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Finding and Creating Possibility: Reading in the Lives of Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer Young Women

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Finding and Creating Possibility:
Reading in the lives of lesbian, bisexual and queer young women

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(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

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in
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Abstract

This study examines the voluntary reading practices of self-identified lesbian, bisexual and queer young women between the ages of 18 and 23 years. The practices associated with voluntary reading including finding, borrowing, buying, reading, sharing and talking about texts, especially those that fall into the genre of lesbian and gay literature, comprise the central theme of this study. Data collection and analysis were guided by principles of qualitative, interpretivist inquiry. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with seventeen young women in London and Toronto, Ontario. Three main themes related to reading emerged from analysis of interview transcripts. The first of these is an interrogation of the metaphor of reading as escape shown to be an inadequate description of the power of reading to give comfort through access to representations of lesbian, bisexual and queer female experience. The second major theme concerns the role of reading for possibility encompassing a rejection of modernist coming out narratives and an emotional engagement with memorable textual characters. The third theme suggests that reading functions as a way to engage with others augmenting social participation in larger communities. Modes of access to reading materials are also discussed. Two themes related to Internet use emerged: the Internet as a searching tool, and the Internet as a site of access to alternative digital texts. Libraries are a significant source of reading materials and thus support personal identity maintenance through the circulation of published materials containing lesbian, gay and queer representations, but libraries do little to augment social connectedness amongst participants. Bookstores play an important role in the reading accounts of participants, primarily as a source of information about lesbian and gay literature. Feminist and gay bookstores may constitute a ground for politically motivated consumption that contributes to the legitimation of alternative sexual identities. Implications for library services are also discussed.

Key words: lesbian and queer young women, voluntary reading, public libraries, bookstores, qualitative research

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Chapter One – Introduction:
Conceptual Influences and Overview

"I don't think it's asking too much of reading to become the many stories for our lives."

–Diane, 21 years

When Diane, one of the participants in this study, spoke these words near the close of our interview, we both fell silent. For me, it was the shock of recognition to hear someone else articulate an experience of reading with such simple explanatory force. I knew in that moment that I wanted Diane's words to open this thesis. If the quote can be permitted to represent the voices of my participants, it gives proper attention to the generosity and wisdom of the seventeen young women who agreed not only to give over a significant portion of their day to talk to me about reading but also allowed me to weave into our conversations the varied threads of our self-declared lesbian, queer and bisexual identities.

The practices associated with voluntary reading including finding, borrowing, buying, reading, sharing and talking about texts, especially those that fall into the genre of lesbian and gay literature, comprise the central theme of this study. The research problematic is reading not identity. I sought to explore the place of reading in the lives of young women who claimed alternative sexualities. I did this, not as an examination of the construction or composition of postmodern lesbian, queer and bisexual identities or subjectivities, but rather, as an investigation into the power of reading, the act of reading itself, to change lives.

There is a political motivation for this inquiry as well, one which would privilege the articulation of a certain set of voices, largely unheard in reading scholarship and in Library and Information Science (LIS), that of lesbian, queer and bisexual young women. In many of the studies of young women reading that attend to discourses of gender and

patriarchy, there is an unspoken, unstated assumption that all readers are heterosexual. In this introduction I present the imbricated conceptual influences of this study: feminist research into reading that privileges the voices of women and girls and does so with a commitment to transparency and reflexivity; hermeneutic studies of reading that explore the co-emergence of meaning with identity; and reception and reader-response studies that investigate the role of various media in the lives of their users, readers, viewers, listeners.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SEXUAL IDENTITY

The underlying assumptions about sexuality in this study are defined by an indeterminate view of identity drawn from postmodernist critique, queer theory and gay/lesbian studies (see Kitzinger 1987; Seidman and Richardson 2002; Sullivan 2003; Weeks 2000):

- the deconstruction of the unitary, essentialist self;
- social construction of identities;
- performativity in the enactment of identity;
- non-binarist fluidity to category of identity.

These assumptions underpin concepts of sexuality and identity, but this study should not be construed as a project of queer theorizing. My concern here falls more accurately into the field of empirical studies that examine the everyday lives of people who claim lesbian and gay identities (see Seidman and Richardson 2002; Weston 1998). This is not to declare an allegiance to constructions of essentialist and binarist understandings of sexuality and sexual identity, nor is it to signify a rejection of queer studies. The loci of analysis in this inquiry are the practices of reading and the lived experiences of engagement with (mostly) printed texts – in other words, what happens when people read.

Identity in this study is most usefully conceived of as "experience," rather than as a static, researchable category of person. Cultural theorist Sally Munt takes this further, developing a notion of intersecting plates as a metaphor for the shifting ground of a "pluralistic, multivalent self" (Munt 1998, 2). Following from this metaphor, then, the expression of lesbian and queer sexualities by the participants in this study should not be read as essentialized or stable identities, but rather as an understanding of self that shifts and recombines with other notions of self in dynamic relationships.

Socio-linguist James Paul Gee (1996) offers another metaphor for identity in his formulation of "identity kits" or ways of seeing, acting, believing, thinking and speaking that make it possible for us to recognize and be recognized by others. He writes:

> I use the term "identity" (or, to be specific, "socially-situated identity") for the multiple identities we take on in different practices and contexts and would use the term "core identity" for whatever continuous and relatively "fixed" sense of self underlies our contextually shifting multiple identities" (Gee 1999, 39).

He does not posit an essentialized self, but does acknowledge that in our interactions with others we situate ourselves and are situated by others along recognizable and characteristic ways of "acting-interacting-feeling-emoting-valuing-gesturing-posturing-dressing-thinking-believing-knowing-speaking-listening," and also in Gee's framework, by ways of reading and writing too (1999, 38; 2001). Gee's conceptualization relates closely to Munt's intersecting plates, and becomes particularly cogent in a study of lesbian and queer women searching for representations of alternative sexualities in the texts that they choose to read. All of the readers I interviewed resisted binarist understandings of sexuality and many of them balked at the strictures of claiming an identity label at all. Notwithstanding their reluctance to commit to a static category, most did express a desire to encounter *something* in the texts that they read that represented lesbian, queer and bisexual experience. Munt describes this as a process of identification

based on an "amalgam of experience and desire" that "produces a sense of belonging, a sense of 'we'" (1998, 5).

The notion of a self in process quite specifically lies at the centre of this study: my participants are assumed to be constantly defining and re-defining what it means to claim lesbian, queer or bisexual identities through their practices of everyday reading. Steven Seidman's definition of sexual identity encompasses the destabilization of essentialist categories and the self in process. He writes, "Identities refer to the way we think of ourselves and the self image we publicly project…we fashion identities by drawing on a culture that already associates identities with certain behaviors, places and things" (Seidman 2002, 9). Sexual identity, then, is a social construct by way of self-fashioning that occurs through relations with cultural texts and contexts.

Based on these ideas the process of identifying as lesbian, gay, queer or bisexual is assumed to be unstable, shifting and relational, also reflecting concepts of class, gender, ethnicity and race (Gamson 2000; Raymond 1994). The participants in this study are not assumed to belong to a monolithic, unchanging, homogeneous population called "gay and lesbian youth" or even "lesbian and queer young women," but rather are seen to be in individual and collective processes of constructing and reconstructing their identities.

Lesbian and Queer Young Women

I focus on the reading experiences of young women between the ages of 18 and 23 who self-identified as lesbian or queer. The specific usage of these terms and others are described below. Although I considered including the perspectives of young men in the study as well, I decided to limit participation to women for two reasons: 1) coming to terms with an alternative sexuality as a young woman is an experience that I shared with my participants, thus allowing for an unique affinity in our research relationship; and 2) studies show that young women's consumption of texts is a vital part of their

adolescence, especially in relation to their negotiation of personal and social identities (see below).

The participants in this study are also defined by their membership in a specific "historical age cohort" of young people negotiating their identities as lesbian and gay (Herdt and Boxer 1993, 1). Gay, lesbian, queer and bisexual youth who are coming of age in the early years of the twenty-first century, with visible agencies of support, have categorically different experiences than the generations that came before them. Herdt and Boxer (1993, 9) have defined four previous historical age cohorts for gay and lesbian youth: 1) 1910: coming of age after World War I; 2) 1940: coming of age during/after World War II; 3) 1969: coming of age after the Stonewall Riots and Gay Activism; and 4) 1983: coming of age in the era of AIDS. A fifth and current cohort can be described as coming of age in an era of increased visibility and support for gays and lesbians (Anderson 1995; Herdt and Boxer 1993; Plummer 1989; Schneider 1989). My assumption was that since my participants belonged to this last cohort that access to youth participants might be easier now than it would have been in the past. Additionally, this study was conducted in Ontario, Canada from November 2001 to February 2003, a time of organized political activism and cautious optimism that lesbians and gays would be fully protected and supported under federal legislation. The general age cohort trend together with the more open political climate led to the hope that there might be a population of young people who would be less constrained by damaging issues of private recognition and public disclosure of their alternative sexualities and more likely to come forward to talk about their lives.

As Kivel and Kleiber (2000) discuss in their study of leisure activities in the context of identity formation of lesbian and gay youth, the bulk of research about lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer youth has focussed on "coming-out" issues (Herdt and Boxer 1993; Hetrick and Martin 1987; 1988) and pathological issues such as suicide, substance abuse and unsafe sex (Kourany 1987; Morris, Zavisca and Dean, 1995; Remafedi 1999). Youth

sexual identity has also been researched in a longstanding developmental tradition (Cass 1979; Coleman 1989; Savin-Williams and Rodriguez 1993; Schneider 1989; Troiden 1989). With this inquiry I depart from this tradition of study of youth sexualities, as I was less concerned with the effects of recognizing and establishing a lesbian or queer identity and more interested in the "effects" of reading on the maintenance or ongoing negotiation of declared identities, and conversely on how "identity matters" (McCarthey and Moje 2002) in the context of reading.

Terms of Identity used in this Thesis

The linguistically awkward phrase "lesbian, queer and bisexual" is used throughout this thesis as an attempt to honour the ways in which its participants described their sexualities. Each participant was asked during our interviews to tell me how she would identify if she had to describe her sexual identity or sexual orientation. Most participants indicated that "queer" was their preferred term, although some participants identified only as lesbian or as bisexual. For the sake of clarity I do not use the term "queer" to refer to my participants unless this was how they referred to themselves. When I refer to participants more generally I use the "lesbian, queer and bisexual" construction.
When I refer to texts and genres of literature such as lesbian and gay literature, I have mostly dispensed with the adjective "queer," as in this case, participants tended to describe books belonging to this genre without using it themselves – they referred to "lesbian books" or "gay books" but rarely "queer books." If they did explicitly refer to a text as queer, I was faithful to their deployment of the term.

On the few occasions that I use the acronym LGBTQ, it reflects actual usage by an organization or individual. I choose not to deploy LGBTQ as a "catch-all" phrase for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual and queer youth in an attempt to resist reinscribing monolithic conceptions of identity, seen also in my use of the plural terms "identities" and "sexualities." In an attempt to shift away from pathologizing, clinicalist

terminology, when writing of my participants I also reject the use of the word "homosexual" with its various symbolic statuses as deviance, sickness and evil (Herdt and Boxer 1993, 89-90).

READING AND READERS

> [W]e need more scholarship on how young people make sense of and interact with one another around their sexual orientations and identities as well as on how their reading and writing practices might support or constrain their developing identities as sexual beings (Moje and MuQaribu 2003).

This call for scholarship was made in November 2003 and, as it suggests, there has been little research to date that considers the relationships between reading practices and the cultural and social contexts in which youth negotiate alternative sexualities. In the following section I present the various strands of reading research that helped to shape my understanding of reading and how it relates to situated identities. The next section is a survey of various fields of research that informed this, but it should be noted that pertinent reviews of the various literatures, including the primary fields of reading scholarship and LIS research, are included throughout this thesis.

Studies of Literacy Practices of Young People

There has been remarkably little research into the literacy practices of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer young people. In recent work, Mollie Blackburn (2002; 2003) found that reading and writing activities of LGBTQ youth associated with a youth-run community centre worked both to challenge and replicate relations of power. She examined reading and writing activities specific to a LGBTQ youth group and speakers' bureau using a theoretical synthesis of the concepts of literary events (occasions of

reading and writing), literacy practices (a series of literacy events) and literacy performances (articulation of social structures through codes and critiques of power), thus positioning her work within an emergent field of critical literacy scholarship. Reading and writing activities helped these young people resist and reject heterosexist discourses that circulated in the tense domains of secondary schooling but, at the same time, the effects of these discourses determined positions of vulnerability, exclusion, and isolation even in the supportive setting of the LGBTQ center.

Other critical literacy studies also examine the relationships between reading and writing practices and identity processes, although none look specifically at alternative sexualities. A central project of critical literacy research is the disruption of normative, mainstream, stereotypical representations found in schooled literacies and sanctioned texts by looking at the reading and writing practices of youth (and others) that might resist such discourses (Christian-Smith 1993; Lankshear and McLaren 1993). For example, Elizabeth Moje spent three years with five gang-connected youth to study how they used unsanctioned literacy practices such as writing graffiti (a complex system of graphic and alphabetic symbols) and music lyrics to "claim a space, construct an identity, and take a social position in their worlds" (2000, 651). Other researchers use the role of popular forms of cultural texts to examine the ways in which the literacy practices associated with them situate the young people who read them in both school and out-of-school contexts. In attempts to expand what counts as reading and writing, studies have looked at comics, manga (Japanese comic books), television based fanfictions, independently produced zines, web site creation, gaming, music and movies (Alvermann and Heron 2001; Bitz 2004; Chandler-Olcott and Mahar 2003; Finders 2000; Mackey 2002). Critical literacy studies and advocates for the multiple literacies of young people all have in common a core respect for the literacy choices, preferences and habits of young people. Findings and theories include accounts of empirical research into youth's actual engagement with texts that range from ephemera such as class notes and emails, to alternative and

discounted forms such as graffiti and rap lyrics, to self-initiated projects like zines and gaming narratives, to conventional books such as romance and horror novels.

Studies of Girls and Women Reading

In many ways, Janice Radway's (1991/1984) study of adult female readers of romance novels ignited the spark for this inquiry. The deep attention given to the perspectives of her participants brought a novel and respectful contribution to the studies of female readers. Rather than theorizing the social effects from the "top down," Radway's ethnography provided a synthesis of empirical evidence, theories of capitalist cultural production, and feminist research methodologies, building her theory from what readers actually said and from what she was able to witness and observe. She demonstrated the complexities involved when others are targeted as certain kinds of readers by producers and distributors of reading materials, by academics who study reading and readers, and by readers themselves as they talk and think about reading. In her study, to be a reader, to read, engenders a limited freedom that allows women to momentarily escape the gendered class restrictions of their everyday lives as wives and mothers. However, Radway's romance readers' disengagement with hetero-patriarchal systems of oppression through their engagement with romance texts is ultimately impotent in its force to establish material changes in the conditions of their lives. This is a theme that has been explored in some depth in subsequent studies of girls reading popular cultural texts.

Finders (1997) and Cherland (1994) both investigated the everyday literacies of young women in both school and out-of-school contexts, focussing on traditional reading of popular novels and magazines, but also on more mundane literacy activities such as the writing of notes, diaries, letters and poetry. Finders developed two categories for her participants ("tough cookies" and "social queens") that reflect social and economic class and peer relations. Tough cookies, called the "trailer-park girls" by teachers and peers, had rich literate lives outside of school including, shared reading of magazines and novels

with family members and friends and the writing of poetry intended and submitted for publication. These girls viewed these out-of-school literacy practices as private and unsanctioned and did not share them with peers and teachers, even when doing so would mitigate strict isolating allegiances among peer groups. The social queens (popular girls from middle class families), on the other hand, used reading and writing activities as strategic extensions of peer group alliances and exclusion. In her study, Cherland found that the practice of reading functioned to position young female readers as "good girls," allowing them to perform "femininity" in acceptable ways that ultimately reproduced patriarchal and sexist cultural relations.

Other studies also concerned with the politics of reading examine the limited agency of young female readers of popular romances to resist discourses of femininity and patriarchy (e.g., Christian-Smith 1990, 1993; DeBlase 2003). Some researchers grant more agency to readers, questioning processes of interpellation and the assumption that ideologies are unproblematically read "off" of texts (e.g., Moss 1993). The popularity of romance novels among young women garners academic attention, and for the same reason (and fears) so too does popular magazine reading. Angela McRobbie (1991; 1997) analyzed the interplay of pleasure, consumption, and market economies in her analysis of girls' popular magazines, playing out the relationship between oppressive ideologies and productive agency. In a fine-grained analysis of teen fashion and beauty magazines and their young female readers, informed by feminist sociological perspectives and grounded in empirical research, Dawn Currie (1999) examines the reproduction and construction of gendered subjectivities. Currie (1999, 281) comes to the same conclusion as Radway and Cherland, claiming "the structure of everyday life organizes girls' agency around traditionally feminine activities such as reading and away from non-traditional activities, including politics and sports." It is striking that in all these studies of girls and women reading there is little speculation that at least some of the readers might resist or assimilate ideologies from the standpoint of alternative sexual identities. Another theme running through the studies cited here concerns the tension between the emancipatory

potential of alternative forms and modes of literacy and its suppression by overarching systems of oppression along lines of class, race, ethnicity and gender. This tension comes to bear on this research when I examine what reading offers to lesbian, queer and bisexual young women.

While these studies contribute in important ways to our understandings of how gender operates in reading relationships, they say almost nothing about sexual identity and orientation. I have been able to locate only one substantive study that uses empirical data of first-hand accounts of the reading practices of lesbian (and gay male) youth: Kivel and Kleiber's (2000) research into the influence of leisure contexts on personal and social identities. One of the four themes that emerged from their grounded theory approach was the role of books, comics and magazines, along with visual mass media, sports and music. The authors write that their participants "discussed reading in terms of gathering information about lesbian and gay issues, and they also used reading to find characters with whom they could identify generally and in terms of their sexual identity" (Kivel and Kleiber 2000, 222).

Another common characteristic of most of the studies cited above is a privileging of what "real" readers have to say about reading through techniques of in-depth interviewing, observation and writing exercises. Talk about reading is socially and culturally situated as researchers illustrate the dynamic relations between readers, texts and contexts.

Active Readers

This inquiry is not a study of reader-reception, and thus it does not join the immense body of scholarship that falls under the rubric of reader-response or reader-reception theory. However, this field critically informs my assumptions about reading and readers. The history of reader-response scholarship has been well documented in several reviews of the area that chart its emergence in the 1950s as a resistance to text-oriented and content-dominated literary criticism to its ascendancy in the 1980s (Flynn 1999; Freund

1987; Holland 1998; Leitch 1995; Machor and Goldstein 2001; Radway 1991; Travis 1998). The primary contribution of reader-response theory to this study is its insistence (that varies in degree) on the indeterminacy of the text and its assumption of an active construction of meaning on the part of the reader. Reader-response studies argue against a text-centered literary criticism, denying that the meaning of any text can simply be read off of it, as if the author simply put it there to be retrieved in the exact same way by all readers.

The "Experience" of Reading

Key studies of reader responses to texts tend to rely on expert readers, in fact, often upon theorists' own readings of literary texts. Lynne Pearce (1997) departs from this convention in her analysis of gendered reading of female academics. In addition to her own reflexive accounts of reading various cultural texts (i.e., literary fiction, paintings, film) over time, she also empirically gathered descriptions of textual encounters by other adult feminist readers. She moves toward a theory of what she calls "implicated reading" that outlines the relationships readers create with what she calls "textual others." Pearce makes an important contribution to this inquiry with her privileging of the *relationship* between readers and texts. She writes in her critique of studies by Murray Smith (1995) and Susan Feagin (1996) who purport to study the affective aspects of narrative engagement:

> …[I]t seems to me that both theorists fail to gain access to this next level of investigation precisely because they refuse to conceive of text and readers in terms of what it most obviously is: a *relationship*. In an effort, one presumes, to preserve the self-conscious textuality of their research, they have resisted a model of human interaction drawn from 'real life'…(italics in original; Pearce 1997, 19).

Pearce consciously denies the hermeneutic function of reading in order to explore the affective conditions (and consequences) of reading. Her thoughtful and original consideration of the complexities of readers' relationships with a variety of textual others

came to play an important role in my interpretation of the concept of reading for possibilities (see Chapter 4) in the lives of my participants.

Dennis Sumara (1996) uses a hermeneutical approach in his attempt to uncover the shared, negotiated construction of meanings that emerge through reflexive engagement with texts and with other readers. Sumara uses his own experiences of reading and re-reading literary fiction to put forward a theory of reading that emphasizes its creative and transformative properties: the confluence of text, reader and context creates something new, takes on new properties in a dynamic process of meaning production that holds the capacity to change both readers and the world. Sumara acknowledges an intellectual debt to Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading first put forward nearly sixty years earlier (1995/1938). Rosenblatt continued to explore the transactional relationship between the reader and the text, theorizing the creation of something "new," what she calls an "evocation," a "poem," "an event in the life of a reader" (Rosenblatt 1994/1978, 16). Like Rosenblatt, Sumara, too, advocates that we take the act of reading as a "complex event" rather than as a "complicated process" (Davis, Sumara, Luce-Kapler 2000). The idea that our encounters with texts signify a powerful relationship or constitute an event or experience that we can then recall and describe to others underpins my approach to this inquiry and my report of it.

Reading as Access to Representation

Five years ago when I was trying to find "a way into" this project, I came across *The Shared Heart*, a book of photographic essays of the words and images of lesbian and gay youth (Mastoon 1997). Below are two passages taken from that book that helped me imagine reading in the lives of lesbian and gay youth as an experience that both opened and foreclosed on the transformative and emancipatory potential held out by reading. The first is written by a self-identified gay male teen, the second by a teenage, lesbian reader.

> I was a boy brimming with desire with no proper way or skills to express it, name it, or even really understand it. Where was a boy to go when he had so many questions in need of being researched? The library. So I went to the library and read. I read Edmund White, Bret Easton Ellis, George Whitmore, James Baldwin. I read them all for the sex…But while I was looking for one thing, I found another: a series of experiences, a set of emotions that echoed my own, beyond sexual desire. I found characters who were lonely like I was, sad like I was, and some characters who were happy living lives I was not even sure were possible…Those written words showed me a community. And in the end that community helped me take my first step in coming out (Mastoon 1997, 68).

> I spent long afternoons in the library between the high stacks that dwarfed me, pulling down one book after another on gay life, lesbian history, Stonewall, politics. I found the most hidden corners of the library, the carrels that fit in the corner so no one could see the reader. I even tucked my legs beneath so nobody could identify my sneakers…I hid, often, in the library and between the stacks…(Mastoon 1997, 80).

Echoing the author of the first quote, these written words showed me that reading could be a powerful experience, a memorable event, in the lives of young people who claimed lesbian and gay identities. These two excerpts functioned as exemplars throughout the formulation of my approach to this inquiry as they renewed my awareness of the desire to find representation of oneself in cultural texts while, at the same time, they forced a continual recognition of the potential and real risks faced by young lesbian and gay people.

Reading as Everyday Life Practice

Another key influence on the initial and ongoing conceptualization of this project came from the writings of the French cultural theorist and historian, Michel de Certeau, in particular the 1984 English translation of *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Two key ideas from Certeau's text frame this study: everyday life is constituted of the *tactics* of individuals and groups in response to the *strategies* of dominant institutions; and in order for us to uncover these strategies and tactics, we must look closely at how people operate as they go about the informal, routine, mundane activities of daily life. Strategies are

recognized or legitimized ways of using and engaging with social institutions that create and define representations of users, audiences, consumers, readers and so on. Strategies issue from what counts as official practice and legitimate identities. Relationships between users and systems are always circumscribed by these strategies (Certeau 1984, xix). Strategies issuing from recognizable sites of social power both create and control when and where "everyday life" can occur. Tactics, on the other hand, signify resistance to categorization and resistance to strategic control, but in Certeau's framework tactics are the "hidden production" of users (1984, xii-xiii).

To Certeau the act of reading is an exemplar of everyday life (Gardiner 2000, 174). Certeau singles out the act of reading for its capacity to permit readers to wander through an imposed system – that of the text, but also the circuit of writing, publishing, distribution and reception of texts that is itself enmeshed in still larger systems. Reading allows readers to escape from the constraints of the text itself, from an authorized or proper reading, and from the limitations imposed by a social milieu (Certeau 1984, 155-56). To investigate reading in this way, we need to look at representations and modes of reading behaviour. These are defined as the "readable space" (the material forms) and the practice of reading itself, the "actuality" of reading (Certeau 1984, 171; Chartier 1992, 50). To Certeau, the production of the reader or that which is created by the reader in the act of reading (like Rosenblatt's evocation and Sumara's complex event) invents something new, something detached from the text's origins, "something unknown in the space organized by [the] capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings" (Certeau 1984, 169). This indefinite plurality of meanings is what removes the power of the text to impose meanings because these meanings are short-lived, and thus the practice of reading itself becomes of critical importance. It is nearly impossible to posit that a specific text or genre of texts has universal meaning, but the act of reading itself can be investigated as a site of meaning construction and meaning production. Informed by my reading of Certeau, I conceived of reading as a tactic that offered the possibilities to lesbian, queer and bisexual young women for resistance to the dominant heterosexist

discourses of mainstream society. The ideas of Michel de Certeau will surface again in final chapter.

LIS and Studies of Reading

In recent years several calls have been made for LIS researchers and educators to pay more attention to reading and readers. Wayne Wiegand has led the advocacy in this field with his persuasive arguments that both libraries and reading are neglected areas of research within LIS due, in part, to disciplinary "blind spots" and "tunnel vision" that continue to privilege the management of information systems and information transfer (1997; 1999; 2003). Using Latour's metaphor, Mari Davis and Cristina Scott (2002) made a similar call, asking LIS researchers to take reading out of the "black-box" of information use. While there has been a general lack of empirical research on the relationships between readers, texts and contexts (perhaps especially as concerns young people), an ongoing analysis by Catherine Ross (1991, 1995, 1999) of nearly two hundred interviews with avid readers played a pivotal role in the conceptualization of this project. Ross privileges what readers say about reading and, by looking at the uses they make of what they read, she expands the notions of what counts as information in the context of readers' everyday lives. In an article that explores the effects of serendipitous information encounters through voluntary reading, Ross (1999) presents six common claims that readers make about the power of reading:

1. an awakening or new perspectives;
2. models for identity;
3. reassurance, comfort, confirmation of self-worth, strength;
4. a connection with others and an awareness of not being alone;
5. courage to make a change;
6. and acceptance.

These categories offered a framework by which to consider the possible ways of thinking about the role that reading might play in the lives of young women negotiating alternative sexualities. Ross's more general claim, that for avid readers reading is a preferred way of finding out about the world, directed me to seek access to lesbian, bisexual and queer young women who also saw themselves as readers. I wanted to know more about how and if reading "transformed" their lives, to know if their unique context for reading conformed to what Ross describes as an assimilation of the text to how they see themselves:

> When the right match is made between reader and story, readers use the text to create a story about themselves. They read themselves into the story and then read the story into their lives, which then becomes a part of them (1999, 349).

Summary of Contributions from Reading Studies

The conceptual influences presented in this overview about what reading is and can be, and how readers read, and what the relationship is between readers, texts and contexts illustrate a certain set of assumptions about reading that underpin this inquiry. These are summarized as:

- reading is an active process of making meaning;
- reading constitutes an event or experience in the lives of readers;
- reading offers a source of representations about certain experiences of human life;
- reading is a socially and culturally situated set of practices;
- reading carries a potentially transformative capacity to change lives.

Beginning with this set of assumptions about reading and the assumptions about identity, discussed earlier, I designed a study to examine the voluntary reading practices of young women negotiating non-mainstream sexualities.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the dearth of empirical research into the cultural practices of lesbian, bisexual and queer young women (and all youth claiming alternative sexualities), I conducted a qualitative, interpretivist inquiry that is also perceived to be exploratory in nature. My aim was to elicit from readers' perspectives a broad sense of the role that reading might play in their lives as they negotiated alternative sexualities. My preliminary research questions, listed below, were designed to open the field to different avenues of inquiry based on an emergent understanding of the central theme.

1. What is the experience of finding yourself (or not) in the texts that you read?
2. What do reading experiences contribute to the lives of lesbian, queer and bisexual young women in the context of their self-declared alternative sexualities?
3. What kinds of texts do these readers read?
4. What are the roles of libraries and bookstores in the reading choices and reading practices of lesbian, bisexual and queer young women?
5. Who are the mediating people and agencies that connect readers to texts?

SIGNIFICANCE

This study contributes to LIS knowledge in several ways. It explores a taken-for-granted and understudied process of making sense through the practice of voluntary reading, a practice that has historically and traditionally been shepherded by librarians of all kinds. It advances our understandings of the meanings that young women create from their reading practice and from various reading materials. It gives voice to a historically silenced group – lesbian, bisexual and queer young women – in stories told from their own perspectives. It contributes to the body of reading research that takes serious account of the voluntary, out-of-school literacy practices of young people. It contributes to public

and school library practice, especially in the areas of readers' services to youth and to marginalized and invisible communities.

THESIS OVERVIEW

In the chapters that follow I delineate three positions that reading takes up in the lives of my participants: reading as escape (Chapter Three); reading for possibility (Chapter Four); and reading for community (Chapter Five). I then examine sites of access as they emerged from the interviews: the place of the Internet (Chapter Six); and the roles of libraries (Chapter Seven) and bookstores (Chapter Eight). In my conclusion, Chapter Nine, I revisit Michel de Certeau's conception of everyday life as an analytical frame for this study; and I suggest further avenues of research as well as implications for library services. In the next chapter I outline the philosophical assumptions that underpin my approach to this study and provide an overview of research methods, data collection and data analysis.

Chapter Two – Methodology and Interpretive Framework: An Interpretivist Qualitative Inquiry

In this section, I justify my research practices for the conduct of this study, a conventional account in most research reports. I also provide an account of those practices that did not work, of decisions regarding methods and analysis that brought trouble to the research process, often times throwing the project into seeming jeopardy, sometimes seriously undermining my confidence to go forward with it. Notwithstanding the rarity of reflexive accounts of research within LIS, noted also by Carey, McKechnie and McKenzie (2001), a conscious reporting of failures and false starts is offered, in part, as evaluative criteria for this project. Conventional elements of methodological considerations and analytical frameworks are also presented: philosophical assumptions, characteristics of research activities, methods of data collection and data analysis, issues of access and ethics, sampling, research instruments and evaluative criteria.

BACKGROUND

During my preliminary literature review, conducted prior to the collection of data, before my commitment to any specific research design, I was drawn to studies that privileged the voices and everyday experiences of youth and other social groups who were often invisible in mainstream academic discourse, not only within Library and Information Studies but in other disciplines as well. I wanted to discover *how* other researchers did research with young people and with research participants who claimed lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer sexual identities and orientations. As discussed in the introduction, it is only within the last decade or so that a small body of research has appeared that goes beyond the tradition of pathologizing that is so prevalent in studies of youth homosexuality. My strong desire to "give voice" to lesbian and gay young people necessitated a research approach that enabled a rich and thick description of the

experience of voluntary reading as presented by participants themselves. From the outset, I was committed to understanding reading practices working from what readers had to say about reading, rather than imposing an *a priori* theory of reading with concomitant hypotheses that would then need to be proved or refuted. In addition to studies of representations of young people (e.g., Adams 1997, Griffin 1993), I also reviewed studies of actual readers (see Chapter 1). The most compelling of these studies relied on qualitative research methods to explore the practice of reading. Radway (1991/1984) interviewed serious readers of the romance genre. Sarland (1991) conducted in-depth interviews with adolescents to gain insight into texts in the domain of popular culture. Sumara (1996) elicited the meaning of shared readings among educators and students through a reflective analysis of interview data. Christian-Smith (1993) interviewed and observed teen readers of romance, and Cherland (1994) interviewed girls and their families about their reading practices. Ross (1987, 1991, 1995, 1999) analyzed interviews with nearly two hundred avid readers. In studies of reading that explore the importance of reading from readers' perspectives, interviewing is the dominant research method. In this study, interviewing and writing protocols became the most viable option for the collection of suitably rich data about the reading practices of lesbian and gay young people. In-depth interviews enable the "thick description of interpretive acts, thick analysis, and thick theorizing" of readers, texts and contexts that reading research requires (Mackey 2003).

My proposed research design (see Rothbauer 2001) was situated within the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, a qualitative and interpretative approach to research widely used in the fields of nursing and education to explore how people interpret their lives and make meaning of their experiences (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 2000; van Manen 1990). My initial research question focused on the concept of "finding oneself in the text," an experience that I imagined would be common, though different, across participants who identified outside of mainstream notions of youth sexuality and who also saw themselves as readers. The original goal of my proposed research was to uncover the common

narrative elements of this unique experience, what is called in a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, the "essence" of a particular experience (van Manen 1990, 10; Budd 1995, 305). After I had conducted three interviews with three participants, all of whom were avid readers and who proudly claimed identities as lesbian or queer, it was clear that the central concept of "finding yourself in the text" was not as meaningful to my participants as it was to me. This, in addition to undermining my proposed research approach, raised troubling questions about the dynamics of social power, as they existed between me, the adult lesbian, "expert" reader and researcher, and the young adult participant. In order to understand the role of reading in the lives of my participants as they interpreted it, from their perspectives, I needed to back away from the notion of "finding oneself" to allow my participants' concepts of reading to emerge, uncontaminated as it were, from my specific conceptualization of the processes at play in their reading accounts.

PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

I rejected the ultimate goal of hermeneutic phenomenology, that is, the recovery of the components of an "essential" experience that can be lifted from the particularities of specific contexts; however, the tenets guiding hermeneutic phenomenology as a naturalistic and interpretative approach to the study of human experience remain at the core of the philosophical assumptions that underpin this study. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) see hermeneutics and what they call "data-oriented methods" of empiricist techniques (such as grounded theory) as compatible and position them as differing levels of interpretation that can have full play within a reflexive research framework. The worldview consistent with hermeneutic phenomenology (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 2000, 6) corresponds to the widely cited axioms of the naturalistic paradigm as put forward by Lincoln and Guba (1985, 36-38). These are summarized as follows:

- theory should be based on interpretations
- interpretations are varied; therefore there is no single reality
- subjectivity is valued
- context is important in explanations
- biases need to be articulated
- ideas evolve and change over time.

These axioms are cited in cultural studies of human experience as well. For example, Paul Willis, author of a now classic study of working class youth, *Learning to Labour* (1981), emphasizes "the importance of listening to people, of respecting their accounts, and of the necessity to attend to sensuous human experience" (cited in Gray 2003, 5-6). However, while hermeneutic phenomenology and cultural studies both make human experience the analytical focus, a cultural studies framework allows us to focus on experience without compressing it into a phenomenon common across all accounts of it. Ann Gray explains a cultural studies approach to experience as follows:

> Experience can be understood as a discursive 'site of articulation' upon and through which subjectivities and identities are shaped and constructed. This involves both how we are positioned in the world and how we reflexively find our place in the world. Thus, experience is not an authentic and original source of our being, but part of the process through which we articulate a sense of identity. (Gray 2003, 25-26).

Experience in this study is seen to be constituted through language and human action, permitting the articulation of relationships among subjects, texts and contexts, rather than the "bringing forth" of essential structures of meaning "exposed" through analyses of experience (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 2000, 5; Smith 1991, 191). I shifted my attention from questions of meaning to the articulation of the experience of reading from the perspectives of young women coming to terms with their alternative sexualities. This is not to say that there is *no meaning* in this articulation – in fact, I argue the opposite – but rather that the meaning in these accounts is grounded in the specificities of each participant's lived experience. My preliminary research question of "What does it mean

to find yourself (or not) in the text?" changed to "What is the experience of finding yourself (or not) in the text?" The shift seems slight, but it solved the problem of what turned out to be a non-salient query at the heart of this project. The change allowed me to ask for and contribute to an articulation about the meaning of reading, without imposing or insisting on that meaning from the outset. Such an approach permitted the renewal of my commitment to the multiplicity of interpretations and intersubjectivity of meaning construction.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY

This study of reading, guided by interpretivist qualitative methodologies, has five dominant characteristics, each of which is elaborated below.

Investigation of Experience as It is Lived

I wanted, as much as possible, to investigate the immediate practices of reading amongst my participants, rather than retrospective abstractions (van Manen 1990, 30-31). Instead of asking participants what they *thought* about the role of reading in their lives, I asked them about this role directly; in fact, this was part of my rationale for exploring the experiences of lesbian *youth*—an attempt to capture the immediacy of their experiences rather than the more common retrospective reflection that is found in most studies of sexuality and the consumption of texts (see Garner 1999; Inness 1997a). My emphasis on lived experience corresponds to the general importance placed on the research participants' frame of reference as a key aspect of qualitative methodology. The authors of a recent qualitative research handbook characterize a chief aim of qualitative research to be the provision of "an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories" (Snape and Spencer 2003, 3).

Experience is Described and Analysed through Writing

This inquiry took its final shape through intersecting processes of qualitative writing. Max van Manen describes the function of writing in interpretative research as a dialectic process that mediates the reflection and action of the researcher (1990, 127). Writing is also a dialectic process between the field texts constructed through data collection activities and the narrative text that conveys the researcher's present understandings (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 2000, 71). Atkinson (1990) describes the relationship between types of research texts as a distinction between "writing down" and "writing up," or a distinction between the data (i.e., transcripts, field notes, method notes, logs of decisions and activities) and the finished product (i.e., thesis, report, article). The central significance of writing in this inquiry corresponds to the next characteristic, the linguisticality of understanding.

Understanding is Expressed and Shared through Language

Underpinning this study is this notion of language as public and shared with a tacit agreement on how it should be used to articulate the experiences under study (Heron 1981, 23-27; Rowan 1981, 133). This is called the linguisticality of understanding where understanding takes place in the medium of language (Gadamer 1989, 384). In other words, whether in conversation or writing, we express our understanding of a certain phenomenon, of ourselves and of our actions in relation to phenomena, through language.

Human Experience has an Historical-Temporal Quality

Language use, research practice, reading habits, identity claims and all interpretive activities encompassed by this project are bound by shared understandings of the historical and temporal aspects of human experience (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 2000). Activities of reading are bound by socio-historical contexts that partially shape its

practice, its constitution and its meanings as explored and presented in this study (Mackey 2002).

Research Design is Emergent

As an interpretive study of human experience, this inquiry is not dominated by "propositional construing" (Heron 1981, 30). Rather, as I attempted to discern patterns that weave together the taken-for-grantedness of voluntary reading of self-selected cultural texts as experienced by my participants, new questions and new directions emerged. This was an exploratory study that took its direction from the material that emerged from my ongoing reading and analysis of what others (including my participants) had to say about the practice of reading. Requirements for this kind of study include flexibility to follow new threads that arise throughout the course of the project (Stebbins 2001). Lincoln and Guba (1985, 208) describe the nature of emergent research design as follows:

> [W]ithin the naturalistic paradigm, designs must be emergent rather than preordinate: because meaning is determined by context…because the existence of multiple realities constrains the development of a design based on only one (the investigator's) construction; because what will be learned…is always dependent on the *interaction* between investigator and context, and the interaction is also not fully predictable; and because the nature of mutual shapings cannot be known until they are witnessed.

RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative research methods and tools were selected that corresponded to the philosophical assumptions that underpin this study and that would allow me to gather data together around the experience of voluntary reading amongst lesbian and queer young women. The primary method of investigation was qualitative interviewing.

