RE/PRODUCING POWER:
SEX EDUCATION AND THE QUEER IDENTIFIED SUBJECT

By

Takara Ann Ketchell

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Graduate Department of Social Justice Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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Takara Ketchell
Department of Social Justice Education
University of Toronto

Abstract
This research delves into the complex relationship between sexuality and/or gender identity and sex education. Seven queer-identified adults were interviewed regarding their experiences of sex education curriculum in Toronto, Ontario. This research draws heavily on queer phenomenology and Foucauldian theory in its examination of education and educational influence on identity. It is, further, influenced by disability studies and post colonialism with regard to the role of society in defining and constraining identity categories. Findings show that the curriculum experienced by participants created and reinforced particular heteronormative discourses in regard to sex, gender, and sexuality. This in turn lent itself to experiences of identity which were marked by a degree of ambivalence. This thesis argues that, while indicative of a problem of representation within the curriculum, this ambivalence is also a site whereby identity can be reimagined as a relational process rather than a defining characteristic.
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Chapter One: Introduction to a Journey

All research projects begin with a question, sometimes that question is personal, sometimes it is professional, but it is always political. In the case of this research, it started with the question of how queer individuals experienced sex education in Ontario. Although I currently identify as queer, I have personally experienced a great deal of confusion around issues of sexuality and identity and was curious to explore whether or not my experiences were as particular as I had felt at the time. Through my research, it soon became clear, that my experience and confusion was not unique to me. Through the responses of participants in my open ended research interviews, responses such as Ellen¹, I began to realize that my experiences are not as unique as I have, at times, assumed.

I think it’s terrible. I mean, I think that on a professional/theoretical level, as someone who is interested in education, and I also think that on a really personal level as a queer woman who didn’t get to come out until I was twenty, twenty-one. Not because I didn’t know women were attractive my whole life but because I didn’t know that queerness was an option. In high school, I was vaguely aware that men could be gay, but I thought gay only applied to men. Like, I literally did not know that women could be queer. I think I had an inkling that women could be bi, because they are in some television shows, but bi was never an identity that really resonated with me… I was trying to be straight and then I realized I was gay… if we’d actually talked about queerness, queer identities, queer sexualities, like anything, in any kind of sex ed, I could’ve realized like five years earlier that I was gay and then I wouldn’t have had to go through the pain of dating a dude that I wasn’t attracted to and having all those terrible experiences, you know? So, I think it’s terrible because we need to know this for health reasons, how to have safe queer sex is important, we need to focus on consent and pleasure. I

¹ Interviews were conducted in October and November of 2014, with approval from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. Interviews took place with queer identified adults who had attended public school in Ontario to speak of their experiences. All participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms chosen in concert with participants; of the participant, one identified as male, one as trans* and four identified as female. One participant had attended high school at a Catholic school. For a more detailed account of methodology and demographics, please refer to the methodology section in Chapter Two.
think the fact that we don’t talk about consent is actually disgusting, and sets us up for rape culture. But on a personal level, I think it’s individually harmful to queer people, to not be told at a young age that this is even an option. Like, as soon as I realized that queerness was an option, that women could be gay, when that clicked in around third-year, it was like, “oh, that’s me.” (Ellen).

Given the uncertainty, confusion, ambivalence, and dissatisfaction evident in responses such as this, it is evident that identity is a highly complicated and complex matter that must take into account the not only the self but also basic societal understandings and re/presentations. It quickly became clear that this project would require an openness to rethinking my own expectations about a great many things, including the project itself.

As is the case with many research projects, this project has experienced many changes from its original conception when I was initially proposing an idea for my master’s thesis. The research was originally to explore the ways that queer identified students experienced sex education in the Ontario public school system and provide recommendations for what would be needed for a more inclusive curriculum. The time seemed right for this research to take place as at that time the Ontario sex education curriculum had not been updated since 1998 and recent attempts to change it had been shelved in 2010 (McKay, Byers, Voyer, Humphreys, & Markham, 2014; Clarke, 2011; Ophea, 2014). In an effort to ensure that I did not overlook those who may not have been ‘out’, or even fully aware of their sexuality or gender identity during high school, I chose interview adults about their past experiences of sex education in public schools in Ontario. This led me to limit my research participants to queer identified individuals between the ages of nineteen and thirty who had gone to public (and not Catholic) school in Ontario.

However, through the process of interviewing my participants, this research took on a new direction. As a result of methodological decisions to give participants some freedom to guide
the discussion within a framework of open ended questions, the early interviews often went in unexpected directions. I had expected that participants would speak about how it felt to be queer in a context where their identity was ignored or overlooked. However, while this was a theme in some participants’ discussions of their experiences, it was by no means a major one nor was it one that many participants chose to dwell on. Although the call for participants specifically stated that the research was to explore queer experiences of Ontario sex education curriculum, early participants were much more interested in discussing the complexities and confusion of identity itself. Of course, the relationship between identity and experiences are always already interconnected as identity is both constitutive of and constituted by our experiences. Our experiences provide us with discourses around and through which our identities can be understood and yet our experiences are profoundly influenced by how we identify. This, perhaps, is why, when asked about their experiences of sex education, the conversation so easily turned to a discussion of identity. Likewise, the very brevity of sex education, not to mention the lack of relevant information, made remembering particulars difficult for participants. Several participants discussed how they went from how they identified, or couldn’t identify, in high school to how they currently identify; this evolution in identity mostly took place outside of the context of school and curriculum, and as such the experiences discussed had more to do with participants’ experiences of identity than of curriculum.

Since I was committed to the idea of examining lived experiences of queer individuals I decided to let the research evolve to speak to the concerns and experiences of the participants. Furthermore, even as I complete my interviews and began to write this thesis, there was a new curriculum to be put into effect in the fall of 2015 which includes many of the kinds of changes that were thought necessary by those interviewed for this thesis. Both the interview process and
the movement in curriculum development not only led to a change in the direction of my research but also led me to interview two participants that fell outside my original parameters. Due to the decreased importance of curriculum to the interviews and to the new focus on identity and ambivalence, I ultimately decided to interview one participant that went to a Catholic high school and one participant who would have been exposed to an earlier version of the curriculum. Rather than being about the effects of a particular curriculum on the experience of queer individuals this project has become a broader exploration of possible ways that queer individuals negotiate their sexual identities in a heteronormative society.

I begin from the social fact that in Canada we live in and through a heteronormative and patriarchal society (Cannella & Perez, 2012; DesRoches & Sweet, 2008). One of the key concerns of queer theory is that society is structured in such a way that heterosexuality is privileged while queer sexualities are peripheral and not taken into account. One element of this is referred to as heteronormative temporality, an understanding of individual and societal destiny based on a developmental teleology ensuring the transmission of a range of goods from moral values, appropriate gender identity, and eating habits, to personal wealth – all through heterosexual marriage (Wilkerson, 2013, p. 102).

These heteronormative discourses arise from many different places; these discourses can be seen in the language of state policies, assumptions about the ‘normal’ nuclear family, school curriculum, consumer culture, and throughout everyday language. The majority of structures and institutions in our society operate with an assumption that heterosexuality is the norm and can generally be assumed. To draw on theories of queer phenomenology, this makes heterosexuality central in society while everything else becomes peripheral at best. In many cases queer issues and topics may not get mentioned at all; unless the topic directly and explicitly includes queer interests and/or concerns, heterosexuality is generally assumed to be the identity, the normalized
and normalizing background order. The heteronormative structures of society mean that figuratively speaking, society is ‘shaped’ in such a way that only straight subjects can properly fit in it (Ahmed, 2006). Those that do not fit experience both alienation from a society that does not have space for them and can have difficulties making sense of themselves due to the fact that the structures of society result in only heterosexual ‘object’ being within reach; what we do is in many ways affected by what is within view for us to orient ourselves towards, and/or away from (Ahmed, 2006). It is therefore still prudent to consider what effects the structures of heterosexual normativity are having within education by exploring how people live the question of sexual identity.

While heteronormativity is widespread and takes place throughout society, one of the key areas where it has a substantial effect on the (re)creation of discourses and on peoples’ development is education. Schools are not only where the majority of institutional education takes place, and therefore where we are instilled with the knowledge and ideologies that are deemed important by those in power, but it is also one of the first places where we experience community outside of our family. Schools are social and through our school experiences we learn how to act and interact with others in society. Education, and our experiences of that education, can have large effects on what kinds of knowledge and identities are available to people when they are growing up. What is made available to us influences what we come to perceive and even what we see as acceptable both for others and for ourselves. As with Ellen cited above, they did not, perhaps could not, see themselves as queer and had to see heterosexuality as acceptable, even inevitable. Therefore, the heteronormative structures that are prevalent within society, education
included, effect the ways that queer\textsuperscript{2} students come to identify, and even what identity issues or questions arise as well as how they are experienced.

This makes sex education curriculum important on a number of accounts. Mention or reference to sex and sexualized imagery are highly prevalent in western society; it is a key concern in much of our lives. Not only do we see sexually charged and/or referencing materials in the media all the time, but sex is closely tied to ideas of love, relationships and intimacy. Sex signifies more than just a reproductive act in our society. Therefore, when what we are taught about sex in sex education is reductive, I would contend that this also, at least temporarily, reduces what we see as feasible for sex, relationships, love, and intimacy as well as identity. The language of sex frames our perception of what is possible, or acceptable while it is simultaneously part of the heteronormative ordering of daily life. While I will go into more detail about the terms and meanings that are integral to this project in chapter two, I feel the need to provide a preliminary definition for the term that has the most central importance to this project. It is important to briefly discuss the issue of identity here as this project is deeply invested in the exploration of identity as an active and ongoing process experienced in meaningful ways by individuals. Rather than taking identity as a simple act whereby a person is identified, this project is invested in theorizing some of the ways in which identity can be viewed as both complex and contextual. The ways that we think about identity is always already organized and structured by

\textsuperscript{2} I choose to use the term queer as a general identifier for those who do not fit into the cisgendered and heterosexual ‘norm’ because queer indicates difference, the sense of something being ‘off’ while not identifying what that something might be. Acronyms, such as LGBTQ and all its permutations, clearly indicate the group identities that belong, and therefore those that don’t. Therefore, I choose to use queer when speaking generally in order to include all people who might feel that they don’t quite ‘fit’ the norm, rather than trying to find an acronym that includes all possibilities. I discuss the term “queer” more extensively in chapter two.
societal values of what it means to be human, or *normal*. Therefore, if we are to change our approach to sexuality and gender identity, we must work to uncouple these connections.

While I began this project with the belief that this normalization of heterosexuality would create a particular, and particularly negative, experience of sex education curriculum, the experiences I was faced with were much more complex and multifaceted. It is true that, for the majority of those that I spoke to, they did not find that the curriculum that they encountered spoke to their experiences, desires, or identities; however, this lack of representations was not seen in an entirely negative light. Rather than viewing these experiences in a negative way, participants in this study predominantly chose to speak about the experience of coming to identify themselves in this ambivalent space outside of heterosexuality. Unlike much of the discourse around sexuality which often focuses on sexuality as something that is always already known by the individual and is often organized around the binary of being either ‘out’ or ‘in the closet’, the conversations which evolved during these interviews often highlighted the ambivalence and/or confusion that surrounded what I refer to as their journey toward identity. It is this journey and the circumstances that engenders it that this project strives to explore and address.

In this chapter, I have endeavored to introduce some of the foundational themes and issues that provide a context for this thesis. In chapter two I will provide a backdrop for my work through an examination of the theoretical and methodological concerns and framework of my research as well as some preliminary analysis of the interviews. Chapter three marks the beginning of my substantive chapters with a Foucauldian analysis of current sex education curriculum and its potential to produce and reproduce normalizing discourses. The importance of these norms will discussed in chapter four as I delve into the responses of my participants which addressed themes of norms, disconnection, and denaturalization. Chapter four contends with the
‘problem of ambivalence’ through an exploration of the disparate relationship between the norms that were presented through sex education and the lived reality of participants which engenders the denaturalization of norms and a sense of ambivalence. The final substantive chapter will build on this discussion by contending with the ‘promise of ambivalence’. As such, chapter five will examine the use of ambivalence, through the use of language of space and spatial metaphors in discussions of sexuality and queerness, to conceptualize identity as a journey and a process rather than a static destination. These themes will be built upon through an analysis of the possibilities created through the use of denaturalization and ambivalence to open up spaces to create and recreate identity. Finally, chapter six will explore the contributions, limits, and future avenues for research that emerged in the course of this research.
Chapter Two: Methodological and Theoretical Concerns

In the first half of this chapter, I will provide a brief overview of the types of theory that I will make use of in my project as well as clarify several terms and ideas that will be used throughout. Given the multiple and contested meanings of the term, queer itself must be unpacked and discussed. Likewise, the notion of identity must be clarified before the subsequent analysis can be made possible. Finally, I turn to issues of curriculum discussed as they relate to identity formation. The second half of this chapter will be dedicated to explaining both the method and methodology used in the gathering and analyzing of data. However, before I get into the particulars of the theoretical and methodological influences, I would like to briefly discuss a few key points pertaining to my use of the words queer and identity.

These terms are often used to refer to a single static or naturalized meaning. In this sense, identity is something that exists in all of us and is natural, static, and uncomplicated. Likewise, queer can be understood as denoting a particular type of identity. However, my use of these identity and queer often departs from these sorts of understandings. I do not refer to identity as something that is naturally occurring and static. Identity is something that needs to be interpreted and understood, even by the individual. As such, my use of the term identity in this project refers to a social project and achievement, it is something that must worked on and produced by the individual and in relation to other people as well as in relation to ways of knowing, saying, and doing daily life. Similarly, while some of my participants do identify as queer, my use of queer often has more to do with the kinds of identities in question rather than any one type of identity. In this way, what is examined here is not any one type or identity which can be understood as inherent and natural. The focus is on unraveling some of the ways in which identity must be
developed and the ways in which discourses around us affect this process, particularly in cases of non-normative identities.

**Theory**

*Queer*

The term queer has a rather contentious history. It has only been in recent times that the term queer has been reclaimed as an identity by some people in the LGBTQ community. Even now there are some people who still choose not to identify with the term queer because of its previous negativity. Queer can refer to a large number of different things; there is a great deal of variability even in terms of what people mean when using queer as an identity category. In the case of those seven people who I interviewed, the majority use a term queer to describe their identity in some manner. While there were some similarities in the answers given, when questioned about what queer meant to them, there are also a few key differences. For Michael, the use of queer was about non-normativity; for him, “the queer part of [his] sexuality is more like the politics of [his] sexuality, rather than who [he is] interested in”. Megan also cited political reasons for using queer, however, she further clarified that “it’s kind of encompassing of, I guess a desire to build intimacy and attraction to people of a variety of different gender and gender presentations… I didn’t find that other, other label, sexual orientation labels, really worked for me”. Likewise, for Danielle, queer “has to do with the people that [she is] attracted to” as it “gives you more flexibility when it comes to honoring who you’ve been dating”. In some academic disciplines, queer is used to refer to objects, subjects, theories, etc. which operate in different

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3 Interviews were conducted in October and November of 2014, with approval from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. Interviews took place with queer identified adults who had attended public school in Ontario to speak of their experiences. All participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms chosen in concert with participants; of the participant, one identified as male, one as trans* and four identified as female. One participant had attended high school at a Catholic school. For a more detailed account of methodology and demographics, please refer to the methodology section in this chapter as well as in chapter four.
ways than the norm. Therefore, while not everybody chooses to identify as queer, the term queer is useful in that it can be used to refer to any identity that is interpreted as falling outside of the confines of cisgendered heterosexuality. The use of the identifier queer in this project is not intended to necessarily reflect the identification of all of the participants.

I chose to use this term as an alternative to the LGBTQ acronym (or any other variation of this acronym) due to the fact that the use of an acronym only speaks to those included in the acronym; as the ever expanding acronym (of which LGBTQ is only a portion of) indicates, there is difficulty in trying to create an acronym that encompasses all ways of identifying along lines of gender and sexuality. By choosing to use the term queer in this research I aim be inclusive of anyone who identifies as in some way non-normative in regards to sexuality and/or gender and to maintain a focus on what it means to identify outside of the norm rather than getting caught up on particular identities. The distinction here is on the importance of the *experience* of identifying from a non-normalized position, rather than the specifics of what that identity may be. An identity is a label that is either chosen for or ascribed to an individual; to identify on the other hand is an active process by the individual that is a dynamic and relational in the ways that it comes into contact with the norms of society. What is spoken and what remains silent is of utmost importance when it comes to issues in society. This is of course not merely relevant in the context of sexuality; similar logics can be seen in Tanya Titchkosky’s article on the ways in which the lack of accessible washrooms in an educational workplace environment (Titchkosky, 2008). Just as her work “adds to the growing body of disability studies scholarship analyzing how the ordinary use of unexamined conceptions of disability reproduces the status-quo even as the material environment changes” (Titchkosky, 2008, p. 39), so too does my work aim to uncover
the unexamined, ordinary, conceptions of sexuality which perpetrate problematic beliefs and practices despite efforts towards equality and acceptance.

