HOLY HOMOPHOBIA: DOCTRINAL DISCIPLINING OF NON-HETEROSEXUALS IN CANADIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

by

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In 2012 clashes between Catholic canonical law and Canadian common law regarding sexual minorities continue to be played out in Canadian Catholic schools. Although Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms ensures same-sex equality in Canada, this study shows that some teachers in Alberta Catholic schools are fired for contravening Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality, while Ontario students’ requests to establish Gay/Straight Alliances are denied. This study seeks to uncover the causes and effects of the long-standing disconnect between Canadian Catholic schools and the Charter by comparing the treatment of and attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (lgbtq) teachers and students in publicly-funded Catholic school systems in the provinces of Alberta and Ontario. I employ a multi-method qualitative research framework involving: 1) semi-structured interviews with 20 participants (7 current and former teachers and 13 former students), 18 of which are represented as condensed narratives; 2) media accounts that illustrate the Catholic schools’ homophobic environment; and 3) two key Alberta and Ontario Catholic policy and curriculum documents. The central question driving this study is: How does power operate in Canadian Catholic schools? Is it exercised from the top down solely, or are there instances of power rising up from the bottom as well? To answer this question, I draw upon the critical theories of Gramsci (1971), Althusser (1970/2008), Foucault
(1975/1995), and Giroux (2001) in order to explain the phenomenon of “holy homophobia” in Canadian Catholic schools. The chief finding of this study is that contradictory Catholic doctrine on the topic of non-heterosexuality is directing school policy and practice regarding the management of sexual minority groups in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools, positioning these schools as potential hotbeds for homophobia. Hopefully, this thesis can one day serve as a resource for anti-homophobia education researchers and practitioners, school administrators, educators and students who are interested in eliminating religiously-inspired homophobia in school settings.
Acknowledgements

I have spent the last five years reading theory, learning how to design and conduct a qualitative study, and struggling through reams and reams of homophobic documents. Without suitable guides throughout this process, I doubt I ever would have made my way.

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**Frequent Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACB</td>
<td>Alberta Catholic Bishops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACSTA</td>
<td>Alberta Catholic School Trustees’ Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACBO</td>
<td>Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (new name of the OCCB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCCB</td>
<td>Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSSA</td>
<td>Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSA</td>
<td>Gay/Straight Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lgbtq</td>
<td>lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCCB</td>
<td>Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops (now replaced by ACBO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGASO</td>
<td><em>Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To Leanne Iskander and other secondary school student leaders like her
Chapter 1

Introduction

Holy Homophobia:

Doctrinal Disciplining of Non-Heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic Schools

In March 2011, a group of students at St. Joseph’s Secondary School in Mississauga, Ontario took on a significant battle for Canadian lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (lgbtq) rights by requesting permission to establish a Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) club in their school (Baluja & Hammer, 2011; Houston, 2011d). Originating in the United States, a GSA is an in-school student club whose focus is on making the school a safe space for lgbtq students and their straight allies by raising awareness about, and hopefully reducing, school-based homophobia. The students, led by a 16-year old Grade 11 student named Leanne Iskander, are vowing to continue their fight into the next school year. Judging by the lack of media stories about problems in trying to set up a GSA in Canadian secular public schools, and by the lack of formal mechanisms in place to issue a ban on GSAs in non-religious public schools, the establishment of a GSA in these schools does not seem to be an issue worth noting – as controversial as setting up an anti-racism club or a debate club – and students in this club have the right to broadcast their club meeting schedule on the school Public Address system, actively solicit other students for their club using posters and other means, meet on school property, and name their club a GSA without any concern over the use of the word “gay.”

In a Canadian Catholic school such as St. Joseph Secondary School in Mississauga, however, Leanne Iskander’s and her friends’ request to establish such a club
has been rejected more than once and has caused serious consternation for not only the administrators of St. Joeseph’s, but also her school district, the Ontario bishops, and the Ontario provincial government (Collins & Kirby, 2011; Galloway, 2011; Houston, 2011d; Kostoff & Abbruscato, 2011). Iskander’s quest for her club has been reported in national media outlets including *The Globe and Mail*, and has even reached international news outlets such as the British *Pink News* and the American *The Advocate* who have reported on Iskander’s “controversial” (in Catholic circles) move to establish a club where she and her friends can be freely lgbtq, and use gay pride symbols like rainbows to promote their club, just like students are able to do in non-Catholic public schools (Baluja & Hammer, 2011; Garcia, 2011; Geen, 2011).

This increasingly public battle between the students of St. Joseph’s school and their Catholic school administrators represents the growing disconnect between publicly-funded Canadian Catholic schools and Canadian society at large. In Canada, same-sex legal rights have been steadily advancing – in 2005 Canada became the fourth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide (Rayside, 2008) – and Canadian Gay Pride parades regularly attract millions of tourist dollars. In the Canadian Catholic school system, however, Canadian advances in same-sex legal rights seem to be virtually unnoticed. As the upcoming chapters in this thesis reveal, lgbtq students are regularly treated as though they are afflicted with a disease that must be “cured,” and lgbtq teachers who are not adept enough at hiding their sexual orientations are routinely fired from their jobs or harassed – all in spite of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* that protects against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.
This thesis attempts to uncover the causes of this lingering disconnect between publicly-funded Canadian Catholic schools and the larger Canadian society, expose the workings of Alberta and Ontario’s Catholic schools’ systemic and blatant discrimination against LGBTQ persons, and most importantly investigate the effects of this discrimination on current and former Alberta and Ontario LGBTQ Catholic schoolteachers and former Alberta and Ontario LGBTQ Catholic students.

**Synopsis of the Dissertation**

The banning of a GSA at St. Joseph Secondary School in Mississauga, Ontario is one of many incidents of homophobic discrimination occurring in Canadian Catholic schools which are actively ignoring their legal and professional responsibilities mandated by the state to protect all students and to maintain a safe, caring and inclusive environment for everyone, including non-heterosexuals. Because most of the Catholic leadership in the preparation of curricular and policy documents on the topic of homosexuality has come from the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops (OCCB) and from the Alberta Catholic Bishops (ACB) (ACB, 2001; OCCB, 2004a), Ontario and Alberta can be regarded as two models and authorities when it comes to devising directives on how to manage sexual minority groups in Canadian Catholic schools. This dissertation is therefore a comparative study of the publicly-funded Catholic school systems in the provinces of Alberta and Ontario vis-à-vis sexual minority groups. At its core are 20 interviews with LGBTQ teachers and former students from Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools – interviews that ranged from 45 minutes to one and a half hours each.

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1 Although 20 people took part in this study, only 18 of their stories are re-presented as narrative research texts in the upcoming “Participants” chapter. The participants’ stories that are excluded repeat the same information as other participants, but in a less detailed way. It is prudent, therefore, to exclude these two stories in order to prevent the data from going beyond a conceptual saturation point (Glaser, 1978;
In order to contextualize the interviews and reveal the extent of the influence of Catholic doctrine on the lives of these 20 teachers and students, I have also included media accounts that report on explicit acts of homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools and two extremely influential and much consulted Catholic curriculum and policy documents that may not be familiar to many people outside the Catholic school system.

The experiences of 20 participants are gained through semi-structured interviews, which are then re-presented in the form of life-narrative vignettes through the qualitative research method of narrative analysis. All participants have experience with Alberta or Ontario Catholic schools, either as a current or former teacher (7) or as a former student (13). All participants identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (lgbtq), except for one Alberta teacher who identifies as a “straight ally.” The interview questions derive from the research questions that direct the study with a view toward uncovering how power operates in Canadian Catholic schools.

Canadians would not have known about St. Joseph’s ban on GSAs, nor would Leanne Iskander be making the little progress she is with establishing her GSA, if it were not for the diligent reporting of the Canadian media. Nor would Canadians have any knowledge of groundbreaking lgbtq-rights cases such as Marc Hall’s fight to take his boyfriend to his Ontario Catholic high school prom (Oziewicz, 2002), or Delwin Vriend’s legal battle to have sexual orientation included as a prohibited ground for discrimination in Alberta human rights legislation after he was fired from his teaching position for being

Lichtman, 2010). Analyses and summaries of the findings of the “Participants” chapter are based on the number 18, not the number 20.

2 When discussing the participants in groups of numbers, this thesis follows the American Psychological Association (APA) Publication Manual rule regarding the special use of numbers to represent participants. Contrary to the APA’s general rule on the use of numbers that requires researchers to use figures to express numbers 10 and above and words to express numbers below 10, the APA requires numbers that pertain to participants to be expressed in figures, regardless of the size of the number.
gay (Pratt, 2008). Both the Hall and the Vriend cases are discussed in more detail in the upcoming “Media Accounts” chapter. The public outrage and activism that resulted around these cases were in large part due to the fact that the media reported on them and brought them to the larger Canadian public. This suggests a tenuous link between media reports and their potential to influence the changing of Canadian law. In addition to examining participants’ experiences and pertinent Catholic documents, this dissertation also emphasizes the important role of the Canadian media in drawing attention to homophobic incidents in Canadian Catholic schools, in the process highlighting a disengagement with Canadian law that protects against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. It is important to note that the Canadian media do not take a uniformly critical view of homophobia in Canadian culture and institutions. Although the Canadian media cannot be portrayed as heroes in the struggle against homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools, the media nevertheless play an important role in disseminating stories about religiously-inspired homophobic discrimination. A newspaper article can become the topic of dinner conversation, which can, in turn, become the beginning of a protest movement. Iskander is not the first schoolgirl to attempt to establish a GSA in a Canadian Catholic school (Callaghan, 2007a), but hers is the first story of this kind to be covered in the Canadian media – in spite of traditional journalistic resistance to stories that examine religion and sexuality at the same time.

This nexus is explored by communications scholar Dane Claussen (2002) in a book he edited called Sex, Religion, Media. Drawing upon the 19 essays he collected for his book, Claussen uncovers North American journalists’ abysmal record in competently reporting on news stories that combine the treacherous topics of religion and sexuality. In
summing up the book’s chapters, Claussen (2002, p. 280) concludes that when journalists are not altogether avoiding stories involving the intersections of faith and sexuality, they tend to overtly deny, or even outright dishonestly portray, the nuanced views of human sexuality held by various religious organizations. Claussen’s observation may account for the lack of media coverage of earlier attempts to set up GSAs in Canadian Catholic schools, but the amount of media coverage Iskander has received suggests this trend is changing. Although media coverage of such stories may unwittingly reproduce heteronormative views of sexuality and gender, the fact that such stories are now being covered at all suggests an important turning point that may lead to greater discussion of the vexing problem of homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools. This is the vital role the media can play in heightening awareness of this little-known problem in Canadian schooling. The media accounts collected in this dissertation range from media coverage of important court cases to coverage of homophobic school policies. The media reports are carried by large, established media outlets such as the Canada’s English language national newspaper, The Globe & Mail, Canada’s national public radio and television broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and smaller outlets such as Xtra! Canada’s Gay and Lesbian News. Although it is a comparatively small weekly newspaper with lower circulation numbers, Xtra! in particular has been key in breaking significant lgbtq news related stories long before the larger outlets have. The Leanne Iskander story, for example, was diligently pursued and written about by Xtra! reporter Andrea Houston weeks before the story was written about in more mainstream, and traditionally more heteronormative, publications such as The Globe & Mail. Although it
is considered a minor newspaper in the Canadian news landscape, *Xtra!* is an essential news source as far as Canadian LGBTQ topics are concerned.

Catholic doctrine is at the root of the religiously-inspired homophobia occurring in Canadian Catholic schools. For those unfamiliar with Catholic doctrine regarding LGBTQ people, who are referred to in Catholic parlance as “persons with same-sex attraction” (OCCB, 2003, p. 3), it can be distilled down to the colloquial Christian expression: “Love the sinner, hate the sin.” This irreconcilable concept underlies curricular and policy decisions regarding sexual diversity and the existence of sexual minorities in Canadian Catholic schools. This dissertation examines two primary Catholic documents from the provinces of Alberta and Ontario written by Catholic bishops and Catholic education leaders to clarify for Catholic educators the official Catholic doctrine on non-heterosexuality. The 2004 Ontario text is titled *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* and the 2007 Alberta text is titled *Toward and Inclusive Community*.

A combination of these three qualitative research approaches (participants, media accounts, and Catholic documents) is helpful in revealing the powerful effects of Catholic school policies regarding “persons with same-sex attraction” on the very people for whom such policies were designed. Policies are not always followed in practice, however, and this study also explores instances of resistance to the religiously-inspired homophobia waged by church hierarchy. Ultimately, the central question driving this study is: How does power operate in Canadian Catholic schools – from the top down solely, or are there some instances of power rising up from the bottom as well? The first part of this question concerning the operation of power from the top down resonates with
Marxist theories of the State’s role in oppressing people, which have largely focussed on the one-way direction of power; that is, from the top down. The second part of this question about the possibility of power operating from the bottom up evokes a Foucaultian analysis that attempts to move theorizing about power beyond the notion of power as repression of the powerless by the powerful to an exploration of how power operates between, among and within people and institutions, including the role individuals can play in affirming or resisting repressive, top-down power. The religiously-inspired “holy homophobia” of this study involves multiple forms of power – certainly the coercive, regulatory, and repressive kinds of power, but also, paradoxically, the productive elements of power that can be born out of oppressive measures.

In gesturing towards an answer to the central question driving this study, this doctoral research project draws upon the critical theories of Gramsci (1971), Althusser (1970/2008), Foucault (1975/1995), and Giroux (2001) – all of whom have formulated theories regarding the function and mechanics of repressive power within cultural institutions – in order to illuminate aspects of the empirical data that might begin to partially explain the phenomenon of “holy homophobia” in Canadian Catholic schools. Each of these theorists’ concepts about ideology, hegemony and disciplinary surveillance are premised on different, and, in some ways, incompatible assumptions. Althusser, for example, is particularly problematic not only because of his questionable politics but also because of his non-poststructuralist concept of there being a truth. Although Althusser’s theory of the Ideological State Apparatus is at times uncomfortably abstract for an empirical study, and the theory also suffers from many flaws, it is nevertheless useful in exploring how the Vatican functions in relation to Catholic schools. One way of
mitigating the flaws of Althusser’s overall theory of the Ideological State Apparatus is by supplementing it with Foucaultian micro-analyses of power. Although Gramsci, Althusser, Foucault, and Giroux belong to fundamentally different theoretical traditions, it is not impossible to imagine a basis for their convergence. Indeed, many scholars have worked out how some of these theorists do converge, especially in terms of how different theories can fill in the lacunae or omissions in each other’s concepts; this issue is taken up in more detail in the “Theorizing the Data” chapter.

**Research Goals and Questions**

The overarching intellectual goal of my research is to integrate theory and practice in such a way that educational stakeholders become aware of the contradictions that underpin their educational policies and practices, and hopefully become inspired to change them in the interests of freeing members of sexual minority groups from heterosexist oppression. This emancipatory goal is connected to second generation Frankfurt School critical theorist Jürgen Habermas who espoused a critical social theory comprised of an emancipatory cognitive interest, which is an attempt to account for the origin of meanings, values, and practices in social life (Habermas, 1971). My research goal is also connected to Henry Giroux, one of the leading theorists of resistance in education, who is also aligned with Frankfurt School ideologies in his studies that show how educational policy and practice serve the interests of dominant groups but also simultaneously make room for the possibility of emancipation through the element of human agency and resistance (Gibson, 1986).

If the natural sciences explain the behaviour of natural phenomena in terms of causes, then the human sciences interpret the meaning of social action (Schwandt, 2007).
The meaning I am interested in uncovering is that associated with the Habermasian hermeneutic tradition, where the meaning of social action is to be found not solely in the intentions of the actor, nor in the act itself, but rather in a dialogic interchange between the two (Schwandt, 2007). In this hermeneutic tradition, meaning is being constructed each time one seeks to understand and is therefore never static, fixed, or complete.

Attempting to understand the dynamic meaning of social action in school settings is another intellectual goal of my research, which can be achieved through the conducting of interviews with research participants. In this qualitative study, I am interested not only in the day-to-day practices of Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools regarding sexual minority groups, but also in the particular participant’s perspective of those practices. That is, how participants make meaning of their school settings and practices and how these understandings influence them.

Connected to this goal of uncovering meaning via participants’ perspectives is another intellectual goal of understanding participants’ distinctive Catholic context and the effect it can have on their actions. Use of this term “action,” as opposed to, for example, “behaviour,” is common among qualitative researchers who follow Max Weber’s distinction between meaningful action and reactive behaviour (Schwandt, 2007, p. 1). As one of the leading scholars and founders of modern sociology, Weber’s (1968) fourfold typology of social action has been subsequently elaborated upon by several notable sociologists, including Jürgen Habermas (1981), who argues that social inquiry is founded on communicative human action grounded in an emancipatory cognitive interest. This theory of social action emphasizes the significance of social praxis and argues that interpreting the meaning of an act requires the qualitative inquirer to position the act
within the greater context of the actor’s life, such as his or her social setting (Schwandt, 2007). This emphasis on the importance of context in the interpretation of social action is associated with “hermeneutic contextualism,” the theory that interpretations are necessarily context specific (Schwandt, 2007, p. 43). As a qualitative researcher, my understanding of context is akin to that which generally circulates in the discipline of cultural studies – that context is produced by asking people to talk about how they make meaning out of certain aspects of their particular culture. My goal of understanding the context of Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools regarding sexual minority groups is achieved by asking research participants questions about how they ascribe meaning to particular structures, practices, or events in the social setting of their schools.

Lastly, another intellectual goal underlying this research project is my needing to find more data to test a theory I have been developing about a subtle yet concerted Catholic backlash to the advancement of same-sex legal rights in Canada, which appears to be playing out in some Canadian Catholic schools. I do this by uncovering normally hard-to-access Catholic documents written by provincial Catholic education leaders to ascertain whether or not they hold a formal interest in enforcing the observance of contentious Catholic doctrine related to non-heterosexuality in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools. Added to this is a collection of media accounts that reveals a series of homophobic curricular and policy decisions taken in some Canadian Catholic schools. Because many Canadians are becoming increasingly aware of their equality rights guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, my interest lies in uncovering any LGBTQ individuals who resist the doctrinal disciplining that is imposed upon them in their Canadian Catholic schools.
In order to uncover the information and understanding required to accomplish the aforementioned research goals, this project: 1) offers narrative vignettes that summarize the significant points of interviews with current and past teachers and past students who identify as LGBTQ in order to gain insights into their experiences, 2) presents media accounts of homophobia occurring in some Canadian Catholic schools, 3) studies policy and curriculum documents related to sexual minorities designed to be used in Catholic schools throughout Ontario and Alberta. This multi-method, qualitative inquiry design helps to answer the following research questions:

1) How does power operate within and across Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools?

2) How do Catholic documents produce teachers and students as subjects?

3) What effects do Catholic documents have on the experiences of LGBTQ individuals in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools?

4) Is resistance possible in an educational context so dominated by the repressive force of religiously-inspired homophobia?

This study can be classified as an instrumental case study (Stake, 2005) of religiously-inspired, school-based homophobia because it examines the particular cases of participants’ situations in order to provide insight into the broader issue of homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools. The narrative vignettes crafted out of the participant interviews could be referred to as a collective case study, defined by Stake (2005) as an instrumental study extended to several cases for the purpose of better theorizing about a still larger collection of cases. Of the three Canadian provinces that continue to publicly fund their Catholic schools (Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta),
Ontario and Alberta can be regarded as leaders in Canadian Catholic education because of the larger populations of these two provinces, their bishops who have written prolifically on Catholic school policy regarding sexual minorities, and the long-standing historical connection with Catholicism and early Upper Canada (now known as Ontario). Therefore, Alberta and Ontario have been purposefully selected (Patton, 2002) sites for this case study of homophobia in Catholic schools (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995).

**Context of the Research Problem**

Catholic bishops in the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Ontario who are involved in preparing curricular and educational policy documents on the topic of “persons with same-sex attractions” recognize that sexual minority groups “are often the victims of verbal, physical and more subtle forms of abuse [and that] suicide rates among homosexual students are higher than those of their heterosexual peers” (OCCB, 2003, p. 3). Still, these prolific bishops see no inherent contradiction in writing curricula and educational policy that teaches the homophobic Catholic doctrine that requires LGBTQ individuals to adhere to a call to chastity and celibacy for the rest of their lives (ACB, 2001). The dissemination of this type of discriminatory curriculum is incongruous in a country such as Canada that is considered one of the most socially progressive countries in the world, due, in large part, to its *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the leadership it has shown in terms of the protection of basic human rights (Department of Justice Canada, 1982).

The importance of having a federal anti-discrimination policy in the Canadian *Charter* is evidenced by the regular and consistent legal victories that have been attained in the struggle against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender
identity. Section 15 of the Charter, known as the equality rights provision, has been the chief tool for the advancement of same-sex legal rights in Canada since the Charter became law in 1982. Legal demands for same-sex equality have been on the rise ever since 1995 when sexual orientation was “read in” to the Charter as a prohibited ground of discrimination, and came to be understood as analogous to the types of discrimination originally listed in Section 15, such as race or age (Hurley, 2005). Many non-heterosexual Canadians – adults and youth alike – are becoming increasingly aware of their Charter rights and expect them to be respected in all government-funded institutions, including Catholic schools.

Yet, with this steady advancement of same-sex legal rights in Canada has also come conservative Catholic resistance. It is important to note that conservative resistance or backlash to progressive advances for LGBTQ rights is not confined solely to conservative Catholicism. Part of the reason religiously-inspired homophobia is so pervasive in the Catholic Church and, by extension, in Catholic schools can be attributed to the high level of ambivalence about sexuality in Canadian society more generally. Homophobia and heterosexism also continue to be formidable forces in Canadian publicly-funded secular schools as well. As peace education scholars Kathy Bickmore and Angela MacDonald (2010) demonstrate, a public secular school located in a large, urban centre refused students’ requests to form a Gay/Straight Alliance and, when pressed, only allowed the students to start a heavily constrained and generalized diversity support group within the school. The difference in publicly-funded Canadian Catholic schools is that homophobic discrimination is actively institutionalized through the use of Catholic doctrine. Highly publicized human rights cases involving discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation
such as the notorious Marc Hall case involving the right to take a same-sex date to the high school prom – sparked a response on the part of bishops, primarily in Alberta and Ontario, who began writing local catechisms for Catholic school districts in order to “be clear about the authentic teaching of the Church on sexual morality and in particular in the area of homosexuality” (OCCB, 2003, p. 1). The local catechisms, also known as pastoral guidelines, are essentially curriculum and policy documents written and designed by local bishops to direct Catholic schools on issues of morality (Callaghan, 2007b).

In addition to reiterating the official Catholic doctrine on non-heterosexuality, local catechisms for Catholic school districts admonish teachers in Catholic schools who do not put the doctrine into practice. “It is not sound or acceptable practice,” the authors of one catechism write, “for Catholic schools to teach that certain behaviour is contrary to Catholic teaching, but then to take no action when it is exhibited openly in a school context” (OCCB, 2003, p. 1). At the same time that the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops calls upon teachers to resort to more strict measures for enforcing Catholic doctrine related to homosexuality, they also profess that “students experiencing same-sex attraction should be treated with sensitivity and compassion” (p. 3). On the topic of harassment against students “with same-sex attractions” the Ontario Bishops declare that teachers, counsellors, administrators and chaplains should “ensure that all members of the school community are aware that the Church teaches that abusive behaviour toward any person, for any reason, is unacceptable” (p. 3).

One argument of this thesis is that the contradictory and confusing treatment of sexual minority groups within their midst makes Catholic schools in Canada hotbeds for homophobia and other forms of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or
gender identity. Prior to the rise of same-sex legal rights in Canada in the mid 1990s, there was no push on the part of Catholic bishops to disseminate homophobic Catholic doctrine in Canadian Catholic schools (Callaghan, 2007b). At the beginning of the 21st century, however, new local catechisms or pastoral guidelines on the topic of “persons with same-sex attraction” began to appear, such as those from the Alberta Catholic Bishops (2001) and the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops (2004a) to be examined in the upcoming “Catholic Documents” chapter. This thesis argues that the appearance of these new pastoral guidelines, following the highly publicized advancements of same-sex legal rights in Canada, suggests a Catholic backlash to Canadian equality rights laws for sexual minority groups. This backlash is observable in the publicly-funded Canadian Catholic schools, featured in this study, which exist as small pockets of human rights violations while simultaneously receiving full public funding from provincial governments.

This anomaly begs the question: Shouldn’t educational institutions in receipt of public funding respect Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms? The religious freedom that is guaranteed by Section 2 of the Charter should not be interpreted as the freedom to deny basic human rights to specific groups in the name of that very religious freedom. It is important to note that rights-based claims are contested among legal scholars, philosophers, educators, and other pundits (more on this below). Section 2 is often the crux of the argument advanced by faith-based institutions seeking to be exempt from respecting all forms of equality outlined in Section 15 due to its perceived conflicts with religious beliefs. A solution to this problem may lie in Section 1 of the Charter, which is
a limiting clause that has the capacity to legally restrict *Charter* rights and freedoms if the expression of one right calls for the suppression of other rights.

There are limitations to this kind of rights-based argument. Women and gender studies scholar, Suzanne Lenon (2008, p. 26) critiques what she calls “the liberal equality rights paradigm” because they presuppose the internalization of a neo-liberal assemblage of norms of self-governance. Similarly, sociologists Kinsman and Gentile (2010, p. 10) contend that LGBTQ people continue to experience what they call “a heterosexist regime of terror” at the hands of the Canadian government despite the strength of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Feminist political and social theorist Iris Marion Young (1998) problematizes the universality of citizenship and argues that absolute allegiance to a principle of equal treatment can have the negative consequence of sustaining oppression. Distinguished legal scholar Shelley A. M. Gavigan (2000) underscores the importance of recognizing the contradictory ways in which the law relates to sexual minorities and sexual minorities relate to the law. This contradiction is echoed by another legal scholar, Brenda Cossman (2008, p. 153) who highlights that the important legal advance of same-sex marriage is nevertheless caught in a “state of liminality, betwixt and between recognition and non-recognition.” Although the law may not be a fully sufficient means for securing and maintaining rights, it has been an effective beginning in the struggle against homophobic discrimination in Canadian institutions. This doctoral study takes the view that advances in same-sex legal rights have been extremely beneficial for LGBTQ Canadians. These same-sex legal rights are often the only recourse for LGBTQ Canadians facing religiously-inspired discrimination in publicly-funded institutions such
as Canadian Catholic schools. Although there are limitations to rights-based arguments, they are nevertheless a worthwhile starting point.

Advances in same-sex legal rights in Canada have not only confirmed equality rights for lesbian and gay Canadians, but they have also caught the attention of teachers’ associations across Canada who started to develop policies that protected the rights of LGBTQ teachers and students in Canadian schools (Grace, 2005). These inclusive and diversity-friendly policies are also reflected in other education governance documents such as provincial school acts and teachers’ codes of professional conduct, which have been updated to reflect changes in provincial human rights codes and the Charter in terms of protecting against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2002). It is important to keep in mind, however, that official policies are often far removed from enacted policies and experienced practices in the schools.

The power of these progressive policies to protect vulnerable sexual minorities against discrimination in Canadian schools is significantly weakened by the fact that Catholic school districts often deftly sidestep them, claiming that they are contrary to Catholicity (Callaghan, 2007a). Homophobic catechisms affirming the Catholic teaching that the “homosexual inclination” is “objectively disordered” and “homosexual practices” are “sins gravely contrary to chastity” (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops [CCCB], 1997b, paragraphs 2358 & 2396) are clearly in violation of equality provisions outlined in school acts and teachers’ codes of professional conduct across the country, which confirm LGBTQ teachers and students’ right to pursue their educational goals in
Canadian schools free from fear of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities, n.d.).

Canadian Catholic education leaders’ conservative reaction to increasing advances in same-sex legal rights has gone virtually unnoticed in educational and social justice circles in Canada. This dissertation examines how Catholic doublespeak (Callaghan, 2007a) contained in local catechisms or pastoral guidelines furthers homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools, calling into question the rationale behind further public funding for these privileged faith-based schools. In describing these schools as “privileged,” I am referring to the United Nations Human Rights Committee rulings in 1999 and 2005 declaring Canada to be in violation of Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights because it provides public funding only to Catholic schools and not to other faith-based schools (Civil Rights in Public Education, 2005).

This type of governmental funding favouritism becomes even more significant when one considers that Canadian courts have constitutionally upheld the right of denominational schools to legally discriminate against their teacher employees on religious grounds (Covert, 1993). Not only do Canadian Catholic schools receive preferential funding from the state, but they also enjoy the benefits of Canadian legal precedent, which has historically granted denominational schools the privilege of exercising the rights of the religious group over the individual rights of teachers. The right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, guaranteed by Section 15 of the Charter and reflected in subsequent educational governance documents, is currently in jeopardy in Canadian Catholic schools.
Of all the Catholic doctrine that could be enforced in these schools, it seems the doctrine related to non-heterosexuality is the most popular in this new era of conservative Catholic leadership under the direction of Pope Benedict XVI, who has taken a keen interest in the topic. When he was known as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, for example, Pope Benedict XVI was responsible for a Vatican encyclical that condemned the homosexual orientation as “an intrinsic moral evil” and “an objective disorder” (Vatican Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986, item 3). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which teaches that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered” (CCCB, 1997b, paragraph 2357), is used to regularly intimidate, harass, and dismiss LGBTQ individuals in Canadian Catholic schools who are open about their sexuality, sexual expression, and gender identity (Callaghan, 2007b).

Until the 1999 and 2005 United Nations rulings became well circulated, few called into question the public funding of separate school systems in Canada. Questions about historical funding models for Canadian Catholic schools lead to questions about the operation of these schools along the lines of Catholic doctrine, particularly when the adherence to Catholic doctrine clashes with adherence to Canadian law. Some members of the Canadian public started to notice that the publicly-funded Catholic school systems that still exist in Canada are using their denominational school rights, guaranteed by Section 29 of the *Charter*, to ensure students and teachers adhere to contentious Catholic doctrine regarding sexual minorities in Canadian Catholic schools, even if this requires an infringement on their human rights guaranteed by other sections of the *Charter*. Few Canadians are noticing, however, that Canadian Catholic schools are working very hard to justify their existence and differentiate themselves from the secular public schools,
including preparing contradictory curricula and educational policies that confusingly proclaim “homosexual persons are called to chastity” while simultaneously refusing to acknowledge that this chastity requirement constitutes a “sign of unjust discrimination in their regard [that] should be avoided” (CCCB, 1997b, paragraphs 2359 & 2358). Of course, attempting to ensure that more members of the Canadian public are made aware of homophobic discrimination occurring in Canadian Catholic schools is not a guarantee that they would take action to redress this problem. Nevertheless, a heightened awareness about discrimination associated with Canadian Catholic schools – in the form of the United Nation’s public admonishment of Canada for preferential funding of Catholic schools, an increase in news media coverage of homophobic incidents in Canadian Catholic schools, and academic studies such as this one – is a good place to start.

This dissertation shines light on these obscure and little-known incongruities in Canadian Catholic schools and provides knowledge and perspectives that may assist Catholic school districts interested in developing policy and practices that are more positively responsive to sexual and gender diversity and matters of inclusion. In addition to Catholic school districts as a potential audience, this thesis is also directed towards students and teachers, along with members of the Canadian public more generally, who may be interested in issues of social justice and human rights, and who may be moved to take action against the doctrinal disciplining of non-heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic schools. This thesis draws upon the critical theories of Gramsci (1971), Althusser (1970/2008), Foucault (1975/1995), and Giroux (2001) to reveal not only how LGBTQ students and teachers are dominated by the Vatican and its Catholic doctrine about non-
heterosexuality, but also how power relations between and among individuals in Catholic schools manage to circumvent the power of the Vatican.

The three main arguments of this thesis are as follows:

1) Contradictory Catholic doctrine regarding “persons with same-sex attraction” makes Canadian Catholic schools potential hotbeds for homophobia;

2) The appearance of several new pastoral guidelines on the topic of non-heterosexuality since the highly publicized advancements of same-sex legal rights in Canada reveals a Catholic backlash operating in some publicly-funded Canadian Catholic schools;

3) The repressive force of doctrinal disciplining of non-heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic schools is more powerful than its productive force, but various acts of subversion and resistance are nevertheless possible.

**Defining Homophobia in Educational Contexts**

Homophobia is most commonly defined as an irrational hatred and fear of non-heterosexuals, specifically LGBTQ individuals. The term homophobia was first used among American psychologists in the late 1960s and early 1970s to describe a fear held by heterosexuals that others might perceive them to be homosexual (Herek, 2004). Although psychologists were the first to use the term, it is not listed as a bona fide phobia in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. It is therefore more of a cultural rather than clinical term. As an illustration of this cultural usage, in his foreword to a book devoted to teaching about sexual diversity,

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3 A version of this sub-section has been accepted for publication in the 2012 *SAGE Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education.*
Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu refers to homophobia as a “crime against humanity” comparable to apartheid (van Dijk & van Driel, 2007, p. vii).

Members of religious groups who oppose homosexual behavior on moral grounds have objected to the term homophobia because it suggests their opposition is fear-based rather than legitimately tied to sacred religious texts and grounded in what many religious people regard to be a socially accepted prejudice (O’Donohue & Caselles, 1993). Despite objections to the term homophobia and its questionable semantic accuracy, its early use in the 1970s cemented it as the most common way to describe prejudice and discrimination directed towards LGBTQ people.

In institutions of higher learning, homophobia is often studied in conjunction with other forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, and classism. Anti-homophobia education and activism address the myriad forms of homophobia, including institutionalized homophobia and interpersonal homophobia. Attempts to reduce homophobia in public schools are expressed as anti-discrimination provisions in various levels of state legislation and also through popular movements, but these are invariably met with counter resistance campaigns from certain religious groups.

Institutionalized Homophobia

Some scholars reject the notion that homophobia is an irrational fear of non-heterosexuals due to its pervasive presence in influential institutions such as the military, education, and justice systems (Herek, 2000). These scholars argue that to understand homophobia as an irrational fear is to associate it with a personal anxiety disorder such as social phobia, rather than to see it as a cultural phenomenon that has found systemic
expression in societal institutions. Institutionalized homophobia is used to describe discrimination against LGBTQ people that has its roots in social and cultural relations.

In terms of the military, for example, many governments around the world have historically engaged in a form of institutionalized homophobia by banning homosexuals from serving in the armed forces (Levy, 2007). This kind of discrimination started to fall away, however, due to social change occurring in the 1960s throughout the Western world, which sparked what was then known as the Gay Liberation Movement in North America, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand (Carter, 2004). LGBTQ activists staged public campaigns and demonstrations that ultimately increased social acceptance of sexual and gender minorities and led to several advances in same-sex legal rights. Aware that their policies banning homosexuals from serving in the military were not in keeping with the social values of the times, most Western armed forces removed their homophobic policies in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s (Segal, Gade, & Johnson, 1993).

In terms of educational institutions such as public schools, institutionalized homophobia is expressed in the absence of references to, or support for, sexual minority groups. Schools often lack educational policies written specifically to protect students, teachers, and others working within school systems from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (Goldstein, Collins, & Halder, 2008). Similarly, it is rare to find mainstream curricular materials that mention the existence of non-heterosexuals, and even more unlikely to find any that present LGBTQ people in a positive light by referring to their historical and cultural contributions (Bickmore, 2002). Curriculum theorists refer to this kind of omission as a null curriculum – a marked absence that shows what is actively not taught is just as important and revealing about a
culture as what is overtly taught (Eisner, 2002; Flinders, Noddings, & Thornton, 1986; Posner, 1995). The meager presence of queer positive curricula in public schools shows that decisions about what should be taught in schools are made by people in power whose perspective reflects that of the dominant culture. The heteronormative orientation of school curricula, policies and practices is not only about denying rights to sexual minority groups, but also about centering and privileging heterosexuality as the norm.

**Interpersonal Homophobia**

Homophobia in schools is also physically or verbally expressed among individuals in the form of discriminatory bullying and harassment of those who either openly identify as lgbtq or who are perceived by others to be lgbtq. Homophobic bullying reinforces social hierarchies that exist outside of the school in the dominant culture, thereby maintaining a balance of power that privileges the heterosexual majority. Homophobic bullying ranges from homophobic epithets, lewd gestures, sexualized teasing, malicious gossiping about an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity (both in the school environment and on the Internet), uttering threats of violence, acts of violence, and various forms of physical aggression including hazing and stalking (Rivers, 2011).

The prevalence of homophobic bullying in schools was the impetus behind the establishment of specialized schools where lgbtq students could receive their education in a safe and caring environment. An early example is the Harvey Milk High School, named after the first openly gay politician elected to public office in the United States, who was assassinated in 1978 (The Associated Press, 2003). Established in 1985 with the help of
private donations, the Harvey Milk High School now operates under the auspices of the New York City Department of Education. In 1995 the Toronto District School Board established The Triangle Program, another example of an alternative school for LGBTQ students, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada (The Triangle Program, 2011).

Homophobic harassment also exists in less violent forms and can target LGBTQ adults in the school as well (Kissen, 1996). In my research for this dissertation, I collected media reports of homophobia occurring in Canadian Catholic schools that filled six file folders. In the course of collecting this data, I also discovered homophobic incidents occurring in Catholic schools in other parts of the world, which I filed in six separate folders labeled “Australia,” “British Isles,” “Malta,” “Poland,” “Spain,” and “United States of America.” Based on my study of this data, I would posit that Western media outlets are reporting more frequently on cases of homophobic harassment in schools throughout the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

School boards form the above-noted countries, including Canada, have caught widespread media attention for the following types of homophobic incidents: firing LGBTQ teachers for publicly disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity; firing lesbian and gay teachers because they married their same-sex partners; firing lesbian and gay teachers because they wanted to have children with their same-sex partners; censoring curricular material that discussed homophobia or presented sexual minority groups in a positive manner; attempting to prohibit gay and lesbian students from attending their high school proms with their same-sex dates; barring students from appearing in gender variant clothing for official school photographs or functions such as the prom dance; and denying students the right to establish Gay/Straight Alliances, which are in-school
student clubs that aim to make schools more welcoming for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Legal Remedies to Reduce Homophobia in Schools**

Western media coverage of the above-noted types of news stories has served to heighten awareness of homophobia occurring in Australian, European, and North American primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools. This attention has ignited public debate and continues to contribute to the development of further legal protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, which directly impacts public schools.

In Canada, for example, educational institutions available to the public are considered public services and are therefore required to uphold Section 15, the equality rights provision, of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which protects against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Similarly, Canadian public educational institutions, regardless of whether they are privately or publicly funded, are also legally bound to observe all anti-discrimination clauses in provincial human rights acts. In the Canadian province of Ontario, the Ministry of Education launched its *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* in 2009, which provides direction for all schools in Ontario on how to reduce discrimination such as homophobia (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a). Likewise, the United Kingdom’s Equality Act of 2006 and subsequent Sexual Orientation Regulations of 2007 provide similar directives for schools to begin actively reducing homophobia, as do Australia’s various federal and state Anti-Discrimination Laws (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2007; UK Legislation, 2007).
Popular Action to Combat Homophobia in Schools

In addition to legislative efforts, there are also grassroots initiatives to reduce homophobia in schools. American educators are well known for being the first to organize Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs) for public schools. Another American strategy is the formation of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLESN). Founded in 1990 as a small support group for gay and lesbian teachers in Massachusetts, GLESN quickly expanded into a national organization that strives to ensure schools are safe spaces for all students by calling attention to homophobia and devising ways to eradicate it (GLESN, 2011a). Accordingly, GLSEN sponsors the National Day of Silence, a student-led action in which students take a daylong vow of silence in the month of April to symbolize the silencing of LGBTQ students and their allies in the face of the ever-present threat of homophobic bullying and harassment in schools (GLESN, 2011b). Canada hosts a similar event called the National Day Against Homophobia, coinciding with the International Day Against Homophobia held on May 17, the day the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 1990 (Fondation Émergence, 2011).

