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RESISTING HETEROSEXISM IN FOSTER CARER TRAINING: VALUING QUEER APPROACHES TO ADULT LEARNING AND RELATIONALITY

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The foster care system in Australia is currently facing a crisis due to a shortage of registered foster carers. As a result, many agencies throughout Australia are now actively recruiting gay men and lesbians as foster carers to make up this shortfall. Whilst this may be understood as a positive step in regards to the recognition that some same-sex attracted individuals have the necessary skills to care for children, it would appear that the use of gay and lesbian foster carers is largely understood as something the system has had to resort to, and that "in an ideal world… every child [would] go to a mother and father and two kids" (Cox, 1999). Such statements, which are used in support of same-sex foster carers, demonstrate the underlying assumptions that inform the foster care system in Australia (and indeed, I would suggest that this is also the case internationally). The outcome of this is that we as gay and lesbian foster carers are faced with a range of practices on a daily basis that are shaped by the context of heterosexism[1]. One particular example of this may be seen in the provision of training to prospective foster carers.

[1] I use the pronoun 'we' throughout this paper as I, along with my partner, are foster carers who have experienced the heterosexism of the training environment. It is important to point out here that whilst I may share similar experiences with other gay or lesbian foster carers, my position as a *white middle-class* gay *male* means that I have access to considerable privilege that may not be shared by other same-sex attracted foster carers. My focus on heterosexism within foster carer training thus does not attend to the impact of the social practices of class, race or

People wishing to become registered foster carers are required to attend training which is provided by local agencies mandated by the state to manage foster carer recruitment, training, and assessment. In this paper, I shall argue that the context of heterosexism (and in particular normative assumptions around what constitutes a family) works to: a) limit the inclusiveness of gay and lesbian foster carers in the training environment and thus b) reinforce the normative status of heterosexuality within the foster care system. I suggest that whilst foster care training is primarily based on the principles of adult learning, the context of heterosexism prevents this from being a productive pedagogical method. Rather, it works to construct certain people's experiences as being more valid than others', thus typically excluding the experiences of gay and lesbian foster carers.

After outlining the explicit assumptions about the family that inform this context of heterosexism, I draw upon Elizabeth Peel's (2001) work on *mundane heterosexism* to explore the ways in which research on lesbian and gay families often reinforces the heterosexual nuclear family as the norm, at the same time as it proposes to challenge this very model. In particular, I look at constructions of the *best interest of the child* and how these are shaped through discourses of family. Finally, I look at some alternate ways of understanding foster care training as a potential site for social action and as a means to challenging heterosexism. I suggest that rather than attempting to develop gay and lesbian foster carer training as an add-on, or as being just as normal as heterosexual foster carers, we need to examine how normalising structures are enacted and the limits of our involvement within them.

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ethnicity, a choice that my white race privilege affords me, and which I have attempted to address elsewhere (see Riggs, 2002; Riggs & Augoustinos 2004; Riggs & Selby, 2003).

Adult Learning as Foster Care Training Practice

When talking about foster care training in Australia, I draw predominantly on documents from Anglicare SA, the state mandated foster care organisation in South Australia. Whilst it is true that this is but one of many organisations in Australia that conducts foster carer training, I propose that it is fairly typical of training programs and indeed one that is relatively forward thinking in its approach[2]. Thus, the Anglicare SA value statement affirms the importance of "forming strategies to change society where there is injustice and oppression" (Anglicare, 2001). However, while this is an important aspect of challenging heterosexism, we need to be mindful of who is setting the agenda for change and how such change can often serve to reinforce the values and beliefs of a particular (dominant) group.

One of the central tenets of foster care training in Australia more generally appears to be a commitment to the principles of adult learning (e.g., Anglicare, 2001). Whilst there are a wide range of models employed in the practice of adult learning, the majority of these centre on the use of experience to encourage a less didactic approach to learning. This seems a reasonably laudable aim, but it entails a number of implicit assumptions that shape what counts as experience within the adult learning environment. As Robin Usher, Ian Bryant and Rennie Johnston (1997, p. 95) suggest, "using experience becomes not simply a pedagogical device but more significantly an affirmation of the ontological and ethical status of adults." In this way, the category

[2] I suggest that Anglicare is 'forward thinking' in that as an organisation it welcomes same-sex attracted individuals and couples as foster carers, an ethos not shared by most other foster care organisations in South Australia. This position on same-sex carers is often reflective of the particular religious and moral beliefs informing the work of foster care organisations, and as such is relatively indicative of foster care agencies nation wide. Heterosexism aside, the Anglicare SA training programme is also fairly indicative of training programmes nation wide, as service providers are mandated to provide carers with information that is in line with state and federal requirements for foster carers.

adult is affirmed as having privileged access to real experiences, as opposed to those of children, for example.