In regards to the more academic aspects of the term queer, I am deeply influenced by such scholars as Sara Ahmed and Judith Butler. Ahmed's work on queer phenomenology, and in particular her discussion of orientation, was integral in influencing my treatment of queerness as deeply relational, operating outside of heteronormative discourses yet deeply influenced by these discourses in society. Ahmed's influence on the phenomenological approach of this research will be discussed later in this chapter. The work of Butler on gender and performativity has likewise been incredibly important in understanding identity, particularly in terms of gender, as something that is acted out rather than entirely static and internal. This informed my approach on identity in this project; rather than approaching participants with the assumption that identity would have been a stable factor throughout their lives, I prepared questions that remained open to the idea of identity as active and changing.

Identity

Within the realm of sociology, identity can be used in a number of different ways. Identity can be as relatively simple as a matter of choosing a label or group that one belongs to; a use which presupposes identity as a *thing* which is possessed by, or simply exists in, an individual. Often when the topic of identity is brought forward, particularly in instances where it is a matter of marginalized identity groups, the discussion turns to issues of identity politics. Identity politics, however, are generally concerned with addressing issues of inequality based on group identities; the focus on pushing for changes in attitude or behaviour towards people of a certain group identity tends to create a more homogenous group identity that does not explore individual experiences of that identity. This is not the kind of identity that this project seeks to address.
Rather, this project concerns itself with exploring the ways in which identity is experienced and made sense of individuals as a social or relational process. I would argue that identity is not a simple matter and when one's identity does not line up with the normative expectations, or what is depicted as dominant in the media, identity becomes a question that must be explored and worked through and thus not a simple matter. Furthermore, it is important to take into account how identity is achieved (and used) by individuals; despite the ways in which identity is often portrayed as being inherent to individuals, there are many factors and influences on how, and if, people will be able to make sense of their own experience and identity. One way this issue has been addressed is through the sense that of the importance of representations in the media, however, much of this speaks of the importance of people being able to see people 'like themselves' reflected in the media. Given my focus on the active use of queer and the accomplishment of identity, I am more concerned with representations as sense making devices, that is, ways or modes of making sense of one's identity. Discourses which produce a sense of what is normal, expected, or 'human' behaviour have a constant presence in society; these understandings of identity which are inherently dichotomous stem in part from racial discourses used in the time of colonization and carried forward to this day (Wynter, 2003; Walcott, 2011). Personal identity is made up of many different aspects; people can identify along lines of gender, race, sexuality, nationality, education, upbringing, religion, etc. and how and why people identify may change as they move through their lives and though society itself. Although sometimes identity is treated as always already determined, the way that we understand or experience that identity and our relationship to it are highly complex and fluid.
Curriculum

This project began with the intention to directly address and analyze the effects of sex education curriculum of queer students. While this has since changed, issues surrounding curriculum studies and ideas such as ‘hidden curriculum’ have remained integral to this project. The development of curriculum studies as a field marked "a shift of theory and practice as scholars sought understanding of curricula as phenomena of interest and societal import in contrast with sole concentration on service to leaders of practice in schools." (Kridel, 2010, p. 230). Rather than focussing on determining the 'best' way to institute and transmit the curriculum in place, curriculum studies is concerned with how curriculum itself is decided and the effect that may emerge as a result. According to curriculum studies, policy around curriculum is usually a function of social policy and large educational policy. Positively, it is a construction drawn from careful analysis of the key questions, resources of the field, history, context, and philosophy pertaining to curriculum studies. Negatively, it is an autocratic imposition orchestrated for the benefit of wealthy power wield-ers, who manipulate curriculum and educational situations to sustain their own advantage at the pinnacle of the societal sorting machine. (Kridel, 2010, p.233).

In this way, curriculum studies concerns itself with the ways in which curriculum may in fact be re-inscribing existing power structures. This kind of concern is incredibly important as education is integral to the transmission of discourses which plays a profound part in influencing how people come to understand and live in our society.

However, what is learned in the classroom is not just what is in the curriculum itself and the textbooks used. Equally, if not more, important is the idea of the hidden curriculum, "which has at least three meanings: first, subtle messages that educators intend to convey, such as politeness or interest in learning" (Kridel, 2010, p.233). This is generally directed towards making sure that student are socialized in such a way that they are manageable and will understand and
follow societal rules and values. The issue here is primarily in the way that this education is largely unaddressed and unchallenged due to its hidden nature. The second meaning refers to the "subtle messages that educators convey without intent due to personal mannerisms" (Kridel, 2010, p.233). This can be particularly important in cases where educators have values and beliefs that are not desired or even end up passing on messages that they do not intend to. The third meaning of hidden curriculum has to do with the "conveyance of structural attributes of the larger society in which the educational organization is embedded, thus perpetuating racism, classism, sexism, ageism, and the like" (Kridel, 2010, p.233). In this way, structural attributes in society are reproduced through education and due to the subtle and unspoken nature of the hidden curriculum, this process can be difficult to pinpoint let alone undermine. Therefore, this projects focus on individuals' relationship to sexual identity in the context of sex education makes orientation to the workings of hidden curriculum especially important.

Methodology

In an effort to explore how sex education and identity are experienced by queer individuals who are coming to identify with and experience their sexuality as an identity issue, I will be analyzing six interviews, as well as excerpts from an earlier pilot interview, to highlight and explore emerging issues. I was given the opportunity through a methodology course to perform an initial pilot interview which allowed me to pinpoint a few emergent themes and to fine tune the interview questions that I would use. Interviews took place in person between myself and a single participant in a private room booked at the OISE library. This was done in order to have the interviews take place where we would not be interrupted nor would participants need to worry about being overheard. Recruitment took place in the form of an email that was circulated through friends, fellow students, and later also by those who had been interviewed. As such, this research
made use of a combination of both convenience and snowball sampling. As a result of my understanding of sexual identity as a relational accomplishment and my interest in understanding this in a more in-depth way, the sampling method used and the small sample size this research is intended to be neither representative nor generalizable. Rather, the value of this research stems from its ability to highlight the multiplicity of experience and in turn provides an avenue to explore the necessity and value of making available a multiplicity of narratives that relate to identity tied to cis-gendered relations to sexuality.

As such, I chose to take a mixed method approach stemming from phenomenology, particularly queer phenomenology and post-intentional phenomenology, as well as critical discourse analysis to guide both the collection and the analysis of the data. As mentioned earlier, data was collected from interviews as well as from curriculum documents and literature around sex education and identity. It is this idea of a multiplicity of experiences which led me to engage with the ideas present in both queer phenomenology and post-intentional phenomenology. More generally speaking, phenomenology as a philosophy began from an “assumption that there is an essence to an experience that is shared with others who have also had that experience. The experiences of those participating in the study… are analyzed as unique expressions and then compared to identify the essence” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 20). However, further development within the discipline of phenomenology has since broadened what it means to do phenomenological research. Phenomenologists such as Mark Vagle, as well as other academic work such as *Queer Phenomenology* by Sara Ahmed (2006) and *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* by Madeleine Grumet (1988), take a different approach when it comes to using the philosophies and methodologies of phenomenologists. Both Grumet and Ahmed do political and disruptive work through bringing phenomenology into conversation with feminist and queer
theory respectively. In the case of my research and its roots in queer theory, Ahmed’s work is particularly relevant and the work she does on queer phenomenology lends itself well to my analysis. Likewise, the work of Vagle in his development of what he refers to as post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle, 2014) works to mesh phenomenology with more post-structural ideologies and take phenomenology in a more political direction.

In the beginning, I had some reservations about using phenomenology in my research, due to the often non-political focus on a shared essence. While the work of academics such as Ahmed (who I will discuss later in this chapter) led me to appreciate the possibility of phenomenology, older phenomenological work seemed a challenging fit for my focus on a dynamic, ambivalent, and multiple perspective of queer identity. However, my reading led me to Vagle's post-intentional phenomenological approach which distinguishes itself in the following way: "In old phenomenology, the goal was to determine the essential structure a phenomenon 'has'. In post-intentional phenomenology the goal is to see what the phenomenon might become" (Vagle, 2014, p. 119). So many of the discourses around sexuality are framed around dichotomous and essentialist understandings of identity and, as much as possible, I wanted my research to resist this tendency. Post-intentional phenomenology's demand that "it is critical that one resists binaries such as either-or thinking, right-wrong, normal-abnormal, and the rigidity that often continues after a binary begins to break down" (Vagle, 2014, p. 118), matches well with my politics to disrupt the singular narrative of what it means to occupy a non-heterosexual identity. The ability to explore the commonalities, or essence (which can be tensions of becoming), of experiences that may be present while also acknowledging the contextual and complex nature of experiences is clear in both Vagle's and Ahmed's use and adaptation of phenomenology. It is, in part, this focus on the fluid dynamic nature of experience that influenced the approach I took in asking participant
about their journey towards their current identification rather than treating sexuality/identity as something that is a static experience.

It is for that reason that work of Ahmed (2006) in "Orientations; Towards a Queer Phenomenology" provided theories that were particularly poignant for this research. She foregrounds this article by asking the following questions: "what does it mean for sexuality to be lived as oriented? What difference does it make what or who we are oriented towards in the very direction of our desire?" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 543). Ahmed goes on to suggest that:

If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces, and who or what we inhabit spaces with…. If we foreground the concept of 'orientation,' then we can retheorize this sexualization of space as well as the spatiality of sexual desire. What would it mean for queer studies if we were to pose the question of the orientation of sexual orientation as a phenomenological question (Ahmed, 2006, p. 543).

By using phenomenology in conjunction with queer theory, Ahmed proposes that it is possible to examine social spaces and structures phenomenologically in a way that explores the social and personal effects of heteronormative spaces. It is the sense of social spaces being organized and orientated around the heterosexual subject(s) that provides a major component of my analysis. Not only does this orientation of society effect what is taught in the sex education but these decisions recreate this sense of society ring oriented around heterosexuality. As Ahmed states, "[q]ueer objects, which do not allow the subject to approximate the form of the heterosexual couple, may not even get near enough to 'come in to view' as possible objects to be directed toward" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 560). In the context of my research, this greatly influenced the ways in which I approached the question of my participants' experiences in and of the sex education curriculum; Ahmed's use of phenomenology to examine orientation led me to ask questions about both the diversity of their environment in school and whether there was any discourses in the
school around issues of diversity. Furthermore, these theories highlighted the possibility that, because of these orientations of society, identification is not always a simple matter. This was exemplified in the journey that was needed for many of my participants to come to an identification that they felt fit their experiences. Canadian society in general, and sex education in particular, is organized in such a way that queer objects, not to mention queer subjects, come into view via degradation, discrimination, and erasure. The absence of queer discourses makes it so that heterosexuality is always already central. "Heterosexuality is not then simply an orientation towards others, it is also something we are oriented around, even if it disappears from view" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 560); heterosexuality is so central to everyday interactions that it is often taken for granted and thus invisible. Yet this taken for granted character of heteronormativity shows itself in the face of the degradation and/or erasure of queer possibilities.

This project also seeks to be cognizant of the importance of experience which is often revealed through what is emphasized and also in how things are said, or even not said. As Hook claims, “we should be wary of rigidly separating the textual and the interactional, of prioritizing merely textual signifiers in understanding the role of discourse in cementing certain social formations” (Hook, 2013, p. 250). Therefore, I turn to critical discourse analysis in order to unpack the meaning and effects of the discourses present in this research. According to Fairclough, discourse aids in the construction of social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and meaning (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 90). My decision to utilize critical discourse analysis in particular for this research stems from its focus on the importance of social analysis in examining texts.

In Fairclough's take on critical discourse analysis in particular, he claims that an "interdisciplinary perspective is needed in which one combines textual and societal analysis"
In fact, I would go further and say that a distinction between what is textual and what is societal in terms of analysis in some ways ignores the fact that these things are so interrelated; texts are merely one way in which society comes into view and in turn many aspects of society may also be viewed as some form of text to be analyzed. I would argue that textual analysis itself is an analysis of aspects of society;

Texts never just get it right or get it wrong insofar as they are also a ‘doing’ – right or wrong, texts are always oriented social action, producing meaning. Texts do not just talk about the world, even though that might be their self-proclaimed intention. Texts, insofar as they appear, are our world. That is, for any word on disability to make sense, it needs to gesture at a whole world that allows for such sensibility. Thus texts act on us and help constitute our social contexts (Titchkosky, 2007, p. 21).

As such, I combine an analysis of interview accounts with a contextual analysis of sex education curriculum. The analysis of sex education curriculum will take place in chapter three and draw heavily of the work of Michel Foucault to address the import role curriculum plays in creating and maintaining hegemonic discourses. Meanwhile, the bulk of the interview analysis will also draw on the work of phenomenologists and postcolonial thinkers in chapters four and five.

My analysis of the accounts from interviews will endeavour to take into account the three dimensions of analysis put forward by Fairclough: “(1) the linguistic features of the text (text), (2) processes relating to the production and consumption of the text (discursive practice); and (3) the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs (social practice)” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 68). In taking this approach, I aim to create an analysis that addresses the importance of what is happening on a societal/institutional level as this is expressed at the individual level. My aim is that, by taking into account both queer and post-intentional phenomenology as well as aspects of critical discourse analysis, I will be able to address the articulations of the lived experiences of the participant as central to the analysis while also making
use of the critical awareness of social power and discourse that is integral in critical discourse analysis.

Methodological concerns

As a queer feminist scholar, my decisions around traversing ethical and methodological concerns draw heavily on feminist theory and methodology. Many of the principles that were developed by feminist scholars to make sure that their research was 'for women' rather than just about women can be seen echoed in this project. As such, I consider principles of reflexivity to be incredibly important for the creation of good research. Within the context of research, reflexivity means making “explicit the power relations and the exercise of power in the research process” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 118). Research, and in this case interviewing, can never be free of bias, subjectivity, and unequal power relations. It is impossible for a researcher to conduct their research unaffected by their own beliefs, expectations, and experiences. Research which claims to be objective and unbiased merely conceals the ways in which the researcher may have been influenced by their own knowledges, biases, and positionality in their analysis, or even in how they chose and designed their study. It is therefore important for the researcher to be upfront about how their positionality, politics, and academic background influence the work that they do. Therefore, while “[t]heory and accountability are critical... attempts to be objective misconceive and mystify real relationships between knowledge and power” (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p.54). As such, my research does not make claims of objective or universal knowledge production as “personal experiences, political consciousness and attention to the voices of others help shape any area of knowledge production” (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p.54). My research is driven by a desire to attend to the multiplicity of experience that exists in how people make sense of identity, in particular, in terms of sexuality within the context of heteronormative spaces.
This interest in experiences of identity is deeply influenced by my own experiences of partial, confused, and hybrid identity. As a fourth-generation Japanese-Canadian from a family affected by the Japanese internment during the war, I have long struggled with the idea of identity and the effects of history and discourse on one’s ability to make sense of and claim an identity. The Japanese internment resulted for a long time in a silencing of that history and a loss of community. Therefore, I grew up knowing that I was a ‘quarter-Japanese’, but with no real understanding of what that meant in terms of my own identity. My interest in identity only grew as I began to grapple with understanding of my own sexuality; the discourses and stories available to me growing up where such that for most of my life I simply assumed that I was straight. It was not until I was in grade 12 that I began to even consider the possibility that I might be anything other than straight. Even after I began to fully identify as queer, I did not feel like my experience of sexuality matched up with the discourses of sexuality in the media. This led me to create a research project that would address sexuality in a way that did not take identity as always already known and taken for granted.

Despite the fact that, like my participants, I identify as queer, it is important to be aware of my privileged position as researcher. In all researcher-participant interactions there is always the possibility of exploitation, marginalization, and misinterpretation. While I have made efforts to minimize this, it is not possible to fully negate the fact that as researcher I ultimately control what is included and how it is analyzed. Due in part to the snowball sample used in this study, those that I interviewed were fairly similar to myself; they were all queer-identified university students, or had been in recent times. As such, my participant all came to the study with at least a general understanding of both social research and the kind of theoretical understandings of gender and sexuality prevalent in sociology and women's studies. This does not, however, negate the
possibility that participants might end up feeling misrepresented by my analysis. Furthermore, when interviewing participants there is the possibility that participants may share more in the moment than they are comfortable with. In an effort to ensure that participants do not feel taken advantage of in this way, I included as part of my research method a review period whereby participants were given an opportunity to read and edit the transcript from their interview. This ensures that accounts given express what participants intended and contain only what participants are comfortable sharing at this time. Given this study's focus on how identity is developed and experienced, it does not make sense to prioritize what was originally said over an account that better reflects the views and experiences of the participant. Of the seven participants, only two chose to edit their transcripts; both participants made grammatical edits to clarify their meaning and one chose to remove a small section of text.

