

The close examination given in this chapter to one lesson that closely followed the preferred Government pedagogy and curriculum in this area demonstrates the poverty of such an approach. The discursive framing of sex as heterosexual, preferably monogamous and married, and dangerous only to those who behave badly (promiscuously or carelessly) gave no opportunity for any kind of real learning to take place. The analysis shows clearly that the children learnt almost nothing that they did not already know. Neither were they enabled to reflect more broadly on sexual relationships. Even when they tried (with partial success) to take the conversation into the realm of such reflection, by discussion of power imbalances, Katherine did not allow that analysis to develop and could in fact not do so without falling foul of the *Guidance*. The critique made of this lesson should not detract from the fact that Katherine and Liz were, in other areas, very successful teachers. In their approach to sex and relationship education, they were doing the best they could, working closely within the constraints of Government guidance and cognisant of the likelihood that any departure from that guidance would be met with a punitive response. The problem was not that they were incompetent or illiberal or malicious teachers, but that the prescribed approach is pedagogically bankrupt and incapable of offering children the kind of sexuality education from which they might learn and on which they might be able to reflect and build their own ways of understanding.

Notes

1. Sex Education Forum is the leading Non-Governmental Organisation in the UK that is concerned with developing policy and practice in sex education. It is funded by the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health and brings together over 50 charities and other organisations with a national brief for developing sex education. Materials can be obtained from Sex Education Forum via the National Children's Bureau website (<http://www.ncb.org.uk/>) or by writing to Sex Education Forum at the National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakeley Street, London.
2. Issued by the previous Conservative Government under John Major.

CHAPTER FOUR

From the Outside, Looking in: Doing sexuality in secondary school

... educators have yet to take seriously the centrality of sexuality in the making of a life and in the having of ideas. (Britzman 1998: 70)

Introduction

In this chapter I review some of the research literature around sexuality education as it is experienced by young people between the ages of eleven and sixteen in secondary or high school. In some respects this research documents a depressing litany of failure over the past fifteen years by educators and government educational policy makers alike, to address the needs of young people around their sexual identities and practices. Britzman's words seem to be frustratingly true. Many young people prefer to rely on teen magazines, adult pornography magazines, television and their friends to provide them with more useful information and support about sexuality than they receive in school. As suggested in chapter one, this is partly because sex and relationship education is always about what a particular government chooses to permit the school to say officially about sexuality and what or whom must remain silent. Chapter three details how the sexual experiences and identities of abused children are silenced through close adherence to the UK government's guidance on sex and relationship education. Equally, as will be seen in chapter five, girls from non-monogamous families must remain cloistered about their family and community customs and practices. Similarly queer pupils (or the children of queer families) are silenced in the context of schooling – and particularly of sex and relationship education. These silenced sexualities belong

to those whose sexual practices and identities fall outside 'the charmed circle of good, normal, natural, blessed sexuality' (Rubin 1993: 13) but who are often nevertheless struggling to survive in very hostile school cultures of homophobia and heterosexism.

I attempt to review sexuality education in secondary schools from the standpoint of those who are not heterosexual (or not normatively heterosexual): those who are on the outside looking in. The chapter also considers important research which makes visible exactly how normative heterosexuality is policed, or made compulsory in secondary schools.

Given that the 1990s has seen an expansion into sociological research into young people's sexuality, the final part of the chapter considers why it is that young people – and often their teachers – have not so far been introduced to this research, through sexuality education or in-service training. I suggest that withholding this knowledge is a mistake. If ideas, theories and ways of making meaning about sexuality are never discussed critically, using the benefit of expertise from the field, then young people are not being educated about sexuality at all. They may be learning an 'appropriate' sexual code of conduct and those who advocate such a code presumably have good reasons for so doing. However, this is at the cost of a missed opportunity to educate more broadly and sensitively about sexuality and to extend young people's understanding about their own sexual identities and those of others.

Delaying first sex: the extension of childhood innocence/ignorance

A review of the research into sexuality education in secondary schools should probably start by drawing out some of the key themes that have emerged since Fine's influential study of sex education in a New York City High School, 'Sexuality, Schooling and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire' (Fine 1988). This identified many of the themes pertaining to sexuality in secondary schools which have preoccupied researchers throughout the 1990s. Fine identified four discourses of sexuality then present in debates in the USA about sexuality education (and which can still

be seen in most anglophone countries). These were: sexuality as violence; sexuality as victimisation; sexuality as individual morality and finally a discourse of desire, which she suggested was only present as 'a whisper'. In observations of and discussions with adolescent Black and Latina women in a comprehensive high school serving a low-income area carried out over the course of a year, Fine investigated the inadequacies of the school system in empowering these young women to explore their emerging sexualities. Although focusing specifically on sexuality education classes, which, she observed, 'typically provide little opportunity for discussions beyond those constructed around superficial notions of male heterosexuality' (Fine 1988: 36), her comments have wider relevance. In her conclusion she identified those most at risk of victimisation as female students, especially those on low incomes and non-heterosexual male students. She concluded:

The absence of a discourse of desire, combined with the lack of analysis of the language of victimization, may actually retard the development of sexual subjectivity and responsibility in students. (Fine 1988: 49)

Ironically, at the same time she argued that, in spite of persistent homophobia the only students who had opportunities in school for 'critical sexual discussion' were the out gay students who were members of the Gay and Lesbian Association and for whom the lesbian and gay rights movement had been a very empowering force.

We observed in our introduction that sexuality in the secondary school is still primarily a discussion about heterosexually imagined futures. The 'discourse of desire' is missing because it cannot be reconciled with the heavy rhetoric of delaying sex, that characterises most sex and relationship education in anglophone countries, nor with the tendency to promote an extension of childhood innocence/ignorance beyond puberty. There is a significant paradox here, in that our society and other western capitalist societies are extraordinarily unsuccessful in protecting children. What this means is that whenever an extreme case of cruelty to children occurs or when children are killed or stories about sexual abuse

appear in the press, there is a public outcry and sense of shock, as if this were unexpected. And yet it happens all the time. This complete failure to actually protect children is combined with the notion that not educating them about sexuality can act as a kind of protection of their innocence. It is precisely this paradox and failure to protect children that makes the discourse of childhood innocence so dangerous. As argued in chapter two, once children 'know' they are by definition no longer innocent. Thus we can see that the young queer students in Fine's study are allowed a critical discussion of sexuality and access to lesbian and gay groups, partly because they are, in much the same way as Debbie has remarked about abused children, already 'spoiled'. They can therefore, ironically in this instance, receive more explicit and wide ranging sexuality education than their peers.

The exclusion of queer sexualities in sexuality education

Evaluating sexuality education programmes in the USA, Sears concluded that they presented a 'techno-rational worldview' (Sears 1992: 7). An emphasis on rational decision making in the sexuality curriculum and 'the failure to explore the eroticism associated with sexuality' (*ibid.*: 18) was, in Sears' view, also integral to the fact that learning about human reproduction was also about the 'reproduction of social relations' (*ibid.*: 19). Summarising studies on the content of sexuality education also showed that homosexuality was consistently one of the subjects least discussed within sexuality education (*ibid.*: 9). Evidently, such an education is unlikely to increase the understanding by young people of their own sexuality or that of others. In the UK, Marigold Rogers (1994) discussed their schooling with her young lesbian research participants. She found that they did not remember lesbianism ever being mentioned in sex education or any part of the curriculum. One of them, however, did remember homosexuality being mentioned but precisely through the techno-rational approach identified by Sears:

... and there is a theory that homosexuality², and I perked up and listened, 'has something to do with the imbalance of hormones'. Then she moved on and I thought, 'Wow! I've been mentioned.' (Rogers 1994: 40)

The desperation of the situation is encapsulated by the fact that this young woman's reaction, at the time, seems to have been one of *positive* amazement. Mac an Ghail's young gay male research participants also identified the techno-rational approach of the sexuality education they received:

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

Trudell (1993) reported her findings of an ethnographic study in a ninth grade sex education classroom. Homosexuality was mentioned briefly in the context of the discussion of AIDS, thus making a link between them in the minds of students, a link that, as David observes in chapter six, is still held in place for many university students. The teacher apparently felt that her students were not mature enough to discuss homosexuality. Trudell was also upset at the teacher's own heterosexual assumptions in relation to the content of the curriculum, its presentation and the presumed heterosexuality of her students. The heterosexist assumptions embedded in these young people's experience of sex education also led to a failure to tackle the homophobic abuse experienced by one young man in the class. Sex education in Trudell's research failed to meet the needs of young queer students or to expand the knowledge base of any of the young people in relation to sexuality. While government advice in the UK now suggests that homophobic abuse should be dealt with, it is difficult to see how that can happen in a context where queer experience itself is not valued or even discussed. Trudell also raised the important issue of the teacher's socially sanctioned status as a heterosexual wife and mother, which allowed her to speak from personal experience and also conferred status on dominant cultural values – an example of heterosexual privilege not available to queer teachers (Spriggs 1994).

Recommending the inclusion of queer experience in sexuality education is not a simple matter. We need to consider carefully the

implications of who delivers sexuality education. In relation to the delivery of sexuality education specifically designed to address homophobia amongst sixteen to eighteen year olds in London secondary schools, for example, a 'Young Gay and Bisexual Men's Development Worker' commented:

This kind of work could be very damaging to lesbian and gay pupils if it wasn't done right. If it's done right it can be liberating, and very life giving to them and to straight pupils as well. (Douglas and Kemp 2000: 44)

This point is reiterated by Warwick *et al.* (2000), when commenting on initiatives specifically designed to address the health needs of lesbians and gay men. They say about many of these initiatives:

It is not clear whether the authors are concerned to address mental illness or mental health and emotional well-being, or are interested in the prevention of mental illness or the promotion of mental health. (Warwick *et al.* 2000: 141)

This is an important distinction. While documenting research on health issues facing young queer people, Ian Warwick and his colleagues were concerned that the focus on mental illness allowed only certain aspects of queer lives to become known about. Moreover they suggested that young people not identifying as queer may have issues related to same sex attraction and that young queer people may also have concerns not immediately related to their sexuality. They pressed for much more inclusive programmes that sought to promote mental health and emotional well-being among all young people and which were sensitive to issues of sexuality.

It is clear that young people themselves feel that there is a general sense of negativity in the discussion of queer issues in sexuality education and in school generally, if such discussion occurs at all. One of Mac An Ghail's respondents, for example, makes the point that there are many positive aspects to a gay identity, highlighting some specifically in contrast to perceived negative aspects of male heterosexuality:

Teachers, especially male teachers, assume your being gay is a problem but there are a lot of plusses. In fact, I think that one of the main reasons that male straights hate us is because they really know

that emotionally we are more worked out than them. We can talk about and express our feelings, our emotions in a positive way. They can only express negative feelings like hatred, anger and dominance. Who would like to be like them? (Mac an Ghail 1994: 167)

Where homosexuality is dealt with well, there appear to be positive effects for queer youth in the form of reduced levels of homophobia and easier access to appropriate support. Nicola Douglas and Sophie Kemp (2000) interviewed staff and students in four schools which had introduced a series of lessons on lesbian and gay sexualities. They were informed by the teachers they interviewed afterwards that since the sessions some young people had felt able to come out as lesbian or gay and seemed to feel supported around issues of homophobia. Teachers also reported that their own confidence in supporting queer students had been significantly increased. Queer young people will talk about their sexualities in school if they feel secure and if the school has expressed a commitment to their education and well-being in the school.

There are few examples of such innovative work in sexuality education undertaken with young people that seek to be inclusive of queer sexualities and which have been evaluated. Apart from the study by Douglas and Kemp in London schools, discussed above, a notable exception is Lyn Harrison's (2000) research into a pilot sexuality and HIV/AIDS education programme in the Australian State of Victoria in 1995/6. In this project, staff were required to interrogate gender-power relations and homophobia. Harrison's findings were less optimistic than those of Douglas and Kemp. She showed how, 'students' strong cultural and psychological investments in policing the boundaries of heterosexuality' meant that such work was met with resistance (Harrison 2000: 17). However, more positively, she also documented instances where a change in thinking occurred when normative heterosexuality was deconstructed in the classroom and students were asked to question its naturalness.

The effects for all young people, but especially for queer youth, of inadequate sexuality education are manifold and something that health researchers have been at pains to explore. Recent research

into transmission of HIV in the UK suggested that young gay and bisexual men were most at risk (PHLS-CDSO 1997). Meeting the specific health needs of gay and bisexual young men in sexuality education is likely to prove extremely difficult if these young people cannot be identified in the first place. Whilst it may be possible to identify young gay and bisexual men from gay youth groups or on the commercial gay scene, this presupposes they are out and already have a level of confidence about their sexuality, as well as access to a gay scene. Furthermore, young men who have sex with other men may not identify as gay. As Forrest (2000) observed in the UK context:

Currently, young people are being denied a right to an education which equips them for adult life (in transgression of the law). For young gay people, their enforced invisibility and the denial of equal access to basic relevant sex education is a breach of a human right. (Forrest 2000: 15)

Interestingly, the British Medical Association outlined their own recommendations for good sexuality education practice and policy:

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

From our analysis of available research, it is clear that such responsible teaching is not generally happening. Part of the problem of implementing this in the UK is the effect of Section 28. Although this legislation does not apply to specific teachers or school governors, many teachers are unsure about its limits and have chosen not to mention homosexuality as a result (Douglas *et al.* 1997; Epstein 1994b; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Johnson and Epstein 2000).

Quinlivan and Town (1999) suggest that queer youth's sexuality is itself complexly shaped through their experiences of sexuality education in school. They explored the pathologising of homosexuality in their interviews with young lesbians and gay men in New Zealand. These researchers were concerned about how, by

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

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

The contention that sexuality education as experienced here has shaped the way in which young people's sexualities are formed suggests that the imperative to provide comprehensive, reflexive and critical sexuality education is urgently needed and would impact positively on the mental health and well being of queer youth.

Understandably, queer youth have often responded angrily to the silencing of their identities within programmes of sexuality education:

'I was waiting to hear something about homosexuality, safe sex and different things in sex education. Maybe some information that could help me. But I got nothing. There was nothing.' (Frankham 1996: 23)

However, such expressions of frustration have tended to occur retrospectively, once young people have come out and are better

able to define what was lacking in their education. The silencing of queer experience in schools is often so absolute that it becomes impossible to articulate a queer voice within such institutions. There is no official cultural recognition of queer experience in schools and it is therefore a very difficult place in which to sustain a queer identity. As one young bisexual woman in my own research commented: 'you just have to do it (queer sexuality) away from school'.

It is possible that keeping queer experience out of sexuality education programmes ultimately keeps young queers themselves out of schools. This is, of course, not universal, and there is evidence that some young queers do exceptionally well academically in school (Friend 1997). However, there is also a burgeoning testimony from queer youth, particularly from the USA, on dropping out of school and academic failure (Friend 1993; Herr 1997; Jennings 1998). Indeed it seems as if queer young people have a tendency to follow one of two paths – drop out or bury oneself in work in order to avoid the heterosexual pressure of the school. As one young lesbian reflected, when asked about using academic work to avoid heterosexuality:

DE: You could choose to be the academic girl and avoid the compulsory heterosexuality?

Rachel: Yes. I don't know how much it was a choice and how much my friends very much steered me into it, because I was good at my work. I don't think I had very high self-esteem: I think I got labelled, but they might think I labelled myself. I remember the conversations on the Monday mornings after the parties – 'and so-and-so got off with so-and-so and so-and-so got off with so-and-so and Rachel got A in her Maths tests'.

It's really funny now, but it wasn't, it was horrible.
(Allstair *et al.* 1994: 21)

Modern queers and positive sexualities

Being inclusive of queer experiences and identities within sexuality education programmes is also complicated by the fact that young people, who are involved in queer practices do not necessarily define themselves according to easy labels such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or indeed queer. In fact they may resist any attempt to label their identities at all. Pallotta-Chiarolli's (1998; 1999a) work with young Australian women, for example, indicated a dissatisfaction with the binaries of the gay/straight divide, embracing a far more fluid conceptualisation of sexualities and sexual practices. The anthology of young women's writing around sexuality and ethnicity edited by Pallotta-Chiarolli (1998) demonstrated a highly politicised understanding of issues of gender/race and sexuality by these young women in their lives. Pallotta-Chiarolli developed the concept of multiple lifeworlds, borrowed from Cope and Kalantzis (1995), to explain how these young women negotiated their membership of different social worlds:

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

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

We need to ask not simply who are marginalised, but what is marginalised. Many students move in and out of the margins in their everyday lives at school, but some more so than others, and those with fewer exits often occupy multiple marginalities which are spatially played out in embodied ways. (Gordon *et al.* 2000b: 202–3).

I would argue that we need more research on how exactly young queer students can be out. It becomes difficult to recommend appropriate strategies to support them, without understanding which bits of queer identities are privileged in their outness, or the consequences of being out for their own identities and for the identities of others. Although many queer individuals argue that coming out is a liberating experience, there are limitations in being out as well as the 'freedoms' it brings. It is therefore difficult to recommend outness unequivocally as the desirable aim for queer school students, particularly as a way of securing a better, more equitable education for them. If it serves only to emphasise the difference between straight-gay identities within the school community and fails to address sexual ambivalence experienced by very many young people, it is likely to perpetuate heterosexism in school. Recent work by Susan Talburt (2000a; 2000b) around teaching is beginning to consider radical teaching agendas around not coming out in the university context¹ and should give us cause to consider its desirability both for students and teachers at high/secondary school:

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

Dennis Carlson (1998) argued that identity politics were essential to empower marginalised groups. However, he also suggested the importance of a politics of the self 'which does not lock itself into rigid oppositional identity politics' (Carlson 1998: 118) and which encouraged young people to relate to each other outside the same-other binary. This is a crucial consideration within sexuality education for all young people.

Homophobia within and beyond the sexuality education classroom

While the DFES has suggested that homophobic bullying should be taken seriously and dealt with through the implementation of school policy, schools nevertheless remain places where homophobia is endemic. Researchers have tried to understand why it is that homophobia is so prevalent, particularly in secondary schools and what function it serves.

Epstein and Johnson (1998) have argued, for example, that sex education lessons often produce especially 'hard' and homophobic performances of masculinity by young men:

Boys tend to use sex education lessons as a place for the particularly strident exercise of hyper-heterosexual performance, for the sex education class is the place, par excellence, where uncertainties and fears about heterosexuality might (inadvertently) surface. (Epstein and Johnson 1998: 182)

The deployment of homophobia here is seen to be a mechanism for propping up the fragility of a heterosexual identity. It is just as likely to be used, therefore, by young men whose sexualities are emerging as queer as it is to be used by those who are heterosexual. For the young gay man whose sexuality is emerging, sex education lessons may therefore be more traumatic than other lessons in school.