The Role of Personal Experience, Stories, Anecdotes, Recollections

The personal experience of the researcher is what brings any inquiry into focus, and the intention of the researcher is the starting point for any research project (van Manen 1990). My position in the world as a person who is engaged in LIS research that is concerned with reading and readers and as a person who identifies as a reader and as a lesbian provided an orientation both for me and for the direction of the inquiry. This study emerged out of my own personal recollection during my late adolescence of "finding myself" in novels that featured lesbian characters and lesbian experience. Some of these stories resonated with me for several years as I negotiated my understanding of what it meant for me to declare a lesbian identity to myself and to others. Conversations with lesbian and gay friends and colleagues suggested that this experience was not unique, and, in fact, several people could remember, with startling precision, the details of lesbian and gay texts that they claimed made a "difference" in their lives by permitting the expression of alternative sexualities, or by providing representations of what it meant to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer.

The lived experience of others should be solicited in salient experiential terms. This involves gathering data through stories, anecdotes and recollections (van Manen 1990, 63). Stories and narratives are one of the ways that people make sense of events and activities that occur in their lives, and often the stories that people tell "come from the experiences that have caught one's imagination, one's attention, and require focus" (Watson 2001, 40). According to van Manen, anecdotes carry the power to render an experience comprehensible. Anecdotes are compelling, can lead others to reflect and involve the listener/reader personally (van Manen 1990, 115-21). For the initial interviews, I used a method of story-telling in which I recounted my personal reading history, highlighting my reading of lesbian and gay texts, in order to illustrate to my participants one kind of reading "experience." As I conducted more interviews and transcribed previous interviews, I would also include reading experiences recounted by

other participants, in this way testing the salience of the described experience and inviting subsequent participants to reflect on their own experiences and those of others.

Interviewing

In-depth interviewing was the primary method of data collection. Following qualitative research guidelines (Ritchie 2003, 36; Lewis 2003, 60), I judged interviews to be the most appropriate way to explore the sensitive topic of nonmainstream sexualities among youth and to investigate its relationship to the everyday practices of voluntary reading. As Kvale writes, "The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (1996, 1). I conducted flexibly structured, in-depth, conversational interviews with seventeen young women between the ages of 18 and 23 years of age, all of whom also self-identified as lesbian or queer.

In an interpretivist framework, analysis begins during the interview itself, with attention paid to what is being said while it is being said (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 2000, 76). The interview encounter is seen to be a "creative and productive part of the research" (Gray 2003, 148), rather than a static narrative record. An active interview technique includes the conscious coding of data as the interview proceeds, also called "indigenous coding" (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Kvale (1996, 4) describes these processes with the use of a metaphor of a traveler whereby the researcher wanders through participants' stories, creating meaning through interpretation. Key features of in-depth interviewing include (Legard, Keegan and Ward 2003, 141-142):

- flexible structure to encourage talk about a specific concern, topic, problematic;
- interactivity to encourage free talk from participants with little interruption from the interviewer;
- use of probes to explore and expand salient themes;

- new ideas, new thoughts are generated for both the researcher and participant about the interview themes and topics.

To focus the interviews on reading and access to reading materials, I used two types of questions: grand-tour type questions (Spradley 1979; Seidman 1998) where I asked participants to reconstruct their movements through various sites of access (i.e., libraries, bookstores, online sites etc.), and questions that elicited more subjective accounts of reading in the context of identity negotiation such as "What was it like for you?" (Seidman 1998, 70). I also asked participants to describe for me the last book they read with lesbian or queer content, or to tell me about their favourite book or the book they would most recommend to others. I found that it was necessary to talk about reading in a general way, for instance, by discussing favourite authors and genres or to discuss childhood reading habits, in order to be able to talk meaningfully about reading that played a role in the context of identity.

I did not use a schedule of interview questions, but I did use "hermeneutic prompts" (van Manen 1990) taken from my own and other participants' insights during other interviews. I maintained a single page of interview "probes" that covered areas that I wanted to be sure to ask participants (see Appendix 3.1). It also functioned as a kind of "security blanket" for the small number of difficult interviews where it was hard to establish rapport with participants. I found that the page of probes allowed me to remain somewhat composed when a participant was reticent or visibly nervous.

The basic interview situation (Kvale 1996, 255) included the following elements:

- welcome and introductions, purchase of coffee, tea, soft drinks if amenable
- letter of information, further explanation about the study and why I was interested
- assurance of confidentiality, informed consent
- request to turn recorder on
- general talk about reading: favourite authors, books, genres; most recent book

- after the fifth interview before any talk about reading habits and preferences, I asked participants to describe for me their interpretation of the phrase "finding yourself in the text" and then moved on to general questions
- questions about modes and methods of access
- use of prompts and probes
- request for a description of the "role that reading plays" in their lives
- specific talk about lesbian and gay literature depending on individual contexts
- final question, variations of "Is there anything there anything that you would like to add?"
- request to turn recorder off
- permission to take notes if talk continued without recorder
- description, explanation and informed consent for protocol writing exercise
- request to contact me with information if desired, and request permission to contact participants if required
- recommendations for reading materials and resources in response to content of interview
- participants thanked

Following Sumara (1996, 2001), I conceived of the interviews as a "holding place" for shared understandings about the role of reading in the lives of my participants. See Appendix 3.2 for the participant consent form.

Protocol Writing

Max van Manen advocates the use of what he calls "protocol writing" to gather firsthand accounts of the experiences of participants (1990, 63-65). Participants were offered an opportunity to provide written descriptions of a meaningful reading experience. They were asked to write about "a book (or books) that made a difference in your life" and were free to interpret this as they pleased. See Appendix 3.3 for the participant consent

form, and Appendix 3.4 for instructions to participants. I anticipated that some participants would not want to complete this exercise, and indeed, despite repeated follow-ups, only four young women submitted protocols. However, these four writing exercises provide rich complementary data that is included in my analysis and report.

Research Diaries and Journals

I recorded all research activities and decisions in a research diary, in addition to "field" notes, interpretations and re-interpretations, concerns with methods, questions and misgivings and theoretical possibilities. I kept notes archived in digitized formats as well as conventional handwritten logs. I also kept a log of questions and ideas that emerged while I transcribed the interviews. I used field notes to reconstruct the appearance and demeanour of my participants and other nonverbal aspects of the interviews, to record my mood and feelings before, during and after the interviews, and to describe interview settings when appropriate. I also used my research diary as a holding place for reflection on all aspects of this research.

A Note about Observation

There is no discernible field in which to conduct an observational or fully ethnographic study into the role of reading in the lives of young lesbians and queer women. I proposed a kind of environmental scanning procedure where I would follow up on participants' accounts of locations where reading behaviour occurred and where reading choices were made. I anticipated that bookstores, libraries and public reading events might provide sites of access to observable data meant to add a layer of richness to my analysis. However, as a demonstration of the emergent nature of this research project, the observation sessions did not add richness to the data, in part because the physical features of reading sites were not significant in the reading accounts offered by my participants. I monitored public library and bookstore spaces, and attended two reading events featuring

prominent lesbian authors. One event was disqualified as a source of research data as one of my participants was also in attendance, and ethical considerations made it impossible for me to continue the observation without her consent. The other reading event was notable for the significant lack of young people in attendance. I was able to identify one reading event that featured the performance of lesbian and gay writing, but at least two of my readers were regular participants. Ultimately, I abandoned observation as a viable research method for this particular study.

Sampling Strategies

Participants were selected for this study for their capacity to provide as a rich a set of data as possible (Gray 2003, 101). Given the impossibility of constructing a sample that is representative of lesbian and queer young women in general, my strategy was to put out several calls for research participants in the hopes of gaining access to a number of young women who saw themselves as readers and who claimed alternative sexual identities. This kind of sampling has been called strategic sampling, purposeful (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 201-2), or purposive sampling (Morse 2004) where participants are selected based on anticipated "theoretical yield." McKechnie (1993, 30-31) further summarizes strategies available to qualitative researchers for the selection of purposive samples including two that were used in this study: convenience sampling where participants were selected because they were conveniently available; and snowball sampling by which one participant suggested other suitable candidates.

I conducted eighteen interviews, seventeen of which were used as data for this study. I conducted one joint interview with two participants but decided not to include it in my analysis, as one woman was significantly older than the upper bracket of my stated age range of 23 years. Based on the qualitative research practice of sampling to redundancy or to a diminishing yield of analytical insights and theoretical yield (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 2000, 12; Lincoln and Guba 1985, 201; Strauss and Corbin 1998), I believe it

would have been possible to cease interviewing after speaking with only half of the number of participants. Each interview yielded a large volume and rich density of information about the role of reading in the life of the participant. As I proceeded with my interviews, however, new questions emerged around the specific place of lesbian and gay literature. When I commenced this project, I had no preconceived hypothesis regarding this kind of reading material as I did not want to assume that participants had even read books with gay content, let alone found them meaningful or helpful in coming to terms with their identity. However, given the framework of this study, and my description of the project to my participants, much of our talk did cluster around the general theme of lesbian and gay literature. I decided to develop consciously this theme in the interviews and did so after the fourth interview by directly asking participants about their awareness and consumption of these kinds of texts. As a result, category sufficiency (Dey 1999, 117) required additional interviews. But after my final interview, I ceased my negotiation of access, removing and retrieving posters and flyers, with the growing conviction that I had saturated my coding categories with the rich material I had already gathered. Qualitative research guidelines posit that sampling should cease at the point when enough data is collected to have a complete description of the experience under study (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 2000, 12; Munhall 1994, 217; Seidman 1998, 47-48), but it is my belief that such a picture of completeness is not possible for this study. My goal was rather more modest in my attempt to present a series of linked interpretations about the role of reading and its practices in the lives of lesbian and queer young women.

Gaining Access to Participants

I used multiple sites to gain access to lesbian and queer young women who also saw themselves as readers. Secondary schools, with the exception of one alternative school, were rejected as sites of access for two reasons: the disclosure of lesbian, bisexual and queer sexual identities and orientations may be too risky in a school setting; and the

notion of reading in an educational setting may be too tied up with proficiency, literacy training and evaluation. My site selection was guided by where reading activities and reading choices occurred and also by where calls for participants might garner the attention of lesbian and queer young women. I used a variety of methods to circulate calls for research participants including the following:

1. digital letters and posters sent electronically to groups and agencies committed to LGBTQ youth;
2. direct (telephone or face-to-face) contact with adult gatekeepers who worked directly with LGBTQ youth, and also with interested librarians;
3. paper flyers and posters mounted at bookstores and community centres serving lesbian and gay patrons, and also at selected public library branches;
4. face-to-face contact with LGBTQ youth attending reading group discussions and, on another occasion, with young people participating in a social advocacy group
5. paid advertising in *Siren*, a newsletter for lesbian and queer women, that circulates throughout southwestern Ontario; and also in the programme for the London Lesbian Film Festival;
6. flyers posted at the offices of LGBTQ undergraduate university and college campus groups in London and Toronto; at the Pride Library at the University of Western Ontario (a research facility for lesbian and gay studies); and at designated displays across the UWO campus (a paid postering service provided by the university);
7. entreaties to friends and colleagues to "put the word out."

No one method worked best to gain access to participants, although it should be noted that I received not one direct response to paid advertisements in *Siren* or in the film festival programme. Some participants saw my call in more than one place, which they indicated increased my legitimacy in their eyes. Snowball sampling led to three additional participants. Many young women noted that they saw my posters or read my emails several weeks, even months, prior to contacting me for more information. Two

women contacted me via email for additional information but did not respond further. Of the seventeen participants whose interviews comprise the main body of data for this inquiry, all responded favourably when I sent them detailed information about research. Once the initial contact was made, meetings and interviews were scheduled soon after, often within the week. All participants contacted me and continued to correspond via email, except one who phoned me at my school office. See Appendices 3.5 and 3.6 for copies of my general letters of information for gatekeepers and participants; Appendix 3.7 for my initial research poster; and Appendix 3.8 for paid advertisements.

Gaining access was time consuming and difficult, an experience confirmed by Carey, McKechnie and McKenzie (2001) in their reflective analysis of their respective modes of access to participants in their research. I worked on gaining access to suitable participants for nineteen months, from November 2001 to May 2003, or from when I received ethics approval from my institution to conduct the study to when I received my final email from the twenty-first young woman to ask about the study. I renewed my calls for participants at some sites, specifically those that served LGBTQ youth. I raised the upper end of the age range from 18 years to 20 years to 23 years, in part, due to repeated requests to participate from readers older than the initially stated age criteria, but also in an attempt to continue to collect data. Once I changed my flyer to ask for participants under the age of 23 years rather than between the ages of 14 and 18, many more younger participants responded. I included the term “queer” in my call for participants in response to the stated preference of the first three readers whom I interviewed. I added tear offs to my poster that gave my name and contact information. I mounted a digital version of my poster accessible from my institutional identity as mounted on the Faculty of Information and Media studies website. I spent many long weeks without any contact from women who might be interested in the study, only to have an unexplained flurry of requests to participate. The difficulty of access resulted in several severe bouts of anxiety regarding the completion of this project. An early entry from my field diary testifies to the ongoing challenges of this inquiry:

> I have embarked on a new round of access, this time with participants aged 23 years or younger. I want to have immediate results, but I know better than this, especially when dealing with email communication. The whole things makes me profoundly neurotic. I imagine people reading my call for participants and being outraged by the use of language or the perceived exclusions. I'm distressed that my most recent potential participant has not emailed me back, another promising lead that seems like it might just fizzle out. It is hard to know when to keep making contact and when to just leave it alone (September 16, 2002, field diary).

Confidentiality

Participants were asked to select pseudonyms but only one young woman chose to do so herself. I assigned pseudonyms to the remainder of my participants. Pseudonyms are linked with actual names on the initial contact summary forms (McKechnie 1993, 66; see Appendix 4) that are kept in a secure location, accessible only by me. Any linkage between actual persons and pseudonyms will be destroyed with the completion of this project. In order to protect the identities of participants any remarks that may link them to specific agencies or sites of access have been altered, removed or changed. Mindful of the close-knit nature of local communities of LGBTQ youth, details of personal identity may also have been changed to prevent the possibility of deductive disclosure (Lee 1993, 172).

Issues of Informed Consent

This inquiry was conceived of as "sensitive research" which is defined as "research on topics or in contexts where the revelation or use of information gleaned from the research, or the very fact of participation in the research, may stigmatize…the research participants" (Sieber 1992, 167). Although ethics approval was received from a university ethics review committee to conduct this research with youth as young as 14 years, I was unable to gain access to any readers younger than 18 years of age, thus canceling the need for a waiver of parental consent. The nature of the research, whereby young women needed to identify publicly as lesbian or queer in order to participate,

demanded adherence to ethical standards to protect identities and to ensure confidentiality (see above). It is interesting to note, however, that many participants stated that they were willing to use their real names in the research records and reports, thus raising questions about the use of anonymized transcripts and analysis that cloak their individual identities. It may, for example, have been possible with a smaller sample to offer the possibility of full disclosure of participants' identities, thus elevating their status to co-researcher. However, it is not possible to know whether participants would have come forward in the first place without stated ethical guidelines indicating that identities would be kept confidential through secure record-keeping and procedures to ensure anonymity.

This research conforms to the University of Western Ontario and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada ethical guidelines for research with human subjects and passed an ethical review (see Appendix 3.0 for ethics approval form). Letters of general information were distributed to adult gatekeepers and left at the offices of LGBTQ campus groups. Letters of information were also given to all participants prior to the interview. Participants were asked to read the letters before giving consent to participate. I then verbally described the project and its purposes and asked if additional information was needed or if participants had any further questions. Informed consent to was attained in writing for interviews and writing protocols.

At times the procedures involved with attaining informed consent – handing out forms, asking participants to read them carefully, explaining the purpose of the project and uses of the data, asking for signed consent to participate—worked against the establishment of rapport. Participants joked about "signing away my life" and other such comments directed to the amount of paperwork needed to continue. Also, many participants declined to take copies of the letters of information and consent forms, citing a concern for "the environment" and the waste of paper.

Establishing rapport

Gaining the cooperation of participants or establishing rapport is an important part of in-depth interviewing (Marshall and Rossman 1989; Seidman 1998; Holstein and Gubrium 1995). I used the following strategies to establish rapport with participants:

- A clear statement of the purpose of the interview, my expectations of the participants' and my own role in the interview (Faux, Walsh and Deatrick 1988, 185).

Participants were often immediately put at ease when I explained that although I was exploring the topic of reading in relation to alternative sexualities, I would not be asking them directly about sexuality, that the emphasis in this project was on reading. I also found that participants noticeably relaxed when I informed them that they would not be required to provide lists of books or authors. I assured them that whatever they had to say about reading would be interesting and valuable. Some young women came prepared with lists of favourite books that frequently comprised lesbian and gay titles. In retrospect, it seems that one way to increase rapport would be to give participants a "task" prior to the interview by asking them for such lists of books and authors. I did not use this approach, as I did not want to influence participants to emphasize one kind of reading or one set of preferences over another.

- Identification of my own sexual orientation as a lesbian in an attempt to put participants at ease as there is evidence that youth prefer to be matched in intensive communication sessions with those who share their orientation (Sheridan 1997, 74).

I believe this, more than any other strategy, worked to establish rapport. We were both more comfortable once I declared my own sexuality. In their historical review of studies

that used interviews with lesbian, gay and queer people to explore dimensions of sexuality, Kong, Mahoney and Plummer (2002) note a shift that occurred in the 1980s with the rise of feminist research methodologies and the pressing urgency of action research into the AIDS epidemic. According to the authors, these two specific research agendas supported the emergence of an interview context "that was based largely on gay (and lesbian) 'sensibilities.' Although this term may have an essentialist resonance, in practice this meant that the gay interviewer and the gay interviewee could empathize around shared meanings and ways of knowing" (Kong, Mahoney and Plummer 2002, 243). I do not want to suggest that because of our overlapping identities as lesbian or queer, I was able to divine a particular way of knowing exhibited by my participants, but rather that often times an unspoken affinity existed that assumed certain shared understandings around such issues as coming out processes, terminology, events and happenings that occurred in local lesbian and gay communities. An implicit trust was, at times, established based upon shared understandings of identity.

I disclosed information regarding my own sexual identity in email calls for participants but not on publicly distributed flyers. I always disclosed my identity in email correspondence with potential participants, usually when they asked for more information. Although participants were aware prior to the interview that I identified as lesbian, I always re-iterated this and my age at the beginning of the interview.

- Verbal assurance of confidentiality and that transcribed interviews will not be shared with others unless participants consent to it, and then only in a format that obscures their identity. This was in addition to explicit, written assurance contained in the human research instruments.

As mentioned earlier, many participants assured me that confidentiality was not required. Furthermore, I wondered at times, if the emphasis on confidentiality was, in fact, contributing to the initial feelings of anxiety experienced by participants: what was going

to be asked that required such protocols? However, I do believe that such assurances were needed in order to gain access in the first place.

- Invitations and requests to meet again if desired or needed (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 2000, 62-63; Spradley 1979, 78-83; Seidman 1998, 40).

I received ethics approval to conduct follow up interviews with participants, but given the richness of the initial set of interviews, follow up interviews were not required. Furthermore, over the nineteen months of data collection, many participants indicated they would soon be moving to new cities and countries, making follow up interviews impossible. However I did invite my participants to contact me if they wanted to add to our conversations. Two participants did so, providing me with additional titles or locations of reading materials with lesbian content.

- Participant control over the specific location and time of the interview (Faux, Walsh and Deatrick 1988, 185).

Although all participants were offered the opportunity to choose an interview location, only one did so. Naomi invited me to her apartment in downtown Toronto, but in all other cases, I selected locations for the interviews. This proved to be a difficult task as locations needed to be suitably quiet to audio-record our voices, and reasonably private to allow for discussion of sensitive topics. Below is a range of interview sites, with a discussion of their merits and weaknesses for the conduct of this research:

Food court tables at university campuses or shopping centres

I conducted three interviews at food court tables. Twice these interviews were planned at these locations at periods during the day when it was anticipated there would not be a lot of consumer traffic. In both cases, these were successful in terms of achieving a private and quiet space. The third interview ended up at a food court located near a public library

after we were unable to locate a quiet space in the library. The food court also worked well for this interview, although we were interrupted twice by teenagers on their way to fast food outlets in the food court.

Cafés

Prior to data collection, I spent a considerable amount of time in Toronto and London trying to locate a quiet café with a layout of tables and chairs that would afford some privacy for our conversation. Ironically, I was largely unsuccessful in this quest as most cafés play loud music through speakers in order to give customers privacy for their conversations, music that was too loud to permit the use of a tape recorder. However, I did find one café located in the lesbian and gay neighbourhood in Toronto that had a few tables situated far enough away from the speakers, in a private corner that provided a location for one interview. The setting and ambience contributed to a general feeling of rapport but when I later transcribed the interview, our conversation was rendered inaudible at times by the noise of the cappuccino maker in the background, a sound that did not register with me during the interview. Another interview occurred on a Saturday at a café on a university campus, affording privacy, comfort and space as the consumer traffic was low.

Public Libraries

All public library staff members with whom I discussed this project and the need for interview space were supportive and offered the free use of seminar rooms, seating areas and reading carrels. However, public library space was problematic for a number of reasons: the distance was inconvenient to travel for participants; levels of noise and traffic were often high; spaces were not sound proof or private; or rooms could not be booked on short notice. Library spaces were used for two interviews. One space was a large meeting hall where we pulled chairs and a table over to one side for the interview. It was one of the most successful interviews and ran for over two hours. We had complete privacy, (although we left the doors to the hall open), and as we continued talking the

cavernous hall receded. For the other interview, a public library very generously offered the use of a sunny, glassed in seminar room. However, in this case, the noise of our voices disturbed other patrons and we were asked (twice) to be quiet.

University Spaces

I gained permission to conduct interviews at various seminar rooms and offices at both the University of Toronto and the University of Western Ontario. This was the most convenient option as participants were often students at the respective campuses and were familiar with the suggested locations. However, in these interviews it took longer to establish rapport. I believe that my status as a "university researcher" was more evident at these meetings, and as such it took more work to break down the "institutionalized" atmosphere that dictated roles as "researcher" and "research subject." When I met participants at universities I took care to dress casually (i.e., sneakers, jeans and t-shirts). Also, when possible, I left doors open, turned computers and fluorescent lights off, opened window blinds and moved furniture to make rooms more inviting and comfortable.

The choice of venue for interviewing raised unanticipated difficulties for this research. After completing the interviews, however, I am not certain that one venue would have worked equally well for all interviews. Considerations stemming from equipment use are another concern: at interviews where participants had a lot of space to move around (i.e. chairs with wheels, large sofas that invited lounging) they would often move in and out of the range of the microphone, at times rendering their voices inaudible for transcription. This could be mitigated by the use of an external microphone but the introduction of even more equipment might detract from the unobtrusive size of a portable recorder.

Summary of Data Collection Activities

The emphasis on emergent research design, conversational interviewing and the attentiveness paid to deepening my understanding of the role of reading in the lives of

lesbian and queer young women made it difficult to progress through this project in a discrete set of data collection steps. An overview of overlapping research activities is outlined below:

November 2001

Submission and approval of research proposal including ethics

December 2001 – February 2003

Ongoing negotiation of access to participants, interviews

December 2001 – July 2003

Verbatim transcription of all interviews, data reduction (removal of incidental, digressive content)

November 2001 – March 2004

Ongoing construction of field notes, research diaries, preliminary analyses

November 2002 – December 2003

Intensive analysis of all data (interviews, writings, diaries and notes)

This careful accounting of time is, of course, misleading as it provides little insight into what has been called the "dark side" of qualitative analysis (Seidman 1998). Kvale (1996, 85-87) describes the emotional dynamics of an interview study through five phases: antipositivist enthusiasm phase; interview-quoting phase; working phase of silence; aggressive phase of silence; and the final phase of exhaustion. My reflections on this interview study bear this model out: I ran the emotional highs and lows of data collection, analysis and interpretation over several months from wild exhilaration when the project was going well (i.e., gaining access, conducting stimulating and rich interviews, making interesting connections among data, sharing the research with others with positive reception and responses), to utter desperation when it was not (i.e., long weeks without responses from gatekeepers or potential participants, pedestrian analyses of boring data, inability to find meaning in data or interpretations).

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Following guidelines for interpretivist human inquiry, data analysis was largely a matter of textual reflection. This process involves moving from the field notes, a holding place for collected data, to a narrative text meant for other readers (Ricoeur 1981). I conducted multiple readings of the data, and constructed multiple iterations of the narrative text. Interpretation was guided by open-coding techniques (Strauss and Corbin 1998) and involved the following qualitative procedures (Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 2000, 76-82):

- Active listening and thinking about what is being said during interviews
- Immersing myself in the data in order to come to some initial interpretations that then drove subsequent data collection and interpretations
- Data reduction and data transformation
- Thematic analysis

These procedures correspond to the "constant comparative method" of grounded theory techniques by which close attention is paid to the data to see which themes emerge (Strauss and Corbin 1998). I also considered the systematic techniques of selective and axial coding of grounded theory but ultimately rejected them as too rigid and too tied up with positivistic notions of validity and reliability (see Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont 2003, 141-152). The underlying stability and linear progression of the analytical process ascribed to Denzin's formulation of analytic induction (1978, 192) led to my rejection of this mode of data analysis as well. In keeping with the philosophical assumptions underlying this inquiry, the logic of my analysis is, however, inductive, working from the co-mingling of my own perspective and those of my participants.

In a hermeneutical approach to interview research, Kvale (1996) provides a useful discussion of interview analysis and interview interpretation. In Kvale's framework, analysis is concerned with techniques of data reduction, condensation and categorization. Interpretation "goes beyond a structuring of the manifest meanings of a text…In contrast

to the decontextualization of statements by categorization, interpretation recontextualizes the statements within broader frames of reference" (1996, 193). The approaches to data analysis used in this study correspond to Kvale's approaches to data analysis (1996, 187-205):

- condensation
- categorization
- structuring through narratives
- interpretation
- ad-hoc

The first four of these need no explanation, but the fifth approach, "ad-hoc methods," is defined as an eclectic approach to data analysis. It corresponds closely to the methods of close and insightful reading of texts described below. Ad-hoc methods encompass interpretive activities such as counting statements, looking for metaphors, comparing and contrasting statements, visualization and mapping, techniques that I used throughout the entire project in my attempts to make sense of the interview data.

I used recommendations by van Manen (1990, 91-93) and Watson (2001, 142-45) to isolate themes: looking at the text as a whole; close readings of selections from the texts; and "insightful" readings that represent an interpretive attempt to make sense of the data within the specific contexts of the inquiry (i.e., library and information studies). In addition to thematic arrangement, I "worked the text" using three other writing techniques modified from van Manen's recommendations for phenomenological writing (1990, 168-72):

- Analytical arrangement: the text is arranged according to deepening stages of analysis and levels of understanding
- Exemplificative arrangement: examples are taken from the data and are varied systematically to illustrate certain phenomena, events, activities etc.

- Exegetical engagement: an ongoing dialogical engagement with other authors writing about reading practices and habits.

At each stage of the analysis, understandings and insights are recorded, summarized and explored in written notes. The emphasis on the position of the researcher in interpretivist inquiry suggests that themes co-emerge from the narratives of the participants and the researcher. In other words, where the researcher stands in the world influences the direction and findings of the study, thus underlining the importance of critical reflexivity throughout the project.

I considered the use of coding software programs, but after a prolonged attempt to code my first interview transcript with Ethnograph 5.0, I rejected this method of data analysis. I was uncomfortable about "flattening" and fragmenting my data, a concern I learned others shared (Atkinson 1992). I also felt strongly that I wanted to be open to what has been described as the "wild and imaginative" thinking involved in qualitative data analysis (Gray 2003, 168), or the unanticipated connections between themes and relationships found in the data, a process that could not be aided by a novice's use of analytic software.

To code my transcripts and to work on the continual isolation and elaboration of themes, I used a series of word-processed and handwritten documents. I deployed McKenzie's (2001, 54) transcription technique of using a "coding notes" document that was opened simultaneously during transcription along with a third document in which to record insights and questions for subsequent interviews. I also kept a paper journal beside me as I transcribed to record thoughts, ideas, comments and problems that did not fit into either additional document.

I made every effort to transcribe interviews fully before conducting the next interview, although it was difficult to adhere to this commitment when interviews were sometimes

scheduled in consecutive days and twice on the same day. Given the difficulty of gaining access to participants I was reluctant to schedule interviews too far in time from the initial date of contact. In some cases, participants indicated times that compromised my transcription progress but were the most convenient to them. When I was unable to transcribe previous interviews, provided the next interview was not the same day, I chose to review field notes and to focus on coding, insights, and questions by listening to the interview again. In some ways, I think this process worked well to improve my skill as an interviewer as an audio playback indicated, with sometimes painful clarity, where I went wrong with my technique. A full transcription included pauses, all utterances, digressions and interruptions. Combined with preliminary coding, note taking, field notes and diary entries, this was an extremely time-consuming process, taking nearly two weeks on average to complete per interview. I was unable to transcribe non-stop for hours on end, and included frequent breaks in my schedule in order to allow me to maintain a position of intense engagement with the material. Although transcription seemed at times to be an endless, grinding task, I believe that such work was essential, permitting a deep attentiveness to the content of the interviews.

Once an interview was fully transcribed, I edited it for possible data reduction, although this process was done sparingly (limited to nonsensical phrases and irrelevant utterances) as I found I preferred to work with the entire transcript throughout most of the research process. I printed copies of the transcript and initial coding categories, and continued to do so for each successive interview, eventually ending up with binders of printed transcripts organized by two broad categories: *reading* and *access* to reading materials. Reading was further coded using the categories of "escape," "community," "possibility" and "barriers." Access was coded according to broad sites of access to reading materials: "libraries," "bookstores," "online," "friends," "family," and a miscellaneous category of "other." Each sub-category was coded further in each of these dimensions. I attempted to code the transcripts for specific instances of what I came to call "identity talk" where participants explicitly mentioned some aspect of their sexualities in relation to reading,

but found this strategy to be unsuccessful as this kind of talk is threaded throughout the entire interview, and indeed, the entire research project. Constant re-reading, writing, and re-working of coding schemes achieved isolation of themes, but a rigid codebook was not practical for this inquiry. I did attempt to construct a codebook using grounded theory techniques, but abandoned this approach when it seemed the codebook was determining the shape of my interpretation. I created systems of codes for the categories covering such themes as the various "roles" of reading in the participants' lives; access encompassing modes, methods, sites and barriers; and evidence of social connections or barriers to such connections. The coding exercise was useful because it gave me some sense of salient themes and increased my familiarity with the general narrative strategies of my participants. Despite these benefits however, the detailed coding system resulted in fragmented data sets that were divorced from the larger narrative contexts. I worked on a more responsive system with which to make sense of the data, one that permitted a movement from the "part to whole" or from the individual transcripts to the larger questions of access and identity that framed our conversations. Each interview transcript was read and listened to numerous times as I tested and elaborated on my arrangement of themes and developed my analysis.

A Note about "Texts"

Throughout this work, I refer to interview data as "texts." The exploratory nature of this inquiry into the role of reading determined my decision to focus more on the "content" than on the "form" of my participants' speech (Gray 2003, 148). I wanted to bring to the surface a particular phenomenon in a specific context—reading in the lives of lesbian and queer young women—and I wanted to do so in a way that respected their "effort to truth-telling" (Gray 2003, 125), thus honouring their perspectives on their positions in the world. My focus in this study on the content of the narratives told by my participants, does not foreclose on my awareness that these stories are produced within certain social and cultural conventions, and that as with all texts, conditions of production, distribution and consumption are needed to complement our understandings of them. In my attempt to

give deep attention to "what happens when people read," I have consciously privileged the words of my participants, as the most appropriate and respectful way to elucidate this varied experience.

Data Management

In a study that relies on voluminous interview data, as this one does, it is necessary to provide some account of data management. My readings of various ethnographic and grounded theory studies warned me about the importance of organised file-keeping, research audits and data security. I used the following techniques to store and manage my data:

1. Clear, consistent (and anonymized) labelling of all documents linked to individual participants. I used a numbered system that corresponded to pseudonyms and documents (e.g., 1.0 for complete transcript; 1.2 for writing protocol; 1.3 for coded documents etc.). Email addresses were stored in a secure location with initial contact forms. Email correspondence was printed off, names were deleted by means of black ink marker, and labels were added that conformed to the above system.
2. All digital documents (transcripts, coding documents, field notes, research diaries) were stored in several ways including a remote server, an internal hard drive, zip disks, and recordable compact disks. I also printed and stored hardcopies of these documents.
3. Audiocassettes were stored in a secure location along with complete transcripts and initial contact summary forms.
4. Once every academic term over the course of this project I reviewed all files and documents for completeness and consistency. This activity eventually took on properties of reflective research practice (Gray 2003, 150; Plummer 2001, 151), working as reassurance that progress was taking place and evidence that I had "control" of what seemed often to be an ambiguous project of interpretation.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

I offer the following discussion with an awareness of the debate among qualitative researchers regarding the degree to which evaluation criteria transforms, re-inscribes or transgresses positivistic notions of reliability and validity (see Garratt and Hodkinson 1998; Atkinson, Coffey and Delamonte 2003). Following the strategies of other LIS researchers using qualitative methods of data collection and analysis (e.g., Carey 2003; Joyce 2003; McKechnie 1996; McKenzie 2001) Lincoln and Guba's (1985) notion of "trustworthiness" can be used an evaluative measure of the appropriateness of my analysis and interpretation of my research data. Using the insights of various qualitative researchers (Kvale 1996; Peräkylä 1997; Seidman 1998; Wolcott 1994), the following qualitative dimensions are suggested as evaluative criteria:

Inclusion of primary data to allow readers to "see" for themselves

Whenever possible I have illustrated and supported my interpretive claims with excerpts from the research data enabling readers of this report to "hear" the voices of my participants.

Transparency of interpretive claims

Garratt and Hodkinson (1998) argue that all predetermined lists of criteria ought to be rejected in qualitative inquiry as such lists deny the influence of the epistemological position of the reader, a factor that cannot be known in advance. One suggested measure of evaluation asks if the interpretation resonates with the reader's own experiences of the phenomena under study.

Feedback procedures

Member checking, where participants respond to the ongoing analysis and interpretation, is one method of feedback (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Cohen, Kahn and Steeves 2000, 91). This technique comprised one of the strengths of in-depth interviewing as the unfolding

interaction between interviewer and interviewee or "turn-taking" could not take place without shared understanding of the topics under discussion (Peräkylä 1997, 209).

I also used peer-debriefing techniques throughout the course of this project including discussion with other qualitative researchers, lesbian, queer friends, colleagues, and avid readers. Additionally, I presented aspects of this research at both scholarly and professional conferences.

Reflexive research practices

The ongoing use of research and field diaries permitted an intense, reflexive engagement with the research practices and interpretive claims presented here. My attempt to write in my research diary everyday was not achieved but I remained committed to writing as a reflective practice. Very often new directions for data gathering techniques or interpretive claims presented themselves through personal writing exercises. For example, it was only after I attempted to come to some understanding of the "stories" of reading that my participants told me, that I begin to see their rejection of the conventions of standard coming out stories.

Prolonged Engagement

Although the difficulty I experienced in gaining access to suitable participants was not without its problems, it also offered the unanticipated benefit of prolonged engagement with the research project. In order to monitor possible venues for recruitment of participants, I kept abreast of relevant events and news in both cities in which I gathered data. I established ongoing relationships with adult gatekeepers, booksellers and librarians, and also with participants who were interviewed earlier. Prolonged engagement gave me the time to establish a legitimate presence (in the words of one participant, "I was still around a year later"). It also ensured a period of time for a deepening analysis.

RECIPROCITY

I imagined reciprocity would come from attending to my participants' accounts of coming to terms with their alternative identities, stressing my role as a sympathetic, adult, lesbian listener. I was not mistaken in the reciprocal effects of this kind of talk – participants did use our interviews as an opportunity to declare, define and celebrate aspects of their sexual identities and orientations. In turn, I was given an opportunity to revisit my own personal coming out experiences. I did not anticipate, however, that participants would value (possibly even more than our talk about sexualities) an opportunity to share experiences as *readers*. They thanked me again and again for the chance to talk about what they liked to read and why, about how hard it was to find good books with lesbian characters and about the role of reading in their lives. They told me how much they enjoyed talking about reading with someone "who understands." I sometimes assumed a readers' advisor role when appropriate, usually at the end of the interview or in later email correspondence. Upon completion of this research I plan to disseminate the findings and implications of this research to interested parties including librarians, social workers, educators and other adults who work with LGBTQ youth, in addition to workshops and book talks with groups of young people themselves.

Irving Seidman (1998, 92) claims, "The reciprocity I can offer in an interview is that which flows from my interest in participants' experience, my attending to what they say, and my honouring their words when I present their experience to a larger public." Following from his words, then, the remainder of this thesis constitutes the main form of reciprocity.

Chapter Three – Reading as Escape?

When I began this study I imagined that I would research reading as a mode of escape. I was influenced by my reading of Michel de Certeau's (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. He describes reading as a transformative social practice that allows readers "to escape from the law of each text in particular, and from that of a social milieu" (Certeau 1984, 174). In his framework people create meaning through the practice of ordinary activities – walking, reading, watching television – in their everyday lives. He challenges the ideology of passive consumption and suggests, instead, that we look at the creative production that occurs when people perform such activities as reading. The apparently mundane act of reading becomes significant in an analysis of what happens when people read. He writes, "…to read is to be elsewhere…it is to constitute a secret scene, a place where one can enter and leave when one wishes; to create dark corners into which no one else can see…" (Certeau 1984, 173). If to read is to be elsewhere, I wondered then, where do the readers who might participate in my study go when they read? And what do they find there?

I was interested in two aspects of reading as a mode of escape: the escape from social milieus and the escape to "secret" worlds that are constructed through the sustained engagement with textual materials. The metaphor of reading as escape was an important initial concept for this study. As other studies report, readers tell us again and again that they read to escape the pressures of their everyday lives. In *Reading the Romance* (1991/1984) the majority of Radway's informants read romances to escape daily problems. Reading constituted a space that was for just themselves, away from the demands of their families. Radway writes, "the Smithton readers' claim that romance reading is a "declaration of independence" is a way to say to others, "This is my time, my space. Now leave me alone" (Radway 1991/1984, 213). In a study of the ideologies and cultural representation of modern lesbian life, Sherri Inness (1997b, 107) takes up the notion of reading to create space when she of writes of lesbian and gay youth:

> Youth are pushed to the very margins of the gay/lesbian community. These doubly marginalized young people need gay and lesbian literature because it has the power to affirm their lives and to address issues of particular concern to them. Also, since talking about homosexuality is still taboo, particularly for adolescents and children, there are few places where homosexuality can be discussed openly, whether between young people or between children and adults. Fiction is one of the few sources that discusses homosexuality openly and offers young people affirmation of their sexual orientation.

Reading as escape is a common, taken-for-granted way of talking about the role that reading plays in our lives, so taken-for-granted that bookstores use the metaphor as an advertising slogan targeted at Christmas shoppers: "Teens crave excitement and escape – to be transported to another world for awhile" (Chapters/Indigo 2003, 28). Free voluntary reading is seen to provide a needed distraction, a form of "mindless" entertainment similar to watching television. Reading provides needed respite from pressures that threaten to overwhelm. Reading gives comfort because readers can visit recognizable worlds in which they exercise power and control, or they are simply swept up in waves of fantasy that push other worries, concerns and pressures to the periphery, for a time anyway.

Reading as comfort, escape or distraction from worlds that are troubling, problematic, stressful or busy is also evident in the discourse of professionals – teachers, librarians, social workers and publishers – who advocate access to reading materials with queer content for young people. In an early call for access to age-appropriate library materials with gay and lesbian content, one librarian writes:

> Reading in libraries is more important than we may realize. It is a relatively private and safe way to sift out the positive from the negative, to discover the gradually improving quality of material available about homosexuality. The library is also a place to find solace through inspirational, religious, or other supportive reading generally directed at heterosexuals, or simply to escape the world through fantasy, mystery, science fiction, and travel. For the young adult, the library, much more than the classroom, offers hope (Monroe 1988, 45).

