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Preservice teachers respond to *And Tango Makes Three*:

Deconstructing disciplinary power and the heteronormative in teacher education

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**Preservice teachers respond to *And Tango Makes Three*:**

**Deconstructing disciplinary power and the heteronormative in teacher education**

It might have gone unnoticed, this whispered comment, except that it became a presence, reincarnated and reenacted by undergraduate preservice teachers after reading *And Tango Makes Three*. This is the non-fiction story of two male penguins that form a family in a New York zoo. In the discussions preceding such readings, we heard from our students something like this, “When reading books like *these*...” The preservice teachers in our classes read children’s literature with characters representing various ethnicities; they read stories about people with disabilities and senior citizens, but the literature depicting lesbian and gay families are not even named, they are, “books like *these*.” As students of poststructural feminists theory, we recognize this comment as the discursive fashioning of our students’ heteronormative subjectivities, reflecting power that shapes “what will and will not be a recognizable form of being” (Butler 2005, 225).

We began to wonder: What teacher subject positions are made possible by powerful and public discourses describing “homosexuality,” “education,” and “teacher”? How do preservice teachers perform these identities made possible by such discourses? Based upon this, what possibilities exist for re-imagining new realities for teacher subject positions and our practice as teacher educators?

To address these questions, we use Foucauldian (1975/1979; 1976/1990; 1997/2003) concepts to trace spoken and silent discourses that fashion teacher subject positions through public discourses. This is done by a macro analysis of four incidents involving public school teachers and conflicted views of homosexuality as reported in the most widely distributed newspaper in our state in the US to determine teacher subject positions available to preservice teachers. We trace these discourses through a microanalysis of our students’ talk as they discuss books with lesbian and gay

themes to consider how preservice teachers perform these identities made available by powerful public discourses. We consider how this performance of teacher subjectivity opens up possibilities for re-imagining teacher subject positions and what this means for our own practice as teacher educators. While research has been done identifying heteronormative discourses of undergraduate and preservice teachers' and classroom teachers' talk (Atkinson & DePalma 2008; Curran, Chiarolli & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2009; DePalma & Atkinson 2006) and pedagogies for countering preservice teachers' ongoing resistance to the inclusion of gay and lesbian students and literature in classrooms and schools (Cullen & Sandy 2009; Hermann-Wilmarth 2007; 2010; Sears 2009), our study uniquely contributes to this existing knowledge by tracing discourses, problematizing subject positions and opening up possibilities in an attempt to imagine different responses, realities and subject positions for preservice teachers.

In the next section, we describe the Foucauldian theoretical framework, before moving to the context and methodology for the study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### ***Foucauldian conception of power***

“Power,” McWhorter (2004) writes, “is something that happens. It is a kind of tension that emerges when people have different goals or perspectives or conflicting projects” (42). Such power circulates. It is never owned in the way that wealth is and functions through networks (Foucault 1997/2003). “The individual is in fact a power-effect, and at the same time, and to the extent that he [sic] is a power-effect, the individual is a relay: power passes through the individual it has constituted” (30). Foucault recommends that power be examined by studying where it “produces real effects” (28). In this study, we look at how power circulates in public discourse and how this produces very real effects on teacher subject positions for preservice teachers.

### ***Biopower and normative discourses of heterosexuality***

In her genealogy of race and sex, McWhorter (2004) illustrates how by the 19<sup>th</sup> century biology had established that “bodies were essentially developmental,” an idea that had a “huge impact on all sorts of disciplines, practices, and institutions” (44). Biopower, then, is constructed through science, the use of statistical analysis and developmental measurements to establish norms. Normative discourses of gender and gender relations are established through biopower. McWhorter (2004) further explores how biopower constructed the “deviant” classification of “homosexual” during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the normative class of “heterosexual.” The homosexual, as a deviant behavior, becomes “a reified developmental stage” (47). Thus “heteronormativity is predicated on an implicit assumption of heterosexuality” (DePalma & Atkinson 2006, 343). Indeed, “Under this function of biopower, we all *embody* normalcy; it disciplines our habits, shapes the everyday ways we live our lives, the ways we envisage our individual life narratives” (Cadwallader 2007, 389, *italics in original*).

### ***Disciplinary power and the subject***

Disciplinary power continues the work of biopower working at the site of the individual. Disciplinary power “centers on the body, produces individualizing effects, and manipulates the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile” (Foucault 1997/2003, 249). Power acting as the “uninterrupted play of calculated gazes” (Foucault 1975/1979, 177) disciplines through the use of comparison. Since disciplinary power manipulates the body producing individualizing effects, then bodies “become intextuated, narrativized; simultaneously, social codes, laws, norms, and ideas become incarnated” (Grosz as cited in Pillow 2000, 201). Butler (1997) describes the work of disciplinary power and subjection as follows:

Subjection is, literally, the *making* of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. Such subjection is a kind of power that not only

unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject (84).