Nayak and Kehily (1997) also explored how homophobia functions in schools. They identified that homophobia in schools has a gendered dynamic. Homophobic abuse could be targeted not just at young gay men but, more often, at any young man who displayed characteristics thought appropriate to women. Actual sexual orientation was not the only factor to provoke homophobia. Any young man who had a perceived underdeveloped body or who worked hard and was relatively quiet could be a target. Girls were more able to deconstruct the stereotype of a gay man, suggesting that homophobia was a strategy of masculinity. Its function was to build the male reputations of the young men who engaged in it, although, as Nayak and Kehily found, this strategy was not available to all young men. They suggested that for less macho young men, engaging in

any talk about sexuality as a means of confirming masculine status could backfire. They argued that homophobia was not simply an abstract fear of gays but rather about internal fears of losing control and becoming gay oneself. Homophobic performances consolidated straight masculinity. While they found that young men had a great investment in portraying straight masculinity as natural, in fact immense energy was expended in trying to establish a coherent straight masculinity. They found young men's masculinity to be especially vulnerable. Evidently, as they suggested, this has implications for any pedagogy designed to lessen homophobia and promote equality of opportunity. Inclusion of queer sexuality is not enough. They concluded:

Pedagogical practice must be contextual and sensitive to interactions pupil cultures are engaged in and the power relations working within groups and individual psyches. (Nayak and Kehily 1997: 158)

Peter Redman (2000) explored the tension between social and psychoanalytic accounts of the functions and uses of homophobia in boys' pupil cultures. He explored how socially oriented arguments about homophobia challenged the belief that it was reducible to repressed homosexuality, showing instead how it reproduced at a local level wider discourses of gender and sexuality in which a masculine heterosexual identity was organised in dialogic opposition to a homosexual other. He maintained that homophobia also had an unconscious dimension and he explored various ways in which this worked. He expanded the usual explanation of homophobia as the external splitting off of homosexual desires, to incorporate other explanations about a threatened male heterosexuality. Redman felt that psychoanalytic explanations for homophobia and anti-lesbian sentiment better explained the *feelings* of those involved in homophobic performances than did socially oriented explanations. Using illustrative examples from his school based research with young men, Redman showed how 'the unconscious and the social are mutually dependent and constitutive, while continuing to have their own level of effect' (Redman 2000: 494). He concluded by suggesting that such a formulation could help us to understand better how boys were positioned in relation to the repertoire of masculinities in school cultures, through the inter-

action of their individual biographies, the unconscious and wider social relations. This, he suggested, called for a much more complex set of practices to address homophobia in schools in relation to all young men, than had often been advocated (see and cf. Van de Ven 1996 on short courses to tackle heterosexism and homophobia).

While young women in school do not appear to be as deeply invested as young men in homophobia as a strategy for consolidating their own heterosexuality, nevertheless, they do police the production of appropriate femininity. Hey (1997) found, for example, that girls' friendships provided the key to social inclusion or exclusion and that success at them was dependent on girls performing appropriate femininity. Girls were therefore largely complicit with the demands of hegemonic masculinity/heterosexuality. This suggested that rather than overt homophobia, girls used friendships to police heterosexuality. These friendships were in a sense, heterosexist, because they coerced a heterosexual femininity. For Renew (1996) homophobia, or the fear of it for young women, made girls keep their behaviour within strictly defined limits of femininity. However, for young women in high schools:

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

Janet Holland and her colleagues in the Women, Risk and AIDS Project (Holland *et al.* 1998) explored the sexualities of 148 young women via interviews. They found that young women generally did not experience empowerment within heterosexual relations. There were only deviant or subordinated conceptions of the desiring woman, for example. They found that for both young women and young men sexual identity and practice was understood through the idea of 'the male in the head' (Holland *et al.* 1998: 19). Heterosexuality, they suggest, is actually constituted for women as well as men, through an internalised male gaze, which disciplines the production of femininity. Male power was therefore constituted through heterosexuality, which not only disempowered women but also prevented subordinated masculinities gaining cultural

definition. They found that for young women in relation to lesbian sexuality, the heterosexual dualism of masculine/feminine left absence or silence as the place for lesbians. They suggested that it could also become potentially 'a political site from which the unthinkable can be thought' (Holland *et al.* 1998: 189). The possibility of this happening in schools does, however, seem to be remote.

It is clear that the UK government advises that homophobia be addressed in schools. A space where that might happen has to be in the sexuality education classroom. However, the problem with this is that the sexuality education classroom is likely to expose the fragility of heterosexual identity and give rise to even harder performances of homophobic masculinity. Discussion of queer identities, emotions or experiences is even less likely to happen where this is the case.

This is especially significant for young people who are thinking about their sexual identities, because the place where they are in the sexuality education classroom is often so inhospitable. The discussion is necessary for them, but not at the risk of exposing them to even greater levels of sexual bullying or making it seem to them that the only way to avoid being bullied is to engage in such sexual bullying themselves. Interestingly, while government advice is concerned with homophobic bullying, the pervasive heterosexism within girls' friendships, which is potentially just as damaging to young women, is not questioned.

Sexuality education reconceptualised

It is difficult to conceive of a sexuality education curriculum which would be able to develop pedagogic strategies sensitive to the deeply felt insecurities which young people often experience in relation to their sexual identities and practices. Young people repeatedly complain that they rarely get the chance to discuss emotions (Measor *et al.* 2000). Yet, given the often overwhelming nature of such emotions, it is difficult to see how they can be discussed or even articulated within the classroom. There are some pedagogic strategies for making classrooms more intimate spaces, by using circle time, for

example, or introducing small group work. Discussions can also be made less personal by using role play. Yet none of these strategies ensures that young people will get to consider very complex questions of human sexuality, nor to extend their understandings of the ways in which sexual identity can be conceptualised.

I would like to suggest that perhaps a more effective way into an exploration of some of the more sensitive aspects of human sexuality is to introduce young people to the ideas and understandings produced by those working in the field of sexuality. I remain concerned, for the present, by the paucity of the curriculum content and pedagogy in much sexuality education I have witnessed in secondary schools. It seems strange to me that young people in secondary/high schools can, for example, be expected to deal with the intricacies of Shakespearean language and gender play; develop an understanding of carbon chemistry in GCSE Science; tackle complex issues of evidence in history; research and imitate different techniques of painting in Art, and yet walk out of a sexuality education lesson with no more knowledge about the contributions of great 20th century thinkers on sexuality than they had when they went in.

I am not suggesting the silent reading of Freud in the original or of Foucault but I do think that young people should be introduced to some of their ideas and the questions they raised in relation to sexuality. Certainly, some of the more recent research which is sociological and school-based would be of particular interest to young people themselves. Most 14 to 16 year olds have no idea that people have even studied sexuality or that it is possible to do so. They are astonished when they find out and, in my experience at least, want to know more. There would be distinct advantages to such an approach. Firstly it would stop sexuality education simply being about 'how to...' or 'how to safely...' or 'how not to...'. It would not therefore be simply about promoting a particular sexual code of conduct. It would deal with the broader issues of sexuality and not just reproductive sex, and young people would have access to some fairly explicit considerations of sex outside of the more familiar contexts of media representations.

Certain researchers within sexuality education have concluded that a greater understanding of pupil culture and the use of young people's culture via the media, for example, enhances the quality and relevance of sexuality education. Clearly it could prove useful for students to begin to deconstruct the dominant discourses about sexuality within such material. However, this approach is fraught with danger. There is every likelihood that rather than moving students on, they will simply become confirmed in the hegemonic or dominant discourses with which popular culture is imbued (Kehly 2002). While using the popular media is more likely to engage young people's interest, reflecting young people's culture back to them as a resource for sexuality education risks merely reinscribing them in the dominant discourses that pervade this material. Furthermore, by making use of such material in classrooms, the school is in danger of legitimising dominant popular discourses about sexuality. Moreover, as amply demonstrated in the next chapter, many young people are already excluded from mainstream media representations of youth culture and are, therefore, in a more difficult position as readers of that culture anyway. Their exclusion may help them to deconstruct the dominant discourses of sexuality represented, but such deconstructive work will not end their exclusion.

At the moment many sex education lessons are reduced to teacher as mouthpiece for the broadly anti-sex government message (see chapter 2 in this volume) or to the messages contained within pupil culture. For example, lessons where pupils have to respond to problem page type letters, often simply relocate them where they already are – in their own culture or, as the case may be, marginalised by it (Kehly 2002). It is hard to claim that something is learnt from this exercise. More often than not, prejudices are simply reinforced.

Sexuality education needs to move beyond this. The attempt to embed sexuality education within young people's popular cultures simply means that young people have to rely to an even greater extent on the dominant discourses of those cultures rather than rethinking them. A far better strategy involves presenting young people with some of the work of thinkers on sexuality in an accessible form, work which questions some of the values embedded in

youth media discussions of sexuality. This would enrich the classroom discussion. It would mean young people were given knowledge about how sexuality has come to be thought about in the ways that it has. The teacher wouldn't be the only expert in the classroom and, as we already know from chapter two, that is one pressure they might gladly give up. It would mean that a range of views and ideas about sexuality could be presented. A more confident pedagogy might then emerge, rooted in the breadth and depth of the materials offered. It might give some pupils the confidence to feel accepting of their own differences and those of others, supported by some prestigious academic work in this area. Were the uses of homophobia to prop up fragile heterosexual identities to be opened up for discussion, all young people might have the opportunity to think about who they are, how they got to be who they are, their investments in their sexual identities and an appreciation of the complexity of human sexuality.

Currently, young people are not asked to consider questions about why sexual identities are embodied in the ways that they are. Nor can such questions be considered without providing some content. This would involve the production of resources which presented the work of such thinkers and writers on sexuality. It is perfectly possible to do this. For example, a good portion of *The Male in the Head* (Holland *et al.* 1998) is accessible to 15 year olds. And for us and for most of the students we have come across, it bears carbon chemistry for interest and information – with the added bonus of providing an interesting critique of compulsory heterosexuality, presented through rich data in the words of young people! We are not suggesting that students have to agree with a particular view or representation of sexuality or sexual relationships. We are saying that there are significant advantages in introducing them to a range of ideas about sexuality and certainly to some of the critiques by feminists and queer theorists on the 'naturalisation' of heterosexuality. This is much more likely to enable school students to be reflexive and insightful about their own sexual identities and those of others, than will invocations to delay first sexual experience or to keep sexual experience within monogamous heterosexual relationships.

Good sexuality education should be about disrupting the taken-for-granted essentialism about biological sex, gender and sexual binaries. The diversity and complexity of human sexuality needs to be better acknowledged and valued within the sex education curriculum and this is more likely to happen if students are aware of some of the findings of those working in the field of sexuality. Valuing sexual diversity allows young people space to consider their own sexualities in more complex ways and to perhaps accept that identities are not fixed and unchanging but are constituted differently in different contexts.

We share Britzman's (1998) concern that educators have not realised how central sexuality is to the development of young people's lives and their identities as both learners and sexual beings. The next chapter considers how many young people – in this case specifically young Somali women – are forced into complex negotiations between their identities as learners and their sexual identities. In schools which cannot appreciate sexual diversity, parts of identities often have to be closeted and this in turn can affect young people as learners.

Note

1. See also the reply by Didi Khayat to Jonathan Sillis about not coming out, quoted in chapter 6.

CHAPTER FIVE

Bodies that Learn: Negotiating educational success through the management of sexuality

Introduction

In this chapter I consider how sexuality is constructed in and through schooling. I argue that education (or the possibility of becoming educated) cannot occupy the same space as sexuality in the formal school. However, as Epstein and Johnson (1998) and others (for example, Gordon *et al.* 2000a) show, and as we have argued in earlier chapters, while sexuality is expelled from the space of the school and made taboo it is, at the same time, ever-present, indeed pervasive. Students embody identities both as learners and as sexual subjects. Sexuality and education therefore come together in embodied ways. The difficulty for students arises from the construction of schools as being on the 'rational', 'mind' side of the 'mind-body' split which typifies modernist, Enlightenment thinking.¹ Schools are fundamentally modernist institutions and education, as a process, privileges rationality and the mind. But students are expected simultaneously to pursue this rational aspect of their lives and to develop as sexualised, gendered, subjects. These two aspects of their lived experience are often on a collision course, which is exaggerated by the hegemony of the ultra-rationalist approaches of school effectiveness and the standards regimes² in place in many countries. Dennis Carlson (1998) suggests that the production of identity in schools occurs through the mind-body split. Marginalised identities, such as those of gay or ethnic minority students, represent the body and desire on the one hand, while dominant identity groups, especially those that are white,

male and middle class, represent the mind and reason. In this chapter, we show how this has severe implications for the ways in which students from marginalised groups are able, or unable, to embody identities as successful learners. This is one of the problems of sexuality education in schools. Sex is seen to represent the body and sex education, as we have shown, offers little useful content. This chapter is concerned with silenced, marginalised or disallowed versions of heterosexuality, exploring how young Somali women living in South London try to manage their identities as learners and as sexual subjects in school.

We analyse the resourceful and ingenious ways in which four young Somali women negotiate the mind-body split, holding it in place in order to be good pupils and achieve the education they so much desire while simultaneously investing themselves in future versions of heterosexual marriage. The situation for these young women is complicated by the fact that their familial biographies are not normatively heterosexual (at least in Western societies), which requires still further negotiations between the heterosexual familial expectations of the school (both official and informal), government policy and their personal situations. We suggest that they produce their educated mind/desexualised body (for the moment at least) through the construction of a 'closet' which is comparable to that occupied by young queer people. Their complex heterosexual identities are formed, also, around diasporic allegiances to Somalia, the racism of their present abode in the UK and the necessity to position themselves as members of 'useful' and productive families rather than as 'asylum-seekers' – a status which is not only marginal in itself but has many pejorative connotations, especially when accompanied by the adjective 'bogus'. They thus have a double imperative: to produce their families as heterosexual nuclear families and themselves as acceptably heterosexual, but only in a married future after they have been educated; and to negotiate the limits of their behaviour in ways that are possible to sustain in both their school and home communities.

Data for this project was collected from interviews with seven Somali students in years 10 and 11, aged 14 to 16, in a South London Girls' state comprehensive secondary school. The inter-

views focused on their views on sexuality, marriage, school achievement and their imagined futures and were conducted during the Autumn and Spring terms of the academic year 2000–2001. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. I had already been working with these young women for one term at the invitation of the school, exploring how the twenty or so Somali students could be better supported, not only to enhance their academic achievement but also to help them feel happier in school. As someone with a dedicated responsibility to these students, but not, at the time, their teacher, I had come to know them, and they me, extremely well by the time I did the interviews. They called me 'Miss Sarah' and I had talked with them all frequently both in and out of school. Thus the interviews were simply a continuation of my relationship with them. This chapter discusses aspects of three of those interviews, involving four of the students. Each chose her own pseudonym. Ayani arrived in London when she was 7 years old. She had been in London the longest of the four. Both Najjma and Nazrin had lived in London for three years and Deqa had been in London for only a year.

Fitting in with institutional heterosexism

I didn't tell them because I didn't want to tell them because they think it's so strange – they will think it's strange. (Deqa)

One of the first ways in which the Somali students felt it necessary to closet and/or rework part of their identities was through 'family'. I had been asked by the school to ensure that the head teacher knew who the responsible parent/guardian was for emergency contact forms. I was told that there had been difficulty on several occasions in contacting the person named on the form and that often the same contact person was variously described as 'auntie', 'mum', or 'step-mum'. On one occasion, the school had been particularly concerned because the named person had appeared to be under sixteen. Deqa gave a very moving account of her life and recalled the moment in Somalia when the fighting had started and she had lost members of her family:

When I was little – five – the fight happened in Mogadishu so we came back and I mean – I mean we came to Djibouti – which is

near to the Somalia . . . and then I used to live with my mum and we couldn't find our sisters or brothers except my younger sister because they run and then they go to another country like the Yemen and then after that we couldn't find as well my Dad because he was – he was like a businessman – but before the fight happened he's gone out – so the fight happened so he can't get an aeroplane or stuff like that – we don't even know where he is so we couldn't find him.

Dega didn't see her father again. She remembered the point at which she asked her mother for an explanation:

Dega: I grow up now – into when I was ten – I ask my Mum and I say 'Mum, where is Dad? Why didn't he call us?' And Mum said 'I don't know where he's gone'. And I said, 'Why? Why you don't know?' and then she said, 'He was a businessman – we – you know we couldn't find him in that time. When the fight happened, he'd gone out. He'd just gone out of Somalia – so we couldn't find him, where he's gone' and then I said 'OK Mummy' – so my Dad, his brother, we call him Dad. Until now we call him Dad. We respect him like a Dad. We treat him as our Dad.

SOF: So you – so it's your Dad's brother?

Dega: Yes it's my Dad's brother and then we call him Dad. Me and my sister still now we call him Dad.

SOF: So you haven't seen your Dad?

Dega: No we haven't seen our Dad since – I don't know if he's alive or dead.

In this account, Dega describes how 'family' is kept together through the inscription of her uncle in the role of father. This is a standard practice within Somali culture and not at all unusual (Ali, A. 2000). Later his role appears more distantly symbolic, as she tells me that he is not usually in England. She goes on to describe her family:

SOF: So in this country now you know – your Dad (uncle) is here now.

Dega: Yes he came here but he's not even here now actually – but he came sometimes.

SOF: So who is living here? D. [a sister] is living here . . .

Dega: [continuing] D. is here and R. [another sister] is living here and my brother he is living here and my sister F. is living here – but my Mum she has only me and K. [another sister] – that is other Mums – same father.

SOF: Yeah.

Dega: My uncle as well, they call Dad.

SOF: Do you think people in this school would find that strange?

Dega: I didn't tell them because I didn't want to tell them because they think it's so strange – they will think it's strange.

S: They won't understand?

Dega: [emphatic] They won't understand anything!

Dega's reference to 'anything' here refers to the polygamous relationships embedded in her family structure, common in Somalia. It is an impossible story for her to tell her non-Somali classmates and for them to understand and also very difficult for her to explain to staff in school. This means that her story has to be cloistered from the wider dominant pupil culture in school and from official school documentation (contract forms etc.). The language to tell it is not available, for one thing, and Dega's knowledge of English makes it difficult for her to find the words to explain family structure. It is also hard to see how, given Government guidelines on sex and relationship education and its insistence on Western [Christian] marriage and familial values, this story could be told with pride, without defaming the character of both her biological father – who had not been seen since the fighting began and who had had several wives – and her biological uncle, who had married his dead (and presumed dead) brothers' widows in order to care for them and their families. Instead Dega tells her classmates another story. When she is asked about her family, she says that she lives with her Mum and Dad and brother and sisters in London, that she was born

in Djibouti and her father is a businessman who travels a lot. There is no mention of Somalia, of a war, of the loss of her father, of her several mothers. There is what there has to be for success in school: a 'happy' heterosexual nuclear family. Even the happiness seems to have to be there, partly to counter the views of some of the white students that all asylum seekers are unhappy and in need of help. The happiness has to be fabricated through the loss of the experience of war from the story.

Dega: Yes when they ask me where I am from I just all the time say Djibouti – I was born in Djibouti —my Dad's living here some time ...

Yet in the suppression of the story that one might describe as 'authentic' lies unhappiness at being silenced, feeling suppressed.