The links between phenomenological approaches and queer theory will be woven together in what follows. In chapter three, I focus on providing context to the following chapters with a Foucauldian analysis of Ontario’s sex education curriculum. Chapter four and five take these themes to a more personal scale with an analysis of interview data in order to explore the concept of ambivalence as indicative of a problem (in chapter four) and as providing promise to our understanding of identity (in chapter five). I turn now to chapter three with an analysis of normalizing discourses within the context of sex education curriculum. This chapter will provide a framework from which to understand the types of discourses present and the potential effects of the privileging of particular sorts of information and knowledges.
Chapter Three: Reproducing Normality

Chapter Three marks the beginning of my substantive chapters with a textual analysis of sex education curriculum between 1998 and the 2014/2015 school year. Within the context of this chapter, curriculum refers specifically to the Health and Physical Education curriculum documents developed by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Obviously, this focus on curriculum documents can only result in a focus on that which those in power considers to be important for students to learn, and to a lesser extent an impression of what is likely taught, or at least the assumed parameters for that teaching. It is important to keep in mind the potential differences that exist between the information provided to teachers through curriculum documents, what and how teachers choose to teach, and the information that students actually take in, not to mention the relations they may or may not develop with educational materials and situations. While examining curriculum documents cannot truly uncover or reflect what students are experiencing or learning in actual classrooms, these documents do provide important context and highlight what is deemed important for students, in terms of knowledge of sex and sexuality.

This analysis focuses on the curriculum itself and its potential to produce and reproduce normalizing discourses, as evidenced in my research participants’ discussions of norms, disconnection, and denaturalization (which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four). Foucault’s theories provide a valuable basis for the type of critique that I provide in this chapter, as, for Foucault,

critique does not begin with the assumption that what exists is wrong or in error; rather, critique examines the assumptions that structure the discursive and the nondiscursive, the linguistic and the material, words and things, the epistemological and the ontological in order to foreground the historicity and, so, the unnatural nature of what exists. (Adams St. Pierre, 2014, pp. 4,5)
In particular, this analysis will be heavily influenced by Foucault’s theories of power and governmentality. As discussed in Chapter Two, when engaging in critical discourse analysis it is impossible to get a full picture by only considering what is being said; if we are to build a more complete picture, it is equally important to attend to the societal and cultural processes and structures at play. Taking this into account, I believe that it is important to provide an overview and analysis of some of the structures at work, through the implementation of curriculum, in order to provide context for my analysis of the interviews and my discussion of identity in the fourth chapter. The discussion of sex education curriculum in Ontario is particularly complicated by the fact that while, as of the 2014 school year, the sex education components remain unchanged from those in use in 1998, in 2010 a revised curriculum was proposed but not implemented. Furthermore, a new sex education curriculum has once again been proposed and approved by the province and is slated for implementation in the fall of 2015. As such, I believe it is important to address the different variations of curriculum, the implications, and the responses to these reforms.

This chapter is concerned with examining some of the discourses surrounding sex education as well as particular discourses within sex education curriculum which promote ideas around sameness and otherness. Views around sex and sexuality have undergone substantial shifts in much of ‘western’ society and much academic work has addressed these changes, see for instance the work of Gayle Rubin, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler. Yet sex education curriculum has been much slower in addressing these shifts. In order to make sense of how sexuality is constructed and enacted in present day society, we must look at the ways in which discourses around sexuality are constructed and how individuals are disciplined in relation to these discourses. This can, in turn, be understood in relation to theories of governmentality, as it is
through the organization and accounting of populations that those in power are able to, at least partially, control and organize what is seen as normal and legitimate. As such, the work of Michel Foucault is useful for making these connections. In particular, Foucault explores how power works in productive ways;

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault, Interview on Truth and Power, 1980, pp. 118-119)

This relationship between knowledge, power, and discourse means that discourse has the power to determine not only what can be said, but also how a topic can be spoken about (Foucault, The History of Sexuality, 1978, p. 11). In particular, he is concerned with how power operates within and through institutions, as it is through these institutions that discourse is both determined and promoted. It is the relationship between power and discourse which determines what counts as knowledge. As such, it is important to explore how sex education can constrain our thinking about sex, sexuality, and the gendered body. In particular, we must consider how curriculum narrows heteronormative focus has the potential to alienate both heterosexual and queer students. The emphasis on reproduction and sexual health privileges the objective/corporeal while marginalizing or erasing more subjective/emotive, and I argue, inclusive approaches. Curriculum, however, does not exist in isolation from the larger institutions and societal discourses.

The types of discourse that are privileged in a society organize what is regarded as valid and valuable knowledge (Foucault, 1978, p. 12). This ultimately influences the way society is structured. Furthermore, the effects of discourses in society could be extended to encompass what is ultimately possible in terms of identity and personhood. While Foucault’s theories are less commonly applied to the individual, they can be of considerable use in analyzing how power
operates with, against, and around particular groups of people. While discipline is generally concerned with constraining and punishing individuals’ behaviour, governmentality has as its focus the organization, accounting, surveilling, and control of a population (Foucault, Governmentality, 2003, p. 244). As Olena Fimyar claims, “governmentality may be described as the effort to create governable subjects through various techniques developed to control, normalise and shape people’s conduct (Fimyar, 2008, p. 5). This process is not neutral. All of these aspects are important for understanding not only how power operates within a larger population, but how those effects might be felt by groups within that population. These effects can be used to then elucidate the general experiences of the individuals within the group. Although power does not operate in the same way on all individuals, there are often similarities of experience within groups who share a common identity. Thus, an examination of how various groups experience discourse, discipline, and the effects of governmentality within the educational system can provide insights into how power operates within a given society.

**Competing Messages: Sex in Society and Curriculum?**

*By the end of Grade 7, students will:*

- Explain the male and female reproductive systems as they relate to fertilization;
- Distinguish between the facts and myths associated with menstruation, spermatogenesis, and fertilization;
- Identify the methods of transmission and the symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and ways to prevent them;
- Use effective communication skills (e.g., refusal skills, active listening) to deal with various relationships and situations;
- Explain the term abstinence as it applies to healthy sexuality;
- Identify sources of support with regard to issues related to healthy sexuality (e.g., parents/guardians, doctors). (Ontario Curriculum, Health and Physical Education - Interim Edition Grades 1-8, 2010b, p. 184)

Sex education curriculum influences how children learn about their gender roles and about the type of relationships that are possible. Curriculum sets out expected learning outcomes that influences what teachers are to teach their students. As such, curriculum also influences how
people learn to experience and think about their gendered bodies. In fact, the kinds of language and discourses that are used in sex education curriculum can greatly affect not only how students come to understand sex, but also how they understand their place in society. Curriculum is, thus, a very important avenue of consideration in understanding the operation of power in society. According to Kate Kearins (1996):

Power is exercised through institutions which codify human experience and extend the reach of its effects. Foucault shows institutions executing social norms through means of exclusion and internment. Employed systematically, such means inculcate norms which facilitate control. (p. 9)

Reproduction-based sex education curriculum aids in creating a heteronormative temporality through which many aspects of a moral and successful life are tied to heterosexual marriage (Wilkerson, 2013, p. 102). Furthermore, since the majority of sex education is organized around the discourses of reproduction, the conversation is by default a heterosexual one. For instance, in the 2010 interim curriculum for grade seven (shown at the beginning of this section), which retained the sex education components from the 1998 curriculum, lists six specific expectations. Of the six expectations, three have to do with biology related to development and reproduction; the remaining three expectations were concerned with developing communication skills, identifying sources of support, and abstinence (Ontario Curriculum, 2010b, p. 184). It is clear that this curriculum is meant to deal with primarily physical concerns. The organization of the curriculum, with its focus on biology and reproduction, in many ways constrains what can be talked about in these classes. This focus has meant that non-heterosexual topics have been slow to emerge.

Discourse is deeply affected by what is given voice and representation by those in power and is therefore always already constructed. The constructed nature of discourse is vital in clarifying the position that discourse comes to occupy in society. This includes the discourses
which provide the backdrop for identity and the language for identification. Discourses that are produced within our society, both in the media and in formal structures such as educational institutions, are by and large heteronormative. The types of representations, information, and messages that are made available and promoted are not neutral, but instead are invested with societal beliefs and values. Curriculum is one avenue through which governing bodies are able to influence populations; through control of the kinds of discourses are made readily available, certain ideas and ways of being are normalized (Kearns, 1996, p. 9). What is taught and the types of knowledges that are made available within a given society have a great deal of influence on how we think about topics such as sexuality – they govern how we can govern ourselves, Foucault suggests. This is in many ways self-perpetuating as the discourses that are readily available and the ways in which we govern ourselves, individually and as a society, in turn influence what is seen as necessary knowledges and information. The discourses that are made available in society, particularly when individuals are younger, often come from family, friends, school, and the media. It is therefore meaningful that the majority of couples in the media are heterosexual and those who transgress ‘proper’ gender identity and sexual orientation have a long history of being depicted in negative or trivial ways (Cooper, 2012, p. 356). This heteronormative bias is also reflected in the information provided in school curriculum. The absence of LGBTQ representation needs to be seen as both discursive and as a form of governmentality. The lack of representation shapes discourse through controlling what is even understood as a possibility for discussion. By controlling what is easily discussed and understood, this governs what kinds of identity are possible.

Among the key issues that I will address in my discussion of (reproduction focused) sex education curriculum are: alienation from the curriculum and the marginalization of queer
students. Students are alienated from the curriculum due to the disconnect between established curriculum and the types of sex positive discourses present in other areas of their lives, including in the media. Further, the marginalization of students occurs when curriculum fails to address the experiences and needs of non-normative sexualities. While a great many students may feel that the material does not fit with their needs, this is compounded when students are non-normative in terms of their sexuality or gender expression/identity. Heterosexual students may not find the material useful or enjoyable, but at the very least they can generally see their own identities represented in the curriculum.

**Alienation and Marginalization: Strategies of Sex Education**

The current form of sex education curriculum is directly informed by the kinds of discourses which surround ideas of children, sex, and sexuality. As such, it is important to examine these discourses before embarking on an analysis of the current curriculum. The persistence of beliefs around childhood innocence has resulted in a quickly widening gap between the ways that schools are teaching students to think about sex and the messages about sex and sexuality that are readily available in mass media. Although curriculum is often framed as value neutral, it is important to consider the strategies and discourses at play in the creation of this curriculum.

The history of sex education in North America is a history of prohibition and has, from its inception, been concerned with limiting the scope of sexuality – its ideas, affects, movements and practices… [W]hen the adult world has met youths’ curiosity about their own and others’ bodies, the adult world has said ‘no’. (Gilbert, 2013, p. 32)

Much of sex education curriculum deals specifically with reproduction and risk prevention; the most prominent topics for sex education in “secondary school classrooms are abstinence, condom use, and HIV prevention” (Bittner, 2012, p. 359). This is clearly also reflected in Ontario’s 2010
Health and Physical Education curriculum. Under specific expectations for the healthy living components for grade eight, for instance, the curriculum document lists the following points:

- explain the importance of abstinence is a positive choice for adolescents;
- identify symptoms, methods of transmission, prevention, and high-risk behaviours related to common STDs, HIV, and AIDS;
- identify methods used to prevent pregnancy;
- apply living skills (e.g., Decision-making, assertiveness, and refusal skills) in making informed decisions, and analyse the consequences of engaging in sexual activities and using drugs;
- identify sources of support (e.g., Parents/guardians, doctors) related to healthy sexuality issues. (Ontario Curriculum, 2010b, p. 201).

This clearly reflects a focus on pregnancy, disease, and abstinence. There is what could be called an “epidemic logic” in sex education curriculum; as such, “risks may be seen to arise from the danger of HIV/AIDS, for instance, but it migrates easily from sex to pregnancy to degeneracy to delinquency and violence” (Gilbert, 2007, p. 49). It is, in part, through this logic that abstinence has been able to maintain its prevalence for so long. Moreover, even our views of childhood and development lend themselves to the continuation of abstinence rhetoric.

There is a long standing, dichotomous, and in many ways contradictory, relationship between children and sexuality in western society. First and foremost, children are held separate from issues of sexuality; children are to be understood as beings without innate sexuality (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 222). As such, children are not to be thought of as sexual beings and must be held apart from anything to do with sexuality. Since children are conceived as inappropriate targets for sexual desire, we strive to see them as being completely innocent, without sexuality (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 224). However, the fact that it is considered necessary to avoid teaching children anything that is of a sexual nature implies that if we did they would somehow become sexual. This clearly indicates that children must have at least the potential for sexuality. Therefore, children are simultaneously framed as asexual, unready for
sexuality, and vulnerable to sexuality. This has led to an extreme reluctance to speak to children about topics that could be construed as sexual; as there is a worry that this might encourage children to express ‘inappropriate’ sexuality. This can also be seen in how the curriculum documents for both grade seven and eight list an expectation that students be able to “identify sources of support related to healthy sexuality (e.g., Parents/guardians, doctors)” (Ontario Curriculum, 2010b, pp. 184, 201). Here, the onus and responsibility for talking to children about issues relating to sex clearly falls to those outside the school setting. Thinking about sexuality as something that is connected (although not identical) to pleasure, does not fit with our demands for an asexual childhood. However, despite attempting to frame children as asexual, reproductive and abstinence based sex education curriculum still “consistently construct children as heteronormative subjects with heterosexual futures, even when sexual knowledge is absent in the curricula” (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 222).

Education depends on the “lines between adult/child, teacher/student, asexual/sexual” (Pillow, 2003, p. 153); as such, sexuality is a difficult subject to consider in connection with children and this makes sex education a contentious subject. Despite its contentiousness, the topic is also seen as vital, as the supposed vulnerability of children to sexuality and the inherent dangers of sex necessitates that they are taught to protect themselves. Yet, the messages that children receive about sex and sexuality are not limited to the classroom. There is a deep disconnect between what young people see of society, through media representations of sexual pleasure, and curriculum based discussions of danger. While popular culture celebrates and trades in expressions of sex and sexuality⁴, sex education portrays sex as dangerous and risky. While there

⁴ See Mooney (Boys Will Be Boys: Men’s Magazines and the Normalisation of Pornography, 2012) for a discussion of the increase in sexual images in the media.
is a need to address the possibility of danger or risk, the education system must also address the representations of sex and sexuality that bombard students on a daily basis if it is to be seen as relevant to their lives. Despite claims that it prevents teen pregnancies and the spread of STIs, abstinence-only sex education is one of the least effective kinds of curriculum for doing so (Conrey, 2012, p. 88). Regardless, abstinence sex education remains fairly prevalent in schools and much of the support for this kind of sex education emerges from religious and conservative parents, institutions, and the pressure that they apply to the schools and government (Conrey, 2012, p. 90).

The topic of children and sexuality is a highly contentious one. Governments often choose to promote abstinence based curriculum whereas challenging and broadening sex education curriculum is not chosen. This was evident in the response to the sex education reform proposed in Ontario in 2010. This reform would have had sex education take place earlier and would have included a more holistic approach to sex and sexuality (Ontario Curriculum, 2010a; Agrell & Picard, 2010; Rush (Ontario Curriculum, 2010a; Rushowy, 2013; Agrell & Picard, 2010). The proposed reform was dropped due to a combination of backlash from some religious groups, concerns from parents, and an upcoming election (Rushowy, 2013). An interim version of the curriculum which maintains sex education components from 1998 remained in effect stating that:

The Growth and Development expectations from the 1998 curriculum document focus on age-appropriate questions related to human sexuality… Students are expected to develop an understanding of reproductive systems, the possible consequences of risky behaviours, pregnancy and disease prevention, and abstinence is a positive choice for adolescents. (Ontario Curriculum, 2010b, p. 168).

Similarly, it was parent groups and religious organizations that had a large part in pushing through a new law in Tennessee in May 2012, which reinforced the focus on abstinence within the state’s sex education curriculum (Wilkerson, 2013, p. 101). As of 2015, the Ontario government has
once again come forward with a proposal for an updated sex education curriculum to be brought into effect in the Fall of 2015. The responses to this new curriculum reform have been varied; while some have welcomed the changes, opposition to the curriculum has been varied. Some of this opposition stems from religious beliefs and values, however, some comes from worries that early introduction of sexual topics would undermine children’s innocence (Keenan, 2015).

Clearly, sex education curriculum is often a matter of ongoing debate (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 221). Much like in 2010, there has been substantial backlash and hesitation towards the proposed school curriculum changes for 2015. This clearly demonstrates that, while governing bodies have a certain amount of control and influence in what kinds of discourses are accepted and promoted, discourse also has a measure of continuity. Once a particular discourse is accepted and becomes hegemonic, it can become difficult to overcome. This does not mean, however, that change is impossible. While it is generally people or groups in power who have greater power to influence discourses, the power flows in both directions. The fact that the issue of sex education curriculum continues to be raised speaks to a growing awareness of the importance for all students to feel that what they learn in sex education is relevant to their lives.

