Beyond the ‘bedrooms of the nation’:
An interpretative phenomenological analysis of Canadian adolescents with lesbian, gay, or bisexual-identified parents

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Although parenting by lesbian, gay, and bisexual-identified (LGB) individuals has 
attracted increasing research attention over the past few decades, relatively little focus has been 
given to the personal identity development of adolescents raised in such families. There is scant 
qualitative data that describes the phenomenon from the viewpoint of Canadian adolescents; this 
study aims to give voice to those with parents that identify as non-heterosexual. In semi-
structured interviews, participants were asked to explain how they made sense of being from an 
LGB-led family, particularly within the contexts of school and Canadian society, and of what 
unique needs they perceived families like theirs to have.

For inclusion in the study, each participant needed to have at least one LGB-identified 
parent. Additionally, they needed to be a current or recent student in an Ontario secondary 
school. A convenience sampling method was used to locate nine (N=9) participants. Three of 
the participants were male, and six were female. All participants were Canadian-born English 
speakers who ranged in age from 13 to 19 years old, with a mean age of 17.5.

The interview schedule was constructed with input from existing narrative psychology 
literature, consultation with fellow students and faculty, and inspiration from other semi-
structured protocols such as The Life Story Interview (McAdams, 2008). Interpretative 
Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed to organize and evaluate responses.
Thematic findings were organized within three domains. First, *family-related* themes were considered, such as interviewees’ responses to parental disclosures of an LGB identity, responses of extended family members, and perceived advantages of having LGB-identified parents. Second, *school-related* themes were found, such as how children choose to disclose their parents’ sexual identity to peers. Finally, themes related to *queer identity* were considered, since many participants revealed their parents’ sexual identity intersected with other narratives (e.g., being Canadian, being heterosexual, the master narrative of heteronormativity, etc.) to create multiple layers to their own sense of self.

The study endeavours to add a qualitative approach to the literature so that Canadian adolescents’ narratives are represented in the overall understanding of the phenomenon of LGB-led families. It also has potential to impact the development of school policies and curricula and to enrich the quality of life for LGB-led families.
Acknowledgements

I once ran the last one third of a marathon despite not having woken up that morning with the intention to do so. Although I had run several marathons previously, that particular morning I had planned only to cheer on other would-be marathoners. However, when I saw a tearful runner at the 28-kilometre point in the race, something compelled me to make sure she did not quit. She was exhausted and delerious, but when she had someone to run beside her saying, “You can do this,” she pressed onward, one step at a time.

Some give us inspiration to run. Some teach us to run efficiently. Some run alongside us. Some cheer us on, perhaps daily or merely in a moment when even a kind word of encouragement is vital. Still others wait for us at the finish line. And they all deserve some of the credit when we finally get there.

To my supervisor, Michel Ferrari, thank you for your patience, kindness, and quiet genius. To my other doctoral committee members, Lance McCready and Indigo Esmonde, I am grateful for your guidance, humour, insight, and trust. I could not be more pleased with a committee that brought varied, useful, ego-free perspectives to the table while simultaneously respecting mine.

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Having taught for over twenty years, I have been inspired by literally thousands of students, many who have become lifelong friends. I pay tribute to all of them, and in particular to those who endured my exhaustion while I juggled the roles of teacher and graduate student.

I am truly grateful to the nine participants and their parents for their willingness to make themselves vulnerable by offering me a glimpse into their lives. Your voices deserve to be heard, and I am honoured to have the opportunity to bring your stories to others. Continue to inspire, to grow, and to shine.

To my family, friends, academic colleagues, teaching colleagues, teammates, badgerers, and honey badgers, a sincere thank you for encouraging me, keeping my work-life balance in check, and running alongside me even though that might not have been your original intention. As we go forward from here, know that I am ready to run alongside you, too.
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Dedication

You know who you are.
I’d name names, but I haven’t met you yet.
Chapter One: Introduction

The words fag, queer, dyke, and homo were used all around me. I even used them. These words were used to disrespect someone. If you were a fag, you were an outcast or someone others didn’t like. In the fall of my seventh-grade year, I began to fear those words and hate people who identified with those words. And then my mother told me she was gay. She came out. She was a dyke, a fag, a queer. My mother was one of “those” people. I couldn’t let any of my friends know. I was afraid they would not like me or that my classmates would beat me up. I wouldn’t let anyone know that the other woman, Barb, who was living in my house, was my other mother […] My mom was gay. I cried and got really angry. I wanted to know why she was putting my brother and me into a situation where we had to be secretive about our family. For five years I lived with the secret. It caused me to lie, be angry, and be sad. No one I knew could know that I was living in a gay family. (McGuire, 1996, p. 182)

The experiences of children with parents who identify as lesbian, gay, and bisexual vary greatly from one individual to the next. Some, like American middle school student Megan McGuire, experience anger, confusion, and the perceived need for secrecy when their parents’ disclosure is made. Others seem relatively unperturbed when they learn of their parents’ non-heterosexual identity. This variability occurs between and within families, between and within cultures. There is much to be learned from these youth’s voices when they are given opportunities to narrate their stories. In view of what researchers have revealed about the experiences of children with LGB-identified parents, only a small portion of the available
literature provides an opportunity to learn how children make meaning from their experiences, and almost none of this qualitative research has been conducted in Canada, a country that over the past half a century has radically changed laws that impact the rights and freedoms of LGB individuals and their families.

**Rationale for the Study**

In 1967, Canada’s Minister of Justice, Pierre Trudeau, introduced sweeping revisions to Canada’s Criminal Code through Omnibus Bill C-150, including an amendment to decriminalize homosexual acts. At a December 1967 press conference, Trudeau made famous the phrase “bedrooms of the nation” with these reflections on the changes that would later become law in May 1969 following his election to the office of Prime Minister:

Well, it’s certainly the most extensive revision of the Criminal Code since, uh, the, uh, new Criminal Code of nine- [sic], early 1950s. And in terms of the subject matter it deals with, I feel that it has, uh, knocked down a lot of totems and overridden a lot of taboos. And I feel that in that sense it, uh, it is ‘new.’ But I, it’s bringing the laws of the land up to, uh, contemporary society, I think. Take this thing on, uh, on um, homosexuality. I think the, the view we take here is that, uh, there’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation, and I think that, uh, you know, what’s done in private between adults, uh, doesn’t concern the Criminal Code. When it becomes public, this is a different matter. (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Archives, 2012a; 2012b)
Today, almost half a century later, it behooves us to consider the ongoing implications of Trudeau’s statement and of the legal changes he introduced. Without question, Canadian law has continued its evolution. A review of Canadian law (see Appendix G for a brief summary) reveals that Canadians are now protected against discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation, that same-sex couples have the right to marry, and that same-sex individuals and couples have the right to adopt children, etc. Trudeau’s parenthetical reference, “when [homosexuality] becomes public,” was probably not giving consideration to the inevitably “public” implications that arise when lesbian, gay, and bisexual-identified (LGB) people marry and/or become parents, but such social rights are indeed realistic possibilities in Canada today and must therefore be considered. Lev (2004) suggests that having children makes it nearly impossible for parents to remain in the closet, but this is not entirely accurate because some parents may withhold their non-heterosexual identity even from their own children. Lev is likely referring to parents who are out to their children and therefore will have difficulty remaining closeted to others because parents cannot know with certainty that their children will keep the secret on their parents’ behalf. When LGB-identified parents have children, their sexual identity becomes much more likely to be a topic of discussion that extends beyond the bedrooms of the nation.

Issues of sexual orientation spill beyond bedrooms and into mainstream media, our communities, and our schools. Of particular interest in this research study are the experiences of Canadian adolescents with LGB-identified parents. Do they, like Trudeau, feel that barriers have been knocked down and taboos overridden, or do they live in the shadows of stigma and discrimination? Do they have an ability to be open about the fact that they have same-sex
parents, or do they sense pressure to maintain an unwritten “don’t ask, don’t tell” code of secrecy?

While accurately stating the number of children who have parents that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) is difficult for a variety of reasons, such as fear of stigmatization or discrimination (Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004), it has been estimated that between 1 percent and 12 percent of all children ages 19 and under have an LGBT parent (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). The 12-percent figure includes all parents who have indicated even the idea of homoerotic sex to be appealing while the 1-percent estimate is based on parents who self-identify as LGBT. Using current population statistics (Statistics Canada, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012;), that would mean anywhere from 76,000 to 900,000 Canadians ages 19 and under have an LGBT parent, while anywhere from 800,000 to 10 million Americans of the same age group have an LGBT parent. Women and men who have LGBT identities prior to becoming parents enter parenthood through a number of different pathways such as co-parenting, adoption, surrogacy, and donor insemination (Epstein, 2009; Patterson & Tornello, 2010). Others have children in the context of a heterosexual relationship prior to any disclosure of non-heterosexuality (Lambert, 2005). Regardless of the exact number of Canadian youth with non-heterosexual parents or of the parenting pathway followed, children of LGB-identified parents present an interesting phenomenon worthy of study. I believe the value of the current research study – a phenomenological study of Canadian adolescents with LGB-identified parents – can be justified for the following reasons:

1. Relatively few qualitative, phenomenological, non-comparative studies have been conducted (i.e., studies that do not compare heterosexual-headed families to queer-headed families);
2. Most of the literature refers to U.S. findings that cannot necessarily be extrapolated to Canadian experiences;

3. A disproportionately low number of the studies of children with LGB-identified parents focus on adolescents’ experiences;

4. Direct access to the perceived needs and experiences of adolescents with LGB-identified parents has the potential to contribute to the literature, to impact the development of school policies and curricula, and to enrich the quality of life for LGB families.

5. The definition of “family” is changing. A direct comparison of Canadian census data across a 25-year span shows that “the traditional family” of two [heterosexual] parents with children is no longer the norm in Canada. In 2006, legally married couples with children made up 34.6% of all families. Only 25 years earlier, in 1981, 55% of all families were legally married couples with children. While the proportion of traditional families has been declining, the proportion of common-law and lone-parent families is increasing (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2006). Given the changing notions of family, researchers need to be prepared to study all types of families that represent Canadian experiences.

Need for qualitative, phenomenological, non-comparative research findings

An overwhelming majority of research in the area of sexual minority families has been comparative in nature; in essence, many studies have investigated whether or not the children of sexual minority parents fare as well as children with heterosexual parents. While reviews of this
literature demonstrate that children of sexual minority parents are at least as likely to thrive as any other children (Lambert, 2005; Patterson, 2006; Fitzgerald, 1999), one might question the implicit assumptions involved in current comparative research. It could be argued that comparative research inappropriately holds up heterosexual parenting as the “gold standard” against which LGBT parenting ought to be compared. Stacey and Biblarz (2001) caution that many research designs place “the burden of proof” on LGB parents to demonstrate that their parenting is no less successful than traditional models of parenting. Even well-intentioned researchers might unwittingly be buying into assumptions that childrearing within heterosexual families is preferable to childrearing within LGB contexts.

Unfortunately, such comparisons have sometimes been necessitated by legal battles in the U.S., where individual parents have had to argue that LGB parenting will not result in harm to children and that LGB-identified parents are no less competent than heterosexual-identified parents. Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, and Mikach (1995) point out that those opposed to granting custody to LGB-identified parents have cited concerns about the LGB parents’ mental health, about an increased possibility for molestation of children, about an increased likelihood of the children engaging in gay or lesbian practices, and about an increased risk of stigmatization by the children’s peers – amongst other unsubstantiated claims. The American Psychological Association (APA, 1983) and the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA, 1996) have taken steps to deal with some researchers such as Paul Cameron who made damaging claims about LGB-headed families, claims that were supported only through his misrepresentation of data. The APA revoked his membership, and the CPA formally disassociated their organization from his work because they believed he had contravened their expectations for ethical research. Additionally, the APA (2004) took a strong stance opposing “any discrimination based on sexual
orientation in matters of adoption, child custody and visitation, foster care and reproductive health services” (para. 11). The American Academy of Pediatrics (2002) acknowledged “that a considerable body of professional literature provides evidence that children with parents who are homosexual can have the same advantages and the same expectations for health, adjustment and development as can children whose parents are heterosexual” (para. 1). Even so, there are still court cases in which unethically conducted studies such as Cameron’s and work that draws on Cameron’s continue to be cited as evidence against LGB-identified parents (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Thus, comparative research that is conducted thoroughly and ethically continues to have legal impact, especially in countries that have yet to offer full protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Nevertheless, moving away from exclusively comparative research is desirable. Hammack and Windell (2011) assert that psychology should challenge the very concept of normality that drives comparative research. By focusing less on what youth with LGB-led parents are not, as comparative research tends to do (e.g., they are not more likely to become LGB, they are not more likely to be abused, etc.) and more on what they report to be their ongoing reality, we will gain more rich details about their lives (Benkov, 1995). To achieve that end, many researchers have therefore implored their colleagues to use a wider variety of methods to explore the phenomenon (e.g., Foster, 2006; Goldberg, 2007; Patterson, 2006). One effective way to accomplish this is to delve into qualitative research that investigates how the children of LGB-identified parents perceive the issues with which they are faced. Research that is quantitative often looks for correlations and focuses on outcomes such as what happens to children who have LGB-identified parents; qualitative research “tends to focus on meaning, sense-making, and communicative action” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, pp. 45) such as
investigating how youth with LGB parents make sense of their experiences. An interview schedule partly based on findings from the Ray and Gregory study (2001) or from Bauer and Goldstein’s research (2003) will allow for the inclusion of items that ask adolescents to articulate how they feel when facing the questions of peers (e.g., “If you have two dads, how were you born?”), the thinking that lies behind their disclosure practices (e.g., their decision making about who to tell and under what circumstances), and how they make sense of and respond to bullying behaviour (e.g., recruiting the help of adults when bullies act out or when school personnel fail to respond to homophobic slurs).

Organizations such as Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE, 2011) point out that the needs of these children have yet to be thoroughly assessed. To comprehend their needs, an important means of broadening our understanding of the phenomenon is to listen to the voices of youth with queer parents, thereby giving them an opportunity to directly articulate their lived experiences within their families, their schools, and Canadian society as a whole.

Scarcity of Canadian data on LGB-led families

In Canada, the Canadian Human Rights Act (Canada’s Minister of Justice, 2011) and other legal protections for queer individuals and their families allow, in a sense, the luxury to conduct research that need not have any politically defensive motivation. Because of the many changes in queer-relevant Canadian laws in the past fifty years (see Appendix G, which will be explained in more detail in the following chapter) – laws that are widely perceived to have evolved more quickly than those in the U.S. – LGB Canadians now have far greater protections under the law. However, that fact should not lead to the premature conclusion that Canadian
institutions such as schools have successfully met all of the needs of LGB families or that diverse families are always treated fairly within our communities. In one review of U.S. literature, Fitzgerald (1999) points out the need “to examine how homophobia affects children in lesbian and gay families, or, more specifically, how the young and their families cope with our [American] heterosexist, homophobic society” (p. 69). The notion of examining how such factors affect Canadian children is equally relevant despite the fact that the needs themselves might not be identical.

To illustrate the differences between the political and social climates of these neighbouring countries, one might contrast Pierre Trudeau’s 1967 liberal assertion that “there’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Archives, 2012b) with George W. Bush’s 2004 conservative call for constitutional amendments “defining and protecting marriage as a union of a man and woman as husband and wife” (Cable News Network, 2004, May 17). Even with an accepted assumption of Canada’s relative liberality on the matter of LGB families, nothing can be assumed about the lived experiences of Canadian youth with LGB-led families without first asking them directly.

We do know that in the United States, various researchers have called for more research to be undertaken within Canada (e.g., Dundas & Kaufman, 2000; Foster, 2006; White, 2008), primarily because it cannot be assumed that the legal, social, and emotional needs of LGB families are the same in Canada as in the United States. The needs of Canadian youth might diverge from those of U.S. youth in response to different levels of legal protection for LGB-led families, to different social norms, or to different definitions of human rights. For those reasons, my doctoral thesis proposes to target the experiences and needs of Canadian adolescents and their LGB-identified parents. Charlotte Patterson, a prominent researcher in the field, pointed
out as early as 1992 that almost all of the studies at that time had been conducted in the U.S. with samples that could be described as predominantly Caucasian, well-educated, and middle to upper middle class (Patterson, 1992). Even since that time, U.S. studies have continued to dominate the available literature on the subject.

*Under-representation of adolescent-focused data*

Research in the U.S. (e.g., Patterson, 2004) and around the world (e.g., Short et al., 2007) provides overwhelming evidence that the children of LGB-identified parents thrive in terms of academic performance and social adjustment. Relatively little research, however, has been conducted on adolescent offspring of LGB-identified parents (Patterson & Wainright, 2007), and it is by no means certain that the results of research conducted with children can be generalized to adolescents (Perrin & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2002). Adolescents do want their voices to be heard (Benkov, 1995), and they see the potential impact their stories can have on breaking down ignorant beliefs and baseless assumptions. Relative to younger children, adolescents grapple more with issues such as personal identity, relationships with peers, dating, and the possible repercussions of having an LGB-identified parent (Baumrind, 1995), and so it stands to reason that their experiences are worthy of study independent of studies of children’s experiences. Wainright, Russell, and Patterson’s study (2004) was the first attempt to examine a large nationwide U.S. sample of adolescents who resided with same-sex couples. Since that time, more research has been done to learn about the adolescents’ experiences in queer-led homes, but those studies remain under-represented compared to the research conducted with children.
Potential impact

Considerable work has been undertaken to assess the needs of LGB students (e.g., GLSEN, 2003; Taylor et al., 2009), but less attention has been given to the needs of the children of LGB-headed families. National climate surveys in the U.S. and Canada confirm that children are likely to hear homophobic slurs in their schools and that the majority of those comments will be ignored by teachers and administrators (e.g., GLSEN, 2003), but it is important to find out the kind of impact that such episodes have on children who have LGB-identified parents. One Australian study (Ray & Gregory, 2001) delved into the school experiences of the children of lesbian, gay, and bisexual-identified parents; the study found that certain themes arose frequently such as questions from peers, children’s decisions regarding disclosure, bullying, and teacher responses. Because of their children’s experiences, LGB parents have proactively identified needs such as anti-harassment and non-discrimination policies, staff development, and inclusive curricula (Bauer & Goldstein, 2003). The youth themselves might identify similar needs, but they might also have other practical suggestions that could impact school policy as well as the curricula of teacher education programs and in-service opportunities.

A phenomenological study has the potential to allow social workers, counselors, and teachers a direct conduit to the narratives they might not otherwise hear, the voices of adolescent children of LGB parents. Allowing such stories to be heard could profoundly impact how individual service providers and systems attempt to offer support. In the U.S., organizations such as COLAGE and the Family Pride Coalition have taken important steps to open dialogue that encourages schools to be welcoming and safe places that respect and include all varieties of family (Bauer & Goldstein, 2003). While most schools would likely want to create such environments, they will be ill-equipped to do so unless they know the needs of LGB-headed
families. Bauer and Goldstein (2003) assert that if the policies of a school district are like those of many states, “it’s likely that little thought will have been given to recognizing LGBT people and/or their families as fully acknowledged members of the community or protected legal entities” (p. 1).

As a public school teacher with over twenty years of experience, it has been my subjective observation that the lack of discourse regarding research-informed practices in this area contributes to a wide variation in teachers’ and schools’ levels of comfort, awareness, and preparation when dealing with LGB-led family issues. In order to contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon of youth with queer parents, a useful entry point is to examine their experiences and to qualitatively evaluate their perceived needs.

**Purpose of the Study**

One school of thought in the selection of a research topic is to “make contact with and respect [your] own questions and problems” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 40). In keeping with this philosophy, my own curiosity to hear the voices of youth with LGB-identified parents was driven by three motivating forces. First, there were things I wanted to know as a potential parent. I could have read one of the “What to Expect” resources for parents-to-be, but I suspect that in so doing many of my deepest concerns would not have been addressed. I wanted to hear directly from youth who had lived in queer-led homes. Second, as a teacher I was interested in the experiences youth had when they left the family nest and entered the school system. I wanted to learn how they navigated between home and school, how and when they chose to “out” their parents, and to what extent they felt teachers and schools had met their needs. Finally, as a psychologist I was eager to further an understanding of LGB-led families in order to
improve the scope and efficacy of programs and services offered. By providing access to the voices of Canadian youth with LGB-identified parents, my hope was and is to build upon researchers’ current grasp of this phenomenon.

**Guiding Questions**

In keeping with the purpose stated above, the following questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do youth with LGB-identified parents describe the experience of having a non-heterosexual parent?
2. How do youth with LGB-identified parents make sense of their queer-family identity when they are in a school setting?
3. What are the perceived needs described by youth with LGB-identified parents?

**Research Approach**

The research approach used was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative method of investigation that will be described in detail in chapter three. As will be discussed more thoroughly, IPA relies upon the analyst to interpret the reported experiences that participants have with a particular phenomenon. This approach was used to examine the phenomenon of adolescents with LGB-identified parents from a different perspective than what has often been taken in prior research studies. IPA provided the opportunity to present a great deal of verbatim evidence, as presented in chapters four, five, and six. Presenting evidence in the form of direct quotations from participants is one means of increasing the internal validity of the study (Osborn & Smith, 1998).
Analytic Framework of the Study

My decision to use an interpretative methodology such as IPA for a psychological study is not without historical precedent. In fact, there is a longstanding tradition of bringing “voice” as data, as a means to understanding a phenomenon. It is this tradition that informed the analytic framework of the current study. In an effort to provide theoretical context, three aspects of the analytic framework for this study will be described below: a history of narrative psychology, evidence of the importance of adolescence as a key moment in personal meaning making, and the role of life course approaches in challenging cultural “master narratives” such as heteronormativity.

A history of narrative psychology

In the late eighteenth century, a German journal of psychology called the Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde (Magazine for Empirical Psychology) published an article that some have argued is the first historical example of a psychological case study (e.g., Gailus, 2000). According to Gailus, this publication, which was edited by Karl Philipp Moritz circa 1782, encouraged readers to use introspective methods to record their own thoughts as well as urging them to record the behaviour of friends and neighbours and to write case histories on the subject of the social deviants of the day. While previous scholars had maintained a view that scientific and literary discourses should be kept apart, Moritz’s work invited readers to “think about the interrelationship between the two at a particular historical moment” (Gailus, 2000, p. 70).

William James, born in 1842 (Hill, 2001), built upon the notion that literary discourse had value as a tool for deepening an understanding of a phenomenon. He advocated for the use of voice as data in his lectures on The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human
When he travelled from the United States to Scotland to speak to a mostly-European audience, he wanted to make it clear that although his topic, religious conversion, was of interest to theologians, anthropologists, and historians, he was approaching the subject as a psychologist:

To the psychologist the religious propensities of man must be at least as interesting as any other of the facts pertaining to his mental constitution. It would seem therefore, that, as a psychologist, the natural thing for me would be to invite you to a descriptive survey of those religious propensities. (James, 1902, p. 4)

James must have known that he needed to tread lightly to deal with the potentially explosive subject of religion while simultaneously exploring new methods of inquiry. He pressed onward, however, to reveal to an academic audience his intention to draw conclusions about religious experience from an investigation of “subjective phenomena recorded in literature produced by articulate and fully self-conscious men, in works of piety and autobiography” (James, 1902, p. 4). He told his listeners that he had no intention to discredit the religious side of life, but was frank in his assessment that a life devoted to religion “does tend to make the person exceptional and eccentric” (p. 7). James cited the writing of religious scholars – essays, autobiographies, sermons, and other works – to draw conclusions not about their religious ideologies, but about the diversity of ways in which the experience of religion manifests itself.

I am aligning the current study with the view held by James that it is difficult to understand a phenomenon without knowing what the phenomenon means to those who experience it. Undoubtedly, his views differed from those of G. Stanley Hall and Wilhelm Wundt, structuralists of the day who believed that James’ ideas were mere literature, to which
James responded that their structuralist ideas had “plenty of school, but no thought” (James, 1904, p. 1).

Others who have also since positioned themselves to embrace narrative psychology include Henry Murray, Gordon Allport, Jerome Bruner, and Dan McAdams. One can examine a phenomenon from any number of perspectives, the most obvious of which are the schools of thought that have dominated psychology’s landscape at one point or another such as psychodynamic, behaviourist, biological, etc. In part, the use of narrative psychology by Murray, Allport, Bruner, and McAdams arose from a desire to add voice to the reductionist tendencies that emerge when one adopts a strictly psychodynamic, strictly behaviourist, or strictly biological interpretation of behaviour.

Murray, who is sometimes referred to as the father of personological psychology (McLean, 2008), believed that strictly psychoanalytic interpretations of the human experience were inexact and unscientific. He admitted to having heeded the warnings of a colleague who referred to Freud’s doctrines as “nothing but a vomit of stercoraceous verbiage,” and Murray himself called Freud’s The Interpretation of Dreams “vagaries of arbitrary speculation” (Murray, 1940, p. 152). Believing that some projective techniques had merit, Murray and his colleague Christiana Morgan developed the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), sometimes referred to as the Murray Test (Ungureanu, 2011). The test consists of thirty ambiguous images that are shown to the subject to elicit stories. The TAT is meant to evaluate how participants relate socially and emotionally to others as well as how they perceive power dynamics within their social structure (Ungureanu, 2011). The stories told by subjects are fictional, but Murray developed his method of analysis based on several assumptions, one of which is that the process of creating a story is part of a meaning making process (Narey, 2008). Murray endeavoured to develop a scoring
system that would, in his opinion, be more holistic and more grounded in science than the psychoanalytic approaches used by Freud. In his instructions for delivering the TAT, Murray specifically stated that it should be used in conjunction with an autobiographical interview (Murray, 1940).

Murray’s work influenced that of Allport who also believed that stories could be used to broaden our understanding of an individual’s meaning making process if their narratives of personal identity were analyzed with sufficient rigour (Allport, 1968). Allport, who was instrumental in formalizing and systematizing the study of personality (Schultz & Schultz, 1998), used the personal-document technique to examine diaries, letters, and other samples of a person’s writing to make assessments about individuals’ personalities (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). “Properly used,” Allport claimed in one of his publications, *The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science*, “such documents anchor a discipline in the bedrock of the human experience” (Allport, 1942, p. 191). Furthermore, Allport rejected previous approaches to personality theory, suggesting that psychoanalysis was too intrusive a method of analysis, that behaviourism did not investigate deeply enough, and that without a more holistic approach a psychologist’s analysis of a person would be nothing more than a set of unconnected traits (Allport, 1924).

As a student of and co-publisher with Allport, Jerome Bruner was similarly critical of mainstream approaches of the time, believing that behaviourist approaches were too reductionist and therefore arguing for a more meaning-centred approach to the study of personality (Bruner, 1990). His background studying perception and sensation as active rather than passive processes paved the way for his contributions to the emergence of the cognitive psychology movement (Holt, 1964). Believing that anthropology and psychology ought never to have been separated
into two distinct disciplines, Bruner maintained a belief that meaning making should be central to any investigation of a psychological phenomenon (Mattingly, Lutkehaus, & Throop, 2008). Bruner argued against the computer model, an approach to studying the mind that had arisen with the rapid development of computer models of problem solving (Tavris & Wade, 2001), advocating instead for a more holistic examination of the mind and self meaning making, which he believed to be at the heart of the human experience.

McAdams, too, approaches the study of human experience with a holistic approach and sees value in using narrative voice (McAdams, 2006). Additionally, McAdams advocates for a lifelong view of personality development, a view that contrasts with that of Freud (Tavris & Wade, 2001) but complements Erikson’s psychosocial theory which is discussed below. McAdams maintains that we need to study narratives of self-meaning making throughout the life cycle of an individual and has therefore developed The Life Story Interview (McAdams, 2008), an interview protocol that gives each subject an opportunity to narrate their past experiences, present realities, and future expectations; through this process, interviewees are given an opportunity to make sense of their own experiences and to develop a sense of the continuity of the self (McLean, 2008).

*Meaning making in adolescence*

Parallel to the emergence of narrative psychology were emerging theories that pointed to adolescence as a key stage in personal meaning making. G. S. Hall was among the first to make this suggestion in his 1904 book, Adolescence (Hall, 1904). Subsequently, as mentioned above, Erik Erikson advocated for a lifelong view of personality development that contrasted with Freud’s assertion that personality development was completed by age 5 or 6 (Tavris & Wade,
Erikson’s psychosocial theory was built on the assumptions that development is stimulated by a variety of psychological and social forces and that each individual passes through several crises that must be sequentially resolved before proceeding to the next stage. Erikson (1968) asserted that adolescence is a time when youth must wrestle with who they are and what they wish to become; dealing with the identity crisis of adolescence, then, is a key phase in their own journey of personal meaning making.

Habermas and Bluck (2000) describe adolescence as a time when youth develop the capacity to explain the self in terms of stories. While Erikson describes adolescence as a period when an identity crisis is resolved, he does not explain how this occurs. Habermas and Bluck, as well as others (e.g., McAdams, 1988), assert that this crisis is resolved by the construction of a life story that serves to integrate the self. As such, according to Arnold, Pratt, and Hicks (2004), “stories provide a powerful qualitative lens through which to observe and document child development” (p. 164).

McLean (2008) makes a compelling argument for why the resolution of the identity crisis and the integration of the self begin during adolescence. Her arguments support my own interest in choosing to interview adolescents rather than pre-adolescent youth. First, McLean asserts that significant cognitive development occurs in the transition from childhood to adolescence. With this cognitive development comes the ability to hold multiple variables in mind at one time, and this skill is critical in being able to bring coherence to self over time. Second, she argues that adolescence is the period when the roots of identity are established; once these roots are established, identity formation continues throughout adulthood (McLean, 2008). This view is consistent with theorists such as Erikson (1963) who assert that identity development is a lifelong process.
The role of life course approaches to challenge “master narratives”

Today, the work of many other psychologists continues the tradition of using meaning making as part of a multi-method approach to understanding phenomena. Building directly from Erikson’s ideas, Phillip Hammack (2008), for example, uses cognitive, social, and cultural levels of analysis in a multimethod framework that presents a blended approach for the use of narrative voice as a vehicle for studying identity. Hammack’s theory of sexual identity (Hammack, 2005), which will be briefly described in chapter two, rejects sexual identity theories that are rigidly aligned with only one psychological perspective. Hammack and Windell (2011) also maintain the importance of considering the larger cultural “master narratives” such as the sickness script (i.e., the medical model’s nineteenth century assumption that same-sex behaviour was indicative of mental illness), the species script (i.e., a view adopted in the 1960’s that same-sex behaviour was not a sickness but merely one means of sexual expression across a diverse spectrum of possibilities), and the normativity script (i.e., restrictive notions of normality defined and supported by culture and media), of which they claim heteronormativity is a part. The term “heteronormative” was popularized by Warner (1991), a queer theorist who maintained that there was a “pervasive and often invisible” (p. 3) tendency to hold up heterosexuality as the default norm for sexuality and lifestyle. Hammack (2010) defines “master narratives” as “dominant scripts which can be identified in cultural products and discourse (e.g., media, literature, film, textbooks). These scripts contain collective storylines that range from a group’s history to notions of what it means to inhabit a particular social category” (p. 178).

Hammack and Windell (2011) make an interesting case for the role that life course approaches can play in challenging cultural master narratives of normativity and of same-sex desire as a sickness. They claim that the vast majority of empirical work from 20\textsuperscript{th} century U.S.
psychology literature supports “a status quo of legal and cultural subordination for same-sex-attracted individuals” (p. 221). Even today, they argue, the discipline of psychology is not being used as effectively as it might be in terms of its ability to bring about change in social policy with respect to same-sex rights. They suggest that the current approach of psychology is too concerned with attempting to establish same-sex attraction as normal and should instead be more focused on challenging the very concept of normality. Furthermore, they assert that psychology should be grounded in a sociogenic conception of human development that would allow for the constant defining and evaluation of social categories. Traditional approaches, they argue, have neglected to use individuals’ narratives of personal identity to trace a lifelong engagement with the persuasive influences of social categorization. “As opposed to a life course approach,” they write, “which seeks to fully contextualize same-sex desire, behaviour, and identity in its sociopolitical context, the mainstream of the psychological advocacy approach has tended to reify the social categories of sexual identity as reflective of an enduring, natural order” (p. 241).

This is in line with Bruner (1990) who, as mentioned earlier, suggested that those with a non-canonical status are likely to engage in a high degree of meaning making. Weststrate and McLean (2010) added to Bruner’s theory the suggestion that “sub-groups of canon-breakers might be able to create master narratives when they share a common cultural experience” (p. 227). The sub-group of LGB-led families could be regarded as such canon-breakers, and by recording the stories of youth with LGB-identified parents, the current study endeavours to contribute to the master narrative literature to investigate how adolescents from LGB-led families characterize their own narratives within the greater context of the master narrative of normativity. McLean (2008) argues that the manner in which an individual negotiates the construction of his or her personal narrative within a greater cultural context informs us about the
individual, the culture, and their intersection. Harré (2005) uses positioning theory to explain that individuals need to take an active stand against other narratives, essentially positioning themselves relative to other kinds of narratives to further their understanding of themselves. Furthermore, while some (e.g., Hammack & Windell, 2011; Weststrate & McLean, 2010) have studied the master narratives within which personal narratives are framed, the present study aims to examine youth with LGB-identified parents, a group of individuals who straddle different narratives and need to negotiate between them.

Paul Ricoeur regarded the ability to straddle and negotiate between different narratives as one of the hallmarks of wisdom (Ricoeur, 1992). He recognized that straddling different narratives could present a challenge but that the process of making sense of the intersections of differing narratives had value. “Narrative identity takes part in the mobility of a story,” he wrote, “in the dialectic between order and disorder” (Ricoeur, 1996, p. 6).

“The narrative constructs the identity of the character,” wrote Ricoeur, “what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character” (Ricoeur, 1992, pp. 147-148). One’s personal narrative incorporates both literature and history as sources of the master narratives used in the emplotment of the events of one’s life, events which are necessarily situated in history but able to be reimagined through fiction. Ricoeur further suggested that the loss of identity that we sometimes experience can “be reinterpreted as exposing selfhood by taking away the support of sameness” (p. 149). In the present study of youth with LGB-identified parents, one can examine youths’ stories for evidence of loss of identity such as that which could be experienced when they realize that the master narrative of (hetero)normativity is not one with which they can entirely relate. Ricoeur would not mourn the loss of identity that such youth may experience,
however, because of his belief that this loss would provide opportunities for their own selfhood to be revealed.

Tappan (2000) asserts that individuals structure their moral lives through narratives, relying on the deep feelings that arise from narratives as a foundation to their moral identity and personality. An observation made by Ferrari and Okamoto (2003), that moral identity develops by trying on different moral identities, may have particular significance since children of LGB-identified parents are exposed to sometimes conflicting narratives that prompt them to select the elements that are intuitively a “best fit” as they strive for synthesis of their own personal moral identity.

Summary and value of the analytic framework of the study

This chapter has demonstrated that there is historical precedent for a narrative approach to the study of human behaviour. Moritz, James, Murray, Allport, Bruner, and McAdams – among others – have successfully demonstrated that a narrative approach allows for a holistic rather than a reductionist view of a particular phenomenon. Additionally, given that the current study focuses on the experiences of adolescents with LGB-identified parents, it is important to orient this study against the assertions of those such as Erikson, Habermas, Bluck, McLean, and others who argue that while the formation of personal identity is a lifelong process, adolescence is a critical time when individuals become capable of personal meaning making and are able to wrestle with who they are and what they wish to become. Finally, the current study draws upon the work of scholars such as Hammack, Windell, Harré, Ricoeur and others to argue that one must consider larger cultural master narratives within and against which narratives of personal identity are framed.
Before proceeding, one must consider the value that such an analytic framework brings to this study. First, because the data of this study are narrative in nature – some of which is personal narrative and some of which comes from cultural master narratives – an analysis of the data will necessarily have links to narrative psychology. The study must be situated within narrative psychology; to do otherwise would not make sense given the nature of the data.

Second, as Harré (2005) has suggested through his advocacy for positioning theory, every storyline unfolds “according to some accepted narrative convention” (p. 186). Furthermore, Harré’s positioning theory suggests that participants such as those in the current study take a stand against other narratives, essentially positioning themselves against those narratives. The participants are talking about the ways that other people interpret things and are positioning themselves relative to those interpretations. The analytic framework allows us to assume, then, that the stories told by the participants are part of their process of personal meaning making as they endeavour to negotiate their own positions relative to other kinds of narratives. Third, as the work of some narrative psychologists (e.g., Hammack, 2010; Hammack & Windell, 2011) has illustrated, by starting with examples of master narratives of normativity (i.e., narratives bound by restrictive notions of normality defined and supported by culture and media), such examples can be frames of reference against which one can orient possible challenges or alternatives to cultural master narratives of normativity. “Identity development,” writes Hammack, “involves a process of narrative engagement in which individuals confront multiple discursive options for making meaning of experience through language, and they undergo a process of appropriation that tells us much about the course of a conflict” (2010, p. 178). Furthermore, Hammack argues that an examination of narrative identity allows insight into the “process of discursive engagement and internalization of various circulating master narratives
(2010, p. 178). In essence, Hammack’s conclusions demand that the current study examines the data (i.e., the participants’ responses) to determine how youth with LGB-identified parents negotiate their own narratives in light of master narratives, as well as how they make decisions about whether master narratives are compatible or incompatible with their own emerging narratives of personal identity.

With regard to the current study, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allows for an analysis of narrative voice to add to our understanding of a particular phenomenon and can be used in collaboration with other approaches. IPA is an inductive (i.e., bottom up) approach that sets out to discover and investigate the ways that participants bring meaning to their lived experiences (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). It is being used with increasing frequency in the field of health psychology and has utility as a middle ground between social cognition approaches and discourse analysis approaches that focus exclusively on a particular linguistic element such as rhetoric, meaning, or style (Smith, 1996). I have decided to employ IPA because it aligns nicely with the narrative psychology precedent set by scholars from Karl Philipp Moritz to Phillip Hammack. I believe that for the particular phenomenon of interest, adolescents with LGB-identified parents, there is value in knowing how they themselves find meaning in their lived experiences.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

In order to facilitate the readers’ grasp of the research process and conclusions about the lived experiences of adolescents with LGB-identified parents, the dissertation has been organized into seven chapters including the current introductory chapter. Chapter two will review the literature related to children of LGB-identified parents. Chapter three will present the design of
the study with an overview of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Chapters four, five, and six will present and discuss the results as grouped in three separate domains – family-related themes, school-related themes, and queer-family identity themes. Finally, chapter seven will offer concluding reflections and give consideration to the potential social, moral, and practical implications that can be gleaned from the narratives of this study’s participants.

**Summary of the Introduction**

The legal and social landscape in Canada has changed since Pierre Trudeau’s 1967 comment about the distinction between public and private family matters, but in order to assess how those changes have or have not knocked down totems and overridden taboos, one avenue of qualitative investigation is to employ Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to assess how Canadian adolescents with LGB-identified parents engage with various narratives to establish a sense of personal identity. This study aims to satisfy my own curiosity as an intended parent, an educator, and a psychologist. It also endeavours to contribute to the literature, to impact the development of school policies and curricula, and to enrich the quality of life for LGB families.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Introduction to the Review of the Literature

In order to fully understand how youths’ narratives of personal identity are shaped by having LGB-identified parents and simultaneously by the society of which they are a part, one must first orient the current study against a backdrop of the existing literature that pertains to LGB-identified parents and their children. The review of the literature begins with an overview of definitions, a discussion of the various pathways that lead to LGB-headed families, and a summary of Canadian laws that pertain to LGB individuals and their families. The presentation of definitions is important because, as is the case in matters of race, terminology related to sexual orientation varies widely in terms of both usage and connotation. For the sake of clarity, I define the terms used most often in the chapters that follow. Next, a discussion of the various pathways to parenting establishes some of the practical, social, and legal realities faced by LGB-headed families whose personal narratives often contrast with prevailing master narratives of normativity. The legal realities of Canadian families are then contrasted with experiences in the United States and other nations.

The review of the literature then shifts its focus from viewing LGB-headed families as a theoretical possibility to examining the practical realities reported in existing studies. Three practical domains are considered. First, psychosocial outcomes of youth with LGB-identified parents are examined. Second, school outcomes are discussed in conjunction with both positive and negative school-related experiences as reported by LGB-identified parents and their children. Finally, queer-family identity issues are explored to orient the reader to what we already know.
about how youth engage with their experiences growing up in LGB-headed homes and how this engagement shapes their personal identity development.

**Definitions**

In October 2011, well after the current dissertation project had commenced, a report entitled “All Children Matter: How Legal and Social Inequalities Hurt LGBT Families” was released (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011). At its outset, this publication eloquently defined several currently used key terms, and because many of the same terms appear frequently throughout this dissertation, they are explained below. Some of these verbatim definitions have been extracted from “All Children Matter”, while other definitions were developed using “All Children Matter” definitions as their basis:

**LGBT.** “The initials LGBT represent the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, which describe a person’s sexual orientation and collectively include women and men who are predominantly or sometimes attracted to individuals of the same sex” (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011, p. 6). The term transgender is “an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behaviour does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth” (APA, 2012a, para. 1).

**LGB.** Because none of the youth in the current study have transgender parents, I have elected to use the initials LGB throughout the dissertation. There is no intent to be
exclusionary. Rather, I want to be true to the voices of the participants of the present study who have parents who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. In fact, Victoria, one of the participants in the study, stated, “It’s very different experiences, kids who have trans parents and kids who have queer parents.” Therefore, the use of LGBT (or LGBTQ – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) is retained only within the context of direct quotations from other authors or from the participants themselves.

**Cisgender.** Cisgendered individuals are those who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, the gender with which they identify themselves in adulthood, and the anatomical components of their gender.

**Heterosexual.** Heterosexual-identified individuals have an “enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction [only] to members of the other sex” (APA, 2012b, para. 3).

**LGB Families.** There are several phrases used to describe LGB families, a term that refers to families in which a single LGB adult is raising children, to families in which a same-sex couple is raising children, or to any number of configurations where at least one of a child’s parental figures identifies as LGB. The term is “not reflective of the sexual orientation of the children in such households” (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011, p. 6). Other synonyms used include LGB-led homes, LGB-headed families, and queer families.
**Queer.** The term queer is often used as an umbrella term to describe a variety of non-heterosexual orientations. Some individuals prefer the generic nature of the word queer to the more exact but sometimes exclusionary labels gay, lesbian, and bisexual. Other people do not feel that the word queer accurately represents their identity. The term is applied here as an umbrella term, but readers are encouraged to substitute terminology more suitable to their own experience when appropriate.

**Child(ren).** As will be reported in the following chapter, the participants in this study ranged from 13-19 years of age. As such, some of them may no longer identify as children. As is the case with other matters of identity, there is no universal agreement about how this term is applied. Even though I am an adult, I view myself as someone’s child and therefore do not believe the term “child” is always problematic. As we discuss the identity of youth with LGB parents, however, it is important to recognize that some of them may desire a term that does not forever label them as “children”. While they will sometimes be described as “children of LGB parents,” use of the word “children” is merely intended to draw attention to the fact that they are the offspring of at least one parent who identifies as LGB.

**Queer Spawn.** As alluded to in the previous definition, some youth desire a term that encompasses people of all ages who have a queer parent. Phrases such as “gayby” and “children of LGB parents” resonate with some. A few of my participants used the term “queer spawn” to describe themselves as the offspring of parents who identified as queer.
However, it is acknowledged that this term is neither used universally in research nor in every LGB family.

**Stepparent.** “A ‘stepparent’ is traditionally defined as someone who marries an existing parent, forming a stepfamily” (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011, p. 6). Because same-sex marriage is legal in Canada, the term stepparent is used here only in the traditional sense (i.e., the stepparent-stepchild relationship that results from a marriage).

**From the Get-Go.** As we shall see in the following section, there are many pathways through which LGB individuals can become parents. The phrase “from the get-go” is used to identify children who were born to parents with pre-existing queer identities (i.e., their parents already identified as LGB when their children were born). In contrast, other children were born to parents in the context of heterosexual-led families, with one of their parents disclosing a non-heterosexual identity at some point following their birth.

**Coming Out.** The phrase “coming out” is used to describe the process of publicly disclosing something previously kept private. In this paper, the phrase will be used in relation to an LGB parent’s disclosure of non-heterosexuality, but it will also be used to describe the disclosure decisions of youth who decide to “out” their family.
**Pathways to LGB Parenthood**

Youth with LGB-identified parents often report being asked questions such as “How were you born then?” by people trying to understand how one might possibly have non-heterosexual parents (Ray & Gregory, 2001). Often these questions are born out of genuine curiosity due to the general public’s lack of exposure to the various pathways that can lead to the formation of LGB-led families. In Toronto, Canada, members of the LGB community who have a desire to become parents have opportunities to learn about the routes that can turn their parenting intentions into realities. Two courses – “Dykes Planning Tykes” and “Daddies & Papas 2B” – are offered jointly through the LGBTQ Parenting Network and The 519 Community Centre to help LGB individuals progress with their plans to become parents (Epstein, 2009). Some researchers (e.g., Riskind & Patterson, 2010) have begun to explore the parenting intentions and desires of both non-heterosexual and heterosexual adults to gain a better understanding of why LGB adults are less likely than their heterosexual counterparts to be parents. LGB families sometimes begin intentionally with non-heterosexuals such as those enrolled in the aforementioned courses, but they more often begin within the context of heterosexual relationships (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011). Considering both heterosexual and non-heterosexual points of origin, six pathways to LGB parenting are outlined below.

First, many LGB-identified adults have children through traditional conception either prior to coming out or after they have come out, while others have children through traditional conception but remain closeted about their non-heterosexual identity. The majority of participants in the current study reported being conceived by parents who were in heterosexual
relationships at the time. In Canada, as we shall see, there are no laws that threaten to strip parents of their custodial rights on the basis of their sexual orientation.

Second, LGB people can become parents when they enter a relationship with someone who already has a child from a previous heterosexual relationship, a previous same-sex relationship, or who had a child while single (Lev, 2004). In some places where same-sex marriage is prohibited, the stepparent-stepchild relationship may be devoid of any legal ties. In Canada, as we shall see, same-sex marriage is legal, which opens the door to legal recognition of new parent-child bonds through second-parent adoption or other avenues.

Third, some same-sex parents choose to become parents by entering into co-parenting arrangements (Lewin, 2009). For example, a single lesbian woman might reach an agreement to have a child with a single gay man. Such arrangements may or may not be legally binding, and there is considerable variability regarding the number of parents who can be legally recognized as the parent of any given child. Co-parenting relationships can involve a wide range of configurations involving shared or non-shared custody, shared or non-shared financial responsibilities, etc.

A fourth pathway to LGB parenthood is through adoption or foster care. As we shall see below, the sexual orientation of intended parents is not a factor in Canadian adoptions. It is, however, in other jurisdictions. Many states in the U.S. (e.g., Florida and Mississippi) have been slow in removing statutory barriers to same-sex adoption (Brodzinsky, 2002). In one landmark Florida case, a gay-identified couple took years to successfully overcome the legal barriers standing in the way of them adopting but were finally successful in 2010 (ACLU, 2011). Despite many obstacles, adoption is becoming an increasingly popular option in LGB communities (Lev, 2004). There is a variety of types of adoptions such as private and public,
open and closed, domestic and international. When same-sex couples or LGB individuals pursue international adoptions, they must work within the legal frameworks of their own country as well as the country from which they are adopting.

Fifth, some cisgendered women choose to use assisted reproductive technology such as donor insemination to become pregnant. For a single woman using her own egg with a known or an unknown sperm donor, there are no barriers in ensuring her legal relationship to the child. In some countries, this becomes a more complicated legal matter when a female-female couple uses donor insemination, because one of the women lacks the biological tie to the child and may not be entitled to a legal relationship with her child (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011). In Canada, as we shall see, legal recognition can be granted regardless of a biological connection.

Finally, some LGB adults, especially gay or bisexual men, become parents via surrogacy. The following legal review gives information about the restrictions faced by Canadians who use a surrogate. In addition to the legal hurdles, surrogacy involves great financial commitment and project management skills because of the need to locate a surrogate and/or an ovum donor (Lewin, 2009). Additionally, intended parents are asked to make sometimes-overwhelming decisions along the way regarding the type of surrogacy (e.g., traditional vs. gestational), the number of embryos to implant, the disposal practices for unused embryos, etc.

With so many viable routes to parenthood, it would be easy to falsely conclude that LGB adults can easily become parents. The reality for many LGB people is that the available options can be fraught with moral dilemmas and can be “bureaucratically dense, emotionally demanding, and sometimes frustrating and disappointing” (Lewin, 2009, p. 33). Fortunately, the current
legal landscape in Canada presents would-be LGB parents with far fewer boundaries on their journey to parenthood than in previous eras.

**Canadian Family Law**

*Canadian Law 101*

**1967.** On November 7, 1967, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled 3-2 in favour of sending Everett George Klippert to jail indefinitely. He had admitted to police that he was gay and had engaged in sex with men over a 24-year period. The courts, therefore, labelled him a “dangerous sexual offender” in accordance with the laws of the day (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Archives, 2012c). Bud Orange, Member of Parliament from Klippert’s jurisdiction, publicly responded to the court’s decision in a press conference by saying, “I hope, uh, the ridiculousness of the situation forces the government to make a move in this regard,” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Archives, 2012a). The government did respond by introducing sweeping changes to the Criminal Code. Those changes took effect in May 1969, but they were only the beginning of many revisions that allow LGB Canadians and LGB families the wide range of legal protections afforded them today. Below, I will explain a number of events and legal decisions that affect LGB families living in Canada, and particularly those living in the province of Ontario where the current study was conducted.

**1969.** The government of Canada introduced Omnibus Bill C-150, legislation to amend Canada’s Criminal Code with the decriminalization of homosexual practices (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Archives, 2012a; 2012b).

**1977.** The province of Quebec, in its Human Rights Code, was the first Canadian province to make illegal the discrimination against gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. Most other
provinces including Ontario eventually if not swiftly followed suit to ensure provincial protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007, March 1).

1978. Canada’s new Immigration Act removed “homosexuals” from the list of “inadmissible classes” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007, March 1).

1992. The Ontario Court of Appeal ruled that the absence of “sexual orientation” from the list of proscribed grounds of discrimination of the Canadian Human Rights Act violated section 15 of the charter (Hurley, 2007). Accordingly, Ontario made similar provisions to those made in Quebec 15 years earlier.

1995. Ontario became the first Canadian province to make it legal for same-sex couples to make a joint application to adopt children, thus necessitating amendments to Ontario’s Child and Family Services Act (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007, March 1).

1996. The federal government passed Bill C-33 to add to the Canadian Human Rights Act the phrase “sexual orientation” as one of the prohibited grounds for discrimination (Ministry of Canadian Heritage, 2012). The new wording of the act now specified that all individuals have the right to live freely “without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted” (Canada’s Minister of Justice, 2011).

1999. The Supreme Court of Canada decided that Ontario’s Family Law Act violated Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms. To comply with the court’s decision, Ontario introduced Bill 5 later that year to amend the Ontario Family Law Act with wording of “spouse
or same-sex partner” where it had previously read only “spouse” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News, 2007, March 1).

2001. Canada’s first same-sex marriage was performed by Reverend Brent Hawkes at the Metropolitan Community Church in Toronto, using a procedure known as the reading of the banns as an alternative to obtaining a marriage licence. Reverend Hawkes wore a bulletproof vest and required police protection on the day of the wedding. After the ceremony, when the city refused to enter the same couple in its official records of marriage, the matter was taken to court (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2011, January 14).

2002. A gay high school student took an Ontario Catholic School Board to court because of the board’s decision to prevent him from attending a graduation dance with his boyfriend. A judge of the Superior Court of Justice granted an interlocutory injunction to enable the boy to attend the event with his partner, and the case did not proceed to trial (Hurley, 2007).

2003. The Ontario Court of Appeal ruled that the prohibition of same-sex marriages contravened Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Court of Appeal for Ontario, 2003).

2004. The Assisted Human Reproduction Act (AHRA) became federal law. AHRA prohibited some aspects of third party reproduction and placed restrictions on other aspects, such as making it illegal for intended parents to pay egg donors and surrogate mothers for anything other than expenses incurred. While the intention might have been to offer medical guidelines, protection from exploitation, etc., some have argued that the AHRA is unconstitutional (Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption, 2009). At this time, the issue of the AHRA’s constitutionality is still before the courts.

2005. With Bill C-38, The Civil Marriage Act, Canada became one of the first countries in the world to grant all same-sex couples nationwide the opportunity to marry, with the identical
responsibilities and rights as those previously accorded only to opposite-sex couples (New York Times, 2005, June 29).

2006. A male same-sex couple in British Columbia dropped its human rights complaint against the Ministry of Education regarding the ministry’s failure to include information about LGB sexual orientations in its curricula. They agreed to drop the case because, under a negotiated settlement, the ministry agreed to introduce new course material and to limit parental rights to exempt their children from courses with LGB content (Hurley, 2007).

2007. In a landmark case known as AA v. BB and CC, a female same-sex couple in Ontario that had used a known male sperm donor won an appeal to have all three adults (i.e., the biological father, the biological mother, and the mother’s partner) recognized as legal parents of their child. This opened the door for a child to have multiple parents who are recognized as legally significant, where previously adults who had functioned for years as a child’s parent might have no legal ties (Court of Appeal for Ontario, 2007).

2008. Ontario’s Minister of Children and Youth Services convened the Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption. The panel presented their report, “Raising Expectations,” to the Minister the following year with a number of recommendations including government funding for assisted reproductive technology. Among many citations, the report highlighted the many barriers to fertility faced by lesbians, bisexual people, and gay men and suggested that the AHRA had unintentionally criminalized third party reproduction. To date, the Ontario government has not acted on the recommendations of this expert panel (Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption, 2009).

2011. In an effort to introduce anti-harassment and anti-bullying measures, the Ontario government introduced Bill 13, The Accepting Schools Act, as an amendment to The Education
Act. Once approved, these measures would require school districts to make curricula more inclusive, provide training for teachers, and impose consequences for perpetrators of bullying. The language of the bill makes it clear that it seeks to address homophobia and gender-based violence in its greater effort to eradicate bullying (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2011).

2012. With the support of all three of the main political parties, Ontario’s legislative assembly agreed to the first reading of Bill 33, otherwise known as “Toby’s Law” an act to amend the Human Rights Code of Ontario with respect to gender identity and gender expression (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2012). A similar move has been made federally with the introduction of Bill C-276 (Parliament of Canada, 2011) and is awaiting the next steps to become law.

2012. Lawyers for the Canadian federal government presented arguments that effectively told a lesbian couple seeking divorce that they had never been legally married in the first place, using a legal loophole made possible by the fact that the two women now live in Florida and England, places where they would not have been able to legally wed (Makin, 2012 January 12a). Reactions from the international community, the Canadian public and from Canada’s Prime Minister Stephen Harper were swift (Ha, 2012, January 12). Within five weeks, the government introduced Bill C-32, which, once approved, will close this loophole in the Civil Marriage Act (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News, 2012, February 17).

**Contrasting Canadian and U.S. law**

The historical summary of Canadian laws reveals that over the course of nearly five decades, laws have steadily evolved to grant equal rights and protections – especially with respect to marriage, parenting, and employment – to all people regardless of their sexual
orientation. Rights and freedoms were not secured without some struggles along the way, but for the most part Canadian LGB individuals and their families now enjoy great security as provided by provincial and federal laws. In other parts of the world, this is not necessarily the case. As a stark contrast one could consider the current political climate in Uganda with the government’s introduction of the “Anti-Homosexuality Bill” (Reuters, 2011, May 13), a bill that threatens grave consequences for LGB-identified Ugandans or even for anyone who fails to report to the authorities any known LGB-identified individuals or any same-sex behaviour. Closer to home, however, there are more subtle differences between Canada and its closest neighbour. Because a great deal of the current literature draws from research conducted in the United States, a brief discussion of some contrasts between Canadian and U.S. laws is necessary. The facts that follow are not intended to be an exhaustive comparison, but they will highlight some reasons why the findings of this and other Canadian studies could be regarded as distinct from the U.S. literature.

Although Canada had decriminalized homosexual acts in 1969, it was not until 2003 that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the matter of Lawrence et al. v. Texas that anti-sodomy laws were incompatible with the U.S. constitution. The higher court’s decision paved the way for the invalidation of any anti-sodomy laws still in place throughout the United States (Lawrence et al. v. Texas, 2003). Although some states had already taken steps to remove or overturn anti-sodomy laws, the federal decriminalization of homosexual practices came 34 years later in the United States than in Canada.

It was in 1996 that Canada added “sexual orientation” to its list of proscribed grounds of discrimination. Lobbyists in the U.S. have tried unsuccessfully to guarantee similar federal protections through the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), but in attempts over the
past three decades, the bill has not been successfully passed into law (The Washington Post, 2012, February 6).

As a result of Canada’s introduction of The Civil Marriage Act in 2005, same-sex couples now have the same legal opportunities and economic advantages that opposite-sex couples enjoy. The implications of same-sex couples in the U.S. not having the same rights are numerous. Among some of these are the inability to secure health insurance coverage through the partner’s plan, ineligibility for certain tax credits, inability to guarantee beneficiary benefits, and so on (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011).

In Canada, same-sex couples were allowed to make joint applications for adoption rights beginning in 1995. In the U.S., lobbyists are still petitioning state governments to grant statutes that would allow joint adoption by same-sex parents (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011). Children in LGB-led families are therefore sometimes blocked from having legal ties to their parents (American Civil Liberties Union, 2011).

Clearly, the legal landscape is vastly different depending on which side of the U.S.-Canada border one resides. There are many explanations that could be examined in accounting for this variance. Adams (2002) suggests that Canadians adhere less to “traditional” family values than Americans. Rayside (2009) argues that the constitutional rights framework in Canada had moved in the 1990s towards the view that sexual orientation was protected as an equality right guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Because of decisions made by the Supreme Court of Canada, provinces had a reduced capacity to go in separate directions that were based on political ideology. In the U.S., as Smith (2008) indicates, states have their own
constitutions and more autonomy on matters related to sexuality. Thus, family policy-making is more decentralized than in Canada. Rayside (2009) also points out the relative weakness of the Canadian religious right compared to their American counterparts. Religious conservatives are present in Canada, to be sure, but they have a less powerful voice and less “capacity to amass politically useful resources” (Rayside, 2009, p. 207).

In their book, *Minding the Law*, Amsterdam and Bruner (2000) examine how implicit narratives shape the law within each culture and, by extension, the kinds of narratives that people can use in their own lives. They argue that every culture employs an array of unique strategies to break the existing canonical order. “But protest itself,” they state, “must conform, somehow, to a culture’s style of discourse. So there are conventions of protest, varying from culture to culture and from period to period” (p. 236). They further suggest that protest and the imagination for canon-breaking ideas gain intensity when such actions take place “within a culture’s recognized forms for challenging the canon” (p. 236). In essence, they are asserting that people’s stories are set within a legal framework, and this legal landscape determines the stories that each character can tell. It may be, therefore, that since the legal frameworks differ for Canadians and Americans, they have approached issues of sexual diversity with differing collections of narratives, differing styles of discourse, and differing expectations regarding how to bring about legal and social change.

No single explanation accounts for the dissimilarities between Canadian and U.S. laws that pertain to LGB families. The differences do indeed exist, however, but are not necessarily predictors of contrasting experiences with regard to discrimination and/or stigmatization. As was established in the review of Canadian law, Canadian LGB-led families are offered legal protection from discriminatory practices, and a legal framework is in place to put LGB-led
families on equal footing with all other families on matters of marriage, parenting rights, spousal economic benefits, etc. That is not the case in all parts of the United States, and so some findings related to legal and economic disadvantages for American LGB-led families may not have relevance to the current study. However, with respect to societal attitudes and practices, it is reasonable to assume that a review of U.S. literature has some relevance to the current Canadian study. For example, there is evidence of institutionalized heteronormativity in many aspects of both Canadian society (e.g., Smith, 2004) and U.S. society (e.g., Jackson, 2006). Furthermore, as Ricoeur asserted (1992), narrative identity draws on history and literature, and there is a great deal of overlap in the history and literature from which Canadians and Americans construct identity. Therefore, since Canadian youth from queer-led families, like their American counterparts, are exposed to the master narrative of heteronormativity, the experiences of Canadians and Americans may indeed have parallels in spite of the legal differences that set them apart. Given that the bulk of the available research on LGB-led families has been generated in the U.S., an examination of the literature will include U.S. findings as well as other findings from around the world. Some of those issues will be explored below as we shift our focus to some of the practical realities faced by LGB-identified parents and their children.

**Psychosocial Outcomes for Youth with LGB-Identified Parents**

*Consensus*

The literature makes it abundantly clear that heterosexual parents do not outperform LGB-identified parents. As Herek (2006) points out:

> If gay, lesbian, or bisexual parents were inherently less capable than otherwise comparable heterosexual parents, their children would evidence problems regardless of
the type of sample. This pattern clearly has not been observed. Given the consistent failures in this research literature to disprove the null hypothesis, the burden of empirical proof is on those who argue that the children of sexual minority parents fare worse than the children of heterosexual parents. (Herek, 2006, p. 614)

There is unparalleled unanimity of agreement on the issue from associations of psychologists, psychiatrists, paediatricians, and other child advocacy groups. The Canadian Psychological Association (2006) stated, “A review of the psychological research into the well-being of children raised by same-sex and opposite-sex parents continues to indicate that there are no reliable differences in their mental health or social adjustment and that lesbian mothers and gay fathers are not less fit as parents than are their heterosexual counterparts” (Canadian Psychological Association, 2006, para. 4). After a thorough review of the literature, the American Psychological Association (2004) resolved that its organization “shall take a leadership role in opposing all discrimination based on sexual orientation in matters of adoption, child custody and visitation, foster care, and reproductive health services” (American Psychological Association, 2004, p. 19). Other notable organizations – the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Bar Association, the Child Welfare League of America, and the National Association of Social Workers – have also given their official endorsement of LGB-led families (Patterson & Wainright, 2007). Evidently, the consensus suggests that the sexual orientation of a parent is not believed to be a predictor of parental quality.
Psychosocial development

Essentially, the aforementioned organizations have based their conclusions on research findings that demonstrate that the children of LGB parents consistently achieve expected psychosocial outcomes. The realm of psychosocial development, according to Vander Zanden (1989), encompasses changes associated with a person’s personality, emotions, and relationships. As previously mentioned, Erik Erikson believed that personality development continued to develop over the entire life cycle (Vander Zanden, 1989) and identified a number of key developmental stages through which he believed individuals progress (Erikson, 1963; 1968). These include infancy, early childhood, preschool, pre-adolescent childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and old age (Erikson, 1963).

A number of authors have presented thorough reviews of the literature (e.g., Short, Riggs, Perlesz, Brown, & Kane, 2007; Patterson, 2006; Lambert, 2005; Fitzgerald, 1999; Patterson, 1992) to demonstrate that children with LGB-identified parents change in positive and expected ways as they grow up, achieving the same desirable psychosocial outcomes expected of any other healthy individual. Charlotte Patterson has made immeasurable contributions to our understanding of the experiences of LGB families, and her work is often cited in both legal and academic circles. Her 1992 and 2006 reviews of the literature provide useful summaries that lead to evidence-based conclusions that the qualities of family relationships are more firmly associated with child psychosocial outcomes than is the sexual orientation of parents.

Case studies of children with LGB-identified parents appeared in the early 1970s (e.g., Osman, 1972) in order to provide evidence in custody cases to demonstrate that children with LGB parents were just as “normal” as those with heterosexual parents (Fitzgerald, 1999). Perhaps it was as the LGB rights movement gained momentum through new laws (e.g., the 1969
decriminalization of homosexual practices in Canada) and unifying protests such as the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion (New York Times, 2009, April 10) and the 1981 Toronto bathhouse riots in Canada (Mills, 2011) that LGB parents became emboldened to speak more openly about their families. Whatever the precise reasons, the late 1970s and 1980s saw an increasing number of LGB individuals terminating their opposite-sex relationships and seeking custody of their children (Fitzgerald, 1999). A natural consideration was the potential impact that non-traditional, non-heterosexual parenting might have on children. Prominent perspectives on child development such as psychoanalytic theory and social learning theory had heavily emphasized the importance of having both a mother and a father, and these theories therefore predicted negative outcomes for children whose families deviated from this opposite-sex parental framework (Patterson, 1997).

To address the assumptions held within traditional schools of psychological thought, several research studies launched comparative studies. Golombok, Spencer, and Rutter (1983) found no statistically significant differences between children of lesbian-identified parents and children of heterosexual-identified parents on measures of unsociability, emotional difficulty, conduct disorders, hyperactivity, ability to socialize with same-gender playmates, or quality of peer relationships. Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray, and Smith (1986) found no differences between the two comparison groups for social skills and popularity among peers. Huggins (1989) administered self-esteem measures to children of both lesbian-identified and heterosexual-identified mothers. She found no statistically significant differences in self-esteem inventory scores between the two groups. These and other studies were criticized, however, because many of the children from lesbian-headed homes had begun their lives with heterosexual parents whose marriages had later dissolved. It was difficult to ascertain whether their
experiences in heterosexual-led homes might have somehow shielded them from possible negative outcomes they would otherwise have experienced without having had a heterosexual framework at some point in their lives. In other words, their exposure to a heterosexual family framework had become a part of their personal narrative, and disentangling the various stories that had been integrated into their emerging personal narrative would be an arduous if not impossible task.

In an effort to address this concern, many researchers decided to conduct studies with children who had only ever known life in an LGB-led home (i.e., they were of “from the get-go” LGB-led families and had not had direct exposure to a heterosexual family narrative). It has been suggested that two-parent lesbian-identified “from the get-go” families have become increasingly common (Patterson, 1992) as a result of the so-called “lesbian baby boom” (Patterson, 1992), and therefore such families are sometimes easier to locate and recruit for research purposes than other non-heterosexual-led family configurations. It should be noted, however, that findings from two-parent lesbian-identified studies do not necessarily extend to all LGB-led family configurations.

In one study carried out by Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua, and Joseph (1995), two-parent lesbian-identified “from the get-go” families were compared to two-parent heterosexual-led families. Research findings indicated no significant differences between lesbian-led “from the get-go families” and heterosexual-headed families, except that lesbian-identified couples exhibited more parenting awareness skills than their heterosexual counterparts. In Patterson’s Bay Area Families Study (1996) it was demonstrated that children’s self-concepts and preferences for activities typically associated with their gender were similar to the self-concepts and activities preferences of children from heterosexual-led families. Even on standardized
measures of social skills and behaviour, children from LGB-led families scored within the normal range (Patterson, 1996). The Bay Area Families Study was criticized, however, for having employed a word-of-mouth convenience sampling method (Patterson, 2006). As Meezan and Rauch (2005) indicate, researchers have no complete listing of LGB-identified parents from which to draw, and their samples may be quite unlike the full population of LGB parents. It could be argued that researchers have no complete listing of heterosexual-identified parents from which to draw either, but Meezan and Rauch’s point has usefulness in taking into account the possibility that many LGB-led families are not easily identifiable as such and are therefore not represented in much of the literature.

Responding to such concerns with a less biased sampling method, another study was undertaken in 1998 with the collaboration of the Sperm Bank of California (Chan, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998). This study included participants invited from a finite population and allowed for a comparison of heterosexual-led families who had used a sperm donor and lesbian-identified families who had also used donor insemination. As well as having parents from both comparison groups complete various test protocols, children’s teachers were also solicited to provide standardized evaluations of children’s adjustment using the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). Again, the triangulated data appeared to indicate that parental sexual orientation had no correlation to children’s psychosocial adaptation. Questions remained, however, such as whether parental sexual orientation might become a factor later in a child’s life, given that the children of the Sperm Bank of California study had a mean age of seven years (Patterson, 2006). Furthermore, even though the Sperm Bank of California study used a less biased sampling method, it still may not have been representative of the full population of LGB parents because many of those studied were white, relatively affluent lesbians (Meezan and Rauch, 2005).
mention that they were predominantly two-woman-parent families, as opposed to two-men-parent families, multiple parents of various genders, or other possible permutations.

Patterson and Wainright (2007) had a tremendous opportunity to work with a large national database, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). This database included participants from a wide range of racial backgrounds, socioeconomic groups, and regions of the U.S. As Patterson and Wainright point out (2007, p. 7), the Add Health study included data pertaining to “various aspects of adolescents’ psychosocial well-being, school function, romantic relationships and behaviours, risky behaviours such as substance use, […] adolescents’ perceptions of parental warmth, care from adults and peers,” and other outcomes that could give a useful overview of adolescent adjustment. They found no difference between adolescents from LGB-headed homes and heterosexual-identified homes with respect to psychosocial adjustment. Their conclusions echo the inferences drawn in previous studies. “The results…suggest that qualities of relationships within the family are more important in predicting adolescent psychosocial adjustment, substance use, school outcomes, family and peer relations than is family type” (Patterson and Wainright, 2007, p. 33). Even in a meta-analysis of 19 studies, one group of researchers (Crowl, Ahn, & Baker, 2007) found statistical confirmation that youth raised by LGB parents fare equally well as those raised in heterosexual-identified homes with respect to psychosocial outcomes.

**Sexual identity development**

Despite overwhelming evidence that children of LGB families have no disadvantages in terms of their psychosocial development, some opponents of LGB-led families continue to express concerns about the impact that a non-heterosexual family environment might have on the
development of sexual identity. Such concerns need to be situated within our current understanding of how one’s sexual identity develops.

Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, and Vernaglia (2002) propose a multidimensional model of heterosexual identity development. They define heterosexual identity development as “the individual and social processes by which heterosexually identified persons acknowledge and define their sexual needs, values, sexual orientation and preferences for sexual activities, modes of sexual expression, and characteristics of sexual partners” (Worthington et al., 2002, p. 510). Additionally, they maintain that there are six biopsychosocial factors that influence sexual identity development. These include biological processes, the microsocial context that includes individuals with whom one has regular contact, societal gender norms, culture, religious orientation, and systemic homonegativity (Worthington et al., 2002). These influences shape a person’s individual identity as well as their social identity as a person transitions between what these authors call “five discernible identity development statuses” (p. 512). Worthington and his colleagues use the term statuses rather than stages to make it clear that there is some circularity and revisiting of these statuses as an individual develops. The five statuses are unexplored commitment, active exploration, diffusion (i.e., the absence of commitment or exploration), deepening commitment, and synthesis (i.e., a state of congruence).

Of course, not all individuals identify as heterosexual or cisgender, so many theories have emerged to account for the development of other sexual identities. Yarhouse (2001) provides a useful review of models of the development of all non-heterosexual identities as well as models of gay identity development and lesbian identity development. He cites the work of Cass as a widely recognized general model. Cass (1979) maintains that gay and lesbian identity develops across six stages: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity
acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. Largely aligned with Cass’ theory is McDonald’s theory of gay identity development for males (1982). McDonald suggests a seven-stage model of awareness, first gay experience, understanding the word “gay”, self-labelling, first relationship, first disclosure to non-gay individuals, and the development of a positive gay identity. With regard to lesbian identity development, Sophie (1986) suggested a four-stage model, which includes first awareness of homosexual feelings, testing and exploration, identity acceptance, and identity integration. Table 1 (see below) compares these three models and reveals some degree of overlap between them.

Table 1: Comparison of three theories that identify stages of sexual identity development

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<td>Stage 2: Identity comparison</td>
<td>First gay experience</td>
<td>Grasping the word “gay”</td>
<td>Identity acceptance</td>
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<td>Stage 3: Identity tolerance</td>
<td>First awareness</td>
<td>Testing and exploration</td>
<td>Identity integration</td>
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<td>Stage 4: Identity acceptance</td>
<td>Self-labelling</td>
<td>Identity integration</td>
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<td>Stage 5: Identity pride</td>
<td>First relationship</td>
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<td>Stage 6: Identity synthesis</td>
<td>First disclosure to non-gay</td>
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<td>Stage 7:</td>
<td>Positive gay identity</td>
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Clearly, many of these stages involve an individual’s coming to terms with the ways in which their experience differs from heterosexual norms. Individuals with a heterosexual identity typically grow up surrounded with affirmation of their identity and ample models of what heterosexuality “looks like”. Opponents of LGB-headed families base their concerns about children’s sexual identity development on the idea that youth in LGB-led families will not have heterosexual-identified role models in their homes and will, therefore, experience confusion.

