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## QUEER NOTES ON SEX EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

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What can be the purpose of withholding from children – or, let us say, from young people – enlightenment of this kind about the sexual life of human beings? Is it from a fear of arousing their interest in these matters prematurely, before it awakens in them spontaneously? (Freud, 1977b, p. 174).

To be clear, the new curriculum is not a how-to sex manual (“Sex ed belongs,” 2010).

**B**EGIN THIS CHAPTER BY NOTING that sex education is an epistemological problem saturated by linguistic tropes conjuring up images of bodily disorientation. Much like sex, our relationship to objects of study is pivotal, and orientation is a matter of perspective. In *Symposium* (1999), Plato passionately argues that Eros evokes the desire to pursue knowledge and truth; one cannot exist without the other and yet, in the present day, it seems as though we cannot easily think about sex and education as mutually constitutive. The relation between sex and education is disorienting to those who prefer to divorce the two because the curriculum has traditionally functioned as, what Sara Ahmed (2006) calls, an “orientation device” (p. 26). This orientation device tends to anchor straight forward “lifelines” (p. 17) – that is, normative and sequential developmental life stages leading to adulthood (one must “grow up,” not sideways [Stockton, 2009] or down) – and it pulls anyone who ventures off course and into queer terrain back onto the straight and narrow.

If sexuality is conceived of as a tension between distance and proximity, an effect of one’s relation and orientation to others – we are always turning away and toward others depending upon who we imagine those others to be – as opposed to a knowable sexual practice that can be taught and tested, it may be easier to understand why

bacterial soap (Steinberg, 1998, p. 194), sanitizing unauthorized pleasures taken in others socially coded as un-familial and abject.<sup>1</sup> For those following debates in education it is obvious that what is most likely to be foreclosed or eclipsed in the formal curriculum is explicit talk about sex. In the face of adult anxieties about what Sigmund Freud called the sexual enlightenment of children, it is helpful to call upon queer theory to better understand why sex and education do not seem to get along. They don't mix well or make good academic bedfellows – at least not without public controversy leaving people in emotional knots. I wonder why education can't know about sex and why childhood curiosities about the body, its gender, and sexuality are deemed out of educable bounds? How can an institution founded upon knowledge acquisition embrace such a passion for ignorance?

Before I say more about the sex education debates in Ontario, a word or two is in order with respect to queer theory and queer pedagogy. While we are right to be suspicious of origin-stories, it is perhaps fair to say that queer theory made its debut in academe with the publication of Judith Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet*, Diana Fuss's edited collection *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (1991), and *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* edited by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin in 1993. But queer theory, as one might suppose, has been in gestation for quite some time. Its coming out in the late twentieth century reveals multiple academic bedfellows and improper (cross-disciplinary) pollinations. It is influenced by postmodernism and notably the work of Michel Foucault (1978) in his three volumes on the history of sexuality, the work Jacques Derrida published in *Of Grammatology* in 1967 on deconstruction, the early psychoanalytic writings of Sigmund Freud (1960) on child psycho-sexual development and later works by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1975/1999) on desire and the impossibility of a sexual relationship, and postcolonial theory and criticism (Bhabha, 1994; Muñoz, 2007; Said, 1979; Stoler, 1995).<sup>2</sup>

those favouring and opposing sex education never see eye to eye or appear in the same place. Take, for example, the recent debate about the proposed changes to the 2010 Health and Physical Education curriculum in Ontario. Even a cursory glance at the mainstream media coverage reveals reliance upon body positions and movements in space, along with feelings of disoriented desire and intentionality, to connote anxious responses to sex education. Tory leader Tim Hudak said the proposed "changes [to sex education] 'don't sit right' with the vast majority of Ontario parents and [Premier Dalton] McGuinty should hold off on the changes until he gets more feedback" (Babbage, 2010). After cancelling the new curriculum, McGuinty said that most parents are "obviously not comfortable with the proposal we put forward" (Howlett & Hammer, 2010, April 22), and that it was not in keeping with the "sensitivities and desires of parents" (Howlett & Hammer, 2010, April 27). The premier was accused of doing a "spectacular flip-flop" (Howlett, 2010, April 26) in his decision to bury the curriculum he defended only days before; others complained that he "pulled the plug on the document" (Howlett, 2010, April 28). "Premier Dalton McGuinty's lightning retreat from a controversial education ministry document caught even his own caucus with its pants down Thursday" (Artuso, 2010, April 24). Speaking about what we might call the ultimate bodily anchoring device, Tabatha Southey (2010) of *The Globe and Mail*, who endorsed the new sex education proposal, wrote that she wished "someone had taught Mr. McGuinty [in his own school days] that he had a spine."

Multiple references are made to bodily plumbing and to correct positions and approaches to talk, quiet, or censorship about sex in education. If learning is relational and subject to peculiar reversals and negations as queer and psychoanalytic theory so convincingly argues, there must be a way to think productively about the images of bodily contortions designed to mirror psychically invested anxiety about an unauthorized pairing. I wonder how to conceive of inappropriate topics like sex and gender when education has been like anti-