This may seem an important step in fostering an interactive environment for adult learning, but it does so by reinforcing a model that attributes value at the discretion of those organising the teaching. I would suggest that in a context of heterosexism, the value of experience as a marker of being an adult is contingent upon the value base of heterosexuality. In regards to foster carer training, this may result in lesbian and gay carers feeling that our experiences are not valued or even recognised as legitimate experiences. Charissa Ahlstrom (1999) suggests that the literature on adult learning largely neglects the experiences of gay men and lesbians, which works to implicitly frame the subject area as being about heterosexual adult learning.

In addition, there are the problems that arise when lesbian and gay experiences are framed within a heteronormative context. In their work on heterosexuality, Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson (1993) suggest that one of the problems facing feminism is that the experiences of lesbians are depoliticised when they are subsumed within the wider rubric of feminism (as a predominantly heterosexual practice). They suggest that many lesbians take the politics of sexuality as being central to their identities and that the use of a "one size fits all" model only serves to further marginalise their experiences. Likewise, in the context of foster carer training, the politics of being a lesbian or gay foster carer are most often silenced, and we are expected to voice our experiences within the framework of heterosexuality. As I will discuss later, this depoliticisation of lesbian and gay experiences works to produce particular acceptable gay and lesbian identities. In order to better illustrate these points, I will now briefly outline the relevant legislation that shapes foster care training and perpetuates heterosexism.

Context and the Construction of Family

In addition to the tenets of adult learning, foster care training centres on enabling carers to work in the best interests of the child. Both the Children's Protection Act 1993 (CPA) and the Family and Community Services Act 1972 (FACSA) form the basis of foster care training in South Australia in this regard. The objects of the CPA are as follows:

> The administration of this Act is to be founded on the principles that the primary responsibility for a child's care and protection lies with the child's family and that a high priority should therefore be accorded to supporting and assisting the family to carry out that responsibility (Part 3, Section 2).
> In any exercise of powers under this Act in relation to a child
> *(a)* The safety of the child is to be the paramount consideration
> (b) The powers must always be exercised in the best interests of the child (Part 4, Section 1).
> Serious consideration must, however, be given to the desirability of *(a)* keeping the child within his or her family; and *(b)* preserving and strengthening family relationships between the child, the child's parents and other members of the child's family, whether or not the child is to reside within his or her family (Part 4, Section 2).

As may be obvious from this brief portion of the CPA, the best interests of the child are constructed as keeping children with their family. This seemingly innocuous statement presumes what may count as family (Millbank, 2000), the implication being

that the term family pertains to the birth family and that the category of family is thus collapsed into a singular definition of family that implies biology. Furthermore, the suggestion that it is important to "preserve… family relations [with] the child's parents" would appear to conflate the category of family with the normative status of the heterosexual nuclear family, thus reserving the title of parents for a heterosexual couple (Johnson, 2003). As a result, not only are non-biological families accorded a lower status, but the category of family itself is applied solely to groups of people that are organised through the institution of heterosexuality.

Such constructions of family are reinforced in the FACSA, whose terms and definitions very clearly construct what counts as a family and a parent:

> A "parent" [presumably other than a 'birth parent'] includes a person who has adopted a child in accordance with the law of this State… A "relative" in relation to a child, means a step-parent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, grandfather or grandmother of the child… A "foster parent" means a person… who, for monetary and other considerations, maintains and cares for a child on a residential basis (Part 1, 6).

In light of the fact that lesbians and gay men are ineligible to adopt children within South Australia and within most Australian states and do not have access to state sanctioned marriage, we are not defined as parents under the FACSA.[3] The implication of this is that whilst heterosexual foster carers may have some claim to the categories of family or parent through their ability to locate themselves within the definition of parent provided by the FACSA, lesbian and gay parents do not.

[3] It is important to acknowledge here that as lesbians and gay men we *do* have access to creating our own families, for example through surrogacy, shared parenting, children born from a prior heterosexual relationship etc. The point I am making is that whilst this is true, the laws surrounding foster care

In addition, the FACSA would appear to make similar assumptions about the category of family as those that appear in the CPA. Thus the FACSA states that:

> The objectives of the Minister and the Department under this Act are to promote the dignity of the individual and the welfare of the family as the bases of the welfare of the community (Section 2, Part 10, 1).