During 2010, a dramatic rise in the suicide rates of gay youths in North America prompted American human rights activists to launch an Internet campaign titled It Gets Better, urging suicidal queer youth to have the courage to carry on until they can leave high school (Savage, 2010). Discouraged by the apparent inability of educators to ensure schools are safe spaces for all students, the It Gets Better campaign dismisses almost all school systems as inadequate and focuses instead on a future, safer time, away from school-based homophobic harassment.
Opposition to Anti-Homophobia Action in Schools

Opposition to anti-homophobia legislation, education, and activism has been both overt, in the form of public protests, and stealthy, in the form of acts of omission and resistance to progressive reforms. Stemming primarily from certain religious groups and leaders of various faith-based schools, the opposition is based on a belief that homosexual acts and gender variant expression are immoral behaviors, or possibly illnesses, which can be stopped or cured by sheer will or prayer. As this dissertation shows, Catholic schools in the provinces of Alberta and Ontario have frequently disregarded anti-homophobia legislation impacting school policies and curriculum. My research into the problem of religiously-inspired homophobia in Catholic schools has also uncovered media reports describing Catholic schools in the United Kingdom and Australia seeking exemptions from the Sexual Orientation Regulations in the United Kingdom and Anti-Discrimination Laws in Australia.

Focus on the Family (FOTF), an American evangelical Christian organization, collaborated with Alliance Defense Fund (ADF), another American Christian non-profit organization, to oppose GLESN’s National Day of Silence by encouraging Christian parents to keep their children home from school that day. In addition, FOTF and ADF mounted a counter protest, originally called the Day of Truth and now known as the Day of Dialogue, in which student participants pass out cards to other students in their schools inviting them to an open discussion about homosexuality and informing them that other unspecified alternatives are possible (Focus on the Family, 2010).

The intersections between religion, sexuality, and gender expression are not without controversy, given that they are typically considered to be highly private matters,
yet they are also complexly related to social life. These convergences will undoubtedly be the next frontier in anti-homophobia education.

**Outlining the Chapters of the Dissertation**

This dissertation represents one exploration into the need for anti-homophobia education in religious schools, specifically Catholic schools in the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Ontario. It employs a multi-method qualitative research framework involving three different sources of data: 1) participants, 2) media accounts, and 3) Catholic documents. Titans in the field of qualitative research such as Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Miles and Huberman (1994) note that qualitative research is conducted in dozens of ways and that there is not one sole, agreed-upon approach to qualitative analysis and reporting. Biklen and Casella (2007) contend that solid qualitative studies depend on strong data, commonly arranged into three data chapters designed to showcase the data and use them to best illustrate the central argument of the study. Biklen and Casella (2007, pp. 82-87) note that a researcher may organize the three central data chapters of a qualitative study in one of the following ways: 1) chronological organization, 2) classificatory organization, 3) continuum organization, 4) data-type organization, and 5) thematic organization. Because this dissertation employs an “eclectic approach” (Biklen & Casella, p. 84) – that is, making use of three different sources of data (participants, media accounts, and Catholic documents) to provide evidence for the existence of a kind of “holy homophobia” occurring in some Catholic schools of Alberta and Ontario – the three central data chapters of this study are organized using approach number four, “data-type organization.” I have organized my three data chapters according to the types of data I collected because this is the best use of the data in terms of highlighting the detailed
richness of the material and the evidence within each data type that all support the central argument of the study.

Chapter Two outlines the conceptual framework of this study – a description of the conversation that already exists in field of anti-homophobia research, as well as the system of concepts, assumptions, and theories that support and inform this qualitative investigation. Chapter Two also discusses issues of validity, or the trustworthiness of the research design and potential credibility of the research findings. Because this dissertation employs a multi-method qualitative research design, Chapters Three, Four, and Five are organized according to the three different types of data collected. Discussion of methods and investigative procedures used to collect data is available at the beginning of each data chapter.

Chapter Three, “Participants,” contains the dissertation’s heart – a series of narrative vignettes resulting from in-depth interviews with 20 participants. The “Participants” chapter defines the population of the people interviewed, explains the non-probability sampling techniques employed to gain participants, and attends to the ethical issues involved in working with human subjects. The “Participants” chapter explains the qualitative research method of analysis known as Narrative Inquiry, describes the writing process involved in re-telling the participants’ experiences, and briefly introduces the narrative vignettes. The concluding remarks at the end of the “Participants” chapter summarize the commonalities and main findings of the stories.

Chapter Four, “Media Accounts,” showcases how media reporting has been instrumental in heightening the Canadian public’s awareness of the mistreatment of sexual minority groups in Canadian Catholic schools. The media reports provide further
context for the narrative vignettes of the “Participants” chapter. The reports range from important court cases involving LGBTQ people in school settings to discriminatory school policies about sexual minority groups and sexual diversity. The “Media Accounts” chapter concludes with a discussion of what I have determined to be a subtle but determined Catholic backlash to the advancement of same-sex legal rights in Canada that is being played out in Catholic schools, as well as growing resistance efforts to counter the homophobic school policies sanctioned by Catholic bishops.

Chapter Five, “Catholic Documents,” analyzes and interprets two obscure but important primary texts relevant to the discovery of how homophobia is produced and circulated in the Catholic schools of Alberta and Ontario. Even though Roman Catholicism is the largest religious faith in Canada, many Canadians are unaware of Catholic beliefs on the topic of non-heterosexuality and how those beliefs are disseminated in Canadian Catholic schools. Chapter Five offers an exegesis of two Catholic documents from the provinces of Alberta and Ontario written by Catholic bishops and Catholic education leaders to clarify for Catholic educators the official Catholic doctrine on non-heterosexuality. The 2004 Ontario text is titled *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* and the 2007 Alberta text is titled *Toward and Inclusive Community*. The “Catholic Documents” chapter concludes with a discussion of the Catholic concept of “pastoral care” and its authenticity in regard to the subject of “persons with same-sex attraction.”

Chapter Six, “Theorizing the Data,” offers an explanation and theoretical investigation of the phenomenon of religiously-inspired homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools by applying critical theories to the three data sets (the data of experience
provided by the “Participants” chapter, and the data of textual evidence presented in the “Media Accounts” and “Catholic Documents” chapters). Gramsci’s (1971) notion of hegemony, Althusser’s (1970/2008) concept of the Ideological State Apparatus, Foucault’s (1975/1995) theory of disciplinary surveillance encapsulated by the Panopticon are particularly helpful in elucidating the ideological domination of Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality in Catholic schools. Chapter Six also draws upon the work of critical pedagogue Henry Giroux (2001) who has proposed an encompassing critical theory of education with resistance to all forms of domination as its central concept.

This dissertation concludes by reviewing the important details arising from each data chapter, summarizing the main arguments of the data chapters, highlighting the findings of the data chapters, and theorizing the meaning of the findings. The conclusion also suggests directions for further research and discusses this study’s implications for the practice of anti-homophobia education.

**Defining Two Key Terms**

Although the “Participants” chapter clearly defines the population of the people who took part in the research interviews, there are two specific concepts used to express the experiences of LGBTQ people in Catholic schools that may need clarification for some readers. These two terms – *closet* and *out* – are employed by the participants in this study, as well as by members of larger LGBTQ communities in Canada, and appear frequently throughout this dissertation. Of course, language evolves over time and the following brief explanations of the terms *closet* and *out* are only offered to assist some readers who may not be familiar with the concepts; these simple descriptions are not intended to be
read as fixed meanings. Similarly, the “Catholic Documents” chapter employs a number of abbreviations of the names of groups and associations which are clearly spelled out and repeated from time to time throughout the chapter. For easy reference, these abbreviations are collected immediately following the Table of Contents.

**Two Key Terms**

**Closet** – A closet is literally a cabinet or small place where things can be hidden. A closet is also figuratively a space to store secrets about sensitive matters, as in the colloquial expression “skeletons in the closet,” which has evolved into the expression “being in the closet” often used to describe LGBTQ people who are not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. The word *closet* can function as an adjective, as in *closet kleptomaniac* or *closet lesbian*. The word *closet* also has an attributive use, as in “he was closeted about his sexual orientation at work.”

**Out** – As a transitive verb, *out* refers to exposing or publicly revealing something, usually about oneself, as in: “Once she outed her alcoholism, she was much more at ease with herself.” Among sexual minority groups, *out* is often a short way of referring to being “out of the closet” and is closely linked to the concept of the *closet*, acting as this term’s foil or opposite. The *outing* of one’s sexual orientation or gender identity can be accidental or intentional. For example, a lesbian may intentionally *out* herself by *coming out* about her lesbianism in conversation either in person or online. But she may also accidentally *out* herself in conversation by not being judicious enough about the personal information she reveals about her private life to others in repressive environments such as Catholic schools. Furthermore, other people may accidentally or intentionally *out* a non-heterosexual person’s sexual orientation or gender identity against his or her will. For
example, schoolyard bullies may sense that a schoolboy is gay and *out* him as such to the student body through various acts of homophobic bullying. Likewise, non-heterosexual teachers may be *out* about their sexual orientation to some close colleagues but may continually worry that these colleagues may accidentally *out* them to Catholic school administrators who have the power to fire them for behaving in ways that are deemed to be contrary to Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality.
Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

*Homophobia in Schools: A Literature Review*

*An atmosphere of compulsory heterosexuality.*

Twentieth century educational research demonstrates that heterosexism and homophobia reinforce specific forms of power and privilege that define and regulate an atmosphere of “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1986, p. 23) in public schooling (Britzman, 1995; Griffin, 1992; Harbeck, 1992; Khayatt, 1998; Pinar, 1998). This atmosphere of compulsory heterosexuality often forces teachers, students, and support staff to be closeted about their non-heterosexual identity. Nevertheless, there are studies from the same time period that show some LGBTQ individuals in American public schools are choosing to be open about their sexuality and that some of these public schools are even accepting and welcoming their openness (Kissen, 1996; Smith, 1994; Woog, 1995).

This openness towards the existence of sexual minorities in public schools does not mean that heterosexism and homophobia is declining in public schools. On the contrary, many twenty-first century studies continue to reveal oppression and discrimination towards sexual minorities in school settings (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2008; Goldstein, 2006; Meyer & Stader, 2009; Sykes, 2004). One observation that has implications for this doctoral study is that those educators who are “coming out of the closet” (that is, being open about their LGBTQ status) in their professional lives are doing so almost exclusively in non-religious schools. Faith-based schools are not usually safe spaces to address the needs of sexual minority groups, and those who have tried have often experienced negative repercussions (Callaghan, 2007b; Ferfolja, 2005; Grace &

In the case of Catholic schools, safe spaces for LGBTQ individuals are difficult to achieve due to the fact that contradictory Catholic doctrine forms the basis of curricular and policy decisions taken in Catholic schools. The fear of experiencing a form of doctrinal disciplining for acting on their sexuality forces many sexually active LGBTQ individuals into a type of Foucaultian self-surveillance during their time in Catholic schools. The few studies that do exist on the experiences of non-heterosexuals in Catholic schools are predominantly American or Australian and may not apply to Catholic schools in Canada, where the political and cultural climate is somewhat different. Thus, a qualitative study that examines policy and curriculum documents related to sexual minority groups, and includes interviews with LGBTQ-identified individuals associated with Catholic schools in Canada to determine the effect of such policy and curricula on their lives, can make an important contribution.

**Canadian curricular attempts to redress homophobia in schools.**

In the conclusions of their theoretical essays, Canadian queer curriculum theorists called upon curriculum developers to produce a “queer pedagogy” (Bryson & De Castell, 1993, p. 285), “stop reading straight” (Britzman, 1995, p. 151), and “interrupt heteronormative thinking” (Sumara & Davis, 1999, p. 192). Some of these theories were similarly expressed in the activism of such groups as Students of Toronto Against Racism (STAR), which evaluated the course outlines of history, social sciences, and English classes being taught in local secular public schools in 1994 and 1995 to see how well they
aligned with the inclusive curriculum mandate of what was then referred to as the Toronto Board of Education; not surprisingly, STAR’s final report card issued predominantly F’s, D’s, and C’s for the Toronto Board’s ability to address racism, sexism, and homophobia (McCaskell, 2005).

Shortly after STAR disbanded in 1995, another activist group of secondary students formed under the name Teens Educating and Challenging Homophobia (TEACH). Members of TEACH, most of whom self-identified as LGBTQ, were invited into schools to lead classroom discussions about homophobia, usually starting with their own testimonials of personal experiences with homophobic prejudice (McCaskell, 2005). The teachers who supported these student-led initiatives, some of whom were also members of the Equity Studies Centre within the Toronto Board, developed Safely Out, Canada’s first curriculum support document designed to help teachers integrate sexual diversity into the existing curriculum at the upper elementary and secondary levels of secular public schools (Toronto Board of Education, 1997).

Since the publication of Safely Out, there have been several subsequent curriculum guides and resources developed throughout Canada to assist teachers who wish to redress the homophobia and heterosexism they witness regularly in their classrooms and schools. Some of these supplementary curricular materials are designed to directly correspond with goals and outcomes related to diversity and inclusivity outlined in official Canadian provincial curricula (for a list of available resources, see Schrader & Wells, 2007). It must be stressed that these are additional curricular resources – teachers may or may not turn to them for assistance in designing their courses, units or lesson plans. Even though the educational policy and governance documents referred to
earlier clearly outline teachers’ legal and professional obligation to remedy homophobic prejudice that abounds in schools, the problem of teacher workload intensification (Apple & Jungck, 1993) suggests teachers may be too overwhelmed to adequately attend to the matter. Clearly, a great disparity exists between “curriculum-as-planned” and “curriculum-in-use” (Werner, 1991, p. 114).

The likelihood of teachers actually consulting these secondary curricular sources diminishes even further when one considers Catholic schools because teachers in these schools may experience reprimands for consulting teaching materials that have not been officially approved by their local Catholic school board (Callaghan, 2007b). Catholic school boards generally do not approve of supplementary curricular materials that present the “homosexual condition” (Vatican Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986, item 3) in a positive light because they are deemed to be contrary to “Catholicity” and therefore have no place in a Catholic school. Michael Bayly, the author of a supplementary curricular guidebook titled Creating Safe Environments for LGBT Students: A Catholic Schools Perspective, concedes that implementing the ideas contained in his book may not be possible in many dioceses or communities due to a Catholic backlash against safe school initiatives that is gaining momentum under the current conservative papacy (Bayly, 2007, p. 6). This Catholic insulating of students from learning about particular human rights violations is untenable given that the best protection against human rights abuses is human rights education and, as critical pedagogue Kathy Bickmore (1999) makes clear, homophobic violence can only be alleviated by expanding rather than restricting the knowledge and experiences made available to students.
Canadian Catholic schools & sexual diversity.

Although publicly funded Canadian Catholic schools are mandated to deliver the provincially approved curriculum, they consistently opt out of the human sexuality component of the physical education or life management curriculum due to perceived conflicts with religious doctrine (Callaghan, 2007a). Canadian Catholic school boards develop their own guidelines for teaching human sexuality, which is taught in a family life unit comprising approximately 20% of a course simply called “Religion,” where the Catholic, heteronormative version of human sexuality can be safely presented within the confines of Catholic doctrine. For example, in 2006 the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops (OCCB) revamped their family life education program called “Fully Alive” for Grades 1 through 8, and currently use two resources for the high school levels called “Turning Points” for Grades 9 and 10 and “Reaching Out” for Grades 11-12 (Durocher, 2007; OCCB, 2006). The development of the human sexuality curriculum for the “Religion” classes taught in Canadian Catholic schools relies heavily upon the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997b), which teaches that sexuality is solely for procreative purposes between male and female spouses (paragraph 2361), that any type of contraception other than the rhythm method is “intrinsically evil” (paragraph 2370), and that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered” (paragraph 2357). It is clear from these examples that students in Catholic schools receive ideologically-laden misinformation about sexuality.

Anti-homophobia education.

Anti-homophobia education is an attempt to include alternative ways of seeing sexuality alongside the predominantly heterosexist and procreative world view currently
enjoying a privileged position in public schools. Twenty-first century educational research has chronicled the development of anti-homophobia education in public schooling contexts to redress the atmosphere of compulsory heterosexuality (Clarkson & Pelton, 2002; Goldstein, Russell & Daley, 2007; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Khayatt, 2000; Kumashiro, 2002; Lugg, 2003; McCaskell, 2005). Although some anti-homophobia concepts have been slowly infused into public secular schools, introducing anti-homophobia education into Catholic schools has been met with strong resistance (Bayly, 2007). To my knowledge, educational policies and curriculum related to non-heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic schools, along with their effects on the experiences of LGBTQ individuals in those schools, have not been extensively studied in the field of education.

One Canadian study that does exist is the multi-method, qualitative research project I have already completed involving participants from the Atlantic, Central and Prairie provinces of Canada, which was published as a book in 2007 under the title That’s so Gay! Homophobia in Canadian Catholic Schools (Callaghan, 2007b). Drawing on interviews with six Canadian Catholic LGBTQ teachers, this study shows that LGBTQ teachers who have same-sex spouses, partners, or are otherwise not conforming to Catholic doctrine that requires them to stay celibate for the rest of their lives, work under the constant fear that they will be discovered and subsequently disciplined for acting on their sexuality, which forces many of them into a “Catholic closet” while teaching in Catholic schools (Callaghan, 2007b). This study also shows that having to be silent about one’s sexuality and being forced to repress it is a serious limitation on one’s freedom and is a form of discrimination that can have grave consequences for one’s health.
However, in presenting on this previous study’s findings at education conferences, audience members have informed me that there are some noteworthy exceptions to the doctrinal disciplining of non-heterosexuals that is generally prevalent in Canadian Catholic schools. I have learned, for example, that some LGBTQ teachers in Canadian Catholic schools are able to be “out” to varying degrees at work (that is, open about their non-heterosexuality), are able to include their same-sex partner in their employee benefits packages, and that some LGBTQ students have taken same-sex dates to their high school graduations without issue. This suggests that Catholic doctrine related to non-heterosexuality, which informs the development of Catholic school policies and curricula, is not always adhered to in Canadian Catholic schools. As Michel Foucault (1982, p. 225) observes, “it would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination,” and clearly some LGBTQ individuals have found ways to resist and subvert the religiously-inspired homophobia that pervades Canadian Catholic schools. This doctoral study investigates much more widely and thoroughly the experiences – both oppressed and insubordinate – of LGBTQ teachers, as well as students in Catholic schools. It also delves into essential Catholic documents designed to influence policy and curriculum, and the degree to which they are followed and consulted in the day-to-day practices of Canadian Catholic schools.

**Theories and Research Traditions that Inform this Study**

In this doctoral study, I explore the Foucaultian notion of the “micro-physics of power” (1975/1995, p. 139) or the very minute operations of power that can occur from the bottom up or among and between different constituents within a school. I am as interested in charting any resistance to doctrinal disciplining as I am with describing
disciplinary control itself. The task of describing how oppressive power operates in the Catholic schools of this study is facilitated by the application of three key critical theories to the empirical data collected for this study: Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) notion of hegemony, Louis Althusser’s (1970/2008) concept of the Ideological State Apparatus, and Foucault’s (1975/1995) theory of disciplinary surveillance. The productive element of power is revealed in the data of this study through Henry Giroux’s (2001) critique of Althusser’s theory for its failure to account for the power of human agency, and also through both Foucault’s (1976/1978) and Gramsci’s (1971) allowances for the possibility of resistance to ideological domination.

Since my research topic has to do with uncovering the experiences of sexual minority groups, queer theory seems to be the most obvious theoretical lens for understanding and explaining the social reality of non-heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic schools. However, queer theory’s disavowal of the subject or “the self” (Green, 2007, pp. 26-27) poses methodological and empirical problems for a study focused on the lived experiences of specific subject positions, notably lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and trans-identified individuals. Sociologist Adam Green (2007, p. 27) notes that queer theory “has a very specific deconstructionist raison d’être in relation to conceiving the sexual subject that marks its departure from Foucault and sociology more generally.” In an earlier essay, Green (2002, p. 539) critiques queer theory for its “underdeveloped analysis of the effects of the ‘social’ on the sexual” and also because of its simultaneous (and therefore logically untenable) deconstruction and reification of sexual identity. Green is referring to the “subjectless critique” of queer studies (Eng, Halberstam & Muñoz, 2005, p. 3) that rejects notions of the self and conceives of the subject as an “ever dissolving, failing iteration”
(Green, 2007, p. 35). As Gamson (2000, p. 367) cautions, “If ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ are provisional, discursively produced, unstable, performative, and decidedly partial identities – if they are forever in quotation marks – how does one go about studying sexuality and sexually identified populations?” Indeed, the bulk of this study relies upon the participation of LGBTQ individuals – subject positions that may be social constructions, but which nevertheless still manage to have determinative effects on the psychological and social lives of those who are non-heterosexual. My attempts in earlier drafts of this doctoral study to unify queer theory’s disavowal of the self with the undeniable selfhood/subject positions of my interviewees only resulted in a theoretical lack of clarity and unproductive contradiction. Since my research is about working towards freeing members of sexual minority groups from religiously-inspired heterosexist oppression, its emancipatory goal is more clearly explored via critical theory, which has affinities with the traditions of critical sociology, critical pedagogy and anti-oppressive research in education.

**Critical theory.**

Broadly considered, the critical theory tradition includes the contributions of what is known as the Frankfurt School, Marxist and post-Marxist thought, semiotics and discourse analysis, structuralism and poststructuralism, postmodernism and postcolonialism, critiques of ideology, psychoanalysis, feminism, queer theory and deconstruction (Simons, 2004. p. 1). Critical analyses are conducted throughout all disciplines and interdisciplinary studies within the humanities and the social sciences. Critical sociology specifically scrutinizes social forces that reduce human potential, restrict individual freedom, and reinforce social domination (Buechler, 2008, p. 26). If
social rituals, traditions, and institutions can be regarded as products of human reason – as opposed to divine law or natural order – then there is great hope for change because it is possible to imagine that human reason can also cause them to be constructed and deconstructed in a manner that would be beneficial to all humanity. This is the hope that I see with critical theory. As Karl Marx suggests, the goal is not to simply understand the world, but to change it (Rasmussen, 1996, p. 11).

If Marx compels workers to revolt against the chains of economic exploitation, then the Frankfurt School for Social Research invites individuals to see the interconnectedness of other oppressive chains that act as powerful forces of social control (How, 2003). In showing how domination and exploitation limit human potential, the Frankfurt School hoped to encourage progressive social change. The Institute for Social Research, founded in Frankfurt in 1923, is often associated with critical theory (Buechler, 2008; Held, 1980; Jay, 1996; Rasmussen, 1996). Critical theory is both general and specific (Rasmussen, 1996), and does not form a unified system of thought among all its advocates (Held, 1980). The theorists associated with the Frankfurt School were generally accepting of Marx’s social class analysis, but following the events of the early twentieth century, many were dubious that the workers of the world would unite against their capitalist oppressors and become the revolutionary agents of change.

The theorists associated with the Frankfurt School recognized that Marx’s emphasis on labour and economic exploitation was an important point of analysis, but they also saw that the various configurations of capitalism control people in a myriad of ways. Frankfurt School thinkers turned their attention to critically building on Marx’s analysis, broadening the scope from exploitation at the material base of society to other
multiple dimensions of domination. Their focus was therefore on the superstructure of society – the Marxist notion of the political, cultural, and ideological realms of social consciousness – that today we may loosely describe in terms of concepts such as hegemony or discourse (Marshall, 1998). Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) theorization of hegemony – cultural domination through consent – is regarded by critical theorists as equally important as the Marxist concept of the material base in maintaining an unjust society. The critical theorists of the Frankfurt School adopted Marx’s critical spirit and attempted to extend Marxism into a critical social theory focused on analyzing various forms of social domination with a view towards transforming society into a more egalitarian state. In that sense, critical theory has emancipatory aspirations.

**Critical theory, education & emancipation.**

The central theme running through German critical theories of education is emancipation – the freeing of the subject, especially young people growing up to take their place in society, from circumstances that limit their rational participation in a democratic public domain (Young, 1990). One way to begin to emancipate the subject is to examine the inequalities and injustices that occur within the enterprise of education itself. Critical theorists of education are known for tracing injustices to their source by revealing the institutional structures and processes that perpetuate inequality in educational practice. Not content to merely observe and describe discriminatory practices within education, critical theorists seek to revolutionalize the process of education by proposing recommendations to make it more egalitarian (Gibson, 1986, p. 44). A critical theory of education has resistance as its central motif, and is neo-Marxist in its broadening of social inequality to include status and power in traditional Marxist
analysis. Well-known critical educational theorists, Michael Apple (1979) and Henry Giroux (1981), both of whom share similar theoretical commitments while retaining valuable differences, have fashioned encompassing critical theories of education with resistance to all forms of domination and discrimination as their central concept (Gibson, 1986, p. 59).

**Critical pedagogy, conscientization & critical methodologies.**

Critical theory in education has also been referred to in educational literature as critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy aims to emancipate the oppressed and mobilize people through a common and accessible understanding of critique for the purpose of ending various forms of human suffering (Kanpol, 1994, p. 27). Its chief theorist is Paulo Freire (1921–1997), a Brazilian educator who united the ideas of liberation theology and critical theory of the Frankfurt School to form a critical pedagogy designed to relieve parts of poverty-stricken Brazil through social justice education and political activism (Kincheloe, 2007, p. 12). Freire’s pivotal text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1967/1970) incorporated education into the insights on social forces advanced by the Frankfurt School; it brought critical pedagogy to an international audience and is regarded as one of the most important and influential books ever to be published on liberation pedagogy (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003; Giroux, 1983; Kincheloe, 2008; Torres, 1998).

The Freirean notion of conscientization – critical consciousness-raising – has influenced educational research and practice, most notably in the forms of participatory action research and popular education (Torres, 1995). Critical pedagogy calls upon educational researchers to enter into relations of cooperation, mutuality, and reciprocity with research participants, giving rise to educational methodologies such as critical
ethnography, which contests the so-called “objectivity” of mainstream ethnographic research (Lather, 1986; McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). In contrast to the supposed “disinterestedness” of the positivist, quantitative researcher, research informed by the methodology of critical pedagogy welcomes the decided “interestedness” of the researcher whose goal is often to produce knowledge that will inform action towards positive social change (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998).

Critical methodology is informed by the enriching, empowering, and emancipatory epistemologies of critical theory, liberation pedagogy, critical race, and poststructural feminism (Lather, 2007).

Critical pedagogue Joe Kincheloe (2007, p. 11) observed that one of the greatest failures of critical pedagogy is its inability to engage indigenous scholars. Norman Denzin, Yvonna Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008, pp. ix – xi) respond to this profound absence by declaring a new “Decade of Critical, Indigenous Inquiry” premised on the belief that indigenous scholars can show critical pedagogues how to learn from the local while striving for social change, social justice, and authentic democracy. These authors believe that the common emancipatory goals of critical and indigenous methodologists create an opportunity for both to come together and work to liberate the oppressed of all kinds, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (lgbtq) individuals (p. x).

Whether working from poststructuralist, postcolonial, feminist, deconstructionist, or queer epistemologies, anti-oppressive researchers espouse a critical perspective that sees oppression as a social dynamic which privileges certain ways of being while marginalizing others (Kumashiro, 2000; Kumashiro & Ngo, 2007). Anti-oppressive
educational research exposes how racism, sexism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression operate in schools, and proposes ways to redress discrimination and domination in school settings. There is a healthy scepticism at the base of anti-oppressive research. As Brown and Strega (2005) contend, critical, emancipatory, and anti-oppressive approaches to research seek to “trouble” (p. 7) the connections between what constitutes knowledge and who is entitled to participate in knowledge production. They stress that research from the margins is not “research on the marginalized but research by, for, and with them/us” (p. 7).

Validity Issues

Validity addresses questions readers of the research may bring to either the design of the research project or its findings, such as: “How do I know your interpretations or the results of your study are valid?” or “Since the entire investigation was conducted by one sole researcher, why should I believe you?” Requiring that the findings of this study will (or must) be valid depends on a belief in unalienable fact or absolute truth and certainty. Here, “fact” refers to a description of objects and/or events that is not simply an account of what the researcher sees, hears, smells, touches, or tastes, but is also a claim that what the researcher perceived through his or her senses is in some way real, precise, or unambiguous. “Truth,” here, is understood in the sense that the findings are believed to accurately represent the phenomena under study, and “certain” refers to an acceptance that the findings are supported by adequate evidence. “Certainty” also suggests that there are no reasonable grounds from which to doubt the findings of the study, and that the evidence offered as the basis of the claims made by the study is stronger than any other evidence that may be offered for other competing claims (Schwandt, 2007).
As a qualitative researcher committed to critical theories, I must admit that I am somewhat suspicious of the validity criterion. For me, critical scholarly work is about engaging in close and explicit evaluation or judgement of knowledge claims, which involves a process of thinking critically and placing all familiar “truths” and established “facts” under close scrutiny. Indeed, “truth” itself is a highly contested notion and is the subject of many philosophical debates among both supporters and detractors of qualitative research. For Michel Foucault, one of the chief theorists championed by feminist, poststructuralist, and queer theorists, “truth” is not an abstract entity as many Western philosophers contend. Rather, he claims “truth is of the world, it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints” (Foucault, 1979, p. 46). For Foucault, truth is produced and reproduced in the power and knowledge system of domination that characterizes the self and society.

For example, in Two Lectures, an address by Michel Foucault collected in a series of essays called Power/Knowledge (1980/1972), Foucault points out that institutions are increasingly vulnerable to criticism. He observes, “a certain fragility has been discovered in the very bedrock of existence … [especially that which is] most familiar, most solid and most intimately related to our bodies and to our everyday behaviour” (p. 80). Here, Foucault is drawing our attention to abstract institutional processes which seem to conspire together to establish one way of seeing as fact or knowledge while simultaneously discrediting other ways of seeing that are equally valid. Foucault’s compound phrase “power/knowledge” points to the way that whenever knowledge is produced, there is also an attendant claim to power. Offering some important examples that illustrate this point, Mills (2003) notes that there are many books about women, but
few about men; many books about Black people, but few about Whites; and many studies
of homosexuality, but very few about heterosexuality.

Foucault’s (1981, p. 56) concept of “the will to truth,” a series of exclusionary
practices meant to determine distinctions between statements so they can be understood
as either true or false, is important for exposing the power of the Catholic doctrine in
claiming the only truth on the topic of non-heterosexuality. Canadian Catholic school
systems have their own “regimes of truth,” which actively restrict the circulation of any
affirming truths about sexual diversity in the schools. Critical educational researchers
may want to deconstruct the Catholic “regime of truth” that casts homosexuality as “an
objective disorder” by replacing this message with one that is more balanced and “true.”
However, a problem arises because, according to Foucault’s schema, this new “truth”
would also be equally fictional and constructed as the original one. The new “truth” being
offered would not be exempt from the workings of power/knowledge. Questions of which
alternative and affirming version of sexual diversity should be put forth would arise in a
complex contest between truth and politics, knowledge and power. Foucault (1980)
argues that knowledge is always implicated in power and that the “will to truth” is an
inseparable expression of power/knowledge. It is important to note, however, that this
concept of the “will to truth” does not mean that any truth is as plausible as any other, or
that pronouncements of truth claims are altogether arbitrary. The Foucaultian task is to
trace how it is that some truths become authorized as the truth. Hence, the findings of my
study would also have to be subjected to a Foucaultian “will to truth” as well.

Since this study is largely informed by a critical worldview, it is challenging to
incorporate into it the notion that researchers can discover the “truth” about the world, or
that there is some kind of solid “truth” to uncover “out there” in the world. If a kind of “truth” does exist, according to the theoretical paradigm that informs this study, it is arbitrary and any attempt at validity would be relative to a particular worldview. To a certain extent, then, it is almost meaningless to muse about attempting to create a “valid” or “true” account of the world in one’s research because no single interpretation or explanation can be judged as superior to any other (Lather, 1993). In the Foucaultian tradition, all we really have is an ongoing interchange of different interpretations and “wills to truth.”

Regardless of the theories that may inform this study, it appears as though the dominant perspective regarding the notion of validity currently circulating the halls of Western academia is that of “fallibilism” – the belief that attempting to assess the validity of a claim is a useful and productive test of whether or not the claim accurately represents the social phenomenon it purports to represent (Schwandt, 2007). Fallibilists contend that there are good reasons for accepting an interpretation as more valid than another, but are careful to underscore that interpretations are not infallible and are subject to change. Fallibilism does not claim that the world is unknowable; rather, it simply highlights that our knowledge of our world is never absolute and certain. One well known fallibilist, educational theorist Martyn Hammersley (2007), asserts that scholars can assess the validity of an account by checking whether it is (a) plausible; (b) credible, considering the subject under investigation; (c) believable, given the circumstances of the research and the characteristics of the researcher. If the plausibility, credibility, or believability is at all in question, then scholars can proceed to scrutinize the trustworthiness of the evidence offered in support of the claim. At a time when there is increased pressure in the
academy to serve evidence-based policymaking and practice, there is a renewed challenge to qualitative inquiry and the arguments Hammersley makes (2008) are becoming increasingly important.

With that in mind, I will take Maxwell’s (2005) suggestion that the idea of an “objective truth” is not essential to a theory of validity a researcher attempts to put in place as a way of establishing the credibility of his or her findings and distinguishing them from those accounts that are not so tenable. As Maxwell (2005) contends, researchers are not required to attain absolute truth in order for their study to still be credible, compelling, and useful. “All we require,” maintains Maxwell (2005), “is the possibility of testing these accounts against the world, giving the phenomena that we are trying to understand the chance to prove us wrong” (p. 106, emphasis in the original). An important aspect of validity is therefore the validity threat – or the ways in which I might be wrong in my interpretations.

One interpretation of mine that I am interested in testing is a finding from my previous study that shows the oppressive power of Catholic doctrine, which forces many LGBTQ teachers into a type of “Catholic closet” during their time in a Canadian Catholic school. I am interested in generating more data to test if the Catholic Closet is still an effective silencer of LGBTQ teachers, but also of students, and to uncover whether or not there are any LGBTQ individuals who are able to refuse the doctrinal disciplining of non-heterosexualities that seems to operate in Canadian Catholic schools. Although the use of terms such as “testing” evokes the very sort of scientistic language that I have just critiqued using the Foucaultian notions of the “will to truth” and “power/knowledge,” it is important to acknowledge that educational researchers are also called upon to satisfy
validity requirements by attempting to establish some grounds for distinguishing credible accounts from implausible accounts. This doctoral study is informed by critical theories, which are often at odds with the scientistic presumptions of traditional sociological research, but it also attempts to adhere to acceptable standards of qualitative research design. Although these can be difficult tensions to navigate when negotiating issues of validity, Maxwell (2005, p. 105) soothes the matter by assuring qualitative researchers that “validity is a goal rather than a product; it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted. Validity is also relative.” Collecting a variety of strong forms of evidence is one way of ruling out threats to a research study’s validity.

Maxwell (2005) identifies two relatively common types of validity threats that surface in discussions of qualitative studies: (1) researcher bias, and (2) “reflexivity” or “reactivity” – the effect the researcher can have on participants. Given the title of this research project, *Holy Homophobia: Doctrinal Disciplining of Non-Heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic Schools*, one might assume that I have already concluded that Canadian Catholic schools exert power and domination over lgbtq individuals in their midst. While this is certainly an overwhelming finding from my previous study, in designing this doctoral study I was particularly keen to discover a more positive rival theory that revealed the various ways lgbtq individuals might use their personal agency to effectively resist the doctrinal disciplining instituted by the Vatican. I therefore actively searched for evidence such as competing explanations and discrepant data that would be able to challenge findings from my previous study. In this way, this doctoral study does not succumb to researcher bias or end up becoming some kind of self-fulfilling prophecy.
In terms of “reactivity” or “reflexivity,” Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) have already proven that eliminating the influence of the researcher on participants is impossible. However, as Maxwell (2005) points out, the goal in qualitative research is not to try to eliminate reactivity but to understand it and use it productively. When it came to working with the research participants, I proceeded under the belief that it is important at the outset to establish my credentials as a lesbian who has herself struggled with various Catholic school environments. I did this with a brief introduction of who I am and what the goals of my research project are. This hopefully put participants at ease who might have been accustomed to having to be secretive about their sexuality. A participant who knows she is speaking with someone who understands firsthand her predicament, might be more willing to disclose details of her experience. I regard this as a positive consequence. I was aware that I would likely have a powerful and inescapable influence on participants (especially the younger ones), and I hoped to mitigate undesirable consequences of this by emphasizing that I was interested in hearing the participant’s story, however he or she might tell it, and I would attempt to avoid any leading questions. Recognizing the various influences I might have had on participants and the potential threats this may pose to validity was crucial to the analysis I made of the interviews.

As Maxwell (2005) makes clear, “validity threats are made implausible by evidence, not methods; methods are only a way of getting evidence that can help you rule out these threats” (p. 105, emphasis in the original). Nevertheless, methods and procedures are essential to the process of ruling out validity threats and improving the credibility of one’s findings. Specifics about the methods of data collection and analysis can be found at the beginning of each data chapter. A discussion of ethical issues is
available in the “Participants” chapter, as this is the method of data collection that involved the participation of human subjects. The findings of my study are validated by the following strategies:

a. Triangulation (multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical perspectives to ensure consistency of findings [Patton, 2002]);

b. Theoretical candour (being explicit about the theoretical paradigms that shape the research questions, problems, and initial hypotheses [Sanjek, 1990]);

c. Analytic induction for checking any theories I may propose for alternative explanations and negative evidence (Silverman, 2001);

d. Peer debriefing (soliciting trusted and knowledgeable colleagues’ reactions to fieldwork [Lincoln & Guba, 1985]);

e. Member checking (soliciting feedback from respondents on my preliminary interpretations of their stories [Fielding & Fielding, 1988]);

f. Comparing findings with existing theory; and

g. Providing fieldwork evidence in data chapters and appendices.

These procedures, along with the three separate methods of data collection outlined before each data chapter, provided sufficiently credible evidence that would enable me to mitigate any serious validity threats to my conclusions.
Chapter 3

Participants: Domination and Resistance

Qualitative researchers Kvale and Brinkman (2009) insist that good qualitative research requires that principal investigators are transparent about all of their methodological procedures in order for readers to properly evaluate the quality, validity, and transferability of the interview findings. The authors outline seven stages of research interviewing, encompassing the initial conceptualization of the interview project to the final report. One stage they overlook, however, is securing research participants.

Whenever I present on the methodological aspects of this study, conference delegates invariably ask: “Yes, but, how did you actually find people to interview?” Scholars pose this question because they are aware of the invisible nature of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) population in general and because they understand that the need for LGBTQ individuals to be closeted about their sexuality or gender identity is more pronounced in religious institutions such as Catholic schools. Religiously inspired homophobia does indeed hinder the process of finding suitable participants for such a study. I certainly had my difficulties. Below is a qualitative description of the steps, procedures, and decisions I took in order to secure participants.

Defining the Population

Sexual orientation is a complex construct involving identity, behavior, and desire (Laudmann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). Educational researchers who examine sexual orientation in educational contexts generally use the acronym LGBTQ because this is the way many sexual minority groups now describe themselves (Baird, 2007). I
transform the acronym into lower case because it is less jarring to read and is less likely linguistically to set up the population as an obvious Other.

Within the acronym lgbtq, the terms “lesbian” and “gay” refer to women and men whose main emotional and sexual bonds are with people of the same gender; the term “bisexual” refers to people who are sexually and emotionally attracted to both males and females (Parks, Hughes, & Werkmeister-Rozas, 2009). The term “transgender” or “trans” refers to transsexuals who may or may not have had sex-reassignment therapy or surgery; it also may include transvestites (cross-dressers) and intersexuales (Baird, 2007). Gender is “performative” (Butler, 1999, p. 9) – it is something one does – how one presents oneself to others as a man, a woman, or as a trans person. The concept “gender identity,” used occasionally throughout this dissertation, refers to an individual’s sense of self as a man, a woman, or a trans person; one’s gender identity may not be the same identity as one’s biological gender. The term “queer” has a rich history that I will not go into here, but in contemporary usage, it is a term preferred by those who eschew rigid gender boundaries or sexual identities. For many, the fluidity of the term “queer” can be liberating. One female teacher participant in this study identifies as a “straight ally,” a colloquial expression for a heterosexual person who values sexual diversity, supports lgbtq rights and social movements, and is willing to challenge homophobia and heterosexism on personal and institutional levels.

When discussing the participants in groups of numbers, I follow the American Psychological Association (APA) Publication Manual rule regarding the special use of numbers to represent participants. Contrary to the APA’s general rule on the use of numbers that requires researchers to use figures to express numbers 10 and above and
words to express numbers below 10, the APA requires numbers that pertain to participants to be expressed in figures, regardless of the size of the number.

**Sampling**

*Purposive sampling.*

Qualitative studies in educational research generally employ “non-probability” sampling, defined by Wellington (2000) as “a sampling plan where it is not possible to state the probability of a unit being included in the sample” (p. 60). Other ways of referring to this type of sampling are “qualitative” or “purposeful,” which Maxwell (1997) defines as sampling in which “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 87). Teddlie and Yu (2007) outline a typology of purposive sampling strategies. This study employs a combination of several subclasses of the three main purposive sampling categories Teddlie and Yu identify, namely: 1) Sampling special or unique cases, 2) Sampling to achieve comparability, and 3) Sequential sampling (p. 81).