Queer pedagogy made its most well-cited debut in 1998 with the publication of William F. Pinar's edited collection *Queer Theory in Education*. But like all coming-outs, it was a little bit late, and so its impact is felt in retrospect or, as Lee Edelman (1991) might say, from behind. "(Be)hindsight" is not only about the "supposition or imagining of the sodomitical scene" (Edelman, p. 101), but a positional logic from which one may begin to think queerly about the education of bodies. As I argued in *Sexing the Teacher: School Sex Scandals and Queer Pedagogies* (Cavanagh, 2007), queer pedagogy is founded upon a wish to think outside the straightjackets of conventional logic and a desire to disorient what we take to be true about the body and its sexuality. It is not excited by the reproduction of the family in the image of the white Christian nation or in what Jasbir Puar (2007) calls homonationalism, or even in what Lisa Duggan (2003) calls "homonormativity." Queer pedagogy maintains a healthy skepticism of that which is "normal" or status quo. It is perhaps most committed to challenging the conventional wisdom of childhood sexual innocence. Queer pedagogues refuse to imagine their students as innocent because they are well positioned to see the harm that gets done by refusing to acknowledge, or to validate, the myriad of ways children are stirred to intrigue by others. By dispensing with the mythology of child sexual innocence, defined by Christopher Bollas (1992) as an aggressive non-relation (or incapacity to desire) along with fantasies of rescue and salvation (which only ever work in the movies), queer pedagogy embarks on the difficult job of teaching one to grapple with what happens in school without callously disregarding those socially coded as different or non-normative.

The point is to conceive of a new relation or pedagogical position from which something new can be thought. In order to facilitate unconventional thinking and student curiosities about life, queer theorists are concerned with the removal of what we might call learning blocks – that which halts or stifles queer imaginings. If the most frightening thing in education is to "not to know" or, conversely, to

"forget," then a queer pedagogy inspired by psychoanalysis is compelled to address what interferes with learning difficult life lessons and the associated passion for ignorance (Britzman, 1998; Felman, 1987; Sedgwick, 1990). As Shoshana Felman and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have so eloquently argued, ignorance is not the absence of knowledge. By maintaining the pretence of childhood sexual innocence in class, for example, the room ironically becomes preoccupied with sex – a queer optic zone ripe for the production of improper objects and relations. There are no blank sexual slates in class. In the case of refusing sex education in the formal curriculum, ignorance can be seen as a passionate refusal to know or, rather, to acknowledge what is already happening in class and in young minds. Ignorance is best understood as a passionate refusal to know what one already suspects to be true.

Learning can upset the "ego's strategies of self-perception" (Britzman, 1998, p. 7) and disorient the subject. Adult refusal to enlighten children about sex or gender may be, as Deborah Britzman (2006) suggests, echoing Freud (1977b), symptomatic of the limitations placed on their own sex education. Adults may worry about the formal education of sex in school because it seems to have things on offer denied to the parent and (wrongly) thought to be impossible. My son may grow up to be a woman or to love another man. My daughter may grow up to be a man or to love another woman. Biology may not be destiny in the case of gender identity or human reproduction – the rise of assisted reproduction in LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and/or intersex) communities is but one example of the latter – and fantasy (who I imagine myself to be and desire) may not need to be quashed by the weight of the so-called facts of life (the science of sex), or by what Michel Foucault (1978) calls *scientia sexualis*.

Queer theorists recommend that sex education not be reducible to the bio-scientific study of health and physical education. It must be something more than a bio-politic designed to govern the subject in the service of healthy nations. Building upon queer writings about

pedagogy (Britzman, 1998; Felman, 1987; Patton, 1996; Pinar, 1998; Sedgwick, 2003), I venture to think about how sex education might disorient or trouble a straight-forward positional logic authorizing a truth about sexual difference and heteronormativity.

### Sex Education in the Ontario Curriculum

Sex education in Ontario is part of the health and physical education curriculum. The most recently proposed changes to the curriculum were posted on the Ministry of Education website in January 2010. The posting didn't receive a lot of public attention until Charles McVety, president of Canada Christian College and leader of the "Family-focused Coalition", raised moral objections to it in the spring.<sup>3</sup> A handful of Christian conservative activists, including Brian Rushfeldt and Ekron Malcolm, following McVety, made wild allegations suggesting the curriculum was "absurd," "bordering on criminal," "corrupt," "dirty," "evil," "ideological," the product of a "militant gay agenda," driven by "mind control," improperly focused on the "perils of promiscuity," "sinister," "traumatic," "unconscionable," "unwholesome," etc. A few Muslim groups also opposed the sex education proposal.<sup>4</sup> Ministry spokespeople acknowledged that the criticism was not widespread but limited to a few people heading up socially conservative religious groups. Despite pleas by the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, Queer Ontario, Egale Canada, Planned Parenthood Ottawa, the LGBTQ Parenting Network, the AIDS Committee of Toronto, the AIDS Committee of London, and the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (among other community groups and publicly funded organizations), McQuinty scrapped the new curriculum which would have given kids technical information about gender identity, sexual orientation, human reproduction, safer sex practices, and contraception. The decision caught even McQuinty's own government by surprise. After initially defending the curricular changes, he retracted the proposal after less than three days of public controversy. The proposal

subsequently vanished from the ministry website and this author's attempt to get a copy of the now-debunked curriculum was thwarted by a telephone receptionist refusing to re-issue the document.

The 211 page document was the result of more than two years of public consultation with 2400 parents, teachers, professors of education, community workers, activists, psychologists, and doctors; 700 students; and 70 organizations, including the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association.<sup>5</sup> The Ontario sex education curriculum hadn't been updated since 1998, the time of the Mike Harris government. The most significant changes involved an expanded definition of sex to include oral and anal sex (in Grade 8) along with a discussion about the importance of vaginal lubrication, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV, safer sex practices, and condoms (in Grade 6 and 7); puberty (in Grade 4); masturbation, gender identity<sup>6</sup> and sexual orientation with a focus on "visible" and "invisible" differences (in Grade 3); and the teaching of "proper" names for male and female genitals including penis, testicles, and vagina (in Grade 1). The curriculum was heavily weighed in favour of sexual abstinence, the prevention of pregnancy and STIs, healthy lifestyles (not a pseudonym for gay folks), tolerance, and respect for differences.