There is the explicit suggestion within the FACSA that foster parents;

> will provide opportunities for the child to maintain or recover his or her identify as a member of his or her own family (Part 2. 42e).

Together, these three aspects of the FACSA demonstrate who counts as a parent (primarily *not* gay men or lesbians); that foster parents maintain children for monetary and other considerations (and thus do not really count in the category of parent); and that the category of family is reserved for a child's birth family. So whilst the FACSA does allow lesbians and gay men to be foster carers, meaning that we are not excluded within the Act *per se*, our relationships and families are not included under the guidelines of the categories of either parent or family. As a result, the implicit assumption is that these categories are constituted through the act of (heterosexual) marriage, the product of which are the categories of parent and child (Clarke, 2001). Within this normative model, heterosexuality is taken *a priori* as being the form that families take and specifically the type of family that is protected by the law (Benkov, 1995; Millbank, 2000). In other words, whilst lesbians and gay men may currently be able to foster children (in some states and with some foster care agencies), this is by no means sanctioned explicitly in either the CPA or the FACSA. Whilst the FACSA

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prohibit foster carers in general from defining ourselves as 'family', and that the inherent heterosexism of the law further excludes lesbians and gay men from this category.

in particular suggests that it maintains a non-discriminatory stance in relation to family and community services, the examination of the Act provided here shows that it does indeed privilege a heteronormative model of family, parenting, and consequently citizenship.

From the above analysis, it is possible to see some of the ways in which the "best interests of the child" is constructed as an inherently moral category (Clarke, 2001). More specifically, what counts as moral good is defined as the connection between (heterosexual) birth parents and their children. The corollary of this is that it is *not* in the best interests of the child to be placed within a gay or lesbian headed family. Such heterosexist practices may therefore be understood as foundational to foster carer training. In addition to these practices of heterosexism are the networks of power that inform discourses surrounding the "best interests of the child". In his brief review of the psychological research conducted primarily in the United States and Northern Europe on children of lesbian and gay parents, Norman Anderssen (2001; see also Riggs, in press a) suggests that such discourses are reliant upon a series of developmentalist assumptions around the category of child. Such assumptions shape the ways in which we understand children and work to construct children in very normative ways (i.e., as naïve or as undeveloped adults). Anderssen, following Rofes (1998), proposes that "lesbian and gay liberation will not succeed until lesbian and gay advocates abandon these notions of childhood" (p. 177).

As a result of these broad range of assumptions, foster care training in Australia is shaped around the category of family as referring to a heterosexual couple (or more precisely, a married heterosexual couple) and their biological children. These assumptions appear within foster carer training in the use of specific words to describe familial relations. For example, the use of the term *spouse* when referring to a foster

carers' partner works to reinforce the presumed heterosexuality of both the couple and the training environment (e.g., see Anglicare SA, 2001). Whilst there have been attempts to address these issues and develop more inclusive frameworks for the provision of foster care training, they have been limited by their reliance upon what are constructed as liberal beliefs about gay men and lesbians. As I will now go on to discuss, such mundane heterosexism constructs lesbian and gay families in particular ways that negate the radical differences of experience that structure our lives and families.

Mundane Heterosexism

In her paper *Mundane heterosexism: Understanding incidents of the everyday*, Elizabeth Peel (2001) outlines an approach to understanding the subtle ways in which heterosexism is enacted. In doing so, Peel (2001) does not intend to create a taxonomy of different heterosexisms, nor to locate heterosexism within individual people, but rather to examine the flexible ways in which heterosexism continues to shape the everyday experiences of lesbians and gay men. She suggests that explicit acts of heterosexism (such as denying lesbians and gay men rights in relation to foster parenting) are often given focus within research, yet the more commonplace acts of heterosexism (those that are passed off as anti-heterosexism) are often ignored. Celia Kitzinger (1996, p. 11) illustrates this point well:

> When there is *no* anti-lesbian explosion from your parents, because you have de-dyked your apartment before their visit; when there is *no* queer-bashing after the gay disco, because you anticipated trouble and booked a cab to get home; when you are *not* dismissed from work, because you stayed in the closet; when you are *not* subjected

> to prurient or disgusted questions, because you talked about your weekend activities in sentences that meticulously avoided the use of any pronouns – when these non-events slip by as part of many gay men and lesbians' daily routine, has *nothing* really happened? (original emphases).