*Sampling special or unique cases.*

This study samples special or unique cases by seeking the participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals who have had some experience, either as a student or as a teacher in an Alberta or Ontario Catholic school. Of Teddlie and Yu’s category “Sampling special or unique cases,” there are four subclasses, two of which pertain to my study: 1) revelatory case sampling and 2) criterion sampling (p. 81).

Revelatory case sampling involves gaining access to a unit of study, such as a group of people or an organization that poses challenges to mounting a full scientific
investigation (Yin, 2009). This study seeks the participation of LGBTQ community members who are also part of the Catholic faith community. Catholicity, or the state of being in accordance with Catholic doctrine, often compels Catholic LGBTQ people to keep hidden and silent about their sexual or gender identity to a greater degree than other LGBTQ people who are not bound by religious maxims. This makes Catholic LGBTQ people difficult to reach and therefore rarely studied.

Similarly, this thesis also employs criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) because it seeks to include individuals who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. These particular identity characteristics are essential for participants in a study that explores the religiously-inspired homophobia in Catholic schools.

**Sampling to achieve comparability.**

This study samples to achieve comparability by seeking the participation of LGBTQ individuals who have either taught or studied in Catholic schools in the two Canadian provinces of Alberta and Ontario. Because these two provinces are among only three Canadian provinces that continue to publicly fund Catholic schools, they make strong sites for comparison. Ontario came into being as a province in 1791 under the name of Upper Canada and has a long history with Catholic schooling (Wilson, Stamp & Audet, 1970).

Alberta tends to follow Ontario’s lead in the administration of its Catholic schools, as evidenced by its curricular and policy documents that closely mirror those of Ontario. The experiences LGBTQ individuals have had with Catholic schools in Ontario provide interesting similarities and differences with those in Alberta, allowing comparability across the cases. Therefore participants in this study are limited to LGBTQ
current or former teachers and former students who have had experience in Catholic
schools throughout the provinces of Alberta and Ontario.

*Sequential sampling.*

This research project also employs sequential sampling, which involves gradually
selecting participants throughout the data collection process (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Within
the category of sequential sampling, Teddlie and Yu identify four types, three of which
are relevant to this study: 1) Theoretical sampling, 2) Opportunistic or emergent
sampling, and 3) Snowball sampling.

In theoretical sampling, the researcher investigates specific examples related to
the research question in order to illustrate various manifestations of the research topic
(Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Drawing on critical theories, this study seeks the expression of
voices traditionally marginalized by an oppressive regime or institution. Therefore, the
participants in this study are those whose voices have been silenced – namely lgbtq
individuals. This study is limited to the experiences of non-heterosexuals, with the
exception of one “straight ally” – a heterosexual person who is supportive of non-
heterosexuals and their equal rights struggle against homophobia and heterosexism.

Opportunistic or emergent sampling requires the researcher to be flexible enough
to follow leads and take advantage of new opportunities that arise during fieldwork
(Patton, 2002). This is an important approach when undertaking research with a
population that is difficult to reach. I was able to draw my initial participants from the
over 400 personal contacts I have developed over the years in my capacity as both a
teacher and a graduate student and through the volunteering I have done in various lgbtq
communities in Alberta and Ontario. The specific steps I took are as follows:
1) I sent e-mails and messages on Facebook, a social networking website, to those in my “contacts lists” who identify as lgbtq. The message began with reminding my contacts of who I am and how they came to be acquainted with me (Appendix A). I then briefly described the research project using non-technical language and asked my contacts if they would be interested in anonymously participating in my study by taking part in a 45 minute to one hour telephone interview. The e-mail message’s closing sentences invited my personal contacts to feel free to ask me any questions they might have about the study and a final sentence informed them that, if they expressed an interest in participating, I would send them some more formal information about the study. 2) I sent interested participants the Interview Guide (Appendix B) containing the interview questions, and the letter of Informed Consent (Appendix C). At the same time that I sent the letter of Informed Consent and the Interview Guide, I also let interested parties know that it was imperative I receive the signed consent form well in advance of any scheduled interview.

The majority of my lgbtq personal contacts did not have any experience with Catholic schools in either Alberta or Ontario. Nevertheless, I did manage to find 6 participants in this way. I then asked my lgbtq contacts to ask their lgbtq contacts if they knew anyone who might be interested in participating in my study, and, if so, to ask the interested party to contact me directly for more information. I gained 3 participants in this way. This method is considered emergent rather than snowball sampling because new participants are gained through contacts of the researcher’s contacts rather than through contacts of already confirmed participants. I quickly realized it was going to be harder for
me to find participants in Ontario than in Alberta where I had many more years of volunteer experience with LGBTQ services.

To solve this problem, I decided to draft an announcement that could serve as a Call for Participants and asked listserv administrators of organizations such as the University of Toronto Student Christian Movement, Trans Bisexual Lesbian Gays Allies at York University, and University of Toronto LBGTout to post it on their websites. Nine people contacted me after seeing this announcement, most of whom were young, white, gay males. Of these nine, 3 completed the paperwork – the signing of the Letter of Informed Consent – and went on to become participants in the study.

Six young people sought me out on Facebook because they had heard about my study through their friends; 2 became participants in the study. The main impediment to getting interested young people to advance to becoming an actual participant in the study was the Letter of Informed Consent. Despite having established a good rapport with an interested individual through brief and friendly Facebook messages, as soon as I asked for an e-mail address so that I could send on the Letter of Informed Consent, the person would cease communicating with me. The suspicion with which the Letter of Informed Consent was met among potential young participants became a predictable obstacle.

As a regular volunteer for Camp fYrefly, a leadership camp for queer youth in Edmonton, I was able to gain 2 participants through the Camp fYrefly Facebook page, and 1 participant after meeting him in person at the camp. Another participant expressed interest in taking part in my study after seeing me give a presentation on my research at a conference. A former colleague and “straight ally” asked to take part in my study once she had heard about it from a Facebook update. I contacted one teacher directly and
succeeded in securing him as a participant after I read media reports about the discrimination he experienced at his Catholic school. In total, there are 20 participants in my study. More information on the participants will follow.

Snowball sampling is the process of asking one known participant to suggest others who may be interested in speaking about their experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Also known as respondent-driven sampling, this sampling technique is often helpful in accessing so-called “hidden” populations not easily available to outsiders (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). Ultimately, I did not rely too heavily on this strategy of selecting participants because only 3 of my confirmed participants said they knew of another LGBTQ-identified individual with experience in Catholic schools who they would invite to contact me about possibly taking part in the study. However, none of these 3 participants’ contacts ever got in touch with me. Even though I did not end up using the snowball sampling technique, it does pertain to this study because this is how I initially assumed I would gain my participants. I caution other researchers not to depend on this sampling strategy when working with LGBTQ populations associated with religious institutions because many do not know of other LGBTQ individuals and seem to feel as though they are the only one in their situation, or they are reluctant to draw more attention to themselves or their closeted peers and colleagues.

Ethical Issues

Broadly speaking, ethics has to do with justifying human actions, especially as those actions affect others. Given that in qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary instrument, ethics, epistemology, and politics are necessarily intertwined throughout the act of conducting research. The critical theoretical orientation that guides this study
assumes that all knowledge is political and that my role as researcher is not neutral since my ultimate purpose is emancipatory, with a view towards advocacy and action. In my view, value neutrality in the social sciences is impossible.

This view has ramifications for how I initiated contact with participants in this study. I presented myself as authentically as possible by revealing my social identity as a culturally Catholic lesbian whose interest in this topic is about drawing attention to, and hopefully changing, the “holy homophobia” that LGBTQ individuals can encounter in Canadian Catholic schools. I revealed these details about myself in initial e-mail and Facebook contacts with potential participants as well as in the formal Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix C). The benefits of being open about my identity and my motivation for undertaking this study with participants are potentially great, for, as Marshall and Rossman (2006) point out “the energy that comes from a high level of personal interest (called bias in traditional research) is infectious and quite useful for gaining access” (p. 74, emphasis in the original).

There are two features that attracted me to qualitative research: 1) its valuing of signs, symbols, and the expression of feelings in language, and 2) its dependence on the interpersonal skills of the researcher. My undergraduate Bachelor of Arts in English (with a double minor in French literature and art history) makes me particularly well-suited for the methods of document and narrative analysis, while my 10 year’s worth of experience in formal and non-formal educational settings makes me particularly sensitive to various levels of human interaction. I am confident that I converse easily with people from diverse backgrounds, and that I am an active, patient and thoughtful listener who has developed an empathetic understanding of and a profound respect for varying
perspectives others may hold. These skills are important in qualitative research that relies heavily on the relationships the researcher is able to establish with participants, the trust he or she is able to build with them, and the respect the researcher is able to maintain for the norms of reciprocity.

In terms of reciprocity, I recognized that individuals who agreed to participate in my study had to give up their time to be interviewed and possibly had to expend emotional energy throughout the interview. I see this as a gift to the researcher and I reciprocated in the small ways that I am able to by offering my time and expertise in return. Specifically, I offered to help participants with some task or problem, provide insight into the world of academia if they showed an interest in this, make myself available as an academic tutor, give informal feedback on any writing they were involved with such as applications for scholarships, extend my knowledge of resources available to LGBTQ individuals in Canada, and to simply be an active and sincere listener. I let participants know of these various ways I could be of assistance to them through the Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix C). I also took care to ensure the reciprocity I offered my participants fit within the time constraints of the research and within my own standards of personal ethics and my role as a researcher.

Although participants had to expend their time and energy, it is possible that they gained in the form of personal empowerment. For example, many shared their relief at being able to finally express themselves after having to be so repressed in Catholic school environments. These exchanges normally occurred at the conclusion of the telephone interview and took the form of comments from teachers such as: “Thank you for including me in such an important and desperately needed study,” and from students “I
was so excited to do this! It was great to talk about what it was like to be queer in a Catholic school.”

My preliminary study, a Master’s thesis undertaken in Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta (Callaghan, 2007b), shows that some LGBTQ teachers experience a form of religiously-inspired homophobia that forces them into a Catholic closet while in Catholic school. People who participate in studies about religiously-inspired homophobia seem to appreciate the opportunity to voice feelings and thoughts about which they usually have to be extremely guarded and secretive. Being interviewed about their experiences in Catholic schools seemed to have a liberating effect on those who participated in this doctoral study. Personal empowerment appeared to occur as participants engaged in the research practice of “member checking” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 242) in which they had an opportunity to modify their interview transcripts so that they more accurately reflect their thoughts and feelings. Although only 5 participants took the opportunity to amend their transcripts, they expressed surprise at their articulateness, made a few minor grammatical changes, and thanked me for obscuring certain details so they could remain anonymous. Other participants who read over their transcripts and had no changes to make seemed pleased that they were given the opportunity to see their thoughts and observations in print.

Conversely, the process of sharing personal experiences in repressive Catholic schools can also bring up complex emotions that can be difficult to manage. Both of these potential benefits and risks associated with taking part in my study were thoroughly explained to the participants in the Letter of Informed Consent. My experience with both my Master’s study and my Doctoral study shows that the potential benefits outweigh any
risks associated with participating in this kind of research because none of the participants from either study had any kind of emotional or psychological break down during the interviews. When participants recounted difficult experiences such as homophobic incidents, I asked them if they would prefer not to discuss these matters, and they all said they were fine with talking about it and that they felt doing so was necessary for people to know what homophobia looks like.

Clearly, there are special moral responsibilities entailed in qualitative studies due to the considerably extended personal exchanges between the researcher and participants and this calls for greater vigilance regarding circumstances that may require prior attention and preparation. Other ethical obligations are more commonly attended to in the form of a contract, represented by the Letter of Informed Consent referred to previously, which is a standard university requirement of researchers who work with human subjects. This contract between the researcher and the participant covers matters such as the purpose and aims of the research, the anticipated extent and length of the participant’s involvement, the procedures to be employed by the researcher, assurances of confidentiality, any potential risks or benefits to participants, and a means through which participants may obtain further information from the investigator. Specific terms of the contract often include that participation is voluntary and based on informed consent and that participants will not experience any penalty for withdrawing from the study early. My Letter of Informed Consent also protects my ownership of the data by stipulating a specific date by which participants must withdraw, along with a description of what constitutes withdrawal. No participants withdrew from this study.
Finally, just as issues of gaining access to participants need to be carefully considered, so, too, does the researcher’s diminished contact with participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In my formal Letter of Informed Consent, I was careful to outline the anticipated duration and extent of the participant’s involvement in the study. I was also respectful of my participants’ feelings by planning a gradual reduction of contact with them. Initial expressions of an end to my interaction with participants took place at the conclusion of the interview in expressions of appreciation and farewell, followed by a comment about when the participant may expect to be contacted by me again. Much of this gradual exit and slow winding down of interaction with participants was accomplished by the procedure of “member checking,” in which I contacted the participants again to ask them to review the transcript of their interview. As a way of easing any possible feelings of abandonment on the part of the participants, I also continue to send them brief messages occasionally to check in and inform them about the progress of the project, as a token of my gratitude for their involvement in my study.

Some Demographic Details of the Participants

Martin and Meezen (2009) point out that LGBTQ populations are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and harm as a result of their participation in a research study due to their marginalized and devalued position in the greater community. For this reason, I do not offer any identifying details of the participants such as their names, the names of their schools, or the names of their cities or towns. Of the 20 participants, 10 are from the province of Alberta and 10 are from the province of Ontario. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, I indicate only that they live in a town or a city in either northern or southern Alberta or Ontario. There are 4 participants from northern Ontario
(one town, three small cities) and 6 participants from southern Ontario (all mid-size to large cities). There are 5 participants from northern Alberta (two towns, two small cities, one large city) and 5 participants from southern Alberta (all mid-size to large cities).

All of the 20 participants who took part in this study are over the age of 18. All have had some experience in a Catholic school in the provinces of Alberta or Ontario, either as a current or former teacher or as a former student. Students’ stories are gathered from 13 recently-graduated young people who are over the age of 18. In the final representation of the students’ stories, 1 participant narrative is excluded due to its lack of detail; therefore, of the 13 student participants, 12 student narratives appear in this study. For the purposes of this study, I define “young people” or “youth” as people between the ages of 18 and 24. The term “student” refers to the young people’s role within their Catholic school prior to graduating. Although they are no longer students at the school, the stories they tell describe a time when they were students of that school, hence the term “student.” Likewise, the term “teacher” refers to the 7 participants who are faculty members from different Catholic schools throughout the provinces of Alberta and Ontario, including: 1 teacher assistant, 1 substitute teacher, 4 teachers, and 1 principal. As with the student participants, 1 teacher participant’s story is excluded from the collection of teacher narratives due to its insufficient detail. Of the 7 teacher participants, 6 of their narratives appear in this study.

An important determining factor in selecting a participant for this study had to do with his or her sexual orientation identity and its representativeness on the LGBTQ spectrum. Because my pilot study, a Master’s thesis conducted at the University of Alberta, drew primarily upon the experiences of white gay male teachers, I limit their
inclusion in my doctoral study. Several young, gay, white males contacted me expressing an interest in taking part in the study, but I had to turn some away in order to ensure that lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people could also participate. I also wanted to interview more students than teachers since my pilot study involved teachers only.

Of the 20 participants, there are 3 transgendered people: 2 female-to-male (1 a substitute teacher and the other a student) and 1 male-to-female student. There are 8 lesbian participants (5 students, 2 teachers, and 1 teacher assistant). There are 8 gay participants (6 students, 1 teacher, and 1 principal). Of the female participants, 1 is a teacher who no longer teaches in a Catholic school system and identifies as a “straight ally.” No bisexuals expressed an interest in participating. Existing research shows “bisexuals display patterns that are unique” (Rodriguez Rust, 2009, p. 124) and this could account for the difficulty in reaching this population.

In terms of race and ethnicity, the majority of participants identify as white or Caucasian of European origin (English, Irish, Scottish, German, Dutch, French, Italian). Only 5 participants identify as non-white (three South East Asian, two Métis). Wheeler (2009) posits three reasons for the low representation of non-white participants in LGBTQ studies: 1) Social stigma associated with LGBTQ issues in non-white communities; 2) Researchers have not gained the trust of non-white communities; and 3) Researchers examining LGBTQ topics consider sexual orientation identity to be more important than racial identity. I knew it was going to be difficult to find LGBTQ Catholic participants in general, including those within the specific age-range of 18 to 24, so I did not want further complicate recruitment by specifying a percentage of non-white participants. I
did, however, ensure that anyone who contacted me with an interest in participating in my study who identifies as non-white would most certainly be included in the project.

Another inclusion factor involved the willingness of a participant to share details about the intersections between his or her sexuality and his or her Catholic school experience. This is significant given that LGBTQ individuals are not always open about their sexuality, especially in faith-based communities where discrimination along moral lines is more prevalent than in secular settings. Having participants who are more comfortable with their sexuality and therefore more forthcoming with reflections on their experiences resulted in not only more robust stories, but, more importantly, less stress for the participant. I tested potential participants’ willingness to divulge details about their experiences in a Catholic school with a few screening questions posed in e-mail or Facebook messages.

Of the initial teacher participants, 3 have a pre-existing relationship with me in that I either worked with them, or met them at a community event. Of the initial student participants, 4 have a pre-existing relationship with me in that I was a facilitator or volunteer at peer-directed youth groups or at a summer camp for queer youth. My role in these for-youth-by-youth settings was simply that of a resource – I did not lead, direct, or control youth in any way. There is no significant power differential between the researcher and the teacher participants, as I did not and do not have any control over any aspect of their lives either before the research began, while the research was underway, or after it was completed. There is no notable power differential between the researcher and student participants, as I did not function in a leadership role with the youth in youth-
directed environments and I was not functioning in any kind of volunteer capacity with the youth at the time of the interview.


| Teachers | 7 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Students | 13 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Total    | **20** | **3** | **2** | **1** | **1** | **4** | **2** | **1** | **1** | **2** | **1** |

This table shows a good spread of participants from a variety of areas within the provinces of Alberta and Ontario. Of the participants from Ontario, 40% are from northern Ontario and 60% are from southern Ontario. As for the participants from Alberta, 50% are from northern Alberta and 50% are from southern Alberta. Of the 5 gay male participants in Ontario, 4 are from southern Ontario, making this the largest concentration of participants representing one sexual orientation in one geographical area in this study.

In preparation for the interviews, I drafted questions in advance and used them to guide the conversations with case study participants (See Appendix B for the interview questions). The in-depth qualitative interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Maxwell, 2005;
Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) explored how purposefully selected participants (Patton, 2002) perceived and experienced Catholic educational policies, curricula and practice and how their perceptions fit in with their knowledge of Charter advances for non-heterosexuals in Canada. That is, if participants’ equality rights were being violated, it was important to determine how aware participants were of this violation. The interview questions focus upon educational policies and curricular issues vis-à-vis sexual minorities in Canadian Catholic schools. The semi-structured interview questions flow from the research questions that direct the study with a view toward uncovering how power operates in Canadian Catholic schools.

Research participants were invited to answer questions to: a) develop a description of their personal experiences in Catholic schools, b) discover their awareness of non-heterosexual related curriculum and policy currently being implemented in Catholic schools, and c) assess their personal safety and general well-being in Catholic schools. Semi-structured questions helped guide the interviews without constricting the participants’ responses. To ensure consistency, the interview questions were the same for each interview. Of course, room was also made for variation and flexibility in order to properly explore any issues that arose during an interview.

Of the 20 participants, 18 were interviewed over the telephone once for 45 minutes to an hour on average. The other 2 participants chose to have their interview with me in writing via e-mail and Facebook. All telephone interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim (Maxwell, 2005). The interviews with lgbtq-identified teachers and students and one straight ally teacher provided much-needed insight into the problem of religiously inspired homophobia in faith-based schools. The participants’ experiences
that I retell using the method of narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinar, 1994; Van Maanen, 1988) are those that are most illustrative and potentially illuminating. As Krathwohl and Smith (2005) make clear, “the key to qualitative sampling is choosing those cases from which once can learn the most” (p. 128). As stated previously, not all of the 20 participants’ stories are recounted here. The 2 that are excluded repeat the same information as previous participants, but in a less detailed way, and are excluded to prevent the data from going beyond a conceptual saturation point (Glaser, 1978; Lichtman, 2010). Therefore, upcoming analyses and summaries of the findings of this chapter are based on the number 18, not the number 20.

Narrative inquiry is well-suited as a linguistic form for expressing human lived experience (Ricoeur, 1986/1991). In this study, narrative inquiry is a powerful way of illustrating the effects of Catholic Church doctrine on Canadian LGBTQ students and teachers. These stories are not widely known and therefore have the potential to make a sizeable contribution to the field of anti-homophobia education, thereby attending to the “so what?” question Bogdan & Biklen (2007) raise regarding the worth of a research project. Narrative inquiry has been helpful in developing feminist and critical theory (Eisner, 1988; Grumet, 1988; Riessman, 1993) and in exploring social change (Elliott, 2005).

The Narrative Inquiry Method of Analysis

Qualitative educational researchers have long been concerned with striking the right balance between the three strands of quality criteria known as legitimation, representation, and praxis. These quality criteria are akin to the three pillars of validity, reliability, and generalizability known to the quantitative or “scientific” research
tradition. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) identify a “double crisis of representation and legitimation” (p. 10) for qualitative researchers, which is that any representation must be able to claim legitimacy in terms of criteria that will enable researcher and reader to make connections between the text and the world about which the text is written (Mulholland & Wallace, 2003). Narrative inquiry, also known as narrative analysis, is a form of qualitative research that involves telling stories, often called narrative vignettes. The story form holds promise as a method for qualitative researchers because it is particularly suited as a linguistic form for expressing human lived experience (Ricoeur, 1986/1991).

Although narrative inquiry is much more than just telling stories, this form of qualitative analysis has been criticised for being solely about description rather than analysis. This is a problem that many narrative inquirers have encountered and have subsequently written about, most notably leading scholars in the field Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly. In their book Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 184) characterize narrative inquiry as a “fluid inquiry, a kind of inquiry that challenges accepted inquiry and representation assumptions.” The authors locate narrative inquiry on the boundaries of what they call “reductionistic and formalistic modes of inquiry” (2000, p. 184). The authors discuss the challenges they have faced from other qualitative researchers about what it means to do narrative inquiry and they note that other qualitative researchers tend to “find comfort and a sense of ease within more stable forms of inquiry” (2000, p. 184). In their discussion of interpretive and analytic considerations involved in the practice of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that other qualitative researchers have
erroneously disregarded narrative analysis as shallow and offering nothing more than simple description:

   Although in some people’s minds, narrative inquiry is merely a process of telling and writing down a story with perhaps some reflective comment by researchers and participants, the process of moving from field texts [i.e. the transcript of the research interview] to research texts [i.e. the narrative] is far more complex. A narrative inquirer spends many hours reading and rereading field texts in order to construct a chronicled or summarized account of what is contained within different sets of field texts. Although the initial analysis deals with matters such as character, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator, context, and tone, these matters become increasingly complex as an inquirer pursues this relentless rereading. (p. 131)

   In response to other researchers’ requests that they systematically demarcate their analysis process, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state:

   It would be tempting to view the overall process of analysis and interpretation in the move from field texts to research texts as a series of steps. However, this is not how narrative inquiries are lived out . . . . The move from field texts to research texts is layered in complexity in still other ways. There is no smooth transition, no one gathering of field texts, sorting them through, and analyzing them. (p. 132)

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 133), a narrative inquirer’s analysis and interpretation of field texts involves “the search for patterns, narrative threads, [and] tensions … that shape field texts into research texts, [which] is created by the writer’s
experiences as they read and reread field texts and lay them alongside one another in different ways.” In this dissertation, I have chosen to focus on the “pattern” of how power operates on a day-to-day, personal basis in and around Canadian Catholic schools. In order to understand the “pattern” I have also drawn on media accounts reporting on homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools, and Catholic documents that instruct teachers and administrators in these schools on how to deal with LGBTQ-related situations, students, and personnel.

Narrative vignettes are the tools life-narrative researchers use to transform educational practice and contribute to theory building (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). From what I have witnessed in school settings and in conferences about educational policy and practice, authentic transformation of oppressive educational policy and practice begins with sharing schooling experiences. Stories have an invitational quality that can help to establish empathy. Empathy opens up space for discussion and can lead to positive change. Some of the most effective anti-oppressive educational conferences I have attended involve sharing personal testimonials, especially from members of marginalized groups whose experiences with oppressive educational contexts are not widely known.

One particularly transformative conference involved the use of dramatic skits designed following a theatre technique called “Theatre of the Oppressed” developed by Brazilian theatre director and intellectual Augusto Boal in the 1960s. Boal’s (1974/1979) method involves enacting everyday challenges faced by ordinary people and acting out new, creative, and non-violent ways of confronting these challenges. Skits set in the homophobic environment of a Catholic school enabled audience members to learn to
recognize homophobia and find ways to stop it (Callaghan, 2007c). Participants were able to take what they learned from the *Theatre of the Oppressed* techniques back to their school settings and begin their own practice of anti-homophobia education. Through the sharing of stories and acting out of skits, conference attendees learned the theory that, like drama, our social reality is constructed and can be reconstructed (Conrad, 2005).

From my experiences with real-life enactments of Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* techniques to develop anti-homophobia activism in Canadian Catholic schools, I recognized that at the base of these powerfully transformative skits was the basic building block of the personal story. When I started to design this doctoral study, I knew narrative inquiry would hold the most promise for developing empathy among those who may not understand homophobia or recognize how it operates in Canadian Catholic schools. Stories have the power to invite readers to reflect on moral complexities in a much more transformative way than traditional forms of argumentation. Data on their own do not tell stories; it is the task of the narrative inquirer to draw meaningful stories out of the data and re-present them in such a way that holds a reader’s interest. If a narrative inquirer can draw a reader in with an interesting story, he or she has a better chance at engendering the empathy that is so necessary for social change.

All analysis of qualitative data begins with the process of organizing and reducing the reams of data down into manageable chunks. Some qualitative inquirers approach the analysis of interview data by using coding to disaggregate the data into specific categories and then applying labels to the categories that correspond with what the researcher sees as emerging themes in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The process of coding produces short segments of labelled sets of data that can then be quoted or
otherwise re-presented in brief forms (such as tables, analytic memos, and concept maps) in further analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Narrative inquirers approach analyzing interview transcripts more holistically by reading them several times over to get a sense of the most striking and important elements that must then be re-presented in writing using the brief form of the narrative vignette (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narrative is a research text that represents the final product of the analysis.

Sociologist and narrative inquirer, Susan E. Chase (2005, p. 663) describes the process of analysis in narrative inquiry as follows: “When it comes to interpreting narratives heard during interviews, narrative researchers begin with narrators’ voices and stories, thereby extending the narrator-listener relationship and the active work of listening into the interpretive process.” Chase (2005, p. 663) underscores that the interpretive process of narrative inquiry is “a move away from a traditional theme-oriented method of analyzing qualitative material.” It is therefore not unusual not to find themes in narrative analysis. Though the process of narrative analysis is not fully definable in terms of procedure, it is no less empirical than the process of coding. I chose narrative inquiry over the more traditional qualitative process of coding because I wanted readers to get a sense of the people in this study whose experiences are not widely known. Personal narratives have the potential to be critical interventions in social life and catalysts for social change.

On the topic of those scholars who might be sceptical of narrative inquiry as a valid and productive method of analysis, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 182) advise narrative inquirers that “we need to find ways of being aware of what those on either side of the reductionistic or formalistic boundaries might think or say of our work, and we
need to be alert and aware of the contexts for our work.” The authors refer to this kind of awareness as “wakefulness” (p. 182). Clandinin and Connelly caution that narrative inquirers need to be “awake to criticism, but not necessarily accepting of it” (p. 183). In a similar vein, Chase (2005, p. 671) contends that “narrative researchers need to confidently assert their contributions to, their interventions in, and their transformations of social science scholarship.”

Judging the value of knowledge claims made in qualitative studies employs different sets of criteria than those traditionally used to ensure validity in quantitative studies. Like Denzin and Lincoln’s (1994) three forms of quality criteria for qualitative research known as legitimation, representation, and praxis, Mulholland and Wallace (2003) organize their quality criteria for qualitative research into three similar categories: (1) Strength; (2) Sharing; and (3) Service. Strength refers to the requirement that research must be conducted in ways that provide evidence of thoroughness and integrity. Sharing refers to the presentation of the research in such a way that enables the reader to experience vicariously the world of the participant and become convinced of the study’s claims. Service refers to the usefulness of the study; that is, the ways in which the field of education is enhanced because the study was able to “expand perception and enlarge understanding” (Eisner, 1991, p. 114) of a particular aspect of educational practice.

The upcoming narrative vignettes in this “Participants” chapter do fulfill the main components of Mulholland and Wallace’s (2003) validity requirements. In terms of the Strength component, the narrative research texts presented in this “Participants” chapter fulfill this requirement because considerable time was spent in the field collecting the data via interviews with 20 participants, transcribing the interviews, and sharing the
transcripts with participants as part of an iterative process whereby they could make corrections, deletions, or amendments, as they deemed appropriate. Regarding the Sharing component, the thick description that comprise the narrative research texts allow the reader to experience the participants’ worlds vicariously. As for the Service criterion, sharing the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (lgbtq) teachers and students in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools provides much needed insight into a previously untold aspect of Canadian schooling. Given that Mulholland and Wallace’s three legitimation categories are adequately satisfied, the narrative research texts that make up this “Participants” chapter do qualify as legitimate analysis of qualitative data. Mulholland and Wallace’s strength component is further satisfied by the two other upcoming data chapters, “Media Accounts,” and “Catholic Documents,” which provide further evidence for the overall thesis argument and establish the fact that the criterion of validity has been met through the procedure of “triangulation” (multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical perspectives to ensure consistency of findings [Patton, 2002]).

In their article, “What Makes a Good Narrative? Beyond Reliability, Validity and Generalizability,” Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explain: “Like other qualitative methods, narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability. It is important not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research” (p. 7). Other criteria suitable for narrative inquiry are those developed by narrative researcher Van Maanen (1988) describing notions of “apparenacy” and “versimilitude,” which put the emphasis on recognizability of the field in the narrative research text. Here, the reader of the research text should be able to match what is described in the study with his or her own experiences and come to understand that
interpretations are founded in contexts and persons (Eisner, 1991). Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) concept of “transferability,” which takes the emphasis off generalizability, is another criterion used to evaluate the quality of a narrative account. Transferability is achieved through “thick description,” which “gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organise the experience, and reveals the experience as a process” (Denzin, 1994, p. 505). A writer’s detailed and specific description enables the reader to connect with the participants in the study and become more amenable to being convinced by the claims of the study (Mulholland & Wallace, 2003). It is not necessary for a narrative to be generalizable; instead Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe a good narrative as having an explanatory and invitational quality.

I chose to conduct a narrative analysis of my interview data because narratives have the power to instil empathy in the reader, and empathy is the first step towards change. In their book *Naming Silenced Lives: Personal Narratives and Processes of Educational Change*, McLaughlin and Tierney (1993) argue that “giving voice” to marginalized people and “naming silenced lives” have been tried and true methods of effecting social change for several decades. I also chose narrative inquiry as a way to analyse and re-present my interview data because I often get the following types of questions about this research topic: “What does homophobia look like?” or “How does homophobia specifically affect students and teachers in Catholic schools?” I found the best way to answer these questions is with a personal account. Communications scholar Stacy Holman Jones (2005) underscores the value of personal accounts by arguing that the personal text can be a critical intervention in social, political, and cultural life. The
data of experience, as told to the researcher by the participants, represents the evidence upon which the research claims are based.

In terms of secondary writing such as conference papers, journal articles, or book chapters that feature a retelling of participants’ stories in the form of narrative vignettes, narrative researchers recognize that, as the research process moves from the field itself (interviews) to field texts (transcripts) and then to secondary texts (narrative vignettes), contact with the participants is reduced and the researcher becomes more concerned with weaving together a plausible and engaging account than with constant consultation with participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1995; Wallace & Louden, 2000). Within the field of narrative inquiry, questions of ownership and voice are of prime importance and are situated within the postmodern debate about the nature of knowledge and truth, authority and power (Britzman, 1991; Brodkey, 1987; Lather, 1991). As Wallace and Louden (2000) point out, early examples of narrative inquiry stressed the importance of arriving at a shared meaning between researcher and research participant in some research texts, but their experiences as narrative inquirers have uncovered that shared meanings are only possible when there is close philosophical agreement between individuals.

Qualitative researchers within the tradition of narrative inquiry now recognize that it is not always possible or desirable to seek a shared meaning in a narrative account of a participant’s experience. Indeed, it is quite common for qualitative researchers to gather people’s experiences through interviews, later transform them into transcriptions and eventually into narratives without any further hermeneutic consultation with the participants (Polkinghorne, 1995). With this in mind, I recognize that the participants’
stories, which I constructed from the transcriptions of my interviews with them, may not be the stories that they would have told about themselves. The ethical decisions I made in terms of which details to stress and which to overlook are in keeping with the overarching theme of emancipatory research, which was communicated to the participants at the commencement of the study through a process of relational ethics.

As critical pedagogue, Henry Giroux (2001, p. 115) points out: “Schools produce social formations … but at the same time they contain contradictory pluralities that generate possibilities for both mediation and the contestation of dominant ideologies and practices.” In the case of Catholic schools, where discriminatory and homophobic Catholic doctrine is officially disseminated, there are also informal opportunities to resist this message. Catholic schools exist simultaneously as sites of discrimination and potential emancipation. In re-telling the participants’ experiences in the following narrative vignettes, I sought details that not only pointed to examples of homophobia within the school setting, but also any possible resistance to this form of discrimination.

The average telephone interview with participants was one hour long, and its verbatim transcription produced, on average, 20 pages of text, single-spaced at 10-point font. A full-length transcript of a sample interview is included as evidence of the data collected for this study in Appendix E. Because qualitative research can be very detailed, descriptive and lengthy, I set an average length target for each narrative vignette at two to three pages, double-spaced at 12-point font. This means a great deal of details and anecdotes would have to be excluded from the final narrative. Length limits are important in a qualitative study involving 20 participants – the research problem needs to be revealed through the retelling of the participants’ stories without being overwhelming.
The emancipatory paradigm directing this study is the guide I used to determine which details from the participants’ interviews to include and which to discard. I sought asides and anecdotes that participants would tell that described the problem of being non-heterosexual in a heterosexist and homophobic institution. I also sought descriptions of how participants coped with their situations, paying particular attention to acts of resistance and attempts at leadership. Since my Master’s study involved the experiences of LGBTQ teachers in Catholic schools, I wanted to give more space to the experiences of the students in this doctoral study. The six narrative vignettes of the teachers experiences are all confined to two pages, double-spaced, each. Of the 12 student narrative vignettes, three are two pages long, seven are three pages long, and two are much longer due to these participants’ remarkable attempts to make their schools less homophobic.

The actual process of determining which details to stress and which to overlook was accomplished by reading and re-reading each transcript several times, searching for the most meaningful narratives that would be in keeping with the goals of this study. Before I read each transcript, I reviewed any personal details I was able to amass about the participant so I could visualize him or her in my mind as I read. I opened the participant’s file and read any initial e-mails or Facebook messages we had exchanged to get a sense of their tone of voice. Occasionally, I listened to a few random minutes of audio recording to remember how the participant spoke. On my desk, I propped up a photo of the participant that I may have had access to as a Facebook friend so that I could glance at it now and again as I read through the transcript. Keeping personal details of the participants around me as I read through their transcripts and began composing their
narratives was important for me to not lose sight of the participants as individuals. This helped assure me that I was retelling their stories in an ethical manner.

In terms of how I kept track of 20 pages of single-spaced, 10-point font text, I used multi-coloured highlighters to single out parts of the transcript that I felt needed to be included. Among the teacher participants, these were stories about having to hide their homosexuality from colleagues, experiencing homophobic incidents, and occasionally resisting heterosexism in the workplace. As an example of a homophobic incident, a termination letter sent to a teacher who was fired for transitioning from female to male is available in Appendix D. Among the student participants, parts of the transcript I highlighted were stories about members of the school administration forcing them to come out about their homosexuality, homophobic bullying or discrimination, and attempts to reduce homophobia in their schools. Parts that were normally excluded from the narratives were those involving descriptions of homophobia that occurred outside of the school setting, as well as details about colleagues or peers, partners or families, and particulars having to do with legal action.

In each of the following narrative vignettes, all real names of participants are replaced by pseudonyms. During preliminary discussions with potential participants, I suggested that they could choose their own pseudonyms if they ended up taking part in the study. When none took me up on this offer, I selected Biblical names that had some resonance with the participants’ actual names, suggested them to the participants and invited them to choose alternate Biblical names, if they wished. Each participant accepted the Biblical name I chose for them as a pseudonym. Details about where participants live and work are obscured by generalities. Participants’ regular habits, such as their usual
teaching assignment, volunteer commitments or leisure activities, are changed so that they are less identifiable and the participants’ confidentiality is better maintained.

Throughout each of the narratives I have written, there are segments of text sectioned off by quotation marks. Text within the quotation marks are verbatim quotations from participants that were expressed in the telephone interview or in writing in an e-mail or Facebook message. As with any regular quotation found in academic writing, the quotations interspersed throughout the narrative vignettes follow standard conventions outlined in the American Psychological Association’s *Publication Manual*. Occasionally, I use quotation marks in the narrative vignettes to introduce a word that I am using as an ironic comment, as in use of the word “roommate,” to describe a romantic partner, for example. I also use quotation marks to introduce an invented expression such as the “Positive Space” campaign. There is plenty of detail in the context of the sentence to enable a reader to discern if the text in quotation marks is from a participant or is being used to introduce an ironic comment or an invented expression.

The remainder of this chapter presents 18 narrative vignettes: the first 6 are from teacher participants and the following 12 are from student participants. Further analysis of the narratives in terms of their meaning can be found in the “Theorizing the Data” chapter, which is an attempt to theoretically explain and develop a more abstract understanding of the phenomenon of religiously-inspired homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools.
Narrative Vignettes

Teachers

Mark.

Teaching since the mid 1990s, Mark is now a principal of a Catholic elementary school in Alberta. He wears his wedding band on his right hand. A gay man who loves to throw parties and entertain friends, he was thrilled with the invitation to host the staff beer and bar-b-q at his home. For a nanosecond. His new vice principal and secretary were standing before him, smiling and nodding while he quickly evaluated the situation and remembered that his partner John could not be part of the equation. “John will have to go away on a business trip,” he thought, “and I’ll have to put away all of our wedding photos, make sure there’s only one bathrobe hanging on the back of the bathroom door, get rid of all the shoes in the front entranceway. Basically, I’ll have to de-gay the house. Do a major sweep.” He wondered if he could buy some more time from the vice principal and secretary by asking if he could get back to them the next day. Deciding they would be suspicious of this, he smiled his best fake smile and said: “Well, sure! I’d love to!”

Mark notes experiences vary widely among the dozens of other LGBTQ colleagues he is aware of, whom he refers to as “terrorist cells” due to their tendency to be isolated from one another. Mark marvels at one teacher assistant he used to work with who he says is “genetically male” but presented as female every day at school. This teacher assistant wore his long hair in a ponytail, accessorized with earrings and bangles, and would occasionally “reach inside the shoulder of his shirt and pull up his bra strap.” Mark observed that “The kids would call him ‘Mr.’ and his first name,” but not all parents and staff seemed to realize that the woman they were interacting with was biologically male.
This kind of acceptance and tolerance were not available to Mark or one of Mark’s gay friends who taught Grade 1. According to Mark, this young teacher was “flamboyantly gay” and he unfortunately became a bit of a “target” by keeping his Pride sticker on his car and by revealing too many details about his personal life to colleagues. Everyone knew the Grade 1 teacher was gay and his principal used that knowledge to intimidate and blackmail him. Eventually, the Grade 1 teacher felt forced to resign. He got the last word, however, when he came back to the school to clean out his classroom wearing a t-shirt that said: “That’s ‘Mr. Fag’ to you!”

As a leader in the school, Mark knows he is being closely watched and heavily scrutinized. Once, during a parent council meeting a parent suggested that, as the principal, Mark should be the one to say grace at the graduation banquet. Another parent disagreed saying it wasn’t appropriate because it was common knowledge that Mark was married to a man. When this was later recounted to Mark, he remembers thinking: “Ok, is this going to be it? Is this going to be the hill that I die on?”

