JOSEPH ROSE DIED FOR OUR SINS
Stories of the Experience of Being Out in High School

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

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May 2005

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Abstract

While studies in the social sciences have looked at lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth, few have focused on how they experience school. Sexual orientation is still a taboo subject or only treated cursorily in educational institutions and teacher-training programmes. Research that does look at schools is mitigated by subjects who are at different degrees of being out in their schools, or are treated as a monolith with other LGBT youth, or have been recruited through psychosocial agencies, and by data gathered retrospectively and/or at arms-length through surveys.

This dissertation describes the experience of being gay and out at school for seven male students aged sixteen to eighteen. Data was collected through multiple semi-structured interviews with participants recruited through the various urban, suburban, and alternative high schools they attended at the time of this study.

Data was analyzed using a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analyzing phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). The theoretical framework undergirding this study is phenomenological research, arts-based research, and queer theory in education. Findings are represented as a literary novel in order to better preserve participants' voices.

Data analysis indicates that the experience of being out in high school is characterized by: (a) managing "the secret" of being gay before and during coming out; (b) seeing being gay as just being yourself; (c) perceiving the school as privately supportive, but publicly indifferent to gay students; (d) emotionally reflecting the school environment; (e) valuing relationships as a positive; (f) seeing harassment, gossip, and gender differences as negatives; (g) ascribing to perpetrators of homophobia and harassment character flaws and anachronistic beliefs; (h) being left on your own to deal with homophobia and harassment as others abdicate their responsibilities; (i) employing escapist, self-protection, and resistance strategies to deal with homophobia and harassment; (j) searching for connectivity to other gays and the LGBT community; (k) facing the silence of information and resources in schools on LGBT issues and people; and (l) advising others to be true to themselves.

This research has implications for teachers, administrators, policy-makers, and those involved in teacher education programmes who are interested in addressing the needs of gay students.

Résumé

Dans le passé, les sciences sociales se sont penchées sur la problématique de la jeunesse lesbienne, gaie, bisexuelle et transsexuelle (LGBT), mais peu d'études ont eu pour objet spécifique l'expérience de la réalité scolaire parmi ces populations. La question de l'orientation sexuelle demeure un sujet tabou, souvent traité de façon sommaire par les établissements scolaires et les programmes de formation des maîtres. De plus, la recherche existante en milieu scolaire est mitigée en ce qu'elle ne tient pas compte du degré relatif de divulgation parmi les sujets, ou alors traite toute la population LGBT de façon monolithique. Enfin, certaines études recrutent les sujets par le biais d'agences psychothérapeutiques, recueillent leurs données rétrospectivement, ou de manière dissociée par l'entremise de questionnaires.

Cette thèse décrit l'expérience d'être ouvertement gai à l'école, du point de vue de sept étudiants âgés de 16 à 18 ans. Les données proviennent d'une série d'entrevues semi-dirigées, réalisées auprès de participants inscrits dans des écoles alternatives, en milieu urbain et en banlieue. Elles furent analysées par une version modifiée de la méthode Stevick-Colizzi-Keen d'analyse phénoménologique (Moustakas, 1994).

Le cadre théorique de cette recherche phénoménologique se fonde sur les théories gaie et pédagogique. Les résultats sont présentés sous forme de nouvelle littéraire afin de mieux préserver l'individualité des participants.

L'analyse des données révèle que l'expérience d'être ouvertement gai à l'école se caractérise par les éléments suivants: (a) gérer le «secret» d'être gai durant la période précédant la divulgation; (b) ne voir rien d'anormal dans le fait d'être gai; (c) trouver dans le milieu scolaire un soutien aux niveaux personnel et privé, mais en public une institution se montrant indifférente aux étudiants gais; (d) se voir le reflet émotif du milieu scolaire; (e) valoriser les relations; (f) considérer le harcèlement, les ragots et les différences sexuelles comme autant d'éléments négatifs; (g) attribuer aux personnes coupables de harcèlement homophobique une personnalité corrompue ainsi que des préjugés anachroniques; (h) se retrouver seul face au harcèlement homophobique alors que l'entourage abdique ses responsabilités; (i) adopter des stratégies de fuite, d'auto-protection et de résistance face au harcèlement homophobique; (j) rechercher l'appui

d'autres gais et de la communauté LGBT; (k) faire face à l'absence d'informations et de ressources sur la communauté LGBT en milieu scolaire; et (l) prodiguer aux autres le conseil de demeurer intègres.

Cette recherche offre des retombées aux enseignants, aux administrateurs, aux décideurs et à tous ceux oeuvrant à la formation des maîtres, et qui s'intéressent à la question des étudiants gais.

Committee

Claudia Mitchell, Ph.D., Supervisor

Lynn Butler-Kisber, Ph.D.

Sandra Weber, Ph.D.

Acknowledgements

It is with great appreciation that I acknowledge the unfailing support I've received from my research committee during this project. Even when my supervisor, Dr. Claudia Mitchell, was on the other side of the world in South Africa, she was always accessible to answer my questions and guide me as though she were sitting right beside me. Her sage advice and suggestions made this work exponentially better. Thanks Claudia.

Dr. Lynn Butler-Kisber was an invaluable source for answers to my questions about qualitative methods, and she kept my feet to the fire to ensure this research is beyond reproach. Thanks Lynn.

Dr. Sandra Weber was my cheerleader. When this entire endeavour seemed daunting or the end of the tunnel seemed light years away, Sandra always had words of encouragement and a smile that never failed to keep me moving forward. Thanks Sandra.

Most of all I am grateful for my committee's enthusiasm for my carrying out arts-based educational research. This passion sustained me throughout this project.

Finally, I am thankful for having participants who volunteered to be interviewed only because they thought it might help others. Thanks Alex, Christopher, Eric, Evan, Geoff, Matthew, and Tristan.

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Introduction

At the 2002 annual Québec Teachers' Convention, I conducted a workshop titled, "Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Students." While approximately forty teachers attended and the workshop was well received, something telling occurred after the workshop was over. A member of the committee responsible for choosing workshop topics from the submitted proposals confided to me that including this workshop was not without controversy. While the committee members had acknowledged the "importance" of the topic and the problems that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students may face in schools, the dissenting opinion was that speaking about such topics was "opening a can of worms."

This work hopes to open the "can of worms" and, by doing so, discover what it's like to be an openly gay student in high school in a relatively progressive jurisdiction like Québec, Canada.

Many of my professional, academic, and personal interests have intersected to form the genesis of this project. For example, for the last ten years I've been teaching university-level education courses, among them a diversity course that looks at race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. The times I've taught this course I've noticed that of all the topics covered, students know the least about sexual orientation, and, while willing to learn about it, have the most apprehension in doing so. In a previous study, I examined the attitudinal change of pre- and in-service adult educators after a diversity education course and the value of various instructional components utilized in diversity education in order to identify those that are the most effective in attitudinal change (Whatling, Rafaelsen, & Tanaka, 2001). Thirty-five university-level adult education students participated in the study that employed a pre/post survey design with non-randomized comparison groups. The only area where participants were found to have had a significant positive change in their attitudes was in regards to sexual orientation. Clearly there is still room for work to be done in this area.

Personally, I have been enriched by the times in my life I've been welcomed by individuals and groups diverse from me. Spending Sundays as a child in Kahnawake with Mohawk friends and later teaching high school there for seven years, working for two

years as the only gaijin in a Japanese engineering company in Yokohama, and teaching in a Jewish elementary school are just a few such experiences. Of course, I have also navigated through my life as a member of a sexual minority. Being adopted and knowing nothing about my cultural or ethnic background, I am especially fascinated by other people's cultures. From early on I've been a student of the dynamics of both acceptance and intolerance. When looking at education, clearly the most marginalized group in schools today is LGBT students.

In the time I worked at Project 10 leading the under-sixteen support group, I met young people who were surprisingly unaffected, or seemed to be, by their being out in school, often having come out at a young age. Sure there were the tales I expected of harassment, some quite harrowing, but both extremes made me wonder how much had changed since I taught in high school or had even attended it as a student.

In reviewing the recent empirical literature on LGBT students, I discovered how little research allows this marginalized group to retain its voice. When deciding what methodological approach to use for this project, I chose phenomenology[1] as I wanted to contribute to the research a deeper understanding of the experience of being gay in high school—what it's really like day-to-day. Naturally I also wanted a way to represent the findings that would keep faith with participants and their voices. Given my prior academic background in creative writing and my attempts at writing fiction over the years, even having one of my novels chosen as a semi-finalist in the Robertson Davies-Chapters First Novel Competition back in 1998, I thought representing findings in a literary way would be appropriate, if not challenging. I strongly reject the notion that intermittent quotes in an academic text, disembodied from participants, could do these gay students and their stories justice.

As a scholar, I have read many journal articles and research proposals that claim they will have an impact on the classroom. Both my experience and my interest in action research has taught me that while traditional research has done much to advance knowledge, it has had very little impact on practicing teachers who, for the most part, are unaware of what researchers have found. Having been both a high school teacher and a

university instructor of pre- and in-service teachers, I'm keenly aware of this dissonance and I've been motivated throughout my academic career to want to do work that's meaningful and has an effect on practice.

For literary inspiration, I turned to Truman Capote's non-fiction novel In Cold Blood (1992). It served me well, as many a night after reading a chapter or two of Capote's masterpiece, I postponed sleeping to work on the stories found in the next section of this document. Also, I was greatly inspired by Moisés Kaufman's play and movie, The Laramie Project (2002), where researchers investigated the attitudes of townspeople to the death of Matthew Shepard. Stories told in these ways have immeasurable power.

Hopefully this work adds to the portrayal of the experiences of being gay and young begun by Edmund White's A Boy's Own Story (1982) and Todd Brown in Entries from a Hot Pink Notebook (1995) and, more recently, in Alex Sanchez's Rainbow Boys (2001).

While consisting of individual stories, one for each participant, exemplars to the themes found through data analysis, these stories comprise one entity under the umbrella of a novel that represents the arc where the protagonists move from the pivotal event of coming out to the ongoing development of their identities as young gay men. Along the way, each of them encounters situations that illuminate the experience of being out and gay in school. I see this type of collection as influenced by the work of Margaret Atwood, although similar in format to some of the works of Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence, and Sherwood Anderson where the stories in the collection form a novel by using the same times, settings, characters, and incidents from other stories.

Let me introduce the stories huddled under this umbrella...

This novel opens with, "Elton John, Uncle David, and Me," a coming out story that depicts that while there may be an imperative to come out, it's losing control of the process that's frightening. In "The Nail That Sticks Up Gets Hammered Down," Alex is in the early stages of figuring out his identity. For Alex, being gay is nothing special and nothing too momentous happens. Or does it? "The Holy Ghost" is about experiencing a teacher's homophobia, and the ghosts that arise from the past, exist in the present, and are

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[1] Refer to "Theoretical Framework," p. 149 in this document, for a more thorough discussion on phenomenology.

created for the future. Geoff, the protagonist in "A Lesson on Being Inseparable," lives completely isolated from other gays, yet is dedicated to teaching younger students about sexual orientation, learning something about himself along the way. Experiencing student homophobia and harassment is the theme of "Episodes in Fear." As harrowing as Matthew's story is, there are clear lessons to be learned by educators that Matthew can even see. Why can't anyone else at his school see them? Christopher, the main character in "E-mails to My Brother," also experiences homophobia and harassment, from family as well as peers, yet has a different approach to handling it. "In case you haven't noticed, I'm gay. Pass the salt." undertakes to show how humour, even in the midst of a serious personal crisis, can be a coping strategy. Finally, in "Rebel...Just Because," Evan, the same protagonist as in the first story, has grown into a self-styled in-your-face warrior against heteronormativity. He's not afraid to "queer" education, for the first time making his school think about students that until then were invisible.

Initially locating myself within this work was problematic for me. I was adamant I wouldn't do anything that would usurp the voices of my participants who so eloquently speak for themselves. In fact, I thought this was the problem with "traditional" research reports in that they become, too often, the glorification of the researcher at the expensive of the participants. As I conducted the interviews I didn't see myself relating to much of what the participants were telling me—their "stories"—perhaps not wanting to as I strived for phenomenological "epoche" (the freeing of oneself from preconceptions and suppositions [Van Manen, 1997]). But as I began to write the narratives, and as a direct result of the reflection that process requires, I quickly saw myself without exception in all the participants' stories. While I thought my own high school experience to be rather unexceptional, (I remember only verbal harassment based on my sexual orientation), these stories made me realize that hadn't been the case. For each of the stories contained in this research, I can situate myself in a similar situation in both school and at other times in my life. Perhaps this is the gift of the writer (or the curse) to be able to relate to what he/she writes in order to achieve authenticity and resonance and, even, poignancy. Diamond and Mullen (1999a) describe how all forms of representation serve to "filter, organize, and transform experience into the meanings that make up and display our knowledge" (p. 23). I found this to be especially true in writing this narrative. Diamond

and Mullen (1999b) state, "whenever we write, we borrow endlessly from the past" (p. 45). I see this as what happened to me during this process as I made sense of what the participants were telling me, connecting me as researcher to those being researched.

Reading is always an act of faith. Even with fictional work, readers trust the writer will be true to plot, characterization, and motivations. The reader may ask, for example, "Does the dénouement ring true?" With a novel as educational research, there also has to be faith on the reader's part that the researcher-writer has been true to both his participants' stories and the research findings. While the stories that follow seek to empower participant voices, a subsequent section of this document makes transparent the research methodology and findings in a more traditional way. Both these parts of this manuscript go hand-in-hand to provide as complete and faithful a portrait as possible of the experience of being out and gay in high school.

Finally, but importantly, Joseph Rose was a real person. I went to the same high school as Joe Rose and, from time-to-time, I would run into him at dance clubs or along a downtown street. More often than not we'd stop and exchange pleasantries as you do with someone you're acquainted with but don't know well. The insanity of losing someone in the way he was lost haunts me even today. He hasn't been forgotten. In this novel, Joe Rose symbolizes those who deserve tribute for having gone before. This work aspires to burn brightly for both him and the out gay students described herein.

A candlelight vigil.

The Stories

Prologue

One morning, a flyer was found in the mailboxes of community workers, social and political action groups, politicians, and university, CEGEP[1], and high school faculty and students, among others, and posted to lamp posts, construction site sidings and bulletin boards throughout the city where those who would be interested and concerned pass by...

Candlelight Vigil

in honour of

Joe Rose

Tomorrow Night
8:00 p.m.

Meeting Place
Parc de l'Espoir
Rue Ste-Catherine and Rue Panet
Gay Village

Procession will be along Rue Ste-Catherine to
the site of the loss

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[1] Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel or College of General and Vocational Education

Elton John, Uncle David, and Me
Evan's Story—Part I

I huddle over my coffee and look out the window at November wind and my bike leaning unlocked against a pole. Everybody at this Tim Hortons is trying to get warm. As customers wait in line to be served, they rub their hands together and stomp their feet and make "brrr" noises to each other and laugh about doing it. Then they take their order and go sit alone at tables like random icebergs in the North Atlantic. They look around but not at each other—over heads, around people, through them. A look or two comes my way and lingers before moving on, but there are no smiles or nods to acknowledge I'm here. Surely they must wonder why it's eleven o'clock on a Monday morning and I'm not at school, but no one says a thing. We've silently agreed to keep each other's secrets—carefully sipping coffee masks whatever turmoil we wish to hold onto alone.

I took off even before the first bell rang. All I remember is riding around on my bike for what seemed like hours. It's the first time I ever skipped; I needed to kill time. Now I need time to think and prepare. I have to have a strategy to face this.

Everybody ran up to me and wanted to know if it was true, and I didn't know what to say. They were all asking questions, but I didn't know how to answer them. The only thing I was sure about was I didn't want to face it right then; I didn't want to be there when the shit storm came down. So I took off.

How quickly things change. Saturday night everything was going so well it made me think grade eight was shaping up to be my best year ever. I was with Chantal, my best friend who's in Sec. V, and her mother at their place—a pretty typical weekend for me. I brought along Melanie, a girl in my grade who I just started hanging around with. We have English together and we usually spend all class passing notes back and forth. It was the first time we were all together and we were having fun talking and laughing. I always have fun with Chantal and her mom—they're like a second family to me. I already told them I'm gay and they're cool with it, but I hadn't told Melanie yet.

I always call Chantal's mother "mom," so all night it was mom-this and mom-that. Every time I said it we laughed, especially since I made it seem like she really was my mother, even asking for my allowance and to borrow the car. Then Chantal's mom said

with a big grin, "You know if I was your mother I'd get a say in what boys you date."

It was all very innocent on her part; it was something she'd have said to Chantal and me and we'd have laughed about it. But Melanie was there. "Boys? Boys?" Melanie said with sort of a smile, I guess thinking it was part of the joke. Then she said dead serious, "Oh, you're gay."

For the longest time it just hung there like that: Melanie putting two-and-two together, Chantal and her mom holding their breath, and me not knowing whether to laugh or run.

But Melanie was cool with it. She told me it was okay. She laughed and said, "Well, I kinda knew."

How could she have missed it? She knows what it's like for me at school with people always asking me if I'm gay. Sometimes they just tell me to my face, "You're gay!" and call me "Faggot!" It's harassment twenty-four-seven. When they confront me, I lie. I say things like, "No, I'm not gay. I'm really not"—anything so they'll leave me alone. I know I show off signs; I suppose I have gay tendencies. Last year when I started smoking, people used to get on my case about how I held a cigarette. "Evan you smoke like a girl." They'd make fun of me because of the way I crossed my legs, my gait, some of the words I used. I decided to butch-up my body language and eliminate any signs that could show me gay: I wouldn't cross my legs; I smoked differently; I changed the way I walked. I tried really hard to be something I'm not.

It didn't work. Everybody still asks me if I'm gay and I still feel trapped by all the questions and all the lies. It makes me a very unhappy person. It's hell, really.

"I mean, come on," Melanie said. We all started laughing and talking at once. Somewhere in there Chantal's mom apologized and said she wasn't thinking and asked me if I would forgive her. I could tell she felt bad about it. But it didn't matter—if Melanie was going to be my friend, she had a right to know. We spent the rest of the evening talking, and Melanie and I got to know each other better. We talked about so many things: my life, about being gay, about her life as well, her family, her boyfriend. I found out she's such an open, accepting person. I suppose that's what attracted me to be friends with her. Deep down I knew that whatever opinion she had could only be a positive one. And that doesn't just apply to gays, but people from all walks of life.

It's good to have friends I can talk to. It's good to finally be accepted.

The thing is, it could've been a lot worse—I'd been through this all before with my parents.

I was eleven, eleven and a half, when I told my cousin, and at the time it was much more a joke to her than it was serious. When she started telling other people in my family—cousins and aunts and uncles—at first they didn't know how to take it, so they just laughed at it too. Then she told her older brother, the older brother told my uncle, my uncle told my mother, and that's when it erupted like Hiroshima 1945.

Quite frankly my parents didn't believe I was gay, they just thought it was some sort of phase that I was going through. They sent me to therapy with the idea to change that.

The first time that I had to go "see someone," I really felt that it was an attack from my parents. It was like they were saying, "No. You're not good enough for us. Go to therapy. Change. You're fucked up. Go cure yourself." It was a big rejection, so I said to myself, "Alright. To hell with this!" I wasn't going to collaborate with the therapist; I wasn't going to collaborate with my parents. Since everybody was pointing fingers at me—"It's your fault that our lives are a misery"—I decided just to make myself indifferent to the therapy. I blocked it off and said to myself, "Whatever goes on in that room doesn't have an effect on me." I didn't give a fuck, I really didn't. That was such a low point in my life.

I didn't like the therapist to begin with because right away she said, "Well there's a possibility you might be gay, just like there's a possibility that anyone could be gay. But in your case it's just some phase that you're going through." She totally sided with my parents. She didn't so much as leave the door open to the possibility. "A lot of boys, they experience this. They have homo-erogenous fantasies, but it doesn't mean they're gay." I thought, "Yeah. I have those...and I'm gay."

In all honesty, I didn't know exactly what gay was or anything about being gay. I didn't even know anyone who was gay—I had to think back to elementary school when people used to say in low voices that the guy who sang in Disney movies was gay. I didn't think I had much in common with Elton John, for one thing I couldn't sing. But I've known since day one there's no way I could be straight. I was sure of that. It pissed me off that the therapist made assumptions about my sexuality so easily.

I just thought my being gay was normal. I didn't know any other way. I suppose it's the same for a lot of boys and girls who know they're straight. For me it's a state of being; it's just something that I've known from day one; it's the only thing that I know how to be. I don't know how to be anything else.

As far back as I remember I knew I was different even before I pinpointed the difference as homosexuality. I wasn't like all the other boys—I was similar but then again.... Action figures. G. I. Joes. They didn't do anything for me. Neither did Barbie. I never played sports. I really thought that to be masculine you had to play sports and you had to be good at them—that kind of defined your masculinity. I didn't do any of that. I had trouble getting along with males—females as well—but males even more. In gym class at my elementary school we'd play boys against girls, and the gym teacher would ask one of the boys and one of the girls to be captains. Of course the gym teacher always picked one of the most athletic and popular boys. Well, whatever "popular" means in elementary school. And so the boy who was captain wouldn't ever choose me—I'd never get picked. I felt like an outcast.

Even when I was three or four years old, I had feelings towards boys. It wasn't sexual; it wasn't an I-want-to-do-you type of thing; it was just an attraction. I remember my babysitter had two sons, one older and one my age, and I really liked Justin the older son. He was eight years old and I was five. That was my first crush. It wasn't sexual, but I was attracted to him—it was emotional. I did everything I could to try and hang out with him—I hadn't learned yet to hide my crushes on boys. But eight-year-olds don't really hang out with their younger brother and the younger brother's friends.

Like the therapist, my father tried to change me, too; he tried to butch me up. Once he even brought me out to an Alouettes football game. He kept telling me he paid good money for the tickets, and all through the game he tried to explain to me that they had to measure the twelve yards or the twenty-yard line or whatever it was. I wasn't paying attention; I didn't care; I didn't have a clue what was happening on the field.

There was a copy of The Gazette that was left on the bleachers, so I picked it up and I started reading Martha Stewart's column, cross-legged as well, and he got pissed off at me. He told me to pay attention to what he was saying and what was going on with the game. I pretended to be interested. They were expensive tickets after all.

My father was always doing stuff like that to butch me up; he always tried to get me to build something or do something athletic. My parents didn't want to believe I was gay and they tried to do everything they could to change me. I found this totally weird because, the thing is, it isn't like I'm the first gay person in the family.

I was in grade four or five when I found out that my uncle had died. I knew my father had a brother, I just had never met him because he lived with my grandmother out in B.C. and he was never really mentioned much. He was always this mystery to me—an uncle whose name could cause the conversation to stop, looks to be exchanged, uncomfortable coughs and squirming. It was my father who sat me down to tell me the news my uncle was dead. I was ten years old but I started asking myself questions. I didn't know anything about him, but I knew it was rare to die at that age—people don't normally die in their forties. A few days later I asked my father, "Did Uncle David have any kids? Was he ever married?" That's when my father told me that my uncle was gay and he had died of AIDS.

So then I knew two people who were gay: Elton John and Uncle David, although I still wasn't sure what either of them was supposed to mean to me.

Three years after going through this "gay phase," my parents have finally gotten it through their heads that I'm gay and there's nothing they can do about it. They were fighting a losing battle. They could send me to all the therapy in the world and it wouldn't alter my sexuality one bit.

Now it looks like I'm going through that all over again.

This morning I rode my bike to school as usual. As I was locking it to the bike rack, I saw Melanie waiting for me. It was the first time I saw her since Saturday night at Chantal's. I thought, "Cool. She's _so_ going to be my new best friend." But I could see in her face that something was wrong. Without even saying "Hi!" she said, "I told Ciaran you're gay." Ciaran's her brother who's in my grade. "I'm not sure," she said, "but I think Ciaran told a whole bunch of his friends."

She said she was sorry over and over again—I could tell she felt bad about it—but how was that going to help me? I didn't know what I was angrier about: having every-body find out I'm gay like that, or her not keeping my secret. Along with saying she was sorry, she kept saying, "But I'm not sure" like there was some doubt, like there was some

hope it was all a mistake.

So I started walking into school and just as I pulled open the front door, Mindy Walters, who never liked me, popped out of nowhere and said, "Is it true? Ciaran just told us you're gay."

My heart started booming "Patump. Patump. Patump." That's when everything began happening so fast—it became a blur. I didn't stop to answer—I kept walking, leaving Mindy and Melanie behind.

Then Sally Levine, who's always been nice to me, came running up to me and whispered, "Do you know what everybody's saying about you?" I just kept walking.

I was scared out of my wits; it was spreading faster than I knew what to do. With the people I told, people like Chantal and her mom, those trustees, I could control it—I told who I wanted to, when I wanted to. Now the word was spreading; it was multiplying exponentially. I couldn't control it anymore and that was very scary.

Before anyone else could confront me, I walked out the back door, went around to the front of the school, unlocked my bike and left.

So now I sit here under these interrogating florescent lights and drink too many cups of coffee hoping I'll find the answer in the bottom of one of them. I'm mad, more at Ciaran than Melanie really, but I guess I can't even be mad at him. I know Ciaran. He didn't do this because he's mean; he did it because he's fucking naïve and childish. When you come down to it, though, it's not like he made something up about me that wasn't true. It's just that he didn't so much as take into consideration what could happen to me. This is _my_ thing to tell. Knowing him he probably didn't do most of the telling himself; he probably told his guy friends over the phone last night or face-to-face as soon as he got to school this morning. Then all his little boyfriends probably ran and told everybody they could. It doesn't take much to make something the talk of our school.

Now I feel scared when all I've known is feeling trapped—trapped in my own thoughts and with other people, always asking myself if they know the secret. Not being out's like wearing a mask all the time, only taking it off for certain people in certain situations. One Evan here. Another Evan somewhere else. Most of the time I don't even know who I am. I only know I'm gay—but who's the gay Evan supposed to be, because that's who I know I'm going to be to everybody: Gay Evan.

So I sit here coffee after coffee, and cigarette after cigarette. I find no answers—I start to doubt there are any. I only know one thing for sure: people will react for better or for worse. If they can't accept it, it will reflect on them, not me. I know I can't be what people want me to be. Just as I couldn't change to fit the straight person my parents wanted me to be, I won't be the gay person I'm not meant to be. I'm not my Uncle David or Elton John or anyone else for that matter. I won't wear another mask; I don't have the energy or the desire anymore, that's for sure.

And I'm sure of something else: whoever I end up being starts right here.

When I know school's over, I play the charade and go home like it's any other day. I do homework like I usually do. I make my bed and put away the heap of clothes on the floor. I wait until my mother gets home from work at seven so we can have supper.

Before going to sleep I listen to the radio: first some music, then talk radio. It comforts me to hear voices I don't know talking about lives I have no connection to or worries about. Then I fall asleep.

* * *

Just as the bell's about to ring, I walk into the school. When all at once people come running up to me and ask if I know all the rumours going around about me and if what they heard is true, I look right at them and say, "Yes. I'm gay."

The Nail That Sticks Up Gets Hammered Down[1]
Alex's Blog[2]

Wednesday, May 28, 2003
About Me

I'm not sure how to jump into this, but I guess I'll tell you about myself. I'm sixteen. I'll be seventeen in three weeks and I want an iPod[3] for my birthday. Hint. Hint. I like to play video games and every Friday and Saturday night I play online with my friends. After school I play an hour by myself on my computer or my PlayStation[4]. I also enjoy taking walks while listening to music. I like kind of eccentric music, mostly music from Japan. Most of it I download on Kazaa.[5] I'm a real fan of Japanese culture. I also enjoy chatting online.

I'm a fairly independent person. I like to go by the beat of my own drum. I'm not a big socializer. I tend to have this mysterious air about me. Everyone at school is always asking Megan questions about me. It's kind of like they're afraid of me. I'm not quite sure why but they always ask Megan, "Who is that?" I guess it's because the grade nines haven't been at our school that long and the grade tens are also new since we didn't have a grade nine last year.

I grew up in the same neighbourhood here in Montreal. I live with just my mom. My parents are separated. I don't know how to describe my mom. She's an artist so she's liberal and accepting. She's a good person. She lets me do what I want but at the same

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[1] A Japanese saying.

[2] Short for weB LOG. A blog is a personal journal kept online that can be accessed publicly by anyone with the Internet. Updating a blog is called "blogging," while someone who keeps a blog is a "blogger. " Usually blogs are updated daily as they chronicle the blogger's day-to-day life. Visitors to a blog are encouraged to leave comments that others can then read.

[3] A portable music player from Apple Computer that stores up to 7,500 songs in digital form (MP3) on its hard disk. It's size is comparable to that of a cigarette pack.

[4] A video game console that attaches to a television set. Hundreds of games are available on CD-ROM.

[5] Kazaa is file-sharing software that allows users to download music and video game files stored on other people's computers. It claims to circumvent copyright laws by using peer-to-peer technology where individual users connect to each other directly without the need for a central point of management. This software is similar to Napster or Limewire.

time I have some responsibilities. My relationship with my father is not very strong. He's not a horrible person, but I never really got along very well with him. I'm an only child.

I go to an alternative school with about eighty students. It's a real small school. There's no clubs or sports. There's not really that much. They don't even have recess. But I'm really not too much into sports anyway. I like that the school's close to me. It's nice because I can walk to school. At lunch I go home to eat. I like that the school's small and more personal. You don't have to address the teachers Miss La-la-la. You just call them by their first names. It's a very personal type of atmosphere. The teachers are all very open-minded.

My best friend at school is Megan. She's very energetic and a fun person to be around. I just met her this year. She pursued the friendship and since then we developed a strong bond. I have other friends at school, but they're more of acquaintances I'd say. Megan and I play this video game called "Dance Dance Revolution" at the arcades. It's pretty funny and pretty physical, too. We go see a movie from time-to-time. Outside of school I have some other friends, but we're not very good friends. Sometimes I invite those guys over to play video games. But rarely.

School is mostly from nine to four. After school I usually go for coffee and do some studying by myself at a rotisserie on St. Laurent Street. I really love their coffee. Then I go for a walk with some music. By then it's maybe seven o'clock, so I have dinner and do some chatting online on MSN[6] and ICQ.[7] Then sleep. On the weekends I generally come in late so I get up at one or two. Like I wrote already, I'm more of an independent type of person so I don't enjoy going to clubs and stuff like that. On weekends I also work at the restaurant down my street. I'm the person who answers the phone and gets the menus.

I don't know what else to write about me so that's it for now.

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[6] aka MSN Messenger. An instant messaging (IM) service from Microsoft that lets users communicate with each other over the Internet by typing in a window that the other user can also see.

[7] An IM service similar to MSN Messenger.

Thursday, May 29, 2003
School

Last week Andrea asked us to start keeping a journal on ourselves and our last days of high school that we can share with other people. She kept stressing how we should be honest and open about what we write. I decided to do mine online, but I just got around to starting it yesterday. We have to keep at least a week's worth.

So far only Megan's written a comment on mine.

> Hi Alex. What do you mean I pursued the friendship? You didn't want to be friends with me? LOL.[8] I'll give you my journal to read at recess tomorrow so you can read MY side of things. We're going to a movie tomorrow night, right? Or else. See you at school. X☺X☺

I guess I should explain what I mean about Megan. I wrote she initiated the friendship because she started talking to me first. That's what I mean. But it wasn't really that one sided. I didn't try to ignore her or anything. Sorry about that Megan.

Since I have to do this for school, I might as well write more about that.

I do all the core courses: math, physics, chemistry, English, French, gym. I like them all with the exception of French. I've always had a hard time in French, but everything else is cool. I haven't decided yet what I want to be. Possibly either a doctor or an astronomer. Those two roles interest me. But that's years off and I'll probably change my mind. I'm going into Pure and Applied Sciences at CEGEP[9].

The teachers at my school are mostly young and great-spirited. They're all good teachers. They're very liberal. They always give us an alternative viewpoint on things, more so the leftist side of things. I mean my teachers know I'm gay and they have no problem with it. It's a very liberal school. The students are just like the students you find at any high school but I don't like that some of the people abuse the freedom. But, I mean, lots of teenagers are slackers. When we're given a work period they just talk to their friends instead of getting their stuff done. They skip classes. If you skip too much

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[8] Laughing Out Loud.

[9] Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel or College of General and Vocational Education

you get suspended. There's been a few expulsions for people who've done like graffiti on the walls and mark the school. I know some people like to go to the park at lunch and smoke up.

There's a principal, but she's an administrator at lots of schools so we don't see her very often. Instead we have a head teacher, Andrea.

At school I'd describe myself as self-motivated and hardworking. I guess that's what my teachers would say too. I mean, I do my own studying. I pretty much know the material even before the teacher teaches it. I find the stuff that we learn really simple so I try to get a broader grasp of the subject like the stuff that's not taught to us.

Friday, May 30, 2003
Being Gay

This morning I woke up and found two new comments on my blog. One was from my friend TJ in Texas who I told last night on ICQ to read it, but another one was from a complete stranger. I don't even know how he stumbled onto it. Maybe he googled[10] something and it came up. Or it's already getting around the StarCraft[11] chat.

TJ is like the person I play StarCraft online with. He's gay too. We met in this gay chatroom on the server for video games. We always talk on ICQ and MSN pretty much every night. He's seventeen. He left a comment that was pretty funny. Just one word: Yawn. He's like that. If it isn't StarCraft he doesn't have much use for it. That's usually what we chat about.

The other comment came from some guy who lives in Montréal, too.

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Hey. I really like what you wrote. I'm gay and I go to
school in Montreal too, but on the south shore. I'm in
Sec. IV and I've been thinking of a way to tell my friends
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[10] Google is a search engine that returns relevant web pages containing the words you enter. People now use the word colloquially as a verb as in "googling," "googled," and "being googled." Example: "I googled his name and found out he was on the hockey team in university."

[11] StarCraft is a real-time strategy computer game with a science fiction theme involving a war between three galactic species. Usually the game is played by one or more players against each other over the Internet and last about 15 minutes a game. The game is won by destroying all of the opponent's buildings. [Available at: http://www.wordiq.com /definition/StarCraft. Accessed 3 August 2004.]

I'm gay, but I don't know how they'll react. What if they hate me? How did you tell everybody? Lawrence

The thing is, I don't consider homosexuality a big part of my life. It's one part but not the main part. It doesn't really come up very often. It's more of like a passive thing. When it comes up with Megan or my mother, it's not really about being gay, it's more like what guys you find cute. Well I guess I mean when there's a cute guy, Megan asks me what I think about him.

I've found guys attractive since I was ten years old. It's as simple as that. I sort of always had a crush on my best friends. I always wanted to sort of get into their pants. At first I didn't even know what it was. Like I didn't even think about it. It was just sort of natural, I suppose. And then maybe around teenage hood I sort of realized I was gay.

Megan was the first person I told actually. I'm not sure why I told her. I think it sort of came out. Then other people followed shortly after. I think I told her online actually. On MSN. I was talking about some guy I liked and so I told her. This was back in grade nine. It's been more than two years so I can't remember the exact proceedings. Like I already wrote, it's not that big a deal for me that I'm gay so it wasn't some huge thing. She was fine with it.

Then I told Aaron. He was my friend at school but he no longer goes there. And Melissa. She's still there. And then a whole bunch of other people who are in my grade. I told a few of them in person and a few online, and they all took it well. No problems. Well they're my acquaintances. We don't really do stuff together anymore. At that time I was more a social-type person and I wanted to branch out to more people. This year I'm more into my own thing and I sort of cut off my relations with certain people. I just stopped talking to them. On the phone. MSN. I just lost interest. Now I just stick with my close friends like Megan.

There's about ten students in school who know and nothing's changed for me. They all just treat me the same way they treat anyone else. And then there's Andrea too, of course. She knows. I sent her an e-mail about it once. I used to write these online e-mail surveys where they ask you questions like, "What's been your most embarrassing moment?" or "What's your favourite possession?" or "What features on the male body do you find attractive?" I used to send them to all the people on my e-mail list and I sent it to

Andrea and I guess she figured it out even though I didn't say I was gay directly in the survey. It's like she knows but she doesn't talk about it.

I find that telling people online is a lot easier because it's not face-to-face. You're just behind the screen. People act different when they're online. People are more free, I suppose.

I told my mom rather recently, just two months ago in fact. She asked me jokingly and I just told her. She has no problems with it. Well she worries that I might get HIV. Now she asks me all the time if I have a boyfriend, which I don't. She's even asked me if I have relations with Jean-François who teaches at our school because she thinks he's gay. I mean not like a boyfriend, but like if we're friends. I don't even know if he's gay and I never really talk to him. Sometimes I feel like she's nagging me a bit by asking me if I have a boyfriend. It's assuming I'm lying to her by not telling her something. It's a bit of an annoyance.

I haven't told my dad yet. I'm not really close to him and I don't really see any reason to let him know. I had no plans to tell my mom but she asked me and that's why I told the truth. As for my dad, I would tell him, I guess, but I doubt he would ask me.

I think there's sort of a trend for girls at our school to be bisexual, but I don't know of any other gay guys. I'm sure there are but I just don't know. I don't think people my age are really out of the closet. I guess they're not mature enough to come out yet. I would imagine that the fact that most people are pretty accepting and would encourage them makes it easier to come out. Well maybe they're out like me, but I don't really advertise it, and maybe they don't need to advertise it to be out of the closet. It would be cool to have more gay students here. It would be nice to have someone to talk to and relate to about everything.

So Lawrence I think you should do what you think is best. I mean, I don't really want to tell you to come out of the closet. Just do what you want to do.

I guess that's enough for today.

You did ask for honesty Andrea.

Saturday, May 31, 2003
<u>Yaoi</u>[12]

Last night I went with Megan to see Mambo Italiano. Megan really liked it but I just thought it was okay. It was kind of funny. I like that it was about Montreal and the parents' reactions were funny but not very believable. Right after Megan brought up the idea of going to the gay village. It seemed like a way to end the evening, I guess. I'd never been before but I didn't really like it. It isn't a place I would go to very often. It's not really me. There's too many middle-aged men and I found it a little too flamboyant. It's very bright and colourful. I'm not into that. I didn't really enjoy myself.

I'm not a really big fan of movies but I do watch some TV. Queer As Folk and Will and Grace sometimes. The few Japanese animes that are on TV aren't very good, Like Yu-Gi-Oh! But I watch them anyway. Sometimes I read this fan fiction from films I like. Slash and <u>Yaoi</u>. If you don't know, it's like male-male relationships in Japanese animes or TV shows like Friends and movies like The Matrix. People write fan fiction about them. There's lots of it online.

TJ likes Slash and <u>Yaoi</u> too. We have lots of the same interests. But he likes Emo[13] music more than the Japanese music I listen to. He always gets me to download some song or another, so to get him back I ask him if he's sure it really is Emo since it may not be whiney enough.

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[12] Pronounced "Yowie." <u>Yaoi</u> is usually in cartoon format drawn by fans using characters from other sources and sexualizing those characters' relationships, predominantly in Japanese. It's the acronym for "<u>yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi</u>," which translates to "no mountain (climax), no point, no meaning." <u>Yaoi</u> often has no plot other than the sexual congress of the two characters. It's most commonly read in Japan by Japanese women. "Slash" is similar, but are usually stories written in English using TV and movie characters. While <u>yaoi</u> sexualizes any relationship, "slash" tends to look for a pre-existing closeness in the original characters. [McLelland, M. (2004). Why are Japanese girls' comics full of boys bonking?" Available at: http://www.cult-media.com/issue1/ CMRmcle.htm. Accessed 2 August 2004.]

[13] Short for "emotional." Emo is a genre of punk music that's more emotional than the norm. The term has extended beyond just the music genre. For example, saying you are feeling "emo" has become a synonym for depression. This has come out of the form of emo that has broken away from the distorted punk sound to quiet acoustic guitars, the most common form of emo today. [Webster's Online Dictionary. (2004). Available at: http://www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/emo. Accessed 5 October 2004.]

So this morning I saw that Lawrence wrote me back to say "Thanks." I don't know why. Like I said before, being gay's not a big part of my life. I read his first comment again and I guess it's not easy being gay at his school if he's afraid to come out. It's not like that where I go. Like whenever someone says "fag" or something, Andrea or some other teacher will step in and say, "Why should sexual orientation be insulting?" I remember a student at our school called someone else a fag while they were fighting and Andrea stepped in and said in a typical Andrea way not to use that word as an insult. She's very politically correct and she doesn't really respect people who discriminate against others. It doesn't really bother me. I'm not going to say anything because I'm not like some PC[14] thug.

I know on Andrea's office door there's this poster in French about homosexuality and how it should be taught in schools.[15] Well, not taught, but like not put in the closet, I suppose. Obviously it gave me the impression that Andrea was very open-minded about gays. I used to hear "That's so gay" or "You're a fag" a couple of times, but not in the past year, except for that one time that guy called the other one a faggot. I guess the students matured a little. I don't know. At my school I often hear there's nothing wrong with homosexuality, like variations of that theme.

About a month ago Project 10 came and gave a seminar for the whole school. There was one lesbian and one gay guy in their twenties or thirties. They talked about sexual identities and how do we identify men and women. It was a very interactive seminar. It was basically people asking questions like, "How do you know you're gay?" Stuff like that. "How should you help someone who doesn't know if they're gay or not?" It didn't really affect me in a profound way, but it was interesting. It's always nice to hear discussions about homosexuality or things like that. In class if a debate comes up about homosexuality, it's nice to hear students' opinions about it.

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[14] Politically Correct.

[15] "Démystifier l'homosexualité commence à l'école." Literally translated as, "Removing the mystery of homosexuality starts at school," or, more comprehensibly, "Stopping the myths about homosexuality starts at school."

Sunday, June 1, 2003
Queer As Folk

Last night after I wrote my blog I played StarCraft with TJ until I went to bed. Before I fell asleep I started thinking that what the hardest thing about being gay is for me so I can have something to write for that Lawrence guy. I think when you're attracted to someone, like someone at school, you have to figure out if the person is gay or not. So obviously it's hard to find someone. Usually I just wonder and wonder about them and ask people about it. Like, "Do you know anything about them?" Even if you ask them if they're gay and they say no, you can always think that they may be in the closet. Unless you tell them you're gay, they won't tell you if they're gay sort of thing. I think people would be more comfortable in telling their own sexuality if they know you're gay. Often times there's like less rejection to being gay in a certain way. Like if a guy isn't interested in you it's because he's straight, not because he doesn't find you attractive.

The only thing that being gay has done to make me different is it's given me a different viewpoint of things. It's made me more open-minded, I guess. A little bit more liberal. I can really imagine myself being pretty conservative and a lot more close-minded if I wasn't gay.

So that guy Lawrence wrote me again.

> Hey! I watch Queer As Folk too. It's a really good show. They discuss a lot of issues without really having it based on the issue. And I like how they're all different personalities. One who is a feminine queen and the other who is like the boy next door, quiet, shy. The accountant who's completely positive at work. And there's one who like doesn't care. There's a younger one who's in high school. It also deals with harassment. I kind of identify with that. It shows that there are people listening to what my life is like. I enjoy how the character in high school deals with everything. It kind of encourages me to move on. Have you seen Get Real or But I'm a Cheerleader? They're more entertainment movies. I just saw one movie on TV that was really cute. Trick. Did you see it? It's a little wild off. This guy goes to a strip bar and he meets a stripper and then they meet in the métro and everything's timed perfectly. And then they try to find a place to make out and they can't. Well I suppose it could happen to someone. It was a cute little movie. Lawrence

I find some of Queer as Folk's a little bit off, too, but some of it's really true. The whole club scenes and stuff. I guess I wouldn't know exactly because I've never been clubbing, but I spoke online to people that go clubbing and they're like it's not at all what it's like on Queer as Folk. Like how drugs are literally being passed around, I heard is off. Everyone says dealing with boyfriends and that whole thing is really accurate.

Occasionally I watch Will and Grace. I think it's okay, but it's too gay sometimes. Sometimes I'm like, "Oh shut up." Sometimes the jokes are too stupid. There's one episode where they're at this gay auction or something and that girl with the annoying voice—I forget her name—says, "This is the only place where I can actually get my hair done in the bathroom" or something like that. You know, "Where I can get a whole makeover?"

I watched Queer As Folk more when it was about Justin in high school. I could relate to him more than the other characters. I thought that the whole thing of him and the school was pretty good. But I thought that guy who beat him up, Chris Hobson or something, like he seemed pretty popular. I thought he'd probably get a gang of his friends to go beat him up. He wouldn't just go beat him up by himself. It's just minor things like that that I think about. Like wouldn't he need his friends to do it too? Like gay bashing is kind of a peer-pressure thing going on.

But I have no idea how true it is since I've never encountered those problems. I'm not the best person to judge. I've had no problems about being gay in my own high school.

Monday, June 2, 2003
Meeting Someone

Lawrence didn't write any comments on yesterday's blog. Maybe he hasn't read it yet. Megan wrote to say how much she likes Will and Grace. TJ finally wrote something longer than a one-word comment. He actually wrote a lot.

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Alex you should make a profile on gay.com if you want to
meet someone. It's funny I can relate to some bits and
pieces of Will and Grace. Like I can see myself in the
serious, ethical Will and the unethical, totally girly,
totally ridiculous Jack. And also my best friend
Christina. I can recognize her in that show as well. We
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have kind of a Will and Grace arrangement practically.
She's my wife and we know everything there is to know
about each other. She might be twenty feet away in a crowd
and we just have to look at each other's face and we know
what each other is thinking. I can see her both as Karen
and Grace. It's like Jack is the epitome of everything
that's girly and really gay and pink. And then you have
Will, who's also gay, but is more down to earth, who's
smarter, who's more ethical, who's more serious about
things. And so they equally counterbalanced it. Then
there's the heterosexuals. There's Grace who's on the same
page as Will. Then you have Karen who's this total
unethical boozehound. Lying. Stealing. Cheating. There's
both ends of the spectrum.
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I never thought that much about a TV show. Maybe I would give the Internet a try to meet someone, but I don't know if I trust it after all I've heard. I've never been in a relationship, but if someone came along who I found interesting, I guess something could happen. Sometimes I think I'd like to meet more gay people. Just to meet people. Not to sleep with them. I don't really know anyone else who's gay. My mom has some gay friends, but I don't know them personally. After I told her I was gay, she told me my step-dad had homosexual relations when he was in his twenties. But I haven't seen him in three years. So I guess he can be considered bisexual.

If I had a boyfriend I possibly might take him to grad with me. I really don't think there would be much of a controversy.

Tuesday, June 3, 2003
School Today

Lawrence wrote back.

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I've tried the Internet but that's a really bad place
because they're just looking for the same thing. I went on
gay.com. They have chat rooms for Montreal and all those
places. I went there and chatted with people and I met a
few but it was just like hell because they just wanted the
same thing. I was looking for friends and trying to figure
out who I am and they had one thing on their minds.
They're just there for sex. This was last year because
that was when I sort of was trying to figure out what I
am. I was fifteen. Like this one guy I just talked to him
on the main screen and after we started privating. Then he
gave me his number to call him. After I talked to him then
I met him. I was nervous. I didn't know what to expect. He
was twenty-five. I met him at a métro station. I guess I
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took my chances. So I met him and he asked, "Can I see
your room?" Typical. I said yes like an idiot. My parents
would kill me if they knew. They were gone on a long
weekend. Well at first I thought he was going to call me,
and things like that, but he didn't. He lives with his
parents and I tried calling him but they would always say
he wasn't there. Then six months later he called me. He
was like, "Sorry. I was busy." And I was like, "Whatever,"
because I didn't know him to begin with. That's why it's a
bad experience. I was just fifteen. I didn't know a lot of
things, so it sort of takes advantage of the person. Like
you meet someone, things happen, and then after you don't
hear from them again.
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If I ever met someone over the Internet I'd bring Megan with me to be safe. I'm not sure I'm the type of person who would just go up to someone and start talking to them like at a club or a café or something. If I really wanted to I'd try to get friends to start showing me people. But Megan doesn't really know anyone except me.

Guess that's all for today. StarCraft awaits.

Oh. I just remembered something. So Andrea came up to me in the hallway today just when school was over and gave me a handout about a candlelight vigil being held tomorrow night for a gay guy who was killed. She didn't say anything about it or anything. Like there's some uncomfortable thing between us. I feel a little bit uncomfortable about it because we never really talked directly about my sexuality. When she left I read it but I just put it in one of the blue boxes that are right inside the classroom doors.

Well I don't try to be very out anyways. Like I don't parade myself around or anything. It could just be a flash mob[15]—I don't want to get involved with that. I don't do things that are gay just because I'm gay. It's stupid.

Like I've said many times, being gay's not that big a part of my life.

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[15] A group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place, do something unusual, and then disperse quickly. They are usually organized through the Internet. Examples include two hundred people who converged upon the ninth floor rug department of a Macy's department store and gathered around one particular expensive rug. Another mob was directed to the mezzanine of the Grand Hyatt hotel in Manhattan where the mob erupted into spontaneous applause for a period of 15 seconds and then dispersed as quickly as they had appeared. [Webster's Online Dictionary. (2004). Available at: http://www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/flash%20mob. Accessed 5 October 2004.]

Who Do You Think You Are?
Pages from Joe Rose's Notebook

You ask, "Who do you think you are?" and I can only tell you I'm no different from you. I know you measure me against what you think a man should be, but those are just meaningless stereotypes-- gay or straight. They're not me. I'm only being myself, wherever the chips may fall. If you want to know why I don't hide anymore, it's because I accept who I am.

If by being out you say I'm in your face, I say now I'm in control of the attention I'm receiving--harassing me when I wasn't out was your way of controlling who I am. But now you've lost that power. I assert myself; I show I'm gay; I make jokes about your heterosexism. It's funny to give hints to people who don't know I'm gay. I can't believe it when straight people like you don't see the signs. If my hair's pink now, it's because for so long I've been told to be dull.

I was gay before I came out, but when I wasn't out I couldn't be myself. I'm happy with who I am and I'm enjoying the benefits of being gay--I have more friends now and feel such relief from the time I was in the closet.

Sure it isn't always great. Sometimes there's harassment, especially in a school where little is done to stop it. But being gay is

just like being anything else, and one day homophobia will go the way of racist or sexism or anti-Semitism.

