Family Portraits
A Collection of Stories about Queer People in New Zealand

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A thesis submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Creative Writing

2011

School of Languages and Social Sciences
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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: 3/0/11
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my two supervisors Dylan Horrocks and Dr. Paul Mountfort. Dylan, it isn’t often that we get to work with one of our heroes, and I’m extremely grateful for the opportunity to work with you. Thank you for your generosity: for the books you leant me, for letting me sit it on your classes, for our long supervision sessions over coffee. Thank you for sharing so much of your own ideas, politics and values with me – thank you for not making me feel like the weirdo who always wants to talk about sexuality and gender. To Dr. Mountfort, thank you for putting up with my emails, and for helping me through the ethics application process without my brain exploding. Thank you for your generosity and enthusiasm in my project.

This project has been the result of immense community support. Thank you to all the brave queer souls that walk through my world. Thank you for fighting to pave a path for me, and thank you for continuing to fight. To my queer whanau and friends: thank you for standing alongside me in this project, for reading my drafts and for helping me to feel like I belong. Thank you to the Rainbow Youth crew, especially Tommy, who let me use the drop-in centre as a home away from home.

I am hugely grateful to my interview subjects. You gave this project life; your stories have shaped my own, and provided me with insight and a pathway to heal some of my own wounds. I feel deeply honored to have been trusted to hold your stories and craft them into comics, thank you for your trust, your experiences and your words.

To my mum and dad: you’re amazing. You brought me into this world, and have helped shape me into the strong person I am today. Your words of encouragement and support have helped me throughout this project, and my life.

Lastly, to my partner, my love, my gentleman companion – Joe. You have left marks on so many pages of this project, and it would not exist without you. Thank you for reading, rereading, and rereading my comics and words over and over again, at every possible stage of completion. Thank you for your relentless reassurance, your hugs, your shoulder, and your generosity. Thank you for sustaining me with caffeine, porridge and kisses. Most of all, thank you for continuing to be a part of my story and my life.
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Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was sought and granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee.

Ethics approval number 11/193

Ethics approval date October 20, 2011
Abstract

*Family Portraits* is a graphic novel that explores a diverse range of queer stories in Aotearoa. I move beyond traditional coming out narratives and explore how age, history, gender, and ethnicity shape our experiences of ourselves.

The varying protagonists in each vignette illustrate the diversity of the queer community, and the diverse experiences that we have. The novel attempts to peel back the concept of being ‘queer’ and to examine individuals’ investments and overlaps with the ‘queer community’ and other communities they belong to.

Each vignette is told using different graphic storytelling devices, comic styles, and genres. The intention is to provoke a response from the reader and to explore how graphic storytelling devices can be used to add to the story itself.

The novel includes my own story as a queer-identified transman. In using my own voice as a narrator I aim to take readers on a journey that interweaves the story of me, a queer transman who was(n’t) a lesbian, with short stories of queer people I have interviewed. I examine the burden of creating queer media, and how the stories of others shape and affirm my own (whether through connections or differences).
Exegesis

Introduction

My portfolio presents a graphic novel that explores a range of queer\(^1\) stories in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The novel interweaves my own story as a queer-identified transman\(^2\), with vignettes of other queer individuals in New Zealand. Using my own voice as a narrator I aim to take readers on a journey that intertwines the story of me, a queer transman who was(n’t) a lesbian, with short stories of queer people I have interviewed.

I move beyond traditional coming out narratives and explore how age, history, gender, and ethnicity shape our experiences of ourselves, and how we live in the world. I examine the burden of creating queer media, and how the stories of others shape and affirm my own, (whether through connections or differences).

The varying protagonists in each vignette illustrate the diversity of the queer community, and the diverse experiences that we have. The meta-narrative is structured in a way that aims to resist a concrete and definitive expression of the queer community. Instead, the novel attempts to peel back the concept of being ‘queer’ and to examine individuals’ investments and overlaps with the ‘queer community’ and other communities they belong to.

Each vignette is told using different graphic storytelling devices, comic styles, and genres. The intention is to provoke a response from the reader and to explore how graphic storytelling devices can be used to add to the story itself.

\(^1\) Queer, in this context, is an umbrella term used to describe non-straight sexualities and gender/sex diversities. It is inclusive of, but not limited to, gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, takataapui, fa’afafine, intersex, and asexual.

\(^2\) In this context I use the term transman to describe myself as a person who was assigned female at birth, but identifies and lives as a male.
Methodology

The kaupapa of my project was to create a graphic novel with a number of short stories to reflect the diversity of the queer community. In order to do this I interviewed six participants and used the material gathered from those interviews to construct comic narratives.

Participants
My qualitative/ethnographic approach consisted of semi-formal interviews with six participants between March and October 2011.

Recruitment
The recruitment process was oriented by both convenience and purpose. A convenience/opportunistic recruitment method involves participants who are readily available, and who have lived the experience the research investigates. In this the selection criteria for those interviewed was as follows:

- Living in New Zealand
- Queer Identified (self identification)
- Willing and available to undertake an interview
- Connect with the diverse range of stories that I wish to tell

Through purposeful recruitment I aimed to address a greater diversity of participants. My project calls for a diverse range of stories of queer-identified New Zealanders; across age ranges, ethnicities, religions and identities.

I used a snowball technique to find participants. After each interview I asked participants to recommend other people who might be available. In keeping with my long-standing involvement with queer communities, I attended various groups and events to connect with possible participants. The participants chosen reflect a range of identities and stories.
Selection
Participants who met the research criteria were provided with an information sheet about the project and given time to consider whether to take part in the voluntary interview.

Interview Process
Interviews were tape recorded, unless requested otherwise, and in one case the interview was conducted via email. In cases where interviews were not recorded I took extensive written notes. Parts of the interviews were transcribed and used to construct short comic stories. Events or themes were extended from the interviews to create a more fictional narrative.

The interviews involved an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning included discussion of the participants’ identities and how their sexual orientation and/or gender/sex identities related to their experiences in the world. The potential questions outlined in the information sheet highlight the themes of the interviews. These questions were:

- What words do you use to describe your sexuality and gender/sex identity?
- What has been your journey to discovering and embracing your identity?
- What role do other identities (i.e. race, religion, gender, culture, age, family) play on your queer/rainbow/LGBT3 identity?
- Are there any particular stories that feel important in describing your sexuality or gender/sex identity?

Drawing on narrative enquiry techniques I remained open to the particular possibilities for storytelling within each interview. Narrative enquiry, as described by Margaret Olson (2009), is “shaped by evolving interactions among individuals, is an unfolding story in which the researcher must balance his or her research purpose and intentions with the unique narratives of other research participants” (p. 349).

Most participants came prepared with a particular story they were eager to share, and so each participant largely drove the interview content. In addition to the guiding narrative, we discussed themes that arose during the interview. Using the Maori concept of

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3 LGBT is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender – words were substituted for each individual, as not everyone identifies with the term Queer.
Tuakana and Teina (which can be translated to mean “big brother”, “little brother”) we both shared our experiences, highlighting the reciprocal exchange of knowledge and ideas.

**Data Analysis and Graphic Construction**
Following the interviews, I examined my records and notes to determine which narratives (within each interview) were most interesting for my purposes. I considered the themes of different narratives in relation to:

- Stylistic Choices
- Story Construction
- The meta-narrative, and autobiographical narratives

I then drafted a script and began to sketch out possible character designs, in order to determine which comic style and graphic devices would be most effective. I took care to ensure the privacy of participants. Dates, ages, names and locations were changed in various comics.

My own position was extremely important in this stage of the process. I created ‘bookends’ to the main comic vignettes, which explored my own reactions and reflections in response to the themes from the interviews. These bookends delved into both my experiences as a researcher (what it means to me to tell others’ stories), and my experiences as a queer person.

**Participant Feedback**
In most cases, I sent the script (outlining the main dialogue for the narrative) to participants for feedback. In some cases this was not appropriate, as the script was an incomplete draft without the visual aid of comic art. All participants received copies of the complete draft (script with comic art) for their feedback and approval. In some cases participants saw multiple drafts. Participants were asked to contribute to the editing process, and have the final say as to whether the story was submitted into the portfolio. All participants approved their comic for submission into the portfolio.
Part A: (Auto)Ethnographies

I employ an ethnographic/autoethnographic methodology, using qualitative research from interviews. Ethnographic approaches take into account the social or situational contexts of the research, with autoethnographies situating the social context and personal experiences of the researcher squarely within the research.

I have used ethnography and autoethnography in a strategic way. I adopt an interdisciplinary approach to counter, or at the very least acknowledge, some of the drawbacks of this type of approach.

hooks⁴ (1990) highlights one of the key drawbacks of ethnography, which are illustrated in her parody of a researcher:

“No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way… a way that has become mine… I am still the coloniser, the speaking subject, and you are not at the centre of my talk.” (p. 341)

hooks demonstrates how uncritical autoethnography risks great power-imbalances. When the position of the researcher is not taken into account the participant becomes the ‘other’. This reproduces power dynamics such as ‘coloniser’ and ‘colonised’, ‘normal’ and ‘freak’, ‘us’ and ‘them’. A strategic and critical deployment of ethnography highlights the researchers own investments and subjectivity within the research.

An ethnographic approach often incorporates dialogue with participants. According to Keddy (1996), who adopts a grounded feminist methodology, the dialogue between researcher and participant should be “interactive, empowering, reflective, transformative, non-hierarchal, non-static and evolving” (p. 449). In this way the interview process is built on mutual respect and knowledge sharing. The researcher may come with a series of open-ended questions, but the interview is driven by a mutual engagement with the topic. This allows for a more free-flowing dialogue that enables the researcher to identify his or her investments in the project, as well as for the participant to have a certain amount of power in constructing the dialogue.