Mark describes himself as an excellent colleague who has out of necessity become a great listener and knows exactly when to block a line of conversation from getting too personal. He says: “You go back to something safer, or else you go: ‘Wow! I’ve got to be on supervision!’” He is nervous, though, about a weekend leadership retreat he will have to attend later in the year that involves bunking in a room with another principal for two nights. To assuage his anxiety, he is already strategizing how he will pull off this 48 hour acting job. “I won’t be the one closing down the bar,” he says, “I’ll plan my exits well.” He’s already got his ice-breaker games ready for the trip and he’s doing everything he can to make sure this retreat won’t be “the hill he dies on.”
Luke has been teaching English in a Catholic high school in Ontario since the mid 1990s. He is more relaxed now about the conflict between his homosexuality and his workplace than he was in his first few years of teaching. “My first year of teaching,” Luke remembers, “I was completely naïve.” Like many beginning teachers who are LGBTQ, Luke assumed there would be no problem with his sexuality at school, even at a Catholic school, because he was able to be out in every other sphere of his life and he thought, “This is Canada, after all, right?” In his first year, Luke volunteered to help out with the school play and on opening night he brought his partner Anthony. From the moment they entered the school, Luke sensed he was going to have to hide their relationship.

He has not brought Anthony to any school function since because he is too worried people will realize they are partners and he will be fired for living outside of Catholicity. It’s not that he’s completely in the closet. He is able to be out to some of his colleagues. His “nightmare scenario” is that one of his teacher friends may let something slip about his gayness when speaking with members of the administration. This is what he calls his “Oh, God. This is the day I’m going to be fired” nightmare. Luke knows this is a very real fear because of the Catholicity clause in teachers’ employment contracts requiring them to uphold Catholic doctrine – a clause that has been successfully used in Alberta and Ontario to get rid of gay teachers who live with their partners.

Luke knows he can only control himself, not others. When he had to teach the homophobic human sexuality component of religion class, he knew he wouldn’t be able to do it, so he called in sick that day. Likewise, when the school chaplain wanted to engage the whole school in a public Catholic procession to the nearby church for the first
of many school Catholic Masses (which involves getting students to carry Catholic banners and walk reverently to the church) Luke also called in sick. He feels guilty about this, though, because he sees himself as letting down the LGBTQ students in the school who cannot so easily absent themselves from homophobic curriculum or activities because they do not have the benefit of knowing what is coming up in the schedule.

To make up for this, Luke encourages student influences on curriculum. For example, during a unit about diverse marriage in the course “Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology,” some of his students asked to do a project on same-sex marriage, Luke did not object and or give them the usual Catholic rationale as to why it would be offensive in a Catholic school. Instead, he let the students do their presentation in front of the class and he later put their poster about it up on the multi-use classroom wall.

Luke also spars with school administrators over their indoctrinating methods. One of Luke’s greatest outlets for expressing his sense of human rights activism was the student Amnesty International club. Bishops informed Catholic schools throughout Ontario that Amnesty International was at odds with the Vatican on the topic of abortion and therefore could no longer operate in Catholic schools. Luke strenuously protested the removal, but to no avail. Similarly, during the last provincial election in Ontario, the school chaplain sent out e-mails to all faculty urging them not to vote for the Green Party because they support abortion. Luke met with the principal to point out the blatant misuse of the chaplain’s leadership role within the workplace to try to influence voting but the principal said she disagreed with Luke and saw no problem with the chaplain’s e-mail.

Luke is certain that his increasing boldness regarding the injustice he sees around him is making him a more authentic classroom teacher and, for him, that’s what counts.
Job.

Job is a government certified substitute teacher who taught for approximately a half year with a Catholic district in rural Alberta before getting fired in 2008 because he was transitioning from the female to male gender. The process of transitioning is a very lengthy one and Job identified as female for the majority of his time with the Catholic school board. Given the rhythms of the school year, Job decided it would be best to inform his school board of his medical condition in the summer so that the board would have some time to adjust to the change before his return to work in the fall. A school board representative called Job to say he would get back to him in August with some more information, but all Job received was the usual substitute teacher package.

Thinking everything was fine, Job returned to work in the fall. Competent and reliable, Job is a substitute teacher in high demand. His first week of work was so packed with assignments, there were many he had to turn down. On the Friday of his first week, Job received an unusual call from the district deputy superintendent informing him that the district had taken the matter of his gender reassignment before the archbishop of the diocese. Together, they decided Job’s decision to change his gender was not compatible with Church teachings and so he would be relieved of his duties, effective immediately.

Job’s request to have the notice of his termination in writing was met with surprise and resistance. When Job explained that Alberta Welfare Assistance would require some kind of proof as to why a fully qualified teacher was suddenly not working, the district deputy superintendent reluctantly produced a letter. “In discussions with the Archbishop … the teaching of the Catholic Church is that persons cannot change their gender,” the letter states, “One’s gender is considered what God created us to be” (see
Appendix D for a redacted version of this letter, which has been widely published both in print and electronically on the Internet).

The trouble is, as Job argues in his case that is currently before the Alberta Human Rights Tribunal, no Catholic doctrine exists on transsexualism or on gender reassignment. To complicate matters, as a substitute teacher, Job was never asked to sign a continuous contract containing a Catholicity clause. Even if he had signed such a contract, he could not be accused of behaving in a manner contrary to Catholicity because Catholic doctrine does not address transsexuality. Furthermore, Job was hired with the full knowledge that he ascribes to a Christian religion other than Catholicism. It is unreasonable for the Catholic school district to suddenly require that Job uphold purported Catholic doctrine when they hired him knowing he is not Catholic.

Existing beyond objections at the school level are those at the provincial level. The Alberta Teachers’ Association *Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers* includes gender identity as a prohibited ground of discrimination for teachers. This professional standard reflects Alberta Human Rights legislation and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, both of which protect against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Publicly funded Catholic school districts in Alberta have a duty to uphold these common laws. As Job points out, “Catholic boards hire Alberta Teachers’ Association teachers, so why should they get some special arrangement that exempts them from contentious parts of operational rules?”

Recognizing the blatant discrimination levelled against Job, the Alberta Teachers’ Association has so far been fully supportive of pursuing his case before the Alberta Human Rights Tribunal. Nevertheless, the matter has devastated Job financially.
Naarai.

A teacher assistant in Catholic community schools in rural Alberta, Naarai’s tasks mainly involve tutoring students individually or in small groups to help them master assignments and to reinforce concepts presented by the classroom teacher. Naarai loves working with young people. It’s the adults in the building who cause her trouble.

Naarai’s first job was in a Catholic high school in 2007. She found she could be herself around the 15 to 17-year-olds; she understood their humour, laughed easily and often around the teens, and established an enviable rapport with them. What she didn’t realize, though, was that her growing comfort with her work environment meant that she was not on guard for the workplace harassment she was about to encounter.

One of her co-workers started to gather, through conversational details and daily observations, that Naarai is a lesbian who lives with her female partner. During lunch breaks, Naarai’s co-worker would expound at length on her disapproval of same-sex marriage and speak in other disparaging ways about homosexuality. Naarai noticed that her co-worker never brought these kinds of topics up around other staff members. Naarai started to get the feeling that her co-worker might somehow blackmail her at work, so she became more guarded about her personal life and called her union for advice. A union representative advised her that, in Canada, people cannot lose their jobs due to their sexual orientation. With this news, Naarai relaxed somewhat. However, when other job opportunities became available within the district, Naarai jumped at the opportunity to take a teacher assistant position at another school.

Not wanting to expend so much energy hiding her life from her colleagues, Naarai made a conscious decision to be open about her sexuality in her new job. She and her
partner were contemplating starting a family and Naarai excitedly shared this journey with some of her co-workers. A bond developed between Naarai and her colleagues and they invited her out to the local pub, a regular Friday after school gathering for faculty. Not one for normally socializing with co-workers, Naarai reluctantly agreed. When her partner later came to collect her from the pub, various staff members managed to cajole her into visiting with them for a bit. It was not long before the principal of the school began to grill the couple about their plans to start a family. He claimed the Church would not approve of their constructed family, and they should therefore consider adoption.

On the way home, Naarai and her partner fumed about the audacity of this man telling them how to plan their family. In the months that followed that one-time pub visit, Naarai started to see a fertility specialist and had to book an afternoon off work for an appointment. The day before the appointment, her principal called her into his office and asked, “What is the nature of your medical condition?” Naarai told him it was none of his business, other than that it was female in nature. The principal stood over Naarai, crossed his arms, and said, “I know what is going on with you and your medical condition. I warned you that the Church does not approve of this.” Naarai protested that she thought she would be safe, considering that a union representative told her she could not be fired for being a lesbian, the school is publicly funded, and it incorporates Aboriginal teachings into its Catholic ethos. He icily responded: “Well, you are not safe and you assumed wrong.”

Naarai contacted her union again and they arranged an out-of-court cash settlement in exchange for Naarai’s quiet departure from the Catholic system. Nevertheless, Naarai remains devastated by the events.
Naomi.

Naomi and her partner of several years travelled together to a small, northern Ontario town in 2004 so that Naomi could take up her first teaching position in a Catholic elementary school on a contract to replace a teacher on maternity leave. People stared at them a lot, and whispered to one another about them while doing so. They were so heavily monitored and scrutinized in the insular, traditional community that they regularly asked themselves: “Are we going to make it? Are we going to survive this?”

Naomi says the town’s wrath was directed primarily at her, rather than at her partner, because she was the one who signed on to be a teacher with the Catholic board. Parents of the students she taught were constantly asking her if she was living in a one or two-bedroom apartment with her “roommate.” The suspicion grew so intense that, once when Naomi and her partner were out of town, one of the parents went up onto their back deck to try to get a look into the bedroom window, as Naomi’s neighbour reported to her upon her return. When she returned to school the next morning, she heard her colleagues whispering about it in the staffroom.

The staffroom became a dangerous place for Naomi. She felt the teachers started to “gang up” on her, finding ways to interject into conversation the message that “homosexuality is a sin” while staring stonily at her. She says she can still feel the pain of those verbal jabs. She coped by avoiding the staffroom and her colleagues in general. On the brief occasions that Naomi would dash into the staffroom to grab her lunch from the fridge, one teacher colleague, whom Naomi initially read as a lesbian, would stop whatever she was doing to draw attention to Naomi. She would call out from the lounge chairs to Naomi across the room, saying something like: “Hey, Naomi! I think I saw you
and your girlfriend at the hockey rink the other day.” Usually, Naomi would just ignore her and retreat as quickly as possible.

Naomi learned the hard way that ignoring is the only way to handle tough topics in that district. Earlier in the year, a five-year old student asked her if it was okay for two men to get married. Naomi said, “Yes, if two people love each other, then they can get married.” When the boy’s mother heard this, she came to the school the next day and threw a “huge scene.” Naomi’s principal called her into his office and told her she was wrong to say that to the young boy and that the best practice is to just “ignore” such questions. One of the Catholic district superintendents said it was board policy to not discuss homosexuality in the schools and, if students raise the matter, teachers are just to ignore it. If students kept asking about it, teachers are to tell them that such questions are inappropriate at school and that disciplinary action would be taken if they persisted.

Naomi’s mental state started to deteriorate. She experienced tremendous anxiety and panic attacks. She says, “I felt like people were watching me because they were! I just kept looking over my shoulder and I just started getting all of these physiological symptoms because of the stress.” She says she would wake up every day and think: “Ok, is today the day that all of this is going to blow up in my face?” The town’s hostility increased to drive-by shouts of “Dyke!” and “Get the hell out of this town!” and culminated in two occasions in which three men tried to run her off the road while she was driving. Naomi knew she couldn’t report these attacks to the police because one of the policemen was a parent of one of her students.

Through counselling in a nearby city, Naomi was able to finish out her temporary contract. She is now working as a supply teacher while pursuing graduate studies.
Anna.

Anna identifies as a “straight ally,” or a heterosexual person who sympathizes with non-heterosexuals and the social justice movement. Her teaching career is wide and varied – an avid traveler, she goes where the work is. In 2003, she landed in southern Alberta and took a temporary position teaching art at a high school within the local Catholic school board. Gregarious and charismatic, Anna is a hit with students. She would always stop and chat with them in the hallways while on her way to class and students were soon whispering to one another: “If you need to talk, go check the art teacher. She likes kids and she will listen to you.”

Eventually, a dozen or so students started hanging out in the art room at lunchtime. It was a relaxed, non-structured space in which students could easily chat with one another, eat their lunch, listen to music, and draw pictures. Anna says her classroom attracted the “weirdos” and misfits of the school, or in high school parlance, the “Goths,” the “Emos,” the “Hard Rockers.”

In the lunch club, Anna noticed a handful of LGBTQ kids. They had many questions for her about the contradiction in Catholic doctrine that tells them it is okay that they are gay, as long as they don’t act on it. Anna did her best to help them understand it, but she too was confounded by the doctrine and felt she didn’t help much. The local Teachers’ Convention was scheduled for the next week, and Anna made a point of attending workshops about LGBTQ students and sexual diversity, even though information about the workshops was purposefully left out of the program for Catholic teachers. Armed with the excellent strategies from the workshops, Anna returned to her little lunch group and
informed the LGBTQ kids about all the resources available to them in the city. She stuck “Positive Space” and pride flag stickers on the window of her classroom door.

Within hours of putting up the stickers, the sensible shoe and necktie-wearing female principal visited Anna and told her to take them down because they were “in conflict with Catholicity.” Anna couldn’t believe these words were coming from this principal, whom everyone in the school believed to be a lesbian. The principal then chastised Anna about her unauthorized lunch club, saying: “We cannot promote the gay lifestyle in a Catholic school. It’s against the philosophy of the board and you can get fired for this.” Despite the principal’s obvious threat, Anna did not take the stickers down. The next morning, however, she found the custodial staff had removed them.

A short time later, tragedy struck the school. A Grade 12 student hanged himself after suffering months of homophobic bullying at the school. The lunch club kids showed up in Anna’s room crying and in obvious pain. Drawing on the resources she gained from the recent LGBTQ workshops she attended, Anna asked the students to write in their private journals, to draw their feelings out on paper, and to make a list of deescalating responses to homophobic bullying.

The principal called Anna to her office, ostensibly to discuss how her temporary position was being opened up to district-wide competition for a continuous contract. The principal told Anna she was out of the running because her forbidden lunch club ran contrary to Catholic doctrine and her future with the board would end with the school year. Anna considered fighting her dismissal through legal channels, but eventually chose to see being fired as a new opportunity. She is currently teaching and still strongly advocating for LGBTQ youth in another part of the world.
All throughout Judith’s kindergarten to Grade 12 Catholic school experience, she identified as a straight male. Today, she identifies as a lesbian woman. Presenting as a straight male was a 24-hour acting job for Judith while she attended Catholic school in South East Asia and until she graduated from a high school in southern Alberta in 2006. She describes this time as extremely uncomfortable and energy consuming; it was when she had to “put on an acceptable face” for those around her, both at home and at school. Attending Catholic high school in southern Alberta was alienating for Judith, mostly because the gender divide was so strongly pronounced. As someone whose outward appearance was male, Judith was expected to use the male washrooms and locker rooms and take physical education class for boys. Deep inside, though, Judith felt abundantly female. She felt exceedingly out of place in these male only spaces. According to Judith, the underlying message of the entire school system was “be straight and procreate.” It was a confusing time for Judith; she felt isolated and alone.

One ray of light for Judith was the music teacher. His slim body, slight stature, and expressive hand gestures made him seem feminine to Judith. “He made me feel more comfortable,” Judith says, “I recognized some similarities in me when I saw him.” She wasn’t at all surprised when she heard the rumour that he was gay. She often wondered if maybe she, too, was gay but she usually concluded that she just wanted to be a woman. It was a deeply confusing conclusion for Judith in her teenage years and many times she just didn’t know what she was feeling. If it was perplexing for her, she knew it would be
exponentially so for her friends. She decided to just kept thoughts about her gender identity to herself.

It didn’t take long for Judith to discover just how wise this protective instinct was. In her first year at the high school, Judith made friends with another South East Asian boy. She was drawn to him because of his lithe movements, long hair, and flamboyant scarves. Even though they never discussed it, shortly after Grade 11 midterms, Judith’s friend suddenly started coming to school dressed up as a female. At first it was just a bit of foundation, then eye make-up and some experimentation with crimping her hair. Finally, one day she arrived at school in high-heeled leather boots, stockings, a black suede skirt, a brassiere and a v-neck sweater. The friends they had in common were completely shocked and acted as though they didn’t know her. When she showed up to first period Social Studies class, the macho Italian teacher called in the vice principal and she was quickly escorted from the school. She transferred to another Catholic high school within the system and managed to get her diploma by passing as female for her remaining years in high school.

Seeing what happened to her friend made Judith even more convinced that she had to keep acting as a male and not mention her confusion about her gender identity to anyone. Even though she longed to express herself in the brazen manner of her now absent friend, Judith dressed plainly with the objective of blending in with her male peers. She concentrated on her studies, paying particular attention to lessons on human hormones in Biology class. Looking back on her high school experience, Judith doesn’t know how she survived it. She wishes there was something in the curriculum about people like her so she wouldn’t have had to feel so detached and excluded.
Jacob.

Today, Jacob identifies as a queer trans-guy. When he hit puberty while in Catholic school, he knew he liked girls. That is, as a girl who likes girls – a lesbian. He says his transition from female to male was a good fit for him because he went from being a tomboy in primary school, to a butch lesbian in secondary school, to being a man a few years after graduating from high school in 2007. He didn’t have to make a conscious decision about coming out because he was so “visibly queer.”

These days, Jacob gives back to the queer community by volunteering as a sexual health educator for queer youth groups. He does this primarily because he had such an abysmal experience with the Family Life programs in Catholic school. He recalls, “The best sex ed class I ever had involved a question and answer box in Grade 7.” The teacher he had at the time did her best to answer all the questions, including one that said, “How do gay men have sex?” Clearly uncomfortable, she managed to muster a respectful tone and this made 12-year-old Jacob trust her enough to come out to her as a lesbian.

Unfortunately for Jacob, his religion teacher told the principal – a man Jacob knew didn’t like him very much. “He pulled me into the office,” Jacob remembers, “and told me he was going to bring my parents in so I could tell them, which was terrifying. Telling my parents was much scarier than telling random people at my school. So, that went badly.” Convinced it was “just a phase,” Jacob’s parents reacted by sending him to reparative therapy in the hope that he could be counselled into becoming straight. Unbeknownst to his parents, however, for about a year prior coming out as a lesbian, Jacob had been getting up at 1:00 in the morning to tune into *Queer as Folk*, the US-Canadian television series about a group of gay men. *Queer as Folk* taught Jacob “there
is nothing wrong with being gay and that you couldn’t therapy someone out of being
gay,” so he was resistant to the reparative therapy.

Another solution his parents came up with was to ban Jacob from watching
television, reading the newspaper or going to the library. Nevertheless, Jacob found ways
to smuggle gay books and DVDs home from the local library. These library materials
helped a lot, Jacob says, “because they gave me some idea of at least other people’s
stories and gave me a concept of what was and what wasn’t ok.” Seeing that the
counselling wasn’t working, Jacob’s parents kept switching therapists and after a while
they were no longer as discriminate and inadvertently connected Jacob with a gay
therapist. This counsellor told Jacob, “There’s nothing wrong with you. Your parents are
nuts!” Emboldened by this medical confirmation, at the age of 14 Jacob told his parents,
“I’m done with this!”

Six months later, Jacob’s parents kicked him out of the house. His staunchly
Catholic grandparents were “spectacular” during this time but they didn’t live in the same
municipality, so Jacob got his own place and learned the responsibilities of paying rent at
the age of 16. He started working as a sexual health educator for a queer non-profit
organization, joined a band, earned a spot on the junior girls’ rugby team, and started
dating girls. Jacob says he was no “85 lb girl,” and was in “pretty good shape.” There was
no way he could hide his muscular, masculine energy. Everyone knew he was gay, “like,
really, really gay.” He exuded confidence and vitality.

That’s why he felt ready to take on his Grade 10 homophobic religion teacher
who went on a rant about how she “didn’t approve of the gay lifestyle and hoped none of
her kids was gay.” When Jacob told her he was a lesbian, she warned him to be careful
because he was “going to get AIDS and die.” The argument escalated to the point of
Jacob walking out of class. As he was heading to the principal’s office, he heard his name
being called over the Public Address system to report to the counselling office. He
demanded to see the principal, though, because he “knew there was no reason any student
should have to put up with this crap.” He and the principal worked out an arrangement
that allowed him to take the rest of his required religion courses by correspondence.

Jacob is convinced that his tough demeanour spared him from encountering any
physical violence in high school, but he was “terrified” by its ever-present threat anyway.
He experienced a lot of verbal harassment, being called “dyke,” and being subjected to
obscene hand gestures and jokes about cunnilingus. He found “the faster you get up in
their face and make it known that’s inappropriate” the sooner the bullies backed down.
Jacob employed a lot of street smarts in high school: he didn’t set himself up to be in
dangerous situations, he didn’t drink alcohol, he didn’t hang out with groups of people
around whom he felt unsafe, and, most of all, he “didn’t act like a victim.”

Jacob knows that what worked for him may not work for other queer kids who are
getting harassed in school. He suggests people in this situation should find someone in
authority they can trust and tell them about it. He stresses that queer kids suffering from
bullying have to be “really, really smart” about who they approach for help in a Catholic
school. Jacob and his friends tried to start a Gay/Straight Alliance, but every time they
tried, the administration would find another reason to refuse them. Jacob feels GSAs are
vital because it is the “kids who are going to save the kids” from homophobic bullying in
Catholic schools. From Jacob’s experience, Catholic school principals, counsellors, and
teachers do not seem to have the capacity for change.
Caleb.

Caleb saw getting admitted to an Alberta university hospital at the beginning of the school year in 2008 as an amazing stroke of luck. Not only because he would be getting the help he needed for his self-harming issues, but also because he could finally get a break from those who were tormenting him at his Catholic, K-12 school.

Growing up in his small town in northern Alberta, Caleb quickly learned to hide the fact that he was gay. He tried to “butch it up” by wearing western-style clothes, complete with a cowboy hat and boots. His classmates assumed he was gay anyway, though, because of his jewellery and his soft-spoken manner. His peers would mutter “faggot” under their breath as they passed him in the school hallways on a daily basis, and he would get called “Brokeback Mountain” whenever he wore his cowboy hat to school. Caleb started dating one of his many female friends thinking this would throw his bullies off, but the taunts only got more vicious. The rumour “Caleb’s gay! He’s only dating that girl for a cover!” circulated around the school.

The harassment reached the point where Caleb became “horrified” to walk down the school halls. The teasing and name-calling pierced Caleb so deeply that he became depressed and lost his “fighter instinct.” He coped by trying to make himself physically smaller and smaller. He thought, “They can call me whatever they want, but so long as I am this weight, so long as I look this way, it won’t hurt me too bad.” Caleb went to see the school counsellor about his growing eating disorder, but she didn’t believe he had a problem because, the way she saw it, eating disorders only plague girls. Caleb knew he needed help, so he went back to the school counsellor again and said, “I think I might be gay.” She responded by saying, “Well, you don’t want to tell that to anyone in this town.”
A few months later, the school principal brought some Catholic youth ministers into the school to speak to the students. All the boys in the school went into one room while all the girls went into another. The focus of their presentation was “homosexuality is a sin” and the teachings of the Catholic Church around homosexuality. Shortly after that, Caleb started cutting himself. His only reprieve was when he got sent to the hospital.

After his second month in treatment, Caleb started to trust the doctors and nurses enough to come out to them. He learned that the stress of having to hide his authentic self in such a homophobic school climate was part of what triggered his self-harming behaviours. Part of his year-long treatment involved visualizing his future life and building confidence. He kept these skills with him when he got out of treatment and moved in with a relative in a different small town in northern Alberta.

He enrolled in a new Catholic school and started volunteering with an on-site daycare program and also as an assistant in a junior high classroom. It didn’t take long for Caleb to come out to a few trusted adults. Their acceptance of his difference was a welcome and unexpected surprise. Similarly, Caleb received no harassment from the student body. He attributes this to a major shift in his own attitude. He had found his “fighter instinct” again and started off his new school year believing “This is who I am and I am not going to change it, even if you don’t like me.”

As a volunteer, Caleb shared the power of positive thinking and creative visualization with younger students who seemed lost. He knows from his own hard experiences that it does get better. He also knows that he needed a lot of help in visualizing a better life because he is certain he probably wouldn’t have survived on his own. He plans to continue helping young people by becoming a teacher.
Simon.

Simon attended Catholic schools in northern Alberta from kindergarten until he graduated in 2010. He can’t remember when he first realized he was gay, but he definitely remembers his first boyfriend in junior high who was about three years his senior. He couldn’t resist telling his best girlfriend about him at the beginning of Grade 9. She came from a conservative, staunch Catholic family and Simon was worried about how she would react. To his tremendous relief, she was very accepting of it. Emboldened by this, Simon told a couple more of his close friends with whom he had been going to school since kindergarten. When they both responded positively, Simon relaxed and returned to his usual gregarious, fun-filled junior high antics.

At Simon’s junior high, the assistant principal also functioned as the school counsellor. He was a highly respected and well-liked teacher and counsellor. Simon got to know him pretty well during his first two years at the junior high school, mostly by telling him jokes. One day, when the assistant principal was on supervision duty, Simon approached him to ask him for advice about how to come out to his parents. The assistant principal asked Simon if he would prefer to have this discussion behind closed doors in his office and Simon said yes. They scheduled an appointment for after school that day.

Once Simon arrived in the counselling office, the assistant principal closed the door and said, “Actually, Simon, I’m glad you came to me today to ask about this because I’ve been meaning to speak to you about your behaviour lately. You see, Simon, I’ve been getting some comments from parents. They’re telling me that they don’t like their children being around you. Some staff members have also mentioned to me that your behaviour has to be reined in.” Shocked, Simon responded, “Are you serious?” The
assistant principal assured Simon that he was and said, “I’m afraid something might have
to be done if this continues. You see, we don’t recognize the homosexual lifestyle in the
Catholic school system,” and then he started laughing with nervousness. Simon didn’t
know how to respond to this, so he returned to the original question about coming out to
his parents. The assistant principal composed himself enough to remark offhandedly,
“Well, I just say go full out and tell them.” Simon thanked him and left.

All the way home, Simon thought about what the counsellor had just said to him.
“How would some parents not want me around their kids?” he wondered. He also
couldn’t imagine what behaviour of his was any different than usual. He remembers at
the time that he felt terribly worthless, like he was “not worth the time to be on the
planet.” He called his boyfriend, who immediately came over, sat him down and said,
“Ok, here’s what you have to do. You have to tell your parents about it. I’ll be here for
you.” With that, he left and Simon went upstairs to tell his parents that he was gay.

His parents were in tears, experiencing shock and disbelief. Then, when Simon
told them about how he was treated by the school counsellor that day, they were
incensed. They assured him by saying, “We love you and support you no matter what
happens.” Despite all that had happened with the assistant principal earlier, Simon
remembers the day he came out to his parents as one of the most positive days of his life.
The next morning, Simon’s mother came with him into the school and together the two of
them went to the assistant principal’s office. All Simon can remember is his mother
lowering her voice to an even, flat tone and saying, “You ever do that again, I’ll have a
lawsuit so far up your ass, you won’t be able to find it!”
Simon is glad he had this experience in junior high because it prepared him for “the world of high school where some people were so cruel.” He got called “fag” a lot and was subjected to cyber bullying, but it didn’t bother him as much as it could have because he knew his parents loved him and he had some supportive friends. He knows, too, that not all teachers are like his junior high counsellor. He says about three of his Catholic school teachers were accepting of sexual diversity and willing to talk about it. He noticed a significant change, though, when Bill 44 came into effect in 2009 requiring all schools in Alberta to notify parents in writing whenever controversial subjects are going to be addressed in the curriculum. Those three open-minded teachers Simon appreciated and respected started to say, “Sorry, I can’t discuss that here” whenever students would ask why the Catholic church is so opposed to homosexuality.

Simon was disappointed by this, but he made up for the gaps in his education by attending queer youth groups and camps and learning about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (lgbtq) history such as the Stonewall Riots and famous lgbtq people such as Harvey Milk. He also used the Internet to explore human rights and social justice issues and closely followed media accounts of lgbtq youths who were discriminated against by their schools. Simon made several attempts to start up a Gay/Straight Alliance in his school, but each was “shot down.” Nevertheless, he did manage to be a mentor to younger gay youth in the school who approached him about being gay and coming out. His hope is that Gay/Straight Alliances will finally be allowed in Catholic schools so that this important mentoring can continue in a consistent way.
Mary.

Mary attended publicly-funded Catholic schools in southern Alberta from kindergarten until her graduation in 2007. She started to realize she liked girls in junior high. In Grade 8, Mary was lucky enough to find herself in the same English language arts class with a group of her friends. In one unit, the teacher was trying to underscore the importance of empathy in appreciating literature. She asked the students to take part in a week-long project, which involved creatively imagining themselves as a member of a subordinate group, such as a person of colour, a differently-abled individual, or someone belonging to a religious minority.

Mary and her friends approached their language arts teacher to inquire about the possibility of exploring what it is like to be a member of a sexual minority group, such as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer person. They suggested they could readily experience this difference by wearing rainbow wristbands and other recognizable symbols of LGBTQ pride. The teacher told them they wouldn’t be allowed to do that because they were in a Catholic school and Catholic schools don’t recognize sexual minorities. When the students pressed for a better explanation, the teacher switched to a different line of reasoning and told them it was for their own safety because if they came to school dressed like LGBTQ people, they would “get beat up” by other students. Mary tried to talk the teacher about it later to understand further what the problem was, but the teacher only offered her insubstantial explanations that made no sense. Frustrated, Mary dropped her request.

Mary also encountered opposition in her Grade 7 physical education class, which also doubled as her health class. At the time, Canadians were in the midst of debating
same-sex marriage and Mary’s Phys. Ed. teacher took it upon herself to address the topic during a lesson on family life. Conceding that “gay people are people too,” the Phys. Ed. teacher nevertheless emphasized that they “shouldn’t have the same rights as heterosexuals because marriage is a sacred vow and what homosexuals do is wrong.” Mary was not surprised by this because her gym teacher was also very conservative about gender roles, specifically regarding two units on gymnastics and wrestling. The girls knew the boys were taking up wrestling at the same time that the girls were meant to do gymnastics, and Mary and a handful of her friends asked the gym teacher if they could do wrestling instead. The Phys. Ed. teacher told them they could not choose wrestling, as that was for boys only. When the girls protested, the exasperated teacher took away the gymnastics option and replaced it with floor hockey.

When Mary got to high school, she found that the family life component of her religion class was not any more sophisticated than the junior high version. She remembers receiving only twenty minutes of instruction on this topic in the entire course. The focus was on abstinence and procreation and Mary remembers specifically being told that “condoms are not good because they are a contraceptive.” She also recalls a time when one of her classmates tentatively asked about homosexuality and, although she does not remember the details of what the teacher actually said in response, she does recall that the subject was tidily “shot down.” The message Mary got from that exchange is that the subject is taboo in a Catholic school.

Nevertheless, Mary could not ignore the way she was feeling about other girls and she plucked up the courage to go in to see one of the school counsellors to get advice about coming out as a lesbian. Rather than attending to the immediate concern Mary
raised by providing her with helpful information and resources designed for LGBTQ youth, the school counsellor chose to tell Mary a story about how her son cross-dressed. Mary felt cheated that the counsellor was not taking her question seriously enough; it was certainly a serious matter to her. She felt the counselling services in her Catholic school “were not actually there,” and that they were not “fulfilling the job requirements.” Deciding she could no longer trust the services that were supposed to be in place to help her, Mary turned to one of her bisexual friends for advice.

This was how Mary first learned of a local support group for LGBTQ youth. She had “no idea that a youth group even existed or to even search for one.” Delighted in her discovery of the group, Mary started going right away and benefitted immediately from the camaraderie of peer support. She also learned a great deal from guest speakers from various local agencies who came in to talk with the youth about queer history, healthy relationships, and emotional and psychological well-being. It was at the youth group that Mary first encountered comprehensive sexual health education. She remembers the stark contrast to the family life education she was also receiving in religion classes at her Catholic high school during the same period. Mary told her queer friends at school about the youth group and many of them also started attending.

The youth group was a tremendous boost to Mary’s self confidence. She started dating girls at school and, together with a group of friends, tried to get a Gay/Straight Alliance started at the school. She wasn’t too surprised when the teacher they approached immediately “shot down” the idea. She feels she was lucky to have learned about the LGBTQ youth group from a friend, and contends that counsellors in Catholic schools should not be allowed to withhold this lifeline from LGBTQ youth who so desperately need it.
Esther.

Growing up in a small town in northern Alberta, Esther attended two Catholic schools: one from kindergarten to Grade 8 and the other until she graduated in 2010. She says in elementary school her classmates thought she was “weird” and she got teased a lot for being different. When she got a short hair cut to begin her new high school life, the teasing turned to homophobic slurs. She got called “dyke” and “faggot” constantly from Grade 9 to Grade 11. The only reprieve she got from the homophobic bullying was when she entered Grade 12, which Esther believes is simply due to the fact she was in her senior year and at the top of the school hierarchy.

It is not that Esther didn’t try to get help about the bullying. Shortly after arriving at the high school, she told the vice principal that some girls kept calling her a “dyke.” He told her he would speak to the people involved, but Esther doesn’t know if he ever did or not because “nothing ever changed.” She got through that year by mostly ignoring the perpetrators. When school started up again in Grade 10, so did the bullying. Esther continued to try to ignore it but there were times when she got “really mad” about it. Once, for example, Esther was sitting in chemistry class and the teacher was explaining how two bonds come together like “a male and a female bond.” One of her bullies was in the class and she and some of her friends turned around and glared at Esther saying, “Yeah, like a normal male-female bond, dyke!” Esther spoke to the principal about the incident, but she never saw any evidence of him doing anything about it.

The final straw for Esther came in Grade 11 in an incident on the school bus. It was the end of the school day and Esther was sitting in the front of the bus with a female friend who was not her girlfriend (Esther did not have a girlfriend while in high school).
Esther’s friend was somewhat tired and started to lean into Esther’s side. Esther responded by putting her arm around her friend. Immediately the yellow bus erupted in laughter and jeers of “Look at the lezzies at the front of the bus making out!” Then the students on the bus started throwing things like apple cores and juice boxes at the two of them. There were no adults on the bus, except the bus driver who didn’t do anything about the bullying. In fact, when Ester and her friend went to get off the bus, the driver turned to them and said, “If you guys do that again, I’ll kick you off the bus!” Astounded that they were being blamed for their own victimization, Esther and her friend filed a complaint against the driver. First with the bus company, then with the school.

This time when Esther spoke to the principal about homophobic bullying he seemed to take it more seriously because an adult employed by the school board was involved who further victimized the students by blaming them for the bullying. The principal promised Esther he would talk to the bus driver but Esther doesn’t know what happened because he never updated her. The principal then referred Esther to the school counsellor who Esther found to be ill-suited to the task. “She wasn’t the greatest counsellor,” Esther said, “no one really talked to her about anything and it was super hard trying to talk to her about this. She just didn’t seem like the counselling type.” Fortunately for Esther, the counsellor recognized her own limitations and called upon the town’s human rights coordinator for guidance.

As an outsider, the human rights coordinator was not steeped in the Catholic school ethos. She made suggestions to the school counsellor that no one in the school system would ever dream of doing. In discussions with the school counsellor, the town’s human rights coordinator learned that Esther had been experiencing homophobic bullying
since she arrived at the school and had reported it to the vice principal and the principal, to no avail. The human rights coordinator determined that the school climate was systemically homophobic and if the school administrators were not going to actively make the school safe for LGBTQ youth, then one more subtle way to increase these vulnerable youths’ perception of safety is by purchasing LGBTQ-affirming books for the school library. Consulting with librarians from the town’s public library system, the human rights coordinator presented the Catholic school counsellor with twenty titles of age-appropriate books that the Catholic school library should purchase for the school as a way of enabling LGBTQ youth in the school to learn about themselves and feel less isolated in such a homophobic environment. Having no alternate solutions of her own, the Catholic school counsellor quietly purchased the books for the library. Esther knew the books were on their way to the school, so she regularly checked in with the school library to see if they had arrived. She was pleasantly surprised one day to find they had not only arrived but were on full display on the tops of bookshelves.

Another welcomed surprise came in the form of a Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA). As much as the town’s human rights coordinator tried to convince the Catholic school to allow Esther and her friends to start a GSA, the school administrators were adamantly opposed to the idea. They finally compromised saying Esther could start a GSA as long as it was not on school property. The town’s human rights coordinator found a space for the GSA in the basement of the town’s public library and she convinced the Catholic school counsellor to display postcards advertising the GSA in the counselling office. While these are major victories for Esther, she wishes teachers and students could be better educated about the plight of sexual minority groups in Catholic schools.
Ontario Students

Gabriel.

Gabriel attended two Catholic schools in southern Ontario: an elementary and middle school from Grade 1 to Grade 8, and an all-boys’ school until he graduated in 2007. “I already came to terms with my homosexuality in middle school,” Gabriel says, “and I wasn’t in denial about it by the time I entered high school.” Accepting his sexuality to himself was one thing; being open about it in his all boys’ high school was something else entirely. Catholic schools often stress the importance of developing a strong mind and body and this was especially true in Gabriel’s high school where physical fitness and athleticism reigned supreme. “There was a lot of testosterone at my school,” Gabriel notes, “and it was not an environment conducive to being open to things like homosexuality. So, I really didn’t want to go through the stress of being out in that kind of environment.”

Gabriel played on various sports teams but he always avoided the dominant sports like hockey and football. Sometimes, when badminton practice would end at the same time as hockey, he would overhear the hockey players uttering ferocious homophobic slurs in the locker room. Times like these reassured him that he made the right decision to keep quiet about his homosexuality at school.

This decision was also reinforced whenever Gabriel attended a religion or philosophy class. According to Gabriel, the religion and philosophy teachers were the most socially conservative in the whole school and typically espoused beliefs on the far right of the political spectrum. They openly expressed their views on many social topics, including the idea that homosexuality is a choice and therefore a morality issue, which is
why Catholics cannot support gay rights. It was not uncommon to hear a religion or philosophy teacher express his adamant opposition to same-sex marriage on the grounds that it “inhibits and damages the very fabric of family life.” Sitting through these classes, Gabriel knew he was right to be secretive about his sexuality.

Classmates’ regular use of the terms “gay,” “fag,” and “faggot,” in the hallways, lunchroom, and even the classrooms also solidified for Gabriel that he was safer being closeted. Peers used these terms a lot, “both casually and to actually mean it.” Once, when Gabriel was volunteering in the yearbook office in the basement of the school, another volunteer was coming into the office and, as he did so, two football players passed by and shouted, “Yeah, go design some layout, you fucking faggot!” Gabriel believes his fellow yearbook club member was subjected to this kind of verbal abuse because his mannerisms made him appear stereotypically gay. Gabriel kept his appearance and demeanour in check precisely to avoid this kind of harassment. Even though Gabriel felt bad for his yearbook mate, he did not speak to him about the incident nor did he choose to come out to him about his own sexuality.

Gabriel wasn’t closeted with absolutely everyone. He enjoyed the “good support of friends in that high school who weren’t part of the typical make-up of the people there.” Gabriel came out to a select few of his friends before eleventh grade. “They were a very understanding crew,” he recalls. Gabriel also had a good network of support online. He joined an online dating service catering to young gay males whose average age was 18. Operated by a now defunct print magazine of the same name, the website featured some of the print magazine content, especially the arresting but not pornographic photographs of young men. The service required members to post their personal
information such as their age, location, and a photograph. This was how Gabriel got in contact with another gay male student at his own school. He remembers this experience with excitement, “I was really surprised! I certainly did not expect to meet anybody in my high school who was gay, considering the environment of my school, which was just too focussed on being this masculine-acting individual. For someone to come out to me, even online, was pleasantly surprising!”

Gabriel was even more thoroughly surprised when he was given the opportunity to come out to one of the school’s new administrators. Gabriel says he was able to become friends with this man “on a political basis because we had a mutual agreement on our support for a particular party.” This administrator also functioned as a religious leader in the school due to his seminary training. Gabriel would “pop by his office” and they would discuss current events. They established a great rapport and a “certain level of trust.” One day, the school administrator asked Gabriel directly if he was gay. When Gabriel hesitated, the school administrator assured him that it was ok to admit it because he was gay too. They became fast friends and Gabriel is still in touch with him today. They occasionally have dinner together and the school administrator even invited Gabriel to celebrate Christmas with him and his mother and siblings one year.