Whilst the foster care system is now actively recruiting gay and lesbian carers, we are welcomed into the training environment, and (to some extent) we are allowed to share our experiences, we are not encouraged to speak out about the problems that we face if we are to be acceptable foster carers. For example, if we find the language used to be oppressive or if we feel that other people are employing the heterosexual nuclear family as a model for our experiences of family, then is it in our best interest to speak out or not to "rock the boat"? Moreover, if someone argues on our behalf that we can be good foster carers and that we are just like heterosexual carers, do we challenge this as heterosexism?

In addition to these questions, it is important to examine the ways in which social practices such as foster carer training work to construct very specific lesbian and gay identities (Hicks, 2000). Working from a presumption that we are all equal (as outlined earlier), foster care training presumes that the best way to include lesbian and gay carers is to encourage a belief in our normality. In this way, our relationships and families are ascribed a neat, safe image that accords with the expectations of what constitutes a good foster carer (Johnson, 2003; Riggs, 2002). This form of mundane heterosexism is thus promulgated under the guise of equality, through its claim to support gay and lesbian foster carers. Yet whilst such an approach may be a considerable improvement on previous assumptions that same-sex attraction constitutes pathology (which thus rendered us ineligible as foster carers), it still

continues to promote a heterosexual norm. As I will go on to discuss, this approach is also evident in much of the literature on lesbian and gay families that is used to support the involvement of same-sex attracted individuals in the foster care system.

"Just as Good" – Research on Lesbian & Gay Families

The foster care system in Australia does not currently have a set of guidelines for the assessment and training of potential gay and lesbian foster carers. As a result, many service providers draw on research that is available in the area from other countries, particularly the UK. One such document is the British Association for Adoption and Fostering's (BAAF) *Assessing Lesbian and Gay Foster Carers and Adopters* paper. This paper is a good example of mundane heterosexism at work. Whilst the paper cites the work of Hicks (2000) to discuss problems that arise when gay men and lesbians feel that they must "prove themselves to be "as good as" heterosexual carers" (BAAF, 2003, p. 3), the paper then goes on to cite a wide range of studies on comparative parenting. They suggest from this overview that "research evidence overwhelmingly indicates that parenting capacity and competence cannot be distinguished on the basis of sexuality alone" (p. 4). Although this is held up as evidence for the suitability of gay men and lesbians as foster carers, it effectively serves to reinforce the assumption that we are no threat because we are just the same.

In a similar way, most of the research cited in the BAAF overview focuses solely on the key social stereotypes that are held towards lesbians and gay men, thus warranting them further attention (Benkov, 1995). Some examples of these are: the equation of homosexuality with paedophilia; the assumption that heterosexual marriage will automatically result in a stable home life; that same-sex attracted parents will raise same-sex attracted children; and more specifically, that these

children will experience more emotional disturbance than children raised in heterosexual families. In addition, the research cited reinforces supposed positive stereotypes, such as that gay men are more sensitive than heterosexual men; that lesbians are more directive than heterosexual women; and that heterosexual men have been identified as those most likely to abuse children. Together, all of these beliefs (and the refutation or support of them) are understood to demonstrate the appropriateness of same-sex attracted carers. I would suggest instead that they serve to reinforce the normative status of heterosexuality by generating a whole literature that proves the normality of same-sex attracted individuals, thus assuming heterosexuality as a normative benchmark (cf., Malone & Cleary, 2002; Riggs, 2004a). Such mundane heterosexism is often overlooked, as it purports to support gay men and lesbians.

I would suggest that the BAAF report and other similar reports (e.g., Brooks and Goldberg, 2001) rely upon discourses of science to justify claims about lesbian and gay foster carers. Elsewhere, I have argued that employing science to legitimate or defend same-sex attraction only serves to accept the terms set by heteropatriachy (Riggs, 2004b; see also Clarke, 2000; Kitzinger, 1990). Thus, the BAAF report outlines what counts as good science by demonstrating the pseudo-science of those researchers who attempt to prove the pathology of gay and lesbian families (Kitzinger, 1990). For example, the BAAF report (p. 1) cites Stacey and Biblarz (2001) to suggest that

> some research in gay and lesbian parenting is flawed “because anti-gay scholars seek evidence of harm”… [Stacey and Biblarz] conclude that some commentators have selectively referenced research findings to support preconceived conclusions. The studies quoted here [in the BAAF report] are

those whose findings have been most generally accepted and referenced.[4] Unintentionally, the report demonstrates how “good science” (i.e., research that is generally accepted and referenced) is constructed by pointing out the flaws of “pseudoscience” (i.e., those who selectively reference findings). In doing this, the value of lesbian and gay foster carers is decided within the realm of science – a site that has historically contributed and continues to contribute to the oppression of same-sex attracted individuals. Why then would we want to use “good science” to argue our case?