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⁴ hooks refuses to capitalise her name in an effort to direct attention at her ideas, rather than her identity.
To highlight the political agenda of my research I have adopted a transformative paradigm approach, which contains “an action agenda for reform” (Mackenzie, 2006, p. 3). Here the researcher acknowledges that their work is aiming to create social or political change, and they are using their research accordingly.

**Part B: Queer Theory**

**What is Queer?**

“*Queer*” involves “the open mess of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, resonances, lapses and excess of meaning [that occur] when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 8)

Throughout this project I use the term queer in a variety of ways: queer as an umbrella term that describes sexuality and gender/sex diversity, queer as a political tool, and queer as an academic discourse (as in queer theory).

As an umbrella term, queer recognises a spectrum of sexualities (beyond the fixed categories gay, bisexual or straight), as well as a spectrum of gender/sex identities (resisting the binary of male/female or man/woman). This creates space for a variety of identities and labels, for example: asexual, bisexual, pansexual, omnisexual, trans, intersex, and questioning. It also allows one to acknowledge that there are many different ways of being within these identities. Queer moves beyond fixed categories and highlights fluidity, incoherence and un-knowing.

As a political tool, queer often resists definition; it is a word that refuses finite categorisation, or consistent coherence. Queer is used as a reactionary tool against structuralism and modernity; it operates to deconstruct the gender/sex binary, and seeks to highlight the heterosexism⁵ and cissexism⁶ of our society.

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⁵ Heterosexism is the assumption that all people are heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior and more desirable than homosexuality, bisexuality, pansexual, or asexual.

⁶ Cissexism is the assumption that all people are cisgendered and that being cisgender is superior and more desirable than being transgender, transsexual or intersex.
Queer theory challenges binaries such as heterosexual/homosexual and male/female in an academic context. Queer theory deconstructs fixed definitions of gender/sex and sexual identities, in favour of more fluid and multiple approaches.7

**Queer media representations:**

“How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation” (Dyer, 2002, p. 1)

There is extensive research exploring the long history of media (particularly, Hollywood Cinema) stereotyping queer people in a negative way. The work of academics such as Russo (1981), Weiss (1992), and Dyer (1984) outline the common stereotypes of gay and lesbians portrayed in the media. These representations are often demeaning, and result in “othering”, or presenting queer people as violent or unstable.8

Dyer suggests that the problem arises from the attempts of a heterosexual society to define homosexuals in terms “that inevitably fall short of the ‘ideal’ of heterosexuality” (1984, p. 31). Weiss supports this critique of heteronormativity in her discussion of lesbian representation, stating that stereotypical representations “may be seen as indicators of ideological contradictions within a film between the promotion of dominant heterosexual values and the attempt to at once represent and repress lesbian desire” (1992, p. 64).

Currently, mainstream media does not have a good track record of working to present a positive, holistic representation of queer people. According to Dyer and Weiss this may be a result of working from a place that values heterosexuality (and cisgenderism) over homosexuality (and transgenderism). I suggest that if we come from a place of valuing queerness, if we work using queer as a political tool, then our representations will be more positive.

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7 Plummer describes how a Queer methodology involves a research practice as opposed to paradigm. In this way queer methodologies seek to challenge existing representations of gender/sex identities and sexualities, to create more complex representations (Plummer, 2005, p. 366).

8 There are many ways that queer people have been conceptualised as being in a lesser position than their heterosexual counterparts. In Vito Russo’s seminal work *The Celluloid Closet* (1991), he details the various ways gays and lesbians have been represented in film. These representations include stock characters of the effeminate man (the ‘sissy’) and the masculine woman (the ‘dyke’). Russo also notes that homosexual characters are largely relegated to the background.
Queers on Queers: Telling our own stories

Mainstream media works to maintain the hegemonic ideals and current power structures, and therefore representations of queer people inevitably fall short.

One way to work towards valuing queerness is to have queer people telling their own stories. When one claims their subjective positions, and works from a place that actively uses queer as a political tool, then one is more likely to succeed in creating media that values the position of queer. If we claim an identity as our own, such as non-straight sexualities, or non-cisgendered genders, then we are less likely to create distance, to devalue, and to ‘other’ queer sexualities and genders.

Leslie Feinberg (1996) calls upon trans and gender variant individuals to work within their own framework to shape their own stories. He states: “It is time for us to write as experts on our own histories. For too long our light has been refracted through other people's prisms.” In writing Transgender Warriors he explicitly states his position and intention: “My goal in this book is to fashion history, politics, and theory into a steel weapon with which to defend a very oppressed segment of the population” (xii).

Similarly, Plummer (1995) encourages people to tell their own stories, noting that this can be an important and empowering experience. He is particularly interested in stories about our sexual orientations, and positions these within a wider context of human society as a society of storytellers:

“The ceaseless nature of storytelling in all its forms in all societies has come to be increasingly recognized. We are, it seems, homo narrans: humankind the narrators and story tellers. Society itself may be seen as a textured but seamless web of stories emerging everywhere through interaction: holding people together, pulling people apart, making societies work” (p. 5)

Part C: Graphic Novels and Graphic Storytelling

Comics scholarship is an emerging field, and one that is still developing a variety of strands and discourses. Comics can be analysed through formal analysis, as an art

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9 This is not to say that heterosexual people cannot tell stories that value queer people, or that queer people will inevitably value Queerness simply because of their sexual orientation or gender/sex identity. It is obviously more complex than that.
10 I use the non-gendered pronouns ‘zhe’ and ‘hir’ to describe Leslie Feinberg to affirm ‘hir’ non-binary gender.
11 By this I mean looking towards a formative definition of comics – What is a comic precisely? Where do the boundaries lie? How does one construct a comic?
form, and in terms of narrative literature. While these three approaches have obvious overlaps, their focuses result in significantly different academic discussions.

In this project I do not aim to engage in a formal analysis of comics.\textsuperscript{12} My work clearly fits within standard comic definitions, and does not seek to push the boundaries of this definition.\textsuperscript{13}

I am, however, interested in the exploration of comics as art, and as narrative literature. I am interested in exploring the narrative history of comics; this includes the tendency of comics towards autobiographies, comics as a product of interviews and conversations, and an ideological analysis of comics as a place where minority and queer stories can be told. I am also interested in exploring comics as an art form; this includes the visual and aesthetic value of comics, and how artistic choices create meaning above and beyond the words they are partnered with.

\textbf{Autobiographic History:}

\textit{“I always felt like there was something inherently autobiographical about cartooning, and that’s why there was so much of it...I does feel like it demands people to write autobiographies.”} Alison Bechdel (Emmert, 2007, 37)

The particular genre of comics I am exploring here are those that exist outside of the mainstream super-hero genre\textsuperscript{14}. These comics have been referred to as independent comics, alternative comics, underground comics, and commix. Generally these comics are written, drawn and lettered by the artists themselves.

This comic genre has a long history of telling biographical and autobiographical tales. This is seen in the works of Marjane Satrapi, Robert Crumb, Joe Sacco, Harvey Pekar, Julie Doucet, Debbie Dreschler, and Art Speigelman.

As handcrafted artwork, comics are particularly well suited for autobiography – or, as Lynda Barry terms it – an “autobifictionalography” (Matheson, 2002, pg. 1). The artist/writer/creator literally frames the story – they are responsible for literally

\textsuperscript{12} The work of Scott McCloud, Will Eisner, Thierry Groensteen and many others more than cover this topic.

\textsuperscript{13} McCloud’s (1994) standard definition of comics is; “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (p. 9).

\textsuperscript{14} I use Leonard Rifas’ (2004) definition of mainstream comics: “created by teams of full-time professionals (a writer, a penciller [sic], an inker, a letterer [sic] and a colorist [sic]) working for commercial publishers” (p. 24)
marking the page, for designing the characters and artwork style, for positioning the images within the frames\textsuperscript{15}.

Barry’s “autobifictionalography” recognises the subjectivity of the author, who has literally framed the story, making choices about what to include, what to leave out, and how to present the story. There is an intimacy with the author, as there is a visceral connection that details their personal work on the page.

**Biography and Interviews**

Comics have not just been used to tell the author’s own stories, but also the stories of others. Joe Sacco and Art Spiegelmen demonstrate the use of interviews as the basis of comic storytelling. Joe Sacco is an investigative journalist and comic book writer. His work includes *Safe Area Gorzade: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1995-1996* (2000), and *Palestine* (2001). Drawing on his journalistic background, Sacco conducts interviews and recreates historic events in comic form.

While Sacco’s approach tries to be more objective, Spielgelmen’s work, particularly in *Maus I* (1989) and *II* (1991), allows much more for the subjective presence of the author. The *Maus* series are the autobiographical tale of Spiegelman interviewing his father, and then recreating his father’s experience of the holocaust.

**As a site for Queer Storytelling**

From my perspective as a queer comic artist, the use of graphic media in storytelling within and beyond queer communities is particularly interesting, and web-comics are emerging as a popular storytelling medium.

In recent years the critical and financial success of Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006) has shown that there is a market for telling queer stories in graphic novels. Her novel has become a prominent example of mainstream success\textsuperscript{16} not only for a graphic novel, but also for a graphic novel that explores queer identities.

\textsuperscript{15} Chute (2010) describes how comics lend itself to autobiographies through the fact that “the same hand is both writing and drawing the narrative… leads to a sense of the form as diaristic; the is an intimacy to reading handwritten marks on the printed page, an intimacy that works in tandem with the sometimes visceral effects of presenting “private” images.” (P. 10)

\textsuperscript{16} *Fun Home* was named “Book of the Year” by *Time* magazine, “#1 non-fiction book” by Entertainment Weekly, and one of the top 10 books for 2006 by *The London Times and New York Times Magazine*. (Emmert, 2007, p. 36)
Other major names in independent comics that deal with homosexuality and gender/sex diversity include: Diana DiMassa (*Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist*, 1999), Howard Cruse (*Stuck Rubber Baby*, 1996), and Joey Allison Sayers (*Just So You Know*, 2009 and 2010).