The proposed curriculum was by no means exceptional or unique in comparison to other provinces across Canada. It was not more explicit in its attention to human anatomy, puberty, sex, and sexual orientation than, for example, the British Columbia curriculum but is more comprehensive in its attention to gender and sexual diversity than the New Brunswick curriculum introduced in 2005 (revised when parents complained that the first version of the 2005 curriculum was too explicit in its focus on homosexuality, orgasm, and masturbation). The Alberta curriculum doesn't mention homosexuality at all, and the Prince Edward Island curriculum is rather narrowly focused on puberty and human reproduction in a heterosexual context. Most provinces and territories have clearly written provisions

sex after marriage. Sex is, allegedly, a fundamental concern to the sanctity of the family and its future: a serious topic.

But the funny thing about sex is that we cannot agree on what it is. As is evident in debates about the proposed changes to the Ontario sex education curriculum, people can't even agree on its merit let alone its proper object of investigation. Is it about the body or gender identity? Is it about human reproduction or contraception? Should teachers focus on safer sex practices or lubrication? Desire or sexual abstinence? Fact or fantasy? Are the sexual habits of the individual or the population at large a greater concern? Is it about public hygiene or pleasure? Even when provisional agreements about what sex might mean are made it continues to signify in excess of any given curricular objective.

Moreover students seem to read teacher anxieties about sex. Our lessons are spiced by slips of the tongue (unintended word substitutions), jokes (remember what Freud wrote about their relation to the unconscious and I will leave you alone to ponder jokes made about the tight asses of teachers), discomfort (how often do students squirm in their seats), embarrassment (who doesn't go red in the face), and bewilderment. Sex education sometimes becomes an occasion for laughter and about the negotiation of discomfort. It is, ironically, a productive foreclosure. Students sense that there is always something left unsaid or, rather, something that defies representation in even the most technical and open instructional methods. Youth exploit and make fun of adult omissions while seeming to ignore teacher intention. Sex appears where it is not supposed to be and is curiously absent in teachings meant to evoke it. Sexuality is in excess of the subject insofar as it defies capture and narration. There is an unconscious mooring to our desires that are never in the place we expect to find them. In other words, desire is always on the move, closeted or found in retrospect.

This brings us to the problem of developmental time in school. Those opposing sex education in schools sometimes characterize pre-adolescence as time interrupted. The sexual clock stops. The

whereby parents can request to have their children opt out of sex education classes, including Ontario.

It is parents, and not students, who get to make the ultimate decision about what will and won't be learned. The problem is proffered as one of knowledge and imposition. For example, reverend Ekron Malcolm, director of the Institute for Canadian Values, affiliated with the "Family focused Coalition," said "I think it's a sort of infringement on parents, because you're talking about a very personal and sensitive area and dealing with kids so young I believe what it will end up infringing on their thought processes and their desires and ability to make correct choices" (Hammer & Howlett, 2010, April 20). The "correct choice" for students, as conservative opponents and many liberal-minded advocates of sex education both make abundantly clear, is to delay sexual experimentation. Christian conservatives in particular argue that talk about sex will prompt kids to have sex while liberal advocates frequently quote studies showing a positive correlation between sex education in schools and the postponement of sexual experimentation along with a decrease in "unsafe" or "high-risk" activities.<sup>7</sup>

No one in my survey of the mainstream provincial and national news media is endorsing what French philosopher Michel Foucault (1978) calls an *ars erotica*, an erotic art for those under the age to consent to sex narrowly defined in adult terms.<sup>8</sup> How might teachers talk about desire in age-appropriate ways, and must this be framed as a hazard to child development? What would it mean to think about sex as healthy and fun as opposed to un-healthy and inevitably dangerous? What if sex was for pleasure as opposed to a larger nationalist agenda involving the reproduction of normative adult heterosexual body politics? As Michelle Fine first observed in 1988, sex education is, curiously, devoid of carnal desire and heterosexist in its imagining of sex and gender differences. It is about abstinence and protection. Few players in the sex education debate balk at talk about sex as dangerous and at curricular materials that reinforce the "natural" differences between "men" and "women" while extolling the virtues of

official name for this phenomenon is the latency period (Bernstein, 2001; Erikson, 1963; Hunt & Kraus, 2009). In an editorial entitled "Sex ed requires prudence and parents" (2010, April 22) published in the *National Post*, the author evokes latency period research. Referring to the "settled" science surrounding latency, the author writes:

In this schema, the second sexual phase in children following infancy and early childhood, from the age of six to 12, is a period in which direct sexual energies fall dormant. During this phase, the child gathers his inner resources and develops mental and physical strength for entry to young adulthood. Only at adolescence do hormonal changes create the appropriate psychological context for absorbing ideas about "gender identity" and sexual ethics in a meaningful light. Until that time schools should butt out of sex education.

The essential idea is that children don't think about sex until they reach adolescence unless, of course, they are prematurely exposed to sexual imagery. Children are allegedly asexual and innocent. McVety writes: "they're innocent, they're clean, they're beautiful" (Quoted in Artuso, 2010, April 20) and proceeds to argue against corrupting them with premature talk about sex and gender identity.

