gender identific - not gender identification but what - mutating gender roles.

M: I am talking about gender but I am also talking about sexuality. Like, I'm talking about both. It's not just gender. Um - Like I'm saying that a lot of the straight people in the world and I think a lot of the gay people in the world have quote unquote "opposite sex attraction" and - um - and they have same sex attraction. And in a million different forms - right? So people say "You think everyone's bisexual?" Well, I think that's a simplified way of putting it. Right? It's more just - like - I think there's a lot of ambiguous space out there that we all inhabit but that we don't even learn to recognize because we only think in words. And we've only learned these words in these ways of talking about sexuality.

I: So it prevents us from thinking in another way?

M: Yeah. I guess

(Personal Interview, May 12, 1998, 14).

Thus, some in the group see and/or work toward an understanding of gay culture centred on social difference and the multiplication of identities where, for example: "gay/straight and gay/lesbian passes into divisions between, say, white/black gay, black/Latino gay, middle-class/working-class gay, or lesbian/lesbian S/M, and on and on" (Seidman, 1993, 128).

In the TEACH group there have often been tensions around the labeling of butch, femme, queer, gay, etc which originate out of many peoples dislike to categorically place themselves or to be categorized by others. This, however, seems to play against other people's need to have a defined sense of self in the coming out process, which may mean assuming a prescribed role within a category. It also may involve an invoking of a category as means of defining what a person is not or does not want to be. "I don't fit the stereotype of an effeminate gay male" is invoked, perhaps, out of a need to "normalize" an identity by associating with qualities and characteristics of maleness common to heteronormative standards even though the person may sometimes exhibit behaviors that constitute the "stereotype". This is part of self-constitution. And part of self-constitution is contradiction.

I want to suggest that there may be a connection to the theory one holds, the place youth are at in the coming out process, and the extent to which they are involved in the culture of the queer community. I think it's important to recognize the possibility of such a connection when working

with youth - queer or straight. If we do not consider that a position may originate out of a process of development then our work may hinder the development of that process.

Earlier I wrote that the participants in this research project come from a multiplicity of places and experiences. Many of those places still remain in the shadows and many of the narratives they elucidate are stories-in-progress. When youth come together in the spirit of solidarity to do anti-oppression work they also open themselves up to the discourses within the circle of that solidarity. Sometimes, as I have shown, that opening can be painful, and damaging. Part of the work of those who drive the project - the institutional leaders and the facilitators - needs to develop ways to bring an awareness of the connections between the self and theory forward.

The pain of personal development comes when there is not sufficient support in the process of becoming. Positions are often attached to significant experiences and if responses to those positions are not rooted in an understanding of those experiences then we run the risk of alienating people who seek understanding and of denying support to people who need it. Interestingly, many of the group have brought their vulnerabilities forward and have begun to show some of the complexities of identity positions by speaking more about race, body image and learning disability. Hearing those admissions, however, and then placing them in the context of theories has been slow to happen. Placing one's own theory under scrutiny and unraveling the origins of it and of others is vital in conducting work with such a diverse group of individuals. The diversity has also brought much potential to the group.

As I've talked to members of the group and watched them interact, the influence of others, and the possibilities of being, they suggest have been invigorating, welcomed additions to their thinking. The line between supporting one another and challenging one another, however, seems fine. Neither need be exclusive one of the other and in this group the line has been crossed several

times in the process of growing. What I want to suggest, however, is that those borders need to be crossed with a greater humility toward one's own position and an increased effort to tease out the places occupied by others without threatening what may be a vulnerable journey into new territory. This will require efforts to build stronger reliable structures in which trust can be further established, where people can speak without fear of censure or rejection and where the institution works in supportive ways to nurture queer youth identity through promoting psychological development in connection with political theoretical positions. This last point requires further work to understand how the two theoretical positions of "sameness" and "difference" play out in identity formation.

10.0 Inclusive Education and the Freeing of Sex

Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth share much of the same developmental processes in their complex development as do heterosexual youth. These include coping with physical and sexual maturation and separation and individuation from parents:

Blos (1975) describes this process as a "second individuation" phase that is analogous to the separation-individuation phase a young child experiences, and one that establishes a sense of autonomy while retaining a mature emotional relationship with parents and other elders. According to Erikson (1975), adolescents must experience the normative crisis of identity formation in order to form a stable, life-sustaining, socially consistent identity in the world.

As many adolescents begin to separate emotionally from their parents and strive for independence, they often reexamine the personal values that they adopted as children...The adolescent who begins to identify as LGB is faced with all of the tasks and conflicts addressed above. However, many of these dynamics are heightened because of the stigma and confusion that are associated with adopting a sexual identity that is often considered abnormal, immoral, and pathological" (Reynolds and Koski, 1995, 87).