Hammack (2005) argues that while strictly essentialist and strictly constructionist perspectives try to account for sexual identity development, neither approach is successful on its own. Essentialists view sexual orientation as an underlying personality trait, while
constructionists argue that sexual orientation is a characteristic created as a social and historical act (Hammack, 2005). Hammack argues for an approach that would find neutral ground and use a combination of perspectives and approaches to account for the development of sexual identity. As mentioned in chapter one, Hammack’s blended theory approach to the phenomenon of sexual orientation is reminiscent of the view taken by early psychologists such as Murray, Allport, and Bruner who believed that a narrative approach could bring balance to interpretations that would otherwise be too closely aligned with one strictly-adhered-to psychological perspective.

Hammack was also influenced by the lifelong approach to development taken by Erikson (1968) and by the work of Elder (1998) who maintained that “historical forces shape the social trajectories of family, education, and work, and they in turn influence behaviour and particular lines of development” (p. 2). Hammack believes that one should use Elder’s Life Course Theory of human development to account for sexual orientation and explains that this theory considers “the biology of sexual desire while simultaneously acknowledging the socially constructed nature of identity and the historical foundations of sexual orientation as a meaningful index of human identity” (p. 268).

Many researchers (e.g., Patterson, 1992; Fitzgerald, 1999) consider three relevant aspects of sexual identity: gender identity, gender-role behaviour, and sexual orientation. As early as 1983, Golombok and her colleagues illuminated the flawed logic of those claiming that children with homosexual-identified role models would eventually come to identify themselves as homosexuals. “Just as children’s exposure to the fact of heterosexual relationships between their father and mother does not prevent homosexuality,” they argued, “so the exposure to homosexual models seems unlikely to have a decisive impact on sexual orientation” (Golombok, Spencer, & Rutter, 1983). Their argument supports a view that while the narratives of others
may become part of a child’s emerging sense of self, the mere exposure to a non-heterosexual narrative is insufficient to form the basis for a child’s sexual orientation. Some have contended that the issue of a child’s sexual orientation is a moot point, asserting that even if differences were found in these regards, differences do not necessarily indicate deficits (e.g., Baumrind, 1995). The assumption that heterosexuality is the ideal to which families and individuals should aspire is a flawed notion that only propagates the heteronormative values pervasive in our society. If the research told us that children with LGB parents were in fact more likely to be LGB themselves, would that be problematic?

To satisfy those for whom the gender identity, gender role behaviour, or sexual orientation of children may potentially be an issue (e.g., certain judges making determinations about child custody rights, foster care workers making decisions about child placements, etc.), many researchers have gathered evidence to determine whether family type has an effect on any aspects of sexual identity, simply because they know that by not doing research of this kind they would leave important issues unresolved and flawed assumptions unaddressed. A question that researchers must first ponder, however, is the age of the LGB offspring that they will consider. It is not reasonable to posit, for example, that valid conclusions about sexual orientation can be made from research that compares pre-adolescents by family type, merely because many pre-adolescents have not yet made conclusions about and/or disclosed their sexual orientation (Cass, 1979). It seems reasonable to consider only adolescents and adults for questions of this nature. Thus, I will proceed by discussing gender identity and gender role behaviour with pre-adolescent children before moving on to a discussion of the sexual orientation of older offspring of LGB families.
Gender identity refers to one’s core-morphologic identity (Hellman, Green, Gray, & Williams, 1981). The term gender identity is intended to provide a label for whether an individual is cisgender (i.e., there is a match between the gender assigned to an individual at birth, their bodies, and their own sense of gender) or transgender (i.e., there is a mismatch between these elements); gender identity is distinct from one’s sexual orientation (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). It is important to note that one’s gender identity is an internal process, and to know a participants’ gender identity involves asking them directly or indirectly through the use of projective measures such as the Draw-a-Person Test used by Green and his colleagues to determine the gender identity of the children who participated in their study (1986).

Gender role behaviour is a relatively more complicated matter because of the implicit assumptions of gender typing that accompany decisions about whether children are choosing toys, activities, clothing, and occupations that are more typically masculine or more typically feminine. While such assumptions may be objectionable to some, most would concede that lists of male-typical toys (e.g., hammer, gun, football) and female-typical toys (e.g., doll, baby bottle) could be generated to serve as a starting point. Spence and Helmreich (1978) used such lists in their Toy Preference Questionnaire and found male-typical toys to be preferred by boys and female-typical toys to be preferred by girls. Measures such as these can be used to examine the gender role behaviour of children with LGB-identified parents to see if their choices of toys, activities, clothing, and occupations mirror the response patterns of children raised in heterosexual-led families. The results of such examinations should be considered cautiously, however, because questionnaires and interviews can be viewed as social interactions, and even child participants decide how much to disclose in such settings. Such disclosures perhaps reveal
their efforts to develop and confirm insights about the self (McLean, 2005); children may have, however, some insights about the self that they choose not to share.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned complications of comparative research, the comparative studies that have been conducted suggest that gender identity and gender role behaviours of children with LGB-identified parents are much the same as those of children with heterosexual parents. In one early study, Green (1978) found no evidence of any gender identity behaviour differences by family type with respect to peer group preferences, selection of clothing, etc. Another early study by Kirkpatrick, Smith, and Roy (1981) used projective measures to demonstrate that most children tended to draw same-gender figures first regardless of their family type. Patterson’s work (1992) demonstrated that the children of lesbian-identified mothers made conventional choices with respect to favourite toys and vocations. Patterson did further work (2004) that led to her conclusion that gender identity, behaviours associated with gender role, and sexual orientation develop in much the same ways for children of lesbian-identified parents and children of heterosexual-identified parents. Furthermore, Patterson and Wainright (2007) found that even during what is a critical time of development, adolescents’ self-reports of romantic attractions and sexual behaviours indicated no significant differences between the adolescents from LGB-led homes and those from heterosexual-led families. On the issue of gender role conformity, one U.S. study (Fulcher, Sutfin, & Patterson, 2008) found that children raised by two lesbian-identified mothers were more tolerant of gender nonconformity in peers.

MacCallum and Golombok’s (2004) research found that 12-year-old boys in mother-only families (i.e., lesbian-identified mothers or single heterosexual-identified mothers) had the same masculinity scores as those in mother-father homes, but they had higher femininity scores than
the 12-year-old boys in mother-father homes. The reader is cautioned, however, that these
differences need not be regarded as deficits; perhaps the boys’ greater femininity scores
demonstrate greater gender flexibility (i.e., increased ability to express one’s gender identity in
ways less rigidly defined by societal expectations) on the part of the 12-year-old boys in mother-
only homes (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010). Stacey and Biblarz (2001) also contend that the children
of lesbian-identified parents are more likely to be emancipated from traditional gender
prescriptions with respect to toys, fashion, career aspirations, etc. An argument could be made,
however, that the gender of one’s parents may play more of a role than the sexual orientation of
one’s parents with respect to the development of children’s gender role behaviours. For
example, the predicted gender role behaviours may be the same for a son of a single lesbian
mother as for the son of a single heterosexual mother because the gender of the parent may be
more relevant than sexual orientation. Regardless of the precise reasons for the greater gender
flexibility that emerges in LGB-led families, however, Elizabeth Short and her colleagues (2007)
aptly sum up some potentially advantageous differences in the literature review they prepared for
the Australian Psychological Society:

In general, the theme of these differences is to be less rigidly sex-typed than children who
live with heterosexual parents. Researchers have found the sons of lesbian women in
their samples to be more self-aware, more adept at communicating their feelings, more
sensitive to others, more thoughtful and measured, less physically aggressive, less “sex-
typed” in their choice of toys and games, and to exhibit more empathy for people than the
comparative groups of sons of heterosexual parents. (p. 21)
Shifting from a focus on children with LGB parents to older offspring (i.e., adolescents and young adults) of LGB parents, I will now consider the issue of the development of sexual orientation. Tasker and Golombok (1995) asked adults who had been raised in lesbian homes to give information about their “first crush” and subsequent crushes and non-sexual relationships from the onset of puberty until their first sexual relationship; they asked a comparison group from heterosexual homes the same questions. Additionally, they asked both groups to outline a chronological sexual relationship history from their first sexual relationship up to the present time. When these “first crush,” non-sexual relationship, and sexual relationship histories were subjected to a between-groups comparison, no significant difference was found in terms of the proportion who had experienced sexual attraction to someone of the same gender. They found that all participants from both groups had experienced at least one opposite-gender sexual experience. However, more participants from the lesbian-mother group reported having been in a same-gender sexual relationship (Tasker & Golombok, 1995). These same researchers (Tasker & Golombok, 1997) also conducted a longitudinal study of young adult offspring of lesbian-identified mothers. Using a matched pairs design to compare them to young adults from heterosexual families, the researchers concluded that not only were the psychosocial outcomes similar in terms of likelihood of depression, anxiety, or other psychiatric problems, but there were no differences in the frequency of reporting same-sex sexual attraction or having an LGB identity. There were, however, differences in terms of pondering the possibility of an LGB identity and of having been involved in a same-sex relationship. Young adults who had grown up in an LGB-led home were more likely to have considered the possibility that they themselves were lesbian, gay, or bisexual; they were also more likely to have been involved in a same-sex relationship (Tasker and Golombok, 1997). These differences are perhaps indicative of LGB
offspring being more open to the possibility that they may have same-sex attraction even though, ultimately, they have no greater likelihood of actually being LGB individuals than the offspring of heterosexual parents. On the issue of sexual orientation, Short and her colleagues (2007) conclude, “The research is fairly scant. Findings seem to suggest that offspring who were raised by a same-sex attracted parent may feel more comfortable to either consider the possibility of having a same-sex relationship, to have one, to feel more comfortable with their sexuality, and/or more able to discuss issues of sexuality with their parents” (Short et al., 2007, p. 22).

Ferrari and Mahalingam (1998) suggest that personal development occurs as an interaction of narrative and action. Narratives associated with gender, family, and other factors serve to frame action. “Action in particular cultural contexts, in turn,” they write, “transforms narratives by enriching and validating them, or by posing problems that must be overcome in order to sustain them” (p. 36). Their conclusions can offer a partial explanation as to why children from LGB-led homes sometimes exhibit behaviours that are less bound to cultural expectations: their narratives have been framed differently than those raised in heterosexual-led homes, and thus their point of origin with respect to the master narrative of heteronormativity differs from that of most of their peers.

School-related Issues for Youth with LGB-Identified Parents

In matters of sexual identity, there is no universal agreement about what constitutes a desirable outcome. Some would be threatened by non-traditional expressions of gender identity, gender role behaviour, or sexual orientation; others would be completely accepting of such non-traditional outcomes. In terms of school outcomes and school-related issues, however, all stakeholders are more likely to find common ground. Political, religious, and ideological
differences do not prevent unanimous agreement that such things as good academic performance and strong connectedness are desirable outcomes. Below, I will review the literature that presents evidence of school outcomes for children of LGB-identified parents. Then, I will discuss in a broader sense the reported school experiences of LGB families.

School outcomes

There are many school outcomes that could be measured, but Wainright, Russell and Patterson (2004) chose to examine grade point average (GPA), school connectedness, and trouble at school. Using the Add Health sample of adolescents referred to earlier, students’ GPAs were calculated using their most recent English, math, social studies, and science grades. There were no significant differences of GPA by family type (Wainright et al., 2004). Interestingly, students in same-sex families had higher school connectedness scores than their heterosexual-family counterparts. School connectedness was measured with a five-point scale that asked questions about the degree to which adolescents felt close to other students, had a sense of being part of the school community, and believed that they were treated fairly by their teachers (Wainright et al, 2004). Trouble at school was assessed by questions related to problems getting homework done, difficulty getting along with classmates, etc. There were no significant differences by family type with respect to experiencing trouble at school.

Michael Rosenfeld (2010) examined U.S. census data to examine rates of grade retention (i.e., repeating a grade rather than progressing with the expected pace of one school grade per year). Rosenfeld points out that grade retention has value as an indicator of a lack of childhood readiness for school. His examination of the data revealed no significant difference in grade retention by family type. Although children of heterosexual married couples had slightly lower
rates of grade retention, those families also had more legal advantages, were more likely to be white, and were more financially prosperous. Controlling for those socioeconomic differences, children were equally prepared for school regardless of family type (Rosenfeld, 2010). His conclusions do not suggest that same-sex families cause school-readiness disadvantages; if anything, his findings should prompt policymakers to ensure that LGB-led families are given the same economic and legal advantages as heterosexual families. For the most part, Canadian LGB families are on a level legal playing field with their heterosexual-family counterparts, but this is not the case everywhere in the U.S. or in many other parts of the world.

School experiences

School outcomes examine the performance of children in schools. However, it could be argued that in order to fully understand the issue one ought to consider the performance of schools with respect to LGB families. Aside from factors such as academic performance, school connectedness, trouble at school, and rates of grade retention, there are a number of studies that examine the performance of schools, of policies, of teachers, and of the attitudes and behaviours of the peers of children with LGB parents. Some researchers have given more qualitative, descriptive evidence about the school experiences of LGB families than that which has been presented thus far in the literature review. These descriptive studies are important complements to quantitative evidence because they provide a window to the environment in which LGB families find themselves at school. The following is a review of literature as it pertains to the experiences of the offspring of LGB-identified parents, beginning with preschoolers’ experiences and progressing through to secondary school.
Lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents are not necessarily visible (Tasker, 2005). While this fact may allow some children with LGB families to avoid being labelled as such by peers or personnel, the relative invisibility of LGB families might be a contributing factor to a lack of societal acceptance (Robinson, 2002). To address this, some have argued for the need to make lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues more prominent in the early childhood education (ECE) years (e.g., Robinson, 2002). Conservative-minded individuals bristle at the idea, believing preschoolers to be “too young” to be exposed to non-heteronormative narratives or maintaining that such matters are irrelevant to this age group. In response to this, Robinson reminds readers of the exposure preschoolers have to the construction of heteronormative behavioural expectations with role plays involving mother/father scenarios, weddings, “playing house”, boyfriend/girlfriend kissing games, and so on. There is a double standard present if the inclusion of opposite-sex activities and resources (e.g., books that feature traditional fairytales) are permitted while any trace of same-sex influence is thwarted.

When queer-themed posters and books are present in ECE classrooms alongside heterosexual-themed resources, opportunities are created for discussion of these issues as they naturally arise. Robinson (2002) points out that in some ECE classrooms in Australia, the issues of same-sex parents were only discussed after they had become a “problem” or when other children were becoming “too curious”. The discussions took place as a last resort, not out of a genuine, purposeful effort to create classroom spaces that promoted social justice and exposure to a diverse range of families. Some LGB families actively search for ECE settings that demonstrate their commitment to social justice and inclusive policies (Robinson, 2002), but the literature does not address the issue of how easily such social-justice-based ECE centres can be located.
In ECE settings, the non-heterosexual identities of LGB families are more likely to remain invisible than in a child’s later years, intentionally or not. There are many factors that increase the likelihood that children with queer parents will find their family configuration more relevant in their elementary school years. As they begin to socialize through “play dates” in elementary school, they will be in their friends’ homes and vice versa. Students in the primary grades (i.e., grades K-3 in the Ontario education system) will experience questions about having two same-sex parents or will receive responses ranging from curiosity to disbelief (Ray and Gregory, 2001). According to Ray and Gregory’s interviews and focus groups with children in the primary years, bullying at that age is unlikely to arise as a factor of parents’ sexual orientation.

Bullying of children with same-sex parents becomes more of an issue in the junior (i.e., grades 4-6), intermediate (i.e., grades 7-10), and senior (i.e., grades 11-12) divisions. Of those students in the junior division, almost half of the children in the qualitative study conducted by Ray and Gregory experienced bullying, and many of them reporting hearing other gay taunts that were not necessarily directed at them. Children expressed feeling anywhere from annoyed to extremely hurt by such bullying and taunting, and even when the homophobic slurs were not directed at them personally, some interpreted the comments as a criticism of their parents’ sexual orientation. In the younger grades, students solicited the help of their teachers, but this declined somewhat in older grades. Older elementary students explained that teachers’ responses to reports of bullying were less than satisfactory and often disappointing (Ray and Gregory, 2001).

Given the high frequency of reported experiences with bullying and homophobic slurs, and the perception that some students have of inadequate teachers’ responses, it is unsurprising that many students elect to not to disclose their parents’ sexual orientation to all of their peers.
Disclosure practices will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but students in the intermediate division (i.e., the middle school years) are sometimes reluctant to be out about their family identity. Thirty-six percent of the grade 7-10 students in Ray and Gregory’s study (2001) kept their family identity a secret. This dropped to only fourteen percent amongst the grades 11-12 students interviewed in their study.

In many ways, high school students with LGB-identified parents – regardless of their own sexual orientation – can probably relate to the experiences of LGB-identified youth. As previously discussed, Ray and Gregory’s (2001) interviews with children in elementary school reveal that homophobic comments affect them, even when they are not the target. For that reason, it is relevant to consider the overall high school climate with respect to LGB issues. In what is described as “The First National Climate Survey on Homophobia in Canadian Schools” (Taylor et al., 2008), 1700 students across Canada were surveyed online and through in-school sessions. Students were asked to provide demographic information including their gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as the ways in which school staff had responded through bullying interventions and/or implementation of safe-school policies (Taylor et al., 2008). The selected “key findings” that follow are important to note, for they provide a glimpse into the some of the experiences that LGBTQ students describe and may have relevance for the offspring of LGBTQ families as well:

- “Three-quarters of LGBTQ students feel unsafe in at least one place at school, such as change rooms, washrooms, and hallways. Half of straight students agree that at least one part of their school is unsafe for LGBTQ students” (p. 3).
- “Three-quarters of all participating students reporting hearing expressions such as “that’s so gay” every day in school” (p. 3).
- “Half heard remarks like “faggot”, “queer”, “lezbo”, and “dyke” daily. Over half of LGBTQ students, compared to a third of non-LGBTQ, reported hearing such remarks daily” (p. 3).
- “LGBTQ students were more likely than non-LGBTQ individuals to report that staff never intervened when homophobic comments were made” (p. 3).
- “Six out of ten LGBTQ students reported being verbally harassed about their sexual orientation” (p. 4).
- “One in four LGB students had been physically harassed about their sexual orientation” (p. 4).
- “Over half of the LGBTQ students had rumours or lies spread about their sexual orientation at school, compared to one in ten non-LGBTQ” (p. 4).
- “Many LGBTQ students would not be comfortable talking to their teachers (four in ten), their principal (six in ten), or their coach (seven in ten) about LGBTQ issues” (p. 5).
- “Over half of LGBTQ students did not feel accepted at school, and almost half felt they could not be themselves at school, compared to one-fifth of straight students” (p. 5).
- “Fewer than half of participants knew whether their school had a policy for reporting homophobic incidents” (p. 5).
"LGBTQ students who believed their schools have anti-homophobia policies were much more likely than other LGBTQ students to believe their school was becoming less homophobic" (Taylor et al., 2008, pp. 5-6).

These findings were very similar to those of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network’s American school climate surveys (GLSEN, 2003; 2009). In the most recent GLSEN study (2009), nearly three-quarters of students reported frequently or often hearing peers make derogatory comments such as “dyke” or “faggot.” Over 60% of students reported having heard homophobic remarks from teachers or other school staff. Almost 89% of students reported hearing the use of phrases such as “that’s so gay” or “no homo” often or frequently in their schools. These phrases, which some might view to be innocuous because they are used without a particular target, can nonetheless serve to propagate negative messages about same-sex behaviour. In fact, 86.5% of LGBT students reported that hearing “gay” or “queer” used in a negative manner caused them to feel some degree of stress (GLSEN, 2009). Those quantitative findings are supported anecdotally by the qualitative research of Ray and Gregory (2001), who report that many high school youth with LGB parents do indeed experience homophobia in direct and indirect ways. “I had apple cores and banana peels and rocks thrown at me every time I walked past them”, one of their interviewees claimed (p. 32) of her experiences with school peers.

In 1995, social worker Tony Gambini and Toronto District School Board (TDSB) trustee John Campey, the first openly gay trustee elected to the TDSB, combined efforts to advocate for the creation of an alternative school program that would provide a safe haven for any student who felt unsafe in environments that were LGBTQ-hostile (Triangle Program, 2012).
program began in 1996, largely in response to high dropout rates of LGBTQ-identified students and following a period of time where the TDSB had implemented anti-discrimination policies after one of its teachers, Kenneth Zeller, had been tragically killed by five high school students in a gay-bashing incident in Toronto’s High Park (Mitchell, 2004). The Triangle Program is currently Canada’s only classroom for queer youth and their allies (Triangle Program, 2012). While most of the students enrolled in the program identify as LGBTQ themselves, any student in need of a safer space for their education due to issues of sexual or gender identity is eligible to apply for one of the limited spaces in the program.

Fortunately, not all youth with LGB parents feel unsafe in their schools, and many older students decide to out their families even after having kept their parents’ sexual orientation a secret for years. In Ray and Gregory’s study (2001), students in grades 11 and 12 stated they were ready to tell their peers because their friends were now more mature. One eleventh-grade student in their survey said, “I told close friends and they were all fine. I was a novelty for my friends. Instead of being negative, people were curious and almost envious of me” (p. 32). Many students in grades 11 and 12 reported feeling relieved that they could finally be more open about their parents’ sexual orientation because there were now fewer homophobic attitudes and support that accompanied positive interest in the unique characteristics of their families (Ray & Gregory, 2001).

Although the findings of Ray and Gregory (2001) are encouraging in that many youth with LGB-identified parents do eventually feel increased levels of acceptance and support by the end of high school, it is by no means sufficient to expect youth to wait until the age of seventeen or eighteen before having these positive responses from school peers. Beginning in ECE centres, children with LGB families need the kind of exposure to all types of family configurations, and
they need teachers who will promote social justice for all (Lamme & Lamme, 2002). The Family Pride Coalition advocates for policy changes in schools that would be more inclusive of LGB youth and LGB families (Bauer & Goldstein, 2003). Their report states, “In an ideal world, your child’s school already has – and enforces – non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, teaches tolerance and respect, opens its proms to all, and includes representations of LGBT people throughout the K-12 curriculum” (Bauer & Goldstein, 2003, p. 3), but the report acknowledges that not all LGB families experiences such ideals. Lamme and Lamme (2002) recommend that schools develop and implement anti-bias curriculum that would include social justice education related to race, gender, and sexual orientation. They also challenge educators to counter misconceptions about LGB stereotypes. By increasing students’ exposure to these issues, they posit, educators can be powerful role models of how to treat all people with dignity and respect.

Even when willing to be such role models, some teachers feel unprepared for the job of advocating for the rights of LGB-identified students and the offspring of LGB-headed families (Ryan and Martin, 2000), citing concerns about their own lack of knowledge, lack of training, and potential backlash from the parents of students who are not supportive of social justice education about issues pertaining to sexual orientation. Nevertheless, some school districts and ministries of education are beginning to introduce policies to make schools safer for LGB-identified students and children of LGB-identified parents. In February 2010, Bill 157 (Keeping Our Kids Safe At School Act), the first law of its kind in Canada, took effect in the province of Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). Among other amendments to the Education Act, Bill 157 requires teachers to report inappropriate student behaviour and to respond to any behaviour deemed to pose a threat to the safety of students and staff. Because these changes are
relatively new, it is difficult to know whether or not Bill 157 has indeed made Ontario schools a safer place or prompted teachers to adopt the “ideal world” practices that Bauer and Goldstein (2003) recommend. As will be demonstrated later in the dissertation, the participants in the current study have recommendations of their own with respect to the best practices for teacher training and school inclusiveness policies.

Queer-family Identity Issues

As previously mentioned, there are many theories and models that endeavour to explain the development of one’s heterosexual identity, one’s gay identity, one’s lesbian identity, or some other sexual identity. Such models include a variety of biopsychosocial influences that contribute to the development of a particular sexual identity. Similarly, there may be various influences, personal narratives of others, and cultural master narratives that intersect for an individual to develop a sense of their family identity.

Intersectionality theory was a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) as a means of articulating how the multiple identities of black women (e.g., black identity, feminist identity, etc.) intersected to form something more powerful than the sum of its parts. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) expanded on Crenshaw’s work to suggest that cultural patterns of oppression are both interrelated and bound together by intersecting identities such as socioeconomic class, race, gender, and ethnicity. Although the current study is not a study in intersectionality, it is worth noting that LGB families also may have cultural patterns of oppression that are interrelated and bound together by intersecting identities and that there may even be types of oppression (e.g., belonging to a queer family) that compete with types of privilege (e.g., male privilege, SES privilege, or heterosexual privilege). For most children of LGB families, they have their own
heterosexuality as an identity that must be reconciled with the queer identity that is theirs because of the family to which they belong. Depending upon factors that led to the formation of a queer-led family, children and their queer-identified parents may also differ by race, by socioeconomic background, by gender identity, as well as other attributes. “Queer spawn hold a unique identity,” writes Jamie Evans (2009, p. 239). “It is one that is complex, multi-layered, and ever-changing.” Lamme and Lamme (2002) suggest that regardless of their own eventual sexual orientation, youth with LGB-identified parents “become de facto members of the gay community” (p. 66) because of their parents’ connections to the LGB community.

Some of the issues which follow have already been alluded to in previous discussions of Canadian law, psychosocial outcomes, and school experiences, but further exploration is needed to present a cohesive summary of queer-family identity issues. Given below are examples from the existing literature that address such topics as narrative psychology interpretations of gay identity development, the myths and stigmatization that LGB families face, the lack of terminology that adequately represents all offspring of LGB parents, and the disclosure practices employed by children with LGB-identified parents.

*Narrative psychology and configurations of queer identity*

Chapter one traced a progression of narrative psychology literature from Karl Philipp Moritz’s era to the present time to provide a historical context for the analytic framework of the current study. Although there is an absence of personalistic psychology studies that feature the development of a queer family identity, some researchers (e.g., Hammack & Windell, 2011; Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009) have employed a narrative psychology perspective to
explain the identity development of sexual minorities, and this can serve as a starting point to establish a connection between narrative psychology literature and queer identity development.

Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki (2009) found that while sexual minority youth varied in their manner of narrative engagement with conventional categories of sexual identity, they did not vary in their experiences regarding the impact of society’s pervasive heteronormativity, a finding also supported by the work of Herek (2007). Hammack and Cohler (2011) suggest, however, that while the narratives of silence, sickness, and stigma continue to proliferate, today they are accompanied by a number of competing narratives of the “normality” of same-sex attraction. It is only through a process of narrative engagement “with a multiplicity of storylines that individuals appropriate in the course of their lives, dependent upon local, national, and regional possibilities” (p. 164). Of course, children of sexual minority parents must navigate between and create narratives at the intersection of a multiplicity of ideologies. Psychologists have yet to do a study of this creative process of navigation, and thus the current study offers a first step towards understanding the processes in which these children engage.

Confronting myths and stigma

Despite whatever legal and social shifts may have been made with respect to LGB rights, the children of LGB-identified parents will nonetheless interact with storylines that include the misconceptions of others and the stigma that is still attached to non-heterosexual orientations. In the 1992 U.S. elections, several states placed referenda on their ballots that, if passed, would limit the civil rights of lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men (Jenny, Roesler, & Pover, 1994). One group in Colorado lobbying to limit LGB rights claimed that people living a homosexual lifestyle were responsible for 50% of all child molestation; research conducted by Jenny and her
colleagues, however, demonstrated that abused children were unlikely to have been sexually molested by identifiably gay or lesbian people. In fact, of the cases in their study in which an adult molester was identified, the molester was an LGB-identified adult in only 2 of the 269 cases which was less than 1% (Jenny et al., 1994). The data on sexual abuse of children is clear: over 99% of the adults who sexually abuse children identify as heterosexual, and children are not exposed to any unique risks by having LGB parents (Barret & Logan, 2002). Despite the data, a non-profit religious corporation in the U.S., The Rutherford Institute, filed a brief in a Florida court in a 1995 case to highlight its fears with respect to LGB adoptions. The Rutherford Brief, as it has been dubbed, highlighted the following concerns:

1. “Children raised in homosexual households are more likely to become homosexual.”
2. “Children raised in homosexual households experience emotional problems associated with their parents’ homosexuality.”
3. Children raised in homosexual households share greater “risk of social or psychological problems.”
4. “Most homosexual parents [are] unable to provide emotional stability to their children” because they are promiscuous, “have an unhealthy attitude toward the opposite sex,” “have fleeting relationships,” and “experience extracurricular relationships” (New England Law Review, 2005, p. 592).

As we have seen in the literature already reviewed, such claims are unsubstantiated. Nevertheless, some people have clung to these seemingly baseless claims, either ignoring or being ignorant of evidence to the contrary. Until those myths no longer exist and are no longer
propagated by organizations aiming to limit the civil rights of lesbians, bisexuals, and gays, LGB families will occasionally or even daily confront stigmatization, disapproval, and judgement by others. Even in Canada, where same-sex adoption is legal nationwide, adults were fairly evenly divided in terms of their approval of same-sex adoption (Leger Marketing, 2001). Miall and March (2005) found even lower approval ratings with respect to same-sex male couples adopting, with only 19% of Canadian adults indicating their belief that it is “very acceptable” for gay males to adopt and 27% viewing gay male adoption as “somewhat acceptable”. One might wonder how such attitudes impact the children of LGB families. Indeed, the literature does provide evidence about the effects of myths and stigmatization on the identity formation of queer offspring.

Using a snowball sampling method, Gershon, Tschann, and Jeremin (1999) conducted interviews with 76 adolescent children of lesbian mothers. They found that adolescents who perceived more stigmatization had lower self-esteem in five of seven self-esteem areas compared to those who perceived less stigmatization, but they also pointed out that “the impact on a child because of societal attitudes about lesbianism should not be confused with the impact of a woman’s lesbianism on her child” (p. 442). Additionally, they observed that the relationship between perceived stigmatization and self-esteem was moderated by coping skills such as more developed decision-making skills (Gershon et al., 1999), a finding that has implications for parents and youth workers desiring to develop intervention and prevention strategies for children with LGB-identified parents. They also observed that even when adolescents perceived a high level of stigmatization, those who were more open about their mother’s sexual orientation scored higher on the “close friendship” self-esteem subscale (Gershon et al., 1999), but this correlation does not necessarily imply causation.
In one Canadian study (Dundas & Kaufman, 2000), 27 lesbian mothers and their children were interviewed. Their children, ages twelve and under, were only interviewed if sufficiently able to verbalize their stories. Although it was a relatively small convenience sample, the authors believed the children’s responses indicated, “They were content with their family make-up and did not feel stigmatized by having two mothers. They understood lesbianism as two women who lived together because they liked or loved each other and included in their descriptions of family all the people who cared about them” (p. 77). Because 14 of the 20 children were ages five and younger and did not elaborate in great detail, it is difficult to understand what factors had shielded them from stigmatization and impossible to predict whether their experience of not feeling stigmatized will continue as they grow older. The findings discussed earlier of Ray and Gregory’s study (2001) seemed to suggest that the effects of stigma would not become a factor until later in elementary school, thus rendering unsurprising the lack of experienced stigmatization by preschoolers in Dundas and Kaufman’s study. Additionally, because it was a small sample from a large urban centre, its results cannot necessarily be extrapolated to Canadian LGB family experiences as a whole.

Tasker and Golombok (1995), in their comparison of adults raised in lesbian homes and in heterosexual homes, found that young adults from lesbian-led families were no more likely to recall being bullied or teased than their heterosexual-family counterparts, at least not with respect to general types of bullying. They were, however, more likely to have been teased or bullied specifically about their own sexual orientation. This was the case particularly for boys from lesbian-led homes (Tasker & Golombok, 1995). It is widely known that LGB youth have often been the targets of teasing and bullying, as was evidenced in the earlier discussion of “The First National Climate Survey on Homophobia in Canadian Schools” (Taylor et al., 2008).
results of the survey also revealed that there are times when homophobic comments may be verbalized without being directed at anyone in particular. Examples include “that’s so gay” or the use of “fag”, “queer” or other derogatory terms from one heterosexual-identified person to another heterosexual-identified person (Burn, 2000). Burn’s study (2000) surveyed 138 heterosexual males and 119 heterosexual females – all of which were first year university psychology students – about the frequency of homosexual put-downs and anti-homosexual practices in which they engaged. She found that the use of derisive terminology is very common amongst heterosexual-identified males, particularly when they are in all-male groupings. Half of those who acknowledged their use of such words, however, reported that they did not have anti-gay attitudes but were actually participating in the behaviour out of mindless conformity and ignorance about how their actions might affect gay males (Burn, 2000). The precise nature of effects that exposure to homophobic environments might have on youth from LGB families is a research topic in need of further study.

Disclosure practices

The very fact that some children of LGB families choose not to be open about their parents’ sexual identity could be viewed as evidence of stigmatization and exposure to homophobia. Just as there is a wide variety of “coming out” stories for LGB individuals, there is wide variation amongst children with LGB-identified parents in terms of their willingness to be open, the extent to which they are open, and the age at which they begin to disclose this information to others. Tina Fakhrid-Deen (2010) describes the range of things she considered after learning as a ten-year-old that her mother was a lesbian:
First, we have to come to grips with having a gay parent. Then we have to figure out when, where, and with whom we feel comfortable and safe. Telling others the truth of our situation can be scary. Some family members will be more accepting than others. Some teachers will try to pry into your business. A few boyfriends or girlfriends may be turned off by the fact that you have a gay parent. Others won’t care in the least. Some friends will betray your confidence even if you tell them you don’t want them to share your secret with anyone (p. 59).

It should also be noted that because, like Fakhrid-Deen, the greatest majority of children in LGB families were born into the context of heterosexual-parent families before one of their parents disclosed a non-heterosexual identity, the timing of their parent’s disclosure further complicates many youths’ disclosure decisions. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Megan McGuire was a middle school student in the United States when her mother revealed her non-heterosexual identity. She recollected her feelings of anger and sadness. “No one I knew could know that I was living in a gay family” (McGuire, 1996, p. 182), she decided at the time.

Her experiences bear tremendous relevance to so many of the issues that have already been addressed such as school experiences, homophobic environments, and stigmatization. But they also strongly illustrate the complicated issues that youth with LGB parents consider when they navigate disclosure decisions about their family’s identity. Early adolescence is a time of identity establishment, and McGuire (1996) was in grade seven when she found out that her mother was a lesbian. One can easily imagine the potential confusion created by the intersection of multiple identities, none of which had yet been fully established, and none of which was
completely and intuitively an ideal fit on its own. The navigation of this intersection of multiple identities has not yet been empirically studied.

McGuire (1996) described her situation as “secretive”, a feeling with which many U.S. LGB servicemen can probably relate. For seventeen years, from 1994-2011, U.S. servicemen lived with “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” as a first step towards ending the harassment of gays and lesbians in the military (Heath, 2011). In a series of interviews with LGB individuals who served during this time, Heath revealed that silence can protect, but it can also be used as a powerful weapon to suppress. “There’s always been a fear that people would find out and then hold it over you for some kind of leverage,” admitted one navy lieutenant (Heath, 2011, p. 234). That bears striking similarity to Megan McGuire’s comment, “No one I knew could know that I was living in a gay family” (McGuire, 1996).

The lesbian mothers interviewed by Dundas and Kaufman (2000) believed strongly that homophobia would have less impact on self-worth and stress levels if they and their children were open about their family identity. The need to lie, the anger, and the sadness that McGuire attributed to guarding this secret are somewhat predictable consequences of what would be commonly referred to as “bottling up your feelings” instead of making the decision to be open. Years after finding out the her mother was a lesbian, McGuire published a story on the front page of the Cambridge Chronicle in which she openly told people she lived in a gay family. “I wanted people to know I felt I had betrayed my family by lying, and it was time for me to be honest,” she states to explain her decision to make her story public. “A week later, I spoke in front of a group of a hundred students, parents, staff, and city officials, telling them that words like fag, queer, dyke, and homo are words that hurt. Not only do these words hurt gay men and
women, but also their families and children, and we should not tolerate words that hurt and cause hatred” (McGuire, 1996).

McGuire’s decision to publicly disclose was motivated by a desire to remove her own personal burden of secrecy, but it was also motivated by her belief that she could play a role in educating others. Goldberg (2007) found similar reasons for disclosure by adults who had been raised by LGB parents. Adult offspring of LGB-identified parents likely encounter fewer situations where they feel as obligated to tell their peers about the sexual orientation of their parents, and indeed some participants in Goldberg’s study did not disclose about their families at all. Some youth with LGB-identified parents did not feel comfortable bringing their family out of the closet, and others may not have felt that it was appropriate or even necessary. The ones who did, however, did so for a variety of reasons. Like McGuire, some had a desire to educate. Others wanted to “screen out” homophobic individuals, essentially eliminating them as potential friends if they exhibited negative responses to the disclosure. Still others wanted their adult relationships to be open and therefore chose to tell their peers in the interest of transparency (Goldberg, 2007).

Some youth do not have a choice about how open they will be if they have a sibling who is extremely open about it or if they have LGB parents who are extremely open about their identity. Even when out-and-proud parents think that their children will be equally out-and-proud about their family identity, sometimes children make decisions to remain “in the closet”. Garner (2004) describes one gay couple whose sons had marched with them in Pride parades as toddlers. They had fully expected their sons would always be transparent about their family configuration and were surprised when one of their sons had concocted an elaborate story at camp to avoid disclosing that he had gay fathers. Garner reports one of the fathers stating,
“That’s what he needs to do right now to feel safe. Smart kid” (Garner, 2004, p. 96). These fathers could have been insulted or hurt, assuming that their son was ashamed of them. Instead, they viewed their child’s behaviour as a coping mechanism to deal with the realities of a homophobic world and gave him the space to navigate what could be considered his own “vicarious outness” (T. Biblarz, personal communication, August 31, 2012), just as they themselves had done when they came out as gay men. It should also be noted that, as discussed earlier in the context of school experiences, students in grades 11 and 12 sometimes feel that their friends have become ready to react more maturely and even with positive interest in the unique characteristics of an LGB-led family narrative (Ray & Gregory, 2001).

Advantages of having LGB-identified parents

Many offspring with LGB-identified parents realize at some point in their lives that their unique family configuration also provides a unique set of advantages. Earlier in the review of the literature, I mentioned the conclusions drawn by Short and her colleagues (2007) that the sons of lesbian women tended to be more self-aware, more skilled in communicating their feelings, and more empathetic to others. Such findings nicely illustrate Baumrind’s (1995) point that differences do not necessarily indicate deficits. With a similar philosophy at its core, some research has specifically addressed the question of whether having LGB-identified parents is at all advantageous to children.

Saffron (1998) suggests several advantages that arise when LGB individuals have children. First, offspring of LGB-identified parents will be in a unique position to educate society about LGB issues, giving them tremendous leverage to change the homophobic attitudes that are pervasive in our culture. Second, children with lesbian parents can see an alternative to
the gender inequality in our society that causes many women to be financially and in some cases emotionally dependent on men. Third, LGB parenting gives children an opportunity to have greater acceptance of differences in lifestyles, types of families, cultural and religious variations, and widespread political values (Saffron, 1998). There is no reason to believe that heterosexual parents cannot give their children similar opportunities, but there is perhaps a unique set of conditions that arises when the children of LGB-identified parents – most of whom fall into the majority category of heterosexuality themselves – are able to view society through the lens of the minority category that is theirs because of their queer family identity.

In addition to the aforementioned advantages of LGB-led families, Ray and Gregory (2001) reported that one common feature across all age groups from primary school to secondary school was that children felt that they were special and unique because of what their parents’ sexual orientation brought to their own sense of personal identity. One group of Australian students in a grade 3-6 support group composed a poem: “We are the children of the rainbow. We like the way we are. We don’t care what you say, so la di da di da” (Ray & Gregory, 2001, p. 33). Additionally, they reported being glad that they could socialize with the LGB community and enjoyed meeting other queer-identified people at events such as Mardi Gras and Pride (Ray & Gregory, 2001).

Summary of the Review of the Literature

The review of the literature presented definitions of key terms that will be used throughout the dissertation such as “LGB families” and “queer”. Next, various pathways were presented to explain the various ways that LGB families are formed. These include traditional conception, same-sex couple adoption, second-parent adoption, co-parenting, donor
insemination, and surrogacy. Then, the focus shifted to a summary of the evolution of laws that affect LGB-led families, first in Canada and then in the U.S. The review provided evidence to suggest that Canadian laws favourable to LGB families (i.e., laws that facilitate the dismantling of the master narrative of heteronormativity) have advanced at a more rapid pace than those in the United States, and a variety of reasons for these differential paces were explored.

The literature review then turned its attention to practical realities and outcomes for the children of lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents. Psychosocial outcomes were considered, and the evidence demonstrated that the quality of family relationships is more significant to a child’s well-being than the sexual orientation of his or her parents. Sexual identity development literature was also examined, giving the reader a sense of what has already been learned about the implications that having LGB parents has on the development of the gender identity, gender role behaviour, and sexual orientation of youth. School-related outcomes and issues were also discussed, with the bulk of the evidence demonstrating that despite many schools having somewhat homophobic environments, children from LGB families fare just as well as their peers from heterosexual-led families.

Lastly, literature pertaining to queer-family identity issues was presented. Narrative psychology literature that accounts for the development of LGB identity was briefly discussed to highlight the role that narrative engagement plays. The literature review also demonstrated that youth with LGB parents must make sense of a myriad of intersecting narratives. The effects of societal myths about LGB parents and of homophobia in general were discussed in relation to identity development for children from LGB-led homes. Descriptive evidence was presented about the experiences that youth have with regard to their decisions to disclose their family configurations to others. Finally, various potential advantages of having LGB-identified parents
were considered, with the outlook that differences between LGB-led homes and heterosexual-led homes do not need to imply deficits.

All of the literature presented serves to give us a better understanding of the issues at hand as we prepare to develop and execute the method of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to study the lived experiences of nine Ontario adolescents with queer-identified parents and to gain insight into the many narratives that shape the development of their personal identities. The plan outlined in the following chapter will enable an investigation of the ways in which youth with LGB-identified parents construct their own identities and navigate the intersection of a multiplicity of narratives drawn from their parents’ experiences, their own school experiences, and master narratives that stem from literary, historical, and cultural influences.
Chapter Three: Method

Introduction and Review of Research Questions

Bearing in mind the guiding research questions about the narratives of personal identity, lived experiences, and perceived needs of youth with LGB-identified parents, the current study was designed in such a way as to provide an opportunity for participants to articulate and explore their side of the phenomenon of having an LGB parent or parents, to tell the story of their own experience. This chapter’s purpose is to present a detailed description of the design of the study, including the theoretical underpinnings of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA, a method of analysis that incorporates hermeneutics and phenomenology, provides a framework for deepening an understanding of narratives of identity. The chapter will also serve to give a transparent description of participant selection, investigative procedure, and data analysis. Finally, this chapter of this dissertation will discuss the methodological biases and limitations of the current study.

Design of the Research Study

Selection of design

In the initial stages of researching the phenomenon of youth with LGB parents, a decision had to be made as to the most effective research approach. Beginning with the assumption that there is no one with greater expertise on the subject than the offspring themselves, I elected to investigate the lived experiences of those youth. In order to find out what youth with LGB-identified parents experience and how they engage with those experiences to develop a sense of personal identity, the most direct approach was to ask them to tell their stories. As is explained
below, a semi-standardized interview schedule was developed and implemented with nine participants. Responses were then analyzed using IPA.

*Semi-structured interview schedule construction*

The semi-structured interview schedule was constructed in a manner that made it consistent with some of the precedents set within the field of narrative psychology. Questions gave the participants opportunities to describe how they, as adolescents, were able to make meaning from their experiences and how they set about either embracing or challenging cultural master narratives such as heteronormativity.

Smith and Osborn (2003) acknowledge that there are various ways for IPA analysts to collect data. While researchers could employ journals, diaries, blogs, questionnaires, email dialogue, or other personal accounts, many IPA researchers (e.g., Reid et al., 2005) assert that one-on-one interviews permit the researcher and participant to work together in flexible collaboration. Indeed, Smith and Osborn contend that semi-structured interviews are the “best” and most common choice for IPA because they allow the researcher and participant to converse in a way that allows the initial questions to be modified, responses to be probed, questions to be asked in varying orders, and worthy topics explored that might not have arisen until the interview was in progress. I made a decision to take Smith and Osborn’s suggestion of using semi-structured interviews a step further, making room for revisions of the schedule from one interview to the next. This “snowball” construction approach meant that I asked later participants some questions that were not asked of earlier interviewees rather than adhering inflexibly to the original schedule. The earlier interviewees’ responses served as the inspiration for topics that seemed worthy of further exploration. For example, when one participant spoke
of the lack of a consistently used term to describe “children of LGB parents”, I began to tease out the issue of terminology in subsequent interviews. The final version of the interview schedule can be found in appendix E.

Inspiration for the content of the interview questions came from several sources. First, I attended a course at Toronto’s “519” community centre, where a panel of youth with LGB-identified parents was presenting to a group of LGB women and men who were considering becoming parents. “Dykes Planning Tykes” and “Daddies and Papas 2B” were classes offered simultaneously by the 519 Centre, and on the evening of the youth panel presentation the two classes were merged. During the presentation, I took field notes to gather a list of topics that were brought up in the participants’ presentations. Some of these later evolved into interview questions on the topics of “defender tendencies” and “political awareness,” among others. I also spoke with facilitators of both courses (Rachel Epstein and Chris Veldhoven, respectively), to ask for their insights and to invite their suggestions for what new information might be helpful to would-be parents, to youth with LGB parents, and to themselves as service providers for LGB-led families.

In addition to inspiration from members of the local community and leaders of community organizations, the *Thematic Apperception Test* (TAT), developed by Murray and Morgan, provided the impetus for another part of the interview, the storytelling section. As previously mentioned, the TAT was designed to evaluate how the participant relates socially and emotionally to others as well as how they perceive power dynamics within their social structure (Ungureanu, 2011). Instead of using any of the original TAT images, however, I chose images that might evoke stories about the experience of living in a queer-led family (see Appendix F). Prompts were used that mirrored TAT prompts (e.g., “What are the characters thinking, feeling,
or wishing?”), but a maximum of three images were shown, thus eliciting a maximum of three stories from the participants instead of larger numbers that are elicited when the TAT is the primary or sole research tool. The transcription of the storytelling portion of the interview was analyzed in the same manner as the rest of the interview rather than as a stand-alone component. In addition to images being used as stimuli for storytelling, two vignettes were included in the schedule to ask participants if they had experienced anything similar to the events described in the vignettes (e.g., “Some youth with LGB-identified parents report peers asking questions such as, ‘If you have two dads, how were you born?’ Have you ever experienced anything along those lines?”). The stimulus prompts came from direct quotations of youth with queer parents, as recorded in Ray and Gregory’s (2001) study of school experiences for this population.

Certainly, the bulk of the interview material was derived from the review of the literature. The work of Charlotte Patterson (e.g., Patterson, 2006 and 2009; Patterson & Wainright, 2007) was particularly informative about our current understanding of issues that are important to LGB parents and their children. There were also excellent articles that spoke to the school experiences of queer youth and of youth with queer parents (e.g., Bauer & Goldstein, 2003; Ray & Gregory, 2001; Taylor, et al., 2008). Any researchers considering the development of their own semi-structured interview schedule would be well advised to read “All Children Matter” (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011), a comprehensive needs assessment that was released in the United States after my research was already underway.

A source of inspiration for the format of the interview came from a fellow graduate student, Ljiljana Vuletic, who had the same academic supervisor as me at the University of Toronto and was also taking a narrative psychology approach to investigate the development of
personal identity. Although she was working with a population of autistic adults (Vuletic, 2010), I saw value in using a similar format that would begin with introductory questions about the individual’s demographic details and personal identity before moving on to questions about their experience with the phenomenon of interest. Smith and Osborn (2003) echo this sentiment in their suggestion to schedule more sensitive topics later in the interview to allow for the development of interviewer-interviewee rapport. Another source of inspiration for the format of the interview was drawn from *The Life Story Interview* (McAdams, 2008) which, as aforementioned, has an elegant approach to asking questions about an individual’s past experiences, present realities, and future expectations; through this process, interviewees are given an opportunity to make sense of their own experiences and to develop a sense of the continuity of the self across the lifespan (McLean, 2008). McAdams’ approach helped me to develop an appropriate sequencing of questions, but the semi-structured nature of the interview permitted flexibility to rearrange questions if a participant spontaneously brought up a topic before I had raised it in the interview.

*Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)*

As mentioned in chapter one, IPA is an inductive (i.e., bottom up) approach that sets out to discover and investigate the ways that participants bring meaning to their lived experiences (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). As Reid and her colleagues acknowledge, participants are assumed to be the experts who can offer investigators access to their thoughts and feelings through the narrative process. In the current study, IPA does not set out to test a hypothesis about the experiences of youth with LGB parents or to compare them to youth with heterosexual
parents. Instead, its aim is to ask broad research questions which lead to the collection of more expansive data (Smith, 2004).

Qualitative researchers use methods such as IPA because they are more concerned with finding the *quality* that is essential to the nature of things than with finding a *quantity* of things (Dabbs, 1982, p. 32). I wanted to determine what youth with LGB parents experienced and how those experiences affected them. I did not seek to draw attention to any quantitative element of their experience, so I did not ask them how many times they faced discrimination or how frequently their parents’ sexual orientation affected them. IPA was a strong approach to get to the essence of their lived experience.

*Researcher positionality: Addressing the “I” in IPA*

IPA is a qualitative research method that relies heavily on the researcher’s ability to interpret the experiences of participants. Potential subjectivity cannot be denied when dealing with interpretations of experiences, since both the words “interpretations” and “experiences” have subjective connotations. IPA draws upon hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), as one of its theoretical foundations. Smith and colleagues (2010) highlighted the “double hermeneutic” nature of IPA when they pointed out that the “researcher is making sense of the participant trying to make sense of*x*” (p. 35). In reality, of course, researchers never have direct conduits to the experiences of their participants (Ross, 2009). With regard to the current study, youth with queer parents are in the midst of processing what it means to have an LGB parent. They may or may not articulate their experience in a way that captures its essence. My role was to make sense of whatever verbal account the participants offered.
Like all researchers, however, I was bound to draw from my own narratives and worldview as I made sense of my participants’ experiences. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed, and I returned to the original recordings frequently throughout the analysis phase so there were no issues of memory reconstruction. However, I still needed to be cognisant of the roles played by my own rhetorical goals, biases, experiences in the past, and in the current context (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). As an active participant in the IPA process, having this awareness was necessary when examining the data. Denzin stated, “Interpretative research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher” (1989, p.12), which suggests that even my choice of topic was influenced by my previous experiences and biases. Brocki and Wearden (2006) acknowledge that a best practice for IPA researchers is to offer appropriate reflections on the analytic process if there is room for argument about the impact that researcher biases could have on the final narrative account. The following is a summary of some of the experiences that might reveal reasons for my interest in the study and might have influenced my analytical interpretations of the data.

I was born in 1969 as the youngest of six children and was raised in a devoutly religious home by a mother and a father who were both ordained ministers in a Protestant Christian denomination. Our home could be described as politically conservative and strict but happy. Most of our family and social activities revolved around our involvement with the church, and most of my childhood friends were also from religious families. Prior to my adulthood, my family had lived in three different Canadian provinces.

As an adult, I decided to pursue a career in teaching and have been an Ontario Certified Teacher since 1991. During more than two decades as a teacher, I have taught a variety of grade levels and subjects. Most of my teaching experiences have been at the middle and high school
levels, and I have taught in Canada, Belgium, and South Korea. I am the only one of my immediate family to have entered the teaching profession.

My parents have been married for over fifty years, and my five older siblings all identify as heterosexual. Each of them is married and has children. In contrast to my brothers and sisters, I am a gay single male with no children. I came out to my siblings and parents in 2008, and their initial responses were consistent with conservative Christian interpretations of homosexuality. Since 2008, their attitudes have softened somewhat. I am currently in the process of investigating possible pathways to parenthood as a single, gay male. My decision to interview youth with LGB parents is largely driven by a desire to hear the stories that could one day mirror the experiences of my own children.

My current worldview is doubtlessly influenced by my experiences living in various regions of Canada and on three different continents. Unlike my family members, I regard myself as non-religious and politically liberal by comparison. While it is impossible to fully escape one’s own subjectivity, I believe that I was well-positioned to undertake this study for the following reasons. First, my family upbringing afforded me the opportunity to view things from religious and political viewpoints that differ from my own current viewpoints. Secondly, my relatively late coming out process allowed me to identify with some LGB parents that also may have come out late, in some cases after having had children with a heterosexual partner. Finally, my experiences as a teacher allowed me to feel comfortable interviewing adolescents and gave me the ability to relate to the stories that my participants told about their experiences in a school setting.
Theoretical underpinnings of IPA: Addressing the “P” in IPA

To better understand the research method used in the current study, it is useful to examine the epistemological position of IPA. As was previously mentioned, hermeneutics is a major theoretical underpinning of IPA that allows us to consider the “interpretative” nature of this research approach. Another pillar of IPA is phenomenology, a philosophical approach to the study of experience. A core principle guiding the work of phenomenologists is their constant return to the source to focus on experience in its own terms (Smith, 2010). On the basis of this philosophical belief, IPA researchers make participants central to their research. Because I was interested in the phenomenon of youth with LGB parents, I conducted a careful investigation of their lived experience with this phenomenon, endeavouring to understand the essence of the experience for each participant and then searching for patterns that emerged across the group of nine participants. Creswell (2007, p. 58) points out that “the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence.”

Discourse analysis is a qualitative approach that is somewhat sceptical of relying too heavily on verbal reports as a representation of experience; IPA, in contrast, desires to understand what participants think or believe about the phenomenon of interest (Chapman & Smith, 2002). My participants’ stories were not presumed to be objective accounts of their experiences in LGB families; rather, they were subjective and personal accounts of the objects or events (Smith, 1996) that were and are part of their thoughts and beliefs regarding the phenomenon of having queer parents.

IPA acknowledges the role of subjectivity for both the participant and the analyst. Because of this subjectivity and due to the typically small sample sizes employed in IPA, another of its major underpinnings is its idiographic focus (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Idiography
suggests that one be unapologetic in accepting the value of a single case. I was able to make claims about the essence of the experience of having queer parents *for my participants*, but I did not make nomothetic claims about the entire population. For that reason, as will be shown in the upcoming discussion of the analysis, I took a great deal of care with one case before moving onto another and before attempting to search for any connections between them.

In summary, the epistemology of IPA reveals that it is built upon principles of hermeneutics, phenomenology, and idiography. My study is hermeneutic in its effort to interpret the reported experiences of youth with LGB parents. It is phenomenological in its aspiration to understand and “give voice” (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p. 102) to the offspring of queer parents. Finally, it is an idiographic study in that conclusions were made about the experiences of the nine participants with whom I spoke rather than assumptions drawn about all children with LGB parents.

*Ethical Considerations*

Before recruiting participants or collecting data, I secured approval from the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto. As well as outlining my participant inclusion criteria and participation invitation strategies (see below), I provided evidence to the Office of Research Ethics that there were more possible benefits to the participants than risks. For example, I stated that by processing some of their experiences as a child of LGB parents, they might have an opportunity to articulate some things that had been on their minds. Additionally, I suggested that the interview experience itself might be an empowering opportunity to realize that their willingness to speak up might make a difference for other youth with LGB parents. Finally, I highlighted the potential for the research to contribute to the scientific literature, to meaningful
curricular and policy change, and to the enriched experiences of LGB-led families. With the potential benefits far outweighing any potential risks on the research risk/benefit scale (e.g., Berg, 2007, p. 59), the Office of Research Ethics approved the research study. To prepare for the unlikely event that the interview experience was in some way troubling to the participants, I gave each of them a resource list of websites and phone numbers (see Appendix D). A small number of participants stated that they already knew about all of the resources listed, but others said that most of the resources were ones they had not previously encountered.

Participants

“Youth with LGB parents” is a relatively narrow segment of society, but there is a wide variety of experiences within this group. Some youth are from-the-get-go children who begin their lives in a queer-led home. Others begin their lives with access to a heterosexual-led family narrative and then, when a parent comes out later in life, transition to new realities with a parent who identifies as non-heterosexual. As was aforementioned, IPA is idiographic and makes no claims to represent an entire population; therefore, I make no claims here that the sample is a representative one. Even so, several criteria for participant inclusion were used to ensure some level of homogeneity within the group of participants interviewed.

Criteria for inclusion

The criteria for inclusion in the study required that each participant must have at least one parent who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Additionally, they needed to be a current or recent student in an Ontario secondary school as defined by an anticipated high school graduation date between 2009-2014. Each recruit needed to have lived in Ontario for a
minimum of five years and be conversant in English. Finally, they needed to be capable of giving informed consent.

**Participant invitation**

A convenience sampling method was used. Emails were sent to individuals, families, and agencies known to have connections to queer communities throughout Ontario. Some agencies such as the LGBT Parenting Network and the queer-friendly Downtown Soccer Toronto league agreed to post advertisements (see Appendices A and B) in the community information section of their websites. In most cases, it was the parent who made first contact with me, but in two cases it was the participant who contacted me directly to ask to be included. One lesbian mother contacted me wanting her younger children (9 and 11) to be interviewed, but they were not recruited because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Their mother stated, “I have noted over the past several years that, almost exclusively, the research on kids of queers focuses on teens […]. A sense of separate identity begins well before the teens hit! So why not start to talk with our children when they are 11, 9, 6, 4, 3?” Her observations were noted and perhaps provide an indication that continued research is needed for all offspring from queer parents, throughout the entire lifespan. In any case, although those two children could not be included in my study, all other eligible youth \((N=9)\) who expressed interest were interviewed. Each participant was given a $10.00 gift card as a small gesture of appreciation for their participation.

**Demographics**

Three of the participants identified as male, and six identified as female. All participants were Canadian-born English speakers currently or recently enrolled in Ontario high schools,
ranging in age from 13 to 19 years old, with a mean age of 17.5. Six of the nine participants had attended only public schools, one had attended only public Catholic schools, and the remaining two had attended both public and public Catholic schools. Five of the students were still in high school; of the remaining four, one was taking time to earn money prior to beginning university, and the others were enrolled in universities.

In terms of their connection to LGB parents, two of the participants were “from the get-go” children whose parents were out at the time of their birth; of these, one was born into a home led by a single lesbian woman who had used donor insemination, and the other was born into a home led by two lesbian women who had used donor insemination. The remaining seven participants were born into opposite-gender-led homes. In each of those seven cases, a parent came out at some point during their childhood. Their ages at the time when their parent came out ranged from 6 to 13, with a mean age of 9.5. Only one of the participants had a biological father who currently identified as gay; one had a participant who had a mother and a father who each currently identified as bisexual; for the remaining seven participants it was a biological mother who now identified as a lesbian. Table 2, shown below, provides a summary of some of pertinent demographic information for the nine participants of the study.

In terms of their living arrangements, the three university students stated that they currently resided in dormitories or with housemates but had lived with their lesbian mothers during high school. Of the other six participants, four of them had a 50-50 living arrangement with their biological mother and biological father, and two lived with their biological mothers. All nine of the participants lived with their LGB parent either 50% or 100% of the time.

Eight of the nine participants had at least one stepparent and at least one stepsibling. All nine of the participants stated that one of their biological parents currently had a partner. The
participants varied in the degree to which they regarded these stepparents or partners as parental figures.

Eight of the participants were Caucasian, and one was of South Asian descent. None expressed a strong religious identity for themselves or their parents, but three identified some parental affiliation to protestant Christianity, one to Catholicism, and two to secular/reformed Judaism.

Table 2: Participant demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Shane</th>
<th>Christie</th>
<th>Owen</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Denise</th>
<th>Nick</th>
<th>Ellie</th>
<th>Julia</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
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</tr>
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<td>Middle</td>
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<td>Middle</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent with whom participant resides</td>
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<td>50% mom, 50% dad</td>
<td>50% mom, 50% dad</td>
<td>50% mom, 50% dad</td>
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<td>House mates</td>
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<td>Mom</td>
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<td>8-10</td>
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<td>7-8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of full siblings</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of step siblings</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consent and confidentiality

All participants had general information about the study before meeting me (the interviewer) for the first time. They had all received the recruitment message (see Appendix A) and had an opportunity to ask questions via email or telephone prior to meeting. When we met, either in their home or in a lab meeting room at the University of Toronto, I explained to them that their participation was voluntary and made every effort to ensure that they did not feel any sense of coercion to take part in the study. They were instructed that they could, at any time, choose to refrain from answering or to withdraw from the study. They were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix C); if the participants were under the age of 16, their parents were also asked to sign a form in accordance with Ontario’s Child and Family Services Act (1990).

Interviews were conducted in one-on-one settings that provided privacy for participants without their parents present. I explained to them that their responses would not be linked to their own names and gave them the option of choosing their own pseudonyms, although none of them availed themselves of this option. For the purposes of this paper, aliases have been used, and any identifying information such as the names of parents, schools, and cities has been altered. Like Creswell (2007), I believed that a higher level of trust and support would be gained from participants if I was very clear with them about the steps that would be taken to secure confidentiality.

Introducing the participants

The results of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (presented and discussed in subsequent chapters) take into account the themes that emerged from the combined responses of the nine participants. When reducing their collective experiences to summarize the essence of
the phenomenon of having LGB parents, it is important to retain participants’ voices. Indeed, Osborn and Smith (1998) remind IPA researchers that the presentation of evidence is one means of ensuring the internal validity of a qualitative study. To facilitate the presentation of evidence, the reader must first be given information about each of the participants interviewed. A summary of each youth – given the pseudonyms Shane, Christie, Owen, Anna, Julia, Denise, Nick, Ellie, and Victoria – will be written in present tense to describe the interviewees as they presented themselves at the time of their meeting with the researcher.

“Shane” is a thirteen-year-old male and is enrolled in grade nine at a public school in a midsize urban centre. Beginning with kindergarten, he has attended four different schools. He has no part-time job, reports that he does not do any kind of volunteer work, and is heavily involved in sports. He has one older biological brother and one older biological sister. Together, they have lived in Ontario for all of Shane’s life.

Shane describes himself as athletic, courageous, generous, and caring. “I would do anything for anyone,” he claims. “Like, I would put them before me.” He was the youngest of the nine participants and had fairly limited exposure to the LGB community relative to the other participants interviewed. His relatively young age and his relative naïveté regarding queer politics may account for his tendency to give shorter, less developed answers than other participants. Overall, he presents himself as somewhat timid, sweet, gentle, and kind.

Shane reports that at the time of his birth, his biological mother and father were in a heterosexual marriage. He recalls his parents separating when he was approximately seven years of age. When he was eight or nine his mother told him, “I have a new friend,” referring to a lesbian romantic partner. His mother later became legally married to a woman, and Shane now spends equal time at his mother’s home and his father’s home, alternating from week to week.
He reports that his biological father and his biological mother are still on very good terms despite being divorced.

“Christie” is a sixteen-year-old female and is enrolled in grade 11 at a public Catholic school in a midsize urban centre. Beginning with kindergarten, she has attended two different schools. She has a part-time job, does regular volunteer work, and is heavily involved in sports. She has one younger biological brother. Together, they have lived in Ontario for all of Christie’s life.

Christie describes herself as active, understanding, and caring. She views herself as “really relaxed most of the time” and muses that her relaxed demeanour and sense of humour might make her someone that her friends come to for help when they need it. Her nurturing tendencies were evident even during the interview process; she asked me if it would be alright to give me a hug at the conclusion of the interview. Overall, she presents herself as kind, compassionate, and approachable.

Christie reports that at the time of her birth, her biological mother and father were in a heterosexual marriage. She recalls her parents separating prior to grade six, and it was not until she was twelve or thirteen years of age that she asked her father if he was gay. “He had this one guy friend that he’d bring over all the time,” she said. “There was this one moment where I really noticed. They were in the kitchen, and they were cooking beside each other, and they were just, you know, being all cute, and I was like ‘Hmm!’ So my dad went downstairs, and I’m like, ‘Dad, are you gay?’ and he’s like, ‘Yes.’” Neither of her parents has remarried, but both currently have boyfriends. Christie now spends equal time at her mother’s home and her father’s home, alternating from week to week. She reports that her biological father and her biological mother still get along very well despite being divorced.
“Owen” is a sixteen-year-old male and is enrolled in grade eleven at a public school in a midsize urban centre. Beginning with kindergarten, he has attended four different schools. He has no regular part-time job, but he does a lot of volunteer work and is heavily involved in sports. He has one younger biological brother and one older biological sister. Together, they have lived in Ontario for all of Owen’s life.

Owen describes himself as athletic, forgiving, and not easily angered. He states that he is outgoing but that this was not always the case. “It’s been quite recently,” he acknowledges. “I just had my basic group of friends, but then I expanded because I started to talk more and, like, meet new people.” He reveals that he can be somewhat shy and “shinks down” when in the presence of personalities that he perceives to be more dominant than his own. He also acknowledges that he is somewhat bothered by his acne condition, something that affects his confidence at times. At the outset of the interview, he seems quite hesitant on occasion, prefacing many of his answers with, “I don’t know.” As interviewer-interviewee rapport develops, it becomes clear that he has a genuine desire to answer questions thoughtfully and accurately. Overall, he presents himself as self-aware, sweet, and honest.

Owen reports that at the time of his birth, his biological mother and father were in a heterosexual marriage. He recalls his parents separating when he was approximately eight years of age, recalling that they had a “family meeting” where his parents revealed that his father was going to move out of the house. Within the next year or two, his mother began to have other people over, eventually revealing that she was a lesbian. His mother later became legally married to a woman, and Owen now theoretically spends equal time at his mother’s home and his father’s home. Although he is supposed to alternate from week to week, he acknowledges that he spends
more time at his father’s home because that is closer to the school he attends. He reports that his biological father and his biological mother remain close despite being divorced.

“Anna” is a female youth who is three days shy of her eighteenth birthday. Although she has graduated from high school in a midsize urban centre and has received an offer of admission from a university, she is choosing to return to a public high school for one more semester. Beginning with kindergarten, she has attended four different schools. She has a part-time job in retail but does not do any regular volunteer work. She has two younger biological brothers. Together, they have lived in Ontario for all of Anna’s life. She states that some members of her family are affiliated with the Lutheran church, but she herself is not religious.

Anna describes herself as outspoken, hard-headed, controlling, and opinionated. “I do just speak my mind, and whatever’s on my mind I’ll just say it”, she acknowledges. She also hints that she is not easily influenced when she says, “I don’t really get pushed to someone else’s view very easily because I’m strong in what I view in life.” Anna does not feel that she is in good physical shape and is somewhat bothered by this. In other ways, however, her confidence is evidenced by her impassioned answers and her blunt, articulate delivery. She maintains a level of cordiality in the interviewer-interviewee relationship, but some of this could be accounted for by the fact that she self-identifies as being “shy” in certain social circumstances. Overall, she presents herself as assertive and as a strong believer in equality for all.

Anna reports that at the time of her birth, her biological mother and father were in a heterosexual marriage. She recalls her parents separating when she was approximately ten years of age. Within the next year or two, her mother met someone, and Anna deduced that her mother was in a same-sex relationship. “She would be, like, on the phone every night, but she hadn’t come out and told us she was gay,” recounts Anna, “so I kind of guessed that she was, just from
the fact that they would always talk on the phone, and it was different than, like, a friendship.”
Anna reveals, however, that her mother eventually told her children directly about her identity as a lesbian woman. Her mother later became legally married to a lesbian partner, and Anna now lives with her biological mother one week and her biological father the next. She reports that her biological father and her biological mother continue to have an excellent relationship. “My dad was the best man at my mom’s wedding,” she proudly reveals, highlighting the extent to which her parents have remained friends despite their marital separation.

“Denise” is a seventeen-year-old female and an Ontario secondary school graduate now in her first year of university in a large urban centre. Beginning with kindergarten, she has attended five schools leading up to her high school graduation. She does not currently have any employment or volunteer responsibilities. She has one older biological brother and one older biological sister. Together, they have lived in Ontario for all of Denise’s life.

Denise describes herself as eager to learn, a social risk taker, somewhat nerdy, and well-rounded. “Sometimes people can take what I’m saying a bit bluntly, and then that causes arguments,” she acknowledges. “I’m a little less concerned with what people are thinking of me, so I’m kind of more quick to take the risk and say what I’m thinking.” She is extremely chatty, conversing easily with the interviewer for two and a half hours. Overall, she presents herself as bubbly, pleasant, articulate, and highly engaged in the opportunity to talk about her experiences.

Denise reports that at the time of her birth, her biological mother and biological father were in a heterosexual marriage. Although she does not specify when each of her parents began to identify as bisexual, she recalls them separating roughly around the time when she was six years of age, and it was shortly thereafter that she was introduced to the woman who is now her mother’s same-sex spouse. From that point on, Denise grew up in the custody of her two
mothers. She uses the phrase “my residential family” to highlight the fact that it is the people she lives with who function together in a fashion that corresponds to her concept of family. She regards her father as her biological father but is reluctant to give him the title “parent” because of his relative absence in her life and her belief that he has not functioned as a parent for her or for her siblings. She describes her stepmother as a parent but is frank about some of the child-stepmother relationship struggles encountered in their home.

“Nick” is an eighteen-year-old male and is enrolled in grade 12 at a public school in a small Ontario city. Beginning with kindergarten, he has attended six different schools. In addition to being a full-time student, he also works 30 hours per week to save money for his post-secondary education. He is also an active volunteer in his school and community. He has one younger biological brother. Together, they have lived in Ontario for all of Nick’s life.

Nick describes himself as hardworking, selfless, and funny. “I know I’m hardworking,” he claims, “because I’m pretty much the only student who pulls out a 30-hour work week and goes to school. And everything I do, I just give it all I have.” To clarify what he means by the word selfless, Nick states, “When it comes to my friends and family, I always try to put everyone else first.” He concedes that there are times when he takes on his friends’ burdens and is reluctant to seek help, even when his friends’ problems give him the sense of being in over his head. In some ways, Nick comes across as wise beyond his years. Overall, he presents himself as mature, responsible, and a strong advocate for social justice.

Nick reports that at the time of his birth, his biological mother and father were in a heterosexual marriage. He recalls his parents’ separation, when he was a thirteen-year-old, as being a very tumultuous time. He recounts stories of his father becoming increasingly abusive as the marriage began to unravel. Eventually, Nick’s mother took her two sons to a shelter in a
nearby city. During their stay in the shelter, his mother revealed to the boys that she was a lesbian. Nick explains that his biological mother now has a significant partner but is not legally married. His father has remarried, but Nick does not regard his father’s new wife as a parental figure. Nick has limited contact and involvement with his father, who pays the required child support but does not help with other financial matters such as expenses related to post-secondary education. His biological mother and his biological father do not have an amicable relationship.

“Ellie” is a nineteen-year-old female and a graduate of a high school in a small Ontario city. She is now enrolled in her second year of university. Beginning with kindergarten, she has attended seven different schools. She works part-time in the food and beverage industry and does a small amount of volunteer work. She has two older biological brothers. Together, they have lived in Ontario for all of Ellie’s life.

Ellie describes herself as open-minded, bubbly, outgoing, and trustworthy. “I’m a very happy person,” she reveals. “Not much gets me down.” In terms of her relationship with friends she states, “I’m more open-minded than most people think. And I think that’s why people, like, aren’t afraid to share things with me.” She describes her high school experience as being “pretty bad” and reveals a number of bullying-related incidents. As the interviewer-interviewee rapport builds, Ellie becomes increasingly willing to make herself vulnerable. She reveals “guys” as her biggest weakness, stating, “I always tend to date the worst guys imaginable.” Overall, she presents herself as friendly, sweet, honest, and somewhat fragile.

Ellie reports that at the time of her birth, her biological mother and father were in a heterosexual marriage. She recalls being approximately seven or eight years old when her parents split up and she began to learn that her mother was a lesbian. “I was eight,” she recalls, “My mom…told me that she was in a relationship with this woman…and I remember being like
‘I know. I see you guys, like, holding hands and, like, you’re always together.’ I remember just
telling her, like, I knew.” Ellie reveals that she accepted her mother’s sexual orientation more
easily than her brothers did. She states that her biological father has since remarried and that her
biological mother has a lesbian partner. Her biological parents do not have an amicable
relationship with one another, and Ellie acknowledges that she also has a rather tumultuous
relationship with her father.