**Comics as a Queer art form**

“Comics convey several productive tensions in its basic structure. The words and images entwine, but never synthesize. The frames – which we may understand as boxes of time – present a narrative, but that narrative is threaded through with absence, with the rich, white spaces of what is called the gutter.” (Chute, 2010, pp. 5-6)

The nature of comics as an art-form is queer. To begin with, there is a lot of debate surrounding what actually constitutes a comic (Chute, 2010, p. 7). As a genre, comics resist definition in a way that is analogous to queer.

Chute (2010) describes the medium as “an elliptical form” (p. 7); comics combine words and images, offer narrative as well as visual art, and make meaning through both frames and gutters. Furthermore, Chute (2010) notes that comics mix “conventional ‘high’ and ‘mass’ elements; they are handmade but mass-produced, as well as often read as ‘low-brow’ while adopting ‘high art’ avant-garde techniques (pp. 10-11). This mixture is akin to postmodern queer theory.

Comics are a unique, sometimes contradictory medium, that Chute (2010) designates a “hybrid” form of art and media (p. 10). This hybridity can be seen “as a challenge to the structure of binary classification that opposes a set of terms, privileging one” (Chute, 2010, p. 11). In their resistance to tightly held classifications, comic art again proves analogous to queer politics.

**Comics, Style and Intertextuality**

The stylistic choices a comic artist makes have huge effects on how the reader interprets the work. Style “usually describes surface details like line quality, a way of drawing faces, or one’s use of dialogue.” (McCloud, 2006, p. 212). Comics can incorporate a huge range of styles of artwork, from the rigidly realistic to the incredibly abstract.

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17 Gutters are the space *between* the panels. For more information on gutters see Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (1994 pp. 60-93)
McCloud (1994) explains that the choice of art style has an immediate effect on the reception of the comic. He suggests “comics harness the power of cartoons to command viewer involvement and identification – and realism to capture the beauty and complexity of the visible world.” (1994, p. 204)

In addition to affecting readership, stylistic choices can signify a lot about the artist’s outlook, passions, priorities, as well as the times and places they have come from (McCloud, 2006, p. 213). In *Understanding Comics*, McCloud explores the styles of comic artists, breaking down his analysis of the “pictorial vocabulary” (range of artists style), along a triple axis:

Like written literature or films, adopting different styles (particularly styles that are significant to a particular artist or genre), locate the comic in a particular way. The reader can identify the work within a context, and can read more into the image than more just the words. The style can illustrate genre and character-types, as well as an artist’s politics, historical context, country of origin, mental state and more.
Commentary

In constructing my portfolio, *Family Portraits*, I incorporated ethnography and autoethnography. I use queer as a theoretical framework and queer as a political tool, speaking from my own perspective, in a way that values queerness, difference and connectedness. I also purposefully adopted various storytelling techniques and artistic styles to influence the reader.

**Part A: Queer Communities, Individuals, and ‘Our’ Stories**

**Storytelling as a Political Tool**

I came to this project from the context of having completed a dissertation about the film *Monster* (Jenkins, 2003). My dissertation explored *Monster* within the context of the common tropes adopted by mainstream media to represent queer women. My central argument was that mainstream media often propagates the idea that if you embody too much difference (if you are non-white, non-male, non-middle/upper class, non-straight, non-hegemonically gendered, non-able-bodied, etc.) then you’re deemed to be unstable or violent (either towards yourself or to others).18

*Family Portraits* is anchored by a commitment to resisting those tropes. I wanted to create stories that celebrated difference, and celebrated queer identities in particular. I use my comic as a political tool to resist the notion that queer identities, whether fluid or stable, result in trauma, chaos or violence. In doing so it felt important to use real stories from existing individuals, and to explore their multiple identities (religious views, cultures, races, politics, historical contexts), so as not to fall into the trap of creating merely two-dimensional representations.

Of course, some of the stories in the project involve violence and trauma. This trauma is explored particularly in the comic “Little Bear” (pp. 76-78) and “On Sadness” (pp. 80-83). In the comic “Little Bear”, for example, I explore my own grief and trauma around

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18 This was highlighted within the context of *The L Word* (Chaiken, 2004), wherein the characters are permissible and not (wholly) unstable. This is due to the fact that they’re mostly white, they’re very rich (and are avid consumers to boot) and they are all mostly hegemonically gendered (even the so-called ‘butch’ one is laughably femme). They are essentially the women in *Sex and the City* (Star, 1998), only they sleep with each other, not Mr. Big.
a friend’s suicide. In “On Sadness” I address the hurt and trauma that I experienced as a result of homophobia. My overall aim was not to ignore trauma all together, but to explore it in a way that valued individuals and our experiences. I have tried to do this by incorporating trauma into queer individuals experiences, as opposed to the mainstream media’s tendency to equate queerness or difference with violence and instability.
My Story as a Reaction to and Reflection of Others

Throughout the novel I interweave my own narrative with others. My story (the segments that are largely subtitled “Sam’s Story”) incorporates my role as the storyteller and guide, and as a queer individual.

The “Sam’s Story” portions of the novel are spread throughout the text to offer both reflections and refractions of the interview stories. Reflections because the themes of the interview stories are reflected in my own narratives. In contrast, I use the term refraction to denote my attempt to offer counter-narratives to the interview stories. One of the reasons why I chose to incorporate my own narrative into the project was to disrupt the idea that there is one way to be queer.

19 For example, I offer my experiences of a religious upbringing to mirror the religious storyline of Pete’s in “The Love Boat” (pp. 27-54).
The Queer Meta-Narrative

The overall narrative of my graphic novel attempts to deconstruct the notion of fixed, coherent identities. In this way the project adopts a queer meta-narrative. The project begins with “Queer 101” (pp. 5-12); a comic built to coherently describe and label queer identities through articulating concepts surrounding gender, sex and sexuality. This comic adopts an educational style; it attempts to explain and define the term queer and all that that encompasses.

As the graphic novel progresses I problematise these fixed labels by developing characters with complex and multiple identities. For example, the individual stories within the novel have narratives that include characters’ religious identities, genders, cultures, and historical contexts.

As the characters become increasingly complex, so to do the narrative structures and depictions of identity. “My Name is…” (pp. 125-132) and “A Poultry Tail” (pp. 146-149) are two of the most incoherent displays of identity in the novel. “My Name is…”

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As the characters become increasingly complex, so to do the narrative structures and depictions of identity. “My Name is…” (pp. 125-132) and “A Poultry Tail” (pp. 146-149) are two of the most incoherent displays of identity in the novel. “My Name is…”
is the story of Rewi, a tangata ira tane\textsuperscript{20}. The story begins with Rewi as a child; he is depicted as a boy. However, as the story progresses it is revealed that Rewi was born female, and as such grew up as a girl. The reader has been seeing Rewi as he sees himself, as a young boy, not as a young girl. This is done deliberately to play with the readers’ expectations.

The final comic “A Poultry Tail” comes after the conclusion, and is told through the eyes of a small child. The child watches a bird enter his/her yard and he/she attempts to figure out if the bird is a rooster or a chicken. It is never expressed whether the animal is a rooster or not, or if it is both. This reinforces the incoherent and fluid nature of queer, and values resisting definition.

\textsuperscript{20} Tangata ira tane is a maori word used to describe transmen.
Part B: From Biography to Autobifictionography

Ethical storytelling

The original proposal for this project was to interview a number of queer-identified people from Aotearoa and tell their stories in comic form. As the novel progressed I struggled with the ethical implications of this and began to weave my own story in between my interview subjects’ stories.

My ethical concerns were a response to two things: bell hooks’ critique of ethnography, and my experience of physically drawing and creating the comics themselves.

As noted earlier, hooks’ (1990) critique of ethnography demonstrates the danger of a researcher as uninvolved and unfeeling, and the participants as vessels from which to extract information. As I engaged in the interviews I became very aware of this critique and tried to be transparent with the participants about my own investments in the project. I also became increasingly aware of the connections and differences between my experiences and the experiences of my participants. This awareness was extremely beneficial in engaging with the participants; by offering my own experiences I was able to help the participants feel more comfortable opening up.

As the interviews involved both myself and the participants sharing our stories, I decided that it was important to include my story in the project. It felt unethical to ask my participants to share so much, and then not to reveal my own self in the same way.

This decision became clearer as I adapted the participants’ interviews into comics. I reflected on Chute’s (2011) arguments regarding the comic artists’ physical construction of a comic; the artist literally frames the story. In this way it became apparent that I was immutably intertwined with these stories. I had the choice of styles, of character design, of narrative construction, of what felt important to include or not; I therefore felt a responsibility as a co-creator of these stories.

I then began to construct comics that portrayed me as a central character. I did so in response to ethical quandaries I was facing; I did so to address the fear that I was
operating as an ‘uninvolved, unfeeling researcher’, to honour the fact that I played an integral role in the stories that came out within the interviews, and to own that I physically constructed the comics.

This comes out, strongly in “The Love Boat and Re/Draw” (pp. 27-32). In this section I begin with a rough draft of “The Love Boat”. After two pages the comic has scribble marks across it, and I transition to a comic featuring me as the protagonist. The comic then transitions once more to a story of my own experiences with religion, and how that presents a block to my writing of “The Love Boat”. This storytelling highlights both my role as the physical creator of the story and the choices I make in terms of what to include, as well as my role as a queer person, with his own experiences of identity.