If you're gay, there's gossip and there can be negative popularity as you have to answer questions all the time like you're the poster boy for homosexuality. While you do have more friends, sometimes the type of friends you have are limited--you have less guy friends and usually there's no other gay students who you can relate to. Sometimes, too, you're made to feel you don't completely fit in with either boys or girls.

When you ask how being gay is different from being straight, I have to say, I'm just attracted to the same sex. I've known I was gay all my life, well, since I was very young. It was a gut feeling. I know I'm gay just like you know you're straight. I'm just not attracted to the opposite sex.

Being gay's only one part of my life--it doesn't define who I am. I'm happy being gay and I wouldn't want to be straight. Being straight seems boring to me. There's no glitter, I guess. I'm free from gender roles and the heterosexual stereotypes you seem to have to follow. If I was straight, I'd be a different person as I've been shaped by experiences that have made me the person I am today. I know I wouldn't be as open-minded.

If you want one word, call me "gay." "Homosexual" sounds too formal. But don't call me "queer" or "faggot," even if you're joking. It's been directed at me as an insult too many times.

You ask, "Who do you think you are?" and I can only tell you I'm no different from you.

Everyone shines. I just shine brighter.

The Holy Ghost
Eric's Story

Father Morel sat at his desk staring down at his attendance book while they crowbarred the crucifix off his classroom wall. He didn't even twitch. It took two janitors to remove it—it had been bolted to the wall back in the day when things were made to survive Armageddon. Since it was an excuse not to work, everyone in class was watching as one of the janitors shook his head then took out a bigger crowbar. Everyone except me, and Father Morel, of course. I continued to watch him checking and double-checking presences and absences as the crucifix groaned off the wall, crashed to the ground, and dusted most of Father Morel and his desk with a white coating. I couldn't believe how he was acting like nothing was happening.

The school hadn't been painted since Christ died. The cross left an image on the wall and Robbie Dufresne, always the clown, nudged me, pointed to it, and called it "the Holy Ghost." As usual, he laughed at his own joke. Only then did Father Morel look up to tell him to "quiet down."

It was the last cross to come down in our school.

Removing the crucifixes was a big deal at Our Lady Catholic, as everyone calls it, even though the wall outside says "Our Lady of the Seven Pains Catholic High School." Of course the eighth pain is going there. Some teachers and parents had tried to stop the school board from getting rid of the crosses, but there wasn't much they could do since the Québec government had changed religious schools into either English or French ones everywhere in the province. But that didn't stop them from protesting outside the school every morning for the last three weeks before the 8:15 bell. To tell you the truth, it was mostly teachers and parents—students didn't give much of a damn about it. As I got off the bus I'd only see a couple of students holding signs and walking in circles with their parents, and they were mostly kids from the lower grades. I'm glad I'm graduating this year and won't be around to see all the shit that'll happen when they get around to changing the school's name.

But Father Morel was always there, silently walking up and down with a sign that said, "Where's God?"

I guarantee you my mother wasn't there. She had more important things to worry about than crucifixes. She broke up with her boyfriend a while ago, and even though they said they'd stay together until the lease was up in June, she found herself another boyfriend and her ex-boyfriend found out and went crazy and kicked us out. So my mother went with her new boyfriend and I was forced to go with mine. I'm eighteen now so it's okay for me to be on my own.

I'm real close to my mother—my family is my mother. I haven't seen my father or my grandmother or anybody like that since I was maybe seven. When I came out to my mom I was nervous 'cause I didn't know how she'd react. I knew that it wouldn't be all bad because she told me already if I ever turn out that way she wouldn't care as long as I'm happy. We had that discussion 'cause I think she sort of knew, you know, but I hadn't told her so she didn't want to say anything. One night we were in the living room and we were watching a TV show explaining the female sexual body—the vagina and everything. I was squinting and I said, "Eww." My mother said, "You're not supposed to be 'ewwing' this." Then she asked me, "Are you gay?" and I was like, "Yeah, I am." And she was like, "That's okay." And then we started talking.

I was sort of doing it on purpose so she would ask me 'cause I wanted to tell her but I didn't have the guts to. I thought if she asked me first, maybe it would be less pressure. I kept hoping she was going to ask me. I even put a big picture in my room of an actor that I found really hot. I knew that every morning she'd have to go past my room to go to the balcony for a smoke and she'd see it. But she wouldn't say anything and I'd be insulted. Like, Hello! When I told her I was gay, I asked her, "Well didn't you see the poster of the guy in my room?" And she said, "I just thought maybe it was just an actor you liked." Oh, my God!

Now we're very close. We even talk about guys sometimes, like who we find hot on TV and things like that. Sometimes I skip school just to have breakfast and go shopping with her. It's been really hard for me now that she lives an hour away. We call each other all the time. Well I call her every second day because it's long distance, but since I have my cell it's not long distance for me.

She doesn't even mind that my boyfriend's older—he's thirty-three. At first I thought there'd be problems with that, but I told a lot of people about him and there

aren't any. I met him at the gym I go to. It was my second day there and this guy was looking at me. So I was looking back because obviously I didn't know what to expect—this muscular guy's looking at me. Like, "Shit. What does he want?" And he has tattoos, so he's a little intimidating. We just kept looking at each other. He'd pass by me and smile, so I'd smile back. Then he came up and talked to me: "Do you want to do something after?" That's how we started talking. At first it was a little weird, but it's not a problem. I thought he was twenty-two because he looks really young. He works out a lot and takes care of himself.

I've only had one boyfriend before, but he was very immature. That was hell. I mean, he was sixteen and he was still playing Mortal Kombat. Not the video game. I mean actual fighting with his friend.

I get along better with older people because they're more mature. I find I matured a lot faster than kids my age. Sometimes I find that I don't really fit in with younger people. Maybe it's because of everything I've been through. Maybe it's because I lived all my life with my mother and without a father. I don't know. It's weird. Sometimes I get sad about it. If I'm alone at home and I'm sad or unhappy or something, I'll put on some music and just dance my frustration away. I'm into dancing and acting. Things like that. The arts. I used to take hip-hop courses at a dance school. I like dancing. I like moving. I like to go with it. It's energetic. I don't really listen to the lyrics. I think that's one of my flaws—I don't listen to lyrics. It's mostly beats that I listen to. Fast ones. With slow songs there's not a lot that I like. I guess I just like moving. So the faster beats make me move more. One of my hip-hop friends calls me Casper as a joke 'cause I'm white.

The first person I told I was gay was a teacher, Miss Marco. I was very close to her because she taught our drama class and one day she asked for people who wanted to put on a show. I went and she was pretty cool and open. I choreographed the whole show. My whole troop was there. The dancers and I picked the songs and everybody loved it and they said it was the best show ever. Because of the show I got to talk to a lot of people I never spoke to before. When it was all over I kept going to see Miss Marco and talk to her, and after a while I started to know her. She was the only one that I could talk to at the time about my life basically. I felt stuck. I didn't like the world because of all the prejudice—you hear a lot of expressions like, "You're such a fag" and "You queer," so

you know being gay is like shit. I hate those expressions.

She suspected something, you know. I had problems saying it, so one day Miss Marco said, "You can always write me a letter." So I did. But I told her I was bi even though I knew I wasn't. I was just like in denial a little bit. So then, as the days went by, I just told her I was gay. Not bi.

She said it was fine and I shouldn't be worried or anything. Things like that, you know. I mean she's straight but she told me she used to go dancing at gay clubs in the village when she was younger. So that was cool. She was totally fine with it. I began to tell other teachers because I was close to them, too. They're really understanding, I find. All my teachers love me because I'm not somebody who does shit and makes trouble. I'm not immature like most of the students here who talk back to teachers and tell them to "Go fuck yourself" and everything. They actually say that and the teachers don't do anything. They know I'm not like that at all and they're more flexible with me. Like let's say I forget my homework or something, they won't care. They know I'll do it and will bring it in the next day. I always get good marks. So I just felt that I should tell them, you know. My science teacher had a funny reaction though. I told her, "You know Miss, I'm gay," and she said, "What? You can't be. You're so cute." I'm like, "Well, it's not my fault. Sorry." She still laughs about that.

One teacher told me to watch out because there are some male teachers in school who don't accept gays. I don't know who they are—she didn't want to tell me.

Now pretty much everybody knows. It was around the time they first began taking down the crucifixes that I started wearing my little rainbow flag on the back of my schoolbag. So it's like obvious. Except most kids at school just think it's the German flag. They always ask me if I'm German. When I first sewed it on, one of my friends asked me what it was and so I told her. I was at her house after school because we were really close friends. We were on her balcony and I looked over the railing's edge for a long while before I said anything. It was a long way down. Finally I just told her, "I'm gay." She took my hand and said, "It's okay," and I was like, "Thank God!" you know. "Finally there's someone who understands me." But then she told another friend and it was like a chain reaction. It got around to everyone. When I found out who started it all I was mad at first and whatever. But what's it going to change? You can't hide it or

anything.

Oh! This one guy was standing at the bus stop with his friends and he came up to me and said, "Why do you have that flag on your schoolbag?" I was like, "Oh, shit! He knows it's not the German flag." And then one of my best girl friends went right up to him and said, "Shut up! Don't tell anybody." But the guy's pretty cool—he knows I'm gay now. He talks to me about it, so it's okay. Whenever he sees me he always comes up to me to talk and he asks how it's going with my boyfriend. Like he's really cool.

Through that confession sort of thing, I got a lot of new girl friends. Some of the popular girls are always coming to see me and ask, "So who do you find hot?" So I got some new acquaintances by coming out. Most of my friends are girls. Go figure! I get along better with girls than guys. I find I have more in common with girls, but it would be fun to have more guy friends. More open guy friends.

It's mostly kids from real strict families that go to our school and they're really closed. They say things like, "You're a faggot." Not towards me, but towards each other as a joke. It annoys me. It really annoys me. It makes me feel dark, you know. First of all I find it insulting. What the hell! I don't go up to someone and say, "You're so straight." I don't know. It's annoying. Everyone here uses that expression.

That's why I like my friends at work even though I'm only a little bagboy in a grocery store. At work it's all Québécois and I find Québécois are very open. Everyone at work—guys or girls—are open-minded with me. They don't care if I'm gay and they don't care about other people who're gay. They're accepting. We're very close.

I had bad experiences, too, telling people. I used to know these two girls, these twins, who are very religious. Very religious. You know, like the Catholic religion and everything. They read the Bible every night. They came over to the house and I told them and then they reacted like, "Oh my God!" That was the reaction I didn't want. They used to tell me they prayed for me because I shouldn't be this way and I was going to go to Hell because God didn't love me because I was gay. They told me they were praying for my soul and I had to seek God's love. Everyday it would be the same story.

I stopped talking to them. They'd call me at my house and tell me, "You can't be gay. It's wrong." So one day I told them to fuck off. I just heard news about them—one of them is pregnant with no father and the other one doesn't live at home anymore. So I

was like, "Shit!" Life turns out kind of weird.

So I don't give a damn about crucifixes either.

As the janitors were leaving, one of them mumbled in Father Morel's direction that someone would return with a vacuum to get the dust. The excitement was over and as usual our class didn't know what to do next without someone telling them. Father Morel finally closed his attendance book and looked up and said, "Take out something and read quietly for the remaining fifteen minutes." Everyone groaned.

He adjusted his shirt collar like it was too tight just like he used to do when he wore his priest's collar. As long as I've been in the school, I always saw Father Morel in his priest collar. Sometimes he'd wear a cardigan on cold days in winter. You'd think being a priest he'd be old, but he was thirty-something. Thirty-one. Thirty-two. Only that black cardigan made him look older than he was. The principal must have told him to stop wearing the priest collar because one day he showed up to class with a regular white shirt buttoned up to the last button. If you looked up at him really quickly, for a moment it looked exactly the same, like the priest collar was still there. The principal must have told him again, because the next day he came to class with the first button of his shirt unbuttoned. Then the second one. Now whenever he bends over a desk to answer a question, the big heavy cross he wears falls out of his open shirt. It's going to kill someone someday. He makes a big production of standing up perfectly straight and putting it back inside his shirt with a sigh that's quiet like a prayer.

This girl, Carmen Lagiorgia, asked him if we could just have a discussion and everyone started begging him because it meant we didn't have to work. Father Morel said, "A discussion about what?" Carmen suggested same-sex marriage since, I guess, it was in the news so much. And he was like, "No. I don't want to talk about that." Carmen asked him "Why not?" Father Morel said again, "No. I don't want to talk about that." But it was too late—he got forced to talk about it because people wouldn't let him just leave it like that. They kept asking him about it.

That's when he told us that being gay was a waste of time and a waste of a life. "It's like taking two outlets—one going in and another going in—and trying to put them together. It's not going to create electricity. It's a waste of time to be gay."

Everyone sat there in silence just looking at him until Carmen blurted out really

loudly, "What!" Then everyone started arguing with him at once. People were like, "It's not! It's not a waste!" All my friends in that class were with me. I was surprised that the whole class was actually going against what he was saying. I was happy about that.

"It is wrong! It's a waste of time! God didn't create us to be that way."

He went on about stuff like that and he even made Jasmine Rose cry and she ran out of the room. My friend who knows her told me her brother Joe was gay and died. Being told your brother was a waste of a life is, you know, sort of harsh. So she started crying and ran out. Everything he said made me want to cry too, but I waited until after class.

He didn't say anything at all when Jasmine ran out—he just let her go.

He kept looking right at me. I didn't know why. I didn't think he knew I was gay unless one of the other teachers told him. Then I noticed that my schoolbag was on my desk with the rainbow flag sort of facing towards him.

Students kept on arguing with him, some were really loud about it, too. "Sir, you're wrong! That's not true. You don't decide to be gay. It's something you're born with." It was mostly girls, but you had some guys who were saying things like, "Who the hell are you?"

The thing is, Father Morel seemed to be getting angrier every time he looked at me. He was almost shouting now. "Everybody who's gay is because they were sexually abused when they were small." On and on. Na-na-na-na. I kept thinking, "Oh God!"

He went on about Jesus and he even pointed to the ghost cross on the wall before he realized the crucifix wasn't there anymore. Then he babbled on about how he was just like Saint Willibrord among the pagans. He started fiddling with the cross around his neck, twisting it so the chain started closing up around his throat.

Nobody was agreeing with him. As he kept talking and playing with his cross, I pushed my schoolbag towards him, right to the edge of the desk as far as I could before it would fall off. That's when he actually got mad and slammed his fist down hard on his desk.

"Listen to me. It's wrong. You people don't know what you're talking about. You're all young. You don't know anything."

It just ended like that. Everybody stopped talking all at once.

Then the bell rang.

As I picked up my schoolbag to leave, other students pushed past me and rushed up to his desk to tell him, "Why were you saying that?" and "You shouldn't be saying stuff like that." He started again to explain what he had said in class, but he was just repeating what we already heard. It was just more bullshit.

Obviously I was pissed off. I went up to the library with the friends who had been with me in class and we told the librarian everything that happened. My friends kept telling me over and over what a jerk he was and how he shouldn't be allowed to say things like that. The librarian told us, "He shouldn't talk about that. And if he is going to talk about it, he definitely shouldn't talk about it in that way." We wondered why a school would hire a priest to teach us anyway. He was always talking about God. It wasn't a religion class.

I tried to let it go when I got home, so I put on some music to dance, but that was that. I just sat there until my boyfriend came home from work.

The next day at school, things were back to normal. Everyone in class seemed to have forgotten about it and Father Morel acted like it never happened. He still went on talking about God every chance he got, but he didn't mention gays again.

A few days later I was leaving class and Jasmine Rose, the girl whose brother was gay and died, looked right at me, straight in the eyes as if to say, "What are you going to do about this?"

I know I should have done something. I really should have. But I didn't know what to do or who to tell that would do something about it. The principal? The school board? The more I thought about it, the more I knew it would be a fag's word against a priest.

That's the funny part. With how much he hates gays it's kind of ironic how I was one of his favourite students and I'm gay. I never gave him a day of trouble. I had the highest mark in class. I was always on time. I'd always work hard. I'd ask respectful questions and not the kind that some students ask as a joke or to make him look stupid.

So I decided that for the rest of the year I wouldn't do anything he told me. I wouldn't answer if he spoke to me, or called on me, or asked me where my work was. My grades could go to Hell as far as I cared and I wouldn't give a damn.

He could look right through me like I wasn't even there.

Advice to Teachers
Pages from Joe Rose's Notebook

1. If you have gay students, be good to them. If they have a problem, listen as best as you can. Listen to what they're telling you because they have a lot to say, so just listen and don't judge. Ask them how you can help them and what you can do to make their being gay at school easier.

2. Treat your students being gay like any other thing. Don't let it affect your view or cloud your judgment of the person. Don't let it become the sole property that you associate with the person. If there are no issues around it, then you don't need to worry about it.

3. Respect the student and give the student space and time and compassion, if needed.

4. Give advice only on what you can--don't give advice on things you have no clue how to handle. If there's something you don't know about, seek more knowledgeable help.

5. If the gay student is being harassed, immediately report it and don't let the harassers get away with it. It's wrong. They should have learned that by now. Some sort of disciplinary action is called for. Tell all your students they shouldn't judge others by their sexual orientation. They may think it's their opinion, but it should never result in physical or psychological harassment.

6. If you hear students using "that's so gay" or calling something or someone "gay" in passing, you should say something about it. Don't let it slide.

7. If a student asks you whether they should come out in school, don't say, "Keep it to yourself," and don't do anything discouraging even if you think coming out isn't the best thing to do. You have to encourage them and say, "Be yourself. Don't care what everyone else says or what everyone else thinks. It's your life."

8. Most importantly, defend your gay students. Don't let things pass. Reinforce rules in your class about discrimination with everybody for everything. Let students know that you're not going to tolerate bullshit in your class.

A Lesson on Being Inseparable
Geoff's Story

As he walked to school that morning, checking every so often to see if the music CD he burned last night to play during the daily news was still safely in his coat pocket, Geoff Mueller smiled knowing that again he'd slipped in another ABBA song. His friends would laugh at him; he had the reputation of being a music Nazi because he didn't let anyone else touch the CD player in the band room where he and his friends hung out at lunch and recess.

The sun was still not up. Ahead in the dark Geoff saw the headlights of a car coming towards him and soon he recognized his neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Turner. The couple waved to him as they drove by—they were always up first thing in the morning, out for a spin in the convertible they bought to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary. In summer the car's top would be down, less, it seemed to Geoff, to allow the Turners to bask in sunshine than for them to wave back at everyone on their street. And everyone waved at the Turners—they were the oldest neighbours on the block. Geoff couldn't imagine the suburban street where he grew up without them—they radiated a joy that you couldn't help but feel. On holidays their children and grandchildren descended on their house filling it with a happiness that overflowed onto the street and up and down the block. The anniversary party had gone on for an entire weekend. There were hundreds of people—everyone in the neighbourhood had been invited, that's the kind of people the Turners were—and hundreds of balloons tied to every shrub and tree up and down the block.

It was Geoff's parents who had taken it upon themselves to watch out for them—Mr. Turner was hospitalized last year with diabetes—and Geoff's younger brother and sister would sometimes go over to the Turners after school to wait for their parents to return home from work or Geoff to come back from school. On those occasions his siblings bubbled with stories of hot freshly baked cookies and cold thick milk, two things that were few and far between in the all-too-health-conscious Mueller household.

Geoff couldn't count the number of times he saw the Turners gardening together or sitting together in lounge chairs on their deck reading newspapers or magazines or

paperback novels. Whenever his mother spoke of the Turners she always mentioned they'd met in high school all those years ago and had spent only a night or two apart in all the time they were married. He thought he didn't know the meaning of the word "inseparable" until he knew them.

Geoff sighed. He had so much to do that day. But as much as he liked to grumble about it, he loved being busy. He loved all the activities he did; he wouldn't give up any of them for the world—and there were so many. To start, he was responsible for picking and playing the background music for the daily news during homeroom. He knew it sounded more glamorous than it was—it was only a slide show, a PowerPoint thing shown on the TVs in all the classrooms, school announcements and advertisements for volunteer jobs and community service. He always made a point of including different, random types of music. Every so often someone would come up to him in the hallway and say, "Oh, that was great music you picked today." He liked that part of the job: the attention. Still others would come up to him and complain that their homeroom teacher hated the music. He found that frustrating—he had certain people in mind when he chose the songs, or people would request he play something for them. Like last week he'd played Our Lady Peace because some grade tens said they were going to see the concert. When he saw them later and asked if they heard the songs, they said, "Oh, really? Our teacher turned the sound off."

After school Geoff had band practice. There were over a hundred people in concert band: students from grade nine, ten, and eleven. He played the sax, the alto-sax actually—it wasn't the same thing he always insisted when people asked what instrument he played. He'd taken up the flute one summer but he almost passed out trying to hold a note. He'd decided quickly, "No. Okay. I'm done." It almost stopped his interest in playing an instrument right there. Now he felt proud he was getting pretty good at the sax.

And he was also involved in various activities like plays and variety shows, but they were over for the year. He missed them. It was during March break that someone had come up to him in the mall and said, "Oh my God! You were in that variety show. You were so great." He'd blushed and quietly said, "Thanks." He'd been thrown off by that kind of attention at first, but he had to admit it was really cool.

With all there was for Geoff to do in a given school day, he always arrived early, at times waiting and shivering in the early morning for the janitor to arrive and unlock the front door. Some winter mornings he found himself watching a mini-snowdrift grow up around his feet, not knowing that school had been cancelled for the day. Eventually he'd walk home, careful to make perfect footprints in the snow, imagining himself some sort of explorer—the first to venture into the uncharted territory of his neighbourhood on a quest for a cup of hot chocolate.

So that was his day. Oh! And attend classes, too. He often forgot that was part of his school day as well.

He felt the nervousness in his stomach, slight, but enough that it gave him a thrill. That day was going to be different. Somewhere in all he had to do, he had to find the time to go to the mall and buy Mark a gift—he couldn't show up at his birthday party without one. Well, not if he wanted Mark to notice him. No boring class could take away from the excitement he was feeling—the excitement of believing something is possible.

He smiled to himself the last few yards to school. Things were going great; he was really enjoying his final year of high school. His involvement in school activities was paying off—he had more friends than ever; he was busier than he had ever been; he felt appreciated for all his talents. Moreover, he felt good about the person he was becoming.

And if Mark wasn't enough, the day promised to be even more special: it was the first day he was going to teach the Changes and Choices unit to the grade sevens.

* * *

"Okay, quiet down," Mr. Mackay said to the class. Geoff was amused by how quickly the grade sevens fell silent. In a grade eleven class, Mr. Mackay would still be waiting to be noticed, left standing at the front of the room like part of the fittings and fixtures. All eyes were looking forward, darting between Mr. Mackay and the mystery guest. "This is Geoff, he's in grade eleven," Mr. Mackay said as introduction. "I've asked Geoff to give today's class, so let's welcome him and treat him with the utmost respect."

Geoff smiled at the students and walked over to Mr. Mackay's desk where his notes were. The previous night he had stayed up a couple of hours past his usual bedtime going over them. Actually Mr. Mackay had never <u>asked</u> him, he'd volunteered. Well, perhaps not quite volunteered since every grade eleven student <u>had</u> to do some sort of community

service. Geoff had heard about this particular job on the morning news and it seemed like fun. He felt he'd prefer it to some of the other community services he could have picked like coaching sports or fundraising for Christmas baskets or organizing a Senior Citizens' tea. These things just weren't him.

People always described Geoff in two ways: he likes to talk and he's always happy. If someone were talking about something, like during a class discussion, Geoff would certainly add whatever's on his mind. He considered himself pretty well informed about things—he read the newspaper and watched the news on TV every day. He loved it when people listened to him, and even if they didn't agree and would start to argue their opinion, he loved how he could think of things to say in reply, logical things, things to make them understand his point of view. He felt people respected him for that.

Geoff could tell Mr. Mackay was pleased, if not pleasantly surprised, when one day after school he'd appeared at his classroom door and asked to help teach the grade seven sex ed. unit. Geoff had known Mr. Mackay from being a student in his history 414 class the previous year. Mr. Mackay told the tall, enthusiastic young man that in his five years teaching the unit, no one had ever wanted to help out. He explained how the topics included contraceptives, safe sex, relationships, and sexual orientation, and right away Geoff asked to teach the part about sexual orientation. Mr. Mackay could have anticipated that—he'd seen Geoff develop over the last year as the school's only out gay student, a popular, sociable student who took part in almost every extra-curricular activity there was. The last time the two had really spoken was a few days before Christmas on Karaoke Day when Geoff had stolen the show. Mr. Mackay couldn't help but smile when he thought about how the boy loved karaoke—he'd made it a point to go up to him at the end of the day and shake his hand. Some students looked down their noses at such activities. Mackay hated that. Teaching school at the best of times was difficult; he thought it was spirit-raising activities like variety shows and plays and karaoke days that gave the school its soul. He believed students like Geoff nourished that soul.

"Today we're going to start talking about homosexuality," Geoff began. He'd rehearsed with Mr. Mackay what he'd say and what activities they'd be doing in class. On his own, he'd researched material for the unit, going to the library and scouring the Internet. Mr. Mackay gave him books and articles he thought he could use. "There's a

video," Mackay had told Geoff who had taken it home and watched it: it showed some kids in some anonymous American school who came out to their parents and were kicked out of their homes, lost all their friends, and were beaten up for being gay. Geoff had never known such rejection. He didn't doubt that it existed, he just hadn't experienced homophobia in his five years of high school. Surely, he felt, it was becoming less and less common. He had to admit that from time to time he had a fear in the back of his mind that he could be attacked like Matthew Shepard, or that kid on Queer As Folk, or, even closer to home, Joe Rose. Logically he knew that it was more the media's influence than anything he could put his finger on at his school, a side effect of consuming too much news. But, in reality, he'd never even been called a name never mind being threatened or fag bashed.

In his MRE[1] class they had conducted a mock court case on Matthew Shepard. Geoff felt it was such a horrible story—everyone in his class thought the same thing. It had an impact on all of them—they'd agreed it was the best possible court case they could have picked to work on. Geoff felt that if anything like that happened to him, he was confident his friends would back him. And his family. And teachers like Mr. Mackay.

The worse he'd known was hearing a friend calling something or someone "gay." Whenever they said, "Oh, that's gay!" or called someone a "fag," he made a point of telling them off—"I don't like it when you guys say that."—or he made a joke about it: "So this book has a gender now? That movie? That CD?" He knew they were probably thinking, "Oh my God! Okay. He's going on about that thing again," but they usually stopped. Geoff felt his friends respected him enough that they stopped for him.

"Look," he'd told Mr. Mackay the next day. "We can't show this video. Like no one's going to want to discuss it. They're all going to live in fear about it, and, if they're gay, they'll never want to come out after seeing it." So he'd presented the teacher with some stories he found on the Internet about high school students who came out and were accepted for whom they were. "We can use this instead," he said. "It's not the whole picture, I know, but we can talk about some of the bad things that do happen to some kids

[1] Moral and Religious Education. A mandatory course for high school students in Québec. There are two MRE courses, one usually taken by Catholic students and another by Protestant students. A "morals" course is taken by non-Catholics.

when they come out. But I think the class would get more out of something positive than just gloom and doom." Mr. Mackay couldn't help but be impressed with how seriously Geoff took the job.

Hands flew up across the classroom, the grade sevens asked Geoff questions all at once: "How do gays have sex?" "How do people know they're gay?" "Is it true gays have sex all the time?" It took Geoff all he could to quiet them down again.

He wasn't nervous at all; he loved being on stage; he loved performing even though he was aware of the stereotype that some people have that actors are gay—he thought of the movie Jawbreaker where one of the main characters fixes up another character with a date but warns, "Oh, he's an actor, so I can't promise total hetero sex." But he wasn't going to stop what he liked doing and was apparently good at just because of what other people thought. And even though this wasn't exactly like being in the plays he'd been in, he thought of it that way. The wide-open-eyed faces in front of him were his audience.

"We're going to start off with a bunch of true and false questions. You can put your hand up when I ask if you think it's true or false and we can talk about it. Okay?" Geoff had to smile when he saw the thirty heads nod agreement.

"First question: Gay men are anti-women and lesbians are anti-men. Raise your hand if you think that's true."

Most of the class threw up their hands. Geoff paused for a second, a bit taken aback by the overwhelming consensus in the room. "I'm not sure you understand the question," he said. "Do you really think gay men are gay because they hate women?" Slowly some hands began to fall.

"Yeah," one boy in the front said. He didn't make eye contact when he spoke; he looked down at the pencil he was rolling up and down the desk's surface. Geoff was ready to tell the boy what he felt, then remembering what Mr. Mackay had said about making them think rather than handing them things on a silver platter, he asked, "Well, can you explain that?"

"I heard from my parents that gays are just afraid of the opposite sex. Didn't something happened to them when they were younger to make them like that?"

"But lots of gay men have women as friends. What's up with that then? I mean, if they're supposed to hate them."

A girl dressed in black sitting next to the window put up her hand. "I think they just like the same sex. Not hate the opposite sex."

And so it went. Geoff continued with the activity as he'd planned with Mr. Mackay, stopping at each question to provide explanations where needed or to ask the students to clarify their answers.

Then Geoff asked them, "Would you feel comfortable if your friend told you they were gay? Would you still be friends with them? How many of you would?" Most of the students raised their hands, and, when they discussed their choice, most of them told him they'd be fine with it. When he asked who wouldn't be comfortable, he heard comments like, "I wouldn't talk to them for a while, but I guess I'd get used to it," and "Wouldn't people start thinking you're gay, too?"

"If you have black friends, do people think you're black?"

"But if you have a gay friend they might start hitting on you," called out a red-haired boy in the back.

"Do your friends hit on you now?" Geoff asked.

"Well...no..." the boy said hesitantly.

"Are you attracted to every girl so you hit on every girl you see? Maybe they don't find you attractive."

A perpetually bored-looking girl sitting next to the red-haired boy said to him, but loudly enough for everyone to hear, "Trust me, you're not that good looking." The students laughed.

"But what if your teacher's gay?" asked a girl wearing a Sum 41 T-shirt.

"What about it?"

"Well they could hit on you, too."

"Do teachers hit on you now? They'd lose their job if they did that."

A boy with longish curly blond hair sitting near the girl who asked the last question said, "They're there to do their job not try to hook up."

More laughter.

One by one Geoff answered the questions they had. He kept reminding himself of the goal he and Mr. Mackay had discussed: to get them thinking. He held himself back a couple of times from just blurting out, "No! You're wrong!" especially when he was

asked if gays were sex addicts and had sex all the time. Instead, Geoff said, "Well if that was true it would be very difficult for them to go to school and hold down jobs." It didn't take long for Geoff to realize they wouldn't believe him just because he said so—they needed to see the logic in his answers. When he made that connection, he could see in their faces a that-makes-sense expression that made him smile. He felt they were pretty smart for grade seven.

Class was almost over—there was only another ten minutes left. Geoff was about to assign them their homework—write one page about how their day would be different if they were gay—when a girl wearing glasses in the second row asked him another question.

"Are _you_ gay?"

Mr. Mackay had warned Geoff that would probably come up—he told Geoff students that age had the immature notion that if you stand up for gays you must be one. He asked Geoff how he'd go about answering it—he assured him it would be his decision and there certainly was no expectation he tell the class more than he wanted to. "We're not looking to put you on display here like the only panda in the zoo." Geoff had told him he'd think about it.

He hadn't decided what to do, but now, faced with the question, faced with a room full of eager grade sevens who were only just forming their opinions of groups of people different from them in ways that may affect them for the rest of their lives, he felt there was only one answer.

"Yes I am," he said. He could see Mr. Mackay in the back of the class, a worried expression on the man's face, poised as if ready to leap into the discussion before something bad happened. But Geoff was okay. He smiled at his former teacher, reassuring him he knew what he was doing, even though it felt like inching towards the edge of a cliff in the dark. There was remarkably little reaction from the students to what he'd just said. Geoff wasn't sure if they'd accepted what he told them matter-of-factly or if they were still processing it—wheels turning. "Any other questions," Geoff asked.

Hands shot up across the room.

"Do your friends know?"

"Of course," Geoff said. He told them how he'd come out to his grade in January on

a ski trip. He liked to say there was no big long story to it: Geoff and the three boys sharing a chalet had been getting ready to head back onto the ski hill when one of them had asked jokingly if he was gay. They were always making jokes like that. Geoff had said, "Yeah. I am." Their response could best be described as, "Oh. Okay," although one of the boys said, "So you're gay?" as if checking to make sure he heard what he thought he had. Beyond that they were fine with it.

But that was the thing—when he told his other friends upon returning to school after the trip, they, too, were mostly indifferent. Geoff attributed it to kids that age being wrapped up in their own lives. The friends he was closest with had listened to him, for sure, had even asked a few questions, then had changed the conversation to their own pressing issues, their dramas-du-jour. When he was with his friends, being gay didn't come up that often—it wasn't a big deal. That was what Geoff liked about his friends—it wasn't a big deal for them. When it came up, it came up, but usually it didn't. So the bottom line was that nothing had changed among his friends except now they were really nosey and were always asking him, "So, did you meet anyone yet?"

"And I told my family," Geoff added. "Everyone took it fine." He'd had his doubts, you didn't know how people were going to react to something like that. When he'd thought about it later, he realized it had been a calculated risk but the odds had been well in his favour.

"It would have been really out of character for them to react any other way than the way they did," he told the class. "My friends are nice people, not really judgmental type people at all. I didn't think it was going to be a problem. Nothing's changed. I'm still good friends with everyone I told."

"How do you know you're gay?"

"Good question. Do you want a straight answer?" Geoff waited until the student who asked the question nodded her head, although they missed his little joke. "Cause I like men." Geoff said, and then they laughed. He saw Mr. Mackay at the back of the room smiling, any signs of worry having disappeared from his face.

"I don't know," Geoff explained. "Like...like you know society says guys are supposed to like girls and so you kind of go, 'I like this person, they're kind of cute,' but they're not the opposite sex so you think that's not right. Then you kind of look and go,

'Well, maybe it is right. I know it's right for me.' Then it's like you go, 'Okay. Screw society. I have to do what's right for me.'"

"When you decided to be gay did you do it because you knew other gay people?"

"Well, let's get one thing clear. You don't <u>decide</u> to be gay. You just are. Like, did any of you decide to be straight? Like did you wake up the morning you were going to be gay and then at the last minute you decided to go the other way?" A few students laughed. "It's just something you know about yourself. Like some people don't know it yet so when they do come out I guess it does look like they've suddenly made a decision, but.... I think people know all along but they may be confused or don't want to admit it to themselves.

"And to answer your other question, my mother has some gay friends and I have a cousin who's lesbian, but we never see her because she's been living in Ireland with her girlfriend." He didn't tell them all the details; they didn't need to know everything. Like he really didn't know his mother's gay friends from work other than to say "Hi" to, although they had come over to dinner a couple of times. And he only found out recently he had a lesbian cousin when he overheard his parents talking about how she'd broken up with her girlfriend and was thinking of coming back to Canada. Geoff had a good laugh when his parents told him that—for some reason his father had the idea that Ireland was so small she <u>had</u> to leave for fear of running into her ex on the one street they apparently had. "Is it awkward there for her now?" his father had asked with a mixture of concern and understanding, as mistaken as it was.

Geoff knew that some people thought Mr. Mackay was gay, but of course he didn't tell the class that. It was just like Mr. Mackay said: if you say anything positive about gays, people assume you must be one, too. He felt it was possible that Mr. Mackay could be gay, but it wasn't something he could ask a teacher.

"And no one can influence you to be gay or make you gay. Look at it this way...almost all gays and lesbians grew up in a home with straight parents. <u>That</u> didn't make <u>them</u> straight."

"Do you have gay friends and go to clubs and everything? I heard gays have the best clubs."

Geoff wanted to say he wished he had some gay friends, but, instead, he simply said

he didn't know of any other gay students in school. "So, no. I don't." It made it lonely at times; there was no one else to talk to or relate to. As far as clubs went, Geoff told them he didn't go to clubs being only seventeen and without an ID. This wasn't just him talking appropriately to younger students, he'd little interest in going to clubs and had no problem waiting until he was eighteen, unlike some of his peers. Gay clubs weren't even a consideration—he hadn't even been to the gay village or the pride parade, although he thought that in the summer he'd do both.

"Are you for same-sex marriage?"

"I don't know. I'm not thinking that far ahead—I try to take it one day at a time. I suppose I want to be able to when the time comes, but I honestly haven't thought about it. But if straights can marry, why not me?"

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

For the first time all class, there was no quick reply. Geoff could feel his heart freeze for the briefest of moments. Having been so ready to answer whatever they asked, he was now at a loss as to how to respond to that question. If there was one thing about being gay that he felt put him at a disadvantage from everyone else, that was it. He found it difficult to meet people. Well, gay people. He'd never been in a relationship, had never even met someone his own age who was gay. The big problem, he knew all too well, was so few people came out in high school, you didn't know who was gay. How many students at his school were gay but hadn't come out yet? Sure he heard rumours, but at one time or another wasn't everyone rumoured to be gay? Geoff felt he was seriously dating-challenged; he had absolutely no gay-dar to speak of. To be honest, he didn't even know how to begin to meet someone.

There was birthday Mark in his French class, of course, but he didn't know if Mark was gay. Geoff felt there'd be nothing more awkward than going up to someone and saying, "You know, I really like you," and he says in return, "I'm really really not attracted to guys." That had to be the most embarrassing situation in the world. He thought Mark was a really nice guy and he didn't want Mark to stop being friends with him. He didn't want him to think that since Geoff liked him he was going to constantly be hit on.

Geoff had confided in a few of his friends about his feelings for Mark, but they

hadn't been very helpful. "What you have to do," one advised him in a serious, conspiratorial voice, "is draw a penis on his birthday card. He'll get the hint." His friends were like that. In French class whenever Mark went up and did une orale, one of his friends would wink at Geoff, while another coughed loudly to make sure Geoff was paying special attention (which he was), and another play-acted looking dreamily at Mark who was intent on his French pronunciation and conjugations, oblivious of his admirers. Geoff would feign annoyance at his friends' antics, but he did have to admit they were funny.

He wasn't one-hundred-percent sure, but he felt that Mark liked him, too. Well, not just like, but like-like. The week before Mark had been sitting with Geoff at lunch, just the two of them at a table together in the cafeteria, and he'd said out of nowhere, "It's my birthday," he told Geoff he was having a party that weekend. "Consider yourself invited." Geoff had been excited at first, then, when he realized he was going away that weekend with his family, disappointed. He spent the rest of the day questioning if it was always going to be like that: wondering about someone, getting closer to him, allowing himself to hope this could be it, then somehow being let down. Geoff was not one for being depressed, but that day had been an exception. As was his nature, by the last bell he'd started telling himself, "Obstacles are only problems to be solved." He only needed to figure out a solution, or start praying. After school Geoff had been surprised to find Mark waiting at his locker. Right away Mark said, "I decided to change the party to next weekend." Geoff's only response had been an ear-to-ear smile. How else should he acknowledge a miracle? Mark went on to explain, "Well, a whole bunch of people couldn't make it this weekend." Geoff barely heard him he was so happy.

"No I don't have a boyfriend," he simply told the grade sevens. Then, not missing a beat: "Why are you going to set me up?" They laughed again.

A girl in the front row, eyes wide open with hope as she looked up at Geoff, asked him tentatively, "Are you sure a hundred percent you're gay? You're cute."

More laughter. "Yes," Geoff said, laughing as well. "I'm hundred percent sure." She feigned disappointment.

The bell rang and Geoff quickly told them he'd be back the following week to continue the unit with them. He wished them a good day and started gathering his notes

from the teacher's desk when he heard the students clapping. He looked up and saw Mr. Mackay walking down the isle towards him, clapping as well. "Thanks Geoff. Good work! That was a great job!"

* * *

It was already dark when Geoff finally made his way home after band practice; they had worked on their plans to record a CD of the final concert of the year—it was approaching quickly. He had even convinced them to play an ABBA song at an upcoming concert—for the first time they asked him to put on his ABBA CD just to hear how it's supposed to sound.

Darkness came so early that time of year, but already Geoff noticed the days were starting to get longer. It would soon be spring. Then grad. Then he and his friends would go off to CEGEP[2] and their separate ways despite pledges of never losing touch.

He liked that time of year—the lengthening days always seemed so hopeful to him: soon the dark would give way to the light. It fed his optimism—he needed that. On his walks home from school he always tried to find something positive to cling to; he almost felt in shock having plunged from the social cacophony of friends and acquaintances and teachers at school into the silence and solitude of the walk home. He could only pinpoint two times he felt loneliness: last November when everyone went on the Europe trip and he didn't go, and walking home from school.

He was tired; he was barely able to keep placing one foot in front of the other. The downtown commuters in their cars started rolling past him and down the street, no doubt happy as well to be almost home. Geoff couldn't wait to eat dinner and then spend the rest of evening listening to ABBA in his room.

He was happy how his day had gone; he was proud of what he did with the grade sevens; he really felt they understood the points he was trying to make. Mentally he started going over all the things he had to tell them next time: the help line numbers; the support groups for gay and lesbian youth in the front of the Changes and Choices guide; the homework assignment he never had time to give them.

He stopped dead in his tracks—he'd forgotten to buy Mark a birthday gift. "Oh,

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[2] Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel or College of General and Vocational Education

well," he told himself as he started walking again, "there's always tomorrow after school," although he knew that would be cutting it short. For the tiniest second he allowed himself to believe that a gift was all it would take to make Mark see what he so wanted him to.

He found it funny the grade sevens had wanted to know if he had a boyfriend. He was confident he'd prepared for every likely question, and he really felt he had—except that one. They weren't unlike his friends who kept asking him if he was going to bring someone to grad. For the last month or so, everyone in his grade was buzzing with talk of their graduation—they were already planning dates and limos and hotels, even though it was still months away. If he was really honest with himself—and that walk home after school in the dark tended to make him so—that prospect seemed out of reach. Who did he know? Between then and grad, what were his chances he'd meet someone who was gay and that person would like him enough to want to go to a high school grad with him? So he answered all who asked by saying he planned to go alone because he didn't want to start trouble like that kid in Ontario who sued his school so he could take his boyfriend to the prom. Of course, Geoff didn't think for a moment his school would stop him if that was what he wanted to do. "You'll meet someone in CEGEP," a friend told him out of nowhere one day. He still didn't know why she said that; he never spoke about it to his friends. Instead he just silently watched the couples walking down the hallways hand-in-hand and their secret kisses in stairwells or hurriedly outside classroom doors seconds after the period bell rang. He didn't think anyone would understand.

And until then it had never bothered him as much as it did right when that grade sevener asked him that question.

As he reached the driveway to his house he saw Mr. and Mrs. Turner coming back from walking their dog, their pre-dinner ritual. From passing cars and front windows, everyone on the street who saw the Turners waved at them as they strolled with their dog to the cul du sac at the far end of their street and back again, arm-in-arm on cold evenings like that or holding hands and swinging their arms carefree on warm summer days.

Geoff waved at the couple, too. And, as always, together they waved back.

Truly inseparable.

Episodes in Fear
Matthew's Story

Leaving Home Again

Matthew waits for the bus to pull out and head towards the Canadian border. He looks out the window at his mother, the ends of her long black hair flailing in the wind. Many times Matthew has heard her tell people with pride that she hasn't cut her hair since she was a girl on the reserve, though what she doesn't like to add is it was the nuns who had forced her to cut it.

"I'll miss you," she says again. Matthew barely hears her above the bus's running engine. "Your father will be waiting for you at the bus station," she yells. He nods, and her face contorts into the look he has come to know all too well in the last few weeks.

"He won't hurt you now," she says, or whispers, or mouths for all he knows—he only sees her lips move as the luggage compartment is slammed shut. She says it a dozen times a day. Two dozen. A hundred times. He knows who "he" is—she doesn't have to say his name anymore. No one does: the lawyers, his mother's boyfriend, his grandmother. "He" lost his name weeks ago, lost the right to have a name Matthew supposes. Matthew wonders if the word "he" will ever mean someone else again, like the boy next door who he finds cute, or a friend at school, or the old man at the post office who hands him letters and packages from his father in Canada. His father's always sending things, he never calls. Matthew can count the times he's heard his father's voice on the phone, his slight Québécois accent a surprise and a treat amid all the American drawls. His father uses "he" too.

The bus's doors close. There's the sound of gears meshing into place, then the engine groans from idle and the bus starts moving. Matthew looks at his mother one last time—a small woman standing alone in sadness. She mouths the words, "I love you," and he gives her a smile and a wave goodbye. He doesn't want to go back to living with his father, to leave her, but he wasn't given a choice. For his parents, this is the only solution. Matthew only hopes it will stop the memories that bleed into his dreams.

He doubts he will see this part of the States, this place, again. He's going back to Canada, back to his father, back to his father and his father's boyfriend and their home.

His father's gay, and, even though his father's gay, Matthew finds it so difficult to tell anyone he's gay, too.

Knowing

The first time I can remember was this feeling I had, and I knew what it was because I'd look at other guys and think they were good looking. I can remember waiting with one of my friends for the métro to come—it was summer and we were going to a friend's house. We were probably about ten or eleven. He was a bully who all the other kids at school feared. He liked to protect me and he told everyone he was my cousin—even though he wasn't—because there were kids who'd always beat up on me. I remember waiting for the métro and just listening to him talk and he brought up the subject that because my father was gay there was a chance that I could be, too. He always used to hang out at my house and he was okay with it and everything. That was just his way of thinking and I was young then, too, so I thought the same thing. And then I thought, "What would happen to our friendship if I was gay like my father?" I never asked him because the métro came, but I thought about it a lot. And that's when I had this moment of epiphany where it hit me: "Gay! That's what I am. That's what I'm feeling." I just accepted it because that's who I am.

A New School

Matthew burns himself some toast for breakfast and his father asks him how things are going at school. Andrew, his father's boyfriend, has already gone to work.

What can Matthew say? Should he tell him again how bad it is? He already has. "So people know you're gay at school?" his father kept repeating in disbelief. "Yes," Matthew kept answering, even though that wasn't the point at all. But for his father there was no other point.

Should Matthew tell him how he feels safe at home but then, walking to the bus stop each morning, it starts, a feeling in his stomach that only gets worse as he stands waiting for the bus. Then boarding the bus and having the feeling build and build. And on the ride to school, having to put on this shell, this mask, this whole other personality. He purposely looks depressed and angry like he's had a big argument at home and people

had better watch out, hoping against hope that they'll leave him alone. When the conversation finally focused on the harassment, his father said, "You've dug your own grave, now lie in it. I told you you shouldn't have come out there."

So Matthew smiles and says, "It's okay," and "School is school," as though that explains everything.

In a way it does.

School is school and school is a shit hole. Matthew knew that from the minute he walked into the building. The first thing he noticed was how run down the place was. The bulletin boards were cut up and covered with graffiti. The hallways looked dirty, like they washed them but it wasn't doing any good. There were very few lights. The school he went to back in the States had just been built and everything was clean and new: the desks were in perfect shape, the walls were bright, the bulletin boards had posters and notices inviting students to become involved in all kinds of sports and after-school activities. In the school back in the States, there had been over twenty clubs and every single sport. Matthew liked watching the cheerleading competitions. Both schools have a large student body, but Matthew's new school has more students than desks for them to sit in. You'd think with so many students, there'd be school spirit, but his first week there Matthew asked at the office about clubs thinking he could join one to get to know other students. The secretaries looked at him as if he asked where they kept the solid gold blackboard erasers. It's like his new school doesn't want to waste any of the students' time.

He's trying to fit in. In the first few days he met Amy and they sit together in history class in the back corner and talk. Because they get into trouble a lot for "disturbing others," they start writing notes back and forth. In one note, Amy tells Matthew she's bisexual and that everybody at school knows and they're cool with it. He feels a sense of trust with her and writes back that he's gay—he wants her to know, he feels it's a part of who he is. He knows if Amy is going to hang out with him, she'll eventually see he's gay, especially if he has some gay friends or a boyfriend. Matthew's happy to have someone to hang out with at school so he's not alone.

Then Amy starts telling people that Matthew's gay. When he finds out she tells him not to worry because everybody's cool with it and they won't say anything. But it

spreads, and before long everybody knows.

That's when the harassment begins.

The Welcoming Committee

Matthew sits outside the principal's office, in the open, clearly visible to all who walk by. Teachers and students give him looks that ask, "What have you done?" or "Who you ratting on?" He's been waiting for nearly half an hour. Finally the door to the principal's office opens and Matthew's told to come in.

Matthew explains how it happened: after the dismissal bell rang for the day, he was walking back to his locker and saw a group of boys at their lockers, so he went around them. They stopped him as he walked past, pulling him back by his school bag then pushed him up against the lockers. They said Matthew was looking at them and they asked him if he wanted them. "You want to suck our cocks, don't you?" one said, grabbing himself through his baggy pants. They pulled him off the locker and then pushed him back against it several times. Then they punched and kicked him.

The principal tells Matthew that he will do everything he can to deal with the situation and for him not to worry. He smiles and Matthew feels relieved knowing it will end.

On the Reserve

On weekends he stays on the reserve with his grandmother. She spoils him, making special dinners like sausages and corn bread and gravy, and she takes him shopping for the things his father forgets he needs. At supper she tells him about his aunts and uncles, his mother's sisters and brothers. Tonight she tells him about his aunt who became a Jehovah Witness and left the reserve with her husband and never spoke to the family again. His grandmother tells the story with pain and Matthew puts his hand on hers as she speaks.

Later she takes him to the big bingo up the highway where they win $143. They treat themselves to cokes and hot dogs and greasy homemade French fries. They eat laughing at how small their good fortune is.

Good Advice...You Just Can't Take

Classes are over for the day. Matthew goes to talk to his MRE[1] teacher. Even though he spoke to the principal, nothing has changed. Maybe she can help. He knocks on the classroom door and she looks up from her correcting. He doesn't know where to begin—he starts by telling her he's gay, then about the harassment and the principal. He tells her how he can't walk down the hallway without somebody yelling "faggot" and shoving him into a wall. It happened at least three times that day alone. He's called a name at least twenty to thirty times a day—some days he can't even count how many times. They say it when teachers aren't around or low enough so passing teachers can't hear.

