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Chapter 4

“Othering” Education: Sexualities, Silences, and Schooling

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May 26, 2000
School officials here apologized today to parents who were outraged by a health survey, given to some students as young as 11, that posed specific questions about sexual orientation and behavior, drug and alcohol use and other intimate details. (New York Times)

July 30, 2000
Sound the trumpet! The moral majority is on the march again. The Section 28 debate is just the latest in a long line of controversies about sexual values that have gripped Britain since the 1950s. Abortion, divorce and gay rights appeared to change the moral landscape forever. Now, it seems, the conservatives are in the ascendant once more. Is this the end of liberal progress? (Independent on Sunday, London)

October 14, 2000
Families should carry the burden of curbing teen pregnancies, according to Premier [of Victoria, Australia] Steve Bracks. Mr. Bracks said he didn’t believe condoms, the contraceptive pill or the morning-after pill should be provided in schools. (Herald Sun, Melbourne)

As these extracts from newspapers in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States show, the media across the Anglophone world are preoccupied with questions surrounding sex education, young people, and sexuality. In the United States and Canada, a search of headlines in newspapers reveals repeated articles on teenage pregnancy, “premature sexuality,” and gay sex among young people. Australian and New Zealand newspapers, too, reveal deep concerns about these issues. In South Africa, news of sexual violence against schoolgirls is in the papers almost daily. In the United Kingdom during 2000, several papers took part in a concerted, and ultimately successful, campaign against the repeal of Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988, which prohibited “promotion of homosexuality” by local authorities, while others supported the repeal. This has been taken as an opportunity by some papers to mount a campaign against any move toward a greater tolerance of queer sexualities in schools.

We have taken as our task, in this review of the literature on sexuality and education, an examination of the structures and processes in education that work to hold heterosexuality in place, metaphorically “policing its boundaries” (Steinberg, Lynn, Epstein, & Johnson, 1997). We are particularly interested in how schools and universities as institutions and sites of cultural struggle over meanings contribute to
maintaining and defending heterosexuality. Why is it, we have asked, that an institution as dominant as heterosexuality must be defended so vehemently and at so much cost, not only to those who identify as in some way “queer” but also to those not conforming to quite narrow gender norms? As Peter Redman (1994) has pointed out, the term sexuality seems often to be construed as applying only to those identifying as “deviant” in some way. Just as “whiteness” has, for the most part, remained unmarked, only recently (and then only in an emergent academic literature) seen as a racialized color (Dyer, 1996; Frankenberg, 1993; Roediger, 1994; Ware, 1992), so too heterosexuality has been the unmarked, the norm, the assumed but invisible. Thus, the British government is able, in the same document (Department for Education and Employment, 2000), to make the simultaneous statements that no particular form of sexuality should be promoted and that marriage (and childbearing within it) must be promoted. Similarly, as Redman (1994) recounts:

Recently, a colleague and I visited a headteacher to discuss the possibility of conducting some research in the head’s school. During the meeting the head was polite, sympathetic but also extremely concerned. In our initial telephone conversation, she said, we had indicated an interest in the ways the school handled sex education, as well as relationships and HIV education. In our follow-up letter, however, we talked about “sexuality education.” Why had the focus of our research changed?

Perhaps not surprisingly we were somewhat confused by the head’s question. As far as we were concerned, “sexuality education” meant education in precisely those areas we had raised in our telephone conversation: relationships, cultural beliefs, stereotypes and power relationships, sexual identities and so on, as well as sexual activity itself—in short, the wider social and moral context in which sexual activity takes place as opposed to a narrow focus on sex and reproduction. The source of the confusion became rapidly apparent. “Sexuality” as far as the head was concerned meant “sexual orientation,” or, more precisely, lesbian and gay sexual orientation. (p. 131)

Using Redman’s broad definition of sexuality increases the amount of available literature exponentially. We have, therefore, not attempted to review or discuss every publication in the area; this would be an impossible task. Rather, we have focused on using the literature to make an argument about the normalization and policing of heterosexualities, through homophobia and heterosexism, in educational institutions in late capitalist Anglophone countries (particularly Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States). We have, of course, drawn on the U.S. literature, but we have sought to go beyond that by using publications from other Anglophone countries extensively. We hope that, in this way, our work will complement the excellent review of the U.S. literature by Tierney and Dilley (1998). Furthermore, because of our location in the United Kingdom, we have often used British events as exemplars of tendencies in several countries, while acknowledging and at times drawing attention to the extensive differences between them.

It is worth pausing here, however, to summarize briefly the main lines of argument within the U.S. literature. There are, broadly speaking, three literatures within the United States to which we wish to pay attention. The first is concerned primarily with the experiences of young lesbians and gay men, sometimes including bisexual and transgendered young people (Herr, 1997; Unks, 1995). Much of this literature is
autobiographical, often including accounts of horrendous experiences at the hands of other students and of teachers in high schools and colleges (e.g., Jennings, 1998; Windmeyer & Freeman, 1998). The focus in this literature is on the victim of oppression, but often little attention is paid to the situatedness of experience or the complexity of the power relations involved. The story to be told is of the victim—and there have, undoubtedly, been too many of them, as revealed by statistics showing the disproportionately high number of suicides among young queer people, with some authors suggesting that the majority of youth suicides are the result of homophobia (Muehrer, 1995).

The second area commonly dealt with in the U.S. (and, indeed, the U.K.) literature is one that is concerned with sex education and (prevention of) teenage pregnancies and the spread of HIV. Here the contested territory is between those who advocate teaching abstinence, who contribute less to research literature and more to policy literature, and those who raise questions about this approach and advocate more open and liberal policies and curricula (Fine, 1988; Silin, 1995; Trudell, 1993; Trudell & Whatley, 1991).

The third line of argument, and the one that we draw on most heavily here, owes much to “queer theory.” It is here that we find discussions about questions of identity and its fluidity. Drawing on writers such as Butler (1990, 1993) and Sedgwick (1990, 1994), this literature concerns questions of identity, performance, and fluidity. At times, it may lean, from our perspective, overmuch toward a concentration on the verbal and textual at the expense of the material. However, we would suggest that it is this literature that deconstructs the categories, moving away from essentialism (or, as Sedgwick would have it, “minoritizing”) and freeing up the area for movement and complexity. It also offers different sets of solutions for making things better for young people of whatever sexual identity (e.g., see Letts & Sears, 1999; Pinar, 1998; Spurlin, 2000; Talburt, 2000b).

We argue here that—with some exceptions that we discuss later—there is an official silence about all kinds of sexuality in the vast majority of mainstream schools in Anglophone countries. And even where sexuality is permitted, the form of sexuality allowed is the straightest of straight versions. At the same time, sexualities of all kinds pervade schools, with their effects unrecognized, because their very existence is denied. We carry this argument through an examination of primary/elementary and secondary schooling into a consideration of higher education. Here we see a change in that sexuality is recognized as something that students legitimately do and that may be included in social sciences and humanities courses, at least; however, young people’s newfound freedoms are not as emancipatory as they might have hoped.

It is important for readers of this chapter to understand where we are coming from and how we have set about writing it. Debbie Epstein has been researching issues involving sexuality and education since 1990, when she left teaching and advisory work to become an academic. She is Sarah O’Flynn and David Telford’s PhD supervisor. All three of us are experienced teachers in schools: Debbie’s background is in early years and primary education in London, Hertfordshire, and Birmingham, England; Sarah’s is as
an English teacher in secondary (high) schools in London; and David was a teacher of economics and social sciences in Melbourne, Australia. We have all researched sexuality and education in the secondary phase of schooling. However, Debbie has recently been researching in primary schools, Sarah's doctoral research is about young women in secondary schools, and David's is about young men in universities.

Since we wanted to cover the full range of formal education, we chose to split the writing of first drafts according to our current research interests. Thus, in what follows, Debbie wrote the first draft of the section on elementary schools, Sarah drafted the section on secondary schools, and David drafted the section on higher education. We have talked extensively about this work and share the argument that we make throughout. However, the different voices may be detectable in the different sections, and we have made no effort to disguise this. Our focus is on formal educational institutions, although we are aware of the importance of the informal pedagogies of popular culture and family life. These fall outside the focus of the chapter, but it should be noted that all of formal education takes place within the context of people's lived experience and everyday lives.

**DISCURSIVE FRAMING OF DIFFERENT PHASES OF EDUCATION**

Schools and universities are places where education of, for the most part, the young takes place. This happens not only in the official spaces of curriculum and classroom but also in the micro-cultures and often very unofficial cultures of students, teachers, and others connected with particular sites (for example, local education authorities and governing bodies in the United Kingdom, school councils in Australia, and school boards in the United States). All phases of education share certain features: Some people (teachers) are meant to pass knowledge to others (students); schools are places where learning is institutionalized; all schools have transient populations of students, although staff may stay for longer or shorter periods of time; and all schools are places where appropriate knowledge is defined, taught, measured, and examined (Foucault, 1977). There are also significant differences between the different phases, related to students' ages and to notions of developmental phases. When considering sexuality in schools, "appropriate knowledge" is contested, particularly during the compulsory years of schooling.

The controversy surrounding the U.K. government's attempt, in February 2000, to repeal Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988 provides a clear example of this contestation. Similar politics around sexuality and school exist in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and some European countries. Of course, the particular negotiations that take place vary from country to country, partly as a result of different formations of "left" and "right," of "moral majority" and "sexual liberal," and of the relative power of religion and civil/secular society. Here we take the British context as a case study of such negotiations.

In the United Kingdom, the campaign against repeal by much of the press, by religious leaders, and by a well-organized faction in the House of Lords significantly influ-
enced the new guidelines on sex and relationship education in schools (Department for Education and Employment, 2000). The guidelines arose partly from long-standing concerns about the high rate of teenage pregnancies in the United Kingdom. David Blunkett, then secretary of state for education, also hoped that through the production of more coherent sex and relationship education guidelines, Section 28 would be seen as redundant. These guidelines seem to borrow from practices in the United States surrounding prevention of teenage pregnancy, despite the high rate of teenage pregnancy there, and from the Netherlands, where the teenage pregnancy rate is low.

At their core, the guidelines seem to preach a profoundly anti-sex message, borrowed particularly from anti-sex campaigns in the United States. Teachers are required to stress the reasons for delaying first sexual intercourse. At the same time, there is to be more emphasis on “relationship” education, as in the Netherlands, rather than the technorational approach that has pervaded sex education up to now in the United Kingdom and, indeed, the United States (Sears, 1992b). The guidelines tread a tightrope, attempting to stress the desirability of marriage to please the churches and those on the right and simultaneously preaching a more liberal view of individual sexuality in order to keep the government’s election pledge to lesbian and gay rights campaigns. So that children’s own family relationships are not devalued, teachers are instructed to preach a message of tolerance of “other” (than normative heterosexual) sexualities and to recognize the value of stable relationships as well as marriage:

Pupils should learn the significance of marriage and stable relationships as key building blocks of community and society. Care needs to be taken to ensure there is no stigmatisation of children based on their home circumstances. (Department for Education and Employment, 2000, p. 6)

These guidelines will constitute part of the criteria set for the inspection of sex education in schools, and there is likely to be much greater scrutiny of how sex education is being taught, although it is difficult to assess, as yet, the overall impact. They show the political tensions surrounding sex education in the United Kingdom, comparable to those in other industrialized, Anglophone countries, and they attempt a negotiation or settlement between these tensions within which teachers will have to maneuver. For pupils in school, the guidelines clearly advocate an ideal and presumed majority subject position of nonsexual heterosexuality in which children and young people “recognize” heterosexuality, and are constituted through its discourses, but also are expected not to consolidate sexual identity through sexual performances, which therefore remain subterranean and transgressive in nature. We return to the issue of students’ performances of sexuality later.

The past 20 years have seen the imposition of marketization and managerialism on schools (Epstein & Kenway, 1996; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; Whitty, 1994) and, more recently, public universities. In this context, success in the educational market depends on achievement in publicly recognizable forms, such as examination results. Competitively driven education has consequences in a number of areas, including the ways in which sexualities can be and are learned and expressed within these institutions. Investments of time and money are more likely to be made by institutions in
areas that ensure greater publicly recognized achievement, which will in turn accrue more investment and funding, than on more controversial programs such as sex education. It is not just that such programs might infringe the law as it stands both in some U.S. states and in the United Kingdom, but also that bad publicity would have an impact on future funding. Thus, even when there are, within institutions, individuals with the power ostensibly to effect change, any attempt to do so is very risky business (Bickmore, 1999; Epstein, 1997b; Kaeser, 1999; Silin, 1995). Without radically altered sex education programs in schools, it is unlikely that more widely held heterosexist views will ever be challenged, and yet it is necessary to secure that challenge first before such programs will be allowed. This is not necessarily easy, given the current politics in the various countries to which this chapter refers.

The right wing federal government of Australia is not receptive to liberal ideas about sexuality, and this is repeated in a number of states. Western Australia, for example, has regulations similar in effect to Section 28. Similarly, U.S. President Bush is strongly allied to social and moral conservatism. Neither are the “social liberals” represented by Blair in the United Kingdom and Bracks in Australia very brave in relation to sexuality, as evidenced by our quote from Bracks at the start of this chapter and the Blair government’s anxious consultation with the churches mentioned earlier. In an article published in the influential British tabloid the *Daily Mail* (January 23, 2000), then leader of the U.K. Conservative Party William Hague made clear his views in favor of maintaining Section 28. Underpinning these views was a particular definition of “tolerance.” Hague defined tolerance as “the need for a minority to accept the views of the majority,” thus standing on their head more usual definitions. It is this principle that governs much policy around sex education in schools and, indeed, universities as well. Foucault (1978) documented the historical processes whereby sexuality has come to occupy the central position of a person’s identity in contemporary Western society. As Ken Plummer (1995, p. 4) observes, “Sex has become the Big Story.” It is for this reason that sex education has become such a battleground and the need to shore up heterosexuality is perceived to be crucial to the maintenance of other key institutions.