Simultaneously, a subject reproduces normative discourses of heterosexuality and is dominated by these discourses. In doing this, the subject becomes intelligible.

### ***Disciplinary discourses defining heteronormativity***

Research tracing disciplinary discourses defining heteronormativity illustrates the work of power. For example, children are defined as innocent asexual beings (Curran, Chiarolli & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2009; DePalma & Atkinson 2006) and therefore must be “protected from the dangerous knowledge of homosexuality” (DePalma & Atkinson 2006, 339). In their research, DePalma & Atkinson (2006) analyze the “SEXualisation of homosexuality” (341) the discourse marking homosexuality associated with sexual desire, “as the excess and perversion that brackets the normal” (341). Combined, these discourses discipline the participants in their study to embrace a public/private divide, the topics of “sexuality” are best engaged between parents and children and do not have a place within schools where children are innocent and asexual beings. The same discourses discipline and justify heteronormativity (Curran et al. 2009).

If biopower and disciplinary power classify homosexuality as sexual excess and perversion, then it becomes a topic only for the privacy of the home thus constructing a discourse of silence that powerfully negates homosexuality, particularly in the public space of school (Atkinson & DePalma 2008; Dalley & Campbell 2006; DePalma & Atkinson 2006). “This silence is often echoed by a prevailing view in the public arena that sexual orientation – including diverse family patterns – is not an appropriate focus for education, in spite of significant evidence demonstrating continuing disadvantage for non-heterosexual pupils and teachers” (DePalma & Atkinson 2006, 333). The silence was reinforced for participants in DePalma & Atkinson’s (2006) study by fear of “anticipated negative consequences of breaching the civil code of silence around gay issues” (353).

In this study, we illustrate the effects of power circulating through the newspaper articles reporting on public school incidents where the code of silence is broken by specific teacher actions. We will show how discourses sexualize homosexuality and seek to preserve the innocence of children are a powerful presence in news stories. The analysis will show the mitigating effects of what happens to the teachers featured in the news stories function as disciplinary power that limit the teacher subject positions available to preservice teachers. We demonstrate how the preservice teachers in this study, are situated in the binary contexts of universities supporting LGBT families and a state that does not, and are in turn silenced and normed. Our careful reading of the data suggests a negotiated teacher subject position by some preservice teachers, that of a subversive teacher. This is the position we will develop in our analysis and conclusion.

But first, we now describe the context and the preservice teachers of this study in more depth. This is followed by a description of our methodology and data analysis.

### **Study contexts and participants**

There are two significant contexts for this study: The State of Oregon in Western U.S. is the macro context; the universities and teacher education programs where we teach are the micro contexts.

Preservice teachers are the participants

Oregon, mirroring national debates in the U.S., has political history norming heterosexuality. This is best represented by a turbulent and highly public campaign attracting national interests groups and attention to legalize same sex marriage. In November 2004, Oregon voters passed a citizens' initiative, Measure 36, fifty-seven percent to forty-three percent to amend Article XV Section 5a of the constitution stating, "that only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or legally recognized as a marriage" (State of Oregon 2004). One result of this contentious election was the fashioning of two subject positions: a conservative/rural subject (labeled by liberals as unsophisticated) and a liberal/urban subject (a subject lacking core morals according to

conservatives). We suggest that the legal power of this constitutional amendment and the polarizing election campaign leading to its passage continues to wield significant influence in silencing the preservice teachers in our study.

Data were collected from two small private liberal arts undergraduate teacher education programs. Both institutions have diversity statements, declaring the values of cultural competency and include sexual orientation as areas in which discrimination will not be tolerated. There is an active group on one campus promoting education and understanding of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered and questioning students. There is active recruitment for teacher education candidates of color on both campuses; there is no such recruitment for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgendered (LGBT) teacher education candidates. As professors within these programs, we support institutional goals of cultural competency and inclusion, which is why we have deliberately included children's literature depicting lesbian and gay families in our literacy coursework.

Participants in this study were 67 primarily white, female preservice teachers, most from working to middle class families, with junior and senior status; none of these students self-identified as LGBT. Most of these students are from the State of Oregon, with a mix of rural and urban backgrounds, situating them within a state that voted against same-sex marriage yet attending universities committed to diversity. They are enrolled in our courses where they are required to read and respond to various genres of children's literature including texts representing diverse families. Our students arrived discursively fashioned. Biopower and disciplinary power define "white," "female" and "working to middle class families," overlaying each label with normalizing discourses of gender and adding to the complexity of this study. Students' views of what is appropriate for elementary students reflects the work of power and discourse in the macro context, the State of Oregon and not necessarily the views of their professors or their universities. This entanglement demonstrates how our research process is "wholly implicated in the processes of ongoing



subjectivation (of both the researcher and the researched) even as these subjectivities form the objects of study.” (Youdell 2005, 254).

