"I JUST WANT TO BE WHO I AM"

EXPLORING THE BARRIERS FACED BY LESBIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS AS THEY DISRUPT HETERONORMATIVE PRACTICES IN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND.

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"One isn't born one's self. One is born with a mass of expectations, a mass of other people's ideas – and you have to work through it all". V.S. Naipaul.

Abstract

This thesis reports on a small scale qualitative research project located in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The objective of the research was to understand how lesbian teachers disrupt heteronormativity in early childhood settings.

The literature was reviewed nationally and internationally. It argues that heteronormativity is the main barrier preventing teachers speaking about lesbian and gay issues. Heteronormativity is a discourse that works to maintain heterosexual hegemony. As a result of this dominance, acceptance of lesbian and gay issues is still a contentious issue within Aotearoa/New Zealand early childhood settings. This study provided an opportunity for heteronormativity to be viewed solely from a lesbian teacher's paradigm. My intention was to also examine the strategies that participants used to challenge heteronormative dominance. Participants negotiated risks to ensure that both children and adults were aware of the hegemonic view point enforced by heteronormativity. A feminist post-structuralist and queer theory paradigm was used to frame the analytical approach.

Glossary of Terms

As with many academic fields, education has its own specific terminology; this section is designed to address this. Several concepts are introduced and explained as they arise within the chapters; however, to ensure clarity to the reader, the following concepts will be explained here. The terms are in alphabetical order. Māori terms are used from time to time throughout this thesis to acknowledge the dual heritage of Aotearoa/New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1996). Language plays a huge role in our lives and how we learn, so ensuring the correct terminology is used is very important (Lee, 2010).

Aotearoa/New Zealand: Aotearoa is the original name Māori gave these two islands, and New Zealand is the result of colonisation. The two names combined are used to describe the place where this research is situated.

Coming out: The process used to share one's sexuality with others, to "come out" to friends, or work colleagues. Historically seen as a one-time event, it is more often accepted now that this is a life-long process. Every day and all the time, people who are gay have to evaluate and re-evaluate who they are comfortable coming out to, if it is safe, and what the consequences might be (Killermann, 2013).

Discourse: Discourse is situated within languages and practices, and becomes discernible though analyses of the way people use language (Gunn, 2003). Jarvis and Sandretto (2010) talk about discourse being socially accepted ways of doing, to identify oneself as a member of a group or society. People read our actions, such as what we say, and how we dress, and position us in particular discourses, as we do to them. Parker (1992, cited in Burr, 1995), cautiously gives a working definition of a discourse as a "system of statements which construct an object" (p. 5).

Early Childhood setting: In Aotearoa/New Zealand this term refers to the places where education and care of children aged between birth and six

years occurs. In the case of this thesis, this could mean either a childcare setting, or a kindergarten.

Gay: A word to describe a woman or a man who identifies as homosexual. For women, both gay and lesbian are generally acceptable or interchangeable terms, along with queer. Gay, lesbian, and queer are considered "emic terms, one where special words or terms are used by the people in the group" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 586). For this research, I use gay as the word to describe homosexuality, in an attempt to create an easy flow to the writing. However, each participant was asked which word best identified them, so when referring to participants, I use the word they chose. Direct quotes from literature and transcripts have not been altered.

Gender: Refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for men and women (Seba, 2011). Killermann (2013) also talks about *gender expression,* as "the external display of one's gender, through a combination of dress, demeanour, social behaviour… generally measured on a scale of masculinity and femininity" (p. 219).

Identity and sexuality: Identity can be described as the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is (Oxford University Press, 2011) , or the fact of being who or what a person or thing is (Oxford University Press, 2011). Robinson (2005a) acknowledges the complexities of identity and makes links to social justice pedagogy and the teaching of difficult knowledge as a way of understanding more about your own and others' identities. Our identity and how we are perceived by others is an important consideration for many. For example, Clay (1990) notes that fathers he interviewed preferred to be identified as "fathers who are gay", rather than "gay fathers" (p. 32).

LGBT*Q LGBTT*Q LGBTT*QI: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender/ Takatāpui, Queer/Questioning, Intersex. This is an acronym to include a range of sexualities. The order of the letters can be fluid, and usually depends upon who is using it. The use of Takatāpui, meaning a devoted

partner of the same sex in Māori, (Ryan, 2012) at times puts an additional "T" in the acronym, in the same way that use of Intersex creates an "I" at the end. "Q" can mean Questioning or Queer depending upon who is using it. In T* the asterisk denotes a special effort to include all non-binary gender identities, including "transgender, transsexual, transvestite, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary, neutrois…third gender, two-spirit, bigender" (Killermann, 2013 Appendix B). For the purpose of this research, I manipulated this acronym's use by selecting the letters which represented the groups I wished to include. For example, I use LGBT, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, when I am referring to only those four groups, or if the context is specific only to them. At other times, I keep to the simplest form, LGBTQI, and consider the "T" and "I" to be interchangeable for the reader.

Othering: Othering has a way of creating an alliance between people in the dominant group, the people who have created the "other". Robinson and Jones-Diaz (2006) define other as "those groups who have been marginalised, silenced or …violated" (p. 24).

Out: The term "out" is used to describe someone who is open about their homosexuality. The metaphor of the "closet" is used to describe a period of silence where information about ones sexuality is withheld. Breaking this silence means the closet door is open, as such "outing" the person's personal information (Gunn & Surtees, 2009). Gunn and Surtees (2009) note that the closet can become closed again, and describe "coming out" more in the sense of repeating this action many times in one's life, rather than as a one off event.

Queer: Sometimes used as an umbrella term to describe people who identify as non-straight. Once considered quite offensive, queer is now used more often as an alternative for gay (Marinucci, 2010). However, due to its historical use as a derogatory term, it is not embraced or used by all members of the LGBTQI community (Killermann, 2013). Gunn (2003b) states that queer can mean "any practice that is anti-heteronormative" (p. 4). That is anyone who disrupts the flow of heteronormativity. In line with Jarvis (2009), I, too, use queer as a verb, to consider how teachers queer a space for

themselves. I also choose to reclaim the word queer, in a noun format, in line with the identity expressed by a participant.

Rainbow Family: A way of describing families who have same-gender parents. Because language can be socially awkward, and ever-evolving (Burr, 1995), I have adopted this terminology from Gunn (2005) as a way of seeing families constructed with same-gender parents in a manner that focuses on the concept of family, rather than the construction of that family.

Same-gender parented families: Is a phrase coined by Gunn and Surtees (2010) to describe families who are parented by lesbian and/or gay people. Gunn and Surtees (2010) suggest that the term same-gender rather than same-sex ensures that the focus is on the gender attracted-ness, rather than sex.

Sexuality: The term sexuality is a complex one. However the dictionary defines sexuality as a person's sexual orientation or preference (Oxford University Press, 2011). Sexual orientation can be defined as a person's sexual identity in relation to the gender to which they are attracted, the fact of being heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual (Oxford University Press, 2011). There is no real truth about sexualities because sexual orientation is more fluid than the simple choosing one of three choices (Clay, 1990; Surtees, 2006).

Teacher who is gay: Identifies that the person is a person firstly, then the sexual preference secondly. This allows for the person to be identified as a person in their entirety, rather than initially by the sexuality.

Chapter one: Thesis Overview

Why this project?

A personal experience which helped to spark this interest happened with my son Zech. I raised the conversation of marriage asking Zech, "Would you like your Mums to get married?" Civil unions were the only choice available at this time, but I used the word marriage as it was a term I thought Zech would better understand. He replied, "No". Confused, I persisted with the topic, mentioning that all the family would come together to celebrate. At this stage, Zech burst into tears, and was inconsolable. I was shocked, but calmed him down, and asked him about his reaction. Zech's understanding at four, of marriage, was that his two Mums (Jody and I) would need to split up and find males to marry. He understood marriage to be between two people of opposite genders. His main concern was "where would I live?" This got me thinking about images, messages, and conversations that Zech and other children are exposed to, and in what way. How do these images override the everyday images he sees in his own home?

I reflected, and started to think about my own actions. How do I show others who I am, in a way that allows them to think there are alternatives to heterosexuality? At the time, heteronormativity was not something I was aware of even though I had experienced its privilege in previous relationships. Although it was around me, I was not able to articulate what it meant or understand its influence.

I reflected back to the first time I introduced myself to the year one, in-training teachers I lectured. I stood in front of the class, and suddenly I was wracked with nerves. I paused to consider how, previously in these situations, I had been confident and articulate, but that the words were not flowing today. I looked out to the classroom of faces and tried to work out what the repercussions would be if I revealed my family composition. I chose not to. I considered the risk too great, I was unsure of the impact, and I felt ill-equipped to defend even the slightest challenge, so remained silent.

In future years, as I introduced myself to first year classes, I gained confidence and started to include phrases like "my partner, she", "my partner Jody", "my wife and I", and the positive (or, not negative) responses boosted my confidence that students would accept rather than challenge my position here. I started to reflect upon my reluctance to share my family composition at the beginning. I was not ashamed of who I am, and who I love. My parents, siblings, and our friends are accepting so why did I have this fear when talking about my family. I just knew that in my current lesbian relationship I needed to mind myself more than before. I became interested in how I position myself now, and how my sense of self had been altered in this environment. My new identity required much more thought, and carefulness than I had previously experienced. Understanding the world and the discourses within it a little better became important to me.

Location of self

Stories about one's sexuality, sexual attraction, and sexual identity are highly intimate and personal. However, when I understood that our social identities are socially constructed it made it possible for me to "deconstruct the taken-for-granted assumptions about how the world works" (McLennan, Ryan, & Spoonley, 2000b, p. 69). To ensure transparency it is recommended that researchers examine and discuss their personal background as well as how this affects the research (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Thus, creating a more robust piece of research is possible once I understand my own assumptions and personal pre-dispositions. In addition, removing any assumptions about my subjectivity allows my position within the research to be acceptable and adds value to the study (Surtees, 2006). My position within the research will be further discussed in Chapter Four.

Overview of research project

Marginalisation and silencing of issues pertaining to the lesbian and gay community has long been the accepted norm in the education sector (Lee & Duncan, 2008; Robinson 2002). Being an openly gay person in a teaching environment has proven challenging (DeJean, 2010a; Jarvis & Sandretto, 2010a; McKenzie-Bassant, 2007; Sumara, 2008). Alongside issues for teachers, the experiences of rainbow families enrolling in education settings

have also been fraught with challenges and barriers (Clay, 1990; 2004; Gonzalez-Mena, 2010; Gunn, 2005). However, recent research about the experiences of rainbow families (or same-gender parented families), entering the early childhood education sector has emerged (Lee, 2010; Robinson 2002; Surtees 2012 ; Terreni, Gunn, Kelly, & Surtees, 2010). Rainbow families, and the way teachers show or do not show inclusion in education settings has been the main focus of resent research. To date, the lack of data available regarding the view point of lesbian early childhood teachers has meant that this group is under-represented in academic literature and, as a result, is largely silenced (DeJean, 2008; Wolfe, 2006).

A homogeneous sample group, lesbian early childhood (EC) teachers was used; that is, a sample group which consisted of people who have something in common with one another (Patton, 2002). Based on the participants' stories, this thesis provides an insight into the narratives and the contexts which made talking about themselves, rainbow families, and lesbian and gay issues both easier and problematic.

There have been relatively few studies which solely focus upon the thoughts and experiences of lesbian EC teachers (DeJean, 2010a). Because of the lack of research in this area I was keen to work exclusively with lesbian teachers who worked in early childhood education (ECE) settings in Aotearoa/New Zealand which, to my knowledge, is unlike any other of the little research that does exist. This research will add to the small body of research focusing on the experiences of lesbian ECE teachers internationally (DeJean, 2010b).

Mapping out the thesis

This thesis consists of six further chapters presented into three main parts. In PART I (Chapters Two, Three, and Four) I situate the study in a theoretical framework, introduce the current literature, and establish the research methodology. In Chapter Two, the key frameworks, feminist post-structuralist and queer theory, are discussed. The concepts of language, discourse and subjectivity are explained here. These explanations will assist the reader to gain insight into the theoretical ideas entwined throughout the remaining

chapters. Chapter Three is my literature review. This is a review of extant literature of sexuality studies that come out of teaching contexts. The chapter discusses four themes: anti-bias curriculum, silence, child as an innocent, and teacher unpreparedness. Chapter Four deals with the methodological issues and research design providing the theoretical and procedural description of methods used in the research to collect data. Thematic analysis and its implementation in this research are also discussed.

In PART II (Chapters Five and Six), I present the results of the data analysis. It is here that I discuss the impact of silence and the efforts taken by lesbian ECE teachers to break down the barrier in relation to heteronormativity. Chapter Five is the first analytical chapter. It is in this chapter that I report on the barriers faced by the research participants. Chapter Six considers the risks involved for participants when disrupting the heteronorm. Risk was identified by participants as something to be managed. This study found that lesbian teachers work hard to ensure their visibility within their workplace; however, being constantly aware of potential risk was draining.

Part III is the final chapter, drawing together the research findings and offering some recommendations based on these findings. Full participation by all teachers in disrupting the heteronormative discourses surrounding the silencing of lesbian and gay issues was identified as a benefit for children, rainbow families, and lesbian teachers. Limitations of this project are acknowledged, and areas for further research are noted before the chapter concludes.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I seek to critically examine post-structuralism, which theorises that there are accepted ways that people participate in their everyday world. The examination includes an introduction to Derrida's theory (Collins & Mayblin, 2005), and an explanation of how he explores the notions of truth. Following this, queer theory and its history are described. I then examine feminist post-structuralism, and comment on three pertinent concepts within the feminist post-structuralism framework. The three frameworks are language, discourse, and subjectivity and these are used to guide my interpretation of the data.

In the final section of this chapter I discuss the relevance of queer and feminist post-structuralism to my research. Although identified as two separate components, I am aware that no theory is as simple as that; in this instance, feminist post-structuralism and queer theory work well together broadening each other's perimeters.

Queer and feminist post-structuralist theory are useful as researchers engage with the dominance of heteronormativity (Lee & Duncan, 2008; Nelson, 2002; Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 1999; Sumara, 2008; Surtees, 2006). The inclusion of these theories provides a specific focus on ways that social interactions mould and socially constitute individuals, as well as examining how individuals make sense of themselves (Burr, 1995). Queer theory and feminist post-structuralist theory were chosen for this study because these theoretical approaches focus on questioning the power structures, dominant gender, and sexuality discourses within society. People draw upon categories of identity to understand themselves and are understood by others using these same categories (Marinucci, 2010). Queer theory is about the acknowledgement that no particular set of categories is necessary, and even "the most entrenched categories are subject to revision" (Marinucci, 2010, p. 36). The belief that categories can shift and be revised, aligns with the research question. It is my hypothesis that participants *will* be able to shift/disrupt the heteronormative dominance. Social constructionism's claim is

that if you can argue that identities can be socially constructed, they can also be deconstructed and contested. Social constructionism in other words is not about essentialising or over-determining identities.

It is the intention of this research to consider the dominance from a lesbian teachers' perspective. One appeal of queer theory is that it comprises a critique of the "logic of domination which attempts to justify the systematic subordination of those who lack power by those who possess it" (Marinucci, 2010, p. xiv). Dominance, in light of this research, could be considered a barrier encountered by lesbian ECE teachers. Alongside the critique of power, by identifying and disrupting the processes which make it possible, queer theory examines how subjects become normalised and marginalised (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008). A specific feature of queer theory is the challenge it provides to the "heterosexist underpinnings and assumptions of what passed for 'theory' in academic circles" (Marinucci, 2010, p. 34).

Post-Structuralism

The intent of this research is to examine how heteronormativity is challenged and disrupted, and what barriers were encountered as lesbian teachers confronted those challenges. I am curious about what barriers the participants encountered so, on a small scale, I was taking a critical look at their world. Post-structuralism was chosen because it examines how structures in society function (St Pierre, 2010). Structure and function are generally talked about in regards to specific hierarchies and institutions; in this research I am referring to the early childhood setting as one form of institution. Post-structuralism is used to describe the mechanisms of power and how meaning and power are organised in our society (Blaise 2005). The claim that the world is ever-shifting and that the individual is (re)created (St Pierre, 2010) sits well with questioning the barriers faced by participants. The defining feature of post-structuralism is its instability.

Post-structuralism has evolved from a modernist or humanist viewpoint of universal truth (Jarvis, 2009), where one's identity is fixed to an unstable world where identity and thinking is a shifting fluid concept. This shift was in

response to the "universal systems proposed by the earlier movement, structuralism" (Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2006, p. 184). Post-structuralism has stopped looking at the individual as an identity that is self-creating, but rather focuses on the discourses surrounding each person which have helped create the individual (Jarvis, 2009). The post-structuralist movement has resulted in a "healthy and important re-examination and much growth in intellectual thought"; it also rejects "universal truths, and emphasises differences" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 392).

Post-structuralism invites critique of accepted knowledge and perceptions of the world. It is through the critique of accepted knowledge that I analysed the data about how teachers disrupted social norms. Post-structuralism's focus is on the power relations: "Feminists and others representing disadvantaged groups use post-structural critiques of language, particularly deconstruction, to make visible how language operates to produce very real, material, and damaging structures in the world" (St Pierre, 2010, p. 481).

Derrida's approach was called deconstruction, because he destabilised texts, meanings, and identities. Derrida's "writing is a radical critique of philosophy and questions the usual notions of truth and knowledge" (Collins & Mayblin, 2005, p. 12). Cannella (2002) explains that the point of deconstruction is to expose the "inconsistencies, contradictions and biases within dominating themes" (p. 2). In other words, to deconstruct the accepted concepts by which we live. Deconstruction "fictionalizes hegemonic truth and unlocks the door to multiple possibilities" (Cannella, 2002, p. 16).

Through deconstruction people are able to reconstruct discourses in a new light; once accepted ways of doing and being are questioned and critiqued, new ways of being can exist. For example, Derrida questions the concept of binary, whereby each action has an equal and opposite reaction, up/down or homosexual/heterosexual. He suggests that there is not always a binary, and challenges the idea we can ever find the real truth about anything in our world (Collins & Mayblin, 2005). Post-structuralism emerged because theorists argued that the social world is not as stable as structuralists assume

it is (McLennan et al., 2000b). For example, Derrida argued that sets of ideas such as "illness, criminology and sexuality" are historically situated in society and change over time as "knowledge-power relationships change in societies" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 391). I propose that the participants' sense of identity has the potential to be shifting and unstable based on what barriers are presented at the time. I suggest that because identity and ideas are fluid, there are benefits for participants to modify their behaviour based on who they are interacting with. Post-structuralism demands that people examine their own complicity in the maintenance of social injustice (St Pierre, 2010). It is this accountability that interested me in post-structuralism. If people are accountable for creating their own world, then it is advantageous for lesbian teachers to disrupt heteronormative practices.

Post-structuralism can be seen as an umbrella over a range of other theories that also question stability: "It is evident from the recent increase in feminist work informed by post-structuralism that the relationship of the two bodies of thought and practice is not inimical (unfriendly) but invigorating and fruitful" (St Pierre, 2010, p. 3). Post-structuralist theory is the over-arching theory from which queer theory emerged. It is natural that these two theories have both connections and differences. A commonality of post-structuralist and queer theory is the desire to make sense of the world, and to call into question, or examine, people's daily practices. Queer theorists, along with post-structuralist theorists, believe that what structuralist theory accepts as truth should be radically questioned (McLennan et al., 2000b).

Queer theory
Queer theory is relevant to this research project because of the questions it raises and the way in which it troubles heteronormativity and its normalising practices (Robinson, 2005a). Prior to the introduction of queer theory there was widespread invisibility of homosexuals, however the gay liberation movement of the 1960s and the creation of gay and lesbian communities created a more visible community (Nelson 2002). At the same time, critical

theorists were theorising that identities were not "socially constructed *facts* but were cultural and discursive *acts* [original emphasis]" (Nelson, 2002, p. 46).