Despite many constraints and silences, schools and universities have spaces where sexualities are not only permitted but even required in either formal or informal contexts. In the early years of education, the “home corner” provides a space for children’s fantasies of heterosexual family, while elementary school children need a certain “sexual literacy” about, for example, desirable pop stars and athletes in the pursuit of friendship. In secondary schools, the “prom” (in the American context) or school disco provides a space where, however uncomfortably, students are expected to interact, producing themselves as feminine and masculine in iconically heterosexual and exaggerated ways. The heterosexualization of this process is often unremarked, and young people are seen generally within a developmental discourse of “normal” gender development.

However, the homophobia endemic in schools and directed in particular at young men who are alternatively masculine makes clear that heterosexuality is indeed com-
pulsony. Heterosexually successful students often make a successful transition into the heterosexual economies of colleges and universities. The clubs and societies of U.K., Australian, and New Zealand universities and the fraternities and sororities of the United States and Canada are places where heterosexual credentials must be proved, because popularity depends on this. Without such heterosexual credentials, young lesbian and gay students find themselves excluded from “university life,” from informal networks of learning and sites of informal cultural exchange. This means that they often do not know what is going on or lack access to the “in” stories. Such exclusions are painful, and, for young people who are already disadvantaged by locations of class, race, or disability/ability, it may be impossible to sustain a gay identity when a heterosexual one provides them with a key strategy for inclusion. In this way, a rehearsal of normative heterosexual adulthood is coerced from students.

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that there is no room for maneuver in educational institutions. As Gramsci (1995) pointed out, hegemony is never total; in more Foucauldian terms, where there is power, there is always resistance (Foucault, 1977, 1978). Schools and colleges are also sites of cultural struggle. Power does not operate simply in one direction. Often the ways in which discourses around sexuality, learning, age, class, and race are configured in the micro-politics of the classroom or the school or university allow for quite powerful resistances. These may in the end be disarmed by the institution, but they do show that the institution is being challenged. A key strategy of the institution to retain power seems to be to allow protest but to contain it in particular areas. Speech is zoned (Steinberg, 1997): What can be said in some places is not possible in others. Thus, in some educational locations and within some discourses, it is possible to speak about sex and sexuality in progressive, even radical, terms. However, closets are often built around these locations, which affords protection on the one hand but limits the challenge to the institution on the other (Talburt, 2000a).

In writing this chapter, we have tried to work in areas where currently not much has been written. There is a real lack of work on sexuality in primary/elementary schools generally and almost nothing at all on pupil cultures and sexuality. While more has been written in relation to sexuality in the secondary school, there is little work that locates sexuality within the “heterosexual matrix” identified by Butler (1990) and focuses on the normalization of heterosexuality. In higher education, there is little about lesbians, and much of the literature on lesbian and gay students is generally quite dated. Given the extent to which universities and colleges have changed in the past decade, it is clear that this work needs updating. In beginning with the youngest students and working upward, in age terms, we do not mean to suggest that this is the only order in which the chapter could have been written. We could, for example, have organized it by themes of inclusion and exclusion, absence and visibility. Pragmatically, we have chosen the easiest way to proceed with the complex task of collaborative writing, but we recognize the advantages and disadvantages of each way of approaching sexuality and schooling.
THE PRIMARY/ELEMENTARY PHASE

Suffer Little Children: Myths of Childhood Innocence

Young children, according to commonsense understandings, are innocent. They neither do, nor should they, know anything about sexuality. The fear is that contemporary children “grow up too soon” or are “not yet ready” for sexual knowledge. In the words of John Patten, who was at the time the Conservative secretary of state for education in the United Kingdom, children “should not even be thinking about beginning to be understanding, never mind understanding” particular items of sexual knowledge (Daily Mail, March 24, 1994). This is a pervasive theme in debates about sexuality and sex education in Angophone countries. John Patten’s views are shared by the so-called “moral majority” of the United States, by the right-wing tabloid and broadsheet press of the United Kingdom, and by Christian and other moral traditionalist groups in Australia and New Zealand (Evans, 1993; Phelan, 2001; Smith, 1994).

In contrast, feminists, sex educators, and others have long argued that “childhood innocence” is little more than a dangerous excuse for keeping young children ignorant (cf. Silin, 1995). Stevi Jackson (1982) pointed out that by keeping children ignorant, the notion of childhood denies them access to power and justifies their powerlessness. Children, she suggested, are not allowed to deny adults the right to touch or kiss them in situations that are not perceived as abusive. How many young children have been told to “kiss x or y goodbye” when they would rather not do so? Similarly, she pointed out, women are more likely to be touched by men without invitation than vice versa, employees are more likely to be touched by employers, and so on. Jenny Kitzinger (1988, 1990) took this argument further, calling for a critique of the way in which the concept of “childhood innocence” is used in the construction of child sexual abuse. This supposed “innocence” itself constituted a form of eroticization of children, making it titillating and exciting. On the other hand, she suggested, children who have been sexually abused lose their innocence (since they are no longer ignorant) and become fair game, legitimate victims of abusers. Thus, an 8-year-old girl can be described by a high court judge as being “no angel,” and men who abuse can get off with extremely light sentences on the grounds that the knowing child tempted them and led them on.

Of course, as Stevi Jackson (1999) argues, the ideology of childhood innocence is profoundly gendered. It is little girls who are simultaneously (hetero)sexualized and meant to retain their innocence. Writing about a television documentary on young girls who take part in beauty pageants, Jackson stated:

The little girl [in the beauty pageant] is just acting out a more stylized version of the usual little girl performance—and in one sense knows nothing about sexuality while in another knows a great deal. She is probably ignorant about the mechanics of heterosexual sex, yet she knows that being attractive, flirtatious and cute wins a positive response from adults—and little girls know this even if they don’t enter beauty contests. (1999, p. 139)

While we would agree with Jackson that the sexualization of young children is highly gendered, it is important to remember that little boys are also inscribed within
discourses of heterosexuality. The extreme femininity of little girls may construct them as “hetero/sex” objects, but little boys are required to prove that they are “real boys” in ways that mark them as masculine, even macho, and therefore (by definition) heterosexual. Furthermore, as Valerie Walkerdine (1997) has argued, the eroticization of little girls is profoundly classed (and we would add racialized) as well as gendered.

We would also agree with the claim made by Kitzinger (1988, 1990) and Jackson (1982, 1999) that discourses of childhood innocence are profoundly damaging to children (both girls and boys). The claim that knowing about sexuality constitutes the corruption of children is, moreover, profoundly anti-educational. As Jonathan Silin (1995) so powerfully argues:

Unlike some, I do not want to protect children from pain during a romanticized period of innocence, nor do I see children as a way to purchase immortality. Rather I want to argue that too much of the contemporary curriculum brings a deadly silence to the being of childhood and not enough of it speaks to the things that really matter in children’s lives or in the lives of those who care for them. I want to argue that the curriculum has too often become an injunction to desist rather than an invitation to explore our life worlds. The curriculum remains lifeless as long as it is cut off from the roots and connections that feed it. (p. 40)

Silin is writing here about death and dying, specifically from AIDS. However, much the same could be said about sexuality, and indeed Silin supports this view in his important book.

In this section of our chapter, we argue not only that elementary school children are already knowledgeable about and interested in sexuality but also that primary/elementary schools are suffused with sexuality. Children use the discourses of heterosexuality that abound on playgrounds and in classrooms as a resource on which they can draw in the making and breaking of friendships, in the investments they make in different versions of themselves as girls and boys, and in their relationships with adults. Indeed, sex education takes place not only in the official school curriculum but also within pupil cultures through processes of social learning. These, however, take place in a context in which compulsory heterosexuality is pervasive, with pupils and teachers alike imbued with heterosexually imagined futures. Our final argument in this section is that some children in primary/elementary school classrooms can be seen to “carry” the sexuality for whole classes, an argument that Richard Johnson and Debbie Epstein (1998) have made in relation to secondary/high schools. In this part, we focus on the performances of heterosexuality engaged in by certain children that others can use as a focus for their own fantasies of romance, marriage, and future family life.

**Doing Sexuality Education**

In most Anglophone countries, sex education is included in the taught curriculum for children in elementary schools, though there is not much of it. In the United Kingdom, for example, children in Year 5 (9–10 years of age) are likely to have four or five lessons in sex education, most probably biologically based. In Ontario, animal reproduction is included in the Grade 3 health and physical education curriculum, while puberty and human reproduction are taught in Grades 5 and 6 (Bickmore, 1999).
In general, teachers are nervous in regard to this aspect of the curriculum and often do not teach it well. They are in a difficult place here. Often, primary school teachers, who must teach across the curriculum, have little or no training in how to teach sex education. Furthermore, they are likely to be legitimately anxious about the reactions of some parents and, worse, the popular press if they stray into territory considered by some to be too risky (even risqué). As we have described, the United Kingdom has seen concerted moral right campaigns to retain Section 28, and sex educators have been subjected to barrages of abuse for answering children’s questions as honestly as they can (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, pp. 86–87, 94–98). Similarly, in the United States, Marianne Whatley (1999) explained that her critiques of moral traditionalist sex education curricula (Trudell & Whatley, 1991; Whatley & Trudell, 1993) have been the most controversial of all her writings. She described how:

At the Madison première of It’s Elementary at which students, parents and teachers who were in the film spoke to a packed house, film-goers had to push past the anti-gay signs of a religious group’s picket line. (Whatley, 1999, pp. 229–230)

Cahill and Theilheimer (1998) asked why it should be harder to imagine children in kindergarten classes acting out events at Stonewall in June 1969, when a group of gay drag queens fought back, than to imagine them playing at being Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King during events in Montgomery, Alabama, at the start of the civil rights movement. They pointed out that children are members of multigenerational families “in which elders, the child her- or himself, and/or the child’s future offspring may be gay” (Cahill & Theilheimer, 1998, p. 40). But, as most readers would recognize, it is almost impossible to imagine the Stonewall scenario being played out (and in a positive way) in schools, particularly during the early years and elementary phases. Moreover, if discourses of desire are missing (Fine, 1988) or forcibly expelled (Epstein & Johnson, 1998) at the secondary phase, how much further are they from the realms of the “sayable” in primary classrooms?

On the other hand, discourses of love may well be present, even though, as Bronwyn Davies (1999) suggested, they disappear from view as adolescence and adulthood are reached. Such discourses enter into the field during sex education lessons when, typically, “having babies” is tied to a man and a woman “loving each other” and “getting married.”

**Playing Out Sex Education: Children Educating Themselves**

Children bring to school all kinds of different experiences in relation to sexuality. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli (1999) quoted her daughter Steph’s writing about taking part in Sydney’s annual queer celebration, Mardi Gras:

I go to Sydney sometimes especially at Mardi Gras time and have fun with Mum and her friends. We go to interesting shops and restaurants. I was in the Mardi Gras one year pretending to be Alan and Malcolm’s daughter. I wore my purple fairy costume and waved a wand and a gay flag. Lots of people took pictures and I was on the news. At first I was shy because there were so many people and I forgot to wave. Then I
started waving. Before it was our turn to move, I saw my Mum waving to me from where her dancing group was getting ready to join in the Parade.... I love my live. It's exciting. (p. 72)

One does not have to be "queerly raised" (Pallotta-Chiarolli's term) to be aware of questions of sexuality in primary/elementary schools. Emma Renold (1999, 2000) showed how sexuality pervades primary school playgrounds and classrooms and how children draw on it as a resource for constructing themselves as boys and as girls. Children play imaginative games involving heterosexual family life (see Epstein et al., in press); talk about "dating," "dumping," and "going out" (Epstein, 1997a); and name-call and abuse those who, for whatever reason, do not "fit" as properly masculine or feminine (but perhaps particularly masculine) (Boldt, 1996; Connell, 1989; Connolly, 1995b).

Children, then, are neither ignorant nor innocent of sexual knowledge of various kinds. For the most part, they will not have the same ways of understanding sexualities within their micro-cultures as older people (adolescents and adults) do. But children's play and talk are profoundly heterosexualized. As Bronwyn Davies showed:

Heterosexuality is continually constructed in the children's talk as they separate and heighten the difference between themselves as male and female. So pervasive is this construction that even the most simple initiative on a girl's part, such as asking a boy for a pencil, can be overlaid with compromising (hetero)sexual meanings. The boys, in contrast are not compromised by (hetero)sexuality. (1993, p. 123)

In fact, what is compromising for boys is homosexuality: Just as all kinds of actions can be interpreted as heterosexual when a girl engages in them, so a whole range of behaviors can be labeled "gay" when a boy performs them. In Epstein et al.'s research in primary schools (Epstein et al., in press; Kehily, Epstein, Mac an Ghaill, & Redman, in press-a, in press-b), for example, a boy could be identified as "gay" because he was friendly with girls (that is, he had girls who were friends and not "girlfriends"), he was studious, he did not like football or fighting, or he was a bit nervous and showed it. Similarly, William Letts (1999) recounted how a boy who did not want to touch a cockroach in a science lesson was taunted as being a baby. As Letts commented:

Taunting boys who refuse to engage in activities that even girls can do is a common misogynist put-down strategy used against boys. But beyond this, it is also implicated in discourses of homophobia... because in Sam's case he is worse than a girl, he is a baby. This infantilization of Sam seems to work to humiliate him, to police his own enactment of his heterogender and to coerce him into behaving in ways that boys are expected to behave in science class. (1999, p. 98)

Pupils learn from each other, not only the forms of policing just described, but also a variety of strategies for understanding and finding out about sexualities. They are not simply passive recipients of teachers' information but makers of meaning, with all that entails. What is particularly striking in Emma Renold's work (1997, 1999, 2000) is the extent to which children's agency cannot be second guessed; they are not who the teachers imagine them to be sexually or in other ways (see also Ellsworth, 1997). Thus, as ethnographic work with young children shows, "sex/uality"
education is not just a matter of the formal curriculum. It takes place within friendship groups, nuanced and marked by ethnicity, class, disability/ability, and gender (at least), and in the “little cultural worlds” that children inhabit in school and elsewhere (see also Ali, 2000; Connolly, 1995a, 1998; Davies, 1993; Epstein, 1995a, 1997a; Kehily et al., in press-a, in press-b; Redman, 1996; Renold, 1999, 2000; Thorne, 1993; Walkerdine, 1997).