It is interesting to note that the scholarly literature McVety references to back up his argument does not confirm but in fact disconfirms his interpretation of latency. In the early 1960s, Peter Bloss (1962) wrote in his discussion of adolescence and psychoanalysis:

The literal interpretation of the term latency period to mean that these years are devoid of sexual urges – that is, that sexuality is latent – has long ago been superseded by an acknowledgment of clinical evidence that sexual feelings expressed in masturbatory, voyeuristic, exhibitionistic, and sado-masochistic activities do not cease to exist during the latency

period. . . . What does change in the latency period is the growing control of the ego and superego over the instinctual life."<sup>9</sup> (p. 54)

In other words, the child is, during this phase, increasingly able to separate fact and fantasy. He or she is also able to make separations between what Bloss (1962) refers to as the "public-world and private-world behavior" (p. 55), and can more easily recognize sexual and gender-based differences between people. The focus upon "visible" and "invisible" differences in the domain of gender identity and sexual orientation, as first proposed in the now retracted Ontario sex education plan, would seem to be *especially* age appropriate in this model of adolescent development.

It is also noteworthy that the idea of latency derives from the writings of Sigmund Freud on childhood psychosexual development. Freud (1977b) not only endorsed sex education but wrote that it is the "duty of schools not to evade the mention of sexual matters" (p. 180). Pointing to the absurdity of concealing knowledge about sex from children Freud also says that the "concealment leads a boy or girl to suspect the truth more than ever. Curiosity leads us to pry into things which, if they had been told us without any great to do, would have aroused little or no interest in us" (p. 174).<sup>10</sup> The Freudian concept of latency has been misconstrued by conservatives, like McVety, to legitimize their opposition to sex education when Freud was one of the first and most influential advocates for such an education in school.

I venture to guess that students are growing tired of adult projections and fantasia about sexual innocence. I also suspect that kids are queerer than adults might think (or remember) and less committed to normative body politics than those who have aged. While the Ontario sex education curriculum originally proposed was not wholeheartedly queer in its theoretical underpinnings, it did seem to upset developmental time lines routed in biology, and non trans<sup>11</sup> or cisgendered (Serano, 2007) fantasies about the essential relation

between sexed embodiment and gender identity. It had other imaginings of the future on offer. It should not be forgotten that the proposal was the first to mention gender identity, and by Grade 8, students are to demonstrate an understanding of those who are two-spirited, transgendered, transsexual, and intersex (p. 202). After distinguishing between gender identity and sexual orientation, the proposed document emphasizes that both are key to

the way we see ourselves and to our interactions with others.

Understanding and accepting our gender identity and our sexual orientation can have a strong impact – positive or negative – on the development of our self-concept. A person's self-concept can develop positively if the person understands and accepts his or her gender identity and sexual orientation and is accepted by family and community. It is harder to develop a positive self-concept, however, if the way a person feels or identifies does not meet perceived or real societal norms and expectations or is not what they want, or if they do not feel supported by their family, friends, school, or community. A person's self-concept can be harmed if a person is questioning his or her gender identity or sexual orientation and does not have support in dealing with his or her uncertainties. (p. 202)

Based on the principles of mutual respect for social differences and healthy physical and emotional development, the document made significant strides in validating the needs of LGBTQ youth.

Those opposed to introducing gay, trans and/or intersex folks into the curriculum often cite the developmental needs of students as a uniform group who are almost always imagined to be straight and non trans or cisgendered. This tendency is especially evident in the public debates in Canada about the rights of trans students to use a school bathroom consistent with their gender identity (Cavanagh, 2003, 2010).<sup>12</sup> Parents resistant to trans-positive policies in schools

often refer to their worries about the rights to privacy of non trans girl students. The well-publicized case involving a Grade 12 trans girl enrolled at Cedar Community Secondary School in Nanaimo, British Columbia in 2002 is a case in point. Carola Lane, Ladysmith School District Superintendent, acting on legal advice received from the B.C. Human Rights Commission, granted the student access to the “girl’s” bathroom. But the parent advisory council chairwoman, Vicki Podetz, insisted that the student use a gender neutral wash-room (the toilet designated for students with disabilities) instead of the “girl’s” washroom because the decision supposedly did not take into consideration the “comfort level of the [non-transgender] female students” (Middleton, 2002). Podetz argued that the “privacy of other female students at the school” would be compromised (Rud, 2002). She stressed that some students were only thirteen years of age. By referencing age of consent laws, Podetz evoked the phantom of the pedophile lurking in the toilet.<sup>13</sup>

Not coincidentally, the toilet also figures into the Ontario sex education debate as a pivotal trope. It is a place where we are hyper attuned to gender and it is culturally marked in school as a place of danger. For example, Ted Temertzoglou, the Ontario board representative for PHE in Canada, noted that by censoring sex education, students will relapse to the age-old fallacy that people “could pick up STDs (sexually transmitted disease) from a door knob or off of a toilet seat” (Lajoie, 2010).<sup>14</sup> Professor Elizabeth Saewyc of the University of British Columbia was quoted as saying that in order to prepare children for puberty it is necessary to talk “about more than just plumbing: Children must also understand the fundamentals of healthy relationships, how to avoid the pressure to have sex and the dangers of sexual assault and exploitation” (Agrell & Picard, 2010). But despite the attempts to legitimize sex education as a means to protect kids, the proposal was – to extend the metaphor – flushed down the toilet. Educational theorist Michelle Fine (1988) even found evidence of student sexual desire in bathroom graffiti in her search for the missing discourse of desire in sex education.