Queer theory has evolved from other minority groups raising awareness of their lack of position, and highlighting their invisibility within a research model. Historically, academic research was conducted and influenced by a hegemonic group of white, educated males, which consequently, reflected their own paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Queer theory is a product of qualitative research which gives voice to previously oppressed voices in research fields, such as women and ethnic minorities (Gamson, 2000). Queer theory has kept hold of this principle and now gives voice to gay people, another previously silenced community. Although queer theory arose from other minority groups forging out a space for themselves in academic research, the driving force behind queer theory is the concern for the queer community. The move by other minority groups allowed queer theory to use that model to also become visible and to understand the "organisation of sexual subjectivities" (Jarvis, 2009 p. 34).

According to Gamson (2000), queer theory is about invisible people becoming visible and has clear links to policies and social movements. "Queer theory has created spaces for multiple discourses on gay, bisexual, transgendered and lesbian subjects" to been seen and unpacked (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 162). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000):

> Critical race theory brought race and the concept of a complex racial subject squarely into qualitative inquiry, next it remained for queer theory to do the same, namely to question and deconstruct the concept of an unreflective, unified sexual subject. (p. 164)

Queer theory is informed by post-structuralism as it applies to sexualities and gender (Plummer, 2008). Furthermore, queer theory avoids "binary and hierarchical reasoning in general, and in connection with gender, sex and sexuality in particular" (Marinucci, 2010, p. 33).

Queer theory "pushes past 'acceptance and tolerance' as a way of coping with difference and ultimately exposes the rigid normalizing categories"

people engage in (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010, p. 7). As well as an act of re-claiming, the use of the word, "queer" is used to challenge clear-cut notions of sexual identity. According to Whitlock (2010) queer theory is "deliberately disruptive" (p. 82). Lee and Duncan (2008) quote Foucault (1977), Warner (1993), and Rich (1980) to describe queer theory, heteronormativity, and understandings of families, stating that queer theory can be seen to disrupt the dominant discourse which is usually held in place by discipline and control. Foucault's work has strongly influenced queer and post-structuralist theories. From queer theory, the concept of heteronormativity was born: this is the idea that all people are born heterosexual, and prefer this over any other type of sexuality. An example of heteronormativity is provided by Rich (1980) who suggests that the idea of family – being a man, woman, and their children – "permeates every element of existence" and any family which does not fit with this pattern is seen as other (p. 1). Queer theory challenges deeply held assumptions about gender, sex, sexuality, and the heteronormative constructions of gender (Marinucci, 2010; Robinson, 2005a). Queer theory exposes the normalising categories in an effort to create equality and socially just environments for all (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010).

Queer theory has been useful to "understand sexuality and how it is played out in educational settings" (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2008, p. 847). Robinson (2005) argues that, "normalisation of heterosexuality is encoded in language, in practices and the encounters of everyday life" (p. 2). Burr (1995) discusses the interactions we participate in in our everyday lives, and how language helps people to form particular assumptions (beliefs) about each other. For instance, children create and recreate meanings about gender in their talk, by "construct[ing] what it means to be a boy or a girl in a particular time or place" (Blaise, 2005).

Feminist post-structuralism

Feminist post-structuralism proposes a critical interrogation of social structures such as patriarchy (Jarvis, 2009). Feminist post-structuralism is interested in how particular discourses operate to normalise gender, which is considered a form of inequity by feminist post-structuralists (Blaise, 2005).

According to St Pierre (2010), when an examination of a social structure occurs, the discourse behind the structure can be challenged and the validity of the discourse can be questioned. A feminist worldview emphasises the importance of gender in human relationships and societal processes (Patton, 2002). Feminist post-structuralism is a framework researchers have engaged with to help explain and understand the gendered "construction and assumptions of identities, diversity and learning" (Blaise, 2005, p. 3). The construction of one's self is influenced by how we "learn to be individual members of… society…viewing gender identity as a product of various forms of learning" (Blaise, 2005, p. 9). Marinucci (2010) supports the view that gender is constructed by society, rather than being innate. Feminist post-structuralism offers a way of producing "new knowledge by using post-structuralist theories and agency to understand how power is exercised" (Blaise, 2005, p. 15).

Feminist post-structuralism has several dominant foci – language, discourse, agency, sex, gender and sexuality; power, identity, and social regulation; and subjectivity. These concepts are used to critically analyse and understand participants' talk and actions (Blaise, 2005). While each concept and its relevance to this thesis is discussed, it needs to be understood that none of them stands alone; they are reliant on one another for meaning-making and clarity. In the next section, language, discourse, and subjectivity, the three foci I have selected for this research, are explored further.

Language
Although individual thought or language is not believed to be "specifically controlled by a pre-determined universal human system, structuralists are convinced that rules and universal concepts regulate, determine, and constrain human thought and activity" (Cannella, 2002, p. 12). Thus, queer theory pays particular attention to language use and sense making. Feminist post-structuralists hold that language is used to maintain a hold on people, and it is through the examination of language and how it is used in the service of power, that the power of language can start to be understood.

The post-structuralist theory states that meanings of particular words depend upon the context they are used in (McLennan et al., 2000b). Discourse is embedded in everyday language. Heteronormative discourse as a dominant discourse thus positions heterosexual as dominant, normal, and necessary and other sexual identities as therefore less worthy.

Post-structuralist theory sees language as a place where identities can be challenged or changed, an opportunity for identities such as "woman", "disabled", or "child" to be transformed or reconstructed (Burr, 1995). Language and discourse are closely connected, so much so that Foucault referred to language as discourse language "constructs knowledge and consequently limits alternative knowledge forms" (Cannella, 2002, p. 13).

Discourse

As mentioned above, discourse and language are interconnected. Discourse can be described as "situated within language and practices and has become discernible through an analysis of the ways people use language and through the ways practices order us, and allow us to order ourselves" (Gunn, 2003a, p. 3). In other words, discourses are located in the language people use, and the ways people do things, and this can be seen when an analysis of how language and practices are used is performed. Burr (1995) implies that once their discourses are identified, people are in a position to claim or reject those which "frame our lives" (p. 90). Discourse is language with social meaning that works to back up a particular worldview that privileges the interests of the elite.

A discourse explains or gives meaning to images, language, and/or stories which produce a particular picture that is creating meaning about a person or an event, a particular way of seeing someone or something (Burr, 1995). "Language and actions are performative acts and they act to create discursive sites where attitudes and beliefs can include or exclude at the personal and institutional level" (Gunn, Child, Madden, Purdue, & Surtees, 2004, p. 294). What is written or what is said can be considered as narrative, and is used to construct an event in one way, or another (Burr, 1995).There

are numerous narratives surrounding all objects, and it is through these discourses that things can be seen from a range of viewpoints.

Post-structural theories of discourse allow people to understand how knowledge, truth, and subjects are produced in cultural practice as well as how they might be reconfigured (St Pierre, 2010). Dominant discourse has a powerful impact upon both the privileged and the unprivileged. The power by which the dominant group maintains control over others and suppresses minorities is a strong binary in action, (from one extreme to the other) and can often be hidden in actions and words (Burr, 1995). Discourses hold a certain level of power; once a discourse becomes ''normal'' and ''natural'' it is difficult to think and act outside it (St Pierre, 2010). Within the rules of a discourse, it makes sense to say only certain things. Other statements and others ways of thinking remain unintelligible, thus reinforcing the power of some and not others. It is day-to-day practices that maintain the interests of the powerful groups, and allow certain "truths" to be so (Burr, 1995). They are powerful simply because they normalise everyday inequality constituting a fabric of feeling that anything other than the dominant discourse is wrong or dangerous.

The discourse of particular societies can be so powerful that many teachers are reluctant to discuss their sexuality within their workplace with staff, parents, and children (Gunn & Surtees, 2004). "There are both perceived and real homophobia issues, such as parents withdrawing their child from the centre because of the teacher's sexuality" (Gunn & Surtees, 2004, p. 84).

Narratives are tools that people engage with in an attempt to define themselves, and to define others; thus, identity and the importance of identification is linked closely to discourse. Once individuals identify with a position within a particular narrative, they start to understand the world and themselves from that particular vantage point. This leads into the creation of self or subjectivity, discussed in the next section. In terms of this research I am interested in the narratives teachers engage with when rationalising their stance on disrupting dominance such as heteronormativity. Disrupting

heteronormativity could potentially mean creating a shift in power for participants.

Subjectivity

Another word for these categories is knowledge; people use knowledge to define themselves and others by drawing upon their knowledge of identifiers to define themselves and others. For Foucault, knowledge is bound up with power, the "ability to control, or be controlled depends upon the 'knowledge' currently prevailing in a society" (Burr, 1995, p. 64). Knowledge and power are integrated with each other, and impossible to separate; when "combined with social practices, discourses constitute knowledge, subjectivities, and power relations" (Blaise, 2005, p. 16). Post-structuralist theory sees the person and their identity as a product of prevailing discourses of selfhood, sexuality, age, and race that are culturally available (Burr, 1995). In other words, people construct their identity from the available identities within their environment. We are influenced by those around us, and our circumstances as we use these to form our identity (Olsen, 2011). These discourses provide ways of describing ourselves, as well as others – for example, strong, young, and short – and Burr (1995) highlights that there are limited "slots" for people. In her example, Burr (1995) refers to sexuality and suggests that the two most "readily available slots are 'gay' and 'straight'" (p. 141).

The above example show how discourses can limit and shape people's way of thinking without people being fully aware, or questioning what happens and why certain things happen. In terms of subjectivity, people have choices and agency to make those choices, but the choices available to people are limited by what is acceptable within the society the person is situated in. For example, dominant discourses, social and institutional structures, and social hierarchies all play a part in limiting choices available and an individual has to "negotiate their identity within a community bound by customs and traditions" (Olsen, 2011, p. 258).

Relevance of queer and post-structuralist theories to my research

As mentioned above, post-structuralism is an over-arching theory from which queer theory emerged. Both desire to make sense of the world, and to call

into question, or examine, people's daily practices. Another similarity is the examination and interest in how sections of people's lives relate to each other (Jarvis, 2009).

Feminist post-structuralism and queer theory helped me frame my questions. Fresh viewpoints will be encountered that will help me to better understand the processes teachers use and do not use to disrupt heteronormativity. Queer theory permits questions to be asked and data to be analysed in more complex ways than traditional development theories (Blaise 2005). Both queer theory and post-structuralist theory sustain a teaching agenda that focuses on social justice and equity, (Blaise 2005), which are two areas that draw parallels to my research questions. Social justice is evident in the desires of participants to disrupt heteronormativity and seek equity and social justice for themselves.

 I am looking at heteronormativity and its dominance in ECE settings from a lesbian teachers' paradigm. Queer theory takes a critical look at how systems in society work, and on a small scale I, too, am exploring how participants in this research challenge the systems. Hegemonic views about sexuality exist in ECE settings, and queer theory, with its critical analysis and desire to trouble the accepted ways of being, assists in understanding these views. Feminist post-structuralism provides a paradigm in which social interactions can be examined, and a lens for the data to be examined. Social interactions are influenced by who is involved in the interaction, so the way society controls people's opportunities to be heard is of interest to me. Heteronormativity is one example of how people can be controlled by others. This research examines the social processes research participants struggle against. When lesbian teachers are presented with opportunities to disrupt heteronormativity are they able to? Are the barriers such that they can be overcome?

It can be seen then, that these approaches are well-suited to this research, which aims to examine how participants troubled, or queered their environments.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with a brief outline of the frameworks I chose for this study; feminist post-structuralism and queer theory. I provided an outline of the concepts pertaining to these theories. I described the links between language and discourse, acknowledging that these are closely interwoven. Following this, I defined subjectivity and the ways identities are created and acknowledged. Feminist post-structuralism is explained, including the relationship between language and discourse, as well as the construction of self; subjectivity. Queer theory provides a way to critically examine any taken for granted ways; that is, to queer-up the environment, providing a tool to question the historically silent side of the lesbian and gay community. Queer theory sits well with the participant selection criteria, lesbian ECE teachers. It is relevant, in this case, to use a theory created for queer people, as a framework for examining the data collected from queer participants regarding the act of queering their environments. The amalgamation of theories used to structure this thesis provides a richer opportunity to analyse the data than using just one or the other. Both theories assist in gaining a better understanding of the actions lesbian teachers can use to disrupt heteronormativity. In the next chapter the literature review is presented.

Chapter three: Literature Review

In this chapter I commence with a brief overview of the historical nature of Aotearoa/New Zealand regarding lesbian and gay acceptance. This is intended to set the scene, and to justify the current situation related to lesbian and gay issues and their (in) visibility within Aotearoa/New Zealand. The historical climate in the educational sector is discussed next. A justification of literature chosen is provided next, including location of literature. Four themes within the studies are then named, and discussed, drawing examples from the literature to highlight their value. The concluding thoughts section draws the themes together and justifies their use in the analytical chapters.

The history of gay politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Protection and acknowledgement has been a relatively recent privilege for lesbian and gay people in Aotearoa/New Zealand. When the Human Rights Act (1977) was amended in 1977, Parliament refused to include sexual orientation as grounds for protection against discrimination (Ua, 2005). Progress was made in 1985 when Parliament voted for the Homosexual Law Reform Bill to be introduced. This decriminalised sexual relations between consenting males (Laurie & Evans, 2005). However, the second part of the Bill, which would have removed discrimination on the basis of sexuality, was rejected. At that time, opponents argued that homosexuality was not a human rights issue and that discrimination was fair and acceptable (Laurie, 2004). It was not until July 1993 that the Human Rights Commission Amendment Act, outlawing discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or HIV, was passed by Parliament (Ua, 2005).

Further progress for inclusion of lesbian and gay rights was evident in January 1996 when MP Judith Tizard proposed legalising same-sex marriage. In July of the same year, the census forms were modified to capture data on same- gender as well as opposite-gender relationships. Partners of the same sex still had no way of formally recognising their commitment to one another. In April 2005 the Civil Union Act 2004 was finalised. The finalising of this Act indicated progress by the Government in Aotearoa/New Zealand to accept and acknowledge family structures, other than husband and wife, in a formal way. In 2013, the Marriage Amendment Bill was passed, and same-gender couples were eligible to marry (New Zealand Parliament, 2013).

Educational history in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Education plays a part in all cultures; it is the channel through which "values, customs, and culture are transmitted from one generation to the next" and the most forceful means for creating change (Lyman, Strachan, & Lazaridou, 2012, p. xiii). Although education is seen as a vehicle to bring about change, because of the perceived sexual nature of the topic, teachers are reluctant to talk about lesbian and gay issues with children. In order to maintain the alleged innocence of children, talk about sex, sexuality, or sexual choices with children is discouraged within early childhood settings (Gunn & Surtees, 2004). The discourse of the child as an innocent means it is not considered appropriate or relevant to discuss with children issues about sex and sexual orientation (Gunn, 2003c). The image of the child as innocent is drawn upon to legitimise the exclusion of discussion around sexuality (Gunn, Child, Madden, Purdue, Surtees, et al., 2004).

In Aotearoa/New Zealand "legislation and policy (e.g., the Human Rights Act 1993; Ministry of Education (MoE), 1996, 1998) supports the principle of inclusion of all families in ECE settings" (Surtees, 2012, p. 3). However, there is still a "taken for granted primacy of heterosexual two-parent family forms" (Surtees, 2012 p.3). Greater public visibility in recent years has been afforded to rainbow families. Nevertheless, there are still many challenges for these

families in dealing with legal and community contexts that are not supportive of same-sex relationships (Power et al., 2010).

The Teachers Council of New Zealand states that qualified, registering teachers must "take all reasonable steps to provide and maintain a teaching and learning environment that is physically, socially, culturally and emotionally safe" (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2014). Surtees (2012) suggests that EC teachers respond to the changing notion of family and what that might mean, in order to "meet their legislative inclusionary responsibilities" (p. 40) as well as to challenge exclusion. Part of these inclusionary responsibilities are set out in *Te Whāriki He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa (*Te Whāriki) (MoE, 1996) which requires teachers to provide an environment that views all children's family background in a positive light. According to the Ministry of Education, the ECE curriculum is expected to "contribute towards countering ... prejudice" (1996, p. 18). Therefore, it can be argued that ignoring and leaving heteronormativity unchallenged reduces the likelihood of all children achieving these goals.

Despite the abovementioned legislation, the experiences of rainbow families show that in practice rainbow families still experience discrimination (Lee, 2010; Lee & Duncan, 2008; Power et al., 2010; Terreni et al., 2010). Although the legislation is intended to protect queer people from oppression, Lee's (2008) Aotearoa/New Zealand based research highlighted barriers for lesbian families when enrolling their children in ECE settings. She interviewed lesbian mothers entering the ECE environment to enrol their children, and found they still face a range of challenges regarding acceptance. Power et.al.'s (2010) Australia New Zealand based research findings are consistent with Lee's (2008). The authors found that rainbow families experienced discrimination within the education systems; for example, when trying to arrange childcare.

Themes that emerged from the literature

There have been relatively few studies internationally which solely focus upon the narratives of lesbian EC teachers (DeJean, 2010a), and none

conducted in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Research over the last decade within educational settings in Australasia has focused either on issues and challenges that rainbow families have faced regarding acceptance in ECE (Gunn, Child, Madden, Purdue, & Surtees, 2004b; Lee, 2010; Lee & Duncan, 2008; Robinson, 2005a; Skattebol & Ferfolja, 2007) or focuses on teachers working in an ECE setting and their understanding of and acceptance of rainbow families (Gunn & Surtees, 2004; Jarvis & Sandretto, 2010; Robinson, 2005a; Surtees, 2005; Surtees 2012).

In terms of the research mentioned previously regarding challenges, two sub-themes emerged; the first theme was the inclusion of lesbian and gay issues in teacher training institutes, and the second was teachers working in ECE settings and (un)knowingly supporting heteronormativity. The focus of this research is on the second theme; teachers working in ECE and how they negotiate barriers created by heteronormativity.

Focusing on this theme, I widened my search to include research from the United States of America. Although my interest is in ECE, most of the literature was concerned with primary and secondary educators. Nevertheless, the research suggests that in other parts of the world, and in other education sectors, issues pertaining to the visibility of lesbian and gay people and rainbow families to teachers is consistent with issues raised in ECE in Aotearoa/New Zealand (DeJean, 2008; Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008).

The research which has been selected for this review was conducted between 1999 and 2015. It was difficult for me to locate relevant research prior to 1999, and the narrowness of this window is an indication that the topic is relatively new. However, there has been an increase in research internationally over the last five years that highlights the need to address lesbian and gay equality issues (Beren, 2013; Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014; DeJean, 2010b; Robinson, 2005a). A survey of the literature about issues pertaining to lesbian and gay people and rainbow parented families, identified four main themes. These are an anti-bias curriculum, silence, child as an innocent, and teacher unpreparedness. An anti-bias curriculum is one

in which the educational experiences of children prepare them for living in a diverse, multicultural world (Beren, 2013). Silence is seen as a tool employed by majority groups to maintain the status quo (Jarvis & Sandretto, 2010c). The child as an innocent prevents teachers talking about topics related to sex and sexuality. Teacher unpreparedness affected teachers' confidence to approach the topic of gay families or gay rights with children in their care.

Anti-bias curriculum in education

DeJean (2008) invited ten educators in California who considered themselves "out" within the classrooms where they taught to participate in his research. These teachers worked with children in primary and high schools. Using interpretive methodology, DeJean used individual interviews as well as focus groups to understand the lived experiences of these teachers. DeJean wanted to explore how the participants disrupted the accepted ways of teaching and employed an anti-bias curriculum. It was the author's intention to find out how teachers worked with students in authentic ways and if this type of engagement invited an anti-bias classroom. He called this way of teaching "radical honesty" and suggests that this radical honesty is central to creating an anti-bias environment and effective teaching (DeJean, 2008, p. 63). One participant from this research explained that her commitment to radical honesty meant that she talked about her weekend (with her female partner) in a similar manner as a heterosexual co-worker. Another participant described creating an anti-bias environment within the classroom as "books, pictures, and posters which reflect inclusive images of the world" (DeJean, 2008, p. 63).