SO'F: So do you think you've changed since you've come to England?

Dega: Yeah.

SO'F: How have you changed?

Dega: I change everything because um like I mean – I didn't change my behaviour – but I change my – I mean – my personality because I feel – because all the time I feel so angry – and I can't do anything –

SO'F: So all the time you feel angry about your situation?

Dega: Yeah.

SO'F: So is your personality now an angry personality or is it that you just have to keep everything inside?

Dega: I just need to keep everything inside —

SO'F: That must be terrible.

Dega: I know Miss but what – I can't do anything innit? So I just have to keep quiet and that's it.

Dega is angry not only because she feels the need to suppress the truth of her family. She is also appalled by the racism she has

experienced in England, which included having been robbed, racially insulted and beaten up on a bus on the way home from school. She is haunted still by her experience of the war in Mogadishu but addressing that becomes impossible, if you have to pretend for most of the time and to most people that you were never there and it never happened. Dega lives her life in relation to the closet – in important respects it is the same closet that young queer students in schools have to work with in their dealings with normative heterosexuality. The broader effects of this closeting here, are to ensure that Somali identity lacks cultural definition within the school because only one particular form of heterosexuality is allowed a place in it.

Explaining and renaming was also important for Ayani. She explained that she called her grandmother her mother because 'she took care of me all my life'. She also explained her relationship to her father:

Ayani: And we used to have a worker cos my Dad left – never got to see him.

SO'F: So you've never seen your Dad?

Ayani: No. But I've seen a picture. He used to send me pictures – for my fifteenth birthday.

SO'F: So is your Dad still in Somalia?

Ayani: Yes – he's got some kids and we just found out – four days ago I think it was – that we have an older brother.

SO'F: Wow.

Ayani: Yes. He lives in Somalia.

SO'F: How do you feel about that?

Ayani: OK – we've only got one brother in our family and it's like now we've got two – and like my Dad was married to another woman – before he married to my Mum – that was in Somalia and now he's married to another woman – she's got more kids.

Ayani tells a different story in this interview, not the happy heterosexual family, but not a story about polygamy either. It is carefully modulated into a story of serial monogamy and is a narrative that can be understood within the context of the school – only just understood since three wives raises eyebrows even in its serial form, but understood nevertheless. We do not wish to endorse any particular form of heterosexuality or its institutionalisation and privileging in any form. However, we do wish to show that an insistence on one version of heterosexuality means that some pupils inevitably feel their families to be stigmatised, no matter what the Government says or claims about avoiding stigmatisation. This is especially the case for those who are marginalised. Students like Dega and Ayani, who are already marginalised, must further marginalise, even rewrite, important aspects of their histories and identities in order to fit in and this has serious consequences for their well-being in school.

Education, heterosexuality and the phallic body

In an intriguing discussion, Nazrin and Nadjima discussed the possibility of boyfriends and the implications this would have on their lives. Tensions between education and sexuality were apparent throughout their discussion. For them, the possibility of sex *and* education appeared irreconcilable, since one seemed to negate the other and sex in particular endangered any project of education. This tension was not one simply dreamed up by Nazrin and Nadjima. It is clearly observable in UK Government discussions on teenage pregnancy, for example, in which it is noted that pregnancy seems to mark the end of education for young women and that this should not be so (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). Furthermore, in the *Sex and Relationship Education Guidance*, the rhetoric is all about 'learning the reasons for delaying sexual activity and the benefits to be gained from such delay' (DfEE 2000: 5) rather than critical inquiry into why teenage pregnancy should signal the end of education and how that situation might be changed.

In the following extract, Nazrin and Nadjima struggle with the implication of their bodies, their sexuality and their education. I have just asked them for their views on being/becoming sexually active:

Nazrin: I think I want to finish my education before doing things like that [having a boyfriend, having sex]. I told my mind not to go with boys and not to do that thing until I finish my education. I mean you can have a boyfriend.

Nadjima: Yeah yeah . . .

Nazrin: But not like do the silly things . . . [the rest is obscured by *Nadjima's interruption*].

Nadjima: No, no – you're saying it like that – but if I say I don't wanna have a boyfriend but sometimes it happen to you – cos you don't – you don't wanna have a boyfriend but who knows?

SO:F: You meet someone!

Nadjima: Yeah. You meet someone but if you be careful in yourself . . .

Nazrin: Yeah – like more hard.

Nadjima: Hard.

Nazrin: Like hard on the inside.

Nadjima: So that means nothing happen to you. You can have a boyfriend and it's not a problem.

Nazrin: Yeah . . . boyfriend.

Nadjima: But if you look like you [*word obscured*] it will be all right for you. Look after your education, have a boyfriend, not to do nothing.

Nazrin: Not have him to take all your mind and all that . . .

SO:F: Take all your mind, so like you mean . . .

Nazrin: Do whatever he tells you to do.

Nadjima: [*emphatic*] No I don't think so [*vowing head no to indicate dissent*] mens tell you to do this, do that . . . [*disparagingly of men*].

My reading of this extract suggests that Nadjima and Nazrin, but especially Nazrin, play out a particularly carefully organised resistance to the idea of heterosexual sex. They seek both to abstract themselves from their bodies – become almost disembodied – and also to draw attention to their bodies – becoming more fully embodied – by marking them out in their description/ascription of themselves as learners. That they have a considerable investment in this move is demonstrated by the heatedness of their conversation, the way that they constantly but in and interrupt each other to complete the thought, and the emotional charge of their emphases. Nazrin begins the conversation by referring to the tensions between sex and education. She also sets up the mind/body split, by alluding her mind with education: 'I told my mind not to go with boys and not do that thing until I finish my education'. There is a powerful sense of self-discipline here, policing desire and bolstering the docile body of the school subject (Foucault 1977: see particularly chapter two), a point to which we return later. She knows, however that 'having a boyfriend' is important in the pupil culture of the school, both as a way of enhancing status and as a sign of maturity which is more than sexual – hence her insistence that, 'I mean you can have a boyfriend'. It is the practice of sex that is problematic – what you do: 'not like do the silly things'.

Nadjima both reinforces and challenges Nazrin's view. She suggests that a rational decision not to have a boyfriend is simply not an effective resistance because 'who knows?' A more effective form of resistance is to have a boyfriend but 'be careful in yourself'. Both young women seem to find the description of 'hardness' particularly appropriate for their bodies – or the inside of their bodies. Intuitively they seem to have understood the requirements of a phallogocentric curriculum. The phallic body of the learner must be impermeable, impenetrable (see Britzman 1998; Carlson 1998). We can see how Nazrin's and Nadjima's description is not so much a resistance to heterosexual penetrative sex *per se* or to the 'dangers' of pregnancy, but rather acts as an inscription of their bodies as phallic; these are the bodies of learners. Thus, being 'hard' means that you *can* have a boyfriend but 'not to have him take all your mind and all that'. These young women seem unconcerned about

the threat of rape or pressurised sex; rather it is the threat that heterosexual penetrative sex holds symbolically for their education that they worry about. It is the mind that is given primacy in the description but its hardness has to be written on the body: 'If you look like . . . it will be all right for you. Look after your education, have a boyfriend, not to do nothing'. Taking away one's mind is problematic. The mind is needed for education and to take it away is profoundly disempowering. Doing as you are told by a man is ridiculed by Nadjima – 'No I don't think so – mens tell you to do this, do that'. But both Nadjima and Nazrin at various points remind each other of the threat, as Nazrin does here: 'But some people does . . .'

Both young women give the impression of being constantly self-surveillant. They monitor their behaviour: 'you meet someone but if you be careful in yourself'. Their self-surveillance involves transforming and disciplining the body: 'like hard on the inside' – and policing the mind: 'I told my mind . . .', 'not to have him take all your mind'. Nazrin tries to disarm the power of heterosexual sex as 'the silly things', almost imputing it to immaturity, knowing that for a rational learner/citizen the public arena is more important or 'adult' than the private one. These young women clearly perceive that the process of regulating their sexualised bodies is a prerequisite for educational success.

Given their strength of feeling about both their education and the threat to it posed by heterosexuality or at least what it stands for, the conversation moved in what appeared to be a contradictory way immediately after this, as we discussed their attitudes to marriage.

Nadjima: No I don't think so – mens tell you to do this, do that –

Nazrin: But some people does . . .

SOE: Yes, so if you ever get married for example, you don't want to marry someone who's going to tell you what to do?

Nadjima: No. If you get married you have to listen what your husband say.

Nazrin: No – both the same – you have to listen to what I say and I have to listen to what he says. If it don't work then ... [shrugs shoulders]

Nadima: No, no. Not us religion Nazrin. Remember here – us religion is ... stop doing this Nazrin. Us religion is like if you get married you have to listen to your man. If you like to go to school or college or whatever, if he tell you don't go to school stay in house, you have to listen to him.

Nazrin: No, no.

Nadima: But try your best to tell him, 'but I wanna do that – stop telling me this', because of course he's going to listen to you if he love you.

SO'F: But what if he doesn't listen to you?

Nadima: If he gets on my nerves I will tell him to fuck off then.

[Laughter]

SO'F: You have the same views as Nazrin really.

Nadima: Yes. But I don't think boyfriends telling me to do this and do this and ...

Nazrin: There are some girls, he's been taking their minds.

Nadima: But if you get good relationship, maybe he's gonna come to you – but if you don't, he can't tell you that, 'stop doing that, stop doing this'.

Nazrin: Yeah? [in disbelief]. How many people have seen any – crying – [imitates crying]

[General Laughter]

Nazrin: I think so!

Nadima: I don't think so

This is a rather convoluted conversation. The argument starts when I assume, incorrectly, that their determination to keep their own

minds will lead to either a resistance to marriage or a presentation of it in liberal terms as a contract between equals (lines 3–4). Nadima's immediate reply is to correct me, saying that if you are married, you must listen to your husband (line 5). Nazrin's response to this, in contrast, is in line with my expectations (lines 6–7). Nadima disagrees and moves religion, being Muslim, centre stage in this discussion, imploring Nazrin, in an exasperated tone, to remember it too:

No, no. Not us religion Nazrin. Remember here – us religion is ... stop doing this Nazrin. Us religion is like if you get married you have to listen to your man. If you like to go to school or college or whatever, if he tell you don't go to school, stay in house, you have to listen to him.

Interestingly, again it is envisaged that disputes will be around education. The conflict between sex and education is held in place here and marriage too carries the danger of leading to the sacrifice of the education that Nadima has striven so hard to protect. Rachel Thomson (2000) has suggested that for pupils in some locations, resistance to heterosexuality in school occurs in order to defer it until later, so that educational rewards can be reaped in the present. This appears to be occurring here, though we might further suggest that educational success demands such resistance – is even implicit in it. Nadima also uses 'love' as a strategy through which to reconcile marriage and education (lines 13–14 and 22–23). In a good relationship, a Muslim man who really loves his wife will not stop her from doing what she wants: 'of course he's going to listen to you if he loves you' (line 14). In the eventuality that he fails to listen, he fails as a good Muslim husband and can legitimately be told to 'fuck off' (line 16). Nadima told me later that a good Muslim woman has to marry a good Muslim man and if he turns out not to be so, then it is actually a duty to leave him. This is a clever argument, drawn on when Nadima implies that authority in a relationship is only granted if the relationship is 'good' and that if it isn't 'good' then the right to authority is lost (lines 22–23). Nazrin clearly disagrees. She has seen women crying in relationships in which they are forced to do as their husband asks and yet his authority is held in place (lines 24–25).

The contention here between Nazrin and Nadjma is heartfelt. Nazrin is holding out for a marriage that is more fashionably 'a partnership' which may or may not work, very much in tune with the UK government's representation of what a marriage is in its *Sex and Relationship Education Guidance* (DfEE 2000). She does not accept Nadjma's view of their religion and Nadjma has to struggle to explain how the relationship is to work and subsequently to reconcile this within a religious framework, perhaps in order to accommodate Nazrin's uncompromising views and the consequent risk to their friendship. As Hey (1997) has observed, girls' friendships work to police girls into being normatively heterosexual. Here we observe a rare moment in which friendship is caught between competing versions of married heterosexuality and in which some very careful negotiations have to take place. However, what is held in place by both as 'fact' is the difficulty of embodying both a sexual identity and an identity as learner. Nadjma imagines the point of contention in the marriage will be around her continuing education, echoing Nazrin's insistence that men might take your mind.

Nadjma's and Nazrin's views on education, heterosexuality and marriage are further shaped by their experience as asylum seekers in the UK. Their identities could be described as diasporic inasmuch as Somalia is of central importance to their lives and is the place to which they intend to return and rebuild, as soon as it is 'safe' to do so.

In the following extract, we are discussing the difficulty of achieving success in school.

Nazrin: Some people are born here, but me I start in year 8.

Nadjma: No that's how you are if you learn quick – even the British girls or whatever, they're not good.

Nazrin: That's cos they didn't learn but I start in year 8 and year 9. I didn't even speak English.

SO'F: Yes, so some of them they really had a head start from you and you're saying that some of them are not very

good anyway. They've been here all the time but they're not very good.

Both: Yeah.

Nazrin: That's the people who give up.

SO'F: The people who give up?

Nazrin: Yeah. They don't know what they wanna do.

SO'F: You think there are students like that in this school? Who give up?

Nazrin: Some people, not all of them.

SO'F: I don't mean really Somali students here. I mean other students.

Both: Yeah.

Nadjma: Some people they don't care about ...

Nazrin: their education.

SO'F: But you both care?

Nadjma: Of course.

Nazrin: Yeah.

Nadjma: Because we wanna be good when we go back to Somalia. That means good grades and all that so we can help them.

Nazrin: Know everything and all that.

The dream of returning to Somalia and rebuilding their lives and those of other Somalis is a central motive for their education. They recognise the difficulty of education without such a motive, identifying those who 'give up' as those who 'don't know what they wanna do' and those who 'don't care about their education', in stark contrast to their own situation. They want to 'know everything' and they have faith that their education in the UK will allow them to have a significant and positive impact on the lives of Somali people, 'so we can help them'. This is an important motive not only

for their education but also for the way it organises their imagined future heterosexual relationships.

When Nazrin tells herself not to jeopardise her education 'I told my mind not to go with boys and not to do that thing . . .', we should ask what constitutes this 'I'. What part of her is it which is telling her mind? I suggest that for both young women the 'return to Somalia' acts as a powerfully organising principle of identity in relation to both their sexual identities and their identities as learners. It is this that leads to their very strong investment in the hard, phallic body required for education. It also explains why there is apparently no contradiction for Nadjma in asserting that she will not succumb to a boyfriend now but that she will obey a future husband. A marriage is part of a cultural investment in Somalia, whereas a boyfriend now jeopardises that investment.

Nadjma and Nazrin are aware of the need to fashion the body and to consider the implications of their sexual bodies for their education. They work through this in discussion. Competing versions of heterosexuality are important, and these are characterised differently through religion and cultural context. For Nadjma perhaps, being won over to heterosexual marriage as a liberal contract (the preferred reading of the UK government) means in important respects sacrificing national, cultural and religious identity. It means assimilation and that might undermine the whole project of the return to Somalia. She constantly reiterates the point that husbands have authority over their wives, though she qualifies by reference to the need for them to be good Muslim men and thus to listen to and respect their wives. Both Nadjma and Nazrin are clearly aware that if one wants to learn as a young woman in school, then sexuality has to be actively resisted. Not resisting sexuality means failing as a learner. There is no dispute about this. Furthermore, an important way of resisting is to constitute one's identity through a more powerful discourse – in this case the return to Somalia, which can help at least to defer sexuality now, even if it demands heterosexuality later.

Negotiating success against a deadline for compulsory heterosexuality.

For Ayani, negotiations between sexuality and education were extremely complex, although again characterised by an overarching desire to return to Somalia and contribute to rebuilding the country, using her education:

SO'F: What do you want to do after, cos you, you're going to leave at the end of this year. What do you want to do then?

Ayani: I'm doing two years GNVQ Business Studies. Then I'm gonna – hopefully I'm gonna get 4 A to Cs and then I can do two years GNVQ Business Studies. And then after I do that I can get a degree or whatever man – I do a one year ATT course

SO'F: A one year what?

Ayani: ATT something course!

SO'F: What's that?

Ayani: Accountancy.

SO'F: Oh right.

Ayani: It's not high and it's not low. It's about middle accountancy but if I want to go for the higher Accountancy then I have to do A Levels . . . which I'm not capable of doing A-Levels. I will find it boring and drop it and I don't want to do that . . . cos if I do business studies – learn about business . . . because hopefully I will go back to Somalia and set up my own business out there . . .

SO'F: That's what you want to do is it?

Ayani: Yeah, because Somalian people believe that women can't do a lot, you know, but I want to show them that they can.

SO'F: Do you think they'll let you? What will your Dad say?

Ayani: My Dad has no control of my life anyway – but if I go up there . . .

SO'F: [Prompting] If you go to Somalia he might have some control!

Ayani: Yeah . . . no not really. You know my mum [grandmother] always said to me – you know I never really had a father or a father figure – do you get me? I've only had a mother and she showed me that she can take care of so many kids but – she's held up two jobs, seven kids – a house everything and in Somalia they used to think that she was crazy like to do that. She needs a man to do the work but she proved them wrong. And if she can do it I think I can do it with me getting the education here – getting the course, getting the degree or whatever and then going up there. We still have our house and our shop and just make that into a restaurant or something and show the Somali people that women are capable – because – that . . . after the war there's going to be a lot more mess and they really do need women's help.

For Ayani, an education in business seems to be key. She has a view that in Somalia women are undervalued generally and she has a mission to change that. She uses the example set by her grandmother to give her the confidence to believe that it is possible for women to function outside of the model where a man/husband is necessary, although she is a little unsure about this. Unlike Nazrin and Nadjma, the pressure exerted on Ayani to marry is great and means that her efforts to suspend heterosexual marriage have to operate differently:

Ayani: I have a boyfriend – hopefully we'll get married soon. Still, it won't stop me [going back to Somalia and setting up a business].

SO'F: Hopefully you're getting married soon?

Ayani: Yeah

SO'F: And what's he like then?

Ayani: Very nice . . . um . . . cos we're allowed to – children – we're allowed to get married at the age of . . . my mum

wants me to get married – third cousin . . . I don't – and she goes to me if you find a man quick enough – by the time you get to 16 – if you have a man then you marry – if you don't you marry him [her third cousin].

SO'F: So you've only got 'til you're sixteen.

Ayani: Yes I've got until June the 6th.

SO'F: Ur [surprised]. What marry on June 6th ?

Ayani: No if I have my man, which I have now and tell my Mum I do have a man and we plan to get married but not now then . . .

SO'F: So is he Somalian?

Ayani: [Nods].

SO'F: So how long has he been here then?

Ayani: He's been here all his life. But um my Mum won't approve of him because she wants me to marry someone who's good at the religion . . .

SO'F: And he's not good at the religion?

Ayani: He's useless – a maniac – he's one of those boys, he's finished school and he's into college. He goes to XXX College. He plays his role – like me – he plays his role but he does other things like he goes out goes clubbing and does this and that . . .