Alienation from the curriculum, however, is not the only issue; issues pertaining to marginalization are also key when discussing sex education curriculum. When government issued curriculum discursively positions heterosexuality as ‘the’ legitimate sexuality, this leads to the disciplining of the ‘other’. Discipline, or the fear of discipline, results in the silencing of those with non-normative sexuality and/or gender identity. Since this fear of discipline makes the creation of alternative discourses difficult, and at times dangerous, heteronormative discourses are slow to be challenged. When discourses are not challenged, they can become hegemonic and therefore reinforce the organizational structures that allow for the continuation of governance. As
such, it is clear that the government-issued curriculum has implications for both the form and organization of society; government-issued curriculum which neglects discussions of sexuality and identity directly contributes to heteronormative understandings and organization of society.

Abstinence-based sex education curriculum serves the purpose of reinforcing underlying moral and heteronormative values within society. According to Wilkerson, “sex-ed debates revolve around a theory of human nature and flourishing based on what queer theorists have called heteronormative temporality… Heteronormative temporality is simultaneously infused with a moralized discourse of health and medicine; the values of health and the certainties of medicine are used to justify what otherwise would appear in the public domain is controversial religious dictates that cannot serve as the basis for Public policy” (Wilkerson, 2013, p. 102) Even when there is a consideration of including more of a pleasure-focused approach to sex education, there seems to be a point of contention as to who would be responsible for this education (Oliver, van der Meulen, Larkin, Flicker, & Toronto Teen Survey Research Team, 2013, p. 145). It is important to note that curriculum that addresses pleasure and a wider variation of expressions of gender and sexuality, is not necessarily pro-sex. For instance, the proposed reforms to Ontario’s sex education curriculum in 2010 called for some rather progressive changes, ranging from first-graders learning the proper terms for male and female genitalia, to the inclusion of information pertaining to masturbation and oral-genital/anal intercourse (Ontario Curriculum, 2010a). Yet, this new information remained in the context of abstinence as the healthiest option (Ontario Curriculum, 2010a, p. 184). The same values (waiting to have sex) are reframed using a new rhetoric in an attempt to be more relevant for students.

A truly fundamental issue in terms of marginalization is the tendency for sex education curriculum to privilege heteronormative discourses. The underlying focus on reproduction in most
of sex education curriculum is inherently heteronormative and, as such, representations of queerness are minimal or absent altogether. The theories put forward by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) and *Discipline & Punish* (1977) explain why the lack of queer representation is so problematic. By creating expectations of what a ‘good life’ should look like and making it dependent on certain types of identities and bodies, such as a focus on heterosexual marriage and biological children, power within society is being used to ‘allow’ the fostering of some lives and ‘disallowing’ others. Foucault claims that while in the past a ruler had the right to “take life or let live”, this has been “replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1978, p. 138). I would argue that this is also the case in abstinence curriculum, which is based on and constantly reinforces heteronormative temporality.

To expand on my earlier discussion, heteronormative temporality is

an understanding of individual and societal destiny based on a developmental teleology ensuring the transmission of a range of goods from moral values, appropriate gender identity, and proper eating habits, to personal wealth – all through heterosexual marriage. (Wilkerson, 2013, p. 102).

This is particularly meaningful within the context of Foucault’s discussions of power in relation to discipline and punishment. While the government, in a Canadian context, is not meant to have the right to execute people (except in the most extreme cases), they have created structures which organize the lives of the individual to the extent that operating outside of these structures is often difficult or impossible; governmentality is concerned with exploring “relations between the forms and rationalities of power and the processes of subjectivation (i.e., formation of governable subjects/citizens) and subjectification (formation of individual existence)” (Fimyar, 2008, p. 4). When one’s identity is not recognized, or recognizable, within prevalent discourses, one is left disconnected from both society and their own identity.
Foucault’s reference to ‘disallowing’ can be connected to feelings of alienation and quality of life. When the discourses and curriculum made available by the governing bodies of a population clearly show that one group of people are ‘normal’ while all the others are in some way deviant, this creates a tendency to discipline those who fall outside of the expected norm. As such, discipline is one way to show where the norm begins. In the case of sex education curriculum, the focus on reproduction positions heterosexual students as normal (Conrey, 2012, p. 92). This creates the impression that queer students are by default deviant. Abstinence sex education curriculum often equates morality with waiting to have sex until (assumed) heterosexual marriage. Thus, the sexuality of queer individuals, as well as those who may not wish to get married, is already constructed as deviant. Furthermore, the reduction of sex and sexuality to the act of procreation automatically excludes all but heterosexual couples from engaging in ‘real’ sex. The lack of a focus on consent, pleasure, desire, or relationships can make the curriculum less relevant for queer students. Since the focus is on the role of reproductive systems, what becomes of those who have non-normative sexual and gender identities or experiences? The impression that certain students are deviant can position these students as potential targets for censure and exclusion from both teachers and peers. This impetus to discipline those who exist outside of the norm is so strong that it can often extend into realms of self-disciplining as well. This can mean that queer students choose to remain ‘closeted’ or in other ways change their behaviour in order not to stand out. However, there is yet another way in which self-disciplining can occur. For instance, academics such as Heather Sykes have been discussing the idea of homonormativity, which refers to “how gay, lesbian and queer subjects are politics produce their own limited perceptions and normative exclusions” (Sykes, 2011, p. 429). Even in cases where the social environment is such that queer individuals feel comfortable being
‘out’, lack of representation can limit what is recognized as appropriate sexual and gender identities. When looking through the lens of reproduction, the queer subject experience becomes difficult to see.

Despite that attitudes towards LGBTQ rights have changed in society, the fact remains that queer students continue to occupy marginal, and in many ways vulnerable, positions in schools and society at large. Thus, the lack of relevant material for queer students in the curriculum is extremely problematic. Sex education curriculum in which reproductive systems and pregnancy prevention are central position queer individuals as unspeakable subjects. Yet, it is not enough to merely add material aimed towards queer students; the current focus on abstinence, biology, and pregnancy prevention is incompatible with meaningful sex education for both straight and queer students. This is because “(e)xclusionary educational practices serve to disenfranchise those who are sexually nonnormative… It allows the myths and stereotypes about LGBTQ people to go unexamined… It assumes that it a very narrow type of heterosexuality is the best and most supreme, and not only discourages various forms of heterosexualities but also excludes sexual pluralism in general” (Elia & Eliason, 2010, p. 28). Further, as reproduction is less likely to be a primary concern for young queer individuals in non-heterosexual relationship, it is difficult to find space in, or connections to, the curriculum that is in place. For queer youth, the primary space of inclusion, if it exists at all, is in the realm of anti-homophobia education, rather than sex education.

Anti-homophobia and its (Dis)content

It is compelling that many schools, in an effort to curtail bullying and increase ‘acceptance’ of queer students, have chosen to institute anti-homophobia policies and programs, and yet little has been done to remedy the ways in which queer students are made invisible
through curriculum that is inherently heteronormative. The strategies commonly used in anti-homophobia initiatives do little to combat that underlying heteronormative values in society (Goldstein, Russel, & Daley, 2007). Many attempts at anti-homophobia initiatives in school use the rhetoric of safe and positive spaces. However, despite the fact that these strategies could be a positive step towards equity, these strategies are problematic in that they fail to challenge and sometimes re-inscribe dominant heteronormative discourses. Furthermore, there are no safe or positive spaces within the sex education curriculum.

Anti-homophobia frameworks also posit homophobia as the problem of queer students rather than an issue for the whole school population, thus simultaneously normalizing heterosexuality (Goldstein, Russel, & Daley, 2007, p. 185). Therefore, queer students themselves become ‘problems’ that need to be solved. The experience of being a ‘problem’ can be harmful to youths’ conceptions of identity. As a result, it is clear that by only focusing on potential harm to the physical ‘self’, the strategy of creating safe schools fail to consider “the harm to “self” that is administered when the subjectivities of queer students are ignored, silenced, dismissed, or misrepresented within classrooms, hallways, and playgrounds” (Goldstein, Russel, & Daley, 2007, p. 185), as is often the case in sex education classrooms.

Strategies for creating positive spaces often make use of ‘out’ students and teachers in order to ‘educate’ others in the school. The problem is that this positions homophobia as a problem of ignorance and lack of information rather than a problem within society or institutions. Furthermore, this places queer teachers and students in a position where they are responsible for

5 This is an important issue and theme in my research. A more in-depth exploration of this issue can be found in chapter four.
6 I use the term ‘out’, here, to refer to an active and performative identity. In this sense, it is not comfort in ones’ own identity that designates ‘out’ness. Rather, it is necessary for these individuals to be willing and able to make their identity known consistently. In this way, being ‘out’ must be understood as a constant labour.
changing those around them; queer individuals have an *obligation* to be ‘out’ and provide an example to those around them. Queer students might feel pressured to be ‘out’ even when they do not feel safe. If they choose not to be ‘out’, they may be left with a sense that they are failing to be honest with themselves or others. Also, by making queer individuals so integral to, and visible in, this process, this produces pressure for them to be *proper* representations of queerness. This constrains queer students’ self-conception/presentation through the “complicity and normativity of new forms of the “gay subject” ” (Sykes, 2011, p. 429). It is ultimately through becoming visible that an individual becomes subject to discipline (Foucault, Discipline & Punish, 1977, p. 201). The increased visibility not only subjects queer individuals to potential censure from those around them, but the feeling of surveillance can encourage queer youths to govern and normalize their own behavior and presentation as well (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 228). However, while the use of anti-homophobia education makes queer youths visible in schools, they remain absent in sex education curriculum itself. Not only does this invisibility of queer subjects and issues within the curriculum result in the alienation of queer student themselves, but I argue that it also undermines the logic of any kind of anti-homophobia program that might be implemented. If there are no safe spaces or positive spaces for queer identified youth in the curriculum, why would students take seriously messages of acceptance outside of the classroom? It is not uncommon to hear the claim that anti-homophobia education is not sex education. However, I contend that connecting anti-homophobia and sex education could lead to more productive discussions.

*Inclusivity through Pleasure*

When we consider LGBTQ-inclusive sex education as solely for queer students, we miss the opportunity to reflect on how changing the curriculum might challenge all students, including heterosexual students, to think differently about sex and sexuality. Anti-homophobia programs
generally focus on changing the behaviour of students and teachers towards queer students. Yet, the programs do not fully address or challenge the underlying logic of heteronormativity that is present both in schools and outside of them. Since anti-homophobia programs shy away from the inclusion of elements of sex education, these programs can re-produce the queer subject as an unknowable ‘other’. Therefore, I argue that sex education classes are a valuable opportunity to address the concerns and needs of queer people and decenter heteronormativity.

Here, through combining aspects of anti-homophobia with sex education that decenters heteronormativity, there is the potential to create shared experiences and knowledge around commonality rather than difference. As it exists now, the focus on biological reproductive sex, must be seen as a privileging of hetero sex. Power, here, produces the normal sexualized subject as heterosexual. Through the production of only one legitimate definition of sex, the queer subject is marginalized as always already outside of hegemonic understanding of sex. An alternative framework that centers on pleasure and desire could provide common ground for all students. Unlike other frameworks of sex education, a focus on pleasure, desire, consent, and relationships, provides an opportunity for the students to address their own needs, rather than having sex and sexuality defined through a division between ‘normal’ reproductive sex and all other expressions of sex or sexuality. I am not claiming that by focusing on a framework of pleasure, the unequal power relations will, or even can, be surpassed. The construction of discourses surrounding pleasure is no more inherently neutral than any other; the difference here is rather in the potential that could be worked towards. Instituting sex education which highlighted pleasure as the center of sex, rather than reproduction, would not automatically ‘fix’ perceptions and representations of queerness. Indeed, the power relations that would emerge from such a focus would need to be explored and analysed if the framework was to provide common ground. With work, however, it
could be used to create a sex education curriculum that could speak to the experiences of all
students, more so than a focus on reproduction. While reproductive sex only speaks to a singular,
and inherently heterosexual, form of sex, pleasure could refer to a greater variety of experiences.

Power is evident through the construction of current or past forms of sex education and
anti-homophobia education that assumes divisions between queer and straight students. Not only
is heteronormativity shored up through a focus on reproduction, but the anti-homophobia
education that is intended to deal with consequences of this heteronormativity frequently
reinforces the perception that queer people are a homogenous group who are inherently different
from those who are considered to be ‘normal’. Education which informs students about different
types of sex, gender identity, and sexuality is portrayed as only really necessary for queer
students; this creates the impression that this information is specialized and generally useful only
to those who are not heterosexual. This, in combination with the fact that heteronormative sex
education is often mandatory for all students, creates a double standard by which students are
taught to judge sexuality. The sexuality of the majority is considered to be necessary knowledge
for everyone, while the sexuality of all others is considered to be only relevant to the non-
normative subject. This completely ignores the many different reasons that information about
non-reproductive sex, and an understanding of non-normative gender identity and sexuality,
would be necessary for everyone.

It is clear that anti-homophobia education and much of the debate around more inclusive
sex education does not address the complexity of sexuality and its effects on our lives. Students
could have parents, siblings, friends, or even children who identify as other than heterosexual
and/or cisgendered. Having a more thorough understanding about non-heterosexual sex and
relationships would be a positive thing in each of these cases. For children with queer
parents/families, the presence of queer topics and representation in sex education would provide important representations of non-normative families. Further, topics that deal with non-normative sexuality allow students to be allies for siblings, friends, and possible future children. Having more understanding about ‘marginal’ groups can allow for the development of a greater understanding of diversity and can minimize potential misinformation. Additionally, the division between the experiences and practices of straight and queer individuals is often artificial, at least in terms of actual types of sexual practices and relationships. One study has been used to suggest that the types of sex that people have are not entirely determined/constrained by sexuality; for example, some straight couples may engage in anal intercourse while some gay couples may not (McBride & Fortenberry, 2010). While individual pleasures are discursively arranged by dominant discourses regarding sexuality, these pleasures do not map directly onto types of identity except through such dominant discourses. Paradoxically, this structures both identity and pleasure, but sometimes this occurs in unexpected ways that do not appear to align. Furthermore, sexuality is fluid and it is not uncommon for young people to experiment with same-sex sexual practices even when they identify as straight (Conrey, 2012, p. 96). As such, it is clear that there is a need for more comprehensive knowledge about sex, if only to help educate students on the possible risks associated with different sexual activities.
Chapter Four: The Problem of Ambivalence

Introduction

The substantive analysis utilizing participant responses from the interviews that I conducted this year, is divided into the following two chapters. This chapter, four, will look at ‘the problems of ambivalence’ and provide the beginning of a theoretical exploration of the denaturalization of norms and ambivalence through sex education. The ways in which society is structured and the underlying understandings of what it means to be human, make the act and reality of existing outside of or in-between normative strictures inherently difficult. Therein lies what I refer to as the problem of ambivalence, the experience of being excluded from what is understood as normal or properly human is often an ambivalent one as one’s own experiences and understandings butt up against societal constraints. In Chapter five, ‘The promise of ambivalence’, I turn to an examination of the role of absence and ambivalence in experiences of sexuality.

I begin now with a more in-depth discussion of identity as it pertains to this project and its participants. This leads into an examination of the three main ways in which participant’s responses highlighted the norming on sex, gender, and sexuality in their experiences of sex education. I argue that there is a disconnection between these norms and the experiences and lived realities of queer students which influence how queer individuals experience their identities. I will, therefore, use excerpts from the interviews to explore some ways in which queerness, and the ill-fitting nature of norms that results, lends itself to a degree of ambivalence as the production

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7 Interviews were conducted in 2014, with ethics approval, with queer identified adults who had attended public school in Ontario to speak of their experiences. Of these participant one identified as male, one as trans* and four identified as female. One participant had attended high school at a Catholic school. For a more detailed account of methodology and demographics, please refer to the methodology section in Chapter Two.
of norms becomes denaturalized. These themes will be further built upon in Chapter Five through an analysis of the possibilities created through the use of denaturalization and ambivalence to open up spaces to create and recreate identity. But first, a word on conducting these interviews in an ethical fashion and a brief description of the participants.

**Research Overview**

This research was given ethical approval through the appropriate authorities at the University of Toronto. However, it is important to keep in mind that interviews are always marked by an unequal power relation from the start. Acknowledging this made it important that every effort was made to minimize potential harm to participants. Potential participants were emailed a letter of invite\(^8\) which invited them to participate and/or send the letter on to others who might be interested. This allowed potential participants to choose whether they wished to contact me with little pressure. Once a potential participant contacted me, a private room was booked according to their schedule at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Library, ensuring a quiet, private, yet public space in which to hold the interview. At the beginning of the meeting, before the interview took place, participants were provided with a letter of consent\(^9\) to sign. This Letter of Consent provided information on the study, their rights as participants, an opportunity to list any requirements they may have, and the ability to choose their own pseudonym. After ensuring that participant fully understood their rights and were comfortable with the interview being recorded, the interview itself took place. All interviews where one on one, ensuring that the privacy was protected for the participants. After the interview were transcribed all participants were sent a copy of their interview transcript and given six weeks to make any changes.