![Image](attachment:image.png)

fig 4.B.1 Page 2 of “The Love Boat” – the comic is in rough, clearly first draft form and features a large scribble mark in the last panel to show the artists mark (p. 29).
fig 4.B.2 Page 3 of “The Love Boat” – Showing a transition from Peter’s story to Sam as author, detailing his experience of having a difficult time constructing the comic (p. 30).

fig 4.B.3 Page 4 of “The Love Boat” – Again the comic transitions from Sam as author to Sam as a queer person (p. 31).
Engaging with Privilege

In creating queer comics (or positive queer media representations) I became increasingly aware of how power and privilege structure our lives. The acknowledgement and exploration of privilege became an important consideration for me. My privilege exists on multiple levels. As a storyteller I have the privilege of deeming what is important to tell, and how to tell a story. As a person I embody a number of privileged positions; I am able-bodied, white, educated, and have a certain amount of male privilege.

I explored privilege in the comic “Pakeha Boy”. While this comic is not present in the portfolio it illustrates clearly my ongoing concern to make my own privileges visible, and my commitment to creating queer positive media.

Fig 4.B.4. Page 1 of “Pakeha Boy” – An examination of privilege (not featured in the graphic novel).
Autobiofictionalography

I began with the intention to adopt a journalistic approach – to interview participants and to retell their stories in comic form. As the project continued I shifted from this biographic or ethnographic approach towards a more subjective approach. I borrow the term “autobiofictionalography” from Lynda Barry (Matheson, 2002, p. 1) as it describes both my subjective influence on the project, as well as the fictional elements I incorporated into the stories.

The stories told in this project are based upon themes, experiences and ideas from participant interviews, and from my own experiences. Some of the stories are largely based on fact (with names and places changed to meet ethical requirements), while others have more fictional elements.
A key example of this “autobiofictionalographic” approach is the rainbow character in the “Sam’s Story” comics. The rainbow clearly is a metaphor to explain the emergence of my queer identity. I used this character to provide a mouthpiece for the pride I feel about queerness, to counter to the fear and anxiety that Sam (or, Sarah, as I was then named) felt.

![Comic strip with rainbow character](image)

**Part C: Comic art and intertextuality**

I adopted a variety of styles throughout the comic to help create meaning. I was very interested in exploring how style impacts meaning, and in creating a queer aesthetic.

**Role of Narrator**

I have drawn myself as a major character in the novel. My role is to provide a guide through the comic, and to weave an alternative narrative into the overall story, highlighting the uniqueness and connectedness of our experiences.
I have created two different styles in the comics that are about me as narrator and queer person: a simple colored style, and a denser black and white style. I use a simple colored style to portray myself as the comic creator and guide. It is the same style I use in my web-comic series *Rooster Tails* (Orchard, 2010).

![Fig 4.C.1 A panel from “Introduction” – An example of the comic creator/guide style. (p. 15)](image)

I use the second style, which is a dense, mostly black and white style, with lots of hatching, to illustrate an historical reflection of my narrative of coming out as queer. I have tried to create a rougher aesthetic that is more obviously stylized. This highlights the fact that it was a pen-drawn and adds a diary-like aesthetic. It also emphasizes the minimal use of colour, which is important because this minimalisation is only challenged by the character of the rainbow, whose bright colours highlight the fictional element of the comic.

![Fig 4.C.2 A panel from “I’m a Boy” – An example of the Sam’s queer narrative style, including the fictional rainbow character. (p. 121)](image)

**Stylistic Choices**

The comics that were based on interview material we also created with specific styles in mind. The graphic novel begins with “Queer 101” (pp. 5-12). This comic adopts a very simple style, with characters that use simple lines and iconic features. It is based upon
Scott McCloud’s educational comics *Making Comics* (1993) and *Understanding Comics* (2006), with direct audience address, simple characters, and definitions.

In order to shift the reader delicately into the next interview comic, I selected a simple, minimal approach for “The Love Boat Attempt Two” (pp. 34-54). Again this involved clear lines and icon-based character design. It also involved a monochromatic colour palette (for the most part) to maintain the minimalism.

The next interview comic, “I’m Not a Tom” (pp. 56-70) combines a number of styles. I borrowed from Ant Sang’s *Dharma Punks* (2003), Bryan Lee O’Malley’s *Scott Pilgrim* (2004) and the general tropes of underground 90s comics (McCloud, 1994, p. 55). I wanted to depict an edgier comic, and exploit the politically left sentiments of the characters. For these purposes the underground 90s comic style seemed most appropriate. This style involved thick lines, often created with an ink-brush, and lots of detail. Ant Sang’s (2003) style was particularly inspirational as he addresses similar themes of race and leftist/anarchist politics in his work. In order to bring a little bit of lightness to this comic I borrowed some storytelling techniques from the *Scott Pilgrim* series. This allowed me to introduce the characters quickly and to use humour, as well as incorporating elements of music and gaming into the narrative.
The comic “One Day” (pp. 85-103) is directly influenced by the comics of Will Eisner. The historical context of the story necessitated a more classic, older style. I aim to achieve an Eisner-inspired watercolour style in the ethereal smoky elements present in the first few pages. This comic, similar to many of Eisner’s, oscillates between a heavy use of ‘Voice of God’ narration and minimal dialogue. At times the work becomes almost entirely image-driven.
The action-driven comic “The Escape” (pp. 112-116) needed an action-based style. The work of Jack Kirby was highly appropriate for this, as his comic work often revolved around superhero comics of Captain America, The Fantastic Four, and Thor. Kirby’s comics combine “a powerful design sense” (McCloud, 1994 p. 55) with muscular characters, and high impact action-based frames. I adopted similar techniques for the “The Escape” comic in order to duplicate the energy levels, and create a link between the uniformed roller derby players, and superheroes.

As the narratives got more complex, I preferred more simple styles. “My name is…” (pp. 125-132) adopts the very simple strip-comic style of Bill Watterson’s Calvin and Hobbes (2005) comics. “My Name is…” begins with a boy and his imaginary friend, and so the link between that and Calvin and Hobbes felt incredibly strong. The simple style also allowed for the story to be told in a simple way, which was especially important considering that the narrative was so complex. The ‘reveal’ of Rewi being female-born at the climax of the comic is reminiscent of the reveals that occur in Calvin and Hobbes, when we are reminded that Hobbes is merely a toy.
Similarly, “A Poultry Tail” (pp.146-149) is constructed as a simple story in a simple style, but actually involves a somewhat complex and value-laden narrative. I wanted to end with a simple, fable-like tale, and so adopted tropes from Children’s graphic literature; the story is intended to be read as a picture book, with clearly defined illustrations, and short simple words.
Conclusion

My graphic novel attempts to explore and break down elements of identity, particularly queer identities, within New Zealand. I use my own story as a reflection and refraction of the stories that emerged from my interviews with participants. I adopt a queer structure to the novel as a whole, by deconstructing queer and refusing to create a monolithic experience of the queer community in New Zealand. I include my own story throughout as an attempt at ethical storytelling. I also adopt various styles in order to create visual meaning beyond simply the words of the comics.
References


hooks, b (1990) *Marginality as a Site of Resistance*, in Russell Ferguson (Ed.), *Out there: marginalization and contemporary culture* (pp. 341-344) MIT Press: Massachusetts


Portfolio
FAMILY PORTRAITS

A collection of stories about queer people in Aotearoa
QUEER 101
A super simple comic guide to gender, sex and sexuality
THE QUEER101
THE DOWNLOW ON GENDER, SEX & SEXUALITY
* A super simple comic guide

Queer is a word I like to use.
But not everyone does, & that's cool.

SEXUALITY:
Is all about who you're into.
It could be who you feel romantic, sexual, or curious towards...
Or who you don't!

Most people think of sexuality as a continuum.

Gay/Lesbian
If you're one gender and you're attracted to that same gender you might be gay or lesbian

Bisexual/Pansexual
If you don't have a preference about the genders that you're attracted to, you might use the term bisexual or pansexual

Then there'd be people way along.
Some people are pretty set in their place,
And other people move along the continuum at different times.

Ask me next week!
I'm a girl who likes girls!

And it's WAY more complex than just that!

We can break down sexuality a little further...

Which is one reason why continuums aren't the be all and end all.

These continuums describe types of attractions within sexuality.

So on one continuum someone might be in one place...

I like menfolk, romantically.
And I'm into ladies in a romantic way.
and on the other they might be in a different place entirely

I sleep with ladies, and sometimes with guys too!

SEXUAL

I'm not into anyone sexually

asexual

Or not on the continuum at all!

sexuality words are all about who you like.

gay
straight
bisexual
lesbian
pansexual
omnisexual

These last 2 take into account that there are more than 2 genders. Leading us into

GENDER & SEX

Gender/sex can be thought of as a continuum too, in lots of ways.

MEDICAL WORDS

Vagina
XX Chromosome
Oestrogen

Penis
XY Chromosome
Testosterone
Gender Identity is all about who you are, and how you identify, regardless of the medical stuff. 

**MEDICAL WORDS**

- Vagina
- XX Chromosome
- Oestrogen

**FEMALE**

- Intersex
- XY Chromosome
- Testosterone

**MALE**

**INTERSEX**

- And, like the other continuum, people exist all along the line.
- After all, all of our bodies are different!

**GENDER IDENTITY**

- I'm a girl!
- I'm both!
- I'm a boy!

**GENDER IDENTITY**

- Woman
- Gender Queer/ Androgynous/ Bigendered / Non-gendered
- Man
So, when we think about this continuum there are some words that get associated with others.

Here, let's add some words in

**Gender Identity**

**Woman**
People down this end might use words like 'girl', 'lady', 'woman', 'sheila'.

For most people down this end you would use pronouns like 'She' or 'Her'.

**GenderQueer/Androgynous**
People here might have a more fluid gender identity that moves between man and woman, or exists in a space outside of the confines of either a man or a woman.

Finding words like 'person' is really important, so as not to box people in as either a man or a woman. Some people use pronouns like 'Ze' or 'Hir', while others use 'He' or 'She' and 'His' or 'Her' interchangeably.

Here’s another example of how limited continuums can be: being non-gendered or genderqueer might mean you exist outside of the continuum completely, and not simply 'in the middle'.