“Julia” is a nineteen-year-old female and a high school graduate who has taken a year
off prior to enrolling in university. Beginning with kindergarten, she has attended five schools in
a large urban centre leading up to her high school graduation. Although she is searching for full-
time work to finance her future plans for university, she is currently a part-time worker and is
concurrently involved in a number of volunteer capacities. She has no biologically-related
siblings and has always lived in Ontario.

Julia describes herself as outgoing, bubbly, inquisitive, passionate, and impatient. “I
always have questions,” she states. “I always ask questions. I like to know things. I like to be in
the loop.” She acknowledges as well that she has a tendency to come across as somewhat abrupt
at times, a quality that sometimes creates tension in her relationships. “It can be very
intimidating and very off-putting when you’re very confident in your views,” she admits.
Overall, she presents herself as honest, unreserved, and confident.

Julia reports that she was a “from the get-go” child, born to a single lesbian mother who
used anonymous donor insemination. Her mother later married a woman, and their blended
family now consists of Julia, her mother, her stepmother, and her stepbrothers.

“Victoria” is a nineteen-year-old female and a high school graduate from a large urban
centre. She is now in her second year of university studies. Beginning with kindergarten, she
has attended five schools leading up to her high school graduation. She is not currently working but is actively involved in a variety of volunteer organizations. She has one biological sibling, an older brother, and regards one other individual as a brother because of her concept of “chosen family.” Victoria has always lived in Ontario with her family.

Victoria describes herself as caring, generous, talkative, and opinionated. She explains that it is in her nature to be concerned for others. “I’ve just always wanted to make sure everyone was okay,” she claims. Victoria has a good sense of humour about herself. “I probably dominate most conversations,” she admits through laughter. “I’m working on that.” Victoria is very well-informed about queer politics, and she seems very aware of research aims and objectives even as she is responding to questions. Overall, she presents as confident, highly politicized, very cautious with her choice of words, and intensely passionate about making progress for queer youth and for youth with queer parents.

Victoria reports that she was a “from the get-go” child, born to a lesbian couple who used anonymous donor insemination. Her mothers later separated, and it was at that time that she realized the ways in which her situation differed from most of her peers who had heterosexual parents. She states, “When my parents broke up that’s when I was like, ‘Oh my god, I’m going to have, like, four moms. That’s crazy.’” Both of her mothers did indeed find new partners. Victoria feels that her two mothers still have a good relationship with one another, and that she herself has a good rapport with each of the four maternal figures in her life.
**Procedure**

*Participant interviews*

Participants were given the opportunity to be individually interviewed in their own homes or in a lab meeting room at the University of Toronto. Six participants chose to be interviewed at home, and three participants chose to be interviewed at the university. All interviews were conducted in a manner that ensured privacy. Initially, it was anticipated that the interview process would be too lengthy to be conducted in one sitting. Thus, the interview was originally arranged in two parts with a lunch break; the plan was to provide a $10.00 gift card so that interviewees could have lunch at a local restaurant before continuing with the second half of the interview. After the first participant’s interview, however, it seemed that a lunch break would not be necessary. Instead, all other participants were given the option of taking a short break. The interviews ranged in length from 70-150 minutes with a mean length of 93 minutes.

**Data Analysis: Addressing the “A” in IPA**

*Variations across researchers’ approaches to IPA*

IPA is an interpretative phenomenological method of analysis. IPA researchers who use semi-structured interviews tend to agree that verbatim transcription is a useful starting point (e.g., Smith, 2010; Reid et al., 2005). Following the transcription, however, there are many routes, none of which is always the most suitable choice for yielding a set of themes that capture the essence of the participants’ experience.

Smith and his colleagues (2009) recommend using the following steps of analysis:

**Step 1:** Reading and re-reading;

**Step 2:** Initial noting of descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual features;
Step 3: Developing emergent themes;
Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes;
Step 5: Moving to the next case and repeating steps 1-4;
Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases.

Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008) break down the process in a different manner:

Stage 1: First encounter with text;
Stage 2: Preliminary themes identified;
Stage 3: Grouping themes together as clusters;
Stage 4: Tabulating themes in a summary table.

While both approaches are similar, their differences illustrate that an IPA researcher is not bound to a rigidly defined, recipe-like set of steps that must be followed. I chose to approach the process with the following steps, each of which is explained and justified below:

Step 1: Personal journaling immediately following each interview;
Step 2: Transcription;
Step 3: Personal journaling following first read-through of each transcript;
Step 4: Reading and re-reading, while listening to original audio;
Step 5: Initial noting of descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual features;
Step 6: Intra-case development of emergent themes;
Step 7: Inter-case search for thematic patterns and clusters;
Step 8: Tabulating themes in a summary table.
Step 1: Personal journaling immediately following each interview

Because of the large amount of data expected in conducting nine in-depth interviews, I believed that it would be valuable to keep a journal of some of my reflections during the process. A total of 14 hours of audio translated roughly to 100 hours of transcription time, and so I took an opportunity after each interview to self-reflect with regard to some of my observations, thoughts, reactions, and feelings while they were still fresh.

Creswell (2007) pointed out that IPA researchers are among many qualitative researchers who employ analytic or self-reflective memos. He illustrated this assertion by stating that some grounded theory researchers also use memos “to document and enrich the analytic process, to make implicit thoughts explicit, and to expand the data corpus” as well as to document “personal reactions to participants’ narratives” (p. 290). Berg (2007) also maintains that subjective reflections are a valuable part of field notes, along with a variety of other types of notes and descriptions recorded during the interview itself. These reflective memos were useful during later stages of analysis when I was immersed in the data; re-reading the journal allowed me to step back from the fine-grained analytical process to remember what my initial reactions and “gut feelings” had been.

Step 2: Transcription

Some researchers (e.g., Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) estimate that each hour of audio will take approximately seven hours to transcribe at a level of detail that is sufficient for IPA. Because transcripts can be used for a variety of analytic purposes, it must be made clear that IPA seeks to examine the meaning of the content put forth during the interview. Thus, IPA transcription does not require strict attention to the precise length of pauses or to non-verbal
utterances (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), and yet it cannot afford to be dismissive of elements that might later prove to be of interest during the initial noting of descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual features of the conversation.

Conversation analysis sometimes employs naturalized transcription (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). In naturalized transcription, utterances are described in exhaustive detail with attention given to time gaps measured in tenths of seconds, emphasis of particular words or syllables, involuntary vocalizations, etc. In denaturalized transcription (Oliver et al., 2005), grammar is corrected, all non-verbal utterances are removed, pauses are ignored, etc. Many IPA researchers, including myself, see value in taking a middle ground with respect to transcription approaches. Beginning with the end in mind, I saw no value in a naturalized approach of measuring the length of pauses but knew that some long pauses had the potential to reveal something about the participants’ experiences. I saw no value in the denaturalized approach of correcting participants’ grammar and removing every “um” or “like” but knew that some non-verbal utterances might help to elucidate the experiences of my participants. The approach taken was, therefore, a middle ground between naturalized and denaturalized transcription, bearing in mind the purposes for which the transcripts would be used.

I enlisted the transcription services of an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto. She transcribed six of the interviews, and I transcribed the remaining three. Then, I listened to all nine of the interviews again while reviewing the transcripts to clean up typographical and content errors.
Step 3: Personal journaling following first read-through of each transcript

After listening to each interview for the transcript clean-up process, I returned to the reflective memo activity, this time recording my first impressions of each written transcript. For the same reasons cited earlier (e.g., Berg, 2007; Creswell, 2007), I saw value in documenting my personal reactions and subjective reflections. The reflective process differed from the post-interview journaling in that the post-transcript journaling afforded me the opportunity to be more distanced from the conversation. Being more distanced was neither more nor less ideal than the intimate experiences I had when journaling immediately following my conversation with the participants. The increased distance merely gave me another lens through which to approach the subject matter.

Step 4: Reading and re-reading, while listening to original audio

In this step, the researcher becomes immersed in the original data (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In the current study, I once again listened to the original audio while reading the transcript and making notes about possible themes and connections. As Smith and his colleagues suggested might happen, the amount of data and the number of possible connections was at times overwhelming. Nevertheless, the goal of this step was to make the participant the focus of analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 82). Maintaining focus on participants was an important part of ensuring commitment to the conceptual framework of the study. As this was a narrative psychology study, it was necessary to return often to data that the participants had generated and to listen to their first-hand accounts of stories that could be oriented against cultural master narratives.
At times, it was easy to sense that interviewees became increasingly comfortable throughout the interview as the participant-interviewer rapport was built. It was useful during this phase to aim to “suspend any existing knowledge of the field, and indeed, personal experiences within it” (Flowers, Smith, Sheeran, & Beail, 1997) so that I could attempt to experience the phenomenon through the eyes of my participants.

**Step 5: Initial noting of descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual features**

During this stage, Flowers and his colleagues (1997) recommend an examination of both semantic content and language use. I chose to follow the three-columned approach modelled by Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009). As per their recommendations, I placed the original transcript in the centre column and used the right-hand column to make notes about the descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual features of the text (see Table 3 below). The left-hand column was reserved for step 6, the intra-case development of emergent themes. In order to stay grounded in the data, I once again listened to the audio as I took these initial notes. In the right-hand column, my descriptive notes were in regular font and were the least analytical of the three types of comments recorded here; rather than being overly analytical, my comments here were concise summaries of facts or assumptions brought up by the participant. I recorded linguistic observations in italicized font. These annotations focused on elements such as word choices (e.g., mother’s “partner” vs. mother’s “girlfriend”), pronouns (e.g., “my dad” vs. “Dad”), pauses, laughter, and hesitancy (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The final type of exploratory notes used in the right-hand column was conceptual comments, which were recorded in underlined font. These exploratory notes included any questions that arose and focused less on the things
that the participants had explicitly stated and more on the broader essence of their experience as children of LGB parents.

*Table 3: Sample three-column record with initial noting of descriptive, linguistic, & conceptual features*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Verbatim Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I- Who knows that you have a lesbian mom?</td>
<td>He claims that most of his best friends know. ‘Most’ implies that even some of his best friends might not know. It also implies that he does not tell friends who do not fall in the ‘best friend’ category. ‘I’m alright with who I am’ suggests that he regards being the child of a lesbian mom as one feature of his own identity. The slight pause before the word ‘now’ indicates his processing of memories that he has not always been at peace with having a lesbian mom. Instead of describing a positive experiences, he describes the absence of a negative experience. ‘I wouldn’t have friends that wouldn’t accept gay people’ is the conditional verb tense. Peers must meet the condition of being accepting of gays before he will consider them a potential friend. He is not waiting to be accepted by friends; he is not interested in being friends with intolerant people. In this driver’s seat position, he eliminates intolerant people as potential friends. This may be key to avoiding being the target of bullying and discrimination. How do the children of LGB parents attain this quality, this position of power?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P- Like, most of my best friends.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I- Um, so do you have any wish to be more open? Or are you pretty satisfied?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P – Um, yeah I guess. I don’t know. I’m alright with who I am [slight pause]. Now. Yeah, pretty open.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I- Yeah, um, can you describe any time that you told someone and had a positive response?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P- Well, I’ve never had a negative response. Like someone being like, “What the heck? That’s weird,” or something like that.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I- You’ve never had a negative response?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P- Well no, cause I think, like, when, like, I told them, like, does that make, like, I don’t think it makes a difference to them, like I don’t, I don’t, like, I wouldn’t, like I said, I wouldn’t have friends that wouldn’t accept gay people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Step 6: Intra-case development of emergent themes*

Returning to the three-columned document, the next phase involved the development of themes that were emerging within each case. Using the notes from step 5, annotations that had been added to column three, I began to tease out thematic elements of each transcript. These thematic summaries were recorded in the left-hand column (see Table 4).
The data corpus had expanded greatly during step 5, and by using step 6 to focus on my initial notes there was a sense of becoming increasingly distanced from the original audio data and the original transcripts. However, as Smith and his colleagues (2009, p. 91) pointed out, “At each stage the analysis does indeed take you further away from the participant and includes more of you.” Knowing that I had returned to the original audio data several times already, I trusted myself to dissect the transcripts more with the intent of piecing things back together later as a more comprehensive whole began to emerge.

Table 4: Sample three-column record with the addition of emergent themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Verbatim Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children of LGB parents engage in decision making regarding their disclosure practices</td>
<td>I- Who knows that you have a lesbian mom?</td>
<td>He claims that most of his best friends know. ‘Most’ implies that even some of his best friends might not know. It also implies that he does not tell friends who do not fall in the ‘best friend’ category. ‘I’m alright with who I am’ suggests that he regards being the child of a lesbian mom as one feature of his own identity. The slight pause before the word ‘now’ indicates his processing of memories that he has not always been at peace with having a lesbian mom. Instead of describing a positive experiences, he describes the absence of a negative experience. ‘I wouldn’t have friends that wouldn’t accept gay people’ is the conditional verb tense. Peers must meet the condition of being accepting of gays before he will consider them a potential friend. He is not waiting to be accepted by friends; he is not interested in being friends with intolerant people. In this driver’s seat position, he eliminates intolerant people as potential friends. This may be key to avoiding being the target of bullying and discrimination. How do the children of LGB parents attain this quality, this position of power?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P- Like, most of my best friends.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I- Um, so do you have any wish to be more open? Or are you pretty satisfied?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P – Um, yeah I guess. I don’t know. I’m alright with who I am [slight pause]. Now. Yeah, pretty open.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I- Yeah, um, can you describe any time that you told someone and had a positive response?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P- Well, I’ve never had a negative response. Like someone being like, “What the heck? That’s weird,” or something like that.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I- You’ve never had a negative response?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P- Well no, cause I think, like, when, like, I told them, like, does that make, like, I don’t think it makes a difference to them, like I don’t, I don’t, like, I wouldn’t, like I said, I wouldn’t have friends that wouldn’t accept gay people.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Step 7: Inter-case search for thematic patterns and clusters

After having repeated the preceding steps for all transcripts, a total of 778 separate entries (a mean of 86 per transcript) had been listed in the left-hand columns, the columns where emergent themes were recorded. Many of these themes were duplicated within one transcript, and it would soon be verified that many of these themes were present across cases as well. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) refer to this phase as one that can involve very creative thinking. Because there is no “right” way to do this, the process ground to a halt for a few days while I processed my options for how to proceed. Ultimately, I chose to cut each of the 778 entries, one at a time, from the document (Microsoft Word file) where they had been compiled. As each was cut, it was pasted into a new document (Apple Stickies file) that was assigned a category name. Working through the 778 entries, if the next entry bore resemblance to a category that had already been created, it was placed within that category; if it was dissimilar to the current categories, a new category was assigned. As the number of categories climbed to beyond 30 and eventually to 47, it became necessary to rearrange the Stickies in a meaningful way so they would be easier to locate. The intuitive decision was to cluster the Stickies together if they seemed to have some overarching thematic connection. Soon, it became clear that there were six clusters, and these clusters would form the basis for three superordinate themes identified, the names of which will be discussed in chapter four (results).

With 47 thematic categories and three superordinate themes, it struck me that some type of reductive process was still necessary to gain a truer understanding of the essence of my participants’ experience. Although the frequency of the themes was examined, numeration alone did not determine whether a theme would be retained or discarded. At times, there were themes that seemed to come up with low frequency but seemed particularly rich or profound. At this
stage, consultation with my supervisors and fellow graduate students helped to narrow down the number of elements that were the best representations of the data corpus.

**Step 8: Tabulating themes in a summary table**

In keeping with the procedure used by Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008), the next step involved constructing master tables (see Appendices H, I, and J) that allowed for an at-a-glance summary of themes. The table for the current study will be described in greater detail in chapters four, five, and six (results). The table included evidence from the interviews (i.e., quotations) that highlighted the essence of what my participants were thinking and feeling about having queer parents. Because nine participants is a relatively large sample size for IPA, I chose to have all nine participants represented on one master table. Smith and his colleagues (2009) point out that with a larger data corpus, the emphasis sometimes shifts from individual case examination to a treatment of the group as a whole. This was indeed the case for the current research study. However, it is important to remember that despite the ‘whole group’ view taken in the master table, I remained committed to the notion that my analysis was an idiographic one that spoke to the phenomenon of having queer parents as experienced by the youth in this study. One of the participants made it clear that she herself made no assumptions about the applicability of her experience to the experiences of those of all other youth with LGB parents when she said, “I’m speaking about my parents and not all gay and lesbian parents. ‘It’s great growing up in a lesbian family.’ I don’t know that. It’s been great growing up in *my* lesbian family!”
Methodological Biases and Limitations

The current study is not without its biases, and IPA is not without its limitations. Strengths and limitations of the study will be discussed in chapter seven (conclusion). However, it is important to bear in mind some limitations prior to the presentation of the results in chapters four, five, and six. Some potential targets for criticism of IPA include sample sizes, sampling methods, and validity.

IPA uses sample sizes that are somewhat small. Smith and his colleagues (2009) use $n = 3$ as their recommended default size for undergraduate or Masters-level IPA studies. My sample size of $n = 9$ was rather large for a full application of the rich, intricate, idiographic principles of IPA; it was too small, however, to satisfy those who might look for more nomothetic value in research.

The same individuals who would like to see more nomothetic applications might also question whether sampling methods used in IPA are scientific enough. Certainly, there was nothing random about the selection of the sample in the current study. Invitations were by word-of-mouth, and those who chose to participate might experience the phenomenon of having queer parents differently than those who did not choose to take part. However, it should be reiterated that IPA makes no claims that the sample is representative of a greater whole; thus, even the word “sampling” is a misnomer here because the participants of the current study were not intended to represent a sample from a larger population.

Brocki and Wearden (2006) point to the inevitable subjectivity of IPA because no two researchers working with the same data set would ever come to the same analytical conclusions. This fact raises concerns about the validity, reliability, and replicability of IPA, but it could be argued that notions of reliability and replicability are irrelevant to studies that aim to be
interpretative (Yardley, 2000). This is not to imply that qualitative research is to be regarded as the wild west of psychology. Indeed, Yardley (2000, p. 219) presents four characteristics that good qualitative research should adhere to:

1. Sensitivity to context;
2. Commitment and rigour;
3. Transparency and coherence;
4. Impact and importance.

Sensitivity to context involves the researcher’s capacity for developing a meaningful interview schedule, possessing the necessary tact to build rapport with potential participants and with the gatekeepers who might provide access to those participants, etc. (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Commitment and rigour involve a passion for the subject as evidenced by a prolonged engagement with the topic and a devotion to a thorough analysis of the data. In the interest of transparency, I sought regular feedback from the group of graduate students in my supervisor’s laboratory group, allowing my data to be held accountable to their scrutiny and auditing. I also presented drafts of this dissertation at three academic conferences to solicit feedback from a wider academic audience. The fourth indicator of good research is its impact and importance. I believe that the results presented in the following chapter will demonstrate validity in that the conclusions are potentially interesting, important, and useful to the reader (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and to all stakeholders who desire to know more about the experiences of youth with LGB parents.
Concluding Reflections on the Research Process

IPA was an appropriate choice of design to gain an ‘insider perspective’ about the phenomenon of youth with LGB parents. Its inductive approach provided a sound framework to bring meaning to the lived experiences of the nine participants interviewed. My own personal experiences and theoretical biases were acknowledged in the interest of transparency. It must be acknowledged, of course, that some interpretations can be better than others given the complexity and subjectivity of the task. Like any IPA researcher, I found myself facing the “double hermeneutic” reality of trying to interpret the interpretations of my participants, but I was well prepared for this challenge because of my sensitivity to context and strong grounding in the literature. The process from beginning to end was well documented and transparently shared with academic colleagues. The data corpus was substantial and was thoroughly analyzed in accordance with the recommendations of seasoned IPA researchers. The identification and discussion of thematic material, as discussed in chapter four (results) has the potential to be interesting, important, and useful to all those who have a desire to better understand the experiences of youth with lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents.
Chapter Four: Family Themes – Results & Discussion

An Overview of the Super-ordinate Themes

After completing the stages of IPA outlined in chapter three, it became clear that the bulk of participants’ responses could be organized into three domains that would deepen an understanding of participants emerging identities as children of LGB-identified parents – family themes, school themes, and queer identity themes. As previously mentioned, Smith and his colleagues (2009) point out that with a larger data corpus such as the one produced here with nine participants, the emphasis sometimes shifts from individual case examination to a treatment of the group as a whole. That is indeed the case in the current study. The master table of themes (see Table 5 below) illustrates the themes that emerged from an analysis of the responses of the nine participants as a whole.

Table 5: Master table of themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Theme Code</th>
<th>Theme Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Themes</td>
<td>F-1</td>
<td>Parent comes out of the closet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F-2</td>
<td>Divorce, remarriage, stepparents, &amp; blended families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F-3</td>
<td>Extended family responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F-4</td>
<td>Advantages of having LGB-identified parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Themes</td>
<td>S-1</td>
<td>Disclosure decisions, practices, &amp; repercussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S-2</td>
<td>Education to expose others to alternative family narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S-3</td>
<td>Best (and worst) school practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer Identity Themes</td>
<td>I-1</td>
<td>Connecting with other “queer spawn”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-2</td>
<td>Connecting with &amp; advocating for queer youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-3</td>
<td>Borderlands &amp; high stakes: privileges &amp; pressures living between worlds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-4</td>
<td>Canadian law &amp; Canadian society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organization of the Results & Discussion Chapters

Chapters four, five, and six will present the results of the study as grouped by the three domains listed above. Operating with an assumption borrowed from Confucianism that family is the basic building block of society, the findings are discussed within the context of the family unit before branching out towards school and then society. This approach is consistent not only with Confucianism, but also with Erikson’s (1963) assertion that an individual’s predominant social setting shifts throughout the lifespan from family, to school, to peer groups, and then to a broader social context. McAdams (2006) and McLean (2008) also maintain that for identity and personality development to be fully understood, one must consider narrative voice across the lifespan. Thus, chapter four will explore family themes, chapter five will examine school themes, and chapter six will investigate queer identity themes. It should be understood, however, that while these domains offer windows to narrative voice across the lifespan, the three domains are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily sequential.

In order to enhance cohesiveness, there will be a free-flowing interchange between the presentation of results and a discussion of those results. In other words, results and discussion will not be written as two distinct sections. The use of this approach has precedence in the work of others who have employed IPA such as Smith and Osborne’s (2007) study of individuals suffering from chronic back pain and Knight, Wykes, and Hayward’s (2003) investigation of stigma in schizophrenia. Results and discussion are combined to allow the reader an element of immediate access to interpretation rather than depending on the retention of large units of transcripted material prior to its analysis.

Results will report verbatim excerpts from participants’ transcripts. Square brackets will be used to enclose explanatory material or missing information. The use of a bracketed ellipsis
will indicate deleted material. The discussion that accompanies the results will offer my analysis, suggestions for ties to existing literature, and possible implications of the findings. Particular attention will be given to responses that address the three guiding questions of this research study: How do youth with LGB-identified parents describe the experience of having a non-heterosexual parent? How do youth with LGB-identified parents make sense of their queer-family identity when they are in a school setting? What do youth with LGB-identified parents perceive their own needs to be?

**Family Themes**

The nine participants had many things in common. They all grew up in English-speaking, middle socioeconomic status, Canadian homes, and all but one was Caucasian. They all attended Ontario high schools with anticipated graduation dates between 2009 and 2014. They all had at least one parent identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. All nine of them had experience with issues related to divorce, remarriage, and/or blended families. There were differences among them, however, as highlighted by Table 2 found in chapter three. Throughout the current chapter, evidence from each of their interviews will be presented to demonstrate the family-related themes that emerged. For a master table of family-related thematic evidence, see Appendix H.

Only one of the participants, Christie, had a gay-identified father. Denise identified both her biological mother and her biological father as bisexuals. The other seven participants had mothers who identified as lesbians. Two of the participants, Julia and Victoria, were from-the-get-go children. Julia was born to a single lesbian-identified mother who later married a female partner. Victoria was born to a lesbian couple that later divorced and subsequently found new
lesbian partners. The remaining seven participants were born into heterosexual contexts prior to their parents’ disclosures of non-heterosexuality. In many ways, as will be demonstrated, there were differences between the “from-the-get-go group” and the “mother-father group.” It is with the latter group that I begin, with an examination of their experiences in finding out about having an LGB-identified parent.

**F-1 Parent comes out of the closet**

Since only two of the participants were from-the-get-go children, the other seven participants had significant turning points in their lives when one parent disclosed their non-heterosexuality. Other than Julia and Victoria, the remaining seven participants averaged 9.5 years of age at the time when they began dealing with the reality of having a queer-identified parent. For the most part, the participants indicated that they did not have a difficult time coming to terms with this, a finding unsurprising given the conclusions drawn by Paul (1986) that the offspring of LGB-identified parents find it relatively easy to cope with the news of their parents’ non-heterosexuality if they are told during childhood or late adolescence. The ease with which they cope with this news, however, does not eliminate the reality that such news will necessitate divergence from the master narrative of (hetero)normativity pervasive in North American culture, a narrative that would no longer be an ideal fit given the prominence of non-heterosexuality within their immediate family.

Shane, who estimated being 8-9 years of age when he found out that his mother identified as lesbian, responded to a question about whether or not he found the news difficult. “No, not at all […]. I’m totally fine with it. I don’t – no complaints or anything. I wouldn’t change anything […], I don’t remember [my mom coming out] that well. I think it was right off the bat,
like, clearly, that she just told us that, ‘I have a new friend.’ Like, later on I realized what that friend was [laughs].”

Similarly, Owen claimed, “Since the young age, like, I’ve never, I’ve never though, I’ve always been in, to terms with [having a lesbian mom], pretty much. I’ve never really been against it or thought it was weird.”

Nick, whose mother had taken him and his brother away from an abusive father to a shelter in another community, recounted his response to a counsellor at the shelter who had asked how he felt when he learned that his mother was lesbian-identified. “I’m fine with it, you know. I just want it to get better.” Then, he commented to me, “But I had already accepted it.” Like Shane, Nick used the word “fine” to describe how he felt about his mother’s lesbianism. Comments such as “fine” and “no complaints” do not necessarily reveal enthusiastic endorsements of their mothers’ lesbianism. Nevertheless, both of these participants expressed the relatively easy acceptance they experienced with regard to the news of having a lesbian parent.

Even Julia, one of the from-the-get-go participants, reflected about her early understanding and acceptance that her mother was lesbian. “I think I always knew,” she said. “Like, I can’t think of a time where I was like, ‘Shit!’ Like, my mom was very open, so I think I always knew. I always understood.”

Several of the participants alluded to an initial lack of dialogue about the issue of disclosure. Relying on their own powers of observation and intuition, some of them drew inferences before their parents formally disclosed their non-heterosexuality. Their responses suggested that they privately began to suspect that the master narrative of heteronormativity was at odds with their observations of their parents’ behaviour. For example, Christie claimed,
“Once my parents got separated, I did notice he was hanging out with a lot of guys. And so he didn’t actually tell me. I figured it out.” She described the conversation she had with her father. “I’m like, ‘Dad, are you gay?’ And he’s like, ‘Yes, I am. I’ve been meaning to tell you for a while.’ And I’m like, ‘Oh, okay.’ […] I was in shock for a little bit, like, just trying to understand, and if that’s going to change anything. But after living with it for a little while, it was fine. It wasn’t any different.” She added, “It’s normal now, for him,” which perhaps indicated that there was some initial shock and a perception that it was not normal. These feelings were temporary, however, and it did not take long for Christie’s father’s gay identity to become one that she deemed as compatible with her own. Throughout the interview, it seemed that Christie began to understand that her relatively seamless transition to the reality of having a gay father might not be everyone’s experience. She acknowledged that during the interview she began to realize “how easy it was, like, to accept that my dad was gay and stuff like that.” I was struck by how nonchalantly she had reacted and asked her to elaborate about how she figured out that her dad was gay:

Well, I just noticed he had this one guy friend that he’d bring over all the time. And that – there was this one moment where I really noticed. They were in the kitchen, and they were, like, cooking beside each other. And they were just, you know, being all cute. And I was like, hmm! So my dad went downstairs, and I’m like, “Dad, are you gay?” and he’s like, “Yes.” And I’m like, “Oh, okay. Cause I kind of noticed you and him kind of have a connection”, and I was like, “Hmm, okay.”
Christie was not the only participant that claimed to have figured this out before being directly told. Anna had silently observed her mother after her mother and father had separated, and she was prepared for the news:

[My mom] had a girlfriend named […], and then she would talk, like, on the phone every night, but she hadn’t come out and told us she was gay. So I kind of guessed that she was, just from the fact that they would always talk on the phone, and it was different than, like, a friendship with, say, one of my friends. So that’s when I kind of noticed that something was different, and that was kind of a hint, but it never really bothered me. I just kind of noticed, and I was like, “Oh, okay. Whatever.”

Similarly, Ellie recalled putting the pieces together on her own when she was seven:
Whenever I was seven, um, my oldest brother didn’t live with us. And I remember, like, I knew he was mad at my mom for some reason, but like no one really told me. And same with my other brother. We just didn’t really know because we were younger. And um, my mom pays hockey, and I remember, like, going to, like her hockey games and seeing her with, like, this woman. And in, like, my seven-year-old head being like, “Oh, my mom has a really close, like, friend” [laughs]. And then, um, I guess, like, that’s all that I ever really thought about it. And I remember one day in, like, one of my classes in – whenever I was seven years old, um, because it’s such a small town, everybody knows everything. And one of the boys’ moms in my class was on the same hockey team as my mom, and he asked me if my mom was a dyke. And at the time I didn’t know what it meant. And I don’t even know if he did. He probably just heard his mom say it. And I was just really confused [laughs]. I remember going home and asking my mom if she
was a dyke, not really knowing what it meant, and her face was like just, “Oh my god” [laughs]. She was just like, “Don’t say that word.” She didn’t really answer me. She just told me not to say the word, that it was disrespectful […]. And then, whenever I was eight, my mom told me, and I remember just telling her, she told me that she is in a relationship with this woman […], and I remember being like, “I know. I see you guys, like, holding hands and, like, you’re always together.” […] I loved my mom, and I didn’t care.

The lack of explicit dialogue from their parents on the subject of parental sexual orientation is not an experience unique to Ellie, Anna, and Christie. Garner (2004) has suggested that the reason many such parents hesitate to engage in explicit dialogue is due to parents’ fears that their children will not be old enough to understand (Garner, 2004). Garner suggests that some parents have a self-imposed “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy:

They don’t consider themselves to be ‘in’ the closet, but they haven’t said anything to their kids about it. However, by not discussing it, and therefore not giving the children permission to ask questions, children take the silence as an indication that the topic is off-limits or that they are not supposed to know. (p. 45)

Garner’s assertion supports a view that by not discussing it more directly with their children, parents will miss an opportunity to assist their children in the navigation between the cultural master narrative of heteronormativity and an alternate narrative that is the new reality for their family. However, the fact that both Shane and Ellie laughed when they described their mothers’ use of the word “friend” to describe their new same-sex love interests supports the
notion that they were independently able to identify an alternative to the master narrative of heteronormativity. Their laughter revealed a level of incredulity at their mothers’ inexact and understated use of the word “friend” that they realized was no more suitable a fit for the reality of the situation than was the master narrative of heteronormativity.

Garner argues that if children find out that they have a queer-identified parent when they are still young, they are less likely to develop homophobic views that impede their ability to come to terms with their parents’ sexual orientation. Reorienting Garner’s assertion within the context of narrative psychology, if children find out about their parents’ non-heterosexual orientation, they are less likely to be rigidly rooted in the master narrative of heteronormativity and more likely to develop a narrative that is a more accurate portrayal of their family’s reality. Furthermore, parents who remain silent about their sexual orientation may unwittingly propagate the master narrative of silence of earlier generations of LGB-identified people (Weststrate & McLean, 2010) instead of encouraging their children to challenge the very concept of normativity.

Without exception, all nine of the participants in the current study did eventually have opportunities to directly discuss the issue with their LGB-identified parent. Even after they found out, however, some of the participants suggested that there were still residual issues that had not been formally discussed. Denise, whose father had not been a steady presence in her life since the separation of her mother and father, speculated that at the time of her birth, both her mother and father “identified to themselves as bisexual, but my mom was not out to her family. And I don’t think my dad is either – out to his family. But I know,” she added, “that he has had same-sex relationships as well […]. Like, I didn’t hear that from him. I heard that from my mom.”
Christie, Anna, and Owen had similar experiences to one another in that they found there was nobody better to talk to initially than the LGB-identified parents themselves. Christie stated, “I didn’t really talk to anyone. It was just my dad that I talked to, just to understand more because it was new to me, so I didn’t really know anything about that.”

Anna explained that she did not get any non-familial advice about her mom’s disclosure. “Most people wouldn’t know,” she said. “Like, if I asked my dad, he wouldn’t know what to say because he was just going through it as much as we were. So, [my mom] was really the only adult figure that could help me out there.” There are potential implications here about how school counselors and or community service programs might address this gap. It was not necessarily problematic for Anna to have only her mother to speak to about the issue. Some youth, however, might experience a need for a non-familial perspective as they seek to integrate their parents’ stories into their own emerging narratives.

Owen confirmed that the decisions that Christie and Anna made to have open discussions with their LGB-identified parents would be his recommendation for any child with queer parents. “Like, if they don’t understand it,” he commented, “I would give them advice to try to talk to their parents and understand more of why their parents are like that.”

Even LGB-identified parents themselves, however, do not always know how to weave LGB issues into their ongoing family conversations. Breshears (2010) examined the decisive moments of change (i.e., turning points) identified by lesbian parents that facilitated discourse with their children regarding family identity. In her view, the discussion of parental and family identity is necessary and healthy for LGB-led families, and thus an understanding of the turning points that can lead to family dialogue is important. “Family discourse creates meaning out of actions, instructing family members’ thoughts and reactions to related aspects of daily life,”
asserts Breshears (2010, p. 80). Her interview-based study revealed that major turning points
that facilitated dialogue for her lesbian participants were the initial processes of coming out to
their children, challenges to family identity such as disapproval from extended family members,
and the announcement of commitment ceremonies or weddings. Along with these turning
points, participants in her study reported having “normalized” their family configuration by
assuring their children that their family was no different than traditional families, by exposing
their children to other LGB families, and by including LGB-family storybooks when their
children were growing up. Essentially, the lesbian-led families in Breshears’ study were
normalizing their family experience by providing opportunities for their children to develop a
new narrative, one that could be positioned both against cultural master narratives of family and
heteronormativity and against the narratives of families similar to their own.

The participants in the present study gave a clear message that they were comfortable
with family dialogue about LGB issues. There was a very strong sense – from both of the from-
the-get-go children and from the participants who had been born into heterosexual contexts – that
they wanted their parents to have the freedom to be themselves. Julia felt that she had often been
a target of bullying because of her mom’s sexual orientation:

Maybe if [my mom] looked a little straighter then, you know, when it came to middle
school it might have had a bit of a difference. But then, she’s not being herself. Why
should I tell her how to be, or why should I tell her how to look? I mean, maybe it would
have helped a bit, but it wouldn’t be – it wouldn’t be, you know, the truth. And it would
be – it would be stupid. You know, like, I could – if my mother started becoming
“femmier” that would be ridiculous. I’d laugh. Like, it’s so not who she is.
The participants were clearly happy for their parents, believing their LGB-identified parents were able to start an important new chapter after coming out of the closet. When I asked Anna how her mom might have felt after telling her children, this was her reply:

Relieved. I would hope so. I would hope that she would feel relieved, but um, maybe, I don’t know. Like, she probably felt that we would either not understand or be confused. Or, um, yeah, but she was probably relieved when she told us because then it was just, now her kids know, and now we can work on this new life that she has.

Owen echoed this belief that LGB-identified parents experience a sense of relief when they disclose their non-heterosexuality to their children. “I think [my mom] felt relieved that she didn’t have to keep it all bottled up from us. And like, after those years, like, she realized that she can be who she wants to be, and I think, as a side, relief for us.” He then added a commentary about the likely benefits gained by his mother because she had decided to come out. “Like, if my mom had kept boxed up, and, like, stayed in the closet, like, I think she’d be [slight pause] such an unhappy person, like, these days.”

Duggan (2007) writes of the consequences for parents who stay in the closet, and the participants in the current study alluded to their own empathetic understanding of what their parents had experienced prior to their disclosures of non-heterosexuality. One man in Duggan’s study, a gay father who had been in a heterosexual marriage prior to coming out, stated, “When I got married, I knew I was doing the wrong thing. But it’s just that because of society, I felt I had to. You know. And when I came out to my wife, I think guilt was a big thing” (p. 118). While this study concerns the experiences of the children in LGB-led homes, the stories of their parents are also relevant to the extent that parents’ stories become incorporated into the narratives of
their children (Ricoeur, 1992). Many of the participants in the current study articulated the relief they perceived their parents to have experienced when they were able to give up the burden of secrecy that they had carried throughout their heterosexual marriages, choosing authenticity in favour of the propagation of the master narrative of heteronormativity.

Christie, for example, alluded to the relief her father must have felt when he told Christie and her younger brother that he was gay. “I want to say he felt lighter,” she mused. “Maybe easier because now that I knew, he could openly talk about it and openly be with his boyfriend.”

Julia, one of the from-the-get-go children, had been born to a single mother who later began a relationship with a woman who had children from a previous heterosexual marriage. Therefore, Julia was in a blended family that combined from-the-get-go children and children born into a heterosexual context. “I don’t know very much about how my brothers dealt with their mom coming out,” admitted Julia. “Maybe I can’t speak for their part, but um, they’re very kind of like ‘whatever’ kind of guys. So they’re kind of very much, like, I know that they were like, ‘As long as you’re happy, we don’t care.’”

Nick, who learned of his mother’s lesbianism as a young adolescent and therefore might have been expected to be the most at-risk participant for reacting negatively to the news (Paul, 1986), also sensed his mom’s relief. “She was so glad to get [it] off her chest to [my brother] and me. ‘Hey, I’m gay.’ And I was like, no big deal. Uh, I just wanted to go get breakfast. I was like, you know, ‘Okay.’ […] When the parents are happy, the kids are happy.” He remembers prior to his mother’s disclosure of non-heterosexuality that he had met a number of his mom’s lesbian friends. “I just thought it was a normal thing that people have gays coming over to their house all the time;” he recalled. “But when I turned thirteen, not only did Mom come out and say it – so everything made sense by that point because my mom and dad were
always having, like, fights about gay and stuff.” Nick added that he and his family had left an abusive father and had gone to a shelter for women and children. “My mom came out,” he explained, “and she said, ‘I’ve had a secret for a long time, and I’ve wanted to tell you,’ and she told us that she was gay. And I was like, ‘Okay.’ You know, it wasn’t a really big deal for me. I just – I felt like we had hit the bottom, and I just wanted it to get better from there.” Certainly, however, the parental conflict that existed in Nick’s home was not representative of the experience of all participants. The termination of their parents’ heterosexual marriages ranged from very amicable to very rocky, as will be discussed in the following section.

F-2 Divorce, remarriage, stepparents, and blended families

All nine participants shared this experience: witnessing a parent they had known since birth transition into a new relationship with a partner that had not been in the participants’ lives from infancy. For the from-the-get-go children, this transition did not take place concurrently with the coming out of the parent, because their parents were already open about their sexual orientation prior to becoming parents. Nevertheless, when Julia’s single lesbian mother met a partner, Julia’s reality changed as she became part of a blended family. She reported that her family was now comprised of “my mom, and um, my mom’s partner and her two kids […]. We’re blended. It wasn’t always that. So [now I have] my two brothers and my other mom.”

When Victoria’s two mothers separated, that was a pivotal moment when she realized that not every family was like hers. Victoria reported that before her moms broke up, “We were just a happy normal family. Like, I didn’t really think of us as that different. Um, when my parents broke up that’s when I was like, ‘Oh, my god. I’m going to have, like, four moms. That’s crazy.’” At the time, Victoria had already embraced a personal narrative that differed
from the master narrative of heteronormativity, but with the impending possibility of having four mother figures, she needed to further expand her own concept of normativity to accommodate her changing reality.

For the seven participants born to a mother and a father, they experienced the near-simultaneous events of parental separation and parental disclosure of non-heterosexuality. Nick expressed his views that these combined factors have the potential to make any child’s new reality difficult. “Even a divorce is hard enough as it is. It’s like, not only did your parents split, but your parents or your one parent is also an LGBT or same-sex.” He went on to say, however, “I think that I’m really blessed for what I do have. My family, even though it’s a very diverse family, everyone in my family’s there for me, and everyone loves me.” As previously mentioned, the termination of the participants’ parents’ marriages ranged from very amicable to very rocky. For the purposes of facilitating a clearer presentation of the results, it may be useful to orient the reader to some of the overall patterns observed within the group of nine participants with respect to two events, namely event (1), the separation of the original parents and event (2), the arrival of a step-parent figure. Event (1) was relevant for all participants except Julia, who was born to a single mother. Using a rudimentary classification system, the separation of each participant’s parents could be classified as either “amicable” or “strained”, and in so doing one will see possible correlations between this separation style and the qualities of parent-child relationships. Table 6, shown below, provides a framework within which one can orient the responses of the participants with respect to matters of divorce and post-divorce relationships between the children and their parents.
Table 6: Summary of connection between parental separation style and parent-child relationship quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good parent-child relationship with both original parents</th>
<th>Amicable separation of parents</th>
<th>Strained separation of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shane, Christie, Owen, Anna, Victoria</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor parent-child relationship with one of the two original parents</th>
<th>Amicable separation of parents</th>
<th>Strained separation of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td>Denise, Nick, Ellie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor parent-child relationship with both original parents</th>
<th>Amicable separation of parents</th>
<th>Strained separation of parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The responses that follow will provide evidence that for the families involved in the current study, if the original parents separated on good terms, their children maintained good relationships with both parents; if the adults separated under more strained circumstances, their children maintained good relationships with only one parent. It would seem that if the parents of these participants were unable to separate on good terms and their children could not accommodate both parents’ diverging stories, these participants either incorporated the narrative of whichever parent provided the best match to the child’s own emerging narrative or tailored their personal narrative to match that of the parent with whom they resided. These findings are not necessarily generalizable but may be part of a broader picture of how parental separation style impacts parent-child relationships following separation. Poor relationships with one of the biological parents were evidenced in the responses of Denise, Nick, and Ellie.

Event (2) could be defined as the introduction of a new parental figure into the participants’ lives, an event experienced by all nine of the participants. Each one of the participants spoke about their LGB-identified parents beginning new significant relationships.
Only two of the participants, Nick and Ellie, spoke about their heterosexual parents establishing permanent relationships after their divorce. Table 7, presented below, provides a framework within which one can situate the responses of the nine participants with respect to relationships between them and their new stepparent figures.

**Table 7: Summary of stepparent-child relationship quality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship with the heterosexual parent’s new partner (heterosexual stepparent)</th>
<th>Relationship with the LGB parent’s new partner (LGB stepparent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reportedly good</td>
<td>Shane, Christie, Owen, Anna, Julia, Nick, Ellie, Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reportedly poor</td>
<td>Nick, Ellie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable, and/or no partner mentioned</td>
<td>Shane, Christie, Owen, Anna, Julia, Denise, Victoria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beginning with event (1), the separation of the participants’ birthparents, there were three participants that reported ongoing strain in their birthparents’ relationships. For this group of participants, the rocky nature of the relationship between their birthparents seemed somewhat correlated with an unstable relationship between the child and their heterosexual parent. Denise revealed that her mother and father had an on-again-off-again relationship at the time of her birth:

I think that, um, at that time, at the time that I was four my parents had separated, then a trial separation. They hadn’t got a divorce yet, uh, when my sister was born, which was three years before I was born, and then they didn’t get – end up getting divorced. And so then when I was – when my mom was pregnant with me they decided, okay, we’re going to move back in together and, you know, see what happens. But then it was just, like, this is not going to work. So then they got a divorce.
In terms of her own relationship with her father, Denise expressed a very arms-length view of him as a parental figure:

I don’t know if I would count him as a parent. Even though that’s a bit of a cruel thing to say. But he’s not, um, quite so present. And especially for me because I am the youngest of the three siblings. I definitely was the least, sort of, involved in his parenting when I was a child. So I would probably say my parents are my mom and [her lesbian partner]. And he is a – he’s not a parent because he doesn’t actually do any parenting. But he is a father in that, yeah, he is my dad, and I do see him every now and then, and I visit my relatives on his side of the family. But in actually being an active parent and actually being supportive and all that, I would say definitely not.

Denise’s use of the word “parent” as both a noun and a verb indicated her belief that her father’s biological parentage was insufficient to merit the distinction of the title “parent.” Without the active component of his ongoing participation in her life, a feature of family that had become an important part of her emerging definition of family, he had seemingly alienated himself even from her view of family. “I would describe my actual family as my residential family,” explained Denise. “Like, that’s who I am with every day and actually do family stuff with.” Denise spoke about how her father’s lack of involvement in her life had impacted her own self-esteem at times. She recalled an episode when her father had not contacted her on the day of her thirteenth birthday. He called three days late, she recalled:

He rattled off this big speech about, oh, he was very, very sorry that he had, uh, missed my birthday. And, but he said the wrong age. Like, he didn’t say thirteen. He said something else like sixteen or something. And he didn’t say the right day, and I was like.
I remember just feeling like it was so pathetic. Like, I was just so disappointed in him, but at the same time I was also feeling, like, just badly about myself […] even though I myself hadn’t done anything wrong […]. I remember feeling like this person who is supposed to be, you know, high up for me, like, on some good role model is, like, so pathetic. And I feel so shitty about it.

Denise also commented about how her father’s detachment from the family had negatively impacted her brother as well. “My dad’s not a great role model,” she observed. “[My brother] is growing up in a house with four women, and he doesn’t really have a male role model. And all of the male role models in our family are not ideal. Like, less than ideal.”

While Denise’s father was merely described as “absent” from their lives, the fathers of Ellie and Nick were portrayed in even less flattering terms:

My dad is to this day still awful. Which is why I don’t really talk to him now. Like, he always, like, he’s so homophobic, and it’s like he’ll constantly make comments about my mom being gay […]. It’s gotten to the point where it’s pointless [to confront him]. Like, he’s not going to stop.

When asked what advice she would give to other youth who heard their heterosexual parent making negative remarks about their now-LGB ex-spouse, Ellie admitted that it was a really difficult situation. “It’s your other parent. ‘Cause you want to love and respect them […]. The advice that I would give would just be to not take it personally. Maybe not even, like, take it to the gay parent personally. Like, that other person saying it is probably just bitter.” Ellie also
revealed that she feels like she has “two separate families.” She referred to her father and his wife as “the other family” and added, “I don’t really see my dad as much.”

Far beyond “absent” or “awful,” Nick described his father as “abusive.” Nick explained the kind of things that had taken place, which led to his mother taking Nick and his brother to a shelter:

Before I was 13, I was happy. Like, I was happy in my family, but you could tell my family was dysfunctional. You could tell my family always had arguments. My dad was aggressive towards me. […] The day before we left, my dad flipped out at me, and we had an argument, and I said that I wasn’t going to come home that night. Um, so I went to slam the door, and my dog was coming out the door and I hit the dog, I slammed the door on the dog so my dog made a noise. So my dad came outside and it was February, so he grabbed me by my winter jacket and held me over top of the deck, just to show how strong he was. And I was like 150 pounds, and he was like holding me over a snow bank, like, off the deck, yelling at me. So I flipped out, and I walked back inside and told my mom, “If we don’t leave tonight, then I am.” And I got on the bus, and at that point everyone could notice – everyone knew what had happened. I was like crying my eyes out. I was upset. I wouldn’t talk to anyone. My teacher was trying to get me to talk to people all day, so. Um, so I was very negative and very shy, and I didn’t want to talk to anyone at that point. And then when my parents, at that point too, I don’t like to say that I had [pause] I don’t like to say that I had suicidal thoughts, but I just didn’t want to be in that situation. And I was thinking of anything possible to get me out of that situation.
Nick continued by describing what happened when he did leave the home with his mother and brother:

We left my dad, and we went to a, uh, like a women-and-children-type house. What am I thinking of here? [Interviewer: A shelter?] Yeah. We just thought it was normal. Like this is what every dad was like. But then when we got there, and we talked to the counsellors, we noticed that we were – it was not normal, and we were in, you know […] a pretty big pickle […]. [When my mom and dad separated] I know it sounds horrible, but I was really happy [chuckles]. I was glad, uh, because everything, like, it was tough at the time. […] My relationship with my dad is [exhales] pretty rocky. I mean, he was a very abusive parent, and he was very abusive towards me. Uh, my brother was very scared of him when he was younger. So my dad could just yell at him and he’d get upset. Whereas me, I didn’t like to put up with his crap […]. I forgave my dad. But what I don’t forgive him for is, um, moving away from here. Like, moving away from [our town], going to [a bigger city], starting a life with a new woman, and then trying to bring us into it. Like, he doesn’t support us here. This is our home. Like this is where we’re from […]. So he’s trying to pull us away and trying to make this perfect family. But he’s not. So I don’t forgive my dad, that’s where it’s kind of rocky […]. My dad will not support me unless I go live with him and his perfect family. So my dad does the basics, pays my mom the minimum money that he needs to, which is so selfish and rude.

Despite his father’s formerly abusive behaviour, Nick explained that he and his brother were still in regular contact with their father. Nick used the present tense when he stated, “My relationship with my dad is [exhales] pretty rocky.” The experience of leaving the abusive
family home with his mother may have accounted for Nick’s tendency to be protective of her. Clearly, even though the abuse no longer occurred, there was a lasting loss of respect for his father and an enduring realization that Nick’s father’s narrative, especially his acceptance of the master narrative of heteronormativity, did not align with Nick’s emerging story of personal identity. Nick alluded to jokes that he and his mom once made about their dog being gay. “My dad didn’t like that,” chuckled Nick. “He’d like to think that our dog was, well, straight […]. My dad [still] says negative and stupid things [about my mom being lesbian-identified],” Nick commented. “That’s just the way he grew up, so I don’t really judge him. I am more mature than my dad, so sometimes he’ll say stupid things about my mom, and I’ll just say, ‘How old are you?’ […]. I’m like, ‘I’m done. Stop talking about it. Or grow up. Or keep it up, and I’m out of here. Whether it’s I’m walking home, or I’m taking a taxi from [my dad’s city] back to [my hometown], I don’t care.” Additionally, Nick felt that there was no possible way to have discussions with his father that did not result in judgemental responses. Nick speculated that if he had gone to his father for advice in the early days following Nick’s mother’s disclosure of her lesbianism, no advice would have been given. Nick’s used a deep, gruff, comical voice to exaggerate his father’s unreasonable words. “I knew it was horrible for your mother to put you in this situation. Now you’re going to be all messed up!”

Whereas Denise, Ellie, and Nick had used words like absent, awful, and abusive to describe their biological fathers, the other participants described their heterosexual-identified parents in a more complimentary light. The most striking contrast to the negative scenarios described above came from Anna, who reported that her mother and father were still on excellent terms after the divorce. In many ways, the behaviour of Anna’s parents could be regarded as a model for how parents can provide meaningful support for their child given the combined
circumstances of divorce and disclosure of non-heterosexuality, making it easier for their child to incorporate both parents’ narratives into the trajectory of their own emerging identity:

I have friends who have parents who split up, and they don’t talk to each other….

When my parents split up, it was never a big thing, ever. It was never, like, this is really sad because my parents are not going to be together anymore. Because for me, it felt kind of natural. I don’t know why. And, like, my parents, like, my dad was the best man at my mom’s wedding. And so, like, I tell people that. And they think that’s awesome. […] But that was like a turning point when my parents split up and my mom told me she was gay because it just kind of didn’t change everything for the worst.

This is a striking dissimilarity from the experiences of Nick and Ellie. While Nick and Ellie had their heterosexual fathers hurling insults at their lesbian mothers, Anna had her heterosexual father demonstrating his full acceptance of his ex-wife’s decision to enter into a same-sex marriage. Anna’s father, then, had demonstrated his refusal to accept the master narrative of heteronormativity and his willingness to embrace a nonconventional definition of normal; in doing this, he had paved the way for Anna’s emerging story to include both of her parents’ stories.

Christie’s heterosexual-identified mother was also very supportive of her ex-husband who is now in a same-sex relationship. It was Christie’s mother, in fact, who made the arrangements for Christie to be a participant in the current study. It is perhaps unsurprising to note the pattern observed in Table 5 (above) that there is a relationship between the style of marital separation and the quality of the ongoing relationships between the heterosexual-identified parents and their children. Garner (2004) expresses her opinion that the manner in
which straight parents react after their partner’s disclosure of non-heterosexuality can profoundly affect the way children feel about the divorce. “Hearing homophobic sentiment from a straight parent does not just threaten a child’s relationship with his gay parent,” writes Garner. “It also builds a barrier between the child and the angry straight parent” (Garner, 2004, p. 71).

Moving next to an examination of event (2), the arrival of a stepparent figure, it is useful to consider what Bray (1999) refers to as the “fears and anxieties that are unconsciously reinforced by descriptions and names for stepfamilies as a result of the prevailing myths and stories about stepfamilies” (Bray, 1999 p. 254). For example, childhood stories such as *Cinderella* often feature so-called wicked stepmothers and evil stepsisters. Certainly, some of the participants in the current study may have had conscious or unconscious worries about the introduction of stepparents into their lives.

It is interesting to note that the same participants who had a rather strained parental separation also had some difficulty with stepparent figures. Referring to his father’s partner by her first name, Nick stated, “I don’t consider [name] as my parent at all.” Ellie merely laughed and gave a curt “no” when asked if she considered her father’s new partner to be a parental figure.

Nick and Ellie did, however, have very positive things to say about the stepparent figure that was now part of their life on the LGB side of their family tree. “[My mom’s partner] and I friggin’ click like crazy,” boasted Nick. “We have fun. She friggin’ makes me laugh all the time, which is nice, and I try to make her laugh […]. I like to consider her as my parent. Because she does the same things that my mom would do for me.”

Ellie stated, “I love [my mom’s] partner. She’s a great parent to me. Like, I couldn’t be happier.” Ellie went on to explain that she viewed having a lesbian stepmother figure as
preferable to the male stepparent she would have had if her mom had married another man after her divorce from Ellie’s father, and to explain her reasons she positioned herself against the lived experiences of some of her female friends who had had negative encounters with step-father figures:

Men have always tended to be really creepy towards me, so like for me – and I had a friend who had a really creepy step-dad – so for me, it’s like a plus. Like, “Yay! I don’t have to ever deal with a creepy step-dad!” Which is what I’ve seen with some of my friends. And some, like, from my experiences with older men […]. Now when I come home, now that I’m older, it’s like a big slumber party [laughs]. It’s a safe environment for young women. As bad as, like, that sounds. But it makes it, like, I’m not saying men can’t provide a safe environment, but it’s – it’s nice. And like other girls really, like, respect that.

Many of the other participants also claimed to have good relationships with the stepparent figure that was in a same-sex relationship with their birth parent. “My mom’s partner’s awesome,” said Julia. “I love her to death. She’s – she’s – it’s amazing to have her […]. [She] is an awesome, awesome support. And she hasn’t brought anything but good to my life.”

Victoria was also positive about one of her birthmother’s new partners, but she was honest in stating that her stepmother would never play a role identical to that of her birthmothers. “I don’t call her mom,” she clarified. “But, um, like, she’s definitely a parental figure in my mind […]. We do have a different relationship. Because it’s different when you grew up with people, like, your parents since birth […]. I have my two moms who I’ve had since birth.”
Owen expressed a bit of concern about his perceived lack of communication with his father with respect to his father’s significant relationships. “My dad and I, like, we don’t really have good communication, like, compared to my mom. [For example], like him and his girlfriend broke up a while ago, and I didn’t really find out. I just had to figure it out, so I don’t know, like, I wish I could get communication better on that.” The lack of dialogue with his father presented a problem for Owen; here, he is expressing a wish for better access to his father’s whole story, lending support to Ricoeur’s assertion that the narratives of other significant figures are important to the emergence of one’s own sense of self (1992). Owen is not suggesting that his relationship with his father is poor. This is perhaps merely an expression of a desire to improve communication so that he would be more informed as he positions his own narrative against his father’s. On the whole, however, Owen indicated that he did indeed have a positive relationship with his father.

Tasker and Golombok (1995) found that young adults from lesbian-led families were, for the most part, quite positive about their relationships with their biological mothers, biological fathers, and their mother’s new lesbian partners. In fact, these researchers observed that children with lesbian mothers developed closer relationships with their mother’s partners than children from heterosexual households had with their mother’s male partners. In the current study, then, it was unsurprising to observe that eight of the nine participants had positive relationships with their LGB-identified parents’ partners. Denise was the sole individual who described a negative relationship with an LGB-identified stepparent. Her comments indicated a feeling that some family discussions ought to have taken place before the arrival of a stepmother:

My mom didn’t ask me my opinion of [my stepmother] when they first started their relationship. So when [she] was moving in, or any of that. So in that regard, it felt like I
didn’t have a say in who was in my family as much as my mom did. And, of course, I’m not supposed to have a say who’s in my family. But at the same time, it felt unfair because this is someone that you’re bringing – this is someone you’re bringing into the family. And the other thing is that [my step-mom] was trying to have kids when they met. So, she doesn’t have any kids, biological children. So my mom sort of, maybe, me being the youngest, I was sort of like, okay, well, she can be your kid, too. You’re just handing me over here […]. I know that I have a bad relationship with [my step-mom]. Definitely is the worst relationship I have in the family. Um, and my relationship with my mom has suffered greatly because of my relationship with [my step-mom]. Especially in the past few years.

Denise’s chief concerns revolved around the issue of whether she believed that her stepmother had any right or authority to assume the role of a mother figure:

[My step-mom] doesn’t parent like a mother. She parents like someone who is taking care of kids as their job. So, it’s – there’s a set of rules, and there’s not sort of understanding as much as there is a hierarchy. Whereas I feel, like, with my mom, we’re on – we’re more of an understanding on the same level. [Do I feel that it’s an LGBTQ issue or a stepparent issue?] I feel like it’s a stepparent issue actually. Because I think that the issue that I have with [my mom’s partner]. It’s not that I have an issue with her because this is another woman in the house. That’s not the issue. The issue is that I was never a part of the discussion about who this new person in the family is. And she feels, um, sort of, an obligation almost or a right to parent me. And yes, she does have some
right to parent me because she’s been here with me for 11 years, but the point is that – she – I – she sees me more as her child than I see her as a parent.

Here, Denise explains that her experiences with her step-mother did not correspond to the set of expectations she had about the role of a mother. Without being part of the decision about her mother and her step-mother moving in with one another, she had difficulty coming to terms with the sudden shifts in her own story that began with a mother-father-led home, transitioned next to a mother-only-led home, and then became a mother-stepmother-led home. Denise’s older brother also found the arrival of a stepmother troubling. Denise recalls that when her brother was fifteen, he approached their mother with an ultimatum:

“I need to go, or [my step-mom] needs to go. Like, something has to shift here. I can’t live in this house.” And my mom – he ended up moving in with my dad, which was not very good for him. And then, moving into a group home. And then moving back home after about five years. A bit of a tumultuous time for him. But I know that my mom feels really guilty because she feels like she picked [her partner] over him, and in a way she did.

Here, Denise raises an interesting point regarding the tendency some youth have to resist the changes that accompany parental divorce and remarriage. Her story is suggestive of unwillingness to relinquish the narrative that is already familiar to them and that, at least from their perspective, is working well for the family. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) conducted a longitudinal study of 131 children from 60 divorced families and found that one third of the children were doing well and had strong relationships with their parents, while one third had
school and social problems combined with unrealistic expectations that their parents would one
day reunite, another common example of unwillingness to relinquish a familiar traditional family
narrative. The unrealistic expectation of the reuniting of one’s parents may be less likely for a
child who has witnessed the end of their parents’ heterosexual relationship and the subsequent
disclosure of non-heterosexuality from one of their two parents, simply because such a child
would have already begun to replace a traditional family narrative with an alternative narrative.
One of the participants, Owen, alluded to this when he responded to the museum stimulus image
(see Appendix F, Image 4). He invented a story about a heterosexual-led family that had decided
to end their marriage after the father had come to the realization that he was gay. “He’s just
changed his look on life, so he went out, and they had to divorce. They had to divorce, and now
the son has [a] mom and two dads,” concluded Owen with a laugh. His use of the words “they
had to” may suggest his belief that it was not a choice for his own parents to divorce, feeling that
after his mom came to the realization that she was a lesbian, she “had to” divorce. In a sense, he
was less at risk for the negative outcomes of divorce described by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980)
because his parents “had to” divorce, and because of his realization that if his mother had “stayed
in the closet, like, I think she’d be [slight pause] such an unhappy person, like, these days.”

Garner (2004) writes that LGB-identified parents sometimes worry that revealing their
sexual orientation to their children will be too much information to handle when combined with
an impending parental separation. “In truth,” she observes, “finding out that a parent’s sexual
orientation is the reason for the divorce can be a great relief. It is the lack of information that
causes anxiety in these family situations, because what children conjure up in their minds is often
worse than the reality” (Garner, 2004, p. 49). The lack of information referred to by Garner, in
narrative psychology terms, effectively stalls the process of locating alternative narratives that could pave the way to embracing an emerging new reality.

Phillip, a 27-year-old participant in one of Garner’s (2004) discussion panels, spoke of his appreciation for how his straight father had handled the situation when his mother had disclosed her lesbianism. He recalled how the potential pain of the experience was minimized because his mother left for another woman rather than for a replacement of Phillip’s father:

It wasn’t ugly at all. I remember thinking how I would feel if I were married and the person I was married to left me for another woman. I remember thinking I would be more torn up about it if she had left for another guy […] From what I picture of divorces, this one was pretty smooth. They actually hang out now. They have remained good friends, which is fantastic, I think. (Garner, 2004, pp. 71-72)

In Wallerstein and Kelly’s study (1980), it was clear that some children were negatively impacted by parental divorce while others continued to thrive. Most parents would want their children to be in the latter group. Despite parental hopes, however, the literature seems to indicate that the individual differences in children’s post-divorce and post-remarriage adjustment are not solely dependent on the behaviour of the parents.

In addition to the explanations offered by narrative psychology that could explain differing response styles to parental divorce as differing degrees of success with regard to amending one’s narrative, a number of studies have given support to risk and resilience models for explaining the various ways that children respond to divorce and remarriage. Deater-Deckard and Dunn (1999) highlight various groups of risk factors that may factor into the equation. They speak of child risk factors (e.g., adverse temperament, irritability, and genetic makeup),
sociocultural factors (e.g., community and neighbourhood contexts), and the home environment (e.g., parent attributes, parenting behaviour, etc.) as being three elements that combine to predict the possible child outcomes resulting from divorce and remarriage. Given the findings in the current study, it seems plausible that the adversarial behaviour of their parents may have contributed negatively to the experiences of Denise, Nick, and Ellie. For those three participants, their parents’ adversarial behaviour impeded rather than facilitated progress towards a new narrative that could include all of the features of their stories that were important and desirable.

In contrast, Victoria reported that her lesbian mothers continued to have a strong relationship even after their separation. Post-separation, the parents of one of her mothers (i.e., Victoria’s grandparents) continued to regard Victoria’s other mother as “part of their family,” and as such, part of their ongoing story. Christie, whose parents had also separated amicably after her father came out of the closet, gave some insight into how her mother might have wisely handled a difficult situation rather than responding in an inflammatory manner. “My mom, she’s very smart,” reported Christie. “And she looks on life with, like, you give what you get. And if you’re good to people, good things will happen to you. So she tries to be as nice as possible and very positive so that good things happen to her.” It may be that because Christie perceived a positive response to a difficult situation rather than a response that made her home environment more volatile, she was able to transition relatively smoothly into the next phase for her family, that of the termination of her parents’ marriage.

Similar to many of the participants in the current study, author Abigail Garner (2004) recalled her own mother and father divorcing well:

In the midst of my father officially coming out and my parents getting divorced, they made a conscious choice to make parenting a priority over their marital crisis. During
this painful time in both of their lives, Mom and Dad supported my brother and me, and still encouraged us to have a relationship with the other parent instead of hoping we would pick sides... [My mother] ignored the societal assumption that my father would be unfit to raise us because he was gay. (Garner, 2004, p. 65)

By encouraging Garner to maintain relationships with both of them, her parents had implicitly given her permission to build an emerging narrative of personal identity that did not force the exclusion of one of her parents’ stories. Furthermore, Garner explained that children face similar issues regardless of their parents’ sexual orientation such as feeling caught in the middle of parents, being vulnerable to losing a parent in custody cases, and integrating stepparents into their lives. Lev (2004) aptly summarized best practices for parents who want to help their children deal with the issues that arise as a result of divorce, describing standards developed by the Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders in cooperation with COLAGE and other organizations. The standards include avoiding the demonization of the other partner, considering the dispute from the point of view of the child, and endeavouring to maintain continuity for the sake of the child. There is no doubt that children are subjected to potential risks when their parents divorce, but there are ways to shield children from some of the negative outcomes that were experienced by participants such as Nick, Ellie, and Denise. Amato (1999) observed that divorce has become increasingly normative in North American society and highlighted the concerns that many conservatives have regarding a high divorce rate, namely that the well-being of society could be negatively impacted if a large segment of people have, themselves, been personally affected by the divorce of their parents. Amato also pointed out that children of divorced parents are at an increased risk for academic, psychological, and social
problems. With regard to the current study, there is particular relevance in Amato’s suggestion that some children are better off when unhappily married parents divorce. This was certainly the case for Nick, who described his life as “way better” after his parents’ divorce.

Some participants predicted their own future with respect to romantic partners. For example, Anna expressed clearly that she would consider forming a family with someone in the future but did not want to be married. This was certainly not the case for Victoria, however, who playfully described her desire to be married one day. “My parents would definitely, like, shame me for saying that,” she joked. “Happily married is definitely not a concept in my family [laughs]. They’re just so against the institution of marriage, of course. Which is why I love it [laughs]!”

F-3   Extended family responses

There is abundant research to describe the experiences that adults have when they come out of the closet to their families of origin (e.g., Merighi & Grimes, 2000; Morrow, 2001; Heatherington & Lavner, 2008). Narrative psychologists such as Hammack, Thompson, and Pilecki (2009) have contributed to such evidence to explain that, when coming out of the closet, people must negotiate master narratives such as the narrative of silence (i.e., the lived experience of many LGB individuals prior to their coming out), the narrative of struggle and success (i.e., resilience in spite of homophobia), or the narrative of emancipation (i.e., the hope that coming out will lead to a redemptive future). However, there is less evidence – from narrative psychology or otherwise – to examine the extended family responses from the perspective of children of LGB-identified parents. Patterson’s review of the literature (1995) acknowledged that there is a limited understanding of the ways that families of origin are affected when LGB-
identified parents disclose their non-heterosexuality. Other researchers (e.g., Murphy, 1989) have also highlighted a need to examine the impact that parents’ LGB orientation might have on relationships among children, parents, and grandparents throughout the life cycle. Given the responses of the participants in the present study, Murphy’s suggestion could be broadened to include other extended family members as well, since other family members’ reactions (e.g., aunts, uncles, and cousins) were also discussed.

Seven of the nine participants recalled negative extended family reactions to their parents’ disclosure of non-heterosexuality. Participants used language such as “didn’t accept,” “upset,” “mad,” “homophobe,” “homophobic,” “disapproval,” and “confused” as they articulated their recollections of extended family responses. Participants varied in the degree to which they felt compelled to become involved in the familial conflict. While some participants viewed the issues as matters for the adults to resolve, others were motivated to take a more active role in defending their LGB-identified parent. It also seemed apparent that some of the participants had been more shielded from family responses than others.

Christie reported that she was not exactly sure how or if her extended family members knew that her father was gay. “I think my dad let them know,” she speculated. “They kind of figured it out, or I don’t know how they found that out, but I’m pretty sure they all know, and they’re fine with it now. [If there were negative reactions] I never saw any. I never heard any. That was, that was for my dad.”

Shane echoed Christie’s feelings that if there were negative reactions, it was not up to him to intervene in the affairs of his adult family members. “No. It’s kind of my parents’ jobs,” he responded when asked if he ever had discussions with extended family members about their religious opposition to homosexuality.
Nick recalled a very affirming response from his aunt, the sister of his mother. “She was just open to it from day one,” he stated. “She knew that I was okay with the situation, but she was like, ‘You know, she’s your mom. She still is your mom. She will always be your mom. She’s always going to love you.’ So she pointed out that no matter what sexual orientation my mom was or who she was with, my mom was always going to love me.”

Denise spoke of the positive response of her mother’s uncle (i.e., Denise’s great uncle). “My mom’s uncle, who lives in Vancouver, has been very positive in his response,” she observed. “He was very accepting. Very sort of warm, and this is her, sort of, favourite uncle from her childhood, so it was very good for her to have that.” Such affirming, positive responses from extended family members, like the ones experienced by Nick and Denise, provide important opportunities for identity configuration that is characterized by the integration of a non-heterosexual narrative into the adolescents’ own personal narratives.

Such opportunities for integration do not always present themselves immediately after their parents’ disclosure of non-heterosexuality, however. Some participants reported initial adjustment periods from extended family. Julia, a from-the-get-go child, knew that her extended family members had needed a bit of time to come to terms with her mother’s sexual orientation. “I have a very supportive family,” she stated. “I think some of them were a little bit confused, and a little bit didn’t really understand, but I think that as of right now they are very much, they're very much accepting.”

In some cases, such as Ellie’s, there was a perception that it did not take relatives very long to adjust to accept the reality of having an LGB family member. Ellie recalled her observations when her mother first came out. “My mom’s parents […] were upset about it at first,” she said. “But, like, literally probably within a week they were over it.”
The relatives on one side of Victoria’s family tree took somewhat longer to accept having a lesbian family member. Victoria described the difference between her two mothers’ families’ responses:

I know that [Mom A’s] family was very supportive. They were very progressive. Um, [Mom B’s] family, like, not so much. It took them a really long time to adjust. Now they, like, love my mom, my other mom, and they love her new partner. Like, [Mom A] is still a part of their family even though they’re not even together anymore. My mom’s family didn’t accept her for a really long time. Like, but she was so determined to be out and be proud of who she was. And it clearly paid off because her mom adores her, and she’s been accepted by her whole family. So that says to me a lot about how I want to live my own life.

While some participants had relatives who had been immediately or eventually accepting, others dealt with the ongoing lack of acceptance from extended family members. This lack of acceptance sometimes created confusion and had the potential to result in an identity configuration characterized by fragmentation (Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009) or in a youth’s decision to sever ties with homophobic extended family members, effectively abandoning those family members’ narratives rather than expending the effort it might require to integrate them with their own emerging identities. Nick and Ellie described the family on their heterosexual father’s side as not being accepting, an unsurprising fact given that Nick’s and Ellie’s fathers were the individuals mentioned earlier who were still openly and regularly critical of LGB individuals. Shane, Owen, Anna, and Denise spoke at length about having uncles who
had never come to accept the LGB family members. In all four cases, the uncle was a spouse of the biological aunt rather than a blood-related uncle.

“I think [my uncle] is a homophobe or something,” stated Shane with a laugh. “He thinks that in the Bible it says that gays aren’t respected. Like, they shouldn’t, uh, it says that God hates gays, so they just [exhales] yeah, they don’t think that my mom should be lesbian.” His laughter and his exhalation were perhaps indicative of the ongoing tension experienced by this awkward family dynamic and of his uncertainty as to how his uncle and other family members used religion to justify their stance against his mother’s lesbianism.