She offers solutions. "Don't look directly at them," she says, like they're an eclipse or a pack of wolves. "Look elsewhere," she says. He's not sure what he can look at. The walls? The lockers? The floor? She tells him ways to get out of situations—they all involve him standing up to them. "Show them you're not afraid," she says. He's not sure he can do that—well, he <u>knows</u> he can't. Anyway, how does he not look at them yet stand up to them at the same time? As he leaves his teacher tells him that CEGEP[2] is a whole other world and a lot more open. She says that coming out in that school wasn't a very good idea.

The Writing's on the Wall

It's lunchtime. Matthew makes his way to his locker to put his books away. The hallways are empty—the other students are already in the cafeteria eating. It takes Matthew longer to reach his locker because he knows where their lockers are, where they hang out, around which corners they might be. He avoids those areas. Every day he finds another, more roundabout route back to his locker or from one class to another. He reaches for the combination lock out of habit, but as he looks up he sees spray-painted

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[1] Moral and Religious Education. A mandatory course for high school students in Quebec. MRE is usually taken by Protestant students, CRI (Catholic Religious Instruction) by Catholic students, and a "morals" course by non-religious or students of "other" religions.

[2] Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel or College of General and Vocational Education

across his locker, "All fags die!"

He goes to see the principal and asks him to come and see what they've done. The man says he doesn't have time for such nonsense and tells Matthew to ask the janitor for some cleaning solution and a rag to remove it. "You don't want the other students to see that, do you?"

Matthew cleans his locker. When he's finished his punishment, he goes for lunch.

Loosening Jars

I was in my room on the Internet and my mother was in the living room with her boyfriend. I could hear the TV, the occasional footsteps to the kitchen for a drink or snack during a commercial, a sentence or two as they discussed the story on E.R. or the plot being hatched by a player on Survivor, the sound of their laughter accompanying the laugh track of a comedy show. They love their TV.

I was chatting online with people I'd met through the personal ad I placed on PlanetOut looking for a friend. People from all over: Canada, the United States, Mexico, Europe even. Some were my age, some older. Recently I'd added Rob to my MSN Messenger—he was thirty-three and seemed like a nice person—he lived in the same state I did. I liked how he was interested in what I wrote him and how he'd always help me out with advice. He used to e-mail me every day just to say, "Hi."

I had questions. "Is what I'm feeling gay?" "What does being gay mean?" "What's it like to be out?" "What would it be like to be my age and gay and out?" I was looking for someone older thinking they'd know their lifestyle and would be able to answer me based on their experience. I didn't want someone my own age who was as confused as I was, so I purposely chose chat rooms where older men went.

One night, just before I usually typed "nite" and "c u later," Rob wrote, "Do you want to meet me?" I didn't answer—I turned off the computer and went to bed. It excited me to think that if I were going to meet him he'd be the first gay person I'd know. Well, excluding my father, of course.

Every night my mother would come to my room and say "Good night" to me. That night she kept standing at the doorway and wouldn't leave. "Can I ask you something?" she said. She told me we'd always been honest with each other and we'd been through a

lot together. She said she wanted me to know it would be okay no matter what I told her. Then she asked me if I was gay.

I said, "no." I acted really indignant. I changed the subject and asked her what she was watching on TV—I knew if I did that she'd forget what she just said. Before she turned off the light she told me, "It's only natural that I want to protect you until you can protect yourself."

I know I was being harder on her than I should've been and I wasn't being honest. She asked—she was probably ready to know. I wasn't ready to tell her. I was scared. I didn't know what jar lids would twist open if I said, "Yes." I mean, I didn't think she'd stop loving me. I knew my mother well enough to rule that out. But I'd be unique—I wouldn't be like everybody else. I was afraid she'd say it was wrong.

Looking back, all the signs were there. I used to have posters of boy bands on my walls. O-Town. *NSYNC. The Backstreet Boys. What boys that age have pictures like that and aren't gay? I didn't have any guy friends—I always hung around girls. I did have a girlfriend the year before, but we only went as far with each other as the shopping mall.

Then there's the way I act and talk. I'm smaller than most guys my age. It's a family curse. My fake girlfriend used to say my face was "too pretty," which is embarrassing. My black hair, my big brown eyes, my full lips. I can check off one-by-one from which parent I inherited each of my features. Should I hate them for being the way I am?

That's when I realized those jar lids weren't as tight as I liked to think.

New Boy in Town

He tries to act more masculine at school. He watches how he walks and moves and sits and holds a book. In class he doesn't look at anyone in case they feel uncomfortable and read something into it. Especially other boys. In class, he keeps his eyes focused on his desk. He has a new technique to go from class to class: he sticks close to teachers as he makes his way through the dark halls—human shields—although he seldom talks to them or acknowledges why he's walking alongside them. He assumed the dispassionate air of someone who's simply hopped a trolley car that will take him from one place to another.

They have to wear uniforms at his school, but he sees how the boys wear theirs and

how they're different from him. Instead of tucking in his white shirt, he now keeps the tails out. Teachers yell at him to "Tuck it in," all day, just like they do to them. He rolls up the sleeves to his elbows. He convinces his grandmother to buy him pants, still in the requisite school navy blue, but many sizes too big. He keeps his running shoes untied, long laces flopping around as he walks.

He'll try this straight-boy act and maybe they'll leave him alone.

Batty Man

They've taken to calling him "batty man"[3] and "sodomite." At first he doesn't know what they mean, so, in a way, it doesn't bother him, but he knows it can't be good. Amy explains it to him as they try to eat their lunch. It's the same every day. No matter where Matthew sits, they sit at the next table and throw food.

"Batty man"

"Sodomite."

When it first happened, he looked around for help. A lunch lady. A teacher. Someone. But he learned quickly that at this school you're on your own. Just last week a girl from another school walked right in and smashed a girl's head against a table putting her in the hospital. Some women in the kitchen came out and stopped it.

Today Amy has had enough. She throws food back at them and says, "Why don't you leave him alone? Why do you care? It's not your life. What does it have to do with you?" They listen until she finishes, then they start throwing food again.

"Batty man"

"Sodomite."

Matthew and Amy finish their lunch in silence.

Judging Books by Their Covers

He thinks he might find answers in the school library. He'd like to read an advice book or even a book about the history of homosexuality or on famous gays and lesbians, anything to learn more about other people like him and what they've gone through and

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[3] "Batty man" is Jamaican patois for "faggot."

how they've handled it. He laughs at himself—he knows he's getting desperate if he's actually going to the library.

He asks the librarian and the man gives Matthew a weird look and says, "There's nothing like <u>that</u> in <u>this</u> library." Matthew feels as if the man is annoyed by his being gay in his presence. On his own he finds one general book on sexuality. The cover shows a man and a woman embracing fully clothed. The woman looks up at the man with undying love. Matthew doesn't bother opening it.

Climbing Down Off the Cross

"I don't get it," Amy says. "They're okay with me."

"Maybe because you're a girl," Matthew tells her. She looks at him as if to ask, "What difference does that make?"

"Those guys probably think they can get some action with you and your girlfriend. With me they're afraid I'm going to hit on them."

"Don't worry," she says. "I'll stand up for you." And she does for a while. But when she finds she's spending most of her day telling people to back off or stepping in between Matthew and someone who seems seconds away from punching him, she soon distances herself from him. At first there are a few missed lunches together, then fewer and fewer phone calls in the evening. Then he's on his own again.

Cyber Secrets Revealed!

One day I came home from school and my mother was waiting for me. Her face was as far from the greeting I expected as ice is from Hell. I put down my schoolbag at the door and without a word I followed her into my room. Her boyfriend was sitting at my desk.

She said, "Chuck's found pictures of naked men on your computer," and she asked me again if I was gay. I lied again and said no.

Her boyfriend said he checked the computer's history and it was all there. All the web sites I'd been to. Gay sites. Porn. He said the only way it could have got on the computer is if somebody went to the website and downloaded it.

I told them none of it was mine.

My mother said it was a new computer and I was the only one who used it. She wanted to know why I had them, but I didn't answer. Chuck erased everything he could find and left my room. He wouldn't look at me. My mother left too—I could hear their voices in the kitchen—not their words, but their noise.

They were arguing.

Barriers to Making the Grade

Now they won't let him in the boys' locker room. Last week they stared at him as he undressed and told him in all kinds of vulgar ways he shouldn't be in there with them. It's absurd—they watch him to see if he's looking at them. They fear Matthew as though he's a sexual predator. They think if you're gay you're attracted to everyone of the same sex. They fear he fantasizes about them or wants to go with them.

Today they barricade the door so he can't get in, holding it closed from the inside. From the other side of the door he hears them calling him "fag" and one of them repeatedly asks, "Do you like it up the bum?"

The gym teacher is in the gym setting up for class. Matthew goes to speak to him. He tells Matthew he can get changed in the storage room if he wants. Matthew finds this funny: every day in gym class he'd get to come out of the closet.

He goes to the principal again and the secretary goes and tells him Matthew wants to speak to him. Again Matthew is made to wait a long time. It's more punishment, this time for needing help. After a while the gym teacher shows up and goes into the principal's office and shuts the door. Matthew waits some more. Finally they call him in and the principal tells him he shouldn't go into the locker room anymore. The gym teacher nods agreement.

"It's a safety issue," the principal tells Matthew. "If you're in there we can't see or hear what's going on." Matthew wants to ask why the gym teacher doesn't go into the locker room if he wants to see and hear what's going on. "We don't want you to get hurt," the principal says with a sympathetic smile.

"And what about them?" Matthew asks. "Will you talk to them? Will you make them stop?"

"Well," the principal begins. "It's difficult to know who's said what and who's done

what."

Matthew describes them to the principal again. He tells him they're black; he gives some of their names; he lists which of his classes they're in and repeats what they do to him. He says there's six of them, but only two cause the trouble. The others just stand around and laugh, or say stuff, or look around to see if teachers are coming.

"It's always the same ones," he says.

"What proof is there that it's them?" the principal asks. "You say there's a whole group. Are there witnesses?"

He waits for Matthew to answer—it's like he doesn't believe him. Matthew thinks it's a form of harassment in itself—a Chinese torture of his coming to the office to ask for help, the promises to do something, then nothing being done, repeated daily, over and over again. At what point does it become unbearable? Now he needs witnesses. He knows there are five or six boys in his gym class who don't harass him, who remain quiet, the ones who're shy in class or are new and don't know anybody. When the trouble starts, they look away, hoping no one notices them. Would they come forward and tell what they saw? Matthew doubts it.

The principal clears his throat and says he has parents to meet with and tells Matthew to go back to class.

So Matthew changes in the boys' washroom but they're not clean and he doesn't feel secure there—it's the one place in school a teacher seldom goes and he worries what will happen if his harassers follow him in there. So he speaks to the guidance counselor and she lets him change in her office. Now he's either late for gym or late getting to the class after gym because he has to walk from the other side of the school over to the gym. Again he's the unique one, singled out as different, made to feel less than everyone else. Nobody else has to get changed somewhere else. He feels so down about gym that he no longer bothers to participate in class. Soon he stops getting changed at all and the gym teacher starts deducting marks. Matthew knows he'll fail the course.

He thinks, "Whatever!"

Quick-change Artist

He stops wearing baggy pants and untied shoes and trying to fool them into thinking

he's tough. No one believed it anyway.

A Show of Support

Some girls in his grade come up to him at his locker and tell him they heard what's happening to him.

"They're so stupid," one says to him.

"It's so wrong what they're doing," another one says. "You should do something."

"My family knows their families," still another one says, "and I know their mothers. She should be slapping them so's their children's children are born with bruises."

"Just change in our locker room," the first one says. "It's not like you're going to look and we won't care." They laugh.

"You're just going to get changed."

"You should stand up for yourself."

They continue talking, it's loud and excited and Matthew is both exhilarated by their energy and worn out trying to make out what they're saying as they talk on top of each other. Matthew knows they're making the effort to be nice to him, to be his friends even, but he also knows that like most people, words are as far as they can go without actually doing something about it.

Exploring Diversity

It's Black History Month. Teachers make them read articles about black heroes and they watch videos and write essays about major events in civil rights. It's the first and only time Matthew's heard teachers at that school talk about diversity. As he works on his essay about Harriet Tubman and the underground railroad to Canada, a wadded-up piece of paper hits the back of his head. He turns around and sees them staring at him menacingly. One asks, "What are you?" Matthew would never tell them he's Mohawk, it would just be another thing for them to mock him for. He turns back to his work. "Just some whitey, huh?" he hears one of them say, and they all laugh.

A Crush of Convenience

A girl from math walks with him to his next class and tells him her name's Jessica.

Before long she's calling him at home and they quickly fall into the habit of spending hours on the phone talking about everything. Music. Movies. School. The usual. She tells Matthew about her messed-up family and how she's tried to commit suicide. There are many long nights when Matthew listens to her unhappiness. Eventually he tells her about "the court case" and how "he" pleaded guilty and was sentenced to seven years. She tells Matthew she wants to go out with him as boyfriend and girlfriend even though she knows he's gay.

"You're a great person," she tells him. "I love who you are."

He asks her about sex.

"Sex doesn't matter to me," she tells him. "You've done so much to help me out. I just want to be with you. I don't want sex."

"You'll find someone else," he tells her. "We can still be friends. You'll find a boyfriend. If you can ask me, you can ask anyone."

She seems to understand, but the next day at school he hears she's telling everybody they're dating. People come up to him and ask him if he's <u>really</u> gay, angry he could be lying.

Matthew stops talking to her.

Like Father, Like Son

When I left the police interrogation room, I saw my mother waiting for me. She pulled me closer to her than I can ever remember her doing before. Through tears she kept saying over and over that everything would be all right.

On the ride home she told me she was proud of me and no matter who I was or what I did in my life, she'd still care for me and would always love me. There was no use lying—it was all coming out anyway: the pictures on the computer, telling the police how I chatted with men on the Internet, how I even met a man, what he did to me.

As we're driving home, I could see her tears and for days after her eyes were red from crying. I felt a bridge had been built between us then. I knew I could trust my mom with whatever was going on in my life. I wondered why I didn't know that before. Why was I so scared to tell her? The reasons no longer seemed important.

That night she phoned my father in Canada and told him what had happened. She

was on the phone for a long time, and from my room I could hear what she was saying. That night she used "he" for the first time.

My father wanted me to come back to Montreal right away. I heard her tell him that I'm gay—she called me to the phone and my father asked me for himself. For the first time I said, "Yes."

My father said it was all right, but it wasn't going to be easy. He told me there was a lot of stuff I'd have to go through and have to live through. He said he guessed I already found that out.

I passed the phone back to my mother and went back to my room, but I could still hear enough to know that they decided that once the preliminary hearing was over, I'd be coming back to Montreal.

Later my mother came to my room to check on me and she asked why it was so difficult to tell her I was gay when my father was gay too. I didn't really know how to answer that. My father being gay seemed so normal to me growing up—having my mom and her boyfriend and my father and his boyfriend—it didn't seem at all like what I was going through. I knew the story: my father tried to be straight, tried various relationships with women, tried to be married, even tried having a child as a way to break his homosexual feelings. I'm that child. It all seemed so long ago, a story about someone else. It wasn't my story.

My parents never mention what happened to me. You know, what "he" did. If anyone does talk about it, they just refers to it as "the court case."

An Ally

In English class he writes an essay about his life and how difficult it is dealing with the harassment. He writes how powerless he feels, unwanted and unsafe, and how he now knows nothing he does or could do will change his situation. His English teacher, Ms. Porter, keeps him after class and asks if he's okay—she's worried he's suicidal. She's young, late twenties, and Matthew sees her as open-minded and cool, so he tells her what's going on. She tells Matthew she has a gay friend and they go shopping together in the gay village. He lives in the apartment on her floor at the end of the hallway, and she tells Matthew his story: how his boyfriend died from AIDS, how he's alone now, how he

doesn't want to find anyone else. As Ms. Porter speaks, Matthew sees she's really moved by the man's life and his loss.

Matthew starts going to see her at lunch and recess and after school. He can tell her things that he can't necessarily trust with his friends or even his family. He knows she won't go and tell other people.

Ms. Porter tells him she'll speak to the principal about stopping the harassment. She says she'll make sure the principal does something this time.

Project 10[4]

As Matthew leaves the guidance counselor's office after changing from gym, having decided this would be the last time, she stops him and tells him about Project 10. She's looked into it and she found they give information sessions in schools on homophobia and she tells him it might be helpful if she invites them to one of his classes. She says she'll speak to his MRE teacher about it. For the first time in a long time, Matthew allows himself to feel hope.

You Can Go Back

On weekends at his grandmother's he explores the reserve, going to the places he remembers playing when he was younger. The old fort. The church with Kateri Tekakwitha's tomb. The seaway bridge. The tunnel. It's too cold now, but he remembers swimming in the quarry with his friends, his mother sitting nearby watching his every move, worrying he'd disappear in the dark water.

Odd Man Out...Again

My father brought me to be tested for STDs. The police back in the States told me I should be tested—it's what they routinely say in cases like mine. When I told the doctor why I was there, she referred me to a social worker who told me about a support group

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[4] Project 10 is an organization supporting LGBT youth offering services such as one-on-one counseling, information on health and sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity, homophobia, and activities such as support groups, social outings, and a summer camp.

where they would understand what I went through. It was weird—I was the only boy there.

I didn't go back.

Everyday Heroes

They're throwing papers at him again and calling him "batty man" and "sodomite" and "faggot." The math teacher is God-knows-where having left the room after handing out the worksheet for the day. Matthew struggles with a page of binominals. More paper balls. More insults. Then a voice in the back of the class booms: "Hey! Shut the fuck up!"

Everybody looks over their shoulders at Delano—he sits in the back corner, away from them, and seldom talks. They see in his eyes he's serious—they know he's not someone to mess with. Quickly they turn around and go back to their work. The girls smile at Matthew in support.

At lunch he sees Delano walking towards the cafeteria. He's alone and there's no one else in the hallway.

"Why did you do that?" Matthew asks as the boy walks past him.

"I don't care if you're gay or not," Delano says, "but they should leave you alone. It's just when your family's from the Caribbean you can't be a gay no how. Nobody likes the gays back in the islands. If you think it's tough here, you should see what they'd do to you over there."

Matthew thanks him.

"Just don't start liking me or anything," Delano says.

Down the hallway they see students walking towards them, their lunch over, making their way outside for a smoke. Delano says, "Later," and walks away—he doesn't want anybody to see him talking to Matthew. Matthew understands. He knows if they're seen together and people make a big deal about it, then Delano would never stick up for him again. If they see them together they'd probably think he's gay, too, just because he's talking to Matthew.

It's in the Mail

Matthew's dying to know. He waits behind as the other students swarm out of

English class. Ms. Porter tells him the principal asked her to write him a letter about Matthew and the harassment, which she did. She tells him she left it on his desk a week ago, but she still hasn't heard from him. "Don't lose hope," she tells him. "He's probably busy."

Matthew doesn't ask her about it again.

New Kid on the Block

A new student starts in school and his locker is next to Matthew's. Matthew can tell he has no friends: he sees him walk to class alone; he never talks to anyone; he eats lunch alone, too. He's a bit of a nerd, but Matthew says "Hi" to him. The boy says his name's Jamie and he looks relieved that finally someone's talking to him. Matthew shows the new kid around school. They laugh together and tell each other stories about their old schools and how much they both miss them.

When they come to rough Matthew up again, to knock him into the wall, to take his schoolbag and empty its contents on the floor, they start pushing Jamie around as well. He stops hanging around Matthew. When he sees Matthew he says "Hi" but keeps on walking. Soon even the "Hi's" stop. Jamie makes new friends and Matthew sees them laughing as they tell each other stories.

Matthew doesn't blame him—he's doing what he has to do. He's just protecting himself.

A Beautiful Day

I went by myself to get the results of my HIV test. My father wanted to go with me, but I felt it was something I had to do on my own. The doctor took me right in to his office as soon as I got there, which made me worry. I didn't know if that was any better than if I had been made to sit in the waiting room for a long time. Right away he got to the point—I was negative.

I walked most of the way home—I didn't want to take a bus or the métro or anything. It was a beautiful day, even though it was a bit cold but it was sunny and that was good enough for me. I couldn't help smiling all day, I was so thankful.

When I got home my father was waiting at the door and when I told him he hugged

me. I think he even cried a bit. I didn't have the heart to tell him the doctor had suggested I come back for another test in a few months "just to be sure."

The Ripple Effect

Matthew can't concentrate on what he's supposed to be doing—two people behind him are talking. He tries to hear what they're saying, if it's about him. He wonders if they're someone else he has to worry about. School is a minefield of subtext and innuendo and clues he has to read to know who he has to watch out for, where they'll be, and the areas and people he has to avoid.

He no longer passes his work in, he knows he's failing, he's nervous all the time.

His history teacher keeps Matthew after class and tells him he'll have to work harder if he wants to pass the year. "Remember," he warns, "decisions you make now will affect you for the rest of your life."

Just Another Day

The school has a carnival day. There's a choice: you can go to the gym and learn acrobatics and weight training and other activities—they seem fun to Matthew and they're things he'd like to try—or you can just stay in class and do normal school work.

He hears them talking about going, all excited to show how good they can be, challenging each other to competitions to find who's the best. Betting whose ass will be kicked.

Matthew chooses to stay in class.

An Intervention

Project 10 comes to Matthew's MRE class. It's the first time he hears the words "sexual orientation" mentioned in that class. In any class. There's a man in his thirties with dark hair and glasses who stands at the board and asks everybody to tell him the names they've heard people call gays and lesbians. They start yelling those names all at once, laughing while doing it. They yell them at the man, but Matthew knows who they are really yelling at. The man tries to quiet them down but they just laugh and yell more.

Matthew doesn't feel comfortable. They know what's going on, they give him looks,

they blame him for having to sit through this. Even schoolwork is better than hearing about fags. The teacher sits beside him no doubt thinking that will protect him. He asks her if he can leave but she tells him to stay for a bit and see how things go. The man from Project 10 tells them about Joe Rose and why he was killed. They argue with him saying being gay is a sin and all "batty men" go to Hell. Some girls and a few boys start arguing back, but when they're called names, too, they stop. They return to calling Matthew and the man from Project "sodomites" and ask if they've fucked each other yet. It's almost a chant. The teacher yells at them again and again to be quiet. Finally she turns to Matthew and tells him he can leave the class. She orders him to get out. She realizes she can no longer protect him.

Matthew hears from the MRE teacher that when the class was over the man from Project 10 asked to see the principal but was told he wasn't available to meet with him.

Small Victories

For the next week Matthew notices the harassment lessens a bit. Instead of being confronted by them ten times a day, it's only nine—instead of being physical, it's mostly verbal. Sometimes they rough him up but they no longer outright attack him. They still say something every time they pass him in the halls, but his locker hasn't been damaged in a week.

Crocodile Tears

One of them walks towards Matthew as he waits in line to get on the bus home, and he braces himself to be hit or even worse, although he can no longer imagine what "worse" can be. This one has hit him before; he's called Matthew all those names; he's pushed Matthew into walls and lockers and down stairs every chance he got. Matthew prepares to run.

The boy looms over him and just when the inevitable seems about to happen, he says he's sorry. Matthew wonders if this is a trick.

"I was a jerk," the boy says.

Matthew says nothing.

"Did you hear me?" he says to Matthew. "I'm saying I'm sorry."

Matthew pushes past him and gets on the bus.

He finds out later that the boy no longer hangs around with them—some falling out or another. Matthew sees him alone at his locker now, not far down the hallway from his. Matthew thinks maybe he should have said something back, but then it's not like they'll ever be friends, so what difference does it make?

A week later the boy's friends with them again. Matthew sees them standing at the boy's locker before the first bell. They laugh. They grab hold of their prodigal friend and push him down the hall towards Matthew telling him to "kiss his girlfriend." "Kiss the faggot." He playfully fights them off but he's serious enough when he calls Matthew "batty man" and "fag" and "sodomite." He fits back in with them again. Matthew thinks that at least when you're fitting in you don't get picked on the same way.

O:nen[5]

His grandmother teaches Matthew some words in Mohawk. When he was growing up, he never learned any. He remembers asking his mother, but she knew very few words and didn't seem to want to know more. His grandmother explains to him that when his mother was growing up, there was a ban on learning their native language. At school they'd be punished if they spoke it—punished for who they were. His mother won't talk about that time. "Memories like that wound the spirit," his grandmother says.

He realizes he knows so little about himself as native, but learning some Mohawk words is a start.

He now says "O:nen" whenever he leaves family or friends.

An Island Never Cries

Another girl starts hanging out with him. She just comes up to Matthew after class one day and asks him questions about being gay. At first the questions are about sex—he's wary of what she's getting at, then thinks it's funny to humour her. She listens attentively when he tells her that the feelings behind being gay and in love are just like the feelings she'd have for a guy.

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[5] Pronounced "oh-neh," meaning goodbye in Mohawk.

One day Matthew asks her if she'd go to the gay village with him, he's never been. As they walk past the cafés and clothing stores and bars, he watches the people—men strolling along the sidewalk looking over their shoulder with a smile at another man walking by, same-sex couples hand-in-hand, a group of women laughing with each other as they go into a restaurant—and he feels exhilarated. He tells her he thinks the world would be better if gay people could stay in the village by themselves. "Both sides would probably be happier that way," he says.

"It'd kind of be like if society set up a curtain with gays on one side and straight people on the other. Personally I'd be a lot happier if I could spend my whole life only interacting with gay people who understand and have the same views as me, only going to a gay supermarket or buying clothes at a gay store. It would be so much better than what you have to live with every day with straight people. You wouldn't have to fear society's views and how people think."

She tells him he's being close-minded and that not all straight people are against gays.

He tells her he wishes there was a school for gays only. He imagines it being a bright, vibrant place, full of creativity, where he'd be able to make gay friends his own age. He's heard on the news about the "Alternative Grad" in Toronto for gay high school students and how they can bring their same-sex dates. He tells her he's jealous. His graduation is next year. "If Montreal had one, I'd go for sure," he says. He sees his parents being able to be proud of him and wanting to be there to support him. They could be with other parents that have gay children and they could meet and talk and be proud together. He doesn't want to think how awful graduation at his school will be.

"Gays have been around for how long?" his voice rises. "Centuries? Millenniums? In the past there's been trouble and problems between Blacks and Whites and Asians, and yet today everybody's able to mix and be okay with each other. With gays and straights it's a constant problem that isn't getting any better. If it hasn't changed and it isn't changing, then maybe it's better to lock in the other way and separate."

She disagrees and tries to tell Matthew her reasons why. He cuts her off. Their voices get louder, each not giving ground on their point of view, each thinking the other wrong. Each of them thinks the other is ignorant for thinking the way they do.

That's the last time they talk. Now he doesn't remember her name.

And Then...

Finally the school year ends.

My Gay Summer

Now that school's over, Matthew decides to go to one of the Project 10 discussion groups. They meet each Saturday afternoon to tell each other what's going on in their lives and what they've done for the past week. At first, he sits and listens as other sixteen-year-olds tell of how they came out, problems with parents and friends, and rocky romances. Then Matthew begins to speak and bit-by-bit he tells them about what's happened to him in his life: how he knew he was gay, how his mother found out, even "the court case." He finds he doesn't have to explain that much—they understand. They've been through what he has. They know.

After group, they hang out together for the rest of the afternoon in cafés or go to see a movie together.

All summer Matthew hangs out with his friends from Project 10. He goes to the pride parade and rides on the Project 10 float. He has a great time and he can't believe how many people are there—the streets are filled with a million people, all types of people. He tells everyone he's there to finally celebrate who he is and to have the chance to express his pride. Later that night he goes out clubbing with his friends and that's where he meets his boyfriend. His name's Nathan and he's twenty-three.

Another Beginning

He changes schools. His father says he's given up, but Matthew doesn't care. Now he goes to an alternative school where he's heard they're more accepting of gay students. The first day he notices that the teachers are always around, walking the well-lit hallways, stopping to speak with students, standing outside their classroom doors greeting them as they arrive. He walks from class to class with a smile on his face, the first time he remembers being able to do that in a long while. He's studying math, English, French, and physical science, and history, the subject he failed last year. He

vows not to get side-tracked this year, no matter what happens. He keeps telling himself as incentive, it's just this year and then he graduates. This summer he's seen there's a larger world outside of school—it won't be long before he can be out in it for good.

There are about eighty students in the school. He's already spoken with some students in his class and discovered them to be open-minded. They talk about their summers and Matthew tells them that this past summer has been the best in his life. He doesn't tell them details—he thinks about coming out to them, but before he makes up his mind, another new student shows up. It's a student from Matthew's old school.

It doesn't take long before everybody finds out about Matthew. To help counteract this, Matthew comes out to people he's spoken with, people he feels he can trust. Without exception they're cool with it—they become his friends—while those who find out from word of mouth don't seem to like the idea of his being gay much.

The harassment begins again.

Three boys stand near the lockers and when they see Matthew walk by they say those all-too-familiar words. He ignores them because he doesn't want to start a conflict with them all over again. But soon it's too much. It's as though nothing has changed. It's as though the wonderful summer he's had—his "gay summer," as he likes to call it—never happened.

With a long sigh, Matthew goes to the principal of his new school and tells him what's happening. The man listens to Matthew and when Matthew's finished reciting his story, he asks him how he wants it handled. "Would you prefer me talking to them first or do you want to have a sit-down with them where we can try to work this out?" The principal goes on to speak of zero tolerance and repercussions. "Harassment and intimidation won't happen in this school," he says. They're wonderful words, but Matthew doesn't allow himself to fall under their spell. Not this time.

The next day Matthew hears nothing from the principal. He knows he wasn't going to allow himself, but he finds himself still holding out hope, however faint, that this time it could be different. He gathers up his books and jams them into his schoolbag. As he walks out of the class, his English teacher stops him with an "Oh!" and hands him a note. He's to see the principal.

The principal tells Matthew he spoke to the three boys and two of the boys

apologized and promised not to bother him again. "I'll be monitoring them," he says. The third boy, the one from his old school, refuses to stop. When Matthew asks, "Why?" the principal says it's better he doesn't tell him the reasons. "Let's just say he has very strong opinions. They're not right, mind you, but I don't think he'll change them any time soon." The principal says he had no choice but to suspend the boy. "I won't put up with intolerance of any kind," he tells Matthew.

If there's one thing that Matthew's learned is that actions speak louder than words, but it only takes a couple of days before Matthew notices the two boys are avoiding him, which works out fine because Matthew avoids them as well. But when the third boy returns to school after his three-day suspension, nothing has changed. Matthew takes it for a while until the principal seeks him out and asks if things are better now.

The third boy is expelled from the school.

The Essay

Slowly Matthew starts enjoying himself. Students are talking to him and soon he finds himself hanging out with them at lunch and recess. He tells some of his teachers he's gay. His French teacher tells him that they've had gay students in the past and they had the same issues. "We know how to deal with it," she tells him and winks.

In English class he writes an essay about himself and his old school and he's surprised when the teacher doesn't make a big deal about it—she just corrects it for grammar. It makes Matthew think there isn't an issue or anything big or spectacular about his being gay. It's just...normal. For the first time he writes that he's Mohawk. He writes how everything in his past has made him a stronger person and how he's proud of the person he is.

For the first time he feels that he has security at school and nothing's going to happen to him. Some times, though, he still feels that fear, but he does what he can to push it away. He wonders if it will ever go away for good.

Love's Bumpy Road

Matthew tells his school friends about an argument he had with Nathan. Matthew and his boyfriend haven't spoken for three days and he feels the need to talk to someone

about it. His friends are sympathetic—they listen and give him advice and tell him stories about fights with their boyfriends and girlfriends. When Nathan calls Matthew and they start talking again and work things out, Matthew tells his friends and they're happy for him. One says, "We knew it'd work out for you two. You're meant to be together."

Matthew never thought as long as he lived he'd hear someone at school say that to him.

C'est Montréal

I was walking hand-in-hand with Nathan downtown along St. Catherine Street last week. We always walk holding hands. I guess people notice but if they do, we don't hear a word about it. Only this time we had a problem—on the métro going home Nathan went to get off at his stop and he gave me a good-bye hug and kiss. A guy in his thirties in the next section over started yelling at us, "Yeah. Go on. Kiss your faggot boyfriend good night." We just ignored him. There were five other people in the same train, and they just ignored him, too. As Nathan was leaving, he told me to watch out. He said the guy could have a knife or something. He asked me if I wanted him to stay with me, but I said I'd be all right.

I could see him standing on the platform as the métro pulled out with this worried expression on his face. He told me on the phone later he regretted not staying with me until my stop.

I stood up when the métro pulled into my stop and the man started up again saying, "Get off the train, you little fag." I just turned to him and said, "Shut the fuck up" and got off the train and walked towards the exit holding my head high.

It was great. I was only a tiny bit afraid.

Dreams Come True

The year ends and then there's graduation. His mother comes up from the States and meets Nathan for the first time—she takes to him like he's a second son. She invites them to visit her next month in Florida and she hands them tickets as a graduation gift. And, yes, Matthew's parents beam with pride, just like he thought they would.

At the graduation dinner-dance, Matthew takes Nathan as his date. He introduces

him to his teachers as his boyfriend and they shake hands with him and smile and say, "It's a pleasure to meet you" and "We've heard a lot about you." The couple sits at a table with Matthew's school friends, some of whom have already met Nathan before from when he's come to pick Matthew up after school.

Matthew wears the ribbon shirt his grandmother made special for him for that occasion. He's never had one before. His teachers and friends ask him about it and he repeats the story of its meaning that his grandmother told him. They ask to touch it.

He's excited beyond belief. He had such anticipation for the evening—and now it's here. It flows over and around him with such intensity he finds it impossible to focus on any one thing—it's all too wonderful. He can't stop smiling. He takes lots of photographs so he'll always have memories of that evening.

Matthew and Nathan hold hands while eating dinner, and, later, when the music starts, they dance. When Matthew finally has a moment to catch his breath and look around, really look around, he sees that nobody seems to mind. He can't get over how normal it is that he'd be sharing his life with his boyfriend, his family, and his friends and teachers. Just like everyone else. Such a simple thing. It's exactly how he wished it had been like all along.

It's a Small Gay World (and Other Open Wounds)

Last weekend Nathan and I went to a movie and I saw this kid there that used to go to my old school. He was with another boy and they were being way more affectionate to each other than straight friends would be—lots of PDAs[6]. I had no idea he was gay. After the movie I saw him again and I went up to him to talk to him. When he saw me he was all smiles and he asked me how I've been. I said, "How have you been?" and I looked right at the hot boy he was with so he knew what I meant. He just smiled and shrugged and blushed a lot.

I asked him, "How come you never came out at school? I thought I was all by myself. It could have helped me out a lot just to talk to somebody." I think it came out more angry than I wanted—Nathan told me after that my voice was pretty loud. But at

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[6] Public Displays of Affection

school everybody had their cliques—that's what high school is. The black kids hung out together and the Hispanics, the Chinese, the Asians, whatever, they all hung out together and I always thought they must feel safe. That at least they had someone like them to watch out for them, while I was always stuck on the sideline by myself.

He didn't say much—I guess he didn't know what to say. He looked nervous and he shrugged again and then he said, "Well, you know how the school was. I didn't want people to know I'm gay. I didn't want to make the mistake you did. I saw what they did to you and I didn't want that happening to me."

It pissed me off even more to hear him say my coming out at school was a mistake. I mean, I've asked myself that so many times, too. By coming out I no longer had this huge secret, this huge pressure within myself. That was a big plus. But when he said that it made me think that in a way it was a mistake for me to have come out what with all the harassment and everything. My life everyday at that school was Hell. I know it was my decision to make and if I could go back, I still think I'd make the same one again—I'd still come out. It's been a hard path for me, but I know it's helped me grow up in the end.

But as I stood there and watched him and his boyfriend walk away, it all came back to me in this intense flash. It didn't matter that time had passed or things had changed—the person I had become meant nothing.

In an instant I was at that school again, alone, and more afraid than ever.

Advice to Administrators
Pages from Joe Rose's Notebook

1. If a gay student comes to you with a problem, do something right away. Listen to your gay students and accept them. Ask the student who's being harassed how it should be handled. Then do it. Don't put the gay student on the spot with the harassing student. Talk with the harassing student and make sure they don't do it again. If it does happen again, suspend him and tell his parents what's going on and why. Make sure the parents get involved to make it stop. Educate them.

2. Reinforce zero tolerance for discrimination. If there's zero tolerance, it means that nothing flies--not one comment--and it applies to everyone.

3. Defend your gay students and don't be ashamed of them. There are gay students in your school--it's a fact, live with it. Be proud of it. Be proud that your school has a safe and accepting environment where a student can be out.

4. If there's a problem in a specific class, talk to the teacher and have them talk to the students about it. Students see teachers every day so it's better coming from a teacher.

5. Educate students earlier. Promote awareness. Expose them to sexual orientation through articles and books. Have more courses about

human sexuality. Teach students it's a part of life and a normal way of living.

concentrate. I was worrying about the people who were talking. I didn't even do homework. I was just lying around pretty much and listening to my CDs. I'd have been an even worse basket case without Jewel and Sheryl Crowe. I didn't bother with anything anymore. I pretty much had given up. The few teachers who said anything figured it was just a phase I was going through. They thought I was just trying to be like my friends who were all going through that depressive phase.

Coming out was like walking out and seeing a light. I kept saying to myself, "Oh my God I'm not so cramped" from keeping everything in all the time. Now I can talk to somebody about it. It's freedom for sure. It just comes off your shoulders. It's better now cause people know and you don't have to hide it and you don't have to worry about people finding out and that whole stupidity of it. People know, so who cares now?

Well I'm no different a person now than I was before I came out. Everyone accepts me. My friends. Nanny and Poppa. Mom. You. No one cares. Well Poppa doesn't want to know about it. He's just like, "I don't care." But Nanny is more like, "Oh, really?" And she asks me questions sometimes cause she's never really known a gay person before. She's like, "What's it like?" "Is it hard on you?" "If you need to talk about it, you can talk to me." You know how she's really open about things like that.

I don't understand why he can't accept me. I thought because he's my father and because I'm his son he should at least understand and try to cope with it. Maybe even change his opinion a little on it. Everyone else I've told has been great. You remember what it was like before I came out? I was always trying to hide it? I would like dress in big baggy clothes and, you know, try to be more macho. I even went out with Ana so no one would suspect anything. Oh God! That was really trying too hard. That didn't last very long. You must have been laughing at me. Finally I

decided to hell with that! Everyone was telling me, "It's who you are. Just be yourself and that's it." Even Mom said, "You're trying too hard to fit in. Just be yourself. Screw what other people say!" I wish I had realized that before.

My friends have been great to me. Nothing has changed. Like Ana, she's so happy for me. I told her in English class because I was like, "OK. To hell with it. I'm going to tell you cause I'm going to tell somebody and I know I can trust you because you trusted me with everything." And I knew that she wouldn't feel weird around me and that it wouldn't change anything and she'd be happy for sure and so I knew right away that "OK. I'll tell Ana," because she'd just take it like it's a grain of salt. We wrote a letter to each other and she read it and she ripped it up because she respected it and she didn't want anybody to find it because then it would be her fault if they knew. She just kind of gave me a hug and she was like, "I love you."

Everyone else is OK with it, so why can't he be happy too?

But I should have known how he'd take it cause of the way he is. He's so predictable. He's so racist. You know what he's like. He's very, "white is right" kind of thing. How many times have we heard him say you bring women home, you don't bring men home? He's always discriminating everything. I knew he wouldn't accept it. I don't know why I told him now.

Yesterday I was talking to my French teacher about how things are changing in schools and everything. I guess all the teachers have heard about me. And she said, "It's good to see diversity in the school. It's good to see that students are more aware because of brave people like you." I was like, "Wow! That's cool. It's true. It is a good thing." None of the teachers look at me different. They're all adults about it. A lot of other people in my grade

I mean, come on! You were there when he started in on me. We were just sitting there watching Six Feet Under at the part when the gay character was telling his brother, and he has to go and ask Mom and you, "Would you still respect Chris if he was gay?" I still can't believe he said that.

That's when I just broke up with my summer fling and I figured I couldn't keep something like that from my own family. I thought he should know so I was like, "You know that I'm gay." You weren't there much after that, but he wouldn't talk to me for the next 3 days.

I don't know, I guess I just kind of felt that he must know anyway. And especially with things that have happened in the past, too. He should know. Well go figure. I never had a girlfriend. So come on, give me a break.

You weren't there when he was like, "Get out," and he told me he'd probably do something to hurt me. I think you were at your friend's that day or at that summer day camp you went to. Mom said she'd always care and she'd always love me, but she told me, "Go. You managed to get away from him. Go to your grandparents house and be happy." You know how he always treats me. So I was like, "OK. I'm going now." So I packed my bags and left. That's why I wasn't there when you got home.

My CDs really helped me, you know? It was the same when I first came out. Music gives me the strength to push on and stuff. If I didn't have that I don't know where I'd be. When he first kicked me out of the house I kept playing this Jewel song over and over again.

Sometimes I want to rip out you throat, Daddy
For all those things you said that were mean,
Gonna make you just as vulnerable as I was, Daddy

What's that say about me? [1]

Not that it really matters. You know I've never gotten close to
him. Even when I was small, I was never close to him. Not like
you. I've always had a closer bond with Mom. And with you too, of
course. If I wasn't with her I'd be taking care of you, bringing
you for walks and to the playground and stuff. We used to always
be together. I don't want to lose that.

Just to let you know, I'm not working at the after-school
programme anymore. I only lasted 3 weeks there. I got into a
fight with the boss, so I just figured enough is enough. It was
stressful too. The boss was always giving me a hard time, so
forget it. It's OK because I found a job at a restaurant on the
weekends.

Are you getting involved in anything after school? I'm working on
the newspaper. Too bad there's no play this year but I heard
there's supposed to be a talent show. Remember last year when I
was Kenicky? In Grease? We actually put a lot of effort into it.
If there is a show this year I want to get involved with it. I
know you like sports a lot so I guess you've looked into that.
But maybe you can do something in the variety show with me.

Write back and tell me how things are going. Mom calls me once a
week or so, I guess when he's not there. She doesn't really have
much to say though. You can call me too if you want.

Love,
Chris ☺

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[1] Kilcher, Jewel. (1997). Daddy. On Pieces of you [CD]. Atlantic Records.

change. I'm not changing for work. So to hell with that.

I know I'm pretty feminine at times and I guess some of the kids didn't really understand that. It was weird. I don't know how to really explain it. I don't know how their parents found out or how it all came out. You know how kids over-exaggerate everything. But I guess the boss knew what the parents meant. She was like, "Is there some way you can change? Just don't be energetic. Don't be so like 'Ahhh!' you know." I don't really notice it, I guess. Just people notice I'm more like flamboyant and you can tell whereas with some people you really can't. I guess that just upset the parents. It's not like I brought up being gay and boyfriends and everything with the kids.

I even spoke to one of my co-workers but she said, "Let it go" because they complained about her doing stuff too that wasn't even true and she almost quit. So I said, "To hell with it" and I quit and I got another job. I just couldn't take it. I don't need that stress. I was pretty upset at the time because it just showed me how people can be so intolerant, but I guess it's how they feel. I guess they wanted to protect their child or whatever they wanted to do. I went to my boss and told her I was leaving and she had no objections actually. She didn't like me very much.

But don't tell mom about this. You know how she'll get all worried. I'm telling you because I want you to know you're a part of my life and that's not going to change no matter what. OK? I hope you'll always believe that.

Love, Chris ☺

P.S. See you tomorrow.

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worrying. It wasn't anything big. At the beginning of the year
they used to scream comments like "Faggot" and stuff like that.
I'd be sitting in class and they'd just be feeling like looking
cool in front of their friends so they'd do it. But I can handle
it. Like if I'm talking with some of my friends and we hear it
I'm like, "Meh. Anyway. Like we were saying?" My math teacher
does nothing about it. Well, sometimes he screams really loud,
"Shut the hell up!" Miss McIntyre is one of the few teachers that
does anything. She actually tells people to lay off the comments
and not to be so homophobic. She made me laugh the other day when
she told them all, "Calm down. It's not like he's going to do
anything." That shut them up for the rest of the day. I can tell
she thinks they're idiots too. But it's getting better. They
don't do it as much as they did at the start of the year because
I think spending 2 months with these people in a class they've
realized I'm not as bad as they thought.

They think calling me names can hurt me but I won't show it.
"Queer" has been used as an insult to me for so long. Like people
have always called me "the queer" or "faggot." Even dad when he
didn't know about me would always call me that. I hate that word.
I don't like hearing it, but you know, queer is OK. I can cope
with it. But faggot, no. I never want to hear that word again as
long as I live cause I heard it so much.

It's not like that all the time like in every class. Well, I get
it a lot in gym class too. You know how much I hate gym. It's
either sports I don't like or other people just don't want to
play sports with me. So I don't really try hard. Sometimes I
don't even bother doing gym. I'll just sit on the bench and talk
with friends, you know? The bigger ones, like the know-it-all
football players, look at me and just go, "OK. This is like
playing with one of the girls. He doesn't know anything about
gym. He's just a fag. Who cares?" But some guys in my class will
still be like, "Keep trying. Don't let it get to you. Ignore

you tell mom? She'll wonder if you don't come home after school.

Something weird happened today. I saw this kid in your grade or maybe grade 8 being pushed around and they were calling him, "Faggot! Faggot!" I saw this and I was like, "OK! Yo! Don't do that because it's not right. It's not fair. You can't just push somebody around and try to look big in front of your friends. Leave him alone." One of them was like, "Oh. The faggot sticks up for the faggot," but I was just like, "Go to hell. Who do you think you are you little thirteen year old?" You know? So they walked away. And the kid said, "Thank-you" to me.

Well I guess it's not weird really. Actually it made me kind of proud.

So 3:15. Be there!

Love,
Chris ☺

My hands are small, I know
But they're not yours, they are my own
But they're not yours, they are my own
And I am never broken[3]

P.S. I miss you.

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[3] Kilcher, Jewel, and Leonard, Patrick. (1998). Hands [Recorded by Jewel]. On Spirit [CD]. Atlantic Records.

If My School Asked Me Not to Be Out
Pages from Joe Rose's Notebook

If the school asked me not be out, I'd be pretty upset. To be honest, I'd tell them to "Fuck off!" I wouldn't even entertain such a comment. I'd probably yell at them.

I'd tell them it's not fair, you know, because you can't tell someone to not act like himself. I've always been this way. I'm not going to change just for them. They have no right to tell me who I can or can't be. It's not right.

I'd probably complain. I'd confirm their intentions and report them to the school board, because it's in violation of pretty much all of the school board's rules about acceptance. I'm sure all my friends would stand behind me. If the school said that, they'd all go, "What the hell's their problem? Where do they get off telling you that?" My family, too, they'd support me. I'm sure the teachers would because they know me. They'd stand behind me.

No. I'm sorry, but I would not tolerate that. If they asked me not to be out, I wouldn't want to be in the school.

"In case you haven't noticed, I'm gay. Pass the Salt."
Tristan's Story

The first time...

I wouldn't know where to begin telling you about what's been happening. It's no greeting card, that's for sure. You said I can talk about anything I want, so I'll start with school since I spend most of my day there. It's boring. It's deadly boring. I waste most of my time waiting with like baited breath for the bell to ring so I can finally, you know, leave and go home. Like I keep telling myself, "Two more weeks." I mean, not that this is new or anything—the other eleven years were just as boring. I go to school and I never really fit in and I have to listen to these immature conversations around me, and I just can't be into it. Then the curriculum is dull and repetitive and not challenging. Like the whole concept of how high school's set up is just such bull.

As far as suburban neo-conservative schools go, I'd say my school is a reasonably good one. I think I sort of found a niche with friends and whatnot. It has your standard contingency of assholes and jocks, but, you know, every place does and I think the assholes-to-decent-person ratio is pretty reasonable. It doesn't have any gangs and it doesn't have many drugs—at least I've never been offered any. I saw on the news that at my old school they had this whole big thing with a drug raid, which was sort of fun because I got to see everyone who was mean to me being taken out in handcuffs crying. It was so perfect. It was like a Kodak moment.

I guess I was always more mature than my peers, even in kindergarten through grade six. I always looked at people sort of oddly when they would do things that, I guess in retrospect, were normal for someone that age. Like laughing at the word "poop" or—oh, oh, oh!—giggling like schoolgirls through sex education. I remember in elementary school we had two sciences: science *naturelle* and science *humaine*. And science *naturelle* was like a French introduction to physics in grade four. We learned about pushing and pulling, except it was like *tirer* et *pousser*, and, you know, people would giggle at *pousser* because it sounds like "pussy" in English. I was totally horrified by that so I told off the entire class, "This is physics. Snap out of it." I think it was just a maturity gap.

Things aren't much different now.

Like in French this year they just randomly put me in the class with, you know, the assholes and the people who throw snowballs in class and do tiresome stuff like that. I know people in the other French class and it's like a hot bed of intellectual activity. I always lean back in my chair and look out the classroom door and see the other group and they're all focused and taking notes and I'm like, "Sigh," while I'm being hit in the back of the head with a snowball. Actually that was a big problem at the start of the year—basically I was persecuted for being randomly assigned to the asshole group and ending up with a bunch of pretty immature people. But I didn't really care as much as they probably would've liked me to care, trying as hard as they did to make my life unpleasant. But I have to admit it was stressful and tiring and I'd often say to myself, "I just don't how I'm going to do this."

I started adapting various coping mechanisms, but, I mean, Gandhi was a great guy and all, but the only real way to quell pre-adolescent behaviour in, you know, late adolescents is sort of "an eye for an eye." Like once they threw their dictionary at the back of my head, right? At first I was sort of shocked and asked myself, "Is this actually happening? Did someone just throw a book at me? Aren't we like sixteen-year-olds?" And, so, the first time I actually gave it back. And then the second time, no. I turfed it out the window and they were like, "Hey," and I was like, "Well, I'm sorry, but what exactly did you expect?" Then they threw a more expensive book that they needed for the course at me, which I tore in half and threw out the window again. That actually worked. They didn't throw books at me anymore.

Yeah, I know it might be borderline maladaptive, but basically that's what you have to do to get through the day. That and reassuring myself how much better I am and that it doesn't matter. I shouldn't even be in that class—I take all the advanced math and physics and chemistry and bio courses. My marks are in the first quintile—my average is like eighty-eight-ish. I know there's always a few little bastards that run around saying, "My average is ninety-four point six," but, I mean, I'd much rather be me because I actually have some personality to speak of rather than, you know, doing good in math and then going home to watch TV and eat cheezies.