**Man**
People down this end might use words like 'boy', 'man', 'bro' and 'dude'.

For most people down this end you would use pronouns like 'He' or 'His'.

Some people move along the continuum from one end to the other.

**Cisgender**
(it's a word used to describe anyone who's not trans)
Plus, the cool thing about this continuum is that there are plenty of ways to travel.*

*This is often referred to as transitioning.

Some people change their names and pronouns, or dress differently.

And others just know that who they are doesn’t match what society assumes.

Some people change parts of their body.

And it can all get much more complicated, too!

‘He’ for me!

My cat brings out my feminine side!

Feminine to me is wearing pink laces in my shoes!

We haven’t even gone into how masculinity and femininity is a continuum, too, and is totally context specific.

We love showing off our femininity!
Using continuums is just ONE way to think about gender, sex and sexuality. There's HEAPS of other ways too!

Many cultures have different words to describe similar concepts. For example, in a Western paradigm, we like to separate gender & sexuality. But that's not the case for all cultures.

Takatāpui is a Māori word, and a cultural identity used to describe non-heterosexual Maori people.

Fa’afafine is a Samoan word that also goes beyond the binaries of male and female, as well as the separation of gender and sexuality.

But, whatever words you use, and wherever you are on any of the continuums (or whichever model you use), you're awesome! And wherever, or however you travel, remember—

The End
Introduction
Hi! I'm Sam. I draw comics.

Here's an old comic I drew about myself.

'Ahgh! I'm so embarrassed about the drawing!"

So I came out as a lesbian.

after not really feeling attracted to anyone for a while.

Boys? Girls? Nah!*

*Books are way better.

Then I started liking guys, but only in a gay way...

Jeez, Rufus Wainwright!

So I started questioning my gender. Now I identify as a transman.

girls can become boys?

and I'm the boyfriend of a trans/genderqueer/boy/person.

Queer is a good word for me.
I've spent the last year drawing this book.

Working with other people to hear their stories.

And trying to find ways to share their stories with integrity.

I'm self-indulgent so I've added my thoughts throughout.

Because their stories had a big impact.

In the following pages you'll find a couple of stories from awesome Kiwis I've met.
People who I've chatted to about their experiences.

And their lives.

About what it means to be gay, lesbian, bi, trans...

Or any other word they use.

These are just some of the stories that exist in our diverse community.

And there are MILLIONS of stories yet to be told.

It's a work of love, and a ‘thankyou’ to all the awesome people who make up the queer community here.

So... shall we begin?
Falling in Love
Sam's Story
I remember the first time I fell in love.

It was all the way back when I was called ‘Sarah’.

Sshhh! Don’t tell anyone!

I remember desperately fighting against it.

I remember the pain of what it felt like to know that how I loved was ‘queer’.

I was filled with

Denial.

Confusion.

Shame.

I remember writing a lot of angsty comics about it years later.
It was weird because my love for her grew slowly and silently over time.

I had no idea it was there until one day I was walking and it struck me.

I like a shot through my heart.

It was as though my feeling had decided to pop into my consciousness...

...that it was tired of being buried...

hi!
Hey Sarah!

I'm your love for Melissa!

Your big GAY love?

Fuck.

You know what that means, right?!

You're a les.

NO! Don't say it!

ssssh!!

lezzzzz.

Someone might hear!!
Soo... if any of our friends were gay, who'd you think it'd be?

You've going on a date? Oohh cool....

You look... woah... You look great.

Shut up! No it wasn't! People think that stuff all the time!

Yeh, gay people do!

listen you! I'm NOT... that, ok!

What do you think when you think of her?

Charming, Crafty, Wise, Joyful, Smart, Witly, Beautiful, Wonderful.
ok. I get your point.

Why do I feel so awful about it then?

Why does she make me feel this way?

Why do I find her so amazing?

Why am I so ashamed?

Why am I different?

Maybe it’s just that I can see how amazing she is... if people could see her through my eyes they’d understand.

It’s not weird or perverse at all.

It’s just love.

*sigh*

It’s not fair.

It’s not fair.
So when mum asked how we felt about moving to New Zealand I was the first to put my hand up.

Ooooh! Ooooh! Yes please!

Distance makes the heart grow stronger, y’know.

No. Distance means you’re not seen, heard or felt.

Distance means that you won’t exist anymore.

*Sigh*

END?
The Love Boat

Peter’s Story
I came out to my sister when I was twelve.

I like boys.

You're too young to know. Talk to me when you're fifteen.

So I did.

I still like boys.

Oh. Ok.

I didn't really tell anyone else. I was an Oamaru farm boy—and it seemed like more trouble than it was worth.

Ooh. Check her out!

Hot! Yeah.

I'd been chosen to represent New Zealand. Me & 300 other young people for a month on a ship.
By the time I left on the ship for World Youth, I was out to a total of five people.

So when I came out to a room full of people at a queer workshop, the population of people who knew tripled.

Maybe it was the fact that they were mostly strangers.

Maybe it was feeling so far away from home.

Or maybe it was Diego, the hot Peruvian facilitator.
How do I write this?

Draft one: I turned this comic into a love story.

And it's not because I'm a hopeless romantic.

It's because I'm terrified about writing the complicated Christian stuff.

Yep. Time for a re-draw.

No time to avoid any more.

No time to play nice.

Love stories are wonderful but it's not really the point of this one.

Confronting one's demons is an unnerving process.
I grew up Catholic. I couldn’t reconcile being queer & Christian.

It didn’t work for me.

There were years of pain trying to reconcile the two.

And then the ache of having to give one away, and deal with the grief.

I remember the feeling of losing a sanctuary.

Churches shifted from safe havens to houses of anxiety.

Ideas that seemed fixed. True. Unquestionable.

Suddenly got thrown into chaos.
I'm not supposed to love?

Or, if I do, it has to be in a certain way?

This doesn't feel right.

So I had to walk away.

What if I hadn't left the church behind?

What if I'd made it work for me?

What if I'd realised...

that the two aren't mutually exclusive?

This is my chance to literally rewrite the narrative.

I feel like the time for me has passed.

There's too much pain to undo.

So I draw someone else's journey.

In the hopes of healing myself in small ways.
The Love Boat

Peter’s Story

(attempt number two)
God & I have always been acquaintances. I was born and raised in a Presbyterian family.

But we haven’t always been close friends.

I generally enjoyed church but I wasn’t exactly an active member.

Come on, home time.

I guess I just went along with it cause that’s what you did ya know?

Ooh, song time!

Like most things at that age, you go along cause everyone else is.

Let’s go swimming!

But there were little things that set me apart.

?? Ooh check her out!

?? Uhh yeh.

?? Hot!!
I came out to my sister when I was twelve.

I like boys!

You're too young to know. Talk to me when you're older.

...and again at fifteen.

I still like boys.

Oh?

What d'ya think mum and dad'll say?

You can't tell them! You can't tell ANYONE!

Woah! Pete! It's ok. I won't!

But, you know bro, no matter what, I love ya, ok?

I didn't tell many others, I was an Oamaru boy.

Hey bro, I think she likes ya!

Oh... cool.
AND IT SEEMED LIKE MORE TROUBLE THAN IT WAS WORTH.

I THOUGHT I COULD JUST GO ALONG WITH THE CROWD.

BUT I KNEW I DIDN’T FEEL THE SAME WAY THAT MY MATES DID.

EVEN SO, I PERSEVERED.

Wanna go out again tonight?

OUT WITH HER AGAIN, BRO?

WHAT ABOUT...

Umm... Yeh.

SSSHH!
You know, it’d be ok if you...

I tried to disengage from it.

Sigh.

At the same time I started engaging more with God.

He became more and more concrete - someone I had a personal connection to.

Someone I had a choice to connect with, not just by a routine I fell into.

Then, at 19 I was chosen to represent NZ on the 21st ship for world youth.

Congratulations! You’re going to Japan!
A YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME.
50 DAYS ON A SHIP. 4 COUNTRIES
300 YOUNG PEOPLE.

I wonder if there'll be any hot boys.

Ruth!

I'm just sayin'...

...you could bring me back one.

Have fun lil' bro!

I arrived in Yokohama and met the other participants.

There were twelve of us from NZ, but the rest came from all over the world.
By the time I left on the ship I was out to about five people in the whole world.

So when I came out to a room full of people at a workshop, the number of people who knew tripled.

Maybe it was the fact that they were mostly strangers.

Maybe it was feeling so far away from home.

Or maybe it was Diego, the hot Peruvian facilitator.

I like boys too.
EITHER WAY, IT WAS IMPORTANT AND EMPOWERING.

Hey...

Thank you. It was amazing you were ama-, ah... it was great.

Thanks for coming along today.

Come here I wanna show you something.

?!
so is "Titanic" your favourite movie?

Ha! It worked for Leo!
That doesn't mean I'm Kate Winslet, ok!

Haha! Come 'ere!
I think we've become the token gay couple...

Well, it's nicknamed the 'Love Boat' for a reason!

Some groups avoided us when they found out.

Uhh...

But it was interesting that as soon as they were alone they were much more friendly.

Hey

Hey

I guess group dynamics are weird like that.

As the weeks turned to days I knew our time on the boat was running out.

Dego & I decided to break up.

I think the distance will be too much.

Reminder: Our closing ceremony begins at 7:30pm.

Yeh... I know.
I'd been away at sea for fifty days, and my life had changed completely.

I didn't know how I'd adjust.

Or how I'd explain what I'd been through.

Mum, dad—there's lots of photos of Diego here... 'cos, well, we fell in love.
Woah, that came out wrong. I mean, uhh... Yeh, I'm gonna go to bed.

Son... it's ok.

I mean, it's a bit of a surprise, but it's ok.

We love you.

I'm proud of you bro.

Though you were supposed to bring me a boy back!

G'night.

C'mon, at least tell me his name!

Thanks!
I went back to my studies in Dunedin.

Welcome back!

How was your trip?