In Anna’s case, the responses of extended family members were clearly viewed as a burden. When asked to identify a moment in her life when she had been the most disappointed, she stated, “A disappointment would be my family turning on my mom for a little bit. That’s a huge disappointment because I thought family was family. Apparently it’s not.” Like Shane, Anna cited her family members’ religious views as the reasons for their position against homosexuality:

I’ve had a conversation with my cousins who are on the religious side of my family, and they were all just saying, “Yeah, they choose to be that way,” and that was negative for me because I don’t think gay people choose to be gay. But that was negative because I just thought they were being very ignorant. They believe it because of the Bible, but I don’t think that’s a good enough reason. I just, in my argument for when people say that they choose to be that way I say, “Well, do you choose to be straight? Did you – were you born, and then you chose to be in love with someone of the opposite sex?” Cause that’s not how it works.
Here, Anna articulated her frustration with what she believed to be the flawed logic of her cousins, a view shared by Shane when he argued that homosexual tendencies “wouldn’t wipe off on someone else.” Anna also expressed that, in her view, merely citing religious reasons for a stance against homosexuality is insufficient. She demonstrated an intention to debate the issues analytically and a desire to change her cousins’ opinions on the matter. Anna’s other remarks indicated that some progress had been made in changing her relatives’ views, with the exception of those of her uncle:

At first, I think [my extended family] were all pretty, not mad at my mom but upset, confused. But her sister came to her [lesbian] wedding. And I think that was, like, a really good thing because she was showing support for my mom no matter who she was marrying. So, that was a very, I thought that was really good when she showed up. And now my whole family, kind of, has accepted my mom and who she is except for my uncle […] I just think that he doesn’t understand it. And so that’s why he, I mean, he doesn’t come to family events my mom goes to, and that’s all of them. So, he doesn’t like being around my mom or her wife. So, that’s – I don’t like him very much [exhales]. And understandably […] My mom has had many conversations with her sister – his wife – and him. And he said that he’ll never get over it.

Anna’s nonverbal behaviour and her admission of not liking her uncle suggested a level of stress caused by familial tension that she felt powerless to change. Viewed from the perspective of narrative psychology, her feelings of powerlessness to change her uncle’s views resulted in her rejection of his narrative rather than risk the fragmentation of her own emerging identity as she sought to reconcile his views with her own. His alignment with a master narrative
of heteronormativity was problematic in that it was incompatible with her own emerging sense of self. Her uncle’s refusal to attend family events if Anna’s lesbian-identified mother and stepmother were present is a phenomenon not unique to Anna’s family. Garner (2004) writes of the complicated family dynamics she observed when she was growing up as the child of a gay-identified father. “When extended family members do not acknowledge or validate LGBT family relationships,” explains Garner, “it hurts the children as well as their parents” (Garner, 2004, p. 131). According to Garner, family events such as weddings and funerals have particular potential for awkward or hurtful effects of such non-validation. Children with LGBT parents, argues Garner, find it unsettling when they see their same-sex parents less open at family functions in order to be accepted by family. When same-sex partners are not included on wedding invitations or are excluded from the list of surviving family members in written obituaries, children with LGBT-identified parents are often hurt and confused. “Even as adults,” writes Garner, “children see the rejection of their parent as a rejection of them, too” (Garner, 2004, p. 136).

Nick described his maternal grandmother as accepting, perhaps due in part to her exposure to LGB issues. “She had two brothers that were gay and a sister that’s gay as well,” revealed Nick. “So there was a family of nine, and three of them were gay. Um, so my grandmother was accepting.” Here, Nick is acknowledging that because his grandmother’s story had already been influenced by the master narrative of gay identity of her siblings, she was able to more easily come to terms with the LGB identity of her daughter. Despite her immediate acceptance, however, she was inconsistent in her support. On one hand, Nick reported his grandmother as saying to his mother, “I know what situation you’re in. Get out if you need to.”
On the other hand, however, Nick reported his grandmother as saying to his mother, “If you’re having a wedding, I’m not going to it.” Of all the participants, Nick was the individual most willing to defend his queer-identified parent in the midst of conflict with extended family:

I remember the one time [my grandma] said something – I can’t remember what she said to my mom, but I could clearly see that my mom was really, really upset because my mom’s always turned to my oma when she needs help. Um, and then she said something like that, so as soon as she got off the phone, I picked up the phone right away, and I called my grandma and said, “What did you say to Mom?” And she was on the other end, and she was upset too. And I’m like, “What did you say to Mom?” And then she was like “Nick, what are you talking about?” And I’m like, “What did you say to Mom? Because she’s in her room right now, she locked the door, and she’s crying.” You know? And she was like, “Well, you know, what your mother and I are going through right now is between her and I.” And I’m like, “Well, clearly it’s not because it’s affecting, you know, she’s in her room right now crying.” […] I’ve defended her from, like birth pretty much [chuckles]. So I said, “Well you know, that’s not right. She’s your daughter. She loves you, and she always will. And what you said to her is wrong. Do you think that I would say something like that to my child? Or do you think I would say something like that to my mom? No, absolutely not.” And I said, “She’s still your daughter. Um, why would you do something like that?” So, I think then my grandmother cried, and she was very upset at what she had did, and then she asked me to put Mom on the phone. She apologized to my mom, and then she thanked me because I had, like, kind of helped her through that.
Nick’s response revealed that there are moments of conflict when it may be necessary and/or useful for children of LGB-identified parents to intervene. Certainly, he believed that his intervention had brought about positive change in his grandmother’s behaviour. Throughout the interview, Nick mentioned many instances where he had defended his mother to adults such as his grandmother or his father. Fakhrid-Deen (2010) argues that parents need to shoulder the responsibility to deal with negative family responses. “They need to handle their opinions and disagreements like responsible adults,” she asserts. “It is not our responsibility to fight family battles or to be the spokesperson for the gay parent. This is our parents’ task […] to protect [children] from the rhetoric of homo-hostile family members” (p. 88). Nick’s opinion is no less valid than Fakhrid-Deen’s, however, and it was clear that he felt that his interventions in adult conflict were necessary and effective. He was unable to extricate himself from this situation and therefore unwilling to passively allow conflict between his mother and grandmother to have a negative impact on him.

Two participants, Owen and Denise, suggested that sometimes youth with LGB-identified parents do not need to address the issue directly, because other factors such as traumatic life events can unexpectedly serve as the impetus for the evolution of attitudes about sexual orientation. Owen began by explaining that he was “unhappy” to observe the stress of his parents dealing with “disapproval from their family.” He explained how a traumatic family event had temporarily softened his uncle’s disapproving attitude:

[My uncle] is just past the point of accepting it, but like, my cousin died recently. And after that point, like his – his son, his son had committed suicide so after that point, it brought our family close to the other. And for a moment, like, he accepted it ‘cause he needed the love, and, but, uh, now he doesn’t accept it again […]. I don’t think I am
going to change his opinion on it […]. I think we’re at that point where no one else is going to follow into that.

Denise also alluded to the initial disapproval family members had of her LGB-identified parents. “The majority of my relatives did not respond so well,” she reflected. “My grandmother is very religious.” She also referred to a homophobic uncle who, like Owen’s uncle, had waited for a traumatic event to usher in a change in his response style:

[My mom’s] sister’s husband was – is – well, was very homophobic, and until recently there has been a huge sort of, they just stopped having any contact with each other. We used to live down the street from them, and then they kind of moved away after [my mom’s partner] moved in with us. Or we moved in with her, actually, so it’s all very, that was very hard for my mom. And I know that recently that has been going away. My grandparents are kind of having a harder time when they moved [away], so in a way it has to be better, because we’re all going to be forced together. And also her husband, my uncle, had a heart attack [chuckles] recently, and it’s made him extremely warm [laughs]. He is, like, all of a sudden has seen the light, and he’s being very nice! Like, he’s had a realization here!

It is interesting to note that Denise was amused by the fact that it took a serious event such as a heart attack before her uncle had an epiphany and was able to see “the light.” Even so, many youth with LGB-identified parents would rather have the immediate acceptance of extended family rather than await a tragic event such as a suicide or a heart attack to prompt attitudinal change. Fakhrid-Deen (2010) writes, “In an ideal world, most of us [offspring of
LGB-identified parents] would have worked out all of our family dynamics and would have fulfilling, supportive relationships with our parents, siblings, and extended family members. The reality, however, is that most of us have to deal with the fact that some family members will always have their issues and be resistant to [our] parents’ sexual orientation and ‘lifestyle’” (Fakhrid-Deen, 2010, p. 86).

Overall, almost as a confirmation of Fakhrid-Deen’s words, the participants in the present study did indeed “have to deal with the fact that some family members will always have their issues” (p. 86). There was a tremendous sense, however, that their resilience and ability to draw from and form alternative narratives had allowed them to rise above the conflict. Recognizing that other youth with queer-identified parents experience family resistance similar to her own experience with her uncle, Denise offered this advice:

“It’s hard to say don’t let it get to you, because it’s your family, and it’s the support system that’s supposed to be very accepting. So it’s very hard to say, oh, just don’t let it get to you. [But] I would say talk about it with not only those members of your extended family but your immediate family, because they’re probably feeling similar about whatever the reaction was. So it’s good to talk it out. And try to stay connected to those members of the extended family as well.

“It’s better now,” said Nick of the relationship between his mother and his grandmother. “She’s always accepted my mom, but it’s better now that she understands, you know, my mom, and she understands that my mom is happy now. And that’s ultimately what you want for your kid.” Here Nick articulates his belief that his grandmother needed to understand her daughter’s narrative before she could fully embrace it and integrate it as part of her own story. His
conclusion hints of his optimistic view that extended family can, with time, come to appreciate the authenticity of the gay narrative, much as he himself had learned that there were many benefits to having an LGB-identified parent.

F-4 Advantages of having LGB-identified parents

The participants in the current study were very clear that they did not view their families as significantly different from any other family, a fact that suggests youth with LGB-identified parents may already be challenging the very concept of normativity, much as Hammack and Windell (2011) suggest that the discipline of psychology should also do. As is the case in many families, participants in the current study experienced occasional sibling squabbles, tension with extended family members, and adjustment to the realities of divorce and the formation of stepfamilies. Still, they were able to articulate some perceived advantages of having an LGB-identified parent, lending support to Baumrind’s (1995) assertion that even when differences are revealed which set LGB-led families apart from heterosexual-led families, these differences are not necessarily deficits.

Victoria had very positive things to say about growing up in a lesbian-led home, but she was also very cognizant of avoiding generalizing her experiences for all children from queer families, recognizing that her own story was not necessarily compatible with the lived experienced of her peers. “I always have to acknowledge that I’m speaking about my parents and not all gay and lesbian parents,” she said to preface her answer. “It’s been great growing up in my lesbian family.” Her words serve as a reminder that this is idiographic research, and that the experiences of this group of young people may be very specific.
The participants identified the following advantages of having LGB-identified parents:

1. LGB parents are role models of great strength (Anna, Julia, Ellie, Victoria).

2. LGB parents can find unique and special ways to relate to their opposite-gender children compared to heterosexual parents’ relationships with their opposite-gender children (Christie, Nick).

3. Having LGB parents promotes open-mindedness on issues of sexuality (Victoria, Denise, Julia).

4. Having LGB parents heightens awareness of social justice issues (Nick, Julia, Anna, Denise, Victoria).

This list represents the advantages identified by the participants, but their responses also revealed other advantages that they might not yet have realized or articulated. As mentioned in chapter two, Saffron (1998) suggested that the offspring of LGB-identified parents are, by virtue of straddling different narratives (e.g., many grow up in an LGB-led home but are themselves heterosexual-identified), in a unique position to educate society about LGB issues, giving them tremendous leverage to change the homophobic attitudes that are pervasive in our culture. There was certainly evidence of this, which will be presented in chapter six. For the moment, however, we will consider only the advantages specifically identified by the participants themselves to illustrate how they make sense of their own experiences growing up in LGB-led families.

Anna, Ellie, and Victoria used the same word, strength, to describe their lesbian mothers. When asked to consider the advantages of growing up in an LGB-led home, Victoria exclaimed, “Oh, my gosh, so many good things! […] For my parents, I’ve taken a lot of courage and strength because they’ve had to come out, you know?” She also alluded to the transmission of
that strength from one generation to the next. “There’s things about being gay that don’t even add up, they surpass, you know, because [LGB people] have to be radical and amazing and so strong, that I think, it’s like, they’ve definitely passed that on to me.”

Ellie remarked that she, too, had also benefited from the example of strength she saw in her mother. “For me, my mom always was a really good role model,” she explained. “Not even because she was a lesbian, but because she’s such a feminist […]. She’s a really strong person. Like, she outed herself in front of, like, a really small town that’s really gossipy and, um, told her parents who were really old-fashioned. Like, I think it’s just – it’s just a good example because she was so strong.”

Similarly, Anna used the phrase “role model” to describe her mother. “She is very much a role model for me because she’s very strong and, like, I’ve seen her go through her family getting very upset with her because they’re so religious […]. I’ve just seen her go through it, and so I view her as a very strong role model because I strive to be strong just like her.”

Victoria recognized that some LGB-identified adults considering becoming parents might have reservations. She expressed her desire to encourage them to pursue their intentions to have children. “I love talking to [potential LGB-identified parents], because I always get this fear, this, ‘Oh gosh, am I fucking up my child?’ And I’m always, like, ‘Do you know the amazing things I’ve gotten from having a queer family? Like, if anything, you’re giving them a gift, you know?’” It is interesting to note that Ellie, Victoria, and Anna saw past the issue of sexual orientation to their mothers’ deeper character traits of strength and courage. They viewed their parents’ coming out processes as demonstrative of a commitment to authentic living, regardless of any negative societal consequences. By not viewing their mothers from a perspective that
assumed heterosexual-identified people to be superior to non-heterosexuals, they were able to recognize their mothers’ strengths.

A 65-year-old gay father interviewed by Duggan (2007) relayed the words of his daughter when he finally came out to his adult children. The daughter’s response was sobering for the father, because she was expressing such profound relief that her father was able to be authentic with her:

[My adult daughter] also said something else to me that has haunted me ever since […]. She said [her] biggest fear [was that] you’d die someday, and you’d never told us, and I’d have to purchase this casket and look at your body and wonder what was this big secret that you’d never tell us. (Duggan, 2007, p. 123)

Similarly, participants in the current study preferred parental honesty to secrecy. They understood that coming out might have been a decision over which their parents agonized, and they were proud of their parents’ genuineness. In addition to viewing their parents as strong, some participants indicated that they were able to find unique and special ways to relate to their opposite-gender LGB-identified parents. It should be noted that only four of the participants had an opposite-gender LGB-identified parent (Shane, Owen, Nick, and Christie). Christie attempted to explain how having a gay father would be a different experience than that of a girl with a heterosexual father. “We connect a lot better than I guess another dad would, ‘cause, I mean, other dads are always so [chuckles] – my dad’s kind of emotional, right [laughs]? As a, as a gay dad, so he has that emotional side to him. So we can talk about shopping and boys and stuff like that [chuckles].” Christie inserted a chuckle where she might have given a descriptor of heterosexual-identified father. This description may have been “macho”, “emotionally
unavailable”, or some other phrase. It is difficult to know with certainty how or why she perceived heterosexual fathers as different from gay dads, but it is clear that she viewed herself as the beneficiary of a closeness with her father that was the result of what she perceived to be an atypical ability to talk about “shopping and boys and stuff like that.”

Her experience was remarkably similar to Nick’s experience with his lesbian mom. “It’s also really cool to have a mom who, when you’re out walking, can say to you, ‘Wow, look at how hot she is!’” joked Nick. “So it’s kind of funny. Like, all the other – like my best friend loves my mom because she’ll say, ‘Did you see her?’ So it’s really fun to have a mom to hang out with and high five, and she can point out hot girls to you. It’s kind of funny.” Nick also felt that because of having an opposite-gender LGB-identified parent, he was able to have an improved understanding of women:

I guess you clearly get a better understanding of women in general. It’s funny to have my mom teach you how to be the polite one. Like, “When you’re walking with a girl, you go on the outside of the street.” You know what I mean? “Give her your jacket when she’s cold.” That kind of stuff. So, like, Mom taught me the little polite things that girls like to see […]. Even though she is feminine, she also has a masculine side to her, too.

Victoria, Denise, and Julia believed that having LGB-identified parents had allowed them to be more open in their conversations about sexuality and in the discovery of their own sexual identity. “I feel like [having a bisexual mother and a bisexual father] has made me a lot more open-minded,” commented Denise. “I also feel more comfortable to approach my parents than some of my friends do about sexual orientation issues, LGBTQ issues, that my friends wouldn’t want to talk to their parents about.”
“It definitely has affected my life as in I’m very open,” echoed Julia. “I’m a lot more open to exploration of the, you know, sexuality.” If, like Denise and Julia, more youth were able to openly explore and talk about issues of sexual orientation, one might wonder if there would be less confusion. Since seven of the nine participants had LGB-identified parents who had originally been in heterosexual relationships, they are all too aware of the reality that many people come to understand their own sexual orientation later rather than sooner. Surely, it cannot be the sexual orientation of their parents that facilitated more open discussion and exploration of sexual orientation. A more likely explanation is that their LGB parents projected a greater openness to the discussion and exploration of these issues than is experienced in society on the whole. There are potentially lessons about openness to be learned from LGB parents that could be beneficial for all parents, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Victoria, who voluntarily disclosed her own non-heterosexuality during the interview, stated that having lesbian moms made her “more open-minded to my own sexuality and to other people’s sexuality.” She added, “I’m not saying that my parents made me gay, but I think they, like, it might have taken me a lot longer to realize that I wasn’t just typically straight.” Of course, many conservatives would cite Victoria’s non-heterosexuality as evidence that LGB-parenting causes confusion about sexual orientation. Victoria’s experience, however, was that LGB-parenting was a resolution to her confusion, not its cause. Essentially, her own identity configuration was facilitated by having parental role models who demonstrated that there was an alternative to the master narrative of heteronormativity.

The final advantage identified by multiple participants was the idea that having an LGB-identified parent had heightened the participants’ awareness to social inequality and issues of social justice. This was the reported experience of Nick, Julia, Anna, Denise, and Victoria.
There was a strong sense of having witnessed discriminatory behaviour directed at their parents. “I really understand the inequalities,” claimed Nick. “Once your one parent becomes an LGBT or same-sex, then you really notice how they’re, how they’re treated, you know what I mean? How they’re treated in general.”

Victoria added that having lesbian mothers made her “more open-minded to other, like, differences – oppressed or marginalized voices.” She also wondered aloud, “I don’t know if that’s because my parents are political or because they’re queer, or a mix of both.” In a sense, her words invite the image of a Venn diagram that allows her own life to be represented by the intersection of multiple influencing narratives.

“The population of queer spawn as a whole are more socially aware,” speculated Denise. “Which is not to say there are some queer spawn who are not socially aware. And of course, there are lots of kids who are not from queer families who are very socially aware as well. So it’s a give-and-take, but I think as a – as a per capita sort of measure – I would say that [youth with queer parents] are probably more socially [aware]. We’re, just, because of the close involvement.” Her response hints to the conclusions of Saffron (1998), that such close proximity to the LGB community puts this group of youth in a position to more intuitively understand social injustice, to know the effects of marginalization like only a member of a minority group minority can.

Julia presented a compelling argument that growing up with the sense of being a minority had also shaped her understanding of social justice issues:

I think when you are a minority of some type you’re very much more focused on that. So I think growing up in an atmosphere where there’s, like, you have to fight for your rights. You, you notice more, and you get more involved, and you become more of an open
person towards human rights issues and social justice issues. As opposed to someone who didn’t grow up with any problems, any types of things they had to fight for. [It was different for me than for] someone whose parents have it easy, or like they, you know, like, your white picket fence family who are the top of the, um, the top of the ladder as in, you know, um, like ability, race, socioeconomic, all that, right? Like, they’re at the top.

Julia’s experiences as a fringe member of a minority group probably have parallels to others who have close ties to minority groups. For example, those who have grown up with a sibling who depended on a wheelchair for mobility would probably be more keenly aware of which buildings had accessibility ramps and elevators, etc. They, like Julia, would “notice more” because certain details would become relevant that otherwise might have seemed unimportant. The stories, struggles, and successes of those who closely interact with minority groups could, as Ricoeur (1992) suggested more generally, be integrated into their own narratives of personal identity. Anna admitted that this heightened awareness phenomenon was true for her when she said, “I wouldn’t be such a strong supporter of gay people if my mom wasn’t gay, I don’t think.”

The reported experiences of Nick, Victoria, Denise, Julia, and Anna were very similar. They all felt that having LGB parents had allowed them to become more aware of social justice issues and/or to become stronger advocates for queer youth. The relationship between youth with queer parents and queer youth themselves will be explored in chapter six, as another potential advantage that highlights the unique position in which youth with queer parents find themselves. In summary, however, it is important to recognize what these nine participants said when asked to specifically identify the advantages of having LGB-identified parents. They
identified their parents as strong role models, believed that they were able to have unique relationships with their parents, believed that they had developed increased open-mindedness on issues of sexuality, and felt they had heightened awareness with respect to social justice issues. Their words provide powerful support to the work of Saffron (1998), who reported that LGB parenting gives children an opportunity to have greater acceptance of differences in lifestyles, types of families, cultural and religious variations, and widespread political values.

**Summary of Family Themes**

Under the domain of family-related themes, the participants’ experiences centered around their parents’ LGB disclosure, events related to divorce and re-partnering, the responses of extended family members, and the perceived advantages of having lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents. For the most part, these particular participants, who had each voluntarily agreed to take part in the current study, reported positive experiences coming to terms with their parents’ disclosure of non-heterosexuality. When parents who were previously in heterosexual-identified relationships came out of the closet, their children could no longer use the master narrative of heteronormativity because it was a poor fit for their own identity configuration. Nor could they use a gay narrative, however, given that the majority of them did not identity as LGB themselves. Therefore, their parents’ disclosure of non-heterosexuality necessitated the emergence of a new narrative identity that was personal and yet also encorporated their family’s story. This notion is consistent with the musings of Ricoeur (1992), who suggested that our stories are co-written with those who are important to us, as well as with the work of Arnold, Pratt, and Hicks (2004), who maintained that the influences of an adolescent’s significant others contribute to the adolescent’s construction of a personal belief system.
Fakhrid-Deen, (2010), herself the offspring of a mother who came out late in life, acknowledges that the manner in which parents come out to their children can be supportive and positive, but not all parents know the best way to achieve this. Learning from the parent-to-child disclosure stories shared by other LGB parents and their children can be an important means of establishing best practices for parents seeking strategies to come out to their own children. The seven participants in this study who were born into heterosexual contexts found out at an average of 9.5 years of age that they had an LGB-identified parent. It must be acknowledged that the recruitment strategy made it more likely to have participants who were happy about being in a queer-led home and therefore these findings are not necessarily generalizable. With respect to the participants in the current study, however, their young age, their parents’ willingness to be direct about their sexual identity, and the participants’ own perceptions of parental relief after the disclosure, were likely factors in allowing these participants to quite easily accept the idea of having a lesbian, gay, or bisexual parent.

For the seven participants who had begun their lives within the context of a heterosexual-identified family unit, the degree to which their parents separated amicably was related to the quality of the parent-child relationships following the divorce. The children whose parents had separated amicably experienced ongoing positive relationships with both original parents. When children experienced negative interactions with one of their parents, particularly in the form of homophobic rhetoric, they described their parents with unflattering terms such as “awful” and “abusive.” When the participants’ LGB-identified parents found new partners, this was a positive experience for most of the participants. They were not only happy to see their LGB parents in meaningful relationships; most of them believed that the stepparent figures’ presence had enriched their own experiences growing up, too.
While the participants in the current study were pleased that their parents were able to be true to their own sexual identities, most of them reported less enthusiastic support for their parents’ LGB identities from extended family members. Language such as “didn’t accept,” “upset,” “mad,” “homophobe,” “homophobic,” “disapproval,” and “confused” revealed that for most of the participants, at least one extended family member had exhibited noticeable opposition to issues of homosexual or bisexual orientation. Participants varied in the degree to which extended family members’ responses affected them, as well as the degree to which they felt compelled to respond to their family members’ concerns. The overwhelming response was that, with time, most extended family members were able to eventually come to terms with the participants’ parents’ sexuality; if family members had not come to accept the LGB orientation of their parents, the participants moved towards more detached relationships with those particular relatives. The participants knew that their parents were living authentic lives and expressed a desire to surround themselves with people who would allow their families to flourish rather than to be held back by intolerant attitudes.

Understanding that their LGB-identified parents were being true to themselves, participants identified several advantages that arose from living in LGB-led families. Some participants expressed the benefits of having parents who had modeled great personal strength during the coming out process. Some pointed to the unique closeness that arose when they, as heterosexual youth, could discuss “boys” or “girls” with their opposite-gender parents. Others felt that having LGB parents had fostered a development of greater open-mindedness with respect to issues of sexuality. Finally, more than half of the participants specifically mentioned that they felt having parents who identified as sexual minorities had directly impacted their own awareness of social justice issues.
When youth with LGB-identified parents have an awakening of sensitivity to social justice issues, one of the first places where they are likely to notice and experience injustice is at school. Beyond the security of their own family, they find a world in which they have to make decisions about their own disclosure practices. At school, they face a range of environments, a myriad of sociopolitical viewpoints, and varying degrees of acceptance from peers and teachers. Within the microcosm that their classroom provides, they learn who to trust, who to enlighten, and who to avoid. In chapter five, the focus of the study shifts from the family experiences to the school experiences of youth with LGB-identified parents.
Chapter Five: School Themes – Results & Discussion

School Themes

The first day of school is a near-universal experience, an event that is part of almost every North American’s personal narrative. Some children face this day excited and ready for new experiences, while others are practically pried from their parents’ arms. Regardless of the level of voluntary acceptance of the realities of school institutions, however, when children begin school they are exposed to new faces, new cultures, new rules, new social expectations, and new guidelines for conflict resolution. Children may have developed a fairly complex understanding of how things work at home and within their extended family, but when they begin school they experience a paradigm shift that requires them to expand their identity configuration beyond the relative safety afforded them at home. Throughout this chapter, evidence from each participant’s interview will be presented to demonstrate the school-related themes that emerged. For a master table of school-related thematic evidence, see Appendix I.

For children with LGB-identified parents and, indeed, for any child, the microcosm of society that their classroom provides will range from hospitable to hostile. When Garner (2004) learned in 1978 that her father identified as gay, she quickly deduced that she needed to be careful about who she told. “From that moment on,” she recalled, “I began a lifetime of seeking out allies and avoiding people I perceived as homophobic and therefore threats to my family” (Garner, 2004, p. 39). In schools, children with queer-identified parents learn to make ongoing decisions about if and when to disclose, who to trust, and who to avoid.

For the most part, the youth who agreed to participate in the current study were very clear that they had, over time, become very open with their peers about the fact that they had a queer-
identified parent. Like Garner, each had learned to choose accepting friends and had acquired a skill set to enable them to drop hints about their family configuration to assess who could or could not be trusted with a window into this aspect of their identity. Their collective experience demonstrated both best and worst school practices. Theirs are anecdotes from which teachers, school administrators, and policymakers can learn valuable lessons. Finally, the lived experiences of the nine participants highlighted the important role that education can play. Over and over again, they stated that to ensure our society’s increased acceptance of diverse family configurations, there is one obvious solution: education.

S-1 Disclosure decisions, practices, and repercussions

During the course of the interview, all participants were asked the question, “On a scale from one (low) to five (high), how out are you about the fact that you have an LGB-identified parent?” All participants stated either 4 or 5, and the mean response was 4.7. As a group, they clearly viewed themselves as currently being very open about their parents’ sexual orientation. There were indications, however, that they had not always been as open, that they still made disclosure decisions, and that responses to their disclosure of parental non-heterosexuality had ranged from unfavourable to favourable.

One could question the very necessity of disclosing parents’ sexual orientations, just as one could question the necessity of an individual disclosing their sexual orientation. Both of these issues were raised by Victoria. On the subject of the disclosure of one’s own sexual identity, Victoria brought up an interesting question:

Do straight people have to come out? And it’s, like, yes and no. Because every time they hold their partner’s hand, they come out. Every time they announce, “Oh, I have a
crush on this person,’” they come out. But they also don’t have to come out, because it’s just assumed that they are. So they don’t have to tell anyone they’re straight because if they don’t say anything, they’re just assumed to be.

On the issue of disclosing one’s parents’ sexual orientation, there is also a widespread societal assumption that everyone has heterosexual parents. In typical circumstances, most youth with LGB-identified parents would not need to disclose their parents’ sexual orientation unless they either wanted to or deemed it necessary. Victoria believed the decision to disclose or not to disclose could depend on the circumstances:

There’s so much more to you than just your parent. I think that’s something that maybe I didn’t realize, and I would like to pass on now. Like, you aren’t your parents; you are your own person. So if you think that [disclosure of your parents’ sexual identity] is going to really inhibit you from growing or from people seeing you as who you are, then just leave it.

That being said, however, Victoria went on to identify herself as completely open about her mothers’ lesbian identities. For the from-the-get-go children (Julia and Victoria) or for other participants who found out when they were quite young (e.g., Shane, Denise, and Ellie), there was an initial sense of not realizing that their family configuration was atypical. “When I was about ten,” claimed Victoria, “people gave me weird looks when they found out. And I was like, oh, this isn’t normal?”
Several participants hinted that they went through various stages of openness about their family identity. Julia’s candid response provided the clearest indication of the various transitions she had experienced:

Julia now would say, “I have a queer family. I have two moms, and suck on that” [laughs]. Elementary school Julia, when I was very young, I’d be like, “I have a mom only.” And then I started to get bullied so I would – I would, when people would ask if my mom was gay, I’d say no. If they’d ask where my father was, I’d make up stories. “Oh, he died,” or “I don’t know,” or whatever. And then when my mom and her partner got together, instead of Patricia she was Patrick. You know, so like, Patrick, you know, so like very much covering up what my family was, hiding it. And I think that that went pretty much all through to grade nine. A lot of denial and covering up and feeling, like, very ashamed and having to almost come out for my mother to people. Being like, “I have to tell you something. Will you still be my friend?” […] As I got older, and I started making different friends who just didn’t care, especially when I also came out and having other queer – you know – other queer support systems in my life […] It was cool. It was, “Oh, I wish I had your family!”

In some ways, Julia’s journey of coming to terms with her parents’ sexual orientation mirrored the development of individual sexual identity as described by a number of theorists (e.g., Cass, 1979; McDonald, 1982; Sophie, 1986; Worthington et al., 2002). However, rather than passing through the stages of an individual’s “identity confusion” and “identity comparison,” Julia’s experiences suggest that she encountered what could be labelled episodes of “family identity confusion” and “family identity comparison.” She concocted details about her
family identity as she became cognizant of the ways in which her family differed from opposite-gender-led families. Eventually, however, she achieved a “family identity synthesis” that perhaps corresponds to the “identity synthesis” or “integration” in the aforementioned models.

Like Julia, Denise explained that she was eventually able to achieve a level of comfort with outing her parents. At some point during elementary school, she became more cautious regarding the process of disclosing her parents’ sexual identity, but by the end of high school it had once again become relatively simple:

As a “queer spawn,” as we call it, um, I know that there’s always a time that I have to come out to my friends. I have to out my parents to my friends, or now, new people that I meet. And I know that when I started – the, like grade one, maybe grade two – people’s reactions began to change […]. I remember being, like, uneasy to tell people. Because I knew that they would react in a different way than if someone else had said, “I have a mom and a dad” […]. Now it’s a lot easier to out my parents.

Shane suggested that when he was younger, he had not been concerned about friends finding out about his lesbian-identified mother. “When I was younger, I didn’t care that much,” he stated. “Now, I don’t mind, but it’s just kind of weird, because they might care.” Shane had given himself a rating of 4 in response to the “how out are you” question referenced above, and it is possible that this score acknowledged his acquired tendency to withhold information about his mother’s lesbianism because he was uncertain about how his peers might react. Like Fakhrid-Deen (2010), he may have found it “scary” to live with the possibility that his friends “might care” about his mother’s sexual orientation. As a result, as he had entered his adolescent years, he had begun to be more selective about who and when to tell.
Seventeen-year-old Anna, who was four years older than Shane and was entering her final semester of high school, provided a useful contrast to Shane’s experience. Anna was exiting high school and had reached a new comfort level in her disclosure practices:

The only time I had a problem with it was when I would have to tell friends. And I remember that that was really hard for me ‘cause at the time, um, I was kind of embarrassed of it in front of my friends. But then, like, that was only because I didn’t want them to judge me, not because of my mom […]. But now, it doesn’t matter anymore. Like, I tell whoever, and I don’t care.

Anna’s comfort in disclosing her family identity increased in late adolescence just as had been the case for McGuire (1996), but this does not mean that all youth with LGB-identified parents follow the same trajectory through their high school years.

It was interesting to note that Anna claimed to be concerned about her peers’ judgement of her, but Christie explicitly stated that it was judgement of her father that she feared most:

I want to make sure if I do tell any of my friends that they’re my best friends. All my best friends understand. It’s just, I wouldn’t openly say it to a group of people, ‘cause I don’t want my dad to be judged. Not just me but, like, my dad. I just want to protect him […]. I’d definitely say just tell your close friends ‘cause they’ll understand you, and they’re more likely to understand your dad as well. Because if you just open it up to the whole class then everyone will be having these little discussions, “Oh, her dad is gay.” Stuff like that. But I just felt that my best friends should know, ‘cause they come over. I mean they can understand that. But I don’t know if I had told – like, if the whole school knew, then I don’t know how they’d feel about that. And I don’t know. I want to, as I
said before, just kind of, like, protect my dad. And have him not judged and stuff like that […]. My dad was completely fine with it. I, I think. He’s like, yeah, because he’s comfortable with himself at that point ‘cause he knew who he was. And so he’s, like, if you want to tell your friends that’s fine. But if you don’t want to, you don’t have to. It’s up to you.

At first glance, it might seem that Anna and Christie differed in their motivations to withhold information from some school peers. However, both were trying to avoid the judgement of others. They differed in terms of whom they claimed to be shielding from judgement, but in both cases this effort to avoid judgement caused them to be cautious about whom they told. Christie’s recommendation to others with LGB-identified parents underscored her cautious tendencies. “If they don’t want to get teased or anything,” she advised, “just tell your close friends and have that little, like, circle of people that you can trust with that information […]. If people don’t understand that, that’s their problem. They don’t need to get it, ‘cause that’s for you, and that’s for your parents.”

Christie’s comments that her best friends “should know” suggested that sometimes, the participants felt that they somehow owed it to their friends to be truthful, or that if they were not truthful with friends that fragmentation to relationships or even to their own sense of identity could occur. “My best friends should know, ‘cause they come over,” Christie said. She explained why she had told one of her best friends. “Like, she should know. ‘Cause if she comes over, she’s met my dad before. I mean, it’s just easier if she knew, right? So there’s no, ‘Hmm, is he?’ When they’re guessing, they’re kind of unsure. So, if I just tell her, it’s much easier that way.” Once friends had reached a certain level of closeness, participants seemed to
know that it would be increasingly difficult to withhold the truth about their family identity from friends. In order to live authentically, participants’ responses suggested that others such as their friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, etc., should be allowed to position themselves within the whole story, and that a level of honesty was therefore necessary to facilitate an authentic positioning of each person’s narrative identity relative to the next. Christie preferred to proactively address the elephant in the room rather than waiting for her friends to draw their own conclusions. She did not tell everyone, however. For example, she said, “I’m not going to come out and tell the teacher if it’s unnecessary.” On the other hand, Christie had a new boyfriend that she was bringing over to the house, and so she decided to tell him. For the third time, she used the words “should know” to describe the sense of obligation she felt to disclose her father’s non-heterosexual identity:

He was my boyfriend for a bit, and I told him that my dad was gay, and he didn’t believe me. But then I explained it to him that, “Yeah, my dad is gay, and he does have a boyfriend.” And when he came over, he did believe me. Like, seeing it for himself […]. [I told him because] I just felt that he should know. We were dating, right, so he should know that my parent – my dad – is gay.

Christie’s reasons for disclosure resembled those of the adult offspring of LGB-identified parents in Goldberg’s (2007) study. She wanted her relationships with her boyfriend and close friends to be open, and she told them about her father’s gay identity in the interest of transparency. “It’s nothing that I would lie or hide about,” confirmed Christie.

This opinion was shared by other participants who saw no value in being deceptive about their family identity. Deception was perceived to be a behaviour that threatened the forward
momentum of one’s identity configuration. Julia, for example, who had admitted to having lied to friends during elementary school, claimed that she did so in response to a friend’s suggestion. “I had a friend who was like, ‘Just lie.’ And I did that. And that was bad advice […]. I shouldn’t have to lie.” Julia’s assertion that she should not have to lie was a feeling shared by the lesbian-identified mothers in Dundas and Kaufman’s (2000) study, who felt that their children were psychologically healthier when they were able to be truthful about their family identity.

“I would always encourage honesty,” said Victoria. “Just tell people, you know? Like just, don’t hide it because it’ll just make you feel shitty. And the friends who aren’t comfortable with it, they’re probably not worth being your friends.”

Rather than risk the negative consequences that arise from deceiving others, such as the fragmentation of one’s emerging sense of self, Owen advocated for an honest approach. “Don’t try to cover it up,” he said when asked for words of advice for other youth with LGB-identified parents. “Just, like, tell the truth ‘cause if you try to hide something, in my opinion it won’t feel nearly as good as if you go and tell the truth to someone.”

Similarly, Denise claimed that she did not want to put herself in the awkward and potentially risky position of hiding the truth:

With my close friends, I’m definitely totally open with them, um, but in a new setting I always want to get a read on people before I out my family. But I try to be as open as I can, and I think everyone that I am in a like, that is my friend, or anyone that I interact with even acquaintances, they all know because I don’t really want to interact with people if they don’t know. ‘Cause then it’s always sort of awkward, I’m trying to conceal things, but I don’t want to be doing that.
Denise’s response above indicates not only her desire for honesty, but also her purposeful use of some kind of litmus test to “get a read on people” before deciding to out her own family. Nick revealed that using the word ‘partner’ was sometimes easier and offered a way to “slowly break it to them.” Denise and Nick were alluding to strategies they sometimes employed to discover how tolerant and accepting people are on other issues, before bringing up the intensely personal subject of their own families. In a sense, Denise was being proactive in new settings, seeking to identify allies and to preemptively “screen out” homophobic individuals, much like the process described by the participants in Goldberg’s study (2007). Rather than investing too much time in a friend who would turn out to be homophobic, Denise subscribed to the belief instilled in her by her mother that it was better to find out sooner rather than later that a potential friend lacked the quality of open-mindedness that Denise required of potential friends:

I think once my mom said to me, “If you don’t tell [your friends] right away [that you have lesbian parents], you are taking a chance to lose a friend [pause] later.” Because I think that what she meant by that was if you don’t tell them right away, like, if you do tell them right away, either they’re not going to be your friend, or they are going to be your friend. And if you wait and then tell them later, you’re taking a chance because maybe they won’t want to be your friend anymore, and you’ve already put in all that effort and emotion to do that.

Owen revealed a similar approach to taking a proactive role in choosing friends. Rather than waiting for potential rejection, he alluded to his tendency to reject potential friends if he perceived them to be intolerant, choosing to exclude them from consideration for friendship if he sensed that their homophobic behaviour would be incompatible with his emerging sense of
personal identity. In a sense, he was negotiating his own sense of personal identity relative to the alternatives, and the homophobic behaviour of certain peers represented an alternative that he could not embrace:

I’ve never had a negative response. Like someone being, like, “What the heck? That’s weird,” or something like that […]. I don’t think it makes a difference to them. Like I don’t, I don’t, like, I wouldn’t, like I said, I wouldn’t have friends that wouldn’t accept gay people.

His assertion that he “wouldn’t have friends that wouldn’t accept gay people” suggests that if he had any indication of someone’s lack of acceptance for his mother in particular or for LGB-identified people in general, he could not view that person as a viable friend. Owen was demonstrating that identity as the child of a lesbian-identified mother was not a mere matter of fact; in a school setting, his story was constructed for a particular purpose, and he actively negotiated between several possible ways of responding to his peers. When asked what advice he would give to other youth with LGB-identified parents, Owen was very clear in his recommendation for how to find true friends amongst peers:

If you can’t tell your friends straight up that you have gay parents ‘cause you think that they’re going to judge you, then you should realize that they’re not actually your friends. If I think that my friends, they don’t accept my family and who my parents are, then I realize that they are not actual friends.
Nick, too, made it very clear that he preferred to be in a position of power with regard to friendship choices. He also referred to his younger brother’s tendency to be more guarded about their mother’s lesbian identity:

He kind of keeps it a secret. Whereas me, I’m like, “She’s gay.” Whatever. I don’t care. Like it or not. You’re in my life, or you’re out of my life. It doesn’t matter to me. Um. Basically, I’m like, if you want to be my friend, or if you want to hang out with me, this is my family. This is my life, and if you don’t like it, then move on.

If Nick is accurate in his description of the differing styles between him and his brother, there may be value in uncovering the reasons for these differences. McAdams (2005) argues that to fully understand narrative identity, one should examine the interaction between personality traits, characteristic adaptations, and life stories. Such an examination would potentially disentangle innate personality characteristics from those response styles that were perhaps tactical, situational, or acquired as empowerment strategies for youth with LGB-identified parents. If all youth with LGB-identified parents felt the same sense of control over their selection of friends, perhaps fewer would find themselves in positions where they felt the effects of judgement or bullying.

The preceding discussion has focused largely on disclosure decisions and practices. Not much has been said, however, with respect to the repercussions of the participants’ decisions to disclose their parents’ sexual identity to others, to be open about this part of their own personal narrative. There appeared to be five main patterns of peer responses when the participants outed their parents at school. I have labelled these as neutrality, connection, humour, hostility, and curiosity.
Neutrality refers to the kind of responses that are almost like non-responses. Denise was very clear in describing such reactions as ideal. “The best reaction is just nothing,” she argued. “Because it’s sort of like, okay. That’s it. You know? You’re just as average as the next person, right? So there’s no reason to react.”

Similarly, Nick acknowledged that when he told people about his lesbian-identified mother, he sometimes was greeted with a neutral response. “There’s people that are, like, ‘oh,’ and it’s no big deal,” he said. Denise and Nick appreciated the “no big deal” responses because they themselves want to view their families as “average” or “normal.” To provide some context for why participants appreciate a neutral response to their disclosures, it is useful to consider the ways in which participants used the word “normal” throughout their interviews.

As a ten-year-old, Victoria was surprised to get strange looks from people because she did not realize that having lesbian-identified parents was not “normal.” Blissfully unaware of the master narrative of heteronormativity at the time when her mothers broke up, Victoria claimed that her family was “just a happy, normal family.”

Shane advised other youth with queer-identified parents to “live life normally. Like, don’t change anything just ‘cause your mom or dad’s different.”

In one of the storytelling tasks, Christie responded to an image that featured two adult males with children by saying, “Just as if they were straight parents. Just the same thing. Just raising their kid normally.”

Julia complained that people did not realize that LGB-led families “can be totally normal”; in fact, she wanted to “show them that [her] family is just as normal as theirs. Maybe even more normal.” Her comments suggest a struggle between the desire youth with LGB-identified parents have to be normalized and the desire society has to marginalize them. Later in
the interview, she added that there are many family configurations that could be regarded as “quote unquote different, as in single parents, grandparents, interracial […] foster care, [and] adoption […]. Family are the people who love and support you in whatever capacity that means […]. Love is love across the border. Doesn’t matter what’s down your pants.”

Owen stated, “I don’t think it’s a big deal” having a lesbian-identified mother. He then added, “Everyone else has a normal family where it’s mom and dad, but then, when you have [a] dad, mom, and step-mom, it’s like – no one’s used to that, right?” He also added that youth with queer-identified parents “need the security of knowing that they’ll be, like, just as good as any other kid with normal parents – straight parents, sorry.”

The participants’ frequent use of the word “normal” reveals some level of their understanding that their situations are atypical and do not smoothly align with the master narrative of heteronormativity. Overall, however, it is clear that participants want to be regarded as “normal” and they want their families to be regarded as such as well. “I hate thinking of us as being different,” remarked Anna. “I just don’t feel any different just because my mom is gay.” Her words demonstrate that she, like Hammack and Windell (2011), hopes for a societal redefining of the concept of “normal.” When she and others receive neutral responses to their disclosures of having LGB-identified parents, this appeals to their desire to be regarded as “normal” in the eyes of society because such responses reassure them that society’s definition of normal is indeed in a state of evolution.

Participants also reported the rather positive response pattern of connection. Sometimes, when participants disclosed to others that they had a parent who identified as LGB, peers would acknowledge some kind of personal connection that led to mutual acceptance. “When I told my friend, Bobby, who’s gay,” recalled Anna, “he was pleasantly surprised […] We bonded in that
way because we could, um, relate to each other through our experiences.” These bonding moments demonstrate that when elements of others’ narratives overlap with elements of one’s own narrative, there can be considerable comfort and affirmation in finding common ground. More will be said in chapter six about the unique bonds between queer-identified youth and youth with queer-identified parents.

The connection pattern of narrative overlap was observed even when the person on the receiving end of the disclosure did not personally identify as LGB but had an extended family member who did. Denise explained that her best friend, a friend that she had had since grade two, seemed to immediately embrace the fact that Denise had a lesbian mother. “Years later,” commented Denise, “maybe grade six or seven, I found out that her mom is actually a queer spawn so her grandparents, her grandmother, is a lesbian.”

Nick spoke of a friend who had said, “That is so cool!” when she found out that Nick’s mother identified as a lesbian. “Her sister is pansexual,” Nick explained. “She loves her sister and understands how her sister lives. So when I told her about my mom, she was like, ‘That is so cool,’ and she wants to meet her.” Similarly, Christie had a positive response from a friend who had a gay uncle. When the participants with LGB-identified parents found friends with some tangential relationship to the queer community, there was often an immediate understanding that accompanied their overlapping lived experiences. This gave participants permission to share their experiences with alternate narratives about family or to share specific personal narratives about being a “queer spawn.” This understanding did not necessarily imply friendship, however, as will be discussed in chapter six with respect to connections made when children from LGB-headed families have opportunities to meet one another.
Another pattern of responses from peers involves the use of humour. Participants varied in terms of whether they found the humour of others acceptable or not. Denise felt that the worst reactions were when people made jokes that she felt were at her family’s expense:

[The worst reactions are] when people think that they’re being funny. And they make a joke. It’s always hurtful. Because it feels like, um, I’m trying to let you in here, and you are – even if I know this person’s like, a bully or just trying to be funny, and I know you’re just uncomfortable. That’s why you’re making a joke. It still hurts, right? […] Like, this is my family.

Ellie stated that her older brother’s university peers “would laugh at the fact that my mom was once straight, like, and then decided to, like come out being a lesbian.” They would make jokes, she explained, but she was seldom amused:

“Oh, your mom’s hot,” and like, people always say like sexual things. “Who’s the man and who’s the woman in the relationship?” Or, “Oooh, lipstick lesbians.” And my brother will just tell them to fuck off. He’s pretty aggressive, so he’ll just like throw them around, but like, that particular day he wasn’t. And I was like, “This is ridiculous, you guys. I don’t ask if your dad is super-hot or if he’s bang-able. Or what your parents do in bed” [laughs].

Nick, who seemed slightly more at ease with the use of humour, said that sometimes when he outed his mother to peers, some of his male friends would make sexual jokes. “There are two girls?” he reported them as asking. “Can I come over for a sleepover?” Even though he seemed comfortable with such responses, he did acknowledge the awkwardness that such
humour sometimes created. “I get put into weird situations where [my mom] will come into work sometimes, and the guys at work are like, ‘Wow, your mom’s hot.’ And then I’m just like, ‘Yeah, you don’t even know.’ And sometimes I don’t say anything, or just stay quiet. Or sometimes I said, ‘Yeah, well she’s gay’ [...] And they lay off, or make jokes, or whatever.”

Denise advised against the use of humour as an active strategy for coming out. She stated that it was a risky approach, and that youth with queer-identified parents don’t want others “laughing it off to, sort of, react.” Clearly, many of the participants’ disclosures were met with humour, but Denise felt that a humorous disclosure would trivialize the moment and prevent the valuable processing and questioning that would lead to deeper levels of understanding and acceptance.

Unfortunately, another pattern of responses from peers involved hostility. This ranged from termination of friendship to persistent bullying. Despite the legal progress that has been made on both sides of the Canada-US border specifically with respect to LGB rights, bullying remains a problem in North American schools. The April 2012 release of the documentary Bully aimed to bring attention to the problem and to a need for meaningful political action. The filmmaker’s website included a definition of bullying which highlighted the imbalance of power in bully-victim scenarios, the intent to cause harm, and the repetition of incidents (Bully Project, 2012), a definition drawn from the work of bullying researchers such as Olweus (1993).

Julia, herself a victim of bullying, expressed a degree of resignation at the pervasiveness of the problem. “I think it would be impossible [to have bully-free schools] right now,” she claimed, adding that when people found out that she had a lesbian-identified mom, some said, “‘Your mom’s weird.’ ‘What’s wrong with your family?’ [...] Literally ‘ha ha’ laughing at me [...] I’ve also blanked out a lot of it. I can’t remember everything, unfortunately. Well,
fortunately and unfortunately.” Julia then revealed that one of her peers also had two lesbian-identified mothers and went to the same school, but for some reason did not experience the bullying that Julia endured. Doubly identifying as both a queer youth and as a child of queer parents became particularly challenging for Julia, and she eventually sought refuge in The Triangle Program in Toronto to escape the queer-hostile environments she experienced in regular classrooms. This experience of being nudged out of an unwelcoming school was mirrored by Kelby, an Oklahoma teen featured in Bully, who also felt the need to leave a hostile environment because of the bullying that began when she publicly disclosed her lesbian identity. In order to develop a workable configuration of personal identity, youths such as Julia or Kelby may feel compelled to escape school environments that threaten their opportunities to fully integrate the aspects of their own identity that they perceive to be important.

Ellie, a heterosexual-identified participant, also fell victim to bullying and changed high schools to escape being targeted by her ex-boyfriend and other members of her school community. Through tears, Ellie explained what had transpired:

In high school, um, I dated a guy – I always – I tend to date people for the wrong reasons I guess […]. I didn’t know anyone, and the first person that, like, I ended up meeting was my ex-boyfriend who I dated for two years. Um, and I was just, like, so in love because he was the quarterback of the football team, he was really like popular, and he was smart, but he was awful. He was really abusive and, like, it was just hard because like no one else would see it, but I would deal with so much stuff from him […]. Um, he like would just make such a big deal about like coming over to my house [because my mom was a lesbian], saying it was, like, weird and, like, awkward and, like, how he had to tell his parents, and it was just this awful thing for him to be dealing with […]. Um, he’s just he
was just really awful. Really, like, homophobic. [I didn’t tell my mom what was going on] because I didn’t want to hurt her. […] The turning point [in my life] would have been when I broke up with my boyfriend […]. My ex was harassing me […]. And the ones that I was close with, like, when we broke up that time, he was awful to me and, like, lied to my friends. And I had no one. Like, I had no friends or anything. And it was pretty bad [voice trails off, soft chuckle]. It was pretty scary. He was really abusive. And he was abusive in, like, all aspects. Like, I remember, he was physically abusive with me a lot, and I didn’t even really get help from the school with that. ‘Cause he would wait at my locker, and I remember one time I went to my locker, and all my stuff was, like, all over the hallway. So, like, he’d gone in and thrown everything away. And, um [begins to choke up with tears]. Sorry. I’m sorry, it’s just, like, really emotional [overcome with tears; sobbing; long pause]. I just didn’t receive, like, any help at all. No teachers, nothing.

Somewhat shockingly, Ellie also described these difficult times as “one of the best experiences” of her life. “It made me really outgoing,” she claimed, “and I guess more talkative about it. So there’s good with the bad [chuckles].” Whereas Nick, Owen, and other participants had put themselves in positions of strength to avoid becoming friends with those who they deemed to be judgemental, Ellie had entered into an ongoing relationship with one who she later acknowledged to be judgemental and abusive. There are many interpretations for why Ellie might later seek to frame the abusive relationship as something that was ultimately positive. One possible explanation can be borrowed from the theory of cognitive dissonance first introduced by Leon Festinger (1957). According to Festinger’s theory, people endeavour to resolve the tension
that occurs when two cognitions conflict with one another. Aronson, Wilson, and Akert (1999) speak of humans’ tendency to justify choices that were freely made in order to reduce cognitive dissonance. Ellie was perhaps trying to resolve the cognitive dissonance she felt at having allowed herself to enter into a relationship with someone who later became a bully. She was trying to find “the good with the bad” in what had been an abusive high school relationship. Another possible interpretation borrowed from the narrative identity literature is that difficult life experiences allow opportunities for personal growth (McLean, 2008).

For Ellie, sometimes people used the fact that she had a lesbian-identified mother against her as if it were her Achilles heel. Knowledge of Ellie’s mother’s lesbianism was used as leverage against her, much as a soldier interviewed by Heath (2011) suggested that his sexual orientation was used against him by people in whom he had confided during the don’t-ask-don’t-tell era of the United States military. Ellie explains that, at times, even when the a dispute had nothing to do with her mother’s lesbianism, that issue became a target:

I experienced a lot of bullying in grade nine. Which, like, um, it didn’t even revolve around [my mom being a lesbian]. For me, it’s just people just tried to like target – if, like, I remember this girl, like, her boyfriend said I was hot, and like, wouldn’t stop flirting with me. And I was shy at the time and didn’t, like, want to talk to him. But she was really, like, loud and mouthy and like a well-known bully. And I remember her, like, calling me a dyke and stuff and like even at the time I knew like it was just like her – it was what she was, like, trying to target me with […]. Like, no one actually disliked me for it, but if people didn’t like me they would say something.
Ellie admitted that she was not very equipped to deal with bullying during high school, describing herself as “shy” and uncomfortable talking about her mother’s sexual identity. She did, however, seem to have become more capable of defending herself as she grew older, and she suggested this was as a result of having learned from experiences along the way. She referred to an incident during her first year in university to illustrate her newfound ability to stand up for herself:

I wouldn’t say I got bullied because I wouldn’t allow it. But I remember, like, one girl on my floor, ’cause my mom and her partner came to visit me. And, like, [the girl] made a comment […] like, “Oh, your parents are lesbians?” I was like, “Yeah” [chuckles]. She’s like, “Isn’t that weird?” I knew that her parents did not care about her at all, so I just said to her, “Well, I have two parents that love me, so I guess your situation is a little bit weirder than mine.” And she was a little bit taken aback [laughs].

Other than Julia and Ellie, no other participants reported being the victims of bullying, but all nine of them reported witnessing events in their school they felt could be classified as bullying behaviours. All of them acknowledged having heard homophobic slurs that were aimed directly at people such as through the use of the term “fag” or slurs that were insulting to the LGB community in general such as use of the phrase “that’s so gay,” which has come to represent anything deemed as inferior. Anna, who described herself as an advocate for queer-identified youth, explained her philosophy about what motivated some of these bullies:

From my experience, I see that people who tease others about being gay are very uncomfortable with it. And they don’t know how to handle finding out that – I mean, when, like if I had two gay dads, I’d just – and guys are very [exhales with an “ugh”
sound] – like boys are more homophobic than girls are. So I think that guys don’t understand it at all, or they’re confused about it, or they’re just scared because they don’t want. I mean from [sighs with an “ugh” sound] from my experience, when I have talked to guys who are homophobic, they say that they don’t want a gay person touching them because they don’t want, like, a guy to fall in love with them. And that is something that really bothers me, and I just think that they’re uncomfortable with their own sexuality, and that’s why they get a bit scared. So I think that bullies who call people a dyke or a fag are very uncomfortable in their own situation, but that’s just my own theory [chuckles].

Shane felt that he was too well liked in his school to ever be bullied. “[Besides], I can just punch them,” he chuckled. “There’s no one really bigger than me at my school.” But hostility was not always experienced in the form of overt bullying. Sometimes, rejection due to disclosure of participants’ parents’ sexual identity came in the form of the termination of a relationship, a phenomenon also experienced by many queer youth (Owens, 1998). Although this had never happened to Nick, he knew that it was a possibility. “I don’t think I’ve ever had anyone say, ‘Well, that’s just effed up,’ reflected Nick, ‘and walked away or shunned me from their life […]. All of my friends – guys and girls – they think it’s cool that my parents, that my mom’s gay.”

Like Nick, Denise had had positive responses from peers, but she reported that her sister had not been as fortunate:

It’s hard to know how [new people] are going to react. I, personally, have never had a friend disappear on me after I’ve outed my parents. But I know that that happened to my
sister, and so I’m a little nervous about it. [My sister’s friend] knew that she had two 
moms [but when the friend’s parents found out] there was just no contact from the friend 
after that […]. It wasn’t even explained; it was just all of a sudden just cut.

“A lot of parents,” observed Denise later in the interview, “see this as, like uh, LGBT 
identifiers are almost contagious. And it’s, like, oh, but if my child is friends with your child, 
then my child is going to become LGBTQ [laughs].”

Victoria explained that her best friend, a girl she had known since kindergarten, had a 
homophobic father. “I wasn’t allowed to go over to her house for a few years,” she revealed. “It was just kind of really hard to remain best friends in the same way.”

The experiences of Denise’s sister and of Victoria reveal the added complication that 
children face when they are outing their families to peers. In addition to needing to take careful 
measures to “screen out” homophobic peers and to use litmus tests to determine levels of 
tolerance from potential friends, they may still face unanticipated rejection if their friends’ 
parents intervene and insist on the termination of the relationship. While termination of 
friendships may seem less dangerous than some types of bullying, it could nonetheless bring 
fragmentation rather than integration to one’s emerging personal identity.

The final category of responses involves the curiosity with which peers may react. Such 
curiosity arises when peers have not been exposed to alternatives to the traditional family 
narrative and have not yet imagined how LGB families are created. At times, youth with queer- 
identified parents may view the questions of others as invasive and/or irritating because of the 
constant possibility that they will have to articulate their family narrative for those who would 
otherwise have no access to alternative narratives. At other times, peers’ questions may seem
like genuine efforts to become educated about family configurations not previously encountered. The question posed to Shane, “How were you born, then?” is an example of what he calls “stupid questions.”

Victoria, too, had received what seems to be a classic question for children of LGB-identified parents. “People always ask me how I was born,” she sighed, “and I’m like, ‘Have you heard of a sperm bank?’”

Denise, who was born to a male-female parental unit at birth, gave some insight into the incorrect assumptions that sometimes underlie the questions of her peers when they first learn of her mother’s current bisexual identity:

I think that [the reaction that I get from other people] depends on the order in which I out myself. Because if I tell people that my biological parents are divorced, and then I tell them that I have two moms, it’s a little bit easier for them to get […] But if they don’t know about my parents are divorced, and I just say oh, yeah, hey, I have two lesbian moms, they don’t make the connection that maybe there was somebody else before. They just kind of take it as, oh, well that’s you know, what’s that? So it has happened to me, “Um, are you adopted?” […] or “Which one’s your real mom?” Which is kind of, like, I don’t know why anyone would ask that because it’s, like, these are my real moms. Do you – do you mean, like, my biological mom? I feel more comfortable answering that than I know some people do because I am not a child who is “from the get-go,” as we call it, right? I’m not a get-go child, so there’s a lot of, um, kids who were born into LGBTQ-headed households. They probably feel more uncomfortable with that question because it’s, like, what do you mean my real mom? They’re both my moms. And they have been my moms for my whole life, right? So I – I feel a little more comfortable with that
question, but yes, I’ve had that, and I’ve had um, someone once said oh, so you do know your sperm donor? Before even like asking if that was [chuckles], it was just like an assumption, and it was like I – I don’t even know what I said. I was probably just so shocked. I was like, “What?”

Victoria tried to account for the boldness with which some people approach children from LGB-led families:

People just feel, I guess, ‘cause like when you’re different they feel they can ask all these personal questions about you. So, I guess, try to flip it around to make people think. Like, “Were you born in a bottle?” “Hmm, do you think that’s possible?” Like, I don’t know, just flip it around to make them question their own intelligence.

All participants were asked what advice they would give to other youth with LGB-identified parents. It is useful to note that they do not all give the same advice. Even within a single participant’s interview, there were different types of advice that were offered. For example, while Victoria had suggested responding in ways that made people “question their own intelligence,” presumably because she believed everyone should be capable of imagining alternative family narratives, she also added a cautionary note to any youth from queer-identified families that might be feeling frustrated at the sometimes-ridiculous statements and questions from others. “Getting offended will never, ever benefit you,” she concluded. “Ever.”

Victoria also recommended that youth with queer-identified parents should always be prepared to answer even the silliest questions. “Answer rationally,” she advised. “Don’t get upset, just, but answer. I would always say give them an answer, because otherwise they’ll think
they can keep doing it.” In fact, Victoria’s current best friend, a close companion who she had
had since kindergarten, did not know the meaning of the term “lesbian” until Victoria answered
the five-year-old’s questions about the term.

Similarly, Julia said that it was important to answer peers’ questions. She reflected on
times when people had wondered aloud how she had come to be born if she did not have a father.
“If you don’t know, if you’re not educated about it, then it’s a very valid question,” she
conceded. “If you’re growing up, and you think, okay, you need a mom and dad to make a baby,
and someone only has two dads, then of course, how did that happen? I think it’s a very valid
question. I think it depends on how it’s asked and what the response of your answer – after your
answer, what happens.” Her response is a very gracious response, and one that highlights the
unique position in which children with queer-identified parents often find themselves, in the role
of educator. More will be said on this topic later in the chapter regarding the role of education in
the reduction of ignorance and the augmentation of tolerance.

Youth with queer-identified parents do not always know what they need until they need
it. The lived experiences of other youth with queer-identified parents have particular
applicability in the lives of children from like family configurations because they provide
templates with which one can compare one’s own emerging story. Potentially, the findings
presented above have relevance for queer-identified parents and their children, as well as for
advocates who wish to support those families. By developing strategies for the disclosure of
one’s family configuration and for anticipating peers’ responses of neutrality, connection,
humour, hostility, or curiosity, children with LGB-identified parents can experience less
uncertainty about that which lies ahead when they leave the security of the family home to begin
new friendships at school.
Education to expose others to alternative family narratives

As previously demonstrated, many participants experienced reactions of curiosity from others following their disclosures of having LGB-identified parents. Victoria said to “always” give peers an answer when they expressed curiosity about how LGB-headed families are formed. Julia and Shane differed in their descriptions of peers’ inquiries; while Julia thought they had “valid questions,” Shane was more inclined to view them as “stupid questions.” Regardless of their individual interpretations of the questions from peers, the nine participants expressed a strong view that if their classmates had been educated through exposure to diverse family configurations, they would be less ignorant in their responses to these participants’ disclosures of living in queer-identified families. In short, some of the more negative response styles (e.g., hostility, inappropriate humour, and offensively voiced curiosity) would be replaced with more positive response styles (e.g., neutrality, connection, and supportively voiced curiosity) if peers had been formally educated in a way that had exposed them to alternatives to the traditional family narrative. Participants described experiences that supported the notion that education can play a role in breaking down the master narrative of heteronormativity in general, and increasing understanding of queer-led family configurations.

Julia made the most direct argument for the role that ignorance played in impeding the understanding of how queer-identified adults could have children of their own. “It’s ignorance,” she stated. “It’s literally all ignorance. It’s because people do not understand. They don’t realize how people that aren’t straight can have families. They don’t realize that they can be totally normal. It’s all – I feel like it always can break down to ignorance.” She went on to encourage other youth with queer-identified parents to not flag in their ongoing efforts to break down the ignorance of others:
Fuck the people who judge you. Like, stand up for yourself. Don’t, don’t – it can be very hard, but there are – you’re not alone. There are other people with families like that. Educate them, teach them, show them that your family is just as normal as theirs. Maybe even more normal.

Anna spoke of the additional challenges she faced when she dealt with homophobic responses from those who had been raised within religious contexts that frowned on same-sex behaviour:

People who are very religious and don’t understand how it – I mean, people – I’ve talked to people who are very set in their ways in Christianity, and they don’t understand. They don’t get it. They actually, they don’t understand how two people of the same gender can fall in love. They just don’t get it because it’s not how they’re taught when they’re growing up.

Anna’s frustration was palpable. She seemed out of ideas for how she might facilitate understanding in those whose exposure to same-gender relationships had been limited. She was concerned, particularly, with the effects resulting from exposure to only one religious point of view. She believed that families would be “stronger” if they were able to openly discuss “different family structures,” and she felt that religious dogma was merely a disguise behind which people could hide their judgemental tendencies.

Anna’s concern highlights the role that schools can play to ensure that all students have opportunities to see issues from multiple viewpoints. As a temporary digression from the issue of LGB-led families, an interesting court case in the province of Quebec is illustrative of the
opposition that sometimes faces educators in their efforts to promote perspective-taking thinking. Concurrent with the present study, a Quebec court debated the legality of a mandatory religious ethics course for all Quebec students (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2012, February 17b). Two parents had challenged a school board’s refusal to allow their children to be exempted from a course that gave an overview of all major world religions. When the case reached Canada’s highest court, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the parents did not have a constitutional right to shield their children from a course that would educate them about the basics of major world religions. “Exposing children to a comprehensive presentation of various religions without forcing the children to join them does not constitute an indoctrination of students that would infringe the freedom of religion of [their parents],” wrote Madam Justice Marie Deschamps (Supreme Court of Canada, 2012). The court recognized that absolute neutrality on the subject of religion was a theoretical impossibility, but it upheld the value of the mandatory religious ethics course’s aim to show respect for all postures towards religion. Christopher Hitchens (2007), a self-proclaimed atheist, wrote at length about the role that conflicting religious views had played in wars across the globe. Like the majority of Canadians (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2012, February 17c), Hitchens would likely applaud the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. Through its decision to tell parents that their children did not have a constitutional right to opt out of this world religions course, the Supreme Court of Canada was essentially supporting the notion that children should be exposed to multiple points of view. The Supreme Court of Canada’s decision, when viewed from a narrative psychology perspective, suggests that the experience of being exposed to others’ religious narratives is valuable rather than harmful and that, if children throughout the world were exposed to similar perspective-
taking exercises, religious differences might begin to play an increasingly insignificant role in global conflict.

Amsterdam and Bruner (2000) considered supreme court decisions in the U.S. to demonstrate that the outcomes of court cases are sometimes influenced by implicit narratives, and such implicit narratives may indeed have played a key role in the Supreme Court of Canada’s ruling regarding religious education in Quebec. For Anna, the court’s decision might also inspire hope that Ontario schools would begin to require that students be exposed to multiple narratives on issues of religion, sexuality, and other hot-button topics. Such courses would not be designed to indoctrinate, but merely to provide a comprehensive presentation of perspectives that students might not consider if their parents were able to shelter them from exposure to all but one viewpoint. In the province of Ontario, premier Dalton McGuinty’s government faced strong and immediate opposition to proposed changes to sex education curricula, a fact that did not go unnoticed by Julia:

I think that what needs to be done […] is what McGuinty tried to put in place. I think there needs to be more education in the school systems, across Canada. ‘Cause, I mean, we can't do anything outside of Canada. Like we can't enforce education in other countries, but um, we can force a Canadian-wide education program or even provincially about safe sex, sexuality, gender, all of that. And that needs to be in place. That is, I think, the most important next thing because […] gay people can get married, but um, that’s not teaching anyone or educating anyone or changing anything […]. Starting from the diversities of families as young as kindergarten. I’ve done it; I’ve talked to them about it. They get it; they understand it; they don’t have judgement when you talk about
it [...]. We can’t go into all those parents’ houses of those kids, but if those kids have
[...] education, they can make their own decisions.

Through Julia’s assertion that children as young as kindergarten already “get it” she is
suggesting that young children intuitively understand that there can be a variety of family
configurations because, while they may be familiar with the master narrative of
heteronormativity, they have not yet embraced it exclusively. In May 2012, U.S. President
Barack Obama described his own personal evolution on the issue of gay marriage and LGB-led
families by referencing the lack of judgement he observed in his own young daughters. “Malia
and Sasha,” he said, “they have friends whose parents are same-sex couples […], and we’re
talking about their friends and their parents and Malia and Sasha, it wouldn’t dawn on them that
somehow their friends’ parents would be treated differently. It doesn’t make sense to them”
(New York Times, 2012, May 10, para. 6). Like the kindergarten students with whom Julia had
spoken, Malia and Sasha intuitively “get it,” and their nonjudgemental stance on the issue
influence their father’s. President Obama’s suggestion is that because his daughters had
exposure to school friends’ narratives that included LGB-led family members, their friends’
stories had been incorporated into their own stories such that the master narrative of
heteronormativity would be an unimaginable fit. A key point in President Obama’s object
lesson, however, was that his daughters had been exposed to situations that challenged the
prevailing narrative of normativity.

Just as it was children who had influenced Obama’s personal evolution on the issue of
same-sex marriage, Julia believed that Ontario school children could drive their own decision
making if given broader exposure to alternatives to the master narrative of normativity. At the
present time, however, the province of Ontario’s sex education curricula are vastly different from the type of program that Julia would consider valuable. As will be described later in this chapter, Julia had a teacher who publicly humiliated her when she disclosed that she did not know the identity of her biological father, and Denise was negatively centred out by a teacher that had a very narrow idea of how children in her class should complete a “family tree” exercise that did not make allowances for two mothers. Instead of promoting the kind of open discussion that would make participants such as Julia and Denise feel more comfortable in class and that would educate their peers, there are many practices that stifle such dialogue.

For example, *Fully Alive*, a sex education program used in many publicly-funded Catholic schools, gives grade seven sex education teachers several suggestions for how to respond when students bring up specific hot-button issues such as abortion, homosexuality, or in vitro fertilization (IVF). “Let the student know that you care about his or her concern,” the manual suggests but goes on to warn teachers “not to extend the discussion” (Santin, 2010, p. 143). If a student mentions a sister’s abortion, for example, the manual advises a teacher to say only, “That’s very sad. That must be difficult for you. I’ll say a prayer for your sister and your family” (p. 143). When a student brings up a brother’s homosexuality, teachers are instructed to give the simple response, “It was probably difficult for him to tell your family. Be sure to let him know that you love him and that he is important to you” (p. 143). If a student reveals that he or she was conceived using assisted reproductive technology such as IVF, teachers are told to merely say, “You look like a fine girl (boy) to me, and I know that God loves you very much” (p. 143). While these canned responses are not overtly negative, neither are they open-ended enough to actually educate the students who raise such issues in class. Furthermore, the *Fully Alive* teacher’s guide is certainly not empowering teachers to bring up these issues, and so
students may hear absolutely no content if none of their peers is bold enough to touch one of the clearly-taboo topics that teachers in publicly-funded Ontario Catholic schools are instructed to address only superficially. Julia wants “more education in the school systems” so that Ontario students learn about diverse family configurations in their classes, thereby removing the burden of responsibility to educate from the shoulders of those from nontraditional families.

Religious responses (or lack thereof) to issues of sexuality are, of course, nothing new. Weinberg (1972), who first coined the term “homophobia” (Hellman et al., 1981), suggested that there are five motives that sustain homophobia in our society: reaction formation, repressed envy, fear of death, religiosity, and a perceived threat to social values. The sex education curriculum legislation for which Julia advocated could go a long way in exposing all Ontario students to diversity they might not otherwise encounter, but there is of course opposition to such change from conservative and often religious organizations such as the Institute for Canadian Values who have suggested that the Ontario government has a sex education agenda that is an assault on family values (Timson, 2012, January 12). In response to this suggestion, Judith Timson, a columnist for the Globe and Mail wrote, “Families everywhere are adjusting to their children being gay or ‘other,’ realizing their emotional ties only get stronger when they support and accept and love each other” (Timson, 2012, January 12, para. 15). Children everywhere are adjusting to their parents being gay or “other” as well, but participants such as Julia know that the adjustment could be easier if their peers had in-school opportunities to be exposed to a wide range of family configurations.

The participants also acknowledged the need for their own education on certain topics related to sexuality. For example, many of them lacked a comprehensive understanding of the legal protections offered to LGB-identified Canadians. Christie recommended that schools
“should probably raise awareness” about laws that are in place to protect LGB individuals, adding her own admission, “I honestly had no idea, and I bet a lot of my friends don’t know that [there are laws to prevent discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation], either.”