Anyway, I don't really give two shits if some people don't like me. If you ask my

friends about me, they'd tell you I'm really funny, smart, charming—pretty much everything that I guess James Bond would be, but with a twist of rainbow. And the people who don't like me, they'd probably describe me as, oh, let's see, "fucking faggot" type deal. You're sort of complimented with the slander.

Oh, oh, oh, oh! Get this! Today someone called me a loser and I was like, "Well you're pretty smug for someone who takes auto. Like geez, are you going to hit me with a wrench?"

The benefit of being in grade eleven this year is I won't ever have to see these people again. I was accepted in the first round to the best English CEGEP[1] in the province in Health Science. I doubt any of them are even going to graduate. I want to pursue a career in clinical psychiatry—they just want to get laid and drink beer for a living.

My teachers pretty much think I'm what every other student should strive to become. Well my math teacher calls me lazy, but he calls everyone lazy. So I don't really take what the assholes say or do too personally. I'd say I have a reasonable self-image with maybe a little chip on my shoulder.

Sure school can be hard sometimes, but, you know, it can also be fun. It's the assholes that make school hard. But it's not the most difficult thing I've had to go through in my life. That's for sure. I can deal with it. I can find creative ways to cope with people who don't accept me and, I mean, I can pretty much solve creatively any problem that comes up. I'm not just going to sit back and take it. Not any more. I used to. Like when they threw that dictionary at me, they were all like Mr. Man-like and furrowed their brows and, you know, threw out their chests and all that macho stuff. But I didn't back down. They were like, "We'll kick your ass," and I was like, "Well bring it, bitch." And, yeah, they didn't bring it. I was like, "Whoa! Endorphin rush!"

At the very least I'll have something appropriately witty to say, and, before you say anything, I know the whole-humour-is-a-defense thing. That's what I count on.

Some of my teachers are funny, though. They don't really care that I'm gay—they don't treat me any differently. Pretty much the only difference is they refrain from saying

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[1] Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel or College of General and Vocational Education

things like, "When you meet a nice girl and settle down..." For example, my physics teacher that I really like—he's funny, about your age, and you can really engage him in conversation even if it's not about the subject at hand—one day I was talking to him about how I'm going to CEGEP next year. He said, "Well, my son went there and that's where he met the girl who's now his wife." And then he was like, "You're going to meet a gir...person there that you're going to really love." And I was like, "Aww."

It's not like every teacher knows. Actually I have this little anal-retentive list of people I've told in the back of my agenda. I think I've told twenty or so people at school, mostly friends and three teachers that I know of, plus I think some resource woman, plus a few teachers who I'm pretty sure are wise to me. I think I sort of hinted it to the chemistry teacher, who isn't really a good teacher, but he's sort of slow, so I'm not sure if he picked up on it. It was something...subtle. I think it was like an "I'm on the other bus" sort of comment. He didn't really acknowledge it. I'm not a fan of his anyway. He's basically a nice guy and all but he just lacks that skill to be a good teacher. He's not really an emotional kind of guy and he's fifty-something, so I don't want to scar him talking about boyfriends or things like that.

I like the teachers in general. They aren't as old as the teachers in many other schools, and they're more—well I judge aloofness by the probability that a teacher will like bring cookies or something to class or like invite me to their house for tea. Not that they've even done that, but, I mean, they're much more likely to do it here than at my old school. That's one of the reasons I changed schools two years ago—this one's much better than that dump.

It was funny how I told my English teacher I'm gay. I was dumped by some guy and I was upset. I actually missed two days of school because—well that's a whole other story. When I came back she was like, "What's wrong? Are you feeling better?" because she assumed I was sick or something. I was so in, you know, poor humour and I explained to her it was about a boy and I gave her like the whole background story. She was like, "Oh, yeah," and I could see her go into a corner with gears turning in the back of her head. I think she...well she caught on pretty quickly. She was completely understanding. She told me it's like mourning a loss. She was really cool about it.

Last week we were silent reading for the research project we have to do for her class,

so I went up to her desk and asked her something or other and she said something about...I don't know...something about deadlines. So I said, "Well, you know, life is entirely too important to be taken seriously. Oscar Wilde." She was like, " Oh, well, speaking of which, I'm doing a unit about Oscar Wilde with my grade nines," and I was like, "Oh! Really? That's interesting. He was a great fellow." She showed me this big biography of Oscar Wilde and it had pictures in it of him and his lover. We spoke about how his boyfriend's father had him put in jail and all that good stuff, and I commented on the boyfriend's cuteness, because he really was—I mean for the 1850's or whatever. They had these whole double portraits done—it was sort of cute—and I pointed to the boyfriend and said, "He's kind of cute," and she was like, "Ha, ha, ha. Oh Tristan, you slay me."

That was a lot better than when my economics teacher found out. I came to class one Monday after a pretty special weekend and she was like, "Well you have an awfully big smile on your face?" And I was like, "Yes I do." And she was like, "So you have a girlfriend?" And I was like, "Well it's hardly a girl." And she was like, "Oh!" Well, she's Greek Orthodox, right? So she was sort of like, "Don't talk about it. Keep it on the down low. You don't want people to find out." I asked her, "Why's that?" and she said, "I don't want you picked on any more than you already are." I told her, "I don't get picked on," and she said, "It's okay, Tristan." So I was like, "Yeah. Whatever! Talk to the hand."

I think she thinks I'm just trying to maintain my pride and I'm this doormat that's picked on when I'm not really picked on at all. Well, no more than anyone else is in that horrible, horrible place. She wasn't being very supportive. I think she should have said something like what my French teacher said when she commended my bravery instead of saying, you know, "Avoid all confrontation because confrontation is bad and standing up for what you believe in is bad."

Oh. My last year's English teacher was preaching to us about how he was unsure of the ethics of homosexuality and he made me angry so I yelled at him. He was telling this story about how he danced with a transvestite who he didn't know was a transvestite. I don't even remember how it came up in class—it wasn't as though we were doing Shakespeare or something. He was saying that after he found out that, you know, that the women or man was a transvestite, he got sort of freaked out and I guess was now spoiled

on the idea of transvestitism. People in the class went "Eww" and I rolled my eyes.

He went on to say that because of his traumatic experience he was unsure about having gays in the school because he wasn't sure of the ethics or if it would corrupt the rest of the students. So, anyway, he went on about, "I'm really Christian so I don't know how I'm going to take homosexuality and if I want homosexuals in my school?" He'd always bring up God, but until then he was persecuting other groups. This was the first time he mentioned gays.

I told him after class that he was offensive and what he said was unacceptable. I told him, "You know, it's public education for a reason. We don't have to talk about God every day and you don't have to make us read the Bible. We're not the Taliban." That didn't go over well.

I stood up for something. Yay! I stood up for, I guess, the cause. I don't remember everything I said to him, but I'm sure I was biting and cynical like only I can be.

Anyway, that Oscar Wilde book my English teacher showed me was about the only thing about gays I've ever seen in the school. I went to the library once and there was this one book that was dedicated to homosexuality but it was written in like 1975. It was sort of funny because it said things like, "Can I still jive with my friend even if he's gay?" I like leafed through it for a while but, I don't know, it wasn't really interesting to me probably because I knew it already. There are like four books in all about sexual orientation in the sexuality section of our library, which is like in a corner so the prude librarian doesn't have to talk about it.

Oh, yeah, yeah. Okay. So one day in class the French teacher was like, "Tristan I want to talk to you for a minute when the bell rings." And I was like, "Oh, oh!" And she was like, "No it's nothing bad." So I was like, "Oh. Okay." So I stuck around after class and she said, "I'm going to start a unit on homosexuality, and I just wanted to make sure that was okay with you and you won't feel uncomfortable in any way." At first I was like, "Wait a minute. Check the back of the agenda. She doesn't know!" So I asked her how she knew, but she was like, "I have my sources. Don't worry." I thought to myself, "The economics teacher!" It had to be the economics' teacher because they're like best friends, right? These teachers gossip a lot so I figured that either she talked to the French teacher about this or the French teacher mentioned to the economics teacher that she's going to

do this unit in her class and the economics teacher said to the French teacher, "Well, Tristan's gay. Maybe you should talk to him first."

Anyway I said, "No, I won't be uncomfortable. But thanks for asking," and then she said that she'd maintain control of the class if anything should happen. I didn't know what she meant by that. I was like, "Well, what's the worse that could happen?" I was thinking, what are you going to do, write my name on the blackboard? I guess I was worried she'd say, "For example, there's a gay student in this class right now and his name is Tristan and he's sitting right there," and point to me a lot. But I told her, "Okay. Sounds good." That's when she said, "Oh, I think it's great that someone your age can be so comfortable in himself regardless of others and not really hide it. You can count on me to lend you my support against anyone who'd give you a hard time, if you need it." I said, "Thanks." I thought she was very cool for A: undertaking that unit and B: for making sure that it was okay by me. I thought it was the considerate thing to do.

Nothing actually did happen. The whole class was really quite receptive to the unit. She started with this discussion about, "What do you think the causes of homophobia are?" and people said whatever. Fear. Prejudicial society.... Pretty much just fear—that was the only thing they could come up with. Then she asked the question, "If one of your best friends came up to you and said they were gay, what would your reaction be? Would you be receptive? Understanding? Negative? Uncomfortable? Happy? Angry?" Whatever. And like all the girls said they would be receptive and understanding, but pretty much a higher—a much higher proportion of the boys said they would be uncomfortable but understanding. There were only one or two people who said, "I would burn them at the stake," and, you know, they were met with much name-calling and "How dare you!" and all that indignation. I guess one person thought he would be funny by saying, "Oh, I would hate him" nah-nah-nah-nah. And everyone turned around and they totally balled him out. "How dare you hate someone just because that's the way they are?" I think he was very embarrassed. And rightly so.

This idiot—let's call him Jeremy...his name is Jeremy—started talking about how, you know, gays should be shot in the streets but lesbians are okay. I was like, "Do you think you're the only idiot with that opinion?" Other people just went, "Ahh," and rolled their eyes and stopped talking to him. The teacher was trying to be as impartial as

possible, like showing him the most respect she had to by law. She said, "Well, I don't really think that's a valid point," and some other stuff. She was really diplomatic in the way she called him an idiot. But she let me have my peace at least. I told him that, you know, he basically should be ashamed of himself for hating something that he A: doesn't know and B: has no reason to hate. First I talked about the hypocrisy of his philosophy that lesbians are okay, but gay men are evil. And then I suggested that perhaps <u>he</u> is gay since he fears them so much. I asked him, "Do you think you're prone to being gay, is that why you don't want them around? Are you worried that you're going to be attracted to them and you won't be able to restrain yourself?" He kept saying, "No! No! That's sick!"

I said, "A-ha," and I very satisfiededly shuffled my papers and turned around. Another one for Tristan!

Everyone who was, you know, in on the discussion was on my side. Mostly girls of course. Mostly my friends. None of the boys said anything though. I'm sure they think that being gay's fine, but it looks sort of incriminating if you're a boy and you're campaigning for gay rights.

After class a whole bunch of people were like, "Good job Tristan," you know, complimenting me for trying to defend my people from some guy who found his way into enriched English.

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What else do you want me to say? Isn't that enough for today?

A week later...

I know I'm supposed to talk about my family and tell you all the dysfunctional details, but if it's all right with you, I'm really not in the mood. Since last time I told you about my teachers, I might as well tell you about my friends—or I can waste your time talking about the weather, if you want.

Yeah, it's the last week of school and everyone has grad fever. My flock of friends are trying to figure out who's going into the limo. "Let's get Tristan, he'll be fun." I think it's a symptom of being gay—they think gays are more festive. They like the fact that they can, I guess, if need be, change in front of me without much hooting and hollering.

It's every girl's dream to have a gay friend, so they kind of love you no matter what your personality is, so I have like this flock of girls by default to outweigh any enemies. Anyway, I'd rather have it this way than the straight way. You know, people who buy their wardrobe at Canadian Tire, with the chains, and then who like play hockey with their jock straps and, you know, testosterone and all that jazz.

I'm not even sure what the attraction is, but I guess gays tend to be funny and like...I don't know. Maybe it's the novelty that you can check out the hot guys with your guy friend and, you know, go shopping with him slash me. Yeah, I admit it, sometimes I do indulge in grad dress shopping with my friends. They need the help—I tell them they can't wear prints or plaid.

For this whole grad thing, I'm so disorganized, I haven't even thought about it. People are talking about reserving tables and I'm like, "I didn't know you had to reserve a table." I thought it was like, "Here's a table. Let's sit down." But, no, apparently that's not it. They're all urgent about it and they keep asking me, "You haven't reserved a table yet?" Grad's next week and it's being held on some boat, so even if you're not having a good time you're sort of stuck on it.

At first I wasn't even going to go. People were like, "So are you coming to the grad?" And I was like, "No." And they were like, "Why?" And I said, "Because I like to hear the word 'why' shrieked at me repeatedly." But they just kept doing it and people kept saying, "Oh, you should go, and if you don't go then you'll regret it. What's the worse that can happen? So you'll have a bad time for a few hours, at least you'll know what it was like." So I said, "Fine," but I'm still not sure I'll show up.

I've only been to one school dance and it certainly was everything I anticipated and so much more in that it's like a bunch of teenagers, you know, twitching awkwardly. I just think the whole thing's silly. I went with this friend, Carly, and we went, you know, as if we were going to a zoo or a nature park. Have you ever seen the Seinfeld where Elaine dances? Well that's pretty much the best of it. We sort of hid in the shadows and watched these gangly teenagers sort of jerking back and forth not even to the beat of the music. These other people kept trying to make me dance, and I sort of entertained them for a while until they eventually turned their backs and ran away.

We didn't stay long, though. Carly wanted to stay until the end but I told her I've

seen "Degrassi" and I think I know what happens. Not the new one—I just like the old eighties one with Snake and Spike and the pregnant girls and the jean jackets. Sometimes it's better not to experience high school yourself when you can just watch it on TV.

But for grad it's like the entire student body keeps encouraging me to bring a same-sex date. Well, some people have asked me, "So who's your date?" I tell them I don't have one anymore slash yet, and then they say, "Oh. So who do you want to bring?" I'm like, "I don't know yet."

I know what they're getting at—is it a boy or a girl? But I'm sort of making them beg. They keep telling me, "You should take one of your friends." That's what they call them, "one of your friends." Well, how many do you think I have? I think they just want me to bring someone so they can take pictures and stuff.

I'm sure the student population would be overwhelming in favour, despite the horrified reactions of some. Like my really Christian friend and I think my economics teacher would, you know, prefer if I took an opposite-sex date. Well, the economics teacher is Greek Orthodox and doesn't want me to talk about it, so I'm gonna hazard a guess that she's more comfortable with straight relationships.

Yeah. Sarah's my sweet little Christian friend who's like, "Oh my goodness," and all that stuff. She's devoutly Christian, you know, so by extension sort of anti-homosexual. She's not like, "Oh I hate those fags." She's more like, "Well, it seems to me that they're, you know, possessed by demons." She said that to me once and I was like, "Oh my God!" When I actually told her, "You know, I'm gay," she was like, "Oh! Well. Okay." She tried to be very casual about it, right? Then she said to me, "Tristan, I think you have a problem." I was like, "Oh for Christ sakes!"

She brought me to her Christian youth group. She goes to Bible church, I'm not sure what brand it is, I can never get a straight answer out of anyone. I asked the priest or whatever, "So what type of Christian are you?" but he said, "Well, we don't like to identify with any specific denomination." I was like, "Hmmm. Two's company, three's a cult."

When she asked me to come with her to her Christian youth group, I said, "You're not going to make me your summer project, are you?" She was like, "Oh, Tristan. No." Then she whispered to me, "I just want you to really be in a position where you can better

see the light."

So I went and they didn't talk about homosexuality at all. So I was like, "Well, why am I here then?" They just talked about, you know, better living through Christ. This youth pastor put on this movie about some guy talking about how we don't need to be anything but believers of Christ to get to heaven. We can pretty much do anything we want as long as we love Christ in the end and we'll be okay, right? But he thought that was taking advantage of the system because it's still possible to get into heaven even if you're a rapist or whatever as long as you believe in Christ.

They said nothing about being gay. Apparently last time they did talk about it, so I missed it. I only went that once—it was just so boring—all the people there were just so hypocritically nice. They were all nice and friendly and shiny on the surface and were like, "Hi! I'm—" whatever. I was like, "Hi. I'm Tristan," you know, relaxed, and they were like, "Okay, do you want to roast marshmallows now?" I was like, "Sure." So. Anyway.

Now I find it sort of fun to shock Sarah. I think I'm working on showing her that gays are not the Antichrist because she doesn't know anyone who's gay, so, I mean, all she knows is what her apparently biased teachings tell her. Obviously she's going to think that right? She doesn't bring my being gay up at all, she just sort of does it indirectly. Like if a subject comes up like girls or something, she'll make a sly comment.

It's kind of difficult being friends with her because her parents don't let her have boys over to their house. Especially gay boys. I might, you know, bring down the property value.

All my friends that I used to have I kept from my old school and lived near my mother, but when I moved out of my mother's house, I guess they sort of were alienated by my stress or whatever, even though I don't really thing that was part of it. They all left my life in such a way that...well...now they hate me. I don't know. It's only been a few months—they've probably forgotten about me already. We don't go to the same school so I never have to see them. Anyway, the friends I have now through school are mostly girls. Who'd have guessed! I guess they're my confidants, but I don't really see them out of school too often. We do the typical fag hag-type things together.

My friends outside of school are mostly guys. Most of them are older, I guess like

eighteen or nineteen. Gay, of course. I met most of them networking. Like you know one first and then they sort of introduce you to the other one, and then you become better friends with that person and you sort of like leave out the guy who got you there. I could probably draw you the whole map on paper if you want. Usually we go downtown because I have this immense hatred for where I've grown up. I despise its neo-conservative suburban paradise status. So, yeah, most of the time I go downtown or just stay home and have various idle conversations on MSN. I have like sixty or so people on MSN. Most of them are just random people who saw one of my, "Help me, I'm desperate and lonely" profiles on the Internet and have added me. And then there's whoever I know through whatever romantic interests I might have.

And, yeah, okay. Okay. Okay. On Monday I was in my chemistry class, right? And the teacher was talking about electrolytes or something, and I was experiencing this magnetic force between my head and...the...chemistry desk...like when he's talking. I was gazing out the door and this hot boy I like walked up and I was like, "Oh, this is interesting." His locker's right out there and I was kind of staring for a while—I don't think he could see me. Then he started to get changed—well like from boxers and stuff. I was like, "Oh, this is way more interesting than electrolytes."

So he was getting changed and I was kind of like staring and he was doing some kind of straight-guy deodorant thing or whatever. I don't know. I just think of guys and deodorant and hockey sticks. Whatever. So, anyway, I was kind of like gazing at him and I think he saw me and I was like, "Okay. Staring contest!" I kind of kept staring, wondering what would happen. My heart was like thump-thump-thump-thump-thump. He kind of like smiled and I was like, "Oh yeah!" Then he kind of, I don't know, did some weird facial twitch thing that might have been a wink. I'm not sure. He might not even be gay. He definitely has some gay qualities though. It's sort of like the thin, neat, single thing. He has a quality—I can't really put my finger on it—he's sort of like, I don't know, tall and gawkish. I think he just doesn't know he's gay yet, but I wouldn't mind being the one to introduce him.

I heard from a few people that he has no life other than hockey because he's in the *sports études* programme. It was kind of exciting. He's not in any of my classes, but I see him all the time in the hallways. Normally he doesn't look at me, but my friend's

boyfriend is friends with him, so I'm gonna have him do my bidding and find out if he's, whatever, interested. I feel like such a girl, but whatever. Just so I'm safely out of the school when he wants to beat me up or something. Well, even though I'm sure he won't beat me up, I'm sure he'd remember me. I just don't want it to be awkward. I don't want to have to look away when I see him. And my grad picture in the yearbook is really good, so I think I'll leave a positive impression on him.

Someone said he looks like me and I was like "Oh my God!" except she said it in a sort of a negative way. She was making a face and saying, "You think he's hot? I think he looks like you." I totally missed the point and I was like all excited: "You think he looks like me!" I thought she called me hot but she was really calling him ugly. Then she said, "It's like having a crush on yourself." I was like, "No it's not." Whatever. Taste the rainbow, bitch.

Well that's one bonus of being gay, you can totally check out the people who don't know without them clueing in. I can like stare at, you know, guys without them thinking, "He must be checking me out." I don't know, maybe it is the first thing they think of, but I just go under the assumption that it isn't and gaze away. I've gotten a few uncomfortable looks, but I sort of just giggle and look away.

I was seeing this guy for a while. I guess he was my first romantic interest, but it sort of sucked because he lives in Arizona. I used to work at Toys-R-Us and I met him there for like forty-five minutes. He was on a vacation of the Northeast with his family for some reason. I don't even know why he was at a suburban Toys-R-Us. Maybe he was looking for metric wrenches or something for kids. We were making eyes and such and he sort of asked me a question about something inane. I mean, it was sort of obvious—we sort of danced the dance for a little bit—then I was very forward by saying, "Well, you know, I can take my lunch and we could go to Starbucks and get a coffee." He actually accepted. I was like, "Really!"

But he was leaving the next day, so Arizona guy and I had this relationship that after the initial meeting was actually really sort of virtual, you know. Like over the phone and sending letters and e-mails with little pictures and all that good stuff. Like we kept up this constant volley. Then he decided, "Well, you know, I can't really do this because of the distance," yadda, yadda, yadda. That was heart breaking for me—first love and all that

jazz. I was like, "Just leave me alone and pass my Häagen-Dazs through the door." That type of thing.

So if it works out, I'll bring a date to grad. But, I mean, if I don't have a date or whatever I'm not going to sweat it. Anyway, I could always bring one of the flock or girls that hang around me. That's another thing about being gay, you get more popular. Well, I think I've really gotten much more popular. Last year I didn't really know too many people and I was pretty much behind the scenes and nobody really knew me. The people who signed my yearbook last year wrote stuff like, "Dear Tristan. I don't really know you, but you seem like a great guy. Have a great summer," and like, "It's a shame I never got to know you, but you seem like a good person. Keep it up." But this year my yearbook is full and people are talking to me about actual things.

The only change I can see is I came out. This was last year, late December or early January. I think it was when I first got back from the Christmas break. It was really sort of gradual. The first person I told was my friend Carly, over the Internet actually. I was talking to her and she was telling me about something personal that happened to her, and then I figured like well it's pretty much, you know, tit-for-tat. Obviously it was a step in our relationship. So I told her that I was actually chatting with Kalen, the Arizona guy, at the same time I was chatting with her and I elaborated on the nature of the relationship. I think she already had her suspicions just like I'm sure other people did. She was like okay dot, dot, dot. Okay dot, dot, dot, question mark. I actually got her to ask, "Are you gay," and I replied, "Yes," except I was more humourous than that. I was like, "Well, haven't you figured it out? Well isn't it obvious?" or something. Anyway, it was cutesy. She was like, "So you're attracted to boys?" and I was like, "Well, yeah," and then she was like, "So who do you think is hot in school?" Then we started to do all the gossip thing—sort of like girl talk. Now it's almost like we paint each other's nails and stuff.

I think she was sort of impressed actually. After all, gay students in high school are few and far between, you know—I mean people who actually admit it. I think she might have said, "Wow!" At least she acted impressed. She started to ask me all these questions, like silly things. I think it was more like a novelty for a while. It was kind of like a revelation for her, but she wasn't weird about it. It's not like she still asks questions. It was only like for a few days after until she got used to it.

She does still talk about how, you know, some people wouldn't take too kindly to my being gay, but she says, "Oh, I'll just kick their ass." I guess I decided I should just stop not talking about it. If it comes up, I'm not going to deny it. I sort of gave the push to the first few people and then they got the ball rolling and I was like, "Spread the word." Then everyone was like, "Wow, that's so cool" and they just sort of, you know, gathered around me and pretty soon I had this flock of people who were laughing and saying "Hi" to me in the halls. So now I have like this little posse of friends who I can pretty much train into my unholy army of the night. It's like, "Do my bidding." They're all girls so if any boys start trouble they can't fight back, so it's a perfect system I have.

Not that anyone would start something. At my school really nothing more happens than, you know, "Oh, he's going to mean to me." It's not like I have to watch my back or anything. But even if Joe Auto-shop says, "You're a loser," I don't think your world screeches to a halt.

I guess the school's sort of ambivalent about my being out. I haven't really faced any, you know, major controversy or like had my locker defaced or anything. Well, if I tried to force myself on someone maybe the guy would punch me, but I don't think I would ever be attacked like Joe Rose.

Anyway, by like about the fifteenth person, it wasn't really so much spelling it out to them like, "P.S. I'm gay" as it was just talking about the events of my life as if they already knew. It's gotten to the point where it doesn't really matter any more. Like if someone says, "Are you gay?" I won't say, "No," but at the same time I take it like as if I were Jewish. I wouldn't like come out as Jewish. I wouldn't say, "I'm Jewish, hear me roar." But if someone asks, well I say, "Oh yeah." When I wasn't out and people asked me that I'd make a cute comment to confuse them like, "If I were, do you think I'd tell you?" Sometimes they'd curse and make grumbling sounds. I was like, "Whatever. Why don't you make me a bird cage in woodshop class."

Yeah, so the people I told responded really anticlimactically. It's like as if they were gearing up for this whole argument, right? But then I totally took the wind out of their sails. It was really quite fun. They were like, "Oh.... Well carry on then."

It was pretty much the same when I told my parents. Well my father and his wife—my mother's side doesn't know. That wouldn't be fun. But my father's family, I

guess, for the most part does. And it's pretty big, so.... Although, I don't know for sure. Word flies pretty quickly in my mother's family so they probably already know, but they don't even care.

With my father and my stepmother I had tried to come out to them in various subtle ways and they kept retaliating with stuff like, "Well, when you get married and have kids" and such. I was like, "Oh! Do you not get it?" And they'd be like, "Get what?" I wasn't even that subtle. When I was with them and I saw a hot guy I'd say, "Oh, he's cute," and they so pretended not to get it.

Oh, oh! Okay. I was like seeing this CEGEP guy a few months ago and so I told them, "I'm going to have my friend sleep over tonight," and they were like, "Okay." So I'm thinking, "Oh that was easy." It was funny how we met. I went to an open house at the CEGEP I'm going to next year, this was in January, and I saw this one booth that was particularly festive, just colourful and stuff, and I was drawn like a moth to a flame. I figured what it was pretty quickly. Well, I mean, I sort of like put on my glasses and I said, "What's that?" There were banners and rainbows and stuff. And I was like, "Oh! I know what that is." I mean, I checked to make sure first—it could have been the chess club that was feeling particularly festive. So I like mosied on over to see what was going on. There were a few people there, but I started talking to this one guy and he was like well.... This is so embarrassing. He was like, "Well, I'm going to get going soon, do you want to come with me?" Yeah, so we decided to talk for a while about that subject, you know.

When he came over we rented movies and stuff and then we fell asleep on the sofa together in such a way that it was obvious that he wasn't really my friend. And then I woke up like at ten a.m., right? And I thought to myself, "Oh gee, they probably saw this," you know, considering that there was a fresh load of laundry already beside me.

Anyway. By the time I actually told my father and my step-mother, I was getting really pissed off, right? I was like, "How can you not know?" So again at supper the next day they were going on about, "Oh, when you settle down with a wife and kids" and whatever, and I was like, "Yuck!" By that time I was really tired and I said, "You know, let's just cut the charade. In case you haven't noticed, I'm gay. Pass the salt."

They sort of needed coasters for their bottom lips, but aside from that little sulk, I

guess it was fine. They weren't really too surprised. They continued on with their inane conversation. Like moving right along....

Now they inquire about my various boyfriends as if they're my girlfriends. I mean, that's very cool and all but I'd rather just not talk about it. I was thinking, "Well, gee, what if I had girlfriends?" I still wouldn't want to talk to them about it. So I guess it's the same thing. Then there was the whole condom talk and that wasn't fun either. But in that respect, I can't fault them on their performance. They've been very cool about it. Everything's pretty much the same as it was before, only back then they didn't talk about it.

A few days later my father asked me why I told them. I guess he wanted me to say it was because we have such a close relationship or something. I didn't want to burst his bubble and tell him that I did it just to stop the irritating marriage comments for once and for all and so that I could maybe start to introduce my quote-unquote friends as who they really are. So it was really just, I guess, for simplicity.

There! You must be happy. I even spoke about my family.

Another week and then...

Yeah, so the grad was on the weekend, except everyone kept calling it "the prom," but I call it "the grad" because I think "prom" is an American-ism. Anyway, I'd say it had its ups and downs. I decided to go like the day before. There was a cocktail party beforehand, and from there everyone took their limousines or whatever to the pier since the grad was on some boat. I went with one of the flock and her date and his Mercedes, and I had to navigate him around Montreal because he didn't know where he was going. You could tell I was totally emasculating him because he had to keep asking me angrily, "Now where?"

When we finally got to the boat there were these little sailor people who you could just tell were these seventeen-year-old French kids just looking for a summer job and ended up having to wear these ridiculous outfits and do the whole stupid "Welcome aboard" salute thing.

So we got on the boat and we passed a few, you know, skivvies or skippers or something, and we filed into the dining room. It was weird, the dining room was on a

slope and rocking but it was a boat so I guess that should be expected. I was at a table with my flock—they all had dates but they didn't talk to them. I watched them, and their dates mostly spent their time elsewhere. Some of them didn't even go in the same limo. Well, there was one date who sat with us. He was having a great time, I could tell.

When I first got there a few people were like, "Hey, where's your date?" Wink, wink, wink, wink. "Like who did you bring?" And I would, you know, say some coy answer like, "My date's at home making me a pie," or something.

The meal was okay, but I had to eat everyone's salad because they didn't like it. It wasn't fennel, it was...I feel so uncultured forgetting the damn name of the weed. It was oval, soft velvet...expensive...anyway it was a good salad but it was too cultured or something for them. And then we had two brochettes and some wedge of a potato cake thing and beans and such. For dessert there was like a tiny piece of cake...and a strawberry.

When we finished eating we went out on the deck for a too-lame-for-this-world dance. I spent most of my time up on deck peering over the railing commenting on the obviously gay, but non-grad group of people that had accumulated on the deck below me. I was with Carly and her boyfriend—he's in the grade after us. Anyway, we were peering over and someone made some offhand comment about how obviously gay this one guy was because he had on like this weird Le Chateau puffy shirt unbuttoned scandalously low, and, you know, casual hair and tight jeans, and a friend with whom he seemed to be exceptionally close who was drinking red wine while everyone else was drinking beer. I don't know. I took that to mean something.

There were like four guys including one really hot polo-shirt guy. He was wearing a polo shirt, that's why I call him "polo-shirt guy." Go figure. Carly asked me if he was gay, you know like, "Is that guy gay?" She's so clueless sometimes. I said, "Yeah," and then we just sort of stalked them, like watched to see what they would do to confirm our suspicions. We were so right. It was clinched when the Village People came on and they had their arms in the air and were making all the motions and stuff.

Carly was like engaging me in this really stupid conversation about dandelions, but like really loudly, too. I could see them looking at me. No, sunflowers, because she won a sunflower award. It was like some gag prize thing to embarrass everyone involved. So

polo-shirt guy looked at me weird after the whole dandelion slash sunflower thing, then they, you know, went somewhere else. "We have to go over here now."

Oh, oh, oh! After the stupid gag awards, this guy who doesn't go to our school—his girlfriend goes to our school—got up to the podium and he started to profess his undying love for her. Everyone was shouting out, "Don't propose. Don't propose," because they knew what was going to happen. Did I tell you this already? He didn't really seem to be discouraged although I really would have been. He did something and it involved kneeling and a ring. I don't know if he actually proposed, or just, you know, gave her a ring on his knees because I fled as soon as I realized what was going down. They're like twelve. They haven't even graduated high school yet. Shouldn't they be saving up for a divorce?

Finally we de-boated at eleven and everyone had to go back to the hotel and start on their unprotected sex as soon as possible, but I called an older gentleman friend and went to a club in the village with him. I actually met him on the Internet. Scandalous, isn't it?

I'd never been before. To a gay club I mean. I wasn't so impressed—it wasn't spectacular or anything. I mean, for starters the obese drag queen at the door sort of freaked me out. Then the noise! noise! noise! kind of got to me after a while, and I had a very watered-down vodka and tomato juice. It wasn't great.

I just sort of, you know, hung around and tried to look as inconspicuous as I could. I didn't want to get separated from my friend though. God knows what would've happened. It was such a labyrinth and it was so confusing, I felt like an old person stepping out of their little apartment building and totally being in chaos in the world around them. I just felt like I should find a corner and stick to it and sip my watered-down booze nervously.

I'd never been in a situation where there were all these men in one room—it was reminiscent of boy scouts. I'm kidding. It was okay. I mean, it's not like I had all of these models around me. No, it was definitely not like I had all these models around me. They were either not my type or gross slash not my type. Except for one guy who sort of was reasonably to moderately cute...ish. He had these endearing glasses and I called him grey-shirt guy cause, you guessed it, grey shirt. This distinguished him from polo-shirt guy, because he was in the past now. I grieved. It was time to move on.

I spent most of the night sipping my tomato juice trying to, you know, explain to my friend and his friend why I didn't want to go to saunas. Well, it pretty much wasn't a coherent conversation—his friend was pretty busy trying to find his crystal meth so.... He said to me, "Why don't you go to a sauna and get laid?" Well, he said something that sounded just as seedy. He thought that was the only way I could, I don't know, get some, which A: isn't true and B: is quite insulting. I tried to convince him that one can live all of one's childhood years without ever going to a gay sauna.

Out of the corner of my eye I kept watching grey-shirt guy and then I saw him like make some sort of facial distortion at me. It was, I don't know, I wouldn't really call it a wink because that would make it sound all seedy and gross when it was sort of cute actually. And then he like made the come-sit-down-next-to-me gesture and I sort of giggled, you know, but didn't sit down. And then he passed by me incidentally, and made some other face and I giggled some more. Well, I didn't really giggle as in "Tee-hee." I just sort of chuckled, I guess. I think I made him feel unloved. Anyway.

I saw him again outside the club as I was getting back into the car and I actually got my friend to circle around that street, Amherst or not, and like spied on him to see what he was doing cause he was standing around outside. But by the time we circled around again, he was gone.

So that was that. I got home I'd say like two-ish.

I'd been to the gay village before, so it wasn't a big thrill or anything, just not to a gay club. I don't like going there though. I think that its reputation as a festive place is completely erroneous. I think that it's an utterly depressing place.

You go to the village and you don't see like rainbows and, you know, people dressed up as Dorothy and all that happy gay stuff. I mean, you imagine the yellow brick road and the gay pride parade and people in tank tops and roller blades, and a street car with hunky men leaning off of it. But it just seems to be a bunch of bars and T-shirt shops and, you know, immigrants who make pizza and stand outside their door in aprons and look at everyone really suspiciously. You see people in leather being taken around by leash, and people who are obviously stoned wandering around, and the street youth soliciting themselves on the corner of Champlain and Ste-Catherine Street. But I guess that's the fun part. It's not exactly as enchanting as some people think it is. I guess that's like a

positive pre-conception about homosexuality that we have that happy-go-lucky little village. But, I mean, it can be really quite grim.

That's probably the seedy underbelly of being gay, so I wouldn't say that's like as good as it gets or, you know, even the mean atmosphere that gay people provide.

Oh, my father and my stepmother were all excited that I was going to the grad, they ended up giving me the money for my ticket actually. They're so looking forward to the ceremonies in September they made me reserve tickets for them.

The money was a surprise since the situation with my father isn't ideal either—we're always engaged in this competitive relationship, except in most competitions you're like striving for something and something good might happen to the winner. But, I mean, there's never a winner with us because it's never really ending—we're just going around in circles. Like we try to have dinner as a family, which I hate. Anyway, we're having dinner and I'm just sort of sitting very tensely waiting for something to happen. Then I'll have to break the news that I need, say a renewal on Zoloft, and then my father will challenge me by saying, "Well, why are you on Zoloft? You seen to be perfectly happy," and I try to explain to him in the calmest way possible that, "Gee dad! Maybe I'm happy because of the Zoloft and not in spite of it." And then, I don't know, he discounts that and says, "Well, just get your psychologist to write you a prescription and I'll buy it." And oh, oh! He doesn't want me to see you anymore extensively because we're poor even though that's so not the case. He makes over six figures a year, and, I swear, all the time they talk about how they're going to lose that crappy little house of theirs. They keep saying it's money they don't have. I'm like, "Well you know, it's like point one percent of your salary," and he retaliates with, "We're spending twenty-five percent of our salary on your luxuries." I actually calculated it and it's like three percent, and those luxuries include such things as education and clothes and food and Zoloft. So everything pretty much to keep me alive is a luxury. Actually when he talks like this, I'd rather go without the luxury of staying alive. You know?

...

I kid. I jest. I hope you didn't take that seriously.

He's always on me for skipping school. I know I've done it a lot in the last few months, but it's not like I'm in danger of failing or anything. It's just at the end of the

week I'm tired and disillusioned with the concept of education in the twenty-first century and I decide that I don't want to go to my last fifteen minutes of wasted time where I'm supposed to be learning about something or other. So I will, you know, make a little note that says, "Please excuse Tristan at X hour," and I sign my father's signature. I do it indistinguishably from him.

Then I go to the office and give it to the vice-principal and I'm like, "I have to go now," and she's like, "Oh. You'll be leaving us? Take care." She's such a perfect bitch to all the other students, but I'm just so nice to her. I'm very polite and animated and I actually take an interest and sympathize with her if I see that she's had a rough day. I always say, "I just can't imagine how you deal with this day-in and day-out." I strike a balance between saying something like, "I don't know why you get up in the morning," and, you know, not caring. I identify with her pain and she just can't hate me, so she always lets me go, no questions asked. I'm like, "And you have a great day now."

I feel slightly guilty, but that's only eclipsed by the thrill of like pulling yet another one over on the system. I call it a mental health block because they don't give us spare periods any more.

Anyhow. My father takes me on so many guilt trips I should be getting frequent flier points. But I guess it's still better than living with her.

...

Sorry. I'm not usually quiet all of a sudden like that. Ever since I moved out of my mother's house, it's been sort of strange. I haven't really spoken to her for the last month. Before I moved out, my mother and father were surprisingly enough on friendly-ish type terms, but now she absolutely hates him and says she never wants to see him again and all these lovely things.

Anyway, this whole situation has been quite...emotionally taxing. She's been living with her boyfriend and his kids for about twelve years and I basically felt like a third wheel there—he certainly didn't like me. For most of the twelve years he was quite the monster—at least a lot of the time—and what I found really awful and the worse part about it was that it wasn't consistently awful. Like it wasn't a consistently abusive situation. I would say maybe like five or ten percent of the otherwise quote-unquote normal existence I had there was awful. But, I mean, it only takes like five or ten percent,

you know, peppered over the whole experience to make it unbearable.

And get this. Her boy friend is vehemently anti-homosexual. Sometimes I think, "Well, maybe I'm gay just to piss him off," because, I mean, it would so be worth it. He's anti-homosexual and anti-Semitic and racist...it's just so dumb. My mother never questions him or takes him to task on this in any way, shape, or form because I guess she thinks since she isn't gay or a Jew, what business is it of hers?

He's such a hypocrite. I mean, when he meets a Black or a Jew he's never...anything other than like really polite and friendly and like chummy. So I don't know even why he would say those things. I think it's just to be shocking. I mean like after a few years of hearing about this every so often, I'd think, "You aren't really so much shocking as you are stupid." He'd also talk about how inferior black people are, yet he'd say that's okay because he has many black friends, even though he doesn't really have black friends. So that's like a triple hypocrite.

As I grew older and older, I just became more and more disgusted by my mother's boyfriend's judgmental attitude and his hating people for no other reason than being born a certain way. I mean he deserves what he gets, but...this... It is a bit much.

Like how do you forgive someone for that? It's sort of a mock incest because they're not related by blood, but it's still grossly inappropriate. It really doesn't make me happy—my father wonders why I need Zoloft? And, well, I'm still sort of disturbed by the fact that she didn't hide it. I repeatedly saw them engaging in activity that's romantic.

I had my own room, but it was really like I lived in the den because that's where everything else happened to be—the computer, the TV—so there was often people in there. Despite my mother's claims that I always had a place to myself, I never really did. About two or three months before I actually moved out, I took to hiding in the bathroom and like reading or whatever. This went on until I, you know, completely ended the life I had with my mother.

Through all this I've tried to preserve my sense of sanity, which is often...not easy. "Keep laughing," I keep telling myself. "Keep laughing." But I know no amount of witty banter will help me deal with this shit. I guess that's where you come in.

So I don't know what's going on with her or who she's with now—the racist homophobic anti-Semite or his seventeen year old son, the son of the guy she's supposed

to be with.

I mean, Hallmark doesn't make cards for that.

Rebel...Just Because
Evan's Story—Part II

The door to the principal's office is shut. I stand against the wall like I've been ordered to along with the usual suspects: the boy who swears at teachers, using "fuck" as a noun, adjective, adverb, and preposition; the kid who by some bizarre coincidence is always in the same hallway where a fire alarm's been pulled; and the girl who's been found one too many times making out with a boy in a stairwell, or behind the school, or in the girls' bathroom. A different boy at that.

One of the secretaries smiles at me, the one who always sighs whenever I'm called down to the office. "What did you do this time?" she asks. I tell her tales of bomb threats and knife fights and white powder craftily planted to explode in the face of anyone who chances upon it. She laughs and shakes her head and sighs some more.

The kid who's constantly re-inventing the word "fuck" says to me, "Yo, man. I know your secret. But, hey, it's cool with me." The secretary gives him a warning look.

"Well," I reply, "first of all it isn't much of a secret, is it? And, second, I really don't need your validation thank you very much."

"Evan!" the secretary says.

The "fuck" kid and I go back to standing in silence. I smile at the secretary and pantomime needing a cigarette and a drink. She laughs and the "fuck" kid sighs dramatically.

I never saw the kid before, some anonymous grade sevener, although he could be the little brother of a girl in my French class. But I don't really talk to her so why would I talk to her brother?

That's what's sad about my life—everybody knows me but I don't really know anybody. I guess that's the price you pay for being the only out gay student in the school—the price of fame I like to think. Everybody knows me because I'm gay and I'm loud. My friends and I have these conversations across hallways, or, even better, sometimes we scream across the hall at each other. We don't do it on a regular basis—it may have happened a couple of times—but if we're in a crowded hallway we're going to

have a really vulgar explicit conversation. As mature as we are, you know, we can be silly. It's fun to shake people up like that.

I guess Ciaran did me a favour. He's the one who told everybody at school I'm gay after I told his sister, thinking it was in total confidence, of course. How dumb was I?

Most people reacted really well when they found out. Lots of them said, "Oh. We knew." It wasn't a big deal. They were like, "Okay. So?" They were mature about it. But other people were like, "Oh my God! You're gay?" I wasn't sure if they wanted to celebrate or what. Evan's coming out party. I suppose they were shocked because I was only in grade eight and only fourteen years old. In a lot of people's minds that might be young.

When I came out I was flooded with questions, so all of a sudden I became the spokesman for homosexuality. When you come out, right away you're popular. People know you. Well, that's not always a plus. But you do get a lot of attention if that's what you like. I have to admit I like the attention.

Now I'm genuinely me; I'm not being something else; I'm not masking who I am and what I am to other people. I think I handled coming out relatively well. I suppose that with time I'll learn more skills to deal with people—it's not everybody that has them, especially young gay people because they tend to be so much more introverted. They keep to themselves.

I, on the other hand, don't keep quiet about it. That's for sure. Why should I?

Last March we did a variety show and one of the skits was a video parody of Charlie's Angels. Three of my friends, all girls, played the angels. In the last scene where they're saying goodbye to Charlie, the camera just kind of moved to where I was standing right next to this big poster of a sexy woman who's wearing a bikini. I was looking at it and smiling.

Everyone thought it was pretty funny—they all laughed.

Every year we have to do a public speech and last year I did mine on gay marriage and how it's time the government recognizes a gay couple as a couple and not as just two companions or two friends. It's an important issue. I know that personally I want to have the choice to get married, same as heterosexuals have the choice. Mind you, I don't see myself doing it any time soon, but I just like having the option. Let's face it: people who

are against gay marriages and gay social equity are homophobic. There's no going around that, so it's worth standing up for. Not every student would do that.

The speech was good enough that I came in second in the class. The students got to vote. When it was over some of them told me I was courageous to have spoken in front of the class like that. It's one thing when you're answering questions to chosen people in the hallway, but it's another thing when you're standing in front of your English class doing a speech for marks. There's a risk of being booed off in front of the class. You can be mocked. But everyone in my class was pretty much in agreement with me. I guess if I came in second it's because I persuaded them enough to agree with me.

You know, I stand up for myself—I don't take shit from anybody. Much the contrary, I give it. I have the tools—I'm well equipped to deal with anyone if I have to. I'm pretty good at arguing, I can be intimidating, and I'm sharp enough with my mouth to do it. I'm more oppressive than they are. I'm more intimidating to them than they are to me. If someone wants to be a bitch to me, okay, that's fine, but it works both ways. I can be one back. I can do that. I don't have a problem doing that.

Some of the students in my school are point-blank assholes—they're stupid and immature. I'm thinking of one in particular, a guy named Kurt. The biggest words in his vocabulary are "Shut up faggot," and after hearing that all day I'm like, "Oh! Ouch! That really hurts." Once after he said, "Shut up faggot," I said, "Don't be jealous Kurt just because I can do the faggot thing better than you can." When other people call me a faggot, I make it into my own joke: "You better not call me straight." I pretend that it will really insult me if they <u>don't</u> call me "faggot." I like finding ways of transforming insults into compliments. Right after that my friends started calling me "straight" as a joke. Except Kurt, of course. All he ever has as a comeback is, "Shut the fuck up faggot." He's not the sharpest knife in the drawer.

If I have to, I even give shit to teachers. If they don't respect me, I don't respect them back. I don't have a problem defying them or getting in their faces.

Like when I'm sick and tired of hearing Kurt say, "Shut up faggot," and if a teacher like Mr. Williams hears and still doesn't do anything about it, I'll say loudly: "Sir, are you going to tolerate that in your class?" I've done it before, but this one time I had the

whole class's attention and he was on the spot so he had to do something. He told Kurt to step outside and after a while he went out and spoke to him.

I know no one would believe this but I actually like school. My whole life's at school. Sometimes I even think I like my friends more than I do my family. My school's a decent place to come out in—it's a good school to be gay in. At least it's better than a lot of other places. My friend Amy goes to another school and once I was at her place while she was on the phone with a guy from her school. For some reason she handed me the phone and the guy started with seriously the worse homophobia I ever experienced. "Fucking fag, man! I hate fags like you. At least I don't suck cock!" It was pretty stupid actually. But, don't worry, I gave it back to him: "What are you so insecure about? Do your homosexual tendencies keep you up at night? Are you afraid we'll find out about your small penis?" All he could say was, "Shut up fuck! I'm really getting mad now." Just threat after threat. I thought, "What're you going to do? Give me a smack over the phone?"

My school's mostly an accepting place. Most of the students are white, but racism isn't a big problem at our school. We don't have a lot of black students but the few black students that are here are some of the most popular people in the school. Everybody's friends with them. We do have some French students and some bilingual students, like myself. We have a lot of Asians, some people from the Middle East, Islamic students. We have some foreign exchange students, too. From Mexico. From Hong Kong. There's a dress code—navy blue pants and white shirts—but the Muslim girls wear their veils over it. Even in gym class they're going to wear their veils. There's one or two boys who wear turbans. We have one guy in my grade who doesn't wear a turban, but he's growing a beard for religious reasons. It's been like an ongoing project for him.

Where there is a problem is with sexism. I notice guys are pretty chauvinistic to my female friends, it happens pretty frequently. But a lot of them are going to hold back their comments when I'm there because the girls may put up with it, but I won't. No one's going to call my best friend Sam a bitch. I have three older sisters and I was raised by women. If anything, I should understand what it's like to be oppressed.

I look around at the company I'm forced to keep as we wait for the principal to deign to see us. Even with their clearly pathological tendencies, they aren't that bad. At this

school I have lots of friends, both boys and girls. They always say things like, "Gays are so cool," and "I love having a gay friend like you," and "Gays have the best taste in guys." My guy friends are always saying "Every guy should have a gay friend so that he can introduce you to girls." They think gay guys tend to have tons of female friends. Things have changed a lot since grade eight when I came out—students seem more informed now, more educated, more mature. They're older now, I suppose.

Yeah, the students in my grade are all cool with me. The whole school really. Well, with a few exceptions. Recently, though, I've noticed more and more that I have less and less to talk to them about. With my girl friends, we can spend the afternoon talking about who's the hottest guy in school and this and that, but when they talk about their girl stuff like makeup and the specials at Ogilvy's and they're having an orgasm because a purse is on sale, I can't handle it. It's the same when the guys are talking about their guy stuff like sports and the latest playboy model. Sometimes I can't relate anywhere.

So this cast of characters lined up against the wall like a firing squad aren't that horrible. Well, for the criminals they are. And as often as I've wanted to tell a teacher to fuck off, or set the school on fire, or make out with Pierre-Luc Gagné in a storage room, my crime today is far more serious, loathsome, and tragic. At least Jon Casey thinks so.

I guess he has a point since it was his chest and abs I ran my hand down.

The door to the principal's office opens and Mr. Russell, the vice-principal, pokes his head out and grunts my name. I smile at the secretary and bid my fellow criminals "adieu." Their puzzled faces show me I'm operating well above their feeding level. I'm making my way to the office when I hear Mr. Pfeiffer holler from inside, "Hurry up."