These studies demonstrate that social differences shape and are shaped by each other within the context of friendships and that sexualities are a resource for the making of friendship in ways that are profoundly gendered, ethnically marked, and classed, while friendships among children are simultaneously key devices for the policing of sexualities (and of gendered, classed, and ethnic identities) (Kehily et al., in press-a, in press-b). Similarly, Anoop Nayak (1997, 1999) has shown how young White men “do masculinity” through sexuality, ethnicity, and class, and vice versa (i.e., they “do class” through sexuality, ethnicity, masculinity, and so on). The same could be said about young children in primary schools.

Who Is (Hetero)sexual, and How?

As all of the studies of primary schooling and sexuality (and, indeed, those of gender and primary education) show, heterosexuality in one form or another is the pervasive imagined future for children. Bronwyn Davies’s (1993) study of state and privately funded primary schools in Australia shows clearly how different femininities and masculinities are available to children linked to their different class, cultural, and ethnic positions, but each version has its reference (implicit or explicit) to the expectation of a heterosexual future (and sometimes present). These expectations are routinely confirmed by teachers, even well-meaning ones, whose intentions are not heterosexist (Caspar, Cuffaro, Schultz, Silin, & Wickens, 1996). Given the “cozy,” familial ethos of much elementary (but particularly early years) education (Burgess & Carter, 1996), these findings are hardly surprising. Nor should it be surprising that gay and lesbian teachers experience particular difficulties in finding a place to conform to expectations in primary schools (Caspar et al., 1996; Khayatt, 1992; King, 1997). Indeed, in these contexts, being queer is no guarantee of avoiding the normalization of heterosexuality.

Sexualities cannot be seen on their own, as separate from other social differences. The celebration of diversity may be an admirable aim but should not blind us to the fact that diversity is not just about difference. Difference is also about power, and sexualities are read, experienced, and produced within contexts that are structured through power and resistance in complicated patterns of inequality/equality. Thus, children are produced (and produce themselves) through a range of identities and social positionings. The hyper-sexualized image of the Black (African American, African Caribbean) male, for example, can work simultaneously to provide young Black boys with the power of heterosexual desirability and to position them as dangerous, troublesome, undesirable, and, in school contexts, “underachieving.” James Earl Davis, writing about middle school boys in Grades 6–8, noted:
It appears that most of the boys at this middle school are not sexually active but are extremely active with their constructions of the masculine and sexual "other." The school culture is clearly heterosexual and normative, wherein boys are expected and encouraged to exhibit an interest in girls and resist dispositions and behaviors not associated with boys. Black males carry a heavier burden of sexuality than do their white male peers at the middle school. Along with the constructed image of troublemakers in and out of class, black boys also hold a special sexualized space at the school. . . . As Michael, an eighth-grade black male states: "Right now black guys are very popular. It seems like white guys have lost their status, they are more invisible. I think a lot of white girls buy into the myth about black boys." (1999, p. 52)

However, it is not only Black boys who "carry" the sexuality for classes, or even schools. Epstein and Johnson (1998) discussed this process at length in relation to certain, usually working-class, girls in secondary schools. Epstein et al. (in press) showed a similar pattern with a girl and boy in a Year 5 class acting out a heterosexual romance in ways that proved to be a reference point for almost all of the other children in the class.

As we turn from the primary/elementary phase to secondary/high schools, it is important to note both the continuities and discontinuities between the phases. Whereas sexuality is often subsumed within a kind of heterosexual familialism in the primary phase, heterosexuality is expected to break out and yet remains taboo in the secondary school. These issues occupy us in the next section.

SECONDARY/HIGH SCHOOLS

In this section, we review some of the research into sexuality and secondary/high school education, drawing out some of the key themes that have emerged and focusing (though not exclusively) on the experience of young queer students. Although written more than a decade ago, Michelle Fine's (1998) article reporting on her influential study of sex education in a New York City high school, "The Missing Discourse of Desire," identified many of the themes pertaining to sexuality in secondary/high schools that would preoccupy researchers throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century. Embedding her discussion in the theoretical perspectives of postmodern feminists such as Rubin (1984), Cixous (1981), Irigaray (1980), Greene (1986), and Vance (1984) in particular but also drawing on more radical feminisms such as that of Catherine McKinnon (1982, 1987), the work of Black feminists such as Audre Lorde (1984), and the work of gay male theorists on sexuality such as Jeffrey Weeks (1985), Fine identified four discourses of sexuality that were present in U.S. debates over sexuality education (and that arguably still are present in most Anglophone countries). These discourses were sexuality as violence, sexuality as victimization, sexuality as individual morality, and finally a discourse of desire, which she suggested was present only as "a whisper."

In observations of and discussions with young Black and Latina women in a comprehensive high school serving a low-income area over the course of a year, Fine explored the inadequacies of the school system in empowering these young women to explore their emerging sexualities. In observations of sexuality education classes specifically, she observed that they "typically provide little opportunity for discussions
beyond those constructed around superficial notions of male heterosexuality” (Fine, 1988, p. 36). In her conclusion, she identified those most at risk of victimization as female students, especially those on low incomes, and nonheterosexual male students. She concluded: “The absence of a discourse of desire, combined with the lack of analysis of the language of victimization, may actually retard the development of sexual subjectivity and responsibility in students” (Fine, 1988, p. 49).

Ironically, at the same time, she argued that in spite of persistent homophobia, the only students who had opportunities in school for “critical sexual discussion” were those “out” gay students who were members of the Gay and Lesbian Association and for whom the gay and lesbian rights movement had been a very empowering force. This cautions us against giving our readers exclusively a victimology of queer youth experiences in secondary/high schools. As Rajinder, a young man in Mac an Ghaill’s (1994) study of masculinity in U.K. secondary schools, observed, there are many positive aspects to a gay identity, some specifically highlighted in contrast to perceived negative aspects of male heterosexuality:

Teachers, especially male teachers, assume your being gay is a problem but there are a lot of plusses. In fact, I think that one of the main reasons that male straights hate us is because they really know that emotionally we are more worked out than them. We can talk about and express our feelings, our emotions in a positive way. They can only express negative feelings like hatred, anger and dominance. Who would like to be like them? (p. 167)

In this section, we endeavor not to forget the positive and pleasurable aspects of being queer in school, while exploring research into homophobia and heterosexism in secondary/high schools.

Fine (1988) identified issues that were subsequently explored in research throughout the 1990s. Perhaps most important, she was preoccupied with hearing the voices of institutionally silenced young people (specifically women), not to construct a victimology as such but to present a fuller picture of how their sexual identities were shaped by both danger and desire (see Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1998; Vance, 1984). There was a need for the research to speak through these young people. This was a preoccupation of much research about queer youth in the 1990s (Alistair et al., 1994; Butler, 1996; KOLA, 1994; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2000; Quinlivan & Town, 1999; Rogers, 1994; Unks, 1995) as well as more recent research asking demanding questions about who has the right to speak for youth generally and calling into question both the notion of fixed sexual identities per se and the discursive construction of youth (Ayman-Nolley & Taira, 2000; Cohen & Ainley, 2000) as it relates to adolescent sexuality (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Rodriguez, 1998). The missing discourse of desire was also traced by Fine through both the formal curriculum and pedagogy of the school and the cultural worlds of students. Work on the cultural worlds of young people and the shaping of sexuality through those cultural worlds has been evident in subsequent research in the United Kingdom and Australia (Gordon, Holland, & Laelhema, 2000; Haywood, 1996; Nayak & Kehily, 1997; Tsolidis, 2001).
In addition, Fine was careful to observe that sexuality education privileged a narrow, “superficial” version of heterosexuality rather than identifying “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1980) itself as the key reason for the oppression of these young women, therefore making space for future discussion of subordinated heterosexualities (Connell, 1995; Mac an Ghaill, 1994), as well as homophobia and heterosexism (Epstein, 1996; Nayak & Kehily, 1997; Rivers, 1995; Van de Ven, 1996). Non-heterosexual men were also identified as a subordinated group, not necessarily specifically gay but gay, transgendered, or bisexual young people. The risk to the health of these young people from homophobia and internalized homophobia has been a concern of research as well (British Medical Association, 1997; Warwick, Oliver, & Aggleton, 2000; Williamson, 2000). Both hegemonic masculinity and subordinated masculinities, especially as they exist in secondary/high schools, were a focus of important research throughout the 1990s (Connell, 1995; Holland et al., 1998; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; McLean, 1996).

Fine’s work was centrally concerned with “desire,” explored in research investigating the “techno-rationality” (Sears, 1992b) of school-based sexuality education and the dichotomy of reason/desire in the broader secondary/high school curriculum (Lorenz, 2000; Pinar, 1998; Talburt, 2000a). Through her discussion of desire, Fine also signaled the future move of critical psychoanalytic research and analysis into schooling and the production of schooled sexual subjects (Britzman, 1995). Fine’s research was ethnographic and worked through the micro-politics of one high school, making visible how discourses operating on the outside came into the school and were institutionalized and/or contested. This was a continued feature of some of the research conducted in the 1990s on sexuality in secondary/high schools (e.g., see Hey, 1997). Because Fine was careful to contextualize her research as involving largely Black, Latino, and low-income young women, her analysis showed the potential for the weaving of discourses around ethnicity and class with sexuality and gender in schools. Again, this has been a thematic concern of recent research (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1999).

While encouraged that more AIDS education was taking place, Fine was concerned that it was often occurring from within an anti-sex rhetoric. AIDS education research has perhaps been characterized by a much greater sense of the context in which it takes place and its probable efficacy with specific groups of young people (Douglas & Kemp, 2000). While not specifically exploring the dilemmas facing teachers in sexuality education and queer teachers especially, Fine did comment on the struggles of individual teachers to provide a more empowering sexuality education for the young people in their classes. The dilemmas, dangers, and possibilities of doing so have also preoccupied subsequent researchers (Douglas, Warwick, Kemp, & Whitty, 1997; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Sanders & Burke, 1994). Finally, Fine worked with the controversy of sexuality as presented through conflicting groups of health professionals, government officials, feminists, “the public,” and new right spokespersons. It is a controversy with which all who study sexuality and high school/secondary schooling must still work. In many ways, it prescribes and proscribes the types of research that
can take place (Douglas & Kemp, 2000; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Measor, Tiffin, & Fry, 1996).

Concerns perhaps not raised in Fine’s piece were issues regarding sexuality as embodied by young people (Connell, 1995; Gordon et al., 2000; Harrison, 2000) and the concerns of young disabled queer students (Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells, & Davies, 1996). Depressing though it is, it appears that not much has changed in regard to sexuality education since Fine’s identification of “the missing discourse of desire.” There are still demands for “better” sexuality education from both educators (Harrison & Hillier, 1999; Lees, 1993; Redman, 1994; Sears, 1992a) and young people (Forrest, Biddle, & Clift, 1997; Measor et al., 1996).

**Queer Youth in Sexuality Education**

Sears, in his 1992 evaluation of sexuality education programs, concluded that such programs presented a “techno-rational worldview” (p. 7). In Sears’s view, an emphasis on rational decision making in the sexuality curriculum and “the failure to explore the eroticism associated with sexuality” (p. 18) was also integral to the fact that learning about human reproduction involved learning about the “reproduction of social relations” (p. 19) as well. A summary of studies on the content of sexuality education also showed that homosexuality was consistently one of the subjects least discussed (p. 9). Such an education is likely to be of little use to queer youth or, arguably, to any young person. Rogers (1994), discussing sexuality education with her lesbian research participants, confirmed that most young women did not remember lesbianism being mentioned. One young woman did remember homosexuality being mentioned, precisely through the techno-rational approach identified by Sears: “...and there is a theory that homosexuality,’ and I perked up and listened, ‘has something to do with the imbalance of hormones.’ Then she moved on and I thought, ‘Wow! I’ve been mentioned’” (Rogers, 1994). The desperateness of the situation is encapsulated by the fact that this young woman’s reaction, at the time, seems to have been one of positive amazement. Mac an Ghaill’s young gay male research participants also identified the techno-rational approach of the sexuality education they received. For example:

They [the teachers] don’t talk about the differences between sexual love and other kinds of love. They don’t talk about emotions and they don’t encourage you to talk about your desires or how they come about. Most boys go through all their school life without ever discussing how they feel about other people. (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 157)

Trudell (1993) reported her findings from an ethnographic study in a ninth-grade sexuality classroom. Homosexuality was mentioned briefly in the context of a discussion of AIDS. The teacher apparently felt that her students were not mature enough to discuss homosexuality. Trudell observed the teacher’s own heterosexual assumptions in relation to the content of the curriculum and its presentation and the heterosexuality of her students. There was also a failure to tackle homophobic abuse experienced by one young man in the class. In spite of Trudell’s insistence that it was not her aim to criticize the teacher’s strategies but to describe them within the diffi-
cult context of the classroom, this example is nevertheless an indictment of sexuality education in its failure to meet the needs of young queer students. Trudell raised the important issue of the teacher’s socially sanctioned status as a heterosexual wife and mother. This both allowed her to speak from personal experience and conferred status on dominant cultural values. This was further alienating for young queer students. It suggests that we need to consider carefully the implications of who delivers sexuality education. As a young gay and bisexual men’s development worker commented in relation to the delivery of sexuality education specifically designed to address homophobia among 16- to 18-year-olds in London secondary schools: “This kind of work could be very damaging to lesbian and gay pupils if it wasn’t done right. If it’s done right it can be liberating and very life giving to them and to straight pupils as well” (Douglas & Kemp, 2000, p. 44).