This study, in conjunction with other research presented here, has shown how unreliable and detrimental school systems have been in meeting the needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. Teachers, as the direct point of contact with the youth in schools have, by and large, ignored the needs of queer youth and - as I have shown - have often contributed to the hostile environment of homophobia. Peer relationships seem, more than any other relationships, to be the ones youth

look to for support and where they are most likely to find it. Given the centrality of peer groups educators must function effectively before and within the “second individuation” phase in ways that inculcate values and attitudes that embrace differences in sexualities.

My study of TEACH reveals that youth are quite cognizant of their situations and very able to articulate the condition of their lives when space for that discussion is opened and their voices valued. Yet, even in TEACH claims of diversity and support for the differences of its membership have lead to the closing down of a number of people when conflicts over ideas have arisen. The disposition of the facilitator and the willingness of many of the members to return and revisit issues, however, have allowed most of the group to remain together and gain from one another’s input as they conduct their anti-oppression work. In most educational settings these issues are shut down before starting. In these spaces a heavy silence on issues of sexuality and homophobia chokes the air.

Teachers tend to take what are social problems and reduce them to the level of the individual where the problem becomes isolated, singular and rooted in personal changes that ignore and downplay structural constraints connected to socio-economic, politico-historical and psycho-sociological realities. Dei argues in concert with Gilroy that ‘racism is just one aspect of social oppression and the struggle for social justice transcends the ‘desire to do away with racism’” meaning that anti-racism workers must deal with racism by dismantling the basic structures and relations of society. (Dei, 1997, 125) The same I believe is true of homophobia.

Part of that dismantling is recognizing that sexuality is not a private matter as many schools would have it. In TEACH public space is opened for exploration and discussion around sexuality. It decentres the “normalcy” of heterosexuality, the unspoken sexuality that does pervade educational spaces even as those spaces insist that sexuality is not part of what it is they are about.

While heterosexuality is explicitly and ubiquitously present in school settings there is rare discussion about homosexuality in any serious and informed manner with students, nor are students provided with a wide range of critical literature or informed opinions on the subject (McLaren, 1995, 109). As this study and other research has shown, criticality on the subject has been fought for and taken up by young people either through supportive teachers or through a system that, when challenged, will cede space. It is a daunting and unfair task to require youth to take on such challenges without adult direction and support. These responsibility constitute much of what the profession of teaching is about. "How", asks McLaren

can teachers work together in the interests of developing a critical subjectivity among themselves and their students that can begin to rehabilitate the pathological development of homophobic discourses in current school policy and practice?... (H)ow can teachers and students develop a collective praxis that takes up in a politically charged and pedagogically progressive way the contradiction between the social relations of homosexuality and the social form of "alterity" (one's relationship to the "other")? (McLaren, 1995, 109)

TEACH, it seems, suggests part of that answer: Democratic forums. Non-hierarchical, peer-oriented structures. Open opportunities to engage in dialogue about sex, sexuality, identity and oppression with commitments to confront but support one another. Adhesion to the need for social activism and contact with other youth. These are some of the key aspects of TEACH brought forward in my study. They are by no means fully realized within the group but for schools where people are trying to do this work, TEACH and its accomplishments point the way.

Appendix A

The Porcupine Game

Purpose:

- ◇ To examine the nature of homophobic name calling and stereotypes
- ◇ To identify the ways in which homophobia affects gay/les/bi/ youth

Materials:

A flip chart and markers or blackboard and chalk

Time:

30 minutes

Procedure:

Step One

Draw a large circle on the board and label it lesbian, gay, and bisexual. Brainstorm a list of the stereotypes used about this group. Draw “spokes” in one colour out from the circle for each name or stereotype you record.

Step Two

In order not to further reinforce homophobic stereotypes, make sure to correct misinformation and have a discussion about each stereotype and slang word you record on the board.

Step Three

Ask the group what kind of discrimination lesbians, gays, and bisexuals face because of pervasive stereotypes (eg. name calling, violence, discrimination in the legal, educational, criminal justice systems, etc.) Draw a second set of “spokes in a different colour and record the group’s responses.

Step Four

Cross out the label, lesbian, gay, and bisexual and replace it with the word “ME” in the centre of the circle. Ask the group to brainstorm a list of the feelings they would have if they were faced with such discrimination. Draw a third set of “spokes” in a third colour and record the group’s responses.

Originally developed by Derek Scott, East York Public Health; Adapted by Vanessa Russell, Equity Studies Centre for use in Toronto Board of Education Classrooms.

Definition Activity

Objectives

To help students:

- ◇ develop a vocabulary in order to discuss gay, lesbian and bisexual issues
- ◇ understand the meaning of homophobia as a system of oppression

Materials

Flip chart and markers or black board and chalk

Time

10 - 15 minutes

Procedure

Write the words stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination on the board. Ask the group for a collective definition. Make sure that the following concepts are understood:

Prejudice: to pre-judge a group of people without adequate evidence or information and then to form an attitude about that group (either liking or not liking them; an attitude)

Stereotype: attribution of the supposed characteristics of a whole group of people to all of its individual members; an idea or belief. Ask the group to come up with some of the common stereotypes they hear at school.