Now Mr. Pfeiffer's a cold, cold man. Whenever anybody winds up in his office, he always says, "I have work to do here," so you get the idea pretty quickly that you're intruding. If I've gotten in trouble or something happens to me because I'm gay, it's like Pfeiffer is saying, "Look Evan. Your homosexuality has just gotten in the way of my work." Not that he'd ever use the word "homosexuality." The man has trouble saying the word "gay" or any variation of it. I know he's not at one with homosexuality because Tony, the teacher in charge of the variety show, told me Pfeiffer's homophobic. I never really felt it directly, but certainly indirectly. Tony's a good friend of Mr. Pfeiffer—it's probably the only reason he hasn't been fired. One day after rehearsals Tony told me that

Pfeiffer had a religious childhood and probably did have some homophobia from a religious point-of-view. Tony said he wasn't certain, he didn't say it like it was written in stone, but he got that impression.

In my opinion, Mr. Russell is more okay with it. In the past I've brushed with the office a few times—surprise!—and just through discussions and things like that I got the idea he's not as homophobic as Mr. Pfeiffer. Like last year I was cornered in the field behind our school and some guy beat the shit out of me. I walked out of it all right, and when the police finished their report, Mr. Russell asked me, "Do you think Kevin Seary could have done this because you're gay?" I said, "No" and I didn't think it was related to homophobia. It wasn't and that was the honest truth—Kevin Seary was just looking for a fight. But at the same time I really wouldn't have wanted to have said, "yes," because I feel if I'd said "yes," I'd have been labeled by the administration as the "gay problem child."

That day Mr. Russell really helped me. I don't love him; I don't think he's a saint. But that day he certainly gave me all the attention I needed. Whatever work he had to do—all of his appointments and his phone calls—he pushed aside so he could really address the issue with me.

"So Evan," Mr. Pfeiffer begins. "Jonathan Casey has come to us with accusations of being sexual harassed by you. He's quite upset. Do you want to tell me about it?"

"It's funny the way you say it," I begin. I chuckle but clearly they're in no laughing mood. I quickly say: "Now before you jump to any ideas about me lurking in dark corners ready to pounce on poor unsuspecting Jon Casey, you've got to hear my side."

"We're waiting," Mr. Pfeiffer says.

"Well," I begin, "Jon was being sexually suggestive to Sam during math. You know, motioning his hands to his penis. So Sam said to Jon, 'If you don't stop, Evan's going to hit on you.' And so he didn't stop. And so I ran my hand down his chest and I stopped at the belt line. I know he's saying I grabbed his balls, but I swear that I stopped at his belt. It was a joke. Ask Sam, she was there."

Sam's my best friend and I know she'd back me all the way. I just don't think Pfeiffer would believe her, either.

"Well, that's sexual harassment," Mr. Russell says. "If Jonathan wants to he can press charges."

"It was a joke," I say again. "Jonathan Casey's so dramatic. It's not like I haven't done stuff like this before. Everyone takes it as a joke."

Off the top of my head I can think of tons of examples—like there's the time I was waiting at the bus stop and David Longpré was there. I was having a smoke and he hates smokers, so he said to me, "The bus stop's a non smoking zone."

"Well fuck. Does it have your name on it?"

"No, but…"

While he was still crying about his right to fresh air, I flicked my ash and I got some of it on his shirt. So I said, "Oh, please. Allow me to take it off," and I got a good feel of his abs.

"God Evan! You had to do that?" he said.

"Uh, Yeah."

Even Pierre-Luc Gagné, my imaginary boyfriend, knows I'm joking. Everybody knows I love him—it isn't a secret, I'm not quiet about it. Like when Pierre-Luc and his asshole best friend Dylan Phillips were sitting in the hall one recess and I was passing by and Dylan asked me, "Are you attracted to Pierre-Luc?" I just answered, "Yes." I kept on walking and Dylan yelled after me, "You know, Pierre-Luc has a waterbed." I stopped right there and turned around and said, "No kidding? Well he's just gotten a lot more interesting now." I could see Pierre-Luc turn red—beet red—he blushes so easily. Dylan was practically pissing himself laughing. But Goddamn! It's Pierre-Luc's own fault. If he wasn't so hot, I wouldn't be so in love with him.

So, okay. I do push things over the limit sometimes. But it's nothing serious. People like Mr. Pfeiffer and Jon Casey need to lighten up. There's only two things you can really say about Jon: he's homophobic and not the sharpest knife in the drawer. Oh, and he's a born again Christian religious fanatic and every day I have to hear him justifying his hate for homosexuality by religion. Well, the only thing he really says is that Leviticus 18 verse 22 prohibits homosexuality. So what? But I have to hear that over and over again. Last year he used to give me shit about that all the time in math class and Mr. Yamaguchi told him to stop it and to leave his religious convictions outside the classroom. So Jon

started in on him: "Well, sir, don't you believe in God? Aren't you a Catholic? You believe in this, too, right sir?" And Mr. Yamaguchi just said, "Jon. You don't want to argue with me. So shuttup." It was good. It pissed Jon off. It pissed him off and I have to admit I got a rise out of it pissing him off.

Of course none of that would help me out of this situation. I know Pfeiffer and Russell are waiting for an apology. When they don't get one, Mr. Pfeiffer puts on his concerned face and says, "How do you explain your behaviour, Evan? Is it because you're gay?"

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean? Would you ask Calvin Stevens if he's such an asshole because he's black?"

"Oh, well. I'm just asking," Pfeiffer says as though it's as trivial as asking for the time or if it's raining. But I guess he's pretty sorry he said it or else he'd have nailed me on the swearing.

"What I'm trying to get at," he says, "is in grade eight you basically came out and told everyone you're gay."

"Well. Okay. That's the short version. It wasn't quite as simple as that."

"I'm just wondering if you're doing this to get attention."

I don't bother to answer—I don't see the point in dignifying that with an answer. When they get the point, Mr. Pfeiffer says, "Well we have to do something about this. When someone who's gay sexually harasses another guy, it's the same as when a girl sexually harasses a guy or—"

"Oh, God! Now are you calling me a girl? Thank you."

"I don't think you understand what I'm trying to say here."

"Well I do understand that if it was a girl who did what I did to Jon, he wouldn't complain. He'd love it. And if he did complain, I'm sure you'd brush it off as a joke."

That's when Pfeiffer gives me a three-day vacation, uh, suspension. All Mr. Russell can do is shake his head at me.

Okay, I realize that the school has to do something, but what kind of a punishment do you really give for this? It's more like it has to be perceived that something's been done, whether it's justified or not or whether the person really will learn a lesson. I mean,

it's not as though I'm <u>not</u> going to do it again. I'll just do it with more style and to people I know won't run around filing complaints.

But what really pisses me off is what's not being said. Sexual harassment goes on all the time at this school. Between guys. Guys to girls. Girls to guys. Regardless of sexuality. Guys are always hitting on girls. God! Jonathan Casey's always hitting on girls! If another guy had done this to Jon, it wouldn't have bothered him. Jon and his friends do it to each other all the time like it's some big joke. When they see me, they grab each other's balls and hold each other around the shoulders in this mock affectionate way. They look right at me as if to say, "Oh, Evan, look at what we can do and you can't."

He complained because I'm gay and to him gay's bad. So the school prevented him from getting sexually harassed, but it's not as if they really ever prevented <u>me</u> from getting harassed from <u>him</u>. Homophobia—isn't that harassment? Calling somebody a "faggot," isn't that sexual harassment? Jon's done that so many times I can't count. How many times does Kurt Mueller have to call me a fag before it's considered harassment?

I even get it from teachers from time-to-time. I'm thinking about this one teacher at my school—while I never had him I've spoken to him before because I speak to all the teachers. I always thought he was nice, but at the start of the year I was wearing a boy-boy pin on my shirt—you know, the symbol for the male that looks like an arrow. Well this one had two of them. So I was talking to Mrs. Hutchison, my English teacher, and he came up to ask her something. When he saw my pin he said, "Hey, that's the gay sign. You're not gay," and Mrs. Hutchison said, "Yes! He is!" Like, duh!

He quickly said, "Oh, that's cool with me. Oh, that's all right. I like gay people." Fuck you! I need your validation? Like I give a fuck what you think. I really kind of thought badly of him from that point on.

So I said to him, "Don't assume I'm straight and I won't assume you're an asshole," and I walked away.

Why don't they do something about him?

Last year in computer class Mr. Murchison was standing next to my desk talking to another student. When I came in and sat down, I crossed my legs and he gave me a sarcastic look like, "What are you doing? That's how you cross your legs? Okay. That's

gay." I thought it was so childish—it's something a grade seven student would do, but he's allegedly an adult. So I asked him, "Do you have a problem or something?" He didn't say anything back because I was confronting him and I know that's what he doesn't like. He just walked away and started talking to another student.

Where was the principal then?

I leave without another word and Mr. Russell comes after me and stops me just outside the main office's door. "We're learning here," he tells me. "You're the first gay student we've had. Or at least that we've known about. We're trying to do our best here, what's right for everyone."

I grunt something non-committal so he'll leave me alone and walk away. What I should have said is: "Well, you're not learning fast enough."

As I reach my locker to get my backpack, Tony sees me and comes up and asks me how it went. I suppose the word is getting around about what happened with Jon, but I'm sure it's not like it's on CNN and spreading like SARS. I'm sure nobody except Pfeiffer really takes Jon seriously. Everyone is probably like, "Oh, Evan hit on Jon. Whatever!" Yawn squared.

"Suspended," I say.

Tony scowls and shakes his head. "Will you be okay?" he asks.

"Sure. Why not?" I say, perhaps more abruptly than he deserves.

"Always taking the road less traveled, eh?" he says with a smile.

I could have taken that another way, but I know Tony's just being concerned—he's way cool; we all love him; he's friends with all the students. He doesn't sit in the staff lounge and gossip about the latest news turning our school into more of a Peyton Place than it already is. He's there for the students. It's not every school that has a teacher who genuinely gives a shit like Tony does. My school has a few good teachers who actually care, but the majority of our teachers really don't. The second we walk out of that classroom, they don't give a fuck whether we live or die.

"Nina wants you to come over for dinner this week."

I thought that was nice of her, even though I was in no mood to convey that to Tony. I met Tony's girlfriend Nina at the variety show. Tony always spoke to me about Nina's best friend, J.P., who was a student here a few years ago—he's gay, too—but he wasn't

out or anything like me. He's twenty-one now. Tony and Nina wanted us to meet, so at the variety show they introduced us and we started this friendship. I thought it was cool they wanted me to meet him. I already had a lot of gay friends—people I met at Project 10 or through friends or friends of friends—but one more couldn't hurt. J.P. and I talk on the phone a lot and sometimes we meet for coffee.

Guess I'll have a lot of time to go out with J.P. now that I have this holiday.

* * *

I'm back at school after spending three days around the house with my mother's disappointment. She would have been a lot worse if I didn't pass off the principal's note home outlining my crime as over-exaggerated and over-dramatic. Frankly, I don't think my mother knew what to do about it. Luckily my relationship with my father's so precarious that he didn't dare punish me, especially over a touchy-touchy gay issue—in a manner of speaking. I mean, how do you punish your son for hitting on another boy? My mother told me I couldn't leave the house while I was suspended, but she was more worried about what my grandparents who live downstairs would think. We decided to tell them I wasn't at school because there was a school holiday. Ped days.

Not that I stayed home during that time. After the first two days of finishing homework, reading a Stephen King novel, playing guitar, and listening to music, I had to get out. As much as I'm endeared to Eminem's vulgar outspokenness, there's only so much of his beats even I can listen to. On the third day when my mother went to work, I decided to catch a bus downtown and walk around the gay village. I hadn't been there for a couple of weeks.

I don't usually go to the village on weekdays, so I was surprised to find it pretty empty—there wasn't the usual rush of hot guys running from one club to another. One thing I did notice, though, while I was walking from one end of the village to the other, were the posters everywhere for a candlelight vigil. I stopped and read one, then ripped a small one down from a telephone pole and stuffed it into my pocket. I knew Sam would go with me. There are some things you can't remain silent about.

At a bookstore I know I bought a book about being gay—the history of homosexuality and what it means to be gay today. It's about four inches thick. It's very educational. Not that you have to read a manual to know how to be gay. Just to balance

out all that intellectual goodness, I also bought an "All Boy XXX" magazine—but only for the articles, of course.

Before I caught the bus home, I stopped at a strip club. By law I'm not supposed to be there but the several times that I've gone, nobody's carded me. Nobody's even questioned it. They make you buy a drink, but I don't drink alcohol so usually I get a Perrier or a Coke. It's pretty amusing when the strippers pay me a lot of attention because, well, to be honest I think they'd rather try to get me to buy a lap dance from them than some seventy-year-old, three thousand pound man. By the time my mother got home, I was sitting at the desk in my room hunched over my math book looking like I'm concentrating on polynomials.

Now that I'm walking through the school's front doors again, I can't help but wonder what everyone did without me? When I'm not there it's probably a lot less exciting—without me the school's just a wasteland of heterosexuality. Most of what my grade knows about homosexuality, I've told them. When I first came out I answered a lot of questions, and I can tell you a lot of people were very ignorant about it. They had this grade three concept: "It's when a guy loves another guy the way that most guys love women." That's all they knew. Through my answers and my discussions I kind of broadened a lot of perspectives. I pretty much educated the whole school.

I had a teacher come up to me a month ago, Mr. Lowell, and he told me that in his grade seven class one of his students is gay and he's being picked on a lot. Well, he doesn't know for a fact the kid's gay, but he's like ninety-five percent sure. He didn't tell me who it was; I didn't ask. He wanted to know what he should do. Unfortunately, I didn't have that many solutions for him. I said he should let his students know that he's not going to tolerate bullshit in his class. I told him to be sure to respect the student and give the student space and time and compassion, because, God! that's what I would have wanted more from people. So why not give the same things to this kid?

Anyway, I don't think that was quite the answer he wanted. I think he was looking for a quick fix solution. But I didn't mind him asking. I really think it's up to me to make everyone realize it's not only a straight school. Being gay's never brought up in class; the teachers don't talk about it much; there's nothing about it in any of the textbooks. Well, not that we use that many textbooks. But if there's going to be a couple, inevitably it's

going to be a boy-girl couple. Obviously it's based on heterosexism. It makes me think: Wow! Life is so boring in textbooks.

So I mix it up to try and open their minds. Like in science class the teacher's always telling us about straight circuits and in math the teacher's always talking about straight lines. So once I said in front of the whole class, "No. No. No, silly. We don't say 'straight.' We say, 'gaily forward.' " Mr. George the math teacher said, "Come on. Don't force me to be politically correct." I don't think he got it—he actually thought I was serious.

I brought something like that up in biology class, but Mr. Côté really didn't like it. He's a horrible teacher; he spits when he talks. I challenged him because I was certain that I heard on the news or somewhere that they pinpointed a gay gene or a neurological differences or something in the chromosomes of homosexuals. So I asked him about it and he said, "No. No. No. There's absolutely no difference." But I thought, "You old coot. Fuck you went to university in like the sixties. What do you know?" I don't think that he totally agrees with my being gay. His daughter Karine was in my elementary school and I remember her saying that homosexuality is wrong—like in grade three. I wonder where she got that from?

Well, that's the burden of being the only out gay student in school. I suppose it would be great if some other gay students came out so we could have a bigger gay student body. As it is now, I'm the entire gay student body. If there were others, I think people here would be more liberated—a gay student doesn't modulate to the norm and to what everybody else is doing. It would promote a lot of eclecticism, if that's the word. Actually I think it would be great in any school. But personally I don't care because it would take some attention away from me. I'd be less in the limelight, and we can't have that.

As I walk into the school, thankfully Sam is waiting for me along with a few of our other friends. Sam and I have been best friends since grade eight. We know each other inside-out—we could look each other in the face from across the street and we'd know exactly what each other's thinking. Teachers hate having us in the same class, though. We talk a lot and get the giggles at least five times a day—on a good day.

Everyone hugs me and laughs and says that Jon Casey should consider himself lucky to be hit on by me. Sam tells me that Jon's been going around telling everyone I grabbed his balls, but nobody's listening to him. Just like I thought.

I try to keep my head down for the rest of the day. At the very least. "One day at a time," I keep telling myself. The rest of the day's like this: my friends supporting me; Jon sticking to his guns; and his friends keeping out if it. I suppose people who don't know me and just know that I'm gay must think the worse about me. The hypocrites!

Anyway, I vow to keep out of trouble for a while.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

A couple of months pass and nothing much happens. Somehow I even manage to avoid the principal's office. Don't get me wrong—this doesn't mean I've somehow laid down and died. I still give as good as I get, maybe even better. Like if someone calls me "fag," I still say, "Thank you, asshole. Tell me something I don't already know."

Just yesterday I asked someone in my French class how his weekend was and he said to me, "Uh, pretty gay," so I said, "Yeah, it was a very homosexual weekend. My weekend was pretty faggy, too." I think he got the point. People say that all the time, even to teachers. You'd think that maybe teachers would say something like, "That's really ridiculous. Out of all the words in the English language, you really have to choose that one to use? Like come on." But so many people say it—I guess if a teacher stops every time a student uses it like that to correct them, they wouldn't be doing anything else.

And despite what people think of me, I've refrained from having my way with every boy I see, although Sam and I still do go to the gym at lunch and sit on the stage and watch the hot boys play sports or whatever it is they're doing. They know we're checking them out, but it's all good. I suppose some of them are really insecure about their sexuality and they might be bothered by it, but most of them don't care. Anyway, what am I going to do? Rape them? Surely they realize that.

School's over for another day.

I'm heading out the door to catch my bus when I see Tony down the hall talking to his girlfriend Nina and her friend J.P. I walk up to them and they're with another guy who I assume is J.P.'s twenty-six-year-old boyfriend because as soon as he sees me he

pulls J.P. closer to him. J.P.'s told me about his boyfriend, but we've never met. Apparently he's jealous as hell and even abusive at times. I kiss Nina and I politely shake J.P. and the boyfriend's hands.

Nina, Tony, and I make small talk for a bit until I hear the boyfriend say to J.P. loud enough so I can hear, "He's the last person I want to see right now." I look right at him and say, "Well, by all means, leave. No one's forcing you to be here." Right away he steps towards me and says, "If I were you, I'd leave right now." I say, "Fuck off! This is my school. You leave!"

Suddenly the boyfriend goes into a jealous psycho rage and grabs my neck and pins me up against the locker. Just as quickly Tony hauls him off me.

There are a few other people in the hall witnessing this, like Mrs. Hutchison, my English teacher, this small little toothpick woman, and she runs up and starts giving J.P.'s boyfriend shit: "You know, this isn't your school. This is Evan's school. You can't just barge in here and pick fights with students. Leave at once!"

And then Mrs. Lehrer, the art teacher—God bless her soul—she comes up to me and takes me by the arm and says, "It's okay sweetie. It's going to be all right. Come on now, we're going to go to the office and get you some ice. It's okay now sweetie." I'm like, "Fuck! You're not helping me!" I don't appreciate all this "sweetie" stuff in front of everyone. But I go with her anyway.

All I can think is: I wish he would have done that right after the bell rang in a crowded hallway with all my friends there. I'd love to see that—a dozen girls ripping him to shreds.

While Mrs. Lehrer does her best to mother me, I tell her who J.P. is. She asks me how it all began, and I tell her, pouring everything out. I even tell her I care about him.

"You're sixteen and you slept with him?" she says shocked.

I say, "Spare me please," and tell her not to preach, and she says, "Okay. All right. I'm not going to moralize to you, but that's my opinion." She says she apologizes if it came out so blatantly. I continue telling her about the whole sordid mess.

She nods and asks questions here and there, and smiles when I come to the conclusion that I don't have that much invested in J.P. anyway, so whatever.

Mr. Russell comes in and asks if I want to speak to him. I thank Mrs. Lehrer for helping me out and follow him into his office. First he asks if I'm okay and then tells me Tony has briefly filled him in on the details. He tells me that J.P. and his boyfriend have been escorted out of the building and won't be allowed back under any circumstances. "I've made that crystal clear."

"It's up to you if you want to press charges," he says. "We'll support you either way." I nod that I understand. I wait, wondering how this will be turned into another incident where it's all my fault. "I want you to know," he continues, "the school guarantees your safety. You can count on that. Especially now that we know about the situation. I'll be informing Mr. Pfeiffer about it, too. He's away at a meeting, but as soon as he gets back I'll let him know what happened." He goes on to tell me that the school isn't going to tolerate someone just coming in and attacking a student.

"I guess I've done it again, huh?" I say. "Created another big gay drama?"

But Mr. Russell says, "The fact is we have a gay student in our school and I want you to know we're not going to overlook him if he has issues or complaints. But the bottom line today is it's about your safety—that's more important than anything else right now. It's not always about being gay, you know."

And I almost believe him.

An Open Letter to Gay Students
Pages from Joe Rose's Notebook

The first thing I'd say to you if you're gay and out in school is don't be affected by anything anyone says, unless it's good. In which case, be affected all you want. If it's bad, just carry on being who you are because it makes people more prone to respect you if they see you don't care what other people have to say. It also makes the person who's saying bad things look dumb. The first thing you have to do is learn how to be strong and to block out negative people and their words.

It's important to be yourself and be happy because you're fine the way you are. Feel inside that you're happy and you're proud of who you are and no matter what people are going to say or do, don't let it change that feeling. Don't become an introvert, unless you're already that kind of person. You'll need friends, and if your friends really are your friends, they'll accept you for who you are. They're not going to judge you.

There will be trials and tribulations when you're out, but there's always a light at the end of the tunnel. Wait it out and don't do anything drastic that you might regret.

If you're not out, take your time. First of all, make sure that when you do come out that you weren't pressured to do it and you're comfortable with it. Coming out is a leap of faith no matter how

comfortable you are. Sometimes you might think that whether to come out is a hard decision to make. For some people, it's not something easy to live through. There might be harassment, so sometimes it's easier to be in the closet. But don't forget there are benefits of being out, the biggest one is you feel more accepting of yourself.

If everything is going fine, then, do what you want. But if you're being harassed about not being out and everyone's making fun of you, you might as well be yourself and come out. You have nothing to lose. Many of us think it's one of the more positive events in their lives.

It's your decision, but realize that people are a lot more supportive than you know. You can talk to your friends. People are a lot more tolerant now.

If you do find yourself being harassed, defend yourself. Don't just swallow it. Get allies like a teacher, an administrator, or other students. If you're being verbally harassed, think of a snappy comment. Don't just say, "Shut up" or something lame like that. If you're being physically harassed, call the police.

But above all, have fun.

And be yourself.

Epilogue

Pink hair cost gay man his life
4 youths held in Rose killing

Montreal – Early Sunday morning a local man was stabbed to death on a city bus by a gang of youths. Joe Rose, 23, was attacked by 15 or more assailants who jeered at him and shouted, "Faggot." The incident occurred at about 4:30 a.m. outside the Frontenac métro.

Witnesses to the attack say the youths beat him and stabbed him because his hair was dyed pink. The youths pulled off Rose's hat and started punching him then pulled out hunting and kitchen knives and scissors and stabbed him repeatedly before fleeing the bus. A female bus driver who tried to intervene was struck but not seriously injured.

"I'm convinced it was because he's gay," said one witness who asked not to be identified. "There were a lot of people they could have singled out. Why him? He had pink hair and looked gay.

They chose him."

A family spokesperson said Rose was returning home from a friend's house on the last bus. In CEGEP, Rose was the president of the gay and lesbian student group.

A 19-year-old and a 15-year-old will be charged later today with second-degree murder. Two juveniles, 14 and 15, who cannot be named under youth protection laws, will be charged as accessories after the fact.

The Phenomenological Study

Introduction to the Study

This qualitative study describes the experiences of out gay high school students. The research design consisted of in-depth phenomenological interviews. Data was analyzed using a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analyzing phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). The theoretical framework undergirding this study is phenomenological research, queer theory in education, and arts-based research. Findings are represented as a literary novel in order to better preserve participants' voices. This research has implications for teachers, administrators, policy-makers, and those involved in teacher education programmes who are interested in addressing the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students.

The Problem

Canada has changed over the last few decades with respect to attitudes about sexual orientation. Polls reporting the opinions of Canadians on various social issues reflect these changes. Maclean's Magazine (Sheppard, 2000), for example, reported that fewer than 20% of Canadians thought it was acceptable to prohibit gay teachers, and that 72% of Canadians felt that improved treatment of gays and lesbians was the most significant social accomplishment of the past decade. In Québec, surveys show an even more progressive attitude towards LGBT issues. For example, 51% of Québécois are in favour of same-sex marriage (contrasted with the Canadian average of 43%), and fully 75% of Québécois believe homophobic insults and name-calling should be as severely reprimanded as racist or anti-Semitic insults (as opposed to the Canadian average of 58%) (Léger Marketing, 2004). Since 1975, the Human Rights Charter of Québec (Government of Québec, 1975) has included "sexual orientation" as one of the areas under its protection, the first province or state in North America to do so. The Canadian government has held public consultations looking at marriage and the legal recognition of same-sex unions (Department of Justice Canada, 2002) in light of the Ontario Divisional Court ruling that it is unconstitutional to prohibit gay marriages (CBC, 2002b). The Supreme Courts in most of the other provinces and territories have ruled similarly, including Québec. (In June 2002, the National Assembly of Québec unanimously adopted the same-sex civil unions act [Justice Québec, 2002]). Recently, the Supreme Court of

Canada endorsed the constitutionality of same-sex marriages (Tibbetts, 2004), and, at the time of this writing, the Government of Canada is days away from introducing legislation in Parliament to legalize same-sex marriage. Clearly both the Québécois and Canadian societies have a relatively progressive view on issues of sexual orientation. But how does this progressiveness manifest itself in schools?

The importance of understanding what LGBT students contend with day-to-day cannot be understated. The negative impact on young people who come out is well-documented: suicide (Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Remafedi, 1999); eating disorders (Siever, 1994); low self-esteem (University of Saskatchewan, 1998); ridicule, harassment, and abuse (Walling, 1993); and even violence (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1997; Office for Civil Rights, 1999).

The recent fight of out gay student Marc Hall in Whitby, Ontario, to bring a same-sex date to his prom, shows that Canada is not immune from homophobic reactions to gay students (CBC, 2002a).

Research is needed to help educators appreciate and understand that the school experience for out LGBT students may not be the same as for other students. One of the seven obligations for teachers under the Education Act of Québec is to take "appropriate means to foster respect for human rights in his (her) students" (Government of Québec, 1999). Schools may not be equipped to deal with issues associated with LGBT youth in any meaningful way.

Rationale for the Study

This study is significant because: (a) the issue of LGBT students in school is important for educational reasons; (b) no studies centre exclusively on out gay students in school; and (c) few studies look at schools in the context of a relatively progressive society.

There is a need to look more deeply into the experiences of LGBT students. As previously discussed, research shows that the challenges facing LGBT youth are numerous. LGBT people have been described as an "invisible minority," and certainly LGBT students are frequently "invisible" within schools, even when they are "out." This study aims to make the invisible, visible.

While studies in education, psychology, social work, and sociology have looked at LGBT youth, few have focused exclusively on how they experience school. Essentially, sexual orientation is still a taboo subject in schools and teacher-training programmes. Those studies that do look exclusively at schools are mitigated by having subjects that were at various stages of the coming out process—some had not yet fully described themselves as "gay." By looking at out gay students, an understanding may be had that is not confounded by questions of degrees of sexual orientation or "are they or aren't they" questions. The experiences of the participants in this study are those of clearly out gay students who are understood as such by teachers, administrators, support staff, and peers.

Most studies regarding LGBT youth occur in the United States where acceptance of LGBT people is not as progressive as in some other countries, most notably northern European countries and Canada. In the USA, "tolerance" of the sexual "minority" is held as the goal. Similarly, other English-speaking countries such as the United Kingdom or Australia have generally less progressive views and policies on sexual orientation than Canada. In England, for example, the ban on gays in the military was only lifted five years ago in response to a ruling from the European Court of Human Rights (Belkin & Evans, 2000). Currently all opposition parties in the British Parliament oppose any extension of gay rights, and while the British government is considering the "registering" of gay partnerships, a government spokesperson emphasized, "We are not talking about marriage here" (CBS, 2002). Australians have also banned same-sex marriages (Washington Times, 2004). Recently in the United States attempts have been made to pass a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages (CNN, 2004), as well as numerous state initiatives to do likewise. In Australia where the ban on gays in the military was lifted in 1992 (Belkin & McNichol, 2000), the same year as Canada, until as recently as 1998 when the Tasmania Anti-Discrimination Act was passed (Government of Tasmania, 2002), it was illegal for consenting adults to engage in "homosexual activity," even in private (Amnesty International, 1996). Contravention of the law was punishable by twenty-five years in prison. In many countries, being gay is criminalized. For example, in Jamaica, and similar to other Caribbean countries, laws are in place that punish any act of physical intimacy between men in public or private by a term of imprisonment of up to ten years and the possibility of hard labour (Amnesty

International, 2004). These laws have almost unanimous support by Jamaicans. Is it any wonder Amnesty International (2004) reports numerous incidents of homophobic violence against gay men in that country, including gay men and women being "beaten, cut, burned, raped, and shot"? Some jurisdictions, like England, have even gone to the length of passing laws forbidding schools to "promote the teaching…of the acceptability of homosexuality" (Warwick, Aggleton, & Douglas, 2001: 133).

This study provides knowledge of experiences further along the evolutionary track, as it were. Looking at a relatively more-progressive country such as Canada with respect to this issue, and specifically Québec, will serve as a canary in a coal mine and may be useful to researchers and educators in countries not yet at this point in the "acceptance" learning curve. The challenges remaining for educators, human rights activists, and policy-makers may be better delineated as a result of this study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework undergirding this study is phenomenological research, queer theory in education, and arts-based research.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology has at its core the tenet that research participants must tell their own stories in as unprocessed a fashion as possible. An understanding of phenomenon begins when participants describe their experiences with the phenomenon and then have the opportunity to reflect on its significance, thus becoming, in a sense, co-researchers. Who best to understand something so personal as those who are experiencing it? The researcher's role is to elicit these stories, most commonly through interviews, and guide and encourage participants to get to the essence of these experiences as accurately as possible. Experiential stories are then searched for common themes that will help elucidate the phenomenon.

Phenomenology differs from other qualitative research paradigms in that, unlike case studies or ethnography, for example, it does not attempt to describe "an existing state of affairs or a certain present or past culture" that most likely changes with time and according to location (Van Manen, 1997: 22). Tools such as surveys and statistics would not be useful to phenomenological research. Phenomenology does not generate empirical findings. "Instead, it offers accounts of experienced space, time, body, and human relation as we live them" (Van Manen, 1997: 184). Different from biographical studies, phenomenology looks at the phenomenon from many participants' point of view rather than a single participant's life (Creswell, 1998).

Phenomenology tries to get at the core of human experience. It doesn't purport to be able to develop theories that explain the world—it provides insight and brings us into what Van Manen (a997) describes as "more direct contact with the world" (p. 9). "Anything that presents itself to consciousness is potentially of interest to phenomenology, whether the object is real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt" (Van Manen, 1997: 9). It always concentrates on the lived meaning of lived experiences rather than merely on the subjective experience of participants. "Lived meaning" is the way a person experiences and understands his or her world and the

meanings he or she ascribes to it.

Phenomenology as a research method is both descriptive and interpretive. It attempts to describe the lived experiences of individuals with respect to a phenomenon, yet it is also interpretive as it looks at the mediated expression of that experience through words, actions, text, et cetera. (Van Manen, 1997). The language that is used by co-researchers to describe their experiences with such phenomena, after all, is inherently interpretive, but they may not completely understand what is at play in their own experiences. Some "outside" interpretation or "filtering" is necessary (Roberts, 2002).

Finally, there is a symbiotic relationship between phenomenological research and writing. "The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which the reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience" (Van Manen, 1997: 36).

While some may see the writing of research findings as the final, and oftentimes, least glorious and most tedious of the research steps, its importance in phenomenology is profound. "Writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of the research project. Writing is also a way of 'knowing'—a method of discovery and analysis" (Richardson, 2000: 923). The goal of phenomenology is not to present findings to convince other social scientists, but, rather, to understand an experience. The written report is as much a part of the phenomenological process as the research. It provides the means by which participants' voices can be heard and, as such, there is a responsibility to represent these voices in as rich and detailed a way possible, thus accurately giving them life again.

Phenomenology, especially, has a relationship with literature. "The phenomenological value of a novel, for example, is determined by what may be called the perceptiveness and the intuitive sensibility of the author. Phenomena such as love, grief, illness, faith, success, fear, death, hope, struggle, or loss are the stuff of which novels are made" (Van Manen, 1997: 70). If phenomenology as a research method must listen to the voices of those who experience a phenomenon, then surely when findings are written they must be written in a way that allows these voices to speak that is both powerful yet subtle. All human science has a narrative quality, but expressly using literary rhetoric ensures that

the story is told in the most evocative, and, ultimately, faithful way possible. "If the description is phenomenologically powerful, then it acquires certain transparency, so to speak; it permits us to see the deeper significance, or meaning structures, of the lived experience it describes" (Van Manen, 1997: 122).

The question of validity in phenomenology is one that cannot be answered either in terms of quantitative research standards or even other qualitative research. Phenomenology has its own set of parameters and precepts. In qualitative research, the quest for internal validity is basically the quest for one thing: Is what is being measured what we wanted to measure? (Wolcott, 1991). Wolcott (1991) states he would rather his work be seen as "provocative" than merely persuasive. He characterizes the concern with validity as a "distraction" and argues that in the greater picture there is little comfort if the scrupulously validated study has "no impact or provoke(s) no further thought" (p. 148). Phenomenology is different—it's not a science of measurement. The goal of phenomenology is not to present findings to convince other scientists, but, rather, to understand an experience. The standards to which phenomenology should be accountable are more questions of whether the experience is accurately presented and whether the analysis is one that can be logically proffered given that experience.

The question as to whether research findings can be generalized to larger populations is problematic with phenomenology as it is in traditional positivistic research as well. Phenomenology has only one rule with regards to generalization: "Never generalize!" (Van Manen, 1997: 22). Attempts to generalize would prevent a deeper understanding of the human experience being studied. Phenomenology purports that all experiences are possibly experiences shared by all of us and have a "universal (intersubjective) character" (Van Manen, 1997: 58). Generalizability to other contexts carry with it the caveat that those contexts may differ significantly from the studied one. The reader is left to decide, and who better, whether the context they are in is similar enough to make generalizations. In order to do this, enough data must be provided about the phenomenon and its context to make such an assessment—providing coherent, rich description that takes the reader into the setting is one way to achieve this. Stake (as cited in Schofield, 1991), posits that "naturalistic generalization" allow us to take findings from qualitative research and help in our understanding of another, similar setting.

Queer Theory in Education

The term "queer" has developed in the 1990s as a descriptor for those who identify with non-heterosexual sexualities. Its use is a defiant act of subverting and a reappropriation meant to disempower those who use the word as a slur, moving it from "stigma to a badge of solidarity" (Tierney, 1997b: 29). Queer theory describes a theoretical movement and a political activism that seeks to subvert on behalf of non-heterosexuals what has been called "normal" by questioning what that means historically and culturally. It extends to many diverse academic and non-academic areas, including education, and proposes and enacts these ideas through non-traditional, non-predictable, and often confrontational ways.

Queer theory encompasses many precepts that can be (and are) challenged, not the least of which is its own definition. Some writers (e.g., Plummer, 1996) see queer theory in terms of its resistance to "normalized" social models, most notably heterosexuality. Such concepts as gender, sexuality, desire, and even the terms "man" and "woman" are called into question. Others see it as residing in the arenas of activism and theory that has developed into "a new form of personal identification and political organization" (Jagose, 1996: 76).

As a theory, easy definitions also remain elusive. Turner (2000) calls queer theory "conceptually slippery...difficult to summarize...in a sentence, or even a paragraph" (p. 3). While its date of origin is generally accepted as being the early 1990s, it has been argued that queer theory has incorporated previous conceptualizations about sexuality, lesbian feminism, and postmodern thought (Jagose, 1996). For example, queer theory embraces the postmodern belief that modernist attempts to seek rationality in the chaos of social life are absurd because rationality is a lie (Stein & Plummer, 1996). Science is used by modernists to classify and label, as if that in itself signifies a true understanding.

From lesbian feminism, queer theory understands and discusses how gender operates, and, how it legitimizes heterosexuality as the normative sexual expression. "Queer is also productively informed by lesbian feminism in three crucial respects: its attention to the specificity of gender, its framing of sexuality as institutional rather than personal, and its critique of compulsory heterosexuality" (Jagose, 1996: 57).

Queer theory is oppositional and suspicious "that the predominant modes of

intellectual and political activity in western culture during the late twentieth century do not serve the needs and interests of queers and that perhaps they cannot be made to do so" (Turner, 2000: 9). That queer theorists do not offer something in its place, some would claim is a strength (e.g., Jagose, 1996). Since what constitutes queer is somewhat nebulous, it sees itself as ever-changing and constantly in the process of definition, and then challenging that definition. Queer resists in an ongoing and persistent way anything "normal."

Queer theorists, such as Michel Foucault, see sex acts in themselves having no meaning other than what society gives them (Tierney, 1997b). Identity is seen as a "cultural fantasy" as opposed to a provable fact (Jagose, 1996). Turner (2000) claims there is growing empirical evidence that sexual identities vary based on "race, ethnicity, class, geography, and time" (p. 7). Only until the creation of the word "homosexual" could there be a "heterosexual." Queer theorists argue that the two terms are inseparable and only definable in relation to the other (Jagose, 1996). Queer theorists see both homosexuality and heterosexuality as constructs that can only be understood in context of culture. A major part of this construction is to represent heterosexuality as "normalized" and distinct from homosexuality.

For example, queer theorists don't see homophobia as an individual problem of a person, as liberationists see it, but the "product of a system of structural power where heterosexuality is encoded throughout daily life" (Tierney, 1997b: 35). It is interesting how, as Sedgwick (1990) describes it, "Many people have their richest mental/emotional involvement with sexual acts that they don't do, or even don't *want* to do" (p. 25, italics in original). Perhaps this succinctly describes the investment homophobes have in being homophobic. Queer theorists go beyond explorations of individual manifestations of homophobia (generally characterized as a personal flaw or a psychological fear) to questioning "how the very term homophobia as a discourse centers heterosexuality as the normal" (Britzman, 1995: 158). The social oppression of gays and lesbians is due, in part, to how homosexuality is close in form to heterosexuality (Weeks, 1996). "Homophobia is not primarily an instrument for oppressing a sexual minority; it is, rather, a powerful tool for regulating the entire spectrum of male relations" (Owens, 1987: 221).

Queer theory, following Foucault's lead, takes a historical look at sexuality and how

it has been used to oppress homosexuals while heterosexuals are privileged (Turner, 2000). Sedgwick (1990) agrees: "The definitional narrowing-down in this century of sexuality as a whole to a binarized calculus of *homo-* or *hetero*sexuality is a weighty fact but an entirely historical one" (p. 31, italics in original). "The aim of queer theory and other poststructural theories of the self is to deconstruct the binary oppositions that govern identity formation, that is, to reveal the power relations that lie behind them and the "truth games" they organize and are organized by" (Carlson, 1998: 113).

Queer is also a resistance to the liberationist politics before them. While this could be criticized as being "immature and generational rebellion" (Jagose, 1996: 115), it does signify the discontent with the assimilationist policies and practices of the liberationists. By perpetuating the heterosexual/homosexual binary, liberationists are seen by queer theorists as buying into how some groups are privileged while others are marginalized— oppositions that leaves the "centre" intact. Queer theory argues that the centre, not just the margins, is ripe for study. "For it is this binary construction of identity, and with it the representation of the subaltern Other as deficient and inferior, that provides a common threat that runs throughout the histories of class, race, gender, and sexual orientation in the modern era" (Pinar, 1998: 15). Assimilationists look at what they must do to be invited to the heterosexual table when "we are assured a place at the table, but our actions can remove us" (Tierney, 1997b: 52). Tierney (1997b) argues that we should also have a say about "what's on the menu" (p. 60). But what good is getting to the table if the structure remains the same? Isn't it time to rebel against having to be asked to the table, or even wanting to be?

Foucault and Butler

Two of the most influential writers in the development of queer theory are Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. Foucault examined the relationship between how knowledge comes to be and how power is employed. Butler (1990) contributes to queer theory how gender is fiction, the performativity of gender, and how those who do not "do their gender right" are punished. "The various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (p. 139).

It was Foucault to whom credit is given in bringing gays and lesbians beyond

cultural innovators to intellectual innovators and social theorists (Stein & Plummer, 1996). Foucault (1988) offered the concept that sexuality (like identity) is not a property of someone but is a cultural category that has been historically constructed. The transition to a homosexual identity came about in the late 1890s where "the sodomite had been a temporary aberration (and) the homosexual was now a species" (p. 43). Foucault believed that sexuality is an effect of power, not a coercive power, but one able to discipline nonetheless. It is claims of scientific knowledge that Foucault sees as a force of domination. "My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous which is not exactly the same thing as bad" (Foucault, as quoted in Turner, 2000: 40). Foucault had no faith that science would discover the truth about sexuality since it had an authoritative political agenda beyond claims of empirical investigation that involves instilling condoned behaviour and restricting anything else.

> What gives power its hold, what makes it accepted, is quite simply the fact that it does not simply weigh like a force which says no, but that it runs through, and it produces, things, it induces pleasure, it forms knowledge, it produces a discourse; it must be considered as a productive network which runs through the entire social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault, 1979, as cited in Jagose, 1996: 80).

According to Foucault, resistance to power undertaken by sexual minorities is only playing into the historic and incorrect dynamics of power and resistance. With power comes resistance—they share the same space. Through discourse, we can "constitute and contest" their meanings (Jagose, 1996: 81). Discourse is a mode of resistance. "Foucault's argument that sexuality is a discursive production rather than a natural condition is part of his larger contention that modern subjectivity is an effect of networks of power" (Jagose, 1996: 80).

Resistance, actually a plurality of resistances in Foucault's vision, is inherent in power. It is "inscribed as an irreducible opposite" (1988: 95). If discourse reinforces power, reverse discourse resists it. "Discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposite strategy" (Foucault, 1988: 101). One example of this reverse discourse is how homophobes have been pathologized where once homosexuals had been. Suggestions and even research has made claims that homophobia is "caused" by

repressed homosexuality (Dollimore, 1991; Adams, Wright, & Lohr, 1996). However, Dollimore (1991) argued that linking the homophobe and the homosexual through their shared homosexuality can be dangerous by making the victim "in some vague sense complicit with the aggression" (p. 243). Another example of reverse discourse is how by pathologising homosexuality, "homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (Foucault, 1988: 101).

Foucault advocated an examination of how identity categories are constructed and how individuals are produced by them. He criticized the trend to provide more information about sexual minorities in both current and historical contexts—Foucault thought this would only bind individuals to their "sexed subjectivities" (Turner, 2000: 65). If sexual identity categories are socially constructed, Foucault suggested this would be an opportunity to "crawl inside the system, maybe gum it up, maybe disassemble some part of it, with consequences that will remain largely unknown until they emerge" (Turner, 2000: 69). Queer theorists continue this work when, for example, they look at the historical and cultural significance of words like "gay," "man," "woman," "homosexual," and so on. "Historical circumstance plays a huge role in determining who we are, what we think, and how we recognize ourselves" (Turner, 2000: 38).

Foucault didn't study sexuality phenomenologically, but, rather, he looked at "the various operations of institutions and discourses in which authoritative individuals used examinations and specifications of sexual thoughts and practices to control their subjects (including themselves)" (Turner, 2000: 69).

One of the many criticisms of Foucault, however, is that he did not write about gender, class, and race (Turner, 2000). Turner (2000) cites geographic and biographical reasons why Foucault did not include them. Foucault's vision leaves itself open to accusations that his view of sexuality is somewhat one-dimensional. But he countered with the contention that it is sexuality that may "provide the basis for challenging or disrupting the operation of class, race, and gender" (p. 46). He doesn't see them as dependent on each other.

Until Judith Butler, the heterosexual representation of biology dictated that "one anatomical configuration desire(s) bodies with the 'opposite' anatomical configuration"

(Turner, 2000: 109). Butler sees culture as being paramount in determining how we understand and interpret biology. "The sciences of biology and anatomy, while purporting to describe the self-evident, irreducible ground of sex difference, betray the signs of their constitution in language and the consequent indeterminacy of their meanings" (Turner, 2000: 109).

Identity categories are also of interest to Butler who sees them as "instruments of regulatory regimes" regardless if they are used to normalize or to liberate (Butler, 1991: 13). Butler saw that when identities are classified, they are also normalized. Queer can subvert this force by remaining constantly in process, "in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes" (Butler, 1993: 19). This doesn't mean terms are not useful. Butler (1993) argues that terms may be used that do the "political work more effectively" (p. 19).

However, Butler believes no origin of gendered identity exists. Butler seeks to undermine existing categories of sexual and gender identities. She sees individuals who "necessarily operate through gendered signs. The subjects who repeat the signs have the capacity to alter their meaning through that repetition" (Turner, 2000: 110). This repetition also provides the opportunity to subvert the conventional meaning of these gendered signs. From that project, power would be more available to the marginalized sexual and gender categories.

The interplay between sex, gender, and desire concerned Butler. She saw the idea that they were interacting in a continuum where sex determined gender that determined desire as fallacious. If the connections between them were removed, gender and desire would be independent, not bound in a causal relationship. Thus gender is a performance and not who you are. "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1990: 25).

Butler muses that once we contest "the immutable character of sex," it becomes a cultural construct similar to the construct that is gender. The next step, then, is not to make a distinction between sex and gender (Butler, 1990).

Butler, like Foucault, sees power in the discursive. It is compulsory heterosexuality

that makes gender uniform, which, in turn, can be resignified through "ongoing discursive practice" (Jagose, 1996: 84). "Heterosexuality is naturalized by the performative repetition of normative gender identities" (Jagose, 1996: 85). Butler advocates deconstructing these identities through displaced repetitions such as gender parodies. "Consequently, heterosexuality is no longer assumed to be the original of which homosexuality is an inferior copy" (Jagose, 1996: 85). Butler sees all gender, for that matter, as performative but

> "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance (Butler, 1993: 95).

Thus, "gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy" (Butler, 1990: 31). As examples of gender parodies, Butler offers drag and cross-dressing, and even sado-masochism in it is, in her view, a theatricalization of the real violence that permeates society.

Butler (1994) believes that "normalizing" the queer would ultimately lead to its demise. For Butler, "marginalized identities are complicit with those identificatory regimes they seek to counter" (Jagose, 1996: 83). Heterosexuality can be seen as a hegemonic institution, but pulling away the curtain it is, in Butler's view, nothing more than "a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations" (1993: 125). Evidently it has something to prove, but it only provides as proof "repeated efforts at self-demonstration" (Thomas, 1997: 100). It is self-policing.

Queer Pedagogy

Issues relating to gays and lesbians have been noticeably absent from most schools and their curriculum. When these issues have arisen, some schools have been turned into battlegrounds. Unks (1995, as quoted in Rodriguez, 1998) calls high schools "the most homophobic institutions in American society" (p. 177). Schools deny the existence of homosexuals unless forced to do so—when a gay student wants to take a same-sex date to a prom or a gay student is fag-bashed. Never mind trying to include a gay or lesbian in the curriculum. Rodriguez (1998) sees the combination of heterosexism and schooling as

"an insidious way of educating youth to promote 'sexual fascism'" (p. 177). He calls this the "moral right's hidden curriculum." Tierney and Dilley (1998) state: "Until the mid-1970s, the literature about homosexuality and its relationship to education was framed in one of two ways: either by absence, or by defining the topic as deviant" (p. 50).

In some regions in Canada, religious and conservative groups have fought AIDS education about safer sex practices and school and school board initiatives to address homophobic harassment and violence in schools (Warner, 2002: 337). As a result, "homophobic remarks and harassment, ostracism, vulnerability, and fear about coming out remain features of Canada's schools" (Warner, 2002: 340).

Education is one of the fields where little work has been done to address homophobia and heterosexism. Pinar (1998), in his introduction to Queer Theory in Education, characterizes education as a "highly conservative and often reactionary field" (p. 2) and goes on to assert that queer theory has come late to education. Sumara and Davis (1998) describe the goals of queer theory in this regard as not an attempt to sex pedagogy, but to examine how it is already sexed and, more precisely, "heterosexed."

Schools as major heteronormative sites for the repression of gays and lesbians are now targeted by queer theorists as significant sites of resistance. In schools, there is an ongoing "interaction of language and action, self- and social identity, power and difference, experience and what is taken for knowledge, and the function of institutions to ensure equity beyond tolerance or representation" (Tierney & Dilley, 1998: 64). Tierney and Dilley (1998) see these issues as fundamental to queer theory. With a queer pedagogical focus, the classroom becomes a site where the dynamics and hegemony of heterosexuality is examined and resisted.

Debbie Epstein (1997, 1998, 1999), writing within the context of the United Kingdom, contributes work that positions schools as one of the major sites for the formation of young people's sexual identities and how schools and the interactions in them "police borders." "We wish to think of pedagogy in terms of all the myriad ways in which we learn and are taught to position ourselves within the regimes of truth through which we understand our gendered, heterosexualized, racialized and classed world" (Epstein & Sears, 1999: 2). As such, schools still perpetuate a privileged male existence while both students and teachers denigrate all that is female or perceived to be female as

gay males frequently are. Epstein links misogyny and homophobia as "inseparable."

Teachers are implicated in supporting hegemonic masculinities, insulting male students through "feminizing" and homophobic remarks (Epstein, 1998; Frank, 1993). Teachers have claimed that respect for race and traditional ethnic cultures as an excuse not to address the needs of LGBT students (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Thus, the relentless inaction of educators can be claimed to be justifiable.

Queer pedagogy attempts to understand how institutions interpret and present sexual orientations. Where gay liberationists looked at how schools could be improved for gays and lesbians and how education could be used to improve the conditions of gays and lesbians outside schools, queer theorists examine the structures behind these somewhat cosmetic attempts at "tolerance."

Arts-based Educational Inquiry

Ellis (1997, citing Denzin [1992], Rorty [1979], and Rosenau [1992]), claims there is a "crisis in representation" (p. 115). We are now asking questions about why there are divisions in research between science, humanities, and the arts. In a postmodern era, Butler-Kisber (2002) sees traditional methods of representation as not attending to concerns of voice and relationship and multiple interpretations. Likewise, Tierney (1997a) argues we need to "develop experimental voices that expand the range of narrative strategies" (p. 23).