When driven underground, talk about sex appears in unexpected places, and the water closet is a repository for what I would like to call the educational unconscious, to be distinguished from the hidden curriculum. Hidden curricula operate just below a conscious pedagogical register or censor. We are almost always aware of what critical pedagogues (Giroux & Penna, 1983) refer to as the inadvertent teachings in school leading to what sociologists call social stratification and to the reproduction of societal institutions (like the family, the factory, the nation, etc.). The hidden curriculum is a by-product or after-effect of formalized curriculum and instruction. The educational unconscious is another thing entirely. It is a product of disavowal and negation and operates in a psychic underground. "In Freud's work, the unconscious is another scene, a parallel process which works by its own logic; it uses its own language, signs and symbols, makes its own connections; it is born out of prohibitions, repressions and taboos – all of which are nested in the psycho-social-spatial field of everyday life" (Pile, 1996, p. 76). In other words, the educational unconscious, like the toilet, is a dumping ground for unacceptable impulses, practices, identifications, and desires that are unknowable in class. The educational unconscious is shaped by what the formal curriculum negates and excludes.

It is therefore productive to consider the school bathroom as a site in which that which is disavowed or driven underground in the formal curriculum comes to an architectural surface. The trope and iconography of the toilet stands in for that which has been eclipsed or censored in school. "Plumbing, so often aligned with bodily trauma, is a volatile signifier of that which cannot directly be acknowledged in the symbolic order – a toilet, a plunger, a shower stall to take the place of the unspeakable – and to make it all the more charged" (Morgan, 2002, p. 178). Queers know all too well that the toilet – closet par excellence – is a storehouse for desirous and aggressive impulses. Students have sex and get beaten up in toilets. Illicit messages are etched onto partition walls that span from the lascivious to the hate ridden. It is a recess or cavity in the otherwise

seamless fold of the school. Most teachers will not walk into student washrooms, as the news media reports of bullying in high schools make abundantly clear, and wilfully ignore what happens behind its closed doors.

By focusing on taboo zones in school we can better understand how learning is a matter of positioning the self in relation to others and to unauthorized spaces in the built environment. One's epistemological orientation grounds identity and desire. Gender orient what Butler (1990) calls the heterosexual matrix, and so it should not be surprising that bathrooms, as gendered architectures of exclusion, consolidate, as they also undo, the oppositional logic of masculinity and femininity deployed to produce a naturalized heterosexual effect. The psychic life of gender identity and sexuality banned in the formal curriculum is acted out in the toilet. "Boys" stand side-by-side in full-frontal view before the urinal (assuming an upright and straight-forward stance), while "girls" back into cloistered stalls (assuming a sitting or squatting position). Urinary positions keep gender intact, but the obsessive gendering of elimination – a hallmark of modernity in the west – is curiously homoerotic as the literature on gay male public sex cultures, tearooms, cottages, and bathhouses amply notes.<sup>15</sup> Homoerotic desire in the water closet does and doesn't escape notice by sexually conservative administrators, parents, and teachers.

For example, trans students, staff, and faculty in universities across Canada and the United States, in pursuit of gender-neutral toilets or access to a room befitting their new gender identities, are often met by an administrative or managerial refusal to develop trans-positive bathroom policies. Again, the problem becomes one of assuming unauthorized positions. We are dealing with an obsessive interest in the "proper" objects of scholastic attention which do not include LGBTQI folks. Take, for example, the discussion emerging from a round-table dialogue on transpedagogies published in the trans-issue of *Women's Studies Quarterly* in 2008 (edited by Paisley Currah, Lisa Jean Moore, and Susan Stryker). Transpedagogies, as



theorized in the special issue, are often concerned about how to theorize female and trans-masculinities in women's studies classrooms (and not coincidentally in bathrooms) when the proper object of investigation is supposed to be "women." What Anne Enke refers to as a "gender-disciplinary perspective" (2008, p. 298) which negates a trans-, inter-, or cross-disciplinary mode of inquiry is a central focus and preoccupation. "What happens to the capacity to create knowledge – new, unexpected, transformative – when the 'inter' and the 'trans' are contained within the already established categories of discipline" (Garrison, 2008, p. 297)?<sup>16</sup> Building upon Ahmed's (2006) writing on orientations, objects, and others, Susan Stryker (2008) makes the claim that trans studies compels us to reorient our thinking about bodies by invoking non-linear "spatio-temporal metaphors" (p. 13). She recommends that we also think about trans-ing as involving movement "along a vertical axis, one that moves between the concrete biateriality of individual living bodies and the biopolitical realm of aggregate populations that serve as resource for sovereign power" (p. 14). Stryker encourages the reader to think about vertical movement so as to unset conventional constructions of gender as a fixed territory. This enticement to move vertically is not about a will to grow up straight or, alternatively, to identify within a given spatial regime but rather to think about practices and points of connection as they operate within and against a dominant spatial and directional nexus.