SO'F: What's he doing at College then?

Ayani: Um, he's doing Engineering –

Ayani may be a little confused about how to reconcile the image she has of her grandmother as a lone woman in Somalia who managed without a man, with the reality that her grandmother is pressuring her into marriage with her third cousin. She veers between a perception of being allowed to marry and being forced to do so. In the circumstances she does the best she can. She secures for herself a boyfriend, who she describes as 'like me', someone who 'plays his

role' and someone who, like her, is used to moving with agility between the demands of different cultural worlds. She also seemed determined to set the agenda as far as the relationship was concerned:

SO'F: And is he your first boyfriend?

Ayani: Not first boyfriend – first Somalian boyfriend.

SO'F: And do you, is your religion quite strict about these things?

Ayani: You're allowed to talk to a boy but you're not allowed to do like more than that.

SO'F: So you're not allowed to sleep with a boy or anything like that?

Ayani: No. I don't even believe in that myself so . . . but I do other things that they say I can't do so [*starts laughing*]

SO'F: So you'll do other things but –

Ayani: Not go overboard.

SO'F: Until you get married.

Ayani: Yes.

SO'F: So how long are you going to wait until you get married?

Ayani: When I finish college, two years. He want to do it quick but no – it's going to be a big [thing] so . . .

SO'F: And you think you'll wait for two years?

Ayani: He said he will. He said even if we get married now he will treat me – he won't treat me like the Somalian men treat their women

SO'F: What do you mean? How do Somalian men treat their women?

Ayani: They treat their women – stay at home, do my cooking, ironing whatever. But he said to me you go and do your stuff and I'll go and do my stuff, but we'll be a couple and

we'll work on it – otherwise . . . Cos I won't do cooking, so he'll do cooking and I'll do washing up. Whatever. We'll just share it as a couple – it's not going to be a one way thing.

SO'F: So do you think for young Somalian people it's different? They're changing maybe?

Ayani: Yes they're changing. It's because we're always included into what the men are . . .

SO'F: But if you go back to Somalia?

Ayani: [*Defiant*] It's going to change.

[*Laughter*]

SO'F: What? Cos you're going to make it change?

Ayani: No, but there is how many people are in this country, who are Somalian? Everyone's going to go back and they ain't going to want what the old people's thing was. All the young boys are going to say right – no. Do you get what I mean? They're all going to be like, 'Oh we don't want to go to work. We don't want to do this.' Do you know what I mean? There's going to be a load different – cos you got Somalia – cos we weren't allowed to drink – but you got Somalian people who drink, smoke, everything. They're not going to have it. Either they're not going to go back unless things changes.

Ayani's setting of the agenda in her relationship with her boyfriend had to be established both now, before marriage, and in an imagined future after marriage in Somalia. She is both defiant of the situation for women as she sees it and hopeful of change. She too, against considerable odds, feels that she needs to finish a college education before getting married.

Ayani moved with agility across the different cultural worlds she inhabited, from her grandmother's traditional values at home, to a more Westernised version of the Somali household at her sister's house, to her friendships in school with many students. Particularly

important were her friendships with other Somali students, especially Nadjima, and her closest friendship with a young South Asian woman student and then her semi-pragmatic relationship with her boyfriend.

Ayani's friendship with the young Asian woman is of particular interest here. This young woman insisted on being called by a boy's name, Stephen. She presented herself as a 'lad' through her appearance, dress and behaviour. She was friendly with many other students, in the context of being the local source of illegal drugs. At one point, she had even run away from home and had stayed with Ayani for a while to escape intolerable pressures of homophobia at home, a situation which Ayani's grandmother had accepted as being preferable to not knowing where Stephen was or, more importantly, Ayani. The relationship between Stephen and Ayani was intense. Ayani described Stephen as 'my very best friend ever' and they had been friends since Year 4 of primary school.

In school, Ayani had experienced considerable educational failure, which she had also had to negotiate and which influenced the way in which she chose to construct her student identity:

SO'F: Right and would you say in the end that you've enjoyed being at this school?

Ayani: Yeah it's really cool

SO'F: And would you say you're a successful student?

Ayani: Yes, because I used to be very, very, very, very low.

SO'F: So what changed?

Ayani: I changed. I think being in year 8, year 9 . . . because I didn't start from high basis reading. I started from . . . I never started – you know the alphabet, learn the vowels. You know the first reading step. I never did that. I just went into hard core reading because I had to and I couldn't understand . . . I couldn't read nothing. And then I got some help in year 10 and now Miss what's her name come up to me and – Miss – that support teacher – Miss G. – she come up to me and she said to me, 'Oh I can't

believe that we had to give you a tutor. You're very intelligent. You've improved yourself and you don't need no more help and you're working really hard'.

SO'F: And you feel pleased with that yeah?

Ayani: Yeah.

SO'F: So would you say you were a good student?

Ayani: Ah – I have my moments but . . .

Ayani was proud of what she had achieved and evidently felt that she had been supported. However, although she felt that she was a good student in terms of her progress with reading, she was simultaneously resistant to an image of herself as 'good' in the sense of 'well-behaved'. Having 'her moments', it transpired, involved being late to lessons, truanting and playing the joker. Some of the behaviours she claimed appeared to be quite macho in the way they were carried out. She seemed to have a venter similar to that of the 'lads' in Mac an Ghaill's study (Mac an Ghaill 1994). This image permeated her language throughout the interview. Uncool tasks were given a cool edge. Others may look at 'hard-core' pornography or music but Ayani has to get to grips with 'hard-core reading' and she has to do that, without ever having been through elementary letters and vowel sounds – just straight into the adult stuff! Her turn of phrase showed a real attempt to live this image. As she said on various occasions in the interview, 'I don't respect people who don't respect me. That's how it goes. If I get it, they receive it – simple as that'; 'no-one messes with me'; 'it don't bother me – if I can protect myself I don't care what I am'.

However, later she commented that 'people think I'm tough but I'm not really. It's just a phase I have to go through at this school . . .'. This statement was particularly revealing, seeming to indicate that toughness was about image, about negotiating her status in the pupil culture of the school and not a reflections of how she felt inside. At the same time she and Stephen became cast as 'the lads' of her year. They may have been likeable rogues but their behaviours were often disruptive and exasperating for both teachers and many other students. For example, they would often take over the toilets

at break times in order to pursue their drug deals, one keeping watch and the other inside doing the deals. Of all the students interviewed, Ayani was the most conscious of the multiple roles she had to play, perhaps because the stakes were so high for her and time was running out.

Style was crucial in the making of identity and involved astonishing maintenance work. In school, Ayani rarely wore school uniform. She and Stephen invariably wore track suit bottoms and a jumper of some description, in a style that was aimed at being more laddish than either traditional Somali feminine dress or that of conventional UK versions of femininity. She explained the importance of what was worn to school in terms of the cultural status that could be accrued through it:

SO'F: Well part of your image in school ... What are you wearing now? Let me see – uniform up to about here [*indicating waist*]

Ayani: I don't know. It's the way you dress as well – helps you ...

SO'F: Explain.

Ayani: If I come into school with boots and off key ... like things that does not go – well like an orange top or a top that has no name whatever. Same way – the people would say that has no name and cuss me – and people would say that doesn't look good. But if it's got a name on it and it doesn't look good – like a red/orange shirt and it's got Reebok on it, people will say, 'Yeah, yeah, that's nice!' But if it's just normal without nothing on it, 'Urgh! That's off key, that's off key'. You really need to have names. You don't have to, but if you want to get in with the crowd I think you do.

SO'F: Do you think that's strange?

Ayani: It's strange yeah – people do care. I don't really care but people do care. People do look at you and they do judge you from what you wear.

SO'F: And you live with your Grandmother don't you? What does she think of what you wear to school?

Ayani: She doesn't know [*Laughter*]

SO'F: She what?

Ayani: She doesn't know.

SO'F: She doesn't know?

Ayani: She thinks I wear black skirt or trousers, white shirt with a tie and shoes.

Ayani went on to recount the time she spent in the daily transformation of herself on the way from home to school and back again. This required bringing an array of clothes to school each day. But it was worth it for the status it conferred on her. She identifies consumerism as an important force in pupil culture. 'Names' confer status even if the actual item of clothing is unflattering or doesn't match the rest of one's outfit. As a Somali student, the pressure to take part in such consumerism seemed even greater and Ayani spoke about how racism added to these pressures. At the time of the interview, asylum seekers in the UK were still subject to the voucher system for buying essential goods.³ Buying luxury brand names meant you had your own money and indicated that you were not an asylum seeker. It thus helped in warding off anti-refugee racism. Ayani narrates a specific instance of the pressure to show off newly bought goods and the conflict with her grandmother about doing so:

Ayani: I'm wearing the shirt – it's just the jumper she [*grandmother*] won't let me. Like I had a white Reebok nice jumper, cost me a lot of money and I wanted to bring it to school and show it to everyone and everyone was like, 'Yeah, I want to get that jumper'. And I was the first one to get it out of all of them. And my mum wouldn't let me take it to school. I had to like put it in my bag and take it to school – she wouldn't – she wouldn't accept it ...

SO'F: So do you like – when you go home, would you change, before you get home?

Ayani: When I go home I take this off.

SO'F: So your mum – it's your grandmother? – would ...

Ayani: Yes but I call her Mum cos she took care of me all of my life.

SO'F: Right. So you will go home now and you'll be wearing your white shirt, your black trousers and your black shoes and a coat?

Ayani: Yes. [Laughter]

Being at the cutting edge of style in school is one thing, but at home Ayani has to remould herself into a more demure image of Somali femininity. Apart from having to change her appearance before going home, Ayani also feels she has to constrain other parts of her identity:

SO'F: And a final thing. Really what's it like for you? Cos you're maybe one person in school and another person at home and another person with your boyfriend. Do you know what I mean? There are lots of different you's. How do you manage with all that?

Ayani: It's difficult – it's hard to please everyone.

SO'F: I'm sure.

Ayani: It's very hard – because at home I have to speak in Somali. I have to eat whatever my mum says I have ... I have to be everything my mum says I have, I have to say everything she wants to hear.

SO'F: Why?

Ayani: I'll say, 'Oh Mum, I got an F for my exam', and then I will be in trouble. I have to say everything she wants to hear. I have to. That's really hard – cos we – I feel horrible to cheat on her but cos she's not allowing you to have your freedom – she's not allowing you ... I'm not allowed to listen to music, I'm not allowed to watch TV, which I find very hard. So I try most of my time to go to my sister's.

aunt's, sister's – anywhere I can just to get away from my Mum.

SO'F: Yeah I can imagine.

Ayani: When I'm with my Mum, she takes the mickey out of me cos I can't speak proper Somali – so they will tease me like that ...

In this exchange, I have provided Ayani with the opportunity to talk about the difficulties she finds. In asking her how she manages all her different you's, I have offered recognition of the ways in which she moves between locations and contextual identities. This recognition may be what enables her to express the feelings here – that much of the time, she seems unable to win, always being somehow wrong. In spite of our understandings around the fluidity of identities and the multiple life-worlds inhabited by young people, Ayani feels trapped both at school and at home. While she seems to have a Westernised understanding of what constitutes freedom, she is caught trying to establish some kind of control over the way compulsory heterosexuality is being enforced in her life. She must negotiate between school failure/success and her image as a young Somali woman within a pupil culture that demands a certain style. The style she adopts in school keeps heterosexual femininity at bay, through the development of a harder laddish posturing, which can account for academic failure but also gives her social confidence to tackle racism and which she hopes will help her build some academic success. Unlike the macho behaviour of 'real lads' (Mac an Ghail 1994; Willis 1977), her borrowing of laddishness functions not to distance herself from educational success but as an attempt to get her closer to it by pushing away heterosexuality and, at the same time, combating racism.

In spite of her extreme hard work at moving between multiple identities, in the final part of the interview Ayani is not very optimistic about having gained anything from doing this:

SO'F: So do you think other students are, I mean do you think it's different for other students? White students or ...

Ayani: Not all of them, but some of them.

SOF: They don't have these . . . like, got to be three different people . . .

Ayani: [Emphatic] No, they get to be one person – same language – same everything.

SOF: Do you think there are advantages in having – [interruption]

Ayani: Yes, and they take the mickey out of everyone.

SOF: Yes, but do you think that there might be advantages in the long run for you?

Ayani: Not really. I got no advantage out of that. I got . . . I get to show people my different sides, that's the good thing. But I'm not [interruption]

SOF: But that is a good thing. Because if you don't have that, it's a bit boring isn't it?

Ayani: Um

SOF: You get to mix with a lot of different people. Seems to me like you could get on with . . . and you're also proud of your culture and your heritage and . . .

Ayani: Yeah, it doesn't bother me what I am. At the end of the day I am what I am and if you don't like it, I can't make you like it and I can't change it.

In spite of my desperate attempt to present a picture of the positive elements of working across different cultural spaces, Ayani does not feel empowered. In her opinion, white British students, or at least some of them, get to be one person and that has advantages in the power stakes. She 'gets no advantage' and the necessity of the constant maintenance of different identities is experienced not as fluid but as fixed, 'I am what I am'. Despite the reference, perhaps coincidental, to Gloria Gaynor's song, which has been adopted as a signifier of gay pride, Ayani's tone is one of resignation, not defiance. There is the implication that if you don't like her, she would change into something you might like if she could. Indeed, it seems from her account of herself that she does spend a good deal

of time doing precisely that – changing who she is or how she presents herself in different contexts. However, she is exhausted by her identities rather than proud, and she is trapped in them, as revealed in her poignant final words here: 'Yeah, it doesn't bother me what I am. At the end of the day I am what I am and if you don't like it, I can't make you like it and I can't change it' (my emphasis). Ayani has cultivated specific gendered and sexualised ways of being in order to manage school and home. These intersect in complex ways with her achievement in school. Moving towards or away from heterosexuality in different contexts helps her to sustain and shape these identities and try to fashion academic success.

In practice, her attempts fell apart and, by the last term of her compulsory schooling, she had suffered a breakdown. The permanent exclusion of Stephen left her feeling extremely isolated and she herself often did not come to school. Her accounts to teachers of her actions became increasing bizarre and unconnected with reality she spent several weeks shut in her bedroom smoking cannabis, and told me that she could see nothing else to do. Her tragedy was that her brave and resourceful attempts to hold things together by shifting identities did not, and perhaps never could, work in practice.

Conclusion

The demands imposed by institutionalised heterosexuality on these young women clearly structure their behaviour and possibilities for identity formation in school. Success in school is beset by complex negotiations around heterosexual identity and practice. These are linked with and complicated by relations of ethnicity, nationality, class and gender. Important in this process is the creation of safe space by pushing heterosexuality away. This was achieved variously by keeping silent about family structures, by using robust arguments about the need for a productive future in Somalia and by adopting a style at odds with conventional femininity.

The silencing of home identities in the school context is particularly important here. While most poignant for Ayani, Dega, Nadjma and Nazrin too have to contend with the imperative of negotiating the differing forms of heterosexuality that were compulsory for them in

each of these sites. Ayami had to choose a putative future husband, though her emotionally intense relationship was with Stephen. Nadima was producing herself as the dutiful future Muslim wife, with the proviso that any husband who demanded unreasonable (from her perspective) duties, would not be a good Muslim and therefore not worthy of the respect due to a husband. Nazrin sought a more Western-style equality in her imagined future relationships, while recognising that there was an imperative to marry a Muslim man. For Deqa, her negotiations take place through the adoption of silence as a strategy for holding things at bay.

At the same time, the school was placed in a difficult position. Senior management and teachers wished to be supportive, as was demonstrated by taking me on as a consultant with the brief of finding out what the Somali girls wanted and needed. However, their options were severely limited. The school could only work within the context given, of the 'standards' and the 'inclusion' agendas. Neither of these had a way of speaking to or dealing with the enormous complexity of these girls' lives. It was not that nothing could be, or was, done, and it may be that the school could have done more. But what was done was akin to covering the wounds with sticking plaster while leaving the sore beneath untreated.

Notes

1. Such thinking is encapsulated in Descartes' famous aphorism 'I think, therefore I am'.
2. It is the idea that 'standards' must be easily measurable, defined and measured that has led to the growth of constant testing and examination in English schools at great cost to the public purse and personal cost to the children subjected to them and their families.
3. Jack Straw, when he was Home Secretary, introduced a system of vouchers for asylum seekers while they were waiting for their cases to be heard, in place of social security in the form of money. This humiliating practice meant that they had to present voucher in shops, not all of which would accept them, thus identifying themselves as asylum seekers, in an atmosphere of considerable anti-refugee comment in the popular press. Furthermore, these vouchers could only be exchanged for items identified as necessities by Government. This practice has now been stopped.

CHAPTER SIX

Post-Compulsory Heterosexuality: Silences and tensions in curricula and pedagogy at university

Introduction

Within formal educational systems, universities are sites where heterosexuality enters the realm of the expected. Going to university provides opportunities and furnishes spaces for many young people to extend their life experiences, especially around the contested territory of sexuality, which has previously been largely silenced. University students are no longer considered innocent, as young children are, or expected to delay entry into mature sexuality. They have come of age in the legal sense and even though funding arrangements keep many financially dependent on their parents, they have the legal right to leave home, vote, and marry without parental consent. On starting university courses students have already graduated into adult worlds where sexuality is permitted. The age of consent in the UK and most of Europe (and much of the anglophone world except some states of America) is 16 and legal maturity is reached at eighteen. University students have metamorphosed into sexual and legal adulthood. As undergraduates they have moved from compulsory schooling and regulation to the post-compulsory 'adult' world of self-inspired learning, legal drinking, licensed driving, and sexual exploration.

While they are educationally past compulsion, young people starting university are still subject to a naturalised heterosexuality that regulates them through friendship groups, family obligations and expectations, and the institutional practices of the university itself.

As 'new' adults they are socially empowered to make sexual decisions and explore sexual freedoms but this liberty is regulated by heterosexual expectations and discourses. The silences in compulsory education around sexuality are repeated in university through tensions between personal desires and the (hetero)normative expectations of others. These crucial silences and the tensions experienced by young people in sites of higher education are examined in the next two chapters.

Bob Connell (2000) notes that the term 'site' can be understood in several ways. First, we can examine the university as an institutional agent of the process of naturalisation – that is the means by which we come to understand what is 'natural' and 'normal'. To understand how this applies in terms of sexuality, it is necessary to explore the structures and practices by which universities, as institutional agents, contribute to the architecture of young people's sexual worlds. This will help to uncover how some faculty members and students have dealt with the paradox of silences around sexual 'otherness' combined with thundering (hetero)normative expectations within their institutions. Second, we can understand 'site' as the setting in which other agencies are in play and especially examine the agency of students themselves. The 'peer milieu' of informal social interaction is an important feature of all educational environments. There are important interplays of development and identity formation, in which students interact and identities are produced discursively.