## **Methodology**

Data were collected from macro and micro sources. The macro source includes over 60 newspaper articles reporting on four highly reported incidents involving teachers in public schools. These stories were published between 1999-2010 by the state’s largest newspaper, *The Oregonian*. The articles were chosen for their high level of controversy, long-term presence in the media and their reference to teachers and LGBT topics. Reporters choose whom they will quote and how they will characterize events; public discourse is created from their reports. The focus of this analysis is to trace how discourses present in the news stories construct possible teacher subject positions . This creates the canvas for the microanalysis.

The micro sources of data were generated from work produced by the preservice teachers enrolled in the two teacher education programs. Preservice teachers signed informed consent and gave permission for their written work to be included in the study. The primary data source are written responses to *And Tango Makes Three*. These responses include individual responses to reading the book and selected readings on censorship, a class activity dealing with issues of censorship, and lesson planning using several books with LGBT themes. Students also took a “What’s Your Multi-cultural Schema survey?” that included three questions around LGBT topics: factors a preservice teacher might consider before reading a “controversial book,” comfort levels with topics like LGBT, and friendships with people from the LGBT community. The researchers wrote field notes of class sessions throughout the one semester data collection period. This micro set of data illustrates how preservice teachers negotiate the teacher subject positions made possible by public discourses in Oregon as reported through newspaper accounts.

## Data Analysis

Three sets of questions guided our analysis:

1. What teacher subject positions are made possible through discourses used in public news reporting in Oregon constructing homosexuality as abnormal and norming heterosexuality, education and teacher?
2. How do preservice teachers embody the teacher subject positions made available? How are these positions negotiated? What possibilities are opened and closed by these teacher subject positions?
3. Based upon this analysis, what possibilities exist for re-imagining new realities and teacher subject positions and how does this influence our practice as teacher educators?

Our analysis is a form of discourse tracing (LeGreco & Tracy 2009), a way of tracing how power produces discourses spoken and silent that discipline and constructs subjectivity of students in the study. The analysis is further informed by Willig's (2008) application of Foucauldian concepts of discourse analysis. Specifically, 1) the individuation of discursive constructions the preservice teachers used in the discussion of children's literature depicting lesbian and gay families; and 2) the subject positions contained within their discursive constructions. We also relied upon Mazzei's (2004; 2007; 2008) work on silence. DePalma and Atkinson (2006) in their work with college students and their discussions of homosexuality document silence as a powerful discourse. We find silence to be a disciplinary discourse in fashioning teacher subject positions in this study.

We read through over 60 articles from the state's most widely distributed newspaper, *The Oregonian*, multiple times, heeding Mazzei's (2007) advice to "live" with the data in order to hear "multiple layers of meaning" (81). We created discourse maps (Clarke 2005) representing possible teacher subject positions. We followed again Mazzei's advice to hear silent voices that seem to represent the most salient teacher subject position available to preservice teachers in the study. We

used our first set of research questions to focus our analysis of this data. While not specific teacher subject positions, the discourses used by administrators and citizens construct binary subject positions of Sophisticated/Cultured and Unsophisticated/Uneducated. The two prominent teacher positions identified were Martyred (Unemployed) Teacher and Silent (Employed) Teacher.

In analyzing data generated from preservice teachers, we used our second set of research questions and applied Willig's (2008) discourse analysis. We read through the written responses of preservice teachers to children's literature with lesbian and gay themes and created discourse analysis maps as described by Clarke (2005). We created multiple working drafts of these maps guided by our research questions. We practiced a "troubled listening" (Mazzei 2007, 110) of the texts, treating the "words as sometimes secondary to the postage stamp" (119). We identified three different responses to the children's literature with lesbian and gay family themes: 1) "Don't even go there..." 2) I would but..." 3) Fly under surveillance.

We experiment using poetic structure in representing data. This occurred as a result of completing the discourse analysis maps; the construction of the poems became the final data interpretation. Preservice teachers wrote all of the phrases and sentences used in the poems. We did not "cut and paste" words or phrases from one preservice teacher into another, nor did we add our own words into the mix; we did add italics for emphasis. We played with the formatting of the phrases and sentences for each theme until the final renditions, which are presented in the micro data analysis.

The macro analysis of teacher subject positions provides context for the microanalysis of how preservice teachers' talk about lesbian and gay children's literature. The combined analyses illustrate how preservice teachers navigate the teacher subject positions constructed through biopower and disciplinary power. We begin our data analysis with the macro analysis of public storying events and then move to the micro analysis of preservice teacher talk.

