

Hi, I'm Kashni; and I'm Erid

I'm Luanne

Carl, nice to meet you

Hi – this is us: Tom, Danielle and Ryland

Hi, my name is Kim

we all have two moms...

here are our stories.

come with us on a fun-filled  
journey, we hope that you'll  
enjoy reading ...

(These are real beings called human, but it is not their real names, it is story names for them, chosen by them, and we had lots of fun deciding this!)

# the experiences of CHILDREN GROWING UP IN SAME-GENDERED FAMILIES

(narrated) BY

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REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

## philosophiae doctor

in

educational psychology  
in the

department of educational psychology  
faculty of education  
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## DECLARATION

“I declare that the thesis which I hereby submit  
for the degree

**philosophiae doctor**

**in**

**educational psychology**

at the university of Pretoria, is my own work  
and has not previously been submitted by me for  
a degree at this or any other tertiary  
institution.”

---

CARIEN LUBBE

signed on the \_\_\_\_\_ day

of \_\_\_\_\_ 2005,

Pretoria, South Africa.

for maycel

"writing often leads the reader to imagine odd interpretations of meaning, takes us down unusual corridors toward understanding, helps us hear faint and unexpected echoes and resonances, and brings us to imagine relationships anew or differently. writing opens up lived worlds for reflection and transformation"

[ely, vinz, downing & anzul, 1997:381].

the secret, as to what we are, whom we love, what we feel with regard to people who love us,, those experiences that remains hidden for so long, are one of the few things in the world that can open windows for us on to what is new and unknown, that can awaken us from our sleeping dreaming state, for the contemplation of universes that otherwise we should never have known.

[adapted from proust, the captive, in sedgwick, 1990:67]

"life can be very easy when love is your way of life"

[ruiz 1997:127]

## my deepest gratitude to...

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<sup>1</sup> All the illustrations in this thesis were created and hand-painted by Chrissie Els.

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- § Die gesinne: elke bevoorregte ouerpaar en kind/  
The families: every blessed parent and child...  
Your openness, courage and willingness to give of your time and to share your lives with me, humbled me and made me proud to witness and present some parts of your lives to the rest of the world.
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## ABSTRACT

Traditional views regarding families are being challenged by new family arrangements. In this study I have explored the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families, in order to inform our current understanding of how children experience the social constructedness of same-gendered families. I have utilised a narrative research design in order to present and re-present the children's *own* meaning-making about being a child in a same-gendered family. I also inquired into the ways in which they negotiate the heteronormativity of society. In order to situate the broader contextual factors of heteronormativity I constructed a narrative tale, which was then developed throughout the thesis as part of the presentation to create a *multivoiced, dialogical and reflexive text*. From a holistic analysis of the created data, narratives were written which gives a unique and individual account of the experiences of each child that I had engaged with. Grounded in these narratives five concepts emerged, that formed my conceptualisation of the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families. The main findings suggest that the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families in this study are (1) that they experience different levels (or ways) of **okayness**, namely a level of okayness regarding having same-gender parents and a level of okayness to **disclose** or not to disclose their family structure, (2) children in same-gendered families are **aware** of others' okayness or open-mindedness regarding same-gendered families, (3) children in same-gendered families at times show the need for **openness** in their relationships with others and (4), children in same-gendered families receive **support** from their parents, siblings, significant others, friends, class mates and other children also growing up in same-gendered families. Finally, I have also explored the interconnectedness between okayness, disclosure, awareness, openness and support and constructed a conceptual framework that serve as a theoretical forestructure against which the findings, interpretations and narratives can be viewed.



*Key words:*

Same-gendered families

Gay and/ or lesbian families

Children of same-gender parents

Experiences

Narrative

Okayness

Openness

Disclosure

Support

Awareness

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## BEFORE DAWN...SITUATING MYSELF IN THIS STUDY...

Everything starts with a dream. All that is good in life begins with a dream.

IMAGINE LIVING YOUR LIFE WITHOUT JUDGING OTHERS...YOU DON'T HAVE A NEED TO BE RIGHT, AND YOU DON'T NEED TO MAKE ANYONE ELSE WRONG...IMAGINE LIVING YOUR LIFE WITHOUT THE FEAR OF BEING JUDGED BY OTHERS. YOU NO LONGER RULE YOUR BEHAVIOUR ACCORDING TO WHAT OTHERS MAY THINK ABOUT YOU. YOU ARE NO LONGER RESPONSIBLE FOR ANYONE'S OPINION...IMAGINE, TO WALK IN THIS WORLD WITH YOUR HEART COMPLETELY OPEN... (RUIZ, 1997:125).

This is my dream: to celebrate diversity and appreciate and enjoy everyone's uniqueness while simultaneously being conscious of our interconnectedness as beings on this planet – beings whom we call "human".