Material for these two chapters is drawn from the existing research literature, a brief examination of policies and practices affecting queer students in universities, and from my recent research involving a longitudinal study of gay male undergraduates at various universities in the UK. Conducted between September 1998 and March 2000, this study involved twelve participants from a variety of social, cultural and economic backgrounds, at ten different locations in England and Northern Ireland. The sample included students from both old and new universities and from ethnic minority and white British backgrounds. Some were the first in their families to go to university. Others came from professional families where higher education was the norm. The research aimed to

uncover what happened to these young gay men as undergraduates, in the making of their sexual identities. The data was gathered through three individual interview/discussion sessions spaced six months apart, as well as monthly e-mail dialogues between the participants and myself. The research provides important insights into the lived experiences of contemporary queer youth in a selection of UK universities; however, because the study involved a small sample group of gay men it reveals only part of the story. I have therefore also included the voices of women, drawn from other studies in American, Canadian and British universities.

'Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil' – or else: experiences of faculty members

So just how easy is it to be queer in universities in anglophone countries? The research literature, as well as anecdotal evidence, suggests that this will depend on the university. For some students, universities provide an environment in which it is easier for them to explore sexuality than was possible in school. Even for those who do not conform heterosexually, higher education may well provide opportunities for sexual exploration, particularly if high school was a difficult location. Certainly, studying at tertiary level provides a new site with new possibilities. However, the experiences of academics from universities in Australia (Misson 1999; Willert 2000), Britain (Epstein 1995b; Weeks 2000), Canada (Eyre 1993) and the USA (Sedgwick c1997; Tierney and Rhoads 1993; Tierney 1993a; 1993b; 1997) suggest that even in what could be regarded as more liberal institutions, there continue to be tensions around identifying as queer. Students and their teachers have to confront a complex realpolitik of sexual disclosure living and working as sexually other in university (see also Powers 1993).

Academics researching sexuality and gender issues frequently report having been advised that they will never get anywhere if they pursue this path (see for example, Jackson 1999; Tierney 1997; Weeks 2000). Paradoxically, the huge lists of published work about sexualities are testament to the success that writing about sexuality, including from a queer perspective, can bring. In addition, there has been a proliferation of courses in which sexualities and gender

issues are a primary focus. Such successes, however, can come at a price for both students and staff. For example, Eve Sedgwick says:

I almost never put 'gay and lesbian' in the title of undergraduate gay and lesbian studies courses, though I always use the words in the catalog copy. To ask students to mark their transcripts permanently with so much as the name of this subject of study would have undeniably disabling consequences for them in the future: the military, most churches, the CIA, and much of the psychoanalytic establishment, to mention only a few plausible professions, are still unblinking about wanting to exclude suspected lesbians and gay men, while in only a handful of places in the US does anyone have even nominal legal protection against the routine denial of employment, housing, insurance, custody, or other rights on the basis of her or his perceived or supposed sexual orientation. (Sedgwick c1997)

So while sexual and gender differences in higher education are not completely silenced in the official discourse, identifying as queer presents real structural and symbolic impediments both inside and outside the university (see for example, Farnum 1997; Prince 1995; Slater 1993). Sedgwick goes on to argue that there continues to be a relative silencing of feminism and gender studies courses. She notes that:

Besides code-naming a range of gay and lesbian-centered theoretical inquiries, 'gender studies' also stands in a usually unmarked relation to another rubric, 'feminist studies.' Feminist studies might be defined as the study of the dynamics of gender definition, inequality, oppression, and change in human societies. To the extent that gender is thus at the definitional center of feminist studies, 'gender studies' can sometimes be used as an alternative name for feminist studies, euphemistic only in not specifying, as the 'feminist' label more than implicitly does, how far inequality, oppression, and struggle between genders may be seen as differentially constituting gender itself. *Women's* studies today is commonly defined, at least in practice, by the gender of its object of study . . . ; by contrast to women's studies, feminist studies, whose name specifies the angle of an inquiry rather than the sex of either its subject or its object, can make (and indeed has needed to make) the claim of having as privileged a view of male as of female cultural production (emphasis in original). (Sedgwick c1997)

Here Sedgwick makes clear the structural and institutionalised tensions and silences around the categories 'lesbian', 'woman' and 'gay' and we would argue that this has relevance for students and staff beyond the names of courses. The subtle, and at times blatant, oppressions of women and also of those who identify as queer are discursively reproduced and actualised in practices that discriminate. Bill Tierney (1997) and Robert Rhoads (1994), for example, have written of the overt and covert limitations of study and discussions of lesbian and gay issues on campus and their consequences for queer faculty and students. They point to the marginalisation of heterosexual women and of queers across subject areas, which strengthen existing relations of dominance within the academy and beyond. There are both impediments and consequences for those who challenge those structures. An example of this is the 'glass ceiling', a hidden structural obstacle that still frustrates promotion aspirations and stifles rewards offered to women, people of colour, or those otherwise marginal to the majority interests. For queer scholars, naming one's sexuality may have adverse consequences in relation to tenure, funding, and promotional opportunities. Bill Tierney gives the following examples of difficulties he has encountered as a queer academic in the US:

A colleague and I once planned to edit a book on lesbian and gay studies. I called someone who was straight and a legal scholar. I asked him if he would be interested in writing a chapter for the proposed book. The person forthrightly declined . . . I wrote a proposal to a major foundation a few years ago that outlined a project for lessening homophobia in academe; the proposal got nowhere. Two colleagues asked me to write a chapter about lesbian and gay faculty members in an edited book about faculty diversity. When the project was completed, the editors informed me that another author had dropped out when he discovered that there would be a chapter in the book about queers. The leaders of a national association of higher education asked me to help form a caucus on lesbian and gay issues similar to other minority caucuses. When they announced the formation of the group, they received several letters from individuals who canceled their memberships because they did not want to have anything to do with an organisation that 'condoned the gay lifestyle.' (Tierney 1997: 85)

Tierney goes on to observe that if his gay sexuality were substituted for a different ethnic category or for physical disability, this kind of discrimination would not be tolerated. Normative pressures to accommodate majority attitudes have done more than damage or disrupt careers and temper academic explorations – they have also destroyed lives – an ugly reality that many women in the academy have had to endure for years. The relatively recent visibility of queer scholars who challenge silences about sexuality also has consequences for the heterosexual majority. As Jonathan Silin comments:

[Coming out] has shifted some of my discomfort about teaching onto students. The situation has become less problematic for me and more disquieting for them, for they have begun to question their assumptions about who can speak and who must remain silent. (Silin 1999: 96–7)

Didi Khayatt responding to Jonathan Silin, argues that coming out is not a necessary act by either teachers or students. She points out that it is possible to trouble students' assumptions without making declarative statements. Indeed, she maintains:

Coming out through a declarative statement is pedagogically unsound . . . for several reasons, not least because one's identity is continually in flux, and the act of freezing one's identity in place does not do justice to the teacher presenting herself or himself in class. What it does is to define the teacher's personality through an act of oppression and to encourage students to see the teacher as standing in for an entire group. (Khayatt 1999: 108. See also Khayatt 1990: 1997)

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

The secret would cease to be a secret if we simply assumed that our students knew it. . . . Furthermore, the secrecy of a statement inflates it, whether it remains concealed or is revealed. As long as hetero-

sexuality is normatively ascribed the default position, will not coming out continue to reproduce the secret even as it interrupts it? (Khayatt 1999: 109)

Both Silin's and Khayatt's perspectives have significant strengths. Changes have taken place in the academy, which make it a place where, in however constrained a form, young people (and, indeed, older, mature students) can explore versions of sexuality other than the (hetero)normative variety in ways which were almost impossible at school. These have often been the result of actions (and activism) by out queer faculty members, which have sometimes resulted in bitter internecine disputes (Cage 1994a; Cage 1994b; Rotman 1990; Tierney and Rhoads 1993)

There have been changes within universities. There is, for example, no longer complete silence in the curriculum about queer themes and it is unlikely that university managements, however homophobic privately, would actively and publicly take action against queer academics or the mention of queer theory or themes in courses (see for example D'Emilio 1992; Tierney 1993b; 1997). There are numerous exceptions of course and the pace and spread of change does vary considerably from campus to campus. D'Emilio reflects:

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

The literature strongly suggests that in the 1990s the structures of higher education have not changed but that tolerance has been *added on*. Many equal opportunities policies now specifically include 'sexual orientation' and prohibit homophobic harassment and discrimination. However, the structures and the oppressions of the hidden curriculum and heterosexist discourses remain (D'Augelli 1989b). Some queer staff and students have named their sexuality and faced harassment, and at times violence, while others have not come out, but both still suffer in the straight-minded environments of universities and colleges.

Que(c)rying curricula and pedagogy

A recurrent theme in the education literature concerns the importance for students of seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum (Barnard 1993; Walllick *et al.* 1992), although this is not a solution in and of itself (Talbot 2000b). Nevertheless, social recognition is important for all students, including those who identify as queer. In social sciences and humanities there are sometimes courses on sexuality available, but these are extraordinarily rarely core courses and are thus taken by students with a particular interest in them. In the rest of the curriculum, even within social sciences and humanities, the institutions of heterosexuality are taken for granted and naturalised (see, for example, Phillips 1991).

There are two issues at stake in this context. First, there is the question of how university curricula could be made more inclusive of queer themes and, thus, of queer students (see, for example, Heller 1990; Lopez and Chism 1993; Piernik 1992). Second, there is the question of how universities might respond to and challenge homophobia and heterosexism (see, for example, Irvine 2001; Rivers and D'Augelli 2001). Kim Howard and Annie Stevens (2000) trace the attempts by queer staff and students to redress the balance in university courses (see also Evans 2001). However, others have argued that anti-homophobic programmes may have the effect of bringing to the surface latent/blatant heterosexist attitudes amongst some students and may even produce a hard-edged version of homophobia (for example, Irvine 2001; Rivers and D'Augelli 2001). Linda Eyre argues that:

Pedagogical practices explicitly intended to challenge the heteronormativity and heterosexism . . . [and] . . . work towards social change risk reproducing the very aspects of injustice that they seek to rectify. (Eyre 1997: 191, 195)

Eyre warns of the danger of alienating heterosexual students from queer perspectives through mismanaged attempts to incorporate Queer Theory into the curriculum. This may be because, as Deborah Britzman (1995) argues, many heterosexual students not only have limited experience and indeed interest in queer themes, but are also deeply emotionally invested in maintaining their ignorance.¹ The danger is that strategies intended to be inclusive

can in these circumstances backfire, leading to further marginalisation and even stigmatisation of queer students and staff. The need, then, is for extremely careful preparation in challenges to naturalised ideas about the normality and inevitability of heterosexuality and also to homophobia.

The good, the bad, and the ugly: student experiences of curriculum and pedagogy

In this section, I draw on my own research both to illustrate the need for curriculum and pedagogic change and to show the complexities inherent in this process. At the time of the interview from which the following extract is taken, Paul was a second-year psychology student at a 'plate-glass'² university on the south coast of England. I asked him about what, if any, gay content had there been in any of his courses, one of which was about 'social trends', so far:

Paul: Some, but very little on the whole, which surprised me a lot. I expected, especially with doing psychology, I mean that's probably why I did it, that there would be more . . . But in this [social trends] course there was absolutely nothing, no mention, no nothing about gay issues or information until we did this weird twenty-minute thing in one session where we were given a handout that gave dumb, really simplified and general definitions of gay and lesbian and transsexual or something and talked about gay population estimates for Britain. It was pants because it was an old photocopied piece of paper, double sided and looked like it had been handed out a million times. And, very faintly at the bottom end of the sheet it had some source thing which said something, something '1987'. I was really embarrassed, not because it was about gay issues, everyone knows I'm gay, but it was so amateurish. We talked quite generally about definitions of 'gay' and then about the one-in-ten stuff and Kinsey and his methodology and how flawed it was. Everyone seemed to agree that Kinsey was over-representing how many people were gay and that there were probably far fewer, which made me

feel that we were even less important . . . There was nothing about the issues that gay and lesbian people have to face and it was all really about white gay people, well that was the assumption because it was so general . . . That we are a small and happy community with a few bars and we don't have real problems, no, and that was it. Though one twat said when we were going on about the numbers that there would be a lot fewer gays around because of AIDS, that many gay men would have died out so the numbers would be getting smaller. The others didn't say anything, just quietly nodding. I didn't want to be left in the position of having to be 'Mr. Gay' and correct this-and-that all the time; it makes me feel very uncomfortable and it was the lecturer's job besides.

David: How did the discussion end and did it lead anywhere?

Paul: No that's because we finished and moved on to discussing ethnic minorities, like there aren't gay people from ethnic groups too. It seemed that 'gay' was covered for fifteen minutes or however long it took, not long, and then we moved on. I did my essay work and as much other work on gay issues, as much as I could do, but there was no opportunity to discuss it and deal with it in the class. Fine, I understand that if I was doing something really obscure like, 'The life experiences of Alaskan Eskimos living in or about Hove', then you wouldn't expect to take up class time, but this wasn't, it was about millions of gays in Britain and it certainly deserved better treatment than what it got.

Paul's experience is consistent with what Linda Eyre (1997) describes as the 'add on' approach, where students are exposed to information about queer identities by providing simple and homogenizing definitions, putative numbers and suggested causes of sexual difference. Here, information about homosexuality was 'pasted' on to the course in a way that emphasised its difference and strangeness. A danger of this strategy is to reduce the complexities inherent in the construction of sexual identities into broad and

frequently misunderstood categories (Eyre 1997; see also Pallotta-Chiarolli 1995). Uribe and Harbeck (1992) suggest that information about how many people in a population are queer, like the often cited 'one in ten' from the Kinsey Report² (Kinsey *et al.* 1948), helps to show that differences in sexual practices are common, frequent and 'normal'. However Eyre argues that these figures are 'just as likely to be used in support of a neo-conservative position . . . used to justify exclusion' (Eyre 1997: 196).

Paul's comments on his experience as a student expose another danger, discussed by Lori Becker and David Denborough (1995). They argue that fragmentary approaches to the inclusion of 'gay themes' in classes create the equation 'homosexuality = AIDS' in the minds of some students. Western experiences of the HIV/AIDS epidemic are marked with discourses that construct gay men as 'diseased creatures' of the night, obsessed with sex and sexual conquests. This thinking reinforces a negative paradigm that solidifies male same-sex sexual practices as dangerous and illegitimate. HIV/AIDS is not only a biologically devastating illness, its social consequences are also pernicious. Demystifying HIV/AIDS so that it is no longer regarded as sexual disease only of 'dirty poofers' remains a challenge for educators, both because of the impact of this on social health and on infected people, and because such an association renders talking about queer sexualities more difficult.

Teachers in some universities and colleges keen to debunk the 'mysteries' of queer sexualities for their students have invited guest speakers to discuss what it is like to live and work as a queer person and to deal with issues of heterosexism (Eyre 1997). The assumption underlying this approach is often that students will know nothing about queer experience. However, some of them will have queer relatives and/or friends and they may, themselves, have been involved in same-sex sexual experiences. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that listening to such visiting speakers will automatically result in the growth of tolerance and acceptance (see, for example, Eyre 1997; Pallotta-Chiarolli 1995). Furthermore, the fact that students express liberal ideas in class does not necessarily mean that they follow these through when they are in other situations. Paul raised this issue:

In psychology where you have a professional obligation not to be homophobic you'd hear guys in classes saying this positively and that supportively, but you'd know that when they got outside or in the pub they would definitely slag gay people off. I would hear them at times with this about not being too 'politically correct' so it was alright to make jokes . . . I've just given up on them and think that I wouldn't want to let these people loose where they could influence others. No way! But they will of course; these are the next generation of counsellors and clinicians to set up couches and coming to a town near you. It's not good, man!

In other words, students simultaneously occupy contradictory positions in discourse. Thus, as in Paul's case, the expression of heterosexism and homophobia is contextual – it may be acceptable in the pub, but not in the classroom. This is consistent with the post-structuralist theorisation of much of our analysis, which sees an individual reframe attitudes and discourses depending on their social context. For example, the university sporting field and the science or engineering labs are more likely to be perceived, and therefore spoken into being as spaces that permit heterosexual attitudes. By comparison, the art room, the design studio, English, history or social studies work spaces are less likely to reproduce monolithic heterosexuality and may, therefore, become sites of resistance.

The disciplinary discourses around sexuality can be illustrated through the experiences of Steve, who at the time of this interview was 19, a Black student at a 'new' university in inner-London, working towards a degree in engineering. Steve was not out to anyone at university about being gay and had no contacts with other queer students there. He described his engineering course as being 'threateningly straight.' Consider his response when asked about the 'queer climate' of his course and whether he had witnessed any anti-gay behaviour.

Steve: It's all the time, not just sometimes but always. Everything is 'gay this' and 'gay that' . . . People are always riding [criticising] others about 'taking it up the bum', or if they can't get a shag then they must be 'gay'. I mean they don't talk like that in front of their mum and that or if they were

going for a job, but maybe after they got the job then it would be OK. No body thinks it's odd, just like continuing from school.

David: Do members of staff overhear any of these comments, and what's their response?

Steve : [Laughs] They're the ones making the comments, man! No seriously, they are sometimes, but not always, and sometimes they don't say anything, but I remember once right, X, one of the lecturers right did say that the gay comments had to stop and said something about 'that it's just one or two idiots' [the numbers of queers that is, not those making the comments] . . . I was surprised by that, a lot, because even at school, right, teachers would have definitely said something sooner and done more, gotten involved and they definitely wouldn't have been saying things too right. . . Maybe [lecturers make anti-gay comments] because they think that we're adults now and that's the way that straight men act, shooting off at the mouth all the time about being 'men' and all . . . It makes me think about whether I want to work as an engineer, but I'm committed to doing it now.

Unfortunately for Steve (and others) the engineering classroom was seen as a place where heterosexual and homophobic comments could be made in relative safety. As Steve observed, these attitudes were common in his course and few staff tried to stop what was being said. The response of some staff in such situations is to individualise an act, ignoring the institutional and systemic practices that make 'practical sense' of heterosexism. This lack of response is one way in which heterosexuality is not only normalised but made obligatory. A heterosexual comment or act is made to seem natural in the context of, say, the macho world of an engineering classroom because it appears consistent with broader social attitudes. It is reminiscent of a 'boys will be boys' mentality. However, if those involved in educational provision do not say anything to challenge heterosexual violence (verbal and physical), then they diminish the chance of the changes that are needed being made. Furthermore,

lack of a consistency in approaches to dealing with heterosexism and homophobia limits those who do wish to intervene to only putting out fires. Where this occurs in schools and universities, 'change agents' are often left struggling with opposition from colleagues, students, the administration and parents in dealing with homophobia.