Epstein and Johnson (1998) argued that sexuality education lessons can produce especially “hard” and homophobic performances of masculinity by young men:

Boys tend to use sex education lessons as a place for the particularly strident exercise of hyper-heterosexual performance, for the sex education class is the place, par excellence, where uncertainties and fears about heterosexuality might (inadvertently) surface. (p. 182)

For the young gay man, whose sexuality is emerging, sexuality education lessons may therefore be more traumatic than other lessons in school.

Peter Redman (1994), in evaluating sexuality education in the United Kingdom, raised many of the same concerns as Sears in the U.S. context, suggesting that there was a need for a fundamental reevaluation of sexuality education in terms of “the need to address sexual diversity, relations of power, the construction of sexuality in schooling processes and pupil sexual cultures” (p. 147). He suggested that such a fundamental rethinking of sexuality education would be necessary if young lesbian and gay students were to be valued. He also indicated a need for more research into pupil sexual cultures and investigations into the reasons for homophobia in schools. Redman suggested that a focus on sexuality, as constructed within schooling,

forces us to confront the ways in which heterosexualities are put in place, and maintained through complex social relationships which serve to marginalize and subordinate specific social groups (lesbians and gays, girls and women, black and minority ethnic groups, disabled people). (1994, p. 143)

The business of sexuality education, then, moved from the specifics of sexuality education lessons to looking at the ways in which sexualities are policed and produced throughout the school.

Hillier and Harrison, as recently as 1999, were still petitioning for a “critical” sexuality education, their concerns emerging from their experience in a number of research projects on young people’s sexual health at the National Centre in HIV Social Research in Australia:

We argue that an overemphasis on penetrative heterosex in school-based sexuality education programs has the effect of reconstructing heterosexuality as the norm, thus excluding or making invisible other ways of
being sexual. This has negative consequences for students who do not identify as heterosexual as well as narrowing the range of (hetero)sexual practices to those which privilege hegemonic constructions of male desire and pleasure. (p. 279)

Measor, Tiffin, and Miller (2000) examined what adolescents 13–15 years of age thought of the sexuality education they received in five secondary schools in the southeast of England. While the young people generally seemed satisfied with the contraceptive advice they received, they felt that there was a lack of discussion about emotions and of explicit information about sexual practices and that the courses did not deal directly with sex and the experience of sexuality or with the range of sexual practices within heterosexuality. A small number of students expressed concern that there was no information provided on alternative sexual orientations to heterosexuality. Such information was identified by these students as necessary to develop tolerance and understanding of gay people. Measor et al. seemed disappointed by the relatively few students who made mention of homosexuality. However, this perhaps was testimony to the continued enforced silencing around nonheterosexual sexualities in school (Friend, 1993).

Quinlivan and Town (1999) explored the pathologizing of homosexuality in their interviews with young lesbians and gay men. They were interested in how, by focusing on anatomy and reproductive heterosexuality, these young people’s sexuality education had “perpetuated the separation of physical bodies from feelings and thoughts” (p. 246). This resulted in different problems for gay men and lesbians. For gay men, the lack of an opportunity to explore their emotions became problematic. All but two of the participants had explored the physical dimensions of their gay sexuality “but still found it difficult as young adults to articulate their feelings about themselves and their place as gay men in a male world” (p. 247). In addition, the mention of gay sexuality only within the context of HIV/AIDS education led them to perceive their sexuality as a disease. For the young women, the effect was to express their love through crushes and infatuations while being unable to explore the physical dimensions of their sexuality. Quinlivan and Town commented in relation to one young woman who experienced this mind/body split acutely:

The negative pathologizing messages that she received about her body as a young woman, combined with the silences that surrounded any mention of independent active female sexuality or lesbian sexuality, led her to shut down any physical expression of her sexuality. (1999, p. 248)

The anger of queer youth about the exclusion of homosexuality from secondary sex education was documented by Frankham (1996) in relation to young gay men and HIV infection: “I was waiting to hear something about homosexuality, safe sex and different things in sex education. Maybe some information that could help me. But I got nothing. There was nothing” (p. 23). The effects of such inadequate sexuality education on young people and queer young people are manifold, and health researchers have been at pains to explore this issue. Recent research into HIV transmission suggested that young gay and bisexual men were most at risk (Public Health
Laboratory Service–Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, 1997). Meeting the specific health needs of gay and bisexual young men in sexuality education is likely to prove extremely difficult if these young people cannot be identified in the first place. While it may be possible to identify young gay and bisexual men from gay youth groups or on the commercial gay scene, this presupposes that they are “out” and already have a level of confidence about their sexuality, as well as access to a gay scene. Furthermore, young men who have sex with other men may not identify as gay. As Forrest (2000) observed in the U.K. context:

Currently, young people are being denied a right to an education which equips them for adult life (in transgression of the law). For young gay people, their enforced invisibility and the denial of equal access to basic relevant sex education is a breach of a human right. (p. 115)

The British Medical Association outlined its own recommendations for good sex education practice and policy:

Responsible teaching about homosexuality is especially important to meet the needs of young people who may be growing up gay, lesbian or bisexual in view of the risks to mental and physical health problems to which they may be exposed as a result of social isolation, bullying and lack of self-esteem, and to educate all young people about the effects of prejudice and stereotyping. (1997, p. 5)

From our analysis of available research, such responsible teaching is clearly not generally happening. Part of the problem of implementing this in the United Kingdom is the effect of Section 28. Although this legislation does not apply to specific teachers or school governors, many teachers are unsure about its limits and have chosen not to mention homosexuality as a result (Douglas et al., 1997; Epstein, 1994; Johnson & Epstein, 2000).

A danger identified by Warwick et al. (2000) in initiatives designed to address the health needs of lesbians and gay men was that “it is not clear whether the authors are concerned to address mental illness or mental health and emotional well being, or are interested in the prevention of mental illness or the promotion of mental health” (p. 141). This is an important distinction. While documenting research on health issues facing young lesbian and gay people, Warwick et al. (2000) were concerned that the focus on mental illness allowed only certain aspects of these individuals’ lives to become known. Moreover, they suggested that young people not identifying as lesbian or gay may have issues related to same-sex attraction and that young lesbian and gay people may also have concerns not immediately related to their sexuality. They argued that there is a need for more inclusive programs that seek to promote mental health and emotional well-being among all young people and that are sensitive to issues of sexuality.

Young queer students in secondary/high schools do not generally seem to have a good experience of sexuality education. Most frequently, there seems to be no mention of it at all, and such students are left desperate for information of any kind, even a passing reference to their sexualities. Failure to teach about sexualities other than
heterosexuality has negative consequences for the developing sexualities of young queer students, as potentially does inappropriate teaching about homosexuality. In instances in which such issues are dealt with well, the positive effects on queer youth seem to be reduced levels of homophobia and easier access to appropriate support. Douglas et al. (2000) documented the reported effects on students in interviews with staff members, following specific work on lesbian and gay sexualities. According to one school official:

In the current year 13, I’ve had two boys who during the course of last year came out. . . . They said, after the talk that it was a lot easier. They had told their friends in the 6th form common room. They got a bit of stick, and then having had the talk from the project worker . . . people seemed to be a lot more understanding, they didn’t get quite as much stick. (Douglas et al., 2000, p. 30)

According to another official:

Well, we had a student who came to us with a problem [about his sexuality] and I think that if [the project worker] hadn’t have been here I wouldn’t have known what to do really. I wouldn’t have known how to handle it, it was the first time that I’d come across it. The fact that I’d already spoken to [the project worker] meant that I could give the student a phone number and someone to talk to and he’s never looked back since really. (Douglas et al., 2000, p. 31)

Queer young people will talk about their sexualities in school if they feel secure and if the school has expressed a commitment to their education and well-being. Perhaps schools have to break the silence first through the official sexuality education curriculum.

There are few instances of such innovative work in sexuality education undertaken with young people. Apart from the study conducted by Douglas et al. (2000) in London schools, a notable example is Lyn Harrison’s (2000) research on a pilot sexuality education program in the Australian state of Victoria in 1995–1996, in which staff were required to interrogate gender-power relations and homophobia. Harrison’s findings were perhaps less optimistic than those of Douglas et al. She showed how “students’ strong cultural and psychological investments in policing the boundaries of heterosexuality” (p. 17) resulted in such work being met with resistance. However, on a more positive note, she also documented instances in which a change in thinking occurred when normative heterosexuality was deconstructed in the classroom and students were asked to question its naturalness.

**Researching Queer Youth**

Because of the difficulties involved with teaching about lesbian and gay sexualities in schools in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia and the dangers of being seen as queer in the often extremely homophobic climates of secondary/high schools, researchers have constantly found it difficult to identify groups of young queer pupils to be research participants. Measor, Tiffin, and Miller (2000), for example, struggled with the fact that their research participants did not choose to reveal queer identities:
We do not seek to exclude homosexuality, nor the concerns which face young people in early adolescence who feel they may have a same-sex sexual orientation. Our problem is that the young people we studied made little mention of it. In the schools we studied we did not find young people who were prepared to talk to us about their feelings and reactions in respect of homosexuality. (p. 2)

While they were not surprised given the climate that surrounds the discussion of homosexuality in schools in the United Kingdom, they knew that this was a potential weakness of the research. Epstein and Johnson (1998) explained the problem in relation to their own research. They managed to obtain information from 50 people who identified themselves as lesbian or gay, but they stressed that this was not a representative sample. The participants answered requests in free lesbian and gay newspapers. Access to these papers suggested that there was already a degree of “outness” present in the participants, since the papers were picked up in gay clubs and pubs. As Epstein and Johnson further pointed out, this excluded young people less than 16 years of age, who were unable to legally purchase a drink in such venues and were therefore relatively unlikely to frequent them. A lesbian and gay group was also a source of participants, but again these individuals were “out.”

While autobiographical sources are helpful in documenting the school experiences of young queer people (Jennings, 1998), they do not help us analyze how homophobia and heterosexism work in the micro-political cultures of schools. In what follows, we look at some research on the experiences of such students in schools, though often through recollection and research that trace the workings of homophobia and heterosexism within schools, trying to develop understandings about how it occurs and why it is deployed by young people, especially young men, so frequently.

**Being Queer in School**

Herr (1997) explored the narrative of a young lesbian to understand “the construction of failure” in high school of “a young student as vibrant and as bright as Elise” (p. 57). Elise’s coming out story followed exactly the trajectory identified by Plummer (1995). Her acceptance within a gay community and her lack of acceptance at school caused her to drop out and to doubt her own academic ability, developing instead a sense of failure that prevented her from taking up education again.

As we point out later in relation to universities, the young Elise found that she could feel good about her sexuality only outside of the educational institution. She became actively involved in lesbian and gay politics. However, while dropping out of school initially was a great relief to her, subsequently “her sense of well-being diminished and was replaced with self-blame, depression, and a sense of diminished life chances” (Herr, 1997, p. 62). She reported that a high school where there were openly lesbian and gay role models, where she would have seen herself reflected in the curriculum, would have made a huge difference. Herr concluded that we need to stop seeing Elise’s sexuality as a private problem for her and start seeing it as a societal issue. She advocated a “level of activism and advocacy that is not currently present” (p. 63) in order to allow diversity to flourish in schools. What we are lacking
are the necessary strategies to allow diversity to flourish and an analysis of why it has proved so difficult in spite of this story and many others like it, in a political climate in which educational achievement seems to be ostensibly such a dominant discourse. One might have expected that any strategy with the potential of raising significantly the achievement of up to 10% of the secondary school population would be embraced by governments.

Moreover, while appreciating that Elise's is only one narrative, we do need to explore the diversity of experiences of lesbian and gay youth. There are other “coming out” stories reworked through other differences in, for example, ethnicity, disability, and class. We also need to know, in the micro-processes of the school, how exclusions take place. There are young lesbian and gay students who achieve after all (Friend, 1997), sometimes because of how they are supported in schools but also often in spite of the fact that they are not. Finally, we perhaps need to question the taken-for-granted assumption that “out” lesbian and gay teachers and inclusion into the curriculum of lesbian and gay issues will really be the panacea that Herr and Elise think it will be.

Friend (1993) identified five strategies of young lesbian and gay students for surviving in high schools: passing, accommodating to a homophobic environment by contributing to it, heterosexual overcompensation, overachievement, and confrontation of oppression through resistance. While perhaps not necessarily nuanced in distinguishing between the positions of young lesbians and gay men relative to the heterosexual matrix, these strategies are still used by lesbian and gay students in schools today (Alistair et al., 1994; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Forrest et al., 1997; Herr, 1997; Unks, 1995). Friend (1993) explored how these strategies worked within the institutionalized heterosexism and homophobic expression of the school, which excluded all positive references to homosexuality and included only that which was negative. This further resulted in young lesbian and gay students being constructed as the problem, rather than the homophobia and heterosexism they experienced.