Ellie claimed that her older, university-educated brother did not know that his lesbian-identified mother could legally marry a same-sex partner in Canada. “There’s definitely still gaps,” she argued, “because literally yesterday my oldest brother thought that being married in Canada, like, that gay marriage in Canada was illegal. And I was, like, oh my god, for a really educated person you are not smart on social topics [laughs heartily].” More will be said in chapter six regarding the participants’ own needs for education in matters of queer history, queer law, etc. There appear to be gaps in their own knowledge on these topics, and they indicated a desire for all Ontario youth to have access to social justice education and sexual education curricula.

For some of the youth in the current study, such province-wide exposure would be viewed as a relief for them because it would remove the burden they feel to educate others. Denise referred to the increased level of comfort that came with age and with the realization that the older she got, the more likely it was that her peers had already been exposed to the narratives of those from LGB-headed families:

As [my peers] began to learn stuff, I began to be more comfortable. Because it’s like, this is not the first time that you’ve encountered someone with two moms, or you’ve heard about someone with two moms, so I’m okay to tell you. Because it’s not like I’m the one breaking down the wall here. I’m just kind of subtly slipping it into conversation and hoping that everything goes well.
Owen and Nick highlighted the general lack of diversity in their communities, and both expressed a belief that peers from their schools would be better off if their exposure to other beliefs and cultures was increased. Owen attributed homophobic behaviour to fear of the unknown, accounting for his peers’ behaviour with this explanation. “They’re just scared of it […] They’re not used to it.” He addressed his peers’ general lack of exposure to racial diversity as well, claiming, “In our general area, like, my high school, there’s two Indian kids and, like, two black kids, and everyone else [is] white, right? But then when you go [not far from here], it’s like all Indian people, which is like, you do not, like, when you get to university experience and you’re, like, weird, because you’re not going to be used to it.”

Similarly, Nick claimed that his community lacked diversity and expressed a desire for his municipal government to find ways to attract more diverse individuals and families to their town. “We need more training for, just, diversity in general,” he stated. “We need more diversity in [this town].” He did, however, state that many of his friends thought it was “cool” that he had a lesbian-identified mother, because they had never encountered that scenario before.

Denise expressed a level of empathy for peers who had never come across a queer-identified family configuration. “I think it’s hard for people to sort, sort of, understand that there are LGBTQ-headed families, when they haven’t met one,” she said, suggesting that what might be confused as homophobic attitudes could be accounted for by considering a lack of access to personal narratives that diverged from the master narrative of heteronormativity.

Anna hinted to the sense of hope she had, having observed societal change over time. She asked me if I had seen the movie Milk, and spoke of the climate that existed in the 1970s leading up to Harvey Milk’s San Francisco municipal election and subsequent assassination. “People didn’t get it,” commented Anna. “I think just the way our parents were raised. It wasn’t
something that was, like, as ‘out there.’ It was very taboo [...]. So [my mom and dad’s] parents didn’t really tell them about it because it wasn’t something that was out there yet. Now you see, like, there’s a Pride Parade and a Dyke March and, like, all that stuff. But when, like, our parents – my parents – were growing up, it was something that was sheltered [...]. I just wish I had been told how gay people were viewed in the media, and how hard it would be to tell people that my mom was gay back then.” Anna’s comments are reminiscent of what Hammack, Thompson, and Pilecki (2009) dub the narrative of silence and the narrative of struggle and success, stories that characterized previous generations of LGB-identified people such as Anna’s mother. She wishes that somehow she had been given access to those narratives prior to seeing Milk so that she could have had a better understanding of her mother’s whole story and perhaps of the decisions her mother had made to enter into marriage with a man prior to her eventual disclosure of non-heterosexuality.

Overall, the participants were clear in their beliefs that they wanted schools to become places where sheltered ignorance was replaced with opportunities to be educated, to be exposed to narratives that included diverse family structures, and to gain access to multiple points of view. With these ideals in mind, they were able to articulate some of the best practices they had observed in their schools, as well as some of the worst practices from which they hoped others could learn valuable lessons about what not to allow in Ontario’s classrooms. The experiences in schools, whether positive or negative, had become part of their own emerging identity configurations.
S-3  *Best (and worst) practices in schools*

“Teachers have a big-ass impact that I don’t really think they understand,” remarked Julia, underscoring the strong influence that teachers’ stories have on the development of their students’ narratives of personal identity. That impact can be felt by students in both positive and negative ways, and the participants in the present study gave evidence to indicate both positive and negative interactions they had had with school staff and administration. They gave concrete evidence of both the successes and failures of their teachers’ performance. Their responses will be presented with reference to the following categories: *responding to bullying and homophobia, providing support for queer-identified youth and students with queer-identified parents, resources, gay-straight alliances, special events, and school curricula.*

Findings described in the review of the literature (e.g., Taylor et al., 2008; GLSEN, 2003; Ray & Gregory, 2001) indicated that teachers could expect to hear homophobic slurs such as “fag,” “dyke,” or “that’s so gay” almost daily, a fact that demonstrates the prevalence of the master narrative of heteronormativity. The collective experiences of the nine participants in the current study provided personal evidence to suggest that these research findings were mirrored in their own schools as well. They gave useful insight into how their teachers were *responding to bullying and homophobia* when it did indeed occur, and they also addressed the problem of some of their teachers failing to respond.

Many of the participants referenced their belief that bullying was somewhat inevitable. “I think it would be impossible [to have bully-free schools] right now,” conceded Julia.

Ellie added, “I think bullying is always going to be there.” In one of the storytelling tasks, she created an imaginary character and said, “This person looks really isolated at school. Being bullied, which is probably causing the isolation. And really helpless, really depressed
about it.” She then revealed what her fictional character was wishing. “I’m sure he wishes he
had someone to talk to about it.” In her own high school experience, she had received no
support, but she seemed to understand that things would have been better if her high school
teachers had been able and willing to respond:

I had a pretty bad high school experience [...]. Whenever I was bullied, teachers would
never, like, step in or anything. Like, I remember that a girl called – like, she called me a
dyke, and it was in the middle of a class, and the teacher was just – all she said to the girl
was, like, “Sit down!” Like, okay [laughs]. You just let that slide [chuckles]. [The
teacher] probably just didn’t know how to handle it. She’s probably just not well enough
educated about the topic to know what to do. So many teachers let bullying slide! Like,
it’s so bad. Like they – and I think my perspective’s different because I was from a small
town and, like, the teachers were all from there and, like, grew up there. It’s like they all
knew everyone’s families so there was always, like, that bias. And, um, like, it was just a
really bad situation for like teachers always letting bullying go and, like, they didn’t want
to offend.

Victoria agreed that teachers’ inaction was problematic. “I think the biggest thing is that
teachers just let it go by,” she stated before advocating for their vigilance. “You know, like,
every time someone says, ‘Oh, that’s so gay.’ No! That’s not okay, you know? Or like, if
they’re making fun of someone who’s gay [punches fist into opposite palm twice]. Every time
you hear it, you need to be vigilant in acknowledging it.”

Anna, too, acknowledged the widespread problem of teachers ignoring homophobic
rhetoric and of their failure to challenge behaviour that propagates the master narrative of
heteronormativity. “Teachers hear homophobic comments and things that make fun of the whole LGBT community,” she claimed, “and I think that some teachers just ignore it. And if they just said something, and said, ‘No, you shouldn’t say that,’ I think that it would help a lot more.” She did, however, confirm that her own family had never been discriminated against in schools, a view shared by Shane, Christie, Owen, Denise, Nick, and Victoria.

“All teachers that I have know about [the fact that my mom is lesbian-identified],” claimed Owen, adding that he would never expect a negative reaction from teachers. “[None] have treated me differently,” he said.

“My dad is treated the exact same,” stated Christie. “It could be because they don’t know, but still, they’d have to treat him the same just ‘cause he’s there. That’s what he is.” Her use of the phrase “they’d have to” indicates that Christie could not even imagine what would motivate school staff to treat her father differently on the basis of his sexual orientation.

On the issue of teachers providing support for queer-identified youth and students with queer-identified parents, there was a range of experiences reported. Julia had experienced bullying by her peers until her transfer to The Triangle Program, and even her teachers had treated her poorly leading up her eventual transfer. “They were never there to support or stand up for me,” she reported. Additionally, Julia claimed to have felt judgement “all the time [from] my peers, my teachers, a lot of peers. Mostly my peers and teachers.” One of Julia’s stories was particularly shocking and perhaps tops the list of “worst practices” reported by these participants:

I had a teacher ask me if I was born in a bottle, in front of my whole class […]. Because I was, like, we were doing family trees in grade two, and I was, like, “What if you don’t have a father?” [My teacher] asked in front of the whole class, “What? Were you born
in a bottle?” [Either she didn’t understand] or she’s a bitch. She’s just like, “What? That’s impossible. Were you born in a bottle? Like, how could you not have a father?”

It is relatively easy to imagine those questions from a fellow elementary school student, questions arising due to lack of prior exposure to alternative family narratives, but no child would expect to face these types of questions from their teacher. Referring back to the response styles of peers who learn of someone’s LGB-identified parent(s), the teacher’s response above would fall somewhere between curiosity and hostility, neither of which is an appropriate reaction from an educated adult who, as was pointed out by Denise, should be advocating for each and every one of the students in her classroom. Denise’s assertion is that teachers should be expected to protect their students’ choices regarding how to articulate personal identity so students have no need to fear the attempts to derail such efforts. She brought up her belief that teachers need to be both neutral and supportive of all students’ interests:

Teachers need to put aside their own opinions. A lot of the time, I feel like teachers are sort of turning a blind eye to what they don’t believe in, and just letting things happen […]. They’re not standing up for, you know, what you know should be happening, right? [Interviewer: Especially within a public school setting.] Especially within a public school setting! It’s, like, you can’t just be standing up for yourself; you need to be standing up for everyone.

As was the case for Julia, Denise had experienced what she characterized as a problematic response from a teacher during her early elementary years. Again, the issue arose during a lesson involving the creation of a family tree:
The worst thing that I can remember happening at school was on behalf of a teacher. Not the students. So it was a supply teacher so, again, it was good that it wasn’t my actual teacher, but the, sort of, most excluded that I felt was sort of in a staff moment. And, like grade [two or three or four], which is when, uh, classes do family tree exercises. Which also then itself is a very exclusionary kind of thing unless you’re drawing your own. For us, we had a pre-drawn tree, and we’re just filling it out. So that became quite a problem because I wanted to put [my mom’s partner] on it, but I also wanted to put my dad on it. And I was having trouble with that and the supply teacher, um, yelled at me. First of all, I was a very small child so it’s not only is this a person that I don’t know, this adult yelling at me, they’re yelling at me about something that is my everyday life. This is my reality […]. But it was sort of making me feel excluded for just being who I was and living in my world. That’s just the way it is, right? And that was a very sort of embarrassed and unsafe moment because this was someone who as a teacher would have been supposed to be making me feel comfortable and that didn’t happen […]. And he said something about families can't have two moms or something, and it was like just not the reality for me so I was kind of scared in that, if families can't have two moms, why does my family have two moms? And I remember him just getting really mad and saying […] he was going to tell my teacher, regular teacher, that I was not doing the activity properly, and so on. And just getting very upset for no reason. […] Like, that’s an isolated incident. And the thing is that my regular teacher was very, like, warm and inclusive, so when she found out about this, ‘cause I told my parents of course when I went home […], my regular teacher, um, just, obviously freaked out because she was like, “Oh my gosh that’s so not supposed to happen.” […] That supply teacher never was
rehired at our school, so [laughs]. Everything can be dealt with, but that was a bit, like, scary what happened there.

Certainly, the negative experiences of Julia and Denise should serve as a lesson to teachers to find more inclusive ways to discuss “family” within their classrooms so as not to risk introducing mixed messages that complicate their students’ task of developing a sense of personal identity. Tasker and Granville (2011) advocate for the use of alternatives to family trees such as the Apple Tree Family (ATF) task or the Kinetic Family Drawing Test (KFDT), instruments that allow for greater flexibility of expression in terms of the people and relationships that one includes in a personal definition of family. Such tasks could be useful as research or clinic tools, as well as useful in family homes and educational settings.

Ellie did not report the same kind of overtly offensive comments from teachers that Julia and Denise had experienced, but she had felt a sense of abandonment at her school. “No teachers. Nothing,” she had concluded about the level of support she received from school staff and administration in the midst of the harassment she received from her ex-boyfriend. When asked if she had any advice for how schools could support youth from LGB-led homes and educate kids about the diversity of family structures, Ellie said, “No, just because I never had that. I wouldn’t even know where to begin.”

The lack of support is a problem addressed in the literature as well as in the responses of the participants in the current study. Walton (2010) highlighted the need for pre-service teachers to be trained in the prevention and management of homophobia through the introduction of required courses on equity and social justice. Victoria mentioned this specifically when she said, “Everyone should have sensitivity training and anti-oppressive training.”
Referring to his teachers and counsellors, Nick said, “I don’t know if they need training or something to be, like, open. To be understanding and just be able to invite [students] into their office and know what to ask them. And know how to respond to their questions.” Nick also brought up the point that, while some school staff attempted to present an image of openness, their efforts were seemingly superficial. “I think some counsellors are very closed off about it,” he said, “even though they have a sticker on their door that has a rainbow on it.”

Rainbow stickers and other resources were, however, perceived by some participants to be small gestures that sometimes made big differences. “I think that making students feel comfortable with being who they are, um, is a big step,” explained Denise. “At my high school, I remember seeing those, um, positive space stickers and posters, and they’re very small. And it’s a very small gesture, but it’s actually very nice to see around the school. Because it’s sort of, like, saying, you know, everyone’s welcome.” Denise recalled one experience where a teacher, who she later found out was gay, had put up a positive space poster the day after he had met her female-coupled parents. “I don’t know if it was a coincidence,” she admitted, but she viewed the gesture as “promoting positive space” as a means of being “supportive in a more subtle way.”

Victoria also remembered the welcoming feeling she experienced when she saw queer-positive advertisements in schools. “Having safe space posters helps, you know,” she claimed. “Having it being there is just really key.”

Beyond posters and stickers, there were other types of resources that participants viewed as helpful and that could, therefore, be considered as ideal practices for schools, at least from the viewpoint of those from LGB-led families. Based on Denise’s positive experience with queer-friendly books in her classroom and in her library, she advocated for the provision of queer-positive resources at a young age. “The earlier the better,” she claimed. “I know there’s
hesitancy to put any sort of family, like, different family structures in the younger grades [but] a lot of the isolation for queer spawn is ignorance on behalf of the other kids. ‘Cause they don’t really know […]. So I think opening some sort of way to ask questions would be helpful about family.” Denise recalled an early elementary school experience where the availability of queer-positive resources allowed her to shift some of the responsibility to educate her peers off of her own shoulders.

I think it was in grade two because I had started a new school, uh, closer to the end of the year. Because the beginning of the year I didn’t really have that many friends. By the end of the year, um, we had a lot of books in the classroom actually that were LGBTQ parent positive […]. I think that a couple of them were, um, my mom had suggested it to the school, like, can you bring in a couple of books here, it’s just you know, as a school, as a public school there’s supposed to be representing different types of families. So I remember, and also I had a book at home that I really liked that I brought into school, I think. So that was also helpful for me because I think in our, I remember in our library, when we used to go to the library to read the books that we wanted to. And I remember when our librarian read it to the class that they, instead of, uh, just sort of being hesitant they wanted to ask questions. And it was very helpful to have an adult to answer those questions rather than me having to. These little kids are saying to me “Oh, but that’s not allowed. How come you have two moms?” […] How was I supposed to answer that as a child? I don’t know. So it was helpful to have an adult to field questions, and that the resources that were in the classroom were also helpful because that sort of opened the doors for the kids to actually ask questions as well. But I know that there was only like one book in my classroom in grade two, and now I think when I look into sort of – I work
at a daycare in the summers, so when I look on the bookshelf in the daycare now there’s way more resources there. So that makes me feel better about it, because okay, maybe it wasn’t so great before, but things are getting better here.

The increased presence of queer-positive resources left Denise with the impression that the very concept of normativity was evolving away from the exclusive, heteronormative practices she had previously observed. Nick, too, believed that stickers, posters, rainbow flags, and queer-positive books had value in advancing a more inclusive master narrative, but he also felt strongly that queer […] youth and youth with queer-identified parents were in need of being actively nudged towards counselling resources. He talked about a lesbian-identified friend at his school that had committed suicide. “Her parents didn’t support her,” Nick asserted. “A lot of her friends, like, pretty much shunned her, uh, because of her orientation. [She] didn’t know that she could go talk to a guidance counsellor or someone.” Referring to one teacher at his school, he said, “[She] is gay, and at our school if you have a problem, if you ever want to talk about gay, lesbian, transsexual, or whatever, you can go to her. And that’s really, really, really resourceful. You can go to her […]. She has these resources,” he concluded as he pointed to the list of resources provided to him at the beginning of the interview, perhaps wishing that his friend had had been actively directed to such services when she was contemplating whether or not to take her own life. “You’ve mentioned stuff that I didn’t even know,” Nick told me, again indicating the list of resources on the table in front of him. “So I honestly think, um, that there needs to be more of, just resources available for students. [The word is not getting out there], especially in this town. […] To be honest with you, I didn’t know any resources other than the Kids Help Phone until now.”
Denise, too, believed that youth with LGB-identified parents did not always know where to get help if they needed it. “[They] need to be more actively given the resources that apply to them,” she asserted. “There’s a hesitancy to seek out help for ‘queer spawn’ because […] there’s this feeling of, well, it’s not my issue, it’s my parent’s […]. People who are in LGBTQ families need to be – need to have access to resources such as guidance counsellors, someone who they can talk to if they don’t have someone who is a role model in their own family.” Of course, sometimes peers prefer to solicit the support of other peers rather than seeking help from an adult (Fleming, 2012).

An issue touched on by Victoria, Denise, Owen, and Anna was that of gay-straight alliances, sometimes referred to as queer-straight alliances, and also known by their acronyms GSAs and QSAs. Walton (2010) recommended policy development at all levels of the education system in Ontario. With policies in place, he argued that a framework would allow for student-led initiatives such as GSAs to effectively take root. Experiences varied for participants in the current study with regard to their exposure to GSAs.

“There are, like, gay-straight alliance groups in school,” stated Anna, “but no one really knows what they are, or like where they are, or what they even do. So, I mean, they’re, the school has put the effort into making that group, but then no one even utilized it to, to understand.” It is difficult to know the specific reasons why the GSA in Anna’s school was ineffective. She seemed to describe an air of secrecy that would not be conducive to welcoming those who were queer-identified, to those questioning their sexuality, or to those who merely wanted to come as straight allies of queer-identified friends. Anna herself was very much an advocate for the rights of queer-identified students, but the GSA had not in any way drawn her into becoming a member.
Fortunately, other participants had more meaningful interactions with their GSAs. “A Queer Straight Alliance is really important,” claimed Victoria. “Because then you know you have a safe space to go to if you feel your school is unsafe.”

Denise also found that a GSA is “very good to have,” but she found that as a heterosexual-identified student with queer-identified parents, it was not always easy to be part of the group. “I want to be there,” she said, “but at the same time there are people who are sort of like [pause] trying to ‘out LGBTQ’ me. They’re trying to be more LGBTQ than me. And so it’s like, in that sense there’s an isolation.” It is interesting to note the conflict Denise experienced between the desire to be part of her school’s GSA and the sense of isolation she experienced there. From her point of view, students in the GSA at her school gave the perception of there being varying degrees of queerness. She felt alienated merely because she was heterosexual-identified, unlike the majority in attendance who were queer-identified youth. Her experience reveals that despite her parents’ LGB identities becoming a key part of her own personal narrative, her story still differed in significant ways from youth who were LGB-identified themselves. Nevertheless, she believed that having GSAs in schools is important.

Fleming (2012) reports that the presence of a GSA is associated with students’ reports of higher levels of feeling safe within their schools, as well as with decreased experiences of facing anti-bias harassment. Fleming cited anecdotal reports from one high school to argue that teachers and students notice a change when GSAs are in place and feels that the hard work of social justice clubs yields results in schools. Nationwide quantitative data supports Fleming’s claims (e.g., GLSEN, 2009). According to the 2009 National School Climate Survey, “GSAs can provide safe, affirming spaces and critical support for LGBT students and also contribute to creating a more welcoming school environment” (GLSEN, 2009, p. xvii). In the GLSEN survey
students from schools with a GSA were less likely to hear homophobic remarks than students in a school without a GSA. They were also more likely to observe a staff member intervening when hearing homophobic remarks (19.0% for GSA schools vs. 12.3% for non-GSA schools) and less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation (54.3% for GSA schools vs. 66.5% for non-GSA schools).

In Ontario, publicly-funded Catholic schools have argued against terminology such as “gay-straight alliance,” claiming they should not be required to allow student-led clubs that violate their religious ideals. The Ontario government, however, has tabled legislation that would compel even Catholic boards to permit such clubs in their schools (National Post, 2012, May 25). Amsterdam and Bruner (2000) speak of “the messiness that results when institutionalized canonicity and imagined possibility are locked in a local dialectic” (p. 229), but they maintain that despite the messiness, all cultures necessarily negotiate compromises between that which is established and that which is imagined. While a growing number of Ontarians are able to imagine the value of a school support system that would protect students from bullying and harassment, it would seem that some institutionalized canons remain in place. Underlying the political wrangling to write laws that reflect the evolving values of Ontarians is what Amsterdam and Bruner call “contests for control over conceptions of reality” (p. 231). Despite the evidence that the presence of GSAs has an impact on school climate with respect to support for sexual diversity issues, only 44.6% of students reported having a GSA student club in their school (GLSEN, 2009). This relatively low number is perhaps indicative of the resistance on the part of some to diverge from a narrative which is already established. Having a GSA in each high school appears, from both students’ and researchers’ points of view, to be a good practice in
theory. However, strategies for improving the accessibility, efficacy, and inclusiveness of these organizations need to be developed if GSAs are to have their desired impact.

Several of the participants also highlighted the importance of special events in their schools. Simple things, such as the recognition of Day of Pink – the international day against bullying, discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia – are things that schools could begin to incorporate into their annual calendar if they are not already doing so. Anna mentioned this practice at her school, but suggested that more of an impact would be made by bringing in a guest speaker to allow firsthand access to the narratives of others on a more personal level. “We have Pink Day, and it’s against homophobia,” she said, “but I think bringing in a speaker who is gay and who has gone through the bullying that people do in my school. If they did that, I think that would help so, like, a lot. Because then they are getting a firsthand view from someone who is strong enough to say something. Not everyone who is gay can stand up for themselves.”

Other special events, ones that are possibly standard practice in many schools, caused a certain amount of discomfort for youth with queer-identified parents. Consider Denise’s experience with Mother’s Day and Father’s Day activities when she was in elementary school:

There are certain school things [that make me feel a sense of social isolation]. School functions that are not conducive to all types of families. Um, for example, in the younger grades, Father’s Day is not very conducive to LGBTQ families. And, in fact, Mother’s Day also becomes a bit of an issue, when um, you know, you’re the last kid making a card or you need twice the supplies, and your teacher says, “Oh no, you can only have one.” And on Father’s Day, when it’s like, oh, I don’t want to make my dad a card because I don’t see him. When I was younger I didn’t see him nearly as often as I do now, probably once or twice a year. So it’s like, oh, I’m not going to make him a
Father’s Day card, like, ‘cause then I’m going to be holding on to it for six months waiting to give it to him, like, I don’t care. And then I find that a lot of teachers feel the need to do the um, ‘Well, do you want to make it for another male that you know? Like your brother, an uncle?’ […] So that is not very helpful, and that sort of forms a bit of exclusion.

Special events such as field trips were also problematic if teachers were not inclined to be inclusive in their practices and to consider issues from the point of view of families that did not fit the master narrative of heteronormativity. Denise explained that while her school board had recently changed all board-wide forms to eliminate previous father/mother signature requirements, some teachers lacked the awareness to make their intra-classroom paperwork inclusive of every family configuration:

Every once in a while when you come across a form that’s not been changed, ‘cause it happens. That sort of becomes a problem […] I remember, doing a course like media consent form thing, and it said, like, you need your mother’s signature, and then it was, like, and father’s signature, and the teacher had just typed it up. So it wasn’t like an actual official form. It was just the teacher had typed it up, and in that sense it’s, like, I – first of all, not just for LGBTQ families, but single parent households, anyone who has any sort of family that’s not a very mother-father-brother-sister-and-a-dog. Like, it becomes very uncomfortable.

The final category of student responses concerned school curricula. As previously mentioned, Julia had advocated for nationwide programs or province-wide revisions to curricula
to allow all students greater access to stories that would provide alternatives to heteronormative ideals. In Canada, education falls within the mandate of provincial governments, and Ontario’s current government is indeed in the process of revising its sex education curricula. Julia advocated for change “as young as kindergarten” because she felt that the establishment of best practices at an early age would expose all Ontarians to diverse family configurations, thus increasing the likelihood that society’s overall acceptance for diversity would increase. As previously referenced, Quebec has already introduced a mandatory religious ethics course for all of its students. If a similarly pluralistic approach to sex education became law in Ontario, there would be no shortage of controversy, but families like Julia’s would applaud the curricular opportunities to expose all Ontario students to diverse sexual orientations and family configurations. Certain high school courses already do so, although they are not mandatory. Nick spoke very highly of one of the courses he took when he was in grade twelve:

I took a Families and Diversity class at school. I really, really liked it. It’s something that I’d like to pursue at some point in my life, whether it’s a college or a university course […] So it’s just about families, like before there was just the nuclear family – mom, dad, kids. And now we’re getting into single parents, lesbian or gay families, and we went through all these – I think there’s at least seven different types of families – ones that weren’t married, common-law and stuff like that […]. In Families and Diversity, we watched Milk, so then you really see it back in the 70’s at that time. And you really understand what it’s like, and you’re just thinking – like, in my class there were students that wouldn’t watch it. They would get up, and they’d walk out. And in my – I was thinking, “You selfish, you know, whatever. Sit down! And watch the rest of this show. That’s really rude!” Cause I’m like, you don’t know what could happen. You don’t
know [...]. I remember there was two, uh, they couldn’t watch. Like, there’s a part where, uh, Harvey and his boyfriend were making out or something, and they couldn’t watch it. And they said to our teacher, “Can I go to the bathroom?” and she was like, “No. What do you need to go to the bathroom for? You just went to the bathroom.” And then he’s like, “I don’t want to watch this,” and then she’s like, “You know, this is a part of Families.” Um, and then she, uh, and he’s like, “Well I’m not watching this,” and he got up and started walking out. And she was like, “Sit down in your seat. This is a part of this class. You’re real mature. You’re showing your maturity right now by walking out on this scene.” He, like, took off and slammed the door, and then another guy followed, like, not long after and took off. So at that point, I guess I could say I felt a little bit of anger, kind of rage. How could you do this? You don’t, you know what I mean? You have your happy, perfect family. You don’t [know] what other students in this class are going through. What other families are like, and maybe you don’t know what your family’s going to be like in five years, you know. Anything could change.

Three hundred fifty kilometres away, Anna experienced a nearly identical scenario of a peer who was resisting a teacher’s efforts to use *Milk* to challenge heteronormative ideas:

I had a class where we watched *Milk* in class, and there were some guys who were very uncomfortable. And my teacher just said, “Suck it up. You’re going to watch this.” And that’s good because the teacher is saying, “Get over it. You’re going to see this in your life, so just deal with it.” But some teachers just ignore comments like that, and they don’t say anything. So I just think if teachers said something, then they’re standing up for those who can’t. And they’re also educating others and saying, “That’s wrong.”
In both Nick’s and Anna’s classrooms, homophobic students tried to opt out of an activity that was designed to expose them to issues of sexual diversity. Both teachers held their ground. Both students who had queer-identified parents watched, wondering how their teachers would handle the conflict and waiting to see the extent to which the students would be expected to participate in class. Without the same kind of legal requirement that is now in place in Quebec religion classes, teachers are left without any real options to ensure that homophobic students, the students who are arguably the most in need of exposure to sexual diversity issues, will not merely storm out of the room in protest.

If the experiences of the participants in the current study are an accurate indication, Ontario education is not yet where it needs to be in terms of consistent and widespread support for students with queer-identified parents. Like Walton (2010), Victoria and Julia suggest that teachers need more training to address homophobia and to develop a more sophisticated understanding of social justice issues. Their assumption is that such training would lead to greater acceptance of family diversity and to teachers’ refusal to turn a blind eye to the homophobic slurs that are uttered in our schools. Many of the participants in the current study observed the same seemingly relentless homophobic banter that three-quarters of Canadian high school students reported hearing (Taylor, et al., 2008).

Social justice training and/or anti-oppression curricula for pre-service teachers, as Victoria expressed, might also prepare teacher candidates to be more supportive to queer-identified youth and students with queer-identified parents. Such support could range from simple yet welcoming gestures such as positive space stickers, to more overt advocacy to keep all students safe, as is required of Ontario teachers according to Bill 157 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). Such overt support would safeguard the choices that students make about how
to articulate their own identities and could include the invitation of guest speakers to classes and school assemblies, funding to provide practical support for GSAs, the appointment of social justice specialty counsellors to all schools, etc. Furthermore, policy and curriculum development, when done in consultation with all stakeholders, will help to ensure that gay-straight alliances are more meaningful and effective and that Ontario sex education curricula are powerful and relevant.

Summary of School Themes

When children with LGB-identified parents are at home, their realities may be far different from the circumstances they face when they first go to school. The participants in the current study provided evidence that in school environments, they are exposed to new faces, cultures, rules, and social expectations that challenge and expand their emerging narratives of personal identity. They learn to seek allies and to avoid those whom they perceive as a threat (Garner, 2004) to the integration of their parents’ narratives of identity as part of their own. Within their classrooms, they develop decision-making skills to determine if and when to disclose, who to trust, and who to avoid. Sometimes, they use litmus tests to screen out homophobic individuals before coming out as a member of a queer-identified family. In many ways, their coming out processes mirror the establishment of queer individuals’ sexual identities. After some questioning of their family’s identity and comparison to the families of their peers, they sometimes reach a point of what could be coined “family identity synthesis”, a point where they are able to accept and celebrate the unique features of their family configurations.

The experiences of participants in the current study suggest that when some youth with LGB-identified parents initially decide to come out, peer responses to such disclosures include
neutrality, connection, humour, hostility, or curiosity. By anticipating the responses experienced by this group of participants, other queer-identified families can strategically prepare for these responses in both emotional and practical ways. In so doing, any possible negative effects of peer responses can be minimized. Even when there are negative effects, however, this does not rule out the possibility that a positive outcome can follow. According to Bruner (2004), trouble is what drives the drama of an individual’s narrative; without it, there is no story. If youth with LGB-identified parents have experiences at school that bring their family narrative into conflict with the master narrative of heteronormativity, this could potentially awaken in them the need to tell their stories. Their struggles offer rich resources to draw from as they seek to establish a personal identity and to share their narrative with others.

Participants in the current study believe strongly in the role that education can play in reducing ignorant responses from peers, in promoting accepting attitudes, and in debunking the stereotypes that serve to propogate the master narrative of heteronormativity. Often, they accept responsibility to answer the questions of their peers, but they welcome the possibility that teachers could assume a greater share of the responsibility to educate Ontario students about diverse family configurations. Some participants in the current study advocate for social justice training for teachers and hope to see curricular changes that would reach all Ontario families. It is also clear that youth with LGB-identified parents value the impact that media can have on highlighting diverse family configurations. Interviewees mentioned television shows such as Modern Family, as well as movies such as Milk, to demonstrate that mainstream media could have an impact on increasing awareness and acceptance of sexual diversity. U.S. vice president Joe Biden echoed participants’ assertion that mainstream media plays a role in public perception when he stated, “I think [the television show] Will and Grace probably did more to educate the
American public than almost anything anybody’s ever done so far” (New York Times, 2012, May 6, para. 19). Barret and Logan (2002) also asserted that televisions shows such as *Will and Grace* have been “revolutionary in their attempts to honestly portray gay and lesbian people” (p. 134). If Biden is correct, it would seem that even fictional narratives from mainstream media that offer alternatives to the master narrative of heteronormativity can play a role in becoming part of one’s own stories, an idea that is precisely aligned with Ricoeur’s (1992) assertion that our narratives of personal identity are partially constructed from the literary and historical resources available to us. Participants were clear, however, that their teachers had an enormous role to play, in addition to the influences of mainstream media, in bringing about attitudinal change.

Some of the participants in the current study expressed a belief that teachers can have a profound impact on students’ lives. Participants provided evidence of both the successes and failures of their teachers’ performance, acknowledging that some teachers are more effective than others in maximizing the potential impact they have in exposing students to alternatives to the master narrative of heteronormativity. Participants described good examples and ineffective teacher practices with respect to responses to bullying and homophobia, the provision of support for queer-identified youth and youth with queer-identified parents, and the utilization of resources. Additionally, participants expressed views about the role of gay-straight alliances, best and worst practices for special events, and hope for meaningful and effective sex education curricula in Ontario.

Mandated changes to sex education curricula would allow for a broader-reaching effort to draw awareness to diverse family structures. As Julia stated, “We can’t go into all those parents’ houses of those kids, but if those kids have […] education, they can make their own decisions.”
Indeed, children may have tremendous potential to effect change within their own families. Furthermore, it is possible that when children are exposed to narratives that challenge heteronormativity, they may even bring about change in their parents’ attitudes, such as was the experience for Malia and Sasha Obama (New York Times, 2012, May 10). When attitudes within families shift in response to an increased education, a broader societal shift may follow that could serve to challenge our culture’s current definition of normality. In chapter six, participants’ responses will be considered with respect to their intersecting and emerging identities as individuals, as children of queer-identified parents, and as members of Canadian society as a whole.
Chapter Six: Queer Identity Themes – Results & Discussion

Queer Identity Themes

Chapters four and five presented and discussed results pertaining to participants’ life stories within the contexts of home and school. Family life and school life, however, are merely parts of each participant’s broader personal narrative. McAdams (2006) and McLean (2008) believe that to fully understand an individual’s personality and identity development, one needs to consider the individual’s narrative within a broader sociocultural context and across the lifespan. The participants in the current study, all of whom were approaching young adulthood, described many experiences to suggest that their queer family identity had been established within the context of their family and that, especially in school settings, they had had experiences where their queer family identity was challenged by others’ heteronormative assumptions. They also gave evidence to suggest that the impact of their parents’ identity was not limited to their childhood; rather, as will be discussed in chapter six, it would continue to shape them throughout their lifespan as they sought to become adult members of Canadian society.

One of the study’s guiding questions concerned how participants made sense of their queer-family identity when they were in a school setting, but there was no place in the interview protocol where participants were directly asked to reveal their own sexual identity. Their references to boyfriends and girlfriends, however, as well as their own self disclosures of sexual orientation, suggested that seven of the nine participants likely identify as heterosexuals. Irrespective of their own sexual orientation, whether they chose to verbalize that part of their story or not, many of the participants provided evidence that “queer” is something that factors into their own personal identity.
As mentioned in chapter two, intersectionality theory explores the notion that individuals’ multiple identities intersect to form something more powerful than the sum of their parts. Although the present study is not a study of intersectionality, there are some elements of intersectionality theory that can be borrowed and extended to frame aspects of the current discussion. Crenshaw’s (1989) intersectionality theory argued that there is an intersection of oppressions that must be considered collectively rather than in isolation. For example, to understand the experiences of a black woman from a low socioeconomic background, one must look at the intersection of multiple types of oppression rather than a single-axis analysis of her experience. Others have extended Crenshaw’s theory (e.g., Sims, 2009) to suggest that identity is formed by more than just the intersection of types of oppression. Sims suggests comparing an individual’s identity to a faceted crystal rather than merely using the traffic intersection metaphor that Crenshaw (1989) used. Little, Paul, Jordens, and Sayers (2002) assert that a multi-faceted identity is constructed and experienced by an individual and that the experience of identity “is constructed and modified by events and associations within which the person moves” (p. 171). Identities, then, can be viewed as individuals’ interpretations of their experiences (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001), a notion that is certainly relevant to the current study which aims to uncover how youth with queer-identified parents make meaning from their multifaceted narratives and how their intersecting narratives inform their own sense of self. Throughout this chapter, evidence from each of their interviews will be presented to demonstrate the queer identity themes that emerged. For a master table of queer identity thematic evidence, see Appendix J.

The participants were all English speaking, middle socioeconomic status, Canadian-born teenagers with an LGB-identified parent. Eight were white; one was of South Asian heritage. Three were males; six were females. Some lived in large urban centres; some lived in small
towns. Some identified as queer; some did not. Some used labels like “queer spawn” to purposefully introduce a family-specific identity characteristic; some did not. Individually, the participants had many interrelated identities. Together, they exhibited the “unique identity” of which Evans (2009) spoke. Their collective identity was “complex, multi-layered, and ever-changing” (Evans, 2009, p. 239).

Although the term itself was acknowledged to be controversial, “queer spawn” aptly encapsulated for some the uniqueness of having grown up with queer-identified parents and was a term with which they identified. In chapter six, the participants’ responses will be presented and discussed, first with reference to the unique sense of identity that united those whose parents were openly lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Next, this chapter will consider the heightened awareness to sexual diversity that participants reported, which resulted in many of them experiencing a special connection to queer-identified youth. Third, this chapter will explore the privileges and pressures that youth with LGB-parents sometimes experience as a result of daily interactions with both the “queer world” and the “straight world.” Finally, participants’ experiences will be considered from a broader societal perspective, taking into account the impact that Canadian law and society have on the identity development of youth from LGB-identified homes.

I-1 Connecting with other “queer spawn”

The unique identity of being the child of an openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual parent is complex and multi-layered (Evans, 2009). The ways and the degree to which one adopts the notion of being from a queer-identified family vary from one individual to the next just as the notion of being LGB-identified means different things to different people. On the subject of LGB-identified youths, Hammack, Thompson, and Pilecki (2009) remind us that “contemporary
youth have access to a number of discourses on sexuality” (p. 874), but they go through a process of narrative engagement to select the discourse that resonates most for them. Similarly, youth with LGB-identified parents have access to a number of narratives of sexuality and must therefore go through a process of narrative engagement to determine the ways in which a queer identity applies to them and their families.

Of the participants in the current study, the three who were most connected to other youth with queer-identified parents were Victoria, Julia, and Denise. Victoria and Julia, by virtue of being from-the-get-go children, had been in queer-identified families since birth. Denise had been in a queer-identified family longer than any of the other participants because her mother had begun a same-sex relationship when Denise was six years old. There is the possibility, then, that early years living in a queer-identified family configuration play a role in determining the degree to which a child is likely to connect with peers from similar families.

Another possible interpretation, however, is to consider the urban nature of the environment in which Victoria, Julia, and Denise were raised. All three participants grew up in Toronto, Canada’s largest urban centre, while the other six participants grew up in much smaller communities. Toronto boasts a population of 5.5 million in the Greater Toronto Area and is considered one of the safest large urban centres in North America (City of Toronto, 2012). Davidson (2005) considers Toronto to have one of the largest gay populations in North America, naming Toronto among the Big Four along with San Francisco, New York, and Chicago. Certainly, the Toronto participants’ experience growing up would be much different than a participant in a non-urban centre such as Ellie, who grew up in a town of fewer than 1,200 residents. Not only would Ellie be unlikely to encounter other youth with queer-identified
parents, she would be far less likely to have daily interactions with any openly LGB people with the exception of her mother and her mother’s partner.

For Torontonians Victoria, Julia, and Denise, there were other connections besides the urban narrative that had influenced their personal identity development. All three had early exposure to LGB-led family life and more regular contact with LGB-identified individuals that increased their likelihood of connecting to other offspring of queer parents. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that these participants, whom I will refer to as “the urban trio” in this section, can be viewed somewhat differently from the other six participants. Their uniqueness from the rest of the group is evident even in their experience with the label “queer spawn,” a term that only they used.

The urban trio of Victoria, Julia, and Denise was very clear about the potential value that comes from “queer spawn” connecting with one another. Victoria made these observations:

For kids who feel isolated about having queer parents, it’s definitely a space for them to see they’re not alone. Like, other kids are going through what they’re going through. It’s a place for people to be able to talk about their families because it is, like, it is hard not seeing your family represented in movies ever, not being able to identify with any of your friends. It can be really challenging. And I think it’s just important to have a space to talk about your experiences.

Similarly, Julia identified an Ottawa-based camp, The Ten Oaks Project, as an organization that had given her the opportunity to meet people like herself. “The Ten Oaks Project just gave me so much support,” she claimed. “I was very reluctant to go, but when I went there, I found a whole type of new people. And understanding people […]. It was the
safest space I’d ever been in […] as in, like, I had no fear of judgement. Based on who I was or where I came from.” Her comment very succinctly identified one potential advantage of the birds-of-a-feather-flock-together concept: if one is usually worried about being judged for a particular characteristic, that fear may melt away when everyone within one group has the same characteristic. If one were to engage in an intersectional analysis of Julia’s experience in this group, one might consider why this space felt so safe for her and whether or not it would feel as safe to individuals who did not have a similar set of intersecting narratives.

Despite having been a from-the-get-go child with frequent exposure to the LGB community in an urban centre, Julia admitted having reservations about going to a Ten Oaks Project event and had not predicted that the event would be such a positive experience for her. One can imagine the reluctance for youth with very little exposure to the LGB community or for those who do not already know peers who also have LGB-identified parents. “I don’t know many people with LGBT parents,” said Shane. Shane and the other non-Toronto participants had no strong ties to other youth with queer-identified parents and therefore could only speculate about the possible advantages of networking with other queer-identified families.

Christie acknowledged her unfamiliarity with the organizations listed on the resource sheet given to each participant prior to the interview. “I’ve never really heard of any of those [groups for kids with LGB-identified parents] before,” she admitted. “I don’t really need anything.” She did speculate, however, that if people had a need for such programs, those might be useful places to “get help or deal with it.”

Ellie, too, guessed that organizations for youth from queer-identified families might have potential advantages. “It probably would have been really good for me to have [a connection to youth like me],” she said, “so I didn’t feel so isolated […]. If there are situations that you don’t
want to talk about with your parents [...] if you didn’t want to offend them or tell them that someone was saying this about them that, like, you can say that to other people and have them say, like, what would your reaction [be]?” It was interesting to note that she felt there were times when a child might hold back from telling their parents certain things, suggesting that when youth hear offensive comments at school (e.g., hostile comments or the hurtful use of humour), they sometimes want to spare their parents any potential pain.

This behaviour sets both LGB-identified youth and youth with LGB-identified parents apart from other minority groups. For example, if a child from a racial minority group experiences teasing at school, he or she can go home to debrief such incidents with parents who, in most cases, are of the same racial minority group. “Other minority groups [besides those whose minority is related to LGB issues],” write Barret and Logan (2002), “experience prejudice and discrimination from the majority group and find safe haven and validation from their family members – safe in terms of being able to rely on their family for support. This, however, is not true for sexual minority youth regardless of ethnic background” (p. 132). Many sexual minority youth face hostile home environments and therefore do not confide in their parents when bullied (Barret & Logan, 2002). Some youth with queer parents, such as Ellie, however, may bottle up their experiences of bullying for different reasons such as the potential risk that their parents will be hurt or offended if they find out details of the homophobic behaviour that their children have observed. That suggests the potential value of networking opportunities for youth with LGB-identified parents. Within such groups, discussions about homophobic behaviour would be unimpeded by fears of offending parents. However, most of these participants had not yet connected with peers who had similar family configurations.
Anna stated that she did not know personally of any peers whose family experiences were similar to her own. “I can’t think of any,” she said. “I know of someone who has two moms and not, not even a dad. Just two moms. But I don’t know him personally. I just know of him.” Later, she speculated that such programs might be the most useful for children of a younger age:

Younger kids [need support]. A lot of teenagers get support because they can voice how they feel and their opinions, but I think that if we started off at a younger age then people could – then those kids could learn to come to terms with how their family is.

Compared to Anna, Denise recalled a distinctly different experience. Having been associated with programs for youth with queer-identified families when she was younger, she found that such programs tapered off as the children became teenagers. “Once we get into teens,” she said, “it’s all very lacking. And I think the teen years, the high school years, are years that everyone is having issues. Everyone is dealing with family issues even more so than when you’re younger.” Denise and Anna’s differing opinions perhaps stem from the fact that Denise had access to such programs as a child, while Anna had no contact with peers from LGB-identified families.

Nick also admitted to having very little contact with other offspring of queer-identified parents. He mentioned that his mother’s lesbian-identified friend had a son. “I’ll talk to him and stuff like that,” said Nick, “but it’s not like we have a connection just because our parents are gay. But if you’re talking about your gay parents, it’s definitely easier to talk to another student who has gay parents as well.” Nick is expressing here a view that it is problematic to assume there will be an automatic friendship solely due to a shared experience. Even when two individuals’ narratives of identity have certain commonalities, there may still be significant
differences between them that prevent them from connecting more than just superficially. Many children who have been coerced to attend their parents’ company picnics might similarly acknowledge that the shared experiences of one’s parents do not always translate into compatibility for the children involved. Nick acknowledged, however, that even though children from other queer-identified families do not make guaranteed friends, there is perhaps nobody better to understand some of the unique issues commonly experienced in LGB-led homes.

Even so, not all youth with LGB-identified parents feel the need to talk to other peers about characteristics that are common to their family narratives. Victoria acknowledged that an organization such as COLAGE might not appeal to everyone:

Maybe it doesn’t have value for them. They shouldn’t have pressure to go. Just because you’re gay doesn’t mean you have to go clubbing in a gay bar, right? Just because you’re a queer spawn doesn’t mean you have to hang out with kids who have the same parents as you. Your parents is a miniscule part of your identity.

Even those who were not part of the urban trio and had had little or no connection to the queer community recognized that they potentially might have knowledge and experience that could benefit other youth with LGB-identified parents. “If [other kids like me] ever feel bad about anything, I don’t know, I could probably talk to them,” offered Christie.

“I want to be open to [others] if they are having a bad experience with it,” echoed Ellie. “And I think it’s important, like, for minority groups to […] discuss it and be – celebrate it, even.”

Given that the urban trio had had extensive exposure to groups like COLAGE while the others had not, I wondered if the urban trio had any advice for youth that had not yet had
opportunities to network with youth from other queer-led homes. “There’s value in [those groups],” said Victoria. “If you feel that space would be helpful, I would highly encourage anyone to go there.”

Julia acknowledged that she “never really had a place to meet people” who also had queer-identified parents until she was approximately 18 years of age. She also predicted that even as she grew older, networking with other people who have queer-identified parents would “still be very important” because of her belief that her own identity as a queer spawn was part of her lifelong narrative trajectory. She also suggested that those who had never been connected to COLAGE, Ten Oaks, or other groups might not know what they were missing:

It’ll give you a support system that you didn’t realize you could have. You could talk to people that understand. And it’s not even a big deal. You don’t even have to talk about it […] [Other queer spawn] are able to stand up and make a difference and, you know, pass on their word of, you know, their words of wisdom to other, you know, other people dealing with the same thing.

Julia’s sentiments prompted me to consider the words I had heard prior to purchasing my first iPhone. After telling the salesperson that I would really just be using it for phone calls and text messages, I was told, “You don’t know yet, but you’re going to be using it for a lot more than that.” Sure enough, I now use my phone for phone calls, text messages, emails, online banking, GPS navigation, weather forecasts, and purchasing my morning coffee. Just as I could not have foreseen all of the uses and advantages of owning a smart phone, children with queer-identified parents might not be able to grasp the myriad of potential benefits in connecting with other such youths and in finding parallels between their collective personal narratives. This is
not to say, however, that organizations such as COLAGE are a one-size-fits-all. As previously mentioned, Victoria stated that the experience “doesn’t have value” for everyone. Denise cautioned that there is, perhaps, a balance that needs to be found between the desire to be “the same” as other families and the desire to bond with those who feel united because “we’re different”:

I feel – with any sort of LGBTQ organization, not just for LGBTQ families – I feel like it creates a separation. This – the existence of it, in itself, will create a sort of, like, well, we need this because we’re different, while at the same time these families are trying to, sort of, be integrated and be welcomed everywhere. I feel like, in making some sort of organization or group, you’re at the same time isolating those families and saying, well, you know, we’re different, but we’re trying to be the same […]. So it’s a little bit counter-productive, and I would love – or prefer – to see a well-rounded positive family space for everyone. But it’s hard for that to exist […]. I feel like a lot of LGBTQ organizations or teams or clubs or anything like that create this sort of idea for people who are not involved that, oh, I guess that means that all these LGBT people have the same interests and the same hobbies, and they all like doing the same things. And they're all the same. But really that’s not the case.

Victoria felt that such organizations also risked the possibility that too much emphasis would be placed on one’s parents at the expense of youth forming their own individual identity:

[A disadvantage is that these groups] focus on the parents too much, and not on the, like, and not on the kids’ identity and what it’s like for them […]. It’s hard to say [sighs]. Why we like the word “queer spawn” is because then we don’t have to bring our parents
into it. We don’t have to identify as a *child* of LGBTQ parents […]. [You are] your own entity that is outside – that is away from your parents, but that has been shaped by your parents’ identity. So, like, we always find ourselves talking about our parents. Like, I’m sure queer spawn talk about their parents way more than any [child with straight parents] talks about their parents […]. Someone could be, like, “I’m 30, and I have my own kids, and I’m still talking about my childhood,” you know what I mean?

Each member of the urban trio used the phrase “queer spawn” to describe themselves, and they were the only interviewees to do so. Victoria explained that the term had originated with Stefan Lynch, the first director of COLAGE. Later, the term was popularized by Abigail Garner’s book, *Families Like Mine*. Denise recalled being with a group of youth who had queer-identified parents when they decided to embrace the term:

We had gone through the whole alphabet,” she said, “the queer alphabet. And it was, like, LGBTTIQQS, and someone said, ‘Well, what about us? Like, we’re not in that.’” She went on to explain that she and her peers were trying to determine how they could identify the elements that were common to each of their narratives, the aspects of their lives that defined them as a group:

You’re not really a kid. Yeah, it’s like you’re not really children anymore. So then we came up with “spawn” because it’s got more of a genetic overarching kind of thing. Like, even if you’re an adult, you’re still the spawn of someone [laughs] […]. I think it will be better once, like, once we start spreading it around [laughs].
Victoria, too, identified the feeling that youth have when they sense a lack of recognition within the queer community as a whole. She wanted, however, to convey both the perceived advantages of the phrase “queer spawn” as well as the potential risk it has to alienate those who might find the term offensive:

“Queer spawn” is a provocative term. A lot of people get very heated about it […].

Recently, we’ve had a lot of backlash for using the term “queer spawn” from other queer spawn – or from other children who have LGBTQ parents. [But] there is no term. The only term that we have is “queer spawn.” We’re lacking terminology, that’s the thing. Cause if there was a better word that more people liked, great! You know? It’s just, we don’t have another term. Especially when you’re trying to fight for space in the LGBTQ community, in the queer community. Like, having a term is key [laughs], right? Because if you are unidentifiable, people are like, “Oh, like, who are you?” Whereas having a term is, like, has changed a lot actually, which sounds silly, but like being able to be here as “queer spawn.”

Somewhat hesitant about the phrase initially, Julia describes how the term “queer spawn” became more palatable with time:

I’ve come to accept it. I didn’t really like it that much, ‘cause it always reminded me of “devil’s spawn.” But I’ve come to accept it. My friends love it, and I mean, it’s just kind of, whatever. It’s a good way to very easily identity, I feel. I think it’s a lot more recognized as anything else. Like, I mean, “gaybies” is stupid.
There is currently no universal term that adequately describes and includes all children of LGB-identified parents. Queer spawn is a term that amuses some and repels others (Hart, 2005), but as Hart points out, “gay and lesbian offspring defy ready classification” (Hart, 2005, para. 1). Evidence of a lack of inclusive terminology is present in narrative psychology literature about gay identity formation, as well. For example, Hammack, Thompson, and Pilecki (2009) reference one adolescent interviewee who expressed his distaste for the term “gay” and other labels. “Although he has developed a workable configuration of identity in which his same-sex desire is fully integrated into his life story,” they conclude, he does not see his personal narrative as conforming to what he perceives as the master narrative of gay identity” (p. 872). Children with LGB-identified parents, too, may have developed workable configurations of their non-heterosexual family identity, but this does not necessarily mean that the master narrative of queer identity fully resonates with them. Even so, the urban trio in the current study sought validation from the queer community because they felt strongly that their own lived experiences included elements of the queer story, and they did not want their personal sexual orientation to be a reason for exclusion from the queer community.

In the present study, the urban trio of Victoria, Julia, and Denise is in a position of relative luxury compared to the other participants in terms of having had time and/or opportunities to develop a high level of comfort with their non-heterosexual family identity. While the other six participants have had almost no chance to interact with other children of queer-identified parents, each member of the urban trio has had opportunities to engage in discussions about what the best terminology would be to describe themselves. There is certainly value to a discussion about the terminology used to name those with LGB-identified parents, and it should be acknowledged that the urban trio is approaching the phenomenon from a different
experiential framework than those who have little or no exposure to peers from similar backgrounds. Nevertheless, if one could accept the assumption that peer-to-peer support groups do indeed have value for the offspring of LGB-identified parents, then one could begin to consider ways to meet their needs, even the needs of those not in large urban centres. “There’s unfortunately so many other queer families around Toronto that can’t come to Toronto,” observed Julia.

In raising this point, Julia draws attention to a potential hurdle that prevents youth with queer parents from finding one another to further consolidate their own sense of queer identity by connecting with other youth in similar circumstances. To address the geographical barriers standing in the way of queer families connecting with one another, some alternatives to face-to-face contact would include online forums or even apps for smart phones, etc. One question posed to all participants was how an app for youth with queer-identified parents might be useful for them to connect with one another. Owen claimed that with an app, “You can discuss what you do the same, what you do different. Like, get ideas about how to prevent [or change] people’s opinions and stuff.”

Shane, Ellie, and Christie felt that some sort of app had potential usefulness as a hotline to offer advice. Julia suggested that a smart phone app would be a guide for dealing with bullies. She also contemplated the possibility that it could be used for peer-to-peer communication. “I guess,” she said, “[it could be for] social networking where you could just talk about stuff. Not even about queer parents, but just talk and know that they’re coming from [a similar family background].”

Nick felt that an app could list useful email addresses, phone numbers, and other resources to allow youth with queer-identified parents to connect with one another and with
counselling resources. However, he was especially animated about other features an app could provide:

On the app, I’d like to see as well, like, [a] focus on positive stuff. I’d like to see stuff like OPP [Ontario Provincial Police] or parliament change completely, where we have very proud gay members of parliament or proud gay police officers. Uh, so I’d like to see stuff like pictures. Even if it’s a picture of an OPP officer holding the rainbow flag. Or, whatever. Something that shows that I’m a figure of authority, or I’m a really big bigwig in the government, or OPP, or whatever, but I’m proud of who I am.

There was a sense from some participants that an app to connect queer spawn with one another could facilitate the integration of queer-family identity into their own emerging stories. Victoria believed an app could have utility if it was “like a discussion board” that would serve as a mechanism to build a sense of community among them, as she currently felt that there was a lack of community for this particular group of youth. “I wouldn’t really say that queer spawn really […] have a community at this point,” she contended. “I think that needs to change.” She added that COLAGE, which is an organization founded in the United States, has not really taken off in Canada. “COLAGE is a lot bigger in the States,” she claimed. “It just grew in the States; it didn’t grow here.”

I-2 Connecting with and advocating for queer youth

One interesting finding of the study was the connection that youth with queer-identified parents sometimes have with queer-identified youth. Despite the fact that the majority of participants in the current study hinted at their own heterosexual identity, there was evidence that
their queer family narrative gave them some common ground with the queer identity narrative of their peers. For the participants in the current study, these connections sometimes took the form of friendships with particular lesbian, gay, or bisexual-identified peers, advocacy for LGB individuals in general, and/or partnership within the context of some program or service for the queer community.

In chapter five, we explored connection as a possible response style that youth with LGB-identified parents sometimes observe when they out their families. As previously mentioned, Anna explained the unique bond and strengthened friendship that had resulted when she told a gay male peer about her own mother’s lesbian identity. “When I told my friend, Bobby, who’s gay,” recalled Anna, “he was pleasantly surprised […]. We bonded in that way because we could, um, relate to each other through our experiences […], handling discrimination and stuff like that.”

Anna, a heterosexual-identified female, was able to bond with Bobby, a gay-identified male, because of their “common experiences.” They do not share the same gender, the same sexual orientation, or the experience of having parents of the same sexual orientation. Interestingly, despite their many differences they felt some reason to bond over the perceived common link to non-heterosexuality. Presumably, they have common experiences because they are both adolescents, both high school students, and both equipped with a heightened sensitivity to homophobia and discrimination because of the role that the cultural narrative of struggle and success has played in their own personal narrative, either as integrated into a parent’s narrative or experienced personally. Nick, too, spoke about the special bond he had with a queer-identified school peer. He relayed a story about his “really good friend” who had committed suicide due to the alienation she experienced at home and at school.
Nick explained further that his friend’s suicide had heightened his own sensitivity to the shortcomings of school responses to LGB-related counselling issues, as well as motivated him to become more involved in advocacy for queer-identified youth. Nick eventually decided to become part of his town’s Youth Advisory Committee. “It’s like a council of youth,” he explained, adding that they were able to give a youth perspective to the municipal government and encourage activities such as the town’s first ever Pride Walk. Additionally, Nick revealed that he was the president of a school organization called Teens Need Teens, a group that aimed to provide outreach services to marginalized students.

Even in his classes, Nick demonstrated his tendency to be an advocate for LGB causes. He explained that he “wrote a 14-page report about homosexuality and acceptance in society,” and he was clearly proud of what he claimed was “by far the best report that I ever did.” Nick explained his motivation for drawing attention to the gay narrative. “That’s my, kind of, sweet spot,” he admitted, “because I have a mom that’s gay. And I – I don’t know how to say – I promote people coming out and saying that they’re gay.” Nick explained that because of his mother’s lesbian identification, he had become protective of his mother in particular and of LGB-identified people in general:

When it comes to my mom, I protect my mom all the time. Um, even to the extent that if anyone made fun of my mom, or made fun of anyone who was gay, I might lose it [chuckles]. That sounds, like, really bad, but I would go crazy, but like for example, what was it? One day, we were at school, and we had just had the Pride Walk, and someone at school said, “Yeah, I bet you were just like all the other fags in that Pride Walk, too,” and I turned around, and I said, “Pardon me?” And the guy was like, “What?” And I was like, “What did you just say to him?” And he was like, “I don’t think it’s, like, any of
your business.” And I said, “I think it is.” […] So that’s just my personality, to be strong and prominent and out there, so when I turned around, and I kind of caught that kid and said, you know what I mean, “You know what you just said?” You know what I mean? “What if you said that to someone who actually was gay? What if that person went home and killed themselves that night just because of what you said?” So like little things like that. And in general, I’m protective […].

Nick’s pattern of advocating for LGB-identified youth is consistent with the findings of Arnold, Pratt, and Hicks (2004), who assert that adolescents often draw upon what they imagine their parents’ responses would be to determine their own responses when facing a novel problem. In responding to his peer’s comment about “all the other fags,” Nick may have echoed or “ventriloquated” (Bakhtin, 1981) the type of responses his mother had made in similar situations or the type of responses he anticipated she might make in the same circumstance.

Whereas Nick was part of his town’s Youth Advisory Committee and a Teens Need Teens organization, other participants found equally meaningful outlets to show their passion for helping queer causes. Victoria volunteered for an organization known as Teens Educating and Confronting Homophobia (TEACH), which uses an anti-oppression approach to draw attention to social injustice. Julia volunteered for Youth Line, a province-wide, peer-support phone line and online forum to support Ontario’s queer and questioning youth (Youth Line, 2012). “I’ve been doing that for, like, three years now,” Julia explained, adding that she also volunteers in schools to teach people “what it actually means to be gay. Breaking down the stereotypes, breaking down the isms.”
Not every participant advocated for LGB-identified peers within the context of a formal organization. Christie, Owen, Anna, and Ellie mentioned that there were times when they, like, Nick, would find impromptu moments to take a stand when they witnessed homophobic attitudes or heteronormative behaviour. “If I hear people say it, like, anything about gay people,” claimed Ellie, “it’s also my nature to stand up for anything I believe in.”

Victoria, the oldest of the nine participants, described how she had begun to stand up for transsexual people, a group for whom she had not always advocated. “I’ve changed a lot over the last two years,” she observed. “I was definitely less reflective and a lot less open. Now, I’m like the biggest trans advocate. And before, I was, like, ‘Oh my god, trans? What is that?’ [said in an exaggerated snooty voice]. I wasn’t really aware […]. So I’ve just, kind of, realized that it’s really, it’s not as far along as the LGBQ movement.” Even though she herself did not identify as trans, she had, over time, developed a level of empathy for trans people because of the continued stigmatization she believed they face.

Owen explained that sometimes he had heard peers make homophobic comments, which prompted him to gently intervene. “There’s, like, the gay kids in our school right? And people being, like, ‘Ew, I don’t like being around them.’ And I’m like, ‘That’s not necessary because they are no different.’” For heterosexual-identified males such as Owen and Nick, such stands against homophobia must take particular courage, given the prevalence of such behaviour amongst adolescent males and the role that participation in such homophobic banter plays in male heterosexuality conformity behaviour (Burn, 2000). Owen went on to explain that he and his sister had both experienced similar incidents. The fact that he and his sister had had discussions about it suggests that homophobic incidents at school had affected them enough to consult with one another to compare experiences and possible responses:
My sister and I get, like, we’ll hear people talking like that, like, “Okay don’t use words like, like, words that are hurtful to people. It isn’t alright.” […] When you hear people calling people faggots, um, and like, “Okay, don’t use that word, cause it’s not nice,” and like homos and that, we’re just, like, using different words. Like, that’s hurtful […]. People disrespect them even though they are no different than you.

In response to the TAT-inspired interview items, participants tended to give fairly superficial responses. Owen, however, invented a touching story in response to the stimulus image that featured a boy sitting on the floor against his school locker (Appendix F, Image 3). His response indicated his ability to empathize with the feelings and experiences that might be part of a gay-identified peer’s narrative prior to and following a disclosure of non-heterosexuality:

So there’s this one boy […] who was gay and was always, he’s always been gay from when he was young. But then, when he realized that he was gay and wanted to let himself out of the closet and tell people he was gay, he didn’t know it was the right choice. So once he did tell people he was gay, he, uh, he told people and he realized that people he told weren’t the right people to accept him and who, for who he was. So he got beat up on and made fun of, and he just felt like he was alone, against everyone, so he went to a session, um, on it and trying to get some wisdom about why people were so harsh and […] he came out of it thinking, “Oh, I can change people’s opinions” […]. So he went back, and he realizes instead of trying to change people who made fun of him, he went out and tried to get new friends, um, so he went out, and he went to the people in the school who weren’t, uh, weren't hurtful like that [laughs].
Like Owen, Anna also indicated the experience of witnessing disrespect and injustice for LGB-identified people. “I have seen a lot of social injustice and social inequalities between gay people and straight people,” she said. “I’m thinking of specific groups that have straight parents [that don’t] see as much social injustice as I would, for example […]. I stand up for gay people as a group.” She went on to explain that it was as a direct result of seeing her mother face discrimination and judgement that she had become a strong ally for the LGB community:

I’m a strong believer in, like, equality in the, in the gay community. And, I mean, I’m very much against homophobia. That’s something that if anybody knows me that’s, like, one of my strongest things. And like, um, people in school are homophobic, and I just get really outraged by it […]. I’ve seen [my mom] struggle through people being very discriminatory and judgemental, so it kind of makes me want to help other who have to go through it […]. It is very much a part of my life, that aspect, in trying to stand up for people who are gay.

As previously mentioned in chapter five, Denise had been involved in the GSA at one of her high schools, even though she had felt somewhat isolated being one of only two heterosexual-identified participants in the group. She revealed that she had attended two high schools and explained that she had founded the GSA at her first school. Clearly, she believed strongly in the role she could play in bringing together queer youth and their allies.

Victoria offered a good explanation of why youth like Denise and herself might feel the need to connect with and advocate for queer-identified youth. She used the phrase “culturally queer” to pinpoint the idea that “queer” does not refer only to a sexual orientation but also to a master narrative. “Queer is both a sexuality and a culture,” she explained. “But people think
that if you identify as queer that means you’re sexually queer. Whereas for years I identified as queer, but I was culturally queer.” Victoria’s comments give great insight into the sociocultural elements that may be associated with growing up in a minority group, specifically within an LGB-led family. One could imagine a certain amount of grief for some young adults if they had had frequent exposure to queer culture growing up (e.g., camping trips with their mother’s lesbian-identified friends, weekly Sunday dinners with their father’s gay friends, etc.), and then lost those connections when they themselves transitioned into adulthood. There may be a sense of having only a temporary childhood connection to the queer community that is threatened by the arrival of adulthood. “When I grow up and my mom isn’t visibly in the room [in a queer-identified group setting], does that mean I don’t, like, I’m not included anymore?” wondered Victoria. “What happens when my mom isn’t present in the room?”

Victoria had expressed a concern that youth with LGB-identified parents could find themselves nudged out of queer communities when they themselves became adults and it would no longer readily apparent to others that their own identity had been shaped by a gay identity narrative. To address this concern, she articulated a view that youth from queer-led families needed to be more fully integrated into partnerships with groups for queer-identified individuals. “Queer groups need to include queer spawn,” she argued. “There are so many queer programs out there for queer youth. And people don’t acknowledge that queer spawn are a part of the queer community […]. Queer spawn need to be included in the queer community and queer groups.” Similar to Denise, who had experienced a sense of social isolation at her school’s GSA because she was heterosexual-identified, Victoria described times when she had sensed exclusivity in queer groups. “Queer communities really need to shape up in how they treat queer spawn because, um, I’ve felt so excluded over the years,” she said.
Denise added, as previously mentioned, that resources for children with queer-identified parents dwindled somewhat as children grew older. “After you hit a certain point, it stops being resources for LGBTQ families,” she said. “All we have [for us now that we are older] is resources for teens who identity as LGBTQ.” If Denise’s assessment is at all an accurate reflection of the available programs and services for the offspring of LGB-identified teens, perhaps there is considerable value to Victoria’s suggestion to develop organizations that could service all youth who were “culturally queer” under one umbrella.

Even for Ellie, who was very clear about her own heterosexual identity, there was a strong sense of the additional layer of identity that came from a perception of being culturally queer. “People don’t really understand,” she reflected, “that someone with gay parents actually, like, it’s like you’re ‘gay’ as well, you know? [laughs]”

It was clear that participants experienced a sense of connection to queer-identified youth. Sometimes, these connections took the form of special friendships with lesbian, gay, and bisexual-identified peers. At other times, the youth became advocates against homophobia and for queer rights. Finally, some expressed a desire to form stronger partnerships with programs and services that might have been designed for queer-identified youth but were perceived to have value for “queer spawn” as well.

**I-3 Borderlands and high stakes: privileges and pressures living between worlds**

In addition to the connections that the participants in the present study made with other children of LGB-identified parents and with queer-identified peers, they had all experienced the realities of growing up in a world largely driven by the master narrative of heteronormativity. As aforementioned, seven of the nine participants hinted at their own heterosexual orientation.
This fact, combined with their experiences growing up with queer-identified parents, allowed them access to both a queer perspective and a heterosexual perspective of our society. This unique position allowed them certain advantages, as previously described in chapter four. Saffron (1998) suggested that a familiarity with both the queer world and the heterosexual world affords the offspring of queer-identified parents opportunities to bring about social change with respect to homophobia. Opportunities to educate others, however, might sometimes be perceived as carrying a burden of proof, a pressured activism, or as being leaderless in uncharted territory in the borderlands between the two worlds.

Owen, Anna, Julia, Denise, Nick, and Victoria each expressed the desire they felt to somehow prove to others that their families were faring well. This burden of proof was experienced to varying degrees, and the tendency to provide evidence to the outside world of family quality also varied from one participant to the next. Anna wanted to make it clear that children in queer-led homes were exposed to plenty of heterosexual role models both in person and in the media. Victoria asserted that her parents were “people” and ought not be viewed merely as queer. Nick spoke of the good job he felt his mother was doing raising him. “I don’t know how to go about explaining to you that she can be a good role model, but I can just say that I’m not doing drugs right now, I’m not living on the street, I’m not failing classes, or I’m not getting girls pregnant. So I’d like to think that whatever she’s doing, she’s doing it right.”

Some participants were more aware than others of the specific stereotypes that outsiders sometimes have of queer-led families. Some children with LGB-identified parents know, for example, that outsiders have speculated that children with gay parents are themselves more likely to become gay. Like Golombok and her colleagues (1983), children are generally savvy enough to understand the flawed logic of such assumptions, but this does not mean they are unaffected
by the knowledge of the existence of these stereotypes. Baumrind (1995) made it clear that even if they were more likely to identify as queer, any differences by family type should not be regarded as deficits. Despite this, Victoria explained how her knowledge of the stereotypes to which some people cling despite the evidence, actually served to magnify the difficulty of coming to terms with her own non-heterosexual identity:

I’m proud of my moms. I love my moms. I think they raised me really, really well. I’m really close with both my parents. I don’t really see them as, like, my “gay parents.” They’re just my parents […]. And I’ve had to find my own identity apart from my parents, which has been the most recent problem, I think, like, in terms of them being queer and me being queer […]. I struggled with my own sexuality for a really long time, because I was, like, I can’t disappoint everyone by turning out gay. Because that’s, like, the biggest stereotype is that gay parents raise gay kids. And I was like, oh, eff. Fuck. Now I have to, like, add my statistic to that, right? So that’s how a lot of us feel […]. Trying to be perfect. Like, not screwing up in life, not failing school or getting really heavily into drugs or experimenting, you know what I mean? Like, I felt the need to be kind of, like, normal. Like quote-unquote normal […]. It definitely was not my parents putting pressure on me whatsoever. Like, I needed to prove it to other people.

Victoria described herself as having previously identified as straight, with a current identification as queer. However, she also said that she had a boyfriend and admitted, “It’s kind of easy for me to stay in the closet with my family because I have a boyfriend. So it’s really easy to just say, ‘Oh, my boyfriend is coming.’” The process of coming out can be challenging, frightening, and isolating (Barret & Logan, 2002). For a child with queer-identified parents, one
might assume that it would be a smoother process. After all, they have parents who were once in
their shoes and whose minds are accepting of non-heterosexual orientations. However, for
Victoria, there was no fear of losing her parents’ love or facing the rejection of them or even of
her extended family members. She feared the broader repercussions of coming out, the
possibility that her disclosure would damage the reputation of queer-led families in general. In
fact, she directly quoted the counter-narrative “gay parents raise gay kids” and expressed the
pressure she felt to avoid lending support to it, support that might provide ammunition to critics
of gay parents. That is quite an enormous burden for one youth to bear. Victoria explained how
she felt a sense of responsibility to be an ambassador for all queer families in other ways as well:

There’s this kind of, like, [sighs] culture of, like, trying to prove to the straight world that
queer parents are just as good as, like, straight parents […]. There is this kind of
tendency to, like, really sell your family to other people. And I’ve given so many
speeches about how amazing my parents are, and like, it’s just kind of, like – that’s hard,
you know? Like, having to feel like you have to be perfect all the time? […]. I can’t
speak to that everyone feels like a poster child because some peoples’ parents are, like,
just really in the closet or aren’t really that out and loud, but I have definitely been in the
spotlight to, like, prove my family’s legitimacy. And I found that really hard to do,
because we’re not always perfect, and I feel like I can’t express that.

Victoria was expressing the idea that she perceived the stakes to be rather high when it
came to admissions of her family’s imperfections. Vander Zanden (1989) wrote of the
widespread and often-exaggerated assumptions society holds that there is mutual antagonism,
misunderstanding, and separation between adolescents and their parents. These assumptions
may be based, in part, on the developmental need that adolescents have for emancipation from their parents (Lerner, et al., 1975). It is interesting to imagine a contrast between Victoria and her heterosexual-family-identified peers. While some of Victoria’s peers may be focused on forming an identity that frees them from their parents, Victoria is experiencing a burden to protect her parents’ (and all queer-identified parents’) reputations by being open about some aspects of her personal and family narratives while simultaneously masking others. She feels like she “can’t express” the imperfections of her family, perhaps worrying that others will take whatever she says as ammunition that LGB-adults make unsuitable parents.