*Why do I begin this thesis by writing about myself? Why do I invoke part of my story? (Kate Evans, 2002:8)<sup>2</sup> These few pages in which I write about myself only constitute a very small part of my story. In such a short space, I could not do justice to all the extraordinary events of the past four years – all my relationships and experiences, not only as a researcher, practitioner and lecturer/teacher, but also as a woman, daughter, sister, friend and committed life partner. But it is these relationships and experiences – in the context of a process of continuous growth – that have helped me to form my own distinctive identity and discover my unique "voice". Nevertheless, I am telling a story that reveals something of my history, particularly in relationship to my cultural and social positioning. I share these things about myself because I want to be explicit that it is from this standpoint that I embark on writing about my research project (my own insertion).*

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<sup>2</sup> I feel a special personal connection with some authors because so many of my thoughts resonate with what they say. I have therefore chosen to present them by using their first names and surnames when I first introduce them in my text. All the words in italics in this paragraph are those of Kate Evans.

I am placing myself in this research as a being who is human and who is deeply interested in the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families. The world constructs me as white, I perform a female gender, I continuously explore my masculinity and femininity, and I happen to have a life partner that is of the same gender as I am.

So why am I so interested in the experiences of children growing up in same-gendered families?

Ever since the age of about 25, I have from time to time considered the possibility of having a child. In the discussions that followed between my partner and me, she told me that she would like to talk to children from same-gendered families so that she could hear at first-hand how they experienced having same-gender parents who live as gay people in a committed and monogamous relationship. Thus, for example, when such children walk in the school grounds during break, what do the other children say to them or ask them? And if they want to bring their friends home for sleepovers, what (if anything) happens?

While she and I were thinking intently about my longing for a child and all the consequences that such an event would have for me, her and the child, I was in the process of working on another topic for my PhD. Then, in May 2003, I had the privilege of attending a conference about qualitative methodology in Banff, Canada. Banff is a breathtakingly beautiful place and it had a magical effect on me in more ways than one. For one, it helped me to birth a completely new thesis topic. This new topic came to me in the form of an intuitive realisation. While in Banff, attending the fourth Advances in Qualitative Methods Conference, I sensed in a moment of intuitive realisation that this present thesis was the doctoral work that I really wanted to do. It resonated harmoniously in my mind, body and soul, and I just knew (in that intuitive way) that this was right for me, certainly academically, but in other ways as well. Small and large things began to speak to me: the phenomenology of Max von Maanen, and the collaborative research of Sharalyn Jordan. But my most profound and intense realisation occurred while I was attending Jean Clandinin's workshop on Monday, 5 May 2003. My new realisation



made me sensitive to a certain beauty in the title of the workshop. It was called: "Experience and story".

During the eight hours of that workshop, everything changed. I experienced a whole range of emotions during that time: excitement, joy, a feeling (somehow) of recognition and familiarity with what was being presented, and a profound and authentic intuitive knowing that what she was speaking about was meant for me. I also experienced fear – fear about the consequences of giving up my previous topic, relief at having given up that topic (even if it was at that stage only in my mind), and courage because I knew that I would have to start all over again. I cried that day as well. But my tears were tears of relief, joy, excitement, and a great longing for... home. In spite of this roller coaster of emotions, I knew for certain on that day that I would have to change the topic of my thesis – no matter what the consequences.

May 5, 2003. It was such an intense day. That moment of final certainty and realisation was so intense that I can still remember when I recorded it in my conference book. My decision immediately created some other concerns. I had arranged to meet various academics in Grand Rapids and Chicago to discuss my work on my first doctoral topic. What should I do? I decided that I would nevertheless go ahead with those meetings, and in the end that proved to be the right decision. Those meetings proved to be invaluable because the knowledge and experience that I gained from the consequent journeys and consultations have ever since stood me in good stead in my lectures, in my therapeutic work and in my life in general.

Nevertheless I was still confused. I remember the long walks that I took through the streets of Chicago. The springtime tulips were in bloom and my thoughts tumbled over one another as I tried to determine the way ahead. But even then, in spite of my inner turmoil, I was strengthened by an inner sense of *authenticity* – of knowing that I had made the right decision because I had been true to myself. That strengthened me. But what exactly would my new topic be? I remember standing outside the planetarium that looks over Chicago's famous horizon of skyscrapers

and ceaselessly speculating about what my new topic might be. When I finally got home to South Africa, I suffered from a few days of jet lag that kept me awake at night. I would lie awake at two or three o' clock in the morning: thinking, thinking... It was during one such nightly interval that it suddenly dawned on me. I suddenly knew! *I wanted to explore the experiences of children who have same-gender parents.* I was so relieved. But now, although one problem was solved, others lay ahead. For one thing, I had to defend my new proposal before my supervisor, the dean, my close colleagues, other colleagues, strangers, students, and the whole Faculty.