Arts-based methods of inquiry in education offer ways of knowing and making meaning that transcend the margins of traditional research methods that rely on numbers and words. Arts-based inquiry most commonly uses forms of literary narrative—poetry, novels, short stories—but has also included performance work such as dance (Cancienne & Megibow, 2001), plays (Goldstein, 2001; Norris, 2001), and performative research texts (Cole & McIntyre, 2001), and now even extends beyond literary representations to visual media. "Visual art is an excellent, although under utilized, way of representing what has been conceptualized in research" (Weber & Mitchell, 2004).

Books, such as The Art of Writing Inquiry (Neilsen, 2002) and Daredevil Research (Jipson & Paley, 1997), are dedicated to arts-based research, and journals, such as Alberta Journal of Educational Research (Norris & Buck, 2002) and Journal of Curriculum Theorizing (Diamond & Mullen, 2001), have special issues on arts-based

inquiry. Websites, such as the "Image and Identity Research Collective (IIRC)" and the "Centre for Arts-informed Research (CAIR)" exist as forums for those interested in both arts-based research and representations. Educational research conferences feature arts-based sessions (Cancienne & Megibow, 2001; Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999).

Examples of arts-based work in education include Rishma Dunlop's dissertation, Boundary Bay": A Novel as Educational Research, Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber's performance piece, "Accessorizing Death: A Monologue for Two Voices," and Lynn Butler-Kisber's "found poetry" based on interviews with student research participants. Even the parameters of arts-based inquiry have been expanded to include reader's theatre, musical drama, hypertext, film, and video (Butler-Kisber, 2002), as well as quilting (Agostinone-Wilson and Hawke, 2001), masquerade (DiRezze & Mantas, 2001), and collage (Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999).

Some writers posit what they believe constitutes arts-based inquiry (Barone & Eisner, 1997) and what criteria should be used for judging its merit (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Richardson, 2000). These writers generally agree that arts-based educational inquiry is characterized by how it responds to issues of (a) aesthetic form and merit, (b) the emotional impact of the work, (c) how the researcher stamps his/her personal signature on the work, (d) how it contributes to the field, and (e) authenticity of voice and content.

Marginalized voices can be heard in research if researchers are willing to eschew the traditional paradigms where voices are too often spoken "about" and "on behalf of" rather than directly. Indeed, research in many countries is looking at making heard the voices of those who have been historically under-represented—aboriginal peoples, the working class, ethnic groups, et cetera. (Roberts, 2002). Alternative forms of representing research hold the promise that marginalized voices can be heard by opening up what counts as representation to the ways of expression that are more universally valued and better understood. Ellis (1997) sees story telling, whether in a written or oral tradition, as a familiar form recognizable by all groups. "Minorities within academia, including ethnic and racial, postcolonial, gay and lesbian, physically challenged, and returning students, find the turn to creative analytic practices as beckoning" (Richardson, 2000: 938). Feminist scholars, as well, have looked at how to represent the voices of those under

study in as true a form as possible, rather than co-opting those voices under the guise of an authoritative researcher (Krizek, 1998). "The most common narratives are stories which tell of discrimination, prejudice and empowerment, stories which tell of coming out as lesbian and gay or as a strong, independent woman, stories of victimization and of survival, stories of difference and of similarity, stories of identity and stories of relationships" (Weeks, 1999: 18). Marginalized groups want to explore alternative forms of representation in research because they want to be true to their traditions, cultures, and histories.

> Within educational research there has been a growing amount of work that makes central the stories told in and about classrooms. Like the research generated out of feminist oriented studies, the work of many educational biographers and narrative inquirers concerns itself with examining and facilitating change within the oppressive modes of the classroom. The effect of this concern for actual life experiences of teachers and children has brought about several important traditions within the field, based on self-disclosure and testimony (Bailey, 1997: 139).

Gay and lesbian students are one such marginalized group whose voices have not been heard in the representations of traditional research. Literary representations, primarily the short story and the novel, are one way for these voices to be heard. Attesting to this is the continuing publication of anthologies of gay literary fiction such as the Men on Men series (Stambolian, 1986), the Best American Gay Fiction series (Bouldrey, 1996), and the His series (Drake & Wolverton, 1995). The history of gay literature is rich and can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome (Woods, 1998). Gay literature has ranged from stories with gay and lesbian protagonists to subtle, even cloaked depictions, and has undergone many onslaughts including frequent attempts at censorship, yet has survived.

Writing allows gays and lesbians to define for themselves what it means to be gay and lesbian. "Queers are to the gay community as God is to Man in the opening of Genesis—hungry for something made in our own image. We create it in our art, and in our art we recognize ourselves" (Drake, 1997: xiii). Stories reflect how high school is still where some of the most shaping experiences occur for gays and lesbians (Chase, 1998). For young gays and lesbians, many of whom still have no one to confide in, such stories tell them "you're not alone; other teenagers have gone through experiences much like yours" (Heron, 1994: 9). For adults, such narratives are informative and offer ways to

begin understanding LGBT youth and provide them with the support they need, especially in school settings.

For bell hooks (as cited in Springgay, 2002), art can transgress oppressive boundaries. "Art is and remains such an uninhibited, unrestrained cultural terrain only if all artists see their work as inherently challenging to those institutionalized systems of domination (imperialism, racism, sexism, class elitism, et cetera.) that seek to limit, co-opt, exploit, or shut down possibilities for individual creative self-actualization" (p. 1).

Increasingly arts-based educational inquiry is seen as being able to move in the realms where traditional research has been lacking. "The emotion invoked through either producing or experiencing a work of art is real and immediate and part of the everyday. Whether we experience it through painting, sculpture, photography, story, drama, poetry, or music, art causes us to tap into our own soul and that of others and becomes a powerful tool for the communication of ideas that may otherwise not be heard if put into more traditional words" (Baskwell, 2001: 133). Arts-based forms make experience "more accessible, concrete, imaginable, and affecting" (Diamond & Mullen, 1999a).

Representing research by literary methods—poetry, drama, and fiction—is one subset of arts-based educational inquiry, and is informed by it. Although literary representations have words in common with traditional research, they are used in different and imaginative ways, expanding what counts as knowledge. Grace (2001), for example, uses poetry, specifically what he calls "research poetry," to "find places where critical analysis cannot go, and to push my own boundaries of engagement and understanding" (p. 84).

While the term "arts-based" inquiry and research is widely used by those working in this area, some writers are now using the term "arts-informed," demonstrating how this area is growing and becoming nuanced (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Neilsen, 2002). "We prefer the use of the term 'arts-informed' research because it suggests that the processes and forms of researching and representation are informed by the arts rather than being based in them or even, perhaps, about them. Arts-informed implies that the whole project is imbued with qualities of the arts" (Cole & Knowles, 2001: 219). This schism of terminology can be seen as a reaction to research that is merely dressed up in "literary clothing" (Neilsen, 2002: 212). Certainly, in educational research it has been the

representation of research findings that has seen the benefit of arts-based methods (Conrad, 2002). The argument for "arts-informed" inquiry is predicated on the precept that the arts and its associated sensibilities must permeate the work from its conceptualization to its execution.

Traditional research methods, whether quantitative or qualitative, have been seen as lacking in, among other things, (a) authenticity, (b) accessibility and practical application, (c) emotional resonance, and (d) depth and transformation. How arts-based inquiry, specifically literary representations, responds to each of these issues will be discussed in the following sections.

Authenticity

The ageless question will not be answered here: What counts as knowledge? Yet, writing narrative does not preclude accuracy. Ellis (1997) asserts her commitment to a "truthful account," but one that moves beyond a mere "historical truth" to a "narrative truth" which attempts to capture the experience in all its dimensions to the writer's satisfaction (p. 129). The reader becomes the judge: Is the story authentic, "true to life," and believable? Can the reader find resonance in his or her own life? Generalizability is made when readers find "a place to imagine their own uses and applications" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 42).

Dunlop (1999) supported her use of fiction in representing research for her dissertation by quoting no less eminent writers as Henry James and Margaret Atwood. James asserted that fiction succeeds when it creates an "illusion" that the reader has "lived another life" (p. 5). Atwood says that the "social value" of novels is that "they force you to imagine what it's like to be somebody else" (p. 9). Krizek (1998) recommends the use of fiction to qualitative researchers in order to "develop a sense of dialogue and co-presences with the reader" instead of relegating the reader to the role of "passive recipient of a discursive monologue" (p. 93).

Gardner argues that fiction, at best, can never be true, only authentic (Saks, 1996). He sees the accurate representation of research findings as paramount to the research process. For Gardner, a literary representation of research is "laughable." He believes that since research is expected to add to the body of knowledge of the field in which it is

conducted, this is not possible with literary writing where, he claims, the major objective is aesthetics. But to denigrate the value of the literary in research is to posit that the arts have no contribution to ideas and discourse. Eisner states that other forms of representation can contribute to knowledge, if what is seen as contributing to this understanding is expanded beyond science (Saks, 1996). "The structure of a work of art—a novel—can disclose what facts cannot reveal. Some things can only be known by feel, by innuendo, by implication, by mood. Good novels traffic in such features" (Saks, 1996: 413). In any case, Stephen Banks (Banks & Banks, 1998) argues that "no text is free of self-conscious constructions; no text can act as a mirror to the actual" (p. 13). Ardra Cole (1994) asserts that her use of non-traditional methods of data representation in research came from her desire to "preserve the integrity of the information I had gathered, and to discover, not impose, meaning" (p. 38).

Narrative analysis also informs this research. Polkinghorne (1995) sees narrative as "the linguistic form uniquely suited for displaying human existence as situated action" (p. 5). Narrative analysis (as opposed to the analysis of narratives) relates events to one another by organizing them into a cohesive story. It occupies both social science and artistic spaces. "The final story must fit the data while at the same time bringing an order and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves" (Polkinghorne, 1995: 16). It's the process of "tightening and ordering of experience by explicating an intrinsically meaningful form" (Polkinghorne, 1995: 20). This ordering is what derives meaning from the reality of participants' lives. It also requires values through which details are filtered. Rather than criteria associated with positivist research, narrative analysis requires fidelity: "being true to the situation of the teller by recognizing, constructing, and establishing linkages between events, small and large, immediate and distant, immediate and historical" (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995: 28).

Kilbourn (as quoted in Cole & Knowles, 2001) sees, "the strength of a piece of fiction lies in its structural corroboration—its coherence with the human condition and credible possibility.... The power of fiction is its ability to show...the qualities of experience that we...recognize as true of people and situations" (p. 213).

Accessibility and Practical Application

Knowledge gained through educational research is pointless, even when it helps us to understand schools in a deeper, more meaningful way, unless it reaches the people who can take action. Traditional research findings in education have a dismal record of affecting practice. While traditional research has done much to advance knowledge, it has very little impact on teachers in their classrooms who, for the most part, seem unaware of what researchers have found. For example, much research (and adult education theory) has found that lectures are not the optimal way for learners to learn. Yet this teaching method persists. Zuber-Skerritt (1992) argues that the traditional, ineffectual form of research should be replaced by a "deep-meaning orientation" (p. 10). Tierney (1997) describes literary genres as "exemplars." "The importance of the *practical* contributions that can be made through this form of inquiry, and the methodology of research and logic...should never be underestimated" (McKernan, 1996: 3; italics in original). At least when research findings are transformed into stories, there is a greater chance that they will reach teachers. One of the aims of arts-based methods of representation is to make research more accessible to both the researcher and the research audience (McIntyre, 2001). Eisner (1997) has a broad definition of what constitutes research: "Reflective efforts to study the world and to create ways to share what we have learned about it" (p. 8). Without effective ways to disseminate research findings, they remain locked in the rarified confines of academia.

"It seems to me that research should have something in common with furniture-making—(that which is produced) should be highly useful. Shouldn't its value come more from its usefulness rather than form it 'artfulness'? Can its artfulness increase its usefulness?" (Finley & Knowles, as cited in McIntyre, 2001: 220).

Emotional Resonance

One area that literary forms of representation addresses that more-traditional forms do not is the ability to convey empathy. Not only does educational research need to express the facts of lives or experiences, it needs to capture the affective aspects of those life worlds so that meaning can be derived from understanding emotions and how people perceive their emotions. "We have begun to realize that human feeling does not pollute

understanding" (Eisner, 1997: 8). Traditional research methods have valued the cognitive and visual over the emotional and sensuous (Ellis, 1997). Baskwell (2001) cites this problem in representation by mentioning one area of educational research as proof, the literature of educational administration, describing it as "barren, faceless, emotionless, and sterile" (p. 133). Surely these descriptors are not exclusive to only that field of education. It is as though nothing can be learned from what is felt as opposed to what is directly observed or informed by theory. "Facts don't always tell the truth, or a truth worth worrying about.... The emotional texture of experience often is what interests me—the consequences of the facts in the lives of actual persons" (Banks & Banks, 1998: 11).

Literary forms of representation are strong in providing what Eisner (1997) calls "particularity" and "dimension" (p. 8). Rather than abstractions, short stories and novels have the potential to place us in a unique setting and with specific people that are full and rich and multi-dimensional. The austerity of traditional research reports can seldom, if ever, aspire to these qualities. Part of this multi-dimensionality is the ability of arts-based representations to move beyond research's traditional denotative representations and to be "evocative" (Eisner, 1997; Richardson, 2000). The reader sees the topic under study as complex and is moved, sometimes powerfully so, to be actively reflective and insightful rather than passive receivers of information. They can live vicariously and, as such, know what it is like to experience a phenomenon they may have no experience with at all. After all, writing is a communicative act between the writer and the reader (Van Maanen, 1988). "The goals of evocative narrative are expressive rather than representational; the communicative significance of this form of research lies in its potential to move readers into the worlds of others, allowing readers to experience these worlds in emotional, even bodily, ways" (Kiesinger, 1998: 129).

A great strength of the representations of arts-based inquiries is that they are meant to connect "in an holistic way, with the hearts, souls, and minds of readers" (Cole & Knowles, 2001: 216). But this is not emotion for the sake of it or cheap sentimentality, but, rather, it is emotion "tempered with mindfulness" (p. 216).

Elliot Eisner makes the point that more can be learned from literary works than any number of traditional research reports if emotional impact, reader accessibility, and depth

are considered (Saks, 1996). Even critics of alternative forms of representation in education agree (Gardner in Saks, 1996). Look at <u>Death of a Salesman</u> by Arthur Miller if you want to know what it is like to be a working man at the end of his career, or <u>In Cold Blood</u> by Truman Capote to see what makes a killer tick, or <u>The Trial</u> by Franz Kafka to know what it is like to be accused of a crime.

Narrative analysis guards against having important emotions drained away from participants' stories that occurs when focusing solely on reason and merely interspersing examples in an analytical text. Barone (1995) sees the potential in this form of representation as being "luring readers into reconstructing the selves of school people or into rethinking their own selves and situations as educators" (p. 66). He sees an important link between narrative analysis and what he says hooks calls "narratives of struggles" where the disenfranchised can be enfranchised through having others hear their voices.

> Fiction allows us to explore the geography, the anthropology, the epistemology of the heart and of the spirit in ways that most other genres (except for poetry) and discourses do not. This is uncharted territory in our field. To date, our conventional notions of knowledge have offered us little about the heart, the imagination, the spirit. We dance around them, nibble in the corners now and then, but for the most part we keep the topics out of our academic conversations and certainly our research efforts. Why? Because these areas are slippery, frightening in their elusiveness, unsettling (Neilsen, 2002: 210).

Depth and Transformation

"Increasingly, educational research suggests that the more traditional, textual descriptions of qualitative findings do not adequately reflect the complexity of studying human behavior" (Butler-Kisber, 2002: 229). Rather than positing answers couched in numbers and words meant to provide the researcher's explanation of phenomena, arts-based inquiry widens the possibilities of response, interpretations, and understandings (Dunlop, 2002). "The powers of imagination and metaphor are crucial ingredients for the process of sensitively portraying elements of a life—and its crucial meaning—for others to discover" (Cole & Knowles, 2001: 211).

In phenomenology, for example, research participants' stories are not seen as "anecdotes" and merely ways of "livening up" what then must admittedly be a boring report. Phenomenology sees such stories as a way of getting at the core of something

thought of previously as incomprehensible (Van Manen, 1997). We tell of our experiences through stories, which, in turn, help us make sense and illuminate meaning for ourselves and others. Just the process of telling changes how that story will be understood and, subsequently, told again. It transcends the exclusionary conventions of elites and brings the research back to the people it often professes to be helping, in a more meaningful and deeper way. "Fiction asks many things: it challenges, extends, enlightens, and stretches us. It teaches us, guides us. Fiction does not enter into the realm of truth claims or accept burdens of proof in the same way as do our conventionally academic exercises around research" (Neilsen, 20002: 209).

Both Rosenblatt (as cited in Sumara & Davis, 1998) and Iser (1989) argue that the depth that literary works can achieve in the reader goes beyond the text to the "transaction between reader and text" and its ability to transform the reader (Sumara & Davis, 1998: 205). This transformation goes beyond the standard notion that literature, at best, can provide apt moral lessons. Reading fiction is transformative as it alters the reader's sense of self. "As the fictional text is interpreted by the reader, the reader is, at the same time, interpreted" (p. 205). Literature is more than entertainment or a vicarious experience. "As a cultural object, the work of literature contributes to the ongoing restructuring and reconditioning of the reader's identity," and thus is a site to contest and negotiate identity (p. 205).

Important to education, fiction is recognized as more than just a literary space. Smith (2000), for example, sees it as a research site that holds a "new and exciting way into the exploration of how the ideology of theory might intersect with some of the power differentials involved in the practical application of such theory in the classroom" (p. 246)—an area she explores in her research into gender and oppression and postcolonial education. There is a symbiotic relationship between reader and writer and the reader and the text. "Language does not simply point to pre-existing things and ideas; rather language helps construct the world we see and know" (Donmoyer in Saks, 1996: 405). In the preface to his influential book introducing the concept of literary anthropology, Wolfgang Iser (1989) explains this relationship between reader and text: "If a literary text does something to its readers, it also simultaneously reveals something

about them. Thus literature turns into a divining rod, locating our dispositions, desires, inclinations, and eventually our overall makeup" (p. 28).

Review of the Research

While there's not a large body of literature about the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students in educational contexts, what research that does exist has found the experiences of LGBT youth in schools to be ones where their health is at risk, they lack basic support, and they must contend with homophobic harassment and institutional heterosexism, all the while managing their own issues of coming out. While these areas are unquestionably important and have a profound impact on the lives of LGBT youth, the link to educational contexts and what administrators and teachers can do has not been made in any meaningful way. This is a direct result of the social sciences other than education having an interest in the experiences of LGBT students, most notably psychology, social work, and sociology.

The Eric, PsychINFO, and the Sociological Abstracts databases were searched for research conducted in the last dozen years as it was thought that studies older than that would not reflect the rapidly changing field of research involving LGBT youth. Only peer-reviewed journal articles and research papers reporting empirical studies were considered.

Of course, there were many ways to have approached a literature review for this project, including a review of the literary literature itself and the novels and short stories for and about LGBT issues and young people, as well as the emerging body of critical work in this area (e.g., Mitchell, 2000). The decision was taken, however, to look at how the more traditional literature in the social sciences was addressing these questions.

The one hundred and eighty-seven abstracts were reviewed to determine whether the journal articles involved an empirical study and LGBT secondary school students. Forty-six articles appeared to satisfy these requirements and they were obtained from the libraries at McGill University and Concordia University, online through ProQuest, and through inter-library loans from other universities (e.g., Université de Laval, Université de Montréal, University of Western Ontario, et cetera). Another eleven relevant articles were obtained in the process, mostly from sources cited in journal articles or books, bringing the total to fifty-seven.

After reviewing the fifty-seven articles, twenty-one articles were deemed relevant and representative and were retained for analysis. (Six other articles were added later through a subsequent search of the aforementioned databases to reflect the elapsed time between when this analysis was conducted and the writing of this document.)

The analysis of the findings in the twenty-seven studies shows that the issues facing LBGT students in secondary school are: (a) health risks (15 studies); (b) homophobic harassment (11 studies); (c) lack of support and resources (10 studies); (d) coming out issues (11 studies); and (e) institutional heterosexism (9 studies). Table 1 summarizes the findings of each of these studies.

Table 1: Recent Empirical Research Findings on LGBT Students

Author	Year	Research Findings				
		Health Risk	Harass-ment	Lack of Support	Coming Out	Hetero-sexism
Blake	2001	√				
D'Augelli	2002	√	√		√	
Edwards	1996				√	
Elze	2003		√			
Faulkner	1998	√				
Garofalo	1998	√	√			
Ginsberg	1999				√	
GLSEN	2001	√	√	√		√
Goodenow	2002	√				
Harris	1997				√	
Jackson	1999	√	√	√	√	
Jordan	1997	√	√	√	√	√
Khayatt	1994			√		√
Kissen	1993	√	√	√	√	√
Kivel	2000				√	√
— Continued —						

Author	Year	Research Findings				
		Health Risk	Harass-ment	Lack of Support	Coming Out	Hetero-sexism
Lasser	2003				√	
Lee	2001		√	√		
Lock	1999	√				
Malinsky	1997	√		√		√
Mufioz-Plaza	2002			√		√
Nairn	2003		√			√
Orenstein	2001	√				
Peterson	2002	√	√		√	
Remafedi	1998	√				
Russell	2001			√		
Rutter	2002	√				
Town	1996		√	√	√	√

Each of these issues is discussed in the following sections.

Health Risks

Researchers often looked at health risks associated with LGBT youth in comparison to their heterosexual peers. Such issues as substance abuse, depression, suicide, increased and unsafe sexual activity, and violence were explored. Table 2 summarizes the fifteen studies looking at health risks and the specific findings for each.

Table 2: Health Risk Findings

Author	Year	Health Risks			
		Subs. Abuse	Sexual Activity	Suicide	Violence
Blake	2001	√	√	√	√
D'Augelli[1]	2002			√	√
— Continued —					

Author	Year	Health Risks			
		Subs. Abuse	Sexual Activity	Suicide	Violence
Faulkner	1998	√		√	√
Garofalo	1998	√	√	√	√
GLSEN[1]	2001				√
Goodenow	2002		X		
Jackson[1]	1999	X		X	
Jordan[1]	1997			√	
Kissen[1]	1993				√
Lock	1999	X		√	
Malinsky[1]	1997			√	
Orenstein	2001	√			
Peterson[1]	2002			√	
Remafedi	1998			√	
Rutter	2002			X	

√ indicates prevalence (when not compared to heterosexuals) or higher prevalence (when compared to heterosexuals)

X indicates non-confirmation of higher prevalence

[1]This study did not compare homosexual participants to heterosexual participants.

Each area will be looked at separately as follows:

Substance abuse

Four of the six studies looking at substance abuse among LGBT secondary school students found greater abuse among the LGBT youth (see Table 2). Lock and Steiner (1999) and Jackson (1999), however, did not find any significant differences in this area. Orenstein (2001) makes the attribution that higher substance abuse is being used by LGBT youth as a coping mechanism to the "stress" of their "stigmatization" or because

of the lack of social settings for LGBT youth other than bars where drugs and alcohol are prevalent (p. 11). Lock and Steiner describe these stressors as resulting from having to deal with: (a) intolerance; (b) psychological and physical harassment and abuse; and (c) internalized homophobia.

Sexual activity

Sexual activity, specifically a greater number of sexual partners and high risk behaviour with respect to HIV, were found to be more prevalent in LGBT youth than heterosexual youth in two of the three studies looking specifically at this area. Goodenow, Netherland, and Szalacha (2002), however, found that gay and lesbian youth had the same levels of sexual activity and at-risk behaviours as heterosexual youth. Bisexuals in their study, on the other hand, were found to have more sexual partners, more unprotected sex, and more incidents of STDs.

Suicide

Depression and suicide are another common area of exploration for researchers looking at the LGBT youth population. Nine studies looking at this question among LGBT school-based populations (see Table 2), found significantly higher levels of depression and suicide ideation and attempts. The Peterson and Rischar study (2002) did not compare homosexual and heterosexual rates, but found that 72% of LGBT participants had thought about suicide. Likewise, D'Augelli, Pilkington, and Hershberger (2002) did not compare homosexual and heterosexual rates, but they found that 48% of participants who had thought about suicide had done so in relation to their sexual orientation. Only Rutter and Soucar (2002) found that sexual orientation did not have an effect on suicide risk and that there was no statistically significant difference between heterosexual and homosexual males in this respect. Although Jackson (1999) reported a few suicide attempts among his participants, they did not make a conscious link between those attempts and their sexual orientation. What did have an effect on both heterosexuals and homosexuals alike was external support: the more external support, the less suicide risk (Rutter & Soucar, 2002).

Violence

Finally, the exposure to violence as a health concern was found to be more prevalent among LGBT youth in all six of the studies looking at this area. Personal safety issues ranged from being threatened (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Faulkner & Cranston, 1998), to physical harassment, fights, and being injured by a weapon (D'Augelli et al., 2002; Faulkner & Cranston, 1998; Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998; GLSEN, 2001; Kissen, 1993), to sexual victimization (D'Augelli et al., 2002; Lock & Steiner, 1999), to even being forced to carry guns for self protection (Garofalo et al., 1998). Studies found that gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth were more likely to miss school due to concerns about their personal safety (Blake et al., 2001; Faulkner & Cranston, 1998; Town, 1996). Garofalo et al. (1998) report that 25% of LGBT students missed school in the last month due to safety concerns as opposed to 5% of heterosexual students. Sexual assaults were also reported to be higher for LGBT youth (Garofalo et al., 1998; GLSEN, 2001; Lock & Steiner, 1999)

Another area of concern with LGBT youth is the issue of runaway and throwaway children. While tangential to education, yet important, these social service concerns were not looked at directly in any of the studies, most probably given that the population under study were school-based. Runaway or throwaway children may no longer be in the school system allowing them to be studied.

Few studies looked at the link between health-risks and proactive policies, activities, and programmes to address such behaviour. Schools do have a role to play in addressing health-based issues. Blake et al. (2001) found that gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth who were exposed to specifically "gay-sensitive" sexual education instruction in their schools had less sexual partners, sexual activity, and substance use before sex than gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth who did not. Kivel and Kleiber (2000) report that LGBT youth in their study used "structured and unstructured" leisure activities to "negotiate their understanding of themselves and the world in which they live" (p. 222), and did not engage in the same self-destructive behaviours outlined above.

Homophobic Harassment

LGBT students report hearing homophobic references up to fifty times a day and that such words are "more hurtful" than other swear words to both gay and heterosexual youth (Plummer, 2001). Homophobic harassment in the form of words directed at gay and lesbian students was common as findings in many of the studies (see Table 1). Most LGBT students experience homophobic assaults at school: verbal insults and threats (60%) and more serious attacks (32%) such as being spit on, chased, having property damaged, being punched or hit, or even sexually assaulted (Elze, 2003). Only 5% of all students surveyed in New Zealand, for example, both heterosexual and homosexual, thought their schools were a safe place for LGBT students (Nairn & Smith, 2003).

Warwick, Aggleton, and Douglas (2001) surveyed 307 secondary schools in England and Wales and found that 82% of the teachers were aware of the homophobic verbal bullying and 26% of the physical bullying of gay and lesbian students. While 99% of teachers reported anti-bullying policies at their schools, only 6% of teachers could state that these policies specifically made mention of LGBT bullying. Hearing the term "gay" used in what some describe as a benign way—as a synonym for "dumb" or "stupid" as in "That's so gay"—was ubiquitous. 90.8% of LGBT youth reported hearing that word used in that way either "frequently" or "often" (GLSEN, 2001). Teachers seldom disciplined those using these epithets (GLSEN, 2001; Jordan et al., 1997; Town, 1996) or were the perpetrators themselves of such harassment (GLSEN, 2001). By comparison, LGBT students reported that teachers failed to intervene only 8% of the time when they heard racist remarks and 12% of the time when the remarks were sexist, yet teachers did not intervene fully 36% of the time when the remarks were homophobic (GLSEN, 2001).

Harassment was most likely to occur in school situations that had the least adult supervision, such as in the school grounds, the hallways, and the cafeteria (GLSEN, 2001; Plummer, 2001).

In a study of predominantly heterosexual secondary students in the United Kingdom, homophobic pejoratives were used 10% of the time in name-calling (Thurlow, 2001). Of greater import, this study found that students rated the use of such pejoratives as less serious than other types of name-calling, for example, racist abuse. Boys, however, saw this type of name-calling as more serious than girls.

In one bright note, the American National Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) 2001 study found changes between their 1999 and 2001 surveys: while only 39.6% of teachers intervened when hearing homophobic name-calling in 1999, 53.9% were reported doing so in the 2001 study. In a similar positive note, LGBT students involved in a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at their school reported less occurrences of verbal harassment from their peers (Lee, 2001). Nairn and Smith (2003) also report the value of GSAs in creating a more positive school environment for LGBT students because "the homo/heterosexual binary which is often mobilized to create an 'us' and 'them' no longer works" (p. 142). Unfortunately, the GLSEN survey also found that incidents of verbal harassment were reported by participants in general to have increased during the 1999 to 2001 time period from 61.1% to 88.2% respectively (p. 28).

Other types of harassment reported in these studies included sexual harassment (GLSEN, 2001) and property damage (Garofalo et al., 1998).

Tellingly, due to this type of ongoing and unrelenting harassment, none of the participants in Lee's (2001) study had any good memories of secondary school. A majority (65.6%) of LGBT students report feeling "unsafe" in their schools due to their sexual orientation (GLSEN, 2001).

Lack of Support and Resources

Schools lack support for LGBT students and their needs, whether it be teachers and staff with whom LGBT students can talk or information and resources in guidance/counseling offices and libraries (see Table 1). Jordan, Vaughan, and Woodworth (1997) found that 73.5% of LGBT youth were able to find at least one supportive person in their schools (most often a teacher), but, conversely, 44.1% had also found a clearly unsupportive adult (also most often a teacher). Again, student involvement in a GSA improved LGBT youths' relationships with school administrators and teachers (Lee, 2001).

The importance of supportive adults in the lives of gay and lesbian youth cannot be understated. Given the reported higher rates of victimization, LGBT students may need more support to handle the effects of this victimization, yet receive less of it. Without that support, school too often becomes an endurance test of harassment and isolation. Elze (2003) found that when LGBT youth have supportive peers and observe teachers who act

unequivocally to stop homophobia, their comfort-levels are positively affected. School outcomes, as well, were found to be predictable on the basis of bisexual boys' and girls' feelings about their teachers (Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). As previously discussed, Rutter and Soucar (2002) found that while sexual orientation had no effect on suicide risk, what did have an effect on both heterosexuals and homosexuals alike was external support: the more external support, the less suicide risk.

Non-family peers and adults (often teachers) are reported by LGBT students to be more supportive than family members (Mufioz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). The lack of role models was problematic to LGBT youth and added to LGBT youth's negative assessments of LGBT people (Town, 1996). LGBT students lamented the lack of role models and wanted LGBT teachers to come out (Kissen, 1993). Other groups benefit from role models, but when LGBT teachers remain invisible, this robs LGBT students of the same opportunities for role models, and may even be detrimental to LGBT students' self-images as the image is perpetuated that non-heterosexual orientations are shameful. This reticence on the part of teachers to come out is linked in many jurisdictions to the fear of losing one's job.

Adding to this problem is the perception among teachers that most schools have no LGBT students. In a study of secondary school teachers in England and Wales, 39% reported not being aware of any LGBT students in their school (Warwick et al., 2001). Kissen (1993) posits that not being aware of LGBT students may be one of the reasons some teachers ignore or even denigrate non-heterosexual sexualities.

Malinsky (1997) found that lesbian students did not feel school counselors were people to whom they could talk about sexual orientation due to their being inundated with behavioural problems or their perceived lack of acceptance of LGBT youth. School counseling offices would seem a likely place to find LGBT-related material, but LGBT students reported that there was little or no LGBT information available in counseling offices.

Feelings of isolation and alienation were common for LGBT students (Jordan et al., 1997; Khayatt, 1994; Malinsky, 1997; Town, 1996). Students often felt that they were the only gay or lesbian students in their school, and, only later, found out it wasn't so as they went out into a gay and lesbian community and met former classmates (Lee, 2001; Town,

1996). Khayatt (1994) reports some of her participants had no friends in secondary school for fear of their being discovered as lesbian.

The benefits of GSAs are profound. In 2000 in the United States, over 700 GSAs were recognized by GLSEN (Lee, 2001). Through participation in a GSA, students reported less alienation and isolation by having the opportunity to meet other LGBT students. As well, they reported a greater sense of "belonging" to the school community as a whole. Lee (2001) found that LGBT students in GSAs reported better grades and attendance, although better grades were not found to be supported by grade records. Teachers were reported to have paid more attention to LGBT students in a positive way, taking an interest in their academic achievement, for example. GSA members also reported being more comfortable with their sexual orientation and found the coming out transition easier. The visibility of such out gay teens makes the issue discussable in schools—schools, administrators, teachers, and other students have to deal with the reality of LGBT students instead of ignoring them.

With the dearth of supportive adults in schools, LGBT resources would seem more essential. Kivel and Kleiber (2000) discuss how participants in their study found reading and the influence of books as important ways to gather LGBT information and to see themselves reflected in LGBT characters. Movies and TV were also important in this way. LGBT students who did have access to library resources on LGBT issues ranged from 14.7% (Jordan et al., 1997) to 36.8% (GLSEN, 2001). Kissen (1993) and Malinsky (1997) report that LGBT students want more LGBT resources in their schools.

Coming Out

Issues of "coming out" are predominant concerns of the research involving LGBT students (see Table 1). Friends were most likely to be the person to whom LGBT youth come out (Harris & Bliss, 1997), more so to friends who are gay and lesbian than straight (Edwards, 1996; Jordan et al., 1997). More than half of LGBT students did not come out to any friends at all (Kissen, 1993). D'Augelli et al. (2002) found only 17% of respondents in their study were out in secondary school, while fully 46% were completely closeted. When students came out to teachers it was due to their being perceived as being accepting (Ginsberg, 1999). But LGBT students who choose to disclose their sexual orientation to teachers are rare, ranging from only 14% (Harris &

Bliss, 1997) to 26.9% (Jordan et al., 1997). Female students were more likely to disclose to female teachers while male students disclosed to both male and female teachers equally (Harris & Bliss, 1997).

The negative messages associated with non-heterosexual sexualities that young people found in schools inhibited their desire to come out. Some research participants even cited the fear of unfair treatment should teachers know (Mufioz-Plaza et al., 2002). Fear of negative consequences by peers and teachers have led some LGBT students to not associate with other LGBT students and even to join in on the harassment of them.

Not coming out in secondary school impacts on students in many ways. While not coming out serves as a protective mechanism for many LGBT students to avoid harassment, for example, there is also a price to pay. Kivel and Kleiber (2000) report there is even an impact on the leisure activities that closeted gay and lesbian youth choose, writing that "having to hide may have led some of the participants to pursue more individual, private leisure activities such as reading or watching TV and films" (p. 229). The fear of being "found out" leads to isolation and alienation. The energy expended to not be who you are is immense. Town (1996) reports how gay male students constructed what they believed to be "masculine identities" in order to survive school. Research shows that "passing" as heterosexual in secondary school is commonplace (e.g., Edwards, 1996; Lee, 2001). Harris and Bliss (1997) report that the majority of students who did come out in secondary school received positive feedback from those to whom they disclosed. The benefits of coming out include receiving support and "enduring" friendship, as well as "a sense of relief, integrity, and personal satisfaction" (p. 97).

Institutional Heterosexism

The response of most schools is to ignore that gay and lesbian students exist. While heterosexual students can be assured they will hear about and read about heterosexuals, textbooks and curriculum seldom reflect the existence of gays and lesbians at all. It is a rare school that teaches about LGBT people of any accomplishment.

When sexual orientation was mentioned in school, it was usually in the context of such classes as health and sexual education (specifically HIV risk), social sciences, or English language arts (Jordan et al., 1997). One survey reported that 61.3% of LGBT students never heard LGBT issues discussed in class even once (Jordan et al., 1997). The

majority of LGBT students who did hear mention of LGBT issues reported a positive portrayal of gays and lesbians (71.9% in the GLSEN survey), and that positive portrayals were most likely to occur in English language arts classes (Kissen, 1993). The presence of a GSA at a school increased the discussion of LGBT issues in the classroom (Jordan et al., 1997). On the negative side, when sexual orientation is mentioned in school in religion classes, sexual behaviour becomes a "moral issue, expressed, for example, in terms of 'sin' and 'purity'" or is distorted (Kissen, 1993: 55).

One would think that health teachers who are usually charged with teaching about sexuality would incorporate sexual orientation into their curriculum, but only 46% of them have done so and only in a very limited way: for one or two class periods (Telljohann, Price, Poureslami, & Easton, 1995). Health teachers mostly taught: (a) the definition of homosexuality (100%); (b) "tolerance/prejudice" involving gays and lesbians (81%); (c) homosexual health issues (79%); and (d) myths about gays and lesbians (68%). However, only 37% of health teachers stated they felt "very comfortable" teaching these topics, and only 20% said they would be "very competent" to do so. Usually such health education was decidedly "reproductive and heterosexual" (Town, 1996: 17). "Silence not only operates to render lesbian/gay/bisexual students an invisible group but silence can also be understood as complicit with forms of harassment that remain unchallenged by staff" (Nairn & Smith, 2003: 138).

Heterosexism permeates the school system. Even when it comes to something as seemingly benign as career counseling and career choice, LGBT students face issues related to their sexual orientation (Kivel & Kleiber, 2000). Even in 2005, many jobs are perceived as being gender-specific. Without sensitivity and understanding of this issue and other issues facing LGBT youth, career counseling perpetuates the heterosexist standard that non-heterosexual students may not be able to ascribe to. As well, heteronormative practices such as pathologizing homosexuality and erasing the feminine from the masculine/male psyche also contribute to the ongoing harassment that is heterosexism (Town, as cited in Nairn & Smith, 2003).

By not mentioning LGBT people and issues in the curriculum or in texts, not providing personal and career counseling services, or not having role models, LGBT students are devalued as equals and important stake-holders in their schools.

Heterosexual students, also, are allowed to continue unchallenged in whatever preconceptions they have about LGBT people, and are, thus, reinforced in their homophobia for the lack of any other information or images.

Problems with the Previous Research

Research that claims to be studying a high school LGBT population is often retrospective, sometimes decades after the fact. In one extreme case, participants ranged from twenty-one to sixty-six years old and were still asked how their sexual orientation affected their experiences in high school (Harris & Bliss, 1997). Not only could participants surveyed or interviewed retrospectively have a less accurate recall of their experiences, one has to question how a researcher can obtain a clear understanding of what it's like to be gay in high school when their participants' experiences span different time periods, especially since both attitudes and legislation has been changing.

Research participants are often recruited in non-educational venues such as psychosocial service agencies and support groups. Is it any wonder that the findings of this research so often report troubled behaviours by these young people? Further confounding this research are studies that looks at LGBT youth as a monolith. Of the twenty-seven empirical studies that involved an LGBT secondary school population that this researcher analyzed, only two had as a sample discrete gay, lesbian, or bisexual secondary school student populations[1] (Khayatt, 1994; Town, 1996). The majority of these studies involved a mix of participants who were gay, lesbian, bisexual, and even heterosexual. Khayatt (1994) argues that while "we believe that the experience of lesbians and gay men may have common features," they are "essentially and fundamentally different" (p. 48). For example, lesbians must negotiate their school experiences as both sexual minority students and as women, with all that entails in a society that remains not only homophobic but also sexist and male-centric. Bisexuality is less researched and may be complicated by questions of whether bisexuality is a terminal sexual orientation or a signpost on the road of developing sexuality. Russell, Seif, and Truong (2001) disaggregated bisexuals from the data in previous research and found that when correlations were performed that considered homosexual, bisexual, and

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[1] See Table 1 and References for the list of studies analyzed.

heterosexual boys separately, there was a greater similarity between homosexual and heterosexual boys than bisexual boys and either homosexual or heterosexual boys. For example, bisexual boys had more negative school outcomes: trouble at school (getting along with peers, paying attention in class, and doing homework), and lower GPAs. Bisexual boys were more likely than their heterosexual peers to feel disliked at school and perceived others as unfriendly. In another study, Goodenow et al. (2002) found no difference in gay students sexual risk behaviour as compared to straight youth, but did find a higher risk profile for bisexual youths.

Questionnaires used in much of this research, often administered at a distance, do not provide the necessary depth to understand this population. Also, there is no context to the research being conducted. Most studies regarding LGBT youth occur in the United States where acceptance of LGBT people is not as progressive as in some other countries, most notably northern European countries and Canada, especially Québec.

When looking at the research questions for these studies, there is an assumption, whether explicit or implicit, that the findings about the experiences of LGBT students will inevitably show these experiences to be negative. Of course, this is not to be unexpected as researchers' questions involve looking for or conforming previous findings related to health risk behaviours, negative experiences, or discrimination. While there is no doubt that the research supports findings that the experiences of LGBT students can be negative, this seems to be exactly what researchers are looking for and expect. Is there anything good about being an LGBT student in school?

Focusing studies on these negatives pathologizes LGBT youth, understandably since many of these studies were conducted by psychologists, social workers, and sociologists who are charged with researching and deciphering psycho-social problems. As well, studies looking at LGBT youth often do so in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts, adding to the wide-spread notion of there being a homo-hetero polarity. This adds to the heterosexism that states "gays do this" and "heterosexuals do that." Frequently the focus of sexual orientation research is on quantifying how many students are gay and experience isolation, pain, substance abuse, suicide, et cetera, but few of them investigate and try to understand the nature of these experiences. The message should be that the problems are not with LGBT students, but with a society that

stigmatizes them and reacts negatively to their existence (Savin-Williams, 1994). If, indeed, suicide ideation and attempts are more pervasive among LGBT youth, then it is time to look at why this is so and what institutions such as schools are doing or not doing that contributes to this phenomenon.

Few researchers, such as Jordan et al. (1997), looked at positive coping skills, traits, and experiences. Likewise, Peterson and Rischar (2003) found LGBT students using such coping skills as "writing, being politically active, being creative, being able to use humour and irony...being able to spar, debate, and argue with the most adroit gay basher" (p. 21). Mufioz-Plaza et al. (2002) found that the majority of LGBT youth found positive ways to manifest their sexual orientation and to deal with school. Herck (as cited in Jordan et al., 1997) sees LGBT students as "gifted," rather than problem-prone, because of their resilience and survival skills, usually developed without the help of others. Elze (2003) focused on what makes schools a positive environment for LGBT youth, while Peterson and Rischar (2002) provided LGBT youth-suggested strategies for support by educators.

When considering the problems with the previous research, the question must be asked: is there a way to look LGBT youth in schools that doesn't pathologize them and provides an authentic portrait of their experiences, good and bad?

Methodology

The following sections provide a description of the research methodology employed in this study.

The Research Questions

The specific questions to be answered in this study are:

1. What does it mean to be an "out" gay student in a Canadian high school today? I.e., What are the day-to-day realities of being an "out" gay student? What are the rewards and challenges?

2. From the "out" gay student's perspective, how accepting and inclusive are their schools? What facilitates their acceptance and inclusion and what stands in the way?

3. How do "out" gay students perceive the actions and expressions of attitudes of teachers, administrators, and other students to their being "out" in school?

Participants

Participants in this study were seven out gay male high school students between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. This number of participants reflects the desire to provide an "in depth" picture of the experiences of out gay students. Criterion sampling was employed—participants were selected that met the following characteristics: male, self-described as gay, recognized within their school context as out, and currently attending high school. Students "questioning" their sexual orientation or bisexual were not included as they would confound the study. Six of the seven participants identified as White, while the seventh identified as part French-Canadian and Native.

Participants were recruited at their high schools through teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors. Fifty-nine private and public high schools throughout Québec were contacted to locate participants, virtually all the Anglophone high schools in the province. Two participants attended urban schools, while the rest went to suburban schools. Francophone high schools in the province (over 400) were not included, as this would have entailed a much larger research project beyond the scope of this researcher at this time.

When counselors, teachers, or principals were contacted, frequently they stated they were not aware of any out gay students in their schools or that there had been some in the past but none at the time of this research. These contacts gave as reasons for the absence of out gay students either their school environments ("homophobic," "socially difficult," "difficult because of a sports mentality," "hostile," "formerly Catholic," "old world values," "the principal wouldn't like it") or potential participants were not completely out yet. In addition to the participants successfully recruited for this study, seven other potential participants were identified, but ultimately could not participate because (a) three couldn't obtain parental consent; (b) two had dropped out of school, one due to harassment and the other due to family problems; (c) one was a special needs student who was described as being unable to fully participate; and (d) one who expressed interest, obtained the necessary parental consent, but was too busy to be interviewed.

Often contacts recommended alternative schools be contacted as they were seen as a more accepting place for LGBT students. Unsolicited, contacts also related their efforts to combat homophobia—many described the prevalence of homophobic slurs in their schools—through talks by LGBT youth groups like Project 10, an LGBT youth support group, and human rights commissioners, "Celebrating Diversity" events, or pro-active interventions by and for teachers, students, and parents. Only one school contacted had a GSA, but that school had only out lesbian students. One school that had Project 10 speak there for many years discontinued these talks because they found the speakers were "too radical."

In the many contacts made in the course of this research, only two negative incidents of note were found: one involved a counselor who was extremely defensive regarding the topic and who characterized the recruitment of participants as "conducting a witch hunt," and a school board ethics review meeting where committee members thought high school students were too young for this type of study. Interestingly, these same research ethics committee members had no understanding of qualitative research and, in a subsequent phone call where a committee member explained the decision, repeatedly referred to the need for large sample groups and statistically significant findings.

The requisite consent forms were explained to participants and their parents and were signed by them upon their agreement to participate. Samples of the participant and parental consent forms can be found in Appendix A.

Interviews

In-depth discourse-based interviews following Seidman's (1998) protocol were used as the primary method of data collection. Seidman's three-interview model was adapted for this study into the following phases: (1) preliminary interviews focusing on the participant's high school life history—the "context"; (2) in-depth interviews concentrating on current experiences and the perception of those experiences within the context; and (3) reflective interviews looking at what meanings participants ascribe to their experiences. While Seidman's model consists of three interviews, this research design attempted to seek a greater depth of elaboration on the part of participants that adhering to three interviews might not allow. As such, occasionally more than one interview was conducted at each of these three phases. Follow-up interviews were also conducted after each interview in order to seek clarification and elaboration of participant responses. Interviews were kept to less than ninety minutes each in order not to fatigue participants. A total of twenty-two hours and fifty-seven minutes of taped interviews were produced. On average, a total of three hours and sixteen minutes were spent with each participant. Interviews were conducted in counselor offices at the participants' schools or at this researcher's university offices.

Interviews employed open-ended questions in a semi-structured interactive process. The interview protocols can be found in Appendix B. Interview questions were developed by examining previous research. Rather than replicating those questions, many of which were directed, questions were developed that allowed for the exploration of what the experience of being gay and out in high school was like for participants. For example, while previous research often asked specifically about the occurrence of homophobia or harassment, this study utilized questions that aimed to precipitate broader discussions. If such issues as homophobia and harassment, for example, were mentioned by participants, then these areas were explored in detail.

At the time of the first interview, each participant was asked to provide a pseudonym in order to preserve confidentiality. Throughout this research project—during the course

of the interviews, when they were transcribed, and when findings were reported—these pseudonyms were used.

After each interview, recordings were listened to and follow-up questions were developed. These questions looked for more detail or clarification of previous responses. In some cases, when participants passed on answering a question (usually because he was unsure how to answer at that point), it was re-worded and asked again in the subsequent follow-up interview.

All questions were asked to all participants, except when they had been previously answered in the course of responding to another question or when the participant seemed particularly resistant to a line of questioning. In one case, the participant felt that questions designed to look at different aspects of the experience of being gay and out in high school were repetitive. He exhibited irritation at having to "repeat" himself, and, thus, such questions were discarded on-the-fly. Occasionally, questions were not understood by participants such as when they were asked if there were any "rewards" to being out and gay in high school. More than one participant took this to mean material rewards.

Overall, participants who described their being gay as not a "big deal" at school, had less to say in response to questions—these interviews tended to be shorter in length with participant's answers more succinct. Those participants who appeared more "fully-developed" in their gay identity gave fuller answers, often speaking uninterrupted for minutes at a time, seeming to greatly enjoy the opportunity of being able to speak about themselves.

One aspect of the interviewing that was successful was the use of humour. Participants who responded to humour and who were themselves humourous, were easily put at ease almost from the beginning of the interview process.

Data Analysis

As interviews were completed, they were transcribed. This process produced approximately 229,000 words or five hundred single-spaced pages of text.

Due to this large amount of data, it was first organized by descriptive units using the NUD*IST (Non-numeric Unstructured Data Indexing Searching Theorizing) qualitative data analyses programme, version 4.0. (NUD*IST was also used for data storage and

retrieval.) Examples of descriptive units include "Coming Out to Teachers" and "How Participant Knows He's Gay." These units were then organized under broader descriptive categories such as "coming out" and "gay identity."

Rules of inclusion were written for each unit. For example, the rule of inclusion for "Coming Out to Teachers" was: The details related to the participant coming out to teachers. Each code was then examined to see if the interview text units assigned to that code met the rule of inclusion. If not, that unit was re-assigned to a more appropriate code, or the rule of inclusion was revised to allow for that text unit to be included. Various checks were made to see if the text units included in each code were exhaustive. For example, since there were seven participants, generally there should be at least one text unit from each of the participants in every code. Using NUD*IST's text search feature, interview files were searched for various word strings indicative of that code. For example, when examining the text units included in the code "How Participant Labels Himself," since the rule of inclusion concerned how the participant self-describes given the available terms, "gay," "homosexual," "queer," et cetera, these words were searched for in the interview files and examined for their relevance for inclusion under this code.

The data was analyzed using a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analyzing phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994).

First all statements in the interview texts relating to a category were listed in order to treat them with equal value and importance. For example, when looking at coming out, the horizontalization of data produced a large list of related statements such as:

Alex—"I had no plans to tell my mom but she asked me."
Chris—"She suspected. For sure she suspected."
Eric—"I needed someone who's like, they care but, you know, they don't care that I am."

In the second step, these statements were looked at in order to eliminate repetitive and overlapping statements, thus producing a list of unique statements, the invariant meaning units.