Epstein and Johnson (1998) were careful not to elide the experiences of young gay men and lesbians. They found that while young gay men spoke of very early same-sex experimentation and identification of themselves as gay from puberty or sometimes earlier, many women identified as lesbian much later and not while still at school. They suggested that the reason was the dominant discourse of heterosexuality, in which young women are constructed as passive and the object of the male gaze. Identification of a lesbian sexuality involved the assertion of an active sexuality. Nevertheless, there were some young women who identified as lesbian while still at school, and Epstein and Johnson suggested that this pattern of later identification may be changing, partly as a result of the increasing visibility of lesbianism and transgressive female sexuality in the popular media.

The experiences of young lesbians and gay men, while having some commonalities, are also noticeably different within minority ethnic communities, disabled communities, and when experienced as part of other differences such as religion and class. Disability (and religion in the first example that follows) can alter the ways in
which homophobia and “coming out,” for example, are experienced. According to
one student, Dave:

My bad experiences at school were more to do with my disability. (I was both colour blind and dyslexic
and also had a dexterity problem. I can’t manipulate physical things very well). They were also to do
with being Catholic. You might have expected that the most painful memories from my adolescence
would be explained through sexuality. But if someone called me queer, it was quite a nice change from
someone blaming me for Enniskillen, or saying I was stupid because I couldn’t spell. (Alistair et al.,
1994, p. 19)

According to another student, Daniel:

I feel it’s [coming out as disabled] been a second coming out to me, and far more important than com-
ing out as gay. I had never been “normal” as a child, so coming out [as gay] was just another not-normal
thing to do, and didn’t present me with any problems as such. If you are not expected to have a normal
sexuality or to be a regular guy, being gay is no great shakes. (Shakespeare et al., 1996, p. 155)

In both of these examples, it is interesting to see the workings of hegemonic
masculinity/heterosexuality. Dave and Daniel were already excluded, positioned as
“other” in terms of their masculinity, which in some respects lessened the power of
homophobia in their lives. Shakespeare et al. provided one of the first studies in which
the voices of queer disabled people are heard through analysis of the multiple ways in
which sexuality and disability interact in their lives both as adults and through their
experiences of schooling.

For Lara, a young Asian lesbian in Epstein and Johnson’s (1998) study, cultural
stereotypes of lesbians operated to further exclude her:

You know my image of lesbianism was like this short-haired, really butch white dyke, bovver boots style,
and here was me, this little Punjabi woman, this Punjabi girl you know at that point, who, you know, loved
long earrings and long hair and liked. I mean I didn’t wear make-up because I absolutely hated make-up
at that point, but I used to love Asian clothes. (p. 159)

Epstein and Johnson (1998) observed that the figure of the lesbian in popular cul-
ture was as Lara described and that, furthermore, Lara was not helped by the fact that
“Asian girls and women are often seen through an orientalist lens as even more pass-
ive sexually (and in other ways) than women in general, while simultaneously and
contradictorily positioned as highly (hetero)sexualized exotic Others” (p. 159).

In relation to heterosexuality, Tsolidis (2001) has documented how multicultural
approaches have created deficit notions of minority cultures. In the context of Australia,
she observed that gender relations within minority cultures are understood by the dom-
inant culture as denying agency to women:

Most often, minority culture is constructed as if it were synonymous with the patriarchal thus denying
the female and feminist traditions within minority cultures. Moreover, implicit in such constructions is
an understanding of mainstream culture as relatively enlightened and able to offer ethnic minority women
and girls a better deal than minority cultures. (Tsolidis, 2001, p. 55)
Such deficit notions of minority culture have also operated to mask homophobia in mainstream culture, transferring it on to minority cultures as theirs by right. As remarked by Rajinder, the Mac an Ghaill (1994) participant mentioned earlier:

It's the same with me being an Asian gay: I get a lot more problems from whites. If I come out the racism will increase. When I told a teacher I was gay, he came out with all his racist ideas about my parents with their culture not being able to accept it. He meant that he couldn't accept it. (p. 165)

While this is not to deny that homophobia exists within minority ethnic communities and necessitates a particularly difficult negotiation for lesbian and gay young people of color, it is clearly important to distinguish between this and projections of homophobia placed onto minority communities via deficit models.

We would agree with Friend (1993) that lesbian and gay young people still use the strategies he identifies; however, there is a need to be more specific about the differences between lesbian and gay young people's experiences and also to situate these experiences culturally as they are played out in the interweaving of race, ethnicity, class, religion, and disability. For example, homophobia plays itself out differently within particular cultural formations and has different effects on the experience of being queer in different places (Butler, 1996; Deacon, Morrell, & Prinsloo, 1999). Indeed, it is worth questioning the extent to which young people in some minority ethnic groups recognize their same-sexual practices within the description lesbian, gay, or queer.

While there are undoubtedly young lesbians and gay men who do protest and who are "out," we need to examine more carefully what that "outness" consists of. Friend (1993) gave some examples: physically fighting back; making legal challenges, especially in cases of the right to bring same-sex dates to high school proms; dropping out of college as a way of actively resisting its homophobia; and reconstructing one's own identity positively in the face of an oppressive environment. This suggests a diversity of protest and a diversity of ways of being out. More recently, Friend (1997) has tried to identify factors that have allowed some queer youth to "thrive." Using specific case studies and informed by research on "psychological resilience," Friend identified four factors for thriving as a young gay man or lesbian: a charismatic temperament, a keen insight into the workings of homophobia in particular, a set of supportive and affirming relationships, and moral strength. What was never questioned was the desirability of being out.

However, we believe it is also important to consider that quality of "outness" in which it is experienced by young lesbian and gay people and question its utopian status within the lesbian and gay political agenda. It could be that being out means that one is seen exclusively in terms of one's sexual identity, as if "gay people are a distinct subtype of the human species" (Carlson, 1998, p. 114). The development of such identity politics in universities, according to Carlson, involves gay people in being represented "as driven by desire and impulse rather than reason, with talents in the arts more than the 'hard' sciences and math" (p. 114). Which parts of the self can be revealed as part of a project of "outness." We have almost no evidence from
ethnographic research on “out” young people in secondary/high schools for reasons already noted. Without understanding how young lesbian or gay students can be “out,” which bits of their queer identity are privileged in their outness, the consequences of being “out” for their own identities and the identities of others, and the limitations of being “out” as well as the “freedoms” it brings, it is difficult to reify “outness” as desirable for young queer students. Possibly, all it achieves is a perpetuation of the same-other binary. Recent work around teaching is beginning to consider radical teaching agendas regarding not coming out in the university context and should give us cause to consider its desirability for both students and teachers at high/secondary schools:

I really have a problem with the whole idea of role models and all of that stuff, particularly with sexuality, because it involves a reification of stereotypes and the entrapment of people in a particular place . . . it’s also a self-limiting narrative of self-discovery that keeps circling on itself, and if people treat you like that’s the only salient fact about you, it actually is playing on the homophobia that you would like to get rid of. (Talburt, 2000a, p. 61)

While Carlson (1998) argued that identity politics were essential to empower marginalized groups, he also suggested the importance of a politics of the self “which does not lock itself into rigid oppositional identity politics” (p. 118) and encourages young people to relate to each other outside the same-other binary. This is essential to the advancement of multicultural education.

Indeed, Pallotta-Chiarolli’s (1999, 2000) work with young Australian women indicated a dissatisfaction with the binaries of the gay/straight divide, embracing a far more fluid conceptualization of sexuality and sexual practice. The anthology of young women’s writing around sexuality and ethnicity edited by Pallotta-Chiarolli (1998) demonstrated a highly politicized understanding of issues of gender/race and sexuality by these young women. Pallotta-Chiarolli developed the concept of multiple “life-worlds,” borrowed from Cope and Kalantzis (1995), to explain how these young women negotiated their membership in different social worlds:

Girls are resisting being trapped in the duality of what they have inherited and what the dominant group wishes to enforce, or indeed resisting being defined by any single set of perceptions and ascriptions, bearing in mind that minority groups also tend to enforce their own conformist criteria for “belonging.” (2000, p. 33)

The notion of lifeworlds is useful, as it emphasizes the creation of multiple individualities embodied within different social sites. It allows for young queer people to be seen simultaneously as both powerful and powerless along different axes of their social being. Gordon et al. (2000) have tried to capture the idea of marginality as being complex and not a characteristic of individuals but of social processes:

We need to ask not simply who are marginalised, but what is marginalised. Many students move in and out of the margins in their everyday lives at school, but some more so than others, and those with fewer exits often occupy multiple marginalities which are spatially played out in embodied ways. (pp. 202–203)
In the next section, we consider the “space” filled by heterosexism and homophobia in the high/secondary school. We look at research that turns the spotlight away from the margins and considers the functions of heterosexism/homophobia and how they are deployed within educational institutions. Clearly, deconstructing the naturalness of heterosexuality is a key strategy for opening up space for all young people to develop confident sexualities and sexual practices of choice that do not depend on the creation of victims.

Male Hegemony and the Policing of Heterosexuality

Important research in the 1990s conducted in the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States developed from feminist research and research into masculinities, identifying heterosexuality as a key strategy for keeping in place a hegemonic masculinity whose status is maintained (although precariously) through the exercise of power over women, homosexual men, and racially subordinated masculinities (Connell, 1995; Holland et al., 1998; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Lorenz (2000) described beautifully his internalization of this power dynamic through his adolescent mimicry, at 13, of the gay weatherman on the television, which caused him to recognize the demands made by hegemonic masculinity and his own entrapment within that masculinity:

I came to comprehend that to be homosexual is incompatible with masculinity, a reductive, fatuous assumption but one made because I had aligned the gay male alongside the feminine, the devalued, the unloved. Love had become a conditional, and I believed that survival depended on the approval of the father. Passing was to be accomplished by excelling in athletics and through my flaming impersonation of the weatherman... and so I existed, as I believe many adolescents did, as queer Steppin Fetchit, trapped and speaking the language of the enemy in a twilight world somewhere between the homo and the hetero, uncomfortably complicit in my own oppression. (p. 37)

Here Lorenz reaffirmed homophobic performances as a strategy for passing. However, the internalized homophobia of gay men does not explain the often rampant homophobia among young straight men. Kehily and Nayak (1997) explored the functions of such homophobia in schools. They identified that homophobia in schools has a gendered dynamic. Homophobic abuse could be targeted not just at young gay men but at any young man who displayed characteristics thought appropriate to women. Actual sexual orientation was not the only factor to engage homophobia. Any young man who had a perceived underdeveloped body or who worked hard and was relatively quiet could be a target of homophobia.

Girls were more able to deconstruct the stereotype of a gay man, suggesting that homophobia was a strategy of masculinity. Its function was to build the male reputations of the young men who engaged in it, although Kehily and Nayak (1997) found that it was not available to all young men. They suggested that for less macho young men, engaging in any talk about sexuality as a means of confirming masculine status could backfire. They argued that homophobia was not simply an abstract fear of gays but rather was about internal fears of losing control and turning gay oneself. Homophobic performances consolidated straight masculinity. While they found that young
men had a great investment in portraying straight masculinity as natural, in fact a huge amount of energy was expended in trying to establish a coherent straight masculinity. They found young men’s masculinity to be especially vulnerable. Finally, they argued that this has implications for any pedagogy designed to lessen homophobia and promote equality of opportunity. Activism alone is simply insufficient and destined to fail. They concluded: “Pedagogical practice must be contextual and sensitive to interactions pupil cultures are engaged in and the power relations working within groups and individual psyches” (Kehily & Nayak, 1997, p. 158).

Redman (2000) is interested in the tension between social and psychoanalytic accounts of the functions and uses of homophobia in boys’ pupil cultures. He explored how socially oriented arguments about homophobia challenged the belief that it was reducible to repressed homosexuality, showing instead how it reproduced, at a local level, wider discourses of gender and sexuality in which a masculine heterosexual identity was organized in dialogic opposition to a homosexual other. However, he maintained that homophobia did have an unconscious dimension as well, and he explored various ways in which this worked. He expanded the usual explanation of homophobia as the external splitting off of homosexual desires to incorporate other explanations about a threatened male heterosexuality. Using the work of Simon Watney (1987), he questioned why it was that although a phobic response was characterized by fear and avoidance, in the case of homophobia it was more frequently characterized by rage. He made use of Bersani’s concept of “narcissistic rage” wherein the self felt threatened by negation. In Anglo-American cultural formations, gay sex also threatened heterosexual male identification with the “phallus” in Lacanian theory, a position of fantasized power and self-sufficiency. Male heterosexuality was threatened with a radical loss of power. Specifically anti-lesbian sentiment on the part of heterosexual men was explained in that lesbians do not desire them, and this again threatened their affirmation as possessors of the phallus. Another possibility was that homosexual men fear reengulfment by an “archaic mother.” The stereotype of the man-hating lesbian generated fears about this figure.

For Redman, the problem was that he perceived psychoanalytic explanations for homophobia and anti-lesbian sentiment as better detailing the feelings of those involved than socially oriented explanations. Using illustrative examples from his school-based research with young men, he showed how “the unconscious and the social are mutually dependent and constitutive, while continuing to have their own level of effect” (Redman, 2000, p. 494). Redman concluded by arguing that such a formulation could help us to understand better how boys are positioned in relation to the repertoire of masculinities in school cultures, through the interaction of their individual biographies, the unconscious, and wider social relations. The suggestion was that a much more complex set of practices was needed to address homophobia in schools, in relation to all young men, than had often been advocated (see also Van de Ven’s [1996] work evaluating the efficacy of short courses to tackle heterosexism and homophobia).