## Data Analysis

### *Macro analysis: Public storying events*

We analyzed newspaper articles from four public school incidents occurring in 1999, 2005, 2008 and 2010 reported in the state's most circulated newspaper, *The Oregonian*. We asked as we studied these pieces, "What teacher subject positions are made possible through discourses used in public news reporting in Oregon constructing homosexuality as abnormal and norming heterosexuality, education and teacher?"

The 1999 incident involved a state drama competition held in St. Helens, Oregon. During the competition, which was open to the public, a drama team from Lake Oswego presented a five-minute excerpt from *Rent*, a musical about young artists enduring among other trials the epidemic of AIDS. After the presentation, a St. Helens community member announced, "That is the worst piece of trash I have ever seen" (Taylor 1999a), sparking a public dispute between what was reported as "Lake Oswego, an upper-middle class suburb southwest of Portland [the largest urban area of the state], versus St. Helens, a middle-class town of about 8,500...northwest of Portland" (O'Keefe & Taylor 1999). The terms "bigoted" and "redneck" were applied to the St. Helen community (Taylor 1999a; 1999b). An editor of the St. Helen's newspaper reportedly complains of "being portrayed as unsophisticated and intolerant" (O'Keefe & Taylor 1999). There is one report of students forming a "protective circle" (O'Keefe & Taylor 1999) around the Lake Oswego teacher, whose team performed the segment of *Rent*. There are no reports of teachers rallying to the cause of the Lake Oswego teacher – teachers remain silent.

The 2005 incident involved the planned drama presentation of *The Laramie Project*, the story of a gay man's murder in the US, at a large suburban high school. This incident occurs just after the 2004 passage of the constitutional amendment stating, "...only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or legally recognized as a marriage" (State of Oregon 2004). There were 24

articles covering this incident spanning nine months. In brief, the high school administrator, halted the scheduled performance “given the language—at the very least—of the play falls under the school district’s ‘controversial matters’ policy” (Duin 2005) and after public outcry, including a visit from members of a Topeka, Kansas Baptist Church who came to Oregon to protest its production. The next year, a “modified sanitized-for-your-protection” edition of the play was performed (Hsuan 2006). The teacher central to this story was disciplined for failing to follow school policies and later resigned (Navas 2008). An Oregonian columnist, Boone (2006), reported the “story of a teacher beaten down by an educational system too timid to face the reality of the conflict between the gay and straight communities.” The teacher later filed a lawsuit against the district claiming he was “harassed, intimidated and humiliated” (Navas 2008).

When the Kansas Baptist Church members arrived to protest the production, 200 students and one parent formed the opposing line. The parent is reported saying, “Where’s everyone else? Where’s the parents? Where’s the city?” (Boone 2005). She might have asked as well, “Where are the teachers?”

The third incident occurred in September of 2008 when a middle school teacher wrote and then planned to produce a play, *Higher Ground*, focusing on issues of bullying and harassment. There is a reference to homosexuality. Two days before the play was to be performed, the administrator postponed the performance saying it “exceeds the maturity of many of our students” (Blackmun 2008). The administrator made this decision after receiving complaints from two parents of students in the play (Parker 2008b). A local theater in a nearby large city offered to have the play performed there; forty of the original forty-eight students performed two sold out performances. The teacher central to the story had her computer seized and the district disciplined her for failing to follow school policies (Parker 2008a). Later, the teacher resigned under pressure. There were 16 newspaper

articles and editorials about this incident. While parents and students both for and against the play are quoted, teachers remain silent.

The fourth incident occurred when a fourth-grade student asked a male student teacher why he wasn't married. According to the newspaper, the student teacher "told the child it would be illegal for him to get married because he would choose to marry another man" (Griffin 2010), resulting in a parent complaint. The student teacher was reassigned to a different school district and claimed discrimination (Owen 2010a). A district spokeswoman is quoted as saying the reassignment was "based on 'concerns about a conversation he had with a fourth-grade student. Our concerns were about the professional judgment and age appropriateness'" (Owen 2010a). After meetings with the school district, the teacher education program and the student teacher's attorney, the school district and teacher education program agreed to return the student teacher to his original student teaching placement (Owen 2010b).

### ***Teacher subject positions available from public storying events***

The first teacher subject position throughout these stories is that of the Martyred (Unemployed) Teacher. Parker (2008a) suggests in a column that the best teachers may take risks and they often pay for their actions. Two of the three teachers in these stories resign from public school teaching; the student teacher is reassigned to a different school district, although later reinstated after he hired an attorney. One teacher later files a lawsuit for being harassed. The teacher who does not resign is reported saying, "I'm hurt that anyone thinks I would allow anything to be performed that would hurt a student or their parents" (O'Keefe & Taylor 1999). Simultaneously in the reporting these same teachers are described at different times as being "award-winning" (O'Keefe & Taylor 1999), "inspirational" (Boone 2006), and those that "really had an impact on students" (Boone 2006). Even so, in these events, they are isolated, without collegial support – martyred for the cause and unemployed or threatened with unemployment as a teacher.