Next these unique statements were clustered into umbrella meaning units. For example, "motivators for coming out" was one meaning unit in the coming out category. This meaning unit was then described for each participant using verbatim examples (in bold) from the interview text.

> **The first person Eric told was a math teacher.** He **was close to her** and **felt like** he **should tell her.** In general, his reasons for coming out were because "**you can't hide it or anything. At one point you just don't care anymore. 'Okay. I'm gay. Get over it!' I'm not going to lie to people.**"

Using all the meaning units developed for a category in the previous step, individual and composite textural descriptions were written. For example, the individual textural description for Eric reads, in part, as follows:

> Before coming out Eric felt the need for support without judgment. He felt negative emotions being trapped with his secret and saw the world as a place of prejudice. Coming out was a time of figuring out who he was. Incrementally he came to accept who he is. Making it difficult for him to come out was facing the unknown and finding the courage to do it. He witnessed society's heterosexist rules being reinforced every day. He thought that if someone else broached the subject first, it would be easier for him to come out. Some people, however, were wary of bringing it up unless he did. When Eric came out, he did so because he wanted to tell. He believed the quality of his relationships with people obligated him to tell. Still he had some ambivalence between telling and not telling. At a certain point, he felt keeping the secret was no longer important, the truth was. He had accepted being gay, and expected others to do likewise.

While the composite textural description for all participants reads, in part, as follows:

> Participants chose people to come out to whom they were close to, saw a reason they should know, could talk to, or could trust. Trust means not spreading it around and causing problems. Participants specifically mentioned friends or teachers who were open-minded, accepting, and non-judgmental. Other qualities of teachers they told were cool, young, understanding, and nice. Participants knew the person had these qualities because of knowing them for a long time, talking to them, or having been on the receiving end of their trust.

Composite textural descriptions were developed by looking at commonalities across the individual textural descriptions, while still being mindful of individual differences. These differences were incorporated in the composite textural descriptions by grouping them under a common topic. For example, all participants described the personal qualities of the people to whom they came out, even if the specific qualities each participant mentioned were different.

Finally, both individual and composite structural descriptions were written employing imaginative variation—the data was analyzed from different perspectives such as employing polarities and reversals and varying the frames of reference, allowing the structural qualities, dynamics, and themes of the experience to be identified. Imaginative

variation requires looking at each piece of data and asking what the experience would be like if it wasn't there, or if it was less or more pronounced, or if it was somehow different, thus getting to the core of the experience and what makes it unique.

For the coming out category, the universal textural-structural description of the experience reads in part as follows:

> The experience of coming out is trying to control the secret that increasingly you know is the conflict between society's gender roles and heterosexist rules and being true to yourself and your relationships with others. There's an illusion of control as you decide whom to tell, when, and under what circumstances. There's an eventual realization that control is not possible: (a) To truly come out is to lose that control; (b) You can only predict other people's responses (an educated guess); and (c) You cling to the illusion of control then give up on it. You experience negative emotions while secret-keeping, positive ones when free. Ultimately higher principles win out: being true to yourself and your relationships with others. True control is the decision to be yourself and how you choose to view yourself and conduct relationships with others.

The emerging research themes were examined for how they interacted with each other and were grouped to form larger, more encompassing themes. Interview transcripts were then read again in order to find exemplars of each of the research themes. For example, the themes found for coming out were exemplified in Evan's story of his coming out. The decision to choose a particular participant's experience as the exemplar was also made based on the import each participant placed on that experience while speaking about it. For example, during the interviews Evan repeatedly referred back to his coming out, often framing whatever he was speaking about in relation to that pivotal experience in his life. One decision that was made at this time was whether to use exemplars that represented the "common denominator" experience of participants or those with less common "variations." As this study's findings found the experience of being out in school to be somewhat easy, all the stories might be expected to convey this, in essence a collection of stories where nothing much happens. This, of course, is in opposition to many of the imperatives in narrative. The exemplars that were chosen do have all the elements of the common experience, but also the benefits of their variations that serve to better highlight (and contrast) the nuances of these experiences.

While each of the participant's stories was used as an exemplar for a specific main theme, they also contained echoes of the other themes, reinforcing and further

illuminating those experiences as well. As no one story could capture the intricacies and depth of any experience, ultimately all the stories collectively serve as an exemplar of what it is like to be out and gay in high school.

As a novel was representing the findings, literary themes were also explored that linked with the research themes. Literary themes emerged through re-reading interview transcripts and looking at the descriptors, metaphors, and similes participants used to describe their experiences. For example, in one of the themes associated with teachers' homophobia, participants discussed being so turned off by the homophobic teacher that they no longer participated in class, in essence, becoming ghosts. In Eric's story about experiencing a teacher's homophobia, a priest, religious symbols were present that evoked the idea of spirits and ghosts as well.

The stories were then written.

Perhaps the previous sentence conveys a simplicity that belies the writing process I undertook when representing this study's findings. In qualitative research, it is expected that the analytical process be open to reflection, but what about the creative process? Writing is second nature to me: first in my academic career, in past incarnations as a technical writer both here in Montréal and in Japan, and in service to my aspiration to become a published novelist. Not a day goes by when I do not write something of more import than, let's say, a grocery list. Seldom do I have problems during the writing process—challenges, yes, but not problems. Certainly nothing as malevolent as "writer's block." At times during the writing of this work, I thought the ease with which I write might, in itself, be problematic, such is the worrier in me. But, if I may be so bold as to quote Alexander Pope:

> True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
> As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.
> 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
> The sound must seem an echo to the sense.
> (An Essay on Criticism, Part ii, Line 162)

So this is my reflection on the writing process...

The writing process involved first taking each participant's stories and assembling them from the interviews transcripts so they would be chronological and contain all their components as told by the participant. Verbatim transcriptions were used at this point in

order to allow for the subtle nuances of voice. As the representation would be literary, such concepts as characterization and story arc were important considerations at this point. Extensive ruminations were carried out as to how best to present the participants' stories with beginning, middle, and end elements. These ruminations consisted of thinking about the participant's experiences and looking at what aspects could and should be developed into the story. This, of course, also involved great appeals to inspiration, an inexplicable entity that never fails to thrill when it reveals itself.

Storyboards were used to outline the plot and how both the research and literary themes would be woven in the fabric of the story. Of course, strict chronology was not necessarily adhered to when the narrative dictated otherwise. For example, Matthew's story contains flashbacks that resulted from starting the story at the transition point between his old life in the United States and his new life in Canada. These storyboards, however, were not adhered to religiously as each story sustained a certain momentum of its own as the writing progressed, incorporating new threads and changing patterns that, as they were being written, the stories themselves dictated. For example, the storyboard for Geoff's story began with a focus on his activism—teaching younger grades about sexual orientation. As the writing progressed and his interview transcripts were read and re-read, this aspect of his experience became more remarkable by how little contact he had with the LGBT community. The writing continued and this sadness over the lack of contact became the true story, and, thus, the main frame on which the plot and the literary themes would be hung.

The momentum of the writing process swept many stories into being, although subsequent editing slowed the process to one that allowed for ongoing and deep reflection. These stories existed through many drafts, which also transformed them beyond the original storyboards or initial versions to forms not recognizable from those that came before. The original transcripts were checked to see if there were pertinent elements that had been missed in the writing process, and, if so, they were incorporated in the stories. When it seemed that no more could be done to the story, it was set aside, allowed to ferment, if you will, and returned to weeks later, allowing for a fresh perspective. More drafts resulted.

The most pronounced illustration of these transformations was with Matthew's story. Initially the idea of having a non-chronological story consisted of a series of statements such as, "Six months previous..." and "Three months after that...," followed by third person narration:

> Matthew is on the Internet, his mother in the living room with her boyfriend. He can hear the sounds of the TV, the occasional moving/steps to the kitchen for a drink during a commercial. A sentence or two exchanged between his mother and her boyfriend, no doubt discussing some plot twist on E.R., or the plot being hatched by a player on Survivor, or the laughter accompanying the laugh track of a comedy. He thinks how they love their TV.

On re-reading these passages, a decided stiltedness was apparent. More than anything, as compelling as Matthew's story was, the way it was being told lacked immediacy. But upon much reflection, the decision was taken to change these episodes to flashbacks in the first person, allowing a greater immediacy while also contributing to preserving Matthew's voice in the story:

> I was in my room on the Internet and my mother was in the living room with her boyfriend. I could hear the TV, the occasional footsteps to the kitchen for a drink or snack during a commercial, a sentence or two as they discussed the story on E.R. or the plot being hatched by a player on Survivor, the sound of their laughter accompanying the laugh track of a comedy show. They love their TV.

Something as simple as changing the narrative person not only made the story more immediate, but also changed the focus of the story. Subsequent drafts were written keeping in mind the question of immediacy—plot points were incorporated that focused more on allowing private looks at what was important to Matthew, what he held closest to himself, such as his being sexually assaulted and the need for HIV testing.

Finally, where possible, participants had the opportunity to read their stories and provide comments. In most cases, participants felt the stories accurately depicted their experiences. Discussions were had on any areas of disagreement and ultimately, where valid, changes were made. Often this disagreement centred on expressions the protagonist in the story uses, which the participant felt was something he wouldn't say. For example, one participant objected to the term "drama queen" being used in the story when describing a fellow student, preferring, instead, to describe the student now as simply "dramatic." These discrepancies resulted from the participant using vague terminology in the interviews. Elaboration of plot points was also common. For example, where in the

story it was explained that a student's actions consisted of simply "annoying" a female student, the participant wanted to provide more explicit an explanation of the student's actions—that he was being sexually suggestive to the girl.

One participant remarked that he was both amazed and impressed how seemingly disparate elements that he related during the interviews were woven together to form a cohesive story. One participant said, "I really liked it (the story). You really captured me and not only that you used a lot of the language I would use. My words. My expressions. As I read it I could almost hear the inflection in my voice."

Audit Trail

An audit trail, as defined by Halpern (as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was undertaken as part of this study. The following artefacts were kept: (1) raw data; (2) data reduction and analysis products; (3) data reconstruction and synthesis products; and (4) interview protocols and questions.

Findings

Participants in this study characterized the experience of being an out gay student in high school by the following major themes: (a) managing "the secret" of being gay before and during coming out; (b) seeing being gay as just being yourself; (c) perceiving the school as privately supportive, but publicly indifferent to gay students; (d) emotionally reflecting the school environment; (e) valuing relationships as a positive; (f) seeing harassment, gossip, and gender differences as negatives; (g) ascribing to perpetrators of homophobia and harassment character flaws and anachronistic beliefs; (h) being left on your own to deal with homophobia and harassment as others abdicate their responsibilities; (i) employing escapist, self-protection, and resistance strategies to deal with homophobia and harassment; (j) searching for connectivity to other gays and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community; (k) facing the silence of information and resources in schools on LGBT issues and people; and (l) advising others to be true to themselves.

These themes and related sub-themes are explained in the following sections. Examples of each can be found in the stories themselves. Appendix C maps stories to their corresponding themes and vice versa.

Managing "the Secret": Coming Out[2]

Coming out is one of the pivotal experiences for out gay high school students—it marks an important and clear delineation in their lives which participants in this study were keenly aware. Coming out is a time of managing "the secret" of being gay, fearing losing control of that secret, and ultimately realizing that it's a losing battle trying to keep "the secret."

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[2] I've placed the words "the secret" in quotation marks for two reasons: (a) there's a connotation of shame associated with secrets. While there's no evidence participants in this study feel shame with being gay, quite the contrary, clearly the attitudes of individuals around them and/or society in general must have caused them to think that there should be an associated shame as they expended varying degrees of energy keeping their being gay a secret; and (b) participants described others as having suspected they were gay, even asking them pointblank if they're gay, so it's debatable how secret it was.

Before coming out, participants were facing a conflict between society's rules regarding gender roles and heterosexist assumptions and expectations, and their ability to adhere to them. Emotionally it's a time of negative feelings: frustration, anger, sadness, depression, feeling burdened and trapped, masking/hiding who you are, and keeping everything in. With time, participants grew towards coming out as they began to see gender roles and heterosexist rules as charades and felt trapped by them and having to keep "the secret." The true secret is realizing you will not be conforming to societal gender roles and heterosexist rules, so there's no use trying.

The decision to come out wasn't easy for participants because they had to go against what they perceived as society's rules and were aware that potentially they could face what they perceived as the consequences: rejection and homophobia. Participants describe this time as one where they had to face the unknown alone because they didn't know anyone else who had experienced coming out and whose guidance could benefit them. This period was marked by the following reasons for not coming out: (a) not being ready to come out; (b) thinking people didn't need to know; and (c) believing being gay is not important in your life, so why tell anyone?

Participants in this study were motivated to come out by the realization that being true to whom you are takes precedence over societal rules regarding gender roles and heterosexism. Another strong motivator was the desire for honesty in the relationships they had with people close to them, their family and friends. Participants believe these people had a right to know, wanted their support, believe they most likely suspected anyway, wanted to include them in all aspects of their lives, and wanted to be able to show pride in whom they are. Out gay students also experienced an urge to tell and be free from the burden of "the secret." They grew tired of keeping it and no longer cared to—increasingly it was clear to them that the secret couldn't be managed forever.

The individuals to whom participants came out were chosen based on the participant's relationship with that person (often a friend, relative, or teacher), and/or the person's qualities, especially if they were perceived as being open and non-judgmental. In choosing a confidante, two additional criteria were also considered: (a) a reasonable expectation that the reaction would be positive; and (b) the confidante's ability to keep the secret so the participant still maintains control.

The over-riding expectation out gay students had for the confidante's response to their coming out was that it would positive and accepting, and the relationship would remain unchanged. Participants felt this response was predictable based on (a) either the relationship they had with the person (e.g., family, friends, et cetera); (b) previous positive discussions they had on the topic of sexual orientation with the person; or (c) evidence of previous supportive behaviour of LGBT people.

Still maintaining control of "the secret," the out gay students hedged their bets when they came out to selected individuals by not always telling people face-to-face, preferring using Internet instant messaging programmes and e-mail, or notes passed in class. Often they first tested the waters by (a) responding to jokes in ways that implied they were gay, leaving the impression the response was a joke itself; (b) first coming out to people whom they did not know well in case it went badly; or (c) by saying they were bisexual thinking that would be better received. Participants also took the opportunities presented to them that allowed for a smoother segue to coming out (e.g., when they were asked jokingly if they're gay, when asked point-blank, and while watching a TV show on the topic of sexual orientation), or they engineered those opportunities themselves with varying degrees of subtlety (e.g., having a boyfriend sleep over, sending out an email survey with revealing items, writing an essay on harassment based on sexual orientation, wearing gay symbols such as a rainbow flag or a boy-boy pin, disrupting heterosexism subtly and not so subtly by saying "Eww" and "Yuck" to heterosexual activity, and missing school because of problems with a boyfriend). In many of these situations the participants were able to come out matter-of-factly, stating their sexual orientation as they would any other of their essential traits like eye colour or being right-handed. Participants report that overall coming out is no big deal unless control is taken away from them because of harassment or gossip.

Out gay students perceive the responses they received when they came out along a continuum ranging from unconditional acceptance to rejection, each characterized by specific, although not mutually exclusive behaviour. Participants characterize a response as unconditional acceptance when, for example, the confidante reaffirms the relationship and pledges support. Positive responses are those that (a) emphasize how the relationship will remain the same as it was before; or (b) the confidante takes an interest in the out gay

student's life, asks him questions, and/or claims insider status such as having gay friends or having gone to the gay village or gay clubs. The out gay students in this study report the predominant responses to their coming out were unconditional acceptance or positive.

Negative responses take the form of being shocked, indifferent, or avoiding the issue. Finally, confidante responses are classified as rejection when the confidante (a) physically or emotionally terminates all interaction (or the out gay student feels forced to do likewise); (b) tries to change, cure, butch up, or convince the gay person; (c) reiterates gender role, heterosexist, or religious rules; or (d) even harasses the out gay student. While participants did experience both negative responses and rejection, these were the exceptions.

If after having come out to a confidante, participants lost control of "the secret" through gossip, for example, they planned ways to gain that control again or even harnessed it for their own ends to make coming out easier (e.g., having others tell people so they wouldn't have to), thus gaining control of "the secret" again.

The time after coming out was also seen by participants as "no big deal," or, if it was a big thing, it was only for a short time and soon died down unless they were being harassed. Often they found themselves in the position of gay spokesperson as they were asked questions by peers, asked advice from peers and teachers, and even looked up to as a role model for other gay students. Participants found their relationships with most people deepened, becoming more open. As well, they attracted to them peers and teachers who would advocate for them, if needed, and who pledged their support. They also made new friends and became more popular at school. They felt better about themselves, describing themselves as free, knew themselves better, and felt a burden had been lifted as the power of "the secret" no longer had a hold over them. By coming out, participants report finally having control over their lives.

This study confirms that gay students go through a process that Lasser and Tharinger (2003) refer to as "visibility management." Gay students conduct an "environmental assessment" for information on what attitudes people have towards LGBT individuals. They also actively elicit responses in order to gather this information. This helps in deciding whether to come out to those people. Coming out is not linear—the present study found that while there were steps forward and retreats, they weren't of the

magnitude described by Mufioz et al. (2002): "cycling back and forth between feelings of denial, fear, alienation, confusion and acceptance during their high school years" (p. 62). Perhaps now that participants in this study are out and generally very comfortable with whom they are, they downplayed this turbulence.

This study also confirms the Harris and Bliss (1997) study that found positive feedback when gay students came out and that gay students come out to teachers whom they perceive as being accepting (Ginsberg, 1999).

As the present study deals exclusively with out gay students, it is difficult to make correlations with other studies that have both out and closeted participants. Being out in school, however, is rare as attested to by the participants in this study who were usually the only out gay student they knew of in their school. Previous studies have also found this to be rare (e.g., D'Augelli et al., 2002; Harris & Bliss, 1997).

Just Being Myself: Towards a Gay Identity

Participants in this study don't believe they act anything different than who they are, although they are well aware of what stereotypical traits are ascribed to gay men and their straight counterparts, and how they measure up to them. Overall they maintain they are just being themselves, wherever the chips may fall, no longer caring to hide being gay as they've accepted whom they are.

Participants knew they were gay all their lives—either it was a gut feeling, or they felt different, or they realized they were different based on gender roles. Often this realization occurred at an early age, between the ages of eleven and fourteen, and was confirmed to them either when they had a same-sex crush as it evolved gradually over time. Participants do not see how they know they're gay as much different from how heterosexuals know they're straight. Where heterosexuals are attracted to the opposite sex, out gay students define their sexual orientation as "just not being attracted to the opposite sex." Peterson and Rischar (2002) also found that gay male participants expressed their sexual identities in terms of the absence of feelings for the opposite sex.

The out gay students in this study downplay the overall importance of being gay in their lives—it's one part but it doesn't define who they are. This is especially true for those participants who recently came out and/or have little or no connections to the gay community and other LGBT people. Without exception, participants are happy being gay

and wouldn't want to be straight, seeing straight in stereotypical terms: boring and close-minded. Participants don't think they'd be different people if they were straight, although they do concede that they might not be as open-minded because of the experiences that have shaped them and made them the people they are today.

To participants, what it means to be gay extends little beyond being attracted to the same sex. When they do see it as being something other than just sexual attraction, out gay students mention (a) a "gay lifestyle and culture," (b) feeling proud about themselves, and (c) being free from gender roles and the heterosexual stereotype. Ultimately, though, out gay students see being gay as just another personal characteristic, like being Jewish, for example.

In any case, participants believe their being gay wasn't a big surprise to others as they report sending signals to others that they're gay: (a) wearing a gay-identifying symbol like a rainbow flag or a boy-boy pin; (b) making jokes about heterosexism; or (c) making a pointed remark to someone who doesn't yet know they're gay. Participants believe that at some time or another their behaviour, mannerisms, and/or interests correlated with a gay stereotype. While claiming being gay is not all that important to their daily lives, they are still exasperated that straight people don't readily interpret signs that identify them as gay.

When it came down to labels, participants identify with the term "gay," and slightly less with the term "homosexual." These two terms are perceived as interchangeable, but participants generally prefer one to the other. Out gay students are definitely not comfortable with the term "queer" as they see it as derogatory and synonymous with "faggot," especially if in the past it was directed at them as an insult. A parallel was made between gays using the word "queer" among themselves and Blacks' use of the word "nigger"—more acceptable within the group but offensive when said by outsiders.

However, if they were not out at school, participants believe their lives would be different. They can readily make comparisons to when they were in the closet, seeing it as a regressive time, one they view negatively. Not being out means they cannot be themselves, and they're happy now with whom they are.

If their schools asked them not to be out, participants are quite adamant that they would refuse and would tell their schools in no uncertain terms that they refuse. Their

reasons for refusing to comply with such a request are rooted in their conviction that they won't change for others and wouldn't think it's fair if they were told not to act like whom they are. They see it as a right to be themselves and that friends, family, and teachers would support them. Carried to the extreme, participants would no longer want to go to those schools if they were asked to go back in the closet. In contrast to this conviction, one participant mentioned that a friend of his had gone to the same school five years before and had told him that he could not picture someone coming out there, including himself, as they would have been "beaten up" and "fucked around with so much."

The only studies where participants were comfortable with their sexual identity are Jordan et al. (1997), and Edwards (1996), although all the participants in that study were passing as heterosexual. Elze (2003) found that when the school environment was a positive one towards LGBT youth, then participants had more positive feelings about their sexual orientation. Likewise, when there was a GSA, gay students had a higher comfort level with their sexual orientation (Lee, 2001). Lock and Steiner (1999), however, found that gay, lesbian, and bisexual students were less comfortable with their sexual orientation than their heterosexual peers. As past studies have outcomes that generally report harassment and negative health issues, being gay may be more of a central thing in those gay students' lives compared with the participants in the present study. Also, previous research had participants at various stages of coming out. A hallmark of being comfortable with one's sexual orientation could be being out in various social situations like school.

Privately Supportive, Publicly Indifferent: Perceptions of School

While all out gay students in this study received support from peers and teachers, it was generally expressed privately, seldom publicly, contributing to the secrecy associated with sexual orientation in schools.

For example, participants have teachers who privately tell them things about being gay that are affirmative, encouraging, and supportive. However, out gay students seldom hear such positive statements made publicly in class or with other students and/or teachers present. Likewise, some participants have had teachers actively discourage them in private not to come out, ostensibly worrying about their safety, but being perceived by the out gay student as negative nonetheless. They've also had teachers publicly say

negative things about gays such as denouncing homosexuality outright or using "fag" in their conversation. Generally, though, out gay students perceive most of their teachers as indifferent to or avoiding the issue of sexual orientation unless he or she is forced to do so by the student himself.

Participants perceive the attitudes of their peers towards their being out as a mix of positive, neutral, and negative attitudes. While it is rare for them to describe the opinion of students at their school as solely positive, it is more common for them to describe it as neutral or as a mix of positive (mostly friends) and negative (mostly other students). The positive things out gay students hear from their peers are mostly stereotypical: gays are fun, they have the best clubs, they make good friends for girls, and they make good friends for boys because they have lots of girls around them. Participants reported that if their peers have negative attitudes about homosexuality, they are seldom expressed with a rationale—they just don't like fags. If a reason is offered, it's usually founded in religious or cultural beliefs.

While participants seldom speak to the administrators at their schools and, thus, they have little idea what their opinion is on their being gay and out at school, there have been occasions where administrators have been perceived to be homophobic. This will be discussed in more detail in the section on homophobia and harassment.

These findings confirm earlier findings that while there is a lack of public support in schools for LGBT students, there is private support (Jordan et al., 1997; Malinsky, 1997; Mufioz-Plaza et al., 2002). The importance of support is highlighted by Rutter and Soucar (2002) who found that sexual orientation did not determine suicide risk, but, rather, it was external support. Ginsberg (1999) found that even coming out is less about the "passion to disclose" than it is the "over-whelming need for emotional support" (p. 52). All participants in the present study told at least one teacher about their sexual orientation, contradicting previous studies that found this to be rare (Harris & Bliss, 1997; Jordan et al., 1997). Perhaps participants in this study are more comfortable with their sexual orientation or it is a reflection of their school environments that allows them to be open with their teachers.

Reflecting the Environment: The Effect of School on The Out Gay Student

Naturally the effect the school environment has on out gay students and how they feel about being gay depends on how that environment is perceived by the out gay student—positive or negative. If it's a positive environment, there's either no effect on the out gay student or there are positive effects such as (a) liking school, (b) feeling accepted, and (c) feeling proud of whom he is. If the environment is perceived as negative, then the out gay student (a) doesn't want to be there, (b) receives the message that if he wants to be whom he is he should go somewhere else, and (c) may even wish he wasn't gay.

When describing how they feel day-to-day at school, participants use positive descriptors such as comfortable, happy, have lot off shoulders, euphoria, listened to, secure, able to be myself, and supported. Much of this happiness is derived from friends and teachers. The few negative descriptors used by participants include feeling unwanted, uncomfortable, and unsafe because of harassment, and general boredom, unrelated to being gay.

All out gay students in this study experience joy and happiness at their school at some time, for example, when helping peers by tutoring, or getting good marks, or when with friends. They do not experience fear unless they are being harassed and don't have administrator and/or teacher support. They seldom experience sadness, and only at times when they are (a) fighting with friends, (b) feel excluded unintentionally because they're not straight, or (c) hear homophobic comments or are being harassed.

At one time or another, participants have their ability to do school work negatively affected by their school's attitudes about their being out, most notably when (a) they first came out, (b) they are experiencing harassment by students or teacher homophobia, or (c) they are breaking up with a boyfriend. During these times the out gay student's symptoms include not being able to study or concentrate in class or do homework, not eating, feeling nervous, handing in work late or not at all, skipping classes or missing days of school, and not doing what the teacher says. The results are lower grades and the out gay student not caring as much as he used to.

While aware of a decline in the student's performance, teachers never address the issue at hand and never ask questions. While participants believe some teachers are

worried, they believe their teachers attribute the lack of work to laziness and typical youth depression. If teachers act on these assumptions, they tell the out gay student to try harder and lecture him about the consequences of his actions.

Out gay students in this study participate actively in extra-curricular school activities such as dances, yearbook, newspaper, plays, variety shows, arts week, band, daily news, and student conferences, often in prominent ways. These findings contradict those of a previous study that found LGBT students choosing more solitary pursuits (Kivel & Kleiber, 2000). If they don't participate, it's because they (a) feel it's not them, (b) have other obligations, or, rarely, (c) anticipate harassment if they do. Out gay students are open to bringing same-sex dates to school dances or their graduations when their school is perceived as a positive environment, but wouldn't in a negative environment because they fear being taunted or people being mean. In both cases, they believe neither the teachers nor the administration would or could stop them from bringing a same-sex date, and they'd make an issue out of it if they tried. Friends and teachers actively support the out gay students bringing a same–sex date to their graduation, often asking them if they will be doing so. Participants acknowledge that bringing a same-sex date would draw attention to them and would even shock some people.

Overall, participants describe their school environments as positive places or mostly-positive places in which to be gay. Only two participants described their schools as having a decidedly negative environment, but, as a result, one changed to a school he now describes as very positive and the other changed his attitude and the way he handles his situation and describes himself as being happier now.

This confirms earlier studies where the direct correlation between a positive school environment and the out gay student's emotions are pronounced (Elze, 2003; Lee, 2001). Peterson and Rischar (2003) found the gifted gay students in their study seldom indicate feelings of guilt and shame, as was the case with the present study. But the findings in the present study significantly contradict previous studies that found schools to be decidedly negative places for LGBT youth (e.g., D'Augelli et al., 2002; GLSEN, 2001; Jordan et al., 1997). No where is this situation more apparent than in the findings of Kissen (1993) where none of the respondents in that study had good memories of high school, and Nairn and Smith (2003) where their findings showed very few of the 821 students and 438 staff

members surveyed found schools to be safe places for LGBT students (p. 135). Mufioz-Plaza et al. (2002) found that schools were places of social isolation due to the "constant negative messages" from peers and school personnel. Jackson (1999) found a "significant segment" of schools held negative attitudes and opinions regarding homosexuality. His participants reported that their schools were "populated with homophobes" (p. 81).

Valuing Relationships: Being Out in School As a Positive Experience

Supportive teachers, students, friends, and administrators are what make school a positive experience for out gay students. The more positive the relationships are, the more positive the out gay student perceives his school experience.

One consequence of coming out in school is becoming more popular, especially among female students. Out gay students attribute their newfound popularity to the attention they attracted by coming out and their new friends' stereotypical assumption that gays are interesting. They believe these girls find it cool to have a gay friend and crave the novelty and fun they think a gay friend brings.

Out gay students feel they can more easily be themselves in classes where (a) people are accepting and don't care about their sexual orientation, (b) they can socialize, (c) they do things that they like (dance, act, play music), (d) they can express themselves, open up, and be themselves, and (e) people are intellectually motivated and not xenophobic and prejudiced.

Most of the time participants feel equal to every other student in their school, but they do feel especially included when their peers or teachers acknowledge their sexual orientation in a positive way. Another time they feel more included is when they're pursuing their interests (e.g., extra-curricular activities) and when they are given responsibilities during those times.

Participants like their schools the way they are and would keep their schools unchanged, with the exception of removing any homophobic students, teachers, and administrators. They'd also like there to be more gay students, and believe initiatives to promote more acceptance and instituting policies protecting gay students would also be valuable additions to their schools.

These findings do not correlate with previous studies, as participants in previous studies felt a social isolation because of not being able to come out to people at school,

and, even when they did, they still felt limited by how much they could rely on those people for emotional support (Mufioz-Plaza et al., 2002). As suggested by Mufioz-Plaza et al. (2002), gay students did choose close friends to rely on the most, which is similar to what participants in the present research described. While Kissen (1993) found that gay students were more likely to confide in English teachers, the present research found all participants were able to confide in at least one teacher regardless of subject matter, as long as they were perceived to be open.

Harassment, Gossip, and Gender Differences: Being Out in School As a Negative Experience

Participants in this study perceive the disadvantages of being out in school to be few, but cite the potential for harassment, whether they experienced it or not. Not all participants in this study experienced harassment—only two participants experienced serious ongoing harassment. The rest experienced either one or two incidents of harassment or none at all. Gossip is also a disadvantage, and there can be negative popularity when they are asked questions about being gay by peers, being made to feel like the poster boy for homosexuality. Another disadvantage perceived by out gay students is having limited types of friends, less male friends and usually few gay friends, if any, to whom they can relate. There's also a sense of not fitting in completely at times with either boys or girls. Coming out to people, especially male friends, can also be a challenge. Ultimately, there's the personal challenge of keeping faith with yourself during these times and not letting others bring you down and learning to brush it off.

Participants seldom feel excluded at their schools. If they do feel excluded, it's while talking to their straight peers when gender-specific topics come up, like makeup and sports, and they don't feel they fit in. In the most extreme example of ostracism found in this study, one participant was physically barred from the boys' locker room, first by the students then by the gym teacher and administrators.

Out gay students may exclude themselves at school from a class or activity because of being gay at one time or another, especially if they are experiencing harassment. The class from which participants most frequently exclude themselves is gym, usually by not participating, either because they don't like gym and/or sports, or feel ignored or excluded by peers.

Many previous studies have also found that harassment based on sexual orientation was the biggest negative facing gay students (e.g., Elze, 2003; Lee, 2001; Nairn & Smith, 2003; Town, 1996). Types of harassment reported in other studies were also present in this study: verbal abuse, threats of physical violence, and physical assaults. However, no participants in this study were assaulted with weapons or sexually assaulted as found elsewhere (D'Augelli et al., 2002). No other studies report gay students excluding themselves other than the GLSEN (2001) study that reported higher incidences of harassment in unsupervised areas of school such as hallways, the school grounds, and the cafeteria. Also, the present study found that gay students who were the most out faced the least harassment, contradicting the D'Augelli et al. (2002) study that reported greater harassment for gay males who were the most open and had been out the longest. Perhaps participants in the present study were able to be out because of perceiving their school environments as accepting, which, in turn, was proven justified as they seldom experienced harassment.

Character Flaws and Anachronisms: Perceptions of Perpetrators

All participants in this study experience varying degrees of homophobia and harassment that ranges from overhearing the use of "gay," "fag," and "faggot" by fellow students as common pejoratives, to hearing anti-gay statements by students, teachers, and others in their presence, to being the target of homophobia and harassment, including physical attacks. The perpetrator's failings as a human being are blamed for homophobia and harassment rather than larger systemic or societal reasons. In these cases, participants characterize the perpetrators as unintelligent and Neanderthal, often ascribing their motivation to insecurity about their own sexuality, and religious and cultural beliefs. Homophobes, whether students or teachers, are seen by the out gay student as a dying breed with a marginalized cult status like the Ku Klux Klan.

The teacher is perceived to serve as an example and, thus, is held to a higher standards of behaviour by the out gay student. The out gay student who experiences homophobia from a teacher initially feels disbelief, anger, and hurt. He tries to do something about it, ranging from talking to the teacher to outright defiance and confrontation, which the teacher generally ignores. The degree of homophobia from the teacher seems to elicit an equivalent degree of opposition, by not only the out gay

student, but also his peers. This opposition ranges from self-imposed silence to outright rebellion. A teacher's homophobia is viewed by the out gay student to be based either in heterosexist and gender assumptions or religious beliefs, with the former more unintentional than the latter, and the latter often being voiced by the teacher passionately and autocratically in class. Dissenters are derided by the teacher as immature. By witnessing the teacher's homophobia, no matter how mild, the out gay student's opinion of the teacher changes—the teacher is seen as childish for less intentional homophobia and unintelligent for intentional homophobia. The class is tainted for the student and he may choose to no longer participate and his grades may suffer as a result. The teacher's homophobia is even seen as encouraging further homophobia in students as though providing a license for it.

The out gay student does not often experience homophobia from administrators, but when he does it usually involves the administrator inadvertently saying something that the student interprets negatively and to which he takes offence. Participants in this study, for example, experienced administrators who linked being gay to the participant's negative behaviour or made analogies that were interpreted as equating being gay to being a girl. Administrators are perceived as ill prepared to deal with out gay students as it is left to the out gay student to instruct the administrator on how to respond and to explain what is and is not appropriate. For the administrators' part, however, the offense is often quickly realized and regretted, providing evidence that it's more a question of there being a learning curve than malice.

While most participants are accepted by their families, those who are not can experience (a) homophobic comments, (b) attempts by family members to change them, and (c) ostracism in extreme cases. But even in the most extreme case where the out gay student is threatened with violence and kicked out of his house, with time remorse sets in and, at least, initial attempts at rapprochement are made on the part of the family member who ostracized him. When family members attempt to change the out gay student, it's through therapy or deliberate attempts to "butch him up" such as taking him to sporting events. However, none of these attempts are successful and are, in retrospect, seen as laughable by the out gay student. Meanwhile he is made to feel rejected and "not good enough." The family member most likely to react negatively to a child being gay is the

father figure—the biological father, the stepfather, or the mother's boyfriend. The out gay student is aware that this person is not only homophobic, but also has other prejudices such as racism and anti-Semitism, and he readily identifies hypocrisies in this person's attitudes and/or behaviour.

While it is rare for participants to experience homophobia at work, when it does occur it's based on perceptions of gender roles and gender-appropriate behaviour and mannerisms. For example, being perceived as feminine or "too flamboyant" when you're a boy is seen as undesirable in the work place. This, however, is not addressed directly, but, rather, through code such as asking the student "not to be so energetic."

The out gay students in this study identify homophobes from all walks of life, but they do see specific cultural and religious beliefs as their harassers' motivators. While homophobia transcends all cultural groups, some groups may have a greater history and systemic reinforcement of their homophobic attitudes, even using culturally-specific terms in their harassment. Supporters of out gay students, likewise, come from all walks of life, including the same groups as the harassers.

Perpetrators of homophobia and harassment who use their religious beliefs as justification (a) believe being gay is not biological, (b) believe being gay affects day-to-day behaviour negatively, (c) cite Bible passages that claim being gay is a sin, (d) believe gays to be possessed by the Devil and/or have psychological "problems," and (e) don't want gays in school as they see them as a corrupting force. Both student and teacher perpetrators express these attitudes. There is a propensity among religious homophobes to try and convert the out gay student that participants ascribe to the influence of biased religious teachings.

Participants believe schools shouldn't hire people whose anachronistic religious or cultural views get in the way of their teaching, and students and teachers should keep their beliefs out of the classroom. They see these types of views as particularly antiquated, uninformed, and unintelligent, often rolling their eyes as they speak of them.

One paradox that exists in this matter is that while out gay students identify a cultural and religious basis for homophobia and harassment, they also believe that historically oppressed groups such as women, Blacks, and Asians, would logically be more understanding to the oppression of other groups like gays. This is clearly not the

case as participants report that some members of historically oppressed groups are also perpetrators of the homophobia and harassment towards them.

Jackson (1999) also had participants who described the perpetrators of homophobic harassment as "stupid," "shitty," or "ignorant" (p. 150). He saw this anger generally as constructive, but possibly laden with the potential to be self-destructive as is so often described in research with LGBT populations.

The intersection of sexual orientation and culture and/or religion is seldom explored in the research. Edwards (1996) looked at exclusively Black male adolescent homosexuals and found that few thought they would ever be able to come out to their parents citing as one reason their parents' "level of religiosity" (p. 348). Holmes (1999) looked at how aboriginal gays in Australia contend with homophobia in the aboriginal culture and racism directed at them in gay spaces. This becomes a double-edged sword, as aboriginal gays must look for support outside their aboriginal culture. Malinsky's (1997) participants recommended that schools celebrate pride week as they would Black history month in order to not only educate students and faculty about LGBT issues, but to give equivalent footing to the rights of students based on the sexual orientation as well as race.

Participants in the present study did not mention having experienced any discord between their own religious beliefs and their sexual orientation. None expressed any degree of religiosity, although this question was not specifically asked during the interviews. This differs from other research such as Ginsberg (1999), for example, who describes the impact of religion on her participants:

> The lack of acceptance, the insistence that being gay is an alterable condition, and the reluctance to sanction support-group involvement all reflect conflicting values. They represent manifestations of the over-whelmingly negative attitudes toward gays from many U.S. institutions. If there is a single source for this pervasive attitude, it may be religion (p. 54).

She also cites administrators who, due to their religious beliefs, were in conflict with their administrative duties and responsibilities, the foremost of which is to protect their students. In the present research, one participant did mention a principal whom he believed to be especially religious, but he felt that principal generally did not allow his beliefs to interfere with his obligation to keep his students safe, even based on sexual

orientation. This may reflect the explicit human rights laws protecting sexual orientation found in this particular jurisdiction, namely Québec.

Complicating the issue of religion and sexual orientation, is that frequently when sexual orientation is mentioned in school it is in the context of morality. Khayatt (1994) found that this was often the case in a Catholic private school were sexual orientation was brought up in religion class. Nairn and Smith (2003) found that heterosexual students and teachers used the "discourse of rights" to argue for their rights as heterosexuals or as members of a religious group as the rationale sanctioning their disrespect of the rights of LGBT students.

Clearly both religion and culture do intersect with sexual orientation. Some of the most vocal and vociferous opposition to LGBT people and attempts to influence the inclusion of LGBT issues in schools, both in the United States and Canada, has come from religious groups. Perhaps seeing school as secular places, researchers ignore these areas in their studies, or, more likely, see it as highly controversial, perhaps confrontational, and even rife for accusations of intolerance. What can't be ignored, though, is the anti-gay influence of both religion and culture on individuals who may interact on a daily basis with LGBT students.

Abdicating Responsibility: Responses to Homophobia and Harassment

When witnessing homophobia or harassment of an out gay student, other students, teachers, and administrators seldom intervene, even when explicitly requested to do so by the student being harassed.

Gender, relationships, and the severity of the act play a role as to whether peers respond when witnessing homophobia. Female students are more likely to respond, especially if they're friends with the out gay student. Female friends of the out gay student worry about him being physically harassed and often promise to protect him. This makes the out gay student feel less alone, flattered, and somewhat safer. During incidents of verbal and/or physical harassment, however, these interveners' effectiveness is limited as the perpetrators often turn on them as potential targets, causing them to stop their intervention.

A male student who does intervene, especially if he is valued by his fellow students, is especially effective in stopping homophobia and/or harassment. This, however, rarely

occurs, because in a homophobic environment it looks incriminating if they do so, and they, too, would be targeted. Male students do, however, express their support for the out gay student privately.

Indirect homophobia—hearing "gay," "fag," and "faggot" as pejoratives—is seldom responded to by fellow students unless they're a friend of the out gay student and have been charged by him to do so. In class, expressions of homophobia, whether from students or teachers, are more likely to be responded to by the out gay student's peers the more extreme those expressions are. In that case, such expressions are met with arguing and logic that angers the perpetrators more.

Participants classify the majority of the responses teachers make to harassment as not dealing directly with the perpetrators, but, rather, (a) avoiding it, (b) putting the onus on the student being harassed to deal with it, or (c) stating it's solely the responsibility of the administration. When teachers do deal with homophobia, participants identified techniques teachers use to deal with homophobia as ranging from the ineffective (e.g., inaction and advising the harassed student how to deal with it), to effective for a short period (e.g., ordering the harassing students to stop on the grounds it is disruptive rather than homophobic, and impartially reasoning with the student which leaves the impression homophobia is within the realm of acceptability and merely a difference of opinion), to somewhat effective (e.g., asking students to explain their behaviour and logic and to think about their actions). The most effective way participants believe teachers can deal with homophobia is by what they call "zero tolerance," but more precisely mean having teachers not let such behaviours go unchallenged. While this response does occur, out gay students report it doesn't occur as frequently as they would like.

With regards to homophobic incidents where students use "gay," "fag," and "faggot" as pejoratives, while teachers are witnesses to it, there's a sense among participants that it's so prevalent that most teachers have abdicated their responsibility to respond. Teachers who do respond directly, however, are described as being effective in curbing this practice. Sometimes the out gay student is even forced to challenge a teacher's inaction in dealing with homophobia and harassment.

Out gay students who have been harassed perceive how administrators handle the matter as one of two extremes: either they do nothing or they act decisively.

Administrators who do nothing often promise much but never follow through. Rather than dealing with the matter head on, they claim impotence in being able to act, or refer the matter to other personnel, often guidance counselors, and then don't support them. Administrators even add to the harassment by requiring the out gay student to perform tasks or by denying them activities or access, in essence punishing them instead of the perpetrators. Of course the harassment continues. Administrators are seen positively by out gay students when they (a) act decisively, (b) don't let homophobia and harassment go unchallenged, (c) take the issue seriously, (d) deal directly with the perpetrator, and (e) keep promises by acting on them. The harassment ends.

Guidance counselors are seen by harassed out gay students as being the most willing to respond to complaints such as name-calling, ostracizing, and physical assaults. They are perceived to listen to the gay student and then act by speaking to the harassing student and weighing him down with the school's policies and consequences that he cannot refute. Such actions are perceived as concrete and serious, and the harassment stops. Guidance counselors who abdicated their responsibility, even by obtaining outside support, only lessened the harassment, but did not stop it.

When the out gay student told his family about homophobia and harassment, they responded at two extremes of the spectrum—either reaffirming their relationship with him and expressing how they want to protect him from further harassment and homophobia, or stating the out gay student had made his own bed and should lie in it.

Participants in this study perceived their own responses to homophobia and harassment as follows: the more direct and unequivocal their intervention with the perpetrator, the more effective it was in stopping the harassment. The responses taken by out gay students can be categorized as either being for self-preservation or to change the perpetrator, and range from indirect to direct and from ineffective to effective. In this study, out gay students reported the most effective ways to deal with homophobia on their part is to (a) teach people about sexual orientation, (b) ask them directly to stop, (c) tell someone about it, and (d) confront or challenge people in authority to act. Ultimately severing all contact with the homophobic person is also effective. The least effective ways for them to deal with homophobia involve (a) ascribing motivation to the person, (b) discussing and/or arguing with them, and (c) using body language to send a message.

Of temporary effectiveness is (a) ignoring and/or avoiding the situation/person, (b) using sarcasm, or (c) laughing at, mocking, or trying to subvert the homophobia through humour.

When teachers are homophobic, out gay students don't report the teacher to either the administration or their parents. Instead, they speak to friends and sympathetic teachers about it, there being a sense that reporting teachers for actions that clearly violate the law is futile. No one would believe them over a teacher.

Out gay students who do intervene when experiencing homophobia and harassment primarily do so to stop friends and peers from using "gay" and "fag" as pejoratives, although there's more likelihood of their being an intervention when the perpetrator is well known to the out gay student than when not. Such interventions include asking perpetrators to stop, or using jokes, sarcasm, and putdowns. The out gay student also enlists his friends in this endeavour, although this has a limited effectiveness.

Participants report taking a proactive stand in responding to homophobia and harassment such as teaching their peers about homosexuality informally by answering their friends' questions, monitoring their friends' use of homophobic terms, and by example. They teach others formally by giving public speeches on gay-related topics and even volunteer to teach units on sexual orientation to younger grades.

The inaction of administrators and teachers found in the present study confirm findings of previous research (GLSEN, 2001; Jordan et al., 1997; Town, 1996; Elze, 2003). In the latter study, only 12% of gay students being harassed sought help from principals and only 29% of students who sought help characterizing the principal as "helpful" in that circumstance. Likewise, teachers were found never to intervene 36% of the time while fellow students never intervened 44.9% of the time (GLSEN, 2001). As found by the present study, the effectiveness of such rare interventions by teachers, administrators, peers, or the out gay student himself, cannot be understated.

Escapism, Self-preservation, and Resistance: Strategies to Deal with Homophobia and Harassment

Whether it's music, acting, writing, dancing, or drawing, out gay students find having an outlet for their creativity is useful in helping them cope with the day-to-day stress of school and incidents of harassment and homophobia.

All the participants in this study report liking music, either listening to it or performing it, as they find it relaxes them, gives them strength, and helps them tune out the world. Specific songs have good memories associated with them, and the out gay student relates to the lyrics as he sees himself in them and finds they provide wisdom and advice.

The opportunity to act, whether in plays, variety shows, or video productions, also makes out gay students happy as it allows them to be something different than themselves and to receive positive recognition, which they may haven't had before.

Participants often write, whether it's journal entries, short stories, poems, or online blogs (journals). The out gay student writes (a) because there are things he doesn't like to tell people, (b) to lose himself especially if the stories he writes are fictional, (c) to express dark feelings, (d) to get things out of his system especially after a bad day, and (e) with online blogs that can be read by others, to feel that he's not alone complaining to himself and having people enjoy it and comment. In the case of journals, participants describe reading what they wrote again in order to see the mistakes they made in the past. The out gay student likes writing as he feels it's something he does well; he writes less when nothing big is going on in his life and when he feels he has developed other skills which allow him to be more communicative with people and to address problems directly.

When participants enjoy dancing, they cite the physical aspect of it and how it makes them feel better as it acts as a stress reliever, for example, after exams or when fighting with friends. When he's good at dancing, the out gay student likes how he's valued for his talent and knowledge.

Participants who draw do so to express themselves and be creative. The out gay student feels proud of the finished product and a sense of accomplishment, and finds this helpful when frustrated or hurt as he sees it as a form of expression about who he is.

Participants who identified themselves as creative described in extreme terms what it would be like to not have that outlet. Without creativity they feel they would (a) go insane, (b) become depressive, (c) become more internal, (d) have to rely on their friends more, and (e) feel their life would drastically change. One participant claims that life itself wouldn't be worth living if he couldn't be creative. Creativity helped participants

while coming out as it (a) gave them strength, (b) motivated them to keep going, (c) allowed them to get out their feelings, and (d) improved their ability to solve problems creatively.

Participants report using self-preservation strategies, such as downplaying being gay and developing "people and social skills," in situations or environments they perceive as rife with anti-gay sentiment and the potential for verbal or physical harassment.

While out gay students in this study usually don't downplay or hide being gay, they might do so in places like fitness gyms or straight clubs they perceive as not being accepting of LGBT people. Before coming out, participants did try to hide being identified as gay, most often when being asked directly. Prior to coming out there were times the out gay student purposely tried to act more masculine to fit in, changed how he dressed, his mannerisms, behaviour, and attitude, and even watched his language choosing to use the third person when speaking about gays. These attempts now seem both futile and laughable to him. This time is described as one where he masked who he was, put on a shell, and had a completely different personality.

The out gay students interviewed for this research believe they are learning, through their experiences, the people and social skills necessary to deal with homophobia and harassment. Examples of these skills include (a) complying with people, (b) choosing your battles, (c) knowing how to make and take jokes, (d) speaking and acting differently to people who may not be as accepting, and (e) defending yourself verbally. As well, the out gay students may preemptively make a gay joke about himself so it can't be used against him. These skills often involve being more intimidating and oppressive than the harassers: confronting harassers verbally by playing on the presumption that they are insecure about their sexuality, challenging teachers, or being more offensive in their verbal retaliation.

Resistance strategies, such as pushing limits and using humour, are employed by out gay students as a way of asserting who they are and sending the message that they will not be repressed or oppressed by heterosexism, homophobia, or harassment.

When out gay student push limits in their schools they do so by co-opting prevalent heterosexual behaviour and making it "gay." Participants report that sexual harassment does exist in their schools and is widespread between boys and girls. When the out gay

student makes boys the objects of his desire, often as a joke or on a dare, he believes he's doing nothing different than what his heterosexual peers do. If his overtures result in the boy's discomfort or even a complaint to administrators, the out gay student sees the hypocrisy of defining those attentions as "sexual harassment" but ignoring when he's called "faggot" or the victim of homophobia, both of which he sees as sexual harassment as well. Again, when ascribing motivation to the boy for taking offence, they involve his being sexually insecure or religious. The out gay student claims other students are not offended by his actions and see humour in what he's doing. Outside of school, the out gay student may push limits by holding hands or kissing his same-sex partner in public, believing it's his right as heterosexuals do the same thing.

Participants in this study often use humour to discredit the perpetrator and diminish the value of his attacks/opinions, both to the perpetrator's face and in retrospect when speaking about it. The out gay student also has a self-deprecating sense of humour and is keenly aware of when he behaves stereotypically gay. The "stereotypical gay lifestyle" is also a common target of humour, but so is heterosexuality, almost as retaliation for society's degradation of homosexuality.