Befriending the school administrator changed Gabriel’s perspectives on the Catholic Church, specifically the differences between the doctrine as laid out by the Vatican and the individuals who practice the faith. Although his high school had a venerable, ultra-conservative tradition and image, Gabriel found there was at least one dissenter among the faculty. Without any institutional supports in place for lgbtq youth in his Catholic school, Gabriel felt lucky to encounter this one maverick.


Jonas.

Jonas attended Catholic schools in southern Ontario from junior kindergarten until he graduated in 2007. He remembers sitting through the heteronormative family life portions of his elementary and middle school religion classes and feeling tremendously alone. From a young age, he knew he was different, that he liked boys, and that he was gay. He saw no indication that other people in his school felt anything similar, so he was left to wonder, “Am I the only gay person here?”

When he started high school in Grade 9, he visited the library often, searching through the psychology and spirituality stacks for anything that might help him understand himself better. He came upon a book about Christian ex-gays. The word “gay” in the title attracted him. When he opened the book, he saw a stamp that indicated it had been specially donated to the school library. As he read through the table of contents, he started to understand that the book was about transforming from homosexual to heterosexual. He knew this was not what he needed, so he slammed the book shut and placed it back on the shelf.

Jonas felt alone about his sexuality, but at least one other person in his high school pegged him as gay. This classmate became Jonas’s personal bully and stalker. Jonas referred to him by his last name – Gershom (not his real name). Whenever Gershom would see Jonas in the hallway, he would make his way over to him and whisper the word “fag” menacingly under his breath. Gershom seemed to be everywhere that Jonas was. Jonas was always hyper-aware of Gershom’s presence, “I was already looking at him the minute he would enter a room or hallway.” One way Jonas diffused Gershom’s power was to surround himself with a bevy of girlfriends and avoid being
alone as much as possible. Although Gershom never stopped singling Jonas out in this way, his behaviour did become predictable enough that Jonas was able to downplay it by thinking, “Oh, that’s just him. Prick! I will graduate and never have to see him again.”

Jonas remembers wishing in Grade 9 that there were some resources available to him or “just material that I could read and understand that recognized homosexuality, that it did exist.” “Over time,” he says, “I just kind of got used to the fact that it was a Catholic school and that they are probably not going to do anything.” Then, towards the end of Grade 9, Jonas developed a friendship with a boy called Ethan (not his real name) who also shared his cultural heritage. This turned out to be a momentous occasion for Jonas because the two of them were able to establish enough of a bond to come out to one another as gay in Grade 10. Ethan became Jonas’s major source of support, especially when it came to dealing with Gershom and Jonas’s increasingly disapproving father. Jonas briefly considered approaching one of the school counsellors about the problems he was having, but quickly concluded they would be of no help. Together with his great friend Ethan, Jonas explored the gay world both on the Internet and in person at gay cafés and other hangouts during the summer between Grades 10 and 11.

Returning to their Catholic high school in Grade 11 was a breeze for Jonas and Ethan. They were both much more confident about themselves and decided to be open about their homosexuality. Other LGBTQ students flocked to them and their circle of friends grew. One of Jonas’s new gay friends suggested that they should try to start a Diversity Club at the school, but they dropped the idea once they learned the school would not allow it. Instead, in his final year of high school, Jonas observed the Day of Silence, an anti-homophobia campaign designed to show how LGBTQ students must live in silence and
fear to avoid harassment in schools. Even though his participation in this observance seemed to have little impact since none of the school faculty understood what he was doing, Jonas felt proud to take part in what he considered a very meaningful action. He knew what it was like to be closeted and he was very relieved to be out at school.

Jonas’s new openness about his sexuality did not stop Gershom from his daily harassment and actually invited new intimidating experiences. Once, when Jonas was walking alone past the smoker’s corner, one of the smokers called out to him, “Hey, are you into guys?” Jonas froze and thought, “Uh-oh. What do I do now?” But, he just calmly replied, “Yeah,” and then walked quickly away. Although Jonas was definitely scared, he was also proud of himself for answering honestly this first-ever direct question about his sexuality. This prepared him for another incident in Grade 12 politics class when Jonas mistakenly picked up the wrong textbook. The boy who owned the textbook shouted out, “Oh my God! Like, a fucking fag just touched my book. Like, now it has AIDS on it!” Jonas was pleased to see that the teacher dealt with the matter immediately by sending the student down to the office.

Jonas was even more pleased later in that politics class when he read in the textbook the case of Marc Hall, an Ontario high school senior who fought a successful legal battle in 2002 against his Catholic school in order to bring his same-sex date to his prom. Even though there was no classroom discussion of the case and the students were not tested on it, the teacher did assign it as required reading along with some written response for homework and Jonas knew his homophobic classmate would have to read it and write about it. This made Jonas feel “kind of giddy,” and he thought, “Cool. Like, it’s actually in our textbook!” Jonas has great hope for change in Catholic schools.
Shiloh.

Catholic schools were a big part of Shiloh’s life in southern Ontario from junior kindergarten to his graduation in 2009. A self-described “un-athletic theatre kid,” Shiloh was called “gay” innumerable times in elementary school. He remembers, “I didn’t know what they were saying, and I don’t think they knew what they were saying, but I knew it was bad, and I knew what attributes they were calling me out on. Like, I hung out with a lot of girls. I didn’t think it was me liking boys. I thought it was me being girly.” In an attempt to rid himself of the name-calling, Shiloh excelled at school, became involved in a variety of school clubs, and accepted any leadership opportunity that came his way.

As Shiloh grew older, his peers replaced calling him “gay” with point blank questions about his sexuality. Upon being elected high school prime minister, classmates would openly ask him, “Hey, man, why don’t you have a girlfriend?” to which he would always reply, “I’m too busy for a girlfriend.” Students he barely knew would come up to him and ask, “Are you gay?” and his answer was always a patient “no.” Shiloh recalls feeling “very, very, very, very uncomfortable with the idea of identifying as gay in high school.” As a student leader, Shiloh felt obligated to uphold the code of student conduct written in the standard issue student agenda. “A graduating student is” the agenda read, “one who believes in the Lord and practices the Catholic faith.” Shiloh felt a lot of pressure to be a high achiever and a role model. He thought, “If I am supposed to be a model student, I can’t be an out gay person at the same time. Those two identities can’t coexist in this school.” Shiloh found suppressing his sexuality consumed an inordinate amount of his energy. Until he discovered the trick of keeping himself so tremendously busy that he wouldn’t have any time to deal with it.
In high school, Shiloh knew of two queer teachers who were also trying to pass as straight. One was the director of a play Shiloh was in who he discovered was gay through the many hours of rehearsal after school in a much less formal environment. The other was a French teacher who lived with her female partner in a house next door to one of Shiloh’s friends. Shiloh was disappointed to discover, though, that he could not count on these two teachers to discuss anything vaguely related to homosexuality in the classroom. Nor could he count on the teachers whose subjects brought them close to the topic.

Sexuality is overtly addressed in religion class, but only procreative heterosexuality, laments Shiloh. Homosexuality appears briefly in the curriculum of the Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology (ASP) course, but Shiloh says all of his religion and ASP teachers were “ardently against discussing the topic.”

In contrast to the general heterosexist norm of his high school teachers were two teachers that particularly stood out for Shiloh: his drama teacher and his English teacher. His Grade 12 drama teacher was someone he could “really depend on giving progressive, new-age type of thinking that wasn’t so muddled in Catholic tradition.” Shiloh was excited when his closeted gay drama teacher tried to get permission from the school administration to produce the Laremie Project, a play about the 1998 homophobic murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay university student in Laremie, Wyoming. Although Shiloh was not surprised the play was refused, he was uncomfortable that his drama teacher told him to keep the news of the refusal in the strictest of confidence, which meant that Shiloh could not protest the decision. Shiloh also describes his Grade 12 English teacher as “progressive,” someone who “made a very, very welcoming environment,”
accommodated divergent thinking, and was “very open to suggesting homosexual themes in Shakespeare’s work.”

Another open-minded faculty member was one of the school’s guidance counsellors. Although Shiloh did not seek the school’s counselling services himself, he did suggest it to one of his friends who was trying to come out to him as gay. Shiloh’s friend reported back to him that the counsellor was very helpful – she took his concern seriously, treated him like an adult, and, most importantly, did not “bring any Catholic themes or other religious connotations into the discussion.” Shiloh was also surprised to learn that the guidance counsellor pointed out a hotline for gay youth to his friend. He is certain, though, that this is something she did “on her own initiative – the school certainly didn’t give her any gay positive materials to pass along to gay students.”

These memorable faculty members were not the norm in Shiloh’s school. According to Shiloh, “Homophobia was everywhere! The phrase ‘that’s so gay!’ is thrown around like candy … calling people fags for things … it was pretty bad.” “Once in the locker room,” Shiloh recalls, “a team captain got naked and touched this unpopular guy in the face with his genitals, basically teabagging him.” Shiloh plucked up the courage to confront the team captain about it, but that was as far as it got.

Shiloh believes students will lead the revolution to combat homophobia in Catholic schools because most of the adults in the building are “constantly just pulling the ‘that’s a sensitive topic’ phrase, or ‘that’s just not what God intended’ lines” whenever students ask a question related to homosexuality. He knows, though, that it is going to be “very hard to reach that state of liberation because of all the constant Catholic school administration resistance to any attempt at gay rights.”
Junia.

Junia attended Catholic schools in southern Ontario from Grade 2 until her 2005 graduation. She waited until after graduation to come out as a lesbian because she felt that was the “safest route” for her. She had learned throughout all her religion classes that the only acceptable family structure was marriage between a man and a woman and that sexual intimacy between a married heterosexual couple was only for the purpose of procreation. When Junia started to develop romantic feelings for one of the girls in her small circle of friends, she didn’t know what to do about it. She knew her feelings didn’t fit the regular coupling and courting norms that would lead to the kind of marriage and family life that she had learned about in religion class, at church, and through her own family, so she kept them to herself. Her increasing desire for her friend just made her confused and unsure about herself, so it was easiest to just ignore it.

One day, while walking to the bus stop with three female friends, Junia was deeply surprised when one of them came out as gay. Although it wasn’t the girl Junia had a crush on, she was thrilled to discover she wasn’t alone. This female friend was the only non-heterosexual person, other than herself, that Junia knew of in her Catholic school.

Even though there wasn’t anything queer positive in her Catholic school, Junia kept abreast of developments for queer youth in schools throughout her province by following media reports. She was in Grade 10 when the story broke about Marc Hall – an Ontario teen who fought a successful legal battle against his Catholic high school for the right to take his boyfriend to prom. She also followed closely the story of a local gay teen who managed to start a Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) in his public high school. Junia doesn’t think there should be any “rules or regulations on who you can bring to your
prom,” but she does think trying to start a GSA in a Catholic school would not be wise because the students “would probably get bullied, or even beat up, or much worse.”

Junia has a good reason to be fearful of this kind of violence in a Catholic school. She was bullied to the point of receiving a death threat from the ringleader of her male tormentors. The bullies targeted her as soon as she entered high school in Grade 9 sporting a super short hair cut after having had very long hair in middle school. She had also put on some weight and started favouring plain clothes such as t-shirts, sweatshirts and jeans. The bullies called her names that zeroed in on her gender non-conformity, specifically her masculine appearance, her inattentiveness to her looks, and her bigger size. The bullying would take place in the hallways and also in the classrooms.

To Junia, the teachers didn’t seem to know it was happening. One time, it got so bad in a classroom that Junia approached the teacher and said, “You know what? I’m leaving because I’m not going to sit here in this classroom and be bullied like this.” The teacher responded by allowing Junia to leave the classroom whenever the teasing got too bad and then the teacher would come and find Junia in the cafeteria and give her the day’s homework.

Junia felt deeply unsafe in her Catholic high school. The environment did not make her feel welcomed and cared for and she felt no sense of belonging there. “I didn’t even go to my prom” she says. According to Junia, resistance to the homophobia of her Catholic school is futile. “It would be impossible” for somebody to stand up for queer rights in a Catholic school because of the “fear of being bullied for their sexual orientation, or maybe even as far as getting kicked out of the school.” “You could get in a lot of trouble just for speaking up” she says.
Growing up in a Catholic family in northern Ontario, Abigail attended Catholic schools from kindergarten until she graduated in 2007. When religion teachers began to address the topic of human sexuality in the upper elementary grades and continued through to high school, they only discussed procreative heterosexual intercourse between a married man and a woman. Looking back on what she learned in religion class, Abigail observes, “I think I could have come out as a lesbian a lot earlier if it had occurred to me that I could be gay, but it just wasn’t talked about.”

When Abigail’s female friends started to date boys in middle school, she studiously avoided the topic by excelling in her classes and writing in her journal. Sometimes she would express her thoughts and feelings in simple diary entries and other times she would create polished poems about alienation, isolation, and feeling different. She became so practiced at writing poetry that her Grade 9 English teacher asked her if she could share it with the class. Hearing a teacher she respected read the poems she created aloud to the class was an instant boost to Abigail’s self-esteem. She developed an immediate bond with this teacher and went to see her occasionally before class, after class, or at lunch to talk about her creative writing throughout the first three years of her high school career. It’s not that Abigail needed a new friend – she had lots of friends, just none who appreciated poetry. “Poetry, for me, was really, really important,” says Abigail, “because that was the way I expressed myself. Like, that was the way I carried on.”

Eventually, Abigail finally agreed to one of her friend’s frequent attempts to set her up with a particular young man in their grade. She liked him well enough, but after about a week into it she thought, “this isn’t working. I don’t like this,” and she said to her
friend, “I don’t understand what is going on with me.” She stopped dating the boy and started writing more in her journal.

Then there was a girl in her Grade 11 English class that she really liked. They “started to hang out” and Abigail “really ended up having strong feelings for her.” “Finally one day it just kind of clicked in my head,” recalls Abigail, “I realized: ‘oh, ok, this is what it is supposed to feel like.’” This girl was the first person Abigail told about liking girls. Although she did not feel the same way, Abigail’s friend from eleventh grade English was “pretty cool” about it. Encouraged by this reaction, Abigail told all of her best friends that she was gay. She didn’t get a single negative response. “Once I realized I was gay,” Abigail remembers, “I wanted to tell someone who wasn’t just a friend. I wanted to tell an adult.” So, Abigail told her former Grade 9 English teacher and found that she, too, was “pretty cool” with it – initially. Then, something went terribly wrong.

To this day, Abigail still does not understand what happened with her former English teacher, but suddenly Abigail’s mother was called into the school at the end of the day to have a discussion with the principal and Abigail’s former English teacher while Abigail waited in a lounge chair outside the principal’s office. On the way home, Abigail’s mother told her, “They think that you’re in love with her.” Abigail protested that it wasn’t true. She was 16 years old, secretly in love with a straight girl from her Grade 11 English class, and only recently out to her close friends and one trusted teacher. “I definitely was not ready to tell my mom,” Abigail remembers clearly. It turns out she didn’t have to tell her mom because the school already did that for her. Thinking back, Abigail remarks, “It was just a terrible time. It was bad for mom, too. It really wasn’t
great to find out your kid’s gay from the administration of the only Catholic high school in town. It *really* wasn’t cool.”

When Abigail returned to school the next day, she immediately sought out her former English teacher to tell her that she wasn’t in love with her and the teacher responded by saying, “I know. Where did you ever get that idea?” Puzzled by this reaction, Abigail nevertheless thought “we were fine.” Abigail visited her former English teacher less frequently for much of the rest of Grade 11, but by the time Grade 12 started, she was “writing again, giving her my poetry again.”

It wasn’t long before Abigail was called down to the principal’s office at the end of the school day. When the secretary ushered her into the conference room, Abigail was surprised to see her mother, the school principal, and her former English teacher sitting around the oval table. In the ensuing discussion, Abigail discovered that her former English teacher started keeping anecdotal records about her behaviour at the beginning of her Grade 12 year, kept some of the poems she shared with her, believed that Abigail wrote them about her, and claimed that Abigail “made her feel uncomfortable.” Even though Abigail’s principal “seemed just as perplexed” as both Abigail and her mom by what they were hearing from the English teacher, she decided nevertheless that Abigail had to stop going to see the English teacher to talk about poetry. In effect, a quasi restraining order was placed on Abigail.

Abigail was outraged by the injustice of it all. She wasn’t in love with her former English teacher; she was in love with a classmate from her Grade 11 English class that was taught by a different teacher. She only wanted to continue getting encouragement on her poetry from her former Grade 9 English teacher. Abigail felt deeply betrayed by this
teacher whom she “totally trusted.” “Not only had I already forgiven her for outing me,” Abigail laments as she recounts the events, “but now this as well? It was just so bizarre!” Then Abigail had to endure walking past her former English teacher in the hallway and seeing a teacher she once held in such high regard act as though she didn’t exist. “She wouldn’t even look at me,” Abigail recalls bitterly. “I don’t think any of that would have happened if I hadn’t told her I was a lesbian,” she notes.

Apart from the guidance counsellor, whom Abigail suspected was a secret, closeted lesbian, Abigail did not know of any other lgbtq people in her school. “Honestly, I felt, like, lost” she says. She visited the public library a lot and read every lgbtq-themed young adult novel on the shelves. She went online and learned about Gay/Straight Alliances and then e-mailed an American young adult author she particularly liked to ask for advice about setting one up. When the author discovered that Abigail was in a Catholic school, she told her not to get her hopes up and that it might be better if she called it “Equality Awareness.” Using the information she received from the author, Abigail designed a club that respected diversity and countered discrimination of all kinds – sexism, racism, classism, ableism, heterosexism – and successfully pitched it to a teacher sponsor. Much to Abigail’s surprise, she got a core group of about ten members who regularly attended the club.

They discussed “stuff that, like, nobody would bring up in the school.” One student talked about how he wasn’t allowed to wear the girls’ kilt to school and together they discussed freedom of expression versus social order. Along with the Equality Awareness” club and her reading and writing, Abigail’s “main outlet was pretty much the Internet.” Online, she learned about the Day of Silence, a student-led action in which
students refuse to speak for a day at school to draw attention to the need to make schools safer for all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Abigail drafted a poster for the Day of Silence and brought it to the principal for approval. The principal told her the club was becoming too “gay centric” and that she “needed to tone it down.” In the argument that ensued, Abigail retorted, “Well, I’m sorry, but this is personal to me. I’m a lesbian, you know? That’s been established by now!” As a compromise, the principal said she could put up some posters as long as she changed the name from Day of Silence to “Oath of Silence” and removed the word “homophobia” from the draft sentence that read “Fight against sexism, racism, and homophobia!” When Abigail asked the principal what was the problem with the word “homophobia,” the principal simply responded, “You know the Catholic stance: It’s okay to be gay, as long as you don’t act on it.” In recounting this story, Abigail observes, “It was really bizarre because Catholics – they’re so, like, sympathetic to you. So she wasn’t mean. But, they don’t understand that what they are saying is incredibly hurtful.” In the end, Abigail’s poster read: “Equality. Oath of Silence Day. Fight.” She made sure students knew what the day was about by spreading the message through word of mouth.

In another stealthy act of resistance, Abigail convinced her school principal that the school should have a benefit concert along the lines of the American Idol Gives Back charity fundraiser. In selling the idea to the principal, Abigail said, “We have a lot of talented students in our high school – a lot of great singers and musicians. We could have a benefit concert like the American Idol one, but simpler. It would be another form of education. We could get an article in the local paper.” The principal nodded her head in agreement and said, “Yeah, that’s a great idea. So, go ahead. Do it.” With only a few
days remaining before the event, the principal asked Abigail what organization would be the beneficiary of the money. Abigail smiled and replied, “Oh, the local AIDS committee.” The principal’s smile disappeared from her face and she responded coldly, “Oh. Ok.” Later, when the AIDS committee representative came to pick up the cheque, he remarked to Abigail, “Yeah, you could just feel the tension of the place as soon as you walked in the door. I felt like I was getting death glares being from the AIDS committee.”

Abigail devoted her final year of high school to actively combating her school’s homophobia. Ever since she got forced out of the closet by a teacher she once admired but who would no longer even look at her let alone talk to her, Abigail developed a cavalier attitude. She knew she would be out of there soon and that they couldn’t do much more than they already had to hurt her, so she defied her principal who told her, “It’s ok if you are quietly a lesbian. That’s fine.” Now that she was forced out, the last thing Abigail was going to be was quiet about it. She thought, “I can’t not be myself. If being myself was pissing them off, that’s unfortunate because that’s just the way it is.”

Abigail’s last act of resistance was in the final semester of her graduating year. In her Grade 12 English class, taught by yet another English teacher, students had to pick one classic novel, complete an independent study on it, and present it to the class. Abigail chose Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway* and emphasized all of the references to homosexuality in it. She was surprised that the teacher didn’t shut her presentation down.

Abigail is hopeful that more people will tackle homophobia in Catholic schools. She says, “The resistance is already starting to happen. People are starting to get upset, and not just gay people. It upsets a lot of people, like my mom. What happened to me upsets her. Same with my friends. It’ll change one day, but we have to change it.”
Hannah.

Born in 1991 into a tight-knit Catholic community in southern Ontario, Hannah went to Catholic schools from kindergarten until she felt compelled to drop out of high school after Grade 11 because of her “being gay.” She was an altar server at her local parish from Grade 3 until Grade 8, when she decided to stop. Back then, she worried: “My appearance! What are they going to think? They’re going to know! They’re, like, mind readers! They can tell!” Hannah was very active in her church, taking part in socials, afternoon teas with the “old ladies,” and Catholic youth groups. In Grade 7, she thought, “Yeah, I’m bisexual. Like, I really like this girl in my class and she likes me and this is hot!” In middle school, when Hannah cut her hair short and started dressing like a boy, she knew the “church ladies” would not approve, so she “completely withdrew from the parish – completely, 100% – no more youth groups, nothing.”

On her withdrawal from church, Hannah comments, “I wasn’t raised in the greatest of neighbourhoods, so I’d go to church and that was my out so I didn’t get in trouble and, all of a sudden, that out was just taken from me … I didn’t go to church because I didn’t feel safe anymore.” On losing her religion, Hannah remarks, “It was really hard because it was my belief, something that was supposed to be my rock. Those beliefs [were] what I was raised on … they got me through. Then everything just turns around and then something you had – all this faith you based your whole life around – is … not for you anymore, it’s against you. And, you’re like: ‘Wow! What do I do?’”

If Hannah thought she was bisexual in Grade 7, by the time she got to Grade 10, she knew she was a lesbian. In the first semester of Grade 10, Hannah signed up for automotives class. She was one of only two girls who registered in that class and, because
there were only two girls, the male shop teacher decided no one would notice when he wouldn’t let them participate in learning actual auto mechanics, so they “got stuck cleaning the tools in the tool room and washing the oil rags.” Alone together for large chunks of time in the diesel-smelling tool room, Hannah and Jane (not her real name) got into some deep conversations in which Hannah learned that Jane had a girlfriend in the same school. It was the first time Hannah could envision a life for herself as a lesbian.

Jane was not the only great friend Hannah gained from shop class: “my two straight boys” – as she calls them, two boys from the school’s junior wrestling team called Kevin and Liam (not their real names) – “stood up to the auto teacher’s” sexist exclusion of the only female students in the class. They did this by wandering into the tool room, sitting on the floor with Hannah and Jane, throwing the oil rags all around the room, and lighting one of the rags on fire. When that got the teacher’s attention, they said, “We don’t want to do welding right now. We’re not going to do anything until the girls can too.” Realizing he wasn’t going to win this battle, the shop teacher let the girls learn what the boys were learning and he never disciplined Kevin and Liam for setting a fire in the tool room. Hannah remembers thinking, “Yes! We’re best friends!”

With this new group of friends, Hannah became more confident. In Grade 11, She started dressing even more like a boy – wearing “the guys’ school uniform, but with the girls’ shorts” – and she began skipping school. This drew the attention of the vice principal and the school counsellor. In a meeting with the two of them over a forged field trip form she had made to get out of class, Hannah blurted out, “I’m gay and I don’t know what to do.” The guidance counsellor responded by suggesting they call Hannah’s mother in to discuss it with them. Hannah protested, saying that wasn’t a good idea because she
had been trying to tell her mother throughout the summer between Grade 10 and Grade
11, but every time she brought it up, her mother shut her down saying, “No, it’s just a
phase. It’s the friends you’re hanging out with. Gay people go nowhere in life. You
should just kill yourself now.”

Impervious to Hannah’s warnings, the school guidance counsellor called
Hannah’s mother into the school for a chat. Hannah remembers, “I sat in the guidance
counsellor office while my guidance counsellor and my vice principal were in another
room with my mom talking about [me being gay] and they came back and they’re like:
‘So, your mom knows now, but she’s not very accepting of it,’ and I said, ‘I tried to tell
you this one!’” Sitting in silence in the car with her mom on the way back home, Hannah
thought her mother would eventually say, “You’re an abomination! Go to church. Pray
more, pray at home even. Go to church every Sunday. You’re in deep crap!” Instead, she
found her mother had something else in store for her.

After her discussion with the guidance counsellor and the vice principal in the
guidance counsellor’s office, Hannah’s mother became deeply suspicious of the school.
She didn’t like how the mannish-looking guidance counsellor spoke so positively of the
“homosexual lifestyle.” She saw that poster of a rainbow flag on her office wall saying
“be positive” and thought it was some vague gay message. She sent her daughter to this
Catholic school to learn Catholic values, not this “it’s okay to be gay” nonsense. Don’t
they know that “gay people amount to nothing in life because they go nowhere?” She
also saw Hannah’s new friends at school as “gay influences” and decided it would be best
if Hannah just didn’t go back there. She decreed that not only was Hannah not allowed to
go back to school, but she would be confined to her room and would not be allowed any
outside contact whatsoever. Hannah wasn’t going to be home-schooled – she was just
going to be at home, period.

Not one to be easily confined, Hannah broke the new rules in a matter of days and
her mother responded by kicking her out of the house. Hannah went to live at a friend’s
house and got a part-time job at a local coffee shop to pay for expenses like toiletries, bus
passes, and lunches. Initially, she enjoyed her time away from her mom and attended
school regularly. Even though her good friend, Jane, was a grade ahead of her, Hannah
managed to take another class with her by signing up for the same option she was taking.
One of the assignments for the class was doing a report on a local community association.
The students were told to work in pairs and Jane and Hannah worked together on a
project about the local LGBTQ community.

While working in the school’s computer lab, they discovered that all the websites
affirming sexual minority groups were blocked while opposing websites such as those of
various Christian reform groups with messages such as “Homosexuals should burn in
hell” were fully accessible. Jane and Hannah went up to their teacher and said, “Ummm
… hello! We’re trying to do our project and we can’t do it because everything that [is
gay] positive is blocked and everything that says ‘gays should go die and burn in hell’ we
can access.” The teacher referred the matter to the school administration, who referred it
on to the computer support personnel, who then started to block and unblock certain sites
from the school system. Hannah doesn’t know if it was just a temporary fix so they could
work on their project, or if the changes are still in place, but she and Jane felt “triumphant
… like Rocky … we were like: ‘Yes! Yes! Projects! Queers are good!’”
Another change Hannah tried to make in her school before she dropped out had to do with opposing the removal of the only gay positive book from the school’s library. The parent council wanted to remove the book from the library and make it a teacher resource only. Hannah found out about this plan from the school guidance counsellor, with whom she had been in regular contact since “all hell had broken loose” and she got kicked out of the house. Hannah says the guidance counsellor might have felt a bit guilty: “she would come and talk to me every single day and pull me out of class and be all like: ‘What’s going on? Are you safe? Is there anything we can do?’”

Although the guidance counsellor never actually came out as a lesbian to Hannah and Jane, she did take them “under her wing” and told them about queer-themed events going on in town. When Hannah and Jane would show up to these events, the guidance counsellor would be there with a woman she would introduce as her “friend.” On the guidance counsellor’s desk in her office, Hannah also saw pictures of this same woman holidaying with the guidance counsellor. Hannah is certain they are a couple. Another detail that cemented Hannah’s impression that the guidance counsellor is a lesbian was the fact that she advocated heavily for Jane to be able to take her girlfriend to prom, and then showed up to the students’ prom dance wearing a pants suit and necktie.

Hannah learned of the homosexual book controversy when the guidance counsellor came up to her at school one day and said, “Hey, hey! There’s a meeting going on tonight for the board to take out this book that promotes homosexuality …” and told Hannah how she could get involved. Hannah remembers, “I went to that board meeting and I put up my hand to speak … and they looked directly at me and said: ‘Oh, well, I guess if there are no more questions, or comments, we can close the meeting.’”
Despite getting involved in anti-homophobia activism during her Grade 11 year, Hannah was not always up to being a courageous crusader. Getting kicked out of her family home was beginning to take its toll on her. She missed her mom (her father was living elsewhere), but would get news about her from her daily interactions with the school guidance counsellor. Having no other way to keep up with her child, Hannah’s mom had taken to calling the school guidance counsellor on a regular basis. Eventually, the guidance counsellor told Hannah that Hannah’s mother was harassing her at her place of work. “That’s how bad it got,” Hannah remembers, “my mom would call her and tell her that she didn’t have her permission to talk to me and she shouldn’t be speaking to me and she doesn’t want her to be talking to me at all and to just leave me alone.” The school guidance counsellor suggested that Hannah and her mother go to family counselling through a local Catholic agency.

In total, Hannah attended seven sessions with her mom at the Catholic family counselling services. Hannah says, “I didn’t get to say much. I just shut up, sat there, listened for my 45 minutes, nodded my head, agreed and left.” The counsellor told her to “keep [your lesbianism] to yourself. You don’t have to let everybody know. You shouldn’t tell everybody. It’s for selective people to know.” When the Catholic counsellor tried to convince her that she should avoid gay people because they “are more promiscuous and [you] are more likely to get diseases,” Hannah countered with “No, I’m not, actually.” At the time, Hannah was also doing her own research online and she knew the counsellor was presenting a biased position. Hannah’s outside research also came in handy during one of the counselling sessions when Hannah’s mother suggested enrolling Hannah in a reparative therapy camp to transform her into a heterosexual. Hannah told
her mother, “No. I’m not talking to you at all. This is the limit. This is the line. You’re putting me as a person in danger doing this! It’s not going to help me.” That was the last family therapy session Hannah had with her mother and the Catholic counsellor.

Two days before Christmas, Hannah got invited to a family gathering at her maternal grandmother’s house. There, she had to endure one of her uncles telling her, “You’re not right, you’re an abomination, and you weren’t created in God’s image.” Then, Hannah says, “he went to punch me and [told] me to get out of the house.” Shortly after this encounter, Hannah spiralled down into a deep depression and made her first of several suicide attempts. She stopped staying at her friend’s place and “switched over and started staying at [her] other friend’s place with him and his dad.”

When school resumed in the new year, Hannah went in to see the school guidance counsellor and told her about the conversion camp her mother wanted her to go to and about the family gathering over Christmas. The guidance counsellor “felt really bad” for Hannah. Aware that all of this had happened after she and the vice principal outed Hannah to her mother, the guidance counsellor met with the vice principal to work out a possible solution. The guidance counsellor assured Hannah, “I’m putting in all the supports I can,” and made arrangements for an outside, queer-positive, counsellor to come to the school and offer Hannah therapy right at the school.

Hannah responded well to this new therapy. She considered seeking out a possible mentor in one of her three rugby coaches who was a lesbian, but she decided against it. “The lesbian coach,” Hannah remembers, “kind of kept to herself … she made it to practice, but she never really did get too involved with this commitment.” Hannah thinks
she did this “to cover her own ass” so that she wouldn’t risk being outed if she befriended a lesbian player. Hannah decided to leave her alone.

Back on the Internet, Hannah discovered another outlet she might be able to use to express herself at school: The Day of Silence. When she tried to observe it at her school, however, she “got in trouble.” From what she read online, Hannah knew that observing the Day of Silence might provoke resistance from teachers or school administrators. She prepared for this, though, by asking for advice about it in advance from the school’s closeted lesbian guidance counsellor. The guidance counsellor advised Hannah: “You can do it, I’m just not telling you that it’s approved or anything, and it’s off the record, as in, you can do it as an individual, but you have to follow rules, and, if a teacher asks you to speak, you should probably speak. It’s not worth the fight.” When Hannah participated in the Day of Silence, her teachers asked: “Why aren’t you talking? Why aren’t you answering questions?” Hannah explained she was trying to observe the Day of Silence, to which her teachers responded, “This is not approved by the administration, so you can’t do it.” Hannah was frustrated by her teachers’ resistance to her peaceful protest because she was “just one person” and was not causing any trouble.

Just being herself got Hannah in trouble. As Hannah tells it: “One day, I was going to an acceptance assembly and a teacher stopped me in the hallway because I was bugging her class and she told me to ‘be on your way “mam” or “sir” or whatever you are!’ And, I brought that to the attention of administration, and they did nothing. And, with this same teacher, I was pulled out of the washroom once, and I was told that I was male and that I should be in the male washroom.” Hannah did not know this math teacher – the first time she had ever met her was when she was called down to the guidance
counsellor’s office to receive the math teacher’s “three second apology.” Dissatisfied with the school administration’s disregard of the matter, Hannah had previously mentioned it to the guidance counsellor who then met with the math teacher. After the two faculty members talked about the problem for approximately an hour, Hannah was called into the office to listen the math teacher explain: “In no way was my remark meant to be hurtful towards you, or homophobic, or anything like that.” As the two briefly shook hands, the math teacher remarked, “You should try out for wrestling,” a sport she coached as part of her extracurricular duties.

Looking back on this experience, Hannah says she regrets “settling for a handshake from that teacher because that could have killed me and they never would have known.” Hannah locates that incident as a pivotal encounter that “really sent [her] down.” Hannah remembers thinking, “Wow! My family is not accepting me, I have no support, and now a random teacher comes up to me in the hallway and does this to me? She doesn’t even acknowledge that I am a sex – she just calls me ‘whatever you are’ … I would have rather been called an it.”

Shortly after this episode, Hannah went into a sharp decline emotionally and mentally. Fortunately, the school’s guidance counsellor had previously arranged for an outside queer-positive psychologist to provide therapy for Hannah at the school. Hannah remembers: “At one point, I was so down. I was sitting in front of my counsellor and I was looking at her and I was, like: ‘My 17th birthday is coming up and I’m not going to be alive for it.’ I was like: ‘I’m telling you this right now. This is how it is going.’” Even though Hannah was doing much better with her new queer positive counsellor than she was with the previous Catholic family counselling sessions, the stress of being rejected
by her family, her church, and certain elements of her Catholic school began to have a cumulative effect on her. To ease the pain, she began making shallow cuts into her forearm. Hannah’s self-harm trajectory escalated to attempts to take her own life by swallowing pills that were readily available to her. Once the outside psychologist and the school guidance counsellor discovered Hannah’s emotional and mental state, they began the process of having her voluntarily committed to the psychiatric ward of the local hospital because she posed a significant danger to herself.

“When I got there,” Hannah says, “the doctor tried to diagnose me with gender dysphoria because I looked like a man. He was like: ‘You look like a man, you talk like a man, you want to be a man!’ I was like, ‘No! No! I really, really, really don’t! I just like girls!’” Hannah remembers thinking, “Wow! What I just came out of and now you’re telling me I want to be a man! No! Can’t deal!” Because Hannah was under the age of 18, she required the consent of her mother to have any visitors while in hospital. Hannah notes, “So, of course, I saw none of my friends or anything, even though they attempted to visit.” After a month and a half of being in the hospital, Hannah finally got out on a day pass in the care of her mother. As Hannah remembers it, “My mom just let in to me and was like, ‘See! Being gay is just causing more trouble! Do you really want to do this?’ So, while I was out on the day pass, I ended up overdosing again and going back to the hospital [where] I was in isolation for a week and a half.”

Hannah was in and out of the psychiatric ward for the remainder of her Grade 11 year. When she wasn’t in the hospital, Hannah was back living with her friend and his father. During this time, Hannah learned about a nearby LGBTQ centre with specific programs for LGBTQ youth and started getting additional counselling there. Despite all of
these supports, Hannah still continued to make attempts on her life. Hannah concedes, “Without [the queer positive counselling], I can guarantee that I would not be alive today, for sure.” All of this turmoil and stress meant that Hannah didn’t have much of a chance at finishing her Grade 11 courses. Hannah notes: “I was in the hospital and I missed the last month of school and I ended up failing my exams …”

Hannah made a valiant effort to return to school the following September after her release from the hospital sometime over the summer. She “was in all of the sports teams and everybody knew [her]” so there was a lot of gossip circulating about her: “Oh, Hannah just dropped off of the face of the earth the last month of school.” Hannah discovered that a lot of people knew she was hospitalized because of her suicide attempts, but most people seemed to think she tried to take her own life because of her homosexuality, not because of the homophobia. Hannah remembers, “I got back and no one was talking to me anymore. We had to do projects and people didn’t want to do a group project with a lesbian.” Hannah recalls, “I [didn’t] want to be the poster lesbian child at Catholic school.”

A “poster lesbian” was exactly what the school newspaper wanted to make Hannah. One young writer, a girl in one of Hannah’s classes, approached her and asked her if she could interview her as the “only lesbian in the school.” She apparently didn’t know about Jane and her girlfriend, who had attended their prom together as a couple just four months previously. Hannah agreed, on the condition the interview take place in the presence of the school guidance counsellor. Hannah recalls, “The first question she asked … was: ‘Why did you choose to be gay?’” to which Hannah responded by standing up and saying, “If you’re asking me that question, I’m not doing this interview.” The school
no longer seemed to be the right place for Hannah: “So, I ended up dropping out – I
mean, I was like: ‘I just can’t deal with this!’”

Hannah moved from part time at the local café to the full time night shift job.
Eventually, she saved up enough money for first and last month’s rent and got a bachelor
apartment with a couple of friends: “It was good having three people in a bachelor. It was
tiny. I slept in a closet, but we joked that I got to come out of the closet every morning!”
She was just 16 years old when she got her first apartment.

The closeted guidance counsellor from Hannah’s former high school approached
Hannah at the café one night shortly after she dropped out of high school and asked her if
she and her friend Jane might like to talk about their experiences of being lesbians in a
Catholic school at an upcoming Catholic guidance counsellor convention in Toronto. The
counsellor said, “You should speak there … and just give us some insight and help us
help the gay kids that are following you.” Hannah responded, “Well, I think that, with
students you need someone a little more stable and able to talk about my experiences.”
The closeted guidance counsellor told Hannah to think about it, but Hannah says, “I
didn’t end up getting back to her because it was, like, just after I got out of the hospital
and I still wasn’t comfortable.” She adds, “Like, now, I could do it fine. But, it’s
definitely needed.”

Looking back at her Catholic high school, Hannah says, “There was a good mix
of homophobia and acceptance. There was the staff that were willing to, like, try to make
changes and stuff, and be like: ‘No, this isn’t how it should be. We really need to re-
evaluate stuff.’ And, then, there’s the staff who are like: ‘No. We’re doing the Catholic
teachings. These are our guidelines and this is what we are doing – no exceptions!’” On
her outlook for less homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools, Hannah says, “I’m hoping that things are getting better and students are trying to get their voices out more because it needs to be done. But, there’s been no change … fear holds everybody back.”

Hannah has done the hard psychological and emotional work of facing her fears and continuing forward in her life. She has been accepted as a mature student at a post secondary institution and hopes to one day become a surgeon.

**Concluding Remarks**

The following concluding remarks involve the use of numbers because, as qualitative researcher Margarete Sandelowski (2001) argues, numbers can compliment qualitative forms of research in that they can assist in summarizing the findings of narrative research texts, establishing the significance of the narratives, and grouping the participants in a different, though equally meaningful, way. Other scholars argue for the use of numbers in qualitative research because meaning can depend, at least in part, on numbers (Dey, 1993), counting is an essential step toward ensuring validity (Maxwell, 1992), and numbers can enhance the understanding of narratives (Olson, 2000). Although the numbers may seem at odds with the preceding narrative research texts, they are offered as a succinct way of conceptualizing the findings.

This “Participants” chapter offers the stories of 6 teacher participants and 12 student participants. Although 20 people took part in this study, in order to avoid repetition and due to insufficient detail in two of the research interviews, only 18 of the participants’ stories are re-presented here in the form of narrative research texts. The following tallies are therefore based on the number 18, not the number 20. All of the student and teacher participants identify as lgbtq, except for 1 female teacher participant,
Anna, who identifies as a “straight ally.” Of the 6 teacher participants whose stories appear in this chapter, 3 were fired for behaving in ways that the Catholic school administrators deemed to be contrary to Catholic doctrine vis-à-vis sexual minority groups. Job was fired from his Catholic district in rural Alberta in 2008 because he was transitioning from the female to the male gender. Naarai was fired from her Catholic district in rural Alberta in 2009 because she was attempting to get pregnant so she could raise a child with her female partner. Anna was fired from her Catholic district in southern Alberta in 2004 for taking on the role of “straight ally” to the LGBTQ students in her Catholic school and providing a “positive space” for them to meet in her classroom at lunchtime. Naomi was harassed by conservative residents in her northern Ontario town, and by certain colleagues at the elementary school where she had accepted a temporary teaching position, because of her suspected lesbianism. The harassment was so severe that she barely completed the school year in 2005.