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\(^8\) A copy of the standard Letter of Invite can be found in Appendix A.

\(^9\) A copy of the Letter of Informed Consent can be found in Appendix B.
(clarifications, inclusions, or deletions) they wished in order to make sure that they were comfortable with what was said.

Interview questions were decided on in advance by me, the interviewer. However, these interviews were designed to be semi-structured, and as such there was a degree of flexibility in what was asked and early interview helped refine the questions asked of later participants. Despite this, the types of questions I asked were largely consistent across interviews. The participants of this study were largely postsecondary students (or had been in the recent past). Of the seven participants, there was one male participant, five female, and one participant who identified as trans*. In terms of sexuality, one participant identified as ‘non-heterosexual’, four identified as queer, one as queer/bisexual, one was queer/gay. Only one participant attended a Catholic school. The pseudonyms chosen by the participants were, Ariel, Allie, Danielle, Shawna, Ellen, Meghan, and Michael. Also, recall that a more complete discussion of the methods used in this research can be found in Chapter Two.

**Identity as Possession and Process**

As was discussed briefly in the previous chapter, identity is taken up in this research as an always partial, incomplete, and inherently intersectional project. This is due to the relationship between experience and identity, which I argue is both mutually constitutive and constituted. Likewise, the complexity of identity and the many facets that come together to constitute an individual must be understood with attention to the intersections that take place. While none of the participants in my research identified as belonging to a ‘racial’ group, this in no way means that racial discourses do not affect and constitute their lives. Discourses of what it means to be normal follow closely those which allow us to make sense of what is human, discourses which are
steeped in racial meaning (Walcott, 2011). Therefore, we must understand peoples’ relationships to identity categories and the attending labels to be highly variable.

While some people see labels as empowering, this stems from a privilege of fitting easily, more or less, into an acceptable label. In cases where ones identity is more complicated, the process of labeling becomes more difficult and complex. While a majority of my participants identified, or at least referenced the identity category, queer, identity was clearly not a simple matter. In particular, one of my participants, Ariel\textsuperscript{10} (who chooses to use gender-neutral pronouns), when asked about how they identify, jokingly chose to identify as a “fat, queer, trans with an asterisk, butch, power bottom”. However, later Ariel asserted that “it’s true though. Because it’s like it would be reductive to say anything else though, honestly”. Although the interview was couched in terms of sexuality, and therefore more likely to solicit responses geared towards sexuality and/or gender, Ariel turns to some key terms of identity that are, or could be, understood to extend beyond ‘merely’ sexual and/or gender identity. The labels of ‘queer’ and ‘trans with an asterisk’ can be understood to be clearly gender and/or sexuality based identity. ‘Fat’ has to more to do with appearance than sexuality or gender but can still be an important part of identity. The other aspects, however, ‘butch’ and ‘power bottom’, are interesting in that they are terms that refer more to the things that people do; these terms reference ways of being and demonstrate a version of identity that is as much an matter of what we do as it is who we are. This all clearly demonstrates how complex and intricate the project of identity can become.

Furthermore, Ariel also commented that, “I actually think that I’m not a very flexible person in terms of my identity, but it’s taken a while to come to where I really feel like I have some kind of

\textsuperscript{10} All participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms chosen in concert with participants.
self-possession of who I am, to sexual gender identity”. There is some juxtaposition at work here, an indication that the labels readily available don’t always fit comfortably, even if they are “true” they can’t be “reduced”. For Ariel, in particular, the many facets of their identity were so interwoven, producing a fuller and more complex meaning, that to fail to mention one aspect of that identity would serve to change the overall impression of who they are. The fact that it took so long to gain ‘self-possession’ of an identity, and the need for so many multiple components in order to feel that their identity fully encompassed their lived reality, points to the ways that labels can be problematic. Yet the fact that they went to such ends to reach this point of ‘self-possession’, and that a concrete identity is a source of comfort and satisfaction, speaks to the importance of identity categories for queer individuals.

Fitting Identities

We are taught early on that our individuality is important; our ability to make sense of and put a name to our identity is key for our sense of self to be actualized. The choice of words when Ariel spoke of their having ‘self-possession’ of who they are, is particularly telling of this. The fact that identity is something that one can actually possess is an important consideration as it must then figure into the needs of the individual. If being able to have a sense of self-possession of one’s identity is vital to the way one experience their lives then we must consider whether all people are equally able to achieve this and if there are any particular barriers to achieving it. We must also consider how individuals are capable of securing a self through identity claims which involve work. In identifying through a variety of labels/terms Ariel does complicated work of producing a particular truth and, in particular, produces truth as non-reductive. Our ability to identify in any particular way is constrained by what we see and hear of in our lives. Therefore, it is clear that norms and the normalization of particular ways of being are integral to one’s ability to
identify in a way that feels true to themselves. For Allie, this can be seen in the way that she spoke about the disconnect that takes place when “I am labelled in a way that I don’t necessarily agree with and I have to make the decision of whether to correct that person or not… usually the negotiation is that it’s not worth it. And that’s a political move that I often regret but that works for me”. Even though she makes her own choices on when and where to ‘correct’ people, it is clear that there is some discomfort in the fact that she does not often find it ‘worth it’ to do so.

The situation for Danielle was different; Danielle went through a few different labels before she settled on her current identity of queer. When she first came out it was as a lesbian and she explained that “when I was coming out, or when I was thinking about…my sexual identity at the end of high school, when I really became cognizant that there is something else going on there beyond heterosexuality, the only model I really had was gay versus straight”. She went on to say that, at the time, she was not really aware that “there was like trans guys out there” but that as she became more aware of the types of people she was attracted to and the different ways that people could identify in terms of gender, she became less satisfied with the identity of lesbian. This was because, as she said, “I like all of this masculinity, like, I like female masculinity, but the masculinity really has to be there. So it seemed really weird to call myself a lesbian, it wasn’t really respectful of the other person and it didn’t really encapsulate what I was trying to find from people”. While the stories that Danielle and Allie told were very different, both demonstrate how important it was to have an identity that fit with how they felt and how when an identity didn’t fit or was mis-assigned there was a sense of discomfort.

What is understood to be normal in a society has a certain amount of draw to it. Within a neoliberal context, uniqueness is often presented in a positive light, as being unique has strong connotations of individuality which is valued in Western culture. However, ultimately everyone
still wants to ‘fit’ in their environment. Therefore, it is important to consider not only whether uniqueness is accepted in a society, but also whether particular forms of uniqueness, such as non-normative identities, are seen to ‘fit’ within societal structures. Despite Western society’s apparent valuing of individuality, the predominantly homogeneous representations in areas such as curriculum (as well as the media) creates very particular ideas about who, and what, are normal and therefore who belongs.

While the effects of this kind of homogenous representation are not limited to issues around gender and/or sexual identity, given both the focus and the relatively homogenous sample of this research, an analysis which takes into account these many intersections is not feasible. As such, this analysis will predominantly focus on identity as it pertains to sexuality and gender. To be clear, I am not making an argument that our environment can change our identity, but rather that it influences the ways in which we approach, conceive, think of our identity. This can be seen in Allie’s response to a question about whether her being aware but not ‘out’ during school caused her any discomfort, particularly around sex education; she replied that “I don’t think it changed how I experienced it, but it changed what I recognized”. It is also present in statements that point to participants ‘knowing’ but not recognizing parts of their identity. Ellen said that “I think, possibly, I knew that I found women attractive, but did I know that that meant gay or queer or something like that? No, I did not”. This was only one of several similar statements and demonstrates the effect that a lack of representations can have on individuals’ perception and ability to make sense of their identity. Other participants chose to highlight the importance of representation, even outside of sex education; Michael in particular stated that “I mean, safety, safe respectful space, acknowledgement, all of that is sort of coming, but in education in general, I think representation is kind of key, like for kids to understand that they’re part of a history”. This
should be considered in light of the work of theorists such as Sarah Ahmed who used the term queer phenomenology to explore the idea of queer and straight spaces:

> It is not that the heterosexual subject has to turn away from queer objects in accepting heterosexuality as a parental gift: compulsory heterosexuality makes such a turning unnecessary… Queer objects, which do not allow the subject to approximate the form of the heterosexual couple, may not even get near enough to ‘come into view’ as possible objects to be directed toward. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 560)

When we consider this view then it becomes clear that the absence of representation and similar privileges could be just as important, if not more so, than the overt discrimination that is commonly focused on. One reason why the absence of representation and privileging of heteronormativity is so important is because, while overt discrimination is generally easy to pinpoint and therefore address, issues relating to representations are often more difficult to pin down.

One of the most difficult things to challenge is the underlying knowledges and understandings which serve to inform and organize how we understand and structure both our lives and the society that we live in. These knowledges are often unspoken, yet they inform and structure many aspects of what it means to live in the context that we live in. Yet, while largely unspoken, these knowledges define what even imaginable in a given context and provide the very basis for the categories and labels that are thinkable. The discourses and understandings by which we come to understand what is normal, expected, or even human have a constant presence, even in cases where they are not obvious (Walcott, 2011). Although race was not discussed as a part of participants’ own identities, questions of whether their schools were ‘diverse’ automatically elicited mention of race. The question of diversity clearly became a question of ‘were there people who were different’, with responses varying from comments outlining the demographic of the
school, in order to highlight either the presence or absence of difference/diversity, to the comment of one participant stating that their school demographic was such that their ‘whiteness’ was what was different. In all these cases race was the ‘other’ by which diversity was indicated. Even in the case of the one participant that challenged the equating of racial presence with diversity did so in such a way that acknowledged the strangeness of her own statement. This unspoken/unspeakable organization of selves can also be seen echoed in the ways that other identities are similarly understood in dichotomous and oppositional terms.

‘Reality’, Norms, and Denaturalization

When it comes to understanding how people fit, or don’t fit, within society, norms become an integral concern. When one fits within the norms of a society, or even a situation, the norms and the processes by which these norms emerge are largely unrecognized and unnoticed. However, in the cases where one comes up against the norms of society and do not see themselves reflected, there are occasions where those norms and their processes can come into focus. In this way, the norms in question become visible as a process rather than mere naturally occurring truth. Given Western/Canadian society’s focus on children as sexual innocents (as discussed in Chapter Three), sex education plays an important role in producing and reproducing norms in regards to gender, sex (in the sense of both normative readings of biology and sexual behaviour), and sexuality. In terms of normalization due to representations in sex education curriculum, my participants’ responses highlighted three separate, if interconnected, areas of concern. It could be stated that all of the accounts from my participants reflected the heteronormative nature of the curriculum. However, I would like to look beyond, or behind, this and focus on a few particular areas where the responses evidence specific areas of normalization.
First and most general, several participants brought up instances where normalizing discourses around desire/attraction were in play. Second, participants observed that there was a reduction of sex to very particular normalized acts. Last, two of my participants discussed ways in which sex (biology) and gender was normalized through the physical education and health components of the curriculum, as well as the sex education components. Each of these areas of normalization have particular implications which culminates in a pervading sense of what is normal that does not take into account queer identity or experience. This has particular repercussions in relation to the ways in which identity is always already overlaid and constituted by what it means to be human. These three general areas will be unpacked and discussed in more detail in the following sections.

1. What is Desire?

I knew I was attracted to people other than cisgendered men, but I didn’t know to the extent. Like, I even knew that I wasn’t really attracted to cisgendered men, but then, like, women weren’t supposed to be as sexually attracted to their partners as men were. So I kind of was willing to, I don’t know, put it to the side. (Danielle)

To begin with, due to the potential ambiguity inherent in the terms, I would like to clarify what I mean when I refer to desire/attraction and sex, and how this differs from sexuality. Within the context of this research, I use sexuality to refer to identities rather than practices. While sexuality based identities obviously have a great deal to do with both sex and desire, I believe that it is important (particularly in the context of sex education) to distinguish between identity and practices. As such, I find it useful to separate sexuality (how you identify in terms of who you are attracted to), desire/attraction (which I see more as connected to ideas of sex drive and the kinds of sex people want), and sex (which in this section refers to sexual acts). The responses of my participants made it clear that the sex education curriculum contained normalizing discourses in
each of these areas. For instance, Danielle, one of my participants, as shown in the quotation at the beginning of this section, demonstrated that desire and attraction were simultaneously gendered and normed in ways that effected perceptions and understandings of sexuality. Despite what she ‘knew’ about her own attraction, dominant ideas about what women were ‘supposed to’ feel led her to ‘put it to the side’. Desire and attraction were normalized as being more strongly felt by men, thus providing an alternative explanation for a lack of attraction and desire for men. While this perception of desire and attraction did not change what Danielle felt, it did at least temporarily influence the conclusions that she made regarding her experiences.

Similarly, another participant, Shawna, stated that, “I was not out in the, like, typical way, I guess you would say… So, I knew I was attracted to men and women. However, because I was attracted to men I thought that was, ‘okay, so I’m hetero’”. It is clear that desire and attraction were constructed as very male dominated arenas, and that links between attraction and sexuality were not always clear-cut. It serves heteronormative and patriarchal power structures to keep the dominant perception of sex as a heterosexual (and largely male driven) activity. As with the experience of Meghan who recounted how “I think I remember when I was maybe 15, and that was kind of when I was really just confused, I didn’t really have words for what was going on and I just really hadn’t figured it out, I was still kind of thinking about it”, these instances show how, if representations are heterogeneous enough, we may not even think to consider the possibility that we might be, or want, something outside of the norm even though the norms may not fit our experiences. We may not even have the language needed to approach the subject.

2. What Counts as Sex?

_If you have that sort of perspective on sex, it really changes what you do in the bedroom, ‘cause if you think sex is just vanilla, you’re either only going to be vanilla, or you’re going to feel guilty about these things that aren’t vanilla you don’t have a context for... I’m not so into BDSM, but I’m really_
happy that... I knew what it was and I didn’t think it was strange. It was like I could fit it into a context. (Danielle)

Along a similar vein as in the previous section, participants also commented on the narrow definition of sex they encountered in their experiences of sex education curriculum. Nearly all of the participants commented on how discussions of sex were experienced as highly reductionary. At times this was done in a very straightforward manner, such as when Ariel commented that “it wasn’t even heterosexuality, it was literally penetrative, penis-vagina sex” or when Shawna described her experience as “very basic and very exclusive to cisgendered heterosexual people, and very concentrated on vaginal-penis penetration, not even other kinds of sex”. Some participants, such as Danielle in the quote that began this section, expressed concerns that this lack of different perspectives on sex could result in either an inability to explore different aspects and acts of sex or guilt over the types of sex that you do have. This concern for the lack of, what Danielle referred to as, context reflects the concerns and thoughts of academics reflecting on ways in which racial, patriarchal, and otherwise problematic underpinnings effect what is thinkable in our society (Walcott, 2011; Wynter, 2003). It is clear that, at least looking back, if not in the moment, these participants recognized that the ways that sex was represented did not speak to their realities and in many cases this resulted in feeling disconnected from the material. In some cases, norms are so prevalent that students may feel as if they are the only ones who feel or want things that aren’t represented. Michael, when speaking of his experiences in sex education, spoke of discomfort in the situation as, “there is your gym teacher… and you were now supposed to talk about your genitals? Like… you want to do things with, that you’re almost positive that no one else in the room wants to do, anything like that with them, so yeah… Forget about that”. As can be seen in participant responses such as Michael and Danielle’s, reductionary discourses and
norms around sex and sexuality can result in discomfort with one’s own desires and an impetus on bringing up the topic or asking questions.

For those participating in this research, this reduction through normalization of sex and sexuality was not necessarily thought to be sufficient or useful, however, despite my early expectations, neither was it always seen to be inherently problematic. In some cases, there was a sense that sex education, as it was envisioned by those developing the curriculum, was intended to be solely about biology, reproduction, and sexual health. In such cases, there was a sense that sex education, as it was envisioned by those developing curriculum, was intended to be solely about biology, reproduction, and sexual health. In such cases, the narrow focus on penetrative penis/vaginal sex was not seen as intrinsically problematic. For instance, Allie commented that “for me, it was effective… It was effective and that I came out of it with a good scientific knowledge of all of the things that could go wrong and how to avoid them. Which I think is at the core of what you’re going for.” She later clarified that “if I was teaching it, I would do differently, but it worked, for me. But I don’t think it would’ve worked for others and I think there’s a way of doing it that could’ve worked for everyone”. Although all participants found that their sex education classes fell short of what they would like to see, a few participants, such as Allie, found some use in the materials provided. Furthermore, one particular participant, Ellen, who was the sole participant who received sex education within the Catholic school system, demonstrated an ability to make use of normative teaching for her own benefit. In particular, she made use of the religious and ‘abstinence is best’ rhetoric within her school in order to avoid being pressured into having sex with her boyfriend during high school. As Ellen said,

I was able to use that [abstinence only rhetoric]. Like, did I completely understand why I found my boyfriend so disgusting? No, I didn’t, but… I was able to use that ‘abstinence is best’ reasoning to not do things I wasn’t comfortable with at the time… I was able to subvert it in a way that allowed
me to not do things that I wasn’t comfortable which, which I would now look
back on and say ‘well that’s because I’m queer’, but I was able to use
abstinence, in a way, to like assert a queer identity before I even knew that I
had a queer identity. So, a roundabout way of saying that I found a way to
make it useful. (Ellen)

In this way, we see that queer students are also active participants in the ways that they
understand and make use of the information provided in the curriculum. Although neither of these
participants felt that it the sex education curriculum spoke to their experiences, they were both
able to orientate themselves within the material in such a way that they were able to make the
material work for them.