As I thought about how to approach the notion of reading as escape in the context of this research, I imagined that lesbian and queer young women might have many reasons to escape from overlapping social worlds of school, family and peers. The discourse of youth-as-homosexual tells us that young people who claim non-heterosexual identities are bound to encounter social prejudice, verbal and physical abuse, ostrazication and rejection from kinship and friendship circles, high levels of emotional stress, fear, self-loathing, low self-esteem; and as a result, such young people will frequently engage in self-destructive behaviour. For example Savin-Williams and Rodriguez (1993) cite processes of self-devaluation and self-derogation as common coming of age experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. The rejection of negative identity and stigma management is seen to be the major task of queer adolescence (Garnets and Kimmel, 1993). Gilbert Herdt (1989) and Unks (1995) see an increase in tolerance for lesbian and gay youth sexualities, but also illustrate the continuing stigmatization of such youth caused by homophobia and heterosexism. In a study of the leisure contexts of lesbian, gay, bisexual and questioning youth, researchers found that these young people often engaged in self-destructive behaviour during periods of leisure (Caldwell, Kivel, Smith and Haynes 1998).

Given the evidence in the vast research record on the difficulties of coming of age while claiming an alternative sexuality, it seemed reasonable to wonder if reading might provide relief from these pressures, especially since reading can be a safe, anonymous and non-risky way to find out about what it means to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer. However, as will become clear, reading as escape does not adequately account for the role that reading plays in the lives of my participants. When asked directly about the role of reading in their lives *now*, participants did frequently rely on the metaphor of escape, but their earlier talk about the place of reading in their negotiation of their emergent sexual identities does not support the use of the metaphor. Dawn Currie (1999) problematizes a similar phenomenon in her study of adolescent girls' reading of teen magazines: although her informants, like adult readers, claimed to read teen magazines

"for fun," when Currie examined their claims more closely, explicitly looking at the societal role of such pleasures, she found that rather than seeking to "escape" they wanted to read more and better articles about "real life" (Currie 1999, 166). In the section that follows, I emphasize the tension between the social conditions reported by participants that might warrant escape and, as Currie writes in her study, their desire for "something more" (1999, 166).

DECLARATIONS OF QUEER, LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL IDENTITIES

"This is allowed. I never thought that was possible."

–Chris, 20 years[1]

Close study of the transcripts revealed the existence of a tension between a notion of the world as a safe space and the world as dangerous. Participants commonly describe homophobic and heterosexist reactions to questions about and early declarations of lesbian and bisexual identities. They suggest that the practice of reading helped them ease feelings of loneliness, alienation and isolation. Although the readers I interviewed appeared comfortable with their alternative identities, many did refer to the necessity of hiding or shielding these from the view of others. My emphasis here on the difficulties in my participants' lives is not meant to refute the apparent ease with which many of them publicly and personally enact their sexual identities. We did talk about closeted life and homophobia and not always in the context of reading choices and behaviour, which drew attention to the conflicts and challenges that face lesbian and queer young women in their everyday lives, even when they have integrated their non-heterosexual selves into mainstream society. For example, Cole identifies as lesbian but prefers to call herself queer. She has disclosed her queer identity at school, at home, to friends and to close acquaintances. She is a science student at a university in a large Ontario city. In the summer she worked at a job that required a more closeted presentation of self:

[1] Pseudonyms are used throughout to refer to participants. See Appendix 1.0 for brief profiles of each participant.

> …The way the job is I can't really be necessarily 'out' per se, like I can get away with a rainbow necklace [note: as a signifier of queer identity]…Within my contract, you are not allowed to talk about personal life choices…You're allowed to talk about whatever you like with staff as long as [clients] can't hear…that includes religion, anything to do with sex, you can mention your boyfriend but you can't mention anything queer… It's a really interesting time because you adopt being more closeted and yet, among staff, I've never been necessarily out, but basically everybody knows and I don't really care…I don't care anywhere else, why would I care there? (Cole)

Cole describes her identity as a "personal life choice" and resists the enforced invisibility of the closet but, at the same time, she respects the boundaries for disclosure drawn by her employer. And yet she expresses muted recognition of unequal, heterosexist policy when she comments that other staff can talk about boyfriends. Perhaps Cole is tolerant of these restrictions as she is "allowed to talk about whatever" with other staff and "everyone knows" she is queer.

Another participant, Nicky, 18 years old, in her last year at a Catholic high school, expresses a similar kind of tension in her account of being out at school:

> …I ended up in my last year of high school, the rampant lesbian feminist that I am at a Catholic high school! …[Being out in high school] is so much fun!…My friends [said] "Nicky it will make your life easier. You don't need to [come out]. It doesn't matter you know."…And it freaks people out sometimes and sometimes it's fun to get a reaction out of people. Because I don't care. If I was going into this situation in grade ten or eleven and I knew I was going to have to deal with people for a long time, but it's kind of a nice situation for me because it's only a year. (Nicky)

Like Cole, Nicky uses the phrase "I don't care" to underline her rejection of the typical characterization of gay youth as fearful and self-loathing while coming to terms with the homophobic responses of peers. It is an overstatement to claim that Nicky's vanguard position at her high school is easy and unproblematic. At other times in the interview she acknowledges the costs of coming out at a young age. Nicky's comments also suggest that life is anything but easy as an out lesbian in a Catholic secondary school: it is a "situation" that cannot help but force her "difference" into the hallways and classrooms,

causing consternation, requiring the need and ability "to deal with people." Indeed, such work is only bearable because her tenure as a high school student will soon come to an end.

Barb also came out while attending a Catholic secondary school. She alludes to the potential for difficulty, but like Nicky, she found a way to celebrate and enjoy her status within the school milieu.

> I had a boyfriend when I was sixteen and we'd been together for a little while…an amazingly platonic relationship which you laugh about now, but that was when I started to think, ah maybe. And then because I went to a Catholic high school, so it was a little bit harder. But we had a very out lesbian join us in grade twelve and she just blew the roof off for so many people and I was one of them and we all just, like it was this big coming out party. (Barb)

Barb was lucky to find other lesbian and queer friends in high school. Chris describes the more commonly experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness. The challenge to self-actualization created by dissonance in value systems is dramatic in her narrative. Chris was 20 years old at the time of our interview. She identifies as a "dyke" and as queer, and in a poignant passage, she recounts for me the effects that religious practice and reading had on her by refusing all possibilities for being gay:

> …At fourteen I started going to a kind of radical church I guess you could call it. You read a lot of books there and the Bible all the time and they are very fanatic about it. So, of course, that didn't help because it basically brainwashes you and teaches you to live a certain way…The thought had never occurred to me that I was allowed to be gay…That this was ok. It still surprises me when I'm grocery shopping with my girlfriend, that I'm actually allowed to do this. Hey, we do get mail together and Christmas presents, this is cool. This is allowed. I never thought that was possible. (Chris)

The kind of reading Chris describes foreclosed on possible ways of being in the world, to the extent that in her present life as out (and proud), she can be struck by the turns her life has taken, even in the mundane activities of daily life. Mail, shopping, shared presents – experiences that collect together to offer new ways of being in the world. In a similar recollection of one of life's small moments, Laurie remembers reading a poem about

bisexuality. It was given to her by a friend several years earlier, recalled during our interview as a helpful encounter with text, an event that gave her confidence to come out in a milieu without any community support or even visible signs of other gays and lesbians:

> …The first excitement you know? Like there are other people obviously out there…It was a small community. There was no support—you know I never really saw anybody who could possibly be gay…I don't know, I must have been confident enough to come out to somebody in some degree…(Laurie)

Laurie's phrase "the first excitement" functions in some ways as an exemplary description of the first time my participants recognized some aspect of their alternative sexualities in print. *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank[2] (1995) is the source of Francesca's self-revelation. She remembers discussing the so-called "lesbian" content with her classmates:

> …I found *The Diary of Anne Frank*[3] confusing. I thought that she, I thought the reason she was popular was because she was a just a normal girl and she was saying things about her sexual feelings. And then, we did a study in grade nine on it and I thought "oh great, I've already read it and don't actually have to go back and read it," but there're certain sections we weren't supposed to read…the queer content one. I was talking with these other girls in my class. I said, "yeah, I read the section I wasn't supposed to read" – [in a different voice]: "that's so disgusting, she wanted to do this and this with her friend."…I thought it was normal and obviously it wasn't but I think in a way it did help because like even back in the forties, that existed. (Francesca)

Francesca's experience is not unique. She explicitly introduces the theme that reading helps her to understand homosexuality and same-sex attraction. Like others in this study, she conceives of "normal" sexuality more broadly, including non-heterosexual possibilities, but at the same time, she must contend with the homophobic and heterosexist responses of her peers.

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[2] Francesca's reference is to *The Diary of Young Girl: The definitive edition*, edited by Otto H. Frank and Mirjam Pressler. This edition has several pages of diary entries that were omitted in the original 1947 publication, including a passage of Anne's erotic appreciation of the female human form.

[3] See Appendix 2.0 for annotated list of titles mentioned throughout this thesis by participants.

Joyce speaks of the fear of being seen buying and borrowing books with queer content. Like Chris, she sees gay and lesbian culture as hidden and secret. She also testifies, as evident in this next excerpt, to the general lack of tolerance exhibited by her parents – a failing that would seem to contribute, at least in part, to her perception of the invisibility and even complete denial of queer culture.

> JOYCE: I think I'd like to read more of them [i.e., books with queer content]. But it's hard to find them for one. And then, like, I'm only nineteen, so obviously if I was younger, I would not buy one those. It's like going to buy a condom. Everyone's going to see me looking at that, you know what I mean?
>
> PAULETTE: What about from the library, have you looked there or would you?
>
> JOYCE: No, I haven't even looked. I just assumed it wasn't there for a long time…It just seems like it's a hidden culture…And it just never occurred to me that it would even be in the library. 'Cause like—my parents are really against it. They kind of enforce the belief that, you know, it's bad, don't read it, don't look, it's not there and let's hide it. You know what I mean?

I shall revisit the theme of the invisibility of queer literature when I discuss issues of access and information seeking later in this work. Others share her assumption that libraries simply would not collect lesbian and gay literature in this research. This raises interesting questions about the general invisibility of lesbian, gay and queer culture in the lives of young people, especially in a mass media saturated society, in which it is claimed, representations of such culture are easily found. I include Joyce's comments here to illustrate the fears and challenges that face her within her own local community as she negotiates a non-mainstream, barely tolerated sexual identity. Taken together with the other transcript selections, Joyce's words illustrate that homophobia and heterosexist ideology are entrenched across various social arenas within which these young women must negotiate a positive and self-affirming space.

READING AS COMFORT

"Literature was a really important part of my becoming comfortable with myself"

–Barb, 21 years

I heard very little direct talk from my participants of distinct and specific instances of homophobic reactions, responses or attacks from others. However, it was clear that coming of age with the realization or recognition that you are not "straight" is not easy and remains fraught with tension, hiding, fear and risk. So while my participants were not always explicit about social tensions, they did discuss their feelings of isolation experienced as a direct result of their emergent non-heterosexual identities. That they did so in the context of this research on reading is not surprising, and may be a function of the ways in which we talk and think about reading as a solitary, private and personal act. Reading is one of the ways that these young queer women coped with their feelings of isolation and aloneness.

Nicky describes the tension between wanting to be left alone and desiring to belong. Aware of her reliance on the tropes of the standard discourse of youth homosexuality – "ten percent of the rest of the population is like you" and the "teen suicide rate is so high"– Nicky sees the practice of reading as just one possible "haven" for security, safety and belonging.

> NICKY: When you're that age and if there's nothing for you and you're just trying to find…belonging…and I think a lot of it is about belonging…that sounds so stereotypical, but really just trying to—trying to be left alone. I mean you're so lonely at that age anyways that discovering that only ten percent of the rest of the population is like you, makes it a lot smaller…It's like a haven.
>
> PAULETTE: A book?
>
> NICKY: Yeah, anywhere you can find it. You can find it in a friend…you need something I think…I think that's why the teen suicide rate is so high for gay and lesbian youth: as much as denial so much denial…

The shifting enactments of "rebel outsider," who chooses and revels in this role, and that of the "ostracized outsider," who does not, comes up repeatedly in the reading histories offered by my participants. For example, Cole finds comfort in the role of being the "odd one out," but also retrospectively recognizes that she wanted to fit in.

> COLE: I remember seeing a lot of the same things on different pages…more or less the same text…even if it was written completely separately, they're saying the same things.
>
> PAULETTE: And you found that helpful?
>
> COLE: Yeah…at the time I did…I don't know…being the odd one out was never really that bad a thing to me…[I] was always a weird kid…and yet in some ways I just want to be normal, except I'm never like that.

Cole's comments underline another interesting tension: her online discovery of ubiquitous coming out stories satisfied both her desire to belong and her stance as outsider. Her reading practice created an affinity with other queer youth while underlining her difference from her straight peers.

Nicky also assumes comfortable roles as outsider and rebel. She refuses to be silenced by those who disapprove of her identity and yet, she acknowledges other queer youth might need the standard coming out stories such as those available in the growing collection of young adult novels:

> And a lot of [young adult novels] are like issues stories. And well, I don't want to read about homophobia. I'd rather not because it's not the biggest issue in my life. Generally because I have a big mouth and I really don't care and if you want to hate me for it, I don't care. And I'll say something to you because I'm like that [talking explicitly about her status as an out lesbian in her high school]. I understand that it's probably important for someone who is having a lot of trouble with coming out and doesn't have any sort of supports and is looking for that. But for me this was the same story. This is my story already… (Nicky)

Nicky wants more from her reading than the standard coming out narrative. As will become clear in the next chapter, like other participants in this study, she has yet to encounter a novel with lesbian characters that speaks to her more varied experiences and

to her dreams of what the future could be. However another participant, Barb, had a more positive textual encounter. As we sat down to the interview, almost immediately she told me that *Written on the Body*, a novel by Jeanette Winterson (1992), played a critical role in her negotiation of what it meant to be queer.

> …Literature was a really important part of my becoming comfortable with myself. And one book in particular, and it just kind of made the difference between feeling like an alien inside to comfortable with who I was. (Barb)

For Barb reading provided comfort as it helped her to acknowledge her difference in a positive way, shepherded by a critical connection with a specific book – in this case, reading "made the difference" manageable.

Another reader, Diane, ironically measures her own experience of alienation against that of one of the most celebrated alienated characters of lesbian literature, Stephen Gordon, the lesbian main character in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1982/1928).

> It's really intoxicating. I didn't get too damaged by it. But it was interesting to read about such an alienated character…I mean we've all been there. We've all been like the ugly duckling nobody gets, is not the same species as other ducklings. (Diane)

Recollections about reading invariably included allusions to difficulties of coming to terms with alternative sexualities during adolescence. Participants described the effects of reading against their experiences of isolation and alienation. Later chapters will explore in more detail the gap between the desire for texts that represented some aspect of lesbian and queer sexualities, and the levels of failure of access.

WHEN READING FAILS

"When the whole thing started for me, I actually stopped reading"

–Ellen, 18 years

Most of the readers in this study strongly identified *as* readers *and* as lesbian, bisexual or queer women. They easily conversed about their reading habits, choices and preferences. When they spoke to me they also appeared to be completely reconciled about their sexual identities – hardship, trauma, isolation were presented to me as past occurrences. However, Ellen, one of the youngest participants at 18 years of age, breaks this consensus. At the time of our interview she was finishing a demanding final year of secondary school. Although she spoke with an engaging humour, she remained reserved and circumspect in her comments until the interview was almost at a close. She continued to share parts of her coming out story with me, trying to help me understand why reading failed her. She was the only participant who was explicit about the steep personal cost of coming out to friends and family. She told me that she lost at least two years of high school when she was forced to withdraw and to change schools twice due to the harassment of peers. She was also unique in my sample of readers in her rejection of the practice of reading at this traumatic and troubling time of her life. She recounts the sheer inability to read in face of mounting depression.

> …When like the whole thing started for me, I actually stopped reading…I thought I would've kept reading more because I was having so many problems in my real life…but I was really, really depressed…I just didn't do anything for a couple of years. (Ellen)

Later in the interview when I followed up this comment, Ellen recalled that she did use the public library to find informational books about being lesbian, but this kind of reading was not helpful either:

> I remember spending—what library was it? Oh what's the one? Um, the Reference Library. I spent like a day upstairs in the—I don't—in one of those sections. I had like a stack of books, and some of, about—if you choose lesbian, and others and other things and reading that stuff. Didn't really help though…It just depressed me more…I don't know, it didn't seem to be about me. (Ellen)

After this talk of reading, I asked Ellen how long she has been out to other people. Her answer is deceptively truncated as she glosses over events that must have been profoundly disruptive and troubling:

> I came out to my closest friend when I was doing summer school…that was a couple of years ago…two years ago. I told her I was, yep, bi and she—it didn't go well. She comes from a very sort of uptight culture. So that, it actually went very badly and we were like fighting all the time and we didn't even like each other anymore. So then I was like, ok it's not true. So then we just didn't talk about it at all and then I told my other friends a few months later. Then I told her again. Then I told my parents…Then I didn't go to school anymore…I don't know…I told one person and the next day the whole school knew. It doesn't make any sense to me. (Ellen)

Ellen's abbreviated coming out narrative is offered here as a cautionary tale. She reminds us that while social trends may indicate that it is "easier" to come of age in the early twenty first century as a gay, lesbian or queer young person (Herdt and Boxer 1993, Seidman 2002), there remain gaps in the services of social agencies and educational institutions that are compounded with misunderstanding and harassment among kinship and peer groups. Intolerance and invisibility have serious and damaging consequences.

SO IS READING AN ESCAPE OR NOT?

After the first few interviews I established a list of topics that I wanted to be certain to address in each successive interview. One question asked participants to describe for me the role that reading played in their lives. The openness to interpretation of this query was by design as I did not want to suggest how it should be answered. It was the last prompt that I gave prior to my wrap up question. I conceived of it as a way for participants to review and expand on our conversation about reading. In almost all cases, some variation of the metaphor of reading as escape was offered. However several close readings of the interview data show that these readers appear to be reading less for *escape from* than for *engagement with* the worlds in which they live. This reliance on a pervasive conceptualization of the power of reading to provide escape, especially the reading we

choose and like to do, points to the taken-for-granted and common sense ways of talking about reading. It is difficult to articulate the role that reading plays in our lives, even for those who read a great deal. Reading as escape is expressed in two ways in this research: escape from social life and escape from personal thoughts. For example, one of my most articulate participants continually expressed dissatisfaction with the standard coming out tales, at least the ones that she could find, ending with a plea to be taken out of her own life:

> I've searched and searched—I search out these kinds of books [young adult books with lesbian or gay characters] and I've never even heard of [*S.P. Likes A.D.*]…and some of them are so clichéd anyway…I find a book and go "oh-h-h." I don't want to hear about their coming out story…it's not what I want to read about. I want you to take me out of my life. (Nicky)

Francesca articulates a tension inherent in the metaphor of reading to escape: rather than escaping the conditions of her actual life including the trials associated with her alternative sexuality, she is escaping her own thoughts. It is a fine distinction that works to remove the ground of escape from the actual world – Francesca and other readers in this study do not read in order to flee the material conditions of their lives in the way that Radway's readers did, circumscribed as they were by their roles of wives and mothers.

> I think it is a different kind of escape. It's just that you can escape your own thoughts…It forces you to distract yourself from the sort of petty little trivialities of everyday life. (Francesca)

Like Francesca, Naomi uses the language of escape to describe her voluntary reading practice. Although she deploys the metaphor of escape, her reading functions more as a way to recharge as she disengages with her daily life as a graduate student. Naomi explicitly conceives of reading as escape, but she still sees it as a meaningful, quite literally 'in-forming' practice. It gives her life meaning; it fulfills her internal needs:

> In order for my life to have any kind of meaningful shape…and [reading] fills like all of my internal needs…I don't have any classes today. It's my day to just do reading in bed…So without [reading] I'm not actually able to function…I kind of escape into books because if I have to be on all the time, I find that really difficult. (Naomi)

Reading as an escape is evident in the transcripts but there is little correspondence with the deployment of the metaphor and negotiation of identity. When I conceived of this research project, I wondered if reading provided an escape from conditions of daily life that were complicated or troubled by emergent non-heterosexual identities. It is more accurate to redefine the concept along the lines of reading as distraction. For example, like others, Anne found it difficult to articulate the role that reading plays in her life: it is a kind of "essential distraction:"

> …I see reading as almost essential, sort of, to the way I live my life. Like, it's very integrated. I don't know whether, what kind of purpose it serves. I don't do a lot of so-called, you know, theorists reading, like nonfiction, so I suspect it's um, a lot of sort of, kind of distraction and getting caught up in a good story. (Anne)

It is almost as if we are unable to apprehend what makes the act of reading so powerful. We cannot live without it and we rely on clichéd constructions to convey its importance to us. Lynne Pearce (1997) has proposed a theory of implicated reading that divorces our voluntary reading practices from the drive to make meaning of what we read. Reading is presented as an act of emotional engagement with the text rather than as a hermeneutical act of interpretation. I wonder to what extent my shaping of the interview and the larger project forced my participants to look for and articulate "meaning." How would they answer if I had asked, "Describe for me how reading makes you feel?"

Anne's distinction between kinds of reading, fiction and "theorists reading," calls up categories of low and highbrow taste. It might also suggest that one of the reasons we find it so difficult to talk about voluntary reading is because we define it against more privileged reading practices such as those we do for "information," for school, for knowledge. In this particular binary of taste, voluntary reading can only function as a

distraction because to invest it with more meaning would usurp the more esteemed position of nonfiction texts.

Joyce collapses the binary of taste distinctions when she describes her reading of nonfiction in the same terms of enjoyment, escape and pleasure. However, when asked directly about the role of reading in her life, Joyce also relies on the metaphor of escape. To illustrate its capacity to distract her from problems in her everyday life, she draws a parallel to reading as drug use, another common metaphor used to describe the act of reading (Ross 1987).

> Well anytime anything bothers me, I'll read something and that's why I like reading like really intellectual things, because it really takes my mind off…I get consumed in it. So in a way, it's bad because I don't deal with the problem, but like it's good because it's like, I could do drugs to do that. But like I'd rather just read…So I think it's always really escape. 'Cause I didn't ever really read for knowledge. I think that was just kind of a by-product. (Joyce)

For Ellen, reading creates an opening or a space rather than an escape. Given her troubled reading history, it holds a creative potential to constitute a distinct space that exists between her everyday, actual existence and the space taken up by the book itself and the stories within its pages:

> Well, if I'm going to read, then I want to be able to wholly experience the book, and the only way I can do that is if I really put myself in there. Same thing when I watch TV shows. (Ellen)

Camille offers an interesting counterpoint to Ellen's comments when she tells me, "I'm maybe at a point in my life that I don't have the desire to read to kind of lose myself." She wants to be critically engaged with the world but her identity is not to be colonized by the fictional or textual worlds. Unlike Ellen who "puts herself in" the text, Camille determines her own distinct place.

At times Laurie shares the same strong desire to "stay in the world." She was one of the most avid readers I interviewed, and she was very clear about the limitations of her

reading practice. Reading has been an escape for her especially during bouts of depression. Now, however, she reads "because [she] wants to be involved in people's lives again." She does not want reading to mute her interaction with the actual world, or as she says, "I believe I'd rather be a part of the world, you know, and watch people or go hiking and be part of my own space rather than somebody else's world."

Sue also emphatically rejects the notion of reading as escape regardless of her reading material. She defines reading as a relational, concrete engagement with the world:

> Well, I never think of myself as reading to escape because I know that whatever I'm reading I'm going to encounter something that is very much a part of the world. Like even if it's from you know the 1200s, there's going to be something in it that relates. (Sue)

Underlining the difficulty of defining just exactly what reading is to her, Kathy describes reading as "kind of an escape." Her concept of reading as a "little secret" suggests risk, vulnerability but also the power that secret-keepers hold. She emphasizes this herself when she explains it is a secret knowledge that can only be shared with other readers, suggesting in turn, a powerful social connection mediated through text:

> It's just kind of like you get to be alone by yourself at the same time—it's like a little secret too…I guess the story, like you get to know this other world, and it's like your own little secret, you can't explain it unless someone else reads it. (Kathy)

READING AS ESCAPE: A CONCLUSION

Reading seems to constitute a kind of "essential relief" that provides distraction from the ordinary pressures of everyday life. The meaning of this kind of reading is difficult to articulate and readers in this study relied on the metaphor of escape to explain the function of voluntary reading in their lives. At times I believe our talk about leisure reading was hampered by a deep-seated derogation of everyday reading choices: mainstream romances, science fiction and fantasy, mysteries and thrillers, so-called

"women's fiction" and Oprah-recommended books were perhaps, not deemed worthy topics of discussion. The young women in this study did read these sorts of texts and would discuss them when I asked them early in the interviews what they liked to read, or what they were reading lately, and other general questions designed to establish rapport. When our conversation shifted to reading encounters that helped them negotiate their sexual identities, talk of these mainstream genres generally ceased. I was conscious of this and attempted to address it by repeatedly acknowledging genres that were mentioned by participants. Most often, however, the distinct genre of lesbian and gay materials was explicitly raised at this point in the interviews. So while reading of a certain kind is seen to be a kind of escape in this research it does not constitute an escape from a problematic identity nor the social implications of this identity. This may be a cause for optimism because the young queer women who participated in this study did not seem overly troubled by their identities. They wanted to read books that informed their personal perspectives on their present and future experiences. In the context of identity negotiation, they wanted reading to expand their understanding of their social milieu and their possible movements through it. More than providing an escapist pleasure, reading offered these young women an opportunity to engage with the larger world.

Chapter Four – Reading for Possibility

Reading as way of finding out about what is possible emerged as a theme early in the interviewing process. Nicky, my second participant, expressed a desire for new possibilities and new ways of being in the world while openly claiming a lesbian identity. She has a corresponding wish for new and different stories of lesbian experience, stories that resonate with her own experiences and that provide a blueprint for her future. Her articulate demands on authors and the materials she chose and liked to read were high: in reading about lesbian experience she wanted much more than to be entertained and distracted:

> And well, I don't want to read about homophobia, I'd rather not because it's not the biggest issue in my life. Generally because I have a big mouth and I really don't care and if you want to hate me for it I don't care. And I'll say something to you because I'm like that. I understand that it's probably important for someone who is having a lot of trouble with coming out and doesn't have any sort of supports and is looking for that. But for me I was just like this is the same story. This is my story already…Show me the possibilities! Show me that someone can be gay and lesbian and be in love and do the things other people do in books, because I couldn't relate to straight characters in books. I wanted something that was me and showed me the possibilities that were available to me. (Nicky)

Nicky's phrase, "show me the possibilities," stayed with me as I transcribed and conducted an initial analysis of our interview. I actively decided not to use it as a hermeneutic 'hook' in subsequent interviews, as I wanted to see if the notion of reading for possibility was shared (without solicitation) by other participants as they talked about the role of reading in their lives. As the interviews continued, reading for possibility was confirmed as a salient theme across participants' reading accounts. Also, as the previous chapter shows, one of the important early conceptual metaphors, reading as escape, proved to be an inadequate explanation for what my participants were telling me. However the concept of reading for possibility does provide insight into how participants engage with texts and, more to the point, what this experience means to them.

Oxford English Dictionary Online provides the following selected definitions for the word "possible:"

- *Adj.* That may be (i.e., is capable of being); that may or can exist, be done, or happen in general, or in given or assumed conditions or circumstances)
- That may be (i.e., is not known not to be); that is perhaps true of a fact; that perhaps exists. (Expressing contingency, or an idea in the speaker's mind, not power or capability of existing as in [above]; hence sometimes nearly = credible, thinkable.)
- Having the power *to do* something; able, capable. *Obs. Rare.*

These definitions seemed to fit with my common sense understanding of possibility as something or some way of being that was potential, emergent, empowering, and capable. But they also suggested a tighter framework for analysis of the interview data. I went back to the transcripts keeping these definitions in the forefront of my next round of analysis. I asked the following questions of the data:

- Do these readers talk about the role of reading as a way that makes notions of identity "thinkable" to them or provide insight into ways of *being* lesbian/queer?
- Does reading hold the potential to allow these readers to enact or claim lesbian/queer identities?

Thinking about the data in this framework resulted in rich themes that draw out and delineate the meaning of the concept of reading for possibility. The readers in this study talked about the role of reading in their lives as helpful or useful as they imagined their futures; and they discussed how reading helped them to make sense of their present understandings of their own identities.

BEYOND THE MODERNIST COMING OUT TALE

"Relationships and sex and everything"

– Laurie, 23 years

Kong, Mahoney and Plummer (2002) chart the emergence of the coming out tale in their history of "interviews with homosexuals." They argue that these narratives of disclosure are 'modernist' in the sense that they contain the following elements:

- Causal language of linear progression;
- Essentialist gay identity;
- Same sequence and pattern of the life course: unhappy childhood; strong sense of feeling different; critical moment usually in adolescence with concern about being gay; problems with secrecy, guilt, shame, fear, suicidal feelings;
- Resolution from meeting other lesbians and gays in the community; and
- Ultimate achievement of sense of self as gay or lesbian with membership in a larger community (242-43).

Coming out issues were only addressed in the interviews if they emerged from our talk about reading. This study should not be construed as yet another that chronicles the suffering of young people coming of age with non-mainstream sexual identities and orientations. I do not deny the importance and relevance of studies that take this area as their problematic as they continue to contribute to our understanding of the dynamic social milieu in which lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer young people enact their identities. My participants did encounter standard coming out stories both in the fictional works they chose to read and in a selection of autobiographical and biographical narratives including those found online. However, there was a great deal of dissatisfaction expressed over these predictable tales of hardship and resolution. On one hand, mentioned texts provided reassuring evidence of lesbian and gay lives and of the existence of other actual lesbian and gay people represented by authors and textual

characters. But on the other hand, many participants expressed a longing for more complex and sophisticated stories of lesbian and queer experience.

Chris found solace in a collection of autobiographical coming out stories written by gay men. She recalls that this book helped her when she began to understand that she was not straight. She actively looked for answers to her questions about her almost unimaginable future as she translated sometimes tragic stories of violence, intolerance and pain into templates of hope:

> …Around the time that I broke up with my boyfriend I was still sort of looking you know where I was going to go from here. Well I knew that that wasn't going to work out, but was I just going to live alone forever? Or was I actually going to go and find a girlfriend or whatever? I read *Boys like Us*…[a] collection of stories written by men, coming out stories, short stories…Which is way better than lesbian coming out stories! [laughter]. It was, it was really…I guess because you know you're a man and you're supposed to be tough and you've got all these ideas, and your family has all these ideas for you. I think it's a little bit harder…I picked that book up. I found it…it was really good. It was really good. And it made me optimistic about telling everybody just because it was such…horrible things happened to people and still these people, they're writers, they're editors, they're playwrights…Everything, you know, from getting kicked out with no money to like, you know, father beating the crap out of you, because they found some love letter in the drawer…yeah…and they're still very successful now, so that—I figured it couldn't be that bad! (Chris)

If we revisit Nicky's comments shown at the beginning of this section (see page 71) we see how the stories help her to locate herself within a larger textual community, while at the same time, they alienate her from the broadening of experience that she craves. She adds an important qualifier to her rejection of books about homophobia and other "issue stories": she allows that these stories are "probably important for someone who is having a lot of trouble with coming out," clearly not a position in which she sees herself. She goes on with a further indictment of the modernist coming out narrative:

> I read them and after awhile, 'cause they're all the same: "and I told my parents and either I thought they were going to be really upset and they weren't and they were happy, or they kicked me out of the house," or somewhere in between. But they start to sound the same and there's more to it. And I really wish—and most of the time, it's well, "they were fine when I came out but they don't really want

> me to talk about it anymore," and that's discouraging to me, I don't want to hear about that. (Nicky)

In coming to terms with her lesbian identity, Nicky found helpful "anything that [she] could find that was a lesbian story that went beyond being the coming out story. So *Rubyfruit Jungle* did that." She recalls another book, *Boys Like Her* by a quartet of queer writers called Taste This, saying, "I just loved them. Cool, they're people…it's just about people and their unique experiences, what happens to girls." This book plays with gender and sex boundaries providing dynamic and multivocal representations of female queerness, and it is not surprising that it matches Nicky's criteria for going beyond the typical coming out/coming of age narrative. In an excerpt from her review, Mariko Tamai describes the depiction of trangressive gender identities and fluid sexualities in *Boys Like Her* as follows: "…a book about being a girl. It's also a book about being a girl who's a boy…it's about girls who are girls who like girls who are boys…" (2000, 33-34).

As Nicky goes on to describe what would be the "perfect novel," she elaborates on the kinds of possibilities about which she would like to read. She emphasizes the future trajectories that such reading might play in her own life.

> … I'd like to see a story like a relationship story about lesbians you know and preferably one where they are already past the coming out stage. And so they meet you know and I would like to see it end badly. I know that sounds bad, but I would like to see it. It sounds horrible, but then I can, then if I was breaking up with someone I'd have a book to go to…that could speak to me. So I would like that and I would like to see more books…with lesbian characters that they are lesbian is an inherent part of their personality and so they just are gay, so I can see them going through their regular lives. Other things in life and how they're…affected by them being gay, not so much about them being gay. So more where it's just a part of them, where it's acceptable, and it's just, as much as it's understood that people are straight…(Nicky)

Nicky's description of the perfect book draws out another tension, one between the desire for clear representation of unique lesbian experiences and the competing desire for it to simply be part of everyday, ordinary life. The call for stories with more integrated lesbian

experience corresponds to Laurie's desire for total immersion in lesbian narratives with "relationships and sex and everything:"

> …maybe I need to, what I need to do is immerse myself in total lesbian books like from start to finish that's all it is, you know. Because for so many years, like I said I read so many het—straight books, heterosexual books. That now I want this full bodied lesbian novel you know. Where there are relationships and sex and everything you know. (Laurie)

Barb's reading of the novel *Self* by Yann Martel (1996) opened the door to new possibilities for her, especially and significantly, after her reading of what she saw as a more conventional body of queer literature. Her praise for *Self* is underlined by her rejection of the linearity of the standard coming out narrative:

> I think it was also because [*Self* by Yann Martel] played with ideas of gender. Umm, and it really, it really normalized each encounter and you know the fact this character just wakes up one day as a woman having been a man and then changes back over. It really, it just makes me think about your own conceptions of gender and stuff like that. And so into that comes you know romantic relationships which bring into it sexual identity and everything like that. And it just really wasn't a problem. I think stuff that I had read, remotely queer stuff up until then it was your token society, you know, shakes their finger at you, and but then it's ok in the end. But I was getting to the point where I was kind of tired of reading that because we're living it. (Barb)

Like other readers in this study, Barb does not simply accept the representations of lesbian and queer lives at face value – the mere presence of gay and lesbian characters is not enough. Readers in this study continually expressed a desire for more than representation of lives they already knew. They wanted something more, something that spoke to them of possibilities.

Reading for possibility reflects a positive, optimistic, future-oriented transaction between reader and text, but the transcripts also invite contemplation of an opposing concept: reading as alienation or reading that re-inscribes an outsider status, feelings of aloneness and isolation. These are sometimes unanticipated possibilities for my participants, and at

times, simply more of what they already know from their own lives and have come to expect from the lesbian and gay literature to which they have found access.

Canonical lesbian literature in general garnered negative commentary but *Rubyfruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown (1973) was singled out in discussions of alienation. This novel was published in 1973 by a small feminist publishing collective in Manhattan, and is considered to be a groundbreaking work of fiction that presented lesbian experience that was positive, even celebratory, bawdy and funny. The lesbian main character, Molly Bolt, often compared to Huck Finn in literary criticism, comes of age in a series of comical, sometimes poignant escapades that chronicle the emergence of her lesbian sexual orientation (Klemesrud 1977). Francesca finds the experiences in the book unbelievable and as a result feels alienated from Molly, the lesbian main character:

> …for instance, you know when she went on the street, she instantly found some place to sleep, instantly found a gay man who was going to take her under his wing, she wasn't like raped 30 times in one night, like what normally happens. Things like that, it was completely unbelievable and I felt…as the book went on…I felt more and more alienated because Molly could do no wrong, Molly will always get laid…What's wrong with your life in comparison to hers? (Francesca)

Naomi also disliked *Rubyfruit Jungle*. She finds it poorly written, dated, "too American" and finds the depiction of women alienating: "the women are always older and predatory women…and they seem kind of like men…" in their behaviour towards Molly and each other. Naomi also expressed dissatisfaction with the contemporary 'male' literary canon and what she calls "teenage boy fiction" claiming, "there's no space in them for me."

Anne read what is, arguably, the queen of the lesbian canon, *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall, published in 1928 to immediate censorship. The novel chronicles the life of Stephen Gordon, described in the contemporary terminology as a "sexual invert." She meets and falls in love with another woman, Mary, and for a time they live together in Paris, among others male and female homosexuals. Ultimately, Stephen cannot bear the burden of shame and in her desire to free Mary from their "unnatural" relationship she resolves to commit suicide. The book ends with a final impassioned plea for tolerance for

those who "suffer" from sexual inversion. Anne read the book with a friend for a lesbian book group, responding to it with a certain amount of critical distance, and still finding it "misogynistic:"

> …I'm in this lesbian book club. So we're reading *The Well of Loneliness*, which I had never read before…you know…a lot of people said that when they first read it, they were like "oh my god," pit of despair! Um, but you know, I kind of, I enjoyed it. I don't know, it was, it was like kind of pretty indicative, like you know, it's from the early twentieth century!…Me and my friend were like taking the radical feminist perspective on it, and it's actually quite misogynistic…but it was definitely interesting. (Anne)

Unlike other readers, Camille did not specify particular titles, but she did talk about her failure to find positive textual space in which to explore her bisexuality. In her case, her feelings of isolation and alienation were somewhat mediated by the practice of online reading, but even online she was unable to find clear and positive information:

> …But it's kind of unfortunate for all the people who are like that [bisexual]. It's not been like that, and they feel kind of lost in a way, they can't, they can relate to straight and relate to you know being lesbians, but at the same time, and I was saying like the only kind of reaffirmation that I found is online, reading different online things but never anything academic or even just bi you know whatever. I've not found a positive space for women who feel like that and maybe explain it a bit more. I have not found that at all. (Camille)

The dissatisfaction that Camille expressed is voiced by other readers in this study who extend it to different genres and formats of lesbian and gay narratives. Kathy would like to read more lesbian and gay literature but dislikes what she sees as the standard plot line of lesbian narratives:

> And then it's with movies too, you find that, even if it's lesbian writers or gay writers, the story I find that, the story's always like they meet one night, they have sex and they fall in love. And also there's always the element of, one of the main characters also has issues with her sexuality… I don't know, it kind of portrays that les—like gays can't really be in love or also that it's not right because everybody always questions it. (Kathy)

In light of the discussion above about *The Well of Loneliness*, Kathy's commentary on lesbian literature published today takes on a certain poignancy – her view encapsulates precisely the dilemma faced by Stephen Gordon at the turn of the twentieth century.