While seldom explored by other research, the kind of proactive strategies found in the present study confirm the findings of other studies are writing, being creative, humour, and arguing (Peterson & Rischar, 2003). Kivel and Kleiber (2000) found strategies such as reading, watching TV and movies, sports, and music helped in the process of identity formation for LGBT youth. In the Kivel and Kleiber study, music also was used by LGBT students to express themselves, similar to the present study, and to reproduce and/or challenge culturally sanctioned gender norms depending on the musical instrument one plays. This latter topic was discussed by one participant in the present study who also attributes gender-appropriateness to acting, mentioning how he thought others would perceive his interest in it as a "gay" thing. Peterson and Rischar (2003) also found academic achievement as an outlet gifted gay students had. Participants in the present study were also concerned about grades and took pride in the occasions they achieved academically.

Searching for Connectivity: A Sense of Community

Participants in this research know no or very few LGBT people. In their schools, they are frequently the only out gay student there; the presence of out gay teachers is rare. Without exception, they want to meet other gay students and attempt to make these connections in various ways.

While participants seldom know of other LGBT students in their school, they have heard rumours about bisexual girls, or other gay students in lower grades, or believe there are other gay students because their "gaydar" tells them so—but they don't know for sure about any of them. Some participants met other gay students at their school when they came out and "opened doors" for others to come out in their schools. Those participants who know other out gay students in their schools claim that because they are either not as out as them or are in younger grades, it is difficult to be friends with them.

Participants think it's important there be other out gay students in their schools because then they'd have someone to talk to, to hang out with, and to relate to that has a similar point-of-view. They believe that with more out gays there would be less homophobia and their schools would be more accepting because the more commonplace presence of LGBT people would remove "the mystery" in which heterosexuals seem to shroud gays and lesbians. When participants speak about the absence of other LGBT students in their schools, they do so wistfully and with a sense of loneliness.

Participants believe that other gay students don't come out at school because they are too young and aren't ready, or fear the consequences with family and friends. Most out gay students describe their school as environments that wouldn't hinder a gay student's coming out, but they are also aware of the message that gay students receive from unchecked harassment and the prevalence of anti-gay pejoratives—don't come out.

While all the out gay students in this study have had crushes on someone at school, most have not done anything about it other than to watch them from afar and wonder if they're gay. Those participants who did do something, did it indirectly by asking friends to find out if their crushes were interested. They find it difficult to meet someone at school as a potential boyfriend because first they must figure out if he's gay. Participants describe the awkward situation where you tell someone you like him and he tells you he's not attracted to guys. There is a fear that declaring attraction to school friends would

cause the loss of that friend because he would be worried about being hit on all the time. Participants believe if you tell people you're gay first, this makes it more likely that they'll tell you, but this is further complicated because even if they say they're not gay, they could always still be in the closet and not ready yet to come out.

Participants who are currently in a relationship or have had relationships in the past met their boyfriends (a) at LGBT-specific venues (e.g., a café or a club in the village, at a LGBT youth support group), (b) at a local gym, (c) were introduced by friends or a teacher, and/or (d) through the Internet. Most of their relationships are with people from outside the school, with only one participant reporting he went out with someone in his school. Previous relationships ended for reasons that include finding someone else, the boyfriend's immaturity, distance, and the participant's confusion about a previous relationship. For participants who have never been in a relationship, they're open to having one although they claim not to be actively looking.

Ages of boyfriends range from sixteen to thirty-three, while the participants currently in a relationship all have older boyfriends, from ages twenty-four to thirty-three.

The impact on school of having boyfriends is minimal and, when they do occur, involve (a) missing a few days of school because of a breakup, (b) not having a date for graduation because a boyfriend won't go because he's older, and (c) going to the guidance counselor for help regarding a relationship "mess." One participant, however, was assaulted in school by the boyfriend of a romantic interest, necessitating teachers and administrators to be involved.

It is more common for out gay student to have gay friends outside of school. Those who do meet other gays do so through the Internet, friends, at LGBT support groups like Project 10, or in the gay village. Participants in this study who don't have any LGBT friends don't do anything to meet other gays and seem at a loss as to how to meet some. Participants also know of LGBT family friends and relatives, but most are not close to them or even speak to them, except for one participant whose father is gay.

Most of the participants suspect that there are LGBT teachers at their school, but only one participant knew for sure. They think it would be a positive thing if there were out gay teachers in order to help gay students who are closeted or just coming out by being there to talk to them, support them, and stand up for them. Also, out gay teachers

would serve to demystify homosexuality among the students, possibly stopping homophobic comments because of the example they set, unless, of course, they were bad teachers, which is seen by participants as potentially counterproductive to these positive outcomes. The participant who has out gay teachers in his school says that knowing that was the reason he came out to one of them first. He describes this woman and her partner, also a teacher at the school, as respected by students who don't make a big deal about them, although some students have said negative things about them in the past.

When out gay students attempt to break the isolation of being the only out gay student and to meet other gays, most often they use the Internet. Frequently the first gay person they know is via the Internet. While participants claim they take various steps to safeguard themselves, they are aware they are leaving themselves open to varying degrees of danger if they choose to meet people from the Internet ranging from being used sexually to sexual assault. In the most traumatic story told by participants in this study, one participant related how he was raped by someone he met on the Internet, necessitating his moving away to live with another parent and to undergo HIV testing. On some occasions participants who use the Internet to meet other LGBT people meet men who are significantly older.

Connections to the greater LGBT community are tenuous, as participants in this study do not typically go to the gay village, gay clubs, or LGBT youth support groups. While participants have been to the gay village, the frequency ranges from once to a few times. When they've gone, they either went alone, with friends or boyfriends, or even with mothers and family friends. The reasons they first went were either on the spur of the moment after a "gay event" like a gay-themed movie or coming out, or they were introduced to the village by a friend after expressing an interest in going there. When being introduced by a friend, the friend utilizes his/her own experience to tell the out gay student where to go and what to avoid. In the gay village, out gay students walk around, go to cafés and restaurants with friends, shop, attend cultural events, clubs/bars, and strip clubs, and sit and watch passersby. Their opinion of the gay village is decidedly mixed and polarized—they either love it or hate it. Participants who say positive things about the gay village describe it as "accepting," "colourful," "cool," and say they feel connected to it and comfortable going there. Negative comments focus on the village

being "flamboyant," appearing dirty and sleazy, being seen as a sexual hunting ground for older men, and centering around clubs and partying.

Not all participants have gone to the annual gay pride parade. Those who went do have a positive opinion of it describing it as "different," "colourful," and "extravagant." Those who haven't gone cite other obligations on that day.

Despite being below the legal drinking age, participants who have been to gay clubs are seldom carded. The first time an out gay student goes to a gay club is usually with a female friend, while subsequent visits are with gay friends and/or boyfriends. The out gay student's reasons for going are curiosity, wanting to experience it, and having felt uncomfortable in straight clubs because of perceiving them as a potentially dangerous place for someone gay. One participant went to a gay club for the first time on his high school graduation. The first time he goes to a club, the out gay student can feel nervous and scared. First impressions of clubs are mixed: "fun" and "cool" with lots of people to talk to, or noisy and labyrinth-like and confusing. Participants report they are more intent on dancing than drinking, as they either drink non-alcoholic beverages or have only one alcoholic drink as they're seen as expensive. One participant reports going to a gay strip club because it "turns him on."

Participants either haven't heard about gay-straight alliances (GSAs) or are unsure of what exactly they are—none of them have one in their schools. One preconception participants have about GSAs is they're only for gay students. They're evenly divided about whether they would join if their school had one, but those who said they would join also believe their friends would as well. None of the participants would start a GSA at their school thinking it takes a lot of guts to do, or wouldn't be taken seriously by others, or the mentality of students at the school precluded it.

When participants had contact with an LGBT organization like Project 10, a government-funded LGBT youth community group, it was usually to attend the support group meetings or when the organization conducted an awareness seminar at the participants' schools. Initially the out gay student hears about Project 10 through his guidance counselor or a family member. Participants who attended Project 10 meetings have mixed feelings about them—they are a good place to meet other gay youth, make friends, and learn about yourself in a environment where you are free to be gay with other

gay people, but they are also seen as controlling, overly structured, uptight, not understanding, and even irresponsible. The participants who went also react to the STD awareness mandate of Project 10, feeling that topic is "drilled into them constantly." There are also complaints about the support groups degenerating into "bitching and complaining about how bad it is to be gay."

The out gay student sees Project 10 as a place he soon outgrows as they pathologize being gay, treating it as a disability. Participants see it better suited to meet the needs of LGBT youth who are just coming out or who have problems with dealing with whom they are. If the out gay student continues attending, he does so with the sole intention of meeting other gay youth. Eventually he decides he doesn't need Project 10 to be gay as he meets gay friends in other ways.

Participants who attended Project 10 seminars in their schools saw them as interesting and interactive. One out gay student, however, found them ultimately only mildly effective as the harassment he was experiencing "calmed down" only a bit.

On the issues of concern to the LGBT community, participants are only aware of one: same-sex marriage. They are divided on this issue, only agreeing on the importance of same-sex marriage, at least as it applies to them wanting that option available to them. Personally, though, participants believe they are either too young to worry about marriage or see marriage itself as not important—it matters more that you love the person.

Recently in Toronto there was a separate graduation for LGBT students. Participants in this study don't like the idea of a separate graduation, some holding strong opinions against it that including finding it "revolting," "stupid," and "like throwing in the towel." Their feelings on these types of issues can be categorized as being pro-integration, not separation. For example, participants don't think a separate school for LGBT students is a good idea. The reasons for not being in favour of a separate school include (a) not wanting to leave friends, (b) believing people should learn to accept and get along, (c) seeing it as isolating gay and lesbian students who need to learn tools for the straight world (to acknowledge but not conform to it), and (d) differences would be thrown out the window. While against the idea of a separate school, participants still wanted to attend it or, at least, see what it's like.

Only one out gay student held separatist views, the student who has been harassed the most of all the participants. He thinks that separate LGBT graduations and schools are necessary because gays and straights cannot get along.

The findings in the present study regarding the absence of out LGBT teachers confirms what Khayatt (1994) found. Khayatt posits that this absence is due to teachers fearing exposing their sexual orientation would risk their jobs. Participants in Kissen's (1993) study recommended that LGBT teachers come out. With regards to other gay students, the present study confirms what Town (1996) found: participants felt they were the only gay males at their school. No other studies found by this researcher looked at how out gay students make connections to other LGBT people or the LGBT community.

Of course, as previously discussed, the impact of GSAs on creating a positive school environment is pronounced. This study's participants would appreciate having a GSA in their schools, but may not have access to one because of the structure of the education system in their jurisdiction. High school in Québec goes until age sixteen or seventeen. Perhaps gay students are too young to start such groups. In contrast, all the Anglophone CEGEPs[3] in Québec where students are generally eighteen and nineteen years old have LGBT support groups. In other jurisdictions where there is a tradition of high school GSAs (such as British Columbia), there is also an older graduating age for high school students (GALE BC, 2004).

Unbroken Silence: LGBT Information and Resources in School

At one time or another participants in this study have had questions or wanted information about sexual orientation. They report there being very little material and few resources available at their school, describing schools that are essentially silent on the topic either in the classroom or at the school's library.

Participants report that homosexuality, gay issues, or LGBT people are seldom part of the curriculum in their schools, and when such topics do come up, it's informally, unplanned, and usually initiated by the students. When LGBT topics come up unplanned, they often precipitate incidents of homophobia from students and teachers.

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[3] Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel or College of General and Vocational Education

While generally ignored, the discussion of LGBT topics does occasionally occur. On the rare occasion sexual orientation is formally discussed in class, it's usually in Morals or MRE (Moral and Religious Education) classes. Some participants in this study have taken decidedly heterosexual situations and brought up comparable same-sex parallels in class, almost in retaliation to the silence. The most prominent inclusions of LGBT issues in the curriculum as reported by participants was a participant teaching a unit on homosexuality to lower grade MRE classes that focuses on dispelling myths around homosexuality, and another participant's French teacher who also taught a unit on the same topic, first asking the participant if it would be okay for her to do so.

If out gay students want information or have questions about gay issues, they turn to their schools' guidance counselors and nurses, family members who are gay, and friends. Outside the school, participants are aware of gay help lines and gay youth support groups such as Project 10 and Lambda Jeunesse, a Francophone support group. Participants found out about such sources from pamphlets in the guidance/student services office or in the front of the school agenda each student is given.

Participants have found very few books, if any, in their schools' libraries that are about or include homosexuality, and those that are there are old or are seen as being off-topic (e.g., being adopted by gay parents). Librarians are perceived by participants as discouraging students or prudish about loaning such books when they do exist.

The Internet is a place where out gay students say they can go for information. Most participants in this study believe they don't currently have problems or questions that require them to seek help and, anyways, they assert that they don't need a book to know how to be gay. Participants want books that show gays in loving relationships, or, when first coming out, could have answered what it's like to be gay. If participants own gay-themed texts they obtained them from bookstores, friends, or the Internet. Such material ranges from informational books, to Japanese Yaoi (comics involving the sexualization of same-sex popular characters), to pornography.

None of the out gay students in this study have textbooks in their classes that mention LGBT people or issues. In one participant's English class they read a novel with a suggested gay character and the teacher and another student mentioned it. While participants expect sexual orientation to come up in their Morals or MRE classes, there

are no textbooks in those classes. In other classes, most of the textbooks are old. The chance of LGBT issues appearing in textbooks is seen as non-existent.

Participants see not having this topic in texts or as part of the curriculum as a negative as they feel (a) it's good to talk openly about all issues, (b) there are other gay students in the school as well—it's not only them, (c) heterosexual couples and their relationships occur in textbooks and as part of the curriculum, and (d) not acknowledging it makes texts and classes boring.

One place where LGBT people have not gone unnoticed recently is in the media. Participants are very aware and judgmental of how the media portrays gays. Most participants measure what they see in movies and on TV against their own lives. They criticize the media when portrayals are stereotypical, and applaud them when it's not. Participants acknowledge that the media is where they learn some gay stereotypes they never knew before. Seeing LGBT material allows some out gay students to take tentative steps into the gay community. Others feel encouraged by how characters handle issues that they, too, have experienced or are experiencing. They see it as a pleasure to have such material as there's so little aimed at their demographic. Of course, LGBT media is viewed for entertainment as well.

The present study confirms earlier studies which also found a lack of information in either the curriculum or in school libraries (Elze, 2003; Khayatt, 1994; Malinsky, 1997; Mufioz-Plaza et al., 2002; Nairn & Smith, 2003; Town, 1996). Elze (2003) found that 56% of her participants never had LGBT issues addressed in their courses or by guest speakers. Most of the positive mentions of homosexuality were in English classes (Kissen, 1993). This lack of information in schools is especially crucial when it comes to including gay-sensitive HIV/AIDS information in the curricula as gay students who had such information available in their schools were less likely to engage in sexual risk behaviours (Blake et al. 2001). There's somewhat of a paradox here as while it's a positive to have gay-sensitive HIV education, most other times LGBT issues are discussed in terms of the health curriculum, thus "pathologising gay male sexuality by equating it with intravenous drug users and prostitution" (Town, 1996: 18). In both the studies by Kissen (1993) and Malinsky (1997), participants recommended teachers find

LGBT material for their students and encourage school libraries to start an LGBT collection.

As previously discussed, Kivel and Kleiber (2000) found reading and watching TV and movies helped in the process of identity formation for LGBT youth. Also, the present study confirms what Kivel and Kleiber found with regards to how LGBT search for characters in books, movies, and TV with whom they can identify as a way to understand the world at large and themselves.

Being True to Yourself: Out Gay Students Offer Advice

Whether it's to other gay students, teachers, or administrators, participants in this study have advice that focuses on acceptance and being true to yourself.

Participants advise other out gay students to just be themselves and have fun. They tell them to not listen to what others say and be strong and proud of whom they are. They want other out gay students to know they're fine the way they are and that their true friends will accept them and won't judge them or exploit their weaknesses. While there'll be trials and tribulations, there's a light at the end of the tunnel. Participants suggest the best way to handle homophobia and harassment is to carry on and not show it's affecting you as this will gain the respect of others and make the perpetrators look "dumb."

The out gay students interviewed for this research recommend that gay students who are being harassed to not just take it. They say harassed students shouldn't listen to what their harassers say, but should defend themselves with snappy comments and by having allies: teachers, administrators, fellow students, even the police if necessary.

Participants' advice for gay students who are not out is to remember it's their decision—take your time, do what you want, and come out when you're comfortable. Most participants describe the positive aspects of coming out as incentive: (a) people are more supportive and tolerant than you think; (b) it's not a big deal; (c) it makes you more accepting of yourself; (d) you become more connected to the gay community; (e) if you're being harassed by people who suspect you're gay, coming out stops the harassment as you have nothing to lose; and (f) coming out starts a positive chain of events which can end in finding yourself a happier person.

Their advice to teachers is to treat the out gay student like everyone else and not let sexual orientation be the sole property they associate with the student. Participants advise

teachers to be mature, to respect all students, and not to let their own views affect how they see that student. They ask that the teacher be understanding if at times the out gay student acts out because they are being harassed such as when, for example, they retaliate verbally. Sometimes the out gay student needs time, space, and compassion. He needs the teacher to listen to him, and they should do so without judgment and only give advice on issues they're knowledgeable about. They should ask the student if he needs help and what can make things easier for him. The kind of things the teacher should say include, "Be yourself" and "Don't care what other people think or say." Teachers shouldn't tell a gay student to keep being gay to himself.

If the student is being harassed, participants advise teachers to defend the student and not let homophobia and harassment pass. They recommend teachers (a) stop students from using words like "gay" and "fag" in everyday conversation, (b) reinforce anti-discrimination rules for everybody, (c) take unequivocal disciplinary action, and (d) report violations immediately to the administration. Participants suggest teachers tell homophobic students not to be so judgmental, and that while homophobic students may think it's their opinion, it cannot be expressed physically or psychologically.

Participants expect administrators to be vigilant and challenge discrimination in their schools. They expect them to defend out gay students suggesting that involving the offending student's teachers may be more effective in dealing directly with the student. Ultimately homophobic and harassing students should be stopped, their parents told, and suspended or expelled, if necessary. Administrators should be proud of the out gay students in their schools because it shows they've created a safe environment. When an out gay student comes to them with a problem, they should be accepting and listen to the student. Principals should ask him how it should be handled so the out gay student is not put on the spot with the harassers—then do it. Finally, administrators should involve all students and their parents as early as possible and educate them about discrimination issues, especially as they apply to LGBT students.

The consensus is strong between the present study and previous research: LGBT participants recommended that teachers let their LGBT students know they're okay and to treat them with compassion (Peterson & Rischar, 2002). Both the present study and

previous studies have found it important that name-calling by anyone towards anyone be stopped (Peterson & Rischar, 2002; Malinsky, 1997).

Participants in previous research seldom advise their gay counterparts to come out in their schools. Perhaps reflecting their positive school environments, participants in the present research are unanimous in recommending that gay students come out in school. Only one participant, the one who had been harassed the most, had some reservations about coming out in school, but did endorse it in certain positive school environments.

Other Findings

Much of the literature on LGBT youth has focused on negative behaviours such as substance abuse, depression, suicide, increased and unsafe sexual activity, and violence (e.g., Blake et al., 2001; Faulkner & Cranston, 1998; Jordan et al., 1997; Lock & Steiner, 1999; Remafedi et al., 1998). While participants in the present study were not asked specific questions about any of these areas, they were open to discuss what was important to their experience in high school. Most participants in this study made a point of stating they did not use drugs and some only infrequently drank alcohol. While none of the participants mentioned any suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts, some did experience depression because of harassment, although the participant who was taking anti-depressants stated that his depression was unrelated to his sexual orientation.

In any case, findings regarding such negative outcomes are contradictory. For example, Ginsberg (199) reported that homosexual adolescents are no more promiscuous than their heterosexual peers. Likewise, Goodenow et al. (2002) found no difference in gay students sexual risk behaviour as compared to straight youth, but did find a higher risk profile for bisexual youths. Kivel & Kleiber (2000) found no significant self-destructive behaviour among gay and lesbian youth. Rutter & Soucar (2002) found no correlation between sexual orientation and suicide risk, but did find a link to psychosocial variables such as external support.

With regards to HIV/AIDS, only one participant mentioned the fear of contracting the virus as he had been raped. The other participants who mentioned HIV/AIDS did so in tangential ways: a mother worrying he might get HIV or hearing of someone who died with AIDS. One participant did teach younger grades about HIV as part of a voluntary school community programme.

Discussion

In direct contrast with previous research on LGBT youth in schools, the out gay students in this study perceive their schools to be positive environments in which to be gay and out, and that relationships are the key. Whether it's students or teachers, out gay students value people who are open-minded and non-judgmental. Nowhere is this more evident than when the out gay student faces that first milestone as a gay man: "coming out." At this time, the out gay student needs confidantes whom he chooses on the basis of their qualities to be supportive. While participants in this study report generally being accepted and supported by teachers and friends to whom they came out, some did experience ostracism and attempts to change them by family, friends, and teachers. This study found that there are still negative associations with being gay that out gay students picked up on that hindered their coming out, thus the idea of being gay as "the secret."

While teachers are supportive of out gay students, this support is generally expressed to the student in private. This also contributes to the idea that being gay is a "dirty secret." The few public expressions of support for the gay student specifically and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in general engendered less homophobia and harassment on the part of other students. The more publicly supportive of LGBT people schools become, most likely the more gay students will come out, making it less of a "unique" occurrence and helping to remove misconceptions and prejudices due to unfamiliarity. Teachers appear to be at a loss as to how to address the issue of sexual orientation in schools, thus their "silence." Public statements by teachers, as well, might be interpreted as being incriminating in negative environments.

Negative reactions to a gay student coming out seem futile, as participants in this study see being gay as a fundamental part of whom they are and which they wouldn't change. Out gay students see themselves as no different from anyone else, and expect to be treated that way. Perhaps due to their young age and still-developing gay identities, out gay students in this study see being gay as nothing more than being sexually attracted to the same sex. Likewise, they reject political uses of the term "queer," a term they see as solely pejorative, perhaps because of the absence of any material in their school about LGBT people and their accomplishments and the ongoing struggle for gay rights.

As part of the valuing of relationships, the out gay student looks to make connections with other LGBT people. Unfortunately, there are seldom other LGBT students or teachers in the out gay student's school. This research found that gay-straight alliances (GSAs) are non-existent neither in the schools participants attend nor in any other Anglophone high school throughout the province, save one. GSAs could provide a positive place where more gay students could come out and meet. Beyond the school walls, LGBT support groups such as Project 10 were only found to have limited benefit to participants who availed themselves of their services, the biggest of which was a place where out gay students could meet other gay youth. However, this benefit was mitigated when participants felt they were being pathologized by this group's focus on STD's and psychosocial issues. There's a need for community support groups that have separate mandates: one to help the socialization of gay youth with each other, and another for psychosocial needs.

These findings differ from previous research that reported gay students having no positive memories of high school, often felt unsafe, and rarely disclosed their sexual orientation to teachers. One reason the experiences of the out gay students in this study are more positive than those found in previous research is that this research focused exclusively on out gay students, not students questioning their sexual orientation, or bisexuals who may have not reached their terminal sexual orientation, or gay students who are still in the closet and fearful—all of whom may not be as secure as the out gay students in this research appear to be. This difference may also be a reflection of the schools the participants in this study attend and the overall progressive society in which they live. Repressive schools may have gay students who do not feel comfortable or even safe enough to come out, and, thus, are not represented in this work.

But despite the generally positive description participants have for their schools, all out gay students in this study did experience some degree of homophobia and/or harassment, more often than not in the form of hearing fellow students use "gay," "fag," and "faggot" as pejoratives, for which little is done by teachers, administrators, fellow students, or the out gay students themselves to stop. For those participants who did experience more directed forms of homophobia from teachers and students or were verbally or physically harassed by students, school is a dark and lonely place. Participants

who were harassed describe their attempts at receiving help from teachers and administrators, and, only teachers and administrators who took the matter seriously and acted decisively were seen as being able to stop the harassment. The teacher and administrator who does nothing in response to homophobia and harassment perpetuate the "dark and lonely" world inhabited by the harassed student. Underscoring the importance of teachers, their relationships with students, and being supportive of LGBT students, the out gay student who perceives his teacher as homophobic shuts off and refuses to cooperate either on a one-to-one basis with the teacher or as a student in that teacher's class.

Harassment is meant to repress the out gay student, but, instead, participants in this study were motivated to seek information, to gain support from others, and to make connections to the LGBT community. All participants report being able to fend for themselves and resist homophobia and harassment to some degree, although the participant who had experienced the most harassment only felt empowered to do so when he had changed to a more positive school environment. The strategies out gay students employ are often creative, but might also be seen as disruptive (e.g., humour and resistance). Even in small amounts, the need for strategies is most likely indicative that heterosexism and homophobia still exists even in positive environments, in subtle forms, to which the out gay student feels the need to rebel and to provide a counter-balance. The more heterosexism is imposed on him, the more the out gay student feels the need to resist. Teachers and administrators should understand these behaviours as symptoms of the underlying problems they are meant to deal with, and not simply as acts of disobedience and/or disruption.

The cultural and religious motivations participants ascribe to perpetrators of harassment is worrisome as the denial of LGBT people and their rights is often framed in terms of the rights of various cultural and religious groups' to do so. Public schools, however, are secular places and should be explicitly referred to as such by teachers and administrators. Respect of the individual's dignity transcends the personal opinions or beliefs of others, regardless of their origin. A positive and safe school culture is cultivated, and dealing explicitly with the intersection of culture, religion, and sexual orientation is necessary if all involved are to understand their own rights and the rights of

others. Ultimately, though, the laws in force trump such motivators. While schools do have weeks devoted to the accomplishment of specific cultural groups, meant, no doubt, to instill pride in those accomplishments, they might also create an "us versus them" mentality. Activities that promote the accomplishments of all groups would seem better able at making students see the value of respecting and accepting "others," but without including LGBT people, their accomplishments, and their struggle for rights, an important "other" still remains marginalized.

This research confirms the lack of LGBT resources for gay students. Being the only out gay student in their schools, participants report the burden of representing all gays as spokesmen for peers' questions. While heterosexual students can be assured they will hear about and read about heterosexuals, textbooks and curriculum seldom reflect the existence of gays at all, let alone teach about LGBT people of any accomplishment. This "silence" of LGBT information and resources again contributes to "the secret."

This research finds a developing gay identity, a continuum where at one end the out gay student is just coming out and the other end where he strongly illustrates many of the themes this study found, especially connections to the gay community and other LGBT people. The themes this research found can be located in the stories of all the participants in this study to varying degrees. Even the participant positioned at the beginning of the spectrum and who has only been to the gay village once, makes connections with another gay youth via the Internet and reads Japanese gay fiction. Another participant who has never met other gay youth and has never been to the village, resists heterosexism and combats homophobia by teaching a unit on homosexuality to younger students. Even in isolation, participants are developing a more integrated gay identity where they are involved in some form of activism and/or resistance in their schools, make connections with the LGBT community, and because they've dealt with harassment, have moved on. This research posits that the more contact an out gay student has with the LGBT community, the more out he is.

The out gay students in this study do not take an assimilationist view of their place in schools and the outside world. Rather than hoping to be invited to the heterosexual table, they see a homosexual-heterosexual table and firmly believe that not only do they have an inalienable right to be there, they will fight to retain that right. They are vigilant about

heterosexism, prescribed gender roles, and inequalities based on sexual orientation. While not aware of it explicitly, participants in this study exhibit more of a "queer" philosophy than a liberationist one, especially when it comes to disrupting heterosexism and asserting their gay selves into the discourse in schools.

This burgeoning activism may reflect the progressive society in which these students live, and the steps their schools have taken to promote the equality of all their students, if not specifically their LGBT students. The participants in this study have been made aware in the curriculum of the struggles of other marginalized groups and have made a parallel with their own rights. They may feel it is their time to be heard.

What makes a positive and safe environment for out gay students? Teachers and students voicing their support both privately and publicly, anti-discrimination policies that explicitly reference sexual orientation, the freedom to resist homophobia and heterosexism, and making connections to other LGBT people and the LGBT community all contribute to participants' perceptions of their schools as positive and safe environments.

While touching on almost all the results previous research on LGBT youth in schools has found, the present study offers far greater detail and depth on many of these issues. It enriches the research in this area by contributing a look forward at a relatively progressive jurisdiction where out gay students feel safe enough to come out. While not reflecting perfect environments by any means, this research does illustrate how progress has been made in some schools and what still remains to be done in order to make schools truly accepting and positive environments for LGBT students.

This research is unique in that it provides two approaches to presenting its findings: a traditional way and one that is arts-based. When comparing the stories found in the novel to the research findings presented in this section, the former findings may seem more compelling. Thus is the nature of an arts-based narrative research: it takes the flat discourse favoured by the academy and breathes life into it again. Without the participants' words, the traditional text gasps for air. Their value is immeasurable. The stories can vividly portray the daily ups and downs of experience that a traditional thematic analysis "flattens." If anything, this disparity best illustrates and validates one of

the main objectives in this work: to facilitate marginalized voices to be heard in as compelling a way as their words were first spoken.

Rather than fearing opening the "can of worms," this research shows that the most effective way to promote a positive climate for out gay students is not to ignore them or their issues, but, rather, to acknowledge that gay students exist and to celebrate the diversity they bring. Above all, the honesty and bravery that out gay students exemplify should be respected and supported.

Implications

The following discusses the implications of this study's findings for policy makers, teacher education programmes, teachers' practice, administrators, and further research.

Implications for Policy

While protections under human rights charters and obligations for teachers in education acts are in place and seem both specific and strong enough, at least in the jurisdiction in which this study was conducted, out gay students are still the object of homophobia and harassment from both students and teachers. Provincial education ministries, such as the Ministère de l'éducation du Québec (MEQ), and school boards are in the position to provide education campaigns that could be effective in diminishing the negatives gay students may experience. Such a campaign could focus on reiterating the current laws and policies regarding the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students, the potential for gay-straight alliances (GSAs) in high schools, the commitment to the secular nature of public schools, and how teachers and others can challenge homophobia and harassment based on sexual orientation in their schools.

Implications for Teacher Education Programmes

Under the umbrella of "multicultural education" often issues of gender and sexuality are, or are expected to be, subsumed and addressed. In reality, they seldom are. Multicultural education needs to include all dimensions of diversity, including sexual orientation. Given the incidents of teacher homophobia, indifference, and silence reported in this study, not all teachers have an understanding of their obligations under the laws and policies of the jurisdictions in which they teach. Clearly a more directed and sustained approach to educating pre- and in-service teachers about the human rights of their students with respect to sexual orientation and their role in defending those rights needs to be undertaken, a more extensive approach than one that merely subsumes the topic in a course or two on diversity and leaves whether it is included at all to the whim of university instructors.

Implications for Teachers and Their Practice

Findings in this study make it clear that the relationship out gay students have with teachers is an important one. Teachers have the power to make a difference in the lives of

their gay students as they're often chosen by gay students to come out to and to turn to as allies when facing homophobia and harassment. Teachers are on the frontline in being able to change all students' attitudes about sexual orientation. This study shows that while many teachers are privately supportive of gay students, it is seldom expressed publicly. Teachers can contribute to a positive environment for gay students by publicly expressing their support, as well, and including LGBT issues and people in the curriculum.

Implications for Administrators

When faced with complaints about homophobia and/or harassment, this research found that out gay students want administrators to take them seriously and act decisively towards perpetrators. Out gay students value administrators who have a policy against discrimination of any sort, including sexual orientation specifically, and applies that policy unequivocally.

Individual schools should rejoice in not only their cultural diversity, but also in the diversity that LGBT students bring. Many schools have school-wide events that honour the contributions made by various cultural groups. By not including the contributions made by LGBT people, schools are doing a disservice to their gay students and teachers, essentially rendering them invisible, whether they are out or not. Administrators are in the position to promote initiatives that benefit gay students, such as GSAs, or Queer Ally programmes, or ensuring there are current LGBT information and resources readily available.

Implications for Future Research

No phenomenological research can provide an exhaustive insight into the phenomena being investigated. Each aspect of this study can be explored separately for an even deeper understanding of the experience of being gay and out in high school.

This study made a considered decision to only look at male out gay students. This research could serve as a model for similar studies looking at out lesbians or bisexuals, or even "closeted" gay students, in order to understand the similarities and differences of their high school experience. Likewise, as this research only looks at students in Anglophone schools in Québec, a comparable study could be conducted to look at

students in Francophone schools in order to see similarities and differences. Other jurisdictions outside Québec can also be investigated.

How religion and culture intersect with sexual orientation and the rights of students in school could also be investigated.

Another area of promise for research is to develop a more extensive "member-check" where participants could read all the stories, not only their own, and provide feedback, perhaps even in a focus group format. Another approach along this avenue of collaboration could be to have participants initially write their own stories.

Finally, the attitudes and the experiences of students, teachers, and administrators who have out gay students in their school could be examined in order to develop interventions, if necessary, to combat homophobia and harassment.

Conclusion

Much has changed for gay students since I was in high school. When gay students come out, they don't experience nearly as much harassment and homophobia as previous studies have reported. By conducting this research, I heard of school environments in which out gay students are, for the most part, having a better time of it. I was surprised to find that the benefits of coming out in high school such as increased popularity and attracting both peer and teacher advocates, far outweigh staying in the closet. Most of all, participants in this research told me that coming out allowed them to be true to whom they are and that coming out is something none of them regret doing. Surely that's an advantage that makes many of the negatives worthwhile.

I listened to these out gay students and learned that day-to-day being out in high school is "no big deal," although from time-to-time there certainly are challenges. Even in a relatively progressive jurisdiction in which this study was conducted, there is still homophobia and even harassment, both verbal and physical.

What is important, though, is the out gay students who spoke to me have been empowered somewhere along the line to stand up for their rights, and, as a result, they are role models for not only other gay students but also for heterosexuals who cannot help but be enlightened by their very presence. No longer are gay students willing to be silent victims. The degree to which some of the participants in this study are vocal and even "in your face" about their sexual orientation is remarkable.

It is doubtful that there are any jurisdictions that are entirely free from homophobia and harassment at this time in human history, but with education, government policies, people who will stand up for what's right, and, above all, time, there is hope. The stories these participants tell make me optimistic that school environments can improve and are improving.

In many ways I found the writing of the novel found in this document to be a great act of hope in itself, as all writing is, or should be. It's that hope that I believe will drive others to continue work in this area as it holds the promise of a day where there'll be an unequivocal acceptance in all schools of gay students like those to whom I've tried here to give voice.

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Appendix A: Consent Forms

Participant Consent Form

This is to state that I agree to participate in a research study being conducted by Michael Whatling, Ph.D. candidate, Integrated Studies in Education—Culture and Values, Faculty of Education, McGill University, Montréal, Québec, Canada.

Purpose

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to analyze and describe the experiences of "out" gay high school students. The researcher will conduct 2 or 3 one-hour interviews with participants to discuss their experiences of being gay in high school. This study will offer teachers and school administrators an understanding of the rewards and challenges faced by "out" gay students with the hope that the needs of these students will be better met.

Procedures

The researcher will interview participants at a mutually agreed-upon location (either at school or at McGill) and time. Interviews will be voice recorded and will occur at agreed-upon intervals between May 2003 and July 2003. There is less than minimal risk to participants, as no identifying information will be included in the findings. Any quotations, descriptions, or findings to be used in the dissertation will be checked with the participant who made it for accuracy. The interview tapes or transcripts will not be shared with anyone.

Conditions of Participation

- I understand the purpose of this study and know about the risks, benefits, and inconveniences that this research project entails.

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without any penalty or prejudice.

- I agree to be voice recorded for the purpose of this study.

- I understand that findings from this study may be published, communicated, or disseminated for educational purposes at the discretion of the researcher.

- I understand that my participation in this study is strictly CONFIDENTIAL. My identity will not be disclosed to anyone, anywhere.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

This is to state that I grant permission for my child to participate in a research study being conducted by Michael Whatling, Ph.D. candidate, Integrated Studies in Education—Culture and Values, Faculty of Education, McGill University, Montréal, Québec, Canada.

Purpose

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to analyze and describe the experiences of "out" gay high school students. The researcher will conduct 2 or 3 one-hour interviews with participants to discuss their experiences of being gay in high school. This study will offer teachers and school administrators an understanding of the rewards and challenges faced by "out" gay students with the hope that the needs of these students will be better met.

Procedures

The researcher will interview participants at a mutually agreed-upon location (either at school or at McGill) and time. Interviews will be voice recorded and will occur at agreed-upon intervals between May 2003 and July 2003. There is less than minimal risk to participants, as no identifying information will be included in the findings. Any quotations, descriptions, or findings to be used in the dissertation will be checked with the participant who made it for accuracy. The interview tapes or transcripts will not be shared with anyone.

Conditions of Participation

- I understand the purpose of this study and know about the risks, benefits, and inconveniences that this research project entails.

- I understand that I am free to withdraw this consent and discontinue my child's participation (or my child may do so) at anytime without any penalty or prejudice to my child or myself.

- I agree to allow my child to be voice recorded for the purpose of this study.

- I understand that findings from this study may be published, communicated, or disseminated for educational purposes at the discretion of the researcher.

- I understand that my child's participation in this study is strictly CONFIDENTIAL. My child's identity will not be disclosed to anyone, anywhere.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PERMIT MY CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

Appendix B: Interview Protocols

Preliminary Interview

<u>Introduction</u>
The purpose of these interviews is to find out what it is like to be an out gay student in high school. I'm **not** looking for **anything specific**, just what the experience of being out in high school is like, **good, bad, or indifferent.** Anything you have to say on this matter will be valued. I'm specifically looking for **stories** that back what you are saying, so if you can tell me about things that happened that describe what you are talking about, that will be great. It's important that you tell it **the way you want** without me telling you how to do that. From time to time I might ask **questions** to better **clarify** what you are saying.

The interviews will be held in 3 parts: the <u>first</u> interview is to get to know you and to describe what your school is like and your coming out. In the <u>second</u> interview you can talk about what it is like to be out and gay in high school. In the <u>third</u> interview, we'll look back over the first two interviews and try to make sense of what's going on—the big picture.

It's important for you to know that what you are saying is strictly **confidential.** Your name or any identifying information will never be used without your permission. If you use other people's names, use their first names only or give them an alias. Also, try not to use your school's name. In any case, such information will be left out of any transcripts or reports. You also have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Is this clear?

REMEMBER to talk **clearly** and **DON'T talk too softly.**

PSEUDONYM: _____

1. Do you understand the purpose of today's interview?

2. Do you understand the consent form you have signed and the conditions under which you have agreed to participate in this study, including your right to freely withdraw from the study at any time?

3. Do you understand that you have the right to disclose only what you wish to disclose?

4. Any questions?

5. So tell me about **yourself.** What would you like me to know about you?
    a. Where did you **grow up?**
    b. What are your **interests,** hobbies, etc.?
    c. What do you do **outside** of school? What do you do after school? In the evening? On the weekend?
    d. Do you **work?** Tell me about it.
    e. What about **friends?**
    f. Are you **seeing someone** and do you go out on **dates?**

6. What is your **family** like?

7. What about **school**?

    a. What **grade** are you in and what **subjects** are you studying?

    b. What are you going to do **after high school**?

    c. What is your **school** like? Describe it. Teachers. Students. Administrators. Support staff. Building. Neighbourhood. Etc.

    d. What do you **like** about your school? Why?

    e. What do you **dislike** about your school? Why?

    f. What is the **cultural makeup** of your school?

    g. Does your school do anything to look at **diversity**—race, gender, language, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.?

8. What are you like as a **student**?

    a. How would you say your **teachers** would describe you as a student?

    b. How would you say your **fellow students** would describe you as a student?

    c. What are you like at school **outside of class** (lunch, recess, etc.)?

9. When did you **first come out**? What were the circumstances? What happened?

    a. How did your **family** feel about you coming out? Please explain.

    b. Could you describe what it was like **before you came out**?

10. When were you **first out** in your **high school**? What were the circumstances? Describe them.

    a. Describe what it was like **before you came** out at school?

    b. How do other **students know** you are gay? Explain.

    c. How do **teachers know** you are gay? Explain.

11. How do **you know** you are gay?

12. What **name** do you use to identify yourself in terms of your sexual orientation? (Gay, queer, homosexual, etc.) What does that **name mean** to you? What do you **think about each** of the other names?

13. Do you **know other gay people**? How did you **meet** them? How **do you** meet other gay people?

14. Do you go to the **gay village**? The **Pride Parade**? Why or why not? What do you do there? How often do you go ?

15. If you have questions about being gay, how do you **find out information**? Books? People? Movies? TV? Internet?

16. I'd like to take this time to **thank you** for participating. I'd like to ask…**why** did you **want to participate** in this research.

In-depth Interview

1. Do you understand your right to freely withdraw from the study at any time?

2. Do you understand the purpose of today's interview?

3. Do you understand that you have the right to disclose only what you wish to disclose?

4. Any questions?

5. Is there anything in the **last interview** you would like to add to or change?

***Go over previous interview and clarify responses.

6. In looking at your experiences as an out gay student, are there things that **stand out as "important"** to you? Anything you want me to know about?

7. When you think of your experience of being out in high school, **what is the 1ˢᵗ thing that comes to mind**? Can you tell me some stories that would illustrate that? Other stories?

8. What would you say is the **attitude of your school** towards your being out? Can you tell me about some **times** when these attitudes showed?

9. How does going to your school **affect you** or **make you feel** about being gay?

10. Are there times you feel especially or personally **included at school** by being gay?

11. Are there times you feel **excluded at school** by being gay or **exclude yourself**? Don't do something? Any activities? Classes?

12. Do you ever feel there is an **advantage** to being gay at school? Please explain. Can you give an example?

13. Do you ever feel there is a **disadvantage** being gay at school? Please explain. Can you give an example?

14. What is your **impression of the teachers** at your school and how they respond towards your being out? Please elaborate. Can you tell me some stories that would illustrate this? Do you have any other stories?

15. What is your **impression of the administrators** in your school and how they respond towards your being out? Please elaborate. Can you tell me some stories that would illustrate that? Are there any other stories?

16. What is your **impression of the students** in your school and how they respond towards your being out? Please elaborate. Can you tell me some stories that would illustrate that? Other stories?

17. Have you **heard positive things** said by teachers, administrators, or students about being gay? If so, when, how often do you hear them, and what happened?

18. Have you **heard negative things** said by teachers, administrators, or students about being gay? If so, when, how often do you hear them, and what happened?

Did anyone challenge them?

19. Is sexual orientation ever **discussed in** your **classes**? Does it appear in your **texts**? What do you think about that? Can you tell me some stories that would illustrate that? Other stories?

20. If you wanted **information** about being gay, where would you go at your school to find it? Is there information about being gay in your school **library** or **guidance office**? If so, have you read it? What do you think about it?

21. Is there **someone at your school** who you can talk to about being gay? What do you talk about? How does this make you feel?

22. Are there **other gay and lesbian** students at your school? **If not**, what do you **think** about that? **If so**, do you **speak** with them? If so, what do you **talk about** together? If not, why not? What is their experience like at school? Is there a **benefit** of having other gay and lesbian students with you at school? A **disadvantage**?

23. Do you participate in any **after-school or social activities** like sports, clubs, or dances? What is it like to be gay at these activities? Tell me about it. Could you, for example, bring a **same-sex date to a school dance**? Explain.

24. In what **classes** do you feel it is **easiest to be yourself**? Explain why.

25. In what **classes** do you feel it is **more difficult to be yourself**? Explain why. What about in **gym** class?

26. Are there times when you **hide or downplay** your being gay? If yes, when? Why do you do so?

27. Are there times when you **emphasize** that you're gay? If yes, when? Why do you do so?

28. Have you ever been **attracted to another student** at school? Did you do anything about it? Why or why not? What happened?

29. If your school asked you **not to be out or "so out,"** how would you respond? What would you do?

30. Have you ever done anything at school to **educate others** about being gay, **stand up** for gay rights, or **fight homophobia**?

31. What would you think if your school had a **Gay-Straight Alliance**? Would you **join**? How **active** would you be in it? Would you **start** one?

32. Anything you would like to talk about?

Reflective Interview

1. Do you understand your right to freely withdraw from the study at any time?

2. Do you understand the purpose of today's interview?

3. Do you understand that you have the right to disclose only what you wish to disclose?

4. Any questions?

5. Is there anything in the **last interview** you would like to add to or change?

***Go over previous interview and clarify responses.

6. Now that you have told me about your experiences as an out student in high school, I'm wondering if you could help me see what they mean in a larger sense. If you could describe your school experiences as an out gay student by just **one or two words**, what would they be? Why choose those words? Can you tell me a story that would illustrate that?

7. Overall, what **one experience** in high school do you feel **summarizes** your experience of being out?

8. Other than being attracted to the same-sex, what does **being gay mean** to you?

9. What would you say are the **misconceptions** people **in your school** have about being gay?

10. Gay marriages have been **in the news** recently. If gay marriages are legalized in Canada, would you see yourself **marrying** one day? Why or why not? Do you see this as an important issue?

11. What **one emotion or feeling** do you have at school most of the time? Why?

12. Was there ever a time at school you felt great **joy or happiness**? Tell me about it.

13. Was there ever a time at school you felt **sadness or fear**? Tell me about it.

14. What are the **challenges** or obstacles to being out and gay in high school?

15. What are the **rewards** or the **good things** of being out and gay in high school?

16. What are the **things that make it better for you** in school when you are out and gay? Explain?

17. What are the **things that make it worse** in school when you are out and gay? Explain?

18. Do you think your experience of being out and gay in high school means you have had a **different experience** in school than other students? Why or why not? How?

19. What do you think of having a **different school** especially for gay students?

20. A **different grad**?

21. Does your being out and gay in high school ever have an **impact on your schoolwork**? Attention in class? Doing work? Doing homework, etc?

22. How would you **compare** being gay in high school **now** compared to **10 years ago**? If you lived back then, what **would it and you be like**?

23. What do you think it will be like **10 years in the future**?

24. Why is it that **you came out** at school and **other students haven't**? What is it about **you**? The **school**? **Them**?

25. If you were **not gay**, do you think you'd be a different person? Why or why not? What would you be like?

26. If you were **not out** at school, do you think your experience at school would be different? Why or why not? What would it be like?

27. If you had **no outlets** for your **creativity**, what would it be like? Do you see a link between your creativity and being gay?

28. If you had a **magic wand** and could do anything you want, what would your **ideal school** be that would meet the needs of gay students? What would it be like? The **teachers**? Other **students**? **Administrators**? **Programs to help**? **Texts**?

29. Do you think it would be a good idea for **gay teachers to be out** in school? Would it have **helped you**?

30. What **advice** would you give **teachers** in schools on how to respond to out gay students in their school? Talk to me as if I was that teacher. What would you say to me?

31. What **advice** would you give **administrators** on how to respond to out gay students in their school? Talk to me as if I was that administrator. What would you say to me?

32. What **advice** would you give to **another gay student** in his school if they are **out**? Talk to me as if I was that student. What would you say to me?

33. What **advice** would you give to a **student** who is **not out**? Talk to me as if I was that student. What would you say to me?

34. Anything you would like to **add** that has not been covered in our interviews?

Appendix C: Story and Theme Mapping

Story —> Theme Map

The following list the main and secondary themes explored in each story.

Story	Main Theme(s)	Secondary Theme(s)
Elton John, Uncle David, and Me: Evan's Story—Part I	A	B, E, F, I
The Nail That Sticks Up Gets Hammered Down: Alex's Blog	B	A
The Holy Ghost: Eric's Story	F, G	A, E, I
A Lesson on Being Inseparable: Geoff's Story	J, K	B, E, I
Episodes in Fear: Matthew's Story	D, F, G, H	A, C, I, J, K
E-mails to My Brother: Christopher's Story	F, H	B, C, D, E, H
"In case you haven't noticed, I'm gay. Pass the salt.": Tristan's Story	C, E, I	A, B, F, G
Rebel…Just Because: Evan's Story—Part II	F, I, L	E, G

A — managing "the secret" of being gay before and during coming out

B — seeing being gay as just being yourself

C — perceiving the school as privately supportive, but publicly indifferent to gay students

D — emotionally reflecting the school environment

E — valuing relationships as a positive

F — seeing harassment, gossip, and gender differences as negatives

G — ascribing to perpetrators of homophobia and harassment the motivators of character flaws and anachronistic beliefs

H — being left on your own to deal with homophobia and harassment as others abdicate their responsibilities

I — employing escapist, self-protection, and resistance strategies to deal with homophobia and harassment

J — searching for connectivity to other gays and the LGBT community

K — facing the silence of information and resources in schools on LGBT issues & people

L — advising others to be true to themselves.

Theme —> Story Map

The following lists the stories that explore the corresponding theme either as its main theme or in a secondary way.

Theme	Story (Main)	Story (Secondary)
managing "the secret" of being gay before and during coming out	A	B, C, E, G
seeing being gay as just being yourself	B	A, D, F, G
perceiving the school as privately supportive, but publicly indifferent to gay students	G	E, F
emotionally reflecting the school environment	E	F
valuing relationships as a positive		A, C, F
seeing harassment, gossip, and gender differences as negatives	C, E, F, H	A, G
ascribing to perpetrators of homophobia and harassment the motivators of character flaws and anachronistic beliefs	C	G, H
being left on your own to deal with homophobia and harassment as others abdicate their responsibilities	E	F
employing escapist, self-protection, and resistance strategies to deal with homophobia and harassment	F, G, H	A, C, D, E
searching for connectivity to other gays and the LGBT community	D	E
facing the silence of information and resources in schools on LGBT issues & people	D	E
advising others to be true to themselves.	H	

A — Elton John, Uncle David, and Me: Evan's Story—Part I

B — The Nail That Sticks Up Gets Hammered Down: Alex's Blog

C — The Holy Ghost: Eric's Story

D — A Lesson on Being Inseparable: Geoff's Story

E — Episodes in Fear: Matthew's Story

F — E-mails to My Brother: Christopher's Story

G — "In case you haven't noticed, I'm gay. Pass the salt.": Tristan's Story

H — Rebel...Just Because: Evan's Story—Part II

Appendix D: Ethics Approval