The absence of queer curriculum content may also impact on the future professional abilities of students taking vocational courses. Wallick *et al.* (1992) illustrated this through an examination of the amount of time spent on health issues for queer people in the curricula of American medical schools – less than four hours, on average, in a whole medical course (see also Kelly 1987; Kissen 1993). The most common strategy was to include queer issues in lectures on human sexuality, followed (eventually) by panel presentations. In a few medical schools there was direct interaction with non-student queer people (Wallick *et al.* 1992). Here again we can see the strategies of the 'one off class' and the 'guest speaker' that Eyre (1997) warned about. Possibly, if one were to talk to programme/course planners in these medical schools, they would insist that queer health issues are covered satisfactorily. We would disagree. Rather, as Wallick *et al.* (1992) have shown, the study of medicine is constructed through the lens of naturalised heterosexuality. Similarly, evidence from teacher training institutions throughout the anglophone world, suggests that the lack of curriculum content around sexual issues this that context can be even starker (see, for example, Barnard 1993; Howard and Stevens 2000; Khayat 1992; Pinar 1998; Sears 1992; Spurlin 2000). To do nothing about the presumption of heterosexuality in the curriculum and its delivery to students risks maintaining heterosexual privilege, isolating queer students who do not identify and creating spaces for heterosexist violence in all its forms. However, as we have seen, the way in which this strategy is handled is important lest it fails to achieve its aims, or worse, further marginalises and stigmatises queer staff and students.

Legal and financial imperatives and impediments to change

In some of the American literature on higher education there are warnings about potential legal consequences for colleges and universities that do not address the needs of students. With regard to issues of sexuality, these cautions usually point out that universities are vulnerable to legal action if they fail to accommodate queer students or staff or to deal adequately with homophobia (see, for example D'Augelli 1989a; D'Augelli 1989b; D'Augelli 1989c; Hendrickson and Gibbs 1986; Liddell and Douvanis 1994). Queer students and staff in the USA are already demonstrating increased willingness to seek legal redress and financial compensation for damages; universities have already been sued by queer staff and students who believe an institution has passively or actively discriminated against them. In the past decade in the US the total number of lawsuits filed by students against universities and colleges has grown. The claims have included suits about disability, sexual discrimination, harassment, and failures by institutions to provide safe environments for students to learn, to socialise, and to enjoy unfettered access to and use of student living accommodation. The legal challenges in US courts with regard to sexuality have ranged from extremely reactionary to the confident claiming of rights by queer students or staff. An example of the first is a claim made by parents whose daughter had shared a room with an out lesbian and had subsequently come out. They blamed her university for not acting properly *in loco parentis* to protect their daughter from the 'infection' of lesbianism. Examples of the latter can be found in cases brought by queer students for lack of privacy and the opportunity to conduct their relationships without interference or abuse.¹

Anxieties about litigation are not solely a factor for American colleges and universities, since US-style litigiousness is increasing in other Western countries. Universities in the UK are also under pressure to change their policies, curricula and practices with regard to sexuality. This comes both from the activism of queer staff and students (for example, the Association of University Teachers in the UK now has an active queer section) and from human rights legislation coming from the European Union. This has

resulted in more equal opportunity policies and declarations of students' rights including queer issues. Important though this is, compulsory heterosexuality remains unchallenged. I examined the equal opportunities policy documents and mission statements produced by the ten universities my participants attended. Not one included an example of any explicit or inferred challenge to institutional heterosexism or compulsory heterosexuality.

There are two issues. First, there is the question of how successful institutions are in designing and implementing equality policies relating to sexuality. Clearly, the codification of appropriate conduct and non-discriminatory practices are important. However, my research indicates that such policies are merely a wish list or a compilation of what the institutions feel they should say. The testimonies of my respondents, such as Steve's, above, suggest that policies about non-discrimination around sexuality are just paper policies, and are yet to be enacted as living documents that lead to change.

Second, and related to this failure, is the fact that heterosexuality is naturalised by and within learning institutions and a range of punishments exists for those who do not conform sexually. Consequently, statements about non-discrimination are not enough on their own. Heterosexuality needs to be de-naturalised in the minds and practices of administrators and planners and then reflected back in policy and practice in the institution as a whole. The willingness to take on these challenges still seems to be missing in many institutions of higher education.

Universities exist within current socio-political climates. As we argued in the introduction to this book, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, these climates include both the growth of discourses of morality and religion, with punitive attitudes towards queer and non-normative hetero-sexualities, and the growth of social liberalism and queer visibility. While some discourses pull educational institutions towards heterosexual hegemony, others produce a tendency towards sexual inclusiveness.

The sexual climate of a university is a marketable feature for students and their parents who, as potential 'customers', are, for

different reasons, attracted to sites that best exemplify certain sexual and moral values. True to the marketing dictum that sex sells, one of the buying features in the selection of universities is sexual marketability. Thus, universities in cities like Manchester, San Francisco or Sydney, which have a strong and visible queer presence, may be particularly attractive to queer students. However, for some parents, a priority may be for a university that will better regulate the sexual environment. This is explored further in the next chapter. Because the sexual climate of the institution will impact on its marketability, those involved in managing and selling a university to students and parents (clients) have a stake in how attitudes to sexuality issues are managed. It is certainly the case that universities will present different aspects of themselves to potential students and to their parents. For example, students may be told about the nightlife and clubs, while parents may be informed about accommodation, safety and pastoral support. In practice, the way that policies are lived out is negotiated by students and staff in relation to policies and institutional practices.

Often neglected in discussions about who influences universities are the alumni. However, in the US there is a long tradition of financial support by ex-students, particularly in the high status private universities. As public funding for universities in other countries becomes increasing meagre, they are trying to follow the route marked out by American institutions. The US gives alumni a potentially significant influence in how universities are run and this may well be detrimental to the experiences of queer staff and students, impacting negatively on the queer climate of the university, particularly when the old boys use money as leverage. For example, *The Advocate* (September 2000), reported that a wealthy former student had threatened to cut off funds to Grand Valley State University (Grand Rapids, Michigan) if spousal benefits were given to the partners of queer staff. The President of the university, Professor Arend Lubbers, withdrew plans to offer domestic-partner benefits to queer employees after major donors threatened to withdraw millions of dollars. *The Advocate* reported that Lubbers repeatedly denied that he had spoken to donors before reversing his position on partner benefits. However, the paper confirmed that he had

spoken to old boy and co-founder of the multi-national business *Amey*, Richard DeVos, who had donated US\$7.75 million for a centre to be named after him. The paper reported:

'I told him to obey the law of the land,' DeVos said of his discussions with Lubbers. 'This country is geared around heterosexual marriage, and to my knowledge only one state has changed.' DeVos is also in charge of raising \$15 million for a new science building. He refused to tell the paper if he would have continued to donate money to the university if it had instituted the benefits. Another potential donor, Peter Cook, who is reportedly considering giving the school \$3 million, was also said to be upset about the benefits. After Lubbers learned that DeVos had confirmed their conversations to the Press, a university spokesman attributed his earlier denials to a weak hearing aid that may have led Lubbers to misunderstand the questions. (*The Advocate* 2000)

It seems apparent from this US experience that where a university's policy is unacceptable to a donor the principles of equal opportunity may be easily swept aside. In principle former students could also act as positive change agents by threatening to contribute or withhold funds but this is less likely than the situation described here.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored some of the institutional and policy aspects of compulsory heterosexuality in universities. Queer staff and students must negotiate their places within these institutions as universities have done little in either the hidden or taught curriculum to render heterosexuality less than compulsory. The examination of the experiences of two gay students illustrates how university spaces are differentially heterosexist and homophobic. Equal opportunities policies and mission statements have failed to make any significant difference to the everyday lived experiences of queer students and staff or to challenge the institutionalised heterosexism of the sector. And the legal and financial dimensions to university policies and practice have been directed at impeding the possibilities of change rather than encouraging or enabling them.

Notes

1. Ray Misson (1999) makes a similar point with regard to secondary school students.
2. The UK has 'ancient', 'red-brick', 'plate-glass' and 'new'. 'Red-brick' refers to older provincial universities, usually situated in cities and established during the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries; 'plate-glass' to those established in the 1960s, while 'new' universities are former polytechnics and technical colleges which became universities in or after 1992.
3. See Kinsey, *et al.* (1948). This report caused considerable controversy at the time of its publication by suggesting that one out of every ten males have had 'homosexual experiences.' It remains an often quoted but much disputed figure on the extent of 'homosexual experience' and numbers of homosexuals.
4. For specific instances of court cases, see Crompton (1993), Dodge (1990), Hendrickson and Gibbs (1986) and Liddell and Douvanis (1994).

CHAPTER SEVEN

The University Challenge: Transition to university

I had always wanted to go to university, it's where I finally thought that I could be me – gay that is [*laughs*]. I wasn't scared or worried about being away from home, I just wanted to get there and do it – like a lot of people I suppose . . . It wasn't like I expected. (John, September 1998).

John (aged 20) is a Modern Languages (French) student at a university in the west of England near to where he was born and raised. He moved into private housing after coming out to fellow students and spending what he described as 'the worst year of my life in Halls', during he endured which constant taunts and abuse. This extract was recorded when John was still living through his hell-year in Halls. Later in the interview one can clearly hear a sample of such abuse. I recorded the interview in John's room, and part of the way through, someone banged loudly on the door shouting, 'Hey John lad, who have you got in there then? Whose whacking it up who?' Two months later the abuse became too much to bear and John moved to private housing.

Young adults at the turn of the century who identify as queer are experienced at working on their sexual identities, whether in the kind of abusive context experienced by John, or in supportive environments. Many are knowledgeable and powerful in their negotiations around sexuality. They are knowledgeable about the meaning in their own lives of being queer, and powerful in their deployment of their sexual knowledge and identity and also in their strategies about when, whom and how they might tell others in their worlds that they identify as queer. Some may have come out to

friends and/or family and may hunger for greater independence and a wider engagement with the world. Others may be uncertain about what gender and sexuality mean for them as they move into adulthood still hesitant about how, or even whether, to proceed with an exploration of the way they feel. Some will have accomplished years of sexual discovery to reach understandings around their bodies and desires; others may be poised on a sexual horizon, perhaps trying to come to terms with new or previously hidden feelings. But regardless of their current state of (in)experience or (un)ease with queer sexualities, these young people are likely to be well aware of the dynamics of their closets (Smith *et al.* 1998) and the borders placed around their sexual desires and performances of gender. One effect of this awareness is that openly queer students and academics frequently find themselves acting as a kind of exemplar for others. This point is well made by Eyre, who argues:

Although lesbians are occasionally permitted to speak at the academy, we can only speak *about* but we cannot speak as lesbians except insofar as we are prepared to . . . make ourselves not lesbian subjects, but lesbian objects, objects of study, of interrogation, of confession, of consumption. Nor can we speak to lesbians, except as we are prepared to place them in jeopardy, to open and dissect a subjectivity created for and by the dominant other (emphasis in original). (Eyre 1997: 198)

This resonates with my own experiences as an openly queer teacher in Australian secondary schools. Shortly after I had come out to students at one school, the Principal thought it necessary to discuss my sexuality in an assembly of 150 Year Ten students (15–16 year olds) – presumably to allay the students' 'fears'. After a short introduction about the importance of pluralism and difference in society, the Principal concluded with the unfortunate remark that 'David's homosexuality should be accepted by everyone because as long as *they* don't make it compulsory then it is okay'. This episode, which still rankles some ten years later, is an example of how the queer guest speaker or the out queer teacher is vulnerable to being made 'Other' and in the process having their sexuality marginalised, reduced to 'it'. The messages to students, especially those who identify as queer or are unsure of their sexuality, are of non-

acceptance and fear. The impression communicated is that queer people are not approved of – contributing to the discursive reproduction of compulsory heterosexuality and heterosexist attitudes and behaviours.

Epstein (1995b) has argued that the hidden curriculum includes the attitudes, assumptions and implicit knowledges of students, as well as those embedded in the taught curriculum, structures and practices of the university. This inevitably includes the presumption of normative versions of heterosexuality that pervade social life, including schools. Thus, queer undergraduates bring with them to the university the ingrained (hetero)normative expectations of their social worlds. And most of their potential new friends will inhabit similar discursive spaces with regard to sexuality and have similar normative sexual expectations to those of the queer students' previous worlds.

A major ambition for many queer students in their early undergraduate years is to come out to their family. For a good many of them, going to university is the pivotal moment in their coming out story, which many have spent years drafting – rehearsing an end to the silence. When telling family and friends – old friends and new – they may encounter hostility, threats and even violence, along with demands they provide a cause or give reasons for their sexual difference (Evans and D'Augelli 1996). They must negotiate their feelings of obligation to their family of origin and attune themselves to the expectations of their friends as they adjust to their new 'families of choice' (Rhoads 1994; Weeks *et al.* 2001). For queer students this involves making decisions about whether to conform or to resist normative heterosexual pressures. Opposition can cause them to be seen as distinctly 'Other', and may *hyper*-sexualise their experiences (Fischer 1995) by making it seem as if sex, who you desire, is the be-all and end-all of the meaning of queer. Certainly, dominant discourses around sexuality and queer identities assume that sex is all that counts, ignoring the many ways in which queer sexualities are lived, in which queer relationships are organised and experienced and in which these are intertwined with questions of ethnicity, nation, gender, disability and so on (see, for example Akanke 1994; Bell and Valentine 1995; Weeks *et al.* 2001; Wilton

2002). The presumption, not just of heterosexuality but of particular versions of it as normal, natural and inevitable are reflected and reproduced in universities (Evans and D'Augelli 1996).

New undergraduates continue their lifelong engagement with the institutions of heterosexuality, but in this context they do so as (relatively) 'new' adults. A few queer students, radicalised by previous engagements with institutionalised heterosexuality, may act as a pivot of sexual insubordination and challenge the one-dimensional sexual/gender configurations of compulsory heterosexuality. Others, perhaps most, may simply come out to themselves or a few select others and desire to blend in, unnoticed. Yet others may remain deeply closeted, defending themselves against discovery and separating any queer experience from university life. The negotiations and identity formations of these students will differ, inflected by social difference and by individual biographies. By the time they graduate, students' sexual identities may be relatively secure, they may have negotiated the place of their families of origin in their lives and may have begun to build their professional and personal lives around their new 'families of choice' (Weeks *et al.* 2001). Then again, they may not. There are also horror stories among the experiences of these young people. For some queer students, expressions of homophobic hatred are as familiar at university as they were at secondary school. Although instances of violence are rare, the attitudes that may lead to violence resonate through the everyday experiences of many students in higher education and found their most appalling expression in the horrific murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998.¹

This chapter examines how young queer people experience the transition from school to university. We are particularly interested in what they think university life might offer them with regard to their explorations of sexuality, and in the impact of their particular geographic, social and disciplinary locations on their experiences of higher education.

Great expectations: going to uni

Many students and their families experience enormous pride and/or satisfaction when a young person gains a place at a university.

However, for queer undergraduates fresh from school and perhaps keen to explore sexual difference, this can also be a time of conflicting emotions, where many underlying tensions are highlighted. These tensions arise in part from their wish to explore queer aspects of their identities, in sharp distinction to the presumption of their heterosexuality liable to be held by their family and friends from school. Many queer students see university as a place and a time to come out to themselves and to others, a place where they can explore their sexualities and their identities.² Families, in contrast, frequently assume that during a degree course the student is likely to meet long-term partners of the opposite sex, and perhaps even get married. The university is the site where these tensions are played out in a context which supports the institutions of compulsory heterosexuality and often, even if inadvertently, punishes those who do not conform.

Before going to university, young people have expectations of what it will be like, though their knowledge about what they can expect from university is often as limited as their power to decide where they go. Students in the UK are becoming less likely to have a choice about where to attend university and where they will live once there, as university attendance becomes increasingly costly and student debt an ever-growing problem. This is particularly the case for working-class students whose parents have limited incomes and where there is no family tradition of going away to university. Sean, for example, studied accounting at a university in Northern Ireland. He was aged 18 at the time of my first interview with him. Although he had not come out to his family and friends, Sean was desperate to explore being gay and saw university as offering him this chance. The university he got into, however, and where he was to live were to provoke critical tensions. As he explained:

We had always talked as a family. Even if you tried to keep a secret . . . someone would find things out and you were blown . . . I knew there was no way that I could keep being gay from them . . . I didn't want to tell them because I knew it would upset them too much. My friends were going to find out as well, like, and that would upset me – they'd beat the crap out of me. It all came out . . . I know that it killed my Ma when I told her and I was so sorry for that . . . My Da's

barely spoken to me since . . . it was just too embarrassing for him . . . Yeah my friends kicked the shit out of me. (Sean, Interview October 1998)

Sean's family were delighted by his achievement of getting a university place, the first in his family to do so. A Catholic, Sean comes from an economically deprived area of his Northern Irish city and his extended family had all chipped in to buy him new clothes for university and planned to buy him a computer to support his studies. His family planned for him to live at home while he studied because money was tight, and the household was rearranged to give Sean his own room with study space. He was paraded around the houses of neighbours, bought drinks at local pubs and taken to meet numerous relatives. Sean was going to university and his family was proud.

Unknown to his family however, Sean had been trying desperately to get into a university in England, Scotland, Wales or anywhere else away from home, but he did not achieve high enough grades or manage to get the funding he needed. In our first interview, at the beginning of his degree course, he was dreading the next four years. His expectation was of bitter frustration, knowing that he would not be able to reconcile his (heterosexual) obligation to family, which encompassed their pride in him attending university, with his burgeoning desire to explore being gay. Sean felt that his world had become *smaller* because of getting into university and seriously considered withdrawing from his course before it began. He thought of moving to London, to Manchester or another large city with a queer scene, where he would get a job and forget university altogether. Sean had a stark choice – move away and be gay or stay at home and study in the hope of being able to explore his gayness clandestinely. In the event, he elected to stay with his family at first, hoping to keep his secret intact. However, as Sean recounted, the pressures eventually became too great and Sean's sexuality was revealed to his family and friends. The upshot was just as he had feared – his parents were distraught and his friends beat him up. As a result, Sean moved out of his family home at the end of his first term to a mixed queer/straight student household near the university, where he continued to study.

As Sean's story testifies, many queer students dread coming out to family and friends because they fear disappointing them or worse. As was the case with Sean, naming one's sexuality to family and friends is felt by many young people to be one of the most challenging aspects of coming out as queer. There is considerable variation in the experiences of students coming out at university; the experiences are as varied as the students are. But for many, the step of coming out is a cause of extreme distress. Sean's story raises another interesting point about being able to attend a university of one's choice, because for many queer students it is more than simply an 'academic' question.³

The proximity of the campus to a large commercial queer scene was a key factor in the choice of university of the participants in my study. Next most important was whether the university itself had an established and thriving queer community. This finding is confirmed by other recent studies (Dunne and Prendergast 2002; Evans 2001; Prendergast *et al.* 2002). Even if they were unsure about coming out when selecting university, usually during their final year of school, in the students' minds being queer and finding a place where there was the potential to come out safely and live as 'out' was critical to their choice of where to go. This fits with the well-known tendency for people to try to live in places where they feel safe because they can slot into existing ethnic, migrant, religious or sexual communities. Thus, as Bell and Valentine (1995) show, queer people tend to gravitate towards large cities with robust queer communities, and this is true also for students.