Gunn (2003c) provides an anti-bias lens to reflect upon the teacher's role, not only to work within an anti-bias curriculum, but to challenge the "barriers to inclusion which existed in the first place" (p. 132). She states that there are many different ways to view an anti-bias education, including philosophy, approach, curriculum and the environment. However the reality of creating an anti-bias curriculum in practice can still be a challenge. Gunn's (2003a) findings suggest that turning the ideals and policies into reality by acting upon them is a critical component for positive change in the ECE setting.

In their article entitled "*What are we doing this for? Dealing with lesbian and gay issues in teacher education*", Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) reflect on their experiences of teaching diversity and social justice issues to pre-service high school teachers. They suggest that information about lesbian and gay people be taught in ECE settings and primary schools as a way of creating anti-bias classroom environments. The research concluded that the challenge they faced when they raised the topic of lesbian and gay issues was that pre-service teachers felt that lesbian and gay issues were not part of an anti-bias curriculum.

Kelly (2012) conducted research into the effects of positive lesbian and gay resources such as books on the children and teachers attending a kindergarten located in Aotearoa. Her research "sought to go beyond traditional understandings of families" (Kelly, 2012, p. 1) and to challenge the dominance of heteronormativity within the kindergarten setting. Kelly used a co-researcher style of enquiry with the teachers employed at the kindergarten. It was the intention of the author to introduce an anti-bias curriculum to the kindergarten through books, thus creating a disruption of the accepted norms. Kelly states that the intention of the research was to form a commitment to equity and inclusive pedagogies. The teachers engaged willingly with the resources (books), and spoke in a positive manner about some of the messages that books were portraying. However, no participant took all the opportunities provided to them through reading the books to involve children in conversations about the topic of lesbian and gay families (Kelly, 2012).

Kelly (2012) noted that although some opportunities arose, it appeared that the dominance of heterosexuality remained a barrier for inclusive practice. For example, one participant engaged in a "normalising action" (p. 6), where she described a blended family as a family that had two mums (a birth mother and a step-mother), rather than introducing the topic of a lesbian parented household. Another participant also noted in her reflective diary that her focus had been on differences related to physical characteristics rather than an emphasis on the differences in the family portrayed.

In his auto-ethnographical research, Wolfe (2006) discusses his shift in thinking about the subjects related to an anti-bias curriculum. Wolfe (2006) maintains that the inclusion and acceptance of lesbian and gay families in early childhood settings is a human issue rather than political issue. An anti-bias curriculum focus is on families and relationships. Wolfe states that an anti-bias curriculum would mean that lesbian and gay families get the same acknowledgement as all families attending the early childhood centre. The goal is to create educational environments free of harassment, homophobia and discrimination: "rather than asking for agreement on the issues of homosexuality, we are asking for support and respect for all children in that community" (Wolfe, 2006, p. 199).

In summary, although teachers considered that they engaged in an anti-bias curriculum, acknowledging that lesbian and gay issues were part of an anti-bias curriculum was challenging for many participants. Participants in the above studies repeatedly reverted to the heteronormative foundations of their experiences. Some research participants felt that the issues pertaining to lesbian and gay people and lesbian and rainbow families were not as relevant to the classroom as issues such as multiculturalism (Robinson 2002). Although an anti-bias curriculum encourages teachers to introduce topics related to diversity as early as possible, many teachers feel uncomfortable welcoming lesbian and gay families into the centre (Beren, 2013). This discomfort could be a possible barrier to the participants in this research. This raises the question, how do the participants in this research react if other teachers minimise the importance of including rainbow families into the centre?

Silence

Silence is a theme which emerged from the literature reviewed (DeJean, 2010a; Gunn, 2003a; Robinson, 2005a; Surtees, 2005; Wolfe, 2006). Beren's (2013) research situated in the United States found that lesbian and gay parents felt invisible, silenced, and excluded in the ECE setting. One way silence can be defined is as a message of unwelcome (Gonzalez-Mena, 2010; Lee & Duncan, 2008). Although people might not actively discriminate by being vocal about their dislike of non-traditional families, their silence

sends the same message (Gonzalez-Mena, 2010; Robinson 2002). Silence, therefore, is not a passive act. The many issues, such as marginalisation, faced by rainbow families make it important to provide care and safety for children of these families in such a way that their specific needs are met (Gonzalez-Mena 2010).

An Australian research project conducted by Robinson (2002) sought to identify how EC teachers addressed a range of topics related to diversity and difference such as gender and biculturalism. One of the five topics the participants were interviewed about was lesbian and gay issues. Forty-nine EC teachers from Sydney were surveyed, and 16 participants volunteered for in-depth interviews. The findings illustrated that participants ranked lesbian and gay issues well below the other areas of difference when asked to consider the importance of each issue. This article examines the discourses that are in ECE that uphold the discourse of silence and exclusion of lesbian and gay issues. The author acknowledges that sexual orientation issues are controversial areas that are fraught with obstacles that operate to silence as well as limit dialogue (Robinson, 2002). The author suggests that broader social issues be included that pertain to lesbian and gay people. The article unpacks the discourse that gay issues are not relevant in ECE settings, thus supporting the silencing of lesbian and gay issues. The discourse, then suggests children attending the centre will still have exposure through their own family and friends regarding lesbian and gay issues and rainbow families, and that discussions about marginalisation of gays is an important issue to raise (Robinson, 2002).

Robinson's research revealed that another way that teachers ensure that the topic of lesbian and gay issues remains silent is located in heterosexism. An example provided relates to children playing dress-ups and mothers and fathers games being considered as "everyday life". Teachers were unable to see and recognise these play actions for the dominant discourse – heteronormativity – that they are, thus adding to the silence. It may be claimed that one reason silence is so appealing to the majority group is because issues pertaining to lesbian and gay families have the potential to disrupt dominant power relationships (Robinson, 2002). In addition, moral

and cultural beliefs about same-gender relationships created silence around the topic of lesbian and gay issues (Robinson, 2002).

Of critical importance is the influence that early childhood educators can have on children's perceptions of diversity and difference. Robinson (2002) suggests it is "through the discourses that they make available to children, and those they silence through their daily practices, pedagogies and curricula" (p. 416). In other words, teachers are highly influential regarding what children are exposed to within the ECE setting. It is this influence that creates and allows the silencing of lesbian and gay issues.

Gunn's (2003a) research located in Aotearoa/New Zealand inquired into the "effects of heteronormativity on *who* and *how* EC teachers might be" (p. 2). Fourteen EC teachers took part in the study. Data was gathered using three focus groups with participants self-selecting groups, and a final focus group with all participants. Queer pedagogy was used in this research, and discourse was used as a theoretical tool. Silence is a key area revealed in these findings. Silence in this study was understood to be a tool teachers employed so as to "not upset anyone" (Gunn, 2003a, p. 5). One participant mentioned she was cautious about over-stepping the boundaries between the teacher's role and the parent's role. She felt that some topics were more appropriate for the family to discuss with the child, rather than her. This uncertainty rendered her silent, and the silence resulted in the heteronormative status quo being maintained (Gunn, 2003a).

Another research project based in Aotearoa/New Zealand undertaken by Surtees (2005, 2006, 2008) invited three qualified EC educators to participate in qualitative research using queer theory and discourse analysis. Theoretical perspectives used in the study draw from social constructionism, discourse analysis, and queer theory. These perspectives were used in facilitating understanding of how teachers in ECE settings might view the child, and the nature of children's development, including the development of sexual identity (Surtees, 2005). Purposive sampling was used to ensure participants fitted particular criteria. In this case teachers were invited to participate who were likely to be informed about the topic of how teachers talk around

sexuality in ECE settings. Surtees deemed the topic to be sensitive and wanted participants who were willing to share personal beliefs.

Surtees used semi-structured interviews and one focus group to examine how children's sexuality is discursively constructed in ECE settings. Surtees' (2005, 2006, 2008) research outlines child-led discourse as a way in which the concept of silence is enforced. The child-led discourse or, Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), requires teachers to follow the children's lead in play and curiosity. Surtees (2008) argues that the DAP teaching method has limitations including the ability to restrain conversations between adults and children, unless a child raises the topic. In other words, rainbow families would not be discussed unless children wanted to discuss them, so creating spaces where silence is possible. Surtees (2005, 2006, 2008) states that heteronormativity fuels and compounds resistance towards and a silencing of sexuality issues in the ECE sector. Participants in this research stated that it was only appropriate to talk to children about gay issues if the children had personal experiences with gay people and /or gay issues (Surtees, 2005). Creating specific boundaries around when lesbian and gay issues can be discussed creates large spaces of silence when the topic cannot be discussed. This implies that the participants understood the topic of lesbian and gay issues, as well as the topic of rainbow families, to be relevant only to children who had prior experience or knowledge. In this instance, silence is reinforced through the policing of relevance.

Jarvis and Sandretto's (2010c) study conducted in Aotearoa/New Zealand researched how teachers challenge heteronormative behaviour. Jarvis (2009) research interviewed six EC teachers and explored the queer theoretical concepts of heteronormativity. Using a queer theory framework with a feminist methodological approach Jarvis used both individual interviews and focus groups with the participants. One of the findings from the research indicates that when teachers do not challenge parent's heteronormative voice they are, by their silence, condoning what others are saying. Silence is a way to remain not implicated. Jarvis (2009) suggests that this silence renders diverse family structures invisible for children in the ECE setting.

Souto-Manning and Hermann-Wilmarth (2008) sought to understand the role teacher education providers played in silencing lesbian and gay issues in the pre-service teacher classroom. One teacher in Souto-Manning and Hermann-Wilmarth's (2008) American based research acknowledged that by doing nothing she was conforming to the "don't ask-don't tell mentality" and she was, in fact, promoting the acceptance of bullying in her classroom. In other words, for this teacher, silence was the same as discrimination. The authors also discuss the reluctance of lecturers in America to raise lesbian and gay issues. This reluctance created silences around the topic of inclusion of lesbian and gay issues at a pre-service level. Reluctance stems from the perception that issues of sexuality have no bearing in the education sector (Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008). These silences in the pre-service sector created teachers who were unprepared to challenge dominant discourses and oppression of lesbian and gay issues in their classroom settings. Teacher unpreparedness is discussed further on in this chapter.

In summary, the reviewed studies revealed that silence is both caused and reinforced by a range of circumstances. For example, the discourse of minimising conflict, by not engaging in topics which may be seen as inappropriate, is one way that silence is demonstrated (Robinson 2002). Silence is evident in both the EC sector and the pre-service education sector (Beren, 2013). Silence is also seen to reinforce the idea for the majority that marginalisation for minorities is an expectation (Gonzalez-Mena, 2010). This silence solidifies diverse family structures being invisible to children in the EC education settings.

Child as an innocent

Many teachers struggle with the idea of raising issues such as rainbow families or gay rights because they believe the topic is about sex, or sex education, rather than inclusion and social justice (Gunn, 2003b; Robinson, 2002; Robinson, 2005a; Sumara, 2008; Surtees, 2008). In studies conducted in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, and the United States (DeJean, 2008; Gunn, 2003a; Robinson, 2005a) participants reasoned that it was the parents' role, rather than the teachers', to talk about topics related to sex and sexuality. These participants taught in preschool, primary, and high school

settings. Robinson and Ferfolja's (2008) Australian based research indicated that participants thought that the younger the child was, the less relevant the topic of sexuality was highlighting ways in which teachers avoided engaging with the topics.

Drawing upon her collaborative research as well as her experiences as a teacher educator in Australia, Robinson's (2005a) reflections focus on the ways that lesbian and gay issues are ignored by teachers. The "innocent child" is a discourse teachers use to minimise the validity of rising lesbian and gay issues. Children are considered innocent, and unable to have discussions about sexuality, because it is considered developmentally inappropriate to raise the topic with young children (Robinson, 2005a). However, Robinson (2005c) makes the point that even though teachers think of children as young and innocent, (asexual), the dominant discourse, heterosexuality, is an "integral part of children's every day educational experiences" (p. 1).

According to Gunn (2003a) the image of the innocent child dictates that teachers do not discuss sex and sexuality/sexualities prior to secondary school. A participant in Gunn's research (2003a) stated she felt unprepared to discuss the topic of rainbow families because she was nervous about a potential conflict of beliefs between herself and the parents. Like Robinson (2005c) Gunn (2003a) also concludes that teachers do not think it is appropriate or important to discuss issues about sex and sexual orientation with children because of the child as an innocent discourse.

Surtees' (2005) Aotearoa/New Zealand based research revealed much the same discourse as Gunn (2003a). Teachers resisted talking about sexuality, claiming the discourse of sexuality belongs to adults to justify why they did not encourage talk of sexualities to children. The discourse that perceives children as asexual and innocent can position children in limited ways and this potentially serves to disempower the child (Surtees, 2005).

In conclusion, the research shows the perceived innocence of the child creates a desire in adults to protect this innocence and to shelter children from adult topics such as sex and sexuality (Gunn, 2003a). However,

although talking to a child about sexualities is avoided, what we do is act out assumptions that the child/children will become heterosexual (Gunn & Surtees, 2010). The innocent child is surrounded by heterosexuality, rendering this as the norm, and only acceptable way to be.

Teacher unpreparedness

Being or feeling unprepared creates barriers for teachers to talk about lesbian and gay issues. Teachers stated that they did not feel well equipped to talk about lesbian and gay issues, because their training did not provide them with the skills needed (Beren, 2013). Participants in Beren's (2013) online course on gay and lesbian families identified teacher unpreparedness as one of the major indicators for teachers to exclude information about lesbian and gay families. The research participants, located in the United States, identified their training as the area that had not suitably prepared them for lesbian and gay families to be present in their ECE settings. The majority wanted" training that provided tools for being inclusive and welcoming" to rainbow families (Beren, 2013, p. 61).

The majority of participants in Robinson's (2002) research in Australia did not feel confident about approaching the topic of gay families or gay rights with children in their care and seemed to lack knowledge of how to incorporate the above mentioned topics. If the topic was raised, teachers felt unprepared and unable to act, mainly because of the perceived sexual nature of the topic. Hostile responses were common when people raised gay issues, resulting in the subject being dropped, because it was too difficult to pursue (Robinson 2002). Some participants in the study indicated that they would raise the issues when/if a gay family started at the centre, indicating that these issues were only relevant to gay families, not heterosexual families (Robinson 2002).

Souto-Manning and Hermann-Wilmarth (2008) suggest that one barrier to pre-service teachers' lack of knowledge about how to approach the subject of gay and lesbian families is mainly due to research being published in volumes which are not accessible to teachers. Teacher education providers will often silence gay and lesbian issues and, as a result of this, teachers are

ill-prepared to provide this knowledge to the classrooms they teach. So, by default, the heterosexual family is portrayed and a heterosexual norm is maintained.

Gunn's (2003a) research participants in Aotearoa also spoke about being unprepared which was unsettling for teachers. Barriers to talking about homosexuality were identified with the teachers stating that they did not feel well equipped to talk about homosexual situations. As with Beren's (2013) research in the United States, teachers attributed this unpreparedness to their training which participants felt did not provide them with the skills needed (Gunn, 2003a). Responding to a scenario presented by the researcher, one participant stated "I don't know whether it's our role to explain the world to him" (Gunn, 2003a, p. 6). The unprepared teacher theme helped maintain the teacher's adherence to language and talk of practices that remained heteronormative. One participant suggested that "teachers needed to pick their battles" (Gunn, 2003a, p. 7) suggesting that for this participant the topic was one they were not prepared to confront fully. Some of Gunn's (2003a) participants did however feel prepared to advocate for other minority groups, stating 'this [lesbian and gay issues] is just like…biculturalism, [or] disabilities … [which] opened up opportunities" to question the unprepared discourse (p. 7).

In summary, participants in the above research spoke about feeling unconfident and unprepared in regard to discussing lesbian and gay families or issues. Lack of knowledge at the pre-service level (teacher training) was attributed to feelings of unpreparedness. Unpreparedness was largely attributed to teacher training which participants felt did not provide them with the skills needed in Gunn's (2003a) research which is consistent with Beren's (2013) research.

Concluding thoughts

This chapter opened by reflecting upon the historical nature of lesbian and gay issues within a political and educational paradigm. Then the four main themes that I identified from the literature were reviewed, anti-bias curriculum, silence, child as an innocent, and teacher unpreparedness. An

anti-bias curriculum encourages ECE settings to develop critical thinking and the skills of standing up in the face of injustice (Davis, Gunn, Purdue, & Smith, 2007). DeJean's (2008) idea of inclusion is different than asking teachers to agree with homosexuality, rather, inclusion is used in the context of building classrooms which are bias free. The literature also found that heteronormativity is a barrier to standing up for injustices such as marginalisation of lesbian and gay issues in ECE. Heteronormativity is also a compounding factor in the engagement of silence. By engaging in discourse that expects people to be heterosexual, lesbian and gay people are silenced

This literature review has considered the impact of silence on children, including preventing children from seeing representations of diverse family structures. It is the discourse that children are innocent, and void of any sexual knowledge that continues to be perpetuated ECE settings and which supports the exclusion of lesbian and gay issues. The review of literature also highlighted the challenge teachers face when they feel under prepared to support conversations around lesbian and gay issues. Robinson and Jones-Diaz (1999) feel it is of great importance that educators have opportunities within their training to "develop a critical understanding of their own attitudes" (p. 1) in regard to diversity and difference and the division of power. Wolfe (2006) also advocates for teacher training to include preparation as a means to breaking down barriers. He suggests that when we prepare pre-service teachers to create inclusive classroom communities we also need to include children from rainbow families, under the "family diversity considerations" (p. 196).

One gap identified within the literature is the lack of knowledge about how lesbian and gay ECE teachers are working towards breaking down the heteronormative ECE environments. As already mentioned, the current research discusses teachers, irrespective of their sexuality, and how they do or do not challenge the dominance of heteronormativity (Gunn, 2003b; Robinson, 2005b). My research project will add to the body of knowledge about the ways in which ECE teachers break down heteronormative practices. In particular, it will provide potentially new knowledge around how lesbian teachers challenge the barriers to promote an anti-bias learning

environment located in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This literature review has identified silence, teacher unpreparedness, the perceived innocence of the child, and an anti-bias curriculum as areas to further explore. The first three can be identified as potential barriers to disrupting the heteronorm. An anti-bias curriculum is recognised as an ideal way to include all families and teachers within the ECE setting. In other words, that there is no bias within the curriculum, meaning, no bias to rainbow parents.

Three studies, (Gunn, 2003a; Jarvis, 2009; Surtees, 2005) influenced the style and types of questions I formed, as well as the theoretical frameworks I used for my study. In addition, DeJean's (2008) statement that there was little research regarding the experiences of lesbian and gay teachers breaking down heteronormativity intrigued me, thus influencing me to include this aspect in my own research. In the next chapter the methodology used to frame the project will be discussed.

Chapter Four: Methods

In this chapter, I outline and discuss the methodology as well as the methods of data collection used for this study. In the first section of this chapter thematic analysis is introduced, and the research questions are revisited. I then comment briefly on methodology and describe the qualitative methods used in this research. The following section discusses the participant selection process, followed by an introduction of the participants. Ethical considerations are explored next. The data collection methods are then described. A brief discussion of feminist and post-structuralist theoretical perspectives regarding the interview process is covered. How the individual interviews and the focus group were conducted is next. I then discuss the concept of reflexivity, where my location within this research will be defended. I provide some concluding thoughts regarding this project at the end of the chapter.