It was amazing! I fell in love!

He's so incredible!

Oh... OK. Woah.

I know, right? It's so awesome!

I found myself back in my old routine.
But it was different

My heart had come alive

But it tugged across the Pacific Ocean.

I'd just got off the phone to Diego...

I miss you.

...when I heard a knock on my door.

Dude, I, uhh, wrote you a letter.

Knock Knock!

Come in!

Oh, ok.
Dear Peter,

I'm not really sure how to write this, but I feel like I need to tell you: homosexuality is wrong. I think you're a good person, but you are living in sin. God does not accept what you're doing.

Ouch.

I love you.

Diego had opened my heart, and love finally made sense.

How could that be a bad thing?
I searched for what God 
had to say about it.

I was scared about what I'd find.

Instead, I discovered beautiful 
passages about love.

“Love is patient; love is 
kind. It does not envy, 
it does not boast, it is not 
proud... it always protects, 
always trusts, always hopes, 
always perseveres. Love 
never fails.”
1 Corinthians 13:4-8

That love was a gift.

“Many waters cannot quench 
love; rivers cannot wash 
it away. If one were to 
give all the wealth of 
His house for love, it would 
be utterly scorned.”
Song of Solomon 8:6-7

A gift to be embraced 
and not wasted.

“Beloved, let us love one 
another, because love is 
of God; everyone who 
loves is begotten by God 
and knows God.”
1 John 4:7

It was odd to see such a disconnect 
from what I'd been told.

Dear Peter,
I'm not really 
this bull I feel like I'm 
emotionallyI'm 
W.A. God's 
don't want 
them to 
and God's 

not a 

nonsense 

not
FROM A DISTANCE, THINGS MIGHT SEEM ONE WAY...

BUT UP CLOSE HELD A DIFFERENT VIEW.

"Whoever lives in love lives in God.
John 4:14"

SO I MADE A COMMITMENT TO RECONCILE THE TWO.

AND REAFFIRMED MY COMMITMENT TO DIEGO

Diego, I can't pretend I don't still love you, d'ya think we could give the long-distance thing a go?

You do?! Diego, that's so amazing!!

I WOULD EMBRACE BOTH WORLDS.

Can I speak to the pastor? I need to organise a meeting.
So, yeh, I'm with Diego. But I still want to be a part of the ministry team.

Sure. Just don't tell anyone, ok?

IT WASN'T ALWAYS EASY 'THOUGH.

Hey...

Hey...

I HAD SOME SERIOUS HEALING TO DO.

Do you think we can work this out?

Umm...

I just can't understand it.

But you...

It's wrong.

WE STOPPED TALKING ABOUT IT AFTER THAT.

THE TWO COMMUNITIES ARE SO OFTEN POSITIONED BY THEIR DIFFERENCES

Christians! Pah!
What Christians don't understand is that their bigotry is oppressive.
Those Jesus freaks!

Hate the sin, not the sinner.
It'll destroy the sanctity of marriage.
It's just unnatural!
I began to realise that in many ways they felt like the fleshy side of the same one.

What? You're gay? Wow... that's surprising.

What? You're Christian? Oh... OK...

The same words kept floating around my head...

Community, love, hope, resilience, fulfillment, truth, belonging, contemplation, existence, spirit, acceptance, joy, enrichment, justice, life.

The two worlds seem so connected.

After falling in love with Diego I felt my knowledge of, and love for, God grow.
And more and more, embracing both was key for me.

They both just make more sense together.

At the end of it all, love is love: I love God, and I love Diego.

And they're the truest things I could know.

Bro, I'm so glad to hear you say so!

'Tho I've known all along.

end.
I’m Not a Tom
Tracey’s Story
You can’t just ignore her, you know.

In actual fact.

Yes.

I can.

Let me rephrase...

You can’t just ignore her and still expect her to be your girlfriend.

TRACEY
THE HERO
26 YEARS OLD
NINTENDO SKILLS: AWESOME
DATING SKILLS: POOR

MYKEY
SURLY DOYKE
27 YEARS OLD
TRACEY’S BEST FRIEND
FUN FACT! SHE’S SURLY
Well this wouldn’t have been a problem if you hadn’t opened your big mouth!

This is all your fault!

What?!
MY fault?!
How could I cause you to ignore your girlfriend?

ONE WEEK AGO...

This Woon Sen is incredible!

You think that’s good, you should try her mum’s!

Oh yeh, why haven’t I met her yet?

Gulp.

Umm...
And now she keeps asking me when I'm going to invite her to dinner at my mum's.

**PRESENT:**

- heh.
- I need a drink.

---

2 beers.

Let's Go.

---

Good Girl.

You're paying, this is your fault.
Might I remind you that it was I, your humble best friend who got the two of you together in the first place.

4 MONTHS AGO...

Aw, man! They've started!!

What?! What?!?

look.
Woah...

Don't say I don't do anything for ya.

Emma, this is Tracey.
BACK IN THE PRESENT....

Well that’s irrelevant now that you’ve made her obsessed with meeting my mum!!

I can’t let her meet my mum...
It’s not my fault that society bows to the monogamous, patriarchal nuclear family model that impels us to connect with our biological family and holds the “meet my parents” moment as a cornerstone to any successful relationship.

And it’s not my fault that your mum’s kinda homophobic.

She calls me ‘Sir’.

No. She’s not.

She’s trying to be polite. She thinks you’re a Tom.

TOM: A THAI WORD THAT OFTEN REFERS TO A BUTCH WOMAN WHO IS ATTRACTED TO FEMME WOMEN, AND CONSIDERS HERSELF TO BE A MAN OR MAN-LIKE.
Just because I’m a dyke doesn’t mean I wanna be a man!

*I sigh*

Some pokeha concepts don’t translate to Thai ones...

I don’t think it’d make any sense.

I’ve caused her enough grief about being Thai already...

The dominant narrative in Thailand is a trans one. How do I explain to mum that I like women—but I’m not a tom, that I don’t wanna be a dude, and that I’m kinda femme-y (shut up, I am), and that Emma is awesome, and that she doesn’t want to be a guy either, and that—
10 OR SO YEARS AGO...

When I was little I remember inviting my mates over to my place.

UM... TRACEY WAS 12, SO WHENEVER THAT WAS...

Sleepover at MINE!

YAYS!

They're here!!

YAY!!
Woah! This place smells funny!!

We're sleeping on the FLOOR?

Where're the forks?

Why does your mum talk so weird?

My mum said she's a mail-order bride!

Guh.
I never invited them back there again.

LATER ON...

Y'all should come over tonight!! To my DAD’s place!!

Ooh! Cooooool! Nintendo!

Yay! Pizza for dinner!

Your dad's place is AWESOME!

heh.
I was a bit of a shit about the whole thing, actually.

Aww mum! We're sooo embarrassing!

Do we have to eat that again? It makes the whole house stink!!

Why can't we just be normal?

I even stopped admitting I was Thai after a while.

I love your olive skin! Are you Italian?

Ah, si—yes!!
It's all just a bit poos.

I don't wanna pretend to be something I'm not.

But sometimes things just don't translate.

*Sigh*

Urgh.

Urgh.
AND! Then a rant about the shaming narrative that surrounds the patriarchal white-imperialist notions that coming-out is the only true way to live, and how it disregards cultural contexts, and pretends that western *Brrrrrrrrrrppp!!!* conceptions will translate easily across cultures and generations. There are some really good reasons not to be out. And those reasons aren’t attached to shame, or repression, it’s just a different context!!

Yeh!

You know, I could always take a whole lot of my anti-anxiety meds and call mum...
My Family

Sam’s Story
Families are funny things.

I often wonder if anyone else has experienced that moment where they realised that their family was really weird.

When I was growing up I thought that everyone had seen The Princess Bride 300 times.

I thought that everyone knew the phrase “don’t cross the streams!”

I still get shivers when people tell me that they haven’t seen Star Wars.

My culture is immersed in films.

It’s how I made sense of the world.

Aaaah, life!

You’re tearing me apart!!

I’m a little dragon.

If I’m happy, you’re happy.

You’ve tried to seduce me...

You have no power over me.

If I’m not happy, you’re happy.

You have no power over me.

You’ve tried to seduce me...

Think you’re beautiful.

Did I stutter?

**for better or worse...**
When I first started writing this I thought that I could just tell other people's stories.

I thought it'd be easy to sit and listen to their stories and then to draw them.

But it felt wrong to put their stories on display without showing mine.

Me. Sam. Who used to be Sarah.

Me. Who maybe was still ever a lesbian - but sometimes called himself that because it was simpler.

Who is white. Australian. And who moved around a lot. Eventually settling in New Zealand.

Who's not sure that he can make sense of other people's stories without owning his own.

Or maybe I'm just a self-obsessed navel gazer.
Little Bear
A comic for my friend
While writing this book, a friend of mine killed himself.

I didn’t know him very well, but it seemed to come out of nowhere.

Or maybe I just wasn’t paying enough attention.

I was up in Auckland when the funeral was held.

I felt so far away and so futile.

So I wrote him a comic.

*sniff*
WAKE UP, LITTLE BEAR.

BRING YOUR BLANKET.

'THOUGH THE SUN IS BRIGHT, THE AIR IS CRISP.

I MADE US SANDWICHES,

WITH PICKLES ON THE SIDE.

DON'T HIDE, LITTLE BEAR.

STAY A WHILE WITH ME.
On Sadness
Sam's Story
I started this with the idea to write something that celebrated our differences.

Where the gay guys weren't just the style-guru-best-friend types who never got laid. Where the gay girls didn't kill anyone, or themselves. Where bisexuals weren't just greedy sex-machines. And where transpeople were actually shown, without being used as a punch-line (in the literal or figurative sense).

I wanted to focus on the positive stories we have.

But not all of our stories are happy.

We experience trauma, sometimes.

So do I avoid trauma?

do I immerse myself in it?
Or do I find a way...