In spite of these obstacles, I was so encouraged and energised by Jean Clandinin's methodological position that I could feel courage rising within me. I was now ready to embark on a research theme that truly interested *me*. And I was also ready to establish my own individual research identity. I found then that I simply did not care about any prejudice or discrimination that would arise as a consequence of the process. When people warned me about possible negative consequences, I could just smile and say (something like): "This is what I have to do. This is me. I can make this research a part of myself because this is who I am. And don't get me wrong! I regard my sexuality as only a small part of my identity."

Jean's wise words rang in my mind. She had said that it is often an apparently insignificant story that we do not attend to and that we ignore that sometimes becomes the most important story in our lives. Yes, my story of me being gay was profoundly significant for me, and now even more so because I also longed to become a mother.

As I later focused on the experiences of the children who consented to become my research partners, I needed to remind myself that this research was not about me. It was about them and the experiences they underwent in their lives. I therefore tried to immerse myself in their worlds and see the world through their eyes – and through the eyes of other people. Sometimes it felt strange to me to hear them proclaiming their heterosexuality, sometimes emphatically, sometimes defensively and at other times merely as a matter of fact. Sometimes such declarations were

unexpected, and I realised that although I shared a common humanity with them, I was also different from them. I was "other" to them, just as they were "other" to me. The constant, inescapable interplay of "us" and "them".

In the end, my vulnerability is kindled by the necessity of having to locate myself in this research. Because I am involved with others (my partner, parents and siblings), I am also responsible to them. Even so, I cannot distance myself from this research. And although the various families involved are involved, interested and supportive, research (in the end) mirrors the researcher and all her connections and therefore reflexivity is required by the whole process.

It was only during the research process that I really started to make sense of the social constructedness of "gayness" – of the way in which Western civilisation over the past 1400 years has constructed and maintained polarities, dichotomies and binary modes of thought as fundamental explanatory categories that claim to be universal and a priori – but which are not. Sexual categories have in fact become a social agreement. People whose sexual orientation makes them prefer partners of the same gender create a consensual reality that enables them to understand the whole phenomenon of being gay as something potentially positive, creative, life-affirming and moral – rather than the opposite. This construction of gayness as a personal and group identity provides the only alternative to the negative construction of same-gender sexual orientations that stigmatise and exclude gay people. But the construction of a gay identity as something healthy, creative, life-affirming, moral and (dare one say it?) normal is a fragile flower upon which the harsh winds of prejudice blow from all directions. Whether it will survive or not only history will tell.

It is my hope that humanity might one day be able to rise above the madness and cruelty of past centuries. If we ever achieve that, it will be because we have relinquished self-righteous judgements and because we no longer *automatically* project our own hypocritical, socially constructed and self-limiting beliefs onto others – especially onto others who are different from ourselves. What is relevant in this regard are the self-limiting beliefs that gay people themselves have created or

those that have been created by others who mindlessly maintain the prejudice or belief that is “wrong” or “sinful” to physically love a person who is of the same gender as oneself.

In place of such limiting beliefs and prejudices, I propose the thesis that a union between two human beings is ultimately a union between two souls. If this is accepted, and if we hope to progress as a society and as a species beyond the patriarchal savagery of our past, we need a paradigm of what it means to be human that not only fundamentally affirms the importance of the body and the goodness of sexuality but that also incorporates other values such as compassion, truth, honesty, respect, care, authenticity, peace and nurturing. All these are aspects of a paradigm of humanity filled with love that is inclusive rather than exclusive and that expresses a more noble ideal of humanity than the institutionalised brutalities and pseudo-certainties of centuries past.

*The soul is after all the highest feeling of love you can imagine. This is the soul's desire. This is its purpose... Every action taken by human beings is based in love or fear... Every single free choice you ever undertake arises out of one of the only two possible thoughts there are: a thought of love or a thought of fear. Fear is the energy which contracts, closes down, draws in, runs, hides, hoards, harms. Love is the energy which expands, opens up, sends out, stays, reveals, shares, heals (Walsch, 1995:19,83).*

I believe that I entered into a contract with my Creator a long time ago and that I decided to come to Earth and to be born into this life I have chosen for myself. Two facets of the life that was presented to me and that I chose before I was born involved my choice of my present life partner, and the longing for a child. This influenced me to choose to do research into same-gendered families. And so, for me, the seed of this thesis was planted a long time ago. As I contemplate the lives of the children who are growing up in same-gendered families, I realise that I was led to this point where I am standing today. I feel as though I am standing on top of a high hill and looking down on my life and on the various journeys that brought me to the place where I am standing today. What an exciting place this is to be.