Given her rather dismal reading encounters, it is no surprise that Kathy has not recognized herself in any texts. She does not expect to see representation in a book because she identifies as a lesbian or, as she says, "Being a lesbian, I haven't really found myself in a book. 'Cause I don't really enjoy the lesbian literature, gay literature. There hasn't been a story [that mirrored] my own life—or [made] me want to like change my life." Madeline feels the same way about the genre of lesbian and gay literature, although her comments suggest a taste preference based on notions of literary merit and distinction:

> I tried a little [books with lesbian or gay characters] and been kind of dissatisfied. Which is kind of interesting. I would get a book out, you know, short stories or something like that and you know, it would just kind of bore me or would be all smutty garbage you know. Like let's see how fast we can turn this into soft porn. And that bothers me too... Never really had a very positive experience with a gay character in a book, which is unfortunate. (Madeline)

Participants overwhelmingly reject the conventions of the modernist coming out narrative with its emphasis on linear plots of hardship and resolution. Even when they acknowledge the utility of such stories in helping them understand that "they are not alone," they quickly want to move onto stories that contain complex, dynamic and variable accounts of lesbian, queer and bisexual experience. Their own lives are anything but stable, and their own experiences of coming out as lesbian, bisexual or queer tell them that there is more to the story than they are getting in much of what they read. We are only now, within the last couple of years, witnessing the rise of more sophisticated representations of non-heterosexual identities within young adult literature. For example, the recently released novel *Luna* by Julie Ann Peters (2004) features a transgender teen, the only book of its kind that I know of published specifically for a young adult audience. In works of Canadian young adult fiction with lesbian and gay characters the dominant focus remains on the coming out processes of mostly gay male characters who, in

addition to representing essentialist conceptions of identity, are rarely made into chief protagonists (Rothbauer 2002). Jenkins (1998) found very little evidence of lesbian, gay and queer communities in her analysis of a comprehensive sample of English language young adult titles with lesbian, gay and queer content published between 1969 and 1997. Most books feature the experiences of a lone lesbian, gay or queer character. Novels with lesbian and gay content written for young adults typically re-inscribe the conventions of the modernist coming out tale and continue to support the heterosexual mainstream rather than offer new possibilities for being in the world for lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and transgender/transsexual young people.

The mere existence of these textual characters might have something to offer to my participants *if* they had actually read them. The young women in this study recalled reading few young adult novels with lesbian or queer content. The notable exceptions are *Annie on My Mind* by Nancy Garden (1982), *Weetzie Bat* by Francesca Lia Block (1989), and possibly – Naomi could not quite remember the title but her description suggests Deborah Hautzig's *Hey, Dollface* (1978). The absence of the sub-genre of lesbian, gay and queer young adult literature could be mitigated by access to relevant adult materials that do, potentially, offer more complex lesbian/queer narratives, but participants expressed dissatisfaction with much of what they could find. The failure to find the kinds of books that they would like to read will be taken up in a later chapter, but the desire expressed by many of my participants for new and different stories remained largely frustrated and unfulfilled.

READING FOR EXPERIENCE

"Where I recognize the situation, it just becomes more real"

—Francesca, 18 years

Readers in this study were also looking for texts that spoke directly to varieties of lesbian and queer experience that could help them come to some personal understanding about

their own identities. For example, Chris was reading a book entitled, *FtM*, an acronym for female to male gender transitioning. Her interest in this book is extremely personal and like Nicky she is looking for models that permit new ways of enacting her identity:

> …My girlfriend was trans to begin with and then kind of switched back and so I'm deciding where do you fit in to all that? Can you just—can you be butch? Can you be—do you have to be a man? How does it all work? (Chris)

One of the four participants to complete a protocol writing on "a book that made a difference," Chris chose to write about Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), a novel about Jess, a white, working-class girl who comes of age in Buffalo, New York during the 1950s and 1960s first as a young "butch" and then as a transperson. Chris received the book as a gift from her girlfriend. During the interview, before the writing exercise was submitted, Chris described her reading of the book as follows:

> *Stone Butch Blues* was amazing… That drastically affected me and still does. It still continues to…wow…I couldn't put it down, so I just didn't breathe and I just read…It was something—I locked myself in my room and just…It took me two days to read it, I think. Which is pretty big for me. But it even affects…like when I'm in a bar at night, I'll notice how many exits there are…[inaudible]…and it's totally changed my perspective of cops. It's just…It's done a lot of skewing and especially, yeah like I do a lot of general labour jobs so I could really relate to everything…she went through. And I can understand her decision to, I'm taking testosterone, something that I deal with all the time. If anything, that's hugely affecting my life, so…I would definitely go back and read that one. If I was ever going to read a book again, it would be that one.(Chris)

Stone Butch Blues shifts Chris's perspective on how she fits into her community and how she might enact a non-mainstream sexual identity. Her reading and response to this particular account of queer life affects the way Chris sees her own life, her own identity; and these identificatory processes influence how she relates to others. Later in the interview, Chris elaborates the criteria necessary for her 'perfect' book:

> PAULETTE: If someone could write the perfect novel or the perfect book for you, what elements would it have in it?
>
> CHRIS: …[Pause]…realistic lesbian based, umm, actual real lesbian things that happen to you…like not this fabricated idea of somebody sitting in their, you know, studio writing…[inaudible]…There's a lot of really good stuff that I feel like people specifically write for me. Is that arrogant? [laughter] (Chris)

She does not want to read idealized or romanticized stories of lesbian experience. Her connection with the "actual real lesbian things" that occur in the books she chooses and likes to read reflects her sense of self so completely, that it seems as though they were written expressly for her.

Chris also makes a strong connection with lesbian and queer literary experience that does not mirror her own life; sometimes the experiences are unimaginable, but this does not make them any less 'real':

> [*Valencia*] was just really, it was real…and I couldn't imagine doing that. I couldn't imagine my life looking like that at all. It's just neat that somebody is like that. (Chris)

Valencia (Tea 2000) is a novel set in San Francisco's Mission District, in a world that one reviewer describes as a place where "dyke bars and communal apartments overflow with equal parts drama, angst, and crazy delight" (Zeisler 2000). The blurb on the back of the book reads, "There is knife-wielding Petra, who introduces Michelle to a new world of radical sex; Willa, Michelle's tormented poet-girlfriend, always on the lookout for her one true love; and Iris, the beautiful boy-dyke who ran away from the South in a dust cloud of drama." Chris cannot imagine living like those depicted in *Valencia*, but in a way simply by saying you cannot imagine something, suggests that you have done just that – imagined the impossible. She also accepts these possibilities as 'real,' a requirement for an enjoyable reading encounter.

The recognition of realistic experiences in novels is important to the other readers in this study too. It may be that the realism permits or enables the reader to place herself into the same kinds of situations, or as Chris suggests, to at least imagine that such lives are possible. Another reader, Francesca, provides a counter example that underlines the importance of credibility and believability in creating possibilities:

> …Well for example I'm doing a course called the Coming Out Novel where we're reading a lot of gay and lesbian literature. And the first book we read was *Rubyfruit Jungle* and that was the opposite of finding yourself in the text…and I

> thought the characters were completely unbelievable; that I would never, I could never understand being in that situation, it wasn't drawn out, it wasn't made clear enough. I have read books where I recognize the situation, it just becomes…more real. (Francesca)

Francesca cannot imagine the experiences of Molly and the other characters in *Rubyfruit Jungle* because they are unbelievable, or in other words, because they are not 'real.' When she "recognizes the situation" the text becomes "more real." Francesca elaborates on this realism requirement later in the interview, stressing the importance of recognizable characters:

> Well, I do like getting sort of vignettes of other people's lives, even if they are fictional. And again this goes back to the idea of realistic characters even if it's mythical or magic realism or whatever as long as the characters are real I can find… I don't know I always want to do something like put a secret camera on somebody's back and see what they do throughout the day. I find books definitely do that. It's interesting to see that too and how other people respond to the same or different situations than I do. (Francesca)

Francesca does not project herself into the book, but along side of it. However, her reading is neither disinterested nor dispassionate: she measures her own responses against those of the characters in the books she reads. That this is so becomes even more clear with her comments regarding the role of reading in her life; she explicitly links what she reads to how she 'performs' a queer identity:

> I think I read some young adult gay and lesbian fiction…it is very stereotypical and that for awhile it made me wonder about my own identity because I know I'm kinda butch now, but definitely I'm very much like just 'cause it's ratty and I couldn't be bothered [referring to her clothes: jeans, tank t-shirt, hooded sweat top]. Generally like I wear makeup and put stuff in my hair like I'm feminine and [inaudible] skorts, things like that. And I always found that kind of alienating because the lesbian [is] always on the sports team things like that…(Francesca)

Francesca suggests that identity can be read from certain cultural markers associated with personal appearance. She feels alienated from the stereotypical depictions of lesbian and gay personae in the fiction she has read as her own more feminine appearance puts her at odds with the "non-feminine" gay and lesbian women she encounters in fiction.

Laurie also suggests that identity codes depicted in what she reads consciously play out in how she enacts a queer identity:

> … for *Tipping the Velvet*, I remember I was questioning um gender roles…like, um, I wanted to be more boyish…um I think I'm androgynous, you know, but I wanted to experience that, like the same year I dressed in drag for Halloween, right. So *Tipping the Velvet* really kind of said something to me because she dressed up in the suits and stuff…(Laurie)

Tipping the Velvet (Waters 1998) is a speculative work of fiction that imagines the largely undocumented lives of Victorian working class women who would today be called lesbian or queer. The author emphasizes in great (perhaps fetishistic) detail the style and manner of the main female character's episodes of cross-dressing. Although the setting is much different from *Valencia*, the two books share an imaginative approach to the depiction of diverse and dissident female sexualities.

Reading about other women's experiences, whether in fiction or nonfiction, helps to define what it means to be 'normal.' To Keri, this kind of reading created a positive connection with other women along the dimensions of experience and emotion. However, this kind of identificatory process is not an unproblematic function of reading. Like Francesca, Keri feels a tension when she recognizes critical differences between her own experiences and those of textual characters:

> I found it hard because I'd be sitting there listening in my women's studies class and reading the material, and I would say, like, even though like, like even back then I said this is the lifestyle that you know that I'm supposed to be in, you know, this is what I want and but then, we would read material about lesbians, like, umm up north and things like that where, you know…and I felt even though, like I was coming out and I was, you know, really insecure about it, I felt like it, that I shouldn't feel that way because there's so much, so much more support than what other people have, type of thing. Like I don't know if that even makes much sense…but I almost felt guilty that I should feel insecure about it. (Keri)

Other readers share a similar refusal to identify *completely* with the characters they read about. For example, Madeline defines finding yourself in the text as "knowing yourself and you know, when you kind of sit back and look at literature and you can find yourself

in many different characters and events and situations that you might be, not completely though." Diane says, "a book can be illustrative of what you're going through, but also different things in the book will show you…the contrast between the story and your life."

While many of the young women spoke to me about reading in terms of a process of identification with the main characters in various lesbian and queer texts, another reason cited for reading and desiring to read this kind of literature, was to learn about sex, specifically sex between women. Laurie addresses this directly in her additional comments on *Tipping the Velvet* as she measures knowledge of lesbian and queer experience against a lifetime immersion in heterosexual culture:

> Like I think a lot, I mean a lot has to do with the relationship part, but a lot of it I was really interested in the sexual part too, right. I mean I have been with women but I just it's just, because so many years you hear about it, the heterosexual life…so it's still novel to you when you read it. You're like, "wow! Should I be reading this?" (Laurie)

Naomi recalls searching for answers to a basic question regarding lesbian sexuality – "what do women do in bed?"

> It was something like *Beautiful Face* and it's two women, basically they have this really intense friendship. And it's clear that there're erotic undertones, and one of the women is really troubled and the other woman is kind of the caretaker. And the caretaker woman is much more interesting…ultimately her friend is unable to reconcile that it's actually an erotic relationship…I kept reading—flipping to the lesbian sex scene, but there never is one. That was totally demoralizing. Or maybe there was like some kissing or something…And that was so confusing at that age. I totally remember that scene in *Annie on My Mind* where um, she's in science class and that woman comes out and she says…what do women do in bed? Answer it! [laughter]. (Naomi)

The tentative nature of the connection that readers make with the experiential accounts of lesbian and queer existence underlines much of my participants' talk about the effects of such reading. Reading helps center their own experience with their nonmainstream sexualities, bringing it out of the closet, relaxing margins of isolation and alienation, by showing them that there are others such as themselves, others who feel and act in similar

ways, and others who give them permission to act as they do. The very existence of these margins is questioned as these young women emerge from them and reject them. A sharp tension exists between the security of claiming possible identities and the insecurity of having them challenged, attacked, or even simply scrutinized by actual outside threats or by internal doubts and fears. Reading about the experiences and characteristics of textual women who provide models of identity gives readers 'tools' with which to define themselves as they engage with the world.

MAKING CONNECTIONS WITH THE TEXTUAL OTHER

"It helps to validate my own life"

—Keri, 20 years

Like many readers in this study, Keri preferred to read of other women's 'real' experiences. She was attracted to "powerful" female characters and recognition of this attraction helped her to come privately to terms with her lesbian sexuality. When asked about the role that reading plays in her life, she emphasized the themes of validation and comfort:

> I think it helps to validate my own life. That's what I look for in a book, and that's what I gain from reading certain kinds of books; is kind of acceptance and validation, even though I have it all around me, you know…like I still look for it. I like to, you know, read other people's experiences and say, yeah I'm having a similar experience. You know. Or, yeah I can associate with this character, therefore what I'm feeling is normal, you know. And so I think that's, that is my number one goal when I'm looking for books and when I'm reading: I'm trying to associate with the book, and kind of make myself feel better, you know, make myself feel normal, I think [laughs]. (Keri)

Reading about other gay and lesbian lives represented in various narrative texts helps readers as they negotiate their own place in the world. Simply knowing that other people claim similar identities helps. Joyce elaborates on this theme:

> Reading definitely helped. I think it's the only thing that did help. Cause it's like, pretty much everywhere else the only message was that this was like nothing, like this is a scary, bad thing and you hide it, and no one else is it. You know what I mean? And then when you'd read and you'd be like oh and this person's gay and this person's gay…And like most of the people I really like, like even Socrates you know, oh he's gay. That can't be all bad…So that made me feel like I wasn't alone. (Joyce)

Comfort, solace, feelings of not being alone and a sense of the liberatory potential engendered by reading are themes repeated again and again. Just knowing that other lesbian, gay and queer people exist helps, and one way to find out about them is by reading. At times reading may be the only available link to a sense of community that readers can access. Barb explains in her response to my question about reading that was helpful to her in the negotiation of her identity:

> Well just in the sense that when you are reading about characters that you can kind of identify with in even just one respect, kind of familiarity and it's comforting, and so if you're having, you know a bit of trouble, it's just—if you don't have a direct example of other people, like if you don't have solidarity…or times when I was just feeling like totally alone, certain books helped me realize, "ohh." You know. Or conversely, wow, what this person's going through is so terrible, my life seems like roses, you know. (Barb)

For participants, finding themselves in the text and associating with 'real' experiences of textual characters validates their own claims to a lesbian existence, and their own experiences of what this means. Comfort, validation and acceptance that my participants find through their engagement with texts are essential components in the process of claiming a positive lesbian or queer identity in the first place. The reading history of one participant, Ellen, provides a negative case that supports this argument. Most of my participants successfully and with relative ease 'found' themselves mirrored in the lesbian and queer narratives mentioned by them during the interviews. Ellen was more resistant to the notion of locating herself in a text, feeling that she already *knew* who she was so she did not have to *find* herself. However, later in the interview I followed up on these comments, asking again if she had ever gone to books to find out what it meant to

be gay, especially when she described feelings of isolation, resentment and fear when she initially came out to herself and to her friends. She admitted that she had tried and failed to find materials at the public library. Ellen is unique in the sample of seventeen participants with her failure to find any connection in conventional lesbian or queer narratives. I do not suggest that what she described as a traumatic coming out process (see "When Reading Fails" in Chapter One) was affected in any way by her failure to find relevant reading materials, but I do wonder to what extent her story might have been different if she had, like others, discovered that she was not alone in the world with her emergent lesbian sexual identity.

Claiming, enacting and imagining possibilities for their lives as out and proud queer young women are activities that are privileged by most of my participants in their talk about reading. Sustained engagements with materials that represent lesbian and queer experience are often described as connections or relationships with what Lynne Pearce has theorized as the "textual other." The textual other "is whoever, or whatever, becomes the focus of [the reader's] dialogic connection in the process of reading, and is not restricted to humanistically conceived characters/subjects in the text" (Pearce 1997: 29). The identification with the main character in lesbian or queer narratives is perhaps the most accessible relationship available to 'ordinary' readers or non-academic readers like the readers in this study. The connection with the textual other imbues readers with a sense of what is possible in their own lives. I initially conceived of this phenomenon as "finding oneself in the text," and I asked participants to tell me what this particular concept meant to them. They repeatedly discussed it in terms of relating and connecting, extending the scope of the phrase to include the notion of the textual other:

> Sounds like the thing where you can find people that you identify with in the text; or maybe not even people, but characteristics of, you know like the heroine in the book, or other people in…yeah, so just being able to like relate yourself somehow to what you're reading. (Anne)

> … you can connect yourself to characters in different books. And especially at a young age where you find definitions of people you'd like to be, what you want to do with your life, by reading through another character's head. And relate or not relate and sort of decide the definitions. (Stella)

Laurie animates the relationship with the textual other, giving it an active voice to which she can respond as she recognizes herself in the text:

> Obviously it means a lot because um when you're looking for somebody to speak back to you and you can say, "oh! That's me." Like you can find through writing, through something, that this text in particular speaks to you? And you feel like a connection to it…then you can explore that feeling more in depth because somebody has it written down. (Laurie)

She elaborates on this process when she refers to specific texts showing how the works create a sense of possibility, how even the knowledge of textual others creates a sense of entitlement and excitement:

> One of the first ones I read was, of the first ones I can remember was just like short stories, called *Boys like Her* from Taste This. And I didn't really identify with any of the women completely, but I mean a lot of thought processing, I'm like, "yeah, I thought of that." You know like that sexual stuff or that relationship stuff and you can identify through that. And actually I remember one poem that, this is the first poem I came across that was, it was "thoughts on bisexuality." Because I first originally thought you know the first step for a lot of women is coming out as bisexual. So it was called "Thoughts on Bisexuality" and um "love is like water" and "when you need it, it doesn't matter where it comes from." (Laurie)

The identification with the textual other is not complete, but the access to lesbian and bisexual experience found in narrative texts creates a space in her imagination for her to explore intersecting identities. And like other participants, Laurie makes a distinction between the lesbian texts she reads and other kinds of materials:

> You know, like the *Pillars of the Earth*, or *Trinity* or something…those are like two of my favourites, right…it's Ken Follet…and it's building of a church over bands of centuries and generations of people…and, I really like those books, but I never like I never identified with anybody. It was just more of learning, enjoying the stories, loved the history. I really loved the history. And *Clan of the Cave Bears* um I learned a lot about sex [slight lowering of tone here and laughter] in *Clan of the Cave Bear*. (Laurie)

Barb's reading of Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* is recalled as a landmark moment in her reading history. She made a memorable connection with the "genderless" narrator (Winterson does not use gender specific pronouns to refer to this character who chronicles a tumultuous love affair with a woman). Barb talks about this book using the metaphor of reading as freedom—the freedom to reject central binaries of gender and sexual identity:

> …The way the narrator is genderless started to make me feel a little bit more open to the concept of love and sexuality and stuff like that. Being separate from one's sex…all the problems, everything they ran into, the main character and the narrator and the love interest were free of gender, and so, while that, you know, speaks a lot in terms of gender and identity and stuff like that, it also helped me realize that it was ok. You know, and that it was just love and stuff like that, and that's free of man/woman and heterosexual/homosexual and that was really freeing for me. Because I was feeling really weighed down by the label of gay. Mostly I think because you know, society tells us it's bad. So reading that book made a big difference in how I viewed things as acceptable. (Barb)

Sue makes an interesting distinction between the effects of reading nonfiction and fiction. Each contributes to her sense of identity but reading nonfiction is described as a kind of conversation with women to whom she *relates* (recall Laurie's animation of the textual other that "speaks" to her), whereas with fiction she *applies* what she reads to her own life.

> When I'm reading all this nonfiction sexuality stuff, I take in the sense of a discussion with people, like even if it's you know, removed like obviously very removed: I'm never meeting with people…Like it's similar in my mind as going to a group and talking with other women and talking about their sexuality, like it's just getting these stories…I almost take as kind of like the more practical, like this is actually specifically supposed to relate to your life and I'm taking it in that way. Whereas with fiction, for example, just to use a very similar comparison like if I'm, if there's a book that has a character who's dealing with similar sexuality questions um, I'll identify with that and kind of apply it to my own experience but I won't take it in the same practical everyday way…but it can be like, "oh yeah, that's kind of like my situation." (Sue)

Sue's relationship with the textual others of her nonfiction reading choices has a clear dialogical nature: it is like a conversation, similar to the sharing of stories during the

meeting of a women's group. When reading fiction, however, she draws what she needs from it and what applies it to her own experience through a process of identification.

READING FOR POSSIBILITY: A CONCLUSION

The idea that young women go to novels and other narrative texts to explore possibilities for their lives is not new. In a work that pre-dates Radway's study of female readers of romance novels, Rachel Brownstein (1984) theorized the development of the heroine in a selection of classic novels, arguing that women read them both with and against their own self-perceptions of "female destiny:"

> Young women like to read about heroines in fiction so as to rehearse possible lives and to imagine a woman's life important – because they want to be attractive and powerful and significant, someone whose life is worth writing about, whose world revolved around her and makes being the way she is make sense (Brownstein 1984, xxiv).

Following Wolfgang Iser, Joanne Frye argues that as women read about new experiences their act of reading 're-writes' their old experiences. She describes reading as " the need to escape the confine of the purely personal: to find, in the acknowledgment of shared experiences, a confirmation or clarification of what has been culturally denied or trivialized" (Frye 1986, 192).

Christian-Smith writes "While reading we dream of identities and pleasures beyond what is possible and escape everyday realities" (1993, 45) but, like Frye, I have argued that the readers in this study are not merely 'escaping' from everyday realities; they are, rather, trying to amass cultural representations of what their everyday realities might look like as they go forward in their lives as out lesbians and queer women. And rather than reading ideology "off" the texts or having their identities read back to them from texts, they read critically. They are aware at all times of the coercion of both heterosexual and homosexual narratives, and both are rejected as capable of representing their present and

future lives. Recent research from Radway (2002) supports this view. She asks questions of the dominant narrative about girls and media consumption that allows only one response, articulated by Radway as – "They can do nothing but absorb the monotonous and uninflected messages." She wonders whether reading "may not always be a process of taking up an already prescribed textual and cultural position but rather more like a practice of exploration, a practice of trying on new roles and experimenting with new emotions in the safe space of the imaginary" (2002, 184-185). Reflecting on her own reading history and using an analysis of "grrl zine" culture, Radway moves towards a concept of "playful gleaning" that posits reading as a "way of imagining possible ways of occupying social space and relating to the world. It can be a way of actually inhabiting other subjectivities, other ways of gesturing toward the world with words" (2002, 196).

In her groundbreaking essay, "Reading Ourselves: Towards a Feminist Theory of Reading," Patrocinio P. Schweickart suggests that a feminist reading ground provides a context for recognizing one's affinity with textual others while "playing this affinity against the differences" (1986, 54). Establishing an affinity is not the same as the process of identification that unproblematically subsumes or erases critical differences between readers and textual others. This notion invites an alternative interpretation to the discussion of reading with participants in this research: readers are perhaps expressing an affinity with the textual other (whether main or secondary characters, authors, setting, mood, other implied readers and so on), while rejecting or resisting a complete identification which would blur the boundaries of their own emergent identities, essentially erasing themselves in a process of interpretative annihilation.

There has been a remarkable silence on reading for possibilities available to young women who claim queer and lesbian identities (Moje and MuQaribu 2003). While studies on young women's reading habits abound, the subjects of this body of research are almost uniformly constructed as heterosexual. And while I am not suggesting that lesbian and queer young women can somehow disengage from the overarching patriarchal and

heterosexist economies of reading and literacy, their experiences as lesbian, bisexual and queer readers are privileged in this study and provide the ground for my analysis of reading. Young lesbian and queer women may dream of a future relationship with another woman that is happy and satisfying, and may even dream of matrimony, but lesbian narratives are hard to find. And when they are located and read by the participants in this study, they are less than satisfying. The ideological bent of the typical coming of age story written for young adults supports the heterosexual mainstream despite the presence of lesbian and gay characters as these characters are rarely the heroes of the stories, and readers usually only hear of their suffering and hardship.

In separate studies, Charles Sarland (1991) and J. A. Appleyard (1990) advocate the idea that young people use fictional texts to invent potential futures. The reading accounts shared by the young women in this study support this. The notion of reading for possibility cannot be untangled from its forward-looking orientation, and, indeed, my participants are often explicit about their desire to read books that provide positive trajectories of hope. But this is only one part of their stories. They also want concrete details of lesbian, bisexual and queer lives, presented with an undeniable, completely credible sense of realism. They want to read about what it means to be a lesbian, to be queer, to be bisexual; how these identities change and remain stable and how they situate those who claim them in the larger world.

Summarizing from the discussion presented in this chapter, the dimensions of reading for possibility are as follows:

1. **An orientation towards the future**. Readers are looking for flexible trajectories for their lives and they look forward with yearning and trepidation to what follows the coming out phase. They wanted and want answers to their questions about “what comes next.” One place they look for them is in fictional narratives.

2. **A rejection of modernist coming out narratives and other narratives derived from what is perceived to be canonical lesbian literature**. Readers are looking for accounts of lesbian and queer experience that are at least as complex as their own lives. They do not reject the linear redemption tales out of hand however as they are often the only materials they can find that speak to them at all.

3. **A desire to read about "being lesbian," "being queer," or "being bisexual."** Questions about identity roles of butch, femme, trans, queer, bisexual; questions about gender constructions and deconstructions; questions about sex and love abound in the transcripts. Readers are looking for models of identity, examples of behaviour that reflect possibilities for their lives.

4. **A connection established with the "textual other."** An emotional engagement with textual characters/subjects and with the authors who create them provides a wholly unique, inimitable ground for a process of identification that is rewarding, helpful and empowering.

Sally Munt illuminates the concept of reading for possibility when she writes that lesbian novels have the potential to show us "*how it could be*, to banish loneliness in favour of membership. They give us a formula for action instead of a recipe for passivity. They give us a self, and offer us a community to share it with…" (Munt 1998, 20). This chapter has been concerned with the process of finding and claiming selfhood; the next chapter turns to the notion of reading as engagement with the larger world.

Chapter Five – Reading for Community

The previous chapters on reading as escape and reading for possibilities explored the more solitary, personal and individual effects of reading in the lives of my participants. In this chapter, reading for community, I focus on the outward looking and outward reaching aspects of our conversations about reading and identity. This concept emerged in response to my thinking about and ultimate rejection of the concept of reading as escape. If reading did not embody the desire to escape from a particular construction of the world as hostile, homophobic and anti-lesbian, what did it mean to the readers in this study? My participants expressed an explicit desire to *engage* with the world on two distinct grounds: local communities and ideological spaces.

Recognition of and participation in specific, local communities comprising other young women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, queer and/or feminist figures in much of our talk about the power of reading to make changes in our lives. Reading is frequently a vehicle of access to "community" and to a sense of social connectedness. The function of reading in this context has less to do with what is within the pages of chosen reading materials and more to do with the social significance of these texts. This is an important distinction as it underlines the qualitative difference between reading as a relationship with textual others (as described and analyzed in the previous chapter) and reading as engagement with actual communities. "Reading for community" encompasses local reading groups or book clubs as well as sharing and conversing about books more generally. However the overarching theme is making connections with other readers. These connections lead to the second reading ground: the creation of ideological space that permits the open expression and exploration of lesbian and queer identities.

Ideological space is 'opened' or 'created' by the everyday practices of reading including conversation with other readers and/or other women about reading. Participants frequently assign value to certain genres of reading or to specific titles based on a

criterion of "space" for lesbian, bisexual, queer and/or feminist issues and concerns. Notions of public space and civic space relate to this reading ground, especially if we take to heart the words of the prominent lesbian and gay rights advocate, Barbara Gittings, who contends that reading stories of lesbian experience allows "a way for lesbians to negotiate a positive sense of themselves before they can move to political action and social change" (cited in Schuster 1999, 44). Reading provides a ground for exploring the implications of lesbian and/or queer subjectivities and offers the empowering opportunity for feelings of solidarity. The everyday practice of reading allows for a public recognition of self and self-understanding that can then be communicated to others in ways that are both profound and mundane. Sharing books with lesbian and queer content is to invite other readers to recognize and celebrate our claims to an alternative sexual identity – the imperative underlying this act of sharing might be said to be: read this book, read me.

READING LOCAL AUTHORS

> "They're in my community, they're in Toronto, I could bump into them"
>
> —Laurie, 23 years

Most of the participants in this study lived in or around Toronto, Ontario. An unanticipated result of this proximity was the frequency with which local, Toronto-based, female queer and lesbian writers were mentioned. During the duration of this study novels and short story collections were released by acclaimed queer women writers such as Camilla Gibb, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Elizabeth Ruth, Marnie Woodrow, Emma Donoghue and Helen Humphreys – all authors who live in or near Toronto. Furthermore, many of my participants knew these and other writers personally as acquaintances met within the literary milieu of their extended queer communities. At times it is a personal connection with an author known to be queer that brings the written work into the hands of the reader. For example, Cole cites the anthology *Boys Like Her* (Camilleri, Coyote,

Eakle and Montgomery 1998), lent to her by a friend, explicitly answering my question of "what she likes about it" by mentioning her acquaintance with at least two of its authors. Ember Swift is a popular "girl band" that plays in Toronto venues on a regular basis, and has a large base of fans in southwestern Ontario.

> There's four authors to it – Taste This . . . and I know one of them…like I know Anna…and then Lyndell who is the backup musician for Ember Swift who I've seen in concert several times… (Cole)

Laurie also knows members of the performance group Taste This, and admits that she read *Boys Like Her* to learn more about one of the writers:

> *Boys like Her* – one of the women who wrote in it was [known to me – specific relationship omitted]…so I picked that up because I mean I knew the one woman who had written it, and so that really kind of hooked me, so I want to read that, so that really happened. (Laurie)

She elaborates on this reading relationship again later in the interview, stressing her sense of social connectedness organized through her literacy practices within a larger community. She also mentions another prominent local queer writer, Elizabeth Ruth, and the long running public performance literary night, called "Clit Lit", a showcase for women's writing:

> …*Boys Like Her*…was getting to know real people, like these people actually exist, this experience actually happened to them, and I know one of them. So I was able to get to know this person more, like just what was she really like?…to learn more…for her to inspire me that way. Yeah, and the other three authors, I met along the way already, you know…So it was kind of neat that way, to read those books, because they're in my community, they're in Toronto, I could bump into them. Same with Elizabeth Ruth. You know like, I haven't read *Ten Good Seconds of Silence* but I saw her on the street car, I really wish I had read the book, so that I could say that was a great book. But I hadn't read it so I couldn't say anything. You know, and then I also saw her at Clit Lit, so just knowing her—it's just really cool living in Toronto because you meet the authors, you meet the people who have written these things. (Laurie)

Another participant, Chris, addresses a local community of writers with a clear sense of the boundaries between the writers' local personas and their status as "authors":

> And I like books that are written by dykes in this community too…I kinda feel like a stalker when I'm reading their books 'cause I see them at like social events and I like suddenly know all about their lives and I don't know if I should know that. (Chris)

Barb's work as a reviewer for a local magazine gives her access to small press titles, but she also "keep[s] an eye out for queer fiction…lots of local Toronto authors too." During our conversation, we discussed Oprah Winfrey's book selection of the award-winning bestseller, *Fall on Your Knees* by Toronto author Ann-Marie Macdonald (1996). The novel was selected as the forty-fifth title of the "Oprah Book Club," for February 2002. Barb and I talked about the excitement generated by this selection and the subsequent interview with the author that appeared on Oprah's popular daytime television talk show. Barb was indignant about the skewed coverage of both the lesbian content in the novel and MacDonald's well-known literary status in Toronto:

> …Little to no mention of you know, the big scandal with the lesbian love affair, and that. And no mention even that she's [Ann-Marie MacDonald] mostly well known as a playwright, and mostly accomplished as an actress and playwright and you know she's partnered with one of the more prominent directors around the city…and no mention even about Toronto really which is kind of sad because she's such a prominent figure here. So I thought it was silly. But that's another reason why I stay away from Oprah. (Barb)

Other readers in this study mentioned Oprah's book club selections as well. Most participants eschewed purchasing the titles, but many had read a few of the selections. There was general agreement that they would avoid buying books that had covers emblazoned with Oprah's book club logo on the front. Affinity with or aversion to Oprah's book club was another way in which social connections were made with other readers – along trajectories of support or aversion to featured titles and subsequent publicity.

In a more personal account of a reading relationship, Diane articulates the connection she has with one queer writer and how it garnered insights for self-understanding and gave

her new ways to talk about her own experiences. To fulfill the requirement of a high school project, Diane located and interviewed a local poet, and she discusses the impact that this had on her understanding of reading and writing processes:

> Well, for me the process of reading and understanding reading is directly involved with authors and their interaction with their own texts…She's a [writer]…I made a lot of discoveries about myself just in dialogue with her…I really saw her as expressing a lot of ideas that I had about writing not just being story-telling, but also being presentation, in the words and descriptions that are a sense of where you are right now. So because she was able to talk like that I found new ways to talk about myself and so that's been a positive relationship and textual relationships…(Diane)

These excerpts show that an actual community of local lesbians, bisexuals and queers rises up around various literacy practices. There is a movement from the notion of reading as personal, as private and as an activity conducted in quiet solitude, to an idea of reading as embedded within a localized social milieu, within a community that is "on the ground" and accessible to readers, and one that engenders a sense of belonging and affinity along lines of identity. Discussions of local queer writers emerged in the specific context of how participants 'found' reading materials with lesbian and gay content, and how reading helped them make sense of their lives in terms of newly declared alternative sexual identities. Being able to speak with an insider's knowledge of local literary events and local literary personalities confers a degree of status. Investing in a vibrant and accessible local literary community may also be another way to enact a public and shared understanding of what it means to claim a lesbian, bisexual or queer identity. Knowledge of local queer women writers can be worn as a badge of lesbian or queer identity among participants of this study, a badge that has the potential to be recognized by other readers.

REAL COMMUNITIES AND TEXTUAL COMMUNITIES

"You don't really need a book, you can just find that out yourself"

—Kathy, 19 years

The 'local community' comprises more than just visible and critically acclaimed lesbian and queer writers. It also includes those who have nothing in particular to do with reading, writing and other literacy practices. In fact, participants were clear about how connections with *actual* people helped them in coming to terms with their alternative sexual identities and sexual orientations.

Nicky recalls the importance of the support she received from her peer group, composed of young women who were lesbian, bisexual, queer and heterosexual:

> …In our group there's one left who's straight and has a boyfriend and everything. We keep joking that she's our token straight friend…I'm so lucky to have this and it is so important for me…And they all remember when I was going through the whole "am I? What am I?" Now they're like we didn't want to say anything. We didn't want to push you or anything so we had to be very careful about what we said. And it's cute. And they're like a couple of years older than me and they're in university…like going to Toronto and learning how to take the train there and get on the subway and going to stay in someone's residence—it was such an eye opening experience—you know like Pride, my first Pride—it was so great and it was so important to me and it's so important to have that gateway in. (Nicky)

Friends who knew her personal, unique history and witnessed her initial confused negotiation of an alternative identity offered her acceptance and mentoring. These friendships are a distinct form of social connectedness that creates a sense of community. They cannot be replicated in text/reader relationships. What is required are actual, localized connections with actual members of the community who pattern ways to negotiate identity as one navigates avenues that lead to a growing sense of belonging to a distinct community.

Chris touches on some of the same themes when she is unable to recall any specific books that might have helped her come to terms with her negotiation of a non-straight

identity. Her knowledge of the existence of a local gay and lesbian neighbourhood helped her more than access to reading material. Her reading history suggests that it is her location within this visible community that heralds the possibilities presented to her by certain texts, but she must first find a place in the world where her identity makes sense and is accepted before she can "find herself" in any text.

> CHRIS: I think it was mostly…maybe a few magazines, reading—knowing that there was, and more or less, that the village existed, being here.
>
> PAULETTE: And did you know about the village early on?
>
> CHRIS: No!…I had no idea. And the only reason—I moved here with my boyfriend…and I decided that I was definitely gay and there was no getting around this whatsoever. And now that I'd gotten out, I lived in St. City, went to church, did all that, so there was a lot of guilt issues around it. So I got far enough away from that, from having premarital sex and that helped me to, you know, figure out that I was a dyke and that was okay, so…hmm. And then I just, we always used to go shopping on Yonge Street, and just one block over there that's where all the queers are, you know. We'd drive through and it was always fun and neat…(Chris)

Kathy also finds talking with real people more helpful than reading (although it is important to note that she could never really recall a time where she found herself reflected in a book because she generally rejected lesbian literature). She says,

> "I [met] some of the people, I went to Pride and [you] kind of talk about your coming out stories…you don't really need a book, you can just find that out yourself."

Note, however, that stories are privileged. Even though Kathy is not reading coming-out narratives, she still assigns value to them and still sees them as helpful to her emergent lesbian sensibility. Actual community takes precedence in Kathy's life. She suggests that she no longer needs to read because she has gay friends now – the corollary is that she does not need to find representation in the texts that she reads. However, she also indicates that normative behaviour valued by various queer "communities" differs in important ways and creates tension in her conceptualization of her own place within these communities. She struggles between "fitting in" and "not belonging":

> I think I've just taken a break…I have a lot of gay friends now, and I think I'm dealing with the bar scene right now…I don't, like I like it, but I would prefer like having a quiet, even if we got together for dinner or something, or be able to read, but there's nothing there. So my outlet would be like the bar scene…see I went to my first meeting [names removed here to protect identity, but meeting is a local LGBTQ youth group]…so I went to that and I enjoy having that outlet, but the youth…I kind of met them before and I'm not really enjoying spending time with them…It's just they're—I don't know—it's like they're obnoxious and you have to be gay. Like they're total stereotypes of gay. And I find that even at the bar and at this group I get—everyone always says "you don't look like a lesbian," and I get in trouble for that…like I wear skirts and stuff to bars…(Kathy)

Kathy has 'located' a distinct community of other lesbian, gay, queer and bisexual young people, but she makes clear that membership is not automatically granted. Negotiation of one's place in this community occurs with the use of certain identity markers including those of personal appearance. This recalls Francesca and Laurie's comments of comparing identity practices against those characters that they encountered through reading (see Chapter Four, pages 83-84). Camille, who identifies as bisexual, expresses a similar discontent with her failure to find a place in what she sees as a polarized queer community:

> CAMILLE: I don't have like a category, or I don't fit into this 'cause it's often "I want research for one or I want to [inaudible] …I wasn't sure.
>
> PAULETTE: so you feel, would it be correct to say that you feel invisible? In a larger queer community?
>
> CAMILLE: oh, definitely. It's like, actually a lot more I think, in the queer community than the straight community… especially with [campus queer group]. [Laughs]. (Camille)

Although there were few specific examples in the transcripts of online environments as sites that fostered social connectedness amongst the participants of this research, a few young women did indicate that they found a sense of belonging online that was missing in their local social arenas. Camille is unique with her active construction of a caring, stimulating online community of peers:

> …goes back to a really positive space and environment because when I was younger I obviously [had] been on the Internet…I started my own website…girls that…write about experience whether it was you know with my father or being in love with this girl or you know being the past or whatever and um, and we kind of formed a community which — and at the same time, and a lot of the girls were mostly either identified as like bisexual or lesbian…And um, so it was again a really positive reinforcement because although we were from somewhere else in the globe we would read each other's writing and you know, poetry or just write opinions…It was great… (Camille)

Camille clearly values the exchange of ideas with her online peers. She was unable to access a similar community in her local area, in part, because of the perceived invisibility of other bisexual young women.

In her writing exercise, Stella shared the importance of her initial forays into online communities. She identified Frank Herbert's science fiction series, *Dune,* as having "made a difference" in her life, citing his speculative exploration of different worlds, cultures, religious and philosophical ideas as particularly compelling during her early adolescence. She joined several online forums devoted to the discussion of Herbert's works, a communicative act arising directly from her desire to reach other readers:

> But it is not so much these books themselves that had an impact on my life. At about this time I was becoming fascinated by the new world known as the Internet. Not content with simply emailing my friends and doing research for school reports, I joined mailing lists and discussion boards dedicated to several of my favourite books and movies. A list centred on *Dune* was one of these…These discussions definitely shaped my view of the world in those important years…I still make sure that I think of fiction in terms of real life, and vice versa (Stella, writing exercise).