As pointed out earlier, young lesbians frequently come out later than their gay male contemporaries, often after compulsory education. Holland et al. (1998), in their
research on sexual histories via interviews of 148 young women, explored the possibilities of an empowered female sexuality. They found that both young women and young men understood their sexuality through the idea of "the male in the head" (p. 19). Male power was constituted through heterosexuality, which not only disempowered women but also prevented subordinated masculinities from gaining cultural definition. For young women, they found that within heterosexuality empowerment was negative. There were only deviant or subordinated conceptions of the desiring woman. In relation to lesbian sexuality, they suggested that the heterosexual dualism of masculine/feminine left absence or silence as the place for lesbians. Alternatively, this also became "a political site from which the unthinkable can be thought" (p. 189). The possibility of this happening in schools does, however, seem to be remote.

Hey (1997), in her work on girls' friendships, found that such friendships provided the key to social inclusion or exclusion and that success at them was dependent on girls performing appropriate femininity. Girls were largely complicit with the demands of hegemonic masculinity/heterosexuality. This suggested that, rather than overt homophobia, girls used friendships to police heterosexuality. These friendships were in a sense heterosexist, because they coerced a heterosexual femininity. For Renew (1996), homophobia, or the fear of it for young women, made girls keep their behavior within strictly defined limits of femininity. However, for young women in high schools,

this femininity is usually strongly related to their relations with the masculine, with boys and men, and to their willingness or unwillingness to make the masculine the focus and reference point for their construction or positioning of themselves. (Renew, 1996, p. 152)

Griffin (2000) has explored how often studies of young women's friendships have overlooked the possibility of same-sex female desire as well as lesbian or bisexual existence. She argued that this is an important omission:

Even where the possibility of lesbianism or bisexuality is acknowledged (for example Holland et al., 1998), few researchers have examined the construction of heterosexual, lesbian or bisexual "identities," and still fewer have looked at same-sex desire for young women in the crucial years between childhood and adult status. I consider this period to be crucial in political terms because this is one of the key moments at which heterosexuality can be lodged in place, and when young women (and men) can be "won" for patriarchal heterosexuality. (Griffin, 2000, p. 234)

New Directions

Perhaps what is demanded in research into lesbian and gay youth in secondary schools is an understanding that all young people are subject to complex pressures with regard to their sexuality, especially in relation to gender, ethnicity, race, age, disability/ability, class, and religion. Curriculum innovations to address homophobia/heterosexism and lesbian and gay role models are unlikely to be effective without sufficient understandings of the cultural worlds of specific groups of young people in specific schools. In terms of high school/secondary education, the dominant set of demands from the lesbian and gay mainstream seem to be liberal. There are demands
primarily for lesbian and gay role models, for inclusion of lesbian and gay content into the curriculum, and for specific services for lesbian and gay young people (Friend, 1997). In many ways, this would obviously represent progress for young queer students; however, as Phelan (2001) observed in relation to lesbian and gay citizenship, “visibility is not enough” (p. 16). She suggested that inclusion of “respectable” lesbian and gay people as citizens created “secondary sets of strangers among lesbians and gays” (p. 8), leading to the creation of scapegoats from those not considered “normal” lesbian or gay people and/or the subsuming of different lesbian or gay people within the model of experience produced by a lesbian and gay mainstream.

In his introduction to “Fear of a Queer Planet,” Michael Warner (1993) powerfully critiqued what he called “rainbow theory.” He pointed out that this form of “expressivist pluralism” aspired to inclusion rather than to equality and freedom and reduced power to mere membership. Furthermore, it was a representational politics in which marginal sites of embodiment were seen as authentically representing race, sexuality, or gender. It did not encourage interrogation of the discursive constructions of these categories, meaning that, once again, what was dominant remained unquestioned. This is why it is important to “queer” research into sexuality in high school/secondary education. It provides us with new theoretical starting points and potentially offers opportunities to all young people to undertake “the critical sexual discussion” that Fine observed was lacking for the young people in her study.

**HIGHER EDUCATION**

In this, the final section of the chapter, we turn to examine the competing discourses around sexualities in higher education. Most students anticipate colleges and universities offering a “freer” and more liberal environment to explore their newly emergent sexual selves; however, the “realer” experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and, within higher education, transgendered and transsexual (queer) youth suggest that the heterocentric discourses that dogged their previous school experience continue. Heterocentric policing of gender/sexual differences is still present, along with, in some cases, bullying and violence. The university may act as a site of partial resistance to heterocentric norms; however, this is frequently limited and perhaps limiting of queer experience. The existing research literature is problematic, particularly as examined in the United Kingdom, because women and those from ethnic minorities or with disabilities are silenced in the predominantly U.S. literature that concentrates on gay men and heterosexual attitudes toward gay men.

In this final part of the chapter, we briefly and generally review the literature and call for more and better research to document clearly the experiences of queer students in universities and colleges. From what we know, it is clear that reforms are needed to shift the paradigm of heteronormative assumption that continues to harass queer students within universities and colleges. And, importantly, change is imperative within these institutions in terms of developing curricula and pedagogical strategies that are more inclusive of “othersexual” youth.
Going to College: Expectations and Experiences

For many (possibly most) young people going into higher education, college or university provides a space within which they can add dimension to their sexual experience. Universities and colleges are the places within the educational system where (hetero)sex stops being taboo and enters the realm of the expected. There is an assumption, among most heterosexual young people and their families, that this is the site and time during which potentially long-term partners, even spouses, will be found. Similarly, the majority of queer young people who have elected to go into higher education want to further the interrogation of their sexual selves (Bell, Weinberg, & Hammersmith, 1981). They presume that their college or university will provide an environment that is more supportive of sexual difference because of the relaxation of heteronormative attitudes experienced in their previous homes and secondary schools (Epstein et al., in press). These students anticipate that higher education will provide a social and sexual intersection enabling them to expand their personal ties and networks within a freer cultural environment (Rhoads, 1994). They may view college as offering the potential for sexual emancipation, personal liberation, and the opportunity of being treated as an equal in a heterocentric world.

However, when nonheterosexual young people arrive as undergraduates, they are often absorbed in having to (re)attune these expectations in light of discoveries about themselves and their peers and to harmonize feelings of obligation to their family as they realign to their new “families of choice” (Weeks, 2000; Weeks, Donovan, & Heaphy, 2001). They confront deeply ingrained and too frequently expressed heterocentric attitudes (D’Augelli, 1989c). If queer students decide to come out to their heterosexual peers at the university and/or at home to their family of origin, they may encounter hostility, threats, and even violence, along with demands to provide a cause or give reasons for sexual difference (D’Augelli, 2000; D’Augelli & Rose, 1990; Evans, 1998; Evans & D’Augelli, 1996; Gannon, 1999). They will then have to navigate along the narrow trajectories of a “heterosexual matrix” (Butler, 1990) that hypersexualizes their experiences (Fischer, 1995). These formations are both reflected within and reproduced by the societies of higher learning to which they now belong (Evans & D’Augelli, 1996; see also D’Augelli & Patterson, 1995).

Nonheterosexual students must, perforce, engage with the institutions of heterosexuality. They may constitute themselves as sites of resistance to produce sexual identities that are valued and seen as legitimate and that challenge the one-dimensional sexual configurations of the dominant heterocentric (Foucault, 1978). In the end, they may leave higher education having negotiated some of these challenges and taken significant steps toward developing their sexual selves, reconciling the place of families in their lives, and going forward to build careers around their new families of (Weeks et al., 2001). This is not always the case, however.

There are also horror stories contained in the experiences of these young people. The brutal torture and murder of Matthew Shepard (1979–1998) was a most violent and socially significant expression of anti-gay hatred. Although the extreme homophobic violence that killed Matthew is rare, the underlying attitudes, albeit in less
extreme form, resonate through the everyday experiences of many students in higher education. As many feminist authors have pointed out, in relation to sexual and domestic violence, it is not necessary for every woman to have experienced violence for the threat of it to act as a powerful regulator of behavior and, indeed, identity (e.g., see Bergen, 1999; Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Kelly, 1988). Similarly, fear of homophobic violence plays a significant part in policing expressions and possibilities of sexual and gendered identities that are not normatively heterosexual. But what else does the literature and recent research reveal about the experiences of nonheterosexual young people at universities and colleges? What are the dimensions of their stories? And what does this mean for the production and maintenance of the dominant, unmarked form: heterosexuality?

Contemporary literature on sexuality in tertiary education (over the last two decades) tends to take two forms: studies of heterosexuality, usually from a feminist perspective, with concerns about sexual harassment and rape (particularly “acquaintance” or “date” rape) (e.g., Sanday, 1990), and studies of the experiences of queer students. Many of the latter take the form of qualitative surveys conducted in U.S. institutions (e.g., see Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Hanson, 1982; Henderson, 1984; Herek, 1993; Hickson, Davies, & Weatherburn, 1998; Hickson, Reid, Weatherburn, Henderson, & Stephens, 1998; Israelstam & Lambert, 1989; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 1996; Slater, 1993; Stevens & Walker, 1996; Waldo & Kemp, 1997). Particularly important are the significant contributions Anthony D’Augelli has made to our understandings of queer youth in American higher education by examining their experiences, describing their fears of and encounters with heterosexist violence, mapping attitudes toward them, and helping to explain why and when they experience such hostilities (D’Augelli, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1993, 1994; D’Augelli & Rose, 1990; Evans & D’Augelli, 1996; Hershberger & D’Augelli, in press).

There are gaps in our knowledge, however, particularly in the United Kingdom, as the research literature often fails to examine how the experiences of young queers in higher education contribute to building their sexual selves and, further, how this might contribute to the “policing of heterosexuality” (Steinberg et al., 1997). There has been relatively little research published to help us understand how other “differences that make a difference” (see Dunne, Prendergast, & Telford, 2000; Epstein & Johnson, 1998)—for example, gender, ethnicity, disability—shape and are shaped by developing sexual identities in higher education. For those of us interested in improving educational provision, such fissures within our perceptions and knowledge of young people’s sexual navigations diminish validity as well as our opportunities to call for change. From the data available, we know there are problems, but we need more and better targeted research to help inform the changes needed.

Young adults at the turn of this century are experienced in working on their sexual selves. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and transsexual young people, whether or not they have come out to friends or family or even to themselves, are practiced in the formulations of their sexual worlds. Some may be developing confidence in their sexual identities. Others may not have worked on this aspect of their “selves.” Many
will have accomplished years of sexual discovery to reach understandings of their sexual bodies and desires, while others may have moved or reframed their sexual identities around various sexual understandings. Nevertheless, the “dynamics of their closets” (Sedgwick, 1990; Smith, Kippax, & Chapple, 1998) and the borders that their environments have placed around their sexual desires are likely to be well known to them.

As pointed out earlier, young people are given social permission to be sexual at the university level; indeed, it is an expectation and considered a legitimate route into the adult sexual world. Heterosexual, lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, as well as those who want to explore transgender or transsexuality, are all likely to have a desire and expectation of sexual discovery at their university or college. When entering higher education, students expect to encounter a visible queer presence (if they have thought about it at all). In a Foucauldian sense, they expect “otherness” to be part of their higher education experience, at least to some extent (Foucault, 1978). There is also a widespread social knowledge (and, for queer youth, often the expectation), in late capitalist Anglophone countries, that the official discourses within the institution will echo with the sounds of “pro-queer” policies and sentiments, in contrast to the previous silencing within the official or macro-discourses of students’ primary and secondary schools.

When students arrive at universities, however, they are likely to discover that social permission to be sexual is tenuous for those who do not conform to the prescriptions of normative heterosexuality. Heterosexual expectations of straight friends and family, as well as the governances of the hidden or micro-curriculum, continue to police the boundaries of their lives (Stevens & Walker, 1996). The thread of heteronormativity that has woven its way through their primary and secondary schools feeds the hidden anti-queer discourses of higher education (Epstein et al., in press). The sexualities of young people, especially in nonnormative form, are both prohibited and pervasive in primary and secondary schools (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). In universities, by contrast, there are likely to be discussions of lesbian and gay themes (and maybe even bisexual and transgender ones) generally, openly queer faculty members, a broader awareness and understanding of sexual differences, and even tacit official approval on the macro level. Nevertheless, the same heterosexism that pursued queer pupils through primary and secondary school lies just under the surface of higher education. Consequently, many nonheterosexual students, particularly those who occupy “sexual margins,” feel that they have little choice other than to distance themselves from mainstream university life and “do” their sexuality elsewhere.

For those attending college in or near large urban centers, “doing” one’s (homo) sexuality elsewhere means, for the most part, in the commercial “gay scene” near the college or university (Rhoads, 1994). In more isolated university settings, however, nonheterosexual young people can experience something akin to a “siege mentality” in which they are sequestered and/or rely predominantly on chance contacts they make within the university or through queer groups often established as part of the student union (Rhoads, 1994). In both urban and rural settings, therefore, the university or college is a site of and for heterosexuality, where an often-narrow heterosexuality is
performed and where gender and sexual differences are marginalized. The halls of residence, the student bar, and other social spaces are often threateningly straight (McNaron, 1991; Taulke-Johnson & Rivers, 1998). This is when queer students realize that they have may cast off the heterosexism of their secondary school only to rediscover, somewhat ominously, that the same heterocentric agenda exists within the now constricting confines of higher education.

Like most other social scientists working in the field, we accept that sexual identities are socially constructed through a variety of social variables (see Dunne, 1997, 1998; Foucault, 1978; McIntosh, 1981): family, ethnic and cultural background, religion, the importance of primary and secondary school, political ideology, socioeconomic status, heterosexual friends, the wider “gay scene,” and issues of gender nonconformity (e.g., see Lottes & Kuriloff, 1994; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996; Waldner-Haugrud & Magruder, 1996). Another variable that can influence the sexual learning of nonheterosexual students is involvement with lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender or queer social/political groups and other political activities (Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2001). Personal ties and social networks too can lend support to the young person by providing a means of escaping from the heteronormative expectations of family and peers and affording a discursive space in which to build a sexual identity (Rhoads, 1994).