Now if we have trouble thinking queerly about time and body-space along with the new trans-politics of sex and gender identity, we may return to the example of the pre-Oedipal child theorized by Freud. Despite the insistence by those lobbying for sex education in Ontario that kids don't get sex education at home, the claim is misleading. While many might not get sex education at home in the way educators and those writing curriculum documents envision it, it does happen. But it is in disguise and quickly forgotten. Most adults don't remember being toilet trained. Sex education on the throne is closeted or, as Freud might say, subject to adult amnesia.<sup>17</sup> What we

today call gender identity is, for Freud, consolidated on the potty. In fact, the Freudian Oedipal complex begins with the onset of toilet-training. Referring to anal eroticism in children he wrote that the "concepts of faeces, baby and penis are ill-distinguished from one another and are easily interchangeable" (1960, p. 296).<sup>18</sup> The gender identity of the pre-Oedipal toddler has not yet been anatomized along a sexual and eliminatory corporeal grid. By separating the orifices and genital zones meant for elimination from those meant for sexual pleasure, the child forges a sexed embodiment in relation to normative hetero-reproductive body-politics.

A hidden curriculum of toilet training is to sort out the body's substratum. The vagina, not the anus, the penis, not the fecal stick (coded as baby, money, or gift in the Freudian unconscious) are to be dominant centers of pleasure. Freud hypothesizes that "The faecal mass . . . represents as it were the first penis, and the stimulated mucous membrane of the rectum represents that of the vagina. . . . During the pregenital phase . . . penis and vagina were represented by the faecal stick and the rectum" (Freud, 1960, p. 300). The boy learns that the fecal stick (coded as penis) is detachable, and the association may instill a fear of castration. The girl may learn that she does and does not have a penis if the making of a fecal stick feels like an erection and if it is detachable (ejected into a toilet-bowl as part-object or floater). I would venture to suggest that this is an early incarnation of Judith Butler's (1993) lesbian phallus in the morphological imagination.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, one need not accept the chains of association made by Freud to recognize the relevance of toilet-training to gender and sexual identity construction. In the normative landscape, the penis is to be seen before the urinal while vaginas are to be cloistered in stalls. The urinal, as a larger or more publicly visible receptacle, amplifies and exaggerates the presence of masculine organs while the mirror – more prominently displayed and less likely to be broken in the "women's" room – positions women in a visual field where her so-called genital or phallic lack will be intercepted. Public bathrooms

are at once segregated (insisting upon an absolute difference between the sexes) and strangely the same (urinals and amplified glass mirrors not withstanding). There is an uncanny likeness to the two rooms. Most people have, at one time or another, walked into the “wrong” bathroom and not known it right away. There is a pregnant moment in which we are uncertain about sexual difference and where we fit in relation to it.<sup>20</sup>

While most children master the art of elimination – a prerequisite for entry into kindergarten in many Ontario school districts – the toddler is inevitably left with some queer ideas. This child becomes (as Freud himself suggests) a little sex researcher in disguise. Because questioning on the pot is often subject to interdiction by parents, and talk about excretion is considered to be crude and impolite in almost all other jurisdictions (accept perhaps the doctor’s office), the child is left with a lot to ponder on his or her own. Like a detective searching for clues, the child busily pieces together the fragments of his or her own unfinished sex education in the home. Sex education in school is similarly unfinished. It feels suspiciously censorial and desexed (void of desire).

It is no surprise that the sex education proposal died under suspicious circumstances and that the assassin’s intentions were questionable. Curiously, there is no public space afforded to mourn let alone recognize the loss. Some lives matter more than others, and LGBTQ youth are, in this epistemological crime scene, not supposed to be. If it is true that queer and trans youth don’t exist for those opposing even their very mention in curriculum documents, it is, I suggest, fruitful to trouble the place of innocence marked as the “healthy” child’s future living space. If it is also true that queerness or trans-ness are not discrete identities so much as they are orientations and identifications foreclosed in heterosexual and cissexist (non-trans) cultures, let us revisit the criminal motive with an eye to exposing the childhood sexual innocence defence as a ruse.

In *The Queer Child*, Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009) notices that children are queered by innocence. They are not yet sexual and to-be

(future) heterosexual(s) at the same time – a queer predicament if ever there was one. Their alleged asexuality is a misnomer because they are also supposed to be heterosexuals in waiting. The proposed latency period that so interests McVety is not devoid of desire. Latency is not a defence that is convincing to a queer jury. It is recognized as a covert attempt to conceal the non-normative desires and imaginings had by those deemed underage. I would even go so far as to suggest that the best queer theorists have always been children. They have not yet made identity-based and marital commitments that act as barriers to thought. If parents are honest, they will tell you that their kids have great difficulty thinking straight. It just doesn’t seem to come naturally. Not only do children come up with strange stories about sex, but they disturb reproductive logic as we adults know it. Take for example the temporal and spatial challenge to conventional developmental logic in what Stockton (2009) calls the backward-birthing process. Gay and lesbian and trans kids are born in retrospect or after-death. As in a motive surmised by detectives investigating a crime, the “protogay child can only publicly appear retrospectively, after a death. Only after one’s straight life has died can the tag ‘homosexual child’ be applied. This is a purely retrospective application . . . because all children are first presumed to be straight and are only allowed to come out as gay, or queer, or homosexual when it is thought they could know their sexuality – in their late teens or after, presumptively” (p. 158). The same backward birthing process may also be seen in the student who transitions from male to female or female to male (or, conversely, adopts a gender-queer identification) now requesting access to a gender-appropriate bathroom. The image of the child had by parents and educators must die before an LGBTQ student (or adult – depending upon the play of chronological time) can be born. “For this reason, the phrase ‘gay child’ acts as a gravestone marking a death: the point at which one’s future as a straight adult expired, along with parental plans for one’s future” (Stockton, 2009, p. 158). The gay coming-out literature written for parents even posits a term for this: “the Bereavement Effect”

ed in Ontario schools, it will turn up in unauthorized and unexpected places that eclipse adult censors and overturn conventional positional logic.