The readers who participated in this study were, without exception, living as out lesbian, bisexual or queer young women. Friends, some family members, many co-workers and classmates knew that they claimed lesbian, bisexual and/or queer identities. Although our conversations were primarily about reading and the role that it plays in the negotiation of identity, participants made it very clear that their reading histories and reading habits told

only part of their stories of coming to terms with what it meant to be gay. While not the main focus of this research, the roles played by people who share bonds of kinship and friendship with lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer youth are central to the creation of a connection with a larger lesbian and gay community. The interviews show that learning about the larger community and sharing this knowledge with others is predominantly communicated and received through the medium of stories. Stories of coming out, of staying in, of survival and of celebration, help ground the confusing and exhilarating experiences of finding one's place within a larger community. The simple knowledge of larger communities fosters feelings of possibility and potential membership. It takes real world interactions with real live gays, lesbians and other queer-identified people to learn how to locate and move within these newly visible communities.

My participants' reliance on relationships with trusted others support the findings of studies that seek to explain the role of experiential information and the function of shared and distinct frames of reference for self-understanding. For example, other LIS researchers have looked at the importance of shared stories of experience among pregnant women (McKenzie 2001) and among women living with lupus (Carey 2003). In both studies, the research participants generally valued stories that narrated shared experiences using an insider's perspective. Although McKenzie's participants exercised a range of criteria with which they judged trustworthiness of sources of information, stories of pregnancy from other women who had experienced multiple birth pregnancies were assessed as useful and helpful. Similarly, the women in Carey's inquiry were receptive to information about all aspects of living with lupus that came from others in their support group. Carey found that information shared informally among group members was often the "best" (most useful, most trusted) source of knowledge about issues facing his participants. In this inquiry, however, participants made a distinction between *reading* for comfort, reassurance, self-understanding and achieving these feelings through involvement with other actual lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer people. In our conversations participants emphasized their desire for realistic accounts of lesbian and

queer experience (another form of experiential knowledge) but reading for many participants was a way to gain entry into actual communities. Underlying the sharing of stories is the notion that these stories do constitute helpful information about what it means to be lesbian or bisexual or queer. As I specifically privilege reading practices in this study, it is not possible to state with any certainty that my participants *preferred* receiving information about homosexuality and bisexuality from interpersonal rather than printed sources. However, it is clear is that these young women preferred to receive information about alternative sexualities through stories that permitted active participation and sharing.

SHARING BOOKS

"We speak the same writers/readers kind of language"

—Nicky, 18 years

The participants in this research spoke of communities of readers that belonged to various formal and informal book groups and reading clubs. A few participants were members of such groups, and many more saw themselves joining in the future when school related work would take up less of their time. Reading groups are places where participants can publicly enact lesbian and queer identities, exercising an affinity between personal identity and the genre of books read. In other words, lesbians and queer young women reading lesbian and queer texts, create a space in which to explore, contest and embody what it means to *be* lesbian or queer. Sharing books with others – friends, peers, families and allies – is a valued experience among my participants.

Friends assume a central position in the social networks related to book sharing. Decisions to share certain kinds of reading materials, especially those with lesbian and queer content are not made lightly. Sharing books like these is both special and risky: exchanging titles and discussing their content is a way to communicate one's sexual

orientation to others. Furthermore, sharing is frequently reciprocal as participants very often receive reading recommendations from friends. In fact, this is one of the most common methods of access to titles with lesbian content.

Nicky deploys the metaphor of reading as a language to be understood by those who "get" the same books as she does. She discusses the reading relationship she has with her best friend who gave her *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1977/1973) and who shares a special bond fostered by *Summer Sisters* (1998), an adult novel written by Judy Blume. Nicky calls it "a good touchstone," claiming "it's like our book, it's us—we are this book." She continues:

> When we go to the library we tell each other what we got and things like that. So maybe if you didn't know that, you would think that she's the cool one and I'm the geeky one. We have that in common. She gave me *Summer Sisters*. It's one of my favourite books now. She bought me *Rubyfruit Jungle*… It's nice to have an intellectual conversation. It doesn't happen very often. It's nice to bounce ideas around…that connection between us. We can have a conversation about whether Madonna is a feminist or not and why she respects her. I've come to respect [Madonna] from her just respecting her—we can just have those kind of conversations so I think she's very smart. We speak that same writers/readers kind of language. (Nicky)

The metaphor of reading as a language is a compelling way to understand the talk about sharing books with others. Barb also uses the metaphor when she describes her habit of re-reading books after discussing them with her friends:

> … But I also, it's funny, like—the people I tend to surround myself with [are] reasonable bookish people too and so when we're talking books back and forth to give to each other, I usually give them that and it's interesting when I get that feedback sometimes I go and re-read parts of it just to understand what they're saying. (Barb)

Camille describes how sharing a key book with a new friend helps to reinforce their relationship. Camille also plays the role of mentor:

> …I guess my one friend I've just gotten closer [to her]…'cause she's related to women's issues and stuff, and she's a bit younger—I've really gotten her onto a lot more things like that…like reading in books and authors like you know, misconceptions…like she's reading a book that I read—this is only my best friend

> and her, the only women that I – I'll be reading a lot of the same books—that's kind of a similar kind of discussion environment that we talk about books, me and her, like she's reading a book that I've already read— it's a collection of essays, it's *Jane Sexes It Up*…just a collection of essays from women from completely different backgrounds and things…which I find really interesting, so she's reading it, so later when she's finished it we're going to talk about it. (Camille)

Laurie also acts as mentor of sorts when she reviews and then recommends books to her mother. Aware of the limitations of her selection, a popular nonfiction work that discusses myths and issues related to homosexuality, she passes it on anyway, giving more weight to its positive treatment of homosexuality:

> *Now that You Know*…which is for my mom which I gave her but I read first before I gave [it to] her because I wanted to see exactly what kind of content she was going to be reading which I found was really good. I really did like what it had to say and it was really positive and had a lot more focusing on mothers dealing with gay sons: too much of that. And actually I gave it my mom saying there's a lot, and she started reading it she's like ok it's good but there is quite a bit of women, mothers dealing with sons. So she actually stopped reading it. (Laurie)

This selection of excerpts sheds light on the relationships that can be constructed around the informal sharing of books. Borrowing, lending, recommending and discussing books with peers plays a significant role in coming to an understanding of self in relation to certain trusted others, usually female friends, and rarely to family members. Furthermore, the practice of reading itself is presented as an ongoing process of interpretation. The meaning of a text is not granted automatically or unconditionally when a book is shared between readers, but is rather negotiated between readers and between readers and texts.

Books also sometimes function as a kind of shorthand for communicating one's sexual identity and orientation to others who are not part of the safety of a trusted circle. For example, Anne described her semi-closeted reading while living at home as follows:

> I think I would bring the books home [laughter]. It was all very passive aggressive. [laughter]. Yeah, I remember once my dad found a – like I had just left out this collection of – I was reading a collection of short stories, gay and lesbian science fiction short stories…he was like "is there something that you want to tell me?" I'm like, "no." [laughs]. I can read what I like. (Anne)

In a different setting, a lesbian text creates a temporary bond between Laurie and a stranger who notices her subway reading material:

> I was reading *Tipping the Velvet* and it has two women on the front cover—I was reading it, I'm sure she was a dyke sitting in front of me, I was reading it, and she was going to get up to get off, she was like, "that's a good book isn't it?" I'm like, "yes it is," and she got off, I'm like, "yeah! That was awesome!" Like the connection you know, such a cool connection…Also reading these books is like a connection to the other lesbians around me: "have you read this book?" "Yeah! I've read this." (Laurie)

In both examples, the lesbian text signaled a connection between the text and the reader's sexual identity. While Laurie's connection with another (perceived) lesbian reader was temporary, unanticipated and detached from known members of her social networks, other participants looked for more permanent and concrete connections with other lesbian readers.

CONNECTING WITH LESBIAN/QUEER READERS

"Very much about the literature, but also about social circles as well"

—Barb, 21 years

Participants talk about reading as a social activity that allows them to make connections with other lesbians. As I discussed in the previous section, one type of connection is made with the textual others. Another type of connection includes relationships with authors, particularly with local lesbian and queer writers. A third type of connection is made with other readers, in some cases, readers with whom my participants were already familiar – friends, acquaintances, family members. However, examples of connections with other readers occurred in our conversations in myriad ways from formally organized book groups or reading circles to spontaneous, anonymous encounters with sympathetic

strangers. The connections, however tenuous, represent social manifestations of lesbian and queer culture – these readers come together as lesbians and queer and bisexual women to talk about lesbian and queer texts. Their collective reading practice creates an ideological space in which to explore, contest, and enact lesbian and queer identities.

At the time of our interview, Anne was a member of a lesbian reading group that she joined at the urging of a friend. While explicitly presenting this reading practice as a way to connect with a group of lesbian readers, she also draws attention to the difficulty of determining what exactly constitutes "lesbian" literature:

> …I joined it last year, one of my friends was going to a meeting, and said I should come too, so I read the book like right before the meeting!…I don't know, it keeps you in touch [with] kind of like a community of people I don't interact with that much…It's women who identify as lesbian…that's what the group's composition [is]. And I think we're kind of supposed to read lesbian material, I think that's kind of what people want to read, but sometimes other things get in there…like we read *Slammerkin* [by Emma Donoghue] since it was written by a lesbian author we were all expecting to find lesbian content, but then there wasn't actually any, and I read it beforehand, so I was like, "yeah, there's no lesbians in this story" [laughter]. (Anne)

Chris calls the issue around determining what constitutes a "gay" book, the "great debate." She has a very clear criterion for her assessment of whether or not a book is "gay" – the inclusion of gay characters:

> I like how it's [*The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde] written and I like the descriptive nature of it, but I guess the dislike would be that it's got nothing to do with being gay and I'm not really sure why we're reading this in the book club…and a lot of books we've been reading this year seem not really to do with the gay content, just by gay authors…And the great debate—what makes a book gay and what makes a book—you know, straight…I think what makes a book gay is that [it] has gay people in it…Someone straight isn't gonna pick it up and read [it] and not think anything about issues around being gay…I think you should have to think about that and you know, any straight person could pick up Oscar Wilde and not think anything about it. (Chris)

In her reading club, Chris would have preferred to read books that had explicit and obvious gay content, and she offers a muted critique of heterosexual privilege, when she

talks about books that would have to make even "straight" readers think about "issues around being gay."

Barb does not attend a reading group but her primary socializing involves local book events. She explains:

> … [B]ook launches and readings and stuff like that is something that I would go to, because there are lots. Um reading groups or reading circles not really, just friends who are bookish…I went to a poetry reading last week because my friend was reading but there were a few other interesting poets…there's a book launch upcoming that a bunch of us are planning to go to…it's funny…there's a social circle, you know they go to these parties and will go to this launch and so you kind of get swept up in that. And you know that you're going to see lots of people there as well as hear some great reading, so it becomes more, very much about the literature, but also about social circles as well. (Barb)

Although Sue did not belong to a book discussion group at the time of our interview, she did not rule out a membership in the future when her formal academic studies end. She valued the sharing of perspectives, multiple interpretations and the widening of her own horizons of understanding.

> I think because when I read a book I have my own interpretation of what it's about and how it makes me feel. You know I don't see every aspect of it and um, so coming together and talking with people, they have their own ideas of what it's about and what's important and they'll have noticed things that I won't have noticed. And um, different perspectives too, I mean you always get people who oh I hated this book and oh I loved it and why and where those perspectives meet…But also in terms of um, like I think on a personal level, just sort of exploring the ideas and the characters and even sharing that sense of having found something that's really cool. Like oh I really enjoyed this part and then think yeah I read it too and isn't it great when she does this and wasn't it funny when he said that and sharing those things and sharing your appreciation makes it so much more meaningful. And just fun. Yeah I don't know, like I always talk, like just about anything that I read, I always go to somebody and talk to them about it…I don't like just reading something and then never talking about it. (Sue)

Sue makes an important point – sharing books with others is fun. This is a key point that is easy to overlook when much of the emphasis thus far has been on reading for meaning,

for making connections with textual characters, with authors and with content that contributes to my participants' self-understanding.

Sharing books with other readers, in particular with other queer readers, affords an opportunity for queer young women to explore the contested domains of lesbian and queer literature. Reading groups, book circles, and quiet conversations among friends all provide opportunities for social interaction that is focused on reading practices. Shared reading contributes to negotiation of identity by providing spaces in which to interpret and challenge what it means to declare oneself lesbian, bisexual or queer. We have a picture of lesbians reading lesbian literature reading themselves into and out of the texts, into and out of their shared communities. A shared practice of reading helps to foster a membership within larger gay and lesbian communities in a social way that is perceived to be both fun and meaningful.

READING FOR COMMUNITY: A CONCLUSION

I have attempted to show that the young women who participated in this study engaged in reading practices that provided a range of social possibilities, extending the notion of reading for possibility in the previous chapter, where I looked at this in relation to their personal responses to reading and various reading materials. My basic argument here is that these young women read to find access to possibilities for lesbian identities, both as they are personally enacted in their present lives, and as they might be taken up in their futures. Reading for possibilities gives them a coherent and perhaps, cohesive, sense of self. Reading for community represents their desire to move this "self" into a larger social arena to make connections with other lesbian, bisexual and queer women as well as with other members of sexual minority communities. And while reading for community serves the readers in this study by providing access to new friendships and peer groups, it also has ideological implications. Social practices such as sharing books with friends and more formal group reading events using materials that feature lesbian, gay and queer

content opens what can be called an "ideological space" in which to explore and navigate the contested notions of what it means to claim lesbian, bisexual or queer identities. Reading in this study is a sign of participation in lesbian and queer culture. Amongst my participants, reading practices constitute a form of social capital that has a great deal of cultural currency.

I believe it is possible to talk about a "queer community" without accepting it as a unitary, stable, reified social structure. The idea of a lesbian community is to some extent a false construction and as Shugar (1999) points out, any attempt to define it further reifies its tenuous boundaries. However, as others (Weston 1991; Seidman 2002; Gamson 1995) argue, the concept of a distinct community of lesbians, gays and other sexual minorities does provide a site for social affinity arranged along the trajectories of sexual identity, sexual practices and sexual orientation. And rather than see collective identity as unchanging across individual enactments and historical moments, we can follow Gamson (1995) who posits collective identity as a process of collective action that continually re-constitutes notions of collective identity. Furthermore, a distinct queer community is imagined to exist in the minds of its members. As Benedict Anderson tells us in his much cited *Imagined Communities* (1991/1983) all communities are imagined and all are created from cultural artifacts. His famous definition of nationalism as "an imagined political community" is worth citing again as it adds clarity to my conceptualization of an extended community of lesbian, bisexual and queer women to which my participants seek to belong:

> It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion…it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (Anderson 1983, 15-16; italics in original).

Additionally, Anderson's analogy of daily newspaper reading as an "extraordinary mass ceremony" that allows "people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to

others" (1983, 39-40) has implications for my argument here that shared reading practices, including the reading of specific materials with lesbian and gay content, contribute to feelings of social connectedness among my participants.

Reading, then, creates feelings of belonging by providing a ground for solidarity. In an analysis of the lesbian film *Go Fish*, Lisa Henderson claims that this "recognition of solidarity" can "demonstrate how representation can be contextualized to accomplish social and political insight, to connect it to the urgency of everyday life, and to set it in motion in the world beyond the text" (1999, 62). In this study, I have privileged reading itself rather than the texts read, providing a different angle on literate practices of everyday life. So rather than demonstrating how *representation* links to social connectedness, the analytic ground is the mode of access (i.e., reading, sharing, and discussing texts) to representational forms.

The dimensions of reading for community as evident in this study are as follows:

1. **A connection with local queer women writers.** Readers express a celebrity/fandom binary when talking about well-known queer writers, but their relationship with writers is more profound than this: through their writing, through reading events, writers are accessible, desirable representations of "real" lesbian and queer lives and experiences. Furthermore, knowledge of authors may constitute a sign of status within literate communities.

2. **A connection with community members that are outside of specific reading practices.** Readers recognize and value the guidance and support provided by people who act as role models and gatekeepers to gay and lesbian culture. However, much of this information is still provided through coming out narratives and other rite of passage stories.

3. **Book sharing and conversations about reading materials.** Lending, borrowing and sharing books with friends and family function as a symbolic exchange of trust, compassion and care. Readers assume a mentoring position by introducing and sharing books with others. Books may also act as a symbol of identity itself.

4. **A connection with lesbian, queer and bisexual readers.** A community of readers is built around lesbian, queer and bisexual texts that provide readers with new perspectives and diverse interpretative claims. Issues of identity as they play out in real life and in texts are discussed and debated. Participating in such communities is empowering, challenging and fun. A shared practice of reading fosters a membership within a larger queer community.

In this chapter I have attempted to show that social reading practices signal participation in dynamic communities of lesbian, queer and bisexual women and other sexual minority members. Engagement with others is central to the accounts of reading shared by the readers in this study. Reading is one of the ways available to young queer women to engage with a larger community of similarly identified women as their age, inexperience and at times, geographical location, barred them from additional meaningful avenues of social connectedness. There were few references to gay and lesbian bars in the transcripts (a traditional route to gay community) and a minority of participants mentioned lesbian and gay pride events. However, two social institutions, one in the domain of private enterprise, and the other of public interest, namely bookstores and libraries, do figure prominently in our conversations about reading and access to reading materials. The next three chapters detail modes and methods of access to desired reading materials.

Chapter Six – The Internet: Failed Searches and Unsanctioned Reading

My aim for this study was to investigate a certain kind of reading within a specific context: voluntary reading of self-selected texts, read outside of school requirements in the context of the negotiation of alternative sexualities. I wanted to know how this kind of reading contributed to my participants' understanding of self and their relations with the larger worlds in which they lived. Situated in this context, then, I also wanted to know more about *how* young women who were personally motivated to find meaningful reading materials did so. This came to mean, given the eventual emphasis in this inquiry on lesbian and gay literature, what role did libraries, bookstores and the Internet play in creation of access to lesbian and gay materials? My statements to participants indicated that I was a researcher in the field of LIS, and as such, I anticipated that participants might be compelled to describe library practices to me during the interviews (which they did). However, it is against the surprising lack of interaction with actual "bricks and mortar" library environments (surprising as most participants had been lifelong and avid library users) that the Internet emerges in a central yet paradoxically invisible role in the reading accounts of my participants. Analyses of the roles of the physical spaces of libraries and bookstores follow in Chapter Seven and Eight, but this chapter is concerned with various online environments and tools and their relationship to reading practices. Two significant themes related to Internet use emerged from the interviews: the everyday use of the Internet as a searching tool and the Internet as a site of access to digital and paper-based texts. In this chapter, I discuss the place of the Internet in the reading accounts offered by participants. There are two distinct themes: first is the use of the Internet to access library catalogues and online bookstore inventories, a mode of access that provided an uneven array of desired reading materials, the acquisition of which was often impeded by a lack of availability and prohibitive prices. The second theme takes up the routine practice of some participants who used the Internet to access digital texts that did offer some satisfying representations of alternative sexualities, although as shall be

seen, this kind of reading was perceived by participants to be trivial and not really reading at all.

SEARCHING THE WEB FOR READING MATERIALS

> I think I came upon [*Annie on My Mind*] through the Internet or something like that. Because there really was no other way to find out about books.
>
> —Barb

The uses of Internet and web-based technologies are taken-for-granted, everyday activities among the participants in this study. Talk about home computers and school computer use is embedded in our interviews along with jargon associated with digital media and their use. Only one young woman, Keri, contacted me via telephone to ask about the study; all other participants used email programs. When asked specifically about their methods of locating reading materials – how they actually searched for books with lesbian and gay content – most participants began their explanations with a statement about "searching" with a simple assumption that I would understand that they meant searching via web access to library catalogues or online bookstore websites. Internet searching was the second step in what seemed to be unfocussed and naïve searches for lesbian and gay literature. My participants did not expect their school and public libraries to have fiction with lesbian and gay characters, so they were not surprised when they did not often find what they wanted. Their next step was to go to the Internet where they conducted time-consuming searches for booklists, new titles and known authors. Information gleaned from Internet searches would then be printed off and used on future visits (actual and virtual) to public and school libraries. A micro-level identification and analysis of Internet searching strategies falls outside of the scope of this study, but in this chapter I shall address some common methods of online searching that emerged from the interviews. Three key methods of online access to lesbian and gay literature were used: search engines; remote use of library catalogues; and online bookstore inventories.

Search Engines

Comprehensive studies within LIS of Internet use by young adults present findings and discussion that subsume activities of reading under web searching or website evaluation (e.g., Agosto 2002; Fidel et al. 1999; Hughes-Hassell and Miller 2003) suggesting that the Internet has only an instrumental role to play in the reading lives of young people. In a brief overview of research on teenage users of libraries, Loertscher and Woolls (2002) assert that teens do read and enjoy reading but the authors do not discuss access to reading materials in their section on information literacy and the use of digital technologies in school and public libraries. Five years ago in her call for more research into informal information-seeking behaviour of youth on the Internet, Eliza Dresang (1999) critiqued the current research paradigm in LIS whereby information seeking strategies of youth are studied in models of use and outcomes constructed and conceived of by adult researchers. Instead, she posits a research approach that begins with "already-engaged and experienced youth" in out-of-school, self-directed information seeking situations. In my study I did take as a starting point the voluntary reading habits of lesbian and queer young women, all of whom were comfortable with popular digital technologies. Most participants were also familiar with at least a limited range of lesbian and gay cultural texts such as novels, magazines, web portals, music, film and television programming. However access to the Internet and previous knowledge of lesbian and gay texts did not result in more satisfactory online searching experiences.

The following interview excerpt is an exemplar that illustrates the frustration of participants as they ineffectively searched the web for reading materials using extremely naïve searches constructed around variants of the terms "gay," "lesbian," and "queer." The sifting process that Nicky describes is representative of what many other readers in this study did in their attempts to locate lesbian and gay literature. Booklists poached from websites were another prominent method of locating books, but one that rarely provided a satisfying outcome as the lists frequently pointed to books that were not held

by libraries, that were out of print or were prohibitively expensive to purchase. The failure to find desired books is a constant theme throughout the interviews. Web searches in particular were regarded as ineffective ways to find information about lesbian and gay literature.

> There are some new books that I've been looking for, for a long time…Various lesbian books. Like I don't know—like with coming out and that whole process thing. I found lists on the Internet—lesbian books and things like that. I would get the lists, print them off, look them up on the Internet, try and find as many as I could and then go the library. I was just wanting to find more and wanting—and getting so frustrated 'cause I could never find—It was so hard…I just remember being really, really frustrated that things I really had been interested in weren't there—and how hard it was to track them down, like you get a list off the Internet somewhere. Like you couldn't just—how hard it was to type in "lesbian" in the search engine… I think I find them [books with lesbian and gay content] kind of by accident or actually typing in "lesbian books" on the Internet—into search engines and just searching and searching and looking for lists all the time. It's hard because they're usually just grouped into like…anything from "may have some sort of lesbian undertone if you're really looking" to "has a gay character in it" to is about, you know, actually that's what the story is about or those are what the characters are doing. They are all grouped together and so sometimes it's kind of—first you gotta get the list and then you have to find what books are actually in your library and then you have to find out of that small number that are there if any of those actually interest you. Kind of like a filtering down process. (Nicky)

Like Nicky, Keri and Cole also performed basic searches using terms such as "lesbian" that returned unsatisfactory results. Cole would continue searching online adding more information in her quest to "match pages." It was difficult to learn from participants *where* they were looking for information about lesbian and gay literature as they did not necessarily assess the sources of information, even for institutional affiliations with for instance, libraries or LGBTQ youth support agencies, both organizations that create web-based bibliographies of lesbian and gay literature. Comments from Keri and Cole below support the notion of the Internet as a taken-for-granted source of information about lesbian and gay literature, one utilized with haphazard and half-hearted searches:

> Well, I would look up like keywords like "lesbian" [slight lowering of voice] or "gay" or something on the computer and see what came up. But like all this stuff I found that came up was like resources for parents who [were] dealing with having a gay child…Doesn't apply to me. (Keri)

> Depends on what the book is. Often it's like, often if I don't know like the author of a book, or like I'm having a problem finding it, I'll go to the search engine and I'll type in enough info about the book to be able to match pages…to find out who wrote it…(Cole)

Remote Access to Library Catalogues

A full review of LIS studies of the information needs and uses of lesbian, gay and bisexual people follows in Chapter Seven, but those that are explicitly concerned with cataloguing, classification and shelving practices shed light on the ways in which my participants accessed library catalogues (and services) remotely through home computers. Particularly relevant are studies that are directly concerned with how library practices create or reduce barriers of access to library materials with lesbian and gay content. For example the library catalogue itself is used as an indexical representation of the breadth and scope of collections of lesbian and gay literature, and the potential of access for lesbian and gay patrons, including youth (see Rothbauer and McKechnie 1999; Spence 1999; 2000). Another study used the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) Union Catalog to compare library holdings of positively reviewed adult materials with gay and lesbian content against "generic" titles reviewed in *Publishers Weekly*, finding that gay, lesbian and bisexual titles were held in fewer libraries (Sweetland and Christensen 1995). More recently, Carmichael (2002) used the OCLC WorldCat Database to search for library records listed under "homosexuality," "gay men" and "gays." He found that while there has been an increase in the number of titles available, poor cataloguing copy may result in confusion and discouragement among users, a finding that is consistent across all studies cited here – books are being purchased by libraries for collections, but problems of access that start with catalogue records create barriers that are often exacerbated by a haphazard approach to online searching via remotely accessed library websites.

I have been unable to identify studies that provide substantive data on how lesbian and gay youth use library catalogues to search for reading material related to sexual identity

and orientation. One study briefly discusses the influence of books, comics and magazines in the context of leisure activities of lesbian and gay youth; it includes an anecdote on library searching in the words of one young woman who said, "I looked up stuff about lesbians…[but] I never checked anything [books] out" (Kivel and Kleiber 2000, 222).

Although most participants in this study recalled using public libraries on a regular basis as children, only four of seventeen participants were regular patrons of the physical branch at the time of their interviews. The practice of using online library catalogues to locate reading material with lesbian and gay content was common across participants as was the almost uniform strategy of remotely searching the catalogues from home. The Toronto Public Library offers a remote reservation service allowing patrons to log in, reserve and request that titles be sent to their home branch (or any other branch of their choosing). Another participant used a similar technique when she "recalled" novels charged to other borrowers using the University of Western Libraries' digital interface. Cole and Anne provide exemplary comments on this library service:

> More of what I've been doing with public libraries—like last night I was on trying to find books, and it was just like, go online, place a bunch of holds and wait till [they] come in…I don't even have to worry about like which branch has what books…a lot of the books I'm looking for are more obscure kinds of books to find. (Cole)

> Yeah I do use [the library catalogue]. Well, sometimes I think of someone I want to read, then I go and I'm crazy—I'm sure I'm putting this big burden on the system by requesting *everything*. And then having them send it to my home branch…(Anne)

All participants in this study used the public library catalogue accessed via library web pages to search for lesbian and gay reading materials. In many cases they did find suitable materials but their satisfaction eventually gave way to frustration as they exhausted finite booklists. My chief recommendation to librarians and library workers is

to implement a complete and consistent classification of fictional works including cross-referencing along subject terms that identify salient lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans- and queer content. If readers can find at least one book that they like that contains content of this nature then they should be able to build a search using the subject headings from this single title to find additional materials.

Over ten years ago Yvonne Raaflaub (1991) cited the following problems of access to lesbian literature: heterosexist and homophobic attitudes, a paucity of selection tools available to librarians, as well as various problems with indexing language, classification schemes and exclusionary standard indexes. She also noted a continuing problem mentioned by the participants of my study—broad indexing terms tend to provide access primarily to male-oriented materials. Sanford Berman (1993) and Ellen Greenblatt (1990) have been advocating for years, with varying degrees of success, for more inclusive, less heterosexist Library of Congress subject headings. However as Grant Campbell (2000) points out in his exploration of the implications of queer theory on the design of gay community-based subject access systems, assigning meaningful subject headings is a complicated task that negotiates between universalizing and constructivist viewpoints. As Campbell writes:

> The critical task is no longer to find content in the text, but rather to identify and articulate the ideological, social and cultural positions from which others find content in the text (2000, 127).

Clyde and Lobban (2001, 27) declare that a library "catalogue can be a powerful tool in bringing together readers and books. But equally, the failure to assign a subject heading such as Homosexuality—Fiction may mean that a book never connects with a potential reader." However, as the participants in this study illustrate, the heading of "Homosexuality—Fiction" does not go nearly far enough to provide access to reading materials. Not once did any participant indicate that she used "homosexuality" as part of her search queries – "lesbian," "gay," and "queer" were, on the other hand, mentioned

frequently, suggesting (and as argued by Campbell) that a deeper, more contextually relevant subject classification is required in order to provide access through the library catalogue to materials with lesbian and queer content.

Online Bookstore Inventories

Clyde and Lobban (2001) note in their review of library services to lesbian and gay young people that the online bookstore Amazon.com assigns relevant subject headings to fiction titles with lesbian and gay content; they also state that the research record has thus far failed to ask young people if they use this resource to locate reading materials. Garnar (2000) reports that members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community of Denver, Colorado found speciality LGBTQ bookstores more useful than public libraries when looking for information about alternative sexualities. Participants in my study used three online bookstores to search for texts with lesbian and gay content although purchases were rare. Two major companies—Amazon.com (and its Canadian affiliate Amazon.ca) and chapters.indigo.ca operated by the Canadian corporation Indigo Books and Music—featured prominently in our discussions of how to locate books with lesbian and gay content. The online site of The Toronto Women's Bookstore (www.womensbookstore.com) was searched less often, but this seems mostly due to geographic location and lack of familiarity with the "bricks and mortar" store: participants from outside of Toronto knew of the store but had not visited it at either its virtual or physical sites. Participants also sometimes mentioned searching other online bookstores for reading materials and information about them but were unable to recall the names of such stores, and in some cases were quite clear that they had simply followed a series of links to end up at an unknown bookstore location which they then proceeded to browse.

Online bookstores are an important source of information about lesbian and gay reading materials. Participants seemed to find them easier to search, trusted their results (which

did after all offer books for purchase), and used them on a repeat basis, sometimes as the starting point for a search that eventually led to their public and school libraries. Participants skirted the commercial imperative of such bookstores especially when most insisted that they did not buy from them. The selection of interview excerpts below highlights some of the prevalent themes of this mode of access. Cole recounts her failed search strategy for a book by a known author: she searches the Internet via the websites of used and specialty bookstores. Tellingly she does not mention library catalogues or reference sources, and as was the norm in my participants' reading accounts, she did not consult a librarian.

> The book is out of print…and I've been looking on the Internet for all these used book sites and I'm finding all sorts of copies of her other book which is about lesbian nuns…no copies of this one…I've checked with The Women's Bookstore, I checked with like looking up online, and I've signed up for these search things with four different used book sites…(Cole)

Madeline performs a kind of pearl searching as she begins with a known author and builds her online search around it. Her primary source of reading material was the academic library at her school, but she raises another salient feature of online bookstore use: the ability to browse through the reviews and recommendations of other readers. Other participants also referred to this review service offered by Amazon.com.

> …When I found a niche of what I would like, I would kind of stick to those authors and sometimes if you go, like if you do a little search online and you go to Amazon and search for a book and they say, people who like this book also liked—And they give you a list and that sometimes works too. (Madeline)

Hilary Potts (2003) recently compared the search results from three online catalogues: Amazon.com, the Library of Congress and the British Library using queries related to the terms "gay," "lesbian," and "homosexual." She found that Amazon.com is easier to use, applies objective headings such as "lesbian fiction" more consistently, provides informative abstracts that the other catalogues lack, and provides access to a broader scope of recent material especially non-academic works. She writes:

> …Amazon does provide to not particularly skilled searchers a reasonably comprehensive list (who could possibly say when it would be complete?) under objective headings, of books published in recent decades for and about the gay community, consistently applied and with relatively little "noise" or false drops…In the form of brief but friendly abstracts and reviews, it conveys vastly more information about the books than any straitlaced public catalogue could attempt. Naturally, since it is hoping to sell the book, not preserve them for all time. One cannot guess the number of Internet virgins to whom Amazon's listings provided definite proof that They Are Not Alone (Potts 2003, 168).

While a more analytical comparative study along the lines of Carmichael's examination of the records listed under "Homosexuality," "Gay Men," and "Gays" ("Lesbians" and "Lesbianism" were omitted) in WorldCat (2002) may be in order to fully test Potts's argument, her work does support the search strategies offered by the participants in this research. For novice, and perhaps discouraged, searchers, online bookstore catalogues, especially ones like Amazon that include out-of-print titles as well, offer a quick, easy, approachable and satisfying search for lesbian and gay reading materials. It is interesting to note as well that Cal Gough and Ellen Greenblatt (1998) recommended Amazon.com as a standard selection tool for librarians (one might say expert searchers) seeking to improve their lesbian and gay collections.

Savolainen (2002) has put forward a conceptual model of network competence that posits information seeking in a networked environment (such as the Internet) is influenced by a person's expectations of the search outcome. It is a reciprocal relationship that can lead to enhanced search skills when searches are successful and weakened incentives for use in face of failure. Savolainen's model can be mapped to the evidence of Internet use in the context of finding lesbian and gay reading materials. In particular the positive relationship between outcome and expectation seems to be at play in the search accounts offered by my participants. The young women in this research were all savvy library users who came of age with the growth of computer-mediated communication. In this context their reliance on the Internet, especially web-based access to lists of reading materials (whether library collections, bookstore inventories or single lists of titles posted

by individual agencies and people), is not surprising. The degree of search satisfaction is, in part, measured by whether participants could actually locate, borrow or buy the books to which catalogue records created access. However the sheer lack of interaction with experts who might be able to aid in their search for desired reading materials points to a basic barrier of library service at all levels. The library itself with its shelves of books, its computer databases, its catalogue, is perceived as a promising venue, but librarians and all the work they have done to create access to lesbian and gay materials remain untapped and invisible resources. Participants in this study relied primarily on their own searching skills and information seeking strategies. They accepted the failure of access as part of the status quo – they did not expect to find what they wanted, so when this was the outcome, they were not surprised. Furthermore, the repeated failed modes of Internet access may have resulted in discouragement or de-motivation to enhance and improve their searches.

READING DIGITAL TEXTS

"This is going to sound really stupid"

– Keri, 20 years

My participants may have been largely unsuccessful in their attempts to match lists of lesbian and gay literature found on the Internet to actual library holdings, but many did regularly read digital texts. Online material for school assignments and research papers are not included in this discussion, although it should be noted that library catalogue searches did lead students to various electronic books (e-books) and electronic journal articles that participants mentioned from time to time throughout the course of the interviews. In relation to digital texts with lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer content, two main genres emerged as common sites of interest: fanfiction and electronic zines.

Fanfiction

Fanfiction is a genre of texts largely created and distributed by fans using a variety of media, appearing in both print and digital formats. It is produced on the Internet in myriad forms from electronic newsletters, chat groups, comic sites, encyclopaedias, reviews, guides and fiction. Fan literature has been described as a "largely unexplored branch of grey literature" that is further defined as follows:

> Grey literature is by definition difficult to define and to locate. In general it refers to materials published outside the mainstream of publishing, although some items may be recorded in certain abstracts and indexes or other bibliographic sources. Conventionally, grey literature is taken to include reports, conference proceedings, theses and other research publications, trade literature and community information" (Hart, Shoolbred, Butcher and Kane 1999, 82).

The authors conclude that fans may not need libraries to access fan literature yet they urge librarians to increase their awareness of this kind of grey literature to better "make links between the esoteric world of fan literature and the resources of public and academic libraries" (Hart, Schoolbred, Butcher and Kane 1999, 88).

I talked with several participants about secondary texts generated by fans related to two television programmes that were popular during my data collection period: *The X-Files* and *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer.* Both shows had lesbian storylines, although this was especially overt in *Buffy* as its creators developed a same-sex relationship between two female characters. Willow, one of the main characters, came out as a lesbian in the fourth season when she fell in love with Tara. Their relationship spanned two and half seasons until Tara was killed off at the end of the sixth season of the program. According to many fan sites dedicated to the show, theirs remains the longest running lesbian relationship on television (see Warn 2003). Participants also referred to the subtle suggestion of lesbian subtext presented in *The X-Files* with the introduction of a new female character in the programme's eighth season. The speculation among viewers and fans is evident even in

the following brief "celebrity update" found in a mainstream newspaper (Duvall 2001, A2):

> *X-Files* Agent Dana Scully, played by Gillian Anderson, has had her share of alien encounters -- but never with another woman. *X-Files* producers have considered pairing Scully with Agent Monica Reyes, played by Annabeth Gish, in a lesbian story line this season. "We talked about it, but it's the kind of baggage that we didn't want to deal with this kind of character right now," *X-Files* executive producer John Shiban told *TV Guide Online*. "On the *X-Files*, anything can happen," he said.

Ellen was an ardent fan of *Buffy* and she was clear that one reason for its appeal was her attraction to the main character and her interest in the developing lesbian plot between Willow and Tara. She browsed magazines that featured the show and its characters, and she acknowledged that she liked to visit websites that featured fanfiction devoted to the show.

> ELLEN: I'll read like fan fiction.
>
> PAULETTE: What do you mean by fan fiction?
>
> ELLEN: …that stuff written…ok, let's say you're a fan of like, *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, somebody will like write a story about it…So, I'll read it which is bad but true…

Ellen's negative evaluation of this genre is evident. She raises interesting questions about whether the reading of fanfiction and related texts are perceived to be unsanctioned and invisible literacy practices.

Keri also struggled with the appeal of fanfiction and its assumed inferiority to "real" literature. She read online fanfiction related to *The X-Files*. She had difficulty talking about this kind of writing as a genre, and was unable to give it a recognized status as "a book," although from her description it could accurately be described as a serial novel.

She uses several rhetorical strategies to "elevate" this fanfiction to that status of a recognizable genre:

> I actually read some fantasy books about like—this is going to sound really stupid but I read this for a long time, and it was on the Internet, it was like, it wasn't a book, but it was like a serial type thing—that people have been posting. It was an X-files romance type of thing…It was called like *The Magician* or something like that. And it was really long, it was the length of a full-length novel, you know. And it was actually really cool. I really enjoyed [it] just because I knew the characters already and it was just putting them into a different, you know, scene where they got into this parallel universe. They'd post, you know, there'd always be new ones. I'd go to the website and be like oh do they have new out yet?…I read it online. It was way too long to print off. (Keri)

There have been calls by youth researchers and educators to privilege the fan-based literacy activities of young people including their preferences for music, television, games, films and comics. For example, Alvermann and Hagood (2000) ask researchers to privilege the mass media preferences of youth so that we can begin to see the role that diverse textual forms play in their lives as they make sense of the world and their places in it. Moje (2002) claims that much educational research on literacy fails to examine critically "how and why youth use and make sense of a wide range of print and mass media." It is argued that by learning about the appeal of a diverse range of mass media texts and about the various uses of them, educators will be better able to facilitate meaningful "literacy events" in the classroom (Alvermann and Heron 2001). Librarians are seldom included in these visions of advocacy and fanfiction is rarely seen in library and information service suggestions for young people in general, nor for those aimed at lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans- and queer populations. However the growing body of research into multiple literacy practices tells us that young people construct meaning through unsanctioned literacy practices that occur in both school and out-of-school contexts such as the much derogated reading of fanfictions described above by Ellen and Keri. These two readers enjoyed following the threads of lesbian subtext from the television programmes into another medium. They experience an affinity with the fictional characters and want to extend the story worlds beyond what is available through

television viewing. However both young women apologized for and ridiculed their reading preferences, thereby underlining their recognition of this genre as unsanctioned and unsupported.