Thematic analysis

There are three kinds of qualitative data collection, interviews, observations, and documents (Patton, 2002). Thematic analysis is the most common form of analysis in qualitative research. It emphasises pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns or themes within data (Patton, 2002). In short, taking data and finding core "consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p. 463). Feminist post-structuralist theory and queer theory were used as critical lenses. Content analysis identifies core consistencies, and meanings, called themes, by analysing the interview transcripts; however, developing a coding system was my first step to conducting thematic analysis (Patton, 2002). As I searched for themes and coded passages, I was aware of Patton (2002) who stresses the point of thematic analysis is not simply to find a concept or label to neatly tie together the data; it is also important to understand the people studied. So although themes emerged, I was also interested in what this said about the person as well as what the person said. Patton (2002) asks, "What

are the indigenous categories that the people interviewed have created to make sense of their world?", and, "what are practices they engage in that can be understood only within their worldview?" (p. 454). The benefit of the homogenous group was that I was able to enquire into the worldview of lesbian ECE teachers and their experiences of heteronormativity. It is important to understand the people studied, including their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2002).

Each interview was initially analysed separately. The first cut at organising themes from the data involved reading through the transcripts and making comments in the margins (Patton, 2002). I was then able to locate discussions and themes more easily using the notes I had created. In reviewing the material, judgements and interpretations are made about the content, and patterns emerged from seemingly random information. Then cross-case analysis of the four interviews and the focus group was completed.

Inductive analysis, where findings emerge from the data "through the analyst's interactions with the data" (Patton, 2002, p. 454) was used. Once the initial patterns and themes had been established, deductive analysis, a process whereby data is analysed according to an existing framework, was also used. Starting with the first transcript, I read and re-read starting to note topics within the transcript. I then used these topics as a way of reading the following three transcripts. Data that did not coincide with the first transcripts topics was given a new title, thus simultaneously creating new themes as well as confirming existing themes. For example, talk of getting to know people prior to disclosing sexuality was a theme that was coded. I became aware that this theme was evident in all four transcripts, so I coded these findings in the same manner as I did the first transcript. Some themes were amalgamated, while other themes were considered in their own right and became a lens through which I re-read the data.

Methods of data analysis need to be systematic, disciplined, and able to be seen and described (Punch, 2005). Based on this, I again studied the data, this time looking for any additional patterns that could be emerging, or able to

be linked to existing themes. Four initial themes emerged: the first was the strength and impact of heteronormativity and the pressure of dominant discourse. The second theme was the implications and risks involved around disrupting the heteronormative dominance. How participants built and maintained relationships was the third emerging theme, and the final theme focused around participants' attitudes of preparedness. These themes informed the findings chapters which follow this chapter.

Research questions

Johnson and Christensen (2008) note that qualitative research is not always linear; the process of settling on a set of questions can be time consuming and troubling. Often the researcher generates preliminary questions and modifies these as data is collected and analysed, and this is the process I employed during this research. Modifications were made to the initial questions to allow for queer and feminist post-structuralist theories to be more visible. After some reflection on my initial questions, and an examination of the questions using a queer theory paradigm, I modified the questions to be:

- *What do lesbian teachers do to disrupt heteronormative dominance in early childhood settings?*
- *What barriers do lesbian teachers encounter when disrupting heteronormative dominance in early childhood settings?*
- *What strategies were used to overcome the barriers faced?*

Because I was looking at how my research participants engaged in social settings with children, parents and colleagues, I based the study within a qualitative interpretative paradigm.

After exploring a range of philosophical frameworks for this project, I turned to feminist post-structuralist and queer theory lenses to consider methodological approaches that align with qualitative research. What is consistent with both frameworks is the expectation that the researcher locates themselves within their own research. This open discussion about the researcher's position within the study appealed to me, and aligned with my

understanding of respectful research. Respectful research and my position within this study are discussed later in the chapter.

Both queer theory and feminist post-structuralist theory suggest that the researcher reflects not only upon knowledge but how knowledge is produced (St Pierre, 2010). It is this lens that I use in my analysis to examine language, subjectivity, and discourses in the data gathered. Within the frameworks of post-structuralist and feminist theory there are no clear guidelines or boundaries that define how to conduct research (St Pierre, 2010), mainly because they are theories that reject universal truth and emphasise differences (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). To this end, using both post-structuralism and feminist theory was both liberating due to the wide scope possible, and frightening due to the lack of clear boundaries.

Participant selection

Purposive sampling was used in this research to create a narrow set of criteria for participants. I was looking for participants who were women, EC teachers, and who identified as lesbian. This research adds to the prior research within Australasia (Gunn, 2003a; Jarvis & Sandretto, 2010a; Robinson, 2005a; Surtees, 2005). However, the above researchers had not specifically required all participants engaging with the research to identify as lesbian/gay, and previous research had a mix of both female and male participants. I sought four EC female teachers who identified as lesbian to add a different perspective to the previous research mentioned above.

Introducing participants

Although Burr (1995) discusses the concept of people having a fluid identity, for the purpose of this thesis I felt it was relevant to gain some contextual knowledge about each participant. I understand that this knowledge will be contextually accurate at this time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and so I also acknowledge that what information has been gathered at this point may in the future no longer be correct or relevant. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) remind me that "identities are multiple, contradictory, and unstable" (p. 349) and this is consistent with my personal experience. Acknowledging the complex ways

that culture and biology intertwine is part of understanding the identities of humans (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

In this study, I deemed the participants' ethnic composition to be irrelevant to the research questions so I did not request this information. In hindsight, this data could have been useful in positioning participants in cultural and ethnic paradigms, but this lack of data does not adversely affect the findings and the outcome of the research. Although I requested information about each participant's age and length of service within ECE, this was not hugely influential in my findings. Considering the fluid nature of identity and that subjectivity allows people to construct themselves, it was deemed more relevant to this research to request the terminology by which participants identified themselves (at the current time). According to queer theory "sexual identity is never fixed – it is shifting, so [people] should approach [others] assumption-less (Zacko-Smith and Smith, 2010, p. 6). I opened each interview with key questions, including age range, length of service as an EC teacher, and their preferred term to identify their sexuality.

In research where participants are interviewed, pseudonyms are often used as a means of protecting identities. In this research, a decision to use pseudonyms was made. Participants are introduced using information provided from the criteria noted above, and in such a way that anonymity is upheld.

I had not intended to include information about the family members of participants; however, I now identify that as a short sighted move. People are inter-connected; forming deep meaningful connections with others (Gibbs, 2006), so naturally their family members are of importance to them, and as such will be included in conversations.

 Names of close family members were raised several times by three of the participants, in both the individual interviews and the focus group. Because of the participants' references to significant people in their families, I deemed this an important aspect to include in their identities, as well as considering this aspect in the research. To protect family members' identities pseudonyms are used. Members of teaching teams, if discussed, are also

given pseudonyms. Three of the participants were known to me in varying degrees, whereas the remaining participant I had not met prior to this study.

<u>Francis</u> is an EC teacher in a low to middle socio economic area. She stated her age is "between 35 and 50". She has been fully qualified and working in ECE for 15 years. She has one child, Dash, and lives with Lu, her partner. She identifies as lesbian.

<u>Sophie</u> is an EC teacher in a low to middle socio economic area; she is aged between 30-35 years, and has been fully qualified and working in ECE for approximately nine and a half years. Sophie has no children and identifies as queer.

<u>Emma</u> lives with her partner, Bette, and her son, Samuel. She is 32 years old. Emma has been working in ECE for 11 years, as both a trainee and trained teacher. She works at a centre which is a middle socio economic area. Emma is still working through her preference of words for her sexual identity, and is currently using both gay and lesbian to identify herself.

<u>Kate</u> lives with her partner Fern, and Milo, their son. She has been working in ECE for 18 years and is 35 years old. She is the centre manager in a mid socio economic area. She identifies as gay.

Ethical considerations

I approached the ethics committee located within the University of Canterbury using their ethical guidelines. Two amendments were required prior to approval being given. These amendments required including clearer instructions on withdrawing from the research and providing details of a lesbian and gay support group that participants could access if they felt that issues or concerns had arisen for them through the process. In addition to the two amendments above, the ethics committee requested that I provide a poster for the staff that I was approaching (Appendix E). The intent was to have this visible to staff "so that the head teachers in [the organisation] are not deciding for themselves who should have access to the information regarding the project" (Educational Research Human ethics committee, University of Canterbury October 2011).

Once these amendments were made, I approached an organisation and staff members were contacted through email by a senior team member who included an invitation to participate in the study and the poster (Appendix B & E). One teacher took up this opportunity, and she was able to suggest one other teacher, a method of participant recruitment referred to as snowballing (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) whereby people refer others to the researcher. This approach can be helpful when researchers are trying to locate members of hard-to-find populations (Johnson & Christensen, 2008), and is particularly useful in purposive sampling. This method only recruited one other participant, leaving me two participants short of my desired four participant total. In order to ensure anonymity of both the participants and the organisation, the ethics approval is not included in the appendices of this thesis.

Re-sending my information to the organisation drew no further interest from this group of potential participants. I approached the ethics committee again and requested permission to explore other organisations and groups in an attempt to recruit two more participants. I used a social media site to advertise my research, gaining one more participant from there. I approached the last participant as I knew her as an acquaintance. By these means I had my four participants.

Methods of data collection

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the nature of feminist post-structuralist theories means there is no set agenda for conducting research that is exclusively feminist. The semi-structured interview and the focus group model were chosen because they align with the feminist and post-structuralist theories. It also involves the participant in the research process (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). One key principle of feminist research is that research for women is conducted by women and is about women (Madriz, 2000). It is this that I am trying to capture in my methodological view of the interview process.

During the process of preparation of the research questions, the interview was piloted with someone from the education sector who identifies as "gay,

lesbian or homo, fag…or dyke," (personal communication). Piloting the questions enabled me to identify any modifications needed. The pilot interviewee provided feedback about the process and offered some insight into the flow and wording of the questions. For example, she commented that two questions were similar, and felt that this was repetitive. After a little modification, the interview questions were finalised (see Appendix A).

When reflecting upon the questions I was mindful of the interview style and the question type. Patton (2002) emphasises the importance of using words that make sense to the interviewee and that reflect their worldview, suggesting that this mindfulness will enhance the quality of the data gathered. I considered a feminist perspective which emphasises the importance of the relationship with the interviewee as I spend time interviewing participants.

Conducting individual interviews

As part of the initial contact, individual interviews were arranged and I asked each participant about a suitable location to meet. It was my desire to ensure that the space for the interview was one that the participant found comfortable. As a result, two interviews were conducted in participants' homes, one participant was interviewed in her workplace, and yet another, in a local café.

The participants, who entered the research initially, had already received consent forms (Appendix D) and interview questions (Appendix A) via email. Interview times were arranged via phone, so I met with them, gained their written consent, and conducted the interview in the same visit. The two participants who were recruited third and fourth, were met face-to-face. The research outline, and letter of introduction, including the participant requirements were discussed (Appendix C). I emphasised that there was no obligation to join the research and that they could consider their commitment. Both participants expressed an interest in the research so I arranged a date for the one-to-one interviews. According to Punch (2005) feminist research makes use of the semi-structured interview, allowing the "active involvement of the respondents in the construction of data" (p. 172). It is this active

involvement I sought to achieve as well as a balance between keeping the interactions focused while allowing individual viewpoints and experiences to arise.

The four individual interviews were completed with participants over the year 2012. These were between one hour and two hours long. Each participant had a copy of the questions prior to the interview. Participants were asked the same set of core questions. The nature of the semi-structured interview allows for flexibility and as a result, topics arose from some interviews, and not from others.

Emerging topics

When topics arose in particular interviews, but not in others extra questions were asked in order to either clarify or to expand upon a notion that I had not included in the initial questions, thus calling upon the "interview style" of enquiry (Patton, 2002, p. 343). In the interview style, the researcher is able to build upon the conversation within a particular subject area. It was also my intention to help participants feel comfortable with the process and I did so by being involved in the dialogue (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

All interviews were recorded and transcribed professionally. These transcripts were checked and sent to participants for confirmation through email. One participant sent back a modified transcript; the other three either replied that the conversation captured was "okay" or did not reply in which case I assumed they were happy with the transcript.

Conducting focus groups

Focus groups allow researchers to collect data in context, and to "create a situation of interaction that comes closer to everyday life" (Flick 2009, p. 195). This is advantageous and well aligned to both feminist and post-structuralist theory because the nature of a focus group is fluid and driven by participants rather than the researcher. Qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the "perspectives of those living in it. It is unquestionable in this view that individuals act on the world based…on their perceptions of the realities that surround them" (Hatch, 2002 p. 7).

Focus groups are considered to be a highly efficient method of collecting qualitative data, whereby participants provide "checks and balances on each other which weeds out false or extreme views" (Flick 2009, p. 196). The researcher's goal is to create free-flowing discussions that follow participants' interests and the interactions in focus groups provide a way of understanding what people think about their reality (Morgan, 1998). The focus group was approximately one hour and 30 minutes in duration. All four participants attended. The focus group was situated in a neutral space. Two of the participants taking part in the focus group knew each other, whereas the remaining two had not met anyone in the group before. Because of this, introductions were made, and I intentionally left this open to personal interpretation; I suggested that people introduce themselves, and include whatever they would like to share about themselves.

Another benefit of a focus group setting is that researchers can direct conversations towards topic and follow new ideas as they arise (Morgan, 1998). Focus groups are also a useful way of bringing together subgroups to offer insights into the subject matter. I was mindful to remain neutral about the information shared so as not to influence the group's thinking (Johnson & Christensen, 2008), as the data produced in a focus group comes from participant interactions more so than the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee.

Group dynamics

Flick (2009) cautions the researcher in regards to group dynamics; for example, ensuring that one person does not dominate, and finding a balance to ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to provide input. I was mindful to be aware of group dynamics prior to the focus group. I had noted during her one-to-one interview that one participant appeared quieter and less confident than the others, so I was aware of creating spaces for her to contribute.

In this instance, the focus group provided an environment where participants could compare and contrast their experiences with each other, often uniting their experiences. Several times one participant would make a comment that

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resonated with others, and they too would share their experiences. One such instance was when there was a discussion about hair styles, and how short hair is often perceived to "make you a boy". This is further discussed in Chapter Five.

At the conclusion of the focus group, I explained to participants that the transcript would be emailed to them so that they could check the validity. However, as mentioned above, there was minimal response to the emailed script, suggesting that participants' were satisfied with the transcript.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the "self-reflection by the researcher on their biases and pre-dispositions" that they bring to the research (Johnson & Christensen, 2008 p. 275). Reflectivity is a key tool researchers' employ to understand their research bias. Research biases are described as pre-dispositions (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Patton, 2002), and it is through examining my own personal pre-dispositions I came to understand my place in this research. Patton (2002) describes reflexivity as "understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being critically self-analytical, politically aware and reflective in consciousness" (p. 41). Patton goes on to say that "different perspectives about such things as truths and the nature of reality constitute paradigms or worldviews based on alternative epistemologies and ontologies" (p. 543). I sought to make my position understood within the research paradigm, to ensure that my personal biases were transparent, and that my own worldviews did not bias the data collected.

It is with this understanding I place myself within my research. It is pertinent to note, my place in this research is an ever-shifting position. Surtees (2006) encourages researchers to ground themselves within their research. She suggests that when researchers position themselves within a piece of research it will "remove any assumptions about subjectivity" (p. 71). This positioning of self adds value to the piece of research (Surtees, 2006). This was something that I had been questioning, and I asked myself, "When and how do I disclose my sexuality?" I am comfortable that my identity as a gay

woman helps me to explore this topic, but are others? Does this create a situation where I could be considered too close to my subject matter?

When conducting research, there are three paradigmatic lenses to consider, the research participants, the researcher and finally, the evaluator, or reader of the research (Patton, 2002). Being mindful of my own paradigm will ensure that I am aware of my own bias and personal influence over the findings. It was also my intention to advocate for minimising status differences between myself and the respondents as a way of developing a more equal relationship (Patton, 2002). Reflexivity meant that I strove to present myself in a friendly and open manner, in an attempt to create an atmosphere of acceptance and comfort.

Introducing myself

I settled on a small introduction of myself at the beginning of the one-to-one interview, including a range of discourses that make up me. These included being a mother of four children, working in EC, my university location, and that I identified as a gay woman. Disclosing my sexuality to participants ensured that I have some association to my topic as well as offering a connection to the participants of this research. It was also my intention to create a balance of power; I was there to interview participants, and I felt it appropriate to share information in a reciprocal way in an attempt to create ease between myself and the participant. A one way exchange of information has the potential to create an imbalance of power between interviewer and interviewee.

Disclosing my sexuality to participants also positions me within the purposive sample group, and validates my positon as a researcher *with*, rather than *of* the chosen group. From a feminist post-structuralist viewpoint, this style also allows me to minimise the distance between myself and the interviewee (Madriz, 2000). One of the benefits of the researcher being part of the community they are studying is that it is easier to establish trust, and this is important to gain valid insights into the point of view of the participants (DeJean, 2010a). Historically being an "outsider" to the research and the research participants was regarded as contributing to the validity of the

research; however, it is now considered that being a researcher who aligns with the particular group is a powerful way to represent the subject's story, and provide a voice through interviews and ethnography (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Minimising the power imbalance

Because I was mindful about the power imbalance created by the researcher/participant relationship, I engaged mindfully in a range of tasks related to this research. For instance, I was aware of time restraints on participants, so I used an on-line booking website to offer several times and dates for the focus group. This on-line calendar was made available to all participants, and they worked together to choose the time and day for the group to meet. When considering the location for the group I was mindful of travel distances and that all the participants worked, and so I chose to conduct the focus group at a location central to all. During the focus group, I deliberately participated in a minimalistic manner, reminding myself that the objective of a focus group is to have participants working with one another rather than with the interviewer. Another way that I endeavoured to provide an environment that all participants were comfortable in was to invite quieter participants to speak. Ensuring everyone had a space to talk is in line with the feminist inquiry model which emphasises "participatory, collaborative, and empowering forms of enquiry" (Patton, 2002 p. 131).

Summary

I opened this chapter with a discussion on thematic analysis. That is, the way in which the data was coded and sorted. Searching for themes required me to take a critical look at the data gathered, as well as working out a systematic approach for grouping the emerging themes. I presented the research questions, and described the process of finding these questions. The wording of the questions is an important consideration. The formation of the research questions requires the researcher to be mindful of feminist post-structuralist theory which holds true the ideology of including and drawing in the research participant. I described how participants were invited to take part in the research, and some of the issues I experienced in the recruitment phrase. Justification was provided for the use of pseudonyms for both

participants and their family members. Ethical considerations were justified and explained.

Methods of data collection were discussed and the use of individual interviews and a focus group was justified in terms of generating rich data, establishing trust, and addressing potential issues of power imbalance. This leads on to the first analytical chapter.

Chapter Five: Heteronormativity as a Dominant Discourse

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the semi-structured one- to-one and focus group interviews described in the previous chapter. Heteronormativity as a dominant discourse was identified as a key theme which emerged from the participant's narratives. Within this over-arching theme, smaller themes are encapsulated.

I open this chapter with a discussion about heteronormativity which sets the scene for the examples regarding disruption of heteronormativity within the ECE setting provided in this chapter. Although not directly related to the ways participants disrupted heteronormativity in ECE settings, what this beginning section does demonstrate is some of the wider societal barriers already facing participants. The smaller themes within the dominant heteronormativity theme, interrupting gender essentialisation and the (in) visibility of the rainbow family are next. Parenting within a heteronormative discourse was raised by participants as one of their challenges; however a discussion on the anti-biased curriculum demonstrates some ways participants' disrupted heteronormativity. The final section of this chapter includes taking up the challenges, making connections with others through relationships, and concluding thoughts.

Responding to heteronormativity

Heteronormativity fuels funds of knowledge which create the message that heterosexual is the "normal" way to be (Marinucci, 2010). Within this research the idea that society expects all people are born heterosexual was evident. Emma provided an example of how she was influenced by heteronormativity in her environment growing up. When presented with the question, "What role do you feel you play as a gay teacher in advocating for gay issues in your teaching?" Emma replied:

I'm just thinking about it. I think because being gay is very new to me…in a way I was a teacher first…

Me – Yeah okay.