The second teacher subject position in this data is that of the Silent (Employed) Teacher. This Silent Teacher occasionally voices opposition to the process by which a teacher is treated but there are no public and recorded teacher voices in *The Oregonian* stories analyzed in support of the featured teachers, the plays being performed or of the LGBT community. This Silent Teacher appears to be the Obedient Teacher. Parker, *The Oregonian* columnist further describes the middle school teacher in this way, “Her biggest sin, as best I can tell: she doesn’t salute all that well” (Parker 2008a). Silence and obedience equate with employment and a continued career in education.

Administrators and some parents illustrate two additional subject positions in these stories influencing teacher subjectivity. In particular, these positions are found in the first story of the drama competition and the performance of *Rent*. In mirroring the profiles of two communities, one a more working/middle class against that of a more professional community, two binary positions are constructed: those who are Sophisticated/Cultured and those who are Unsophisticated/Uneducated. Members of the St. Helens community are quoted as feeling as if they are being judged as unsophisticated. The Superintendent of the St. Helens district is quoted as saying, “People have called us bigoted and red-necks” (Taylor 1999b). According to the reports, Lake Oswego did have some parents balking at the drama director’s decision but this is not a central point in the news stories.

Prominent in all the news stories is the “SEXualisation of homosexuality” and the discourse that children are asexual beings (DePalma & Atkinson 2006). This becomes more of an issue the younger the students involved. In the middle school incident, the play is canceled because the administrator says it “exceeds the maturity of many of our students” (Blackmun 2008). The fourth grade student teacher is reassigned for lacking professional judgment and the concern that his comment was not “age appropriate.” These stories discipline teachers well: speaking of

homosexuality is far too dangerous. If a teacher breaks the code of silence, the teacher will pay and become the Martyred (Unemployed) Teacher.

DePalma and Atkinson (2006) note students in their study projected concerns about the consequences of ‘incivility’ (345). In the above news stories, this fear is affirmed and more than merely imagined. Teachers loose their jobs, student teachers are reassigned and lawsuits are filed.

Biopower and disciplinary power silence teachers into obedience and their silence further norms heterosexuality:

Heteronormativity not only defines homosexuality as abnormal Other, but invokes homophobia and homophobic violence and bully as a way of policing gender roles and maintaining hegemonic masculinities...The heterosexual matrix is self-sustaining and self-replicating; that is, since we take it for granted, our action can serve to perpetuate it (Atkinson & DePalma 2008, 28).

The public storying of these newspaper articles perpetuate discourses that discipline, even bully teachers into silence, thus the heterosexual matrix is sustained and replicated. These binary teacher subject positions, Martyred (Unemployed) Teacher and Silent (Employed) Teacher; Sophisticated/Cultured and Unsophisticated/Uneducated are the work of power. Binaries appear to limit subject positions and work to control the population even as they prominently construct teacher subjectivity for the preservice teachers in our study. This is further complicated since these same preservice teachers are living in a university-space supporting inclusion of homosexuality and a public space of heteronormativity.

***Micro-analysis: Preservice Teachers and “books like these”***

Do preservice teachers take up these teacher subject positions? If they do, how are these binary positions negotiated? What possibilities are opened and closed by these teacher subject positions? Preservice teachers live uneasily within the binaries of two disciplinary discourses:



Sophisticated/Cultured and Unsophisticated/Uneducated. As a result, there is a level of silence in the data reminiscent of research by Hermann-Wilmarth (2010) and DePalma and Atkinson (2006). This is named “the silence of political correctness” (DePalma & Atkinson 2006, 343). All students appear on the surface to support diversity – but this is the culture of the universities they attend and represents the views of their professors; agreement allows students to still appear “sophisticated,” despite what they may believe. We recognize the tangled ethics of this complexity - there is no doubt that this discourse of political correctness shadows our data interpretation of preservice teachers. In the task of tracing powerful public discourses and subject positions for preservice teachers in this context, this shadow remains an embodied discourse for preservice teachers, and like power itself, is not easily identified-we are all implicated.

Preservice teachers must negotiate the binary of sophisticated/unsophisticated and the teacher subject positions of Martyred (Unemployed) Teacher and Silent (Employed) Teacher. Our analysis of preservice teacher responses to children’s literature with lesbian and gay families suggest three possible ways to negotiate these positions: 1) “Don’t Even Go There,” representing an embodiment of the Silent (Employed) teacher subject position; 2) “I Would But...” illustrating a tentative moment considering inclusion quickly overcome by disciplinary discourses of fear; and 3) “Flying Under Surveillance,” a possible alternative teacher subject position, supporting lesbian and gay families.