Notes

- 1 In his discussion of Michel Foucault, Leo Bersani (2001) says: "Nothing, it would seem, is more difficult than to conceive, to elaborate, and to put into practice 'new ways of being together'" (p. 351). And this, Foucault tells us, is our most urgent ethical project, one in which we queers are destined to play a pivotal role.
- 2 It should be remembered that Lacan (2006) thought of men and women as borderlands that would never meet and evoked the curious phenomenon of "urinary segregation" to denote the primacy of the signifier writ large on the bathroom door to evoke man and woman.
- 3 McVety also objected to the Charles Darwin exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.
- 4 See an otherwise inflammatory article entitled "Canadian Tradition Matters" (2010) published in the *National Post* about how McGuinity evokes Ontario's multicultural population to legitimize his decision to pull the plug on the sex education curriculum. The premier is quoted as saying "We have a very diverse province in so many different ways and I think it is really important as a government we listen carefully... Especially when it comes to sex education." ("Canadian Tradition Matters," 2010). While there were south Asian religious groups opposing the curriculum change, it is misleading and unfair to frame the decision as an attempt to respect cultural differences because the folks protesting most vehemently were white Christians (not Muslims), and all parents are given the right to have their children opt out of the sex education classes.
- 5 In 2009 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) even advocated for early sex education beginning at the age of 5.
- 6 This would have been the first Ontario curriculum to explicitly mention transgender and two-spirited folks.
- 7 For example, Lyba Spring, who works with Toronto Public Health, insists that the World Health Organization is very clear about how sex education leads to a delay in sexual experimentation: "When children get compre-

(Stockton, 2004, p. 285). This is an effect resembling the one incited by an actual death. The beloved child dies only to be replaced by a "sinister version of the same person" (p. 285). It is not a child per se, but a parental image of a son or daughter that dies.

This psychic death may not be a surprise to those familiar with Butler's (1997) notes on gender-melancholia (in which she conceptualizes gender identification as melancholic attempt to incorporate the gender identity of the same-sex parent on to the body of the self in order to preserve that parent fantasmatically as lost object).<sup>21</sup> But the death may be a surprise to those who do not imagine the life of the child as having anything to do with love and loss, desire and prohibition. It is here where education fails us. Insofar as education negates talk about sex, it refuses to engage with what William Haver (1998) calls extremities: the "extremities of suffering and the extremity of pleasure" (p. 351). The failing is well illustrated by Cindy Patton (1996) in her discussion of how the American (and I would add Canadian) government failed to develop a national pedagogy of AIDs in the face of a world-wide pandemic. Silence equals death, and the pretence of innocence will not save us.

If we, as educators, wonder what happened to sex education, I suggest that we revisit the toilet. As adults we forget the formative losses incurred by the self. But we are, like the Freudian hysteric, troubled by reminiscences – recollections of the past and disavowed desires. The water closet acts as a storehouse for disavowed desires and gender identifications, the non-subjects of formal education. It also stands as a museum or relic of the subject's past. José Esteban Muñoz writes: "*The Toilet* represents a violent and tragic past that, when seen through the optic of queer utopia, becomes a source for a critique of a limited and problematic straight time" (2007, p. 353). The time of the present is not the time of the past, and as educators we may forget that psychic time can queer or obfuscate the place of the self in the normative landscape. Identities are bound up with the problem of time and memory in space along with psychically invested desires and epistemic positions. Insofar as sex education is closet-

hensive sexual-health education from an early age, they are more likely to postpone the higher-risk activities" (Agrell & Picard, 2010).

8 See Curtis and Hunt (2007) for a relevant discussion of the "fellatio epidemic" among Canadian teens and their access to what Foucault (1978) calls the *ars erotica*.

9 The Latency period is no longer characterized as a period of sexual disinterest and nor is it a developmental stage had by all pre-adolescent children (Bernstein, 2001; Erikson, 1963; Hunt & Kraus, 2009).

10 Sigmund Freud's preliminary notes on the mythology of childhood sexual innocence (which he, incidentally, regards as a problem of adult memory), and upon the intricate relation between sexuality and aggression in children, has been pivotal to more recent writing on what Stockton (2009) calls the queer child in her book by the same name. See also the landmark collection edited by Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (2004) entitled *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, the psychoanalytically inspired notes on the child in Lee Edelman's (2004) book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, and the controversial works of James Kincaid (1998, 1992) in his books *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting and Child-loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*. Shadows of Freud and psychoanalysis more generally are also evident in Susan Talburt and Shirley R. Steinberg's (2000) collection *Thinking Queer: Sexuality, Culture, and Education*, in William J. Letts IV and James T. Sears (1999) collection *Queering Elementary Education: Advancing the Dialogue about Sexualities and Schooling*, and in a long-line of theorizing on power and pleasure in pedagogical encounters (Britzman, 1998; Cavanagh, 2007; Gallop, 1995; Jagodzinski, 2002).

11 See Stryker (2008); Stryker, Currah, & Moore (2008); and Stryker & Whittle (2006) for a discussion of trans subjectivities. As Stephen Whittle puts it, the category trans is "accessible almost anywhere, to anyone who does not feel comfortable in the gender role they were attributed with at birth, or who has a gender identity at odds with the labels 'man' or 'woman' credited to them by formal authorities" (Stryker & Whittle, 2006, ix).