Many of the problems faced by nonheterosexual students may be a result of their finding it harder to fit in with the overwhelmingly straight environment of the university (Reynolds, 1989). Indeed, many queer students may not want to blend in to yet another heterocentric institution, because part of the reason for their journey into higher education was to facilitate an escape from their previous heterosexual intersections of peer, school, and family entanglements. Nancy Evans and Anthony D’Augelli (1996, p. 215) reported, from D’Augelli’s previous studies (1989c, 1992), that 75% of queer students in a U.S. university experienced verbal abuse; 25% were threatened with violence at least once; 22% were chased or followed and 5% spat on; 17% had personal property damaged; 64% feared for their personal safety on campus; and most hid their sexual identity from their roommates or other students.

Significantly, among the students in the study, “nearly all expected the ‘average’ lesbian or gay man to be harassed on campus” (Evans & D’Augelli, 1996, p. 215). Most of these incidents were not reported to the university authorities, and many queer students made changes to their daily routines to avoid hardships. Many gay or bisexual men in these studies feared for their personal safety, and these fears were based on previous experiences of personal violence or attacks to property. We would argue that such experiences are relevant not only for nonheterosexual students but for many who identify as heterosexual. The often violent policing of queer sexualities also constitutes a means through which heterosexual masculinities and femininities are regulated, particularly those that are in some way nonnormative (e.g., gentleness among boys/young men, assertiveness among girls/young women). Indeed, it is worth asking whether the attacks on evidently queer students by evidently straight ones is a way of dissociating oneself from any aspersions on one’s sexuality.
Whatever generalizations can be made about the experiences of nonheterosexual students, it must be borne in mind that they are not the experiences of all students (Rhoads, 1995). They are often dependent upon the location of the university/college (Windmeyer & Freeman, 1998), and, importantly, they are dependent upon the student’s own history (Waldner-Haugrud & Magruder, 1996). They are also shaped by gender, ethnicity/race, and disability/ability, all issues notably absent from much of the literature on higher education.

The Lady Vanishes, or All the Women Are Straight and All the Queers Are Men

The earliest study we found that mentioned “homosexuality” in higher education was the 1938 U.S. investigation by Bromley and Haxton (1938) titled Youth and Sex: A Study of 1300 College Students. The two chapters devoted to issues of “homosexuality” in “girls and boys” at college make fascinating reading. Chapter IX examines “girl homosexuals” and claims that

“stepchildren of nature,” as Krafft-Ebing has called the company of homosexuals, are likely to move under a cloud because they know that they are different from other people. Being different, these girls remained on the fringe of our study. (Bromley & Haxton, 1938, p. 117)

Sadly, the findings reported in this scholarly investigation into the same-sexual experiences of lesbians in higher education are not too different from those reported today. For example, it claims that “girl homosexuals” are hard to locate in the research, much like the case with recent studies reporting difficulties in recruiting lesbians and emphasizing gay male experiences as “the gay experience” (e.g., see Rhoads, 1995; Savin-Williams, 1996; Tierney, 1997). We have mentioned the Bromley and Haxton (1938) study to illustrate that this research bias is historical. While we acknowledge that the spaces some lesbians occupy may be less open to researchers or being researched, this does not make the research task impossible. Rather, it is more difficult terrain in some instances, but this does not excuse the relative silences of lesbian and bisexual women in the literature in the 63 years since Bromley and Haxton published their book.

While lesbian, gay, and bisexual experiences do have common threads, there are important differences in these experiences that have not always been acknowledged in the literature. The experiences of lesbian and bisexual women students are, of course, shaped by their gender as much as by their sexuality. Indeed, the much-vaunted “lesbian invisibility” can be seen as a version of the invisibility of women as sexual agents rather than as objects of the male gaze (Rogers, 1994). The heteropatriarchal structures of universities/colleges affect these women in ways that are both similar to and different from the ways they affect heterosexual women students, on the one hand, and gay and bisexual male students, on the other.

Men, in contrast, enjoy the relative privileging of masculine hegemony, and, particularly in large city centers, they can more easily access and draw benefits from the male-centered commercial “gay scene.” Therefore, while some gay male students may
experience discrimination because of their sexuality and different performances of gender, these effects can, at least in part, be mediated by the relative privileging of a male-centered society. Notwithstanding the recent growth of “lesbian studies” in the academy (e.g., Griffin & Andermahr, 1997; Wilton, 1995) and writings about and by lesbian academics (e.g., Griffin & Andermahr, 1997; Mintz & Rothblum, 1997; Talburt, 2000b), comparatively few studies have focused specifically on the experiences of lesbian or bisexual women students. Lesbians and bisexual women (and bisexual men, as described subsequently) most commonly are referred to in studies only in passing or generally included as part of the “gay” experience.

What previous and contemporary research literature fails to capture are the issues specific to lesbians and bisexual women and their distinct relationships to the “heterosexual matrix” relative to men—straight, gay, or bisexual. There are germane relational differences between gay and bisexual men in the heterosexual hierarchy, as well as different oppressions and discriminations that lesbians and bisexual females confront as women. For example, while male rape does occur on university campuses, it is far less frequent than the rape of women (Wilson, 2000). Rape, both in incidence and in understanding, is a “realtor” threat for women than men (Reilly, Lott, Caldwell, & DeLuca, 1992; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992). Conversely, male suicide is far more frequent than female suicide, and the literature suggests that gay male suicide is disproportionately high in comparison with heterosexual and lesbian deaths (e.g., see Muehrer, 1995; Rotheram-Borus, 1994; Schneider, 1989; Westfield, Whitchart, & Range, 1990).

Issues surrounding coming out to friends and family can be different for lesbians and bisexual women than for gay or bisexual men owing to different relationships and expectations of friends and family (Ben-Ari, 1995; Dunne, 1999; Wishik, 1995). Gay men’s uses of space and ways of occupying space are different from those of lesbians, and this is witnessed most strikingly in the commercial “gay scene” (Knopp, 1995). Most typically, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender groups at universities and, more important, commercial queer venues are designed around the needs/wants of gay men (Castells, 1983; Knopp, 1995). Men occupy those queered spaces differently from women, and there are likely to be many more male gay venues than those that cater to women (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Rothenberg, 1995). There are, of course, commonalities in the experiences of these young people that are important to recognize and work from. However, the differences are significant and are too often ignored in the male-centered research literature. Indeed, there are more studies about heterosexuals’ attitudes toward “homosexuals” (does this include lesbians?) than about the particular experiences of lesbians in institutions of higher education (e.g., see Anderson, Fakhfakh, & Kondylis, 1999; D’Augelli & Rose, 1990; Hanson, 1982).

Ethnic Minorities: Complexities of Difference(s)

Just as maleness is the assumed norm in much work on queer students, so too is whiteness and, more specifically in the U.S., Canadian, Australian, Aotearoa/New
Zealand, and U.K. contexts, Anglo whiteness. Lesbian, gay or bisexual, transgendered, and transsexual students from ethnic minority groups must work with issues of identity across a number of congregations and social and cultural formations that, as we have shown earlier in talking about elementary and secondary school, shape and are shaped by each other. Living in White supremacist societies (Eisen & Hall, 1996; hooks, 1982), students of color may well find that negotiating racism requires validation from within ethnic minority communities, including their families of origin, as well as from within the queer spaces that they might come to occupy in higher education (e.g., see Chan, 1989, 1995; KOLA, 1994; Loiacano, 1989; Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992; Manalansan, 1996; Weeks et al., 2001). This is not a simple binary choice—either the family of origin or the family of choice—but one that is complexly shaped by changing combinations of racism, heteronormativity, and sexism:

By definition in the context of a heterosexual, racist and sexist society, the process of identity development for Latina lesbian women entails the embracing of "stigmatised" or "negative" identities. Coming out to self and others in the context of a sexist and heterosexual American society is compounded by coming out in the context of a heterosexual and sexist Latin culture immersed in racist society. (Espin, 1987, as cited in Savin-Williams, 1996, p. 152)

Savin-Williams goes on to observe that this presents queer young people of color with three tasks: "developing and defining a sexual and an ethnic identity; resolving potential conflicts in allegiance within both reference groups or communities; and negotiating homophobia and racism" (1996, p. 152). Struggling across and within categories in this way is difficult for young people (indeed, for anyone), particularly if they are also attempting to settle into a university and continue their academic success. This burden can become incredibly onerous.

A need to find validation within different communities does not mean necessarily becoming fully integrated within any particular community, but rather internalizing (and construing) a level of acceptance from each of the communities (Slater, 1993). Problems arise, however, when young people feel they must make an either/or choice in favor of one community over the other. Chan (1989, 1995) notes that the Asian American participants in her study felt compelled either to choose their Asian community or to live openly as queer rather than attempt to reconcile both (see also Cross, 1991; Hom, 1994). The personal skills required to achieve a livable level of acceptance within different communities, often with contrasting ranges of values, can prove beyond the life skills of many young people. Manalansan (1996, p. 393), in his study of Latino, Black, and Asian men in the United States, makes the point that the phrase "men who have sex with men" better captures the complexities of sexual desires and expressions within ethnic minority communities than terms such as gay, bisexual, or homosexual. He goes on to note, however, that "even the phrase men who have sex with men, is unable to capture the complex ways in which different cultures provide meanings and structures for such phenomena" (Manalansan, 1996, p. 393; see also Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992).
Queer Geographies

The worlds queer youth inhabit are in constant motion as each individual attempts to attain equipoise between what at times seem like competing life frames. Some non-heterosexual students on university and college campuses live in a world of secretiveness and fear (Heret, 1993), while others have learned to “dance around” heteronormative discourses. Where young people attend college, where they are living, with whom they are living, and their opportunities to meet “others” all affect their experiences of higher education.

Many campuses, in particular halls of residence, have been identified by researchers as sites of oppression for both queer and heterosexual students (Baker, 1991; Mallon, 1992; Taulke-Johnson & Rivers, 1998). While queer students’ experiences of living at home or in private lodgings are varied, it is clear that both geographies are important to these students’ navigation of their sexual selves within institutions of higher education. The policing of nonheterosexual students by their peers can be a significant deterrent to those young people who seek to defy the hyper-romanticized heterosexuality that so often accompanies life at universities in all of its forms. This can be particularly acute when, as is frequently the case, they have to share accommodations with straight, sometimes homophobic, often heterosexist students.

Robert Rhoads’s important work, Coming Out in College: The Struggle for a Queer Identity (1994; see also Rhoads, 1995), examined the coming out experiences of gay and bisexual male students at Clement’s University, an isolated, semirural (“middle” American) campus. Rhoads argued that coming out is a continuing process in which experiences of trading with the heterosexual world inform students’ construction of their sexual selves. For many of his participants, this meant developing a politicized “queer” identity and a “queered” persona. As one of the participants noted, “Queer is a kind of ‘in your face’ attitude toward heterosexism and homophobia” (Rhoads, 1994, p. 24). Rhoads’s study tracked students’ development of queer identities by exploring how they sought to engage as “cultural workers” (see also Gramsci, 1995, on “organic intellectuals”) in seeking change, greater acceptance at the university, and wider societal transformation through destabilization of heterosexuality.

The concept of cultural workers is useful, but it is limited in this case by the fact that all but three of the participants were members of the university’s Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students Alliance. Such students are likely to be more politicized than those who remain away from organized groups. Because the overwhelming majority of queer college/university students in the United States and the United Kingdom (and elsewhere) do not belong to queer collectives, studies such as those of Rhoads (1994) and Taulke-Johnson and Rivers (1998) reveal only part of the story.

Individuals’ involvement in a queer collective could make a substantial difference in regard to their experiences and expressions of their sexual identity. Membership, and particularly active membership, in a queer group is a very specific political action taken by a student for a variety of reasons, from wanting to “belong” through seeking social and/or sexual contacts to political and even career ambitions (Chung, 1995;
D’Augelli, 1991a; Dey, 1997; Nora et al., 1996). Membership in a queer collective would suggest a certain openness of one’s sexual identity—one is “out,” and in view (even in the face) of the heterosexual majority. However, one of the hallmarks of a nonheterosexual identity is the “in-built cloaking device” (to pinch from Star Trek) that allows lesbian, gay, and, most often, bisexual students to blend with the straight majority. Belonging to a queer group is not the experience of all students, and most must seek to acquire their “queered capital” and do their queer learning elsewhere.

The broader “gay scene” is an important arena that has been relatively under-researched in terms of its impact on the lives of queer students in higher education (e.g., see Windmeyer & Freeman, 1998). The proximity of a university to a large city (or to a smaller place renowned for its “gay scene”) gives students wider permission to stray from the narrow path of heterosexuality. This takes place, of course, in circumstances also shaped by personal histories, family circumstances, and relative privilege or marginality with regard to other “differences that make a difference.”