Web Comics and Zines

Online comics and electronic zines (e-zines) possess some of the same features as television fanfiction: the development of a textual relationship with a favourite character or author; a departure from mainstream storylines; and the potential for the participatory creation of texts. Their use might also be seen as unsanctioned literacy practice. Ellen and Francesca were regular readers of online comics, and while other participants mentioned this kind of reading, they had trouble remembering specific titles and websites (see Appendix 2.1 for an annotated list of web zines and comics mentioned here). Their reading was characterized as a kind of routine browsing of sites, usually accessed through links found on other websites, whereas Ellen and Francesca read web comics on a routine basis:

> Sometimes I'll read…once again anything with Buffy. There's a Buffy comic that someone puts out sometimes. It's really bad though…I'll just look at it though. It's only like four panels. (Ellen)

> A lot of the [inaudible] comics that I read are online…and actually a lot of them, now that I think about it, are sort of queer positive. *Boy Meets Boy* – pretty obvious. *Venus Envy* about a transsexual. Umm. *Unicorn Jelly* which is one of the weirdest things I have ever heard. It has a number of—it has a transsexual character, it has a number of gay men characters, like sexual characters. I'm trying to think what else there is now. Yeah. Just things like that. There's a number of others…(Francesca)

Madeline, on the other hand, rejects comics unable to view the genre as "actual literature" (her words) worthy of her attention. Her comments emphasize her disparagement of the genre and reveal a novice's failure to appreciate the artistry and skill brought to many comic works:

> … comics are more, news [unclear]. Comics disappoint me. You know five year old who can draw stick figures, you know, and then their ten-year-old brother fills in the dialogue. It's horrible! (Madeline)

Web zines are another form of online reading material for some participants in this study. Fanfiction as described above constitutes one form of zine, but paper-based fanzines have been a popular phenomenon since the 1930s science fiction fan magazines (Duncombe 1997). Web zines are a digital format, sharing with their print counterparts the following features: nonprofessional, low circulation numbers, and published and distributed by their creators. Aside from the web-based fanfictions discussed above, the types of web zines read most frequently by participants in this research are one of the following categories of Duncombe's taxonomy of zines (1997, 11-12):

- personal zines or "perzines" that are personal notes on the daily experiences and thoughts of the creator (i.e., *Grrl.com*; various weblogs available at lesbian and gay web portals such as gaycanada.com; lesbian.org etc.);
- political zines associated with identity categories such as feminist and queer (e.g., *Soapboxgirls*)

Francesca, an aspiring comic artist, and Diane, a self-published paper-based zine creator, routinely read web zines, but for Keri online zine reading is more a function of her geographical isolation from communities of other young queer people and from forms of lesbian and gay literature. This online reading declined when she moved to a larger city in southern Ontario.

> I like reading a lot, like, like the kind of online zines and stuff…I'm kind of down with that right now too. I don't know if they have it at *Grrl.com* but they've got, kind of websites like that, where there's kind of like, writing and stuff, I don't know, I like it [laughs]…I do it on a pretty regular basis, actually. But, actually I haven't been reading recently though. I was doing a lot more in [northern Ontario city] when there wasn't a whole lot to do. (Keri)

Camille and Barb recalled reading material from online magazines that are structured more closely to their traditional print counterparts with tables of contents, feature articles, regularly contributing columnists and commercial operations. *Nerve* is now a multi-media company with active film, television and publishing projects. *Soapboxgirls* began as a web forum and e-zine for discussion about social and feminist issues. Today it exists primarily as a weblog with regular entries by its two female "twenty-something" creators.

> Well I read *Nerve.com* I think that's the one that used to be a magazine…It's kind of this, their slogan is intelligent smut. It has a lot of like feminist things, issues mostly to do with sex, and that's what kind of interests me…They have all kinds of opinion pieces…They do have some fiction but it's short, or just kind of you know criticizing things like why so many women today are ashamed of their bodies, different things like that…(Camille)

> It's mostly, it's not fiction, it would be mostly just like social commentary or just ramblings. Like there's a few sites that I visit. One of them that I really like is called *Soapbox Girls* and they're just, they're based out of the West Coast and one, it's one lesbian and one straight girl. I don't know how old they are—older. But just writing on various things and um, let me think of what else. It's usually more for procrastinating and I'm bored or I'm at work or *Technodyke*, they're ok. I'm kind of drawing a bit of a blank…It depends on how much time I'm actually in front of my computer. I much prefer to have something in my hand. (Barb)

The web portal *TechnoDyke.com* was visited by many participants in this study, but Kathy was most articulate about how she used it: she searched for stories of other lesbian and queer women, she read poetry and stories online, she looked for information about homosexuality, and she sought connections with others through common cultural interests:

> I looked for lesbian poetry. It was like Sappho? I guess she was a great lesbian poet…I didn't really like her stuff, her stuff wasn't really translated and it was chopped up…but I what I did before I did that is I joined a lot of like gay—I joined *gaycanada*. I'd go to gay chats or just—oh *Technodykes* I joined that…That's pretty cool. It's American based. So I would join a lot of, I don't know, communities on the Internet. Then I'd read message boards…I mean the questions—a lot of the questions I thought and I was even shy I don't post questions, but a lot of the questions I was always concerned with, people would ask…and there was always people always supportive. It was always the same

> people talking. You might have got to know their personality…I lurked a lot. I talked on text with it for a bit. Because they have they have just general topics, like they have different areas of message boards. Like they have a music board and—[it wasn't always about] lesbian or gay issues. (Kathy)

CONCLUSION

The participants in this study used the Internet to search for information about reading materials especially novels with lesbian and gay content. They also attempted to locate books themselves through remote access to library catalogues, and more satisfactorily, through online bookstore inventory lists. Some participants read a variety of web-based digital media on a regular basis and found it a rewarding extension of their enjoyment of other media texts. Participants expressed an intensity of engagement with the "textual other" (Pearce 1997) in their accounts of reading online whether perceived as a character from television and comics or an imagined community of like-minded readers. Fanzines, web comics, electronic zines and other digital texts accessed via the Internet provide new options for readers' advisory services and library collections. Furthermore, in an echo of the call made by educational researchers, I believe that the LIS community needs to take better account of invisible and unsanctioned literacy practices of all young people. In particular we ought to look more closely at the reading interests and practices of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and as their visibility increases also transsexual and transgendered youth, who like the young women in this study, must remain largely frustrated in their search for relevant, popular, entertaining materials that provide positive, complex, varied and sophisticated representations of non-mainstream sexualities. Encounters with realistic representations of viable possibilities for the enactment of alternative sexual identities are far more than personal and individual processes of finding oneself in the text. This kind of reading holds the potential to augment and build powerful social connections with other readers and other members of lesbian and queer communities.

I conclude with the words of Camille and Joyce whose comments underline well the common expectation held by the young women who participated in my study that they would find something useful, satisfying and even sometimes entertaining on the Internet, but rarely were these expectations transferred to the provision of reading materials supplied by their school and public libraries. Joyce, one of four regular patrons of the physical library branch, encapsulates the potential of the Internet to fill the vacuum of "nothingness" with information regarding non-mainstream sexualities simply by virtue of being a holding place for information about what it means to be gay.

> I think I kind of did that on the Internet…I didn't get it, like I didn't even really know what it was…Like no one ever talked about it near me. Ever. Like it was just nothing. It was like not even around. (Joyce)

Camille also found stories online, a reading event that offered her a sense of positive space in which to explore her ideas about bisexuality and feminism. She compares this positive experience with the failures she had at libraries and bookstores.

> Reading on the Internet and reading when I got online, just reading those being queer and being depressed or whatever, there was so much kind of positive space on the Internet where those kind of things were not found in the bookstore, were not found in the libraries. (Camille)

The dimensions of library use and the features of bookstore use as they figured in the reading accounts offered by my participants are taken up in the next two chapters.

Chapter Seven – Libraries

There have been very few empirical studies of the information needs and uses of lesbian, gay and bisexual people within LIS. The handful of studies that have been conducted generally fail to include the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. I have not been able to identify a study that seriously considers the information worlds of transgendered and transsexual people. That libraries emerge as a significant site in this study will come as no surprise to readers, even less so when one accounts for my position as a student of LIS. However the influence of libraries on the reading practices of my participants does take on some interesting properties. The library in its most accessible and major institutional forms (i.e., public, school and academic) seems to function in this research primarily as a repository for reading materials—again no surprise. However my participants had much to say about the shallowness of collections and barriers to navigation and access, suggesting that in the context of this study, libraries represent *only* static collections with almost no perceived role in the augmentation of social intercourse amongst readers, librarians and larger communities of lesbian, gay and bisexual patrons. In this chapter I outline the dimensions of library use, but in the final chapter of this thesis, I argue that it is *precisely* the characterization of public libraries as static and neutral institutions that grants its users a degree of power that comes from navigating its services and poaching from its resources.

SUMMARY OF LIS RESEARCH

Several studies have been published that report on the uses made of libraries by lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer adults. Steven Joyce reviewed the library literature indexed by four major indexing services to conclude that public librarians exercise an ethos of neutrality that perpetuates poor library service to lesbian, gay and bisexual people (Joyce 2000). Services to youth are included but not emphasized in this review. In his review,

two articles pertaining to lesbian and gay youth are cited: one that recommends books for LGBT youth (Jenkins and Morris 1983); and another by Alex Spence (1999) that reports on a holdings study of lesbian, gay and bisexual fiction for young adults (although Joyce does not indicate that the study is of young adult titles).

Library Services and the Information Needs of Adult Lesbians

Creelman and Harris (1990) published the first empirical study of the information needs of lesbians; indeed, as Joyce (2000, 272) points out, this was the first LIS study of any lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer population. The information needs of lesbians in an age range of 20 to 47 years were identified by Creelman and Harris as coming to terms with a lesbian identity; coming out to others; and findings others (1990, 39). A large majority of the women interviewed perceived the library to be an important resource for information about homosexuality, but they predominantly expressed dissatisfaction with the materials they found there. Creelman and Harris also found that more than half of their participants claimed that reading "printed sources" did not help them with their information needs because they could not find relevant, lesbian-oriented, practical and everyday life information that was neither depressing nor pessimistic. My participants echoed many of these concerns, and like the adult women in the Creelman and Harris study, they relied on other lesbians and queer women for information, although not necessarily for information about homosexuality, as much as for information regarding appropriate or recommended reading materials.

Another study of the information behaviour of adult lesbians between the ages of 24 and 44 years, this one by Stenback and Schrader (1999), found that libraries in particular, and printed sources in general, were more important sources of information than were other lesbians. Alisa Whitt distributed surveys to determine the information needs of lesbians. She received one hundred forty-one responses from women between the ages of 18 and 59 (1993, 277). Like the women in the other studies, Whitt's

participants also reported low satisfaction with public libraries as resources for information about homosexuality and for reading materials with lesbian content and themes; but at the same time, they saw the library as a central site for information about homosexuality. Furthermore, all three studies of the information behaviour of adult lesbians cited here conclude that one of the most frequently expressed needs is for information related to meeting other lesbians and becoming part of a larger community.

Studies of mixed populations of lesbian, gay and bisexual patrons provide much of the same evidence. Garnar (2000) reported in his survey of one hundred sixty-nine lesbian and gay adult library patrons in Denver, Colorado that the public library took second place to lesbian and gay bookstores and community centres as sources of material to meet information needs related to sexual identity and sexual orientation. In a survey of lesbian, gay and bisexual library patrons of two U.K. public libraries supporting a lesbian, gay and bisexual collection, Mark Norman (1999) concludes that this kind of separate collection aids access to information. His second key finding is that most respondents use the special collection for recreational reading with a clear emphasis on fiction. Using survey instruments, Joyce and Schrader (1997) captured the perceptions of gay male patrons of the Edmonton Public Library. In a general way, their findings support the earlier empirical studies of adult lesbians: the library is identified as the most significant source of information about sexual orientation and the primary information need emphasized a desire for a sense of community.

Ann Curry provides background and analysis of the legislative acts in Canada and the U.K. regarding the gay and lesbian free newspaper press. She uses a 1996 censorship challenge presented to a British Columbia public library over the distribution of a Canadian lesbian and gay newspaper, *Xtra West*, to illustrate how public librarians can advocate for “the further acceptance of gays and lesbians within society” (Curry 2000, 24). In another study, Curry also found that when it came to controversial fiction for

children and young adults, discussions of homosexuality prompted censorship challenges in public and school libraries (Curry 2001, 31).

So while there are a handful of empirical studies of library services to lesbian and gay patrons, none consider the perspectives of lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer young people. Most of the LIS literature advocates on behalf of youth patrons and is focussed on improvements to service to lesbian and gay youth. Typically these articles begin with a rationale that lays out the tropes of the angst-filled coming out narrative, suggesting that librarians have a responsibility to connect lesbian and gay youth to larger communities, to each other and to appropriate informational materials. For example, in a recent article that introduces a collection of web sites designed for queer youth, the authors write:

> With the Internet, however, has come the opportunity for LGBT teens to interact within a virtual community—a community not limited by the chance circumstance of geography or the prejudices of homophobia. Librarians have a particular responsibility to provide LGBT teens with access to virtual communities and other Internet resources designed specifically for them (Hughes-Hassell and Hinckley 2001).

My study, along with Steven Joyce's (2003) recent dissertation on the discursive construction of lesbian and gay identities, are the only ones I know of that privilege the information behaviour of young people who claim lesbian, gay and bisexual sexualities. However there is a growing body of literature that reviews and examines the subgenre of young adult literature (mostly fiction titles) that provides access to representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer experience.

Young Adult Literature with Lesbian, Gay and Queer Content

The bulk of LIS literature concerned with improving access for young people to young adult materials with lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer content provides various booklists and bibliographies. Early bibliographies, published in the late 1980s and early 1990s,

include extensive annotated lists of fictional works for children and young adults. For example *Out of the Closet and Into the Classroom* by Clyde and Lobban (1992), published by the Australian Library and Information Association, includes English language titles published between 1954 and 1991 that contain homosexual characters and themes. Alan Cuseo (1992) produced another comprehensive list of books for young people based on his dissertation research into literary homosexual characters present in young adult fiction. In addition to scholarly bibliographic essays on the emergence of this sub-genre (1998, 1993), Christine Jenkins has also offered several iterations of annotated bibliographies (1987, 1988, 1990a) of young adult titles with lesbian, gay and queer characters or content. Other early calls for improved library services to young gays and lesbians also included lists of recommended titles (Monroe 1988; Paolella 1984). Recent bibliographies include lists of recommended web sites and electronic zines (i.e., Hughes-Hassell and Hinckley 2001). Other articles suggest ways to design and improve library services to lesbian and gay young people (Clyde and Lobban 2001; Hawkins 1994; Jenkins 1990b), or evaluate collections for the inclusion of lesbian and gay themed young adult materials (Rothbauer and McKechnie 1999; Spence 1999, 2000). I have also published a critical bibliography of Canadian young adult fiction with lesbian and gay characters (Rothbauer 2002).

The existing research on all aspects of library and information service to lesbian and gay patrons is consistent in its positioning of the library, especially the public library, as a resource and mediating agent in the lives of these users. Key findings and recommendations are summarized below:

1. Libraries are a safe place to explore alternative sexual identities
2. Libraries have a responsibility to provide information about alternative sexualities to all patrons
3. Libraries play an unique role as an information resource in the initial coming-out processes of lesbians and gays

4. Libraries could play a stronger mediating role between individual lesbian and gay patrons and larger queer communities
5. Library collections of lesbian and gay literature need to be improved in terms of depth, currency, scope and quality
6. Libraries need to improve access to existing collections

Most of these findings are passive enactments of advocacy that are supported by an underlying assumption that the most important role that libraries can play in the negotiation and maintenance of alternative sexualities is to provide deep collections of lesbian and gay literatures. But the relationships amongst library collections, library users and library workers are more complicated than this. It is not a simple, linear process to create collections that then invite specific readers to borrow them. As the participants in this study testify, even highly motivated, experienced library users who are also avid readers cannot plumb the library collections and its range of services with any high degree of satisfaction. In the section below I outline the types of libraries that surfaced in our interviews and discuss dimensions of library use. This study is primarily about the reading practices of lesbian, bisexual and queer young women, and unlike most studies of reading, library use and non-use were also examined in relation to reading practices. I directly queried my participants about the place of libraries in their lives as we progressed through the interviews.

TYPES OF LIBRARIES USED BY PARTICIPANTS

Empirical studies of gay and lesbian library users typically focus on the public library as a site of information seeking behaviour. However, the young women who participated in this study used a variety of libraries to locate information about homosexuality as well as recreational reading materials (with and without gay and lesbian themes). Participants were regular users of public libraries, academic libraries, secondary school libraries, and

small lending libraries associated with other publicly funded social agencies and organizations. Additionally, specialized lesbian and gay collections housed by both public and academic libraries were also mentioned.

Public Libraries

When asked directly about public library use most participants proceeded to tell me that they visited public libraries more often in the past, especially during their childhoods and early adolescence. One participant did not mention past library use, and one participant explained that the town where she lived as a child did not have a public library. At the time of our interviews only four participants visited public libraries in person on a regular basis to use a variety of services. However, they freely offered accounts of relevant past library use throughout the interviews. As mentioned earlier, most participants accessed the library catalogues remotely via Internet access and borrowed materials by taking advantage of the electronic reservation tools. The types of public libraries used to locate reading materials included large, central branches in Toronto and London, as well as smaller, regional and neighbourhood branches in outlying towns, cities and suburbs.

College and University Libraries

At the time of the interviews, eleven participants were engaged in academic studies at major universities in Ontario. One participant attended a community college with a specialization in a specific skilled trade. Two young women had attended university and college in the past but were not attending school at the time of the interviews. Three participants were in their final year of secondary school. To some degree their uniform status as students or former students anticipates their reliance on academic and school libraries. Participants did not mention libraries affiliated with community colleges, but libraries at universities were used for academic work and recreational reading materials including novels with lesbian and gay content.

High School Libraries

Many participants had a story to share about searching their high school libraries for materials related to alternative sexualities. Some accounts were fraught with tension created by furtive searches, feelings of risk, and fear of the associated disclosure of one's own sexuality. More than any other institution found in the transcripts, the school library embodied the traditional fear laden narratives of queer young people. School libraries appear in my participants' reading accounts, but rarely in the context of reading for pleasure or in relation to successful searches for lesbian and gay literature.

Small Lending Libraries and Personal Collections

Small collections of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender materials were sources of reading material for my participants. For example, two participants borrowed books from provincial social agencies serving young people and their families. Another participant borrowed materials from a grassroots organization committed to providing information and outreach services (including shelter and meals) to transgendered and transsexual people. Personal libraries belonging to friends and acquaintances were another important source of reading material.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Library Collections

Most participants based in Toronto were familiar with a special gay and lesbian collection of materials, including novels and plays, housed at the Yorkville Branch of the Toronto Public Library (see Toronto Public Library 2003). Yorkville is situated near an area of Toronto that has been identified as a significant lesbian and gay neighbourhood. Although the Canadian Lesbian & Gay Archives (see Canadian Lesbian & Gay Archives 2003) are also located in downtown Toronto, they did not come up during the interviews. However, a third specialized collection, the Pride Library at the University of Western

Ontario (see UWO Research Facility 2002-2004) in London, Ontario, was mentioned mostly to acknowledge its existence, rather than as concrete evidence of its use. In the words of one young woman, "…there's a lesbian library or something in UWO, like a gay library…I haven't been in it, but I'm going to."

On its own the identification of types of libraries tells us very little about how my participants used various library resources to search for lesbian and gay reading materials. There is ample evidence to show that public, academic and school libraries represent only three sites of access in an array of information sources and sites, although they do remain among the most common across the reading accounts offered by the women in this study. In the following section, features of library use and associated barriers illustrate the uneasy relationship between my participants and libraries.

DIMENSIONS OF LIBRARY USE

Libraries assumed a central place in our discussions about how readers find books with lesbian and gay content, and how they locate general information about homosexuality. At some point in the interviews, all participants mentioned going to the library to "look stuff up" about being gay. Furthermore, all of the young women who spoke with me were regular users of either academic or public libraries, sometimes both, at the time of the interviews. As shown above, libraries of all kinds (i.e., public, academic, school, small lending collections) play a role in the acquisition of lesbian and gay reading materials for my participants. However, a more complicated view of libraries emerges when we look closely at how my participants conceived of library services and library spaces. Below I present dimensions of library use in order to provide a clear picture of the library in the lives of the young women who took part in this study, keeping the negotiation of alternative sexualities in the foreground of my analysis. What follows is an identification of certain common features of library use – how my participants used library services and

spaces; and an explanation of cited factors affecting actual library use including specific barriers.

During the interviews our conversations wove around the main themes of reading and access to reading materials. At times I directed our discussions to take some account of library services, collections and spaces, although it is important for readers to note that this was not a distinct set of questions asked at each meeting. Comments on library usage emerged naturally from the flow of our conversations and, in many cases, were offered without my solicitation. Below I summarize the range of library uses cited by participants.

The catalogue and related borrowing services

Remote use of electronically accessed library catalogues is discussed at length in an earlier chapter (see Internet chapter); however it would be incorrect to leave the impression that participants did not use this library resource while visiting libraries in person. The young women who attended high school used school library catalogues for assignments and sometimes to simply to "kill time" in between classes. The reservation service offered by public and academic libraries is a related borrowing service that was used frequently.

Physical Browsing of Space and Shelf Access

When participants recounted visits to public libraries, they often described their time there as a series of browsing encounters. They browsed new books sections, lesbian and gay sections when they were available, favourite genres of fiction such as mystery or romance, poetry and magazines, young adult literature, and in a few cases, the entire library collection.

Use of the Collections

Borrowing and browsing the collections are clearly the most common facets of library use. All participants had borrowed at least one lesbian or gay themed book, almost always a novel, from a public or academic library in the very recent past. They expressed varying levels of satisfaction with both access to such literature and its quality, concerns that did not detract from their very clear perception of the library as a resource for reading material.

Library as a Place to Hangout

Public and school libraries were described by some participants as places to relax, kill time or hang out. Joyce, a senior high school student, was the most vocal advocate of this use of library space:

> I always go to the library anyways. So now it's like huge. It's amazing. And then you can just hang out there too, and they have coffee shops. So it's like you can hang out there and couches—so comfortable! Honestly, you go, you have your couch and your coffee and you are not going to leave, you know what I mean? (Joyce)

Social Events in Library Space

Although there was only one reader in this study who participated in a library sponsored book discussion group for queer youth, many of the other young women acknowledged such clubs, citing lack of time for their non-participation. Similarly, participants mentioned library sponsored reading events featuring local lesbian and gay writers, but these were not attended by anyone. The main reasons given for lack of attendance were lack of time, refusal to pay an admittance fee, and unwillingness or inability to travel to destination. Additionally, many participants found out about the events after they had already occurred.

FACTORS AFFECTING LIBRARY USE

The dimensions of library use take on more depth with a consideration of other factors such as proximity, negative perceptions of collections, a certain mystique of access, and administrative policy concerning late fees. Each of these factors is discussed below.

Proximity

Participants typically attempted to locate reading materials at the library that was closest to them—where they lived, worked, attended school, and where they performed the majority of their everyday life activities. For example, women who attended university visited the affiliated academic library before a consideration of their public library branches. A clear distinction followed from their statements of use that indicated academic and school libraries were primarily used for what was construed as "research" or as "information." Laurie, one of the most avid readers of lesbian literature, goes further as she explains that she used her high school library for a project on the "gay gene," but that she now does not use libraries at all: "But I think in that case [i.e., the high school project], that's where I got my information, from libraries, except otherwise no, not so much." Laurie is no longer looking for information with explanations of gayness or definitions of homosexuality; she is, rather, searching for fictional explorations of diverse expressions of lesbian sexuality. The public library in this case is not viewed as having much on offer that meets her requirements, hence her almost complete rejection of it. Cole is also direct in her appraisal of her library use when she states, "There's U of [X] library and if I can't find it there, then the public library."

Sue, Stella and Madeline were patrons of only academic libraries. Unlike other participants who either felt they had exhausted the library holdings of lesbian fiction, or felt defeated by their failure to locate desired materials, these three readers were satisfied with the academic libraries. Madeline claimed, "I've found everything I've wanted

here." Sue recounted using the public library while travelling in England, but went on to say:

> I haven't used a public library in a while…I generally don't tend to because I have access to the university library and I have like a stack of books at home I've been meaning to read for you know, twelve years or whatever. (Sue)

Stella similarly discounts the public library:

> I haven't used the public library in [Large City]. I did in high school…Actually I haven't bothered to figure out where it is. I've used the University Library, quite a bit, even to get some fiction out, but I haven't bothered with the public library. (Stella)

Barb used her academic library as a resource for lesbian fiction. Her knowledge of the process of how new titles move through the collection is unique to the sample of participants in this study, as is her consistent use of book reviews (although it must be noted that she sometimes reviewed books herself):

> [Academic Library] has pretty much everything…Every time I read a review in any paper, I can, it's there. It ends up in rare fiction first, and then it comes down, so a month later, that where I get it. (Barb)

Proximity and distance as well as geographic location were important factors in expressed preferences for type of library. As most participants were enrolled in university courses their primary use of academic libraries comes as no surprise. Use of public libraries was more common among those participants still attending secondary school and those who were not, at the specific date and time of the interview, attending post-secondary educational institutions. Another factor affecting library use concerns my participants' general perception that they did not have much time to read for pleasure, or in particular, time to read fiction outside of the texts required for courses.

> And the other two [books] have gone back to the library…They're not due back yet, but I finished them within two days of getting them out and the library is across the street from me. (Cole)

> I like that library [public library with lesbian and gay collection] actually, quite a bit. And I'm lucky that I live so close to it. (Chris).

> I did [use the public library] in [remote Ontario], yeah. I haven't really been that much in [southern Ontario city]…The public library, it was hard. I came out in [remote Ontario] and so it was hard…and just like you said, I wanted to read stuff, get as much information as you could and everything and I was like the same way. There wasn't a whole lot at libraries there at all [laughs]. (Keri)

Keri felt isolated in northern Ontario, unable to find information about being gay, unable to find novels with lesbian content at libraries. Another participant from a rural area of Ontario expressed surprise at the range of services available at a larger city's central library branch:

> …I was like whoa!—and they have CDs and like movies and pretty amazing to me. When you look up stuff…they have a computer database to find books and it shows up stuff for both branches. So like, wow, so much more stuff there [in large city library collection].

Comments such as these signal an important relationship between geographic isolation and access to textual representations of alternative sexualities, suggesting an area worth further study to gain insight into the place of libraries in the lives of rural lesbian, gay and bisexual youth.

Negative Perception of Collections

My participants confirm findings from earlier empirical studies of lesbian, gay and bisexual library patrons who told researchers that they were dissatisfied with the scope of holdings available at public libraries. The earlier chapters on reading illustrate the general failure to find access to desired kinds of reading materials, partly because such texts may simply not exist. However, young women in this study also continually expressed their negative perceptions of library fiction collections in their assumptions about what they imagined was available. For example, Barb knew that the public library would carry major bestsellers and various classics of lesbian literature, but she is not certain about the availability of more contemporary works. Her strategy of looking at bookstores instead is significant and shall be taken up in the next chapter.

> The public library had stuff like Ann-Marie Macdonald, Jeanette Winterson, or um, I'm sure it had some more classic texts: probably Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster or people like that. But the ones, when I wanted to find something more contemporary…I don't know if it had *Rubyfruit Jungle*, but there was a bookstore in [mid-sized Ontario city] that I went to a couple of times, and [it was] well-priced, so that's where I actually bought the books. (Barb)

Barb is also clear about her perceptions of the limitations of the large academic library at her university:

> The only things that you can't really get at [the Large Academic Library] is stuff on small press. Like I remember a book called *Valencia* by Michelle Tea, it's one of my favourites. They don't carry it, it's just too small I guess. It's San Francisco based. If it were Canadian they'd have it. (Barb).

Nicky offers a somewhat different perspective on the collection of books available at the many secondary school libraries she had used over the years. While her comments do not specifically address lesbian and gay texts, her response was predicated by my question regarding her search for this kind of literature. Her comments are insightful when set against the dismal record of success exhibited by my participants as they used computer technology to search for reading materials (see Chapter 6):

> …I don't find school libraries to be that great anymore. I find they've become like, sometimes, they don't even call them libraries anymore. They're learning resource centres…So there's not very many books in them anymore because schools pretty much have to make the choice between computers or books and they buy computers because that's what the curriculum goes for…It's not the same and I hate walking into a library and finding that there's twenty computers in there and no books! (Nicky)

Mystique of Access

The previous chapter on the uses of the Internet covered access to lesbian and gay literature via classification schemes through online library catalogues, but in a more general way, the challenges posed by classification systems had relevance to my participants' general assessment of libraries as useful resources for lesbian and gay fiction. For example, Anne criticized the browsing capabilities available at the large

academic library affiliated with her university: "like I use it for research and stuff but it's terrible if you want to browse or something. You can't do that in like the Library of Congress classification system." She goes on to explain both the challenge of finding lesbian fiction and how she overcomes it by borrowing fiction from the public library:

> I think when I first came [to university] I did read like a number of the fiction things…I think I've read all their collections of like lesbian writers, like the Oxford collection…but um, now I don't read any of the fiction here. Like I'd have to think of what I wanted before I tried to find it…So I just go to the [public] library. I go to the new books…(Anne)

Nicky also suggests a kind of mystique regarding the collection, especially where lesbian and gay literature is concerned. She is not explicit about the barrier to access, but the metaphorical sense of barriers is unmistakable:

> I'm still trying to find [*Annie on My Mind*]!…I want to read them [i.e., young adult novels with lesbian and gay content] and I can't get at them…I'm kind of hoping—I've got to go to the main branch of the library—now I'm like, "ooh, city library, there might be more." (Nicky)

Anne who worried about the burden she placed on library catalogues by requesting all the material she could find, admitted later in our interview that she now skips the library catalogue altogether when searching for lesbian novels.

> I don't think I do many searches of the catalogue any more. But definitely, you know sometimes at the library they have those lists, little pamphlets or something like that, so sometimes I check out [those]. (Anne)

Other participants deployed similar serendipitous tactics when their primary method of locating books was physical browsing of library spaces and shelves. I've included a sample of excerpts from the transcripts below, but many more examples of this kind of accidental discovery of texts exist.

> Generally I just walk around and kind of look at titles or you know, kind of scan and go, oh that looks kind of interesting and pick it up. (Nicky)

> I stand there. And I just wait for something to pop out at me. (Ellen)

> Most of the stuff I read, I get from the library…so it was probably somehow in the new book section. (Anne).
>
> I just walk around. It's weird. I won't think of anything or look for anything, I'll just like walk around. (Joyce).

In very rare cases, browsing resulted in the revelation of caches of lesbian and gay literature, sources of reading material that were soon exhausted.

> I know where I got books from—I forgot all about this. I used to go the [provincial family counselling service] and they have this little lending library, so it had lesbian books in a section with "lesbian books" written underneath it. It was non-fiction pretty much, but it was still right there and I think I read pretty much the whole library. (Nicky)
>
> Well, every time I'm in the library, or when I'm in the bookstore, I will specifically look at cheap books, and I also look at the gay shelf. That's really all my, the only thing I look at. In the library, that all I stay for. There's like the new releases, the new stuff that's out and [it's] very small and sad [laughs]. (Chris)

Chris was the only participant who attended a public library sponsored reading club, and to her, getting easy access to lesbian, gay and queer titles was one of its chief advantages as she did not have to search or browse or locate titles at all.

> …I just go to the [book club] meeting every month and they kind of hand them out for the next month's reading, so there's not thought involved which is what I like. So I'm always reading a gay relative book I guess, um, every month, which is why I go, just because I don't even have to look on the shelves for anything—they just hand it to me. (Chris)

The picture of a reader having books placed directly into her hands is an evocative symbol that could easily represent the most successful path of access to lesbian and gay titles found in the transcripts. Other participants relied on book recommendations from friends and, less often, family members.

Late Fees

Many participants somewhat sheepishly raised the recurring problem of library fines. Very often when I asked about current library use, participants responded that they would use the public library but they were barred from borrowing privileges until they cleared their fines. Naomi and Barb provide representative examples of this:

> …I'm terrible with library books…I think I owed Rita Mae Brown…I made my way through that from the library last year…I have a [library] card, but I sort of owe them money…(Naomi)

> …I'm on a student budget, so I'm not out buying hardcovers frivolously. And um, not the Toronto Public Library because I have books outstanding [laughs]. For two years, so I don't even want to poke my head in there…Well I heard after six years my record's clean. I'm just kind of waiting for the next four years. (Barb)

These explanations were offered with self-deprecating humour, but they indicate a very real barrier to access to reading material, perhaps especially to hard-to-find and often expensive lesbian and gay texts. Barb's comments are underlined by the serious attention given to book buying that is exhibited by all participants in this study, a theme that will be taken up in detail in the next chapter.

CONCLUSION

Decades-long advocacy of public librarians brought issues related to library services to lesbian and gay patrons to the table at library association meetings and into these same associations' policy documents. Studies of holdings show that while there is much room for improvement, public and academic libraries in Canada and the United States hold a great many titles of lesbian and gay literature, including those aimed at younger reading audiences. Additionally, all empirical studies, this one included, indicate that libraries, in a taken-for-granted way, are assumed to hold relevant "information" related to alternative sexualities, whether this is found in expository, nonfictional or narrative, fictional forms.

There is, however, a gap between this initial assumption of relevance and the ongoing (and in some cases final) process of locating desired texts. The participants in this study underlined this tension in their accounts of how they searched for and found lesbian and gay literature. Libraries were represented in all accounts of access and, indeed, in all accounts of failure of access. The very best that can be said about libraries in the context of the research undertaken here is that they continue to embody institutional circulations of media representations of alternative sexualities. Quite simply, libraries continue to circulate published materials that contain lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, and queer themes and characters. In this way then libraries support personal identity maintenance (i.e., reading for possibilities) but they do little to augment social capital amongst my participants (i.e., reading for engagement). An exception can be made in the case of one reader who belonged to a queer youth reading group that met regularly at a public library and borrowed library materials: the library played a role in Chris's experience of a larger community of readers and it engendered social connections with other queer young people.

At the outset of this inquiry I wondered to what extent people acted as intermediaries between readers and between readers and texts. Not one participant included a meaningful transaction with a librarian or library worker in her discussion of how books with lesbian and gay content made their way into her hands. One young woman asked a librarian to help her locate a specific lesbian title only to be told it was missing. This lack of interaction cannot be solely assigned to a reluctance on the part of my participants to ask for assistance for fear of disclosing their identities; although it should be noted that many indicated that they would definitely not be afraid to ask for help locating books with lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer content. The young women in this study did, in fact, mention assistance offered by other people—booksellers, counsellors, family members, friends and acquaintances—on their quests for reading materials. The failure to enlist the help of librarians and other library staff invites consideration of the sheer invisibility of librarians and the inscrutability of library spaces. One could surmise that it has to do with

the continued emphasis placed on the "private" negotiation of non-mainstream sexualities by advocates for improved library services to lesbian, gay, queer and bisexual patrons. Researchers and authors (myself included) have tended to stress the value of libraries, in particular public libraries, in providing a safe, private, anonymous way for young people to learn about and explore what it means to be gay or lesbian or bisexual. The activity of reading is promoted in a similar vein, one that constructs identity negotiation as an entirely internal, personal and private process that requires conditions of safety, security and confidentiality. It would be premature and short-sighted to proclaim that young people such as the women featured in this study do not need these contexts to explore their sense of self and to discover where and how they might move in the larger world. I think it is possible, however, that the particular situatedness of my participants (i.e., Ontario, Canada in the early twenty-first century as sexual orientation is increasingly legitimated and protected by our highest governmental and judicial offices) invites an enlarged vision of the kinds of services and the kinds of social roles that might be played by public libraries in their lives. It is with attention to this vision that I offer the following chapter on the competitive place of bookstores and bookselling in the reading lives of my participants.

Chapter Eight – Bookstores

Bookstores play a significant role in the reading accounts offered by my participants. When asked where they located their latest book with lesbian and gay content the readers in this study were as likely to name the neighbourhood bookstore as the closest public library. Like libraries, bookstores did not offer much ground for social connections to other readers or to larger communities of lesbians and gays, although they are perceived to be more reliable and useful sources of lesbian and gay literature. Bookstore use can also be viewed as a politically motivated consumption ritual that contributes to the legitimation and authentication of lesbian and queer identities.

STUDIES OF BOOKSTORES AND BOOKSELLING

Articles in the professional library literature regarding bookstores position them as threats or allies to the library depending on the particular perspectives of authors. A review of the North American library literature reveals that writers respond in editorials and opinion articles to the perceived threat of book superstores in three main ways (see Dixon, McKechnie, Miller and Rothbauer 2001):

1) the public library is an unique, inimitable social institution, freed from the profit imperative of bookstores (Birdsall 1998; Fialkoff 1999; Kazdan 1998);
2) bookstores represent a possibility for cooperation between booksellers and librarians (Campbell 1997; Glick 1997; Sager 1994);
3) and bookstores and libraries are competitors for the same base of clients with an overlap of service provision (Coffman 1998; Hicks 1994; Sannwald 1998).

Another recent review of library literature examines the place of cafés and the ongoing debate over coffee consumption in libraries in the context of library materials preservation (Browne 2000).

There has, however, been very little serious research within LIS into the role of bookstores and bookselling. In a speculative exploration of the small worlds of virtual communities and feminist bookselling, Burnett, Besant and Chatman (2001) put forward a "theory of normative behavior" that privileges information behaviour along with three other theoretical concepts of social norms, worldview and social types. Feminist bookselling is offered as a testing ground for a theory of information behaviour but the authors' analysis does not follow from empirical evidence of actual communities of booksellers. One empirical study of super bookstores using unobtrusive participant observation of naturally occurring behaviour of bookstore patrons indicates that while similarities exist between library and bookstore use, this kind of bookstore functions most clearly as a destination for entertainment and socializing, a finding that suggests that libraries and bookstores are not direct competitors (Dixon, McKechnie, Miller and Rothbauer 2001).

Sociological studies of bookstores provide insights into both cultural and economic imperatives of booksellers and publishers. In her inquiry into the role of bookstores and booksellers as cultural authorities and community builders, Laura Miller interviewed booksellers and bookstore patrons, data that she complemented with unobtrusive observation at bookstores. In one study she found that the profit imperative of bookselling undermines its simultaneous appeals to the ideals of community (Miller 1999b). In another study she observes that new technologies have allowed chain booksellers and, to some extent, their independent counterparts, to channel a decreasing selection of reliably selling materials to targeted markets of book purchasers while operating under the false ideology of consumer-driven choice (Miller 1999a). Thomas Linneman (1999) also argues that the drive to make money confounds the cultural gatekeeping role of booksellers. He examines this tension in the specific context of booksellers' degree of advocacy for gay and lesbian rights and environmental movements as measured by their readiness to stock texts that correspond to the various ideologies associated with them. Linneman goes on to posit that the purchase of gay and lesbian

materials by booksellers on an individual level represents ideological support for lesbian and gay rights advocacy without a concomitant engagement in the collective action of the social movement. He explains:

> Booksellers culturally innovate by introducing new ideas into the cultural mainstream. While browsing through the bookstores, the general public may happen upon these movement books and read them, or acknowledge that such ideas are now legitimate topics for discussion (Linneman 1999, 476).

Kate Adams (1998) provides a more concrete example of the empowering social effects of ideological diffusion in her study of the "Women in Print" movement composed of feminist booksellers, publishers, printers and writers. The surge of work by and for lesbians, reliably available through women's bookstores, argues Adams, is a sign of "tremendous achievement: it is not possible any longer to imagine a young woman exploring her sexuality from within the information vacuum that lesbians faced before the women's liberation movement" (Adams 1998, 136).