...to embrace both?

Heya! You didn't think I'd go away did ya?!

You've totally stuck with me forever.

Great.

So today we're going to be talking about Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest."

Sir - wasn't he gay?

?!

Umm... Yes, I think so.

It's true! He was.
See! Oscar Wilde, he's cool!

Ewuch!

That's so disgusting!

Fags are so sickening! They should all be put on an island and shot!!

Now will you be quiet?
One Day
William and Albert’s Story
YOU’LL FIND HIM ONE DAY

HIS SLOW, STEADY VOICE
PUFFED OUT OF HIM, LIKE THE
SMOKE FROM HIS PIPE. WILLIAM
FELT IT SWIRL AROUND HIM,
WRAPPING HIM IN HOPE.

I DON’T THINK
I’LL EVER BE
THAT LUCKY

BUT THE SEED OF HOPE HAD BEEN PLANTED

Could I?
Could I be like them?

EDWARD SHARED STORIES OF
A COUPLE HE KNEW. HE
SHARED LETTERS THEY’D SENT
HIM. HE CREATED A PICTURE
OF THEIR LIVES. IT WAS VIVID.

THEY HAD TRAVELLED,
AND SEEN THE WORLD.

THEY HAD SET UP THEIR HOUSE,
JUST OUTSIDE OF AUCKLAND

LIVING TOGETHER AS A COUPLE
THEY LOVED.
Edward’s words slipped inside William’s heart that night, and set up house. They weren’t going anywhere. His words of hope.

William had never heard such hope before.

Back then you couldn’t have read about it any book. There were no stories for men like them. And it certainly wasn’t visible. Their world was shrouded in secrecy. They had a secret language, and secret codes.

But Edward’s words provided William with a template for how his life could be.

Edward and William had a ritual of meeting every Sunday for afternoon tea. They’d talk for hours.

“I could tell you were family from the moment I saw you.” Edward would often say.

He had ushered William into his world, letting him know there were other men like them.

“Camp” was the word he used.
William's life was pretty simple. He was a good Catholic boy from a tight-knit Dunedin family. He enjoyed his orderly life.

He'd go to work each day...

Using his good looks to sell housewares to newly married housewives.

Occasionally his good looks would work on their husbands as well.

Then, each evening he'd travel the same route back home, where he'd retire to the basement of his parent's home.
HE KEPT TO HIMSELF, MOSTLY, PREFERING THE COMPANY OF HIS PIANO, TO OTHERS. MUSIC WAS HIS SANCTUM

AS THE NOTES SWIRLED AROUND HIM HE DRIFTED OFF TO FAR OFF PLACES

TO SMALL ITALIAN COFFEE HOUSES, AND DIMLY LIT GERMAN BARS,

TO HOTEL ROOMS FULL OF FABULOUS PARTY GOERS, AND SMALL APARTMENTS WITH BROODING INTELLECTUALS.

HE'D SIT AND PLAY FOR THEM.

WILLIAM! DINNER'S READY!!

COMING MUM.
ALBERT, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS THE REAL-LIFE OBJECT OF MANY MENS’ FANTASIES HE SPENT FAR TOO MANY NIGHTS RUNNING FROM THEIR AFFECTIONS. HE HAD TO SHOO THEM AWAY.

HE WORKED IN TELEVISION AND EVERY DAY HELD A NEW CHALLENGE.

IN THE EVENINGS HE’D FIND THE BEST PARTIES, AND THE LATEST SCENES.
In his spare time he worked on his house, an exquisite mess that he had bought at 21 and had been repairing ever since.

Lars longed to return to his homeland, and had convinced Albert to be his traveling companion. He knew it was a big decision. After the incident with his first love, and the jealous neighbour, the court had stated that if he left the country he'd never be allowed back. Such was the way before law reform.

Hey Lars! Can you help me with some boxes?

I can't right now Alice!

Wanna come up for a cuppa, Lars?

Hey! I've got some questions for you.

We're getting there mate!

We could fix it and sell it in 3 months - then we'll be all good to go!
Albert knew he wanted to explore the world. To sip coffee in small Italian cafes, to smoke cigars in dark German bars, to find friends in hotel parties and small apartments. He wanted to see more than what Dunedin had to offer.

One morning...

Lars, I'm off to the store to get a shower curtain.

Hi, how can I help you?

Just this, sir?

Oh! Um... Yes.
CAN I GET IT ON 
APPROXIMATELY, I'M NOT 
SURE IF IT'S UH, THE RIGHT SIZE.

I'LL TRY IT FIRST 
AND THEN COME BACK TO PAY 
FOR IT?

NO PROBLEM, SIR. IF I COULD 
JUST GET 
YOUR CONTACT DETAILS?

LARS... I 
CAN'T COME 
TO EUROPE WITH YOU.

THE NEXT MORNING...

LARS...

DID YOU 
GET IT?

OK.

THE NEXT MORNING...

FURNITURE

OK, YOU 
CAN DO IT 
JUST GO IN 
AND ASK 
HIM OUT.

SORRY SIR, 
HE'S NOT HERE. 
I CAN HELP YOU 
WITH YOUR 
ACCOUNT.

OK.
Upon seeing William, Albert's life was changed forever.

Every day he'd walk past the homeware store in a bid to lock eyes with Albert again.

And every Friday evening he'd stay late, hoping that William would follow him.
IT... UHH IT LACKS MOTIVATION.

AFTER YOU FOLLOW ME FOR SO LONG YOU CRITICIZE ME?!

OH NO, I MEAN... I - I'VE LOVED SOME OF THE OTHER WINDOWS THAT YOU'VE DONE.

AND YOU DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING?

WELL, SOMETIMES I THINK I ONLY SEE WHAT I WANT TO.
THEIR FIRST DATE WAS A PICNIC OUT AT WAIKOUITI BEACH
WANNA SEE MY HOUSE?

SURE!

IT NEEDS A BIT OF WORK...

AND THEN I CAN SELL IT OFF.

IT'S PERFECT

SELL IT?! NO! NO!

DON'T SELL IT.
WILLIAM MOVED IN SIX MONTHS LATER.
STOP FUSING DEAR

I JUST WANT IT TO BE PERFECT

Quick! He's here! He's here!!

KNOCK! KNOCK!

Albert, this is Edward

Come in, come in! Make yourself at home.

Great to finally meet you, sir

One sec. Honey, can you help me?
IN THEIR 42 YEARS TOGETHER, THUS FAR, ALBERT AND WILLIAM HAVE MADE A LIFE TOGETHER...

LIVING TOGETHER, JUST OUTSIDE OF DUNEDIN...

TRAVELLING THE WORLD.

BEING IN LOVE.
GRANTED, IT WASN'T ALWAYS EASY.

LOVE RARELY IS.

BUT IT WAS THEIRS, AND NO-ONE ELSE'S.

END.
Queen’s Honours
A brief intermission

We’re just going to take a brief moment out of storytelling to say a few important words.

And I’m calling in my partner Joe to help me out with this one.

Say hello, Joe.

Hello Joe.
In NZ they have a Queen's Birthday honours list.

So we're gonna take a moment to do these queens' honours list.

To honour the Queen Women!

Who strengthen and love us as their own while acknowledging our differences.

To honour the Queen Men!

Who see & sustain us, and who support our foggy masculinities (and gorgeous haircuts).

To the people who call me Mr., sir, brother, man, dude and he without skipping a beat.

And to the people who can be comfortable with my ambiguity, who call me darling, love and person, and those who remove the Mr. & Ms. titles & just leave a dot.

And to those that make mistakes, or take a while, and try it anew next time...

We Thank You. We Honour You.
To the older butch women who teach me so much, and are so much of my past.

And a growing part of my future. Thank you for showing us how to be both gentle and strong.

To the older gay men, thank you for surviving the systemic government sanctioned oppression.

Thank you for being yourself even when the law forbade it.

To the:

Genderqueers, trannys, queers, bois, grrls, butches, people, femmes, tops, bottoms, switches, tomboys, flags, fairies, dykes, rebels, outlaws, fighters...

And queer faces in the street who make the world safer for me even though you don't know me.

And the voices who rise up, shout, whisper and sing for change.

We honour you.
And now, back to our regular programming.

Staring
Sam’s Story
You're not going anywhere are you?

nope.

Umm... hello?

*coy*

You know I'm kind of a lot of fun...

A lot of annoying, more like.

OK then.
The Escape
Sissy Asskick's Story
PUT YOUR HANDS TOGETHER
FOR THE FEROCIOUS MASCARA MASSACRE!

AAAND TONIGHT THEIR DANGEROUS OPPONENTS FROM THE MIGHTY SOUTH: THE DOUBLE D ALL STARS!

THE ONE TO WATCH IS NUMBER 60: THE AMAZING SISSY ASSKICK!

FWEEEEET!!!

FWEEET FWEEEEEET!!!
AAAAAAND THEY'RE OFF!

WATCH ASSKICK POUND HER WAY THROUGH THE PACK!

SHE'S ANYTHING BUT SISSY!

A THRILLING DISPLAY OF POWER, AGILITY AND DANGEROUS BEAUTY!

ANOTHER CASUALTY OF THE PITILESS ASSKICK!
AND COMING UP THE RANKS

IS THE BLOODTHIRSTY HURRICANE HORI!

AND HER SIGHTS ARE SET ON ASSKICK!

ASSKICK BUILDS UP SPEED AS HORI MOVES INTO POSITION...

OOF!

ASSKICK IS AIRBORNE!
THAT'S GOTTA HURT!

OOF!!

SMASH!

BUT WAIT!
WHAT'S THIS?!

WARDROBE MALFUNCTION!

WHAT A PROFESSIONAL!
SISSY STUFFS THOSE BAD BOYS BACK IN AAAND...

ESCAPING TITS!!

SHE'S BACK UP... AND VOWS HER REVENGE ON HORI!!!