Discrimination: unfair treatment against a specific group of people; an action.

Usually when asked to come up with a definition of “homophobia”, people will say homophobia is a fear of homosexuals which, of course, is only a small piece of the definition. Ask your students to define homophobia in terms of the above definitions.

Homophobia: stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against gays, lesbians and bisexuals. It is made up of ideas, attitudes and actions.

At this point you may decide to ask the group to define racism and sexism so that they can begin to see some of the similarities among different forms of oppression. Namely, that they consist of the same building blocks.

Originally developed by Vanessa Russell and Tim McCaskell, Equity Studies Centre, Toronto Board of Education.

APPENDIX B

Teens Educating Against and Confronting Homophobia: Space, Anti-Oppression Education and Identity

1. The Study

Teens Educating Against and Confronting Homophobia: Space, Anti-Oppression Education and Identity, is a five month study aimed at documenting the impact of the TEACH program on youth who train within its model. Information will be collected over the five month period from all members within the group. Data will be collected through in-depth individual interviews that focus on personal, educational and social concerns that the participants choose to discuss with the interviewer. Other sources include data collected from group discussion, workshop presentations, and observations made from the interviewer's overall participation in the group as an adult facilitator.

The project has been initiated by Ian Rutherford, a Master of Arts student in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. The data will be used as part of his Master's thesis which aims to examine the ways in which participation in TEACH assists lesbian, gay and bisexual students gain an increased understanding of who they are and how they identify themselves through participation within an anti-oppression framework. The results will be shared with TEACH in order to assist its effectiveness in its anti-homophobia work. Results will also be used to examine how educational spaces in Canada might respond to this kind of model within the school system.

What is expected of participants?

A) We are asking you to make a five month commitment to the project

Ongoing work over five months will allow us to document some of the cumulative effects of your participation in the project.

B) We are asking you to allow us to interview you up to three times over the next three months.

We will arrange convenient times for these interviews and will follow up with you after the interview to verify that we have understood correctly the main points you have made in the interview.

C) In the Consent Form we guarantee confidentiality.

However, we recognize that over these five months some of your friends or relatives, may come to know from other sources (like others in the group) that you are one of the participants in this project.

You should consider how you would feel if this happens and discuss it with Ian Rutherford. If you then decide that such public knowledge would have a bad effect on you, you may wish to withdraw from the study.

What can the study offer participants?

A) The interviews and feedback from the interviewer will give you a chance to talk about the process and results of participation as they affect you and others in the project.

The interviews and group discussions are meant to serve as reflection tools within the project. They should provide opportunities to organize your thinking and to consider ways in which you might channel any learning toward further endeavours you think would be of benefit to you and/or to others.

2. Tape Recording and Confidentiality

All interviews and most group discussions are being tape recorded to provide an accurate record of what was said. By doing this we will not be relying on memory, which is often questionable.

It also means that the interviewer does not have to take so many notes. Thus the interviewer can concentrate on what you are saying. The tape recorded interviews will be transcribed (typed into a computer) so we have an accurate record of what each participant said over the project's duration. In the analysis, themes and issues that people raise will be considered.

In some cases notes will be taken instead of recording. Note taking is preferable when circumstances (such as when you are conducting workshops in the schools) would make it awkward for students to participate in discussion. It will also be necessary to sometimes take notes from taped discussion due to the time constraints in transcription work. In these cases, however, the location on the tape of any comments made will be noted for reference purposes.

Tapes, notes and transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet either at the Planned Parenthood Office or at Ian Rutherford's office. Only the supervisors at TEACH and the supervisors of Ian Rutherford's thesis has access to the original transcripts or field notes.

No information that identifies individuals will be used in any written reports, articles or public presentations without a participant's consent. Please note that you can request that the tape recorder be turned off at any time if you wish to speak "off the record".

PARTICIPATION IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time

Consent Form**Teens Educating Against and Confronting Homophobia:
Space, Anti-Oppression Education and Identity**

I acknowledge that the research procedures described in the attached form have been explained to me and that all questions asked by me have been answered to my satisfaction.

Both potential risks and benefits have been outlined and discussed. I know that I may ask now, or in the future, any questions I have about the study or the research procedures.

I have been assured that the records relating to me will be kept confidential and that no information will be released or printed that would disclose my personal identity, without my written consent. I have agreed to have interviews and group meetings tape recorded with the understanding that these tapes will be destroyed after the project is completed.

I may also choose to speak "off the record" at any time during the interview by having the tape recorder turned off.

I also understand that during my participation in all aspects of the project written field notes will be taken and that I may ask at any time to discuss the content of them.

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that it is my decision whether or not to participate. I further understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from the study at any time.

I hereby consent to participate.

Name of Participant and Date

Signature

Name of Parent and Date

Signature

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