12 School administrators, parents, students and community members throughout the United States and Canada are debating the rights of trans teachers and students to use bathrooms consistent with their gender identities. Consider the following American examples: in Eagleswood Township near Atlantic City, parents were concerned about a trans substitute teacher, Miss McBeth. At a "school board meeting last winter, some

decr[ied] what they termed an experiment, with their young children as guinea pigs" (Parry, 2006). Carla Cruzan, a teacher at Southwest High School (who is not transgender) "filed a complaint with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights . . . alleging that her rights to privacy [were] being violated" because a transgender colleague was permitted to use the same restroom (O'Connor, 1999). Cruzan refused to recognize her colleague as a woman and believed that her privacy and safety were compromised by the trans-positive School Board policy.

There is now a gender neutral bathroom for students at Park Day School in Oakland, San Francisco. "Park Day's gender-neutral metamorphosis happened over the past few years, as applications trickled in for kindergartners who didn't fit on either side of the gender line. One girl enrolled as a boy, and there were other children who didn't dress or act in gender-typical ways" (Lechuk, 2006). The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity. This legislation is being used to make bathroom and change-room provisions for gender non-normative children.

A New York organization called Advocates for Children interviewed 75 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students and learned that many students had to fight to use a school bathroom consistent with their gender identity (Yan, 2005). Numerous other cases in the United States and Canada of student difficulty accessing appropriate washrooms without harassment by students and teachers appear in the news media (Meadows, 2006).

13 We can observe what James T. Sears (1998) identifies as the culturally specific pairing of the homosexual (and I would add the transsexual) with the child molester.

14 See Sacco (2002) for a fascinating discussion of how public toilets came to be thought of as breeding grounds for sexually transmitted diseases.

15 For a discussion of gay male public sex cultures, tearooms, and cottages See: Aldrich, 2004; Bapst, 2001; Berlant & Warner, 1998; Delph, 1978; Desroches, 1990; Edelman, 1994a; Edelman, 1994b; Flowers, Marriott, & Hart, 2000; Hollister, 2004; Houlbrook, 2000; Humphreys, 1975; van Lieshout, 1995; Leap, 1999; Magni & Reddy, 2007; Merrick, 2002; Nardi, 1995; Potvin, 2005; and Tewksbury, 1996, 2004.

16 Putting the objective of transpedagogy in slightly different terms, Muñoz and Garrison (2008) write: "To expose gender as transitional within a changing cultural, political, geographic, and historical matrix creates feel-

lend itself to comparison and competition, and from the anal point of view, what criteria could be employed to judge them? Sexuality is equalized as it is diversified, not only within the male sex, but between the sexes" (1998, p. 240). It is an equal opportunity orifice. To libidinize the anal region is to de-center the master phallic signifier. The anus is, consequently, gendered female (hidden from view and privatized), racialized as "dark" (see David Eng [2001] on the feminization of Asian men in America), and over-determined by the specter of sodomy. Unlawful attention to the anus in public threatens to reverse hetero and homosexual positions. One is disoriented by the back-side because heterosexuality demands attention to the front. "To refuse to maintain the schizoid disjunction between public and private, and to excrete in public what modification requires we save for our wives, lovers, or psychiatrists, soils the social fabric" (Pinar, 1998, p. 241). It should thus not be surprising that the renunciation of the anus as centre of pleasure inducts the child into the genital stage, a prerequisite for adult hetero-normative sex.

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- ings of confusion that dislodge fixed notions of identity, whether these be racial, ethnic, economic, or sexual" (p. 301).
- 17 It should give us pause to wonder how even the psychoanalytically minded - with their penchant for abject thoughts - side-step the toilet. While psychoanalytic theorists engage Freudian ideas about psycho-sexual development, they often omit his notes on toilet training. The elimination function is an area of bio-political regulation that is often designated "out of scholarly bounds" (not to mention crude and subject to interdiction in polite discourse), yet, curiously, central to an over-emphasis upon an absolute and unchanging sexual difference. Robyn Longhurst, in her study of bodies, fluids, and extramental space, notes that toilets are "one of geography's abject and illegitimate sites that have been deemed (perhaps unconsciously) inappropriate and improper by the hegemons in the discipline" (2001, p. 131). Yet ideas about what is a "proper," "worthy," and "respectable" topic of inquiry operate to censor, repress, and prohibit but also, as Foucault (1978) tells us, to map the terrain of the thinkable, the analyzable.
- 18 In "Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ('Dora')," Freud (1977a) writes in a footnote that "It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the pathogenic significance of the comprehensive tie uniting the sexual and the extramental, a tie which is at the basis of a very large number of hysterical phobias" (Footnote 1, 63). While we may question Freud's understanding of hysteria and female psycho-sexual development, there is an important association between sex and feces given voice in the early twentieth century.
- 19 The "lesbian phallus" is, of course, Butler's (1993) key example of an internalized bodily image that doesn't correspond to a visible anatomy, though somatized through what we might call a transmasculine, butch, and/or lesbian identification.
- 20 Defecation (not unlike the vaginal recess not to be seen) is also closeted because it draws sensory attention to an orifice that is less susceptible to sexual difference. As Guy Hocquenghem (1993) famously notes "from behind we are all women" (p. 87). Because we all have assholes, attention to the posterior (or backside) confounds the "stability or determinacy of linguistic or erotic positioning" (Edelman, 1991, p. 105). As William Pinar suggests in his reflections upon the anus and its capacity to instruct us in the art of queer relationality. "Anal eroticism draws libido from its overinvestment in the phallus and diversifies it throughout the rest of the body, deterritorializing not only sexuality but power as well. The anus does not

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