This sentiment was echoed by Denise, who claimed that queer spawn do indeed feel pressure to prove that their families are good families, even despite their private admissions of their families’ imperfections:

A lot of the time for LGBTQ spawn there’s a lot of pressure to uphold this, “Oh I have a very good family,” just because you’re trying to defeat the stereotype that LGBTQ families are not, sort of, safe for children [laughs] or they’re not as good as straight-parent households. So I know that there’s sometimes a stigma there […]. I know that in talking right now, I’ve made it seem like my family’s all very happy and good […] but at the same time, no one in my family is perfect, and it’s not because we’re an LGBTQ family. It’s because there was a stepparent coming into the family […]. It’s not because we’re an LGBTQ family. I do sometimes feel pressure because often times in school, especially in high school, um, there’s a lot of, “Oh. you know, but imagine how messed up a kid from a lesbian family would be.” But the thing is these are people that like, like, in a high school class, I don’t know everybody, and they – I’m not out to everyone in my high school class. Well, most people I am, but like, if it’s uh, but by grade 12 everyone is
different in every class, right? So there’s some people that I don’t know, and I don’t care to know, but they say things like that, and I kind of want to sort of say, “But you didn’t know that I was part of a lesbian family. So why would – like so obviously they’re not that different, because I’m here and you didn’t call me out!” […] It’s not like I’m some freak who, like, you immediately know that I’m from an LGBTQ family. Like, I’m fine.

When Denise told a story in response to one of the stimulus image cards (Appendix F, Image 3), she talked about a fictional two-mother, two-child family as a “regular family” despite the occasional family squabbles:

Might as well be any other family. And, of course, they have the trials of any family.

There are arguments, and there is hair pulling, and there is, you know, “They’re wearing my clothes!” And, “They didn’t do the dishes!” And there’s all sorts of fighting, and they grow up into their teenage years, and the fighting turns into different fighting, but it’s still mundane and just regular family issues.

Denise and Victoria seemed to be expressing their perception that their queer-led families had imperfections and sometimes engaged in “normal” or “regular” squabbles, but they had a self-imposed gag order because they worried that by disclosing too much information about their own family problems, they would be subjecting their families to undue scrutiny. They also worried, like Julia, that any family discord would be automatically assumed to be a result of their parents’ sexual orientation. In a sense, there are no “low stakes” opportunities to be honest about family tension when one worries that others might use those honest disclosures to extrapolate exaggerated conclusions about familial dysfunction. Julia explained that she and her mother
were very similar. “We argue,” she admitted, “but it has nothing to do with her identity […] [I want to] fight the expectations, fight the ideals, be strong and, you know, be someone who can make a difference.” I had not asked Julia if her arguments centred on her mother’s lesbian identity, but she seemed keen to make sure that I could not falsely conclude that her mother’s lesbianism was the source of any family conflict.

Garner (2004) refers to the burden that children bear to learn the “right” answers to questions about queer-identified families. They overhear conversations and media debates that allow them to understand that they are “symbols of something much bigger” (Garner, 2004, p. 19). This burden may be particularly heavy in countries where same-sex rights are not yet guaranteed by law. In the States, for example, children grow up hearing about pending legal decisions and opposition to laws that would grant equal rights for same-sex couples and LGB-led families. Garner writes of the fear children live with that their words could be manipulated in an effort to discredit their LGB-identified parents:

Every time children with LGBT parents agree to talk to a journalist, participate in research, or even come out about their family in a social setting, they know they are not only representing their own families – they are opening the window to an entire population that is otherwise invisible. With such intense scrutiny, they are aware of their burden to literally represent millions. Understanding that what they say might influence public policy impedes their freedom to talk openly about their lives. There is an ongoing fear that anything they disclose could be manipulated to discredit their parents, and that any ambivalence or disclosure of difficulties within their home would reflect poorly on their parents, and in turn, would be used to build a case to limit LGBT-family rights (Garner, 2004, p. 20).
When queer spawn open the window to give others access to a narrative that would challenge the master narrative of heteronormativity, they also expose their family to criticism. Of course, there may be other subgroups that feel a similar sense of vulnerability to public scrutiny: Drawing from my own personal narrative as the child of a Protestant Christian minister, one of my own identities is that of a “preacher’s kid” or PK, and I know that growing up I felt a certain internally-driven pressure to behave a certain way because so many eyes were upon me and my parents. There may be parallels between the experiences of queer spawn and PKs and indeed for members of many stigmatized groups. Campbell (1995) writes of the experience that Canadian ministers and their families sometimes describe as living in a “fishbowl.” Campbell (1995) also reveals that adult PKs are more likely to attend church and are more likely to have a church-related career focus than non-PK adults. Such practices may be of their own free will or out of a sense of expectation to remain connected to a religious community. PKs also report experiencing pressure due to the stereotypes that people have of them, namely that they are either angelic or that they are rebellious (Allman, 2007). According to some, children of LGB-identified parents also have the impression they are expected to fall at either of the extremes on an angel-rebel spectrum, two opposing cultural master narratives, neither of which accurately represents them. “The media present us,” writes Hart (2005), “alternately as either blissfully well-adjusted or angrily screwed up” (para. 3). There may be other similarities between children of LGB-identified parents and preacher’s kids. The larger implications of the parallel between them concern the ways in which each phenomenon could inform the other. There is potentially much to be gleaned in terms of both theory and practical applications such as best practices in counselling if more time is given in comparing and contrasting these two phenomena.
The participants in the current study, much like PKs, expressed varying degrees of pressure to be activists within the community that was so much a part of their parents’ essence. There was no sense that they resented the expectation they felt, and no participant named their parents as the source of the pressure. Nevertheless, it was clear that their activism for lesbian, gay, and bisexual causes was heightened because of having queer-identified parents. “I wouldn’t be such a strong supporter of gay people if my mom wasn’t gay,” Anna said.

Nick echoed Anna’s suggestion that having LGB-identified parents played a role in increasing one’s political involvement and advocacy for the queer community:

Before I knew my mom was gay, no, I wasn’t really politically minded. But then, you know, when Mom came out to us, I kind of realized that you kind of have to stand up for what you believe in. There’s a lot of times, you know, we used to go to church because my mom, as I say, wanted to “pray the gay away,” but then we stopped going, and I stopped going to a Catholic school. Like, I could have continued on in a Catholic school, but I don’t believe in what they believe in.

Nick’s use of the phrase “you kind of have to” suggested a sense of obligation to be an advocate for LGB rights. He did not speak of being externally forced to be politically minded, however. His words conveyed a tone that indicated his understanding of the master narrative of struggle and success experienced by people like his mother, as well as his resolve to do something about it. The pressure to become involved, then, was self-imposed and born of a refusal to imagine a world that continued to discriminate against LGB-identified individuals. There was a “not if I can help it” approach that underpinned Nick’s newfound political awareness.
Julia demonstrated that, at times, political activism can be modelled by parents who are highly involved in campaigns for LGB rights. “[My mom has] always been involved in [queer politics],” claimed Julia, “and I just took it on from there. I guess that I’m very opinionated, so I have a lot of opinions, and I like to really back up my opinions and causes and, um, stand up for things I believe in.” With her use of the words “I like to,” Julia made it clear that she is content to be an advocate for the LGB community.

Denise, too, was direct in her assertion that while she did indeed feel pressured to be an activist, she also enjoyed the role. As a heterosexual-identified female, she described having “outed” herself as a queer spawn to her peers in grade 10 or 11, and spoke of the subsequent peer-imposed obligation she felt to be an ambassador for the LGBTQ community:

I often found it – it was basically me, and there was another girl in the class who identified as lesbian. So I found that whatever queer issues would come up, they would always look to us to be the voice of the LGBTQ community. And it was, in some ways, a burden. But at the same time, I felt like even if they hadn’t put that pressure on me, I still would have wanted to be that anyway. So it was not, um, something I disliked.

Denise’s use of the word “burden” reiterated Nick’s description of the sense of responsibility that youth with queer-identified parents sometimes experience in their classrooms and in society as a whole. Saffron (1998) is correct in establishing queer spawn as being uniquely positioned to deconstruct and debunk stereotypes about queer-led families, but it would seem that this power does not come without a burden of responsibility. Victoria, too, alluded to the constancy with which peers looked to her to be an ambassador for the queer community. “I
was the ‘gay issues kid’ growing up,” she claimed. “If there was anything, it was, like, ‘Victoria, what’s your opinion?’ […] I was the go-to kid when it came to gay stuff.”

Denise expressed the possibility that some youth with queer parents might experience some inner turmoil because of the conflicting emotions of feeling compelled to be a queer-community ambassador and the feeling of guilt that they, as heterosexuals, had in knowing that they could fall back upon their own heterosexual privilege. “I know that there are lot of LGBTQ [-parented] kids who feel sort of guilty about their own [heterosexual] orientation,” she said. She added that her advice to them would be, “It’s okay for you to be who you are because, I know that again, there’s a certain pressure for people to be really into the LGBTQ community, and maybe sometimes [you] don’t want to be.” Denise referred to one elementary-aged family friend that had lesbian-identified mothers. “She is feeling guilty about noticing boys,” Denise observed, adding that she and her sister “had never felt that way.”

Most youth with LGB-identified parents are, themselves, heterosexual (Golombok & Tasker, 1996). However, their ability to identify with queer communities but also with the majority of the population gives them a sort of “dual citizenship.” As a result, they may relate with the borderlands concept popularized by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). Speaking primarily about her intersecting identities of being a woman, a Chicana, a lesbian, a poet, and an activist, Anzaldúa explored how various cultures responded to people like herself who straddled different borders. Consider the words of one of Anzaldúa’s bilingual poems. She begins the poem, entitled “*Una lucha de fronteras / A Struggle of Borders*” with the words, “Because I, a mestiza, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time.” Then, the poem transitions into Spanish as she speaks of occupying two, three, or four often-contradictory worlds that speak to her simultaneously. “*Alma entre dos mundos, tres.*
“cuatro,” writes Anzaldúa, “me zumba la cabeza la cabeza con lo contradictorio...que me hablan simultáneamente” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 99).

Like the struggle experienced by Anzaldúa, it is possible that youth with queer-identified parents also feel torn between their intersecting narratives. In the face of conflicting messages, Anzaldúa suggests that those occupying borderlands sometimes face difficult decisions:

It is not enough to stand on the opposite riverbank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence [...]. At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory. Or we might go another route. The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 100-101).

Victoria, who only relatively recently had begun to identity as queer, stated that coming out was a turning point for her, a time when she, to use her own words, began to “figure out [her] varying and intersecting identities.” She also very eloquently expressed the phenomenon that arises for some queer spawn who are coming to terms with feeling familiar with two worlds while being fully integrated with neither:

There are so many queer spawn who will never identify as queer, but who still have just as legitimate a spot in the queer community. Because I felt like I was part of two worlds,
but I wasn’t fully a part of either of them. Because I was kind of part of the queer world, but only until I was a certain age. And then I was straight. But I also wasn’t fully part of the straight world, because I had already been part of the queer world, and it’s like this lack of space where it’s like, “Where do I belong?”

For Victoria, this dual citizenship arising from this intersectionality was confusing. For Denise, an existence in the borderlands was comforting. “It feels good to belong to an [LGBT] community,” she reported. “Although […] I feel like I belong to the LGBT community just because of my parents. But at the same time I can also belong to other communities as well, which is very nice to know […]. I feel almost more connected to other people who are part of the LGBTQ community, whereas, but at the same time I can step back from it.” Denise also reported that some of her heterosexual-identified friends with heterosexual-identified parents sometimes expressed that they wanted to be more connected to the queer community but felt that they could not be. “[They] don’t feel like they can be a part of, like, Pride for example,” she said. “My friends all ask me to go with them because they don’t want to go by themselves because they feel they can’t go […]. They feel uncomfortable, and I’m glad that I don’t.” Like the Australian children in Ray and Gregory’s study (2001), Denise was expressing the perceived advantage of being able to interact with the LGB community, an opportunity she felt was hers because of the dual citizenship afforded to her by virtue of her mother’s sexual minority narrative.

The arrival of this sense of dual citizenship may be one aspect of each participant’s emerging identity. According to Erikson (1968), whose stage theory of development was briefly described in chapter two, adolescence is a time when youth meet and resolve the crisis of ego
identity, forming a sense of who they are and who they want to be. For many adolescents with LGB-identified parents, parental disclosure of non-heterosexuality may have been a turning point in the emergence of their own already-complex identity. McLean (2008) defines a turning point as “a particular episode in your life story in which you underwent an important change in terms of how you understand yourself” (p. 1685). Particularly for children who were born to heterosexual-identified parents who later began to identify as LGB, there may be a sense of having experienced a cultural shift that causes or enables them to understand themselves in a different way.

There are parallels, as well, between the experiences of youth with LGB-identified parents and the experiences of so-called “third culture kids” or TCKs. To briefly digress, TCKs are people who spent some or all of their formative years away from their parents’ culture, growing up instead in another country, another cultural shift that might be considered a turning point. For example, if Canadian parents expatriated to another country such as South Korea for military, missionary, diplomatic, or business purposes, their children might grow up in Korea. As such, the children might not fully identify with Canadian culture, nor are they likely to be fully integrated into Korean culture. They will, however, be more inclined to develop a sense of intercultural literacy (Heyward, 2002) as a result of their experiences with links between two or more societies (Useem & Useem, 1967). Pollock and Van Reken (2009) characterize the experience with this assertion:

TCKs are raised in a neither/nor world. It is neither fully the world of their parents’ culture (or cultures) nor fully the world of the other culture (or cultures) in which they were raised […]. This neither/nor world is not merely a personal amalgamation of the various cultures they have known […]. TCKs develop their own life patterns different
from those who are basically born and bred in one place. Most TCKs learn to live comfortably in this world, whether they stop to define it or not. (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 4)

Sometimes, after years of living abroad as children, TCKs reintegrate to their home culture and may sometimes feel “out of sync” with their peers or like strangers in their own land (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). However, they might also feel that their experiences in a neither/nor world have given them a special ability to be social connectors, and they report their belief that they have greater sociocultural adaptability than their peers (Cottrell, 1993).

While the phenomenon of having queer parents is indeed unique, perhaps there are parallels between this experience and the experiences of third culture kids, preachers’ kids, and others who have lived in the borderlands between intersecting identities. While they may feel some burden to prove their families’ legitimacy and perhaps the pressure to become activists in campaigns for greater social justice, perhaps they can take heart from what has been observed of TCKs: most learn to live comfortably in this world.

For the participants in the current study, although there was evidence of feeling somewhat burdened by living in the borderlands between worlds, there was also a strong sense that their families were, for the most part, accepted and protected by Canadian society. The last area of focus, then, is on how participants articulated the ways in which Canadian laws and Canadian society influenced their narratives of personal identity.
The nine participants unanimously felt that their LGB-led families were well-supported by Canadian laws and that Canada was ahead of the United States and other countries around the world with respect to its legal framework for LGB-identified individuals and their families. They also suggested that Canadian laws are still changing in ways that they perceived to be positive and progressive. Many, however, stated a belief that Canadian society had not kept pace with the evolution of law, citing examples of discriminatory and/or homophobic behaviour from Canadian citizens and even politicians. There are perhaps parallels to many other struggles for social justice around the world. For example, one could point to significant changes that have been made with regard to the legal prevention of racial discrimination in countries such as South Africa or the United States, but even the monumental elections of black leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Barack Obama do not represent a definitive end to discriminatory behaviour in their countries. In Canada, advancement with respect to LGB law is inarguable, but I wanted to understand the participants’ experiences to determine the extent to which legal progress had impacted their LGB-led families and the extent to which the dismantling of heteronormative laws had led to a culturally-accepted alternative to the master narrative of heteronormativity.

During the interview, participants were given a brief historical timeline of Canadian laws that pertain to LGB rights (see Appendix G) and asked how they felt Canada was doing in its treatment of LGB-led families. Christie believed that Canadian society was “starting to treat them better,” acknowledging that Canada has not always been as accepting as she currently perceives it to be. She herself believed that society is quite tolerant today, acknowledging, “When we’re out [with my dad] and his boyfriend in public doing things, like, they’ll do little cute things, and people might be able to tell, but it doesn’t really bother me.”
“Compared to the rest of the world, we’re doing so well,” observed Victoria. However, she believed there was still room for improvement, and she cited evidence of gay teen suicide to illustrate her point that Canadian society had not yet reached an optimum level of acceptance with regard to sexual orientation:

So many more people are out. But then you also see a lot of teenagers committing suicide, and stuff like that happening. But it’s like, well, why is that happening? Because it’s like, like, the don’t-ask-don’t-tell mindset, even though it’s not like a rule in the same way. In the army, maybe this is the American army, but don’t-ask-don’t-tell was actually, like, a legal procedure. But even though that’s gone, and you can’t fire someone on the grounds of being gay, but like, it’s still, like […] there’s kind of this, “Well, just don’t tell me, and it’ll be all fine,” you know? […] I think the more people who feel free to come out, the more that people will come out, and the more people will be accepted.

The laws governing same-sex marriage in Canada had changed during the participants’ lifetimes (CBC, 2011), but most of them did not recall a time when same-sex marriages were not legal, a fact that reflects a very significant way that their own narratives differed from those of their parents. In fact, Owen seemed shocked when he learned that the first Canadian same-sex marriage was in 2001, and he had not realized that his mother’s same-sex marriage would not have been legally recognized if it had occurred only a few years earlier. His response was probably the most animated moment of his interview. “That was only 10 years ago? Wow! That’s awesome!” he exclaimed. “Like, you can see how it, it’s – we’re growing as a country, like, a community throughout the world to change what people thought was wrong. But yeah, in
the end, it’s not wrong at all. It’s just different people’s views […]. I think all the laws are getting close to what it can be, but I think it’s just the people around accepting it.”

Shane believed that his mother’s marriage to her lesbian partner was a turning point for some members of his extended family. Referring to their initial lack of acceptance and religion-based opposition to homosexuality, Shane claimed, “They have kind of gotten over it […] since [my mom and her partner] got married.” For those in other parts of the world still fighting to secure the right to marry their same-sex partners, Shane’s words have particular value. Perhaps the right to marry is more than merely symbolic to some; marriage could convey to many a sense of legitimacy and commitment.

Julia expressed her desire to see all nations strive to make the gains that Canada has made in recent years. She stated that she would like to see “universal acceptance, especially in the countries where it’s illegal to be gay.” Ellie, too, stated her disapproval of laws that prohibited same-sex rights. Both Julia and Ellie viewed Canada as a country that had broken down previously-accepted establishments with relative ease compared to other nations, yet they maintained that other cultures could eventually embrace alternatives to traditional family narratives, too.

Denise stated her view that “things are getting better here.” It was unclear whether she was using “here” to represent Canada or merely the large urban centre in which she resided. Certainly, however, she went on to explain that there are some places where she believes same-sex couples need to exercise caution because of ongoing intolerance and discrimination. She explained one conversation she had had with her mother and her mother’s same-sex partner to warn them about not being too public about their sexual orientation while they were travelling in the States. She advised them to be prudent in their travels through “small towns” in the States.
Presumably, her concern stemmed from a belief that the people they would encounter in such places would have values that were more firmly rooted in the master narrative of heteronormativity than what they were accustomed to in Toronto:

There are sometimes when I [say to my mom and her partner] now is the time to just tone it down for a second! Like, um, they went to, they drove me to camp in Vancouver, and then my sister flew back, and they drove back through the United States. And I said, “Okay, while you’re in the United States tone it down, like, ‘cause you know you’re two women travelling alone and, you know – you know, things are not quite as open-minded, probably.” Because they were, like, going through small towns like Cody, Wyoming, and stuff, and I was like, you know, it’s fine, but you know, also be mindful of the people around you because some people are judgemental, and this is not where you live, and you don’t know the people that are around you […]. Cases like that, I kind of have to remind them to be like mindful.

Anna felt that “Canada is pretty well-off” with respect to its treatment of LGB individuals. However, she was aware of the need for continued improvements. “They’re still discriminated against even though they’re – they shouldn’t be. But, um, they do have all the rights now that they should,” she claimed. Her words hinted to a belief that the evolution of Canadians’ concept of normativity had not kept pace with legal change in Canada. It was in 1967 that Trudeau introduced Omnibus Bill C-150 and suggested that it had “overridden a lot of taboos” (CBC Archives, 2012). However, if Anna’s assessment of Canadian society contains truth, it would appear that certain taboos remain firmly in place. “There’s always going to be discrimination no matter where you go,” stated Anna. “I would hope it would go away, but it’s
going to take a long time. But compared to other places and how discriminatory other places are,
I think that Canada is pretty well-off.”

There was a sense, however, that Anna was not certain that all of the LGB rights that had
been gained in Canada would be kept permanently in place. “If [same-sex marriage] became
illegal, that would change my life a lot, just because it’s something that I would be really upset
about.” Her response indicated a hint of fear that if laws had changed during her lifetime to
allow same-sex marriage, it must also be possible for laws to change to disallow it. If she had
had a sense that all of her fellow Canadian citizens shared her strong convictions to advocate for
LGB rights, she would not have made that statement. Instead, she had observed enough
individuals who, like her uncle, had firmly entrenched heteronormative views and were strong
opponents of LGB rights, and she worried that at some point the political momentum could shift
in Canada to strip away gains that had been previously made. Her fear indicated a belief that if
there were enough people within a culture who desired to reject alternatives to traditional family
narratives, a culture could collectively block imaginative progress in favour of the maintenance
of canonicity (Amsterdam & Bruner, 2000).

Denise, however, expressed more optimism about Canadians on the whole, believing
them to be advocates for equality. She believed that in the future, Canadians would continue to
negotiate compromises between that which was already established and that which was imagined
to be possible (Amsterdam & Bruner, 2000), thereby working towards the protection of
everyone’s rights:

As a country, we’ve […] been getting better at, sort of, when there is an issue, dealing
with it in the best way. And sort of seeing for example, the multiple parents recognition
and sort of, okay, well, then if this is the problem, this is what we can do to protect those
rights. And so, I think that probably there are still gaping holes in our law, but as those issues arise and become more prevalent I think they’ll be dealt with. So it’s not so much that I feel like the country is being negligent or not wanting to protect everyone’s rights. I just feel like certain things haven't been brought up yet […] . Also, Canadians are very sort of – we have a certain refusal to let things slide by in terms of equality.

Denise had referred to the likelihood of there being “gaping holes” in Canadian law with respect to LGB rights, but she did not identify any in particular. Her point was that she felt confident that Canada would address those concerns as they arose. Nick, too, felt that ongoing improvement was possible. “The laws shouldn’t stop,” he said, “until same-sex couples or LGBT have the same social standing, the same rights, and everything as a straight person should […] . They need to keep going, keep making improvements until everyone’s accepted for who they are.”

Victoria explained that, in her opinion, Canada had made amazing legal progress relative to the rest of the world, but there was still room for an attitudinal shift away from heteronormativity amongst Canadians and a need for more anti-oppressive practices:

I don’t think it’s laws in Canada at this point. Obviously around the world, wow, people are so behind. Like, even in the States, right? Some states don’t have legalized marriage. That’s like, really? It’s not, right now, about the laws. It’s about the attitudes. Like, nothing’s illegal, you know? You can adopt – queer people can adopt, queer people can – or you can get sex changes, you know, nothing’s illegal. So it’s not about laws, it’s about people […] . It’s just about, yeah, people getting anti-oppressive training, you know, and realizing that the questions they ask people have both positive and negative
impact, you know? Like being in a doctor’s office and asking, like, I mean, this goes for me and my parents. I’ve been asked, and like I’ll tell them, like, I’m sexually active, this is very private, and they’ll say, “Oh, what’s your boyfriend’s name?” Oh, actually her name is… But that’s hard. Or, “What do your mom and dad do?” Well, actually, you know, it’s hard having to constantly correct people. Whereas it’s so simple being like, “What do your parents do?” That changes nothing. Or, you know, “What’s your partner’s name?” It’s just about, like, such little things like that make such a big difference. Working on the language people use, like, “That’s so gay” or “lame” or “retarded.” Like, that all ties in to anti-oppressive training, right? Because there’s so much language that oppresses someone.

Participants had been clear that there were differences that set Canada apart as an international example of progress with respect to LGB rights and legal protections. Within Canada, however, participants acknowledged that there were major differences in the perception of equality and acceptance depending on whether one was in an urban or rural setting, suggesting that the pool of narratives from which one draws their values and sense of personal identity is different for urban dwellers and rural dwellers. Within large urban centres, participants believed that there was greater acceptance of diversity in general. They did, however, have plenty to say about the current mayor of Toronto, who seemed to be viewed as an exception to the rule with regard to urban centres being generally more tolerant than rural areas. In one portion of the interview, I said to each of them, “In 2011, some people had strong opinions when Toronto’s mayor decided not to attend the Gay Pride parade or any of the Gay Pride events. Did you or do you have any opinions about that?” Even though only three of the nine participants lived in
Toronto, eight of the nine had heard the news and responded with words such as “homophobic,” “cruel,” “embarrassment,” “disgusting,” “duty,” “asshole,” and “idiot.”

“He’s an idiot,” stated Victoria. “Like, every other mayor has attended [Toronto Pride events]. Like, come on, you know? That’s just, like, such a step back. And it doesn’t matter in the end because Rob Ford is just – he’s not riding the wave […]. He’s obviously, you know, on his own, like, losing path.”

“I thought it was disgusting,” Ellie claimed. “If you’re going to be the mayor of Toronto, you need to represent all minorities. And I feel like minority groups need to be celebrated. Like, if the people who are running things aren’t participating, then what are the other people going to think that are sort of on the fence about the situation?”

Anna echoed the notion that government officials have a responsibility to represent all of their constituents, even those whose beliefs differ from their own. “I think it is his duty as the mayor to show up at everything that has to do with the city that he is in charge of,” she said. “If he doesn’t support it, then he can work on that in his own time, but if he is in charge of the city, he’s in charge of the whole city, everybody who’s part of it, every community.”

“We know by your behaviour that you are being homophobic,” asserted Denise. “If you’re some random civilian not wanting to go, that’s fine. I don’t really care, but as someone who is supposed to be showing support for the total population, you’re not doing a very good job.” Denise was not holding the mayor of Toronto to any higher a standard than she held teachers. As reported in the previous chapter, Denise argued that teachers “need to set aside their own opinions.” As public school teachers, she said, “you can’t just be standing up for yourself; you need to be standing up for everyone.” Clearly, she holds elected officials similarly
responsible to represent all constituents, not merely the ones who share the same social and
political systems of values.

“He is an asshole,” declared Julia on the subject of the Toronto mayor. “I did not vote for
him. He’s an embarrassment to Toronto. Because being the city we are, and having him
represent us is awful. We could have somebody so much better.” Perhaps Julia was referring to
the facts mentioned previously in this chapter, that Toronto is considered one of the safest and
most diverse urban centres in North America (City of Toronto, 2012) and that it has a large gay
population (Davidson, 2005). These facts run contrary to the level of acceptance for diversity
that Julia saw exhibited by her currently elected mayor.

The participants’ strong reactions to the Toronto mayor’s absence from Pride events were
striking. If Amsterdam and Bruner (2000) are correct that cultures are “marked by contests for
control over conceptions of reality” (p. 231), then political leaders such as Rob Ford (and indeed,
any celebrity who enjoys widespread publicity) are watched carefully as individual members of
society decide where to place their own allegiances in the negotiations of compromise between
established canons and imagined possibilities. Julia, Victoria, and Denise – the urban trio – had
grown up accustomed to annual Pride Parades that draw hundreds of thousands of attendees,
including Toronto’s mayors. These participants perceived their previous mayors’ attendance as
indicative of support for progress away from the master narrative of heteronormativity. Their
current mayor had not attended in 2011, nor did he attend the 2012 Pride Parade (Campbell,
2012, July 1). He did, however, make a surprise appearance at a May 2012 gay outreach event to
mark International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (Toronto Star, 2012, May 19). It
is inarguable, however, that the current Toronto mayor has been largely absent from Pride events
and other events that would indicate his support for the queer community of Toronto. Despite
this, the urban trio shared a perception that life in Canada, for the most part, had become progressively easier for LGB individuals and LGB-led families.

Certainly, the Toronto participants’ experience growing up would have been much different than those who grew up in small towns or in rural Ontario, such as Ellie:

I’m from […] such a small place. And people are, I found, just they weren’t good with the topic […]. It was a pretty gossipy town, and I remember people would just, like, make comments. Like, even at a young age, um, I remember I went to my friend’s house, and her mom [said], “I always see a police car in front of your house.” [She was trying to] get more information from me as a child [about my mom’s lesbian partner who was a police officer] […]. Small town people are small town for a reason.

Owen, who lived in a mid-size urban centre, had just returned home from a camping trip with his mother the day prior to our interview. He had not observed any homophobic behaviour, but he observed his mother’s behaviour changes when she was outside the relative safety that urban life provided. In a sense, Owen’s mother was exercising the same precautions that Denise had instructed her mother to use in small U.S. towns. Owen, however, had likely not considered the need for such precautionary behaviour here in rural Canada:

We just got back from our camping trip, like, yesterday, from Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday, and like, when my mom pulled into a small town to eat lunch, and she parked in like, with the back, like, the front against the wall, but then she’s like, “Oh, I don’t want to be keyed,” because she has a rainbow flag on the back, so she turned around, and I just thought that, like, people shouldn’t really have that, like hate against
gays [...]. If she has that worry, then it’s like, what is the other worries people like she experience?

His mother’s heightened awareness to the possibility of vandalism surprised Owen and caused him to consider things from her point of view. “What is the other worries people like she experience?” he wondered. This is an excellent example of how Owen’s mother’s lesbian identity might be contributing to the development of his identity. His multiple identities are at a crucial point of intersection here as he struggles to reconcile his points of privilege with his mother’s points of oppression. As an adolescent male who identifies as heterosexual, he must also consider himself to be Canadian as well as being a son of a lesbian-identified mother. Owen is musing about why other heterosexual-identified Canadians would be motivated to commit hate crimes against his mother, solely because of a non-heterosexual symbol on the bumper sticker of her car. He knows that he is able to accept his mother’s sexual orientation and is struggling to understand why other heterosexual members of society would not be equally accepting. Bruner (1990) suggests that we use stories to makes sense of our experiences, particularly those experiences that contradict our expectations. Owen’s decision to verbalize this experience, according to Bruner’s assertion, would be part of Owen’s effort to account for aspects of society that contrast with his own ideals. This example also highlights the important role that the personal narratives of others play in the formation of one’s own identity, particularly when positioning oneself against the narratives of those such as parents who play critical roles in our lives. Weststrate and McLean (2010) refer to the master narrative of silence and the master narrative of struggle and success (see also Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009) that have characterized the experiences of earlier generations of LGB-identified people. Were it not for
Owen’s mother articulating her fear of having her car vandalized, Owen would not have had a window into her story; he would not have had access to the master narrative of heteronormativity that had doubtlessly shaped his mother’s experience as a lesbian-identified person and, by association, had now become part of his own story as well.

Later in the interview, when Owen was telling a story in response to one of the stimulus images (Appendix F, Image 2), he invented a story of two lesbian-identified mothers whose home was being targeted by homophobic vandals. The story demonstrates that his mother’s reference to the narrative of struggle and success had now become part of his own narrative:

One night, they went to sleep and as, uh, they were lying in bed trying to fall asleep they heard smashes and all that through their house, through the windows and that car, so [they] went outside everything, like, all the windows were destroyed and, um, so they went and yeah, so it was being destroyed so they, and throughout the next day couple of days they didn’t know what to do between telling the kids what happened and why it happened. So they went to talk to elder, uh, gay, uh, gay, an elder gay couple, um, what they should do to trying, like appreciate the community and, explain what’s happening. So he just said to trying show what, why you're no different than people, your neighbours and stuff, um [laughs]. So they went and told their neighbours that they are no different, showed them they’re no different, and I don’t know like, in the end they just, their neighbours accepted them.

It is interesting to note that Owen introduced characters that were not pictured on the stimulus image, namely the “elder gay couple”. Presumably, he used these characters to demonstrate a belief also held by Ricoeur (1992) that we can learn from others who have
experienced and ultimately overcome adversity. His story revealed not only his concerns about the possibility of hate crimes being committed against LGB-identified people, but also his optimism that wisdom could be gleaned from others and that acceptance would come with time.

Acceptance for LGB individuals and for LGB-led families in Canada has, according to most of the participants in the present study, evolved over time, which supports the possibility that the master narrative of (hetero)normativity is also changing. They expressed contentment with the legal progress that has been made and claimed to feel a sense of security about the rights to which they and their parents are entitled. Their desire is for continued momentum towards full equality and towards an elimination of discrimination at home and abroad, within all levels of government, and in both urban and rural settings.

Summary of Queer Identity Themes

Youth with queer-identified parents draw from multiple and intersecting narratives to develop a sense of personal identity. Having lesbian, gay, or bisexual-identified parents is one element that is important to their sense of self. As an invisible minority group, the offspring of LGB-identified parents cannot easily find one another, and so many of the participants in the current study were not part of organizations for so-called “queer spawn.” Participants who lived in Toronto, a large urban centre with a sizeable LGB population, were the most likely individuals to have been associated with groups such as COLAGE. Even the participants who had not yet interacted with organizations for youth with queer-identified parents recognized the potential value such groups had for bonding, for preventing a sense of isolation, and for learning from one another’s experiences.
The participants in the current study also reported many instances of bonding with queer-identified peers. As well as forming special friendship with particular individuals, some of the participants articulated the desire they felt to be advocates for LGB people in general, largely because their parents’ narratives of silence or of struggle had awakened them to the reality faced by sexual minorities. Additionally, some interviewees felt that if programs for queer-identified youth would become more inclusive of children with queer-identified parents, there could be mutual benefit for all. The participants varied in the extent to which they viewed themselves as being part of the LGBTQ spectrum.

Many participants hinted at the experience they had with straddling two or more narratives as a result of their queer-family identity. Several alluded to the burden of proof they carried to debunk some of the stereotypes about LGB-led families. For some, this resulted in a tendency to “sell” their families to others while at the same time downplaying typical family squabbles for fear that some might use knowledge of family imperfections as evidence of parental unsuitability; while they wanted to break down societal attitudes of heteronormativity, they remained cautious about how much of their own family story to reveal to others. Additionally, some experienced an admittedly self-imposed tendency to be LGB activists. Many of the interviewees felt a sense of “dual citizenship” because of their ability to interact with the queer community and with the heterosexual-dominated world of which they were also a part. They experienced both privileges and pressures as a result of occupying the borderlands between multiple identities.

Finally, participants expressed a sense of how Canadian law and society had shaped their identity. There was a unanimous voice among the nine participants to indicate how strongly supported they felt by current Canadian laws, but there was also an acknowledgement that
Canadian society has not always kept pace with legal progress. Interviewees pointed out that incidents of homophobia and discrimination continue to occur and that steps need to be taken to ensure that more people receive anti-oppression and social justice training. Overwhelmingly, however, the participants believed Canada to be a country that had advocated for and would continue to support the rights of LGB individuals and their families. In their eyes, Canada was making progress in its effort to find an alternative to the master narrative of heteronormativity.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Recapitulation of the Guiding Questions

Through the use of semi-structured interviews with nine Ontario adolescents, this study endeavoured to examine the narrative construction of personal identity of youth with LGB-identified parents. In many ways, youth with LGB-identified parents can be regarded as unique cases in the study of personality development because their identities often defy classification (Hart, 2005). To complement existing literature regarding LGB-led families, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used as a vehicle to gain insight into how these adolescents use narrative to describe the experience of having a non-heterosexual parent. Additionally, the inquiry aimed to investigate how youth with LGB-identified parents make sense of their family identity when they are in a school setting and are exposed to multiple and sometimes conflicting narratives. Finally, the study sought to reveal the needs that youth experience specifically because of their queer-family identity.

Strengths and Limitations of the Current Study

Chapter one described the analytic framework of narrative psychology that provided a basis for the current study. Situating this study against the historical precedents set by scholars as early as Karl Philipp Moritz and William James offers the opportunity to draw from the work of all who have used “voice” to better understand a particular phenomenon. Allport (1924) was a pioneer who advocated for an undivided analytic approach to personality development, suggesting that analysis would be incomplete without the use of voice. Bruner (1990) echoed this assertion, arguing that holistic examinations of the mind and self meaning making could
paint a more accurate picture of identity formation than the reductionist approaches offered by psychoanalysis, behaviourism, or cognitive psychology. McAdams (2006), too, advanced narrative psychology towards more holistic approaches and maintained that examining personality development across the lifespan was as important as viewing development from multiple psychological perspectives. Building upon this notion, McLean (2008) suggested that the integration of the self begins in adolescence but continues throughout the life cycle. Built upon the framework offered by these historical precedents, the current study employed a narrative approach to add “voice” to the body of literature on the subject of adolescents with LGB-identified parents.

To provide context, chapter two’s literature review explored what is already understood about the experiences and development of children and adolescents who grow up in LGB-led homes. As well as providing definitions and an overview of Canadian laws that pertain to LGB families, a number of studies were described to situate the current study against what is known about the psychosocial development, the school experiences, and the identity formation of “queer spawn.” The evidence demonstrated that the quality of family relationships is more significant to a child’s well-being than the sexual orientation of his or her parents, that children of LGB-identified parents thrive even in schools where the master narrative of heteronormativity prevails, and that youth with LGB parents make sense of their personal identity as a product of a myriad of intersecting narratives.

In chapter three, theories underpinning IPA were explored in an effort to justify the selection of IPA for the current study. The epistemology of IPA revealed that it is built upon the principles of hermeneutics, phenomenology, and idiography. These theoretical assumptions
contribute to certain strengths and limitations of this study and are a useful starting point in an
evaluation of its strengths and limitations.

First, the double hermeneutic nature of IPA requires an analyst to make sense of the participant making sense of a phenomenon. As the author and analyst, there were times when my own biases may have influenced the interpretation of participants’ experiences. My own prior experiences and assumptions may also have affected my interview approach. For example, when one participant, Denise, expressed a belief that teachers need to put aside their own opinions and stand up for what they know is the right thing to do, my own views about the role of teachers crept into the conversation. “Especially within a public school setting,” I added, which was not an entirely neutral response. For the most part however, interviewer input was neutral, and an ongoing effort was made to probe rather than lead the participants.

The double hermeneutic aspect of IPA contributes to the current study in another sense, as well. Ricoeur (1970) writes of two interpretative positions that a researcher could take, a hermeneutic of empathy and a hermeneutic of suspicion. Smith (2004) suggests that IPA should adopt a middle ground between these two positions, and I believe that I have done so in the current study. On the one hand, the interview questions and the subsequent interpretation of participants’ responses aimed to adopt an empathetic “insider’s perspective” (Conrad, 1987); this allowed me to gain insight into what it is like growing up with queer-identified parents. On the other hand, the approach permitted me to stand alongside these participants to question, probe, and dissect the phenomenon from a new vantage point (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). If given the opportunity to repeat a similar study, I would be tempted to work with a smaller sample size over a series of interviews with each participant, to allow for a deeper exploration of some thematic material that arose in the initial interviews. In so doing, I could perhaps come
closer to the end result of seeing what life is like in their shoes (i.e., hermeneutic of empathy), as well as gain a more critical analysis of all that is involved in the phenomenon of having LGB-identified parents (i.e., hermeneutic of suspicion), thereby striking the balance suggested by Smith and his colleagues (2009).

Another one of IPA’s philosophical underpinnings is phenomenology, an approach to the study of experience. Effective phenomenologists are committed to constant referral to the source of the material being analyzed in order to focus on experience in its own terms (Smith, 2010). Without question, the audio interviews and the transcripts of those interviews were at the heart of the present study. Each interview was listened to countless times. Transcripts were read, re-read, and subjected to both electronic and manual cut-and-paste procedures to establish the best way to re-tell the participants’ personal narratives of growing up with LGB-identified parents. IPA studies such as the current one have tremendous internal validity because of their heavy reliance on the lived experiences of participants who exhibit the characteristic or phenomenon being studied. In the case of the phenomenon of youth with LGB-identified parents, there can be no doubt that a reader with no prior understanding of the phenomenon would have a more secure grasp of the phenomenon after having read the results and discussion previously presented in chapters four, five, and six. Although the literature review provided a historical and legal overview to give some context to the issue, those topics played a secondary role to the verbatim excerpts from participants’ interviews. The guiding questions were adhered to in chapters four, five, and six, to ensure that the focus of the study did not drift away from the phenomenon in question, the experiences of youth with LGB-identified parents.

My participants’ stories were not presumed, however, to be objective accounts of their experiences; rather, they were subjective and personal accounts of the objects or events (Smith,
1996) that were and are part of their thoughts and beliefs regarding the phenomenon of having queer-identified parents. Their own beliefs and thoughts about having grown up in a queer-led family may have been shaped by others. However, it was difficult to ascertain how their previous discussions with parents, with other researchers, or with connections to other LGB organizations might have influenced their opinions and experiences. Their responses may have been genuine expressions of their beliefs and experiences, but there is also the possibility that some of their responses were partly rehearsed or stated with a sense of what they imagined to be the “right” answers in the eyes of others. Additionally, as Garner (2004) pointed out, even when talking to a researcher such as myself, children with LGB-identified parents may be aware of their burden to represent all youth from LGB-led homes. “Understanding that what they say might influence public policy impedes their freedom to talk openly about their lives,” suggested Garner. “There is an ongoing fear that anything they disclose could be manipulated to discredit their parents, and that any ambivalence or disclosure of difficulties within their home would reflect poorly on their parents” (Garner, 2004, p. 20). It must be acknowledged, then, that some or all of the participants may have been filtering some of what they said during the interview, granting access only to the parts of their personal narratives that they deemed safe to share and allowing their stories to diverge from cultural master narratives only in ways that they believed would serve a constructive purpose.

Nevertheless, the mere fact that many of the participants acknowledged the pressure they sometimes feel to debunk stereotypes about LGB-led families suggests that a certain level of trust was established during each interview. It was my hope to build interviewer-interviewee rapport throughout each interview to the extent that they would understand that there was no intention to gather ammunition for a case against queer-identified families. Although I was
neither a parent nor a child in an LGB-led family, the mere fact that I myself identify as gay may have been enough to give them permission to relax the defences that might otherwise have been in place with non-LGB-identified researchers.

Yet another theoretical component of IPA is idiography. As mentioned in chapter three, one potential target for criticism of IPA is the relatively small sample size that IPA researchers tend to use. The sample size in the current study, $N=9$, was actually rather large for a full application of the rich, intricate, idiographic principles of IPA, and there were some non-homogenous features within the group of participants. The sample size of the current study was too small, however, to satisfy those who might look for more nomothetic value in research. As Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) point out, however, participants in an IPA study are selected because they represent a perspective on a phenomenon, not a population. Still, some believe research only has value if it can be applied to the masses. To such critics, I would argue that if the current study facilitates a smoother journey for even one youth with LGB-identified parents, it has been a success. If it nudges one educator towards more inclusive practices, it has been an achievement. If it debunks the stereotypes held by even one opponent of LGB-led families, it has been a triumph. I make no claims that these experiences represent the masses, but the voices of these nine adolescents are valid nonetheless.

To illustrate this point, if I knew that a particular intersection in my neighbourhood had been the source of several pedestrian deaths, I would not be able to make any claims that all pedestrians who crossed that particular street would meet their demise. Still, I would be wise to pay attention if I were the one standing on the corner weighing my options. The experiences of this group of participants may not predict the experiences of all children who come from LGB-led families, but the lessons we learn from their experiences may have broader applicability than
if we limit ourselves to a strictly idiographic approach. Howard Gardner (1993), in his examination of the lives of seven creative thinkers, made it clear that he wished for this work to cast its light upon the phenomenon of creativity instead of merely upon the seven subjects themselves. “I seek to transcend a concatenation of specific biographies,” he wrote, “by searching for common properties and illuminating distinctions across a small set of instructive cases” (p. 13).

In the current study, it is my hope that the examination of the stories told by the nine participants with whom I spoke will serve to be “instructive cases” regarding the phenomenon of youth with LGB-identified parents. While the purpose of this study or of any IPA study is not to generate theory, findings can and often do influence and contribute to theory in a broader sense (Caldwell, 2008). Smith and his colleagues (2009) suggest that if the research account is rich and transparent, the reader should be able to independently evaluate transferability. I believe that there is indeed enough richness and transparency, given the comprehensive data provided in the results section as well as in the master tables of themes (see Appendices H, I, and J), to allow readers who wish to generate theory to adequately assess the transferability of these findings to their own studies or meta-analyses.

In addition to viewing the current study’s strengths and limitations through the lenses of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, one must consider that some have also questioned the very role of narrative psychology in terms of its accuracy and portrayal of participants’ stories. Mishler (1986) argues that when participants’ narratives are summarized, the reduced version of their words is an inadequate representation of their original stories. Others such as Smythe and Murray (2000) have commented about the ownership of participants’ narratives, arguing that this ethical problem is often ignored by qualitative researchers.
Furthermore, Brocki and Wearden (2006) point to the inevitable subjectivity of IPA because no two researchers working with the same data set would ever come to the same analytical conclusions. Their concerns bring up questions about the reliability and replicability of IPA. As mentioned in chapter three, Yardley (2000) argues that notions of reliability and replicability are irrelevant to studies that aim to be interpretative. She presents four desirable characteristics to which qualitative researchers should aspire.

(1) Sensitivity to context. As a teacher with over two decades of experience, I believe that I was well-positioned to establish credibility and to build rapport with the gatekeepers who provided access to potential participants. Furthermore, the fact that I was a gay-identified male allowed for the development of trust with interviewees, who knew that I was sensitive to the issues at hand and could trust that I had no hidden intention to discredit their parents.

(2) Commitment and rigour. I demonstrated a high level of commitment and rigour through my prolonged engagement with the topic and through a devotion to thorough analysis of the data. A multi-step process was followed, which involved a repeated return to the original interview audio and an approach mirrored after that used by many other IPA researchers such as Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009).

(3) Transparency. In the interest of transparency, I sought regular feedback from the group of graduate students in my supervisor’s laboratory group, allowing my data to be held accountable to their scrutiny and auditing. I employed a fellow student to transcribe the interviews and made the transcripts and the rest of the data corpus available to graduate students and supervisory faculty. I also presented drafts of this dissertation at three academic conferences to solicit feedback from a wider academic audience.
(4) *Impact and importance.* It is my hope that the findings will have implications for youth with LGB-identified parents, as well as for their parents, their educators, and for those in academia who desire to build a greater understanding of the phenomenon under examination.

**Summary and Implications of Family Themes**

The results and discussion chapters were organized into the broad categories of family, school, and queer identity. The decision to begin with family themes before branching out to topics that concerned school and broader societal issues was consistent not only with Confucianism’s assumption that family is the basic building block of society, but also with Erikson’s (1963) assertion that an individual’s predominant social setting shifts throughout the lifespan from family, to school, to peer groups, and then to a broader social context.

Under the domain of family-related themes, presented and discussed in chapter four, the participants’ personal narratives centred around their parents’ LGB disclosure, events related to divorce and re-partnering, the responses of extended family members, and the perceived advantages of having lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents. The group of participants in the current study experienced relatively positive experiences coming to terms with their parents’ disclosure of non-heterosexuality. At times, their parents did not give them the benefit of the doubt that they were sufficiently sophisticated to understand and accept their parents’ LGB identity. Sometimes, this resulted in children finding out prior to actually being told. While this was not problematic for the participants in the current study, there has been some suggestion that when parents wait too long, they risk their children finding out in ways that could be potentially unsettling (Garner, 2004). For example, it may be advisable for the LGB-identified parent to have an honest conversation with their child rather than the child finding out by witnessing a
parent’s intimacy with someone of the same sex or by being told by a non-parental figure. Waiting too long also invites the possibility that children will develop homophobic attitudes from external influences who propagate the master narrative of heteronormativity. Parents and would-be parents can learn from the parent-to-child disclosure stories shared in this study, as a way of establishing best practices when they come out to their own children. They may be surprised to find that their children, like the ones whose experiences were reported here, are easily able to integrate their parents’ sexual identity into their own emerging narrative and are often willing to celebrate their parents’ diverse sexual orientation as a feature that adds to the uniqueness of their own personal identity.

For the seven participants who had begun their lives within the context of a heterosexual-identified family unit, the degree to which their parents separated amicably was related to the quality of the parent-child relationships following the divorce. As is the case with all families navigating divorce, parents would be well-advised to set their adult conflicts aside while they continue to protect the interests of their children. All parents typically desire positive post-divorce relationships with their children. Animosity between the adults makes it improbable that children will see the viability of getting along with each of their parents. In the case of heterosexual-identified couples that break up when one of the parents discloses an LGB identity, the non-LGB parent’s maturity and acceptance of diverse sexual orientations are crucial. If the non-LGB parent can model an accepting attitude, they will likely make it easier for their children to integrate both parents’ narratives into their own emerging sense of self.

LGB-identified parents and their children must sometimes bear the burden of negative responses from extended family members who are firmly attached to the master narrative of heteronormativity. In the current study, participants used language such as “didn’t accept,”
“upset,” “mad,” “homophobe,” “homophobic,” “disapproval,” and “confused” to reveal the opposition to same-sex relationships they observed from at least one member of their extended families. Participants reported that, for the most part, extended family members had a tendency to eventually come to terms with having an LGB-identified relative, suggesting that heteronormative beliefs can be replaced over time by more inclusive ones. It is important for parents to have open and honest dialogue with their children about the effects of extended family members’ homophobic attitudes and behaviour, as well as how those relatives’ actions should be handled. Fakhrid-Deen (2010) reminds parents that it is their responsibility to shield children from the unwanted burden of fighting family battles and being spokespersons for their parents. Participants acknowledged and appreciated the steps their parents had taken to abandon the master narrative of normativity to adopt one that was a more authentic representation of their true identities. They knew that their parents were living authentic lives and believed that extended family members would eventually acknowledge the same qualities of strength and courage that the participants had come to see in their parents.

Interviewees in the current study were proud of their LGB-identified parents. Teenagers do not always admit this sort of pride to their parents, but current LGB-identified parents and would-be parents can take heart in knowing this. As Ricoeur (1992) suggested, the personal narratives of significant figures often become integrated into one’s own story, and this was indeed the case for the current participants with respect to their parents. The youth in the current study saw several advantages of having LGB-identified parents that included having role models of strength and courage, heightened awareness of social justice issues, and greater open-mindedness with respect to sexuality. LGB-identified parents can acknowledge the unique gifts they bring to their children, but in so doing, they are wise to be aware of the challenges that their
children may face because of their non-mainstream perspectives. With heightened awareness of social justice and exposure to their parents’ narrative of struggle and success, adolescents with LGB-identified parents may be more inclined than other youth to feel the burden of the social injustices and oppression that they observe around them. They may also feel a sense of isolation if they perceive themselves to be more open-minded than their peers with respect to gender roles and sexual orientation. Family counsellors also need to become more attuned to the issues that are unique for children and adolescents growing up in LGB-led homes. Lambert (2005) points to the complete absence of counselling-specific studies that pertain to LGB-identified parents and their offspring and advises counsellors to increase their knowledge about the particular needs and realities of these families as well as to begin conducting research on their own work to contribute to the growing body of research. As all family service providers become more aware of the issues faced by marginalized populations such as LGB-led families, a greater level of advocacy for these families will be possible (Lambert, 2005). Regular family discussions and counsellor-facilitated dialogue on topics of stigmatization, social isolation, and social justice will allow children to more easily interpret and process the messages that bombard them daily, messages that often conflict with the open-mindedness that is modelled for them in the safety of their family homes.

**Summary and Implications of School Themes**

When they transition from the relative security of their families to a school environment, children from LGB-led homes are exposed to new faces, cultures, rules, and social expectations that stretch beyond the comfort of the narrative with which they are familiar. As their own sense of self develops, they learn to seek allies and to avoid those whom they perceive as threatening
At school, children develop strategies for screening out homophobic individuals as potential friends, and they must learn to decide if, how, and when to disclose to others the unique features of their family configuration. When they out their families to peers, they face a wide range of peer responses such as neutrality, connection, humour, hostility, or curiosity. By anticipating such responses, queer-identified families can prepare strategically for these responses in both emotional and practical ways.

While some literature qualitatively explores the disclosure practices of children with LGB-identified parents (e.g., Garner, 2004; Fakhrid-Deen, 2010), to the best of my knowledge there has been little theoretical attention given to the subject. The current study adds additional voices to a growing understanding of that particular aspect of the phenomenon of youth with LGB-identified parents and highlights the need for future researchers to develop a more formalized theory to frame issues pertaining to the disclosure of one’s parent’s sexual identity and the subsequent peer responses that youth can expect following such disclosures.

Participants in this study were well-aware of the role that mainstream media played in increasing exposure to diverse family configurations and stories that challenge the master narrative of heteronormativity, and they were grateful for the educational impact that celebrities, movies, and television shows could make. Nevertheless, teachers must also recognize how critically important their voices can be in bringing about social change. Julia’s blunt message, “Teachers have a big-ass impact that I don’t really think they understand,” must not be taken lightly.

Findings described in the review of the literature (e.g., Taylor et al., 2008; GLSEN, 2003; Ray & Gregory, 2001) indicated that teachers could expect to hear homophobic slurs such as “fag,” “dyke,” or “that’s so gay” almost daily, but there was also a great deal of evidence to
suggest that teacher observations of homophobic language and bullying do not necessarily lead to immediate and consistent teacher responses (Taylor et al., 2008). Participants in the current study reported experiences that corresponded to such findings in the literature and articulated their belief that teachers should be more proactive in safeguarding students’ choices about how to articulate their own identities. Some researchers have advocated for measures to support LGB-identified youth (e.g., Walton, 2010) through the creation of GSAs and the revision and implementation of new sex education curricula. However, little attention has been given to the impact that homophobic school environments have on children from LGB families, and some of the current participants indicated that GSAs are not currently attracting them and/or meeting their unique needs.

Interviewees in the present study provided evidence of both the successes and failures of their teachers’ performance, describing both good examples and ineffective teacher practices with respect to responses to bullying and homophobia, the provision of support for queer-identified youth and youth with queer-identified parents, and the utilization of resources. Some participants, like some researchers (e.g., Walton, 2010), advocated for training for both pre-service teacher candidates and for currently-certified teachers. Heightened awareness to social justice issues combined with targeted strategies to identify and eliminate homophobic behaviour in schools will equip teachers to offer greater protection for LGB-identified youth and for students from LGB-led families. Participants also identified the need for mandated changes to sex education curricula to allow for a broader reach in exposing all Canadian families to alternatives to the master narrative of heteronormativity.

Educators and policymakers must heed the concerns raised by these participants and by any students who have witnessed and experienced homophobic bullying in schools. Because of
Bill 157, Ontario educators are currently required to take action when they witness any behaviour deemed threatening to the safety of students and staff. Clearly, however, many teachers are not fulfilling their legal and moral obligations to eliminate homophobic attitudes and behaviours. These are not issues that can be solved overnight, but until the impact of homophobic hostile environments to the development of personal identity is acknowledged and fully understood, forward momentum will be very slow.

Bauer and Goldstein (2003) advise LGB-identified parents to meet with school board members to draw more attention to LGB-led families and their unique narratives. As invisible minorities, youths with LGB-identified parents will not have their unique needs considered without awareness being raised. Additionally, LGB-identified educators and other adult role models need to begin making their presence known in schools, however frightening that might be. Even in Canada, where there is tremendous legal protection for LGB-identified adults to be free from discrimination and to have the right to be parents, to marry, and to enjoy the same economic spousal benefits afforded to heterosexual-identified people, there are many gay and lesbian-identified teachers who are fearful of the repercussions of being out in the workplace. The narrative of silence (Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009) may not characterize these teachers in all aspects of their lives, but they may feel the need to be closeted in the classroom for fear of repercussions from students, students’ parents, or colleagues. Until environments are established in which LGB individuals feel safe in publicly identifying as such, homophobic attitudes will be silently condoned. Even heterosexual teachers have a fear of reprisal for discussing issues related to homosexuality in their classrooms (Bauer & Goldstein, 2003). This might be particularly true in publicly funded Catholic schools, where certain religious expectations sometimes conflict with the policy directions taken at the ministry level. However,
ministries of education need to ensure that all schools develop and support written policies that prohibit the discrimination and harassment of any LGB-identified individuals or of anyone who is perceived to be supportive of or associated with LGB individuals (Bauer & Goldstein, 2003).

**Summary and Implications of Queer Identity Themes**

Youth with queer-identified parents draw their personal identity from multiple and intersecting narratives. Having lesbian, gay, or bisexual-identified parents is one element that is important to their sense of self. Because they are part of an invisible minority group and because each child varies in the degree to which they are open about their parents’ sexual orientation, children of LGB-identified parents do not always know about one another. In the present study, most of the participants had not connected with other so-called “queer spawn,” but the ones who had done so were able to articulate many perceived advantages of such networking. “Queer spawn” are able to talk to one another about their families more candidly and with increased mutual understanding. Additionally, they are able to learn from one another’s personal narratives and escape the sense of social isolation brought on by their under-representation in their schools and in mainstream media. In Canada, there are very few support groups or social networking opportunities for youth with LGB-identified parents. This could be, in part, because of the relatively few centres with large LGB populations, but even in a city such as Toronto, organizations such as COLAGE appear to have low membership compared to similar organizations in the United States.

The participants in the current study varied in the degree to which they desired to connect to youth from similarly configured families. The ones who had previous exposure to COLAGE and to Project Ten Oaks believed in the potential impact of such programs. They also viewed it
as important for youth with LGB-identified parents to be more included in the spectrum of the LGBTQ community, citing the lack of terminology for describing youth with queer-identified parents as a potential reason for their perceived lack of legitimacy amongst LGBTQ-identified youth organizations. Some hinted to the possibility of being more fully integrated with queer youth rather than being identified as two distinct groups, a notion that was suggestive of their belief that individuals from both groups encorporate the gay narrative into their own personal identities. In a way, even the youth who identified as straight believed themselves to be “gay” in some senses, by virtue of having LGB-identified parents. The possibility of developing programs that would be inclusive of both queer-identified youth and children of queer-identified parents has implications for youth service providers, educators, and facilitators of GSAs in schools. Social media and technology also have potential utility for youth with LGB-identified parents, particularly given the geographical barriers that prevent many, especially those living in rural areas, from having opportunities to meet face-to-face to have access to one another’s narratives.

Due to their exposure to their parents’ gay narratives, many of the participants had strong connections with gay and lesbian-identified peers. All of them expressed a desire to see a reduction in the discrimination and homophobia that are pervasive in our schools and in Canadian society. The fact that they could empathize with queer-identified peers was indicative of the experience many of them had with straddling two or more worlds as a result of their queer-family identity. There is potential here for further exploration of the intersectionality between various aspects of the identity of youth with queer-identified parents, and of the tension that arises between the various forces of oppression they experience (e.g., heteronormativity, stigmatization) and the various types of privilege they enjoy (e.g., heterosexual identity,
education, race, socioeconomic status). Many of the interviewees felt a sense of “dual citizenship” because of their ability to interact both within the queer community and the heterosexual-dominated world of which they were also a part. They experienced both privileges and pressures as a result of occupying the borderlands of multiple identities, and the emotional impact of their position between worlds is a topic worthy of more in-depth study.

For example, some alluded to the guilt they experienced because of the heterosexual privilege that their parents did not enjoy, and many referred to the burden of proof they carried to debunk some of the stereotypes about LGB-led families. They were sometimes keenly aware of the possibility that others might be motivated to discredit their parents’ ability to be suitable caregivers (Garner, 2004), and thus several articulated the sometimes-cautious measures they employed to give people a rosy picture of their family life. For the most part, family life was very happy, but participants reported checking themselves before acknowledging to some people even the most mundane and “typical” evidence of family disagreements.

One of their identities, that of being Canadian, was important to participants because they felt that their families were strongly supported by Canadian laws. Compared to the U.S., participants believed that Canada has many nationwide legal protections already in place. As was discussed in chapter two, there may be many reasons for the differing trajectories that Canada and the U.S. have followed with respect to legal change for LGB-identified people and their families. Amsterdam and Bruner (2000) assert, “Undoubtedly all laws and practices are culturally constructed, the end products of a society’s interpretive negotiations” (p. 226). The differences between current laws in Canada and the U.S., therefore, have come about as a result of each country’s citizens’ collaborative efforts to make sense their collective stories.
Amsterdam and Bruner explain, however, the role of society is often to question laws, practices, and institutions and sometimes to change them.

It is inarguable that both Canada and the U.S. are in the midst of questioning laws and institutions that pertain to LGB-led families. While the two nations’ collective narratives share similarities, however, their stories have not unfolded in synchronicity. During the data collection phase of the current study, the Movement Advancement Project, the Family Equality Council, and the Center for American Progress (2011) released an in-depth needs assessment that was the result of the collaboration of these U.S. organizations. The needs assessment, entitled “All Children Matter: How Legal and Social Inequalities Hurt LGBT Families,” highlighted twelve areas that need to be addressed in the U.S. if LGBT-led families are going to be on equal footing with heterosexual-led families. Those current needs are listed in the table below (Table 8) with a comparison to Canada to highlight some needs that have already been met in Canada, at least from a legal perspective.

Just as the master narrative of heteronormativity appears to be diminishing in Canada, at least from a legal history point of view, the same could be expected in the U.S. over time. Americans’ support for same-sex marriage has risen from 36 to 53 percent over the past six years (Washington Post, 2012, May 23). This fact, in conjunction with President Obama’s evolving opinions about same-sex marriage and LGB-led families, suggests that standards of normativity are in a state of change in the United States. Nevertheless, it is clear that significant legal differences between Canadian and U.S. laws still exist.

In the United States, for example, multiple-parent-recognition laws have not yet been passed in all states that would fully protect children in LGB-led families (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011),
whereas multiple-parent-recognition laws have been secured in Canada since 2007 (Court of Appeal for Ontario, 2007). Similarly, in the United States there is still no federal recognition of marriage for same-sex couples (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2011), while this is indeed in place for Canadian same-sex couples and has been since 2005 (New York Times, 2005). With respect to adoption, marriage, taxation, and immigration, Canada makes no legal distinctions that would disadvantage LGB-led families compared to heterosexual-led families.

As in the States, however, there is still a need for meaningful anti-bullying legislation in Canada. In February 2010, Bill 157 (Keeping Our Kids Safe At School Act), the first law of its kind in Canada, took effect in the province of Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). It remains unclear, however, whether Bill 157 has indeed made Ontario schools a safer place and prompted teachers to truly change their practices with respect to bullying, homophobia, and the pervasiveness of the narrative of heteronormativity in our schools. Other needs in the U.S. are also present in Canada such as the need for stronger support services and expanded research on LGBT families and parenting.

On the whole, although participants acknowledged the relatively strong support they enjoy in Canada because of the robust legal progress that has been made with respect to LGB rights, there was also an acknowledgement that Canadians’ attitudes have not always kept pace with legal progress and, therefore, that the master narrative of heteronormativity prevails in Canada, too. As aforementioned, there is evidence of institutionalized heteronormativity in many aspects of both Canadian society (e.g., Smith, 2004) and U.S. society (e.g., Jackson, 2006). Interviewees pointed out that incidents of homophobia and discrimination continue to occur and that steps need to be taken to ensure that more people receive anti-oppression and social justice
Table 8: Comparison of current LGB family needs in Canada vs. United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need in the U.S.</th>
<th>Current Status in Canada = Good</th>
<th>Current Status in Canada = Satisfactory</th>
<th>Current Status in Canada = Needs Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pass comprehensive parental recognition laws at the state level to fully protect children in LGBT families.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Legalize and federally recognize marriage for same-sex couples.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Provide pathways to immigration and citizenship for binational LGBT families.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Revise the Internal Revenue Service tax code to provide equitable treatment for LGBT families.</td>
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<td>5. Provide equitable economic protections when a parent dies or is disabled.</td>
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<td>6. Advance equitable economic protections when a parent dies or is disabled.</td>
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<td>7. Recognize LGBT families and children across government safety net programs.</td>
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<td>8. Enable LGBT family members to care for one another.</td>
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<td>9. Pass state anti-bullying laws and laws barring discrimination in employment, adoption, custody and visitation, health services, housing and credit.</td>
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<td>10. Expand education and cultural competency training on LGBT families.</td>
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<td>11. Create stronger support services for LGBT families, particularly families of color, low-income families, and transgender parents.</td>
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<td>12. Expand research on LGBT families and parenting, with an emphasis on filling gaps in data on families of color, low-income families, and transgender parents.</td>
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individuals’ choices regarding how to articulate personal identity will be restricted. In contrast, when an increased number of people understand and defend principles of social justice, individuals will experience freedom to articulate more genuinely their emerging narratives of personal identity. Despite their assertion that Canadians needed to receive anti-oppression and social justice training, the participants believed Canada to be a country that had advocated for and would continue to support the rights of LGB individuals and their families. Their stories, as well as Canada’s history of legal evolution with respect to rights for LGB individuals and families, indicated that institutionalized practices were changing in response to a collective cultural imagination of new possibilities for Canadian norms and values.

**Recommendations for Parents, Schools, and Government**

Insofar as the lived experiences of the current study’s participants are instructive about the realities for Canadian youth with LGB-identified parents, their stories and a review of the literature invite parents, school officials, and politicians from all levels of Canadian government to consider how support for such youth can be ameliorated. LGB-identified parents can take comfort in inferring from these stories that children can and do flourish in LGB-led homes. Youth with LGB-identified parents seek honesty and communication from their parents; they hope for their parents to live genuine lives rather than having their voices masked by a master narrative of silence. When parents delay coming out to their children, children may rely on their own observations and intuition to deduce that their parents do not fit the master narrative of heteronormativity, and the lack of explicit dialogue about the issue may reinforce the master narrative instead of challenging it.
“[My dad] didn’t actually tell me,” said Christie. “I figured it out.” Engaging in honest dialogue with their children will give LGB-identified parents opportunities to share their own narratives of personal identity, stories that will ultimately be embodied in their children’s emerging narratives. Further exposing their young children and adolescents to other LGB-led families, to queer history, and to queer-positive media will provide models of alternatives to the traditional family narrative. While exposing their young children and adolescents to the experiences of others, parents can seek opportunities to impart new vocabulary to their children to facilitate the articulation of their feelings about social injustice and to express the pressures and privileges that may be part of the reality of their multiple and intersecting identities. Recognizing that their children of all ages make ongoing disclosure decisions at school, LGB-identified parents should be both proactively involved in their children’s schools and respectful of their children’s autonomy to out their families on their own terms.

“Teachers have a big-ass impact that I don’t think they really understand,” claimed Julia. School officials from classroom teachers to directors of education should make every effort to create safe, inclusive environments that permit a myriad of ways for students to articulate their own identities. To close the gap between current and ideal practices, anti-oppression and social justice training should be provided to all staff as well as educating teachers as to the new responsibilities they must accept to comply with emerging anti-bullying legislation. Sex education curricula should be revised to formally expose all youth to alternatives to the master narrative of heteronormativity rather than expecting sexual minority youth and/or youth with LGB-identified parents to shoulder the burden of educating their peers. Schools should provide all students with access to non-heterosexual narratives via literature, history, law, media, guest speakers, etc., for the stories of others become embodied in one’s own narrative. Publicly-
funded schools ought not limit access to narratives that challenge existing institutions and norms. Based upon what the literature and the youth of the current study have told us about the importance of gay-straight alliances, all schools should move to create environments that encourage GSAs that are vibrant, accessible, effective, and inclusive. When such clubs are in place and actively supported by school personnel, all students — including the children of LGB-led parents — will feel safer at school and more secure in articulating their personal identity without fear of reprisal.

“You can’t just be standing up for yourself; you need to be standing up for everyone,” asserted Denise. Government of all levels – municipal, provincial, and federal – must acknowledge the important role they play and the privileged position they hold in making Canadian society safer and more inclusive for LGB-led families. With regard to their participation in the “contest” between canonicity and imaginative progress, government leaders must use their privilege and influence prudently. Bi-partisanship should be replaced by meaningful dialogue in order for our laws to evolve in a manner that strikes an effective balance between the “orthodoxies of a culture” (Amsterdam & Bruner, 2000, p. 232) and the “restless powers of the human imagination” (p. 232). All levels of government must play a role in ensuring that schools and workplaces are free from bullying and discrimination. This must include anti-bullying legislation as well as the creation of support services for LGB-led families. Finally, I recommend government support for an expansion of research on LGB-led families to deepen our understanding of this relatively new cultural phenomenon.
Conclusion

Narrative has the potential to be instructive and powerful. When a controversial collection of Taliban poetry was released by a British publishing company in May 2012, the anthology was both criticized as inflammatory and hailed as revelatory (Marche, 2012). Some wondered if it was a mistake to give voice to the Taliban perspective, and others contemplated engaging in a war of “counterpoetry”. “What does it matter if we control the cities and the battlefields,” mused columnist Stephen Marche, “so long as they control the narrative? The narrative is all they need to win” (para. 6).

In Canada and throughout the world, laws that impact LGB-identified individuals and LGB-led families are evolving. Of this, there can be no doubt. In a sense, Pierre Trudeau’s 1969 assertion that the state had “no business in the bedrooms of the nation” was merely a starting point beyond which Canadians have since progressed. Despite the progress, however, the master narrative of heteronormativity has endured. Stories such as those told by the nine courageous participants in the current study, however, are an important part of understanding the experiences of adolescents with LGB-identified parents. Rather than allowing others to control the narrative, their voices need to be part of shaping society’s emerging understanding of normativity.

One can learn a great deal from these participants about the process of meaning making that occurs in the development of personal identity. Personal identity is not formed merely from a collection of facts. It emerges from the way individuals create a story to orient their own experiences against the experiences of others and in contrast to master narratives; it stems from roots established in adolescence and is actively situated within (and sometimes against) the available narratives that intersect to inform a sense of self. There is much to be gleaned beyond a mere understanding of personal identity development, however. The stories of adolescents
with LGB-identified parents are instructive; their voices are powerful. By listening to the voices of these adolescents, one can begin to understand how to be a product of a cultural narrative while at the same time being an effective producer of change for the betterment of our society.
References


Burn, S. M. (2000). Heterosexuals’ use of “fag” and “queer” to deride one another: A contributor to heterosexism and stigma. *Journal of Homosexuality, 40*(2), 1-10.


Fleming, J. (2012). Bullying & bias: making schools safe for gay students: students on campuses with Gay Straight Alliances are more likely to report feeling safe at school, and less likely to be exposed to bias-related harassment. *Leadership, 41*(4), 12-13.


http://colorado.academia.edu/ChristyDaleSims/Papers/117479/Faceted_Identities_Extending_Intersectionality.


The Toronto Star (2012, May 23). Toronto Mayor Rob Ford deserves credit for attending gay outreach event.


Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

DO YOU HAVE AN LGBTQ PARENT?

IF YOU HAVE A PARENT WHO IDENTIFIES AS LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer),
CONSIDER ADDING YOUR VOICE TO RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Participants must meet the following criteria:

- The child of at least one parent who identifies as LGBTQ;
- Able to converse comfortably in English;
- Currently or recently a student in an Ontario secondary school (graduating year sometime between 2009-2014);
- Lived in Canada for at least 5 years;
- Able to give informed consent to be interviewed.

The interview will be conducted in July 2011 at the University of Toronto (or at a location convenient for the participant). Questions will pertain to the experiences of Canadian youth with LGBTQ parents.

To volunteer or to make further inquiries, please contact:

Kenneth D. McNeilly (Doctoral Candidate)    Dr. Michel Ferrari (Thesis Supervisor)
kenneth.mcneilly@utoronto.ca        michel.ferrari@utoronto.ca
Appendix B: Agency Consent Form

Dear (Name of Representative and Agency),

My name is Kenneth McNeilly. I am a doctoral candidate currently working on my thesis project. I have undertaken a needs assessment of youth who have at least one LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer) parent. I am writing to ask if your agency would consent to helping me locate participants for an interview-based study.

Participants would need to meet the following criteria:

- The child of at least one parent who identifies as LGBTQ;
- Able to converse comfortably in English;
- Currently or recently a student in an Ontario secondary school (graduating year sometime between 2009-2014);
- Lived in Canada for at least 5 years;
- Able to give informed consent to be interviewed.