Queering Adult Learning

By examining the limitations of foster carer training, I have sought to demonstrate the problems that arise from the context of heterosexism and, in particular, the impact that mundane heterosexism has upon assumptions about lesbian and gay foster carers. I have demonstrated some of the many different ways in which heterosexism is played out within the foster care system. I would now like to explore some alternatives for restructuring or queering foster care training.

First, I believe that it is important to take as central the proposal that adult learning can be a site for social action (Hill, 1995). Thus, rather than simply reinforcing the social norms that construct the category of adult (as always being heterosexual), the process of adult learning may allow for a critique of the systems of normalcy that surround the category itself. In this way, instead of focusing on how we may achieve equality within foster care training or how we may best promote the normality of gay and lesbian foster carers, we may focus on challenging the ways in

[4] It should be noted that this is somewhat of a misuse of Stacey and Biblarz’ paper. Their paper outlines the “defensive posture” that often shapes research on lesbian and gay parenting, an opinion that I would share (see Riggs, 2004a). Their aim (in my reading) is thus not to define “good” and “bad” science, but rather to look at how scientific discourses structure these debates.

which the category of normal is constructed (Brooks & Edwards, 1999; Riggs & Riggs, 2004). This would not entail a simple reversal of the rules of normalcy so that gay and lesbian experiences are centred as the norm, but rather a radical challenge to the practices of normalisation.

One approach that may be useful to enact such a challenge would be to look at just how experiences of difference are constructed through discourses of sexuality within foster carer training (Hicks & McDermott, 1999). For example, foster carer training often promotes the idea that sexuality is not an important issue when considering potential foster carers[5]. Yet, in queering adult learning, whilst the notion shared humanity can help to combat heterosexism, such a notion may instead work to reinforce the heteronormative nature of the category humanity itself.

Second, it is important for lesbian and gay foster carers to set our own agenda when it comes to discussions around family. Both Bronwyn Winter (2002) and Judith Butler (2002) make this point in their discussions of the relationship between the state and the family. Butler suggests that in fighting for access to traditionally heterosexual institutions such as marriage, we may be rendering ourselves complicit with practices of normalisation. She states, “to be legitimated by the state is to enter into the terms of the legitimation offered there” (p. 17). Whilst Butler (2002) recognises the importance of being validated in Western society, which is most often achieved through adherence to particular rules arbitrated by the state, we do need to be wary of the limitations of this approach to social justice. For even as we need to be aware of the personal gains that have been made through recourse to state sanctioned practices of self (e.g., access to superannuation or adoption rights), we also need to be mindful of

[5] This type of liberal belief is often used to support the application of lesbian and gay foster carers, as I have already suggested.

how such practices of self are themselves constitutive of particular (heteronormative) regimes of truth (cf., Johnson, 2002 for more on this dilemma).

In regards to this, Winter (2002) suggests that the category of family is problematic for its historical relationship to patriarchal ownership and possession. She suggests that in taking on the term family to describe our relationships as lesbians and gay men, we run the risk of taking on board an unproblematised approach to understanding relationality. This is evidently the case in relation to foster care more generally, as distinctions are constantly drawn within training between what are termed natural/real/birth families and foster families. In this way, foster carer training is already unsettled by its reliance on the category of family. Add to this the heterosexism of the training environment, and the term family is perhaps not all that useful for gay and lesbian foster carers. I would thus suggest that a second approach to developing radical challenges would be to engage in alternate ways of relating to each other as lesbians and gay men and to the children that we care for, in order to resist the heterosexual model of relationality that is privileged within foster carer training (Riggs, 2004a).

Finally, it is important to note the problems associated with constructing categories of belonging (Butler, 2002). As discussed earlier, the use of distinct categories often only serves to alienate certain people. To counter this, we may engage in practices aimed at queering adult learning by challenging the role of lesbian and gay carers within foster carer training. Such a radical challenge may entail lesbian and gay foster carers openly challenging heterosexism, engaging with training providers in developing alternate modes of service delivery, and continuing to engage in political action aimed at reformulating social practices such as parenting.