END.
I'm a Boy
Sam's Story
When it comes to comics I can be pretty sexist. I'm way more likely to pick up a book written by a woman, and I usually enjoy them more.

There's something quite powerful about reading something that's literally been framed by a woman.

Ow... maybe there's just something subversive about stories that aren't about or framed by white, cisgendered, heterosexual, upper/middle-class able-bodied men. Since so much is created by, and about just this type of person.

All this makes my position somewhat complicated as I embark on my transition from female to male.

I'm a white, middle-class able-bodied man.

What does that do to the stories I tell?

2/3rds there.

Am I even allowed to tell women's stories anymore?

How about stories with non-white protagonists?

If I'm the one with the power to frame those stories then what are the ramifications?

How do I avoid "othering" people?
What if I'm too ignorant to realise my own sexism/racism/classism/ableism?

What if I can't realise it even if I do recognise it?

Being a dude was something that came to me after a series of incidents...

I'd long since embraced my friend the rainbow...

Finally!

I'd like you to meet... my girlfriend!

BUT STILL, SOMETHING WASN'T QUITE RIGHT...

So lovely to see that woman in love!

Woman? But I like woman...

You're so butch, Sarah!

Butch? Are you kidding?

There's something you should know...

Rainbow... what's going on with me? I think I like boys too... but in a kinda gay way. I'm so confused...

Hmm... you might not like this but...

Sarah, meet Joe & Matt...

They're transboys
Hey!

Holy Shit! They used to be girls???
Mind = Blown!

It's sooooo amazing!
Know!

Sooo... you're pretty excited about this, eh?

Ohhhh...
Shiiiit...

Dude, I can't do that again. You and me - we're sticking together this time, ok?

Even if you're incredibly inconvenient.

Yay!
AND SO I WAS A DUDE, A BOY, A MA
STOP!
I'm not ready for that word yet!

I remember cutting my hair and getting up enough courage to try boys' clothes...

If anyone asks, I can say I'm buying them for my boyfriend!

And attempting to make my own binder after getting some advice from a sometimes drag-king...

Ha! I'm sure they'll believe you.

Ahh...

IT DIDN'T WORK OUT SO WELL...

AFTER THAT, I ASKED THE GUYS ABOUT BINDERS.

Uh, yeah, that's not good for your health.

That's a couple of online stores you can get them from.

Oooh, that ones cool!

THE NEXT DAY I ORDERED ONE ONLINE.
Ooh! Yus!

What the? How do I get into this?

Urrgh!

Guh!

Ergh!

Nyaaah!

Eeeek!

Pant

Pant

Pant

Pant

Pant

Pant

Being a dude is so tough!

but so worthwhile!
My Name is...
Rewi’s Story
MY CHILDHOOD CONSTANTLY ECHOES THROUGH MY MIND...

IT'S 1968, AN EARLY SUMMER EVENING WITH BEETLES AND CICADAS STILL BUSILY CAPTURING WHAT AUDIENCE THEY CAN IN THEIR EXTREMELY SHORT LIVES.

I AM A RUNTY FIVE YEAR OLD, RUNNING AROUND LIKE AN ERRATIC PUPPY WITH MY MAKE-BELIEVE FRIEND WHO IS CHASING ME.

WO-OAH!
I WILL TRIP AND FALL MANY, MANY MORE TIMES. THIS MEMORY HOLDS TIGHT TO ME REASSURING ME THAT I CAN ALWAYS DUST MYSELF OFF.

TENA KOE
MY NAME IS REWI

PART TWO
I AM A VERY LUCKY PERSON

IT'S THE 1970'S, SEMI-RURAL NEW ZEALAND. I LIVE WITH MY GRANDMOTHER, MY GRANDFATHER DIED AFTER HE CAME BACK FROM THE WAR.

RARRRR!

NO RUNNING INSIDE, YOU LITTLE BUGGER!

RARRRRRR!
I sometimes wonder if my grandma had been in the army too. She was so bossy and purposeful.

Breakfast at the ready, 7:30 am sharp: porridge, fry bread, and a cup of hot tea. All prepared on the ol’ coal range.

One question that keeps coming back to me—why do some children train to be warriors and others do not?

All finished. See ya!

The elders (nga kaumatua) observe us children (tamariki). It is apparent to them which children are warriors, gardeners, healers, food gatherers, speakers, singers, leaders, etc.

Hmm...

Oooh...

If
OUR FUTURES ARE DETERMINED BY HOW WE ACT, AND REACT, AMONG OUR PEERS.

*MUG PIE.*

MUG PIE!

MUG PIE!!

WHAT YER DOIN’?

UM... NUFFIN'.

...MUG PIE....

YER WHAT?!

MUG PIE!?!?

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!!

AS WE GROW WE ARE TRAINED INTO ROLES THAT BEST SUIT OUR PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES.

YER THE NEW KID, RIGHT??
YER FOUR, RIGHT?

FOUR AND A HALF!

SO WHO'S THE PIE FOR, KID?

UMM...

FOR YOU!

MOST IMPORTANTLY, WE BECOME VALUED MEMBERS OF THE TRIBE.

OH YEAH, I LIKE MUG PIE TOO. YEH, I'LL HAVE SOME, KID.

TO BE HANDED DOWN THE KNOWLEDGE FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT IS AN AWESOME CONCEPT OF A PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND FAMILY (WHANAUONGATANGA) AND SUPPORT (MANAAKITANGA).

TENA KOE MY NAME IS REWI. I AM MAORI.

PART THREE

I HAVE BELIEVED IN MYSELF SINCE I WAS A CHILD, AND HAVE WORKED TIRELESSLY TO UNDERSTAND 'ME'.
I'm in my twenties, and I finally find the words that are medically and socially assigned to people like me.

Hey Sugar...

Woah!

I feel a connection...

Come on, kid.

I can relate to you.

But I'm not like you.

I'm the opposite...

I work even harder against all odds to be happy— not only in my smile, but in my heart.

What the heck is a transsexual, anyway?

Oh... shit.

That's me...

That's me.

You're a man! You were born to be a man!

Heart—what are you telling me?
So many people do what they have to to feel safe, happy and comfortable within their surroundings. It takes a lot of work and changes to finally get to a place when you can say “that’ll do.”

I’m a, well, um...

I’m not a woman...

I know exactly what you’re saying.

I know what we can do.

My journey, from a baby girl to the proud man I am today, is but one story of many thousands of people like me, who have gone before me, and who will continue long after I’ve left this earth.

Tena koe. My name is Rewi. I am Maori. I am transgendered.
Trans/sexual
Sam's Story
To label, or not to label?

I remember writing a comic about labels and sexuality about 5 years ago.

Eep! Iapome the chest bumps please!!


Monosexual. Transgender. Intersex.
Takata'pui. Fa'afafine. Queer.
Brokeback. Gender Bender. Camp.
WHY DO YOU INSIST ON LABELLING ME?

You try to put me in a box.

With clearly defined labels, straight, gay, lesbian, and solid boundaries.

With no chance to redefine, to shift, to change, to move, to grow, to discover.

IT'S JUST NOT THAT SIMPLE.

labels are hard, and confusing.

And when you add gender to the mix, you get a whole lotta muddle!
I remember talking with Joe about all of it...

So you're genderqueer, non-trans?

Well... I use words like trans and genderqueer, and gay, and femme, and bi, and girlboy... I'm kinda masculine, but not really a man, and not really a guy or a woman, either.

I choose both and neither.

huh...

Well, that's confusing.

Well, excuse me for confusing you about my gender! Gosh, that must be really difficult for you. I'm so sorry for causing you confusion.


Well, it kinda is, but I just mean I'm confused 'cause I think that you're not.

And I'm kinda gay, I mean, like guys in a gay way...
But I still like girls too—mostly the queer dyke ones.

And I, Uhh... Well I like you.

So— if I like boys AND girls AND girlboy/femme/transboy/faggy/girlish/non-man-non-woman-type-people, what does that make me?

Not really gay, not really straight, not really bi, just kinda... Um...

Complicated?

I think complicated is good.
Conclusion
I like to think that I can break things down, and make things easy to understand.

That gender fits neatly on a continuum, and sexuality fits neatly on a separate one.

I like to think that my whiteness sits in a whole other room completely.

And that my identity as a person who grew up in Australia and New Zealand in the '80s & '90s is another separate thing.

As well as the fact that I was raised a girl.

The truth is—they all mingle and mix in together.

and don't ever break down in the same way for anyone.

All the protagonists in this book identify as queer (or at least as not straight or cisgender).
But we all do it our own way.

We've all just trying to be.

In our own, sometimes similar, ways.

I started T last month.

I'm excited to get hairy, and have my voice break.

To not have to worry about whether I'm going to get sir'd or ma'am'd when I go to the shops.

* T is short for testosterone. I've started hormone therapy.
And... I'm terrified.

What if it doesn't work in the way I hope it will.

Or what if it does and I don't like who I become?

What if I become a misogynist?

Or an a**hole?

What if I become one of them, and lose the 'us'?

I have so many questions left to answer.

And so many more questions unasked.
But something tells me that's ok.
A Poultry Tail
An extra little comic
A chicken wandered into our yard one day. It decided our grass was just the right level of softness, I guess.

We watched it discover the clubhouse and the swingset. We watched it examine the cabbage tree down the back.
Do Chickens crow?!

Cock-a-doodle-do!

I liked seeing it when I looked out my window. It was so curious. It made me happy to think that it chose our yard.

Apparently roosters crow... roosters also have tail feathers.

Sometimes we’d try to approach it. But it was too shy. It didn’t like to be touched, I guess.
STILL, I LIKED WATCHING IT GROW.

Hey... look at the tail! It wasn’t like that yesterday... was it?

I LIKED WATCHING IT CHANGE.
I LIKED WATCHING IT DISCOVER.
I LIKED WATCHING IT BE.