In describing each of these responses, we have used poetic representation of data, creating a composite of preservice teacher responses in poem form. We use this to illustrate and allow the reader to hear the voices of preservice teachers.

*“Don’t Even Go There”*

The “Don’t Even Go There” responses represent heteronormativity discourse of SEXualisation (DePalma & Atkinson 2006) and reinforce silence as the teacher subject position.

Here is the poetic representation of this data:

*Don’t Even Go There*

I would not read  
*this* book in my classroom.  
It leaves the teacher in a  
*very* awkward position  
when *they* have to answer  
the students’ questions to the  
whole class.

It would be nearly *impossible*  
to answer non-biasedly.

Really, this topic is *not* school related  
*not at all,*

Even as a book to just read to the class.  
(And I don’t think I would be comfortable  
with *this* topic.)

*This* topic should be discussed by parents.

There are other ways  
(and different materials)  
that could be used to make our students  
accepting of diversity.

These preservice teachers preserve their own acceptance of diversity by saying they will use “other means” to teach diversity. This then justifies the Silent Teacher position based upon the argument that the topic of lesbian and gay families is best kept within the safety of the family. They are teaching diversity, but they argue a teacher would be in a “very awkward position,” a martyred position, an a-lone, position, if they were to take up the topic of lesbian and gay families. Furthermore, it may not be a topic the teacher, herself, is “comfortable” addressing, so “why even go there?” This is the work of power in disciplining heteronormativity and the teacher subject position of Silence.

*“I Would But...”*

Some preservice teachers negotiate the teacher subject positions by appearing to consider reading books about lesbian and gay families if ever so briefly. Each of these kinds of responses carries with it a “disclaimer clause,” a caution, warning, or the necessity of a prior condition before “going there.” Here is the first poetic representation of this kind of response:

*I Would But (1)*

I would read *it*

if I were in a public school.

While I believe one way

religion believes the other.

I believe all families should be celebrated.

*However*, before I just

pull *it* out

read *it*

I would check the community, the district,

to get a “pre-read” feel

of how *it* might or might not go over.

In these responses, the preservice teachers clearly know the university diversity statement when they state, “all families should be celebrated.” They want to make it clear to us, the professors, that they support this and then in what may be interpreted as a pragmatic retreat, or a cover, they hand the decision-making responsibility to an authority beyond themselves. Playing it safe, they maintain their lives in binary spaces: the public discourse of heteronormativity and the universities’ discourse of diversity.

A second poetic representation illustrates a subtle difference in the “I would but” theme. In this representation, the students struggle with fairness: what if there are children in their classes living with two fathers or two mothers? Shouldn’t they have literature that reflects their lives? For a moment, this dilemma hangs in the air before the fear of incivility drowns the dilemma in silence:

*I would but (2)*

I enjoyed this book.

It is very appropriate to read in the classroom.

I’m not sure if I would pull it out as just a daily read

But if I had a students who were living

With two fathers or two mothers

I would consider it.

Maybe as a daily read I would pull it out

But not preface it with too much

Or discuss too much

Just allow for the concept of different families

To enter their heads and become comfortable there.

More mature students

Or classes in the right community

Might be able to deal with it.

*But repercussion could be very strong*

*And to just blindly talk about –*

*That could be dangerous.*

In this representation there is also the strong beginning statement, perhaps met to signal the student's individual support of the universities diversity statements. The clause is different here: the students consider that *if* there are children who have lesbian or gay parents, then they would consider including similar literature as part of their classroom curriculum. Students then begin seeking a way to do this, "not preface it with too much or discuss too much." We see this as students negotiating the teacher subject positions, attempting to find another space between Martyred (Unemployed) and Silent (Employed). There is still the fear the topic is not appropriate for children, but the greater fear, the one that trumps and appears to move them back into the Silent Teacher, is the fear of incivility. The dilemma and question for preservice teachers may be, "Is it worth sacrificing one child for my own career?"

*"Trying To Fly Under Surveillance"*

The final category of student responses we name, "Trying To Fly Under Surveillance." While a heteronormativity discourse is still present, there is more negotiation of how one might be the Silent Teacher or perhaps the Unnoticed Teacher who still breaks the code of silence, but in such a way as to avoid martyrdom. Here is the poetry representation of this category:

*Trying To Fly Under Surveillance*

If you were ever going to broach this subject

This is a good source.

The fact is, *it's penguins not humans*

and – *a true story*.

It is a mild approach  
to a controversial subject  
and it is well-written.

Just don't answer questions about the book

but really encourage questions to be asked.