Interviews will be conducted in July 2011 at the University of Toronto (or at a location convenient for the participant). Questions will pertain to the experiences of Canadian youth with LGBTQ parents. It is important to note that no youth should experience coercion in making their decision regarding participation. If you are able to disseminate the attached poster (via email, bulletin board postings, etc.), youth can contact me directly if interested rather than feeling that they need to respond through your office. I understand that your agency may be interested in discovering the broad themes that these youth identify as needs they have because they are children of LGBTQ parents. I will be happy to share these broad themes with you so that further focus groups can take place. Individual participants’ confidentiality will, however, be protected. If you, on behalf of the LGBT Parenting Network, give consent to advertise for participants on my behalf, please indicate your consent below. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact either me or my advisor, Dr. Michel Ferrari.

Gratefully,

Kenneth D. McNeilly (Doctoral Candidate)  
kenneth.mcneilly@utoronto.ca

Dr. Michel Ferrari (Thesis Supervisor)  
michel.ferrari@utoronto.ca

On behalf of the (Name of Agency), I give my consent to disseminate information on behalf of Kenneth McNeilly. The role of the LGBT Parenting Network will be to help get the word out to potential participants. No coercive means will be employed; rather, participants will be informed of the research project and can freely choose whether or not to contact Kenneth McNeilly to indicate their desire to participate in his doctoral research project at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto.

Date:  
Printed name:  
Signature:
Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Assessing the Needs of Canadian Youth with LGB Parents
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education – University of Toronto

Why do this study? We are interested in assessing the needs of Canadian youth (graduating year sometime between 2009-2014) who have at least one parent that identifies as LGB (lesbian, gay, or bisexual). We need to collect interview data from these youth to allow us to summarize the feelings that other youth with LGB parents might also be experiencing.

What will participation involve? This research involves participating in a two-part interview that takes approximately five hours to complete. Ideally, the interview will be completed in one day, with a 30-minute break for lunch. Participants will be given $10 for lunch and can have lunch on or near the University of Toronto campus. The interviews will be recorded and later transcribed in a written form. Both the audio recording and the written transcript will remain confidential. Participants’ real names will never be revealed to anyone other than the principal investigator. The interview questions will be about the participant’s life experiences, with particular interest given to what it is like to have an LGB parent. Participants can request a copy of the consent form, transcript, and final thesis if they choose. Including lunch, it is anticipated that the participant will be on campus for 4-6 hours.

As an informed participant of this experiment, I understand:

1. That my participation is voluntary, and I may cease to take part in this at any time, without penalty.
2. What my participation involves, which is primarily to respond to interview questions.
3. That the researchers do not foresee any risks in participating, but if the questions that I am asked are upsetting in any way, I know that I can choose not to answer those questions. I also know that if the interview causes me to feel upset, I can ask the interviewer to point me towards resources that will provide me the support that I need.
4. That all of the data collected will remain strictly confidential. Only people associated with the study will see my responses. This consent form will be stored separately. My responses will not be associated with my name; instead, my name will be converted to a code number when the principal investigator files my responses.
5. That all my questions about the study have been satisfactorily answered. If I have other questions, I can ask the researcher (Ken McNeilly) or his supervisor (Dr. Michel Ferrari).
6. That I may contact the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics (ethics.review@utoronto.ca, 416-946-3273), if I have questions about my rights as a research participant.

I have read and understood the above, and give informed consent to participate:

Participant’s Printed Name: ______________________________

Participant’s Signature: ______________________________ Date:__________

Parent’s Signature: ______________________________
(if participant under 16)
Date:__________

I have explained the above and answered all questions asked by the participant:

Researcher’s Signature: ______________________________ Date:__________
Appendix D: Participant Resource List

*The following is a list of resources that you can make use of at any time.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Website/Contact Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kids Help Phone</td>
<td><a href="http://www.kidshelpphone.ca">www.kidshelpphone.ca</a> 1-800-668-6868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Trevor Project</td>
<td><a href="http://www.thetrevorproject.org">www.thetrevorproject.org</a> 1-866-4-u-trevor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLAGE</td>
<td><a href="http://www.colage.org">www.colage.org</a> 416-985-3749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFLAG</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pflagcanada.ca">www.pflagcanada.ca</a> 416-406-6378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouthLine</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youthline.ca">www.youthline.ca</a> 1-800-268-9688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten Oaks Project</td>
<td><a href="http://www.tenoaksproject.org">www.tenoaksproject.org</a> 613-321-2825</td>
</tr>
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Appendix E: Interview Schedule

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Qualitative Needs Assessment: Canadian Adolescent Children of LGB-Identified Parents

Name of Interviewer: ______________________________
Name of Participant: ______________________________
Current Age: ______________________________
Gender: ______________________________
Date of Interview: ______________________________
Duration of Interview (minutes): ______________________________
Interview Code Number: ______________________________
Introduction

As you know, I asked for your participation in this interview because you have at least one parent who identifies as something other than heterosexual. So it’s probably not a surprise to you that I’ll ask some questions about what it’s like to have a lesbian, gay, or bisexual-identified (LGB) parent. I want you to think of the rest of our time together as a “conversation” as much as an “interview.” There are no right or wrong answers to any of your questions because this is about your life story and your opinions. It’s important for you to know that this is not a “therapy session” or anything like that. If you have anything that comes to your mind or any questions for me, you’re free to bring those up. This packet will guide us through different topics, but we can go off on tangents, too. And if at any time you’re asked something that makes you uncomfortable or that you feel is putting you on the spot, then please let me know. If you need to take a break, we can do that whenever you need to. Also, if you change your mind about being in the study, you can always ask to withdraw from the study, or to ask me to withdraw your answers from the study.

As you know, I’m making a digital recording of this so that I can later type up everything to have the conversation in written form. Other than the people who help me transcribe the conversation and my university professors, no one else will hear the recording. Once it’s typed up, it will still be confidential and your answers will never be linked with your real name when I write my final paper for this project. You can see the transcript if you want to, but it will be kept confidential so that none of your friends or family will be able to read it. As an adult, I wouldn’t be allowed to keep it a secret if I thought one of my participants was suffering from abuse or neglect, but other than that scenario everything that you say will be kept confidential. As well as asking you to sign this consent form (Appendix C), I’m going to ask you to take a copy of this resource list (Appendix D) that has a few numbers that you could call if you ever wanted to talk to someone confidentially about issues you face as a result of these interview questions or any other topics. If I was ever doing further research on this topic and wanted to interview you again several years from now, or I wanted to use these answers for another study, I would come back to you then and ask for your consent. So, do I have your permission to record the conversation?

That’s great, thanks. My questions today have a lot of components, but mainly I want to think of it as a past-present-future interview. The past – of you personally, of your family, of your school experiences. The present – how things are going for you now personally, within your family, and at school. And the future – how you see things turning out for yourself, what you feel you need to make life better, and what you would like to see if we lived in an ideal world. We might jump back and forth from past-present-future, but my main goal is to ask you about what kids who have LGB-identified parents need and perhaps hope for in the future.
PART A: DEMOGRAPHICAL AND STATISTICAL DATA

1. Name and Address
Let’s get a few details out of the way first. What is your full name? What is your mailing address?
Would you like to choose a pseudonym for the purposes of being identified when I refer to you in my project?

2. Age
What is your current age? _____ When are you going to turn (___)? ______________

3. Education
Are you currently a student?
What grade are you in?
Has most of your education been in the public system, the public Catholic system, in private schools, or home school settings?
Did you go to regular or special classes? (If yes) When?
Beginning with kindergarten, how many different schools have you attended up to this point?

4. Employment Status
Are you employed at the moment? (If yes) What is the title of your job or position? What kind of work do you do? Is this work full time, half time, or less than half time?
Do you do any regular volunteering? (If yes) Where do you volunteer? What kind of work do you do there?

5. Income
Describe your personal and family financial situation? Is it adequate?

6. Family Members
Who are the members of your family?

7. Residential Status
Do you live on your own, with your parents, with somebody else, or in a group home?

8. Parents
Who do you consider to be your parents? Who are your biological parents?
Do you make any ongoing distinctions or have any labels for your mother(s) or father(s) such as biological, adopted, surrogate, etc.?

You have at least one parent who identifies as LGB. Can you tell me how your parent(s) identify themselves?

At the time of your birth, did your parents identify as LGB, or is that a self-identification they made at a later time? If it was at a later time, how old were you when your parent(s) began to identify themselves (themselves) as LGB?
With what race do you identify yourself? Is that the same as your parents?
What is your ethnic identity? Is that the same as your parents?
Do you have any religious affiliation? Is that the same as your parents?

**PART B: GETTING TO KNOW THE PARTICIPANT’S VIEW OF SELF**

10. **Self-Definitions**
I want to know what you’re like. What can you tell me about the kind of person you are?
(Probes: If more than 3 characteristics - out of all these characteristics, which three do you consider the most important for you? What did you mean when you said that you are ___? How did you come to the conclusion that you are a ___ person? Have you always been ___? (If NOT) When did you become ___? How did you become ___? (If not clear)

How do you think a person who knows you well might describe you? Do you know of anybody who would describe you differently? Who?

What do you consider to be your greatest strength? It could be one of the things you already told me about, or it could be something new. Why do you consider ___ your strength?

What do you consider to be your greatest weakness? It could be one of the things you already told me about, or it could be something new. Why do you consider ___ your weakness? Can you give me an example of a situation where you exhibited this weakness? As you go through life, what could help you overcome this weakness?

11. **Self-Evaluation**
On the scale of 1 to 5 (1 lowest, 5 highest), how much do you like yourself?
What have you considered when you said ___?
(If not 5) What should you be like to deserve the rating of 5?
What would it take for you to get to a 5? What you need to get there?

12. **Psycho-social adjustment**
Do you consider yourself well adjusted within your school community?
On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your current adjustment?
What were you thinking about when you said ___?
What factors do you think should be considered when we talk about people’s adjustment to their school community or to the world?

13. **Current Life-Evaluation**
What does your day-to-day life look like? What do you like doing? What’s a typical day for you?
In general, how satisfied are you with your life? How do you feel about your life nowadays?
On a scale of 1-5 (1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied), how would you rate your life satisfaction?
What has contributed most to your life satisfaction (or dissatisfaction)?
What would it take for your life to get a rating of 5?

How satisfied are you with life at school?
On a scale of 1-5, rank your level of satisfaction with your current school experience.
What would your school experience need to look like to rate a 5?

(If applicable) How satisfied are you with your current employment?
On a scale of 1-5, rank your level of satisfaction with the work that you do.
What would your employment need to look like to rate a 5?

(If applicable) How satisfied are you with your current volunteer work?
On a scale of 1-5, rank your level of satisfaction with the volunteer work that you do.
What would your volunteering need to look like to rate a 5?

PART C: HAVING LGB-IDENTIFIED PARENTS

14. Realization of Parent(s) Being Different from Peers’ Parents
Did you ever have a time in your past when you began to realize that your family situation or your parents were different from those of most of your peers?

Everyone with LGB parents has a story that’s unique, and I want to know a bit about yours. How old were you then? How did you come to that realization? How did you feel about it? How did you deal with it? What was most useful in dealing with this realization? Is there any particular person that you can remember that helped you come to terms with it?

How do you think your mom/dad (referring to the LGB parent) felt when you finally knew (question pertains only to children not born to already-out parent)?

How do you feel about it now? What do you think about it now? Do you feel like you’re still dealing with it?

How might having LGB parent(s) affect your life in the future? Do you think you might need anything as you get older that will be helpful or useful for some of the issues you might face having a gay/lesbian parent?

15. Having (an) LGB-Identified Parent(s)
What is it like having gay/lesbian/bisexual parents? Do you think that having gay/lesbian/bisexual parents changes your life in any way?

If there are difficult things about having a gay/lesbian/bisexual parent, what are the most difficult? What is the worst thing about having a gay/lesbian/bisexual parent? How do/did you deal with that? What was most helpful in dealing with ___? Who, if anybody, was most helpful in dealing with ___?

Are there any good things about having a gay/lesbian/bisexual parent? What are the best things about it? Anything else?
Do you feel like your parent(s) can “pass” as straight? To what extent do you feel that your parent(s) is regarded as straight by others? On a scale of 1-5 how straight do you think they might come across as straight (1 not at all likely to be regarded as straight by others, 5 pretty likely to be regarded as straight by others)? Is “passing” important to you? Why or why not?

What is your relationship like with your family?

Do you ever feel a sense of social isolation because of having an LGB parent? Do you ever feel that there is nobody to talk to about having an LGB parent? Why or why not? If so, would connecting with other queer spawn help to alleviate this feeling of isolation?

I’m curious to know if you think that it’s possible for an LGB parent to be a good role model for their children, many of whom are straight. For example, can a gay dad be a good role model for a straight son and/or can a trans mom be a good role model for a straight daughter? Why or why not? Do you think your definitions of “masculine” and “feminine” are different from kids that only have heterosexual parents? Why or why not?

16. Advice for Children of LGB-Identified Parents
What was the best advice you ever got from a parent that prepared you for telling others that you had a gay/lesbian/bisexual parent? Was there anything you wish a parent had told you about or wish they had advised you?

On the subject of having LGB parents, have you received good advice from anyone else? What was it? Who gave it? On the subject of having LGB parents, have you ever received bad advice or unsolicited advice from anyone else? What was it? Who gave it?

If you were able to give advice to a younger child who had LGB parents (either related to you or not), what would you tell them that you think they need to know?

This may or may not have happened to you. Some kids with LGB parents report hearing things from their peers such as, “You have two dads? How were you born then?” Have you had any experiences where you heard questions or comments along these lines? How do you explain why some kids ask things like that? What advice do you have for kids with LGB parents who might hear comments like that? What advice do you have for how schools might educate kids about the diversity of family structures?

This may or may not have happened to you. Some kids with LGB parents report being teased or bullied. One girl who had two lesbian moms was teased, even though she identified as heterosexual. She said, “I had apple cores and banana peels and even rocks thrown at me at high school. People called me a dyke, and I was pretty scared at school sometimes.” Have you experienced any teasing or bullying? How do you explain why some kids behave that way? What advice do you have for kids with LGB parents who might be the targets of teasing and/or bullying? What advice do you have for how schools might establish an environment where this type of behaviour is non-existent?
17. **Extent of “Outness” Regarding Sexual Orientation of Parent(s)**

On a scale of 1-5 (1 = very private, 5 = very open), how open or how “out” are you about the fact that you have (an) LGB parent(s)? Why would you give yourself that rating?
Who knows about your parent(s)?
Do you ever wish that you could be more open about it? Why or why not?

Can you describe any times that you’ve told someone (or that someone found out in some other way) and had a positive response? What situation, context, or circumstances led you to tell this person? *How did it make you feel?*

What is the best reaction you’ve ever had? *Why would you characterize this as “best”?*

Can you describe any times that you’ve told someone (or that someone found out in some other way) and had a negative response? What situation, context, or circumstances led you to tell this person? *How did it make you feel?* Have you ever been the victim of bullying that was related to being the child of an LGB parent?

What is the worst reaction you’ve ever had? *Why would you characterize this as “worst”?*

Are you part of any organizations for kids with LGB parents? *(if necessary, probe by giving examples such as COLAGE, LGBT Parenting Network, QWAK)* Can you identify any pros or cons that organizations like these have? What are the pros? What are the cons? *(if yes to first question)* Some queer spawn that might not have any connection with such organizations might not see any value in them; would you say anything to them that might change their minds?

Do you know any peers with LGB parents? *(If yes)* In general, how would you describe those kids? Do you feel you have anything in common with them other than that the sexual orientation of your parents? In general, do you think that they need to have anything provided for them in society or in school that is currently not being provided?

18. **Responses of Teachers and Other School Personnel**

Have any teachers or school staff responded positively, sensitively, and/or appropriately when they found out? *If you’re comfortable naming this individual, you could tell me his/her name and school. Do you think that if I were to interview ________________ (without revealing to them that I got their name from you) that I would learn anything valuable about how to treat students who have LGB parents? What do you think he/she does that all teachers should do? What else could you tell me about teachers that respond well or appropriately to you when they find out that you have (an) LGB parent(s)?*

Have any teachers or school staff responded negatively, insensitively, and/or inappropriately when they found out? *If you’re comfortable naming this individual, you could tell me his/her name and school. Do you think that if I were to interview ________________ (without revealing to them that I got their name from you) that I would learn anything valuable about how not to treat students who have LGB parents? What do you think he/she does that other teachers should learn not to do? What else could you tell me about teachers that respond poorly or inappropriately to you when they find out that you have (an) LGB parent(s)?*
19. Responses of Extended Family

Have any relatives (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) responded positively, sensitively, and/or appropriately when they found out (or if they have known your whole life, treated you positively/sensitively/appropriately throughout your life)? What do you think he/she does that all extended family members should do?

Have any relatives (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) responded negatively, insensitively, and/or inappropriately when they found out (or if they have known your whole life, treated you negatively/insensitively/inappropriately at times throughout your life)? What do you think he/she does that all extended family members should learn not to do?

What advice do you have for how the children of LGB-identified parents should respond to negative, insensitive, or inappropriate comments of extended family members?

20. Being Canadian

Take a look at a little history of Canadian laws over the past 40 years or so (see Appendix G). A lot has changed in terms of LGBT rights and freedoms. For example, the Canadian Human Rights Act now prohibits discrimination based on “race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability and conviction for which a pardon has been granted” What do you think of that law? Do you think it goes far enough?

In general, how do you think Canada is doing with regard to its treatment of LGB-led families? With regard to the children in those families? If you were part of a committee giving advice to the Canadian government on issues like this, what would you tell Canada it needs to do differently?

In general, how do you think other levels of government (Ontario government, Toronto municipal government) are doing with regard to treatment of LGB-led families? Is there anything that you would tell the provincial government or the municipal government that they could do differently?

This year, some people had strong opinions when Toronto’s mayor decided not to attend the Gay Pride parade or any of the Gay Pride events. Did you or do you have any opinions about that?

How is your school board and school administration doing with regard to treatment of LGB-led families? Is there anything that you think your school or school board needs to do differently, or to do better?

Do you find that Canada has useful programs and services for children with LGB parents? Are there programs for youth of all ages (toddlers, preschoolers, elementary, middle, high)? If any, which age group currently lacks programs and services for the children of LGB parents?
PART D: WISDOM

21. Examples and Definitions of Wisdom
I want you to think for a moment of the person you would consider to be the wisest family member (parent, sibling, cousin, aunt, uncle, grandparent, etc.) Who was this person? What makes this person so wise? Why did you choose them? What is one story you know about this person, or one thing this person said or did that shows wisdom? What was wise about that? How could this person have been less wise? What might some other person have said or done? How do you think that person got to be so wise? How has this person affected or inspired you in your own life?

Think for a moment of the wisest adult you ever encountered in a school setting. Who is this person? What makes this person so wise? Why did you choose him/her? What is one story you know about this person, or one thing this person said or did, that shows wisdom? How could this person have been less wise? What might some other person have done? How did this person get to be so wise? How has this person affected or inspired you in your own life?

Can you think of moments in your own life when you have been wise? What were these times?

What is wisdom? What does wisdom mean to you?

PART E: PROJECTIVE STIMULI

22. Storytelling
Note: In a moment, I’m going to show you a picture, the first of three pictures actually. I want you to use the picture as a starting point for a story that you invent. Be as imaginative and creative as you want, and add as much detail to the story as you want. It should be a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Try to portray who the people might be as well as what they are feeling, thinking, and wishing. Try to tell what led to the situation shown and how everything will turn out in the end. A longer story is better than a short one, so feel free to talk as much as you want. However, there’s no need to over-think it.

(Note: Use Images 1, 3, and 4 for participants whose primary caregivers are gay fathers and Images 2, 3, and 4 for participants whose primary caregivers are lesbian mothers).

Okay, here’s the first picture. Show participant Appendix F, Image 1 (or 2).
Here’s the second picture. Show participant Appendix F, Image 3.
Here’s the third picture. Show participant Appendix F, Image 4.

Prompt as necessary with comments such as:
- That was an interesting story. Could you add some details about what the people are feeling, thinking, and wishing?
- Thanks for sharing that story. The other stories could be a little bit longer so that you can add information about how everything will turn out in the end.
- What about each of the people in the picture? What is each of them thinking and feeling?
Thanks for everything you’ve said so far. I really appreciate having the chance to talk to you. We probably have about 30-45 minutes remaining. Would you like to take a break, or would you like to continue straight through?

Okay, let’s get started with the second part of the interview.

PART F: EXAMINING THE PAST AND ENVISIONING A FUTURE

23. Past Self-Definitions
You’ve been telling me about the kind of person you are now—were you the same kind of person 5 years ago? (If the same) How about 10 years ago? What were you like ten years ago?

Were you ever a different kind of person? (If YES) When was it? What were you like then? How come you are not ___ anymore? (If different) What were you like then? How did it happen that you are not ___ anymore? What were you like as a child, say at around the time you were in grade 2?

24. Awareness of Social Injustice and/or Social Inequality
Would you say that, on the whole, kids with LGB parents are more aware or less aware, than kids who don’t have LGB parents, of social injustice and/or social inequality? Have you ever been called upon (or taken it upon yourself) to defend people who needed to be defended, who were socially on the fringes, etc.? Could you describe some times in your past when you have had to take on the role of “protector” or “defender” for your parent(s), yourself, or someone else?

25. Being Politically Minded
Being “politically minded” might involve understanding the power dynamic in various situations, understanding the role of being actively involved in bringing about change in society, taking on leadership responsibilities – both formally and informally, etc. Could you describe some times in your past when have been somewhat politically minded? On the whole, would you say that kids that you know with LGB parents are any more politically minded or any less politically minded than kids who don’t have LGB parents? Why?

26. Significant Life-Experiences
Now, let’s talk about how you got to be the way you are now. You can try to imagine that somebody wants to write a nonfiction book or make a documentary movie about you and this person needs to find out what events and experiences from your past—and from your perspective—are the most important to include in this book or movie—what experiences you consider to be most important in you becoming the person you are now. These should be the events that help you understand who you are as an individual and might be memories you would tell someone if you wanted that person to understand what kind of person you are. They should be events from your past that are still very important to you and help you define who you are.

Were any of these experiences mentioned a moment ago “high points”? Were any of these “low points”? Were any of these “turning points”? When you think about your life, do you find that there were any/any events or experiences, other than the ones you have already mentioned, after which your life changed so dramatically that it felt like a different life from that point on? (If
YES) Can you tell me a little bit about this event? What happened? (Probes as above)
Out of all these experiences that you might put on this graph, which three would you consider to be the most important for becoming the kind of person you are now? (Probes) These could be three events big enough that they might be worthy of a separate chapter in a book about you. Can you tell me a little bit about [each of the three experiences]? (If not answered) What happened? How old were you then? How did you feel when this happened? How do you feel about it now? What did it mean to you? (What did you think about this event when this happened?) What does it mean to you now? What do you think about it now? Why is this event important for your life and for the kind of person you are now? How did it influence your life? If what you just told me had never happened, how would your life be different? What have you learned from this experience, if anything? Have you ever talked with other people about this event? (If YES) Who? Why? How did you feel when you talked about it? (Was talking about it a positive or a negative experience for you?) Would you say that talking to other people about ___ was in any way helpful to you? (If YES) How was it helpful? (If NOT) Why not? Did you ever want to talk to somebody about it? (If YES) Why didn’t you? So am I the first person to you ever told about this? (If YES) How does it feel talking about it?

(If not mentioned) When were you the most disappointed in your life? (Probes as above)
(If not mentioned) How about the time when you were most unhappy; what made you most unhappy? (Probes as above) (If not mentioned) What is your happiest experience?

From which of these experiences you told me so far did you learn the most?
Can you think of any (other) experience from which you learned an important life lesson? What did you learn? (Probes as above)

What people do you consider to be the most important in your life? (Probes) Why is this person important? How would your life have been different without this person? Are there any other people that were important to your becoming the kind of person you are now?

27. Future Autobiography
Till now you have been telling me about your life so far. Have you ever thought about yourself in the future? (If YES) Have you ever talked with other people about your future life? (If YES) Who? What did you talk about? (If NOT) Can you try to think about it now?

Going back to that book or movie about you, can you tell me some ways this book or movie about you might continue from this point on, and how it might end? (If obvious) That seems like a good/bad ending. Is that the best/worst ending? (If not obvious) Would you consider this a good or a bad ending? (If not mentioned) Where will you live? Who will be living with you? Who will your friends be? Will you have new or old friends? Why? What will you do together? What would you do for a living? What do you need today to help you get to the best ending for your life story?

On a scale of 1-5 (1 is low, 5 is high) how confident are you that you will gain the best possible life you have just described? On a scale of 1-5 (1 is low, 5 is high) how confident are you that you will avoid the worst possible life you have described? What allows you to have this level of confidence?
28. Perceived Control over Future
On who or on what does your future depend?
How much will it depend on you? How so? Please elaborate.
How much will it depend on other people? (Probes as above)
You’ve seen that Canadian laws have changed considerably in the past. Nobody knows exactly what kind of changes Canadian laws will have in the future. To what extent does your future depend on the government and new laws or policies that emerge?

29. Projections for the Future
What three goals do you have over the next five years? (Probes for the first 3 goals) How important is for you to ___? Do you have any ideas about how you can achieve this? What would you need to do for this to happen? What resources would you need in order to achieve this? What will be your first steps toward achieving this? When do you plan to start ___? What are some potential obstacles? How can you deal with ___?

30. Better Person, Better World
If you could make three changes in the world, what would they be?
If you could choose to be any kind of person, what kind of person would you want to be?
Can you ever really become like that? How so? Why? Can you say more?
What could never change about you? Why did you say that?

If somebody asked you how this world, the world in which you live now, could be improved for the children of LGB parents, what would you recommend?
In your opinion, what do kids of LGB parents need that other kids don’t need?

If you could design an “app” for kids with LGB parents, what kinds of features would you want the app to have? (Probe if necessary) Would it be a social tool, an informational tool, or some other type of resource? Why do you think that such an app could be beneficial?

PART G: CONCLUSION

31. Reflection
Could you please reflect on what this interview was like for you? Did any thoughts or feelings come up that surprised you or that you might be thinking about later today? How do you think this interview might have affected you?

32. Opportunity for Participant to Ask Questions
So far, I have been asking you questions, but do you have any questions for me?
Thanks so much for participating in this study and all the best. Feel free to stay in touch if any questions arise or if you have anything to add. If you decide to withdraw your responses from my study, please let me know as soon as possible.
Appendix F: Stimulus Images

Image 1:  www.psychotherapist.org/PaidForGayFamily.jpg
Image 2:  www.sh ewired.com/Images/Articles/26105/26105_TopNews_momsmain.jpg
Image 4:  http://stevewalkerartist.com/galleriesomefamilyvalues.html and lym aneyerart.com
(Used with permission of the Estate of Steve Walker)
Appendix G: Historical Timeline of Canadian LGB Rights

1969  – Homosexuality acts are decriminalized (changes to Canada’s Criminal Code)
1977  – Quebec Human Rights Code makes discrimination against LGB people illegal
1995  – Same-sex couples given legal right to adopt
1996  – Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms adds “sexual orientation”
2001  – Canada’s first same-sex marriage ceremony performed
2003  – Ontario’s Court of Appeal strikes down all barriers to same-sex marriage
2005  – Civil Marriage Act (Bill C-38) allows all Canadians right to same-sex marriage
2006  – Birth Registry Charter
2007  – Multiple Parents’ Recognition (AA v. BB and CC)
2008  – UNDHR – 50 nations including Canada sign statement to end violation of queer rights
2011  –???
Appendix H: Master Table of Family Themes

F-1  Parent comes out of the closet

Shane: I only started realizing that [my family situation] was different when [my mom] told me, which was when I was, I think, eight, or what I was nine.

Shane: I don’t remember [my mom coming out] that well. I think it was right off the bat, like, clearly, that she just told us that, ‘I have a new friend.’ Like, later on I realized what that friend was [laughs].

Christie: Well, once my parents got separated I did notice [my dad] was hanging out with a lot of guys. And so he didn’t actually tell me. I figured it out. I’m like, ‘Dad, are you gay?’ And he’s like, ‘Yes, I am, I’ve been meaning to tell you for a while.’ And I’m like, ‘Oh, okay!’ [chuckles]

Christie: Well, I just noticed he had this one guy friend that he’d bring over all the time. And that – there was this one moment where I really noticed. They were in the kitchen, and they were, like, cooking beside each other. And they were just, you know, being all cute. And I was like, hmm! So my dad went downstairs, and I’m like, ‘Dad, are you gay?’ and he’s like, ‘Yes.’ And I’m like, ‘Oh, okay. Cause I kind of noticed you and him kind of have a connection’, and I was like ‘hmm, okay.’

Christie: Well, um, my dad didn’t know he was gay when I was born. […] I’m not quite sure how that went. I think that my parents kind of talked about something like that, and he kind of figured out, yeah, that he was [slight pause] gay.

Christie: Well, I was in shock for a little bit, like, just trying to understand, and if that’s going to change anything. But after living with it for a little while, it was fine. It wasn’t any different.

Christie: I didn’t really talk to anyone. It was just my dad that I talked to, just to understand more because it was new to me, so I didn’t really know anything about that.

Christie: [After he told me], I want to say he felt lighter. Maybe easier because now that I knew, he could openly talk about it and openly be with his boyfriend.

Christie: [During the interview today] I just realized, I don’t know, how easy it was, like, to accept that my dad was gay and stuff like that.

Owen: Um, well, when I was like 8 or 9, when we would have family meetings, and like how my dad was going to move out of the house, and like, they are getting separated and stuff. And then, uh, like a couple – like, a year after that, like, mom will have, like, friends over. And like guy friends and girl friends, so then, and she told us that she was like, gay.
Owen: Since the young age, like, I’ve never, I’ve never though, I’ve always been in, to terms with [having a lesbian mom], pretty much. I’ve never really been against it or thought it was weird.

Owen: [After my mom came out], I think she felt relieved that she didn’t have to keep it all bottled up from us. And like, after those years, like, she realized that she can be who she wants to be, and I think, as a side, relief for us.

Owen: Like, if my mom had kept boxed up, and, like, stayed in the closet, like, I think she’d be [slight pause] such an unhappy person, like, these days.

Owen: When I was younger […] we [would] have like QWAK [Queer Women And Kids] camping trips. [At] first, I’m like, oh, I don’t really get being gay and stuff like that. I didn’t understand that very well ‘cause I was so young, um, but now I’m older, like, I understand that I think it’s their choice. Like, no one should really care about it, and I think it’s a good thing.

Owen: [If other kids are just finding out that they have LGB parents], like, if they don’t understand it, I would give them advice to try to talk to their parents and understand more of why their parents are like that.

Anna: [I found out] about 7 years ago. I’m trying, I think it was grade 5. When, like, everything started happening, and my parents separated. And then, she told me a while later.

Anna: [How did my mom feel after she told us?] Relieved. I would hope so. I would hope that she would feel relieved, but um, maybe, I don’t know. Like, she probably felt that we would either not understand or be confused. Or, um, yeah, but she was probably relieved when she told us because then it was just, now her kids know, and now we can work on this new life that she has.

Anna: [I didn’t get much advice about how to handle my mom coming out because] most people wouldn’t know. Like, if I asked my dad, he wouldn’t know what to say because he was just going through it as much as we were. So, [my mom] was really the only adult figure that could help me out there.

Anna: [The woman in the painting] is not even holding hands with her kids, so the family seems kind of disconnected. And, I don’t know, maybe she’ll come out […]. She is disconnected from the family, and she has doubts in her mind about her sexual orientation. So yeah, that’s like my family. So yeah [chuckles].

Julia: I think I always knew [that my mom was a lesbian]. Like, I can’t think of a time where I was like, ‘Shit!’ Like, my mom was very open, so I think I always knew I always understood. I mean, I was in daycare from a young age, too, so I wasn’t
like, like, I’ve always been around other kids, so I’ve never, like, from before, you know, my memory goes back.

Julia: Maybe if [my mom] looked a little straighter then, you know, when it came to middle school it might have had a bit of a difference [in making me less of a target for bullying]. But then, she’s not being herself, right […] Why should I tell her how to be, or why should I tell her how to look? I mean, maybe it would have helped a bit, but it wouldn’t be – it wouldn’t be, you know, the truth. And it would be – it would be stupid. You know, like, I could – if my mother started becoming ‘femmier’ that would be ridiculous. I’d laugh. Like, it’s so not who she is.

Denise: [My mom] identifies as a lesbian sometimes. Sometimes she says she’s bisexual. [I think at the time of my birth that both my mother and father identified as bisexual, but my mom was not out to her family. And I don’t think my dad is either, out to his family. But I know that he has had same-sex relationships as well […]. Like, I didn’t hear that from him. I heard that from my mom.

Nick: I was 13 when she told me, but I think she knew when I was 11 […]. I didn’t know the extent of it until I was 13. Like, before I was 13, mom would have friends that were gay that would come over all the time […]. I think it was because she wanted to talk to them about how she was feeling and what she was doing with her life and whatnot. Um, and so I just thought it was a normal thing that people have gays coming over to their house all the time […]. Like, it wasn’t like a thing where I’d go to school and say, ‘You know, Mom had a bunch of gays come over.’ It wasn’t like that. Uh, but when I turned 13, not only did Mom come out and say it – so everything made sense by that point because my mom and dad were always having, like, fights about gay and stuff.

Nick: [A counsellor at the shelter for women and children asked me], ‘How do you feel about it?’ And I’d say, ‘I’m fine with it, you know. I just want it to get better.’ […] But I had already accepted it.

Nick: [Telling us that she was a lesbian] was, like, something [my mom] was so glad to get off her chest to [my brother] and me. ‘Hey, I’m gay.’ And I was like, no big deal. Uh, I just wanted to go get breakfast. I was like, you know, ‘Okay.’

Ellie: Whenever I was seven, um, my oldest brother didn’t live with us. And I remember, like, I knew he was mad at my mom for some reason, but like no one really told me. And same with my other brother. We just didn’t really know because we were younger. And um, my mom pays hockey, and I remember, like, going to, like her hockey games and seeing her with, like, this woman. And in, like, my seven-year-old head being like, ‘Oh, my mom has a really close, like, friend’ [laughs]. And then, um, I guess, like, that’s all that I ever really thought about it. And I remember one day in, like, one of my classes in – whenever I was
seven years old, um, because it’s such a small town, everybody knows everything. And one of the boys’ moms in my class was on the same hockey team as my mom, and he asked me if my mom was a dyke. And at the time I didn’t know what it meant. And I don’t even know if he did. He probably just heard his mom say it. And I was just really confused [laughs]. I remember going home and asking my mom if she was a dyke, not really knowing what it meant, and her face was like just, ‘Oh my god’ [laughs]. She was just like, ‘Don’t say that word.’ She didn’t really answer me. She just told me not to say the word, that it was disrespectful […]. And then, whenever I was eight, my mom told me, and I remember just telling her, she told me that she is in a relationship with this woman […], and I remember being like, ‘I know. I see you guys, like, holding hands and, like, you’re always together.’

Ellie:  I didn’t care. Like, I think I was just too young, and it was my mom […]. I loved my mom, and I didn’t care […]. Like, my brothers weren’t okay with it. And so I was always around, like, my brothers being so upset about it […]. I was eight, so my one brother would have been ten. The other one would have been fourteen. And, um, the 14-year-old brother, he got bullied constantly at the time.

F-2  

Shane:  [My sister] moved out, but that wasn’t because my mom was gay. That was because of the partner, I think.

Christie:  [On the subject of her mother, who handled the divorce well, Christie states her mother’s viewpoint to] just treat people better, and better things will come to you. […] Um, my mom she’s very smart. And she looks on life with, like, you give what you get. And if you’re good to people, good things will happen to you. So she tries to be as nice as possible and very positive so that good things happen to her. [My mom taught me] just to make sure that if I’m always being positive and good and do good things that better things will happen to me.

Owen:  Generally we switch back every week. So Mondays we switch to our Dad, like, every Monday we switch.

Owen:  I would think we have a pretty good relationship because of communication we work on. And we all get along at certain times, but then we are like any other family who will have their fights.

Owen:  Since my mom married [her lesbian partner], she’s […] been thinking that, like, you can’t live without great communication. So the better communication you have, the better it is.

Owen:  My dad and I, like, we don’t really have good communication, like, compared to my mom. [For example], like him and his girlfriend broke up a while ago, and I didn’t really find out. I just had to figure it out, so I don’t know, like, I wish I could get communication better on that.
Owen: [In response to the museum stimulus, Appendix F, Image 4] Okay, so there’s this family of three – a mom and dad, and the mom and dad had a son who was the age of seven. Um, and they’ve been living in a house, a nice house with, like, Dad being a doctor, and all happy life. And so one day they went – it was summer vacation – dad and mom took a day off to go go to an art museum, just for their son to look at pictures, and yeah, so when they went there was pictures all over of fantastic artworks, but then they came to this one piece where it was two men, and the other man was touching the man. And the dad – they looked it, the dad and the soon looked at it, and they were thinking, like, why is it like that? Why is that right, like, and then I think, and then after that they left and the dad realized that he was gay. So he went out and just looked upon how he had been expressing himself to his son, and show his wife that he still loves her. But he is, uh, yeah, um, yeah [laughs]. Um, but he, no, he doesn’t still love her then. But he’s just changed his look on life, so he went out, and they had to divorce. They had to divorce, and now the son has mom and two dads [laughs].

Anna: I have friends who have parents who split up, and they don’t talk to each other…. When my parents split up, it was never a big thing, ever. It was never, like, this is really sad because my parents are not going to be together anymore. Because for me, it felt kind of natural. I don’t know why. And, like, my parents, like, my dad was the best man at my mom’s wedding. And so, like, I tell people that. And they think that’s awesome. […] But that was like a turning point when my parents split up and my mom told me she was gay because it just kind of didn’t change everything for the worst.

Julia: [My family now consists of] my mom, and um, my mom’s partner and her two kids […]. We’re blended. It wasn’t always that. So my two brothers and my other mom. [My mom] had me as a lesbian single woman.

Julia: I don’t think [that my step-brothers’ mom coming out] was much of a big deal for them. I think it was definitely an adjustment. You know, [my step-mom and her ex-husband] got divorced for different reasons, varying reasons, her own reasons. And then she started, you know, dating women from thereafter. So I know before she got with my mom, [my step-brothers] had been exposed to other relationships with women that she’d had […] So they’re kind of, very much like, I know that they were like, ‘As long as you’re happy, we don’t care.’ But maybe [programs for youth with LGB parents could provide] more, kind of like, support in, like, blended types of families.

Julia: My mom’s partner’s awesome. I love her to death. She’s – she’s – it’s amazing to have her […]. [She] is an awesome, awesome support. And she hasn’t brought anything but good to my life.

Denise: The members of my family are my sister, my brother – my sister and my brother are both older than me, uh, 22 and 21. Um, my brother is the oldest 22. And my
mom, who is my biological mom who has her partner, [first name], who I call [by her first name]. That’s my residential family, and I also see my father probably once every couple months. He also lives in the city. So that’s my family. But I – I would describe my actual family as my residential family. Like, that’s who I am with every day and actually do family stuff with. We go out to dinner. We do, like, stuff around the house together. So I would say that would be my family. I don’t know if I would count [my father] as a parent. Even though that’s a bit of a cruel thing to say. But he’s not, um, quite so present. And especially for me because I am the youngest of the three siblings. I definitely was the least, sort of, involved in his parenting when I was a child. So I would probably say my parents are my mom and [her lesbian partner]. And he is a – he’s not a parent because he doesn’t actually do any parenting. But he is a father in that, yeah, he is my dad, and I do see him every now and then, and I visit my relatives on his side of the family. But in actually being an active parent and actually being supportive and all that, I would say definitely not.

Denise: The biggest issue that I have with my parents, I would say, is that my mom didn’t ask me my opinion of [my step-mom] when they first started their relationship. So when [she] was moving in, or any of that. So in that regard, it felt like I didn’t have a say in who was in my family as much as my mom did. And, of course, I’m not supposed to have a say who’s in my family. But at the same time, it felt unfair because this is someone that you’re bringing – this is someone you’re bringing into the family. And the other thing is that [my step-mom] was trying to have kids when they met. So, she doesn’t have any kids, biological children. So my mom sort of, maybe, me being the youngest, I was sort of like, okay, well, she can be your kid, too. You’re just handing me over here […] I know that I have a bad relationship with [my step-mom]. Definitely is the worst relationship I have in the family. Um, and my relationship with my mom has suffered greatly because of my relationship with [my step-mom]. Especially in the past few years.

Denise: [My step-mom] doesn’t parent like a mother. She parents like someone who is taking care of kids as their job. So, it’s – there’s a set of rules, and there’s not sort of understanding as much as there is a hierarchy. Whereas I feel, like, with my mom, we’re on – we’re more of an understanding on the same level. [Do I feel that it’s an LGBTQ issue or a stepparent issue?] I feel like it’s a stepparent issue actually. Because I think that the issue that I have with [my mom’s partner]. It’s not that I have an issue with her because this is another woman in the house. That’s not the issue. The issue is that I was never a part of the discussion about who this new person in the family is. And she feels, um, sort of, an obligation almost or a right to parent me. And yes, she does have some right to parent me because she’s been here with me for 11 years, but the point is that – she – I – she sees me more as her child than I see her as a parent. I see her as a parent in okay, she’s providing my home, she’s providing my food, but she’s not providing support for me in the way that I need it from a parent that I get from my mom. And she’s not providing a family structure that I get from my siblings as much as I want her to. And so I have a hard time seeing her as a parent, but she has no
trouble sort of disciplining me as a child. Like setting boundaries. And I often also find that she will try to out – to “out-parent” my mom almost. Like, my mom will say, ‘Okay, this is what’s happening, and this is the boundary here.’ And [my step-mom] will say, ‘No, no, like, it’s here.’ And so when my mom is trying to have a discussion with me then [my step-mom] will often come in and sort of say something different, and that, I feel, causes the majority of the fights between my parents – well, my mom and [my step-mom].

Denise: My brother, he has a bit more trouble, um, because yes he does – he does have my dad, and he does have, like, my dad’s not a great role model. Um, so it’s a little bit harder for him […]. He’s growing up in a house with four women, and he doesn’t really have a male role model. And all of the male role models in our family are not ideal. Like, less than ideal […]. He looks to his friends for guidance, but then I think he also sometimes wants to have an adult who he can go to.

Denise: [When my brother was fifteen he told my mom] I need to go, or [my step-mom] needs to go. Like, something has to shift here. I can’t live in this house. And my mom – he ended up moving in with my dad, which was not very good for him. And then, moving into a group home. And then moving back home after about five years. A bit of a tumultuous time for him. But I know that my mom feels really guilty because she feels like she picked [her partner] over him, and in a way she did.

Denise: [When I was thirteen, my dad] called me on my birthday. [His call was three days late], and he rattled off this big speech about, oh, he was very, very sorry that he had, uh, missed my birthday. And, but he said the wrong age. Like, he didn’t say thirteen. He said something else like sixteen or something. And he didn’t say the right day, and I was like. I remember just feeling like it was so pathetic. Like, I was just so disappointed in him, but at the same time I was also feeling, like, just badly about myself […] even though I myself hadn’t done anything wrong […]. I remember feeling like this person who is supposed to be, you know, high up for me, like, on some good role model is, like, so pathetic. And I feel so shitty about it.

Nick: I like to consider [my mom’s lesbian partner] as my parent. Because she does the same things that my mom would do for me.

Nick: I think that I’m really blessed for what I do have. My family, even though it’s a very diverse family, everyone in my family’s there for me, and everyone loves me.

Nick: When I was thirteen, we left my dad, and we went to a, uh, like a women-and-children-type house. What am I thinking of here? [Interviewer: A shelter?] Yeah. We just thought it was normal. Like this is what every dad was like. But
then when we got there, and we talked to the counsellors, we noticed that we were – it was *not* normal, and we were in, you know [...] a pretty big pickle.

Nick: [When my mom and dad separated] I know it sounds horrible, but I was really happy [chuckles]. I was glad, uh, because everything, like, it was tough at the time. Like, I wasn’t glad *at the moment*, like, when we left. But then the following time after it, I was glad because it was *way* better. Everyone was happy, and there was no more fighting and stuff like that [...]. And we were in the shelter doing counselling, talking to these women – they were all women in there, so we were talking to all these women counsellors and stuff. They would take us out and go skating and take us out to Tim Hortons and all this kind of stuff.

Nick: My relationship with my dad is [exhales] pretty rocky. I mean, he was a very abusive parent, and he was very abusive towards me. Uh, my brother was very scared of him when he was younger. So my dad could just yell at him and he’d get upset. Whereas me, I didn’t like to put up with his crap. Like, I was a very strong person. I’m strong like my mom, and I was also strong like my dad in a way, so I didn’t like to put up with his crap, so [sigh] I would tell him off, and that’s why, um, he was a little more abusive towards me [...]. So I forgave my dad. But what I don’t forgive him for is, um, moving away from here. Like, moving away from [our town], going to [a bigger city], starting a life with a new woman, and then trying to bring us into it. Like, he doesn’t support us here. This is our home. Like this is where we’re from [...]. So he’s trying to pull us away and trying to make this perfect family. But he’s not. So I don’t forgive my dad, that’s where it’s kind of rocky [...]. My dad will not support me unless I go live with him and his perfect family. So my dad does the basics, pays my mom the minimum money that he needs to, which is so selfish and rude.

Nick: Like, even a divorce is hard enough as it [...]. It’s like, not only did your parents split, but your parents or your one parent is also an LGBT or same-sex.

Nick: [My mom’s lesbian partner] and I friggin’ click like crazy [...]. We have fun. She friggin’ makes me laugh all the time, which is nice, and I try to make her laugh.

Nick: My dad says negative and stupid things [about my mom being a lesbian], but that’s just the way he is [...]. That’s just the way he grew up, so I don’t really judge him. I am more mature than my dad, so sometimes he’ll say stupid things about my mom, and I’ll just say, ‘How old *are* you?’ [Sometimes when my dad is negative towards my mom] I’m like, I’m done. Stop talking about it. Or grow up. Or keep it up, and I’m out of here.’ Whether it’s I’m walking home, or I’m taking a taxi from [my dad’s city] back to [my hometown], I don’t care.

Nick: Even before I was 13, I was happy. Like, I was happy in my family, but you could tell my family was dysfunctional. You could tell my family always had
arguments. My dad was aggressive towards me. He’d like to show his dominance over everyone in the family. Whereas with my brother, he could just yell at my brother and my brother would be afraid of him, he couldn’t yell at me. That wouldn’t really intimidate me, I guess you could say. Um, it got to the point where it was like really, really bad. It was affecting – it kind of affected who I was at school, like I became kind of like this more shy type of person. I didn’t like to talk about my life, or do family projects, or speak about my family in general because I was kind of ashamed about the way that it was. I remember a few times when I was getting ready to go to school, and my dad and I had kind of like an altercation, especially the day before my mom, brother and I left the family – or left my house and went to the shelter. Um, my dad was flipping out.

My dad would always flip out if we weren’t making my mom happy because he thought that if my mom wasn’t happy, she was going to leave. He’s aggressive in general, but he also thought that if my mom’s not happy, then she’ll leave him, and she’ll take us with her. So my dad was, like, very you know, if we woke up in the morning and we were loud, he’d start yelling at us. And he’d come downstairs or grab our arms or shake us and stuff like that and say, ‘Keep it down, your mother’s trying to sleep in’ […]. So he was very aggressive, and the one – the day before we left, my dad flipped out at me, and we had an argument, and I said that I wasn’t going to come home that night. Um, so I went to slam the door, and my dog was coming out the door and I hit the dog, I slammed the door on the dog so my dog made a noise. So my dad came outside and it was February, so he grabbed me by my winter jacket and held me over top of the deck, just to show how strong he was. And I was like 150 pounds, and he was like holding me over a snow bank, like, off the deck, yelling at me. So I flipped out, and I walked back inside and told my mom, ‘If we don’t leave tonight, then I am.’ And I got on the bus, and at that point everyone could notice – everyone knew what had happened. I was like crying my eyes out. I was upset. I wouldn’t talk to anyone. My teacher was trying to get me to talk to people all day, so. Um, so I was very negative and very shy, and I didn’t want to talk to anyone at that point. And then when my parents, at that point too, I don’t like to say that I had [pause] I don’t like to say that I had suicidal thoughts, but I just didn’t want to be in that situation. And I was thinking of anything possible to get me out of that situation.

Ellie: For me, like, in my head I have, like, two separate families. Um, the one, like, I identify as my closest family would be my mom, um, her partner [first-name], who I’d call my step-mom, and, um, my two brothers and myself. And then, um, the other family. Like, I don’t really see my dad as much.

Ellie: I love [my mom’s] partner. She’s a great parent to me. Like, I couldn’t be happier [chuckles].

Ellie: My dad is to this day still awful. Which is why I don’t really talk to him now. Like, he always, like, he’s so homophobic, and it’s like he’ll constantly make comments about my mom being gay […]. It’s gotten to the point where it’s pointless [to confront him]. Like, he’s not going to stop.
Ellie: [What advice do I have for someone hearing negative things about their LGB parent from the other parent?] It’s a really hard situation ‘cause it’s your other parent. ‘Cause you want to love and respect them […] The advice that I would give would just be to not take it personally. Maybe not even, like, take it to the gay parent personally. Like, that other person saying it is probably just bitter.

Victoria: I call [my step-mom by her first name]. I don’t call her mom. But, um, like, she’s definitely a parental figure in my mind […]. We do have a different relationship. Because it’s different when you grew up with people, like, your parents since birth […]. I have my two moms who I’ve had since birth.

Victoria: Before [my moms broke up], we were just a happy, normal family. Like, I didn’t really think of us as that different. Um, when my parents broke up that’s when I was like, ‘Oh, my god. I’m going to have, like, four moms. That’s crazy.’

Victoria: [In the future I hope to be] married, but you know, that’d be nice. Um, my parents would definitely, like, shame me for saying that. ‘Happily married’ is definitely not a concept in my family [laughs]. They’re just so against the institution of marriage, of course. Which is why I love it [laughs]!

F-3 Extended family responses
Shane: I think [my uncle] is a homophobe or something [chuckles] […]. He thinks that, in the Bible it says that gays aren’t respected, like, they shouldn’t, uh, it says that God hates gays, so they just [exhales] yeah, they don’t think that my mom should be lesbian.

Shane: [Interviewer: Do you ever have a discussion with your extended family about their views?] Uh, no. It’s kind of my parents’ jobs.

Christie: I think my dad let [my extended family members] know. Whether it was all at the same time or just, like, individually. They, they kind of figured it out, or I don’t know how they found that out, but I’m pretty sure they all know, and they’re fine with it now. [If there were negative reactions] I never saw any. I never heard any. That was, that was for my dad.

Christie: I think [extended family members] should always be accepting of whoever is coming out […]. They should just try and understand them, if anything. They shouldn’t be, ‘Oh, that’s bad,’ or stuff like that. They should just accept them for who they are […]. It’s not a bad thing. I mean, they’re just like you. They just have a different view on people and what they like better. It’s nothing that different. It’s just what they like. They’re the same person. It’s just they like someone different.

Owen: [My uncle] is just past the point of accepting it, but like, my cousin died recently. And after that point, like his – his son, his son had committed suicide so after that
point, it brought our family close to the other. And for a moment, like, he
accepted it ‘cause he needed the love, and, but, uh, now he doesn’t accept it again
[...]. I don’t think I am going to change his opinion on it [...]. I think we’re at
that point where no one else is going to follow into that.

Owen: I’m unhappy seeing, like, my parents upset or stressed out having to have them,
how all that weight of like stress and, like, disapproval from their family against
them [...]. My grandparents didn’t accept my mom’s wife when, like, it first
happened [...]. Now her parents accepted. They feel alright now. Which is nice
to not see my mom like that anymore.

Anna: I’ve had a conversation with my cousins who are on the religious side of my
family, and they were all just saying, ‘Yeah, they choose to be that way,’ and that
was negative for me because I don’t think gay people choose to be gay. But that
was negative because I just thought they were being very ignorant. They believe
it because of the Bible, but I don’t think that’s a good enough reason. I just, in
my argument for when people say that they choose to be that way I say, well do
you choose to be straight? Did you – were you born, and then you chose to be in
love with someone of the opposite sex? Cause that’s not how it works.

Anna: At first, I think [my extended family] were all pretty, not mad at my mom but
upset, confused. But her sister came to [my mom’s lesbian] wedding. And I
think that was, like, a really good thing because she was showing support for my
mom no matter who she was marrying. So, that was a very, I thought that was
really good when she showed up. And now my whole family kind of has
accepted my mom and who she is except for my uncle [...]. I just think that he
doesn’t understand it. And so that’s why he, I mean, he doesn’t come to family
events my mom goes to, and that’s all of them. So, he doesn’t like being around
my mom or her wife. So, that’s – I don’t like him very much [exhales]. And
understandably [...]. My mom has had many conversations with her sister – his
wife – and him. And he said that he’ll never get over it.

Anna: A disappointment would be my family turning on my mom for a little bit [...].
That’s a huge disappointment because I thought family was family. Apparently
it’s not.

Denise: My mom’s uncle, who lives in Vancouver, has been very positive in his response,
um, to my mom coming out. So he was very accepting. Very sort of warm and
this is her sort of favourite uncle from her childhood, so it was very good for her
to have that.

Denise: The majority of my relatives did not respond so well [...]. My grandmother is
very religious, so she had a pretty big – my grandfather is a little, he’s a little,
like, not insensitive but he just is sort of, um, if it’s not affecting him he’s okay.
So, he was – he was definitely not quite as hard to um, adjust, sort of. He sort of
was like, okay, you know. That’s fine. It’s totally fine. It was kind of, like, he
kind of saw it as, I already have the grandkids so it’s fine. Cause I know a lot of parents that are, I know [my step-mom’s] dad was most, his – his reaction to her coming out was something about kids. Cause his other daughter doesn’t have kids either. But then, you know, it was like oh well three new kids so it’s fine [chuckles].

Denise: [My mom’s] sister’s husband was – is – well, was very homophobic, and until recently there has been a huge sort of, they just stopped having any contact with each other. We used to live down the street from them, and then they kind of moved away after [my mom’s partner] moved in with us. Or we moved in with her, actually, so it’s all very, that was very hard for my mom. And I know that recently that has been going away. My grandparents are kind of having a harder time when they moved away, so in a way it has to be better, because we’re all going to be forced together. And also her husband, my uncle, had a heart attack [chuckles] recently, and it’s made him extremely warm [laughs]. He is, like, all of a sudden has seen the light, and he’s being very nice! Like, he’s had a realization here!

Denise: It’s hard to say don’t let it get to you, because it’s your family, and it’s the support system that’s supposed to be very accepting. So it’s very hard to say, oh, just don’t let it get to you because it does […] I would say to talk about it with not only those members of your extended family but your immediate family, because they’re probably feeling similar about whatever the reaction was. So it’s good to talk it out. And try to stay connected to those members of the extended family as well.

Nick: [My aunt] was just open to it from day one. She knew that I was okay with the situation, but she was like, ‘Nicky, you know, she’s your mom. She still is your mom. She will always be your mom. She’s always going to love you.’ So she pointed out that no matter what sexual orientation my mom was or who she was with, my mom was always going to love me.

Nick: [Interviewer: Did you have any relatives that responded negatively or insensitively when your mom came out of the closet?] Yup! [makes a popping sound with the letter P]. My dad’s whole side of the family. My mom’s mom was, like, not completely against it […] She had two brothers that were gay and a sister that’s gay as well. So there was actually three. So there was a family of nine, and three of them were gay. Um, so my grandmother was accepting. She was like, ‘I know what situation you’re in. Get out if you need.’ [In contrast], she would say, ‘If you’re having a wedding, I’m not going to it.’

Nick: I remember the one time [my grandma] said something – I can’t remember what she said to my mom, but I could clearly see that my mom was really, really upset because my mom’s always turned to my oma when she needs help. Um, and then she said something like that, so as soon as she got off the phone, I picked up the phone right away, and I called my grandma and said, ‘What did you say to
Mom?’ And she was on the other end, and she was upset too. And I’m like, ‘What did you say to Mom?’ And then she was like, ‘Nick, what are you talking about?’, And I’m like, ‘What did you say to Mom? Because she’s in her room right now, she locked the door, and she’s crying.’ You know? And she was like, ‘Well, you know, what your mother and I are going through right now is between her and I.’ And I’m like, ‘Well, clearly it’s not because it’s affecting, you know, she’s in her room right now crying.’ […] I’ve defended her from, like birth pretty much [chuckles]. So I said, ‘Well you know, that’s not right. She’s your daughter. She loves you, and she always will. And what you said to her is wrong. Do you think that I would say something like that to my child? Or do you think I would say something like that to my mom? No, absolutely not.’ And I said, ‘She’s still your daughter. Um, why would you do something like that?’ So, I think then my grandmother cried, and she was very upset at what she had did, and then she asked me to put Mom on the phone. She apologized to my mom, and then she thanked me because I had, like, kind of helped her through that.

Nick: It’s better now [between my mom and my grandma]. Like, she accepts, like, she’s always accepted my mom, but it’s better now that she understands, you know, my mom, and she understands that my mom is happy now. And that’s ultimately what you want for your kid.

Ellie: My mom’s parents, like, they were mad with her [when she first came out]. They weren’t mad, they were upset about it at first. But, like, literally probably within a week they were over it. Um, and I think my mom’s sister was positive about it.

Victoria: I know that [Mom A’s] family was very supportive. They were very progressive. Um, [Mom B’s] family, like, not so much. It took them a really long time to adjust. Now they, like, love my mom, my other mom, and they love her new partner. Like, [Mom A] is still a part of their family even though they’re not even together anymore.

Victoria: My mom’s family didn’t accept her for a really long time. Like, but she was so determined to be out and be proud of who she was. And it clearly paid off because her mom adores her, and she’s been accepted by her whole family. So that says to me a lot about how I want to live my own life.

Victoria: I haven’t come out to a lot of my family yet, just because I feel like they won’t understand, or they might just kind of go back. Like, like, my parents’ coming out might [sighs] lose all of the amazing ground it has made in terms of them being really accepting if they realize that I’m gay. They might be like, ‘Oh my god, they did turn her gay!’ [chuckles]

F-4 Advantages of having LGB-identified parents
Christie: We connect a lot better than I guess another dad would, ‘cause I mean, other dads are always so [chuckles] – my dad’s kind of emotional, right [laughs] as a – as a
gay dad, so he has that emotional side to him. So we can talk about shopping and boys and stuff like that [chuckles].

Owen: I don’t think it’s a big deal for, to have parents, like, like, gay parents. I think it’s kind of interesting ‘cause, you know, everyone else has a normal family where it’s mom and dad, but then when you have dad, mom, and step-mom, it’s like – no one’s used to that, right?

Anna: [My mom] is very much a role model for me because she’s very strong and, like, I’ve seen her go through her family getting very upset with her because they’re so religious […]. I’ve just seen her go through it, and so I view her as a very strong person. And in that, I view her as my role model because I strive to be strong just like her.

Anna: I wouldn’t be such a strong supporter of gay people if my mom wasn’t gay, I don’t think.

Julia: It definitely has affected my life as in I’m very open. I’m a lot more open to exploration of the, you know, sexuality. I think that I have a lot more of an open mind on social justice issues.

Julia: I think when you are a minority of some type you’re very much more focused on that. So I think growing up in an atmosphere where there’s, like, you have to fight for your rights. You, you notice more, and you get more involved, and you become more of an open person towards human rights issues and social justice issues. As opposed to someone who didn’t grow up with any problems, any types of things they had to fight for. [It was different for me than for] someone whose parents have it easy, or like they, you know, like, your white picket fence family who are the top of the, um, the top of the ladder as in, you know, um, like ability, race, socioeconomic, all that, right? Like, they’re at the top.

Denise: The population of queer spawn as a whole are more socially aware. Which is not to say there are some queer spawn who are not socially aware. And of course, there are lots of kids who are not from queer families who are very socially aware as well. So it’s a give-and-take, but I think as a – as a per capita sort of measure – I would say that [youth with queer parents] are probably more socially [aware]. We’re, just, because of the close involvement.

Denise: I feel like it’s made me a lot more open-minded. And I feel like, I also feel more comfortable to approach my parents than some of my friends do about sexual orientation issues, LGBTQ issues, that my friends wouldn’t want to talk to their parents about.

Nick: I’ve got my mom, and I’ve got her partner, and then my dad’s got a partner. So, in that sense, I’ve pretty much had, like, three motherly figures in my life. So, I guess you could say that it lets you understand women better and the stuff that
they go through […]. It’s also really cool to have a mom who, when you’re out walking, can say to you, ‘Wow, look at how hot she is!’ So it’s kind of funny. Like, all the other – like my best friend loves my mom because she’ll say, ‘Did you see her?’ So it’s really fun to have a mom to hang out with and high five, and she can point out hot girls to you. It’s kind of funny.

Nick: I guess you clearly get a better understanding of women in general […]. It’s funny to have my mom teach you how to be the polite one. Like, ‘When you’re walking with a girl, you go on the outside of the street.’ You know what I mean? ‘Give her your jacket when she’s cold.’ That kind of stuff. So, like, Mom taught me the little polite things that girls like to see […]. Even though she is feminine, she also has a masculine side to her, too.

Nick: I really understand the inequalities because, like, you see once your one parent becomes an LGBT or same-sex, then you really notice how they’re, how they’re treated, you know what I mean? How they’re treated in general.

Ellie: Men have always tended to be really creepy towards me, so like for me – and I had a friend who had a really creepy step-dad – so for me, it’s like a plus. Like, ‘Yay! I don’t have to ever deal with a creepy step-dad!’ Which is what I’ve seen with some of my friends. And some, like, from my experiences with older men […]. Now when I come home, now that I’m older, it’s like a big slumber party [laughs]. It’s a safe environment for young women. As bad as, like, that sounds. But it makes it, like, I’m not saying men can’t provide a safe environment, but it’s – it’s nice. And like other girls really, like, respect that.

Ellie: For me, my mom always was a really good role model because, like, she – not even because she was a lesbian but because she’s such a feminist […]. She’s a really strong person. Like, she outing herself in front of, like, a really small town that’s really gossipy and, um, told her parents who were really old-fashioned. Like, I think it’s just – it’s just a good example because she was so strong.

Victoria: There’s things about being gay that don’t even add up, they surpass, you know, because they have to be radical and amazing and so strong, that I think it’s like, they’ve definitely passed that on to me.

Victoria: Oh, my gosh, so many good things! I think, just like [sighs], like, I can’t speak – I always have to acknowledge that I’m speaking about my parents and not all gay and lesbian parents […]. It’s been great growing up in my lesbian family! Um, but, for my parents I’ve taken a lot of courage and strength because they’ve had to come out, you know? […] I know my family has been really awesome.

Victoria: I would like to say that [having lesbian moms] has made me more open-minded to other, like, differences, oppressed or marginalized voices. And it made me very political. I don’t know if that’s because my parents are political or because they’re queer, or a mix of both. Um, and it also made me more open-minded to
my own sexuality and to other people’s sexuality […]. I’m not saying that my parents made me gay, but I think they, like, it might have taken me a lot longer to realize that I wasn’t just typically straight.

Victoria: I love talking to [groups of LGB-identified adults who are considering becoming parents], because I always get this fear, this, ‘Oh gosh, am I fucking up my child?’ And I’m always, like, ‘Do you know the amazing things I’ve gotten from having a queer family? Like, if anything, you’re giving them a gift, you know?’
### Appendix I: Master Table of School Themes

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<th>S-1</th>
<th><strong>Disclosure decisions, practices, and repercussions</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shane:</td>
<td>When I was younger, I didn’t care that much [about my friends knowing I had a lesbian mom]. Now, I don’t mind, but it’s kind of just weird, because they might care.</td>
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<td>Shane:</td>
<td>[When some people first find out they ask], ‘How were you born?’ [laughs] It’s not that hard to think of that. I think they’re confused, like, how they would deal with it maybe. How they could believe, just, thinking of stupid questions [chuckles].</td>
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<td>Shane:</td>
<td>[Interviewer: Do you ever worry about being bullied at school when you tell people you have a lesbian mom?] Well, I think that I’m liked in my school. Like they don’t – and I can just punch them, so [chuckles]. There’s no one really bigger than me at my school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shane:</td>
<td>[In response to the museum stimulus image, Appendix F, Image 4] They turn their backs away from other people as in, um, like, they don’t want to be seen as someone, people who are gay.</td>
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| Christie: | I want to make sure if I do tell any of my friends that they’re my best friends. All my best friends understand. It’s just, I wouldn’t openly say it to a group of people, ‘cause I don’t want my dad to be judged. Not just me but, like, my dad. I just want to protect him […]. I’d definitely say just tell your close friends ‘cause they’ll understand you, and they’re more likely to understand your dad as well. Because if you just open it up to the whole class then everyone will be having these little discussions, ‘Oh, her dad is gay.’ Stuff like that. But I just felt that my best friends should know, ‘cause they come over. I mean they can understand that. But I don’t know if I had told – like, if the whole school knew, then I don’t know how they’d feel about that. And I don’t know. I want to, as I said before, just kind of, like, protect my dad. And have him not judged and stuff like that […]. My dad was completely fine with it. I, I think. He’s like, yeah, because he’s comfortable with himself at that point ‘cause he knew who he was. And so he’s, like, if you want to tell your friends that’s fine. But if you don’t want to, you don’t have to. It’s up to you. |

| Christie: | I think [youth with LGB parents] should accept the fact that their parents or parent are like that, and that it’s a fine thing. It’s nothing too extreme. I mean, people should just accept it, and if they don’t want to get teased or anything, just tell your close friends and have that little, like, circle of people that you can trust with that information […]. If people don’t understand that, that’s their problem. They don’t need to get it, ‘cause that’s for you, and that’s for your parents. |

| Christie: | I’m comfortable with it, yeah. If any of my friends would ask about it, I would tell them […]. It’s nothing that I would lie or hide about. |
Christie: [I had a positive response from my friend] because her uncles are gay. Or one of them. I don’t know. And she’s, like, that’s fine. I’m totally cool. She actually thought that was really cool, and she like wanted to hang out with my dad.

Christie: [I told my friend] because we’re just really close friends. So I’m, like, well she should know. ‘Cause if she comes over, she’s met my dad before. I mean, it’s just easier if she knew, right? So there’s no ‘hmm, is he?’ When they’re guessing, they’re kind of unsure. So, if I just tell her, it’s much easier that way.

Christie: There was this one person I did tell. He was my boyfriend for a bit, and I told him that my dad was gay, and he didn’t believe me. But then I explained it to him that, ‘Yeah, my dad is gay, and he does have a boyfriend.’ And when he came over, he did believe me. Like, seeing it for himself […]. [I told him because] I just felt that he should know. We were dating, right, so he should know that my parent – my dad – is gay.

Christie: I’m not going to come out and tell the teacher if it’s unnecessary.

Owen: Don’t try to cover it up. Just, like, tell the truth ‘cause if you try to hide something, in my opinion it won’t feel nearly as good as if you go and tell the truth to someone. And trying to explain why it is not, like, if the person things it’s bad – why it’s not bad.

Owen: [Interviewer: How open are you about it?] I’m alright with who I am [pause] now. Yeah, pretty open.

Owen: If anybody [like my girlfriend] asks me a question about what it’s like [having a lesbian-identified mom, I explain that] it’s different, it’s kind of interesting.

Owen: Well I’ve never had a negative response. Like someone being like, ‘What the heck? That’s weird,’ or something like that […]. I don’t think it makes a difference to them, like I don’t, I don’t, like, I wouldn’t, like I said, I wouldn’t have friends that wouldn’t accept gay people.

Owen: If you can’t tell your friends straight up that you have gay parents ‘cause you think that they’re going to judge you, then you should realize that they’re not actually your friends […]. If I think that my friends, they don’t accept my family and who my parents are, then I realize that they are not actual friends.

Anna: Um, I never had a problem with it. The only time I had a problem with it was when I would have to tell friends. And I remember that, that was really hard for me ‘cause at the time, um, I was kind of embarrassed of it in front of my friends. But then, like, that was only because I didn’t want them to judge me, not because of my mom […]. But now, it doesn’t matter anymore. Like, I tell whoever, and I don’t care.
Anna: [I have never been bullied, but for people who are I would say that] I would just surround myself with people who understand my situation better […]. Be confident and don’t be embarrassed because it’s something that is just part of your life.

Anna: From my experience, I see that people who tease others about being gay are very uncomfortable with it. And they don’t know how to handle finding out that – I mean, when, like if I had two gay dads, I’d just – and guys are very [exhales with an “ugh” sound] – like boys are more homophobic than girls are. So I think that guys don’t understand it at all or they’re confused about it or they’re just scared because they don’t want. I mean from [sighs with an “ugh” sound] from my experience, when I have talked to guys who are homophobic, they say that they don’t want a gay person touching them because they don’t want, like, a guy to fall in love with them. And that is something that really bothers me, and I just think that they’re uncomfortable with their own sexuality, and that’s why they get a bit scared. So I think that bullies who call people a dyke or a fag are very uncomfortable in their own situation, but that’s just my own theory [chuckles].

Anna: [I’m the type of person who doesn’t mind being loud in public even though I sometimes embarrass my friends]. I think that, like, when you care about what would people think about you, it’s hard to come out of your shell […]. If they’re judging me, then it doesn’t matter.

Julia: Julia now would say, ‘I have a queer family. I have two moms, and suck on that’ [laughs]. Elementary school Julia, when I was very young, I’d be like, ‘I have a mom only.’ And then I started to get bullied so I would – I would, when people would ask if my mom was gay, I’d say no. If they’d ask where my father was I’d make up stories. ‘Oh, he died,’ or ‘I don’t know,’ or whatever. And then when my mom and her partner got together, instead of Patricia she was Patrick. You know, so like, Patrick, you know, so like very much covering up what my family was, hiding it. And I think that that went pretty much all through to grade nine. A lot of denial and covering up and feeling, like, very ashamed and having to almost come out for my mother to people. Being like, ‘I have to tell you something. Will you still be my friend?’ […] As I got older, and I started making different friends who just didn’t care, especially when I also came out and having other queer – you know – other queer support systems in my life […] It was cool. It was, ‘Oh, I wish I had your family!’

Julia: [One of my friends who also had two lesbian moms] and I grew up together, went to the same school. She had totally opposite – she did not have any bullying.

Julia: I had a friend who was like, ‘Just lie.’ And I did that. And that was bad advice […]. I shouldn’t have to lie.
Denise: I’m kind of more quick to take the risk and say what I’m thinking rather than be concerned [about what others will think of me] […]. I’m kind of more concerned about being surrounded by people that actually can – cannot – can take it but, like, are sort of accepting of what I believe, what I believe.

Denise: As a ‘queer spawn’, as we call it, um, I know that there’s always a time that I have to come out to my friends. I have to out my parents to my friends, or now, new people that I meet. And I know that when I started – the, like grade one, maybe grade two – people’s reactions began to change […]. I remember being, like, uneasy to tell people. Because I knew that they would react in a different way than if someone else had said, ‘I have a mom and a dad’ […]. Now it’s a lot easier to out my parents.

Denise: It’s hard to know how [new people] are going to react. I, personally, have never had a friend disappear on me after I’ve outed my parents. But I know that that happened to my sister, and so I’m a little nervous about it. [My sister’s friend] knew that she had two moms [but when the friend’s parents found out] there was just no contact from the friend after that […]. It wasn’t even explained; it was just all of a sudden just cut.

Denise: I think once my mom said to me, if you don’t tell [your friends] right away [that you have lesbian parents], you are taking a chance to lose a friend [pause] later. Because I think that what she meant by that was if you don’t tell them right away, like, if you do tell them right away, either they’re not going to be your friend, or they are going to be your friend. And if you wait and then tell them later, you’re taking a chance because maybe they won’t want to be your friend anymore, and you’ve already put in all that effort and emotion to do that.

Denise: One of the better things that I’ve heard is to not, not joke. Not bring it up [the fact that you have LGB-identified parents] as a joke. [You don’t want others] laughing it off to sort of react. I think people need the time to have a serious sort of processing moment. And not only a processing moment, but a lot of the time sort of, uh time to, like, question you almost. ‘Oh, well, what’s that like?’ Oh, you know, like, ‘How does that work?’