A – And it's not that I wasn't… when I've sort of thought about describing myself as being lesbian is [pause] – that for me a lot of gender roles are defined.

Me – Right.

A – And so everybody else goes 'oh I like that guy, he's cute'… and I just wasn't in to any of that either way. I think because being gay is very new to me, being lesbian. A lot of people know who they are from a very young age, whereas I didn't. So I did what I thought I should do, and it wasn't until I had time to stop, and think about myself, and from that I realised that I was attracted to women. Once I had met the right person, it all gelled and I understood that I rushed into a [heterosexual] relationship at a very young age.

The expectation from Emma's peers was that she conforms to the beliefs of a heterosexual-driven worldview, and as Emma states, it was not until she "had time to stop and think" that an alternative option was presented to her. In this instance, heteronormativity was strong enough to block out other potential relationship choices for Emma. This example provides an insight into the dominance of heteronormativity for children as they grow up. It is an example of the type of thinking for many, and the extent that heteronormativity is evident. This demonstrates some of the wider societal barriers people may encounter as they navigate their sexual identity formation construction. The consequence of these barriers is that children are presented with limited choices by which to construct their identities. Children learn to be members of society through observation and guidance, language and discourses (Blaise 2005). It is when these are limiting that children miss out on opportunities to be fully exposed to the wide range of identities possible.

Those around us, and our circumstances, are influential because we use these to form our identity (Olsen, 2011). Evidence from this research

supports the feminist post-structuralist belief that people's identities are not fixed, but are fluid and ever-changing (Burr, 1995; Jarvis & Sandretto, 2010c). Identifying as gay is still quite new to Emma: when I asked "what role do you feel you play as a gay teacher", she responded that she "hadn't really thought of the two words together before", indicating that she may still be in the process of (re)defining her identity. She goes on to say:

> I guess subconsciously sometimes because it's so new, I go, I'm still unsure of everything…but I'm not unsure of who I am and who I'm with and who I love, just that identity thing.

Emma is learning that the construction of one's self is influenced by how we learn to be individual members of society. Identity is influenced by a range of factors, some internally, such as personal perceptions and attitudes, and some externally, like other people's perceptions. As Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) point out, race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity all form people's identity. For children in ECE settings, seeing different ways people form identities is one way children can be alerted to new ways to express their own identities.

 In Emma's case, she is able to distinguish between the many parts of her identity, stating that she is comfortable and sure of herself about some parts, but less confident about others. For teachers such as Emma to be effective in their teaching roles, tension between identities should be minimal (Gibbs, 2006). Emma was acting out the expected female gender roles, and conforming to gender category discourse. These behaviours also indicate a binding of one gender to the other, men and women growing up expecting to connect with one another, which demonstrates the heteronormative dominance.

Interrupting gender essentialisation

The following examples from the focus group demonstrate how gender definitions and expectations are not only evident in wider society, but specifically in ECE settings as well, and from a very young age:

Sophie: I think with children it's the hair. I cut my hair off and they [the children] asked me if I was a boy. I was blown away by it, that's really interesting. They literally thought I had become a boy.

Francis: I remember when I shaved my hair off and came in the next day [to the childcare centre], someone said, 'You're a boy now aye' and another [child] said, 'She's still a girl, she's just really ugly now'.

These participants, then, had experiences that involved their gender expression creating a disruption in the expectations of society and how they should be. Killermann (2013) terms these expectations "social norms", the expected ways of acting and being in society. In the above examples, short hair challenges the social norm of female identity. The findings from this research are consistent with those of Jarvis and Sandretto (2010c) who found that a male teacher wearing jewellery was challenged by children about his gender. In both Jarvis and Sandretto's (2010c) research and this research children were drawing upon previous knowledge and known markers, the short hair and the necklace, to assign people to particular genders. Participants in both studies were able to expand children's thinking beyond the gender norm, by expressing their identity in non-conforming manner. By being comfortable with their gender expression – having short hair, and wearing a necklace – and using courageous action discourse, the participants were able to engage with gender category interruption pedagogy.

Kate spoke about her experience of non-conforming from an early age. Kate challenged society's expectations of being a girl, by wearing her hair short in a "boyish style":

I remember when I was little and people used to call me a boy. Even though I liked looking the way I looked, and knew who I was, I would be mortified and so embarrassed when any one would get my gender wrong; again it's just a whole lot of questions: I just want to be who I am.

This example links with gender socialisation which is the process by which we learn to act out socially approved characteristics of the gender we were given at birth (McLennan, Ryan, & Spoonley, 2000a). Kate's comment demonstrates how she used gender category interruption discourse, by not accepting the conformities of being a girl.

Kate's example highlights the way that society expects people to act regarding gender. Kate provided an opportunity to view gender non-conformity of children from her personal viewpoint. Gender expression is about how you "demonstrate your gender through the ways you act, dress, and behave" (Killermann, 2013, p. 63); it is how you demonstrate who you are. The above examples demonstrate how gender is portrayed in the appearance of the person; short hair on a woman is a stereotype that is often associated with lesbians (Seba, 2011). The findings from this study, therefore, echo the thoughts of Seba (2011) who concludes that expressing gender in a way that is comfortable, rather than conforming to ways that are deemed acceptable within society, can lead to tension.

The example provided by Kate demonstrates her ability to reflect upon her lived experiences, as a child who disrupted the taken for granted heteronormativity, and apply them to the way she interacted and taught children in her ECE setting. Because of her own personal experiences, Kate wanted to ensure that all children in her ECE setting had a positive sense of identity:

> So perhaps me getting to where I am now has really influenced the way I want to teach, because I think that the most important thing that you can do for children is that "you're awesome, so let's find out what you are awesome at."

Modelling acceptance of self, in Kate's case, allows children to (re)think ways of being. Kate provides a springboard, an example, a disruption of the taken-for-granted ways, and provokes further thinking about what it means to be female. It is advantageous for children to be exposed to a range of ways to express gender, and to the notion that multiple ways of gender expression are acceptable within society. Gender is closely linked with sexual identity,

and Kate, in this instance, is also providing ways of expressing sexual identity. Kate uses her lesbian identity, her personal experiences, and her ability to reflect as tools to disrupt heteronormative environments for children. By being a visible out lesbian teacher she challenges the silence. She also rejects the unprepared teacher discourse, and demonstrates the ways in which she is a prepared teacher. She is engaging with children in ways that celebrate, rather than silence difference.

Dominant discourse and the (in)visibility of the rainbow family

Using the example of family structure, the dominant discourse would construct a family as a mother, father, and children. However, as Murdock argues, although discourses within societies can be dominant, they are also fluid. Murdock's (cited in Morgan, 1975, p. 20) definition of family demonstrates that perceptions about how families are constructed can change over time:

> A social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.

This narrow view of family would be less acceptable in today's more open way of viewing families. This description demonstrates the development of discourse and its tendency to be swayed by the community in which it is present. McLennan et.al.'s (2000b) definition of family as "a group of persons tied together by kinship" (p. 78) indicates that a wider acceptance of a range of family structures is possible. A wider acceptance of families is made possible when diverse families break down barriers to visibility. Emma spoke about how she provides opportunities for children to understand and think about families in a wider context:

> I think part of that [is] if you're just naturally talking about family dynamics then that's just a part of it. When you're talking about families, there are so many diverse families out there anyway so it's just a part of a whole really. Cause as adults we put a lot of, I mean

it's called sexuality isn't it, so you put a lot of that sexual stuff in to it
but children don't, so for them that's completely separate part of it so
you're approaching it in a different way. We need to be able to
advocate for everybody. And that we need to be not preaching but
teaching and encouraging learning about fairness and equality in all
respects.

Francis also spoke about advocating for everyone, and highlights being
explicit when discussing different families with children. She talks directly to
children about a range of family structures:

I tend to talk to them about how families might be different…this family
they've got a mum and a dad, but at our house we have two mums,
and at your house you have one mum, and no dad. Just explicitly
identifying those themes to children. I think with the whole hetero-
normative undercurrent … you know these days not a lot of families
necessarily are a mum and a dad even though most of the story
books still feature that, so I think it is really important to normalise
children's at home experience for them by being explicit about that
stuff.

Talking directly to children and being explicit is a strategy employed to
disrupt the dominance. The ability to critically analyse the discourses which
frame society means that change is possible (Burr, 1995), and this is evident
through the way in which Francis provides examples to children about the
changing understandings of how families are formed. Francis is engaging in
an active-thinker discourse, and challenges children to also be active
thinkers, as she advocates for her family. Burr (1995) discusses the active
thinker as someone "capable of exercising choice and making decisions
about the strengths and weaknesses of her or his society's values" (p. 85). In
this case, the weakness identified is the lack of visibility of rainbow families.
Francis identifies the heteronormative undercurrent as one of the barriers
she faces. Explicit identification of a wide range of families, in which Francis
also includes rainbow families, is a strategy she engages with to disrupt
heteronormativity. Francis demonstrates how rainbow families can be

portrayed to children as just another way of creating a family, helping to build an anti-bias ECE setting. It is interesting to note here that although Francis is explicit about rainbow families, she also merges them within a range of family structures. In other words, she is explicit about both rainbow and other family compositions, potentially watering down the effect of raising rainbow families within the general family discourse.

Using the difference-is-okay discourse, participants advocated for acceptance for a range of family compositions, not just rainbow families. The emphasis here is that families are widely diverse. Acceptance of a wider range of family structures is a method used to start to break down heteronormative barriers: on one level, bringing rainbow families to the forefront, but on another level, still encapsulating them within the wider concepts of family.

In summary, although the concept and ideology of the family has evolved and become more inclusive, this research found that rainbow families are still not recognised in the same way that other family structures are. This means that visibility of many rainbow families is still problematic. However, the evidence here suggests that there is some progress to providing alternative family construct exemplars to children from participants, and that participants are active in this disruption. The dominance of the nuclear family is an example of a barrier to participants disrupting heteronormativity. One component of an anti-bias curriculum is critically examining how families are portrayed in early childhood settings. Often families are portrayed as mother-father unions. A critique of the concept of family, positioning families as richly diverse, changing, and organised by what they do has been evident in the data gathered for this research. Dominant discourse is therefore challenged as the visibility of the rainbow family is increased.

Parenting within a heteronormative discourse

Kate, a team leader in a suburban ECE setting, is an example of an alternative family composition for the children and families at her workplace. Kate's partner also worked in the same centre environment:

Well I think luckily for me I do happen to be someone who is fairly confident and assertive and also obviously because Fern was working at [centre name] as well. So the children know of my family, they know Fern, they know me. They're really a big part of Fern being pregnant and having Milo. So Milo is just like a superstar when he comes to [centre name], they just love him, like I think, yeah, I've been lucky … all the parents know as well, then also that's because it's the kind of environment that we've tried to foster [here].

Kate disrupts the dominant discourse within the centre environment by her presence and her family's visibility. She uses her confidence and assertiveness as a tool to break down barriers to heteronormative dominance. Heteronormativity privileges heterosexual relationships to such an extent that rainbow families are often made invisible. In order to be recognised as a lesbian-parented family it is critical to directly state the family composition (Lee & Duncan, 2008). Kate does this in her everyday actions at the ECE setting, her comment, "they know my family", indicates that she directly states the composition of her family in such a way that her family composition is recognised. I suggest this may not have been as easily accomplished if Kate was not the team leader of her ECE setting. In other words, Kate's power in this space affords her a certain level of privilege and confidence in her actions (Burr, 1995). As the team leader, there is less chance she will be directly confronted by team members and parents within the centre environment.

Kate's visibility disrupts the dominance, and challenges the heteronormative perceptions of family formation. It is the desire of rainbow families to be acknowledged and accepted within their community (Clay, 2004) and being visible is one strategy employed to ensure acceptance is forthcoming, and silence is minimised. Francis is also a team leader in her workplace, and she also took up the opportunity her pregnancy afforded her to open up conversations about family formation:

I also think that being pregnant and becoming a new mother while I was at that centre, we had that shared experience of motherhood and I think that broke down barriers [with families] as well.

On the other hand, visibility can be problematic. Another comment provided by Francis shows that although her pregnancy opened up avenues to discuss a range of family formations with children and parents, she was reminded by comments people made that, for many people, pregnancy and parenting usually align with heterosexuality:

I found that particularly when I was pregnant…I always had to out as a couple… [It's] that assumption, particularly when you're a pregnant woman then obviously you have some sort of partner who's a man.

Ways of talking, such as asking a pregnant woman about her husband, solidifies the dominant and acceptable ways of creating families. This in turn solidifies and creates an environment where the silencing of rainbow families is the norm. In Francis's example, families which do not fit with the mother-father pattern are invisible and therefore not considered part of the dominant group. The barrier faced by Francis is the dominant view of society; that is, because of her pregnancy she is perceived as heterosexual. Francis engages in disruption by having "to out as a couple"; in other words, correct assumptions made about her. Her existence, along with Kate's partner, Fern's, existence acts as a means of disruption. Although there are barriers, such as parents assuming a heterosexual stance, both women were able to break down the barrier by using their pregnancies to form relationships and connections with children and families at their ECE setting. This willingness to break down the barriers is an example of a prepared teacher, and contrasts with the literature reviewed previously. It is possible, then, that participants saw themselves as prepared teachers in this instance. The tension about family structure and visibility is evident in Francis's concern about her daughter feeling comfortable in society:

I feel it's a responsibility as a lesbian mum to advocate for my family and to make sure that my daughter knows that our family is normal. So the flip side of that for me as a teacher is that I need to make sure

that children in my kindergarten see gay and lesbian families as normal…that's the world that I want her to live in, then that's the world I need to help create. Normalising it [rainbow families] and making sure that it's out there as an option for children.

In these examples heteronormativity was challenged by participants through being visible and willing to present themselves and their families as examples of alternative ways that families can be formed. Teachers demonstrated a willingness to be prepared, and to disrupt the heteronorm to benefit both their own children, and the children in their ECE settings.

An anti-bias pedagogy

When reflecting upon the importance of disruption, Francis identified a lack of role models as she was growing up, and flagged that as one possible reason for being vocal and visible:

It was as important to me that children were aware of my family structure. Maybe it was growing up in small town New Zealand and not having any gay people that were out and visible, that it's become really important to me… [the children] are aware of good people that they can look back on and go, you know actually I think that teacher was gay or a lesbian and that wasn't so bad.

Emma worked with the children in her ECE setting regarding family composition and on one level, provided a critique of the concept of family:

I did family trees with four year olds and it was quite eye opening. I got them all to write down their families and they've all got very diverse families and we went on to several pages for most of these kids. They go through their big folder and they look through their family trees and I put my family tree in there as well.

The children and Emma discovered that the family compositions within the centre were diverse, and worthy of noting. Social justice within an ECE setting can involve dealing with the complex nature of teaching topics that are confrontational such as homophobia and heterosexism with children (Robinson, 2005a). In the above example, Emma demonstrates how the

family topic was introduced with the children, thus dealing with a complexity of diverse family structures using a common ECE activity, the family tree. Emma can also be considered a prepared teacher, who also minimises the silence around rainbow families. In summary of the above comments, minimising silence and acting as a prepared teacher seem to be somehow connected to one another.

Further to this, putting her family into a booklet which was available for children, staff, and parents to look through could be seen as a bold move on Emma's part, and not one without risk. Risk will be further explored in the next chapter. The disruption was created in this instance when Emma also included her family among the other centre families. Teaching with a queer pedagogy means being alert to ways to reduce homophobia, and this was taken up by Emma when she added her family into the booklet about families. In this instance Emma challenged heterosexual privilege and advocated for inclusion (Zacko-Smith & Smith 2010). Parallels can be drawn from this research and DeJean's (2008) where a participant talked about artefacts such as books and posters as part of an anti-biased classroom.

According to Surtees (2005), teachers need to critique and reflect upon the discourse and discourses in which they act or ground themselves: when teachers understand that they operate within a particular discourse, they can start to queer their teaching and challenge the dominant discourse, which is impossible to do until they are able to "see" the dominance. Part of seeing dominance is having an understanding of yourself, and your position in the world. Gibbs (2006) suggests that personal reflection and understanding yourself creates authenticity. An anti-biased curriculum is achievable through small changes in practice, such as including rainbow families into discussions and activities.

Barriers identified

Part of this research was enquiring into the barriers that participants were able to identify that provided challenges to disrupting the heteronormativity within their ECE settings. I asked: "have you got a specific example or an

experience that you can share where there have been barriers that have kind of made you question whether this is a safe place or not?"

> Kate - Yeah, the only one I can think of, when Fern and I got together and we had a team leader at the time that was fairly conservative in her approach to life. And I remember her saying, 'Look, whatever you do – you just can't talk about it. I don't want to hear about it, you can be like that but I just don't want to actually hear about anything to do with it, or see it'.

> Sophie - I think that if you were in a position that you felt isolated within your team or unsupported in your team that would be a significant barrier.

> Francis - I think that there are organisational barriers in some centres… if your head teacher is not gay friendly then it doesn't leave you a lot of places to go if you're in a small independent centre.

Francis, Emma, and Sophie all identified people as possible barriers, in particular head teachers, implying that head teachers hold a position of power. The power afforded to this position was also noted when discussing Kate's ability, as the team leader, to directly disrupt the discourse at her centre. This demonstrates the power dynamic, where power and privilege is afforded to those in particular positions at particular times. In this instance, the head teacher position is one that affords power to whoever is in that role. Kate used her power as the team leader in much the same way has her previous team leader did. Both desired a particular discourse to be more visible than another. For Kate the acceptance of all families and people was most important to her. In other words, she wanted an anti-bias curriculum, where rainbow families were not silenced. For her previous team leader, the most important discourse was heteronormativity, which maintained the silence around lesbian and gay issues. This sent a very powerful message to both Kate and the community in which she worked about what was considered acceptable within the ECE setting.

Taking up the challenge

When children used discriminatory language such as "you can't have two mums/dads" all participants used an awareness-raising discourse:

> Francis - I would definitely step in there and really explicitly advocate for that stuff (acceptance of gay/rainbow parented families), but also any time that children are talking about their families I think it's important to just relate.

> Emma - If [a child said] 'you can't have two mummies, or daddies', or something like that then I would probably sit down and say, well actually…

> Sophie - There have been plenty of times when I have kind of joined those discussions and put those sorts of seeds out there.

> Kate - You know when you see children engaged in socio-dramatic play, it is an important thing to make sure…[saying] 'well you could both be the mums if you want'.

All participants in this research provided examples of engaging in a "diverse parenting awareness-raising pedagogy" (Jarvis & Sandretto, 2010c p. 48), where teachers apply a queer pedagogy to their teaching. In these examples the limiting theory that the children had perhaps constructed about family structures may therefore be interrupted.

Challenging perceptions and raising awareness of diversity, or in other words, working towards an anti-biased curriculum, was acknowledged as being difficult at times. Sophie, for instance, spoke about how it "takes a certain amount of pushing because change is difficult for people…it's not often perceived as a gentle process; it can be perceived as combative or quite pushy and…requires energy".

Making connections through common language; developing relationships

Participants talked about disrupting heteronormative practices by creating spaces for lesbian and gay people and rainbow families to be visible in ECE settings. Participants identified relationship building as a key requirement prior to raising the potentially challenging topic of rainbow families, or lesbian and gay issues. Francis and Emma both provided examples of making connections with and for children between the known and unknown, a strategy to support children to consider other ways of people being together:

> Francis: I will try and draw parallels if they are confused about that, your mum loves your dad or your mum has your dad as her sweetheart, and I have Lu as my sweetheart.

> Emma: I just generally say to them well you know how mummy and daddy love each other; well that's how Bette and I love each other.