This leads me to suggest that as lesbian and gay foster parents, we need to be mindful of the (relative) privileges associated with this category membership and that we do not inadvertently contribute to the marginalisation of families that do not fit into this category (i.e., single parents (of any sexuality), friends who care for children together, shared care arrangements between separated partners) (Malone & Cleary, 2002). If we do wish to engender more inclusive and critical understandings of relationality, then it is important that we do so more broadly than simply within the realm of lesbian and gay headed families (Budgeon & Roseneil, 2002). For example, if we assume that a household with a lesbian couple and their children constitutes a challenge to heteronormative assumptions about the family, we stop our analyses of oppression at the very place they should begin. In other words, whilst lesbian families may indeed challenge such assumptions, they may also be read as reinforcing the category family through the construction of relationality as being solely connected to biology, cohabitation or the adult/child relationship.

What is needed then is an ongoing critique of the processes of normalisation and a critical reflexiveness about our roles within the framework of heteropatriarchy. This should not entail an add-on approach, whereby lesbians and gay men are appended to a heterosexual model, nor should other non-normative families be appended to a lesbian or gay model of parenting. Rather, my suggestion is that we must work through difference, to recognise the incommensurabilities that shape our lives and to resist the ways in which assumptions of sameness work to reify heterosexual parenting as the gold standard (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2004).

Conclusions

Throughout this paper, I have taken an approach to understanding foster care training in Australia that seeks to both recognise how people are attempting to support lesbian and gay foster carers within the system and to examine how this support may be limited by the context of heterosexism. Likewise, I have sought to value the constructions of family that are evident within lesbian and gay headed families currently, while questioning how we may be critical of our own involvement in systems of oppression. This entails an approach that does not simply dismiss or denigrate the concept of family as useless. Rather, it seeks to examine how the category is understood in a range of contexts and how it connects with and is potentially resistive of heteropatriarchal understandings of family as ownership.

This means that we need to be aware of the ways in which “adult education [may] function to reinforce patterns of oppressive socialization” (Hill, 1995, p. 146). In this regard, it is important to examine how foster carer training is conducted within a context of heterosexism and what this means for the valuing of experience.: Who does training benefit? What does it assume as normative? If we are to take these questions as a starting point, then it may be possible to queer adult learning, as we focus on the practices of oppression that it constitutes, rather than simply adding-on information that is relevant to gay men and lesbians.

I am hesitant to provide a prescriptive programme to queer adult education, for, as Foucault (1996, p. 312) suggests, “as soon as a program is presented, it becomes a law and there’s a prohibition against inventing. However, I do take as useful Suzie Stiles’ (2002) suggestion that we may understand “family as a verb” – as something that we do. In this way, we may be better located to examine how we are positioned in relation to discourses of the heterosexual nuclear family and what this

may mean for the ways we construct family. Importantly, we need to take advantage of the opportunities in the training environment to facilitate social change and to use such opportunities to help understand how heterosexism works in our lives. As I have already suggested in the previous section, this may entail an increased focus on the politics of parenting and how this informs foster carer training (Riggs, 2004).

This approach may focus on developing ways of actively introducing the political into discussions around foster care. This may be one way to counter the normalising practices that inhere to foster carer training. Thus,as Hill (1995) suggests, by taking a liberal approach to the issues facing lesbians and gay men, it has become possible to simply assimilate our issues, rather than presenting a radical challenge to (heteronormative) systems of knowledge. In contrast to this, it is also important that we do not forgo the politics of sexuality in order to be accepted within the category of normal (Riggs, 2004a). Whilst this approach has often been very successful in gaining rights for lesbians and gay men, we need to pay attention to the limits of this, and to examine whose terms are being used to define the issues themselves.

Finally, I would suggest that we need to continue to problematise notions of experience that inhere to adult learning models. We must examine how particular types of experiences are deployed to warrant a set of moral values around what constitutes knowledge. As I have suggested elsewhere (Riggs, in press b), it is important to develop understandings of experience that are accompanied by a more complex theorisation of subjectivity, which may allow us to a) understand the self as a social practice through investigating axes of subjectivity, b) examine the exclusionary practices that such axes are founded upon and c) explore the possibility for politicality and change that such an approach engenders. I would thus suggest that experience should not be used as a catch-all phrase to legitimate particular worldviews, but rather

as one of the practices through which particular selves are made possible. This may allow us the opportunity to develop understandings of lesbian and gay parenting within the foster care system that neither take heterosexuality as an appropriate model, nor engage in a "one size fits all" model for lesbian and gay parenting. In this way, queering adult learning may be a practice that prioritises understandings of relationality that challenge the heteronorm.

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