The Queer Climate of Universities: Experiences of Faculty Members

As pointed out, many students imagine the university/college to be a freer sexual environment than their previous schools. So just how “sexually free” are universities in Anglophone countries? The answer very much depends on the university (Epstein et al., 2001). For many heterosexual students, universities may well prove to be sexually more liberating. Even for those who do not conform heterosexually, higher education may provide opportunities for sexual emancipation, particularly where high school seemed to be an impossible location. Certainly, higher education provides a fresh environment in which to explore newly exposed sexualities. However, experiences from universities in Australia (Jeffreys, 1997), Britain (Epstein, 1995b), Canada (Eyre, 1993), and the United States (Tierney, 1997) suggest that even in what could be regarded as more “liberal” institutions, there are tensions around sexual otherness. Both students and teachers who are not heterosexual have to confront a complex realpolitik of sexual disclosure and then live and work as “sexually other” (see Powers, 1993). It is therefore worth examining briefly some of the experiences of queer professionals who have elected to work in higher education. The experiences of faculty members can provide important evidence as to the social climate of universities around issues of gender/sexual difference and can help provide a clearer understanding of the attitudes that underpin the heterosexual hegemony.

Academics researching sexuality frequently report having been advised that they will never get anywhere if they pursue this path (e.g., see Jackson, 1999; Tierney, 1997; Weeks, 2000). At the same time, the huge lists of books about sexualities issuing from publishers are a testament to the success that writing about sexuality, including from a queer perspective, can bring; such success can come despite limited acceptance. As Sheila Jeffreys points out, in her elite Australian university,

I teach a lesbian and gay politics course with the support of my department of Political Science at the University of Melbourne. My course is called “The Politics of Sex Reform Movements” because the stu-
students pointed out that the title that included the words lesbian and gay might impede their chances of employment. The very fact that my course has to be closeted in this way suggests some of the political difficulties of such teaching. My course and my department are exceptional in Australia. Departments of Political Science often contain no teaching about women or feminism, let alone lesbians. (1997, p. 142)

Thus, while sexual and gender differences in higher education are not completely silenced in the official discourse, naming oneself as “other” involves very real structural impediments both inside and outside the university (e.g., see Farnum, 1997; Prince, 1995; Slater, 1993).

Tierney (1993a, 1993b) has written of the overt and covert limitations of study and discussion of queer issues on campus and their consequences for queer faculty and students. Similarly, there are consequences to coming out, which may produce a “backlash” (e.g., see Tierney, 1997; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). There are, of course, also consequences for the heterosexual majority. As Jonathan Silin (1999, pp. 96–97) comments:

[Coming out] has shifted some of my discomfort about teaching onto students. The situation has become less problematic for me and more disquieting for them, for they have begun to question their assumptions about who can speak and who must remain silent.

Didi Khayatt, responding to Silin, argues that coming out is not a necessary act on the part of either teachers or students. She points that it is possible to trouble students’ assumptions without making declarative statements. Indeed, she continues:

Coming out through a declarative statement is pedagogically unsound... for several reasons, not least because one’s identity is continually in flux, and the act of freezing one’s identity in place does not do justice to the teacher presenting herself or himself in class. What it does is to define the teacher’s personality through an act of oppression and to encourage students to see the teacher as standing in for an entire group. (Khayatt, 1999, p. 108; see also Khayatt, 1992, 1997)

Khayatt is not, of course, advocating living a closeted life. She writes from a lesbian perspective, lives openly as a lesbian, tells students stories from her life, and so on. Her point is that unsettling heterosexuality may be as well, or better, achieved through the curriculum and by refusing to behave as if queer sexuality were a secret requiring a declaration, unlike other parts of our identity:

The secret would cease to be a secret if we simply assumed that our students knew it... Furthermore, the secrecy of a statement inflates it, whether it remains concealed or is revealed. As long as heterosexuality is normatively ascribed the default position, will not coming out continue to reproduce the secret even as it interrupts it? (Khayatt, 1999, p. 109)

Both Silin’s and Khayatt’s perspectives have significant strengths. Changes have taken place in the academy that make it a place where, in however constrained a form, young people (and, indeed, older, mature students) can explore versions of sexuality other than the heteronormative variety in ways that were almost impossible in their earlier school career. These have often been the result of actions (and activism) by “out” queer faculty members, sometimes resulting in bitter disputes (e.g., see
Cage, 1994a, 1994b; Rottman, 1990; Tierney, 1993b). The literature is univocal in suggesting that attitudes within the academy have changed from the days when there was complete silence in the curricula and administrations actively campaigned against activists (e.g., see D’Emilio, 1990, 1992; Tierney, 1993a, 1997; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). The pace and spread of change, however, vary considerably. John D’Emilio concludes that,

for the most part, the 1970s was a decade characterised by organisation and networking. The 1980s have witnessed the production and sharing of knowledge. We expect that the 1990s will be the time when we see significant movement toward the institutionalisation of queer studies in higher education. (1992, p. 169)

It is interesting to compare D’Emilio’s prediction made at the start of the last decade with what we have witnessed within institutions of Western academia. While some of the changes have been significant, they have not been uniform. Our reading of the available literature strongly suggests that, in the 1990s, the structures of higher education did not change; rather, tolerance was “added on.” Student and staff handbooks espouse the virtues of equal opportunity policies and threaten sanctions against those who are caught, reported, and (eventually) heard in tribunals.

There is little doubt that distinct heterosexual biases continue to exist and are embedded in the curricula and pedagogical practices of universities. There appear to be two projects for which writers in the field are calling. The first is implementation of curricula that are more inclusive of queer issues and are supported by more tolerant/aware pedagogical practices (Lopez & Chism, 1993; Piernik, 1992). This requires a redesign of the existing heterocentric curricula and modification of the pedagogical practices of many university teachers to incorporate the specific learning needs of non-heterosexual students. The second project, a corollary of the first, involves demands to “educate” straight students about negative effects of their heterosexist attitudes (Wallick, 1995) and to disrupt heteronormativity (Britzman, 1995). McCord and Herzog (1991) suggest that programs designed to help students understand that discrimination and abuse are not justifiable responses can also help expose latent/blatant heterosexist attitudes among straight students. As Linda Eyre points out, however, there are inherent dangers and contradictions in this and similar approaches: “Pedagogical practices explicitly intended to challenge the heteronormativity and heterosexism . . . [and] work towards social change risk reproducing the very aspects of injustice that they seek to rectify” (1993, pp. 191, 195).

Some of the approaches employed in teaching can harm the success of curricula and pedagogical practices that aim to be queer inclusive and/or disruptive of normative heterosexuality. These include what Eyre (1993) describes as the “add on” approach, the “homosexual” guest speaker, and workshops on heterosexism. There are dangers, too, in further isolating straight students from “pro-queer” perspectives through mismanaged attempts to incorporate queer theory into mainstream curricula. The reason is that many heterosexual students have limited reference points from which to engage with queer themes, or, as Deborah Britzman (1995, p. 159) argues, those in dominant, unmarked groups often feel they have an entitlement to maintain their ignorance.
There is no possibility of predicting exactly how straight (or even queer) students may read queer curricula. Therefore, “to boldly go” where no straight class has thought of itself going before could cause a backlash of heterosexism that can abandon queer students to feel further marginalized and further entrench straight students’ heterocentric attitudes. The fact that “a few” straight students are offended is not the real concern. Rather, of greater consequence is the missed opportunity to advance the political project of troubling and disrupting heteronormativity. We are not arguing, of course, that curricula should not be “queered.” Rather, we suggest that unpredictability of responses and our inability to know the true addressees of any curriculum or pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1997) must be taken into account and acknowledged.

**The Fuzzy Research Paradigm**

A significant amount of the literature approaches the study of lesbian and gay youth in higher education from a problematic perspective. It deals with the difficulties faced by queer young people in terms of heterosexism and negative attitudes toward same sexualities, suicide and young gay men, counseling issues, curriculum shortfalls, and structural intransigence toward queer studies. In short, the literature on nonheterosexual students is largely about the problems they confront at universities. We do not deny that there are enormous difficulties that temper the capacity of queer students to complete their courses of study and influence the construction of their sexual selves; it is, however, important not to forget the great pleasures of being (identity) and doing (sexuality) that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and transsexual young people enjoy.

The relative silences of queered voices in the monotone quantitative data, which problematize participants in the very design of the research question, do not allow these voices to speak loudly enough. We want to know how nonheterosexual students negotiate the issues they confront and the meanings they ascribe to these issues. How, not only why and when, do these themes affect young people? There is homogeneity in the findings of much of the literature because of the overwhelming amount of positivistic data that have been collected, predominantly by U.S. researchers. This type of research is important to help us understand the frequency of heterosexist violence, map attitudes, and explain in what circumstances queer students experience difficulties in constructing sexual identities. However, it is now time for research to add greater dimension to these experiences to view how anti-queer violence and heterocentric attitudes affect the lives of young queer students in our universities and colleges. This, then, is a call for much needed research in this field, but different research, research that goes further than providing more of the same, research that lays a foundation for “real” changes.

**CONCLUSION**

In this chapter we have, for the most part, been concerned with the experiences of children and young people in schools and colleges. We have shown how these experiences are regulated with regard to sexuality in ways that are nuanced and shaped by gender, ethnicity/race, class, and disability/ability. The regulatory frameworks we
have discussed do not operate in isolation from each other. Rather, there are webs of discourses that interlink, contradict, strengthen, and disrupt each other in sometimes unpredictable ways.

We have shown how each phase of the formal education system produces and carries its own meanings, giving more or less permission to different versions of sexuality, always tightly linked to questions of gender. We have argued that normative heterosexuality is policed, and even enforced, with greater or less success in all of these different locations. We have traced some of the ways in which heterosexuality is reproduced through the often sexualized "gender play" (Thorne, 1993) of primary schools, the more overt yet still forbidden sexuality of secondary schools, and the relative "freedom" of the university. In focusing on the experiences of students, we have said little about their teachers. This is, of course, an important area for study and one that is linked to how students are able to live in schools. The expected "mumsiness" of the primary school teacher is, itself, a heterosexual trope and one that models ways of being for young children. Equally, secondary school and university teachers deploy heterosexual tropes, often fulfilling expectations in ways that reinforce heterosexuality. Consequently, the question of whether queer teachers should come out or not is an important one—though there is no "right" answer to such questions. In all cases, the expectation is heterosexual, the norms are heterosexual, and the structures permit and facilitate normative heterosexual lifestyles. In these ways, the "othering" education does of those who identify as in some way queer is also a narrowing and constraining of heterosexual identities.

NOTES

1 Section 28 prohibits local authorities (that is, local governments) from "promoting homosexuality," labeling same-sex relationships as "pretended family relationships." When the Thatcher government passed this legislation in 1988, there were protests in the United Kingdom and nearly all of the "Western democracies." The government was finally defeated in the House of Lords on the repeal of Section 28 in July 2000. It seems unlikely that a further attempt to repeal Section 28 will be made before the next general election in Britain.

2 We recognize that terminology is always contested and that not everyone likes the term queer, which can be seen as derogatory. However, we use it in this chapter for two reasons. First, we find the litany of identities—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual—awkward to use, breaking the flow of writing. Second, queer suggests something more of the fluidity of sexual identities that we would argue exists among both heterosexuals and nonheterosexuals. While we are probably more materialist in our analysis than many queer theorists, we are certainly indebted to queer theory for much of it. At times we use more specific terms, when gendered sexualities are important to note.

3 Between 1977 and 1996, the United States, relative to comparable countries, had the highest rate of live births per thousand women between 15 and 19 years of age. It was followed by (in order) New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. New Zealand is the only one of these countries to show a significant reduction in the rate of teenage pregnancies over this period (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999).

4 The United Kingdom has a large number of national daily papers. The tabloids tend to be more scandalous and read by much larger numbers than the more "highbrow" broadsheets. Right wing tabloids include the Sun (owned by Rupert Murdoch), with the largest readership
of any national daily, and the Daily Mail (which has traditionally been closely associated with the right wing of the Conservative Party). Right wing broadsheets include the Times (also a Murdoch paper) and the Telegraph.

5 It’s Elementary is a film designed as a classroom resource for elementary school teachers to use in addressing homosexuality issues.

6 Matthew Shepard was a 21-year-old student at the University of Wyoming. On the night of October 6, 1998, he was “picked up” from a gay bar in Laramie by his killers and their accomplices under the guise of having sex. Outside of the bar, he was hustled into a car, robbed, beaten and tortured, and then tied to a fence and left to die. He remained undiscovered for five days tied to the fence. Matthew finally died of his injuries and severe exposure on October 12, 1998. Four suspects were charged and convicted, two of kidnapping, robbery, and murder and the other two of being accessories. The reason given at the trial for the kidnap and murder of Matthew was gay hatred.

Matthew’s murder made international headlines, and then-President Bill Clinton commented on the case and urged support for anti-gay hate crimes legislation. The case served to highlight and underscore the intolerance toward queers in and around many university campuses.

With macabre irony, at the same time Matthew was tied to a fence, dying, students a few hundred miles away at Colorado State University sprayed graffiti on a scarecrow in a homecoming parade float with the words “I’m gay” on the scarecrow’s face and “Up my ass” across its back (Burana, 1998).

7 With apologies to Alfred Hitchcock (1938).

8 With apologies to Gloria Hull (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982).

9 Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902) was a professor of psychiatry at the University of Vienna. He produced the influential work Psychopathia Sexualis, a compilation of more than 200 sexual histories published in 12 editions between 1889 and his death in 1902. The work covers fetishistic practices, many of which were no doubt sensationalized to titillate his “learned” audience. Krafft-Ebing viewed same-sex attraction as an illness, a symptom of physical or mental degradation, and a disease. His acrimonious depictions of “homosexuals” were so influential that they were to dominate the medical discourse well into the 20th century and continue to influence some contemporary discourses (Jeffreys, 1977; Norton, 1997; Spencer, 1995).

10 Some lesbians use women-only spaces, often not bars or clubs but houses, for women of all sexualities to build alliances.

11 Taulike-Johnson and Rivers (1998) recruited participants for their study from the lesbian, gay, and bisexual society at the University of Luton.

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