One of the key pedagogies that emerged from the data was the importance of building relationships. Emma stressed that her teaching philosophy is based on reciprocal relationships with children, and feels that it is "not really fair" if there is not some give and take in conversations and relationship building between children and staff. Reciprocity is a teaching style adopted by the participants, where the focus is on both teachers and children feeling a sense of belonging within the teaching environment. Teachers demonstrating reciprocity show appreciation and "reverence for the whole [person, and] teach with a sense of social justice" (Gibbs, 2006, p. 79). I argue that the importance of relationship building cannot be overemphasised. The ECE environment is often the first "formal setting outside the home which families with young children encounter, and the relationships formed can have long lasting effects on family and parenting identities" (Gunn & Surtees 2011, p. 27). Knowing the children and their families allows teachers to see the teachable moment; Gibbs (2006) believes it is the building of relationships that is a clear predecessor to teachable moments. Connection-making is a strategy that Francis and Emma employ as they encounter barriers to inclusion.

Another area identified as a potential barrier was language use. Put another way, certain words used by participants might not provide clarity to children's thought, or satisfactorily answer their questions. Mindfulness about language is one way of breaking down barriers for children and adults to understanding a diverse range of family compositions. Francis, for instance raises the word "lesbian" as potentially a word that children are yet to become familiar with:

> I was reading some research about two-mum families and how that doesn't necessarily explicitly name for children a lesbian family. While I can totally see where that research was going, I think for the age group that we work for with in early childhood, relating it to a relationship they know or someone they know is really important for them to understand what you're talking about. Because it's fine for me to say "I'm a lesbian and Lu is my sweetheart", but that's quite an abstract concept to get particularly if the people are 3 and 4 [years old], but saying you know, "Dash has two mums in her family" or "my sweetheart is Lu". Making it close to a relationship that they know and understand, I think is really important.

Francis uses language to make connections with children's understanding of their world, so that once that connection has been made, and the new idea presented to them, then she can add in the new word:

> So my partner's my sweetheart like mum and dad have got a sweetheart …and then we name it, [lesbian]… so what they are learning about has a name.

In the same manner that Vygotsky used the zone of proximal development (ZPD), (MacNaughton & Williams, 2009), Francis is scaffolding the child's knowledge from the known, (sweetheart) to the unknown (lesbian). A barrier such as understanding the specific language – in this situation, lesbian – is overcome by using an alternative word that means the concept is still understood by children. This situation suggests that Francis disrupts the innocent child discourse, and engages in conversations that help children

better understand complex concepts. Conversations regarding ways of being in relationships challenges heteronormative practices within the education environment. Children are further developing their understanding of that relationship, relating something that they know really well and having a word for it.

Concluding thoughts

The purpose of this chapter is to report on how society's expectations impact on participants who do not conform to the expected norms within that social group. It is possible, I claim, that participants have already experienced forms of heteronormativity prior to teaching in ECE, and so were able to bring with them previously successfully strategies to break down the heteronormativity they had encountered.

The exemplars presented in this chapter also demonstrate that although this research is limited to ECE settings, the disruption of heteronormativity is a wider issue for participants of this research. It was also important to explore the idea that disruption is not exclusive to a time and place in participants' lives. By this, I mean that for some participants, disruption of heteronormativity is not a new experience, and nor is it limited to their work environment. Participants called upon previous events which had successfully challenged and disrupted heteronormativity, and applied the same actions to the workplace, thus demonstrating that strategies that are effective in personal lives can also be used in the workplace.

Rather than taking up the teacher unpreparedness discourse, participants were active in their desires to un-silence the issues surrounding lesbian and gay people and rainbow families. Families and the formation of families was one way that participants raised the topic of rainbow families. I suggest that participants were challenging the child as innocent discourse by raising rainbow families with children, directly challenging children to think about family formation in other ways. Relationships were identified as a key component to successfully breaking down children's and parents' views about rainbow families. It was identified that the building of a relationship needed to come prior to disruption. Nevertheless, participants still

challenged the heteronormative discourses in a range of ways; for example, using awareness-raising pedagogy after a relationship has formed. Although there is a wider understanding today than before of what constitutes a family, participants in this research still found it a challenge to ensure their visibility and worked hard to legitimise their family's position within the paradigm of family.

With regard to this project and the research questions, I can conclude that the participants worked in a range of ways that helped others to see them for who they are, thus disrupting the discourses in their work spaces. Queer theory examines how subjects become normalised and marginalised by identifying and disrupting the processes which make it possible. For three participants, it was deemed vital to pursue visibility for the sake of their children and the future they desired for their families. Thus, these three participants created spaces where they could talk to both adults and children about their family composition. Carving out a space for yourself despite the dominance of heteronormativity is identified as a challenge, but a challenge that participants want to take up.

 The next chapter focuses on risk, the conflict between personal safety and visibility, and a discussion regarding the barriers to lesbian and gay issues being raised.

Chapter Six: The Implications of Disruption – Managing Risk

Introduction

The previous chapter opened with a discussion about participants' history with heteronormative discourse. It was acknowledged that participants already had experiences with barriers when disrupting heteronormativity prior to working in ECE settings. The findings revealed that participants identified team leaders as one of the potential barriers to disrupting heteronormativity. An imbalance of power was identified as a barrier by participants. However, for three of the participants who are parents, disrupting heteronormativity was regarded as an investment in their children's future.

 This chapter opens with an introduction about risk. Risk is introduced because it was one of the barriers identified by participants in this research. Risk and barriers are closely interwoven and ground the reader in the concept of risk, and allows a deeper understanding of risks and barriers negotiated by participants. The ways participants engaged in mindful discourse is discussed next. This is followed by a discussion about the impact of a null curriculum on disrupting heteronormativity. A concluding thoughts section completes the chapter.

Managing risk

In this chapter I suggest that participants were in a constant state of weighing up risks associated with sharing their sexuality. Although risk is evident in many situations, in most cases, risk is manageable. Risk, however, is experienced differently depending on the individual.

Three types of risk

I drew upon the three types of risk Robinson (2005a) revealed in her Australian research: Low risk where people feel safe to challenge the barriers head on; Negotiated risk, where participants are in a constant state of

deciding if and when to confront the barriers presented; and, finally Total risk, where the barrier encountered is insurmountable and the person feels unable to act. I suggest that the participants in this research engaged in negotiated risk and total risk.

A range of strategies was used by participants to disrupt heteronormativity because the risks they encountered varied. For example, Francis takes opportunities to discuss her own life and her family "when children are talking about what happens for them at home, or talking about their family structure….when it comes up naturally in conversations about families".

An example of an awareness of the risks is highlighted when criteria for discussion is noted: "when it comes up naturally in conversations" indicates that Francis is still mindful of the potential risks involved with challenging heteronormative practices, preferring to wait until the topic is raised rather than initiating it herself. Francis waits until the child raises the topic of families as a strategy to disrupt the heteronormative dominance. Although she is committed to ensuring that children's thinking is questioned she still acknowledges barriers and risks associated with queer pedagogy. The findings of this research are consistent with that of Gunn (2003a) and Robinson (2005a) where participants found themselves acting in particular ways based on an assessment of the current situation.

 Gunn's (2003a) research also reported that risk was evident in many places. Gunn stated that teachers were unable to challenge heteronormative practices because of the risk discourse (2003a) which is also evident in the research presented here. In other words, participants consider what consequences will be encountered in the future and alter their current actions accordingly. The findings in this research indicate that risk taking is based on a self-assessment of each situation participants find themselves in.

An example provided by Emma demonstrates the impact risk has on her, as she considers discussing her sexuality, or not: "It should be that people feel fine talking about it no matter what, and that they should just be able to feel accepted, but the reality is a lot of people don't". Teachers judge the risk factors within the environment in which they work, and decide to act based on

the discourse surrounding them. In other words, participants position themselves upon a continuum, ranging from "totally closeted" to "publically out" (DeJean, 2010a, p. 177) depending upon the situation in which they are in.

Emma highlights her reluctance to raise the topic with parents: "When I'm responding to adults…I find I'm unsure of things, and it makes me wonder …but it's not something I'd avoid if it came up". Emma also spoke about the barriers or risks associated with conversations with children: "I think with the children I do say something, but in a general way." There is a level of vulnerability in Emma's statement; demonstrating she is not fully confident because the topic she is trying to raise is one that people have agreed (often unknowingly) not to discuss in the ECE environment.

Risk was identified as a barrier by participants in this research, and they discussed how they negotiated the struggle to be visible, but also safe at the same time. The energy required to maintain these teachers' assumed identities "is a daily struggle which often drains the teacher's energy and effectiveness as educators" (DeJean, 2010a, p. 235).

Managing negotiated risk

Negotiated risk is understood to be an acknowledgement of risk, but once assessed, the risk isn't deemed insurmountable, and so action is taken to disrupt heteronormative practices. This would indicate that it is possible for the barrier associated with the risk to be overcome. Participants negotiated the spaces between a desire to engage with a queer pedagogical style of teaching, and analysing the situation using a negotiated risk narrative when working with children in the ECE setting. A queer pedagogical teaching style would indicate that participants were not engaged in the child as innocent narrative. Instead, they are prepared to queer their teaching and challenge the silence, thus employing an anti-biased pedagogical style.

When questioned about when she raises the topic of rainbow families, or gay issues, initially Sophie spoke positively about how she weaves her personal narrative into conversations with children through stories of home life, talking with children about "getting to know you type stuff" and "your life outside

Kindergarten." These comments from Sophie support an example of negotiated level risk, and indicate a willingness to engage in an anti-biased conversation. As a teacher, Sophie demonstrates that she is prepared, rather than unprepared, to challenge the silence that heteronormativity creates for lesbian and gay issues to be discussed.

In summary, participants used markers within their environment, such as who they were talking to, as a way of assessing the level of risk in a situation. Discussions with children with whom they were familiar were the easiest to have, highlighting the importance of relationship building.

Managing total risk

Participants also experienced situations where they considered the level of risk associated with disrupting the heteronormative dominance to be too high. Participants analysed risk when conversing with parents in the ECE setting. An example provided by Emma about how she analysed a situation notes she was unsure about the family's position on the topic of homosexuality being raised. She cites Christianity as a possible barrier to acceptance, "See, I'm not 100% sure about all the families in the centre … and they [family at the centre] were strictly Mormon and I felt a bit nervous about them." Emma was attempting to interrupt heteronormativity, at the same time engaging in a non-accepting negative Christian view paradigm, thus demonstrating the power and the hold dominant discourses can have on a person. Historically "religiosity…[was] positively correlated with prejudice towards gays and lesbians" (Hopwood & Connors, 2002, p. 81), suggesting that Emma was valid in her apprehension.

Sophie also provided an example of total risk narrative saying:

> And then there have been other times when… for whatever reason and usually because I'm not sure about them [people she is talking to], I guess it's my personal safety thing, like I wouldn't necessarily be talking about that stuff [being gay, or rainbow families].

In this instance, Sophie viewed the barriers to disrupting heteronormativity to be too large and the risks too great. In this instance, silence was maintained,

and the unprepared teacher narrative was evident as Sophie identified that she was not equipped to navigate past the barriers that the risks presented.

At times, parents engaged with heteronormativity that resulted in participants defaulting to an unprepared and vulnerable narrative. Emma, for instance commented on a situation where she and her partner, Bette, were out walking and she found herself unable to correct a grandparent who responded to her with a heteronormative assumption:

> We came across the grandmother [of a child at her centre], and it was 'Hi nice to see you', 'cause you know, she's lovely. Her husband was there and I hadn't really met him before, and she goes, 'Oh hi, it's Emma and Emma's sister'. So, yeah, I…didn't say anything then [be]cause I felt really awkward.

In this case, Emma defined the situation to be one where she felt unable to disrupt and correct. It is possibly because that would involve risk of exposure to negativity resulting in a higher level of risk to self. Emma felt uncomfortable correcting the grandparent and so accepted the "you must be sisters" narrative rather than contradicting her and exposing her relationship is of a sexual nature. It follows that in any interchange with people there is a constant monitoring of the "definition of the situation" (Burr, 1995, p. 146). I suggest that this inability to see Emma with a woman in any way other than her sister highlights the power of heteronormativity.

In this instance, Emma confirmed rather than contested or disrupted a heteronormative discourse created about her by another (Burr, 1995). Risk and the perception of risk can render people incapable of engaging in behaviour other than the current narrative, and this leads to social control (Robinson, 2005a). The stories that are told about us help form our identity (Olsen, 2011), and in this case Emma has assessed the situation and concluded that to reveal her true identity and to re-create her story is too risky. However, in this situation, Emma may also understand that the grandparent "constructs unique understandings" (Olsen, 2011, p. 263) of her own world based on prior experiences, and so Emma's actions accommodate this.

Francis described an incident of a more confrontational manner, with a parent. Francis was being photographed for a poster prompting acceptance of LGBTQI teachers:

> We had one dad who felt the need to come up and have a little talk to me about why they didn't want their child to be photographed and he didn't support that kind of lifestyle. He didn't think 'those sort of people' should be teaching and you know to use that… to be quite in my face about that stuff.

Francis managed the risks presented in this confrontation by engaging in talking about acceptance; she acknowledged that the parent was entitled to feel the way he did, but the photo shoot was going ahead. As a teacher who regularly engaged in anti-heteronormative pedagogy, Francis was able to call upon an awareness-raising narrative, and was potentially prepared for confrontation. That is, Francis was aware her actions troubled the regime of truth operating for this parent but was prepared to disrupt the non-diverse parenting awareness pedagogy within her ECE setting.

Disrupting the silence

Due to the challenges participants of this research faced when attempting to disrupt heteronormativity, lesbian and gay family structures are part of the null curriculum (Carpenter & Lee, 2010; McGee, 1997). The null curriculum is described as what is absent from the curriculum; agendas and topics that society has decided will not be spoken about within the education system (McGee, 1997). Sophie, for instance, notes, "There could be a feeling that to talk about this stuff [issues facing lesbian and gay people and rainbow families] is a risk – opening yourself up, being a bit vulnerable".

An example provided by Kate also indicates a level of vulnerability: "I guess it's how you read people, when new people come in… [to the childcare environment]… there might be… you know whatever it is that makes me judge people". In this example, Kate makes assumptions about the reactions to queering the conversation, and weighs up the risks associated with challenging the heteronormative discourse. Heteronormativity is emphasised by Sophie's and Kate's hesitancy to raise a topic when they are unsure about

how it will be received. However, there is a level of irony in the above statement: where Kate is worried about someone judging her, at the same time she is applying judgement to them. Participants want to be accepted for who they are, but make snap judgements about how they will be received.

Because homosexuality is part of the null curriculum, (McGee, 1997) teachers have minimal resources which they can call upon to support them to provide an anti-biased curriculum - to find a place in which they can include conversations about lesbian and gay issues:

> When you look at resources that you buy …I mean there's nothing about gay families in there. When you're talking about families they're not there so you have to sort of make a concerted effort to include it [rainbow families] in to your teaching, yeah whereas other families are just sort of there. (Emma)

Participants' identification of a lack of resources is consistent with Jarvis' (2009) research. A lack of LGBT resources in the environment by default creates a curriculum which is heteronormative because heterosexual families are the only ones represented (Jarvis & Sandretto, 2010c). On the other hand, Emma felt it was her role to step up and disrupt the heteronorm, irrespective of the lack of resources available to her. Because of the commitment Emma had to removing barriers to inclusion, she was able to see the advantage, or resource, her rainbow family provided her, saying, "In some ways being gay and having my family there in the centre makes it easier". The findings from this research suggest that opportunities were taken up by participants to bring rainbow families into the operational curriculum. This created spaces where rainbow families were visible in the ECE setting. Francis also spoke about creating spaces where rainbow families are made visible:

> I think that's really a strong part of my teaching role, is to make gay and lesbian families visible in our centre so that the fact that it is normal life for so many of us is really reflected. That this is a queer friendly place, or that we have gay and lesbian families here. That your books reflect, that, your displays around the walls reflect that, because

it's really important for children from all families to feel that their family is normal.

Despite the challenges presented by the null curriculum, Emma and Francis both spoke about the ways in which they bring the null curriculum topic of rainbow families to the forefront, engaging with an interruption and awareness-raising pedagogy.

Diversity and inclusion in the work place

During the process of interviewing participants for this thesis, the Marriage Amendment Bill (2013) was raised in Parliament in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The Bill provided an opportunity for open discussion about rainbow families, lesbian and gay rights, and heterosexual privilege within communities. Anecdotally, many conversations occurred involving a range of views from both sides of the argument. An example shared by Kate shows the way her centre provided an opportunity to show diverse-family construction awareness pedagogy with children and their wider families. Kate, as the centre manager, created a news-board in the centre, and included information about the Marriage Amendment Bill:

> We've got a thing at our centre that's "What's in the news – what are your views?" where we just put up topical pictures and articles from the newspaper that children and parents can talk about. So we just put any information around that, [Marriage Amendment Bill], especially on the day when it got passed. [There were] multiple conversations around what I thought of it, where my level of support lay. That was interesting because people know [I'm] totally for that kind of thing, [but] there was still the odd parent…'You've got Civil Unions – isn't that enough?' They were interesting conversations to have.

It appears that the imbalance of privilege or power cannot be seen by this [male] parent who challenged Kate to accept the status quo, and settle for inferior conditions. In the example provided above, the parent has located Kate in a group which is different or opposite to the questioning parent. He is located in the privileged position, where he has access to both options, marriage or civil union, to express his commitment to his partner, whereas

Kate (at the time of this interview) had only one way that she could formally commit to her female partner. The dominant narrative creates a kind of blindfold for people whom it privileges the most.

When I questioned Kate about her response to this parent who suggested that Civil Unions were "enough", Kate described how she replied to him:

> I said… if you are looking at all the children we've got here, in terms of wanting to give them the equal rights, not discriminating against this [Marriage Amendment Bill] is a really positive step in the right direction and it's not going to make any difference to people that… don't understand or appreciate gay relationships; it's not going to have a negative [consequence] on anyone currently. All it's going to do is enhance the situation for people that are currently not getting the same deal.

This quote shows how Kate uses an interrupting narrative, highlighting an imbalance in power between minority groups who are unable to experience the privileges afforded to the majority group. Interrupting is a tool that Kate uses to break down barriers to inclusion. Breaking down these barriers is a way of supporting an anti-bias curriculum for the ECE setting. Post-structuralism suggests we construct and deconstruct the world through language (St Pierre, 2010), and I argue here that Kate is re-constructing her world by challenging the parent's opinion of her rights to equality. It is also apparent that Kate holds a certain level of power as the head-teacher at this ECE setting, and that this disruption might not have occurred if the setting in which Kate works had not already been queered. By this I mean, as an active, out head teacher, Kate is already queering the environment, and as such the Marriage Amendment Bill discussion only adds to an environment that is accepting of diversity and already challenges the heteronorm. Kate expresses her commitment to disrupt the heteronorm by stating:

> You've just got to start that dialogue, you've got to start getting those people thinking and showing them or helping them to understand that at the end of the day, what is important is people being good to other people.

Foundations are flexible and open to change, and people are agents of change. Kate challenges the "way things are", the heteronormativity in this example, using the everyday environment to forefront the topic of inequity and social justice. Kate's existence as an out teacher has already disrupted the heteronormative discourse within her ECE setting. However, the parent's reaction to the inclusion of the Marriage Amendment Bill newspaper article is an example of the need to continually challenge the silence that heteronormativity creates for lesbian and gay issues. Although Kate spoke in her interview about her commitment to being visible, "women that are like me – just do speak up", and how she strives for an anti-biased ECE setting, "there's not gender stereotypical bias going on", I suggest that there are some barriers still to be overcome. Socially just ECE spaces are places where there is existence of "equitable regard" and recognition for all, including those who have "non-heteronormative life experiences" (Gunn & Surtees, 2004, p. 82)

Summary of risks

In summary, people who identify as lesbian or gay move between two desires; one, to be honest about themselves, and two, to be safe. Being honest about oneself means facing risks, either real or perceived, whereas being safe means hiding aspects of whom they are, in the attempt to draw less negative attention. Not disclosing oneself can lead to "sacrificing parts of identity that did not comfortably fit into the world's sense of what is appropriate" (DeJean, 2010a, p. 233). In this research, participants judged the risk factors within their environment, and decide to act, or not, based on the amount of risk involved.