Denise: [The worst reactions when I out my family are] when people think that they’re being funny. And they make a joke. It’s always hurtful. Because it feels like, um, I’m trying to let you in here, and you are – even if I know this person’s like, a bully or just trying to be funny, and I know you’re just uncomfortable. That’s why you’re making a joke. It still hurts, right? […] Like, this is my family.

Denise: I think that there have been sort of isolated cases where I will be talking to a friend who already knows and, you know, I’ll be like oh you know I haven't said anything to this person or this person. And they say, […] I think that person would either be okay with it or would not be okay with it. And then whatever I do in that situation it turns out that they're wrong. So it’s like, for example one of
there’s this person who I went to high school with. He is very conservative. And I hadn't outed my parents to him, and all of my friends are saying you know, you shouldn’t do that because he’s not a nice guy, and he’s just not going to take it well, and he’s very, um, malicious, sort of, in his debating […]. You’re going to like be hurt if he says something cruel in response. Because it’s a little too personal, and it’s like up until now, yeah, he’s been saying cruel things, but it’s going to be worse if you tell him and he doesn’t stop, sort of. And in some roundabout way he found out, and I think it was one of the actually best reactions, not the best reaction because of course, you know the best reaction is just nothing, but it was he sort of, paused and sort of realized and I think that was something that I wish I had done it sooner. Because he actually, um, he was one of those people who I had overheard saying, ‘Oh, wouldn’t a kid from a lesbian family just be so weird?’ And so I think at that moment he was kind of, like, shocked. Um, sort of he hasn’t obviously ever encountered a lesbian-headed family before he had said that. So I think in finding out that actually he was wrong was very helpful for him because I don’t think that’s ever happened to him in such a clear way before. So it was, like, actually very helpful and he actually kind of changed a lot of his opinions, which I think was helpful.

Denise: I think that [the reaction that I get from other people] depends on the order in which I out myself. Because if I tell people that my biological parents are divorced, and then I tell them that I have two moms, it’s a little bit easier for them to get […] But if they don’t know about my parents are divorced, and I just say oh, yeah, hey, I have two lesbian moms they don’t make the connection that maybe there was somebody else before. They just kind of take it as, oh, well that’s you know, what’s that. So it has happened to me, ‘Um, are you adopted?’ […] or ‘Which one’s your real mom?’ Which is kind of, like, I don’t know why anyone would ask that because it’s like these are my real moms. Do you – do you mean, like, my biological mom? I feel more comfortable answering [people’s question about which mom is my ‘real mom’] than I know some people do because I am not a child who is ‘from the get-go,’ as we call it, right? I’m not a get-go child, so there’s a lot of, um, kids who were born into LGBTQ-headed households, they probably feel more uncomfortable with that question because it’s like, what do you mean my real mom? They’re both my moms. And they have been my moms for my whole life, right? So I – I feel a little more comfortable with that question, but yes, I’ve had that, and I’ve had um, someone once said oh, so you do know your sperm donor? Before even like asking if that was [chuckles] it was just like an assumption, and it was like I – I don’t even know what I said. I was probably just so shocked. I was like, ‘What?’

Denise: With my close friends, I’m definitely totally open with them, um, but in a new setting I always want to get a read on people before I out my family. But I try to be as open as I can, and I think everyone that I am in a like, that is my friend, or anyone that I interact with even acquaintances, they all know because I don’t really want to interact with people if they don’t know. ‘Cause then it’s always sort of awkward, I’m trying to conceal things, but I don’t want to be doing that.
Nick: [When I tell people about my mom] there’s people that are, like, ‘oh,’ and it’s no big deal. Sometimes there are guys, and they’re just like, ‘There are two girls?’ and they’re like, ‘Can I come over for a sleepover?’

Nick: Sometimes if I want to make it easier, I can just drop the hint, well, my mom’s ‘partner.’ When you say ‘partner’ people are going to think, you know, oh, what does he mean by that? So then they’ll ask, so then you can slowly break it to them. Instead of just coming out and saying my mom’s gay […] So sometimes that’s easier.

Nick: I get put into weird situations where [my mom] will come into work sometimes, and the guys at work are like, ‘Wow, your mom’s hot.’ And then I’m just like, ‘Yeah, you don’t even know.’ And sometimes I don’t say anything, or just stay quiet. Or sometimes I said, ‘Yeah, well she’s gay’ […] and they lay off, or make jokes, or whatever.

Nick: [My younger brother] doesn’t like to tell people his mom’s gay. He kind of keeps it a secret. Whereas me, I’m like, ‘She’s gay.’ Whatever. I don’t care. Like it or not. You’re in my life, or you’re out of my life. It doesn’t matter to me. Um. Basically I’m like, if you want to be my friend, or if you want to hang out with me, this is my family. This is my life, and if you don’t like it, then move on.

Nick: Sometimes it’s hard bringing kids home to the house, because [we] don’t want those kids going to school and saying, ‘Well, so-and-so has a gay mom.’ But the friends that I brought home, like, my mom’s kind of friends with them, too. Just kind of knows them as my friends.

Nick: I don’t think I’ve ever had anyone say, ‘Well, that’s just effed up,’ or something like that and walked away or shunned me from their life […]. All of my friends – guys and girls – they think it’s cool that my parents, that my mom’s gay.

Ellie: I didn’t really know how to deal with [telling other people about my family situation].

Ellie: I feel like there are going to be those hard years there, and for me [being a target because my mom was lesbian-identified] was probably one of the best experiences of my life because it made me really outgoing, and I guess more talkative about it. So there’s good with the bad [chuckles].

Ellie: Um, in high school, um, I dated a guy – I always – I tend to date people for the wrong reasons I guess […]. I didn’t know anyone, and the first person that, like, I ended up meeting was my ex-boyfriend who I dated for two years. Um, and I was just, like, so in love because he was the quarterback of the football team, he was really like popular, and he was smart, but he was awful. He was really abusive and, like, it was just hard because like no one else would see it, but I would deal
with so much stuff from him […]. Um, he like would just make such a big deal
about like coming over to my house [because my mom was a lesbian], saying it
was, like, weird and, like, awkward and, like, how he had to tell his parents, and it
was just this awful thing for him to be dealing with […]. He was an asshole
[chuckles]. Um, he was just such a jerk, and he was so small-minded. And
maybe he’s gay and just doesn’t want to admit it. Which actually, like, it’s
looking like he could possibly be. Um, he’s just he was just really awful. Really,
like, homophobic. [I didn’t tell my mom what was going on] because I didn’t
want to hurt her.

Ellie: Last year [during my first year in university], I wouldn’t say I got bullied because
I didn’t really allow it. But I remember, like, one girl on my floor, ‘cause my
mom and her partner came to visit me. And, like, she made a comment […] like,
‘Oh, your parents are lesbians?’ I was like, ‘Yeah’ [chuckles]. She’s like, ‘Isn’t
that weird?’ I knew that her parents did not care about her at all, so I just said to
her, ‘Well, I have two parents that love me, so I guess your situation is a little bit
weirder than mine.’ And she was a little bit taken aback [laughs].

Ellie: My mom’s given me some pretty, like, bad advice. Or I thought it was bad at the
time ‘cause I was in high school, and she would just [say], ‘Stand up for yourself
blah blah blah.’ […] I was in such a, like, small place with people, like, not
accepting. At the time, in grade – I’m speaking mostly about like grade nine – I
wasn’t comfortable with it. I was really shy, and I wouldn’t, not have, like, said
anything to anyone.

Ellie: I experienced a lot of bullying in grade nine. Which, like, um, it didn’t even
revolve around [my mom being a lesbian]. For me, it’s just people just tried to
like target – if, like, I remember this girl, like, her boyfriend said I was hot, and
like, wouldn’t stop flirting with me. And I was shy at the time and didn’t, like,
want to talk to him. But she was really, like, loud and mouthy and like a well-
known bully. And I remember her, like, calling me a dyke and stuff and like even
at the time I knew like it was just like her – it was what she was, like, trying to
target me with […]. Like, no one actually disliked me for it, but if people didn’t
like me they would say something.

Ellie: [My brother’s friends] were just making jokes, typically, like, ‘Oh, your mom’s
hot,’ and like, people always say like sexual things. ‘Who’s the man and who’s
the woman in the relationship?’ Or, ‘Oooh, lipstick lesbians.’ And my brother
will just tell them to fuck off. He’s pretty aggressive, so he’ll just like throw them
around, but like, that particular day he wasn’t. And I was like, ‘This is ridiculous,
you guys. I don’t ask if your dad is super-hot or if he’s bang-able. Or what your
parents do in bed’ [laughs].

Ellie: [My brother’s university peers] would laugh at the fact that my mom was once
straight, like, and then decided to, like, come out being a lesbian.
Victoria: When I was about ten [...] people gave me weird looks when they found out. And I was like, oh, this isn’t normal?

Victoria: [Interviewer: What advice would you give to other youth with LGB parents when they are outing their families?] I think, it depends on the environment they’re in. Like, if they’re in a hostile environment I would tell them to be careful about who they come out to, because you don’t want that to be [sighs] the thing that you’re associated with. Because there’s so much more to you than just your parent, and I think that’s something that maybe I didn’t realize, and I would like to pass on now. Like, you aren’t your parents; you are your own person. So if you think that that is going to really inhibit you from growing or from people seeing you as who you are, then just leave it. Um, but I would always encourage honesty. Just tell people, you know? Like just, don’t hide it because it’ll just make you feel shitty. And the friends who aren’t comfortable with it, they’re probably not worth being your friends. Like I would definitely also give that as a piece of advice. Because all my best friends love my moms. And like, my best friend who I made in kindergarten who, like, I taught her what the term ‘lesbian’ meant. Like, she liked my moms, but she didn’t know that they were technically lesbians. She’s still my best friend today and, like, my moms – she’s definitely like an adopted daughter in our family. She’s always been amazing – and she has a very homophobic father – but she was always just so worth being friends with.

Victoria: [When people ask intensely personal questions after you out your family to them] be the bigger person [and] answer rationally. Don’t get upset, just, but answer. I would always say give them an answer, because otherwise they’ll think they can keep doing it [...]. Or to say, ‘I don’t know.’ I know that a typical thing, which is super strange, but way too many queer spawn have been asked how their parents have sex. Which is, like, ‘How do your parents have sex?’ Like, we don’t know.

Victoria: People just feel, I guess, ‘cause like when you’re different they feel they can ask all these personal questions about you. So, I guess, try to flip it around to make people think. Like, ‘were you born in a bottle?’ ‘Hmm, do you think that’s possible?’ Like, I don’t know, just flip it around to make them question their own intelligence. Because getting offended will never, ever benefit you. Ever.

Christie: Education to expose others to alternative family narratives

Christie: If everyone understood what [kids with LGB parents] were going through, then people wouldn’t be as hard on the kids themselves, and they wouldn’t have to deal with people making fun or judging them.

Christie: [The government and schools] should probably raise awareness about [laws that are in place to protect LGB individuals] because I honestly had no idea, and I bet a lot of my friends don’t know that, either.
Owen: [Some kids use homophobic language and gay slurs because] they’re just scared of it, and then, on, I think it’s different, and they’re not used to it.

Anna: People who are very religious and don’t understand how it – I mean, people – I’ve talked to people who are very set in their ways in Christianity, and they don’t understand. They don’t get it. They actually, they don’t understand how two people of the same gender can fall in love. They just don’t get it because it’s not how they’re taught when they’re growing up.

Anna: Have you seen Milk? The movie Milk, um, it’s like people didn’t get it. And I think just the way our parents were raised it wasn’t something that was, like, as ‘out there.’ It was very taboo […]. So their parents didn’t really tell them about it because it wasn’t something that was out there yet. Now you see, like, there’s a Pride Parade and a Dyke March and, like, all that stuff. But when like our parents – my parents – were growing up, it was something that was sheltered.

Anna: [In response to the museum stimulus image, Appendix F, Image 4] He’s wishing that his parents would teach him everything that he’s going to face and see in his life. And he’s probably also confused by what will, by what his parents will tell him.

Anna: [In response to the museum stimulus image, Appendix F, Image 4] This family is a very, like, straight-up family. They don’t talk about homosexuality or anything like that. Um, but when the kid sees that picture of the two guys, he will probably ask, ‘Why is it two men, and why is it not a man and a woman?’ Um, and then that family has to discuss different family structures, but it makes them stronger because they’ve realized that they are other people out there, and they shouldn’t be judgemental of others.

Julia: It’s ignorance. It’s literally all ignorance. It’s because people do not understand. They don’t realize how people that aren’t straight can have families. They don’t realize that they can be totally normal. It’s all – I feel like it always can break down to ignorance.

Julia: [When other kids ask about how you were born], if you don’t know, if you’re not educated about it, then it’s a very valid question […]. Yeah, ask, and I would explain […]. If you’re growing up, and you think, okay, you need a mom and dad to make a baby, and someone only has two dads, then of course, how did that happen? I think it’s a very valid question. I think it depends on how it’s asked and what the response of your answer – after your answer, what happens.

Julia: Um, your family is still your family no matter what. And it’ll be, you know, fuck the people who judge you. Like, stand up for yourself. Don’t, don’t – it can be very hard, but there are – you’re not alone. There are other people with families like that. Educate them, teach them, show them that your family is just as normal as theirs. Maybe even more normal.
Denise: Yeah, I think it’s hard for people to sort, sort of understand that there are LGBTQ-headed families, when they haven't met one. And in fact, in grade two when I didn’t have any friends, um, my first friend that I made and who is still my best friend, my very close friend, she and I met each other, and I remember being really afraid that once I met her parents that she wouldn’t be friends with me anymore. Um, cause it was a new neighbourhood, the school was in a new neighbourhood, you know it was very different where I was, right? And I remember meeting her parents and my parents meeting her parents and everything was fine. And there was this sort of, ‘Why is everything fine? Why is everything fine?’ [chuckles] Like, years later maybe grade six or seven, I found out that her mom is actually a queer spawn so her grandparents, her grandmother, is a lesbian. And has a lesbian partner. So it was kind of an interesting sort of – I never met a queer spawn who had had a family of her own and I’d never met a lesbian couple who were grandparents before so it was very interesting, sort of wow like. You know, they're everywhere, but nobody knows.

Denise: [When other kids hear about LGB-led families] they kind of don’t really know, so they just say, ‘Oh, you can’t have that. Because I don’t know about it, so that’s not allowed.’ And so that was what had made me uneasy, but sort of, as they began to learn stuff, I began to be more comfortable. Because it’s, like, this is not the first time that you’ve encountered someone with two moms, or you’ve heard about someone with two moms, so I’m okay to tell you. Because it’s not like I’m the one breaking down the wall here. I’m just kind of subtly slipping it into conversation and hoping that everything goes well.

Best (and worst) practices in schools
Shane: Sometimes kids say ‘gay’ and stuff like, ‘they’re gay’ [...] [Schools need to change] the rules on how kids should act.

Christie: There’s always some people that are going to bug you, right?

Christie: [My school experience would improve] if everyone treated everyone equally. And wasn’t so harsh on each other.

Christie: [Schools] could make it easier for kids to understand, so that when people do tell them [that they have LGB parents] they should just accept it. [Schools need to] kind of set them in a good mindset for it. Just to be accepting of stuff like that.

Christie: [When it comes to the school staff], I think I’m treated just as well [as any student with straight parents] [...]. My dad is treated the exact same. It could be because they don’t know, but still, they’d have to treat him the same just ‘cause he’s there. That’s what he is.

Owen: You are well adjusted if you are well into the school sports programs [...], if you are actually part of the extra curricular, then you get well known by the whole
school pretty much, ‘cause you get to know the teachers, the other students in other grades.

Owen: We have, like, pride club, out of school. We have all that show it, all that, like, we have seminars about all of it about gay, like LGBT sessions and stuff. And, like, this one kid in my grade, his mom teaches high school. And, like, he has a straight family, but he’s gay. I think everyone just looks at him weird. [He is] very openly gay, and just. I don’t know, like, I don’t think they accept it.

Owen: Bring in guests who, like, parents even, to say what it’s like to live in a household like that. Um, I don’t know, just like discuss it in class.

Anna: There are, like, gay straight alliance groups in school, but no one really knows what they are, or like where they are, or what they even do. So, I mean, they’re, the school has put the effort into making that group, but then no one even utilizes it to, to understand.

Anna: We have Pink Day, and it’s against homophobia […]. But I think bringing in a speaker who is gay and who has gone through the bullying that people do in my school. If they did that, I think that that would help so, like a lot. Because then they are getting a firsthand view from someone who is strong enough to say something. Not everyone who is gay can stand up for themselves. So I think that that would educate people.

Anna: [At school, we had an assignment to write a rant]. Originally, I was going to do discrimination against, um, homosexual people. And I changed my topic only because there were people in my class who, I feel, would just be laughing at my rant and not actually be listening […]. When I said my topic out loud one of the guys beside me laughed, and I, I kind of just, like confronted him, saying, ‘Why is that funny? Like, I don’t get it.’ […] It frustrated me how he just wasn’t listening.

Anna: Teachers hear homophobic comments and things that make fun of the whole LGBT community, and I think that some teachers just ignore it. And if they just said something, and said, ‘No, you shouldn’t say that,’ I think that it would help a lot more. […] I had a class where we watched Milk in class, and there were some guys who were very uncomfortable. And my teacher just said, ‘Suck it up. You’re going to watch this.’ And that’s good because the teacher is saying, ‘Get over it. You’re going to see this in your life, so just deal with it.’ But some teachers just ignore comments like that, and they don’t say anything. So I just think if teachers said something, then they’re standing up for those who can’t. And they’re also educating others and saying, ‘That’s wrong.’

Anna: In my experience, I’ve never seen any of the teachers discriminate against LGBT families.
Anna: [In response to the boy against the locker stimulus image, Appendix F, Image 3] He’s being bullied. Um, he struggles with his sexuality but also other things in his life. His parents are not, his family’s not stable. He doesn’t have a stable household, but in the future he’ll overcome all the bullying that he has to go through, and he’ll come out and be really proud of himself and have a really great life with lots of friends.

Julia: I went to the Triangle Program for my last years of high school […]. It’s the classroom for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning youth and their allies, for high school. People go there for multiple reasons, mostly to do with homophobia and having to escape from mainstream school […]. It was really awesome […]. It’s definitely unfortunate that it’s needed in the presented day and time. I was the first queer spawn at the school, actually. I was the first person who had a queer family that had been at that school.

Julia: Teachers have a big-ass impact that I don’t really think they understand.

Julia: [I felt judgement] all the time as a kid. All the time [from] my peers, my teachers, a lot of peers. Mostly my peers and teachers. [The judgement was based on my] parents’ identity. It was always my parents.’

Julia: I think that there needs to be more education. I think it comes down to education. Starting from the diversities of families as young as kindergarten, I’ve done it, I’ve talked to them about it, they get it, they understand it, they don’t have judgment when you talk about it. And also, education for teachers and um, authority, because they don’t realize, like I said, how much of an impact they have. By standing up for people’s families for anything and unfortunately we can’t go into all those parents’ houses of those kids, but if those kids have […] education, they can make their own decisions […]. Then they’ll be able to make their own minds up.

Julia: [Schools need to have] books on family. Talking about queer, talking about differential families. Bringing people in to talk about it. Um, you know having things like positive space stickers, um, different images around the classrooms. That’s the smaller stuff that, you know, you might not think of.

Julia: I had a teacher ask me if I was born in a bottle, in front of my whole class. Because I was, like, we were doing family trees in grade two, and I was like, ‘What if you don’t have a father?’ She asked in front of the whole class, ‘What? Were you born in a bottle?’ [Either she didn’t understand] or she’s a bitch. She’s just like, ‘What? That’s impossible. Were you born in a bottle? Like, how could you not have a father?’

Julia: [When people found out that I had a lesbian-identified mom, some said] ‘Your mom’s weird.’ ‘What’s wrong with your family?’ And, like, ‘How could you not have that?’ and […] literally ‘ha ha’ laughing at me […]. I’ve also blanked out a
lot of it. I can’t remember everything, unfortunately. Well, fortunately and unfortunately.

Julia: I think it would be impossible [to have bully-free schools] right now.

Julia: I didn’t really talk about [having a lesbian mom] to teachers [before Triangle Program]. Because they never were there to support or stand up for me. Like, when I would tell them or whatever, they would just be, like, ‘Oh, whatever.’ Like, they would never, no, I can’t think of a time that a teacher, other than in the Triangle Program.

Julia: I think that what needs to be done, which is what McGuinty [the premier of the province of Ontario] tried to put in place. I think there needs to be more education in the school systems, across Canada. ‘Cause, I mean, we can't do anything outside of Canada. Like we can't enforce education in other countries, but um we can force a Canadian-wide education program or even provincially about safe sex, sexuality, gender, all of that. And that needs to be in place. That is, I think, the most important next thing because […] gay people can get married, but um, that’s not teaching anyone or educating anyone or changing anything.

Denise: I think it was in grade two because I had started a new school, uh, closer to the end of the year. Because the beginning of the year I didn’t really have that many friends. By the end of the year, um, we had a lot of books in the classroom actually that were LGBTQ parent positive […]. I think that a couple of them were, um, my mom had suggested it to the school, like, can you bring in a couple of books here, it’s just you know, as a school, as a public school there’s supposed to be representing different types of families. So I remember, and also I had a book at home that I really liked that I brought into school, I think. So that was also helpful for me because I think in our, I remember in our library, when we used to go to the library to read the books that we wanted to. And I remember when our librarian read it to the class that they, instead of, uh, just sort of being hesitant they wanted to ask questions. And it was very helpful to have an adult to answer those questions rather than me having to. These little kids are saying to me ‘Oh, but that’s not allowed. How come you have two moms?’ […] How was I supposed to answer that as a child? I don’t know. So it was helpful to have an adult to field questions, and that the resources that were in the classroom were also helpful because that sort of opened the doors for the kids to actually ask questions as well. But I know that there was only like one book in my classroom in grade two, and now I think when I look into sort of – I work at a daycare in the summers, so when I look on the bookshelf in the daycare now there’s way more resources there. So that makes me feel better about it, because okay, maybe it wasn’t so great before, but things are getting better here.

Denise: [Recently my school board] switched all of its forms. They’ve started doing the parent/guardian thing, but every once in a while when you come across a form that’s not been changed, ‘cause it happens. That sort of becomes a problem […].
I remember, doing a course like media consent form thing, and it said like you need your mother’s signature and then it was like and father’s signature, and the teacher had just typed it up. So it wasn’t like an actual official form. It was just the teacher had typed it up, and in that sense it’s like, I first of all, not just for LGBTQ families, but single parent households, anyone who has any sort of family that’s not a very mother-father-brother-sister-and-a-dog. Like, it becomes very uncomfortable.

Denise: I know that the resources are very helpful. I don’t – I would also say that the earlier the better. I know there’s a hesitancy to put any sort of family, like, different family structures in the younger grades […]. And I know that also there is not very much open discussion in younger grades as there is when you start your health classes, which is in grade five, I think. So I think the earlier that it started the better because they – a lot of the isolation for queer spawn is ignorance on behalf of the other kids. ‘Cause they don’t really know. And they don’t have any way to find out because they maybe – they’re not going to ask their parents maybe, they're not going to ask the teacher if it’s not being brought up. So I think opening some sort of way to ask questions would be helpful about family structure.

Denise: The worst thing that I can remember happening at school was on behalf of a teacher. Not the students. So it was a supply teacher, so again it was good that it wasn’t my actual teacher, but the sort of most excluded that I felt was sort of in a staff moment. And, like grade – not really – three or four, which is when, uh, classes do family tree exercises. Which also then itself is a very exclusionary kind of thing unless you’re drawing your own. For us, we had a pre-drawn tree, and we’re just filling it out. So that became quite a problem because I wanted to put [my mom’s partner] on it, but I also wanted to put my dad on it. And I was having trouble with that and the supply teacher, um, yelled at me. First of all, I was a very small child so it’s not only is this a person that I don’t know, this adult yelling at me, they’re yelling at me about something that is my everyday life. This is my reality […]. But it was sort of making me feel excluded for just being who I was and living in my world. That’s just the way it is, right? And that was a very sort of embarrassed and unsafe moment because this was someone who as a teacher would have been supposed to be making me feel comfortable and that didn’t happen […]. I remember asking where to put my other mom. I said okay I don’t want to put my dad here. I have my dad here, I wanted to put my other mom. So then, cause then he got upset, and he said, ‘What do you mean your other mom?’ And at first, he thought I meant my step-mom with my dad. But then I said no I want to put it here. On the mom side of the family tree. Right? And then he said, ‘You’re not allowed to do that.’ And I said, ‘But I want to put her on this because she’s in my family.’ And he said something about families can’t have two moms or something, and it was like just not the reality for me so I was kind of scared in that, if families can’t have two moms, why does my family have two moms? And I remember him just getting really mad and saying […] he was going to tell my teacher, regular teacher, that I was not doing the activity
properly, and so on. And just getting very upset for no reason. Like, obviously I didn’t know how to handle it because [laughs] I was seven, and so I was like ‘Why is this happening?’ Um, so I remember that I started crying, and that didn’t stop him from yelling at me. And so I ran away from the class, and you know when a seven-year-old runs away from the class as a teacher you’re not supposed to just let them run away. First of all, of course, he has this whole other class of seven-year-olds to be watching so maybe you know, why are you letting this child run out of the classroom? But I remember that I ran out of the classroom, and my friend who I’ve mentioned previously, my best friend, um, came out of the room ‘cause I was in there, and she sort of said something like, what the eff? Like a grade two would say to comfort another grade two probably like oh you know, ‘We’ll just tell the teacher tomorrow that he was mean,’ or something. But I think that was probably the extent of feeling unsafe, and/or feeling very excluded. Like, that’s an isolated incident. And the thing is that my regular teacher was very, like, warm and inclusive, so when she found out about this, ‘cause I told my parents of course when I went home […], my regular teacher, um, just, obviously freaked out because she was like, ‘Oh my gosh that’s so not supposed to happen.’ […] That supply teacher never was rehired at our school, so [laughs]. Everything can be dealt with, but that was a bit like scary what happened there.

Denise: I think that making students feel comfortable with being who they are, um, is a big step […]. At my high school, I remember seeing those, um, positive space stickers and posters, and they’re very small. And it’s a very small gesture, but it’s actually very nice to see around the school. Because it’s sort of, like, saying, you know, everyone’s welcome.

Denise: I think teachers need to put aside their own opinions. A lot of the time, I feel like teachers are sort of turning a blind eye to what they don’t believe in, and just letting things happen […]. They’re not standing up for, you know, what you know should be happening, right? Especially within a public school setting! It’s, like, you can’t just be standing up for yourself; you need to be standing up for everyone.

Denise: There are certain school things [that make me feel a sense of social isolation]. School functions that are not conducive to all types of families. Um, for example, in the younger grades, Father’s Day is not very conducive to LGBTQ families. And, in fact, Mother’s Day also becomes a bit of an issue, when um you know you’re the last kid making a card or you need twice the supplies, and your teacher says, ‘Oh no, you can only have one.’ And on Father’s Day, when it’s like, oh I don’t want to make my dad a card because I don’t see him. When I was younger I didn’t see him nearly as often as I do now, probably once or twice a year. So it’s like oh I’m not going to make him a Father’s Day card, like, ‘cause then I’m going to be holding on to it for six months waiting to give it to him, like, I don’t care. And then I find that a lot of teachers feel the need to do the um, ‘Well, do you want to make it for another male that you know? Like your brother, an uncle?’ […] So that is not very helpful, and that sort of forms a bit of exclusion.
Denise: I don’t think that I’ve ever had to out my parents to a teacher before. I think my parents kind of take care of that because they always come to school functions, so they out themselves, and so I’ve never had to see a reaction. But, I’ve had certain teachers who have been positive. Not directly, like, they haven’t come up to me and said, ‘Oh, you know like I met your parents, and I am here to support you.’ But they have been supportive in a more subtle way, sort of, giving me opportunity to speak if we’re ever discussing an LGBTQ issue or sort of um, promoting positive space after finding out that I have LGBTQ parents. I – there were not that many LGBTQ youth at either of my high schools, maybe two or three out students. I know that a lot of people come out after high school because high school can be a very difficult time to come out. So, I know that there were not very many out students, at high school […] I’m actually thinking of one teacher who was also gay himself, who, I found this out later. But, um, the day after parent-teacher interviews he had, put up a positive space poster. And I don’t know if it was a coincidence, but it was like, I remember looking at it, and he saw me looking at the poster, and he was like, ‘Yeah, I put that up.’ After parent teacher interviews. So I dunno if it was, like, a little coded message.

Nick: I think some counsellors are very closed off about it, even though they have a sticker on their door that has a rainbow on it.

Nick: [A teacher at our school] is gay, and at our school if you have a problem, if you ever want to talk about gay, lesbian, transsexual, or whatever, you can go to her. And that’s really, really, really resourceful. You can go to her […]. She has these resources – these numbers [points to the resource list provided by the interviewer] […]. To be honest with you, I didn’t know any resources other than the Kids Help Phone until now.

Nick: I don’t know if [teachers and counsellors] need training or something to be, like, open. To be understanding and just be able to invite them into their office and know what to ask them. And know how to respond to their questions and stuff like that.

Nick: A little while ago, we had a teacher – I took a Families and Diversity class at school. I really, really liked it. It’s something that I’d like to pursue at some point in my life, whether it’s a college or a university course […]. So it’s just about families, like before there was just the nuclear family – mom, dad, kids. And now we’re getting into single parents, lesbian or gay families, and we went through all these – I think there’s at least seven different types of families – ones that weren’t married, common-law and stuff like that. [Our guidance counsellor came in to talk to the Family and Diversity class]. I think if anyone ever helped me and supported me about my mom, it was her. [She] was very, um, very open and very honest and just liked to provide – like she wanted people to feel comfortable being gay or having gay parents, and stuff like that. So she was the
one that, like, if I had any problems and I was in her office, I could talk to her. If I wanted to know how to tell other people about my mom’s relationship, she would say, ‘Just say it, and if they don’t like it, and if they don’t like it or you don’t know what to do, just come see me again. Or if you don’t want to say it, [don’t].’ She would always give me advice. But she came into the Family and Diversity class and she talked, in general, about what it’s like to be in a gay relationship. How they let people know that they’re gay, stuff like that. So, we did kind of do some training a little bit. She came in for like an hour, hour and a half […]. She told us her story [of coming out as a lesbian woman in a small town], and how she did lose friends along the way. But she said she found even better ones.

Nick: In Families and Diversity, we watched Milk, so then you really see it back in the 70’s at that time. And you really understand what it’s like, and you’re just thinking – like, in my class there were students that wouldn’t watch it. They would get up, and they’d walk out. And in my – I was thinking, ‘You selfish, you know, whatever. Sit down! And watch the rest of this show. That’s really rude!’ Cause I’m like, you don’t know what could happen. You don’t know […]. I remember there was two, uh, they couldn’t watch. Like, there’s a part where, uh, Harvey and his boyfriend were making out or something, and they couldn’t watch it. And they said to our teacher, ‘Can I go to the bathroom?’ and she was like ‘No. What do you need to go to the bathroom for? You just went to the bathroom.’ And then he’s like, ‘I don’t want to watch this,’ and then she’s like, ‘You know, this is a part of Families.’ Um, and then she, uh, and he’s like, ‘Well I’m not watching this,’ and he got up and started walking out. And she was like, ‘Sit down in your seat. This is a part of this class. You’re real mature. You’re showing your maturity right now by walking out on this scene.’ He like took off and slammed the door, and then another guy followed, like, not long after and took off. So at that point, I guess I could say I felt a little bit of anger, kind of rage. How could you do this? You don’t, you know what I mean, you have your happy perfect family. You don’t [know] what other students in this class are going through. What other families are like, and maybe you don’t know what your family’s going to be like in five years, you know. Anything could change.

Nick: [I think it is useful] just trying to get people to watch Modern Family just to see how mixed up and jumbled up families can be, because it’s not always just one nuclear family. Um, and I think, I went to a Catholic school when I was younger. And I think that’s because my mom was going through this phase where she wanted to, she calls it “pray the gay away” so she had us in Catholic schools, we went to church every Sunday, we went to choir practice every Wednesday night, we went to every Wednesday night mass, and stuff like that. Um, so the Catholic schools really had no information about gay families because they didn’t believe in that. I think public schools, what they do, I’m pretty sure Catholic schools wouldn’t do this, but public schools can just, we would have conversations like life, about marriage and getting older, and then you would talk about how babies are made and stuff like that. And I think they should have told us, at grade six or
something like that, some age younger than high school, that there are same-sex couples.

Nick: A really good friend of mine, um, her name was Jane, and she committed suicide. She was gay. Because her parents were one way. Her parents didn’t support her. A lot of her friends, like, pretty much shunned her, uh, because of her orientation. Jane didn’t know that she could go talk to a guidance counsellor or someone. I think now that that happened, we have a little sore spot in our school where that is a little bit more of a push, but I don’t think it’s enough. I really don’t. I want to see more… The principal [who was appointed to our school after the suicide] came up here, and he did a presentation on mental health, and he just said like a quick, ‘I know that we lost someone,’ you know what I mean? I don’t think he understands the full extent, really.

Ellie: I had a pretty bad high school experience […]. Whenever I was bullied, teachers would never, like, step in or anything. Like, I remember that a girl called – like, she called me a dyke, and it was in the middle of a class, and the teacher was just – all she said to the girl was, like, ‘Sit down!’ Like, okay [laughs]. You just let that slide [chuckles]. [The teacher] probably just didn’t know how to handle it. She’s probably just not well enough educated about the topic to know what to do. So many teachers let bullying slide! Like, it’s so bad. Like they – and I think my perspective’s different because I was from a small town and, like, the teachers were all from there and, like, grew up there. It’s like they all knew everyone’s families so there was always, like, that bias. And, um, like, it was just a really bad situation for like teachers always letting bullying go and, like, they didn’t want to offend. I think, like, my situation’s different because the reason they let it go was ‘cause they didn’t want to offend that person’s parents.

Ellie: [In response to the boy against his locker stimulus image, Appendix F, Image 3] This looks like a typical bullying picture. This person looks really isolated, and there’s his backpack, so isolated at school. Being bullied, which is probably causing the isolation. And really helpless, really depressed about it […]. I’m sure he wishes he had someone to talk to about it, or wishing that it wasn’t happening.

Ellie: [Interviewer: Do you have any advice for how schools can educate kids about the diversity of family structures?] No, just because I never had that. I wouldn’t even know where to begin.

Ellie: The turning point [in my life] would have been when I broke up with my boyfriend […]. My ex was harassing me […]. And the ones that I was close with, like, when we broke up that time, he was awful to me and, like, lied to my friends. And I had no one. Like, I had no friends or anything. And it was pretty bad [voice trails off, soft chuckle]. It was pretty scary. He was really abusive. And he was abusive in, like, all aspects. Like, I remember, he was physically abusive with me a lot, and I didn’t even really get help from the school with that. ‘Cause he would wait at my locker, and I remember one time I went to my locker,
and all my stuff was, like, all over the hallway. So, like, he’d gone in and thrown everything away. And, um [begins to choke up with tears]. Sorry. I’m sorry, it’s just, like, really emotional [overcome with tears; sobbing; long pause]. I just didn’t receive, like, any help at all. No teachers, nothing.

Ellie: I think people just really need to be made aware that [bullying] is really not okay, and it has serious effects. Like, I think a lot more talks need to go on about, like, major, I guess, like, extreme cases, so that people are more aware. But at the same time, I think bullying is always going to be there, and I don’t – obvious I think it’s really awful, and I think it’s bad – but you can also get, you get, like, a lot stronger from it. And you learn how to deal better with social situations. ‘Cause it’s always going to be there, and there’s always going to be someone trying to say something. So I think it’s important to know how to handle yourself.

Ellie: I would say [Canada does not have useful programs and services for children of LGB-identified parents] because I’ve never even heard of any until today.

Victoria: I think the biggest thing is that teachers just let [bullying] go by. But, I mean, addressing it every time it happens. You know, like every time someone says, ‘Oh, that’s so gay.’ No, that’s not okay, you know? Or like, if they’re making fun of someone who’s gay [punches fist into opposite palm twice]. Every time you hear it, you need to be vigilant in acknowledging it. And also, having safe space posters helps, you know. Like people, just, like, having it being there is just really key. And having a QSA, a Queer Straight Alliance, is really important because then you know you have a safe space to go to if you feel your school is unsafe.

Victoria: Everyone should have sensitivity training and anti-oppressive training.
### Appendix J: Master Table of Queer Identity Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I-1</th>
<th><strong>Connecting with other “queer spawn”</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shane:</td>
<td>I don’t know many people with LGBT parents […] except for, like, young kids.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shane:</td>
<td>[An app for kids with LGB-identified parents would be] probably just like any other, like, phone-in, um, yeah, probably just an advice kind of website thing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christie:</td>
<td>[This interview] opened my mind up to how okay it is, and to how other people might be feeling ‘cause I know how I feel about it, but I don’t have other friends that have gay parents. And if they ever feel bad about anything, I don’t know, I could probably talk to them. ‘Cause now I know that it – not everyone will be like that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christie:</td>
<td>I’ve never really heard of any of those [groups for kids with LGB-identified parents] before […]. I don’t really need anything.</td>
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<td>Christie:</td>
<td>Like, if there’s a need, if there’s a need for you to go to [programs for kids with LGB-identified parents] and get help or deal with it if you need something like that, then, yeah, sure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Owen:</td>
<td>We go on these camping trips with my mom, like, my mom has a group, a camping group […] called Queer Women and their Kids.</td>
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<td>Owen:</td>
<td>[The interview today was] good, trying to discuss what my thoughts and, the whole, mom being gay […]. I don’t discuss it as much as I’d like to.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna:</td>
<td>I can’t think of [any peers who have LGB-identified parents]. I know of someone who has two moms and not, not even a dad, just two moms. But I don’t know him personally. I just know of him.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna:</td>
<td>Younger kids [need support from organizations for youth with LGB-identified parents] because a lot of teenagers get support because they can voice how they feel and their opinions, but I think that if we started off at a younger age then people could – then those kids could learn to come to terms with how their family is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julia:</td>
<td>[A useful app for kids with LGB-identified parents would be] like a guide to dealing with bullies or a guide to dealing with queer families. And just, kind of like, I guess, a social networking where you could just talk about stuff. Not even about queer parents, but just talk and know that they’re coming from [a similar family].</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julia:</td>
<td>The Ten Oaks Project just gave me so much more support and so many other people that I could ever imagine. I was very reluctant to go, but when I went there I found a whole type of new people. And understanding people that understood.</td>
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</table>
And unfortunately it’s only a camp. So it’s not all year round. We all live in different places. But it was still one of my favourite places to be. It was my favourite – it was the safest space I’d ever been in […] as in, like, I had no fear of judgement. Based on who I was or where I came from.

Julia: [Even as I grow older, connecting with other people who have queer-identified parents] will still be very important to me. I can’t – because of the fact that I’m queer, and I’m going to want to have children of my own. So I think it’s very important.

Julia: I think [programs for offspring of queer-identified parents are] a lot more important when you’re younger […]. Right now, through things that I did when I was younger, I have friends, I have more support of people that, you know, have gone through similar things or have queer parents as well.

Julia: I am definitely one of the first generations of queer spawn as in the sense of I’m 19. And, of course, there are people older than me that have queer parents, but it’s definitely still, I was definitely still one of, you know, the beginnings of people being really out and open with being queer and having families. It was pretty new, I think.

Julia: [I felt socially isolated until] maybe 18 […]. I guess I never really had a place to meet people [that also had queer parents].

Julia: [A disadvantage] of COLAGE is that it’s the only one in Canada. And it’s very small […]. And there’s unfortunately so many other queer families around Toronto that can’t come to Toronto, so it’s not enough.

Julia: [Other kids with queer parents who are not connected to organizations for kids like them should know] it’ll give you a support system that you didn’t realize you could have. You could talk to people that understand. And it’s not even a big deal. You don’t even have to talk about it […]. [Other queer spawn] are able to stand up and make a difference and, you know, pass on their word of, you know, their words of wisdom to other, you know, other people dealing with the same thing […]. There’s nothing out there from queer spawn for other queer spawn, in a sense […]. We want to start [an organization that highlights] our history from the eyes of queer spawn. And we have a few options for our names yet.

Julia: I’ve come to accept [the term queer spawn]. I didn’t really like it that much, ‘cause it always reminded me of ‘devil’s spawn.’ But I’ve come to accept it. My friends love it, and I mean, it’s kind of, just, whatever. It’s a good way to very easily identify, I feel. I think it’s a lot more recognized as anything else. Like, I mean, ‘gaybies’ is stupid.

Denise: [With a group of youth with LGB-identified parents we were trying to find] what unites us as a group […]. You’re not really a kid. Yeah, it’s like you’re not really
children anymore […]. So then we came up with spawn because it’s got more of a genetic overarching kind of thing. Like, even if you’re an adult, you’re still the spawn of someone [laughs] […]. I think it will be better once, like, once we start spreading it around [laughs].

Denise: [My brother] wanted to either meet another boy who had two moms, or have [a] male role model. And he didn’t get that […]. I think it would have been easier on him if our dad was maybe more present.

Denise: I am not part of any organizations for kids with LGBTQ parents [but] I used to be […]. I think it’s very good to know someone who’s in your situation […]. It’s good to know that there’s another family that is like yours […]. But I feel – with any sort of LGBTQ organization, not just for LGBTQ families – I feel like it creates a separation. This – the existence of it, in itself, will create a sort of, like, well, we need this because we’re different, while at the same time these families are trying to, sort of, be integrated and be welcomed everywhere. I feel like, in making some sort of organization or group, you’re at the same time isolating those families and saying, well, you know, we’re different, but we’re trying to be the same […]. So it’s a little bit counter-productive, and I would love – or prefer – to see a well-rounded positive family space for everyone. But it’s hard for that to exist […]. I feel like a lot of LGBTQ organizations or teams or clubs or anything like that create this sort of idea for people who are not involved that, oh, I guess that means that all these LGBT people have the same interests and the same hobbies, and they all like doing the same things. And they’re all the same. But really that’s not the case.

Denise: I was in that founding group of the people who decided that queer spawn was going to be a term […]. We had gone through the whole alphabet, the queer alphabet, and it was, like, LGBTTIQQS, and someone said […], ‘Well, what about us? Like, we’re not in that.’

Denise: I think [queer spawn] need to be more actively given the resources that apply to them. I feel like there’s a hesitancy to seek out help for queer spawn because […] there’s this feeling of, well, it’s not my issue, it’s my parent’s […]. People who are in LGBTQ families need to be – need to have access to resources such as guidance counsellors, someone who they can talk to if they don’t have someone who is a role model in their own family.

Denise: Once we get into teens, [programs and services for youth with LGB-identified parents are] all very lacking. And I think the teen years, the high school years, are years that everyone is having issues. Everyone is dealing with family issues even more so than when you’re younger.

Nick: I’ll talk to [my mom’s lesbian-identified friend’s son] and stuff like that, but it’s not like we have a connection just because our parents are gay. But if you’re
talking about your gay parents, it’s definitely easier to talk to another student who has gay parents as well.

Ellie: I want to be open to [other youth with queer-identified parents] if they are having a bad experience with it. And I think it’s important, like, for minority groups to, um, like, for people to discuss it and be – celebrate it even.

Ellie: It probably would have been really good for me to have [a connection to an organization for youth with queer parents]. Just, like, whenever I was younger, so I didn’t feel like I was so isolated. […] If there are situations that you don’t want to talk about with your parents […], if you didn’t want to offend them or tell them that someone was saying this about them that, like, you can say that to other people and have them say, like, what would your reaction [be]?

Ellie: [An app for youth with queer-identified parents] would have a hotline to talk to someone right away if there was something crazy going on.

Victoria: ‘Queer spawn’ is a provocative term. A lot of people get very heated about it […]. Recently, we’ve had a lot of backlash for using the term ‘queer spawn’ from other queer spawn – or from other children who have LGBTQ parents. [But] there is no term. The only term that we have is ‘queer spawn.’ We’re lacking terminology, that’s the thing. Cause if there was a better word that more people liked, great! You know? It’s just, we don’t have another term. Especially when you’re trying to fight for space in the LGBTQ community, in the queer community. Like, having a term is key [laughs]. Right? Because if you are unidentifiable, people are like, ‘Oh, like, who are you?’ Whereas having a term is, like, has changed a lot actually, which sounds silly, but like being able to be here ‘as queer spawn.’

Victoria: Some guy who – the founder of COLAGE – coined the term. Um, and it was really used in Abigail Garner’s book, Families Like Mine.

Victoria: For kids who feel isolated about having queer parents, it’s definitely a space for them to see they’re not alone. Like, other kids are going through what they’re going through. It’s a place for people to be able to talk about their families because it is, like, it is hard not seeing your family represented in movies ever, not being able to identify with any of your friends. It can be really challenging. And I think it’s just important to have a space to talk about your experiences.

Victoria: [A disadvantage of organizations for youth with LGB parents is they] focus on the parents too much, and not on the, like, and not on the kids’ identity and what it’s like for them […]. It’s hard to say [sighs]. Why we like the word queer spawn is because then we don’t have to bring our parents into it. We don’t have to identify as a child of LGBTQ parents […]. [You are] your own entity that is outside – that is away from your parents, but that has been shaped by your parents’ identity. So, like, we always find ourselves talking about our parents. Like, I’m sure queer
spawn talk about their parents way more than any [child with straight parents] talks about their parents […]. Someone could be, like, ‘I’m 30, and I have my own kids, and I’m still talking about my childhood,’ you know what I mean?

Victoria: There’s value in [groups for youth with queer-identified parents] if they’re feeling isolated or whatever. But maybe it doesn’t have value for them, and they shouldn’t have to feel a pressure to go. Just because you’re gay doesn’t mean you have to go clubbing in a gay bar, right? Just because you’re a queer spawn doesn’t mean you have to hang out with kids who have the same parents as you. Your parents is a miniscule part of your identity. If you feel that space would be helpful, I would highly encourage anyone to go there.

Victoria: COLAGE is a lot bigger in the States, and so there’s a lot of teenagers that are part of it. But not in Canada. It just grew in the States; it didn’t grow here.

Victoria: [A useful app for youth with queer-identified parents] would be like a discussion board. You could have ongoing chats, like a question board […]. For example, like, the kid in Iowa would come up. Like, ‘This really awesome queer spawn just gave this really awesome speech’ […]. Just letting people know what’s going on in their community. Because I wouldn’t really say that queer spawn really have their – or have a community at this point. I think that needs to change.

I-2 Connecting with and advocating for queer youth

Christie: I have a few friends, one in particular…I don’t think she was gay or anything. Like, she has a boyfriend now, but she was just really, she could stick up and she would stick up for people that were gay and really understanding of that. So I definitely think I know about it personally because of my dad, but I think that there’s other people out there that understand it just as well as I do, if not better because, I don’t know, they just, they know, and they have, like, strong feelings about that, and they’re passionate about equal rights for everyone and things like that.

Owen: My sister and I get, like, we’ll hear people talking like that, like, okay don’t use words like, like, words that are hurtful to people, it isn’t alright…when you hear people calling people faggots, um, and like okay, don’t use that word, cause it’s not nice and like homos and that, we’re just like, using different words. Like, that’s hurtful […]. People disrespect them even though they are no different than you.

Owen: One kid in my grade [is] very openly gay, and just. I don’t know, like, I don’t think they accept it. Well, there’s groups of people where it’s, like, they’re, like, ‘What the heck? Why are they gay?’ And there’s the other, like, everyone else pretty much is like, okay, get over it. It’s, like, it’s his choice.
Owen: There’s, like, the occasional, like, they’re talking about, like gay, there’s like, the gay kids in our school, right? And people being, like, ‘Ew, I don’t like being around them,’ and I’m like, ‘that’s not necessary because they are no different.’

Owen: [In response to the boy against locker stimulus image, Appendix F, Image 3] So there's this one boy, named hmm James, also named James, um, who was gay and was always, he's always been gay from when he was young but then, when he realized that he was gay and wanted to let himself out of the closet and tell people he was gay, he didn't know it was the right choice, so once he did tell people he was gay, he uh he told people and he realized that people he told weren't the right people to accept him and who, for who he was, so he got beat up on and made fun of, and he just felt like he was alone, against everyone, so he went to a session um on it and trying to get some wisdom about why people were so harsh and what's, why, like how he can change it and what he's like, um and so he came out of it thinking, ‘Oh, I can change people's opinions’ but, when he went back to the people they would treat him like crap pretty much, and he tried to tell them that, he's no different than you, it's just I have a different, like, look on things, so and then the people like started to make fun of him again so he went back and he realizes instead of trying to change people who made fun of him, he went out and tried to get new friends, um, so he went out and he went to the people in the school who weren't, uh, weren't hurtful like that and, he realized what people would accept him so he went to uh that group whatever it was, and uh yeah [laughs].

Anna: I’m a strong believer in, like, equality in the, in the gay community. And, I mean, I’m very much against homophobia. That’s something that if anybody knows me that’s like one of my strongest things. And like, um, people in school are homophobic, and I just get really outraged by it… I’ve seen [my mom] struggle through people being very discriminatory and judgemental, so it kind of makes me want to help other who have to go through it […]. It is very much a part of my life, that aspect in trying to stand up for people who are gay.

Anna: When I told my friend Bobby, who’s gay, um, he was very, he was pleasantly surprised […]. We bonded in that way because we could, um, relate to each other through our experiences. Going, like, handling discrimination and stuff like that […]. Sometimes [other guys] get uncomfortable, and it’s just – he’s not interested in you, like, don’t be flattered! It’s fine, he just wants to hang out and be friends with you.

Anna: I have seen a lot of social injustice and social inequalities between gay people and straight people […]. I’m thinking of specific groups of people who have straight parents, all their friends are straight, and I don’t think they’re exposed to, like, the gay community, so I just don’t think that they would see as much social injustice as I would, for example […]. I stand up for gay people as a group, but never anyone specifically that I’ve seen had to – because my friends who are gay have – I haven’t seen them struggle.
Julia: I volunteer with the Youth Line. I’ve been doing that for, like, three years now. [I also do presentations about] what it actually means to be gay. Breaking down the stereotypes, breaking down the isms, learning about stereotypes, discrimination, um, what the difference is.

Denise: I founded the GSA at my school, my um, first high school, and it’s very good to have.

Denise: I founded the GSA at my school, my um, first high school, and it’s very good to have, but at my second high school I found that it’s a little bit of a weird form of isolation… It was harder to be a part of because I myself didn’t identify as lesbian or gay or bisexual. So I myself am going to – I want to be there, but at the same time these are people who are sort of like [pause] trying to “out LGBTQ” me. Sort of like? They’re trying to be more LGBTQ than me. And so it’s like, in that sense there’s an isolation.

Nick: I’m part of the Youth Advisory Committee. I’m part of the Youth Advisory Committee. It’s like a council of youth [in my town] […]. I run a group at our school called Teens Need Teens, which is almost like an outreach program for other students.

Nick: At the end of [a course that I took] […] I wrote a 14-page report about homosexuality and acceptance in society […]. And that’s my, kind of, sweet spot because I have a mom that’s gay. And I – I don’t know how to say – I promote people coming out and saying that they’re gay.

Nick: [There was] a really good friend of mine, um, her name was Emma, and she committed suicide. She was gay.

Nick: When it comes to my mom, I protect my mom all the time. Um, even to the extent that if anyone made fun of my mom, or made fun of anyone who was gay, I might lose it [chuckles]. That sounds, like, really bad, but I would go crazy, but like for example, what was it? One day, we were at school, and we had just had the Pride Walk, and someone at school said, ‘Yeah, I bet you were just like all the other fags in that Pride Walk, too,’ and I turned around, and I said, ‘Pardon me?’ And the guy was like, ‘What?’ And I was like, ‘What did you just say to him?’ And he was like, ‘I don’t think it’s, like, any of your business.’ And I said, ‘I think it is.’ […] So that’s just my personality, to be strong and prominent and out there, so when I turned around, and I kind of caught that kid and said, you know what I mean, ‘You know what you just said?!’ You know what I mean? ‘What if you said that to someone who actually was gay? What if that person went home and killed themselves that night just because of what you said?’ So like little things like that. And in general, I’m protective […]. So it’s, like, little times like that where, you know, someone needs, like, people need someone, like, to be there for
them, you know. Like, bystanders are kind of useless to just stand there and watch. And then they don’t do anything.

Ellie: People don’t, like, get how much it affects – like, people don’t really understand that someone with gay parents actually, like, it’s like, you’re ‘gay’ as well, you know? [laughs]

Ellie: [Kids with LGB-identified parents are more aware of social injustice] because they face it all the time. And it’s funny because you always have the idea of your parent being, like, so strong, and seeing them have to go through something where they’re still being bullied. Everyone needs to be protected; everyone needs someone there.

Ellie: I’m sort of thankful that I was bullied and stuff because I wouldn’t be as protective of people as I am now, because I don’t want to see people hurt [chuckles] the way I was, I guess […]. If I hear people say it, like, anything about gay people, like, it’s also my nature to stand up for anything I believe in.

Victoria: There are so many queer programs out there for queer youth. And people don’t acknowledge that queer spawn are a part of the queer community. That, like, I would say there aren’t enough adequate programs, but I think what needs to happen is just queer spawn need to be included in queer community and queer groups. Because I would say that queer spawn are part of the queer community, and they are queer. And I think that, like, there needs to be this kind of acceptance of that, and I think then the queer spawn will hopefully start identifying as queer because that’d be awesome. But, like, yeah. I think that, like, queer is both a sexuality and a culture. But people think that if you identify as queer that means you’re sexually queer. Whereas for years I identified as queer, but I was culturally queer. Like, another term that we have is – it’s maybe our second best term – is culturally queer kids. But I think that with queer communities – it’s not even about the straight communities. Queer communities really need to shape up in how they treat queer spawn because, um, I’ve felt so excluded over the years. Like being in queer spaces and being the only queer spawn, and feeling like the only legitimate reason for me being there was because my parent was that. But then it’s like, when I grow up, and my mom isn’t visibly in the room, does that mean I don’t, like I’m not included anymore? What happens when my mom isn’t present in the room, right?

Victoria: I volunteer with TEACH, which is Teens Educating and Confronting Homophobia.

Victoria: I also just think that, like, queer groups need to include queer spawn.

Victoria: I’ve changed a lot over the last two years, you know what I mean? I was definitely less reflective and a lot less open. Now, I’m like the biggest trans advocate. And before, I was, like, ‘Oh my god, trans? What is that?’ [said in an
exaggerated snooty voice] I wasn’t really aware […]. So I’ve just, kind of, realized that it’s really, it’s not as far along as the LGB-Q movement. So, and like, I obviously don’t identify as trans, um, but yeah.

**I-3**  
*Borderlands: privileges and pressures living between heterosexual and queer worlds*

Owen: [I want people to understand] my parents’ thinkings and how they feel […] and why it’s not bad.

Owen: You should try to speak your work on how it’s not bad […] and why they should accept it in the first place.

Anna: Teenagers especially are exposed to the media, so just because we have a gay parent doesn’t mean that that’s the only thing we see.

Julia: I’m white, I live in an urban city, I’m physically able, I’m mentally able, I’m not a poverty-ridden family, so you know, I still have a lot of privilege that I have to check.

Julia: [My mom has] always been involved in [queer politics], and I just took it on from there. I guess that I’m very opinionated, so I have a lot of opinions, and I like to really back up my opinions and causes and, um, stand up for things I believe in.

Julia: [I want to] fight the expectations, fight the ideals, be strong and, you know, be someone who can make a difference.

Julia: [My mom and I] are very similar, so we argue, but it has nothing to do with her identity.

Denise: After I outed myself to my class in grade, grade 10 and 11, I had – I was at a different high school than I was in grade 12. Um, and I was much more close with those friends, and we were much, we were a much more close-knit family, I would say. And I often found it – it was basically me, and there was another girl in the class who identified as lesbian. So I found that whatever queer issues would come up, they would always look to us to be the voice of the LGBTQ community. And it was, in some ways, a burden. But at the same time, I felt like even if they hadn’t put that pressure on me, I still would have wanted to be that anyway. So it was not, um, something I disliked.

Denise: I know that there are lots of LGBTQ kids who feel sort of guilty about their own [heterosexual] orientation […]. It’s okay for you to be who you are because, I know that again, there’s a certain pressure for people to be really into the LGBTQ community, and maybe sometimes they don’t want to be.

Denise: [An elementary aged queer spawn that I know] is feeling guilty about noticing boys, which she told me and my sister. ‘But, you know, Mom doesn’t like boys.
Mom likes girls. My mamas don’t like boys, so I shouldn’t like boys.’ [My sister and I] had never felt that way […]. We’d never felt guilty.

Denise: I think there is a lot more unity in the LGBTQ community in Toronto […]. It feels good to belong to a community almost. And although I kind of, like, but then at the same time, I feel like I belong to the LGBTQ community just because of my parents. But at the same time I can also belong to other communities as well, which is very nice to know […]. I feel almost more connected to other people who are part of the LGBTQ community, whereas, but at the same time I can step back from it.

Denise: A lot of the time for LGBTQ spawn there’s a lot of pressure to uphold this, ‘Oh I have a very good family,’ just because you’re trying to defeat the stereotype that LGBTQ families are not, sort of, safe for children [laughs] or they’re not as good as straight-parent households. So I know that there’s sometimes a stigma there […]. I know that in talking right now, I’ve made it seem like my family’s all very happy and good […] but at the same time, no one in my family is perfect, and it’s not because we’re an LGBTQ family. It’s because there was a stepparent coming into the family […]. It’s not because we’re an LGBTQ family. I do sometimes feel pressure because often times in school, especially in high school, um, there’s a lot of, ‘Oh. you know, but imagine how messed up a kid from a lesbian family would be.’ But the thing is these are people that like, like, in a high school class, I don’t know everybody, and they – I’m not out to everyone in my high school class. Well, most people I am, but like, if it’s uh, but by grade 12 everyone is different in every class, right? So there’s some people that I don’t know, and I don’t care to know, but they say things like that, and I kind of want to sort of say, ‘But you didn’t know that I was part of a lesbian family. So why would – like so obviously they’re not that different, because I’m here and you didn’t call me out!’ […] It’s not like I’m some freak who, like, you immediately know that I’m from an LGBTQ family. Like, I’m fine.

Denise: [In response to the two-women and two-children stimulus image, Appendix F, Image 2] They are as comfortable with each other as any family will ever be. And they grow up, of course, and they do love their parents, their adopted parents. Might as well be any other family. And, of course, they have the trials of any family. There are arguments, and there is hair pulling, and there is, you know, ‘They’re wearing my clothes!’ And, ‘They didn’t do the dishes!’ And there’s all sorts of fighting, and they grow up into their teenage years, and the fighting turns into different fighting, but it’s still mundane and just regular family issues.

Nick: I don’t know how to go about explaining to you that [my mom] can be a good role model, but I can just say that I’m not doing drugs right now, I’m not living on the street, I’m not failing classes, or I’m not getting girls pregnant, so I’d like to think that whatever she’s doing, she’s doing it right.
Nick: Before I knew my mom was gay, no, I wasn’t really politically minded. But then, you know, when Mom came out to us, I kind of realized that you kind of have to stand up for what you believe in. There’s a lot of times, you know, we used to go to church because my mom, as I say, wanted to ‘pray the gay away,’ but then we stopped going, and I stopped going to a Catholic school. Like, I could have continued on in a Catholic school, but I don’t believe in what they believe in. Sometimes people have arguments with me about what the Bible says, and I’m like, the Bible also says, ‘Love everyone as you love yourself,’ you know what I mean?

Victoria: Because this is what I found growing up in a queer community, like, or growing up as a queer spawn, I didn’t – and this was, like, until I identified as queer. But there are so many queer spawn who will never identify as queer, but who still have just as legitimate a spot in the queer community. Because I felt like I was part of two worlds, but I wasn’t fully a part of either of them. Because I was kind of part of the queer world, but only until I was a certain age. And then I was straight. But I also wasn’t fully part of the straight world, because I had already been part of the queer world, and it’s like this lack of space where it’s like, ‘Where do I belong?’ And I think that a lot of queer spawn feel this attachment to queer spaces. And queer spaces need to be open to them if they want to continue being a part of that.

Victoria: I’m proud of my moms. I love my moms. I think they raised me really, really well. I’m really close with both my parents. I don’t really see them as, like, my ‘gay parents.’ They’re just my parents […]. And I’ve had to find my own identity apart from my parents, which has been the most recent problem, I think, like in terms of them being queer and me being queer.

Victoria: Just because [my parents] are queer doesn’t mean that all of what they are is queer, right? Like they’re ‘people’ just as much as anyone else is ‘people.’

Victoria: It’s about how, like, the outside community – or, like, maybe not even the outside community, but like, there’s this kind of, like, [sighs] culture of, like, trying to prove to the straight world that queer parents are just as good as, like, straight parents […]. There is this kind of tendency to, like, really sell your family to other people. And I’ve given so many speeches about how amazing my parents are, and like, it’s just kind of, like – that’s hard, you know? Like, having to feel like you have to be perfect all the time [voice rises like a question] […]. I can’t speak to that everyone feels like a poster child because some people’s parents are, like, just really in the closet or aren’t really that out and loud, but I have definitely been in the spotlight to, like, prove my family’s legitimacy. And I found that really hard to do, because we’re not always perfect, and I feel like I can’t express that.

Victoria: I struggled with my own sexuality for a really long time, because I was, like, I can’t disappoint everyone by turning out gay. Because that’s, like, the biggest
stereotype is that gay parents raise gay kids. And I was like, oh, eff. Fuck. Now I have to, like, add my statistic to that, right? So that’s how a lot of us feel […]. Trying to be perfect. Like, not screwing up in life, not failing school or getting really heavily into drugs or experimenting, you know what I mean? Like, I felt the need to be kind of, like, normal. Like quote-unquote normal […]. It definitely was not my parents putting pressure on me whatsoever. Like, I needed to prove it to other people.

Victoria: Me and my friends […] are forming a queer spawn organization […]. We have an email. We’ve already given a workshop. We are making a video. Like, we’ve made a 3-5 minute kind of ‘queer spawn manifesto.’

Victoria: I was the ‘gay issues kid’ growing up. If there was anything, it was, like, ‘Victoria, what’s your opinion? Because your opinion’s obviously right [pause]. ‘I didn’t know about this!’ [laughs] But I was the go-to kid when it came to gay stuff.

I-4 Canadian law and Canadian society

Shane: I think [Canada] is doing better than America [chuckles] in some ways, just like how people treat them […]. I think [Canadians] treat my mom fairly well, but not everyone, like […]. You probably heard this, but, uh, one time a mom went to school to pick up her child, but she was a lesbian, and there was a dad there that was hetero, and then he, like, beat her. But then he didn’t go to jail […]. [Police] should have put their foot down and noticed what [had] happened.

Shane: [My extended family has] kind of gotten over it […] since [my mom and her partner] got married.

Christie: When we’re out [with my dad] and his boyfriend in public doing things, like, they’ll do little cute things, and people might be able to tell, but it doesn’t really bother me.

Christie: [Canadian society is] starting to treat them better.

Owen: [Legalized same-sex marriage in Canada] was only 10 years ago? Wow! That’s awesome […]. Like you can see how it, it’s – we’re growing as a country, like, a community throughout the world to change what people thought was wrong. But yeah, in the end, it’s not wrong at all. It’s just different people’s views.

Owen: [In response to the two women and two children stimulus image, Appendix F, Image 2] So two moms, one day were trying to discuss what to do with their lives and, didn't want to come out of the closet, because they thought that they would have been stereotyped as the gay people in the community and so they just didn't know what to do, but then they went to an adoption agency and realized that they have the strength between them to take the discipline like the uh, um the hurt like from the community, on them being gay, and adopting two children um so they
did it anyways and they adopted the two children from wherever, like Africa, sure, um, and so they adopted them and so they, from when they're both babies, two twin, grown guy, and so they grew up, but then in the age of three, they move to Toronto, and people in Toronto didn't accept their, like, uh, [interviewer: sexual orientation?]. Yeah. Sorry. And so one night they went to sleep and as, uh, they were lying in bed trying to fall asleep they heard smashes and all that through their house, through the windows and that car, so [they] went outside everything, like, all the windows were destroyed and, um, so they went and yeah, so it was being destroyed so they, and throughout the next day couple of days they didn't know what to do between telling the kids what happened and why it happened. So they went to talk to elder, uh, gay, uh, an elder gay couple, um, what they should do to trying, like appreciate the community and, explain what's happening. So he just said to trying show what, why you're no different than people, your neighbours and stuff, um [laughs]. So they went and told their neighbours that they are no different, showed them they're no different, and I don't know like, in the end they just, their neighbours accepted them after being understanding, and understanding why they're like that, and yeah [laughs].

Owen: I think it’s still not great on how [Canadians] treat them… We were on our camping trip, like, we just got back from our camping trip like yesterday, from Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday, and like, when my mom pulled into a small town to eat lunch, and she parked in like, with the back, like, the front against the wall, but then she’s like, ‘Oh, I don’t want to be keyed,’ because she has a rainbow flag on the back, so she turned around, and I just thought that, like, people shouldn’t really have that, like hate against gays […]. If she has that worry, then it’s like, what is the other worries people like she experience?

Owen: I think all the laws are getting close to what it can be, but I think it’s just the people around accepting it.

Owen: [I would like to see improvement] on the side of LGBT stuff, like, people having hate against [them] and not thinking of them as different people.

Anna: They’re still discriminated against even though they’re – they shouldn’t be. But, um, they do have all the rights now that they should […]. There’s going to be discrimination no matter where you go. It’s the same with racism. I mean, I would hope it goes away, but it’s going to take a long time. But compared to other places and how discriminatory other places are, I think that Canada is pretty well off.

Anna: If [same-sex marriage] became illegal, that would change my life a lot, just because it’s something that I would be really upset about.

Anna: I think it is [Rob Ford’s] duty as the mayor to show up at everything that has to do with the city that he is in charge of […]. If he doesn’t support it, then he can
work on that in his own time, but if he is in charge of a city, he’s in charge of the whole city, everybody who’s part of it, every community.

Julia: [I would like to see] universal acceptance, especially in the countries where it’s illegal to be gay.

Julia: [The mayor of Toronto, Rob Ford] is an asshole. Like, I did not vote for him […]. He’s an embarrassment to Toronto. Because being the city we are, and having him represent us is awful. We could have somebody so much better.

Denise: Things are getting better here.

Denise: There are sometimes when I [say to my mom and her partner] now is the time to just tone it down for a second! Like, um, they went to, they drove me to camp in Vancouver, and then my sister flew back, and they drove back through the United States. And I said, ‘Okay, while you’re in the United States tone it down like, ‘cause you know you’re two women travelling alone and you know – you know, things are not quite as open minded probably. Because they were, like, going through small towns like Cody, Wyoming, and stuff, and I was like, you know, it’s fine, but you know also be mindful of the people around you because some people are judgemental, and this is not where you live, and you don’t know the people that are around you […]. Cases like that I kind of have to remind them to be like mindful.

Denise: As a country, we’ve […] been getting better at, sort of, when there is an issue, dealing with it in the best way. And sort of seeing for example, the multiple parents recognition and sort of, okay, well, then if this is the problem, this is what we can do to protect those rights. And so, I think that probably there are still gaping holes in our law, but as those issues arise and become more prevalent I think they’ll be dealt with. So it’s not so much that I feel like the country is being negligent or not wanting to protect everyone’s rights. I just feel like certain things haven't been brought up yet […]. Also, Canadians are very sort of – we have a certain refusal to let things slide by in terms of equality.

Denise: [In Toronto in the summer of 2011, for] the Pride flag raising [ceremony] at city hall, [Toronto’s mayor, Rob Ford] was present in his office, which is in city hall, but he instead sent someone else to go down and to stand in his place, which I feel that is where things get very cruel […]. As the leader of the city […] this is an event that you’re expected to be at, and you don’t, it’s not like he was somewhere else. It was, he was sitting in his office in the building right behind where the event was taking place. So we know that you’re there, and we know that you don’t want to come. And the other thing that I had a huge problem with about this whole issue is he was trying to hold on to pretending that he was not being homophobic. Which is, you know, I don’t want you to say, ‘Oh, I’m homophobic,’ either. But at the same time, I don’t want you to pretend that’s not part of the issue. Because we know by your behaviour that you are being
homophobic [...]. If you’re some random civilian not wanting to go, that’s fine, I don’t really care, but as someone who is supposed to be showing support for the total population, you’re not doing a very good job.

Nick: The laws shouldn’t stop [evolving] until same-sex couples or LGBT have the same social standing, the same rights, and everything as a straight person should […]. They need to keep going, keep making improvements until everyone’s accepted for who they are.

Ellie: I’m from […] such a small place. And people are, I found, just they weren’t good with the topic […]. It was a pretty gossipy town, and I remember people would just, like, make comments. Like, even at a young age, um, I remember I went to my friend’s house, and her mom [said], ‘I always see a police car in front of your house.’ [She was trying to] get more information from me as a child [about my mom’s lesbian partner who was a police officer] […]. Small town people are small town for a reason. That’s what they enjoy, being in a small community where there isn’t as much accessibility to, like, organizations and that kind of thing.

Ellie: I disagree for sure with any laws in the states that don’t allow, like, gay marriage.

Ellie: [When Rob Ford, Toronto’s mayor, did not go to any Pride events, I though it was] disgusting. If you’re going to be the mayor of Toronto, you need to represent all minorities. And I feel like minority groups need to be celebrated. Like, if the people who are running things aren’t participating, then what are the other people going to think that are sort of on the fence about the situation?

Victoria: So many more people are out. But then you also see a lot of teenagers committing suicide, and stuff like that happening. But it’s like, well, why is that happening? Because it’s like, like, the don’t-ask-don’t-tell mindset, even though it’s not like a rule in the same way. In the army, maybe this is the American army, but don’t-ask-don’t-tell was actually, like, a legal procedure. But even though that’s gone, and you can’t fire someone on the grounds of being gay, but like, it’s still, like […] there’s kind of this, ‘Well, just don’t tell me, and it’ll be all fine,’ you know?

Victoria: I don’t think it’s laws in Canada at this point. Obviously around the world, wow, people are so behind. Like, even in the States, right? Some states don’t have legalized marriage. That’s like, really? It’s not right now about the laws. It’s about the attitudes. Like, nothing’s illegal, you know? You can adopt – queer people can adopt, queer people can – or you can get sex changes, you know, nothing’s illegal. So it’s not about laws, it’s about people […]. It’s just about, yeah, people getting anti-oppressive training, you know, and realizing that the questions they ask people have both positive and negative impact, you know? Like being in a doctor’s office and asking, like, I mean, this goes for me and my parents. I’ve been asked, and like I’ll tell them, like, I’m sexually active, this is
very private, and they’ll say, ‘Oh, what’s your boyfriend’s name?’ Oh, actually
her name is… But that’s hard. Or, ‘What do your mom and dad do?’ Well,
actually, you know, it’s hard having to constantly correct people. Whereas it’s so
simple being like, ‘What do your parents do?’ That changes nothing. Or, you
know, ‘What’s your partner’s name?’ It’s just about, like, such little things like
that make such a big difference. Working on the language people use, like,
‘That’s so gay’ or ‘lame’ or ‘retarded.’ Like, that all ties in to anti-oppressive
training, right? Because there’s so much language that oppresses someone.

Victoria: Compared to the rest of the world, we’re doing so well.

Victoria: Rob Ford. He’s an idiot. Like, every other mayor has attended [Toronto Pride
events]. Like, come on, you know? That’s just, like, such a step back. And it
doesn’t matter in the end because Rob Ford is just – he’s not riding the wave […].
He’s obviously, you know, on his own, like, losing path.

Victoria: I think the more people who feel free to come out, the more that people will come
out, and the more people will be accepted.

Victoria: It’s kind of easy for me to stay in the closet with my family because I have a
boyfriend. So it’s really easy to just say, ‘Oh, my boyfriend is coming,’ you
know? Even though he is super queer and does not look straight at all and has
piercings and tattoos everywhere.
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