Clear gaps in the research record exist with a dearth of study into the role of bookstores in the lives of young people or the more general exploration of bookstores from the perspective of bookstore patrons and readers rather than from those of booksellers and publishers. The impact of mainstream, feminist and gay bookstores in the lives of actual readers who claim lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer sexual identities has not, to my knowledge, been addressed in any discipline. The handful of studies cited above contributes to my argument that follows in the remainder of this section – that bookstores function as an understudied and taken-for-granted site of information practices. The bookstore search for lesbian reading materials differs from library searches in terms of reader satisfaction, and perceptions of relevance and availability of materials.
More importantly, the use of lesbian and gay materials at bookstores represents a significant symbolic enactment of a lesbian or queer identity amongst the participants in this study. And finally, the participants' consumer support of bookstores specializing in

the provision of lesbian texts and their patronage at independently owned and operated bookstores dovetails with their muted critiques of shrinking market shares across media companies and with their advocacy for gay and lesbian rights movements.

BOOKSTORE PROFILES

An identification of the range of bookstores discussed by participants in our interviews illustrates the diversity of sources, sites of access and, indeed, entertainment. The following list of stores is an arbitrary one as the categories are not always discrete and there is some degree of overlap, for instance, between online bookstores and multi-national corporate bookstores, or between independent general bookstores and speciality stores catering to lesbian and gay patrons. However, without insisting on irremovable boundaries, it is possible to provide a sketch of the kinds of bookselling sites that my participants visited and supported.

Corporate Bookstores

Participants usually referred to corporate bookstores as "chains." In Canada the largest of these is now owned by one corporate entity, Indigo Books and Music formed after the merger in 2000 of the two largest bookstore chains, Chapters and Indigo, a result of a hostile takeover initiated by Heather Reisman, then CEO of Indigo (Anderson 2001, Shaw 2001). Indigo, a publicly traded company, owns and operates 300 bookstores across Canada including the large format super bookstores Chapters, Indigo, an online store (chapters.indigo.ca), Coles, Smithbooks, and The World's Biggest Bookstore, in addition to several campus bookstores (*Hoover's Company Capsules* 2004). Nearly all participants lived in cities with at least one large format bookstore at the time of their interview.

Online Bookstores

The use of online bookstores was discussed in the previous chapter, but they are significant in this discussion of bookstores as well, primarily as a further representation of corporate bookstores. The American company, Amazon.com, and its Canadian affiliate, Amazon.ca, figure prominently in the reading accounts of my participants, often as a counter example to their preference for smaller, independently owned, bricks and mortar stores. Many participants refused to buy books via electronic transactions that are contingent upon credit card use which participants either did not have or refused to use in what were perceived to be insecure transmissions of private information.

Independent General Bookstores

The independents are almost always positioned against large format chain bookstores by my participants and by the book industry press more generally. These kinds of stores are often locally owned shops sometimes comprising two to three store chains. Examples include the Toronto-based chain, Book City, and the London-based chain, Wendell Holmes.

Academic Bookstores

Given that many participants were also students, their use of academic bookstores affiliated with universities and colleges is not surprising. However, participants were very clear that they did not purchase leisure reading materials or specific lesbian and gay texts from academic bookstores. Their use of these stores seemed to be wholly determined by school requirements and, as such, academic stores are not a significant aspect of this chapter.

Second-hand Bookstores

Retail stores that purchased used books for resale at much reduced prices were popular sources of reading materials among my participants. The high cost of many of the books that they wanted to own prevented them from buying them at stores selling new books. However, lesbian and gay texts were rarely available from used bookstores. Used books were also purchased from library and school booksales, flea markets, and thrift stores such as Value Village, Goodwill and the Salvation Army.

Specialty Bookstores

Nearly all participants discussed women's bookstores and bookstores serving lesbian and gay patrons. Many young women were committed to their support of the Toronto Women's Bookstore, as it demonstrated support for women's issues and provided a clear destination for "women-positive" space. Visits to gay and lesbian bookstores were somewhat less politically motivated but clearly corresponded to a desire to find relevant, current, and sophisticated lesbian, gay and queer texts. Bookstores located in Toronto's gay district such as This Ain't the Rosedale Library and Glad Day Bookshop repeatedly appear in the transcripts. This Ain't the Rosedale Library is a general bookstore that also sells a large selection of lesbian and gay related books and magazines. It is centrally located in the gay and lesbian district of Toronto. Glad Day Bookshop is located in downtown Toronto on the perimeter of the gay district and is the oldest established gay bookshop in Canada, in operation since 1970 (see Glad Day Bookshop 2004). The Toronto Women's Bookstore, established in 1973, is located near the University of Toronto. It is a non-profit bookstore specializing in books by and for women (see Toronto Women's Bookstore 2004).

Just as a list of libraries tells us very little about library use, a summary of bookstores does not tell us much about the methods of book acquisition recounted by many

participants. Like most avid readers, participants in this study actively looked for reading material all of the time, capitalizing on any given opportunity to browse through collections of reading materials whether in library spaces, bookstores, or on Saturday morning strolls past yard sale tables. However, the successful acquisition of lesbian and gay materials was more problematic as these kinds of texts do not often present themselves at browsing sessions except for those conducted at women's and gay bookstores. In the following section, I present a picture of bookstore use that illustrates its implicated role in personal politics and personal expressions of lesbian and queer sexualities.

DIMENSIONS OF BOOKSTORE USE

Participants were less forthcoming with their accounts of bookstore use than they were with stories of library use, perhaps, because bookstores are not perceived to be within the purview of library and information science. However once I started asking about whether they visited bookstores or when a book was last purchased, bookstores took up a competing position to libraries in their interview narratives. A central tension exists in the accounts of bookstore use, one that pulls these young women between the valances of everyday consumerist practices and commitments to local feminist, gay and lesbian community, membership to which is granted to women's and gay bookstores.

Recalling that a key feature of bookstore and library use was the remote use of electronic catalogues, discussed in Chapter Six, two other significant features of bookstore use also correspond to the ways in which participants used public and school libraries – book buying and the draw of known collections of lesbian and gay literature.

Book buying

Book purchases including those of long sought after lesbian novels were undertaken with careful consideration of cost and content. Much conversation was generated around the theme of book buying as almost all participants desired to increase their personal libraries. Many expressed a related longing for their personal copies of borrowed library books, especially those that met their standards of excellence for lesbian and gay content. However, required textbooks and books as gifts for others were the most common motivation for new book purchases. Laurie, an avid reader of lesbian fiction, found that her public library use was in decline, partly because she "needed" to own the books that came to mean so much to her through reading them: in her words, "…I prefer to buy and own, to say I've read that book and that's where I put my life for that many weeks." To Laurie, and other women in this study, the book itself represents much more than a unit of consumption – it is a holding place for life itself – a compelling reason for ownership, and an equally compelling disincentive for borrowing and returning it to the library.

Browsing of Known Lesbian and Gay Sections

The young women in this study knew that certain bookstores had distinct and separate collections of lesbian and gay materials. They expressed dissatisfaction with what they could find at bookstores, but most felt sure that at least some books would be offered for sale. Kathy's comments followed a question regarding how she found books with lesbian and gay content, and they reflect both her awareness of a labelled section of materials with lesbian and gay content, and its lack of appeal:

> Well I go to Chapters a lot and I look in the history section. Or they have a gay/lesbian section and it's—it's not good…It's like two shelves…A lot of the stuff is geared more towards gay men, so it's limited. (Kathy)

Participants did not extend similar expectations to the library with a labelled section or a known collection of materials. Keri has come to believe that libraries are simply not as

reliable as bookstores regarding lesbian and gay literature. She emphatically declared, "I don't remember finding *anything* [books with lesbian and queer content] at the library. Bookstores had some things, like Chapters."

Women's and gay bookstores are, of course, obvious destinations for those searching for lesbian and gay materials. When asked how she finds queer books to read, Chris did not even mention libraries, even though we had just been discussing library services and collections, and she was an active member of a gay, lesbian, queer, bisexual and trans youth reading group. She says about finding books, "It's too easy really. I step into the bookstore and I'm leaving with like five or six books. It's a problem." Nicky remembers her visit to a gay bookstore in positive terms as well, remarking on the surprising diversity of materials which included a previously unknown genre of lesbian literature – children's materials:

> Cause there's no gay and lesbian section in most bookstores…It's mixed in with fiction…I remember cause there was one [gay bookstore] we went in one time and I don't even remember what it was, it was really cool. Yeah, it was great and seeing lesbian kids' books. *Heather has Two Mommies*. I love that. I was like cool!" (Nicky)

However the mere existence and knowledge of specialty bookstores are not always enough to recommend their inventories to readers. Naomi is a regular patron at women's bookstores, lives in a gay neighbourhood, is intellectually engaged in sexuality studies, and she still has trouble locating novels that feature lesbian and queer women:

> …I live at [intersection of gay neighbourhood]…I go to The Women's Bookstore and I deliberately seek out sexuality stuff and it's still really hard. I find that you know…for a while I've read every single title. (Naomi)

On the other hand, Keri recalls her time in a more isolated region of Ontario, a place without any specialty bookshops, only large format super bookstores and campus stores. She found some lesbian and gay materials at the campus store, mostly on order for sexuality courses, and as she expresses her disappointment at finding the same books at the local Chapters store, she wonders about the marginal selection of available titles:

> I was in their, checking out their, you know, like women's studies texts, stuff like that, to see what's in there…At Chapters I always head to like the queer book section, all the time—or like gender studies or whatever they call it, I don't even know. Well, the last time I went to Chapters was actually in the same run when we were at [university]…I found that a lot of the same books that were in the university bookstore were in the Chapters bookstore. And so, I'm thinking to myself that there's not a big, like a wide variety of people that are writing on this subject or like, because if it is that limited, like you're finding the same books and they're using them as textbooks…(Keri)

FACTORS AFFECTING BOOKSTORE USE

Proximity, a factor in library use, also influenced the type of bookstores that participants visited. Other factors affecting bookstore use include financial barriers as well as political and ideological affiliations. Each of these is described below.

Proximity

Physical proximity to the locales of participants' everyday activities was as an important factor for bookstore use as it was for library use. The knowledge of feminist and gay bookstores was not enough to pull most participants out of their own home and school neighbourhoods, even though they often assumed that they would be more likely to find better books at such shops. Excerpts from the interviews illustrates this again and again:

> I don't really go to This Ain't the Rosedale Library or Glad Day. I have been in there. I don't know—I'm lazy. I don't want to go so far away…I have often gone to the Toronto Women's Bookstore because it happens to be on my way home. (Anne)

> I go in and out [of the Toronto Women's Bookstore] but I never buy a book from there. I don't think I've bought one…I definitely know about it and I've been in it and mean I live closer to Church and Yonge, so it's easier to walk into a used bookstore or those stores [This Ain't the Rosedale Library and Glad Day Books]. (Laurie)

> This Ain't the Rosedale Library I guess 'cause I'm right around the corner from it. (Chris).

The use of a range of bookstores as sources for reading materials with lesbian and gay content holds no surprises. The impact of the provision of a small selection of titles for sale is negligible however. Participants in this study may have located titles that seemed more relevant, that offered a more satisfying range of representations of alternative sexualities than were available at school and public libraries, but there is a real material barrier to access nevertheless, one that delineates a gap between availability and acquisition that is ultimately unbridgeable by any retail book operation. In short, these materials are for sale: they cost money.

Financial Factors

Library late fees prevented participants from borrowing books and in their interviews they see this limitation as necessitating the purchase of books. However, the purchase of books is not undertaken lightly and many young women spoke of lists of criteria that needed to be met before they would actually buy a book. One of the main barriers when it came to book buying is simply the cost of books, deemed to be prohibitively expensive by all readers in this study. In view of the limitations imposed by price, the bookstores and libraries each exert an influence on the use of the other as the cost of books pushes readers back to lending institutions.

> So, I was looking at the [This Ain't the] Rosedale Library and I found it [a book on trans issues], but I didn't have forty dollars so I went down to the 519 and borrowed it. (Chris)

> I don't know, I just feel stupid buying books. Cause it's like, why am I buying this? I can go to the library and get it and then read it, and then if I really like it, then I get to buy it. (Ellen)

> Normally, because I don't have a lot of disposable [income]—or I just don't spend a lot on books, I will look into certain books and like I can take whatever out of the library. Like if I can't find it in the library, I'm going to get an idea of what the writing is like, or even read the first page at a bookstore and think about it. (Barb)

> Too expensive…that's basically why [I don't buy books]. And I mean, with a magazine, it feels so much less of a commitment. It's like six or seven dollars or something. And a book is you know, twenty-five dollars or something. I really only buy books when I have presents or if I was going on a trip. (Anne)

> I only buy long books…'cause they're so expensive…and it takes me like a day to finish something…so I try to buy books that are as long as possible. (Naomi)

Participants also named a variety of other sources of reading materials including book fairs and sales, thrift stores, used bookstores, and yard sales; all are sources of inexpensive books, a point made repeatedly, almost apologetically, as participants explained why bookstores were uncertain sites of access to reading materials with lesbian and gay content. One book fair, the Toronto-based Word on the Street, stands out in this research as a source of inexpensive queer materials. Word on the Street is a one day event that brings writers, illustrators, publishers, libraries, bookstores and other book industry representatives together to promote Canadian writing and publishing (Word on the Street 2002-2004).

> One of the places where I've gotten stuff is the Word on the Street Festival…It's all sorts of bookstores, booksellers, everything, you get the Toronto Star there, you get independent bookstores, you get a lot of independent bookstores and publishers which is what I really like to go for. They're selling books often at really reduced prices. It's in September. There has to be a fair amount of queer stuff there, at least if you look and know where to look. They have magazines where you can get them for like a dollar or less per magazine and often they're ones that are harder to find, you'll find a lot of queer ones…you can get like *Curve, Girlfriends* and stuff. (Cole)

> I went to Word on the Street. That book fair and the Women's Bookstore had a table there and their stuff is wildly expensive, but it was very cheap that day. I picked up a bunch of stuff…You have to go, it's a frenzy…It's worth it I think. I even picked up a bunch of magazines, back issues of *on our backs* which is great for like a dollar…Yeah, and if anything, no tax on anything and most stuff is on sale. (Chris)

Some young women simply chose not to purchase books. They preferred to spend their disposable income on movies and music instead. Nicky explains her preference in terms of risk and investment and book buying is the riskier of the two transactions:

> I don't spend my money on books, I spend my money on CDs because once you read a book, it's hard to—when you really want to read something and you don't even know if you're going to like it or not, to invest money in it or to invest trying to search it down. (Nicky)

Political Factors

The readers in this study made unequivocal declarations of support for independently owned and locally situated booksellers. This is not to say that they refused to visit the large format chains, because all of them did purchase books from stores like Chapters and Indigo and also the large online bookstores such as Amazon.ca. However, explanations follow closely on their admissions of shopping at the large multinational chains. Moreover financial support of independent booksellers, especially at women's and gay bookstores, expressed a show of solidarity for women, gays and lesbians. Shopping was one way that some participants demonstrated their disapproval of heterosexism, patriarchy, homophobia, and monopolistic capitalist enterprise. The link to politics is explicit in their accounts:

> I often check out those sites [amazon.com and chapters.indigo.ca] but I don't buy stuff from those sites. I try to buy from independent bookstores as much as I can—Toronto Women's Bookstore specifically. They have a lot more stuff that I'm interested in and I've had them order a book in for me…Toronto Women's bookstore is the one that I tend to go to, partly because it's close—and it's also like a feminist queer kind of thing. (Cole)

Naomi's decision to shop at women's bookstores is even more grounded in her personal politics that dictate a strict set of criteria for book purchases. Her comments also illustrate that her relationship is not without its problems – even women's bookstores fail to provide her with the materials she most desires.

> I like to read sexuality stuff…I guess my thing is, usually I have some sort of restrictions on what I'll buy…so based on what kind of criteria…so right now I don't buy anything that's written by men…I only buy stuff that's written by women. And then depending on like, for a while I was only buying stuff written by women of colour…and then depending on what's popular…What I'm really looking for that's just so hard to find, you know, novels that picture two women together…it's this constant war with women's bookstore. (Naomi)

Barb has similar unsatisfying relationships with the small independent stores from which she buys books. The discourse of competition and threat regarding the national chain of bookstores is apparent:

> I have used Indigo for a few schoolbooks actually. I try to, I prefer to hit up some of the small bookstores first, like This Ain't the Rosedale Library, or the Toronto Women's Bookstore because they have a pretty broad selection and they'll order anything. And I just prefer to support them, because well, they're good stores. Easy to get swallowed up by Chapters. But they don't have, remarkably even going to the stores, they don't really have that great a selection. (Barb)

The super bookstores figure prominently in my participants' accounts of how they find books to read even when they do not shop at them. Failure to patronize these stores was a mark of pride for some participants, for others recalling purchases made there required embarrassed explanations.

> You know part of my whole loving buying books is the whole used bookstore scene, like just going and spending an afternoon doing that…I haven't done that in a long time, except for gifts for other people. And new bookstores too, like the Women's Bookstore, feminist bookstores…I try not to use [the chain bookstores]. I try to avoid like plague if I can, but sometimes it's so, they're so convenient and if you're buying Christmas gifts for somebody you don't know well, then it's like they have their featured things and they make it easy right? (Sue)

The emphasis on financial barriers and the expressed political affiliation with feminist, lesbian and gay bookstores and more generally, bookstores that are run independently of the large corporate book chains, raises troubling questions about the role of the public library in the lives of the young women who participated in this study. Again and again public libraries seem to exist solely as repositories for materials. Participants did not once

express a view of libraries that was grounded in personal politics relating to identity or to larger social contexts for its enactment. Reasons for this rather pedestrian view of libraries may have to do with the entrenchment of the "ethos of neutrality" that ultimately undermines the potentially progressive advocacy in the provision of library services to lesbian, gay and bisexual patrons (see Joyce 2000). The work of some librarians and scholars that demands improvement to library services on the grounds that intellectual freedom and human rights may be overshadowed by the persistent public perception of librarians as neutral, detached, objective providers of service and libraries as static storehouses of information.

Another explanation for this lack of political interest in libraries relies on a critical view of the production and consumption of cultural texts. Libraries fail to engage the political interests of my participants because they lie outside of the politics of consumption: the readers in this study exercise political power through their purchase of texts offered for sale by bookstores and publishers that help to constitute a particular kind of buying public. Readers in this study privilege lesbian and gay texts available at feminist, gay and independent bookstores as a political exercise that dovetails with the enactment of their alternative sexualities which are in turn, constituted and re-constituted by the commercial imperatives to produce both texts that sell and audiences who buy. However an extension of this view of textual consumption ultimately denies readers agency to inform and articulate their personal and social identities. The young women in this study actively engaged with other political grassroots advocacy for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans- and queer visibility, rights and freedoms. Many of them expressed a strong feminist orientation to the world where the issues of disenfranchised women were seen as particularly compelling. Furthermore, the majority of participants were directly involved in the investigation and transformation of social inequalities within their immediate and extended communities. Examples of this kind of work include anti-oppression workshops, participation in anti-poverty and anti-war rallies, writing and performing pro-gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer texts, and outreach to marginalized and invisible groups

such as people living with HIV/AIDS and members of the transsexual and transgendered communities. Politics wed with idealistic views of society clearly motivated many young women to work towards what they saw as a better world, outside of their consumption of texts. To refuse the power of their convictions, to reduce them to the status of passive receivers of cultural texts, commits a kind of violence to their activism and idealism.

Bookstore use might also be another way to publicly enact a lesbian or queer identity – supporting local, lesbian and gay friendly stores could be construed as a political consumer-oriented ritual that lends legitimacy, visibility and recognition of nonmainstream sexualities. There is a new body of research that emerges from cultural and social studies of marketing that provides support for the idea of politically motivated consumption among lesbian and gay individuals and groups. In a recent ethnography, Kates and Belk (2001) discuss the basic paradox of two competing notions of consumption during lesbian and gay pride day celebrations: on one hand informants decried the commercialization of a grassroots, consciousness-raising lesbian and gay rights political movement. On the other hand, informants reported spending money on food, alcohol, clothing, jewellery and other souvenirs purchased from lesbian and gay businesses and vendors in order to mark the importance of the celebration and to support the claims of space and promotion of visibility of lesbians, gay, bisexuals, queers and trans people for one weekend in late June. Kates and Belk see this active loyalty to gay shops and vendors as a form of symbolic resistance to the hetero-patriarchal status quo, although sponsorship for the celebrations from prominent local and national companies (airlines and hotels, beer and liquor producers etc.) also helps to legitimize lesbian and gay identities in the eyes of the informants. In her evaluation of the marketing strategies used to target a lesbian and gay consumer base, Penaloza (1996) also claims that the increased accommodation of lesbians and gays as a segmented market brings with it a sense of social validation and legitimacy, but she also warns of the potential for alienating representations of nonmainstream sexualities (i.e. emphasis on male identities, distortion of income levels, and attacks from religious right-wing groups). Using these

studies as a framework, it is possible to see my participants' patronage at women's and gay bookstores in a context larger even than everyday life information practices. The establishment of lesbian and gay space, represented in this study by specialty bookstores, committed shelf space and structured websites, offers not only sites of access to lesbian and gay literature and information, but also functions as a solid ground from which participants can find reflection of lesbian and queer sexual identities. This, in turn, provides an empowering legitimacy for the enactment of such identities.

HUMAN INTERMEDIARIES

The surprising lack of interaction with human intermediaries, librarians, discussed in the previous section, is not found in my participants' talk about bookstores. Booksellers played a central role in the accounts of how books got into the hands of the young women in this study. Perhaps due to the drive to make money that forces bookstore employees to approach potential customers with helpful queries in order to initiate sales transactions, participants recalled several incidents where booksellers provided not only desired reading materials, but also memories of helpful service.

> I went to Chapters to look in the gay/lesbian section…I used to go usually when I was in high school and I'd go in between certain classes just to kill time…so it was always the same people working and then there was one woman who would always help me. She looked kind of gay…I think the first time I was looking for a Fannie Flagg—a whistle [*The Whistle-Stop Café*]. So I asked her where it was, and she was like, "oh I know." And she showed me and the next time I came in, she's like, "oh are you looking for anything?" I was like, "oh I'm just looking," and then I was in that section [gay/lesbian studies]. She came over again and she gave me like the bookmarks with her name and [employee] number on it. She's like, "if you need any help." I don't know if they like get extra points. (Kathy)

Although Keri was talking about general fiction rather than lesbian fiction, she also recalled a helpful bookseller, who in this scenario acts rather like a readers' advisor. The passage is striking as it is one of the few narratives that portray a helpful human intermediary.

> Well actually there was another place where I was getting books from in [northern Ontario city] and it was in the mall, but it was like a market type of thing in the mall. And people selling you know, pottery and stuff that they had made in there. This one woman was selling these books and she'd go like, "what books are you reading right now, or what type of books do you like?" I'd tell her and she'd go, "you'll really like this one." Like she's read all the books. (Keri)

Perhaps this woman was also a librarian or former librarian, there is no way to know, but she does represent a trusted outsider who makes reliable recommendations, a role that few others are given in this research. One other bookseller was granted this status as well, this time by Madeline as she recounts her visit to a local second-hand bookstore:

> You would go in and it would just look like this little store and then it just kind of went through this vortex that expanded. Like you'd go in the backrooms and there'd be more books. you'd turn around and there's more books. It was fabulous. That was a big place, and you had no cataloguing system. You'd walk in and you'd say, "do you have such and such?" and he'd just go to these messed up shelves and pull [it] down. (Madeline)

Madeline is not talking about lesbian and gay texts in this quotation, but it is a telling testimony nonetheless as similar accounts of satisfying library visits were not forthcoming from Madeline or from other participants. The question raised by this research—why librarians and library workers are invisible in these accounts of reading and gaining access to reading materials—cannot be adequately answered by it. We could surmise that lesbian and queer young women are unlikely to ask for assistance when searching for materials that contain lesbian and gay content, and some indirect evidence from the interviews support this.

Browsing and shopping at bookstores that carry even a limited selection of lesbian, gay and queer texts may function as a safe way to express one's emergent lesbian or queer identity. I wondered if women's and gay bookshops provided a kind of safe testing ground where simply by browsing through and perhaps even purchasing a book with lesbian or gay content might signify a subtle, yet powerful expression of identity. Bookstore space, rather than library space, may represent "public" space in which these

young women could enact one possible way of being lesbian or queer without serious consequences, requiring not even the eventual return of borrowed materials. To play the role of potential paying customer grants an unquestionable right to be in the store, browsing and shopping. The focused selection of materials at specialty stores aids in directed browsing and reliable book finding results. Participants may then take information about specific titles and authors to the library, but once at the libraries, where they lack witnesses, the power of being seen browsing and selecting lesbian and gay materials renders the act and the actors invisible, and ultimately, perhaps, of no account. So, libraries remain then, safe, private, anonymous sites of potential access to lesbian and gay material, but so much so, perhaps, that they also remain invisible.

CONCLUSION

Like the participant observation study of Chapters bookstores (Dixon, McKechnie, Miller and Rothbauer 2001), this study found evidence of bookstores as leisure time destinations. Participants described using bookstores as places to hangout or to kill time between classes or simply to browse magazines. In the context of this study, bookstores are seen to be reliable sites of access to information about lesbian and gay literature – reliable access because participants knew that they would always be able to find *something* with lesbian and gay content at the bookstore, an expectation that they did not extend to libraries. The visibility of labelled lesbian and gay collections at most bookstores aids the readers in this study by initiating a string of book finding activities that often bring them back to the library. The high price of books is a very real disincentive to book purchasing and a consistent barrier of access to specific lesbian and gay texts. The prohibitive cost does, however, drive readers back to circulating collections. Bookstores are not perceived to be competitors to libraries by participants, but rather more like a node in a spectrum of possible institutional locations for information that also include the Internet and public, school and academic libraries.

When it came to fictional or recreational reading materials bookstores and booksellers were seen as helpful intermediaries. All participants were able to recall finding at least one memorable lesbian or gay text at a bookstore, a claim that cannot be extended to libraries. Similarly, participants recounted helpful encounters with booksellers, but none could recall useful assistance from librarians or library workers.

Affiliation with women's issues and pro-gay and lesbian rights politics also influences bookstore use. This suggests that women's and gay bookstores may, in turn, support the diffusion of pro-gay and feminist ideologies amongst readers and shoppers. Shopping at these kinds of bookstores corresponds to ideals of community and to expressions of solidarity with larger lesbian, gay and queer communities, a political discourse of support that is entirely absent from our discussions of libraries.

Chapter Nine – Conclusions and Implications

In my effort to understand the place of reading in the lives of lesbian and queer young women, I have, in the past six chapters, explored the practices of reading, and of gaining access to reading materials through the Internet, libraries and bookstores. In this chapter, I explore three areas from Certeau's writing: the ethical consideration of writing as a research practice; strategic control of readers/patrons/users by libraries; and reading as a "tactical" maneuver. Drawing from the findings of this inquiry, I discuss implications for library service, and I conclude by revisiting my preliminary research questions.

REVISITING CERTEAU

Certeau questions the totality of the power of technocratic, bureaucratic social processes to control, surveill and manipulate human subjects in service to the values of late modern Western consumer capitalist society. He rejects the dominant ideology thesis of consumer capitalism that posits readers, consumers, users of cultural products as victims or dupes who witlessly absorb the values and beliefs provided by the systems of production. In a critique of the ideology of "informing" through books, Certeau writes of consumers:

> …[W]e thus find a "reduction" and a confinement: consumption…takes on the appearance of something done by sheep progressively immobilized and "handled" as a result of the growing mobility of the media as they conquer space. The consumers settle down, the media keep on the move. The only freedom supposed to be left to the masses is that of grazing on the ration of simulacra the system distributes to each individual.
>
> That is precisely the idea I oppose: such an image of consumers is unacceptable (Certeau 1984, 165-66).

He goes on, refuting the producers' implicit claim to "*inform* the population, that is, to "give form" to social practices":

> Even protests against the vulgarization/vulgarity of the media often depend on an analogous pedagogical claim; inclined to believe that its own cultural models are necessary for the people in order to educate their minds and elevate their hearts, the elite upset about the "low level" of journalism or television always assumes that the public is moulded by the products imposed on it. To assume that is to misunderstand the act of "consumption." This misunderstanding assumes that "assimilating" necessarily means "becoming similar to" what one absorbs, and not "making something similar" to what one is, making it one's own, appropriating or reappropriating it" (Certeau 1984, 166).

Taken from the chapter entitled "Reading as Poaching" (Certeau 1984, 165-76), these two excerpts encapsulate the institutional strategies associated with everyday reading used by visible structures of cultural production, in this study, taken primarily to be libraries and bookstores. Strategies are methods that create and define representations of users, audiences and readers, and attempt to determine the circumstances and modes of use. Strategies circumscribe "legitimate" identities and official practices by instantiating relationships between users and systems based on power that comes from the establishment of legitimate and official places.

Libraries and bookstores as official sites of "production" exercise strategies (in Certeau's sense) to represent, target and "control" youth who are negotiating alternative sexualities. This should not be read as a negative judgment of library services, but rather, as an articulation of library practice in Certeau's formulation of strategies (termed such because they issue from a visible, recognizable locus of control). The primary way that libraries target lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer youth is through the design and provision of various services including: collections, systems of access to collections, outreach activities, space, reviewing mechanisms and readers' advisory tools and professional advocacy.

Cal Gough and Ellen Greenblatt's edited collection of essays, *Gay and Lesbian Library Service* (1990) remains the standard for service strategies and products for lesbian and gay patrons, although, aside from Christine Jenkins' discussion of gay and lesbian issues

for school librarians, the scope of this volume focuses on adults. Over the last decade or so, there has been increased advocacy on behalf of LGBTQ youth from professional library associations. It is visible in the continued sponsorship of workshops, conferences, presentations and panels; the publication and distribution of booklists of lesbian and gay literatures for young people; and mobilized professional responses to censorship challenges mounted against the intellectual freedoms of young people, usually in the form of calls to ban books with lesbian and gay content. A population of library users has emerged that is recognizable in the literature as "lesbian and gay" youth, sometimes including the terms bisexual, queer, transgendered and transsexual (although as stated earlier, there has yet to be any serious or sensitive examination and analysis of the information needs and behaviour of trans people within LIS). The collection of various reading materials represents the major service effort, which raises two concerns about the best methods of access to these materials. First, is the assumption that young people who read lesbian and gay materials will absorb such representations unproblematically in a more or less reductive process of identification. Second, is that methods of access need continual improvement to ensure that such reading can occur. The aim is to direct young people (and others presumably) to a specific body of literature that is perceived to be helpful in the negotiation of sexual identities and sexual orientation. However, the continued problems of access identified by the young women in this study and by all the participants in the other empirical studies of the information needs and uses of lesbians and gays (see Chapters 6 and 7), continue precisely because processes related to identity cannot be "pinned down," nor can the "effects" of reading be determined with any certainty or conclusiveness. The attempt to bind together into a stable relationship two dynamic processes – reading and the negotiation of identity – is challenging, perhaps ultimately impossible, as both are tactical, dynamic and transient everyday practices.

Writing as an Ethical Act

The process of writing is another practice of everyday life that comes to bear on this project. I wrote the following entry into my field diary the day I completed my first substantial written interpretation on the themes of reading:

> In some ways this research project has been an extended love affair with Michel de Certeau's ideas. I have been reading Certeau the way I read poetry, by falling into the words without forcing an interpretation, encountering what were sometimes breathtaking insights about human experience, and feeling moved by Certeau's moral, ethical stance to his theme. I have been frustrated and exasperated by the seeming divide between the ethical study of everyday life and the process of writing about it that is so tied up in disciplinary apparatuses that at times it seemed impossible to write or say anything at all. About half way through my analysis I wanted to jettison Certeau altogether, unable to reconcile the imperative to produce this thesis ("will to interpretation" or the "will to knowledge") with the transience, contradictory, multiple logics at play in Certeau's writings on everyday life (December 6, 2003, field diary).

Certeau was concerned with the ethics of anthropological and ethnological writing that he saw as an "imperialist medium" that makes the writer/researcher complicit or allied to the interests of the powerful (Gardiner 2000, 177). Writing about other people and their cultures is a process by which heterogeneous, multiple, dynamic cultural practices (and practitioners) are fixed into an analysis that does a "symbolic violence" to the subjects of the research. Ann Gray describes this basic tension of research as follows:

> Michel de Certeau, speaking of the development of the discipline of anthropology, notes the gap between the anthropologist as docile and grateful for the hospitality of the host culture and the anthropologist as author of the written monograph. The latter reveals the institutional affiliations (scientific and social) and the profit (intellectual, professional, financial, etc.) for which this hospitality is objectively the means. Thus, he says, the Bororos of Brazil sink slowly into their collective death, and Levi-Strauss, the world-famous anthropologist, takes his seat in the French Academy (Gray 2003, 19).

Gardiner writes that Certeau's insistence on the "silent production" of reading undermines "the perennial dream of technocratic power" of the "scriptural economy," or the ability to force a literal interpretation (2000, 174). This thesis, of course, represents a contribution to the scriptural economy that seeks to provide a picture of the lives and experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer young people. It is an articulation of just one interpretation that joins with the work of other researchers, other writers. I offer it as a holding place for interpretations about reading practices and identity. I have resisted the formulation of a final theory that offers a rigid explanation of "what went on here."

Reading as Poaching and An Invitation to the Social

Studies of reading, especially those that begin with assumptions of active readers and indeterminate texts (see Chapter 1), tell us that readers are, to some extent, wily and unpredictable. And if the insights from queer theory and social constructionist assumptions about identity tell us anything, it is that identity formation is also wily. The participants in this study support such perspectives on reading and identity. Throughout our discussions of reading, participants exhibited a trenchant unwillingness to reduce their own understanding of sexual identity and sexual orientation to modernist conceptions of either coming out or of identity. Even young women who claimed "stable" identities as lesbian, and rejected the term "queer" for self-description, found the range of lesbian and gay material to which they had found access to be severely limited in the representations of sexualities that it offered to them. Most of them did not reject these books out of hand, but rather like Ross's readers and as Certeau posits, they "poached" as they read taking what they needed, what they wanted, what made sense to them and helped them without regard for its origins.

Certeau's (1984, 91-110) other main metaphor for tactical resistance in everyday life is walking through a city, a practice that is unavoidably bound by a "spatial order," but also one by which pedestrians may move about creating multiple and multiplying possibilities

for new paths, shortcuts, detours and, at the same time, new barriers to movement. This relates to browsing through public places such as libraries, bookstores, and perhaps also online spaces, an activity that is consistently valued by readers and library patrons, including the ones in this study. Leckie and Hopkins report that library patrons browsed collections to clarify information needs, but also because it is "a pleasurable social activity, contributing to the vitality and ambience of a public place" (2002, 355). My participants further suggest that the search for books with lesbian and gay content constitutes a kind of ritual coming out into literature, where the difficulty of finding relevant, highly appraised materials becomes part of their narratives (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Even books that were judged to be depressing, unrealistic, or simply poorly written (see Chapter 4), held out some possibilities for readers in this study, possibilities, moreover, that had little to do with the content of the text. Rather, reading engendered feelings of belonging, and offered membership into a community of readers (see Chapter 5). This, more than anything, points to the "creative production" of everyday reading as theorized by Certeau. The readers in this study made "something new," something lifted from the origins of any text or body of texts. And rather than looking to internal, psychological processes of reading and identity, my participants indicate that the contours of what Certeau called the "readable space" are visible only through an enunciation of relations with others, whether fictional characters, authors, other real and imagined readers, friends, peers, family members, or indeed, researchers.

Collections of even excellent fiction with lesbian and gay content are not enough for readers when modes of access are circumscribed by strategies that reduce readers to a silent (perhaps silenced) group of LGBTQ patrons seeking information about what it means to be lesbian or gay or bisexual or queer or transgendered or transsexual. Furthermore, the young women in this study suggest that the metaphor of the closet may have outlived its usefulness as a concept to be considered in the provision of library

services to young people (perhaps, at least, in the locale where this study took place). In this respect, bookstores that maintain inventories of lesbian, gay and queer books and magazines offer more than public and school libraries (see Chapters 7 and 8). Simply stepping into a gay and lesbian bookstore establishes an affinity with other people who also declare alternative sexualities, a service that mainstream libraries, no matter how progressive, can offer. However, as the young women in this study illustrate, books at bookstores cost money, and like other young people, they choose to spend their money elsewhere on other things. This suggests that libraries can do more than build collections of lesbian and gay materials, or create a series of pathfinders to these collections. A major theme to emerge from the interviews was the search for social connectedness. Locating, borrowing and reading books with lesbian and gay content comprise procedures of everyday reading for participants, but equally important and compelling to them is recourse to discussion, debate, talk, and other activities that permit the shared exploration of alternative sexualities. The willingness expressed by participants to read pretty much anything with lesbian or gay content provided it could be located, may be explained to some degree by the *desire* to read about one's own experiences, the affective need to feel connected to others. Reading in this study, as in many others, helped readers to "not feel alone" by creating a sense of connection with what Lynne Pearce (1997) has called the "textual other." To do justice to the wide-ranging, dynamic reading practices of readers like the young women in this study, requires an acknowledgment that reading is a call for participation, an invitation to the social (Smith and Wilhelm 2002), rather than an isolated, private reflection of the closet.

Reading as Wandering: Vistas for Further Study

Certeau deploys two key metaphors to theorize tactical reading: one is reading-as-poaching, discussed above; the other is reading-as-wandering. The activity of wandering, like the practice of reading, runs through this work with discussion of movement through specific stories, bodies of literature, libraries and bookstores, magazines, websites, online

catalogues and search engines. Participants, in their quests to find reading materials wandered from one mode of access to another and back again as they rejected and then renewed attempts to find stories with lesbian characters, with queer content. This general inability and (sometimes outright failure) to locate desired reading materials signals a need for serious evaluation of library service. This includes shelving, cataloguing and classification practices, in addition also to study of publishing strategies that are in misstep with the expressed needs of young people for information about sexual identities. The research reported here also suggests a more radical interpretation of library space – namely that it is subject *only* to heterogeneous, multiple, dynamic or, in a word, "queer" uses. The trajectory of this logic is that the library itself constitutes a "queer space." This is, I think, a rich, speculative idea that invites further study. What would make a library queer? Is it the uses of its spaces, its collections and resources, the wily navigation of its patrons, its users? Is a special collection such as the Pride Library at UWO that holds resources to support research into sexual diversity automatically queer? Are the uses that lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer youth make of the library queer, not because of a correspondence to some essentialized core of identity, but rather because the strategies of libraries, publishers, educators, bookstores leave them no choice?

This line of study dovetails with the recent call for a broadening of perspectives within LIS scholarship, asking scholars to consider the place of the library in the lives of its users (Wiegand 2003). It also invites an analysis of place, meaning and social process used by human geographers. Following Agnew and Duncan, three major elements of place are location, or "the spatial distribution of social and economic activities," locale, or "settings for everyday routine social interaction," and sense of place, or "identification with a place engendered by living in it" (cited in Sumartojo 2004, 88). Studies of the public place of urban, central libraries by Leckie and her colleagues (Leckie and Hopkins 2002; Given and Leckie 2003) could inform this research direction.

Although this study privileges the experiences and voices of young women, I have been silent on the cultural reproduction of gender in order to focus on the role of reading in relation to aspects of sexual identity and orientation. Issues of unequal representation were raised primarily in the context of the content of fictional works with lesbian characters and themes. Participants complained about the lack of material with representations of female sexuality, claiming that it was much easier to locate books that featured the experiences of gay men. Other studies of the content of lesbian, gay and queer literature published for young adults support this claim (see Chapter 4). Questions are thus raised about the role of voluntary reading in the lives of young gay, bisexual and queer men. How does it differ? What kinds of materials do they read? How do they find access to them? What are the roles of libraries, bookstores, and friends?