Participants' engagement in mindfulness discourse

For many of the research participants, being mindful of whom they were talking to was a regular occurrence. Sometimes this mindfulness was linked to the participants' own lack of knowledge. This lack of personal knowledge led participants to be more wary about their own personal safety and created a heightened awareness of their own vulnerability.

Sophie noted her own limitations and lack of knowledge about some family values. This lack of knowledge meant she was less open about herself with the children and their families. She negotiated this space by talking about the people in her own life who were lesbian or gay:

> I'll talk about friends of mine who are both girls who are married or in Civil Unions or two of my friends who are girls who have a baby…I wouldn't necessarily come out to [the children]… [but I am] still addressing that stuff [gay issues] but it's a safer kind of way to do it.

While this demonstrates a desire to engage in dialogue with others in order to transform views about sexualities, at the same time it shows an under-supported queer environment narrative. Sophie protects herself, but leaves a gap of vulnerability in her attempt to catch the teachable moment.

Furthermore, another example provided by Sophie noted there is a heightened level of risk: "in some communities you might need to be careful." She noted that it was the "collective insecurity of some communities that could mean that the reaction could be quite… you know." This indicates that participants were analysing spaces and engaging with respectful practice narrative and risk-assessment narrative to ensure their personal safety. "I would be really careful about talking about queer families with children from cultural backgrounds that I didn't know a lot about…sometimes you have to be aware of what context you are in" (Sophie). She was intentionally peaceful when interacting with adults: "no matter what job you are in, you don't go and purposely rock the boat." Thoughtfulness means to step back from our conduct and reflect on what we do (Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2000, p. 44). Sophie is thoughtful and reflective about the manner in which she engages with disruption. She identifies that she is aware of the communities, context, and cultures, that surround her and it is an analysis of these components which is conducted prior to her speaking out.

The internal conflict for participants is when and how to disclose their sexuality? Participants drew on courageous actions narratives as well as an awareness of risk regarding speaking for the first time to parents about their family life – for example, Kate noted:

If I had a new family start…that I knew had recently come to New Zealand, I possibly wouldn't be so quick to talk about, 'Oh, I've got a son and my partner Fern is at home' [but] if I've got someone who looked kinda New Zealandy –funky, you know, [I would say] 'Yeah, this is my son", so again , that's me making assumptions of who they are, and so I think your own assumptions give out barriers – then I wonder whether that's a barrier or a protective barrier in the respect that you're kind of thinking, 'Well, I don't want to freak these people out'.

Parallels are drawn here to the previously mentioned example, where judgements were made regarding others accepting who the participants was. Participants drew on a heteronormative assumption narrative regarding communities' understandings around heteronormativity. That is, participants assumed the people they were speaking with were heterosexual, and that there was potential for conflict. The problem with this type of assumption is that participants are also intertwined in the heteronormative discourse, thus amplifying the heteronormative dominance. Lesbian teachers inadvertently engaging in heteronormative dominance was also identified in Gunn's (2003a) research, indicating heteronormativity is an over-arching barrier to inclusion of lesbian and gay rights and visibility of rainbow families in the ECE setting.

An example of mindfulness narrative can be seen in a situation where a participant, Sophie, found herself being more cautious than she usually would when she was talking to a child whose mother identified as Christian:

One of the kids said 'You can't get married, you are two girls'. I said:

'Well, actually that's true at the moment, but, you could have a civil union'… just putting it out there – the conversation didn't really go anywhere… that's probably the only time I've felt really…[for] some reason because it was my colleague's daughter it felt a bit more risky I think, or potentially risky.

It can be argued that this participant is approaching the subject with the child by stating facts, using a somewhat interrupting pedagogy. However, because of the perceived risks involved, she chooses not to persist with the topic further. Sophie is mindful of who she is talking to. I suggest that this is because of two reasons. Respect for the family is the first reason. The second reason that Sophie is mindful of, is to minimise conflict for herself. Queer pedagogical teaching styles can be problematic; their very nature troubles and disrupts taken-for-granted ways, so naturally queer theory causes trouble in itself. Although the silence is disrupted, in this instance, the teacher felt ill prepared to disrupt the heteronormativity further. Fearing a negative consequence resulting from challenging the child of the teacher, meant that Sophie was unprepared to challenge the silence related to ways of forming relationships with the two children.

Maintaining a positive role model

Amongst the anecdotes outlining the challenges participants had, there were also moments identified where there was a connection and an understanding between teacher and parent. Emma, for instance, engaged in banter about the difficulty of getting pregnant in her new relationship [with a woman] as opposed to her previous relationship with a male, but acknowledged that this easy conversation was only so with "certain parents." Kate also spoke about positive connections with families; however, she noted that this was more likely to happen "once they become part of the centre community…If you want to make those people feel really welcome then you've got to try and talk to them in a way that they're used to I guess." Francis also hopes that she will be seen as a positive role model:

> I think its meeting people and meeting nice normal people, you know that you'd say hello to and have a coffee with and that stuff is really important for breaking down those barriers. You know that we, that while protest and maybe being politically radical and stuff is an important part of being a lesbian, and an important part of lesbian history, I think minds are changed just as much by, 'Oh my neighbour's a gay and she's not like that'.

The art of being friendly and approachable can be seen as a political stance, and even a radical stance, a way of challenging the dominant discourse around what to expect when people think about lesbian and gay people. Participants considered the work involved with being a self-advocate to be worthwhile. One participant spoke about the acceptance she and her family received from an older Samoan Christian teacher at her work. She described that felt that this teacher's beliefs were quite different than her own. However, over time, the participant noticed that the teacher became more accepting of her, her partner, and their child:

> You know, an over 50 year old that wouldn't have come across lots of lesbian families – she's totally embraced it and she now is an advocate so that's…how the power of being a positive advocate works. But if we hadn't been positive already about that [gay families], she would have found it really difficult.

These small windows of positivity encouraged participants to continue to be visible within their ECE settings. A Jehovah Witness family member told Francis that she wanted her daughter to have positive lesbian role models in her early years:

> [If] she [the child] is in a position to come out to us as a family, that's actually an okay option for her, that she doesn't have all of that stuff to work through. I want her to think about people, you know that we as a family liked. The parent appreciated me being out at work and about the fact that my [Francis'] partner will pop in and her little girl knew that, that families had two mums. And if you were a girl you could have a girlfriend or a boyfriend.

Again, presenting oneself as a role model for what a lesbian person and a rainbow family looks like was deemed an important aspect for creating an anti-bias curriculum. Having the support of the family would have been a significant affirmation and would help to build upon the anti-bias curriculum. The teachers' presence in the ECE setting disrupted the silence narrative.

The findings from this research suggest the disruption of silence can happen in small, seemingly incidental ways, even when the risks are high. In addition, silence is challenged on a larger scale when the risks are lower.

Concluding thoughts

Risk is about acknowledging personal fears, and breaking the silence on issues that matter (Robinson, 2005a). Admittedly there are repercussions to risky practice such as disrupting heteronormative practices, and Robinson notes that "most [people] are aware of the risks of choosing to take up a non-heterosexual identity" (p. 181). Every day and all the time, one has to evaluate and re-evaluate who they are comfortable coming out to, if it is safe, and what the consequences might be (Killermann, 2013).

Although queer pedagogy was a risky discourse for participants, they nevertheless felt it was relevant and necessary to question the heteronorm in their ECE settings. Amongst all of this dialogue about safe spaces, risk discourse, and queer pedagogy sits the idea that children are usually accepting of difference: "I think children are so open anyway…talking with children is going to be a lot easier than articulating who you are to the parents in your community" (Sophie). It was hypothesised by participants that this is because "we care more about being judged by other adults" (Emma).

The research found that there are a range of levels of risk and that people and environments contribute both positively and negatively to the perceptions of risk involved. The null curriculum which highlighted the way that communities manage what are acceptable topics for education environments helped to make sense of the risk levels. This was particularly relevant as it helped explain the difficulty that teachers face when they attempt to disrupt the dominant discourse of heteronormativity. Trying to disrupt heteronormativity by introducing the idea that homosexuality is acceptable proved to be a challenge for participants. All the participants referred to family structures to start conversations about accepting rainbow families, and to highlight discussions about lesbian and gay issues. It was noted that awareness-raising pedagogy was a factor in managing personal risk, and that all participants were aware of who they were talking to, how their message

could be received, and were alert to potential risk to themselves when challenging heteronormative practices.

Sitting alongside the ideal of the acceptance of difference, a vital part of communities working together in harmony, is the reality that expecting the dominant group to change is seen as unlikely, mainly because the status-quo has served its interests well. This is a "Catch-22 situation, where things can change as long as the dominant group is persuaded that their dominance or interests will not be compromised in any way" (Lumby & Coleman, 2007, p. 92). An example of this was provided in this chapter through the discussion regarding the Marriage Amendment Bill (New Zealand Parliament, 2013), where a parent questioned the need for change.

However, despite the risks involved, participants found ways to queer their pedagogy. If it is acknowledged that each person will experience their own personal environment through their own set of values and beliefs (Burr, 1995), that means that each person will manage their own risk levels in their own way. Participants used an awareness-raising pedagogy, as well as a general acceptance narrative when considering a queer pedagogical teaching style.

Protective strategies, discourses, and pedagogies were used to ensure participants were not putting themselves into unsafe positions as they formed relationships with the families within the communities in which they worked. Some of the strategies were mindful of others' opinions; for example, not necessarily raising the topic of rainbow families when they first meet, rather waiting until they have some connections with the family established first.

The next chapter concludes this thesis, and draws together the trends running through the findings. I also provide some recommendations based on the findings presented so far. Some limitations related to this thesis are discussed in Chapter Seven also, and suggestions for future research are included as the final part of the chapter.

Chapter Seven: Concluding Thoughts

In Chapters Five and Six I presented the findings from the research data. The focus for the findings and research project sought to better understand the ways that lesbian teachers disrupt and overcome heteronormative practices. Firstly, I was eager to understand what lesbian teachers do to disrupt heteronormativity in ECE settings. Secondly, I wanted to understand better the barriers faced by participants, and what strategies were used to overcome those barriers.

In this final chapter, I will discuss the barriers and the strategies which emerged from these findings. The themes from the literature review, silence, child as innocent, teacher preparedness, and anti-bias, are revisited next. The contributions this study has made will be discussed next, followed by the limitations of this study. Then the implications for future studies and some recommendations are discussed prior to my concluding thoughts section.

The formation of families has changed markedly over the last 30 years (Clay, 2004; Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014; Gonzalez-Mena, 2010; Pryor, 2005). This change has resulted in a wider range of families attending ECE settings. Because of the wider range of families attending ECE settings, teaching pedagogies have also had to evolve (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001; Wolfe, 2006). Although there has been an increase in interest in the experiences of rainbow families and lesbian and gay issues, heteronormativity ensures silence is still dominant (Gunn, 2005; Gunn & Surtees 2011; Lee & Duncan, 2008; Robinson 2002; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001; Surtees 2012 ; Wolfe, 2006). It is within this realm I attempt to understand the ramifications of heteronormativity on lesbian teachers working in ECE.

This research project sought to understand the complexity of disrupting heteronormative discourses within ECE settings for the four lesbian teachers participating in this research. It has been argued in this thesis that heteronormativity plays a significant role in silencing the non-conformer, creating risk for participants to navigate (Gunn, 2003a; Robinson, 2005a; Surtees, 2005).

Since embarking on this research I am more aware of the influences of heteronormativity on lesbian teachers. I have been influenced by reading a range of literature which challenged me to broaden my understanding of heteronormativity and the barriers it ensures. I am increasingly aware of the link between barriers and risks, and how they influence and maintain silence. Subsequently, my analysis of the gathered research data identified a more complex situation for lesbian teachers disrupting heteronormativity than I had previously considered.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a useful tool to help understand large bodies of knowledge. Understanding the themes and the narratives allowed me to gain an insight into the experiences of the teachers involved (Patton, 2002). My data analysis identified the strength and impact of heteronormativity on lesbian teachers. Examining not only what was said, but how it was said, allowed a deeper understanding of the data gathered. My position within the research, as someone who identified with the participants, enabled me an insider's interpretation of the data (Marinucci, 2010). A close examination of the data for reoccurring themes provided a unique insight into the impact of heteronormativity on lesbian teachers.

Barriers identified

Three of the barriers identified in this research were: generalised heteronormativity, null curriculum, and an awareness of risks.

An example of generalised heteronormativity was evident when a grandmother at the centre did not acknowledge the relationship between Emma and her partner. A challenge by a parent about Francis' photo shoot was another example. It was identified in the findings that the null curriculum

impacted on the ability to readily access resources to support disrupting heteronormativity.

One of the key findings which emerged from the data is that risk is a main barrier and is an on-going issue which participants have to constantly negotiate. Teachers in this study understood disrupting heteronormativity to be risky, and the results from this research suggest that assessing the level of risk was an on-going process. This was congruent with the literature which acknowledged disrupting heteronormativity as risky (Robinson, 2005).

Teachers identified that at times they were unprepared, due to wariness of risks, to challenge heteronormative thinking. This affirmed that although there are many positive changes within society to heteronormativity, there is still work to be done for acceptance for lesbian and gay people within ECE settings.

However, there were times when although participants were wary and vulnerable, they still deemed it necessary to disrupt the dominance of heteronormativity in their teaching spaces. Results from this research concluded that regardless of the risks involved challenging heteronormativity was still a priority for participants. Challenging heteronormative actions meant that generalised heteronormativity is brought into question. Challenging the dominance means that lesbian and gay issues are fore fronted. Challenging heteronormative actions also means that issues pertaining to lesbian and gay people are transferred from the null curriculum to the negotiated curriculum.

Strategies identified
The results presented in the analytical chapters suggested that the teachers had already experienced heteronormativity prior to working in ECE. Because of their previous experiences with disrupting heteronormativity, participants had strategies already in place to disrupt heteronormativity in ECE settings. Personal experiences meant that they were already equipped and prepared to disrupt heteronormativity, and able to transfer this knowledge into their teaching.

One of the key findings of this research was the use of families and the topic of family composition to raise awareness of rainbow families. Taking a lead role in starting conversations regarding heteronormativity, or discussing their family composition, rather than waiting for the wider community to take the lead was a strategy that participants engaged in. Francis said; "You can't always wait for that community stuff to change, like someone has to be the person who says 'our family's got two mums and we're okay'" summing up the role she felt she played.

Teachers who come from minority groups bring "to their teaching knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of what it is like to be a member of [that]…minority group" (Gibbs, 2006, p. 183). Participants in this research shared their experiences with the community and advocated for rainbow families. This research found that the participants interacted with children, families, and communities, as a strategy to break down barriers of acceptance.

Relationship building was identified as a strategy that participants used to ensure that there was minimal conflict when engaging in difficult conversations. Participants in this research built up relationships with others prior to disrupting heteronormativity. When they did disrupt heteronormativity, they were mindful of who they were talking to and how the message would be received. Such mindfulness and respectful practice was used most commonly in situations when participants did not know the parents or their beliefs.

Disrupting the silence

The findings from this research showed that lesbian teachers have a desire to be visible within their workplace. To put themselves into situations where they *are* visible, however, makes the participants vulnerable. Despite this, while some conversations were problematic or stressful, participants often felt the barriers were not insurmountable. Conversations with children were identified as easier to initiate than conversations with adults. Judgement from adults was identified as contributing negatively, whereas children's acceptance was viewed positively. This research concludes that participants

felt for the most part, that the value in opening up dialogue with children, peers, and parents outweighed the vulnerability they experienced.

The three participants who had children challenged silence in an attempt to positively influence their children's future. Participants in this research provided people the opportunity to be open-minded and accepting of their family composition. This was achieved by complying and aligning with people's current knowledge about families. This research found that participants were aware of presenting similarity rather than difference as a means of acceptance. Kate's concern that the message was coming across in a manner that was accepted by the recipient was captured in her comment "It's being able to articulate who you are in a way that is easily digestible to all".

The findings identified that participant's use a strategy to ensure the message is articulated in such a way that the person receiving the message does so in their language, and in a manner that they can understand. I suggest that this research highlights how this kind of double guessing, where one tries to anticipate the others thoughts, feelings and responses is ultimately draining and time-consuming for the participant. A wider level of acceptance for rainbow families and lesbian teachers would eliminate this need to be second guessing and re-framing conversations with others.

One way to disrupt the silence is interaction between lesbian teachers and families. Hopwood and Connors (2002) discuss Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis (1958), which suggests that to "reduce prejudice between groups, interactions must occur and involve positive outcomes for all involved" (p. 82). The findings from this research found risks need to be taken to challenge the space taken up by silence. This disrupts the normalising discourses within ECE settings, and challenges the contradictions around social justice that can operate in everyday interactions (Robinson, 2005b; Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2006).

Data collected indicated that participants with children were determined to have a positive impact on their world so as to provide safe spaces for their children to grow up. The findings of this research show participants role-

modelling so other teachers also take up teaching pedagogies that challenge heteronormative practices. Participants negotiated personal risk to ensure that both children and adults were aware of the hegemonic viewpoint enforced by heteronormativity.

Child as innocent

Participants of this research modified their actions and words to accommodate the child as innocent narrative in ECE settings. The discourse of the child as innocent means it is not considered appropriate or relevant to discuss with children issues about sex and sexual orientation (Gunn, 2003a). The "innocent child" is a discourse teachers use to minimise the validity of rising lesbian and gay issues.

Examples were provided which highlighted the need to tune into the language and discourses that children use. Francis directly challenges the child as an innocent narrative, by talking with children about rainbow families. Gunn et al. (2004) discuss the importance of language and actions which help children to make sense of their world. Francis used the term "sweetheart" with children to describe her relationship with her partner, which helped children make sense of their world, and also provided opportunities for Francis to make her family visible.

Having conversations regarding ways of being in relationships challenges heteronormative practices within the education environment. Francis disrupts the innocent child discourse, and engages in conversations that help children better understand complex concepts when she speaks about her family composition. Children are further developing their understanding of Francis' relationship, relating something that they know really well and having a word for it. I suggest that participants were challenging the child as innocent discourse by raising the topic of rainbow families with children, directly challenging children to think about family formation in other ways. The direct challenge to children to think about family composition in ways other than mother-father indicates that teachers consider children to be not-innocent about relationships and sexualities. In fact, the participants in this research

were pro-active regarding debunking the perception that children are innocent.

Teacher preparedness

Teacher unpreparedness was an issue in previous research such as Gunn, (2003a) Robinson and Ferfolja, (2001) and Robinson (2005a). However, the participants in this research still engaged in disrupting the heteronorm. I argue that this is because disrupting the heteronorm is of direct benefit to participants. Because of the direct benefit to them as well as their children, participants were prepared to disrupt and challenge heteronormativity.

Being prepared usually requires a level of reflection. Queer pedagogy is a way to critically reflect what is taken for granted (Robinson 2005b), and supports educators to define and redefine attitudes regarding sexuality (Zacko-Smith & Smith 2010). In this study, queer pedagogical practices were used by participants to queer their teaching environment. Being visible, speaking about their family structure, and challenging the discourses others engage in are examples of queering the environment.

I found that the simplicity in which participants were able to bring up the topic of rainbow families was made easier by having their own child at the centre. This finding was consistent with all three participants who had children, and allowed a natural flow with conversations particularly focused around family structures and compositions. The fact that all three participants had partners who would visit the centre, meant the children attending the ECE setting were able to see the family "in action" per se. The findings from the research, therefore, indicate that real life examples are useful for understanding realities.

Working towards an anti-biased curriculum

As previously mentioned, this study highlights that talking about families is a strategy used to break down heteronormative environments (Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2006). Engaging in conversations with children as a tool for disrupting the heteronorm was evident in the data gathered, and queer pedagogy is a tool teachers used to question heteronormative environments.