*I don't know if I would send out permission slips -*

*I feel I would be denied!*

In this representation, students appear to negotiate the Silent Teacher position into a new reality. The idea here is to remain silent or at least unnoticed and out of the headlines and still include diverse families as literature topics. Students find *And Tango Makes Three*, a possibility. It is the true story of two male penguins that have been partnered for years, get an opportunity from their keeper to raise a penguin chick in the Central Park Zoo. So, preservice teachers seem to reason, this could be something a teacher might “get away with,” as long as one doesn't ask in advance. It is an interesting way to negotiate power – to fly under the gaze of biopower and disciplinary power in order to construct an identity that can survive in a hostile environment. Preservice teachers find themselves in a conundrum about presenting the book, “Don't answer questions necessarily about the book but really encourage questions to be asked.” Perhaps this is reminiscent of the “Don't ask, don't tell” policy of gays in the US military. A kind of “Just read the book, let children ask lots of questions, don't answer anything” policy. The thinking may be that as long as the teacher doesn't answer (as the student teacher did in the newspaper article above), one may be able to get away with reading the book. “Getting away with it” is a way of flying under surveillance, circumventing the heteronormative discourse, surviving the hostile environment and negotiating Silence through Obedience.

The teacher subject positions constructed by biopower and disciplinary power subjugate the preservice teachers in the context of this study. Yet the data seem to suggest that some preservice teachers are negotiating between the two teacher subject positions of Martyred (Unemployed) Teacher and Silent (Employed) Teacher. Some students in the “I would but...” category seem to suspend for a moment their fears and this opens up a possibility of a different reality. Disciplinary power quickly overwhelms these students and they retreat back to safety of silence.

More intriguing may be those students in the “Try To Fly Under Surveillance” category. These students appear actively engaged in trying to negotiate a voice for the Silent Teacher, a shape that is still intelligible to heteronormativity yet subversively welcoming lesbian and gay families into their classroom through literature. We read this data as a performance still unfolding in what Butler (2005) refers to as a “critical opening,” or a way of re-imagining the future (24).

Based upon this analysis, we contemplate our last research question, “What possibilities exist for re-imagining new realities for teacher subject positions and how does this influence our practice as teacher educators?”

### **Subversive as Possibility**

Colebrook (2008), in her discussion of Deleuze, writes, “Learning to swim is not replicating the movements of the swimming teacher; nor is it feeling the waves that the teacher herself is responding to; it is imaging the response to new and other waves” (42). Can we imagine new responses? How can we free our own thinking, work out of the binaries, and present new teacher subject positions to our students?

It seems impossible to ignore how power constructs heteronormativity and how it disciplines through fear and the very tangible public stories of martyred teachers, harassed and leaving education. Yet in scrutinizing our own practice, we find ourselves implicated: we have asked students to read and evaluate books about lesbian and gay families for stereotypes, illustrations,

storyline and without considering the greater macro context. We have suggested and in some cases required that preservice teacher write lesson plans with books having LGBT themes. We model with apparent ease how to use *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson & Parnell 2005) as an interactive read aloud. We must appear oblivious to the possible ramifications of such actions and the teacher subject positions so apparent to our students. The first implication, then, for us as teacher educators is to acknowledge this hostile and homophobic public school environment openly as well as to re-imagine it with our students.

Acknowledging the environment is to teach against faceless fear by giving LGBT students and families an authentic face. The critical opening we find throughout the preservice teacher data is when preservice teachers consider the children of lesbian and gay parents who may be in their future classes. Often, this is framed by heteronormativity, “children cannot be held accountable for their parents actions.” Yet, this presents an opening: most of our students believe that children ought to have access to literature reflecting their lives, and this includes a variety of family structures. In our classes, we frequently quote Bishop (1990), “Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange...a window can also be a mirror” (ix-xi). How can we use this concept from Bishop to imagine a different reality with preservice teachers as they considering teaching with the LGBT community?

Equal to preservice teachers imagining hoards of angry heterosexual parents lining the street to their elementary school in protest of them, we want them to imagine a child crying at home, pretending to be sick, not coming to school, and being bullied at recess for having two fathers, two mothers or being gay. Our students want to be the Teacher Who Cares and Meets the Needs of all Children. This is a place to begin the work of “queering” straight teachers.

Ruffolo (2007) terms this a “*momentary* norm” of “queer” (268). He argues that “giving an account of queer as an implicated norm is radically strategic through its momentary commitments to



the negotiations of norms so as to disrupt the modes of subjectivation that re/produce intelligible subjects in society,” (268). This, then, can disrupt the straight teachers performance of heteronormativity. “As such, the re/production of queer as a norm is not a binary to nonqueer – the queerly intelligible straight teacher is not a binary to a straight teacher – but is a binary to the ideology of binaries as discourses,” (269). Constructing alternative teacher subject positions with preservice teachers is a way to negotiate the binaries of teacher subject position that appear to be the only choices. This is a critical opening of “queering straight teachers” that Ruffolo (2007) describes.