Through these themes that emerged around discussions of what sex was portrayed to be in
sex education a few interesting concepts emerged that suggest two main sources of ambivalence
relating to human engagement in these spaces. References to feelings of, or at least the potential
for, guilt and shame related to the types of sex one may desire or engage in suggest a tendency for
normalized discourses of what is ‘proper’ sex to result in hierarchal ways of being. The use of
guilt and shame, in particular, are poignant for the way that it brings to mind moralizing language
and discourses which are used to define and shore up ‘proper’ ways of being or behaving;
alternatively, what it means to be ‘truly’ human. Normative discourses become the hallmark of
what is, leaving what remains as either flawed or unthinkable. Interestingly, however, these
spaces outside of the norm can also provide room to maneuver and imagine what is left unsaid.
This is clear in the way that Danielle calls for context; she sees the potential for guilt, but she also
can see what is needed to combat the negative possibilities. This feeling that the material taught
did not sufficiently discuss what was needed to satisfy their needs led a number of participants to
seek sources and knowledge outside of organized education.
In contrast, in the latter part of this section it is clear that the representation of sex became more a matter of effectiveness, rather than a matter of correctness. While other discussions were focused on whether the material was accurate/complete, the concern here turns to the effectiveness of the material. The interesting thing about discussions of effectiveness is that they are necessarily shaped by the understood, or assumed, intent or usefulness of the material. In this way, Allie was able to see the course as effective, despite the fact that it did not speak to her identity, because she chose to recognize that the course material was not intended to cover anything outside of biology and disease/pregnancy prevention. Similarly, Ellen was able to make use of the material, albeit for an unintended reason, to justify her desire not to have sex with her boyfriend at the time. It is clear that despite the facts that all of the participants of this study reported encountering a very reductive definition/representation of sex, the ways in which they engaged with this material was much more variable.

3. Norming the Gendered Body

When I was a teenager, I had some weird health stuff happening... like, I didn’t really get a period, like a normal at a ‘normal’ time... So, I spent many years of my early to mid-adolescence being bounced from doctor to doctor, trying to figure out what was wrong... and none of them could really figure out what was going on. So I always got this, “just wait, it will come. Just wait, there’s nothing actually wrong, you just have to wait”, and then tears go by and I would go back to the doctor and the whole process would repeat itself. But... it just left me with a lot of anxiety around my gender. And feeling like always catching up in term of gender and sexual development to all of my peers. (Meghan)

While experiences of the normalization of the gendered body were not prevalent in all the participants responses (perhaps in part due to a lack of focus on this aspect of experience in my interviewing), three of the participants spoke on the topic and as I believe that they made valuable point (and indeed the fact that I failed to anticipate the issue points to the extent to which it is normalized), I would like to take the time to delve into the issue. In the course of developing this
project, I was surprised to learn that gender segregation was the norm in Physical Education in general and in the sex education components in particular. My own experience being educated in British Columbia included co-ed gym classes and both gender segregated and mixed sex education. However, while I originally thought that this would be a factor in participants’ responses, I did not realize the role that some specific norms would play in these discussions. The majority of my participants saw gender segregated Physical Education as non-problematic or were unsure if the alternative would be any better; which, given that it was largely the only way they had experience with, makes sense. However, two participants in particular highlighted ways in which the body was both gendered and policed in potentially harmful ways.

Within the context of physical education, from the idea of health and fitness which demands particular kinds of ‘fit’ bodies, to gender segregation which demands that student comfortable fit themselves within a gender binary, there is little room for non-normative bodies, even discounting some forms of sexuality. Therefore, these spaces must be seen as always already problematic sites for people who do not have either ‘normal’ bodies or normal relationships to their bodies. The very organization and structures in place serve to promote and normalize bodies in such a way that no other possibilities come into view. For instance, Ariel made a distinction between the sex education parts which they deemed ‘totally irrelevant’ but not actually uncomfortable, and gym class in general (particularly citing change rooms) which they referred to as “massive awkward times”. Part of this could be related to their gender identity; while speaking of their identity Ariel specified that,

I also think it is important for me, for my sexuality and my gender are really intertwined, like in the way that I’m into femmes, and that’s important it’s important for me that I am butch in that people see me as butch, and only recently have I really… Like also felt OK identifying with trans to certain
degree. Like, I mean I don’t identify as male, but I also don’t want people to think of me as female.

When one’s identity does not easily fits within the notion of a normalized gender binary, a space which calls for a strict separation between gender categories can make things difficult from the start. However, it is not only in cases of non-normative gender identity or presentation that problems emerge.

Norms around the gendered body are not only constructed by the physical structures and concrete aspects of educational organizations which emerge around gender segregation, but also through the types of information that is taught. The school system is built around the idea of providing students with a standard education. As such, it generally starts with the assumption that the information provided is correct and unproblematic. However, in areas such as sex education and developmental understandings of health, the tendency to teach the ‘standard/expected’ development as the correct, and in some cases only, possibility ignores the existence of other experiences or understandings of bodies. In the case of one of my participants it was an issue with the presentation of information regarding biology and development which was deemed problematic. I had never considered that the ‘facts’ taught about puberty, menstruation, and ‘normal’ development could be problematic to some. If anything, this demonstrates how norms can easily pass unnoticed to those who fit within the norm, however well intentioned. In interviewing Meghan, this topic became highly important. Despite the fact that Megan identified as a cisgendered female, she spoke extensively of how she felt shame and failure as a woman as a result of the material taught in the sex education components (in particular the information regarding puberty, menstruation, and development). The way in which the material around development was presented assumed and presented a singular correct and ‘normal’ linear path from girl to woman. Megan’s experience with the development of her body did not fit within the
norms presented by this material. Megan spoke of how she did not start menstruating until later in life as something that left her with feelings of inadequacy and of being left behind by her peers. She experienced both medical intervention and considerable anxiety over this ‘late’ development. The discourses around what ‘proper’ development looked like was so prevalent and singular that Meghan did not feel able to discuss what she was going through with any of her friends and would even fake having her period so no one would know. This demonstrates the very clear effects that can result from not feeling like your experience fit within the norm, or are in the very least recognizable within it.

As mentioned earlier, the ways in which society constructs understandings around the ‘truths’ of the world and being in the world are integral in the continuing re-inscription of problematic discourses. The organization and teaching of knowledge in such a developmental manner in combination with the linking of gender, sex, and the body, presents a singular narrative of being human; this proper way of being can be seen in areas ranging from physical ways of being and growing as well as emotional and identity driven ways of being. With the largely dichotomous approach to knowledge that is idealized in our society (with the valuing of science and objectivity with the type of learning that focusses on clear divisions of right and wrong, correct and incorrect) this creates a clear separation between what is (what is taught) and what isn’t (what is left unsaid). Much like with other construction of what it means to be human, this leads to the creation of a discountable unimaginable ‘other’ which stands outside and alongside the norm, and by which the norm comes further into focus (Walcott, 2011).

These last three sections have demonstrated three different ways in which the participants of this research came up against the norming that took place in their sex education classes. These experiences are not representative of all of the ways in which norms around sex, gender, and
sexuality are enacted and/or dealt with, but each of these experiences were characterized by feelings of alienation, anxiety, and/or ambivalence. However, it is not only peoples’ reactions to norms that are characterized by a certain degree of ambivalence. Many of the ways in which we speak and think about identity is in concrete and static terms. The accounts of my participants, however, seem to suggest a greater degree of ambivalence in the way that people experience and in some ways perform their identity. As such I will take a moment to discuss some of this ambivalence before we turn to Chapter Five. Before considering the promise of ambivalence in chapter five we must start from an acknowledgement of the problematic aspects of experiences of ambivalence and the meaning making from which they stem.

**Ambivalence and Absence**

As we’ve seen in the last three sections, identity is not best understood as a thing that the participant had, but rather an active process which is necessarily marked by ambivalence and ambiguity. In the course of these interviews, participants consistently spoke in such a way that it was clear that identity was understood/made real through opposition and contrast to societal norms. Therefore, identity often began from a realization of ‘I am not that’ before it even becomes possible to entertain thoughts of what/who one is. In terms of identity, self-possession was something that needed to be worked on; it is not an inherent quality. Rather, it is an interactive and intersubjective quality that is brought into being, accomplished, through the meaning-making efforts of individuals and constrained by the preexisting organization and understanding of the ‘self’, the human. Throughout the interviews, participants spoke about their identities with a sense of becoming, which can also be read in the idea of self-possession which Ariel spoke of in their interview. While participants often referred to their sexual and gender identity as a stable rather than a flexible thing, a few also spoke of changes in who they were attracted to over time.
Dominant throughout this interview material, however, were references to feelings that participants did not have the ability, or possibly even the language, to properly give a name to their identity and/or identities. Several participants went through a variety of labels and identity categories before they came to the one that they currently use. Several participants spoke of feelings of identity being there but not being fully able to give voice to it. For instance, Ariel said,

I definitely would never have thought of myself, then, as being on the trans spectrum or anything, but I also don’t think I would have thought of myself as a lesbian… I wouldn’t have used the word queer. Probably would have just said gay… I was never really comfortable with the word lesbian.

While others, such as Shawna and Danielle, knew that they were not just attracted to men but did not necessarily know what that meant in terms of their own identity. The language was not available for them when they were in school, it wasn’t provided for them. While the heteronormative structures of society, and sex education, provide straight students with representations that mirror and illuminate their own identities, queer students do not have this privilege. When asked about whether they were out during high school, Ariel demonstrated an interesting ambivalence. The issue of being ‘out’ was obviously made complicated by their difficulty with claiming an identity. They said that,

there was a sexual element to my feelings… when I was in elementary school I definitely had really intense crushes on my friends … but I think I knew then, even, that it was a little unusual and also I never had any interest in ‘boys’… I knew actively but I also didn’t admit is to myself, like I don’t know how to define exactly what that means or what was actually happening… but I think, I am pretty sure that I was actively thinking these [things], yet at the same time I would be denying it to myself.

This demonstrates that the experience of knowing that something was different about one self yet not feeling able to give it voice, even to oneself, is in part a result of what we see around us in our environments.
Here, I have demonstrated some of the ways in which ambivalence stems from normalizing discourses in sex education, and some of the ways in which participants engaged with these discourses and feelings of ambivalence. Due to the fact that this ambivalence stems in part from the problematic construction of singular narratives of being\textsuperscript{11}, it can be viewed as indicative of a tenacious problem in our society. However, to leave it at that, would be to miss out on the possibilities and promise of ambivalence as a way of opening up possibilities that are deemed unimaginable by available discourses. Views of ambivalence as purely problematic do not account for the types of ambivalence that arose when several other participants shared accounts which demonstrated a degree of ambivalence in terms of the issue of ‘coming out’. Some participants first came out using one label before ultimately choosing a better fitting one. Others commented on how surprisingly few ‘coming out’ moments they have had. Allie made the comment, while describing her identity, that “I’d describe my sexual orientation as queer or bisexual, but I pass pretty well as straight most of the time and I’m in a relationship with a man. So there is how I identify myself and there’s how I’d identify to the world. So, they don’t always match”, demonstrating one way in which identity can be experienced in an ambivalent way and challenging an easy dichotomy between being ‘in’ or ‘out’ of the closet. Identity is never a simple matter and discourses of the closet which clearly demarcate what it means to be ‘out’ vs ‘in’ of the closet ignore the many ways in which identity is experienced. While the experience of coming up against norms may result in feelings of ambivalence and/or alienation, ambivalence does not necessarily need to be negative. It is entirely possible for individuals to make use of that ambivalence in order to understand the broad nature of identity. It is for this reason that we must

\textsuperscript{11} A type of narrative which has been highlighted as problematic in terms of race and disability as well through the work of scholars such as Walcott, Wynters, and Titchkosky.
now turn from the discussion of ambivalence as indicative of a problematic, and instead turn to a
more nuanced exploration of how spatial language and ambivalence intertwine in promising
ways.
Chapter Five: The Promise of Ambivalence

Ambivalence has been taken up in the previous chapter as at least partially a product of normative representation around sex, desire, and gender in experiences of sex education classes. In this way ambivalence was explored as indicative of a problem with the ways in which normative discourses are supported by the very ways that the term human comes to have meaning. So, what then does it mean to contend with the ‘promise of ambivalence’? This chapter will examine, through the use of language of space and spatial metaphors in discussions of sexuality and queerness, how ambivalence can be used to conceptualize identity as a journey and a process rather than a static destination, as well as the implications of this conceptual move. These themes will be built upon through an analysis of the possibilities created through the use of denaturalization and ambivalence to open up spaces to create and recreate identity. Before this argument can be made however, it is necessary to look at some of the ways in which space is used in the context of sexuality. As an important aspect of this discussion of space, I begin this chapter with a discussion of the ways that space is used to make sense of sexuality, including the metaphor of the closet, and unpack discourses of safe and positive ‘space’. This will provide an idea on the prevalent use of spatialized organization around the idea of sexuality, in order to provide context and a jumping off point for thinking of identity as a dynamic process more reminiscent of a journey than a destination.

Locating Sexuality

One of the more prevalent usages of spatial language in discourses of sexuality and identity revolves around the metaphor of ‘the closet’ and the subsequent designations of being ‘in’ or ‘out’. This metaphor is highly prevalent in discussions of sexuality and serves the purpose of ‘locating’ people in relation to their identity and society. Popular discourses surround non-
heterosexual individuals and often position being ‘out of the closet’ as the ultimate goal and best case scenario. Being ‘out’ indicates a degree of comfort and commitment in ones’ identity, particularly since there is always a possibility that those in their lives won’t react in a positive way. Generally, these ‘coming out’ moments are very particular moments in which the individual with a non-normative identity tell those who they care about their identity. The act of ‘coming out’ therefore is important as it creates the impression that one is truly sure of their identity. Sharing their identity in this way reflects that surety and a commitment to that identity as, while generally hopeful of a corresponding acceptance of their identity by those in their lives, it is often impossible to know how people will react. Therefore, within each ‘coming out’ moment there is the possibility that one might experience a negative response and even possibly lose, or damage, their relationship with those they tell. This places their commitment to their identity potentially over even their relationships. When one is not ‘out’ this seems to indicate a problem of some sort, such as, being ashamed of, or in denial of, their identity. However, the reality of queer individuals’ relationships with their identity and with the notion of coming out, is more complicated than these simplicity of shame or denial discourse allows.

The idea that one must ‘come out’ to have a proper relationship to their identity has interesting connotations. One of these connotations is that sexuality or gender identity should automatically be considered one of, if not the most, important and relevant aspect of their identity. This could be seen as a particularly heteronormative notion; while those who have a normative identity are able to prioritize other aspects of identity, those with non-normative identities are largely reduced to just one or, in the case of those with non-normative gender and sexuality, possibly two aspects of identity. This call to reduce ones identity to that which is of ‘primary’ importance must be understood as highly problematic. Despite the importance that western
society places on gender and sexuality, individuals do not always consider these aspects of their identity to be all that important in their day-to-day lives. I return again to my interview data\textsuperscript{12}. As on participant illustrates, Allie, who identified as queer or bisexual, clearly did not consider her sexuality to be an important factor in most areas of her life. She admitted that in most cases where her sexuality was assumed to be heterosexual, she generally does not feel it worth contesting.

Likewise, when asked if her family was aware of her sexuality, she replied simply that “No. They’ve never asked”. This wording is particularly interesting, as it indicated that she did not consider the topic to be important, or relevant, enough to broach the subject herself. Yet, there is also an inference, here, that if her family had asked, she would have told them. This suggests that the decision to not have a ‘coming out’ moment did not truly stem from a desire to hide her identity. This can also be seen in how one on the few spaces that she feels comfortable ‘identifying herself properly’ with her partner. Her choice of who to discuss her sexuality with is largely driven by what she sees as relevant. It is clear that while she is comfortable discussing her sexuality with her partner, she did not see that conversation to be relevant to have with the rest of her family. In fact, early on in the interview, Allie stated that “the part of me that doesn’t identify as I appear, as a heterosexual woman, isn’t relevant very often”. In cases where sexuality is not seen as relevant to much of the individual’s life, the ‘coming out’ moment might not be seen as important.