Higher (and further) education also offers social permission to be openly sexual. As we argued in the introduction and as I suggested above, there is an expectation that university life will provide students with a legitimate route into the adult (hetero)sexual world. It is a reasonable assumption that, if they have thought about it at all, heterosexual students would expect university to be a place where they might meet queer students. Certainly, my evidence suggests that queer students make several assumptions about what university will be like before they go there. For example, they expect that they will be able to meet other queer students, that there will be some kind of a visible presence, probably a 'LGBT Society',

and that even if they do not join a group, they will meet or bump into other queer students somewhere on campus. In sum, queer students in anglophone countries are likely to expect universities to be more liberal than their schools, to have equal opportunities policies that encompass sexuality and, generally, to be more comfortable places to be than schools, and particularly secondary schools. However, our analysis of the voices of young queer university students suggests that many have experienced different and more complex scenarios.

Queer geographies 1: staying at home, staying in, going out

Sean's story and the desire of queer school students to select universities in queer-friendly locations show that geography plays an important part in a student's university experience – that is where they study and where they live while studying. But for many students, 'going away' to university is not an option. It may be that, like Sean, they do not get into their university of choice. In his case, this was combined with financial reasons. Where public funding of universities and students is minimal or inadequate, going away to study depends on family support that may well be impossible or severely limited by poverty or lack of will.

Staying at home means that the kind of parental restrictions placed on students may well prevail into their twenties. In this context, it is the lives of young women (heterosexual and lesbian) and young gay men that are likely to be the most stringently policed. Women, as is well established in feminist literature, are restricted in the expression of their sexuality, partly through lack of available discourses and the discursive invisibility of active female sexuality and partly through the workings of 'reputation' (see, for example, Fine 1988; Holland *et al.* 1998; Lees 1986; 1987; 1993). They are also policed by the fear of male violence⁴ (Jones and Mahony 1989; Kelly 1988; Sumari *et al.* 2002). What this means for young women is that they are both more likely to limit themselves and to be under the surveillance of others (like parents) in terms of their sexual and social lives. My evidence shows that similar forms of discipline, control and constraint operate with regard to the behaviour of young gay men, especially those living at home.

Take Steve, the African-Caribbean engineering student discussed in the previous chapter. Steve lived with his family and the university was located close by. He said that he had 'to sneak away from the area to do the gay business because I'd be dead if anyone found out what I was doing'. Steve would take the bus or Tube into central London and the gay bars and clubs of Soho, where he knew almost no one at first, and would use the venues to meet sexual partners. Over the eighteen months he participated in the study, I witnessed his attempts to negotiate his way through competing frames in his life.

There is just no way that my folks would understand me being gay, they know what it is like, and we've talked about it, but it's just not something that they can accept... My mum's very involved in the community church and I've been going there for years and know loads of people there right. I used to go out with some of the girls from there too right [*laughs*]...

They [my straight African-Caribbean friends at university] all hate gays, like they would beat them up and that if they get the chance... they are always going on about being a gay or queer and that... (Interview October 1998)

Here we can see how Steve is torn by his fear that his family would not understand his being gay. He connects this to his mother's involvement in the community church and indicates that he has engaged with the presumption of heterosexuality within that community, dating some of the girls who attended the church. He talks with intensity and pain about the homophobia of his straight friends, attributing to them extremes of hatred and the will to violence. His perception is that the group is almost obsessive in their hatred – 'they are always going on about being a gay or queer or that'. During my project, Steve 'told my mum that I wasn't going to church any more. Which I suppose has upset her a lot but it's something that I not prepared to do', (Email diary, March 1999).

Here is another indication of the difficulty Steve found in reconciling the demands of his home life with his desire to be part of a queer social scene. Unspoken but certainly present as a subtext is Steve's knowledge that his mother's church is condemnatory of

queer sexuality. At the end of his first year at university, Steve spoke in similar vein about his difficulties and frustrations concerning his straight friends from his university and from his neighbourhood:

We hang around talking and looking for things to do. It gets very frustrating as we talk about who we, or they, *they* talk about who they are having sex with or who they want to have sex with and you so know that nothing [interesting to me] is going to happen. When I could be out at the bars getting it every night if I wanted instead of hanging around with them . . . (emphasis added – but provided on tape by the repetition of ‘they’). (Interview, July 1999)

Because Steve was not out at university, and felt strongly that he could not risk coming out, he could not take part in the discussions of hetero-sex that dominated the social scene of these male students. As he said, he could have spent more, maybe all, of his spare time on the gay scene but at the cost of losing his friends from the local area and the university. And he would not necessarily be able to replace them with gay friends from the scene, who might live in any part of London or come from some distance to go to the venues. The size of London makes this particularly problematic, but similar issues exist for queer students in other big conurbations. For those in smaller towns there is always the risk of being seen by friends or family going into (or in – and it is surprising how many people are nervous of that!) a queer venue.

For women living at home the situation is further complicated. First, there are far fewer lesbian than gay venues and mixed clubs are often dominated by men. In smaller towns, the relatively rare lesbian venues may be gay or mixed for most of the time, with a lesbian-only night once a week. Even in a city the size of London, there are relatively few public places where women can meet other lesbians. Second, women have to contend with the same constraints as straight women, for example, in feeling able to move around safely. There is also the likelihood that while they live at home their parents will be more anxious about them when they go out at night than about sons of the same age. Furthermore, as Tamsin Wilton (2002) has shown, much lesbian socialising takes place away from the scene and in people’s homes in friendship groups. This means that Steve’s possible solution, of spending more time in queer

venues, is even less available to queer women students than to their male counterparts.

For Steve, an important factor in the geographies of his life is the racism of the scene. His response to a question about racism demonstrates that the choice between spending time with homophobic straight, black friends and being on a racist scene is not a simple one:

I mean it [racism] is out there every time. You ask yourself right, why are they looking at you? Is it because they fancy you or is it because you’re the only black guy here? Or is it some fancy about sleeping with a black guy? And when I talk to some of them they think that all I want to do is rob them. (Interview, July 2000)

Steve’s concerns about either being fancied because (and only because) of his skin colour or being regarded as a potential robber are both based in forms of racism prevalent in British and American culture. Black men have long been regarded as hypersexualised – in Franz Fanon’s words, ‘the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He is a penis’ (emphasis in original, Fanon 1986: 20; Davis 1999; see also Morrison 1993). At the same time, the discourse of the black mugger is well established (see, for example, Hall *et al.*, 1978). Consequently, Steve’s experiences of the scene, and even of his desirability on it, were complex and ambivalent.

Steve worked hard to negotiate all the different, often contradictory, discourses he inhabited and, notwithstanding his uncertainties, he did begin a relationship while on his course. The first intimation of this to me was in his email diary:

I arranged with this guy [Ben on my course to take him to Heaven [a large gay night-club in London] this Saturday and I’ll tell you how it goes. (Email diary April 1999)

At this point, Steve was not at all sure how Ben would react, but as his later email shows:

He [Ben] really liked it and it turned out that he had slept with some guys before and he says he’s bisexual . . . We took some E [Ecstasy] and I caught him later snogging [kissing] this guy near the dance floor. It was wicked . . . We agreed not to tell any one about it . . . (Email diary April 1999)

Over the months that followed, Steve continued his efforts to reconcile the different discursive and physical spaces that he moved between. At our final interview in March 2000, he still had not come out to his parents and had no plans to do so. His relationship with Ben continued, though both remained very cautious and did not allow anyone else in the locality or at the university to know about it. By then Steve was looking forward to finishing his engineering degree and planned to move right away from the area, his friends and his parents. He took the view that this move would enable him to come out 'properly' and begin to live his own life, unencumbered by the presumption of heterosexuality or the homophobic ethos that dogged him in his parental home and at university.

Queer geographies 2: leaving home, going out, staying out

Having described some the complexities for students who stay at home while going to university, I now turn to the experiences of those who leave home. The location of a university in or near large urban centres with their networks of gay bars, clubs and other community contacts can provide queer students with greater access to friendship, a sense of community and sexual relationships. In this context, the 'gay village' or 'scene' can overtake the campus as the main site for social interactions. Mathew, a chemistry student in London, offers an example of this. Originally from the Home Counties, he was living with gay friends in North London. He was out to his extended family and described their response as being 'very supportive and fine about it... but they're still a bit wary'. He started participating in the scene in London at the age of fifteen and described himself as having built extensive queer networks before beginning university. He said that his main reason for choosing a London college was 'to spend more time at Traffic [a weekly gay dance club in London] and to turn up at college occasionally'. Mathew was supported financially by his parents and grandparents during his studies, and supplemented his income by occasionally selling sex and dealing drugs. He described his life in the following terms:

I made numerous contacts on the scene and it was a significant part of my world during that time... Yeah, going to university was

really secondary in my life, something that I did during the day before going out at night. I went to gay pubs and clubs in Soho, Brixton, all over London a lot and even to Brighton a few times because that's where I was *really* gay, not at university. (Interview April 1999)

Mathew went on to describe his dislike of the LGBT Society at university and the great importance of the commercial scene in his search for queer experiences. The queer contacts Mathew made at university were a rarity; he neither sought them out nor considered them important. They were, he believed, tangential to what he regarded as more authentic experiences in the world of gay bars/clubs/saunas and parties. Mathew's experiences are similar to others' in my study and consistent with many of the personal narratives, recounted in the collections of Howard and Stevens (2000) and Windmeyer and Freeman (1998), of students living in or near large cities with access to a commercial scene. For Mathew, then, university was incidental. He did not pay particular attention to either his studies or his social relationships within that context. Rather, his predominant preoccupation was with his life on the scene, where he embraced discourses of gay hedonism and sexual promiscuity. He worked hard at his identity within this particular paradigm of what it means to be queer. By contrast, the students in my research who studied further away from a large city found that the personal ties and queer community networks at university were vital to their explorations of what it meant to be queer (see also Rhoads 1994). For these students, the university was the centre of their queer experience.

This, too, is complicated and nuanced by gender and ethnicity, as illustrated in the edited discussion by KOLA, the Birmingham Black Lesbian and Gay Group⁵ (1994). Here Rajah explained how:

Up till then I'd been in majority Asian schools, and now I was in a completely white city, in a completely white middle-class university and department... So I had to completely detach myself from them, so the race issue took over. But I came out as well and, at the beginning, was very active. I went to gay societies, but I didn't have anything in common with anyone because they were all white. So then, in a way, I had to go back into [the closet] again, because there

wasn't any support for black and Asian gays in that part of the country. (KOLA 1994: 59)

For Rajah, being at university in a predominantly white town with very few meeting places for queer people combined with his discomfort in the gay society to render him isolated.

Family matters

As we have seen, one of the key issues for young queer people is when and whether to come out to their families. Joe (aged 20–22), for example, was a psychology student from north London who still lives in the same area with a lesbian friend. He described himself as completely disconnected from his father, who was not accepting of his sexuality. His family was from a liberal Jewish tradition. However, his younger brother became a strict orthodox Jew and moved to Israel, wanting no further contact with Joe after he came out. Joe's parents were divorced, his father lived in the USA and his mother, with whom he still had weekly contact, lived nearby in London. He had a close relationship with his maternal extended family. Joe described his family relationships as:

A constant 'game of hide and seek' with my parents. They were just waiting for me to tell them that I was gay. I wouldn't, or I was just waiting to see how it would go with my parents. I knew that both would be really hurt when I did tell them, but whether I was or wasn't just became part of their messy divorce. My being gay was like a weapon that each could use to beat the other over the head with. X, my mad Rabbi-wannabe brother, was no help. He just made things worse, but he was playing the game too ... I was the real loser in all of this as I let everyone down. My father and brother don't talk to me any more and my mother has gone from not wanting to know anything to being 'Yenta-the-fag-hag'. It's not pretty David! (Interview May 1998)

Families are, of course, complicated, and Joe's narrative was one of negotiating the emotions of one son coming out while another adopted a fundamentalist approach to religion, which was probably almost equally unwelcome. Furthermore, this all took place in the context of on-going conflict and eventual divorce. The game of hide and seek with one's family involves some of the most difficult

experiences in the lives of many, perhaps most, young queers. The fear, here, lies in revealing to one's family that you are not what (or who) they thought you were or in confirming what you believe might be your parents' worst fears. Stories of coming out abound in the academic literature, in autobiography (Plummer 1995) and in queer fiction, perhaps most famously in Armistead Maupin's 'Letter to Mama' (Maupin 1989: 413–15). Maupin captures the fear of coming out to parents when he has Michael, his main character, write:

I'm sorry, Mama. Not for what I am, but for how you must feel at this moment. I know what that feeling is, for I felt it for most of my life. Revulsion, shame, disbelief ...

I know what you are thinking now. You're asking yourself: What did we do wrong? How did we let this happen? Which one of us made him this way? (Maupin 1989: 414)

The literature suggests that the most significant project for many queer students is navigating issues surrounding decisions to explain their sexualities to their families (D'Augelli 1999c; D'Augelli 1991; Oswald 2000; Rhoads 1994). Whether or not to tell parents, family and friends about their hidden sexual identities, how to tell them and, significantly, the consequences of disclosure are powerful dilemmas most queer young people. For a queer undergraduate, fears of disappointing the family may sit alongside a family's pride in their daughter or son's achievement of getting into university or college and their expectations for their child's and family's future.

Coming out to one's family often has significant emotional consequences, whether the family is accepting or rejecting of one's sexuality. For many students, there is also the hard question of finance. As Paul, a psychology student living away from home, put it:

I am shit scared about telling them ... I'll put it off until I finish [university] and get a job ... If they stop helping me with money and that, I'm fucked. (Paul interviewed in November 1998)

What is not clear from this extract is the extent to which Paul's fear is of emotional trauma or financial ruin or the way in which these

are linked. Being cut off financially is an act of symbolic violence, so the two are totally entwined. Almost a year later, Paul was still agonising about coming out to his parents:

I so want to tell them. It's really starting to bug me that I can't just come out and say it. Like I want them to meet [my boyfriend] and know who he really is... Just can't take the chance in case they stop helping me out [financially]. I don't think that they would but I would rather not upset them. (Interview July 1999)

In this second extract, the emotional aspects are more evident. Paul's distress was primarily about not being able to introduce his boyfriend to the family, complicated by financial worries, but ultimately resting in a desire not to upset his parents. Finally, Paul did come out:

Paul: I think that they mostly worked it out when they last came down to visit. We tried de-gaying the flat but it still came out looking like a gay disco... When I told them later they seemed to have already worked it out and decided to ignore it mostly.

DT: So did they stop paying the bills then?

Paul: No. I knew really they wouldn't. I was just worried about taking the chance. (Interview February 2000).

From this last account, it seems that Paul's worries were unnecessary, but the chance he was taking was not simply about losing money but about losing his parents, as Joe did his father.

One aspect of coming out to parents that is seldom considered is that it is then the parents' turn to come out to friends and their extended families as the parents of queer children. In Paul's case, they did not do so immediately, preferring to tell others 'in their own time'. This theme appeared again in an interview with Tim.

I had to think long and hard about when to tell them. I knew that it would probably be all right and they wouldn't freak, but I couldn't be absolutely sure of it. They [Tim's parents] were still signing the cheques after all... Yeah, they were fine about it in the end, but they still don't tell anyone else, like their friends and me grands and aunts

and that. They said that they would need more time to think about how they tell them. (Interview July, 1999).

Fears about being cut off financially seemed to be an important factor for the young person when deciding to come out to parents and this was evident in the extracts from Paul and Tim. These fears became very real for Clayton, born and raised in Birmingham, England, in what he described as 'a boring, straight, totally fucked up, working class family'. When I first interviewed Clayton, he was eighteen years old and in the first year of a science degree, with plans to specialise in biology. Clayton had come out on the gay scene while attending Sixth Form College the year before. Clayton had told his parents that he was gay four months before I spoke with him and they had reacted very angrily. He says 'It's the most forbidden topic in the house I'm not allowed to say anything... They know, but that's it, they don't want to know'. Part of the Clayton's dilemma was that his parents used money as a resource for controlling his sexuality:

Clayton: They said to me that if I still am sleeping with guys then I can get out of the house and pay me own way at university...

DT: Do you still have sex with guys then?

Clayton: Fuck yeah! [laughs] I don't tell 'em [laughs]. (Interview November 1998)

For both Tim and Paul there was a transfer of secrets from the child to the parents, with Tim and Paul's conundrum about who to tell, how and when becoming that of their mothers and fathers. For Clayton, the reaction of his parents has led to a situation in which secrets and lies continue. Clayton's deception of his parents is reminiscent of President Clinton's 'solution' to the problem of gays in the military. 'Don't ask, don't tell' seems to be the rule here, with all its attendant and circuitous ways of avoiding knowing about someone's life. As can be seen in these accounts, how parents respond to news about their child's sexuality varies, depending on a range of factors including religion, support networks, parental relationships with the child and others in the family. There are as many

permutations of family response as there are disclosures, although these can be broadly condensed into a few general categories: gradual acceptance, silent acceptance, denial or rejection.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the experiences of queer (but mainly gay male) students of going to university and coming out to parents. The stories these young people tell illustrate vividly how the heteronormativity of universities is as pervasive as the injunction to be heterosexually asexual in primary schools and heterosexually exploratory in secondary schools, but only in ways that conform to the norm and not in the context of formal schooling. Although the focus of my own research is on gay men, it has much to tell us about the policing of heterosexuality and of the sexualities of other queer students.

One striking aspect of student experiences is the importance of the geographies of their lives, both in the sense of the physical locations of their universities and their living space, and also in the more metaphorical sense of the location of their social positions within their families and in the wider society. The resourcefulness with which young queer students, both in my study and in those of other researchers, negotiated the complex and difficult spaces they must occupy and traverse is remarkable. That they must continue to do so without much support from the institutions in which they are (supposedly) being educated is shameful. Numerous gaps remain in our knowledge. We do not yet know enough, for example, about how other differences that make a difference (like gender, ethnicity, nation and disability) shape and are shaped by developing sexual identities.

What we do know, and what has been shown here, is that colleges and universities are sites of and for compulsory heterosexuality, where an often narrow version of heterosexuality is performed and where gendered and sexual differences are marginalised. The halls of residence, the student bars and other social spaces are often threateningly straight. Queer students may well discover that they have left the confining spaces of their secondary schools only to

realise that similar agendas of compulsory heterosexuality continue to constrict their lives in higher education.

Notes

1. Matthew Shepard, a student at the University of Wyoming, was abducted on October 6 1998 by two men, taken out into the prairie, beaten up, tied to a fence and left to die. The events are described by CNN as follows:

Matthew Shepard was lured out of a Laramie bar on October 7, 1998 – allegedly because he was gay – driven to a remote prairie, tied to a fence, pistol-whipped into unconsciousness and left for dead in freezing temperatures.

A bicyclist who found Shepard, nearly hidden in the sagebrush, 18 hours later thought at first the 5-foot-2, 105 pound University of Wyoming freshman was a scarecrow.