The 2 other teacher participants are a male principal and a male teacher who have been teaching with their respective Catholic school districts since the mid 1990s, but are only able to do so by remaining closeted at work and by pretending to be bachelors unlucky in love, despite the fact that both men have long-term male partners with whom they have been living for several years. Mark is a principal at a Catholic elementary school in Alberta who has developed excellent coping skills in avoiding personal questions that might reveal his sexuality and marital status. Luke is a high school English teacher in Ontario who is fearful that the Catholicity clause in his employment contract might be used to fire him if it becomes known that he has been living with his male partner in a common-law arrangement for more than a decade. Like Mark, Luke has
developed coping skills to avoid the homophobic indoctrination that pervades his school atmosphere. Unlike Mark, Luke finds ways to express his sense of human rights activism in his Catholic school.

Of the 12 student participants whose stories are re-presented in this chapter, 4 chose to stay resolutely closeted while in their Catholic school. Judith witnessed the ridicule another transgirl faced in her school in southern Alberta and felt it would be safer to present as male rather than as the male-to-female transgender person she was discovering herself to be. Caleb tried to “butch it up” and date a girl in his Catholic school in northern Alberta, but he was called “faggot” anyway and it was only when he was in treatment for his eating disorder that he was able to come out as gay. As a student leader in his southern Ontario Catholic school, Shiloh felt pressured to be an example of the Catholic faith, and this kept him closeted at school. Bullied for her gender non-conformity in her southern Ontario Catholic school, Junia decided it would be safer to wait until after graduation to come out as a lesbian.

One student participant called Gabriel was semi-closeted in his southern Ontario Catholic school, coming out about as gay to only a few trusted friends. The hyper heteronormative environment of Gabriel’s athletic Catholic school reinforced for him that it would be too stressful to come out at school. Gabriel was able to be out to some select friends at school, online through a website for young gay males, and also to one of the school’s clergy administrators who asked Gabriel about his sexuality while reassuring him it was safe to talk about it with him because the administrator revealed that he was gay too.
Of the 12 student participants, 3 who were out about their sexuality to themselves and some of their friends had the disastrous experience of their Catholic school administrators outing them to their parents. Jacob now identifies as a “queer trans-guy,” but back when he was in Grade 7 at his Catholic junior high school in southern Alberta, he identified as a lesbian. Jacob came out as a lesbian at the age of 12 to a trusted religion teacher who told the principal of the school who then called in Jacob’s parents for a meeting so Jacob could come out to them at the school. Jacob’s parents reacted by sending him to reparative therapy. Abigail had such a positive experience coming out as a lesbian in Grade 11 to her best friends in her Catholic high school in northern Ontario that she decided to tell a trusted teacher with whom she had bonded over poetry. That teacher informed the principal of the school who then called in Abigail’s mother to apprise her of Abigail’s disclosure of her lesbianism. Reflecting on this experience, Abigail says she “definitely was not ready” to tell her mom, and that it was a “terrible time” for both her and her mother. While being disciplined for not wearing the full girl’s uniform, and for making a forged form to get out of one of her Grade 11 classes, a frustrated Hannah told her vice principal and guidance counsellor that she was gay. These administrators of her southern Ontario Catholic high school decided it was best to call in Hannah’s mother so that she could be informed of this. Hannah’s mother responded by pulling Hannah out of the school to keep her away from what she regarded to be “gay influences,” and by eventually expelling Hannah from the family home.

One student participant called Esther was outed as a lesbian by bullies in her northern Alberta Catholic high school who had been tormenting her since she arrived in Grade 9. Esther reported the bullying to her administrators early on, but the only action
she ever witnessed was in her eleventh grade after she complained to the school board about an incident on the school bus in which the bus driver tried to blame Esther and her friend for the homophobic bullying they endured. Following Esther’s complaint, the school’s guidance counsellor was persuaded to purchase several LGBTQ-affirming books for the school library and Esther was allowed to run a GSA off of school property. The bullying stopped in Esther’s senior year.

Of the 12 student participants in this study, 3 were able to be fully out about their non-heterosexuality while in their Catholic schools. Jonas knew from an early age that he was gay. When he started Grade 9 at his southern Ontario Catholic high school, at least one other student knew Jonas was gay, too. This student became Jonas’ personal bully and stalker who followed Jonas around and called him a “fag” whenever he could. Together with a close friend, Jonas found ways to cope with his bully. Eventually, Jonas came out as gay to his close friend who responded by also coming out as gay. Drawing strength from one another, the two friends came out to others in their Catholic school at the same time and their openness earned them a whole new set of friends. Like Jonas, Simon also knew he was gay from a young age. He came out as gay to his friends in his northern Alberta Catholic high school at the beginning of Grade 9. His friends reacted positively but the assistant principal/school counsellor did not. He asked Simon to “rein in” his “behaviour” because he said it was making some parents uncomfortable. Simon told his parents who threatened to sue the school and Simon was able to carry on being himself. Mary remembers realizing she liked girls at the beginning of junior high but it wasn’t until high school that she came out as a lesbian. She sought guidance about coming out from the counsellor at her southern Alberta Catholic high school and, when
she didn’t receive any help or encouragement, she confided in a friend who informed her about a local support group for LGBTQ youth. The youth group gave Mary the confidence she needed to be more and more out about her sexuality at school.

Of the 6 teacher participants whose stories are recounted in this chapter, 4 are no longer teaching with their original Catholic school board (3 were fired for not conforming to Catholic doctrine regarding sexual minorities, and 1 was harassed about her lesbianism until she finished her temporary contract). The 3 who were fired still continue to assist sexual minority groups in other school districts and 1 is still fighting his wrongful dismissal through legal channels. The 1 teacher participant who was harassed about being a lesbian until she left the town where she was fulfilling a temporary teaching assignment is now pursuing graduate studies. Of the remaining teacher participants, 2 continue to teach with their original Catholic school boards but remain closeted about their homosexuality. One of the closeted teachers is in a leadership position as a principal and is therefore reluctant to openly question the homophobia of the system in case his actions draw attention to his own homosexuality, thereby jeopardizing his employment. The other closeted teacher has received a continuous contract and feels confident enough in his role as a regular classroom teacher to question his board’s systemic homophobia.

Of the 12 student participants whose stories appear in this chapter, 5 felt too closeted to be able to take any action against the homophobia around them. Of the others, 4 were outed at school, either by school personnel or by bullies, and were able to transform their anger over this experience into positive steps to combat homophobia in their schools. The remaining 3 student participants were able to be out about their non-heterosexuality while studying in Catholic schools and, while they experienced both
positive and negative reactions to their openness about their sexuality, their courage in being out likely had incalculable effects on those around them in their Catholic schools.

The majority of teacher participants in this study experienced greater degrees of doctrinal disciplining than the student participants, but some of the teacher participants who were disciplined by being fired were able to find alternate ways to still serve the cause of equality and justice for all in their new school districts or through legal avenues. The 2 teacher participants who remain employed by their original Catholic school districts engage in a kind of strategic self disciplining designed to shield their homosexuality from others. One of the closeted teachers is able to find ways to circumvent his doctrinal disciplining and thereby feel less oppressed by the system.

The doctrinal disciplining that the majority of the student participants experienced came in two forms: 1) feeling afraid to come out about their sexuality while still in school; and 2) being outed to their parents by school personnel, or being forced out of the closet by bullies. Even those student participants who were able to be out about their sexuality of their own volition when they were students in their Catholic schools still did not feel entirely safe about being out in such an environment.

This summary of the participants’ experiences helps to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis. In terms of the first question: “How does power operate within and across Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools?” it appears from the participants’ experiences that the power that originates with the Catholic doctrine operates primarily by means of discipline and repression. However, another form of power originates with the people in the ways they are able to resist the dominating force of Catholic doctrine. Regarding the second question: “How do Catholic documents
produce teachers and students as subjects?” it appears from the participants’ experiences that Catholic documents, such as curriculum and policy documents (to be discussed in the upcoming “Catholic Documents” chapter) designed to disseminate Catholic doctrine about sexual minorities, try to cast LGBTQ students and teachers as “persons with same-sex attraction” whose behaviour should be closely monitored, controlled and disciplined. This chapter’s answer to the third research question, “What effects do Catholic documents have on the experiences of LGBTQ individuals in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools?” is overwhelmingly negative – most student participants felt it would be safer to stay in the closet, some student participants wereouted by the school to their parents, and most teacher participants were fired for behaving in ways considered contrary to Catholic doctrine regarding non-heterosexuals. There is hope, however, in that “yes” is this chapter’s answer to the final research question: “Is resistance possible in an education context so dominated by the repressive force of religiously-inspired homophobia?” Yes, some participants resisted the doctrinal disciplining of their Catholic schools, but the evidence of resistance among participants is not as strong as the evidence of their domination.

The participants’ experiences begin to gesture towards ways in which the three data sets that comprise this dissertation intersect with one another. The majority of the participants’ experiences overwhelmingly show how the Catholic doctrine (to be examined in the upcoming “Catholic Documents” chapter) asserts its disciplining force against sexual minorities in some Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools. However, some participants’ experiences show alternative ideologies competing with the dominant ideology of homophobia that pervades the Catholic school system.
For example, Simon, an out gay student who attended Catholic schools in northern Alberta from kindergarten until he graduated in 2010, was able to counter the homophobic effects of the null curriculum that excluded information about non-heterosexuals by attending queer youth groups and camps where he learned about LGBTQ history such as the Stonewall Riots and famous gay people like Harvey Milk.

Simon’s autodidactic drive also lead him to the Internet where he filled in the gaps of his formal education by learning about the social justice issues underlying several media accounts about LGBTQ youths throughout North America who were subjected to homophobic discrimination by their schools. Online, Simon read news stories such as that of Constance McMillan, the Mississippi high school student who was refused permission to bring her girlfriend as her date, and to wear a tuxedo, to her high school prom dance (Housley, 2010).

These kinds of news stories about homophobic discrimination against students that Simon was reading about on the Internet show the important role the news media can play in disseminating news stories about LGBTQ youth to other LGBTQ youth, which can have the powerful effect of making the LGBTQ youth feel less alone and more connected to other LGBTQ youth of their generation. Simon said this kind of alternative information made him feel more confident about his sexuality and capable of taking on the role of mentor to younger gay youth in his Catholic school. If reading a news media story can have the effect of instilling confidence and a sense of belonging among LGBTQ youth, it is not inconceivable to imagine the media accounts igniting the spark that starts a resistance movement. Simon’s experience highlights an important connection between this “Participants” chapter and the upcoming “Media Accounts” chapter.
Chapter 4

Media Accounts: Surprising Allies in Resisting Homophobia

The role of religion in public education in Canada has been a contentious topic since the 19th century, eventually resulting in the formation of two separate school systems for the two dominant religions of early Canada: Protestant and Catholic (Lawr & Gidney, 1973). Upon the establishment of the Canadian Confederation, the denominational rights of these two school systems were enshrined in the British North America Act of 1867 (Wilson, Stamp & Audet, 1970). This is an important detail because it is to these denominational rights that Catholic education leaders point when questions arise regarding their adherence to Catholic canonical law at the expense of Canadian common law.

Questions rarely arise about the operation of Catholic schools, however, due to the increasing secularization of Canada, and Canadians’ deep respect for the fundamental freedom of religion, which is a constitutionally protected right guaranteed by Section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Prior to 1971, less than 1 per cent of Canadians selected the box beside “no religion” on national surveys; today, that number has risen to 23 per cent (Valpy & Friesen, 2010). Non Catholic Canadians are often unaware of special concessions regarding curriculum that Catholic schools enjoy, as well as the structures in place that enable the continued public funding of Catholic schools in the provinces of Alberta, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. Non Catholic Canadians are often equally unaware of the discriminatory ways in which Catholic doctrine disciplines sexual minority groups in Canadian Catholic schools. This lack of awareness could be attributed to what communications scholar Dane Claussen (2002) identifies as a failure on the part
of North American journalists to take on and competently cover news stories that involve both religion and sexuality. The amount of media coverage Leanne Iskander received – whose story about trying to establish a bona fide Gay/Straight Alliance in her Ontario Catholic high school opened this dissertation – suggests the failure Claussen (2002) identifies may be turning around. Media accounts have been instrumental in disseminating information to the general public about the mistreatment of sexual minority groups in Canadian Catholic schools. Without this important media coverage, very little would be known of various clashes between Catholic canonical law and Canadian common law in relation to non-heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic schools. This chapter highlights the important role the news media can play in raising awareness that can lead to social change. The role of the news media is especially important when Catholic schools are considered because of the Catholic Church’s historical and theological preoccupation with avoiding scandal (McBrien, 1995), which, in practical terms, has often meant a reticence and secrecy around its administrative inner workings.

Catholic schools seek to manage such conflicts between Catholic canonical law and Canadian common law vis-à-vis sexual minorities “in-house” – that is, away from the critical eyes of a variety of different groups and spaces such as student groups, teachers’ associations, the news media, human rights tribunals, and courts of law. However, ever since the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1960s occurring throughout parts of the Western world such as Australia, New Zealand, North America, and Western Europe (Carter, 2004), members of sexual minority groups throughout the Western world have become increasingly aware of their legal rights and have started to demand that they be respected in public institutions, including Catholic schools. Students and teachers who
have experienced homophobic harassment in Canadian Catholic schools, but can get no satisfactory resolution to the problem through appropriate channels within the school system, often turn to the media to express their frustration. The Canadian media have responded by reporting more and more on incidents of homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools.

The following collection of Canadian media accounts range from media coverage of important court cases to homophobic school policies. The stories are not meant to be an exhaustive list, or a representative sample, but rather a snapshot of some homophobic incidents occurring in some Canadian Catholic schools. They are meant to provide a context for the stories shared by the participants in this study. Some of the media accounts offer a rare glimpse into the inner workings of Canadian Catholic schools of which many Canadians are unaware. For example, some Catholic education leaders have gone on public record explaining that their denominational rights exempt them from fully adhering to governmental policies calling for diversity, equity and respect in relation to sexual minority groups, or from completely implementing provincial curricula that addresses sexual orientation or gender identity. Regular lay Catholics such as parents or teachers who are interested in learning more about the process of revamping provincial curricula or educational policies to suit Catholic codes of morality cannot easily access high ranking Catholic education leaders through normal channels. However, various Canadian media outlets such as The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, The Globe and Mail, The Ottawa Citizen, The Toronto Star, and Xtra! Canada’s Gay and Lesbian News have been able to interview such leaders and have provided the general public with direct
quotations of their views and rationales for their decisions. This is an immeasurably valuable exchange that sheds light on a hitherto obscure element of Canadian schooling.

Relatively speaking, matters related to Catholic schools and non-heterosexuals rarely appear in the media, and those that do tend to be negative. This focus on negative news is reflected in the topics that tend to dominate the global news agenda such as crime, violence, politics, and government (Cross, 2010). An obvious limitation, then, of this media section is that it does not contain direct examples of positive experiences LGBTQ people may have had with their Canadian Catholic schools. However, this research does reveal suggestions of queer positive activism occurring at the trustee level of one Catholic school board in southern Ontario. More details on this little publicized activism can be found in the upcoming section titled, “Banning an inclusive education book that mentions homophobia.” Discussion of the significance of this little known queer positive activism in Catholic schools can be found in the “Concluding Remarks” section.

My data collection methods were as follows: starting in 2006 I began amassing media reports that attended to the topic of homosexuality and Canadian Catholic schools. I did this by subscribing to the paper version of The Globe and Mail newspaper and reading other Canadian newspapers online, such as The Ottawa Citizen, The Toronto Star and Xtra! – I read through these print and electronic versions of Canadian newspapers daily for relevant stories. I also set up several electronic alerts through the Google search engine as well as through alert systems available through some media outlets. I used search strings containing words such as: “homosexuality,” “same-sex,” “sexual minority,” “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” “transgender,” “queer,” “homophobia,” combined with the standard “Canadian Catholic schools.” This process of collecting
stories on this research topic between the years 2006 and 2011 yielded a significant number of stories, not all of which could be used in this study.

Because this is a comparative study regarding the treatment of sexual minority groups in the Catholic schools of Alberta and Ontario, I limited the media accounts to these two Canadian provinces primarily. Two exceptions are references to one story from British Columbia and another from Saskatchewan. These stories were included for contextual and important illustrative purposes. In my search for teacher participants from Alberta and Ontario to interview for this study, more teachers came forward from Alberta than Ontario. I decided therefore that I needed more data from Ontario in this study, and so I have included more media stories from this province. Ontario also generated more news reports on this topic than Alberta. This could be due to a number of factors, including a more active Ministry of Education in Ontario that works harder to effectively implement progressive policies on equity and inclusivity – these policies have recently become problematic for Catholic boards throughout Ontario due to ideological clashes with Catholic doctrine. Because of these high-profile clashes and controversies, and particularly the infamous Marc Hall case (to be discussed later), there are a greater number of media accounts from Ontario than Alberta.

The following media accounts section is divided into two sub-sections. The first section revolves around two pivotal court cases involving a gay teacher and a gay student who experienced discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The second section is a collection of homophobic school policies undertaken in some Ontario Catholic schools.
Turning to the Canadian Court System to Fight Homophobia

Two significant court cases involving homosexuality and Christian educational institutions occurred in the provinces of Alberta and Ontario. The first court case involves a gay male teacher who was fired in 1991 from his teaching position at King’s College, a private post secondary Christian institution in Edmonton, Alberta, because of his sexual orientation. The second court case involves a gay male student who was refused permission in 2002 to take his same-sex date to the prom at his publicly funded Catholic high school in Oshawa, Ontario.

These two significant court cases are set in the context of other previous court cases involving Catholic schoolteachers who were fired for behaving in a manner that Catholic school leaders regarded as being contrary to Catholicity. The two court cases are also contextualized within existing media accounts of other Canadian schoolteachers who were fired from their Catholic schools for acting on their homosexual desires by marrying their same-sex partner or by starting a family with a same-sex partner.

These two cases underscore a potential Charter conflict between Section 2, freedom of religion, and Section 15, the equality clause. Although Canada has yet to experience a Charter challenge between Sections Two and 15 involving the denominational rights of Catholic schools and the equality rights of LGBTQ Canadians, a recent Saskatchewan Court of Appeal ruling that marriage commissioners cannot claim freedom of religion to deny marriages to same-sex couples suggests current Canadian judicial leanings on this particular intersection.
A Pivotal Court Case in Alberta: Delwin Vriend.

The fact that this Alberta case did not take place in a Catholic school setting is insignificant given the powerful ramifications it has had for same-sex legal advances in Canada. Peter W. Hogg, the former Dean of Osgoode Hall Law School at York University in Toronto, Ontario has ranked this Alberta case as one of three all-time important Supreme Court of Canada decisions since the Charter became law in 1982 (Saunders, 2002). Indeed, it would be highly unusual to discuss the effects the advancement of same-sex legal rights have had on Canadian lgbtq schoolteachers without addressing the landmark Vriend case. This case is important to this doctoral study because it shows the Canadian legal precedence requiring provincial human rights protection acts to reflect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms by including sexual orientation as prohibited grounds for discrimination.

As I have briefly described elsewhere (Callaghan, 2007b), the Alberta case concerns Delwin Vriend, a chemistry laboratory instructor at King’s College, who was hired in 1988 then fired in 1991 when he was 25 years old because his openness about his homosexuality violated the college’s newly drafted policy statement on homosexuality (Lahey, 1999). Disapproval of Vriend’s “openly gay” behavior in a Christian educational setting eventually wound its way to the president of the college who called Vriend in for a meeting in 1990 to ask him directly if the rumors about his sexuality were true or not. Following this meeting, the college president found the expertise necessary to draft a policy on homosexuality reflecting the college’s Christian beliefs that would tidily exclude Vriend (Pratt, 2008). Because Vriend had earlier admitted that he was gay and that he had a boyfriend, the college president found that he could now ask Vriend to
resign on the grounds that he was not complying with the college’s newly drafted policy on Christian religious beliefs vis-à-vis homosexual behavior (McKay-Panos, 2008).

After his termination, Vriend attempted to file a complaint of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation with the Alberta Human Rights Commission but was informed that *Alberta’s Individual Rights Protection Act* (IRPA) (now called the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*) did not include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground for discrimination (Hiebert, 2003).

The *Vriend v. Alberta* case was eventually heard by the Supreme Court of Canada, which decided unanimously in 1998 that the omission of sexual orientation from Alberta’s IRPA infringed upon Section 15 of the *Charter*, and ordered that sexual orientation be “read in” to the legislation (Hurley, 2005). In its written decision, the Supreme Court of Canada commented that this omission was as good as “condoning or even encouraging discrimination against lesbians and gay men,” and that it revealed a “sinister message” that gays and lesbians are less worthy than others (cited in Hiebert, 2003, p. 12).

As a result of the *Vriend* decision, all Canadian provinces and territories were required to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination in their human rights codes. The discussions and debates that surrounded these legislative changes called upon Canadian people to re-examine the cultural and social practices that have discriminated against and excluded their fellow LGBTQ citizens simply because the ways LGBTQ people live and love fall outside the heterosexual norm (Grace, 2004).

Not only did the *Vriend* decision confirm equality rights for lesbian and gay Canadians, but it also attracted the attention of teachers’ associations across Canada who
started to realize the need to develop policies that protected the rights of LGBTQ+ teachers and students in Canadian schools (Grace, 2004). In its *Vriend* decision, the Supreme Court of Canada made it plain that LGBTQ+ teachers and students have a right to pursue their educational goals in Canadian schools free from fear of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

It is unclear how many LGBTQ+ students and teachers in Alberta are aware of this protection, however, because the province of Alberta still has yet to actually write the words “sexual orientation” into the re-named *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*. This glaring omission exists despite the fact the Supreme Court of Canada’s 1998 decision in the *Vriend* case ordered the province to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination in its provincial human rights act and the Alberta legislature has had many opportunities to do so (McKay-Panos, 2008).

The *Vriend v. Alberta* case began as Delwin Vriend’s attempt to file a complaint with the Alberta Human Rights Commission about the discrimination he experienced when the Christian college where he was teaching fired him for living as an openly gay man. The *Vriend* case ended as a monumental step forward in Canada in terms of recognizing sexual orientation as a ground for protection from discrimination.

Although Delwin Vriend was ultimately successful in his court challenge to have sexual orientation included as a protected ground, he declined to proceed with his original complaint against his former employer. Vriend was fired in 1991 and it was not until 1998 that he learned the Alberta Human Rights Commission could legally hear his complaint about being wrongfully dismissed from his teaching position due to his sexual
orientation. The ensuing seven years took their toll on Vriend and he no longer had the energy for, or interest in, pursuing another legal battle (Pratt, 2008).

_Catholic Teachers Fired For Behaving in a Manner Contrary to Catholicity._

Complainant burnout is not uncommon in cases of teachers being fired due to their sexual orientation. In 1997, Joseph Stellpflug was fired from his position as a lay chaplain and religion teacher at St. Elizabeth Catholic High School in the York Region of Toronto, Ontario because he took part in a commitment ceremony with his same-sex partner (DiManno, 1997). An unknown person had passed one of Stellpflug’s commitment ceremony invitations on to the archdiocese offices in Toronto and the bishops responded by conducting an investigation. Their investigation concluded that Stellpflug’s commitment ceremony was analogous to a wedding (this was prior to the 2005 legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada) and was therefore contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Stellpflug tried to fight his dismissal, believing that the Ontario Human Rights Code would protect him because it forbids discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. He eventually gave up his fight, however, once he learned that courts have interpreted Catholic separate school systems as benefitting from a legal loophole due to their denominational rights, guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and their occupational hiring rights assured to them by the Education Act of Ontario.

Other Canadian teachers have been fired from their Catholic school systems due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, but their stories are not widely known. Even those who took their case to the media did not follow through with a human rights complaint or lawsuit. One example is Lisa Reimer, a music teacher at a Catholic school...
in Vancouver who was fired in April 2010 for living outside of Catholic doctrine after her female partner gave birth to their son (Rolfsen, 2010). Although Reimer informed the media about the discrimination she experienced, she did not pursue any further legal remedy. Like Stellpflug and Reimer, two teachers I interviewed for this doctoral study, whose stories are recounted in the “Participants” chapter under the pseudonyms Naarai and Anna, also chose not to contest their wrongful dismissals through legal channels for several reasons. Firstly, both teachers could foresee they would not have the necessary mental and emotional stamina, not to mention the financial resources, to withstand such a battle while simultaneously looking for other work. Secondly, Naarai’s Catholic school board offered her a lump sum payment to settle the matter out of court. Thirdly, the lawyers both teachers engaged through their Catholic teacher associations discouraged them from proceeding further because they believed the case was not winnable due to previous legal precedent that sided in favor of the Catholic school boards.

Indeed, as Canadian educational theorist James Covert (1993) makes clear, Canadian Catholic school systems have a long history of firing their teachers for not upholding specific aspects of Catholic doctrine 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Most cases Covert describes took place in the 1970s and 1980s, prior to the institution of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and tended to involve teachers who got pregnant outside of marriage, teachers who left Catholicism to join another faith, and teachers who married a non-Catholic. Given that these types of cases are no longer appearing in Canadian courts, and subsequently as stories in the Canadian media, it appears as though dismissals on these grounds occur less frequently in Canadian Catholic schools today, likely due to shifting societal values and morals related to marriage and
selective observance of Catholic doctrine. Many of the dismissals Covert describes from the 1970s and 1980s would not withstand a *Charter* challenge today.

Enforcement of Catholic doctrine among Catholic school teachers seems to have shifted from regulating the coupling arrangements and sexuality of heterosexual teachers to ensuring that non-heterosexual teachers strictly comply with the Catholic doctrine that calls upon them to remain celibate for the rest of their lives. Indeed, Catholicity, or the state of being in accordance with Catholic doctrine, is increasingly invoked as a reason for discriminating against non-heterosexuals (Baird, 2007).

Once Joseph Stellpflug (the Catholic teacher described above who was fired in 1997 for having a commitment ceremony with his male partner) took his case to the media, interested parties began to share their thoughts on the matter. Pearl Eliadis, the director at the time of public policy and public education for the Ontario Human Rights Commission, openly questioned how far denominational rights should extend. Eliadis asked, “Can the board or the archbishop fire a male teacher who’s had a vasectomy? A female teacher on the pill?” (cited in DiManno, 1997, p. 1). A Toronto archdiocese spokesperson responded, “Nobody is going to go snooping after people – that would be absurd. But if something is extremely public, that’s different” (cited in DiManno, 1997, p. 1). As Covert’s (1993) description of wrongful dismissal cases from the 1980s shows, some Canadian Catholic school districts regarded the “mortal sin” of getting pregnant out of wedlock “extremely public” enough to warrant firing a female Catholic teacher. A male Catholic teacher’s violation of the same doctrine regarding premarital sex would presumably go unpunished because his sin would be undetectable and therefore would not carry the same “extremely public” shame.
Similarly, LGBTQ teachers in Canadian Catholic schools are not at risk of being fired today as long as they portray the image of being gay but not acting on it— that is, living a celibate life. Entering into a same-sex relationship (as Vriend did), marrying a same-sex partner (as Stellpflug did), becoming a parent and raising a family in a same-sex relationship (as both Lisa Reimer and this study’s participant Naarai did) are all life decisions that can put LGBTQ teachers at risk of being fired if they teach for a Canadian Catholic school. If LGBTQ teachers are able to be less public about these aspects of their lives (as this study’s participants Mark and Luke are able to do), then their risks of being fired from their Catholic school diminish significantly. But who among us can be easily secretive about falling in love or silent about bringing a child into the world? Even if a Catholic teacher manages be closeted about his or her same-sex relationship and new family, young children will not be able to comply with their closeted parents’ forced reticence and may inadvertently out the family in some way.

If the dismissals from Canadian Catholic schools throughout the 1970s and 1980s were primarily about regulating the “extremely public” aspects of heterosexual teachers’ sexuality, the focus in the 1990s and beyond has been directed towards the “extremely public” aspects of non-heterosexuals’ sexuality, namely commitment ceremonies, marriages, and raising children. The difference in this shift is that now the focus has moved away from particular members of the heterosexual dominant culture to members of sexual minority groups who are already the subjects of religiously inspired homophobic harassment, hatred and violence.

Canada has yet to see a Charter challenge that pits Section 2, the section pertaining to fundamental freedoms including freedom of religion, against Section 15, the equality clause, in cases where LGBTQ teachers have been fired from their Catholic schools due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, a recent case in the province of Saskatchewan showcases this particular battle, albeit in the civil service arena of marriage commissions. On January 10, 2011, the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal unanimously ruled that marriage commissioners cannot claim freedom of religion to deny marriages to same-sex couples (Graham, 2011). The case began in 2009, when the Saskatchewan Minister of Justice asked the province’s highest court to rule on the constitutionality of a law proposed by the ruling right-of-centre Saskatchewan Party that would have allowed marriage commissioners to cite their religious beliefs as a bona fide rationale for refusing to marry LGBTQ couples (Christopher, 2011).

In its unanimous decision in January 2011, the court ruled that the proposed legislation that would have given marriage commissioners the option of refusing to marry same-sex couples for religious reasons is unconstitutional – such a law would violate the equality rights of LGBTQ people, which are safeguarded by Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Writing on behalf of three of the five judges on the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal, Justice Robert Richards notes, “persons who voluntarily choose to assume an office, like that of marriage commissioner, cannot expect to directly shape the office’s intersection with the public so as to make it conform with their personal religious or other beliefs … the law is supreme over officials of the government
as well as private individuals, and thereby preclusive of the influence of arbitrary power” (Saskatchewan Court of Appeal, 2011, p. 40).

The above decision of the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal has some interesting implications for the problem of homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools. Like marriage commissioners who provide the service of officiating weddings for members of the general public, publicly funded Canadian Catholic schools provide an education to the general public, including students who may not subscribe to the Catholic faith. Publicly funded Catholic schools increasingly cater to a diverse cross-section of the general public, many of whom are under the age of majority and did not choose to attend a Catholic school or follow the Catholic faith of their own volition. After reading the decision in the Saskatchewan marriage commissioner case, it strikes me that the logic of this decision can be applied in a similar way to the problem of homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools. That is, Canadian Catholic schools should not have the arbitrary power to force the selective observance of particular religious beliefs that directly infringe upon the Charter rights of minority groups among the school’s population, namely LGBTQ individuals.

The Saskatchewan court case that ruled marriage commissioners cannot refuse to marry same-sex couples on religious grounds because this would violate Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms reverberates in some other notable ways with the issue of discrimination against sexual minority groups in Canadian Catholic schools. Canadian Catholic schools that are in receipt of government monies and provide educational services to the general public must respect all aspects of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms – including the equality rights provision – even if it
poses problems for the selective observance of particular Catholic doctrine related to non-heterosexual behaviour. It occurs to me that it may become necessary to remind Canadian Catholic school boards and Catholic education leaders that the Catholic Church is not the sole arbitrator when it comes to the daily operations of publicly funded Catholic schools. School trustees make important decisions that directly impact how Catholic schools are run, and they are answerable to many authorities – the Roman Catholic Church, most certainly – but they are also answerable to parents, taxpayers, provincial school acts, the provincial Ministry of Education, provincial human rights legislation, and the Charter.

In the case of Saskatchewan marriage commissioners attempting to exercise their freedom of religion rights in refusing to marry same-sex couples, two other judges on the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal arrived at the same conclusion as the majority, but with different rationales. Justice Gene Ann Smith argued Section 2 of the Charter – religious freedom – is not violated by the court’s finding that the proposed law is unconstitutional because “interference with the right of marriage commissioners to act in accordance with their religious belief … is trivial or insubstantial, in that it … does not threaten actual religious beliefs or conduct” (Saskatchewan Court of Appeal, 2011, p. 65). Discussing the circumstances in which the expression of particular religious beliefs should not require the suppression of the equality rights of certain groups, Justice Smith concluded: “the legislative objective in this case cannot be found to be of sufficient importance to permit the infringement of the Charter rights of others” (Saskatchewan Court of Appeal, 2011, p. 67). The logic outlined in Smith’s decision has enormous wider implications – perhaps as far reaching as the 1998 Vriend case discussed above – for LGBTQ teachers who
have been fired from a Canadian Catholic school because of their sexual orientation or gender identity on the grounds that Section 2 of the *Charter* should not trump Section 15.  

*A Notable Legal Battle in Ontario: Marc Hall.*

Although Canada has yet to see a *Charter* challenge in cases involving LGBTQ teachers who have been fired from their Catholic schools due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, the *Marc Hall v. The Durham Catholic School Board* almost reached this level. Marc Hall was the 17-year-old gay Catholic student enrolled in his senior year at Monsignor John Pereyma – a publicly funded Catholic secondary school in Oshawa, Ontario – who was successful in obtaining an interlocutory injunction on May 10, 2002, to take his boyfriend as his date to the prom dance (Grace & Wells, 2005). Earlier, on February 25, 2002, the principal of the school had refused Marc Hall permission to take his boyfriend to the prom on the grounds that interacting with a same-sex partner at the prom would constitute a form of sexual activity that was contrary to Catholicity (MacKinnon, 2002).

Experiencing the sting of discrimination, Hall discussed the school’s decision with his family and together they rallied the support of several community organizations who believed in Hall’s fight for his equality rights. David Corbett, a well-known lawyer and gay activist who was involved with several Canadian advances in same-sex legal rights, offered to represent Hall free of charge (Huber, 2002). Two main pillars supported Corbett’s legal arguments. Firstly, as a publicly funded institution, Hall’s Catholic school had to respect the same secular laws as other publicly funded institutions, specifically those pertaining to anti-discrimination. Secondly, by refusing Hall permission to take his boyfriend as his date to prom, Hall’s Catholic school contravened the anti-discrimination
sections of Ontario School Act, which governs all school boards in the province, as well as the Ontario Human Rights Code (MacKinnon, 2002).

Canadian children’s rights advocate and scholar, Katherine Covell (2007), has pointed out that in discriminating against Hall, Monsignor John Pereyma Catholic secondary school also violated several articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Canada ratified in 1991 and is bound by international law to uphold. Specifically, the school’s homophobic discrimination against Hall violated Hall’s article 13 right to freedom of expression, article 14 right to freedom of thought and conscience, and article 15 right to freedom of association (Covell, 2007, p. 250). Covell underscores that in picking on a member of a sexual minority group, the Catholic school sends the dubious message that it believes it has the authority to discriminate against, and otherwise mistreat, LGBTQ individuals in its midst.

Authority, history and tradition form the main pillar of the counter argument put forth by the lawyers for the Catholic school in the 2002 Marc Hall v. The Durham Catholic School Board case. Legal council for the Catholic school argued that Section 93 of the Canadian Constitution assured the school of its denominational rights to make curricular and policy decisions that are in line with Catholic doctrine. Furthermore, the Catholic school legal team argued that any secular interference with its reliance upon Catholic doctrine to conduct its affairs would constitute a violation of its religious freedom, as guaranteed by Section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (MacKinnon, 2002).

At the end of the two-day hearing, Justice Robert MacKinnon ordered that Hall be allowed to attend his high school prom with his boyfriend as his date. MacKinnon had the
foresight to stipulate that the school could not circumvent his ruling by cancelling the prom (MacKinnon, 2002). The hearing’s purview did not encompass the wider issues the case raised in terms of Section 2 of the Charter versus Section 15 – MacKinnon left those arguments to be addressed by a higher court. Although both parties expressed an interest in fighting further in a court of appeal, Hall eventually dropped the case (Grace & Wells, 2005).

The Marc Hall v. The Durham Catholic School Board case is well known among Canadians because it was widely covered in the Canadian media (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News, 2002; Canadian Television News, 2002; Oziewicz, 2002). Hall became a minor celebrity after filmmaker Larry Peloso cast Hall to star as himself in a one hour documentary about his case called Prom Fight: The Marc Hall Story (Peloso, 2002). The Marc Hall case became even more widely known after filmmaker John L’Ecuyer created a made-for-television movie called Prom Queen: The Marc Hall Story, which received even more distribution than the previous documentary (L’Ecuyer, 2004).

When the creators of Queer as Folk, the US-Canadian television series about a group of gay men, learned of Hall’s plight, they invited him to appear in a cameo role as a reveller on the dance floor of the series’ fictional bar Club Babylon, set in an actual Toronto gay bar called Woody’s (Cowen & Lipman, 2002). This cameo appearance cemented Hall’s status as a folk hero among LGBTQ people in Canada and abroad. This is true for at least one young LGBTQ Canadian I interviewed for this study who regularly watched the Queer as Folk series and learned from the television program that “there is nothing wrong with being gay” (quotation from the narrative vignette about participant referred to by the pseudonym Jacob in this study). Hall’s brief appearance on Queer as
Folk shows the interconnectedness between an increased cultural acceptance of non-heterosexuals and the advancement of their legal rights.

The 2002 Marc Hall v. The Durham Catholic School Board case received tremendous media coverage, spurred the production of two films, caught the attention of a television drama about the lives of gay men, and even influenced the content of a Canadian law textbook. Hall’s influence on young LGBTQ Canadians has the potential to endure much longer than in the fleeting world of popular culture now that his case has been outlined and explained in the textbook Canadian Civics, which was written by two Catholic educators and is used in secondary schools throughout Ontario (Ruypers & Ryall, 2005). One young Ontarian I interviewed for this study (referred to by the pseudonym Jonas) spoke about how encouraged he was to see the Marc Hall case in his textbook while in Catholic school and he noted that this case made him more interested in following other LGBTQ human rights cases occurring in schools throughout the world.

**Homophobia Making Headlines: Examples from Ontario Catholic Schools**

Catholic school boards in Canada have drawn unwanted media attention for the above-mentioned cases involving Joseph Stellpflug, Lisa Reimer, and Marc Hall. Catholic school boards in Canada have also made national headlines for a myriad of other homophobic incidents. In the province of Ontario, some of these incidents include: Catholic school boards banning a book called Open Minds to Equality because it discusses homophobia; declining to participate in a national survey on homophobia in schools; disregarding aspects of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy that attend to homophobia; circumventing aspects of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s 2010 Health and Physical Education curriculum that address
gender identity and sexual orientation; and banning Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs) from forming in Catholic schools. Each will be briefly described in turn.

**Banning an inclusive education book that mentions homophobia.**

In November 2007, during the height of the fallout surrounding the 2005 legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada, Waterloo Catholic District School Board succumbed to pressure from Defend Traditional Marriage and Family (DTMF), a Christian organization serving the Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge area of southern Ontario, to remove a controversial book from circulation (Kawawada & Mercer, 2007). The book, *Open Minds to Equality*, is a teacher resource that provides learning activities designed to affirm diversity and promote equity in schools (Schniedewind & Davidson, 2006). DTMF opposed the book’s circulation in Catholic schools because it lists homophobia as being on par with other types of discriminatory practices in schools, such as racism, ageism, sexism and anti-Semitism (Kawawada, 2007). Jack Fonseca, communications director for DTMF, said the “clever subtlety” of the book is that it “hooks the immature Catholic reader by mixing homosexuals and children of homosexuals into the list of racial/ethnic groups who suffer ‘institutional discrimination’” (cited in Kawawada, 2007, p. 1).

Although his original complaint was about the presence of *Open Minds to Equality* in Waterloo Catholic schools, Fonseca also tried to broaden his concern to include objections to the Waterloo Catholic District School Board’s approved referral of Catholic students to queer positive therapists and organizations (O’Brien & Westen, 2007). Queer youth who come from devoutly religious homes are often faced with fewer supports than those who come from nominally religious or non religious homes in terms
of receiving affirming information about sexual orientation or gender identity. In recognition of this added stress and safety issue, in 2006 the Waterloo Catholic District School Board’s Family Life Advisory Committee approved of referring troubled queer youth throughout the district to a local, queer positive, and provincially certified psychotherapy organization called “Rainbow Therapist,” and also to a local support group for LGBTQ youth called “OK 2B Me” (O’Brien & Westen, 2007).