Another connotation implicit in the idea of ‘coming out’, is that one is generally automatically ‘in the closet’ and that, as such, a concerted effort is required in order to ‘come out’.

\textsuperscript{12} Interviews were conducted in October and November of 2014, with ethics approval, with queer identified adults who had attended public school in Ontario to speak of their experiences. Of these participant one identified as male, one as trans* and four identified as female. One participant had attended high school at a Catholic school. For a more detailed account of methodology and demographics, please refer to the third paragraph of the previous chapter or, alternatively, the methodology section in Chapter Two.
In this way, the construct of the closet re-inscribes heteronormative ideas through the assumption that unless told otherwise (unless someone ‘comes out’ or visibly presents as non-normative), that person can be assumed to be straight/cis/normative. This privileging of heterosexuality would, perhaps, be called into question if people were not under pressure to ‘out’ themselves. In the case of some participants, such as Allie (mention above) and Meghan, the participants did not feel that they needed to have a ‘coming out’ moment with their family. Above, in the discussion of Allie, it was a matter of what the participant thought was relevant for her family to know. For Meghan, the lack of ‘coming out’ moments were more indicative of the fact that, by the time that she was fully aware of and comfortable with an identity, she felt that her actions, interests, and behaviors were indication enough of how she identified. She did not feel the need to make a statement of her identity. In some ways this demonstrates a kind of ambivalence in how these participants identified and how others may have read them. In both these cases, the individual did not feel that others perceptions of their identity affected or encroached on the way that they wished to live. One way both of these women made sense of a lack of interest in ‘coming out’ was that it was not integral to either already being out or to being as they wished to be with their families. As such, neither of these women felt that ‘coming out’ was integral to their own experience of their identity.

Similar moments of ambivalence, or a desire for ambivalence, could also be understood in some of the participants’ decision to identify as queer. While there were many reasons why an individual may choose to identify as queer, from personal to more political reasons, one prominent aspect can be located in the ambiguity that is available in such a label. When asked, “What does queer mean to you?”, many mentioned the political/theoretical usages of the term, but others highlighted the ambiguousness of the term. Meghan said that, for her, “it’s encompassing
of, I guess a desire to build intimacy and attraction to people of, like, a variety of different genders and gender presentation, including the non-binary ones” and that “it felt ambiguous enough to kind of, it didn’t feel like I was pinning myself down into a particular box or around particular limits of who I would or would not be attracted to or interested in. So it just left things open and confusing and I like that”. The fact that the ‘confusing’ nature of the term was cited as a feature of the label demonstrates that not all individuals want, or feel comfortable, with a singular term. Also of note is the fact that the term is described as a box; rejecting the term is described as an opening, a space to move through.

The need to complicate our understanding of identity to make a place for ambiguity and ambivalence is particularly evident in the spatial language employed in discussions of sexuality and/or gender identity. This spatial language can create static points of reference which do little to challenge the restriction and limits that are reproduced even through programs and discourses that are intended to be inclusive or helpful. While academics have examined the ways in which “space is an integral of queer experience” (Sullivan, 2012, pp. 4,5), this is often in the context of how sexuality is navigated in relation to physical spaces, safety, and comfort. This relates to one of the more common usages of spatial language around issues of sexuality pertains to anti-homophobia initiatives. These stem, at least within the context of the United States, from the emergence in the 1960s of a prevalent belief that safety in the classroom for all students was both possible and a moral obligation (The Roestone Collective, 2014). In particular, there has been considerable focus on the promotion and creation of ‘safe’ and ‘positive’ spaces, both in schools and in communities. The concept of safe space was not, however, originally related to schools or sexuality; safe space, as a concept, “emerged in the women’s movement in the late twentieth century… and has a lively history, primarily but not exclusively in activist and pedagogical communities” (The Roestone
Collective, 2014, p. 1346). While there are some places, such as Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015), which have policies in place to make schools safe (combat bullying), safe spaces in the context of sexuality and gender identity are generally the perogative of individual teachers and/or school. There are a number of groups, from those based in universities to groups that attempt to operate on a national level, which are dedicated to providing resources and/or workshops for the development of safe spaces in schools. The implementation of safe spaces is not, however, without controversy. One particular instance of this can be seen in the issues surrounding safe space policies and free speech on university campuses in the UK (Dunt, 2015).

The implementation of safe spaces on university campuses in the UK has been a relatively recent phenomenon. In the last few years there have been a number of articles which question safe space policies are compatible with educational spaces and, most importantly, values of free speech. There has been concerns put forward that “safe space policies are too wide ranging and limit free and open debate at universities” (Free speech or safe space: which should universities protect?, 2015). This issue is of course too multifaceted to truly delve into in this project. I merely wish to note that safe spaces are not fully uncontested and that, despite the positive intentions of the policies and initiatives, their use and institution requires careful analysis and consideration. Regardless of the potential issues, there is considerable value in these initiatives and the mapping of identity through and within these spaces would be a valuable project. Studying the safe space movement, is however, beyond of the scope of this research project. Instead, what I am concerned with, here, is the ways in which the defining of these spaces makes use of static spatial understandings, and the possibility of these initiatives falling short of making substantial changes to the way people approach and understand sexual/gender identity.
Safe Space: Tolerating the ‘Other’

In recent years, the concern with bullying in schools and with the increasing rights for queer individuals has led to a number of attempts by some schools and institutions to institute anti-homophobia initiatives aimed at ameliorating negative environments for queer individuals. It has been argued, however, that the implementation of safe schools has the effect of promoting “tolerance but not acceptance of sexual diversity and differences” (Goldstein, Russel, & Daley, 2007, p. 184). The distinction between ‘tolerance’ and ‘acceptance,’ here, is extremely meaningful. First, the language and spirit of tolerance is always already laden with negative connotations. This positions queer students as a presence which requires tolerance and “homogenizes queer youth into one hopeless category” (Goldstein, Russel, & Daley, 2007, p. 184). The call for tolerance does not ask that queer students be treated in inclusive and positive ways; the goal instead is to encourage other students to curb outward expressions of explicit negativity. This focus on tolerance is seen reflected in the sex education curriculum, where non-normative sexualities are no longer framed as immoral. Still, true inclusion is not yet a goal.

Anti-homophobia frameworks also posit homophobia as the problem of queer students rather than an issue for the whole school population, thus simultaneously normalizing heterosexuality (Goldstein, Russel, & Daley, 2007, p. 185). By positioning identity as static destinations, these discourses make “easy problems.” Such “problems” are easy to identify, located, be narrowed down in a simple fashion for and by those who are most clearly affected and thus making it seem that sexuality is an individualized problem. As a result, efforts to ‘fix’ the problem are also often seen to hinge on certain individuals or groups of individuals. In this way, queer students themselves become ‘problems’ that need to be solved. The experience of being a ‘problem’ can be harmful to youths’ conceptions of identity. As a result, it is clear that by only
focusing on potential harm to the physical ‘self’, the strategy of creating safe schools fail to consider “the harm to ‘self’ that is administered when the subjectivities of queer students are ignored, silenced, dismissed, or misrepresented within classrooms, hallways, and playgrounds” (Goldstein, Russel, & Daley, 2007, p. 185), as is often the case in sex education classrooms specifically and heteronormative curriculum in general.

The implementation of the rhetoric of safe space in schools can, additionally, never promise that the spaces outside of the school will be safe. Violence, bullying, and other harm that occurs off of school property is not addressed in this strategy. By doing little to counter the discourses and structures which support and propagate these ‘homophobic’ feelings, safe space initiatives merely enforce the notion that school is not an acceptable space to make such sentiments known. Safe spaces are viewed as an issue only for queer students. This approach does not problematize the effects of homophobia for all students. Inclusive curriculum is seen as one strategy that can help schools transition from ‘safe spaces’ to positive spaces.

**Positive Spaces: Accepting Individual Identity**

Unlike safe spaces, positive spaces call for the inclusion and acceptance of queer students in the classroom. This strategy “seeks to redress homophobia through individual change and institutional and structural (systemic) change” (Goldstein, Russel, & Daley, 2007, p. 186, emphasis in the original). As such, positive spaces make more of an effort to address the need for queer students to feel welcome and included. What is not addressed in the use of positive spaces is the on-going individualization of queer students as problems. There seems to be a focus on positive spaces as being necessary to support queer youths during a difficult time in their lives. This frames discrimination on the basis of sexuality and gender identity as being an individual and situated problem, rather than a systemic issue. This constrains our ability to “[think] about queer
sexuality outside of the effects of heterosexism and homophobia” (Goldstein, Russel, & Daley, 2007, p. 186). Many of the discourses around helping queer students tend to have the implication, or promise, that high school is a particularly difficult time/place for queer student and that once it is over, things will get better. This, however, ignores the fact that schools do not operate independent from outside influences. Therefore, focuses that only take into account what happens on schools, ignore the fact that heteronormativity and homophobia stem from values outside of schools and continue beyond it. If things are to be ‘better’ after high school, this must be at least partially due to the increased ability to choose where, and with whom, one spends their time. This once again positions the individual as the site and solution to the problem of queerness. While there is greater potential with positive space for the promotion of more accepting ideologies, this does not widely affect the larger social sphere. It is into this space of issues and the issues of safe space that questions of identity arise and to which I now turn.

The Journey to Identity

The discussion of sexuality is often spoken of in terms that invoke a degree of spatial imagery. From identity labels which can be termed as ‘boxes’, to distinctions of being either ‘in’ or ‘out’ of the ‘closet’, and anti-homophobia strategies which try to institute ‘safe’ and ‘positive’ spaces. We find it easy to speak and make sense of identity in spatial terms and it is this tendency, along with the work of academics such as Sara Ahmed, that has led me to theorize a way of understanding identity as a journey and juxtapose this to standard ways of thinking which takes identity more as a static location. This sort of thinking calls for a degree of certainty, specificity, and stability when it comes to identity. When I speak of sexuality as a journey, I am not only looking at sexuality as evolving, flexible, or as a simple matter of coming to ones ‘proper’ identity; as such, I am engaged with allowing for a degree of ambivalence in both identity and in
the way that identity is taken up and understood by individuals. We can also see this in the ways that people navigate their sexuality in the context of everyday life. To take the idea of identity as a journey, and only see it as a means to reach a ‘destination’ is to stop short of the concepts full possibility. The idea that a journey is only between two points is only slightly broader than the perception of identity as static, as it only allows for movement between set identities rather than exploring the diversity and complexity that makes up identity.

The possibilities and value of understanding identity as a journey can be understood by examining the following excerpt from Danielle’s interview:

When I was thinking about my sexual identity at the end of high school, when I really became cognizant there was something else going on there beyond heterosexuality, the only model I really had was gay versus straight… I knew I liked butch types but I was still kind of operating under the old model where butch women were still considered women, they were part of that lesbian lexicon…then I got to university… I came out, I broke up with my high school boyfriend and I was part of this lez crew, and they all kind of identified as lesbians… and they either liked other girls that were like andro or more feminine than them… but I just, all these girls in my lez crew, they liked these girls, and I’m like, ‘I don’t find these kind of girls attractive’… the girls I would hit on were so different from the girls my friends were hitting on… it was the fact that my friends thought it was funny and strange that I liked butch women that started to make me think there was something different about my identity that theirs. Like, ‘I’m not this’. But still I identified as a lesbian because… I was dating people who still identified as cisgender… But then over time, the people I was dating, the way they oriented themselves to their gender, changed… So it seemed really weird to call myself a lesbian, it wasn’t really respectful to the other person and it didn’t really encapsulate what I was trying to find from people… if I’d been out as a person twenty years ago, thirty years ago, I don’t think I would’ve identified as anything close to queer… I probably would’ve just though I was into butch lesbians and that’s where I would’ve left it, and who knows what will happen in the future with how people are configuring their gender identities, and I imagine my sexual orientation will continue to change based on the people that I’m attracted to and their relationship to their gender identity changing. (Danielle)
In this lengthy excerpt, it is clear that a number of different understandings of sexuality, in regards to both general sexuality and her own, have been evident at different points in Danielle’s life. The majority of these changes are the result of changes in the types of discourses, information and representations that were available at different points in her life. In the beginning, her understanding of sexuality as being a matter of ‘gay versus straight’ affected how she thought of her own sexuality. Likewise, her experiences with her ‘lez crew’ briefly formed a representation of what it was to be ‘lesbian’; once Danielle became aware that she did not truly fit in with that representation either, the question of identity was once more called into question. I do not see this, however, as a matter of one’s sexuality changing from one thing to another, nor do I see it as developing towards a more true identity. Rather, the progression of Danielle’s account demonstrates the possibility for an understanding of sexuality that is not based on fixed, static, meanings. In particular, the very end of the quote is of interest:

who knows what will happen in the future with how people are configuring their gender identities, and I imagine my sexual orientation will continue to change based on the people that I’m attracted to and their relationship to their gender identity changing. (Danielle)

This excerpt denotes an understanding of sexuality that is fluid; while Danielle has her own identity and her own understanding of sexuality, she also is clearly aware of the potential that exists for new ways of thinking and knowing about sexuality. The ways in which she discusses sexuality clearly reflects a view of sexuality and identity which is necessarily relational. The relational aspect of sexuality does not only exist in that Danielle’s understanding of her identity changed as a result of the gender identities of those she was attracted to, it is also in the way that her account of her identity draws on an understanding of sexuality which is shaped by particular perceptions and ideas that are drawn from ones surroundings and/or society. In this way, identity is constantly in motion as we come into contact with new ideas and ways of thinking; the only
way that we can see identity as a simple matter of *being*, is if we ignore all of the ways in which identity is always already constructed and constrained by particular ways of thinking of and understanding identity as a thing to be thought of. If we take these things into account, we must also take into account the myriad ways that they could be constructed differently. Much the same way that discussions of race are always already caught up in discourses which produce the other as object (in some cases an unspeakable, unknowable object) which stands on the ‘outside’ of what is fully human (Walcott, 2011), current ideas around identity and sexuality also produce very particular ideas about what kind of identities can exist. However, accounts like Danielle’s demonstrate the fact that by looking at identity as a journey, the discourses acting on it come further into focus and open up new pathways.

I see identity intersecting with ideas of ambivalence in two main ways. First of these is in regards to individuals’ approach to making sense of their identity. Despite the types of discourses common with identity politics which promote the idea of identity as an innate knowledge that individuals possess early in life (a point of view which I am not trying to dispute in its entirety), even among the small number of people that I interviewed, there were several individuals who displayed a more ambivalent approach to their identity. All of the participants in this study were able to easily provide a narrative account of their ‘journey to their current identity’ when prompted; some of the participants provided, more cursory, similarly structured accounts without prompting. In some cases, there was a sense that they were different from the norms that they were provided with, however, in many cases, applying the statement that ‘they just knew’ to their experiences with sexual and/or gender identity, would be an oversimplification. Yet, these discussions around the complexity and ambivalence in the process of identity were not particularly troubled. While there was confusion and at times frustration, particularly when the
terms available didn’t fit, these journeys were not generally spoken of in a negative way. For Michael it there was an element of knowing that he was gay before he was actually comfortable with applying the label to himself. However, even in that case, what was included in his ‘journey’ went beyond a ‘simple’ matter of labels. While Michael was able to provide specific detail on when he became aware of his identity versus when he became comfortable with it, he also placed a substantial focus on the work that he did to find resources and literature which spoke to his identity.

Among many of the interviews there was also a common trend in the types of language that were used when describing how they came to their identity and when discussing whether or not they had been ‘out’ or aware of their identity in high school. As mentioned earlier, there is a great deal of complexity to be found around the concept of being or coming ‘out’. However, beyond this, some of the participants expressed a marked degree of ambivalence when discussing the issue of this self-awareness. There was a preponderance of statements which demonstrated uncertainty and confusion around the question of self-awareness and several participants made an effort to challenge what it means to be aware of one’s identity through use of language which either claimed a sense of awareness without knowledge or an awareness that could not then be made sense of or given voice. Repeated in these accounts were phrases that demonstrated a level of ambivalence and uncertainty, such as “I knew that I found women attractive, but did I know that that meant gay or queer or something like that? No, I did not”, and “it was really just confused, I didn’t really have words for what was going on and I just really hadn’t figured it out”. There was, in several accounts, comments which therefore challenged and complicated what it is to be a self-aware and self-knowing subject. I would argue, however, that it does not serve the interests of queer individuals, nor a fuller understanding of what it means to navigate the many
issues of identity, for this confusion and ambivalence to be taken as an essentially problematic result of inequality or conflict within the individual. Rather, I believe that there is value in ambivalence itself. Identity is often discussed in largely singular terms, in which case we are often required to highlight what we feel is most important and/or find the ‘best fit’ label.