The investing in our children's future pedagogical style taken up by the three participants who were parents helps create an anti-bias ECE setting. Educating and providing opportunities for younger children to think about diversity, and the importance for people to be treated equitably was deemed an important part of participants' teaching.

This research found that participants engaged in a range of strategies to overcome the silence that is associated with the null curriculum. The disruption of the heteronorm was made possible by building relationships, and raising awareness through visibility. This research found that self-disclosure usually happens during everyday events, such as conversations. Participants wanted to be seen in a positive light, valued authenticity, and endeavoured to be true to themselves. The (in)visibility of the rainbow family was overcome by participants when they used their own families as exemplars.

The findings identified the participants worked hard to present a positive profile, recognising that for some families they may have never knowingly met a lesbian before. Francis highlighted this, saying, "We assume that people have met gay and lesbian people in their life…they might not have met anyone who is out…". Being a positive role model was used when lesbian teachers engaged in conversations hoping that the conversations and experiences will be recalled in times of need by the recipient. The intention is that they have a positive memory or experience of their interaction with a lesbian person, adding weight to the side of the argument that lesbian and gay people are "okay". The participants in this study identified that they not only advocated for themselves but for lesbian and gay people in general.

Contributions to research

This study has provided several contributions to research. It has provided an understanding of how thematic and narrative analysis can provide an insight into lesbian teacher's experiences of heteronormativity in ECE. Several insights were identified into how the lesbian teacher responds to heteronormativity and the barriers created by heteronormativity. This

research adds to the small body which focuses solely on lesbian teachers' experience with heteronormativity in the education sector (Wolfe, 2006).

Thematic analysis identified risk as a significant barrier to disrupting heteronormativity. An examination of the findings revealed that the null curriculum was also a barrier to including family structures which differed from heterosexual. Irrespective of the risks, participants still found ways to disrupt the hold heteronormativity has, stating they would take up the challenge presented by the dominance of heteronormativity.

Of significance was the use of family to open up discussions about rainbow families. Participants used their own families as exemplars due to the lack of resources within the ECE settings which portrayed families as other than heterosexual (Lee, 2010). Viewing the relevance of discussing rainbow families from the viewpoint of participants who were heavily invested in disrupting the heteronormative discourse was a key factor of this research.

Gunn's (2003a) research drew her to question "when might this [lesbian and gay issues] be a topic that people want to take up?" I hypnosis that the topic of lesbian and gay issues is taken up when it is valued by people. By this I mean, when it directly affects them, as is the case for participants in this research. The participants in this research were proactive in raising the topic of rainbow families. My follow on provocation is; in what way can lesbian teachers help make this topic be as important to other teachers?

This research builds upon previous studies by Gunn (2003a), Jarvis (2010), Lee (2008), and Robinson (2002) who have highlighted the benefits in Australasia of making rainbow families and lesbian and gay issues more prominent in ECE. This study, then, contributes in a small way to the on-going conversation regarding lesbian and gay visibility in ECE settings.

Although Robinson (2005b) raises the importance of moving past the family construct as the only way to talk about lesbian and gay issues, the findings of this research have indicated that participants felt it was an age-appropriate method to start the initial conversation off with children. The intention was to draw parallels to the child's known world, using zone of proximal

development(MacNaughton & Williams, 2009) as a teaching technique to expand children's concepts of family formation.

In this research participants presented a positive example of life in a lesbian family narrative which in the long term would benefit children's understandings of lesbian family structures. This is a positive contrast to Robinson and Jones-Diaz's conclusion where they note that rainbow families are often being "constructed as sites of discrimination rather than sites of celebration" (2006, p. 162).

In terms of this research, it is cause to celebrate that the participants felt comfort levels that ensured that conversations about rainbow families occurred. Silence is challenged when these conversations happen, and participants felt the conversations are relevant and appropriate. I argue however that the comfort level is not always there as evident in the reflections in chapter six around the risks involved.

Limitations of this research

There are several limitations to this research. Firstly, the small number of participants does not allow for a wider set of viewpoints to be heard. Four participants gave me a wide and detailed set of data to work from, and as a beginning researcher I had more than enough to work with. The lack of data requested regarding ethnicity means that an opportunity to engage with many ethnicities was potentially lost. Focusing on one location rather than multiple locations is also a limitation. However, from a practical point of view, this may have become too much of a challenge given the challenges I encountered in the recruitment process (see methods chapter).

The methodologies were interpretive, therefore vulnerable to my personal biases and beliefs. However, thematic and narrative analysis are well known methods, commonly used by researchers (Patton, 2002). Knowing three of the four participants could have been problematic; however, I knew each one more as a professional acquaintance than a personal friend, and my supervisor and I agreed that this knowledge of the participants would not be detrimental to the research validity.

One aspect I am aware of regarding this study is that the interest which the participant has with this research could potentially correlate with their interest in breaking down heteronormative discourses. That is, this research itself can be seen as an action which disrupts heteronormativity. Participants who are already aware of the benefits of disruption may be more likely to take up the invitation to participate. Conversely, a lesbian teacher who is less confident might see engaging with research about lesbian teachers as problematic. Lesbian teachers who have not disclosed their sexuality within their workplace might find accepting an invitation to participate in research regarding lesbian and gay issues places them in a vulnerable position, and may fear they might be questioned about their participation by other team members.

Implications for future studies

Far more questions than answers are provided when one engages with critical reflection, and that is certainly so for this thesis. Although it is my desire to leave this work with some possible lines of direction, on a personal level, the work done here has posed more questions than answers, therefore opening up other potential areas for research.

The first potential area for future study picks up on a comment made by a participant that did not directly align with the research questions. Kate spoke about a new teacher who told Kate that seeing another lesbian teacher "just made her feel so much more at ease and that she could be herself and know [she] was going to be appreciated and not challenged". Research in ECE settings where multiple lesbian and/or gay teachers work could be a possible line of enquiry. Is there less vulnerability when there is someone else also advocating? What part does the environment play in attracting same-gender attracted people to work there?

Aotearoa/New Zealand is a small but richly diverse environment, and this study was located in a large city, which for the most part has an active LGBTQI community. The council financially supports community events such as a parade and fair that focus on the LGBTQI community. Would the same study replicated in another, possibly more rural setting have the same

outcomes? Would the same or similar outcomes be evident in a different city even? Although it is assumed that this research will resonate with other lesbian teachers, it is not safe to assume that all aspects are consistent with all lesbian teachers' experiences. Validity is gained by examining and cross examining hypotheses, and a replication of this study would add strength to the findings shared in this thesis.

The impact of the pro-active lesbian teacher on the children, families, and ECE setting community has only been touched upon in this thesis. Francis spoke about the diverse nature of her ECE setting and how her pregnancy had a positive impact on the relationships she formed there. However, it was beyond the scope of the research questions to explore further the impacts of an "out" lesbian teacher on the ECE community at this time. Interviewing children and families could reveal a more in-depth discussion about the ramifications, both positive and negative, of lesbian teachers queering their environment through being out and vocal about LGBTQI issues.

Lastly, I reflected upon the energy given by participants to disrupt the dominance of heteronormativity, and the management of risks, and wondered if there were times in which this was thought be "too big a task". By this I mean, were there days when participants weighed up the personal ramifications of addressing the injustices and felt they were insurmountable? Does the heteronormative dominance have such a hold that to be hyper-aware all the time is too difficult?

Recommendations based on findings

Ideally a culture where all teachers were alert to the potential to highlight lesbian and gay issues with children as the need arises would reduce the barriers encountered by participants in this research. It is of benefit to children if all teachers are interested in seeking equal rights for lesbian and gay people by interrupting heteronormativity (Sumara, 2008).

Barriers such as silence, child as innocent, and the unprepared teacher were all faced by participants in this research on various levels. An anti-biased curriculum was something that participants strove for when they disrupted heteronormativity. An environment where all teachers are mindful would allow

lesbian teachers to not be so on guard knowing that others were willing to also challenge heteronormative assumptions and strive for an anti-bias ECE setting.

Ideally the topic of rainbow families would find a position in the intended curriculum, where there would be a cohesive plan by all teachers to regularly find moments where the topic of rainbow families could be raised.

A wider range of resources within the ECE setting portraying a variety of family formations would allow teachers to access tools to better equip themselves to bring to the forefront rainbow families. Participants in this research, along with Robinson's (2002) and Gunn's (2003a) research noted that resources would further support teacher's abilities to disrupt heteronormative practices.

The burden of disrupting heteronormativity would become lighter as other teachers shared the role and responsibility to advocate for lesbian and gay issues to be visible within their community. With many people challenging the heteronorm, the dominance would then potentially shift from the silence previously identified. Challenging heteronormativity would then become the dominant pedagogy.

One way to achieve this is to break down real and perceived barriers to engagement with others. If all teachers, not just lesbian teachers, aimed to gain a better understanding of others around them, the promotion of acceptance would be spread among the teaching team. This would potentially benefit children with one consistent pedagogical teaching style within the team.

Personal reflections

My developing understanding of heteronormativity has helped me make sense of the barriers that society creates to enhance the silence of minorities and the voices of majorities. Efforts by 'out' teachers to raise awareness of a range of sexualities supports students understandings and makes connections between their lives and the social realities they live it. Teachers benefit from environments where they can be themselves, and are able to

concentrate on teaching. Minimising the instances where lesbian teachers need to be mindful of their sexuality would ensure that they were able to be authentically engaged teachers rather than concealing part of their identity.

In closing, it is my desire that this piece of research contributes somewhat in a positive light to all teachers, but especially to the lesbian women within the teaching sector who are yet to find their space, voice, and position in this heteronormative world. When a person is openly gay, choosing visibility puts them in a vulnerable position, but by being visible, gay people inspire actions that confront stereotypical behaviour. Kia kaha, be strong.

Mā mu aka kite ā muri, mā muri ka ora ā mua,

Those who lead give sight to those who follow – those behind give life to those ahead.

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Appendix A

<u>Research Questions</u>

Questions for participants of research: "Mapping the language of confession and internal resistance, gay teachers making sense of their sexuality and place in ece settings."

Name:_____Pseudonym:_____

Age bracket:_____Length of service in ece:_____

Prefered terminology (e.g. gay/lesbian/queer/same gender attracted):

1) When do you talk about your own life or yourself generally in your teaching, with children?
2) What role do you feel you play as a gay teacher in advocating for gay issues in your teaching?
3) I'd like you to think about a time in your teaching where you felt you *could have* said something about same-gender families or relationships?
4) How did you respond?
5) Why do you think you reacted that way?
6) Can you describe a situation in which *you would* proactively raise a topic regarding sexualities or same-gender families?

7) As a gay person, why do you believe that discussing gay families is something that you personally should be advocating for? (if you don't, can you please explain why).

8) What do you see as the barriers to talking about same-gender families?

9) If you could paint an ideal picture of a centre (thinking specifically about same-gender families and inclusion)- what would it look like?

Appendix B

Letter of Introduction to first two participants
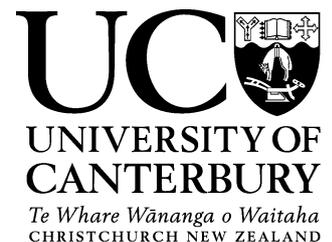
Dear Applicant,

My name is Kath Cooper and I am completing my MA in Education. The senior teacher in charge of research for the [this] Association has agreed to forward this letter to your [ECE setting], on my behalf, inviting you to participate in my research. Due to the nature of this research, you will be required to self-identify if you qualify for this research, using the criteria outlined below.

What is the study about?

I am interested in how and when gay teachers talk about their relationships and family structures with children in early childhood settlings. What are the barriers to talking about same-gender relationships? What are the success stories? It is considered part of everyday life for a teacher to share some

details of themselves and their experiences with others, and children can gain important knowledge about the world around them if teachers, talk about their experiences.

Studying how and when teachers talk to children about their relationships will help us to answer some of the complex questions there are about disclosure and potential repercussions.

Who can participate?

Participation in this research is limited. This is to ensure that the data collected is from the source identified within the study.

Characteristics for participants are:

1) Women who self-identify as gay/lesbian
 2) Women who work with children in a [ECE setting] within the [local] area.
3) Women who are willing to participate fully in the research obligations, this includes being able to meet for a one-on one interview in November and on Wednesday 7th December for a focus group.
I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study including non-disclosure to employers. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings through the use of pseudonyms.

What does participating involve?

Participating involves a one on one conversation-style interview. This would be about one hour to one ½ hours in length. This interview is a little like a conversation, where the style is more open, and allows extra questions to be added. This also allows you, the participant to direct the flow. You will also join in one focus group, this will be with approximately three-four other people who have participated in the study and is set for Wednesday 7th December . This would be about one hour. Participants will be asked to treat what is shared in confidence.

Your rights.

You have the right to decline to participate. No further action would be required.

If you agree to participate, you have several rights. These include the right to:

- Refuse to answer a particular question.

- You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, I will use my best endeavours to remove any of the information relating to you from the project, including any final publication, provided that this remains practically achievable.

- Ask any question about the study at any time during participation

- To be given access to a summary of the findings of the study when it is concluded.

However, it must be stressed that your answers will be valued. It is important to understand the barriers as well as the successes of gay teachers, and this study can help with that.

All information collected for the study will remain confidential.

All data collected for the study will remain confidential. The completed notes and transcripts will be archived until the thesis has been examined and journal articles have been published, in order for the data to be verified if necessary. All raw data will be held securely and kept for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of the project and then destroyed. Your name will not appear on findings, or on any part of the research

If you are willing to take part in the study, please email me directly on the email below

Further Information

If you have any questions, or would like further information about the study, please feel free to contact me on the numbers below: You may wish to contact my supervisor on:

Contact Numbers

Researcher	Supervisor
Kath Cooper	Dr Gina Colvin
Broadmeadows	School of Maori, Social and
Wellington	Cultural Studies in Education
	College of Education
Email :	University of Canterbury.
kathandjody@xtra.co.nz	
04 477-9072	email:gina.colvin@canterbury.ac.nz
0211 288 231	
	ph. 03 364-2987 ext. 44294

Thank you very much for your consideration, I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Cooper

Canterbury University Student.

*If this letter has raised any questions or concerns for you, please contact:*

Gay and Lesbian Help-Line

> Providing information, advice, active listening, youth support and more Helpline Services to the whole lesbian, gay, trans, questioning, coming out, whatever community.
>
> More info at **www.gaywellington.org/** or phone them at 04-473-7878.

Appendix C

Letter of Introduction to second two participants
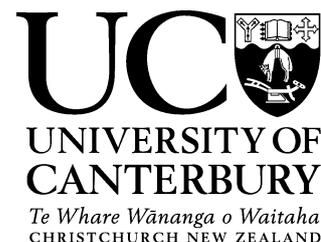
Dear Applicant,

My name is Kath Cooper and I am completing my MA in Education. I would be delighted if you would consider being part of my research for my thesis. Due to the nature of this research, you will be required to self-identify if you qualify, using the criteria outlined below.

<u>What is the study about?</u>

I am interested in how and when gay teachers talk about their relationships and family structures with children in early childhood settlings. What are the barriers to talking about same-gender relationships? What are the success stories? It is considered part of everyday life for a teacher to share some details of themselves and their experiences with others, and children can gain important knowledge about the world around them if teachers, talk about their experiences.

Studying how and when teachers talk to children about their relationships will help us to answer some of the complex questions there are about disclosure and potential repercussions.

Who can participate?

Participation in this research is limited. This is to ensure that the data collected is from the source identified within the study.

Characteristics for participants are:

1) Women who self-identify as gay/lesbian/queer
 2) Women who work with children in a Kindergarten or childcare centre within the Wellington area.
3) Women who are willing to participate fully in the research obligations, this includes being able to meet for a one-on one interview and a focus group.

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study including non-disclosure to employers. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings through the use of pseudonyms.

What does participating involve?

Participating involves a one on one conversation-style interview. This would be about one hour to one ½ hours in length. This interview is a little like a conversation, where the style is more open, and allows extra questions to be added. This also allows you, the participant to direct the flow. You will also join in one focus group, this will be with approximately three-four other people who have participated in the study and a date is yet to be set. This would be about one hour. Participants will be asked to treat what is shared in confidence.

Your rights.

You have the right to decline to participate. No further action would be required.

If you agree to participate, you have several rights. These include the right to:

- Refuse to answer a particular question.

- You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, I will use my best endeavours to remove any of the information relating to you from the project, including any final publication, provided that this remains practically achievable.

- Ask any question about the study at any time during participation

- To be given access to a summary of the findings of the study when it is concluded.

However, it must be stressed that your answers will be valued. It is important to understand the barriers as well as the successes of gay teachers, and this study can help with that.

All information collected for the study will remain confidential.

All data collected for the study will remain confidential. The completed notes and transcripts will be archived until the thesis has been examined and journal articles have been published, in order for the data to be verified if necessary. All raw data will be held securely and kept for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of the project and then destroyed. Your name will not appear on findings, or on any part of the research

If you are willing to take part in the study, please email me directly on the email below

Further Information

If you have any questions, or would like further information about the study, please feel free to contact me on the numbers below: You may wish to contact my supervisor on:

Contact Numbers

Researcher	Supervisor
Kath Cooper	Dr Gina Colvin
Broadmeadows	School of Maori, Social and Cultural

Wellington

Email :
Kathleen.cooper@hotmail.co.nz
04 477-9072
0211 288 231

Studies in Education
College of Education
University of Canterbury.

Email:gina.colvin@canterbury.ac.nz

ph. 03 364-2987 ext. 44294

Thank you very much for your consideration, I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Cooper
Canterbury University Student.

If this letter has raised any questions or concerns for you, please contact:

Gay and Lesbian Help-Line

Providing information, advice, active listening, youth support and more Helpline Services to the whole lesbian, gay, trans, questioning, coming out, whatever community.

More info at **www.gaywellington.org/** or phone them at 04-473-7878.

Appendix D

Consent form
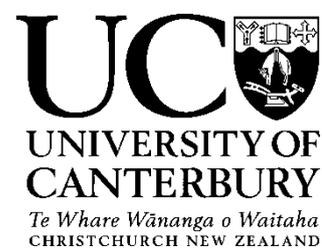
University of Canterbury

Kath Cooper

University of Canterbury

Ph. 0211288231

Email: Kathleen.cooper@hotmail.co.nz

An investigation into the factors that impact how and when gay ECE teachers talk about their relationships and family structures.

Consent Form for participants

(Please tick each box)

☐ I have read the information sheet and understand what will be required of me if I participate in this project.

☐ I understand that the group discussions will be audio-taped, and will be transcribed by an independent person.

☐ I have read the information letter and understand that all information collected will only be accessed by the researcher and that it will be kept confidential and secure.

☐ I understand that neither I, nor my work, will be identified in any presentations or publications that draw on this research.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may choose to withdraw at any time.

☐ I understand that I can receive a report on the findings of the study. I have written my email address below for the report to be sent to.

☐ I understand that I can get more information about this project from the researcher, and that I can contact the University of Canterbury Ethics Committee if I have any complaints about the research.

Full
name_____
___

Signature

_____

Date _____

Email address for
report_____

Appendix E

Copy of the Poster for Staff room.

Research opportunity.

Kia ora, I'm Kath Cooper, I'm conducting research about how and when lesbian/gay teachers talk to children about their lived experiences . I'm looking for participants who meet the following criteria:
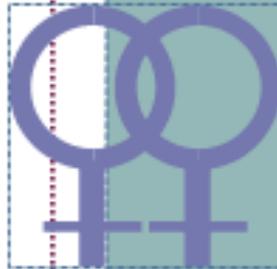
- Woman who identify as lesbian/gay.
- Currently working with early childhood aged children at WRF KA.
- Happy to be interviewed individually and as part of a focus group
- Ideally have had some thoughts about this topic yourself.

If you are interested, or would like to know more, please make contact with me using the information provided below.

If this topic raises questions for you, and you need support call
Gay and Lesbian helpline ph: 473 7878