Additionally, in 2006 the WCDSB approved of referring Catholic parents of LGBTQ youth to PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), a well-established support group that promotes the health and well-being of LGBTQ individuals by actively supporting their friends and family. Defend Traditional Marriage and Family was opposed to the WCDSB’s approval of referrals to the above-noted queer positive services, and its communications director, Jack Fonseca, tried to raise these concerns along with his original complaint about the queer positive book. However, the WCDSB’s Family Life Advisory Committee informed Fonseca that their meeting was arranged to solely attend to his original complaint and that other matters would have to be raised in future complaints (O’Brien & Westen, 2007).

Trustees for Waterloo Catholic District School Board were inundated with requests to keep the book *Open Minds to Equality* away from students so they devised a compromise whereby the book would be available only as an optional teacher resource in a designated teacher resource library, which is housed in the Catholic Education Centre in downtown Kitchener and is off limits to students (Kawawada & Mercer, 2007).
Circumventing curriculum about sexual orientation and gender identity.

In 2008, Ontario’s Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne, recognized a need to take action against all forms of discrimination in schools and consulted with a diverse group of educational stakeholders to develop what is now known as the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* for Ontario schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a). The *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* describes homophobia as being at the “forefront of discussion” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a, p. 7). In order to realize the government’s vision of an equitable and inclusive education system, future curricula revisions would have to reflect the guiding principles outlined in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*. Accordingly, Ontario’s *Health and Physical Education* curriculum, which was slated for revision in 2007 after not having been updated since 1998, attempted to redress homophobic discrimination in schools by actively discussing gender identity and sexual orientation.

Like the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, the development of the *Health and Physical Education* curriculum was a lengthy consultative process involving many educational leaders and specialists, including the education division of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, the Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) (Craine, 2010). ICE’s executive director, Sister Joan Cronin, was not concerned about the more controversial aspects of the new curriculum – such as appreciating invisible differences in others and recognizing that some people are raised in families led by two mothers or two fathers – because she knew the Catholic education system enjoys a long-standing tradition of reworking Ministry curriculum so that it can be appropriately presented from a Catholic faith perspective (Greenberg, 2010b).
When the Ontario Ministry of Education posted the revised *Health and Physical Education* curriculum on its website in January 2010, a coalition of religious and family-values organizations – with the notable exception of Catholic education stakeholders – vocally opposed it (Hammer & Howlett, 2010). The coalition’s opposition involved a threat to keep their children home from school on May 10, 2010 as a form of protest to the new curriculum unless Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty agreed to abandon the changes. Caught off guard, Premier McGuinty defended the new Ontario *Health and Physical Education* curriculum, saying it had gone through a rigorous two-year consultative process involving parent groups and a wide variety of education experts (Babbage, 2010). When pressed as to whether or not Ontario’s publicly funded Catholic schools would also have to teach aspects of the new curriculum that were affirming of sexual minority groups, Premier McGuinty asserted that Catholic schools would not be able to opt out of the revamped curriculum due to conflicts with Catholic doctrine (Babbage, 2010; Greenberg, 2010b). McGuinty’s new Education Minister, Leona Dombrowsky, a former Catholic school board trustee, confirmed that educational experts from Ontario’s Institute of Catholic Education were involved in the development of the new curriculum and therefore endorsed it (Babbage, 2010; Greenberg, 2010b).

Premier McGuinty erroneously believed the Ontario provincial curriculum applied equally to all publicly funded schools in the province, saying: “We have a single curriculum when it comes to mathematics, when it comes to history, when it comes to world studies and when it comes to sex education” (cited in Howlett, 2010b, p. A5). Similarly, McGuinty’s Education Minister, Leona Dombrowsky, went on public record saying: “This is the Ontario curriculum, and it’s the curriculum for all schools and all
students” (cited in Greenberg, 2010a, p. 1). Ontario’s Premier and Minister of Education can be forgiven for being unaware of a rarely discussed special arrangement for publicly funded Catholic schools in Canada – even education experts and specialists are surprised to learn of the little-known practice in which the Institute for Catholic Education “interprets” provincial curricula to reflect Catholic doctrine.

In a rare public explanation of the situation, Ottawa Archbishop Terrence Prendergast told The Ottawa Citizen, “Whatever is prescribed by the government on issues of sexuality, life and faith – these are to be understood in the rights that Catholics have by the denominational school system to apply them and to interpret them in their own way” (cited in Greenberg, 2010a, p. 2). The Institute for Catholic Education’s executive director, Sister Joan Cronin, clarified further that Catholic education consultants were developing their own human sexuality program that deviated significantly from the new provincial one due to conflicts with Catholic doctrine. Sister Cronin confirmed that the Catholic version of the new provincial Health and Physical Education curriculum would simply be a supplement of the current Catholic curriculum for Family Life Education called the Fully Alive! series (Greenberg, 2010b). “When it comes to matters like faith and morality,” Sister Cronin explained, “the denominational rights accorded to the Catholic schools supersede any Ministry of Education policy directive” (cited in Howlett, 2010a, p. A5).

Once his ‘misunderstanding’ was pointed out to him, Premier Dalton McGuinty arranged to have a statement of clarification issued from his office. Signed by James Ryan, President of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association, together with Paula Peroni, President of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association, and
Thomas Collins, Archbishop of Toronto and President of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, a portion of the statement reads: “We want to be clear: Ontario’s Catholic schools teach the provincial curriculum from a Catholic perspective and have done so successfully” (cited in Howlett, 2010b, p. A5). The McGuinty government subsequently changed course and agreed to release the new *Health and Physical Education* curriculum in the fall of 2010 without the contentious components having to do with homosexuality and gender identity. Accordingly, the Ontario Ministry of Education withdrew the new curriculum from its website in April 2010, just a few weeks following the initial opposition from the conservative religious coalition (Howlett & Hammer, 2010).

**Declining to participate in a national survey on homophobia in schools.**

Recognizing a lack of comprehensive data on levels of homophobia in Canadian schools, critical pedagogue Catherine Taylor devised a national climate survey in 2007 to assess the situation (The University of Winnipeg, 2009). An education and communications professor at the University of Winnipeg, Dr. Taylor also serves on the education committee of *Egale Canada* (formerly Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere), an advocacy association that strives to advance equality for LGBTQ individuals and their families across Canada (Egale Canada, 2005). *Egale Canada* had long been interested in assisting with anti-homophobia education in Canadian schools, but its resources were exhausted by the long campaign to legalize same-sex marriage in Canada (Martin, 2008). Once *Egale Canada* was able to regroup and refocus following the successful legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada in 2005, it turned to its
education committee for ideas and Dr. Taylor suggested a collaborative study with her team at the University of Winnipeg and Egale Canada.

Launched in January 2008, Dr. Taylor’s internet-based survey has been completed by students from St. John’s to Victoria to Iqaluit. Dr. Taylor and Egale Canada invited all school boards across the country to participate in the survey, but not all accepted. Absent from the study are Catholic school boards throughout Canada – all declined to take part (Egale Canada, 2009). Father Dennis Noon, former chair and trustee of the Wellington Catholic District School Board in Guelph, Ontario, made national headlines for responding to Egale Canada’s invitation to take part in the nation-wide survey with a capitalized, “NOT INTERESTED THANK YOU” (cited in Kawawada, 2008, p. 1). When reporters pressed for an explanation, Noon simply stated that “homophobia is not a big issue” for his board (cited in Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News, 2008, p. 1). Apparently, homophobia is not a concern for any other Catholic board in the country either, given that no bishop gave his assent for any Catholic board to take part in the study (Egale Canada, 2009). The uniformity of this response suggests a centralized directive from within the upper echelons of the Catholic Church in Canada.

Despite the fact that no Catholic school boards in Canada agreed to officially participate in the national survey on homophobia in schools, some Canadian Catholic school students participated on their own by visiting the Egale Canada website and following the links to the survey. A phase one report on the survey shows that the few students from Canadian Catholic schools who did participate were much more likely than their counterparts in non-Catholic schools to feel that their school was not supportive of LGBTQ people, that teachers were ineffective in addressing homophobic harassment, and
that they could not talk to at least one adult in their school about issues facing sexual
minority groups (Egale Canada, 2009). Due to the lack of involvement from Catholic
boards throughout the country, Dr. Taylor and her research team regret that they are not
be able to provide any further data on the situation in Catholic schools for LGBTQ students
in future reports (Egale Canada, 2009).

**Banning Gay/Straight Alliances from Catholic schools.**

In keeping with its *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* launched in the fall of
2008 and available in an abridged version on its website (Ontario Ministry of Education,
2009b), the Ontario Ministry of Education released a policy statement in the fall of 2009
intended for all administrators in all publicly funded schools throughout the province.
This policy statement, which the ministry refers to as “Policy/Program Memorandum No.
145,” addresses the topic of “progressive discipline and promoting positive student
behaviour” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009c, p. 1). This policy statement
specifically names Gay/Straight Alliances as important student-led initiatives that should
be encouraged: “In order to promote a positive school climate, school boards must
provide opportunities for all members of the school community to increase their
knowledge and understanding of such issues as homophobia … Boards must also help
school staff to give support to students who wish to participate in gay–straight alliances
and in other student-led activities that promote understanding and development of healthy
relationships” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b, p. 1). Government support for
GSAs could not have come at a more opportune time.

During 2010, a dramatic rise in the suicide rates of gay youths in North America
prompted human rights activists to launch a grassroots Internet campaign titled “It Gets
Better,” urging suicidal queer youth to “hang on” until they can leave high school (Savage, 2010). At this time when the need for GSAs could not be more profound, the Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) decided to ban GSAs in their schools (Houston, 2011a). One of Ontario’s 29 Catholic school boards, HCDSB serves 29,000 students in several suburbs of Toronto such as Milton, Halton Hills, Burlington, and Oakville (HCDSB, 2010). HCDSB chose to ban GSAs in deference to the wishes of their local bishop. In a January 19, 2010, letter to all Ontario Catholic school board directors, Bishop Paul-André Durocher discouraged the establishment of GSAs in Catholic schools claiming that they “imply a self-identification with sexual orientation that is often premature among high school students” (Durocher, 2010, p. 1). As the chair of the education commission within the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, Bishop Durocher is an important authority for Catholic education in Ontario. Intrepid reporters for Xtra!, Canada’s leading source of LGBTQ news, confirmed Durocher’s powerful influence by contacting all 29 of Ontario’s Catholic school boards to see if any of them maintained some form of a GSA – not one of them reported having a GSA in any of their schools (Stayshyn & Houston, 2011).

Bishop Durocher, and the other bishops before him who served as Catholic education leaders, provide Catholic perspectives and guidance for revised versions of Ontario education curricula and policy that may clash with Catholic doctrine (Collins, 2011). On the matter of implementing the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, a Catholic consortium of education leaders worked closely with members of the Ontario Education Services Corporation to design what is known as a “Catholic template” of the ministry’s equity policy (Ontario Education Services...
Corporation, 2010a). The Catholic version is similar in content to the original provincial ministry’s equity policy, but it reserves the right to implement the policy “in a manner which is consistent with the exercise of the Board’s denominational rights” (Ontario Education Services Corporation, 2010b, p. 1). The denominational rights of Catholic schools in Canada form the main pillar of the Catholic template with its authors invoking these rights seven times using variations on the above-quoted phrase throughout the 16-page document. There is no requirement that Catholic boards throughout Ontario adopt the Catholic template, however doing so would assure Catholic boards that they are implementing a Catholic version of the ministry’s equity policy that has been approved by the province’s highest bishops and Catholic curriculum and educational policy leaders.

Written into the Ontario Ministry of Education’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* is a list of action items requiring all school boards in the province to develop their own equity and inclusive education policies that must comply with the ministry’s overarching strategy and be ready for implementation by September 1, 2010 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a, p. 21). In an attempt to follow this directive, Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) met in November 2010 to review the existing Catholic equity template provided by the Ontario Education Services Corporation and voted to adopt the bulk of the document with the notable removal of “gender” and “sexual orientation” from the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination (Houston, 2011c). During the same November 2010 meeting, the HCDSB also took a conservative reading of above-noted letter from Bishop Durocher, in which he discouraged the establishment of Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs) in Catholic schools, and HCDSB voted to ban GSAs outright from all schools in its jurisdiction (Houston, 2011c). This move
earned HCDSB international notoriety as people around the world struggled to understand this particular form of institutionalized homophobia (Hammer, 2011).

However, two Grade 12 HCDSB students contacted the York Federation of Students and a Member of Provincial Parliament to prepare a human rights challenge to the ban on the grounds that HCDSB’s local equity and inclusive policy – the tool the board created to prohibit GSAs in all of its schools – is in violation of the Ministry of Education’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* and the Ontario Human Rights Code (Houston, 2011a). The students may eventually choose to withdraw their human rights challenge, however, since HCDSB trustees voted 6-2 in favor of rescinding the ban during an emergency board meeting in Burlington on January 18, 2011 (Houston, 2011c).

It should be noted that removing the official ban does not automatically ensure free clearance to establish a GSA. Even though GSAs are not explicitly banned, they are still not allowed. Speaking to *Xtra!* reporters, Gerald Casey, superintendent of education for the Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board in southern Ontario, remarked: “No, I wouldn’t say we ban them. We support student clubs that support inclusiveness, especially for students who might otherwise feel marginalized. But all our clubs must, however, adhere to the Catholic teachings and values” (cited in Stayshyn & Houston, 2011, p. 1). When the reporters asked Casey if students at a Bruce Grey Catholic school could start a GSA, he admitted: “The answer would be no” (cited in Stayshyn & Houston, 2011, p. 1). The Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) is continuing to monitor HCDSB to ensure that an unwritten ban does not replace its written one and students will not be precluded from exercising their equality rights guaranteed by the *Canadian*
Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as their Charter rights to freedom of expression, association, and speech (CCLA, 2011).

The students’ potential court challenge would be a difficult battle, as leaders of Catholic education in Ontario regularly rely on a liberal interpretation of their denominational rights. For example, in referring to the right of Catholic schools to disregard progressive curriculum on sexual education, Lou Piovesan, the general secretary of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, stated: “In particular, when it comes to matters of faith and morality, the … denominational rights accorded to Catholic schools in Ontario would supersede Ministry of Education proposed curriculum content … accordingly, if some content related to faith and morality matters is indeed determined to be at variance with [Catholic] principles, it would not be endorsed for use in Catholic schools” (cited in Artuso, 2010, p. 1). Should they continue to go through with their human rights challenge, the Grade 12 students may have some success with it if lawyers are able to point out to Catholic education stakeholders, as well as to members of the tribunal hearing the case, that the Roman Catholic Church is not the only authority on Catholic education in Ontario.

Concluding Remarks

This collection of media accounts shows a progression in terms of same-sex legal rights in Canada. The accounts also show, however, a subtle and determined Catholic backlash to those same legal advances. In the Vriend case, the Supreme Court of Canada decided in 1998 that the omission of sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination under the Alberta Individual Rights Protection Act infringed upon Section 15 of the Charter. This decision represents a logical first step in ensuring that Albertans
who have experienced discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation now have an avenue for legally filing a complaint. The *Vriend* decision did not, however, attend to the larger issues raised by Vriend’s wrongful dismissal in terms of how far religious freedom can extend when intersecting with equality rights.

Canadian educational researcher, James Covert (1993) shows a history of Canadian legal precedent that has almost always decided in favor of the denominational rights of Catholic schools over the individual rights of Catholic teachers. Despite the fact that most of the cases Covert describes took place in the 1970s and 1980s, this record of past legal proceedings serves as a guide for subsequent cases of a similar kind and successfully discourages new complainants from proceeding further. One example is Joseph Stellpflug who eventually dropped his 1997 wrongful dismissal complaint after learning that his lawyers were not confident they could win his case due to legal precedent. This legal precedent was powerful enough to dissuade Stellpflug from seeking a legal remedy for the discrimination he endured, despite the fact that his province’s human rights code had already included sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination in the years prior to his wrongful dismissal.

No legal precedent exists that shows Canadian judges deciding in favor of Catholic school leaders who wish to use Catholic doctrine to legally discriminate against students. Hence human rights lawyers were not deterred from taking on the 2002 *Marc Hall v. The Durham Catholic School Board* case. In the *Marc Hall* case, the Ontario Superior Court granted an interlocutory injunction to Marc Hall so that he could take his boyfriend as his date to his high school prom dance. As in the *Vriend* case, the presiding judge did not decide on the broader issues the *Marc Hall* case raised in terms of Section 2
v. Section 15 of the *Charter*. A higher court would have addressed these issues and, although both parties were interested in arguing their case further, Hall eventually dropped the matter due to the stress it incurred and his desire to move on with his life.

The Education Commission of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops (OCCB – now called the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario) did not drop the matter, however. Instead, the OCCB held a two-day conference in the fall of 2002 – four months following Hall’s successful court challenge – to strategize ways to make clear the official Catholic stance on homosexuality and avoid such embarrassing student challenges in the future (Borst, 2003). The product of the bishops’ conference was a brief pastoral guideline, written in the form of a letter, which they released on their website and sent out to all Catholic schools in Ontario called, *To All Involved in Catholic Education* (OCCB, 2003). A footnote at the end of the OCCB pastoral guideline states, “the controversy leading up to and resulting from the interim decision of the Ontario Superior Court in the case of *Marc Hall v. The Durham Catholic District School Board* showed that this pastoral instruction is opportune” (OCCB, 2003, p. 5). Essentially, the OCCB pastoral guideline reiterates the official Catholic doctrine on homosexuality and informs teachers that they must enforce the doctrine in Catholic school settings. More disturbingly, it harbors a conversion agenda in that it asks teachers to “try to lead the homosexual student to a progressively better sexual morality” (OCCB, 2003, p. 4).

With this kind of leadership from the Education Commission of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002, it is not surprising that the incidents of homophobic school policies described in this chapter soon followed throughout some Catholic school boards of Ontario, notably Halton Catholic District School Board and
Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB). One important example is, as mentioned earlier, the 2007 banning of a book called *Open Minds to Equality* because of its frank discussion of homophobia. Although on the surface this media report recounts a negative news event (WCDSB’s banning of an equity book that attends to homophobia), the subtext of the media report contains some surprising references to LGBTQ positive activism occurring within this school board’s Family Life Advisory Committee. That is, this media report also contains references to WCDSB’s authorization of its counseling staff to refer LGBTQ students and their families to queer-positive therapists (the Rainbow Therapist) and community organizations (a local LGBTQ support group called OK 2B Me and the local chapter of PFLAG – Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).

Through this media report, one can see instances of queer-positive resistance to repressive Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality. Waterloo Catholic would have been familiar with the Ontario bishops’ pastoral guideline, *To All Involved in Catholic Education*, which clearly lays out the official Catholic teaching about “persons with same-sex attraction,” but Waterloo Catholic nevertheless authorized its counselors to provide referrals to local queer positive services that affirm sexual diversity and are therefore not aligned with Catholic teaching on non-heterosexuality. This anomaly suggests a fissure between what the Catholic bishops want and what the Catholic schools are willing to do. It is one thing for the Ontario bishops to remotely declare that LGBTQ youth must be called to a lifetime of celibacy, it is something else altogether for educators in Catholic schools to condemn students they work with on a daily basis to such a sentence. The media account ostensibly about the banning of the book, *Open Minds to Equality*, also reveals instances of resistance on the part of some individuals within
Waterloo Catholic who recognized the grave consequences of callously calling LGBTQ youth to a lifetime without intimacy and romantic love and offered instead some affirming resources not only for the students but also for their families.

Although the Waterloo banning of *Open Minds to Equality* is for the most part a depressing media account, the tangential reference it makes to resistance to homophobic Catholic directives is an impressively hopeful story. If negative stories about homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools rarely appear in the media, then positive stories about resistance to homophobic policies and curricular revisions in Catholic schools are even more rare. The infrequent appearance of stories describing resistance to homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools is not only due to the tendency of the media to report on negative stories, but also because any kind of resistance movement, no matter what its size or scope, must initially be clandestine out of necessity lest it draw the attention of the oppressive force and incur sanctions and other forms of retaliation. If Waterloo Catholic’s Family Life Advisory Committee sent out a press release outlining its new policy of offering queer positive referrals to troubled queer and questioning youth and their families, then surely other staunch Catholic factions within the board or the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario would exert their power and reverse the queer positive school policy or curricular decision. It is important to be stealthy when first resisting homophobic school policies and curricular revisions.

Just because few direct media reports exist on specific resistance to homophobic school policies, it does not mean that resistance is weak or not occurring. The blogosphere is jammed with comments from Catholic school stakeholders and other members of the general public who are disgruntled with homophobic school policies and
curricular decisions they are reading about in the media. Many regular lay Catholics disapprove of bishops targeting vulnerable sexual minority groups. Media reports have been instrumental in igniting the online debate and raising general awareness of this little known aspect of public education in Canada.

When Canadian media sources such as *The Ottawa Citizen* and *The Globe and Mail* posed questions to Catholic education leaders as to why they feel they have the right to openly disregard aspects of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* that address homophobia, or carefully circumvent parts of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s 2010 *Health and Physical Education* curriculum that raise the topics of gender identity and sexual orientation, the Catholic school leaders invariably replied that it was within their denominational rights to do so. For example, as quoted earlier in this chapter, Ottawa Archbishop Terrence Prendergast told *The Ottawa Citizen*: “Whatever is prescribed by the government on issues of sexuality, life and faith – these are to be understood in the rights that Catholics have by the denominational school system to apply them and to interpret them in their own way” (cited in Greenberg, 2010a, p. 2). Similarly, The Institute for Catholic Education’s executive director, Sister Joan Cronin, concurred with Ottawa Archbishop Terrance Prendergast, telling *The Globe and Mail*: “When it comes to matters like faith and morality, the denominational rights accorded to the Catholic schools supersede any Ministry of Education policy directive” (cited in Howlett, 2010a, p. A5).

Ontario Catholic education leaders and bishops might believe that the Roman Catholic Church is the only authority on Catholic education in Ontario, but the fact is, Catholic schools in Ontario must also answer to the Ontario Ministry of Education and its
Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, which reflects the Ontario Human Rights Code, which in turn is modeled after the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 93 of the Canadian Constitution and Section 29 of the Charter outline the need to establish and maintain particular denominational schools; they do not provide provisions for Catholic schools to use selective aspects of Catholic doctrine to discriminate against particular groups of people. Denominational rights do not mean the right to openly discriminate against ill-protected sexual minority groups. This is not exclusively an Ontario problem – Alberta is in an even more precarious position in terms of respecting the equality rights of LGBTQ people in Catholic schools because Alberta’s provincial Ministry of Education is less progressive than Ontario’s. Furthermore, as the upcoming “Catholic Documents” chapter shows in great detail, Catholic bishops in Alberta write pastoral guidelines and make statements about how to manage LGBTQ people in Catholic schools that are heavily influenced by similar policies and decisions undertaken by the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario.

Ironically, separate schools in Canada – established in the 19th century because of the perceived need to protect Catholic faith minorities from a hostile Protestant majority – are now often culpable in the 20th and 21st centuries of a similar hostility towards minority groups once directed towards them (Callaghan, 2009). As one media report’s oblique reference to Waterloo Catholic school officials’ referral of queer youth and their families to queer positive support services suggests, resistance is not futile. Marc Hall was successful in reversing his Catholic school’s homophobic policy that forbade same-sex dates at his high school prom. Two Grade 12 students at Halton Catholic may be successful in their human rights challenge to Halton Catholic’s equity policy on the
grounds that it explicitly excludes sexual orientation from the list of prohibited forms of discrimination, which is in direct violation of the Ministry of Ontario’s equity policy.

Media accounts have played an instrumental role in getting this much needed discussion started. Without the media, Catholic districts throughout Ontario would have likely quietly continued with their suppression of same-sex legal advances in Canada by continuing to draft homophobic school policies and curricular revisions. Without the media, regular Canadians, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, would have continued to know nothing about it. It is fair to say that the media are important “first responders” to instances of homophobic discrimination in Canadian Catholic schools. Media reports on these kinds of stories can set in motion a far-reaching chain of events that can bring about progressive change. In the case of the Halton Catholic District School Board’s (HCDSB) banning of GSAs, for example, it was only after the media reports drew unwanted attention to the board’s discriminatory equity and inclusive education policy that the HCDSB called an emergency board meeting that resulted in a removal of the official, written ban on GSAs in all of its schools. The important role the news media can play in eventually effecting positive change is also evident in one of the student participant’s stories. Jonas, who attended Catholic schools in southern Ontario from junior kindergarten until he graduated in 2007, remembers feeling “kind of giddy” upon discovering the Marc Hall case in his politics textbook. It is not likely that the Marc Hall case would have appeared in an Ontario high school politics textbook if it were not for the amount of attention drawn to this case by the Canadian media.

In both the Halton and Jonas examples, we can see one of the ways in which the three data sets presented in this dissertation overlap and inform each other. The Catholic
doctrine (to be discussed in the upcoming “Catholic Documents” chapter) asserts its disciplining force against non-heterosexuals in Catholic schools. The Canadian news media learn of these homophobic and discriminatory practices and disseminate them to the general public. Members of the general public respond with such outrage in various forms that the Catholic school districts in question are compelled to reverse or at least revise their homophobic policies. In this way, media reports have the potential to play a crucial role in influencing school policy and, by extension, improving the school experience of non-heterosexual students and staff in Canadian Catholic schools.

Of course, informing the public about discriminatory practices does not mean that once members of the public are more aware they will be moved to take action to redress the discrimination. However, a news media report does have the potential to be the impetus behind the drafting of a protest petition, the establishment of a letter-writing campaign to elected officials, and other forms of public demonstrations designed to bring about change. Journalism scholar Dane Claussen (2002) notes that journalists often avoid covering stories that involve the intersection of religion and sexuality. The fact that the stories showcased in this chapter received any kind of media coverage at all is significant and points to a change in practice among Canadian journalists regarding these types of stories. An increase in media coverage of these kinds of stories is important because media reports can sway public opinion and lead to progressive change.

This summary of the main issues raised in the “Media Accounts” chapter helps to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis. In terms of the first question: “How does power operate within and across Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools?” the majority of news media reports show that Catholic doctrine originating
from the Vatican is able to assert a dominant force within Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools, and, in terms of the sexual conduct of non-heterosexuals, Catholic canonical law prevails over Canadian common law. The Vatican’s power is not absolute, however, as is evidenced by those media reports that describe successful acts of resistance to the doctrinal disciplining of non-heterosexuals on the part of everyday individuals.

Regarding the second question: “How do Catholic documents produce teachers and students as subjects?” it appears from the majority of news media reports that Catholic documents, such as curriculum and policy documents (to be discussed in the upcoming “Catholic Documents” chapter) designed to disseminate Catholic doctrine about sexual minorities, are an attempt to portray LGBTQ students and teachers as “persons with same-sex attraction” whose behaviour should be closely monitored, controlled and disciplined.

This chapter’s answer to the third research question, “What effects do Catholic documents have on the experiences of LGBTQ individuals in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools?” is predominantly negative – most of the media reports outline stories of students and teachers in Catholic schools experiencing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation because of directives originating with homophobic Catholic doctrine. Other media reports describe stories of homophobic school policies that were drafted specifically so that the Catholic schools in question would be properly aligned with homophobic Catholic doctrine. This chapter’s answer to the final research question: “Is resistance possible in an education context so dominated by the repressive force of religiously-inspired homophobia?” is a tentative Yes, but the evidence of resistance is not as strong as the evidence of domination.
Chapter 5

Catholic Documents: Doctrinal Disciplining

This “Catholic Documents” chapter examines two obscure but extremely important primary texts. The first text is an original 2004 document called Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation written by several Catholic education leaders from the province of Ontario in collaboration with members of the Education Commission of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops. A pastoral guideline is normally a sanctioned letter from a bishop, or group of bishops, outlining official policy on a particular topic involving the moral care of a congregation. The second text is an original 2007 workshop for Catholic educators called Toward an Inclusive Community written by Catholic education leaders from the province of Alberta in order to ensure that the Alberta Catholic Bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline called A Resource for an Inclusive Community: A Teacher’s Guide for and about Persons with Same Sex Attractions is read and understood by Alberta Catholic educators and that the bishops’ message is disseminated in Catholic schools throughout Alberta.

The Ontario text is a pastoral guideline commissioned, written and approved by Ontario bishops for mandatory use in Ontario Catholic schools. The Alberta text is a workshop for Catholic educators (similar to a teacher resource manual, a teacher in-service/ workshop manual, or a policy and curriculum document) written by and for Catholic educators in Alberta for required use in Alberta Catholic schools. Both texts are little publicized documents that nevertheless have a powerful influence on the educational policy and curriculum decisions that Catholic education leaders make regarding sexual minority groups in the Catholic schools of Alberta and Ontario. A study
about homophobia in the Catholic schools of Alberta and Ontario must necessarily examine the written sources of homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools, which can be found in certain elements of Catholic doctrine regarding non-heterosexuals about which the Catholic bishops write. The Ontario text is a good example of Catholic bishops’ attempts to draw Catholic school staffs’ attention to the official Catholic doctrine on homosexuality. It is one thing for the bishops to write a pastoral guideline about sexual minorities – it is something else entirely to get that message communicated in Catholic schools. The Alberta text is a good example of conservative Catholic educators’ attempts to ensure the Catholic bishops’ message reaches teachers and students in Alberta Catholic schools. A close examination of both the Ontario text and the Alberta text is necessary to understand how homophobia is institutionalized and serves as the underpinning for the education administered in these provinces’ Catholic schools.

Both the Ontario primary text and the Alberta primary text are obscure in the sense that they are not available in public or academic libraries and very few lay Catholics (that is, Catholics who are not members of the Catholic clergy), or non-Catholic educational stakeholders and experts, know of the existence of these texts. I first came across the 2004 Ontario text *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* in 2005 when it was posted on the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops’ website. Since then, the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops (OCCB) has changed its name to the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO) and its new website does not provide a link to this 2004 publication. Neither the Education Commission of the ACBO, nor the Institute of Catholic Education in Ontario, provide a link to the *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* (PGASO), despite the fact that
they were both heavily involved in creating it. Given that the PGASO is no longer posted on the Ontario Catholic bishops website, it appears the Ontario bishops prefer to limit the general public’s access to it. I was only able to get a copy of this Ontario text after hearing back from one of the Catholic diocese centers I contacted throughout Ontario. One of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, who was posted to a town in northern Ontario, assisted me by sending me a paper copy of the Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation via Canada Post.

Similarly, the complete Alberta text Toward an Inclusive Community is not available online. Its principle authors, the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta do not provide a link to this 2007 publication on their website. However, a revised version of the PowerPoint presentation contained in the Toward an Inclusive Community workshop is available as a PDF online (CCSSA, 2007b). I first became aware of an early version of the Toward an Inclusive Community workshop when I attended a teacher in-service in 2004 called “Sensitive Issues In Our Catholic Schools,” in my capacity as a high school teacher employed by a Catholic school district in Alberta. The first edition of Toward an Inclusive Community was issued in October 2005 to all Catholic school jurisdictions in the province of Alberta. Two minor amendments were made to the workshop and it was subsequently reissued in 2007 (CCSSA, 2007b). I obtained a copy of the complete 2007 edition from one of my contacts in an Alberta Catholic school district.

A characteristic of Catholic documents that address the topic of non-heterosexuality is to refer to other Catholic documents that have also addressed this topic, and to appeal to the authority of official Catholic doctrine from the Vatican on the matter.
Therefore, a study of one Catholic document, such as the Ontario text for example, is often a study of several other similar Catholic documents on the matter embedded within it. Both the Ontario text and the Alberta text refer to several other Catholic documents and the authority of the Vatican’s official Catholic doctrine. Many Catholic documents have long titles and it was necessary for me to abbreviate them in order to make the task of reading this dissertation easier. I occasionally reiterate the full title of a Catholic document that I abbreviated earlier in order to remind the reader of its meaning.

Given that both the Ontario text and the Alberta text are Catholic documents that employ the custom of referring to other Catholic documents and the Vatican’s official Catholic doctrine on the topic of non-heterosexuality, both use language to describe sexual minority groups that is considered antiquated by today’s standards. For example, the authors of both the Ontario text and the Alberta text use the term “homosexual” as a universal term to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (lgbtq) individuals. This is because the other Catholic documents and doctrine, to which the authors of the Ontario and Alberta texts refer, use the term “homosexual” liberally throughout their writings. Furthermore, as I discuss in more detail below, a prevalent Catholic belief is that it is “reductionist” and “problematic” to use “politically charged language” such as “lesbian” or “gay,” not only because the authors of the documents believe such labels are “inaccurate,” but also because they have the power to “re-enforce” and “legitimate an arrested psycho-sexual development” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 3). Accordingly, the Alberta bishops advise Catholic educators to refer to lgbtq students and teachers as “persons with same-sex attractions” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 3), while the Ontario bishops prefer the phrase “students of same-sex orientation” (OCCB,
2004, p. 26). Phrases such as “students of same-sex orientation” already suggest the homophobic underpinnings of both the Ontario text and the Alberta text that this “Catholic Documents” chapter elucidates.

**Ontario’s Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation**

The “Media Accounts” chapter of this thesis shows an increase in same-sex legal rights in Canada that directly impacts public schools. The 2002 case of *Marc Hall v. The Durham Catholic School Board*, which decided in favor of Hall taking his boyfriend as his date to prom, is particularly far-reaching and influential. On the secular side, the *Marc Hall* case drew attention to homophobic discrimination against LGBTQ students occurring in publicly-funded Catholic schools and prompted social justice activists to ensure educational policies were in place to safeguard the equality rights of sexual minority groups in all publicly-funded schools, including the Catholic ones. On the Catholic side, the *Marc Hall* case prompted the bishops of Ontario to react by holding conferences and producing documents designed to “be clear about the authentic teaching of the Church on sexual morality and in particular in the area of homosexuality” (OCCB, 2003, p. 1).

The secular arguments relied upon the authority of Canadian common law, specifically the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Catholic arguments referred to the tradition of Catholic canonical law, specifically the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Both the secular and the Catholic positions are at odds with one another, leading to several power struggles captured by media reporters and described in the previous “Media Accounts” chapter of this thesis.

On the part of anti-oppression educators and proponents of equal opportunity and social justice within Ontario’s Ministry of Education in 2008, one tactical move
following the *Marc Hall* case was to develop a province-wide *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2009a). This policy’s most important feature in terms of this dissertation is its recognition that “homophobia has risen to the forefront of discussion” (OME, 2009a, p. 7) and that school boards throughout Ontario “must also help school staff to give support to students who wish to participate in gay-straight alliances” (OME, 2009c, p. 1). Halton Catholic District School Board responded to this directive from Ontario’s Ministry of Education with a tactical move of its own – it banned gay-straight alliances from all of its schools in 2011. As the “Media Accounts” chapter of this thesis describes, a flurry of media reports ensued.

Unaccustomed to so much media attention to curriculum and policy decisions taken by Catholic schools in Ontario, Father Thomas Collins, President of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (formerly known as the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops) and Archbishop of Toronto, issued a formal statement on the Halton matter (Collins, 2011). In defending the willingness of Catholic schools throughout Ontario to recognize that “bullying is wrong under any circumstances and all schools should provide a safe and welcoming environment for each student” (Collins, 2011, p. 1), Collins declares: “in 2004 the bishops sponsored the development of pastoral guidelines to ensure that such an environment was in place in Catholic secondary schools for students dealing with the issue of same-sex orientation, long before the government mandated an equity and inclusivity policy” (Collins, 2001, p. 1). An exegesis of the text to which Collins refers, called *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* (OCCB, 2004a), shows that LGBTQ students are taught that they must remain celibate for the rest of their lives, and that a corrective 12-Step program called “Courage” will help them attain
The Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation.

The Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation (PGASO) is a lengthier and more detailed version of an earlier pastoral guideline from the Catholic bishops of Ontario called To All Involved in Catholic Education (OCCB, 2003), which I discussed previously in the “Media Accounts” chapter of this thesis. A pastoral guideline is an official message from a bishop, a group of bishops, or a group of bishops in collaboration with other clergy members and/or laypersons who have expertise in a particular matter. The intended audience of a pastoral guideline can be other clergy members, members of a bishop’s diocese, or those under an archbishop’s authority within a province. The purpose of a pastoral guideline is to function as a directing principle or policy pertaining to the spiritual or moral care of a congregation.

The PGASO is a 75-page document, arranged in seven sections, formatted with sequential page numbers, hole-punched for easy storage in a school binder, and contained by front and back covers made of hard stock paper. Its seven sections are labeled as follows: 1) Letter from Bishop Paul-André Durocher; 2) Letter from Ontario Bishops, Spring 2003; 3) Introduction; 4) Personal Stories; 5) Pastoral Practices; 6) Appendix – Theological Foundations; and 7) Catholic Church Teachings: Resources. Although various Catholic clergy members refer to pastoral guidelines as “letters,” the sheer bulk and complexity of the PGASO makes it more of a reference manual than a letter.
The PGASO can also be regarded as a curriculum and policy document given that its writing team is comprised of members from various Catholic education organizations. Although the copyright of the Ontario 2004 *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* (PGASO) rests with the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops (now known as the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario), and it is essentially the Ontario bishops’ document, the Ontario bishops consulted several other Catholic education leaders for their expertise. In addition to its own Education Commission, which monitors the development of curriculum for both the English and French Catholic schools of Ontario, the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops also sought the advice of members from leading Catholic education organizations such as: the Institute of Catholic Education in Ontario, the Catholic Association of Religious and Family Life Educators of Ontario, the Faculty of Theology of St. Michael’s College at the University of Toronto, and educators from four Catholic district school boards in and near Toronto (Dufferin-Peel, Durham, Toronto, York) (OCCB, 2004a). On August 3, 2004, the Education Commission of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops officially approved the *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* and directed that it be used within all Catholic schools throughout Ontario (OCCB, 2004a, p.1).

*The Ontario pastoral guideline advocates celibacy and reparative therapy.*

The PGASO opens with a letter from Bishop Paul-André Durocher followed by the complete 2003 pastoral guideline from the Ontario bishops, *To All Involved in Catholic Education*. I have analyzed the contents of this 2003 pastoral guideline closely elsewhere (Callaghan, 2007b), so I will not attend to it greatly here, except to point out that the 2004 PGASO is a more detailed condemnation of LGBTQ people to a lifetime of
celibacy, and a more prolonged – yet subtle – promotion of “therapy directed toward changing a homosexual orientation” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 60) than can be found in the 2003 pastoral guideline. In his opening letter for the PGASO, Bishop Paul-André Durocher acknowledges in a blatant understatement that “we have not always been sensitive to the particular needs of students with a same-sex orientation” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 1), but he nevertheless goes on to introduce a pastoral guideline steeped in Catholic doctrine that condemns homosexuality.

The PGASO is replete with a Catholic doublespeak I have elucidated elsewhere (Callaghan, 2007a), which is characterized by, on the one hand, repeated emphasis of the need to protect non-heterosexuals from “unjust” discrimination, while, on the other hand, actively contributing to that very same discrimination by referring to the authority of Catholic doctrine that condemns homosexuality, and by also advocating for reparative therapy. Reparative therapy, also known as reorientation therapy, or conversion therapy, is employed by some mental health professionals and religious pastoral care givers to convert gay men and lesbians into heterosexuals using aversive treatments – such as electric shock – and spiritual interventions (American Psychological Association, 2009; Haldeman, 2002). As I have discussed in a previous publication (Callaghan, 2010), scientific, medical, legal, and academic experts have soundly denounced reparative therapies as unethical, discriminatory, and abusive (Canadian Medical Association, 1999; Grace, 2005; Hicks, 2000; Just the Facts Coalition, 2008).

Despite the dangers posed by reparative therapy, the PGASO nevertheless refers to it as a viable option. The PGASO is not an obscure publication that is read only by clergy members. On the contrary, the PGASO is the Ontario bishops’ directive to all
Catholic schools in Ontario and is distributed to every school administrator (principals, vice principals, assistant principals), school guidance counselors, school chaplains, school pastors, and secondary school department heads for every school subject (OCCB, 2004b; Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board, n.d.). As the “Media Accounts” chapter in this thesis demonstrates, Catholic doctrine pertaining to homosexuality, described in great detail in the PGASO, informs school policy on matters related to sexual minority groups and underpins the sexuality component of “religion” class every student in every Catholic school in Ontario must take in order to graduate.