Lastly, I would like to address a different sort of space; I would like to discuss the implications of considering sexuality in relation to temporal space. In the earlier lengthy excerpt from Danielle's interview, she opens with the statement "When I was thinking about identity...". This "when" is important for the ways that it is steeped with heteronormative languages and understandings. The "when" of thinking about one's sexual identity must be automatically understood to be a queer moment; a queer moment 'ready made' through the operation and perpetuation of heteronormativity in our society. 'When' is a temporal space of orientation. However, orientation is always in relation to what object/ives, physical or social, are evident.

According to Ahmed:

If we start with the point of orientations, we find that orientations are about starting points… orientations are about how we begin, how we proceed from 'here'. Husserl relates the questions of ‘this or that side’ to the point of ‘here’, which he also describes as the zero-point of orientation, the point from which the world unfolds, and which makes what is ‘there’ over ‘there’. It is from this point that the differences between ‘this side’ and ‘that side’ matter. It is only given that we are ‘here’ at this point, that near and far are lived as relative markers of distance. (Ahmed, 2007, pp. 150, 151)

This is also true of how we orient ourselves in and through temporal spaces. The 'when' of thinking about one's sexuality is oriented to heteronormativity in very particular ways.

Heteronormativity presupposes heterosexuality; there is no need to think about sexual identity, it merely is. While some spaces, such as safe space programs and groups, work to give people a sense of an alternative to heterosexuality, this is often in the shape of a problem to be managed by a “program”. However, not all identities are seen as in need of a program; the need for a program
is always already producing this temporal space of queerness as a problem that must be managed. Therefore, the act of thinking about sexuality is to be taken out of the moment of being into a moment of becoming. It is through this need to think, to become, that queer moments become times outside of being, and it is in this movement from being to becoming that the need for an acceptance of ambivalence and the understanding of identity as a process become most important.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

As I stated in the beginning of this thesis, all research begins with a question; it has been my privilege, in the previous chapters, to explore questions around identity and education as they emerged from the interviews and the analysis of the curriculum. While many aspects of identity, sexuality, and education were explored, there is still much left unanswered and unexplored. No research is complete and there are no absolute answers to the complex question of queer experiences of identity and sex education. This project was limited by both time and spatial constraints. That said, this project has provided valuable insight into the need for new analysis and understandings of the formation and functioning of identity, particularly in relation to education. This project provides a nuanced discussion between curriculum, identity, and education. It also provides valuable insight into the need for new analysis and understandings of the formation and functioning of identity, particularly in relation to education. Thus, this research has opened up avenues for new research moving forward.

Findings

Curriculum, the body, and identity are all socially constructed through epistemological constructions and relations of power. How this occurs differs, but the processes are much the same. One problem is that subjects feel ambivalence in both the construction of the body and in their identities that is not reflected in the normalizing discourses of the curriculum. Ambivalence has clearly been a central theme in my analysis of the interviews and my subsequent theorizing. However, despite the importance of ambivalence, normalization has also played an integral part in this research; not only was it a central theme that emerged in my analysis of the curriculum documents, but it also manifested in the descriptions that participants gave of their experiences of those sex education classrooms. It is by examining these processes of normalization that I was
able to uncover the importance of ambivalence, both as a result of norms and as a potential avenue to challenge those norms.

Normalization of certain discourses is integral in the production of invisibility and visibility, which are crucial to the application of power and discipline in a society. This is particularly true with regard to schools, which function as microcosms of society. Curriculum, which effectively organizes and determines some sense of what is taught in schools, remains largely invisible in its day to day operation. Students are not likely to be aware of the multiple ways that decide what it is that they learn. Nor are they made aware of the reasons behind a particular curriculum being instituted. Education, particularly at such an early age, is often constructed as value neutral. When the structures that determine and organize what is taught are not visible, there is less possibility for the curriculum itself to be contested, at least within the classroom itself. The invisibility of curriculum in classrooms positions students who might disagree with the mandates of established curriculum and what is being taught as troublemakers and problem students. The existing curriculum in Ontario does not include topics that are important to those with non-normative sexuality and gender identity. This silence positions the needs of queer students as inconsequential within the context of society.

Likewise, by making the knowledge of topics that are mostly relevant to heterosexual students mandatory for all students, this positions heterosexuality as exclusive and exclusionary knowledge (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 225). When only one way of being is represented in classroom material, this makes those who are ‘deviant’ all the more noticeable and visible. Also, I would argue that, even if individual teachers are willing and able to provide information to LGBTQ students, the fact that there is no place in the existing curriculum for this information means that it is likely not to be seen as necessary knowledge for all students. As such, this
information would likely be available ‘on request’. While this is better than nothing and a step in the right direction, this requires that LGBTQ students make themselves visible through their requests for more information and risk possible backlash from teachers and peers (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 226). In this way, curriculum supports norms which create very particular representations of what types of knowledge are important and what kinds of people are normal.

Sex education in its current form is not well suited for the kinds of conversations that are necessary in order to challenge the division between ‘straight’ and queer sexualities. While the anti-homophobia strategies around creating safe and positive spaces are complicit in the continuing pervasiveness of this division, there is a useful parallel between how discourses of safe and positive spaces structure sexuality, and how these discourses are also used to structure approaches to sex. Much like safe spaces, safe sex is concerned with minimizing the risk that stems from sexual activity. However, both positive spaces and positive sex are more concerned with improving individuals’ relationships to sex and/or their sexuality.

True inclusion and relevance require more, in terms of both anti-homophobia and sex education, than a focus on safety or positivity. Likewise, sexuality and gender identity are much too fluid and complex to be encompassed within a framework that defines sex as primarily reproductive and/or risky. Indeed, my analysis of interview data suggests that the current ways that we understand and define sexuality and gender identity are not reflective of the true complexity of identity and the ways that individuals relate to that identity. If the ways that people think about and define sex are flexible and wildly diverse, how then can we hope to have meaningful and relevant conversations about sexuality within the confines of a curriculum that does not encourage active dialogue and multiple meanings? In order to make sex education inclusive and relevant to all students, it is essential that we challenge the practices and discourses
that normalize the division between queer and straight students. We must decenter heteronormativity and create a more flexible curriculum that provides space for all students to explore what sexuality means to them.

It is this need for ‘space’ which led me to conceive of ambivalence as a potential way of theorizing the space of identity. The interviews demonstrated a feeling of ambivalence in the face of the norms prevalent in curriculum and classroom experiences. While it is possible to view this ambivalence as arising from conflict between the norms produced in classrooms (and society) and individuals’ personal identities, the complex and meaningful ways in which participants made use of these feelings pointed to a potentially more multifaceted understanding of this ambivalence. If we take into account the way we have a tendency to think of sexuality in terms that recall a sense of space, then the concept of ambivalence creates a sense of movement. This allows for a challenge to a dichotomous understanding of identity which constrains the possible ways of identifying. By theorizing the use of ambivalence as a way to open up the possibility for the conception of sexuality as outside the overarching societal constructions of what it means to be normal, I draw on the work of anti-colonial and anti-black theorists (Walcott, 2011; Wynter, 2003). If we are to understand the prevalence and continuing presence of problematic norms and resulting perceptions of marginalized populations, we must be cognizant of the processes by which these norms and understandings come to exist.

If we can begin to conceptualize sexual identity as fluid, then this opens up more room for fluidity within the curriculum. Further, the notion of identity as movement is suggestive of an approach to sexual education that takes into account the necessity an ever-evolving curriculum that is open to change and responsive to student-centered dialogue. Given that this research suggests that ambivalence may be a result of the normalizing curriculum which simultaneously
erases non-normative sexualities and marginalizes non-normative bodies, we must consider ways to de-center curriculum to ensure its inclusivity.

**Limitations**

This research uncovered several important points which are valuable for opening up our understanding of identity and education. However, all research has limitations. This research project relied on small number of interviews with participants who were largely recruited through snowball sampling methods. As a result, the participants in this research were fairly homogenous in terms of race/ethnicity, sex, and educational background. Because of the limited number of participants, there were many different experiences and manifestations of identity which were not present. Not only were the majority of participants cisgendered (all but one), but the majority were female as well (with only one person choosing gender neutral pronouns and one cisgendered man). As a result, the relevance of this research is limited to the experiences of a very particular subset of individuals. Individual experiences are incredibly nuanced and the experience of one trans* identified individual cannot speak to the complex experiences of all trans individuals. As such, this project is limited in that it remains relatively cis-centric. Likewise, given the same size, the intersections of multiple identities, in terms of how people would manage ‘marginal’ identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and ability in concurrence, was not addressable within this. This was partly due to the methods used in this research; while interviews are an important method of eliciting in-depth and personal information, the fact remains that the time required for interviewing and the resulting need for transcription meant that having a large number of participants was not feasible. Additionally, as a result of the use of interviews, information regarding background and demographics were not elicited, meaning that no concrete links could be drawn regarding these factors. Similarly, due to the small number of participants and the lack
demographic information elicited, this study does not take into account geographic location. Furthermore, the strategy of speaking to adults about their past experiences, while a useful strategy for this project means that the accounts are affected by the participants’ memories and their current perceptions. The accounts of current students would likely differ in that current student would be better able to remember and recount concrete examples of event in the classroom, whereas adults are much more likely to only remember one or two examples and in the case of this research, were more likely to speak to their identities, current perceptions, and the ways that these things came to be. This difference in memory and focus could have produced a very different kind of research. The distance provided by time gave the participant room to explore their own perceptions and identity, encoding it with their own meanings.

**Future Research**

One of the promises of this is research is that it is suggestive of new avenues for future research. This research has uncovered a need for more research that attends to individual experience in understanding identity. As a result, it is important that further research is done which focusses on different gender and sexual identities and the ways in which these intersect with other identities such as class, race, nationality, geography and/or disability. It would be useful to have a study with larger number of transgender and transsexual individuals that would take into account the different experiences that likely result from intersections of gender and sexuality. Alternately, there is also room for research that would explore sex education from the perspective of those with different ‘racial’ backgrounds or ability levels in addition to sexuality and gender identity. Not only would this provide voice to a wider range of experiences, but it would also help to further uncover the complexity and interconnected nature of identity. A study which had a more even division between male and female participants might also be better able to
attend to the potential differences engendered by the experience of sex segregated sex education. It would also be potentially valuable to examine different experiences with co-ed sex education.

In particular, it would be useful to produce comparative studies which would explore the different effects that the sex education in different areas have on individuals. This avenue of research would be important for a number of reasons. Foremost would be the ability to take into account the different types of curriculum that are in place in different provinces. Comparative studies would, however, also enable researchers to examine how the curriculum was being applied in different geographic location, such as urban and rural areas.

By far the most important avenue of research moving forward in this area is the implementation of the proposed curriculum which is slated to be implemented starting in the fall of 2015. This new curriculum contains what appear to be marked improvements to the past curriculum. Therefore, it will be incredibly important in the future for research to be done in order to ascertain and address the changes made. Not only is it important to see if the changes made will result in changed experiences for queer students, but there also needs to be work done to ensure that the progress made is not restricted to this singular change. It has been made clear through this research that the ways in which identity is taken up, preformed, understood and utilized by individuals are incredibly complex and multifaceted. Therefore, it is also clear that we must remain cognizant of the ways in which the curriculum is being taken up by students.

I would like to turn now to a brief discussion of the particular value of this research is the realm of phenomenology. This project built upon the work of phenomenological theorists such at Ahmed, in particular, on Ahmed's writings on queer phenomenology and orientation. My own work expands on this work through its focus on queerness and identity as a phenomenological topic which can be considered through spatial terms and logics. This project took an unexpected
(based on my original intentions) turn away from the qualitative analysis of curriculum, classrooms, and/or policies. Instead it turned to the lived experiences of queer individuals as represented by interview accounts as they delved into their experiences of sex education and identity. By enacting this methodological and ontological turn, this research became invested in the nuances how queer individuals come into their identity or identities. By using phenomenological (and spatial) language and logics, this project opens up new ways of examining and orienting ourselves in terms of sexuality, and identity more generally. Through drawing on individual experience and spatial metaphors, I have endeavoured to create a fuller picture of how interconnected and intricate of a matter identity is. Curriculum, and many ways of looking at it and its effects, has thus far been firmly rooted in norms which have proven to be solid and impermeable barriers to non-normative students. These barriers constitute an epistemological ‘closet’ from which queer-identified students must escape in order to claim an educational space that is relevant and inclusive. My hope is that this journey out of the closet can begin in a more productive way as we throw open the door to change.
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Appendix A – Letter of Invite

Hello,

My name is Takara Ketchell and I am a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I am currently conducting research for my Master’s thesis. As a part of this research, I am interested in learning about how individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender/transsexual, or queer (LGBTQ) experienced sex education curriculum in Ontario secular public schools. This interview will explore sex education experiences and my research will evaluate these experiences of sex education with the goal of deepening our understanding of the effects of current curriculum and proposing alternatives. I am seeking LGBTQ-identified participants between the ages of nineteen and thirty who have attended public school in Ontario to participate in a one-on-one interview about their experiences. The interview will be about one hour long. Given the nature of the research, some of questions will pertain to participants’ sexual/gender identity and views of and/or experiences with sex. You will have the freedom to answer these questions with as much or as little detail as you are comfortable with; you may also choose to decline answering these questions entirely. Examples of questions that may be asked include but are not limited to:

- How would you describe or define your gender/sexuality?
- Did your sex education include information about different kinds of sexuality or gender identity?
- Describe your memories of how sex education was taught in your school?
- In your view, what would make sex education more useful or inclusive for LGBTQ students?

With your permission the interview will be audio-recorded and a transcript would be made available for you to review and you will be given three weeks to make any changes, should you wish to do so, email reminders will be provided. I would greatly appreciate your participation in my project. Please feel free to contact me for more information at the email address or phone number below. Texts are also acceptable, but please leave a name and number where you can be reached.

Sincerely,

Takara Ketchell  
Graduate Student  
Humanities, Social Science & Social Justice Education  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education  
University of Toronto  
takara.ketchell@utoronto.ca  
(250) 899-1544

Supervisor:  
Tanya Titchkosky, PhD  
Associate Professor, Disability Studies  
Dept. of Social Justice Education, (formerly HSSSJE; and SESE)  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto  
Office: 12th floor OISE, 12-236  
Phone: 416-978-0451  
tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca
Appendix B – Letter of Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM
Title of Research: Re/producing Power: Sex Education and the Queer-identified Subject
Principal Researcher: Takara Ketchell
Date: _____________________

Dear Participant:
Thank you for your participation in this research project. The purpose of this letter is to outline what is to
be expected so that you can make an informed decision regarding participation. Participation is
completely voluntary and, should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you
withdraw from the study you may request that the transcript of your interview be immediately destroyed.
You may choose to not answer any questions. Measures will be taken to ensure your confidentiality,
however, **there is a chance that information, such as stories and anecdotes, provided in these
interviews may be recognizable to friends and/or family and as such might constitute a risk to your
confidentiality.** Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact Prof.
Tanya Titchkosky; Rm. 12-236 OISE, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON M5S 1V6, Tel.: (416) 978-
0451; Email: tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca. You may also address questions regarding your rights as a
participant in this project to the Office of Research Ethics; University of Toronto, Tel.: 416-946-3273;
Email: ethics.review@utoronto.ca.

I am currently conducting research for my Master’s thesis. As a part of this research, I am
interested in learning about how individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual,
transgender/transsexual, or queer (LGBTQ) experienced sex education curriculum in Ontario
secular public schools. This interview will explore sex education experiences and my research will
evaluate these experiences of sex education with the goal of deepening our understanding of the
effects of current curriculum and proposing alternatives. You are being asked to participate in a single
one-on-one interview that will be approximately one-hour in length which will be recorded with a
digital audio recorder. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript for your interview and will be
given an opportunity to make changes. All audio files, transcripts, and any other identifying material will
be stored under lock and key in a secure location. Names and other identifying information about you
will be systematically eliminated and identifying codes will also be kept under lock and key, separately
from transcripts. Only the researcher will have access to the raw data. All files or raw data will be
destroyed on or before September 2017.

Potential benefits of participation include having the opportunity to discuss equitable education for
LGBTQ students and to contribute recommendations for changes to sex education curriculum.
Potential harm is possible, as recounting some of your experiences may be upsetting. Measures will be
taken to minimize discomfort and **information and contact details for counselling services at the
University of Toronto and other support structures on campus will be available upon request.** You
are free to stop or interrupt the interview at any time.

Additional information
Should you desire to participate, please sign and date this form and make note of any stipulations. You
may keep the second copy for your reference.

Thank you.
Sincerely,
Takara Ketchell
Email: takara.ketchell@utoronto.ca
Phone: (250) 899-1544
To Be Completed by Participants

I have read through this document. I understand and am satisfied with the explanations offered, feel that my questions have been addressed, and agree to participate in the ways described. **I understand that this interview will be audio-recorded.** If I am making any exceptions or stipulations, these are:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

________________________ (Signature)

________________________ (Printed Name)

________________________ (Preferred Pseudonym)

________________________ (Date)