By constructing with preservice teachers a subject position of the Teacher Who Cares and Meets the Needs of all Children, even those preservice teachers who believe homosexuality is unacceptable, are momentarily able to focus on the child and are committed to finding ways to create a safe and welcoming classroom where their family structure is respected. Momentary imagining is an opportunity to think differently, to break out of the binary and to challenge discourses of heteronormativity. Although it may appear fleeting, it introduces a difference and can function to disrupt normed and homophobic attitudes. Constructing the Teacher Who Cares and Meets the Needs of all Children serves to “trouble normative constitutions of schooled subjectivities” (Youdell 2009, 38).

Imagining the hurt child is a way of reframing the public/private discourse and homosexuality as a relationship rather than a sexual act. The Teacher Who Cares and Meets the Needs of all Children, does not intentionally inflict harm by ignoring children, discouraging them not to speak of their families, or allowing them to be teased and bullied. This teacher subject position moves between public/private spaces to a between-space, that of the classroom, a space controlled by the teacher, a space where all children are nurtured and protected “despite” the practices of their parents. This teacher subject position plays upon the good intentions of The Teacher Who Cares and Meets the Needs of all Children. It does not name such a teacher as

“homophobic” or as “unsophisticated” but subversively changes the focus to a teacher’s responsibility and “good teacher” qualities. It might be argued that this is a tenuous if not treacherous position since homophobic attitudes are not directly addressed; but we posit that if preservice teachers embody The Teacher Who Cares and Meets the Needs of all Children subject position, then this discourse working on preservice teacher subjectivity, opens the potential for disruption by “creating conditions in which what/who is intelligible/unintelligible might be shifted” (Youdell 2009, 47).

Cultivating the Teacher Who Cares and Meets the Needs of all Children is also a way of growing the subversive teacher identity of those students contemplating a teacher subject position of one who “flies under surveillance.” These preservice teachers are those who want to support lesbian and gay families and students and are wrestling to give the Silent Teacher a body and a voice. What does the Teacher Who Flies Under Surveillance look like, sound like in the elementary classroom? Our data suggest this is a critical conversation to have with preservice teachers. What *can* a teacher do? As teacher educators, we need to provide practical suggestions, such as documenting all books read aloud, showing how they relate to students’ lives and what literacy objectives and state standards they address. We can support students in constructing their classroom libraries by making available multiple titles in multiple genres of LGBT families and individual biographies. We can ensure preservice teachers are trained in seeing and responding to teasing and bullying. We can coach preservice teachers in the art of deflecting, cultivating how to “encourage questions without answering them.”

Let us be honest: we do not like the last position. Teachers ought to be able to talk openly about LGBT families and themselves as LGBT, but as the columnist and lesbian, Griffin (2010), of *The Oregonian* writes of deflecting, “Maybe it’s cowardly. I think it’s common sense.” To the preservice teachers in our program who can only see the teacher subject positions of Martyred

(unemployed) Teacher and Silent (employed) Teacher, learning to name LGBT families and acknowledge the children in their classes through subversive means is a way of negotiating teacher subject positions and re-imagining a new reality. Including, deflecting, and educating are three strategies that may allow LGBT students and families to have teachers as allies and models throughout their school experience. This is a place to begin, a temporary space to advocate for change. This is not a place to end.

Power circulates; it is fluid. Biopower and disciplinary discourses are not fixed, static, or immovable – the guise of power is to make them seem so. Subject positions can be altered. “...the ‘T’ is not a representation of norms but is its articulation” (Ruffolo 2007, 264). Foucault writes:

...I think there are a thousand things that can be done, invented, contrived by those who, recognizing the relations of power in which they are involved, have decided to resist them or escape them. From that viewpoint, all my research rests on a postulate of absolute optimism. I don’t construct my analyses in order to say, “This is the way things are, you are trapped.” I say these things only insofar as I believe it enables us to transform them (1980/2000, 294-295).

In this study, we trace powerful discourses of heteronormativity as enacted in newspaper stories that frame the context for our study of preservice teachers reactions to children’s literature featuring lesbian and gay families. We have done this to recognize the “relations of power,” to identify teacher subject positions made available by these relations of power, and finally, to allow this study to transform how we teach preservice teachers and force critical openings of possibilities that will include all families and children in public school classrooms.

We find ourselves in good company with Foucault. There are a “thousand things that can be done, invented, contrived” by those of us who recognize the powerful discourses of heteronormativity, negotiate out of the binaries, and imagine a Subversive Subject Teacher position,

a position of the Teacher Who Cares and Meets the Needs of all Children. We hope that in the words of Colebrook (2008) our study becomes a “provocation, a violation of good sense, an assault on method and consensus” (41-42) or at least a beginning, in re-imagining different realities for teachers and families – particularly those in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered relationships.

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