A third area of further study concerns the circuit of production and distribution for lesbian and gay materials of all kinds including those written and published for young people. Following Certeau, people can only read what the system distributes, in this case quite literally. We need to know more about how this recent emergent field of literature came to be and where it is going. Given the lack of familiarity expressed by the majority of participants in this study (avid library users and avid readers), one pressing question may be to ask who are its readers? Is it the case as Jack Zipes (2001) argues of children's literature more generally, that its primary audience is composed of interested adults?

IMPLICATIONS FOR LIBRARY SERVICES

Discussion of the implications for library service to LGBTQ youth raised by this research is provided in the following summary. Despite the problematic relationship between libraries and the participants in this research, especially in the context of searching for lesbian and gay materials, libraries remain at the center of the quest for information about what it means to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer.

1. Reading as a way of "finding out."

In her research into the reading practices of avid readers, Catherine Ross (1999) has shown that free voluntary reading (especially for those who do a lot of it) functions as a way of finding information without an explicit need or expressed requirement for it. The participants in this inquiry support this more flexible view of what information can be and how readers might search and locate it. Rarely did my readers articulate anything so direct as a "need" for information, but it is clear from our talk about the role of voluntary reading in their lives, that they gained a certain kind of information about what it means to be lesbian, bisexual or queer. In this study we talked mostly about narrative texts – novels, short stories, biographies and autobiographies. Stories of experience gave them what could be called "lived information" offering them insights into sexual identity and sexual orientation that is rarely found in expository texts and nonfiction, "informational" books. Libraries must continue to create access to fictional accounts of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer experiences with the recognition that stories are a rich source of "information."

2. Imperative to recognize social dimensions of reading.

Overwhelmingly, participants conceived of the role of reading in their lives as relational, social, active and contingent on the involvement of others. Libraries could do more to foster reading grounds for social interactions that might arise through the shared reading of texts. Service options include book discussion groups, interactive online spaces, writing workshops, reading events featuring LGBTQ youth and more prominent authors. Another possibility includes offering workshops and reading groups for adults who work and live with LGBTQ youth – building an exciting forum for discussion about lesbian and gay literature that is of interest to young people.

3. Recognition of and respect for "the closet," but provision of services for young people (and others) who are "out and proud."

The young women in this study did not recognize the public library as a social arena that might offer more than haphazard access to mostly unsatisfactory and irrelevant materials. Libraries could do more to foster social connections between LGBTQ youth and larger communities. Research tells us that there is still a serious need for private, safe, non-risky ways for young people to explore non-mainstream sexualities, and public libraries must continue to respect these needs and to protect private, safe and anonymous access to materials. However, it may also be appropriate to expand service mandates to include an opportunity for young people to publicly and openly enact alternative sexual identities, thus rendering library space and library services more relevant, visible and appealing.

4. Look for content that goes beyond the modernist coming out tale.

The readers in this study suggest that more complex stories of coming out with more sophisticated representations of lesbian, bisexual and queer experiences are needed. It is imperative that we have firsthand knowledge of books "about homosexuality" before we make recommendations to readers. It is no longer appropriate to subsume all materials concerning a range of sexualities under LGBTQ headings without an articulation of differences. Participants who claimed bisexual, or more fluid queer identities were frustrated and exasperated in their searches to find narratives that might reflect their experiences. Most participants mentioned finding nonfiction materials in libraries – question and answer guides about sexualities, self-help books, and sex manuals. One effective strategy is to make virtual and actual links from nonfiction to fiction and other extended narrative forms. Attention could also given to materials that are age-appropriate for younger adolescents.

5. The role of online bookstore search engines.

My participants gave more evidence that existing catalogue access to materials belonging to genres of lesbian and gay literature continue to create significant barriers, barriers, moreover, that did not surface in their accounts of using online bookstore search engines and catalogues. It behooves us to look more closely at how readers use these search tools that operate in service to commercial enterprise.

CONCLUSION: Revisiting the Research Questions

I have attempted to investigate and explore what my participants were reading, in addition to where and how they got it, traditional concerns in reading research at least as early as Bernard Berelson's 1949 study *The Library's Public*, continuing through to recent large-scale, national surveys of reading and readers that continue to quantify reading practices and experiences (e.g. Book Marketing Limited 2000; IPSOS Book Trends 2002; Statistics Canada 1998). However, following from Certeau's imperative to find out "what happens when people read," shored up with a committed interest in the sustained examination of reader agency, I also wanted to know why my participants read, or as another researcher wrote of her respondents (women readers of self-help texts), "what they got out of it" (Simonds 1992, 25). It is useful to turn to the preliminary research questions that guided this inquiry to bring this discussion to a close. Answers to the five original questions are now possible. Each question is stated below in reverse order of how they were originally stated, beginning with intermediaries and ending with experiences of reading.

1. Who are mediating people and agencies that connect readers to texts?

Librarians and library workers assume an invisible role in the reading accounts of the young women who participated in this study. Only one reader recalled asking for help at a library and when the staff member was unable to fulfill her request regarding the location of a specific lesbian novel, she simply assumed that libraries were not likely to carry the material that she wanted. Librarians do, nevertheless, mediate the connection between readers and texts, by virtue of the structural systems established to create access to reading materials with lesbian and gay content: classification schemes, cataloguing and shelving practices, and reader's advisory tools such as bibliographies, bookmarks, pathfinders and reviews. Furthermore, the route to access begins with a single act – the purchase of titles for library collections, often performed with opposition from their communities.

Unlike librarians, bookstore employees were cited as helpful human intermediaries. Participants viewed staff as "book experts" and trusted their reading recommendations.

Friends and family members played a minor mediating role in this study. Participants mentioned both borrowing from and lending books to friends. Friends attended book clubs and offered opportunities to converse about various texts. Many participants received from friends cherished editions of books with lesbian and gay content. The role of friends and families in the distribution of lesbian and gay literature is an area that invites further study, raising questions about systems of gift exchange and the commonplace diffusion of ideologies within trusting relationships.

Participants also borrowed books from various social agencies serving LGBTQ youth and adults. Sometimes people working at drop-in centers, youth groups, family counseling services put books into the hands of the readers in these studies.

2. What kinds of texts do these readers read?

I have primarily focussed on the reading practices related to lesbian and gay literature, but it was clear from the interviews that participants consumed a wide range of reading materials. Regarding lesbian and gay literature, participants would generally read anything and everything that they came across. Most readers were not familiar with young adult fiction with lesbian, gay and bisexual characters. Coming out narratives were encountered frequently and usually with unsatisfying results, as most participants shared a general dislike of these stories. Many participants singled out books by local and well-known lesbian and queer female writers, perhaps, in part, due to the particular situatedness of this study in a city that boasts several prominent authors. The young women in this study expressed a longing for reading materials that were more explicitly queer in structure and content – plots and characters that reflected their own understandings of nonbinarist and dynamic sexualities. This longing relates to the more general criteria for realism in the depiction of lesbian, bisexual and queer experience.

3. What is the role of libraries and bookstores in the reading choices and reading practices of lesbian, bisexual and queer young women?

Public libraries were the main source of lesbian and gay fiction. Gaining access to titles was difficult however as participants relied primarily upon serendipitous browsing encounters. The most successful routes to other lesbian and gay titles started with known authors, and exact titles specifically recommended by others, especially friends. Lists of lesbian and gay titles were downloaded from the Internet, accessed via library and bookstore websites as well as an array of personal sites. Subject headings accessed remotely via library catalogues resulted in unsatisfactory search results, but similar search strategies used with online bookstore inventories were more successful.

Bookstores are sites that invited certain enactments of lesbian and queer identities. Shopping, browsing and visiting lesbian and gay bookstores and women's bookstores functioned as a way to show allegiance to ideologies that supported lesbian and gay rights movements and anti-oppression frameworks more generally. Bookstores were also judged to be more reliable sources of information about lesbian and gay titles, as most participants found books or magazines that featured lesbian and queer content, an experience not common to library use. Book buying was unusual among this sample of readers with the high cost of books acting as a serious disincentive for purchase.

4. What do reading experiences contribute to the lives of my participants in the context of their self-declared alternative sexualities?

Reading helped participants make sense of their sexualities by offering representations of other lives and other experiences, some of which resonated with them, while others were rejected outright. For many participants reading (especially reading about other lesbian, bisexual and queer people) eased feelings of loneliness, aloneness and alienation, in particular, during early self-disclosure of non-mainstream sexual identities and sexual orientations. Reading offered participants a way to measure their own alienation against that of fictional characters. It allowed them to redefine 'normal' sexuality to include same-sex desire between women without insisting on rigid meanings and inflexible boundaries. For some participants, reading permitted them to enact "rebel outsider" roles by encouraging self-acceptance and self-respect for their differences, and by providing a reliable knowledge that there was a place for them in the larger world. Reading was experienced as engagement with others – fictional characters, authors, and other imagined and actual readers. This kind of experience is itself an enactment of a lesbian or queer identity: sharing books, conversing about them, or simply even knowing about them were signs of membership to a larger community. Furthermore, reading allowed participants to locate themselves in a community – reading was a process of finding self

through finding and interacting with others. There is no simple process by which readers lift identity off of texts, no instrumental, identificatory process of reading.

5. What is the experience of finding yourself (or not) in the texts that you read?

By this time it should be clear that the "experience of finding yourself in the text" is not a single, unitary thing. In the lives of the young women who participated in this study, finding *themselves* in the texts they chose to read was only a peripheral concern by the time they met with me to talk about reading. The concept of "finding oneself" did not resonate with participants, perhaps because it suggested an associated abandonment of the selves they worked so hard to define. Finding oneself relies on the metaphor of reading as escape, and while the women in this study spoke of reading this way, their words also expressed an outward searching for possibilities. Participants were not seeking an initial ground of identification, but were looking for paths that led to viable, optimistic futures. In her work on reading, Travis (1998) suggests that readers move both "in" and "out" of texts in a shifting, dialectical relationship. She sees reading as a reiterative series of performances enacted by readers as they move between their roles as actual readers (situated historically, temporally) and implied readers (created by texts). My participants give credence to this idea as they were constantly negotiating between their own desires, background, personal situations and the implications of identifying too closely with fictional characters found in lesbian and gay texts. Reading, as discussed in other studies of reading, and as theorized by Certeau, is a way to "find experience" that is then assimilated to one's own sense of a dynamic self.

Reading to find experience encompasses the testimony of participants who described reading practices that foreclosed on possibilities for them. For example, reading the Bible, genre fiction with heterosexual plots and characterization, or young adult fiction allowed participants to reject or question a set of experiences that did not resonate with them. For some, this led to further isolation and feelings of alienation; for others, it

strengthened their positions as “rebel outsiders.” In an unanticipated way, classic works of lesbian fiction, also foreclosed on possibilities – readers in this study were unsatisfied with unrealistic, simplistic and outdated representations of lesbian existence.

Affective relationships formed with a variety of textual others offer the most cogent explanation of the experience of finding or not finding oneself in the text. The meaning of reading comes not only from a rational interpretation of the content of reading materials, but also from emotional trajectories established through the practice of reading. Readers in this study enunciated the importance of *feeling* throughout – feeling connected with others; feeling reassured and confident to go forward; feeling alienated; feeling exhilarated, infatuated and satisfied.

Finally, a deterministic view of informing through books whereby books function as unitary receptacles of ideology is, as Certeau claims, inadequate and unacceptable. Reading *informs* participants in this study by enunciating possible ways of being in the world. Reading adds possibility to the promise of fulfilling futures that permit the continual exploration of diverse, dynamic and changeable sexualities.

The meaning of reading in the lives of my participants carries no single definition. Reading helped them negotiate their places in the world, but not always. Reading produced optimistic views of possible futures, but not always in credible, believable or realistic ways. Reading satisfied yearnings for representations of lesbian, bisexual and queer experience, which were then often rejected. Reading provided feelings of solidarity, permitting the public and shared expression of alternative, female sexualities, but also reinforced feelings of isolation and alienation. Institutional barriers exist that constrained reading including library practices and commercial enterprise. Reading encompassed a diverse range of textual encounters some of which were valued more than others. The meaning of reading is subject to many qualifications, but it does carry power to make a difference in the life of a reader, a testament to which all readers in this study, myself included, bear witness.

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Appendix 1.0 – List of Participants

Participants are listed in alphabetical order by pseudonym. Age and student status is noted as given at the time of our interview. Details have been generalized or changed to protect identities and submit to requirements for confidentiality. Median age of participants is 19 years. Some participants were known to one another but these relationships are not disclosed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Demographic data related to economic class was not solicited, but it was clear that most participants were likely from middle-class backgrounds. All participants were white. Two women identified as Jewish, and one as pagan. Most had lived in Ontario for several years.

Anne 21 years. Social sciences undergraduate at a large Ontario university. Self-identified as lesbian and queer. Reads mainstream romances, science fiction and fantasy.

Barb 21 years. Humanities undergraduate student at a large Ontario university. Self-identified as queer. Reads mostly recent Canadian literary fiction and seeks out lesbian and queer literary fiction

Camille 20 years. Social sciences undergraduate at a large Ontario university. Self-identifies as bisexual. Reads mostly nonfiction in the areas of feminist theory and sexuality studies. One of her favourite books is the young adult novel *Weetzie Bat* by Francesca Lia Block.

Chris 20 years. Student at a large urban university. Self-identified as queer, accepted term "lesbian." Member of local reading club for queer youth. An avid reader of queer literature. Favourite book *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg.

Cole 19 years. Science student at a large Ontario university. Self-identified as queer, but used interchangeably with the term "lesbian" throughout the interview. Reads an eclectic range of fiction and nonfiction.

Diane 21 years. Undergraduate student at a large Ontario university. Self-identifies as bisexual. Reads a wide variety of literary fiction, children's literature and nonfiction. Creates and distributes her own 'zines.

Ellen 18 years. Student at an urban high school in a large Ontario city. Self-identified as lesbian. Avid library user, borrowing mostly thrillers and mysteries. Fan of Margaret Atwood novels.

Francesca 18 years. Science student at a large Ontario university. Self-identifies bisexual. Reads a variety of fiction and nonfiction, including print and web-based comics and 'zines.

Joyce	19 years. Student at urban high school in large Ontario city. Self-identified as lesbian and queer. Reads mostly nonfiction – philosophy and current events. Many texts cited in interview were read in digital formats.
Kathy	19 years. Social sciences undergraduate at a large Ontario university. Self-identifies as lesbian. Prefers historical nonfiction and fiction for leisure reading.
Keri	20 years. Self-identified as lesbian. Incomplete undergraduate education; currently not enrolled in post-secondary program. Reads popular mysteries and suspense thrillers, also self-help texts.
Laurie	23 years. Self-identifies as lesbian but interchanged with "queer" throughout the interview. Completed undergraduate degree in social sciences. Avid reader of a variety of texts, but consciously seeks out lesbian and gay literature, both fiction and nonfiction. Young adult novel *Annie on my Mind* by Nancy Garden identified as an important book.
Madeline	20 years. Humanities undergraduate at a large Ontario university. Self-identifies as lesbian. Reads Canadian literary fiction and popular suspense thrillers.
Naomi	23 years. First term as graduate student in social sciences. Self-identifies as bisexual. Avid reader of feminist literary fiction. Familiar with genre of lesbian and gay literature for young adults.
Nicky	18 years. Student at Catholic high school. Self-identifies as lesbian. Avidly reads queer and especially lesbian literature. A heavy user of public libraries. Favourite book is *Summer Sisters* by Judy Blume, also a fan of Margaret Atwood's novels.
Stella	19 years. Science undergraduate student at a large Ontario university. Self-identifies as lesbian. Reads science fiction for pleasure.
Sue	23 years. Completed undergraduate degree in English at a large Ontario University. Self-identifies as queer and bisexual. Was mostly reading nonfiction sexuality texts at the time of the interview.

Appendix 2.0

The titles listed here are only the ones that appear in this thesis. Hundreds more titles were mentioned throughout the interviews, both those with lesbian and gay content, and those belonging to mainstream genre fiction categories.

Annie on My Mind. 1982. Nancy Garden. NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

> This groundbreaking American young adult novel is considered by many to be the first sympathetic and celebratory portrayal of a love relationship between two young women. Laurie described this book in her writing exercise as "A feel good kind of book that you are proud is on your shelf. Amongst all of the adult novels of complicated relationships, here is a love story of two real young girls, who really show you what it feels like to be in love for the first time. Reminding me to keep my first memories of 'girl love' alive."

Boys Like Her: Transfictions. 1998. Anna Camilleri, Ivan E. Coyote, Zoe Eakle and Lyndell Montgomery. Vancouver: Press Gang.

> A collection of short stories, essays, poems and photographs depicting trangressive play with gender and sex. The four authors perform together in a troupe called Taste This. Lyndell Montgomery is also a member of a popular band, Ember Swift, which played regularly in Toronto during my data collection period. Other authors also performed at various reading events across Toronto.

Boys Like Us: Gay Writers Tell Their Coming Out Stories. 1996. edited by Patrick Merla. NY: Avon.

> Includes the autobiographical coming out stories of twenty-nine gay male writers. This collection of essays was the only book mentioned by title by any participants that was specifically described as writing for gay men.

Clan of the Cave Bear. 1981. Jean M. Auel. Toronto: Bantam.

> A couple of participants mentioned this popular novel, the first in Auel's multi-volume "Earth's Children" series. The series constitute an epic chronicle of the earth's first tribes of people, but in these interviews, it was mentioned as early and illicit source of information about sex.

The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition. 1995. Anne Frank. Edited by Otto H. Frank and Mirjam Pressler. Translated by Susan Massotty. NY: Doubleday.

This edition of Anne Frank's diary was released with much media coverage of the restored pages, edited from the original publication in 1947. There are two pages in the definitive edition that describe Anne's fleeting appreciation for the female human form.

Dune. 1965. Frank Herbert. NY: Putnam.

Stella mentioned Herbert's first book in the multi-volume Dune series. She described the series as "a set of giant, extremely intellectual well researched science fiction books." The series continues to sell today and has been made into films and a televised mini series.

Fall on Your Knees. 1996. Ann-Marie Macdonald. Toronto: Knopf.

This award-winning Canadian novel features one subplot that involves a lesbian relationship. Ann-Marie Macdonald, an openly lesbian writer and performer, is a prominent Canadian personality. She lives in Toronto and gives frequent public readings. Ann-Marie Macdonald appeared on the Oprah Winfrey television programme in April 2002.

FtM: Female-to-male Transsexuals in Society. 1997. Holly Devor. Bloomington: Indiana UP.

This is considered to be a groundbreaking book about an invisible population by a Canadian sociologist. It is a scholarly book that can be alienating and difficult to read, but it is a rare resource for people desperately seeking information about the processes related to transitioning.

Heather Has Two Mommies. 1989. Lesléa Newman. Illustrated by Diana Souza. Boston, MA: Alyson.

One of the first picturebooks for children to feature a family with lesbian parents. It has sold over 35 000 copies and has never gone out of print. A revised edition was released in 2000. It is one of the most widely known children's books with lesbian or characters and it continues to raise controversies.

Hey, Dollface. 1978. Deborah Hautzig. NY: Greenwillow.

This novel presents an affirming view of lesbian sexuality throughout most of the novel up to the end when the two female characters consummate their attraction to one another. Their refusal to claim lesbian identities is read by some as an avowal of bisexuality.

Jane Sexes It Up: True Confessions of Feminist Desire. 2002. Merri Lisa Johnson, editor. NY: Four Walls Eight Windows.

Includes essays by 20 young feminists who explore female sexualities and feminist ideologies.

Now That You Know: A parents' guide to understanding their gay and lesbian children. 1998. Betty Fairchild. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace.

Updates a classic guide, first published in 1989. Plain and direct use of language, question and answer format. Widely available through mainstream bookstores and public libraries.

The Picture of Dorian Gray. 1891. Oscar Wilde. London: Ward, Lock and Company.

This book was on the reading list of a Toronto-based LGBTQ youth reading group when I started my first round of interviews. It was mentioned by one participant who was a member of this group.

Pillars of the Earth. 1989. Ken Follett. NY: Morrow.

Popular fiction that chronicles events in the history of Great Britain.

Rubyfruit Jungle. 1973. Rita Mae Brown. New York: Daughters Publishing.

Readers follow the adventures of Molly Bolt as she comes to realize, understand and accept her lesbian identity and orientation. Still considered a classic coming of age story for lesbians. A few participants came across this book through women's studies and gay/lesbian literature courses.

S.P. Likes A.D. 1989. Catherine Brett. Toronto: Women's Press.

Stephanie explores her feelings of attraction for Anne, another student in her high school. One of the earliest young adult novels published in Canada with lesbian or gay content, and one of the few that provides narrative insights into the experiences of young women coming to terms with same-sex desire.

Self. 1996. Yann Martel. Toronto: Knopf.

By an award-winning Canadian author, this novel chronicles the experiences of a male character whose biological gender changes to female and then back again. Martel was awarded the Man Booker Prize for his 2002 novel *The Life of Pi*.

Slammerkin. 2000. Emma Donoghue. London: Virago.

By a prominent lesbian author, now living in Canada. Many readers of Donoghue's other fiction (which features lesbian characters) expected to find lesbian content in this novel as well. The book chronicles the life of female petty thief and prostitute who is accused of murder in England in the late eighteenth century. Donoghue regularly gives readings of her work in London and Toronto.

Stone Butch Blues: A Novel. 1993. Leslie Feinberg. New York: Firebrand.

Written by a prominent transgender lesbian activist about a white, working-class girl's coming of age during the 1950s and 1960s as she tries to gain self-acceptance as she comes to term with her fluid gender and sexuality. Widely recommended as a compassionate, realistic, ultimately optimistic portrayal of transgender experience.

Summer Sisters. 1998. Judy Blume. NY: Dell.

A novel written and marketed to adult readers by this popular author of realistic fiction for young adults. This is not a lesbian novel but it does include depictions of sex between women.

Ten Good Seconds of Silence. 2001. Elizabeth Ruth. Toronto: Dundurn Group.

This novel, set in Toronto during the 1970s and 1980s, was published and promoted during the data collection period for this study. There is one lesbian character. Elizabeth Ruth lives in Toronto. An openly queer female writer, she formed and managed a popular women's literary event in Toronto ("Clit Lit") for several months.

Tipping the Velvet. 1998. Sarah Waters. London: Virago.

In this critically acclaimed novel, Waters provides an imaginative narrative of what a working class lesbian life could look like in Victorian England. Readers follow Nancy Astley aka Nan King from her life as oyster shucker to the music halls of London where she performs in male drag with Kitty Butler, her secret lover. When Kitty abandons her, she turns to prostitution, becomes a kept lover of

a high society "Sapphist," though eventually she returns to her working class roots. *Tipping the Velvet* appeared on the sale tables at Chapters and Indigo stores in Toronto and London during the data collection period. Waters was in Toronto in October 2002 to promote her new book *Fingersmith*.

Trinity. 1976. Leon Uris. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

A best-selling epic novel, the first in a trilogy, which chronicles the history of Ireland.

Valencia. 2000. Michelle Tea. Seattle, WA: Seal Press.

An autobiographical, stream-of-consciousness collection of stories about life outside of the mainstream featuring the experiences and adventures of urban, young queer women. The author, a zine creator, and spoken-word performance artist, has described her book as being about "having sex with girls."

Weetzie Bat. 1989. Francesca Lia Block. NY: Harper and Row.

A young adult novel that introduces Weetzie Bat and her friends, whose stories overlap and continue in a series of short novels, also published in one volume marketed for an adult audience. The author's treatment of sexuality attends to its shifting boundaries: there are gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer characters and plots without a didactic definition of these identities and relationships.

The Well of Loneliness. 1928. Radclyffe Hall. NY: Garden City Press.

First published in London in 1928, *The Well of Loneliness* was banned almost immediately. It is primarily a treatise calling for sympathetic understanding for the "sexual invert." Her loving father, who dies without ever informing his daughter of her 'malady', diagnoses tomboy Stephen Gordon as a sexual invert. Stephen grows up, falls in love with a series of women, meets and lives with Mary together in Paris in society with other male and female homosexuals. Eventually, however, Stephen Gordon can no longer bear the burden of shame, and in a bid to save her beloved from their 'unnatural' relationship, resolves to commit suicide. Hall is frequently credited with promulgating the stereotype of male and female homosexuals as tragic, flawed, ill, suicidal substance abusers.

Written on the Body. 1992. Jeanette Winterson. Toronto: Knopf.

Jeanette Winterson is an award-winning, queer writer of literary fiction. On her website (www.jeanettewinterson.com) she writes of this book:

All my work is experimental in that it plays with form, refuses a traditional narrative line, and includes the reader as a player. By that I mean that the reader has to work with the book. In the case of Written on the Body, the narrator has no name, is assigned no gender, is age unspecified, and highly unreliable. I wanted to see how much information I could leave out - especially the kind of character information that is routine - and still hold a story together.

Appendix 2.1 – Online Reading Materials

Burton, Bonnie J. 1996-2004. *Grrl.com.* [accessed 25 January 2004]. Available at: http://grrl.com

A self-promotional website for the creator includes material on a diverse range of subjects: books, music, animals, art, dating.

Fuhr, K. Sandra. 22 September 2000 – 10 January 2004. *Boy Meets Boy*. [accessed 25 January 2004]. Temple City, CA: Keenspot Entertainment: Available at: http://boymeetsboy.keenspot.com/

Publication ceased 10 January 2004. Archives still available at Keenspot. Principal characters include a cast of young adult gay male characters. Manga style of animation.

Lindsey, Erin. 6 November 2001 – 21 January 2004. *Venus Envy*. [accessed 25 January 2004]. Temple City, CA: Keenspot Entertainment: Available at: http://venusenvy.keenspace.com/

Venus Envy is an active web comic with new manga strips appearing several days a month. Two volumes available for purchase in traditional print or "dead tree" editions. The main character is Zoë, a male-to-female teenage transsexual. Supporting characters include: Larson, a female-to-male teenager transsexual; Lisa, a lesbian character and extended family members and friends. About her own identity, the author writes:

I know that, medically, I'm TS, but it's not a word I use to describe myself (the word I would use would be geek). I've been a girl for several years now, and don't really hang out with other TS girls or do TG things. Not that I have anything against anyone else going through this, I just don't like hanging out with people based solely on a mutual birth defect.

Nerve. 1997-2004. [accessed 25 January 2004]. Available at: http://www.nerve.com

Nerve is an active web magazine with active multi-media projects including high-profile film and television projects. *Nerve's* banner statement:

Nerve exists because sex is beautiful and absurd, remarkably fun and reliably trauma-inducing. In short, it is a subject in need of a fearless, intelligent forum for

both genders. We believe that women (men too, but especially women) have waited long enough for a smart, honest magazine on sex, with cliché-shattering prose and fiction as well as striking photographs of naked people that capture more than their flesh. You've waited long enough.

Reitz, Jennifer Diane. 5 September 2000 – 14 April 2003. *Unicorn Jelly*. [accessed 25 January 2004]. Available at: http://unicornjelly.com

Publication ceased 14 April 2003. Archives are still available online. Volumes one and two are available for purchase in traditional print editions. A philosophical mangastrip inspired by role-playing game motifs. The creator provides extremely detailed meta-information about the characters, many of which are given non-heterosexual "Kinsey" ratings.

Soapboxgirls: Women's Passions and Politics. 2002-2004. [accessed 25 January 2004]. Available at: http://www.soapboxgirls.com

Soapboxgirls was presented online in 2002 as an electronic 'zine. Each issue is organized around a specific theme (e.g. "The Food Issue," "The Race and Racism Issue"). Creators are two "twenty-something" women from British Columbia. Current offerings by creators are posted as blogs.

TechnoDyke.com: The Gathering Place for the Web Savvy Dyke! 1999-2004. [accessed 25 January 2004]. Available at: http://www.technodyke.com

Technodykes is a well-known web portal for "lesbian, bisexual and trans dykes." It includes features such as astrology, chat rooms, personals, resources for learning how to use the web and the Internet.

Appendix 3.0 – Ethics Approval Form

Appendix 3.1 – Interview Outline (Probes)

Introductory Comments

- ☐ thank participants for agreeing to meet and talk with me
- ☐ review letter of information, consent forms
- ☐ self-identity, and date?
- ☐ introduce myself: lesbian, doctoral student, bookstore manager, reading interests
- ☐ pseudonym:_____

General Reading Questions

What are you reading right now? OR

What was the last thing you read for pleasure?

How do you choose a book to read?

What is your favourite kind of reading material?

Who are your favourite authors?

Where do you get the books that you read?

Are there books that you do not enjoy and would not choose?

What would it be like for you if one reason or other you couldn't read?

Can you remember a book that helped you in any way in coming to terms with being lesbian?

Can you think of a time when you read something that definitely didn't help you at all?

Do you seek out reading material with queer content?

What is your favourite book with queer content?

What would you say is the role that reading plays in your life?

Is there something important to you about your reading experience that I have not asked you? Or something that you expected me to ask you but didn't?

Appendix 3.2

Finding Yourself in the Text:
A Study of Voluntary Reading

Participant Consent Form - First Interview

Participant's name:
_____

As a participant in the study, Finding Yourself in the Text, I have read and discussed the letter of information. I understand the purpose and procedures of the study as explained to me by the researcher.

I understand that my permission is required for my participation, that I may withdraw my participation at any time for any reasons, and that my participation is completely voluntary.

I understand that my identity will be kept strictly confidential and that data that may identify me will be removed or replaced by the researcher. I understand that any records that bear my name will be kept in a secure location, accessible only by the researcher, and will be destroyed upon the completion of the research project.

I hereby give my permission to be interviewed by the researcher for the purposes of this research.

I consent to procedures associated with being interviewed for this study, including the audio recording of the interview and the transcription of these tapes.

I give my permission for educational and research use of the tape recordings, transcripts of the tapes, and field notes made by the researcher.

_____
Participant's Signature

_____
Researcher's Signature

_____
Date

Appendix 3.3

Finding Yourself in the Text:
A Study of Voluntary Reading

Participant Consent Form – Protocol Writing

Participant's name_____

As a participant in the study, Finding Yourself in the Text, I have read and discussed the letter of information. I understand the purpose and procedures of the study as explained to me by the researcher.

I understand that my permission is required for my participation, that I may withdraw my participation at any time for any reasons, and that my participation is completely voluntary.

I understand that my identity will be kept strictly confidential and that data that may identify me will be removed or replaced by the researcher. I understand that any records that bear my name will be kept in a secure location, accessible only by the researcher, and will be destroyed upon the completion of the research project.

I hereby consent to engage in personal writing (called protocol writing in this research) for the purposes of this research.

I give my permission for educational and research use of this personal writing.

_____
Participant's signature

_____
Researcher's signature

_____
Date

Appendix 3.4

Finding Yourself in the Text: A Study of Voluntary Reading
Personal Writing Exercise - Instructions

I am interested in your experience of reading for pleasure. This is the reading you do for fun or relaxation, NOT the reading you have to do for school. In this writing exercise, I'd like you to tell me about a book (or books if you can't choose just one) that made a difference in your life. You may write about your experience with *any* kind of book. For example, the book that made a difference in your life may be romance, mystery, horror, thriller, science fiction or fantasy, biography, sports, history, poetry. It may be a comic book, or a certain magazine or 'zine. Perhaps it is an adult or a child's book, or maybe it is one written for "young adults." Or maybe your book is none of the above. The following questions are meant to help you focus on your experience of reading a book that made a difference in your life.

Think about a book that has made a difference in your life.
What is this book? Who wrote it? What is the title? What does it look like? What kind of book is it?

Describe your experience of reading this book.
How did this book make a difference in your life? What happened? What changed? How?

Who were you when you read this book? How old were you? What time of the day, week, month, year was it? Where did you read this book?

How did the book find its way into your hands? Where did it come from? Where is this book now?

What would you like to tell people about this book? Why is it important to you?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this book and your experience of reading it?

You may write as much or as little as you wish. You may write in any style or format that you wish. The goal of this exercise is to show what your experience of reading was really like.

If you have any questions or concerns about this exercise please contact me.

Paulette Rothbauer (416) 534-6958 (home voice mail)

prothbau@uwo.ca (email)

Appendix 3.5 – Information Letter for Adult Gatekeepers

Finding Yourself in the Text:
An Inquiry into the Reading Practices of Lesbian and Queer Young Women

An Information Sheet

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore the voluntary reading practices of self-identified lesbian and queer young women. I am especially interested in what this kind of reading means to these young women and the role this reading plays in their lives. Does the practice of reading help these young women in their daily lives as they negotiate their identities? How does it help?

Research Procedures:

Young women between the ages of 14 and 23 years of age, who have self-identified as lesbian or queer, at least one year ago, will be interviewed about their voluntary reading, reading for pleasure, or reading done by choice. Before the interview a meeting or discussion will occur during which time the research project and procedures will be outlined. If interested, the participant will be asked to give her written consent to participate. Parental consent is not required for participation. Interviews will be audio-recorded. The young women may also be asked to participate in follow-up interviews, or to do some personal writing in which they describe their experience of "finding themselves in the text." Participants will be invited to review the research findings and reports.

Time Required:

The initial meeting/contact will require only a few moments. The interviews can be expected to take between 45 and 90 minutes. Follow-up interviews (if conducted) will likely be less than 30 minutes. Personal writing time is flexible and dependent on the motivation of the participants who engage in it.

Risks:

There are no known psychological or physical risks associated with participation in this research.

Discomfort of Inconvenience:

It is anticipated that participants will experience little or no discomfort or inconvenience. Meetings and interviews will be scheduled at times that are convenient to participants, in locations that are mutually comfortable, safe and conducive to audio-recording.

Confidentiality:

The identity of respondents will be kept strictly confidential. Participants will choose a pseudonym before the tape-recording of the interview. This pseudonym will be used in all research documents. Anything that is said that could identify participants will be removed from the tapes, print copies of the interviews, protocol writing, research notes and reports. I will be the only person who will be able to link actual names to pseudonyms and this linkage will be destroyed immediately upon completion of my research.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participants are free to withdraw from the study, or any part of the study, at any time. Participants do not have to give reasons for their withdrawal. Participants do not have to answer any questions or talk about any topics or events if they do not wish to do so.

About the Researcher:

I am a doctoral candidate in Library and Information Science at the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario. I hold a Masters of Library and Information Science, in addition to a Bachelor of Arts in English. I have published research that addresses access to young adult literature with gay, lesbian and bisexual themes. I also identify as a lesbian and consider myself to be a lifelong, avid reader.

Further Questions: Please contact me:

Paulette Rothbauer
Doctoral Candidate
Faculty of Information and Media Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario N6A 5B7
(519) 661-211 ext. 88481

(416) 534-6958 (home voice mail)
prothbau@uwo.ca

My supervisor:

Dr. Lynne McKechnie
Associate Professor
Faculty of Information and Media Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario N6A 5B7
(519) 661-211 ext. 88476

emckech1@uwo.ca

Appendix 3.6

Information Sheet for Participants: Finding Yourself in the Text

I am a graduate student at the University of Western Ontario who is exploring what happens when lesbian and queer young women find information that helps them in their lives through reading done by choice. I call this "finding yourself in the text", and I am curious about what happens when you encounter information in books or any other reading materials.

As someone who self-identified as lesbian or queer at least one year ago, and is between the ages of 14 and 23 years of age, you will be interviewed about reading. Before the interview, I will meet with you, or contact you, to discuss this research project and the procedures involved. If you are interested in talking with me about reading, I will ask you for your written consent to participate. Parental consent is not required for your participation. Interviews will be tape-recorded. You may also be asked to do some follow up interviews or some personal writing in which you describe your experience of a book that made a difference in your life. You will be invited to read my final research report.

The initial meeting/contact will only take a few minutes of your time. The interviews will probably take between 45-90 minutes. Follow up interviews (if conducted) will likely be less than 30 minutes. Personal writing time is flexible. It depends on how long you wish to spend doing it.

There are no known physical or psychological risks associated with participation in this study. It is anticipated that you will experience little or no discomfort or inconvenience. Meetings and interviews will be scheduled at times that are convenient to you, in locations that are comfortable, safe and allow for audio-recording of our conversations.

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential. You will choose a fake name (pseudonym) before tape-recording begins. This fake name will be used in all research documents. Anything that is said that could identify you will be removed from the tapes, print copies of the interviews, research notes and reports. I will be the only person who will be able to link your actual name to your fake name, and this linkage will be destroyed immediately upon completion of my research.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study, or any part of the study, at any time. You do not have to give reasons for your withdrawal. You do not have to answer any questions, or talk about any topics or events if you do not wish to do so.

If you have any questions, would like more information, or are interested in participating in this research project, please contact me:

Paulette Rothbauer

(519) 661-2111 ext. 88481 (shared voice mail at the University of Western Ontario)
(416) 534-6958 (home voice mail)
prothbau@uwo.ca (email)
Faculty of Information and Media Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario N6A 5B7

Appendix 3.7 – Research Poster[1]

DO YOU LIKE TO READ?

If you are a lesbian, between 14 and 20 years, and would like to talk about your experiences of reading for pleasure, fun, relaxation or the reading you do by choice (NOT the reading you have to do for school!) you are invited to participate in this study. You also need to have been "out" to yourself or others for at least one year.

FICTION? 'ZINES? NON-FICTION? MAGAZINES? COMICS? POETRY?

Do you read for fun, pleasure or relaxation?

Have you ever read something that changed your life?

Do you have a favourite book that you read again and again?

Has your reading ever helped you understand what it means to be lesbian?

Did reading help you when you were coming out? Does it help you now?

what do you have to do?
One interview about 45 - 90 minutes and possibly a shorter follow up interview.
You are also invited to do some personal writing about what reading means to you.

who am I?
I am a Ph.d. Student at the University of Western Ontario who is interested in the reading that teenage lesbians choose do outside of school.

Want more information? Interested in participating?

Call or e-mail me: Paulette Rothbauer
416 534 6958
prothbau@uwo.ca

[1] This poster is one of several variations. Other posters included the extended age range (18-23 years) and used different images and colours. Later versions also called for participants who identified as "lesbian or queer."

Appendix 3.8 – Paid Advertisements

London Lesbian Film Festival Ad: May 2-3, 2002
Rainbow Cinemas, London Ontario
Business Card sized ad, submitted on April 15, 2002

Research Participants Needed for a Study about Reading

If you are a queer/lesbian young woman, 14-20 yrs old, who likes to read, you are invited to participate. You will be interviewed about reading: what you like to read, how you choose reading materials, and why you like to read. You are also invited to write about a book (or books) that made a difference in your life. Interested? Want to know more? Please contact me!
Paulette Rothbauer (Ph.D. student)
Faculty of Information & Media Studies
The University of Western Ontario
(519) 661-2111 ext. 88481 prothbau@uwo.ca

Classified ad copy for *Siren: Irresistibly tempting for queer women* 7(2). The stated mandate of this free bi-monthly magazine "to give the power of the written word to queer women across Canada, with the main focus being on Ontario's women's communities." Ad appeared on page 46 of the Pride June/July 2002 issue as follows:

Reading Study: Research Participants Needed
Queer/lesbian young women, 20 years old or younger, who like to read are invited to participate. You will be interviewed about reading: what you like to read, how you choose reading materials, and why you like to read. Study based in London and Toronto, Ontario.
Interested? Want to know more?
Please contact me! Paulette Rothbauer
Faculty of Information & Media Studies,
University of Western Ontario
Email: prothbau@uwo.ca

Appendix 4.0 – Initial Contact Summary Form

Initial Contact

Name_____ Date_____

Phone Number _____Email_____

Description and summary of initial contact:_____

_____

_____

Sampling Criteria

Date_____Age_____

Self-identification as lesbian?_____

At what age did self-identification occur?_____When? _____

Engaged in voluntary reading? Or identification of self as a reader?_____

_____

Interested participating?_____

_____

Appointment for information sharing and orientation

Location_____

Time_____

Date_____

Summary of this meeting/contact_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____