Taken to a hospital, Shepard never regained consciousness and died of massive head wounds on October 12, 1998. (CNN, 1999)

2. It is important, in this context, to take account of Kate Chedzoy's (1999) insistence that even where the narrative is of leaving home and coming out on going to university, the story is not one of heroic release or happy-ever-after queer life. This is true for other students as well and may be equally acute for those heterosexual women whose sexuality is strictly controlled by their parents while they remain at home. Equally, there are students who have other urgent reasons (for example living in abusive households) for wanting to leave home. For all students, staying at home until they are in their twenties provides a very different experience of university than that of students who are able to leave home. Anecdotal evidence from university lecturers suggests that those staying at home are liable to be less mature than those who must look after themselves – but this has not, to our knowledge, been the subject of research.
4. It should be noted that young men between the ages of 16 and 25 are the most likely group to be assaulted outside the home. This is because the most common form of violence outside the home is male on male (Stanko *et al.* 2002) and because women are more likely to alter their behaviour if they can in order to avoid violence outside the home.
5. KOLA does not exist in this form any more. Some reviews of the book containing the discussion (Epstein 1994a) enquired what KOLA stands for. However, it was not an acronym. It is unclear why the group adopted this name.

Conclusion: Making a difference

We hope that this book has made visible the persistence (and insistence) with which normative versions of heterosexuality are institutionalised within schools and universities – in particular the exclusionary and often punitive effects on those who are either queer or for whom heterosexuality takes a relatively unacceptable form. We have argued that there is a one narrowly defined way of being in the world that is always already present, promoted, and policed within formal education. Education is not just about learning subjects. It is also about learning how to be heterosexually 'normal', that is, monogamous, married, with one's own biological children. The quotes drawn from the book and threaded through this conclusion all, in one way or another, illustrate some of the problems which are caused by the institutionalisation of the particular version of heterosexuality dominant in anglophone countries.

Three quotes from children (two of them from Cherry) open up the argument:

Nadine: But it's like a love triangle in our school. Sally fancies Ben, Ben fancies Anne, Anne fancies Sunil, Sunil fancies me, and then Sally as well. But I don't fancy anyone in the class . . . (Chapter 2)

Cherry: Erm, yeah, rape you, or they force you to do something that you didn't want to do or something. And there's another, I want to say, it's if I would be scared about, I bet that most, not most, men, but some men in this world, most of them would be like, this wife has been through about three husbands and then she finally found

someone, and then they're okay, like, for a couple of months, and then it starts to go wrong, like, he starts hitting her and hitting her children and, like, being really horrible, like punching them, throwing them hitting with anything in the hand, or something like that. I would be something like that as well . . .

Cherry: Katherine, if you're about twelve or thirteen, and you haven't had your period, and you had sexual intercourse, could you die from not having your period and having sex? (Chapter 3)

Nadine demonstrates the imperative of having to 'fancy' someone of the opposite sex at the same time as she shows her own agency in not fancying anyone. Her agency in this regard, however, places her outside the framework of the boy/girl dynamic through which her classmates constitute themselves in gendered terms. It is not clear whether she will be able to maintain both her stance of not fancying anyone and also her position within her own friendship group. As we have shown, friendship is frequently solidified and produced for young children through particular discourses of heterosexuality. The two quotes from Cherry, taken from chapter three, show poignantly how she has suffered, both through her mother's repeated, but unsuccessful, attempts to create the required normative family group, and through the abuses enabled by the gendered power relations that characterise normative heterosexuality. Crucially, as discussed in that chapter, her raising of these uncomfortable issues is not allowed to become central and her hurts are ignored because the object of the lesson is to endorse marriage and normative heterosexuality. Thus Cherry's wounds remain hers alone and she is positioned as the exception that proves the rule of happy heterosexuality.

Our examples show that the exclusion of those who do not conform to normative heterosexuality and heterosexual gender norms occurs throughout the educational system, from primary school to university. The quote below, drawn from Marigold Rogers (1994) and used in chapter four, reveals how complete the invisibility of non-heterosexual ways of being can be in secondary schools.

Rogers quotes one of the young lesbians she interviewed, talking about the only time when homosexuality was mentioned in the course of her schooling:

. . . and there is a theory that homosexuality', and I perked up and listened, 'has something to do with the imbalance of hormones.' Then she moved on and I thought, 'Wow! I've been mentioned.' (Rogers 1994: 40, cited in chapter four)

This young woman finds her sexuality reduced to an 'imbalance of hormones', and yet is delighted to have her existence acknowledged, albeit in such a pathologised way. Her 'Wow, I've been mentioned' in this context is an amazing testament to the fact that she has been excluded throughout her school career. Equally, Dega's heartfelt 'They won't understand *anything*' in the following quotation shows how far schools would have to go to recognise versions of heterosexuality that do not fit the easy norm:

Dega: I didn't tell them because I didn't want to tell them because they think it's so strange – they will think it's strange.

SOE: They won't understand?

Dega: [emphatic] They won't understand *anything*! (Chapter 5)

These quotes from Rogers' informant and from Dega show, on the one hand, how desperately these young women wish to be recognised for the people they are or feel themselves to be and identify themselves as. On the other hand, they point to the futility of their desire to be seen and listened to in their own school contexts. And even where, as in Dega's case, the 'mistr' finds someone they can talk to, there is a zoning of this talk which means that it is unlikely to spill over into any possibility of actually changing the school.

There is also a kind of despair in the quote drawn from chapter six:

Paul: In psychology where you have a professional obligation not to be homophobic you'd hear guys in classes saying this positively and that supportingly, but you'd know that when they got outside or in the pub they would definitely slag gay people off. I would hear them at times with this about not

being too 'politically correct' so it was alright to make jokes ... I've just given up on them and think that I wouldn't want to let these people loose where they could influence others. No way! But they will of course; these are the next generation of counsellors and clinicians to set up couches and coming to a town near you. It's not good, man! (Chapter 6)

The professional obligation of psychologists not to be homophobic is only recent and has not become embedded in the curriculum or in the practices of student (or, indeed, practising) psychologists. Thus Paul must negotiate heterosexism, even homophobia, in his classes and his social interactions with his fellow-students. Similarly, Steve is placed in the invidious position of having to listen constantly to (hetero)sex talk:

We [straight friends living near him – some from university] hang around talking and looking for things to do. It gets very frustrating as we talk about who we, or they, *they* talk about who they are having sex with or who they want to have sex with and you so know that nothing is going to happen. When I could be out at the bars getting it every night if I wanted instead of hanging around with them... (Steve, in chapter 7)

Steve must work with and appear to respond positively to the heterosexual imperative in order to succeed as a student, while wishing, *sotto voce*, that he could be somewhere else, somewhere more gay-friendly, somewhere more comfortable.

We have, in this book, shown the tremendous amount of work that children and young people, regardless of their own sexual identifications, must do in dealing with, resisting, coming to terms with, negotiating or adopting normative versions of heterosexuality. It does not matter who you are, or who you wish to be, you will have to be/come that person within the frame of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990). Normative heterosexuality is thus a critical shaper of identities, along with other differences that make a difference (like gender, race, class, nation, disability and so on). People may make themselves but they do so in conditions not of their own choosing (Marx 1963), and are constrained by the insistent demands of compulsory heterosexuality. Furthermore, all the children and young

people we have quoted here would/could be better or happier or more successful were they freed from these constraints.

It can be extremely difficult for teachers, administrators, policy makers and parents to see how embedded is this narrow version of heterosexuality in the system and the damage it can and does do to a whole range of learners. It is not only those like the young people we have discussed who are harmed. It is also, for example, those 'underachieving' boys who dare not present themselves as studious for fear of being labelled gay (Epstein 1998). Similarly, young women, especially if they are working class, who become (or even choose to become) pregnant, suffer from the stigmatisation of their 'precocious' sexuality. For these young women, in particular, 'too early' heterosexual activity usually sees the end of their education.

Similarly Prendergast *et al.* (2002) have argued that for lesbian and gay youth, early experiences on the commercial gay scene can, for some, have a deleterious effect on their school experience and cause some to leave their family homes. At the other end of the 'achievement spectrum' may be young people who bury themselves in their school/university work specifically in order to distance themselves from the compulsoriness of normative heterosexuality (Prendergast *et al.* 2002). For such young people, apparent success may be achieved at the cost of developing significant anxiety about this achievement (Walkerline *et al.* 2001) and also at the cost of being positioned as in various ways deviant. Thus, high-achieving young women may be regarded as 'frigid', 'drags' rather than 'slags' (Lees 1986; 1993), and the young men may find themselves categorised as gay or, if not gay, as (heterosexually) unattractive 'nerdy' boys. In these ways, as we have shown, compulsory heterosexuality shapes who you can be academically as well as sexually, though not in straightforward or simple ways.

We do not intend to convey doom and gloom. The many different ways of being and the very inventiveness of young people in educational institutions in negotiating and coping with compulsory heterosexuality give us cause for hope. We believe that the process of our research and what we have seen in schools and universities offers a chance to develop better ways of organising education

and of teaching about sexuality (in both formal and informal curricula). Paradoxically, the very failure of their schools to include adequately the Somali girls discussed in chapter five indicates something of the way forward. If serious attempts are to be made to include them, it is clear from our work that this cannot be done without sharing a critique of normative heterosexuality with all students.

We are suggesting that this could be done by taking sex education out of the realm of personal, social and health education and placing it squarely within social sciences and humanities. We have argued, especially in chapters three and four, that having a primarily biological approach to sex education is as problematic, in its own way, as a narrowly moralistic one. What we are advocating is that young people need to develop a critical approach to sex education, as with education generally.¹ They need to be equipped to analyse and understand the pitfalls of any particular paradigm for understanding sexuality, whether that paradigm is steeped in the biological, the moral, or the constructivist.

It is clear that sex education as currently taught avoids constructivist, cultural and social science based approaches. It aims to get young people to adopt an approved code of sexual behaviour – in the UK, for example, stressing marriage and stable family relationships – rather than allowing students to develop their own understandings. If school students were enabled to study and understand the varied nature of the history and sociology of sexuality not only in the West but also elsewhere, they might not arrive at university still making homophobic comments! They might also be saved from falling prey to common sense prejudices and bigotries.

What might a social science and humanities based sexuality education look like in practice? Let us take the example of Cherry in chapter three. How might Katherine have approached her interventions had she not been committed, as prescribed by government guidelines, to promoting 'marriage and family life' (that is, normative heterosexuality)? First, Katherine would not just pass over Cherry's contribution with a comment like 'okay' or 'right'. She might use the opportunity presented to explain that there is such a

thing as domestic violence and men more usually do it to women than the other way round. Even quite young children could be asked to consider questions of what we mean by violence and this could raise issues about institutionalised power. As chapters two and three show, even young children are very aware of questions of power and can make comments that reveal this. They can deploy their own power as social actors with significant levels of agency, and offer analyses of how power operates in sexualised ways. Second, Katherine would probably be better able to explain that sometimes people (children) are treated badly, that sometimes they do not realise at the time that what is happening is bad and that this is not their fault. This would free her from the implication, or, indeed, implicit assumption, that it is the responsibility of children and women to prevent abuse by saying no. Third, she would be able to talk with the children about the range of family types and relationships that exist, some of which are harmful and others productive, generative and supportive. She might be able to talk with them about the difficulties that can be encountered within familiar relationships and the fact that these are not always disastrous or somebody's fault in any simple way. The familiarity of most children in the early twenty-first century with family break-up (even if they themselves do happen to live with both their parents in happy relationships) means that they would be able to draw on their own experience to understand the wider issues.

In secondary schools, young people could be introduced to more complex work around sexuality. In this context, the opportunity offered by studying, for example, the history and sociology of sexuality at different times and in different places, could serve as a way of making normative heterosexuality strange. This might enable young people to explore their own assumptions, heterosexism, homophobia, racism and so on. A common question in secondary schools, fuelled by media reports of forced marriage and political action to prevent it, is 'what do you think about arranged marriages?'. This question may come from different positions. It may come out of a racist derogation of the customs and cultures of the Other. Alternatively, it might derive from confusion and concern amongst those whose marriages are likely to be arranged.

Without a take on marriage that places the institution under critical scrutiny, neither the racism of the one nor the anxieties of the other can be addressed. It should be possible to invite young people to develop a critical understanding of the social institutions surrounding the making of family in a range of cultures. In other words, what we are recommending is a critical take on socially and historically situated versions of heterosexuality, marriage, and so on. We would argue that such an approach would offer young people the chance of greater control over their own lives.

Often universities do provide spaces for just such study, particularly within the social sciences and humanities, but these are strictly delimited. The teaching of lesbian and gay studies, or queer theory, does not necessarily spill over beyond the boundaries of the classroom itself. Furthermore, conventionally straight students do not normally attend such courses and most subject areas simply do not make space for queer or non-normatively heterosexual students to work within their own subject areas on issues of sexuality. For the majority, then, neither schooling nor university will provide them with a space for critical reflection on normative heterosexuality. Chapters six and seven demonstrate the ways in which heterosexism is institutionalised within the structures, organisation and curriculum of universities. For example, a university may support its women staff and students by providing space for a Women's Group to meet on campus. However, as shown in these chapters, this would not be a solution for queer staff or students who were not (or did not feel able to be) out at the university. Thus a support group for queer members of the university would need a different kind of strategy, such as enabling them to rent rooms in pubs, clubs or bars for meeting away from the university. Unless the university structures itself in such a way as to make this strategy a reality, the inherent difficulty for such groups is solidified. Formal equality, which would lead to queer groups being offered the same facilities as others, do not, in practice, offer any real support.

In these chapters, we can see how the students in David's project frequently felt impelled to take on the question of sexuality as a kind of personal battle or responsibility. In some ways, this is comparable to the position of ethnic minority students who feel that

they must be active in challenging the racism in their institutions. The difference is that queer students will frequently lack support at home and, as shown in this book, may well not be out to their parents, or be at risk of being expelled from their homes if they do come out to their family. Accordingly, queer undergraduates may well find themselves struggling to negotiate, combat or live with heterosexism and homophobia in every aspect of their daily lives, whether at home, in paid work or at university. The situation at the university will have the further effect of making it more difficult for them to integrate fully into university life or gain maximum benefit from attending university.

Thus we can see that, while universities may offer a somewhat liberal space for queer sexualities, they are also spaces which place even greater demands on students than schools do to fulfil fantasies of heterosexual coupling and romance. The attainment of formal adulthood carries with it expectations of impending 'settling down' redolent of the heterosexual imperative. This is problematic not only for queer students but, as we have argued throughout the book, for those students who do not wish, for whatever reason, to be shaped in this particular mould.

The role of policy is important to changing schools and universities. The existence of equal opportunities policies of all kinds make it possible for people in marginalised or stigmatised groups to seek redress against discrimination. Without policy, demands for change cannot succeed and, indeed, the making of policy can itself serve as a catalyst for change (see, for example, Arora and Duncan 1986; Epstein 1993; Gaine 1987; 1996). However, as argued in chapter six, policy cannot and does not in itself change anything (see also, Deacon *et al.* 1999). Furthermore, school policies are often written in language and stored in places that are inaccessible to young people. At best, the existence of policies can make spaces for marginalised groups. At worst, they are not worth the paper they are written on. Moreover, we have never seen a policy that challenges, in any way, the centrality or dominance of normative heterosexuality.

Children, young people and adults who study, teach and work in other ways (for example as dinner supervisors, administrators, cleaners) in educational institutions, make their identities within discursive frameworks and structures that do not allow easy resistance to compulsory versions of heterosexuality. Those who spend a good part of their everyday lives in educational institutions, be it as learners, educators or other workers, shape their social identities within the context of the institutionalisation of heterosexuality in those institutions. Just as surely as the dominance of whiteness in anglophone countries frames constructions of race, ethnicity, gender and nation, so too does the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990) constrain constructions of sexuality, gender, race and so on. As we have shown, the ways this happens are complex, but a reflexive analysis of schools and universities by those who inhabit them is an urgent necessity.

Note

1. We are indebted, here, to the work of scholars in critical pedagogy generally and, more particularly, in critical literacy (for example, Freire (1996/1972), Freire and Macedo (1987), Gale *et al.* (2000), Rowan *et al.* (2001))

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Index

- Britzman, Deborah 51, 70, 80, 108
- Carlson, Dennis 62, 71, 80
- childhood innocence 15, 17, 18, 48, 101
- Children's Relationship Cultures* 21, 25, 26, 31, 34
- Connell, Bob 44, 102
- Davies, Bronwyn 20, 26, 30
- DfEE, *see* DfES
- DfES 1, 34, 46, 63; and policy on homophobic bullying 63, 66
- Eyre, Linda 110, 111, 122
- Fine, Michelle 52-4
- Foucault, Michel 4-7, 9, 67, 80
- heterosexist violence 113, 114
- heterosexuality
- assumptions about relationships 41, 42, 55
 - normative 15, 77, 99, 141; in universities 101, 102, 109, 113
 - policed through friendships 65, 84
 - heterosexualization 6, 10
 - and medical studies 114
 - and play 20
 - and teacher training 114
 - and sex education 36, 47
- Hey, Valerie 65, 84
- homophobia
- as consolidation of heterosexual masculinity 63, 64, 69
 - as directed to non-queer boys 63, 64
 - in schools 52-6
 - in universities 108, 109, 112, 113, 124
 - homosexuality
 - legal implications in universities 115
 - linked to HIV and AIDS 55, 58, 59, 110, 111
 - teaching about it in schools 57-8
- identity
- and heterosexual discourses 16
 - and mind-body split 71, 62, 80, 81
 - and play 21
 - as a learner and sexual subject 71, 72, 80, 83, 84, 99, 144, 145
- Kehily, Mary Jane 22, 63, 64
- Khayat, Didi 106, 107
- lesbian and gay studies courses in higher education 104, 105, 133
- LGBT Societies in universities 127, 133
- Mac an Ghail, Máirtín 55, 56, 93
- Nayak, Anoop 21, 63, 64

SILENCED sexualities IN SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

Debbie Epstein, Sarah O'Flynn and David Telford



Cover illustration: Franziska Ewart

This is the first book to deal with sexuality in all phases of formal education, from early years to university. It presents a review of the literature across the phases and combines it with original research by each author. It examines the naturalisation of heterosexuality in educational settings and the playing out of sexualities in relation to other differences that make a difference, exploring the interrelations of sexuality, dis/ability, race, class and gender. A key theme is the way sexualities are manufactured in and by schools and universities. The individually written chapters, 'wrapped' in the collaboratively written introduction and conclusion, deal with:

- the primary phase: the informal curriculum of classroom and playground
- sex education and compulsory heterosexuality in primary schools
- emergent sexualities in secondary schools
- disability, achievement, market and sexuality
- post-compulsory education; post-compulsory heterosexuality – transitions to university
- the hidden curriculum of higher education: possibilities, locations and the gay scene

This book makes a valuable and original contribution to the literature on equality – or inequality – of opportunity and on sexuality. It will interest researchers, academics and teachers.

Debbie Epstein is Professor of Education at Goldsmiths College and author of *Changing Classroom Cultures*. Sarah O'Flynn teaches vulnerable young people in the London Borough of Merton. David Telford teaches in the Department of Education, Deakin University.

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