Unlike non-Catholic public schools where the topic of human sexuality is covered in various non-religious classes, Catholic public schools relegate lessons on sexuality to “religion” class where the topic can be presented within the confines of Catholic doctrine. Textbooks intended for the “religion” classes taught in Canadian Catholic schools are developed by the National Office of Religious Education, an organization within the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), located in Ottawa (CCCB, 2011). A Grade 9 religion textbook called *Be With Me*, used extensively throughout Catholic high schools in Ontario, teaches, for example, that “love, commitment and procreation don’t go together for [homosexuals]; therefore love, commitment and genital sex don’t have to go together either” (CCCB, 1997a, p. 93)

*The Ontario pastoral guideline cites condemning Catholic doctrine.*

In their formal introduction to their pastoral guideline, the authors of the PGASO acknowledge their obligation to adhere to Canadian common law in the following passage:
As publicly funded institutions, Ontario Catholic schools have a legal obligation to provide equal access to education and equal protection under the law for all students. Catholic schools, and Catholic school boards must ensure that legislation, including legal requirements addressing professional responsibility, issues of confidentiality and the protection of privacy, are adhered to in board policy and school practice. The right of each student to be free of harassment, violence or malice in speech or in action is unequivocal, and schools carry the clear obligation to provide a positive school environment for all students and staff. As faith-based communities, Catholic schools carry an even more compelling obligation to protect the most marginalized within their care. (OCCB, 2004a, p. 10)

Although this introduction gives the impression the Ontario bishops are concerned for the safety of “marginalized” LGBTQ students and staff, and want to ensure a positive environment for everyone their schools, their continued dissemination of homophobic Catholic doctrine in all Catholic schools throughout Ontario belies this caring impression.

In addition to relegating non-heterosexuals to a lifetime of celibacy and promoting reparative therapy, the Ontario 2004 Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation (PGASO) contains references to Catholic doctrine such as: “Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 45). Directing Catholic school boards in Ontario to inform students in their schools that falling in love with a person of the same sex and physically expressing that love is an “intrinsic moral evil” and
an “objective disorder” is not only contrary to the Ontario Ministry of Education’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, but is also an insidious form of discrimination against a sexual minority group that contravenes the Canadian *Charter*’s guarantee of equality for every individual in Canada.

The Ontario bishops’ pastoral guideline contains many references to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997b) that describe “homosexual acts” as: “intrinsically disordered,” “contrary to the natural law,” and therefore “under no circumstances can they be approved” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 53). Variations on this phrasing describe “homosexual practices” as being “among the sins gravely contrary to chastity” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 53). The authors of the PGASO vaguely define chastity as “the holy and holistic approach to sexuality” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 42), though non-religious definitions are clear that it refers to virginity and celibacy.

This is an important distinction because the authors of the PGASO try to argue that it is not an undue punishment to expect LGBTQ people to live a life devoid of romantic love and physical intimacy since Christians believe that “each [Christian] is called to live chastely, whether married, single, celibate, widowed or divorced” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 12). However, this call to “live chastely” cannot apply to heterosexual Christians who are married within the Catholic Church because they are also called to the goal of procreation. Therefore, it is not true that all Christians are called to chastity all of the time. Expecting LGBTQ people who are born into Catholic families and, by extension, the Catholic faith to remain chaste, virginal, and celibate for the rest of their lives is not only a double standard, but also a harmful form of discrimination.
The Ontario pastoral guideline references a similar American guideline.

In addition to referencing the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other Vatican encyclicals, it is not uncommon for bishops, and other Catholic education leaders who have been commissioned to write guidelines like the PGASO, to reference their colleagues in other parts of the world. Accordingly, the authors of the PGASO include in their text the full length of another pastoral guideline called *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers* written by their American colleagues, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB, 1997). The introduction to *Always Our Children* begins on a positive note, informing parents of LGBTQ youth that: “the Church offers enormous spiritual resources to strengthen and support them at this moment in their family’s life and in the days to come” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 56). However, just a few paragraphs later the authors of *Always Our Children* make it clear that their pastoral message is “not to be understood as an endorsement of what some call a ‘homosexual lifestyle’” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 56).

The Church resources referred to by the authors of *Always Our Children* are not only the usual pertinent passages of scripture, Vatican encyclicals, and excerpts of selected Catholic doctrine pertaining to homosexuality, but also information about “special” parish resources in the form of a “parents’ support group,” a “retreat designed for Catholic parents of homosexual children,” and a “special diocesan ministry to gay and lesbian persons” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 63). This additional information is listed under a heading called “Pastoral Recommendations to Parents” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 62). The American bishops are careful not to name the “special” parish resources,
opting instead to invite parents of LGBTQ youth to contact their parish for further information.

The Ontario bishops’ *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* (PGASO) is issued to Catholic schools throughout Ontario with an accompanying eight-page pamphlet called *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation: A Parent’s Guide* (OCCB, 2004b). This parents’ guide also obliquely refers to same Catholic resources alluded to in the American pastoral guideline, *Always Our Children*. Appealing to distressed parents, the Ontario bishops’ parents’ guide to the PGASO uses the same sentences as the authors of *Always Our Children* to advise Ontario parents to participate “in a retreat designed for Catholic parents of homosexual children” and directs them to contact their “diocesan family ministry office” for more information on “a special diocesan ministry to gay and lesbian persons” (OCCB, 2004b, p. 4).

These same Catholic resources are also mentioned in a three-page brochure issued to teachers employed by the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB) in Mississauga, Ontario (DPCDSB, n.d.). The Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board designed this three-page brochure called *Building Safe, Nurturing, [and] Inclusive Communities* in order to advertise its teacher in-service that helps teachers understand the PGASO (DPCDSB, n.d.). Unlike the American bishops’ pastoral guideline *Always Our Children*, and the Ontario bishops’ parents’ guide to the PGASO, the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board brochure actually names the umbrella Catholic organization that offers the above-mentioned Catholic resources as “Courage.” A brief reference to *Courage* also appears in a section called “Personal Stories,” in the PGASO.
Directly following the first of three testimonials that appear in the “Personal Stories” section of the PGASO, the authors of the PGASO include a small note that describes *Courage* as “an apostolate of the Roman Catholic Church [that] ministers to those with same-sex attractions and their loved ones” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 14).

**Ontario bishops endorse Courage, a 12-Step program for homosexuals.**

According to its website (Courage Apostolate, 2011), *Courage International* operates as a 12-Step support group modeled after the original 12-Step program, Alcoholics Anonymous, but instead of sobriety, *Courage* promotes chastity for “same-sex attracted” Catholics. The first step members must take is to admit “we are powerless over homosexuality and that our lives had become unmanageable” (Courage Apostolate, 2011). Subsequent steps require members to pray to God to “restore us to sanity,” and to admit “the exact nature of our wrongs,” “defects of our character,” “shortcomings,” and the “persons we had harmed,” (Courage Apostolate, 2011). Along with *Courage* is another 12-Step support group called “Encourage,” which is intended for friends and relatives of Catholics with same-sex attractions and has a similar supporting function as Al-Anon within the Alcoholics Anonymous program. Fully endorsed by the Holy See in Rome (that is, the Vatican), *Courage* hosts annual conferences, regular retreats, and a summer sports camp (Courage Apostolate, 2011).

I have already uncovered the function of *Courage* in a previous publication (Callaghan, 2007a), so I will not analyze it in great depth here except to underscore that, although *Courage* is, for the most part, carefully reticent about its conversion agenda, it does publicly acknowledge that it supports its members who choose to seek reparative therapy to explore the possibility of developing a heterosexual orientation. Available on
the *Courage International* website are the success stories of its members who have managed to convert to varying degrees of a heterosexual orientation for fluctuating periods of time by following the 12-Steps and by living a chaste life. *Courage* operates a “Courage Reparational Prayer Group” for its members who “seek to make reparation for sins against human sexuality” in which its “weak” and “suffering” members pray “for the conversion and healing of those who struggle with same-sex desires” (Courage Apostolate, 2011). The *Courage International* website provides a link to Narth (the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality), Exodus International, and Homosexuals Anonymous – all are organizations devoted to reparative therapy. *Courage* also lists books on reparative therapy in the resources section of its website.

*Always Our Children*, the American pastoral guideline fully reproduced in the Ontario bishops’ *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* (PGASO), advises parents of LGBTQ youth to respect “a person’s freedom to choose or refuse therapy directed toward changing a homosexual orientation … though some might find it helpful” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 60). The footnote that appears at the end of the first of the three personal testimonials collected in the “Personal Stories” section of the PGASO recommends *Courage* as a valuable resource and informs Ontarian readers that individual chapters of the 12-Step support group do operate in Ontario with the permission of each diocesan bishop (OCCB, 2004a, p. 14). Furthermore, the authors of the PGASO assure readers in Ontario that local *Courage* chapters are fully endorsed by the Pontifical Council for the Family, which is part of the Curia, or administrative apparatus, of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome (OCCB, 2004a, p. 14).
Although the authors of the PGASO provide no introduction to, or explanation of, the three testimonials they apparently collected from three citizens of Ontario, their purpose in including them in the PGASO becomes immediately clear: to encourage the reader that one can progress from non-heterosexuality to a better, more acceptable form of sexuality. The first story, titled “No One By My Side,” is a two-page account from “a member of Courage, Toronto, ON” (OCCB, 2004a, pp. 13-14). The second testimonial, simply called “Michael’s Story,” is also two pages long, and a note at the end indicates that “Michael attends an Ontario Catholic high school” (OCCB, 2004a, pp. 15-16). The third story, titled “Take Time to Discover,” is three pages long and offers no information about whom it came from (OCCB, 2004a, pp. 17-19).

Each of the three testimonials offered in the “Personal Stories” section of the PGASO describes a difficult period for the protagonists as they became aware of their “same-sex attractions” while in Catholic school (OCCB, 2004a, pp. 13 – 19). Each story eventually culminates in a new beginning for the protagonists: a young man who joined Courage progresses to the morally superior sexuality of celibacy (p. 14); a young man who had less trouble with females than with males advances to having a girlfriend and admits to bisexuality rather than homosexuality (p. 16); and a formerly homosexual young woman eventually marries a man and is expecting her first child at the time her story is written (p. 19). Like many of the testimonials available on the Courage Apostolate website, the three testimonials presented in the PGASO all neatly end with smoother, less complicated, existences for the no-longer-homosexual protagonists.
Contradictions in the Ontario pastoral guideline.

The PGASO contains a section called “Pastoral Practices,” which offers practical guidelines for “creating a safe school environment for students of a same-sex orientation” (OCCB, 2004a, pp. 23 – 24), and answers to “most commonly asked questions about same-sex orientation” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 25 – 27). The Pastoral Practices section of the PGASO opens with an address to guidance counselors, chaplains, pastors, and teachers in Catholic schools throughout Ontario. Included in the list of values the authors of the PGASO believe people holding such positions in Catholic schools should possess is the value of “conversion” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 20). Although the authors of the PGASO do not elaborate on what they mean by conversion, it is conceivable that they are referring to the more morally acceptable forms of sexuality (celibacy and heterosexuality) available through conversion therapy alluded to elsewhere in the pastoral guideline. The authors of the PGASO go on to caution pastoral caregivers that: “the process of assimilation into Christ is … unique … for each individual” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 20). Words such as “conversion” and “assimilation” reveal a very specific vision of how “students of same-sex orientation” should be “assisted” in Ontario Catholic schools: they should be carefully absorbed, transformed, and otherwise indoctrinated into a Catholic way of life.

In the “Guidelines for Administration” segment within the Pastoral Practices section of the PGASO, administrators are advised to familiarize themselves with the Catholic teaching on human sexuality. Catholic school Administrators would not have to look much further than the PGASO itself since approximately 70% of the document contains all of the relevant Catholic doctrine and theological foundations on the topic of homosexuality. As described above, much of this Catholic teaching consigns LGBTQ people
to lifelong celibacy and encourages therapy that attempts to convert a homosexual orientation into a heterosexual one. Once they have familiarized themselves with this Catholic teaching, administrators are expected to “actively promote a welcoming, safe environment rooted in gospel values of love, justice, and compassion” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 23). These two guidelines are at cross-purposes. There is no “love, justice and compassion” in singling out members of a sexual minority group by disseminating homophobic Catholic doctrine in a public school setting. Circulating this kind of material in a Catholic school promotes the opposite of a “welcoming and safe environment” for lgbtq people.

Catholic school administrators are also encouraged to “be involved in working for school-wide support and education for understanding and tolerance of sexual minorities” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 23). Unfortunately, these administrators seem reluctant to use already existing school resources and strategies such as the “Positive Space Campaign” and/or the active encouragement of student-initiated Gay/Straight Alliances. The Positive Space Campaign is an initiative undertaken by lgbtq activists in North American universities in the 1990s in order to disrupt the heteronormativity of institutional spaces by raising awareness of sexual and gender diversity through the placement of small stickers, bearing the inverted triangle that has come to symbolize non-heterosexuality and the phrase “This is a positive space,” on the office windows and doors of campaign participants (Burgess, 2005). The goals of a Positive Space Campaign are to create a positive and welcoming environment for non-heterosexuals, and to reduce discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in educational settings (Tate & Ross, 2003). In the United
States, the *Positive Space Campaign* is referred to as the “Safe Space Campaign” (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, 2011a).

Variations of the *Positive/Safe Space Campaign* also operate in some primary and secondary schools with funds from diversity and equity programs available in some school boards and teacher federations whose members oversee the design, development and distribution of their own versions of *Positive Space* stickers, posters and training programs (Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario [ETFO], 2010). The *Positive Space Campaign* can take different forms in different schools, but it generally involves designating a *Positive Space* trained staff member for the school who places a small sticker bearing an inverted triangle, the rainbow colors of the Pride Flag, and a message stating variations of “This is a positive and inclusive space for lgbtq students and their allies” in his or her classroom window or office door (ETFO, 2010). The *Positive Space* trained staff member is often the first point of contact for students struggling with homophobia or transphobia, and can also be instrumental in providing support for the establishment of a Gay/Straight Alliance in the school (ETFO, 2010).

The various configurations of *Positive/Safe Space* campaigns and Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs) that have existed in some North American secular schools since the early 1990s have been effective in improving understanding of sexual minority groups (Blumenfeld, 1995; Uribe, 1995). However, as the “Media Accounts” chapter of this thesis attests, both initiatives are rarely, if ever, approved by the administration of Ontario Catholic schools. It is difficult to imagine how administrators of Catholic schools can follow the Ontario bishops’ guideline to “be involved in working for school-wide support and education for understanding and tolerance of sexual minorities” (OCCB, 2004a, p.
23) when the Chair of the Education Commission of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario actively discourages the establishment of GSAs in Ontario Catholic schools (Durocher, 2010). Without *Positive Space Campaigns* and GSAs, working towards school-wide support of LGBTQ people is more difficult than it need be.

The Guidelines for Administration section of the PGASO also advises Catholic school administrators to “provide grade level assemblies to address zero tolerance for discrimination of any kind as outlined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms … [including] sexual orientation” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 23), yet the Catholic bishops of Ontario seem oblivious to the ways in which their dissemination of homophobic Catholic doctrine encourages various forms of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation to take place in Catholic schools. Circulating Catholic doctrine to parents, teachers, and administrators who deal directly with students – doctrine that decrees physical love between people of the same sex is an “intrinsic moral evil” and an “objective disorder” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 45) – contributes to a homophobic school environment and leads to homophobic school policies.

As the “Media Accounts” chapter of this thesis reveals, homophobic Catholic doctrine is at the base of homophobic school policies. Catholic doctrine has been used to justify the firing of a gay teacher because he married his same-sex partner (Joseph Stellpflug), the firing of a lesbian teacher who started a family with her same-sex partner (Lisa Reimer), and an attempt to prohibit a gay student from attending his high school prom with his boyfriend (Marc Hall). Other discriminatory practices undertaken in Catholic schools due to homophobic Catholic doctrine include: altering Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum to avoid addressing the topics of gender identity and sexual
orientation; banning an Ontario Ministry of Education approved teacher resource book because it discusses homophobia; and forbidding Gay/Straight Alliances from forming in Catholic schools.

Using Catholic doctrine to fire lesbian and gay teachers and otherwise discriminate against LGBTQ students in Catholic schools violates the equality rights provision of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Catholic bishops of Ontario advise Catholic school administrators to respect the fact that sexual orientation is a prohibited ground of discrimination in the *Charter*, but they actively disregard the ways in which their distribution of homophobic Catholic doctrine to all Catholic schools throughout Ontario could contribute to discrimination against sexual minority groups in these schools. In this way, the Catholic bishops of Ontario contravene their own advice to respect the *Charter*, along with other forms of legislation designed to protect against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in public school settings.

These kinds of glaring contradictions are lost on the authors of the PGASO. A final example of how the Ontario bishops overlook their contributions to homophobic discrimination in Catholic schools can be found in the “Answers to most commonly asked questions about same-sex orientation” (OCCB, 2004a, pp. 25–27) section of the PGASO. This section is fraught with contradiction and misinformation, but the most obvious example is the fifth question, “What is homophobia?” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 25). In describing the many forms of homophobia, the Ontario bishops list “vulgar and abusive language and jokes about homosexuals, condemnation, discrimination, persecution and even murder of homosexuals” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 25).
However, in the “Catholic Church Teaching” section of the PGASO, the Ontario bishops cite Catholic doctrine that describes “homosexual acts” as “acts of grave depravity” that are “intrinsically disordered,” which count among the list of “sins gravely contrary to chastity” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 53). These references to Catholic doctrine are clearly a form of the “condemnation” and “vulgar and abusive language” that the authors of the PGASO acknowledge as examples of homophobia, yet these homophobic and abusive citations nevertheless appear in the same pastoral guideline.

Likewise, “condemnation” of homosexuals takes place when the Ontario bishops cite homophobic Catholic doctrine that states: “under no circumstances can [homosexual acts] be approved” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 53). This citation is a clear judgment and strong disapproval of homosexuality; it is an example of the homophobia described in the Ontario bishops’ pastoral guideline intended for use in Catholic schools.

Furthermore, discrimination against non-heterosexuals occurs when the authors of the PGASO refer to Catholic doctrine that states: “homosexual persons are called to chastity” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 53) because “only within [heterosexual] marriage does sexual intercourse fully symbolize the Creator’s dual design, as an act of covenant love, with the potential of co-creating a new human life” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 61). This distinction between heterosexual and non-heterosexual sex condemns non-heterosexuals to a lifetime of celibacy, a restriction that is not imposed on other lay Catholics.

The very existence of the Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation constitutes a form of religiously inspired maltreatment of a vulnerable sexual minority group. The PGASO does not offer any assistance to lgbtq people in Catholic
schools. On the contrary, it singles out sexual minorities and subjects them to a thinly
disguised guide to the ill treatment of, and hostility toward, “students of same-sex
attraction.” The PGASO cites Catholic doctrine that lists “homosexual practices” as
being among the “sins gravely contrary to chastity” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 53), but –
interestingly – also included in that list is pornography. It is unclear why Catholic leaders
have written so much about homosexuality and so little about pornography, when they
regard both as “sins gravely contrary to chastity.” This persistent singling out of sexual
minorities is a clear example of the behavior that the authors of the PGASO identify as
homophobic, yet they do not recognize their culpability in this regard.

Similarly, the authors of the PGASO seem unaware that their pastoral guideline
contains references to specific Catholic doctrine that can easily be interpreted as
condoning violence against non-heterosexuals. The Catholic doctrine in question is an
earlier pastoral guideline published in 1986 called “Pastoral Care of Homosexual
Persons,” which comes from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), an
office in the Vatican responsible for the development and promotion of official Catholic
doctrine. The CDF has had many name changes over the centuries, but it is perhaps best
known by its former 16th century name, The Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman
and Universal Inquisition, which is often shortened to The Holy Roman Inquisition or
simply The Inquisition (Vatican, 2011). Given its long history of developing and
safeguarding Catholic doctrine and Catholic morality throughout the Catholic world, the
CDF is the oldest and most active of the nine congregations that form the administrative
apparatus (also known as the Roman Curia) of the Vatican (Vatican, 2011). The CDF is
prolific on matters of sexuality, including homosexuality. This example of Catholic
doctrine from the CDF – the “Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” – has the distinction of being co-authored by the current Pope Benedict XVI when he was known as Cardinal Ratzinger, the Prefect of the CDF (“Prefect” is the title given to a cardinal in charge of a congregation of the Roman Curia). The fact that the current Pope is the principal author of a highly influential pastoral guideline containing some of the most spurious language about non-heterosexuals offers some explanation for the conservative direction of the current papacy on the matter of sexual minorities. The violent tone of the “Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” is particularly alarming given that it is reprinted in the PGASO, which is disseminated in Catholic schools throughout Ontario. In discussing the “violent malice” against homosexuals, the authors of “Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” state:

The proper reaction to crimes committed against homosexual persons should not be to claim that the homosexual condition is not disordered. When such a claim is made and when homosexual activity is consequently condoned, or when civil legislation is introduced to protect behaviour to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the Church nor society at large should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground, and irrational and violent reactions increase. (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 48)

This passage of Catholic doctrine from the Vatican decries civil legislation that decriminalizes homosexuality and lays the blame of violence against non-heterosexuals directly with the advancement of same-sex legal rights via civil legislation. According to the authors of this passage (Bovone and Ratzinger – now Pope Benedict XVI) the quest for increased protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation has
infuriated the general population to such a degree that no one should be surprised when violence against sexual minority groups increases as a result.

The fight on the part of LGBTQ activists for human rights for non-heterosexuals stresses the equality of persons before the law and rejects homophobic Catholic doctrine that claims homosexuality is “disordered.” According to the authors of “Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,” when human rights activists – such as those in Canada who fought in the mid 1960s for the Canadian Parliament to decriminalize homosexuality (Rayside, 2008) – respond to violent homophobic hate crimes by stressing the need to protect the equality rights of non-heterosexuals, they invite even more violence against sexual minority groups. The solution offered in this passage, then, is to accept the authority of homophobic Catholic doctrine that describes the “homosexual condition” as “disordered,” and to denounce the advancement of same-sex legal rights because it is this agitation of the status quo that increases violence against non-heterosexuals, not the homophobic Catholic doctrine itself. After all, as the authors of this passage state, “no one has any conceivable right” to live as a non-heterosexual, so “society at large should [not] be surprised” by violent homophobic hate crimes. This passage of Catholic doctrine represents a tacit endorsement of violence against non-heterosexuals, a form of homophobia described by the authors of the PGASO, and to which they seem to be unaware that they are contributing.

In their description of homophobia, the Ontario bishops state that “sometimes homophobia exhibits itself in silence, … [which] can be perceived as compliance to continue discrimination” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 25). As the “Media Accounts” chapter in this thesis demonstrates, there are many examples of how homophobic silence furthers
discrimination against sexual minority groups in Catholic schools. Catholic doctrine that requires non-heterosexuals to remain celibate for the rest of their lives means that LGBTQ teachers, counselors, chaplains, pastors, and administrators must remain silent or lie about their same-sex partners, and any children they may be raising while working in Catholic schools. This deception not only wreaks havoc on the mental, emotional, and physical health of LGBTQ staff in Catholic schools (Callaghan, 2007b), but it also deprives LGBTQ students of important positive role models. Other forms of homophobic silence manifest themselves in curriculum and policy decisions taken in Catholic schools that would eliminate or at least reduce the circulation of positive information about sexual orientation and gender identity through the banning of books, the editing of provincial curriculum, and the barring of Gay/Straight Alliances. The authors of the PGASO mention homophobic silence, but they seem oblivious to the ways in which their pastoral guideline keeps homophobic silence alive in Catholic schools.

In spite of these rich examples of the many ways in which the PGASO contributes to homophobia in Catholic schools, its authors contend: “It should not be assumed, however, that to guide others away from the practice of homosexual genital activity comes out of homophobia” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 25). The authors of the PGASO can simply state that their pastoral guideline is not homophobic, but the document’s many contradictions suggest otherwise. In their answer to the question, “What is homophobia?” in the PGASO, the Ontario bishops state: “Unlike homosexuality, homophobia can be ‘cured’ through education, experience, reflection and prayer” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 25). It is conceivable then, that the authors of the PGASO may be cured of their obvious homophobia, if only they would follow their own advice and reflect on the ways their
pastoral guideline contributes to homophobia in Catholic schools. This would require a level of awareness, though, that the authors of the PGASO have yet to demonstrate.

The Ontario bishops’ references to vilifying Catholic doctrine, their emphasis on the homophobic Catholic requirement that non-heterosexual lay Catholics must remain celibate for the rest of their lives, and their recommendation of the corrective 12-Step program *Courage* as a viable option for non-heterosexuals, are all forms of discrimination that contribute to the institutionalization of homophobia in Catholic schools throughout Ontario. These examples of discrimination may not be as obvious as firing lesbian and gay teachers, barring same-sex dates at the high school prom, or banning Gay/Straight Alliances, but they nevertheless constitute a form of discrimination that violates the equality rights provision (Section 15) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The authors of the PGASO state that they are aware of the legal obligation Ontario Catholic schools are under to uphold Canadian law impacting sexual minority groups in public schools, yet they have designed a pastoral guideline that encourages Catholic schools in Ontario to disregard these very pieces of Canadian law. In so doing, the *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* does not assist LGBTQ students in Ontario Catholic schools at all – on the contrary it encourages further homophobic discrimination to be leveled against them. This kind of homophobic curricular and policy document does not encourage a safe and caring environment for sexual minority groups in Ontario Catholic schools.
Alberta’s Toward an Inclusive Community workshop for Catholic Educators

In his essay on Christian churches and homosexuality, Wolfgang Lienemann (1998), an ethics professor at the University of Bern in Switzerland, documents an unusual proliferation of official church studies, declarations, and pastoral guidelines on the topic of homosexuality since the 1970s. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church, the definitive doctrine is a pastoral guideline from the Vatican to all the bishops of the Catholic Church, titled: “Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” (Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986). This is the example of Catholic doctrine, discussed above, that refers to homosexuality as “an intrinsic moral evil” and “an objective disorder” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 45).

In order to ensure that this message from the Vatican reaches young people in Catholic schools, different associations of local Catholic bishops throughout North America started to write their own pastoral guidelines with the audiences of Catholic school administrators, teachers, and students in mind. One American example, discussed above, is *Always Our Children: Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers* (USCCB, 1997). This was followed by a Canadian example, the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline called *A Resource for an Inclusive Community: A Teacher’s Guide for and about Persons with Same Sex Attractions* (Alberta Catholic Bishops, 2001).

The Alberta bishops’ 11-page pastoral guideline predates the Ontario bishops’ *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* (OCCB, 2004a) discussed above, and can be therefore regarded as a model for the much lengthier and more detailed Ontario 2004 pastoral guideline. As I discuss further below, there is some
evidence of the Ontario and Alberta bishops working together on the development of their pastoral guidelines. I have previously examined the contents of the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline *A Resource for an Inclusive Community* elsewhere (Callaghan, 2007b), so I will not analyze it closely here, except to underscore that it refers to the same largely anti-lgbtq Catholic doctrine found in the Ontario bishops’ 2004 pastoral guideline, discussed in some detail above, and it also recommends *Courage*, the reparative 12-Step program uncovered above, as a supportive pastoral ministry for “those with same-sex attractions and their loved ones” (Alberta Catholic Bishops, 2001, paragraphs 56-58).

Unlike the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, the Alberta Catholic Bishops have no centralized office or online presence, though their spokesperson is Calgary Bishop Frederick Henry, who functions as a liaison bishop to the Alberta Catholic School Trustees’ Association (ACSTA, 2004).

One of the problems Alberta Catholic School Trustees’ Association (ACSTA) noticed about the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline is, although the ACSTA promptly posted the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline on the ACSTA website shortly after the Alberta bishops wrote it, the Alberta bishops’ message was slow to reach the Catholic schools of Alberta. To rectify this, during the 2002-2003 academic year, the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta (CCSSA) struck a sub-committee called “Inclusive Communities” charged with the task of devising a province-wide implementation plan for the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline (CCSSA, 2007, section 2). The “Inclusive Communities” implementation plan was the development of a workshop called *Toward an Inclusive Community*, designed to teach Catholic educators about the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline. The focus in this chapter is to closely
examine this workshop *Toward an Inclusive Community* (CCSSA, 2007) in order to understand how members of the CCSSA have received the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline and how they envision it being used in the Catholic schools of Alberta.

*The authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community.*

According to its website, the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta (CCSSA) is “a community of disciples” whose vision is to “influence the development and direction of Catholic education in Alberta” (CCSSA, 2011b). Most of the CCSSA’s 34 educator members hold various levels of administrative positions within the central administrative offices of their school districts, including – but not exclusively limited to – the role of superintendent or director of their Catholic school districts (CCSSA, 2011a). Many of CCSSA’s 34 members are Catholic school administrators who hail from the Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 1 and the Elk Island Catholic Separate Regional Division (representing areas east of Edmonton). Of the 22 Catholic school districts in Alberta, 17 send a representative to the CCSSA (CCSSA, 2011a). The CCSSA is not a governmental organization; it receives its funds through member fees and donations from member school jurisdictions (CCSSA, 2011c). Members of the CCSSA are bound by a code of ethics that requires them to: “[be] aware that all actions are for the benefit of the students and for the glory of God;” “[hold] to the ideals of the Christian family, [promote] these ideals through commitment to family life;” and “[participate] actively in the advancement of the Catholic faith at the parish and diocesan levels” (CCSSA, 2011d, p. 1).

The mandate of the CCSSA’s Inclusive Communities sub-committee is twofold:

1) to provide a practical manual for teachers and counselors in Alberta Catholic schools
to consult when implementing the Alberta bishops’ pastoral guideline for persons with same-sex attractions; and 2) to develop standard, predictable answers to possible media questions about the treatment of sexual minority groups in Alberta Catholic schools (CCSSA, 2004a). The CCSSA’s Inclusive Communities sub-committee is comprised of eight members, four of whom are also members of the CCSSA’s Religious Education Network, which is described on the CCSSA website as “a community of Catholic educators providing support and opportunities for collaboration … in teaching through the eyes of Faith in the Province of Alberta” (CCSSA, 2011c, p. 1). CCSSA’s Religious Education Network is similar in function to its counterpart in Ontario, the Education Commission of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario. The difference in Alberta is that the CCSSA’s Religious Education Network is made up of Catholic educators from Catholic school districts throughout the province in collaboration with representatives from each Catholic diocese (that is, lay or religious members of a parish within a district overseen by a bishop) (CCSSA, 2011c). In Ontario, the Education Commission is part of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, comprised predominately of clergy members. The advantage of the CCSSA’s Religious Education Network over the Ontario bishops’ Education Commission is that its members are also Catholic educators and can readily disseminate directives from the Alberta Catholic Bishops in Alberta Catholic schools.

Although the authors of Toward an Inclusive Community are a group of eight conservative Catholic educators, they worked with the guidance of Bishop Frederick Henry, Liaison Bishop to the Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association (ACSTA) and the principle author of the Alberta Catholic Bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline A Resource
for an Inclusive Community: A Teacher’s Guide for and about Persons with Same Sex Attractions. Bishop Henry hails from Ontario and was a member of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops Education Commission (Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary, 2011). An internal memorandum of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association (ACSTA, 2004) shows Bishop Henry’s influence on the Toward an Inclusive Community workshop, as well as the involvement of Bishop Thomas Collins, now Archbishop of Toronto. Based on the similarities between the Alberta and Ontario pastoral guidelines (such as citations of the same Catholic doctrine, references to the corrective 12-Step program Courage, and a similar question and answer section), as well as the fact that Bishop Henry (of Ontario) and Bishop Collins (of Ontario) were consulted on the development of the Alberta educators’ Toward an Inclusive Community workshop, it appears the organizations of Catholic bishops from the provinces of Alberta and Ontario worked closely together in the development of their separate pastoral guidelines for managing sexual minority groups in the Catholic schools of Alberta and Ontario.

A brief description of Toward an Inclusive Community.

Toward an Inclusive Community is a Catholic teacher in-service manual designed to ensure Catholic educators throughout the province of Alberta are trained on the contents of the Alberta Catholic Bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline A Resource for an Inclusive Community: A Teacher’s Guide for and about Persons with Same Sex Attractions. Written by devout Catholic educators, whose membership in the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta (CCSSA) requires them to be family oriented and active in their Catholic parishes, Toward an Inclusive Community represents a particularly conservative Catholic perspective on the topic of sexual minorities in Alberta
Catholic schools. The *Toward an Inclusive Community* teacher workshop manual is intended to be used by senior Catholic administrators in various Catholic school districts throughout Alberta to train their district personnel (teachers, counselors, administrators) on the contents of the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline so that its message may inform curricular and policy decisions on the topic of sexual minorities in Alberta Catholic schools. In terms of curriculum, the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline is distributed directly to students as a course text within high school Religious Studies courses (CCSSA, 2007, section 7) and Religious Studies teachers therefore need to be trained on its contents. In terms of school policy, counselors facing students who are questioning their sexual orientation, or administrators trying to determine if students can be granted a Gay-Straight Alliance or not, are trained on the contents of the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline so that its message may direct how they proceed in these matters.

Along with their professed goal of supporting students “with compassion and respect as they develop on their faith journey,” the authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* wish to ensure “that there is clear direction in this sensitive issue” of sexual minority groups in the Catholic schools of Alberta (CCSSA, 2007, section 2).

Furthermore, a memorandum from the CCSSA’s “Inclusive Communities” subcommittee to all Catholic school superintendents of Alberta lists their rationale for developing the *Toward an Inclusive Community* workshop as follows:

> There is mounting pressure from special interest groups outside of our school jurisdictions to be involved in providing “support” to young people in our schools. Much of that is based on seeing same-sex attraction as a reality with no
specific call to chastity. Added to that is the overwhelming exposure of the issue of same-sex aspirations. Facing the situation directly, discreetly and deliberately would ensure that the moral teachings of the Church be upheld. (CCSSA, 2005, p. 2)

Compiled in an unassuming, school-friendly binder with 8 sectional dividers, *Toward an Inclusive Community* has no consecutive page numbers, but is a collection of approximately 95 pages of articles and other miscellaneous material the authors deem will be of use to Catholic educators working with LGBTQ individuals in Catholic schools. Among the miscellaneous materials included in the *Toward an Inclusive Community* workshop are needs assessments and pre-tests for the Catholic educators taking the workshop in order to determine how much the workshop participants already know about Catholic perspectives on non-heterosexuality. Since there are no consecutive page numbers in this unbound resource for Catholic educators, references to its contents in this study will necessarily have to be to its sections. The authors divide *Toward an Inclusive Community* into eight sections: 1) PowerPoint Presentation; 2) Opening and Closing Prayer; 3) Catholic Perspective; 4) Student & School Perspective; 5) When Students Disclose; 6) Parental Support; 7) Curriculum Support; and 8) Media Questions. Sections 3, 4, 7, and 8 are the most illuminating for this present study.

*Toward an Inclusive Community – Section 3: Catholic Perspective.*

Section 3 of *Toward an Inclusive Community*, labeled “Catholic Perspective,” opens with the complete text of the Alberta bishops’ 11-page pastoral guideline *A Resource for an Inclusive Community: A Teacher’s Guide for and about Persons with Same Sex Attractions*. Presumably because of those Catholic educators who do not have
the time to read the Alberta bishops’ pastoral guideline in its entirety, the authors of
_Toward an Inclusive Community_ also include a 5-page summary of its salient points,
which directly follows the original bishops’ text. Insisting, “this is a document of
HOPE!” (upper-case letters in the original), the authors’ summary of the Alberta bishops’
pastoral guideline declares that it “offers to teachers, support staff, parents and students a
vision of Christian community which calls for holiness and accountability, compassion
and justice” (CCSSA, 2007, section 3). However, a close reading of the complete Alberta
bishops’ pastoral guideline shows the same fundamental lack of justice for sexual
minority groups that exists in the Ontario bishops’ _Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students
of Same-Sex Orientation_ (OCCB, 2004a).

It is not surprising that Catholic educators who compiled _Toward an Inclusive
Community_ can attempt to cast the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline as a
“document of hope” given that the most contentious segments have been omitted from
their five-page summary. In their 2001 pastoral guideline, the Alberta bishops reference
the same Vatican encyclical called “Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” that the
Ontario bishops reference in their 2004 pastoral guideline, which reads as follows:
“Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or
less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself
must be seen as an objective disorder” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 3). However, the
authors of _Toward an Inclusive Community_ have removed this reference to Catholic
document from their summary of the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline. Also absent
from the authors’ five-page summary of the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline is
the following question from its “Questions and Answers About Same-Sex Attraction”
“Where can a homosexual person go for information and support?” Answer: “Courage is an apostolate of the Roman Catholic Church whose purpose is to minister to those with same-sex attractions and their loved ones” (CCSSA, 2007, section 3). As discussed above, the Ontario bishops also suggest Courage, a corrective 12-Step program that tries to “cure” people of their non-heterosexual orientation, as a viable option for LGBTQ persons.

The Catholic educators who wrote Toward an Inclusive Community did emphasize in their summary, however, a section of the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline that concedes: “most professionals no longer accept the notion that homosexuality is something that can or should be fixed. The consensus is to help youth with same-sex attractions develop self acceptance and recover from the trauma of growing up in hostile environments” (CCSSA, 2007, section 3). As discussed above, it is certainly true that reparative therapy has been decisively rejected by every reputable professional medical organization, but it is clear that Catholic clergy members in both Ontario and Alberta have yet to recognize the dangers of reparative therapy given that they continue to recommend the corrective 12-Step program Courage as a positive “ministry” for non-heterosexuals in their pastoral guidelines.

The Alberta and Ontario bishops may not be willing to recognize or admit the dangers of reparative therapy apparent in Courage, but they do seem to be aware of the controversy associated with this corrective 12-Step program. Both Alberta and Ontario bishops suggest Courage in an understated way in their pastoral guidelines, which signals the bishops’ awareness of possible controversy surrounding the Catholic endorsement of Courage. The Alberta and Ontario bishops try to avoid this controversy by mentioning
Courage only briefly in their pastoral guidelines and by embedding it discretely within questions and testimonials that are not set apart under headings with the word Courage in their titles. Despite their attempts to downplay their advocacy for Courage, it is nevertheless clear that the Alberta and Ontario Catholic bishops do favorably suggest Courage as a resource for Catholic educators to pass along to LGBTQ students and their families. Rather than address the dangers that Courage represents, the Alberta and Ontario bishops prefer to deny that Courage is associated with reparative therapy.

Similarly, the Catholic clergy members in Alberta and Ontario who were involved in the development of the two pastoral guidelines for each province prefer to overlook how their continued push for the dissemination of homophobic Catholic doctrine in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools contributes to the very “hostile environments” from which they seek to save LGBTQ students. The LGBTQ teachers and students who participated in this doctoral study all found their Catholic schools to be hostile to non-heterosexuals. The authors of Toward an Inclusive Community included in their summary of the Alberta bishops’ pastoral guideline the above-noted quotation that “homosexuality is [not] something that can or should be fixed” because it assists with the “HOPE[ful]” presentation they are trying to depict in their workshop for educators about the contents of the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline. The authors’ emphasis of the quotation that “homosexuality is [not] something that can or should be fixed” also ties in neatly with their pre-test designed to be given to workshop participants at the start of the Toward an Inclusive Community in-service to ascertain how much Catholic educators already know about the Catholic position on homosexuality. Arranged in a True or False chart, the pre-test states: “The Church encourages the homosexual person to seek therapy
to change their orientation” to which the correct answer is meant to be false (CCSSA, 2007, section 1). However, in their pastoral guidelines to “assist” sexual minorities in Catholic schools, both the Ontario bishops and the Alberta bishops suggest the corrective 12-Step program *Courage* as a support for LGBTQ people. Therefore, the Church is, in fact, encouraging reparative therapy. This is just one of many semantic games the authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* play in order to detract from the overall disturbingly homophobic message contained in the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline.

The Alberta bishops wrote their 2001 pastoral guideline *A Resource for an Inclusive Community: A Teacher’s Guide for and about Persons with Same Sex Attractions* for educators in Alberta Catholic schools, and Catholic educators wrote their 2007 teacher in-service manual *Toward an Inclusive Community* to ensure the Alberta bishops’ message is properly disseminated among educators in Alberta Catholic schools. The further away from the bishops the message gets, and the closer it comes to reaching LGBTQ students, the greater the need on the part of the authors who developed the *Toward an Inclusive Community* workshop to deny its homophobic message. In order to soften the Alberta bishops’ message, the authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* summarized the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guidelines in a way that carefully expunges Catholic doctrine that describes “homosexuality” as an “intrinsic moral evil” and an “objective disorder,” and makes no mention of the bishops’ recommendation of the 12-Step rehabilitation program *Courage*.

Section three of *Toward an Inclusive Community* concludes with three supplementary resource materials the authors included in the binder under the heading “backgrounders:” 1) a 1997 statement from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
called “The Catholic Church’s Teaching on Homosexuality;” 2) an essay titled “Chastity – A Universal Christian Call” excerpted from a 1999 book called *Catholic Moral Teaching*; and 3) an article titled “Psychology and the Church’s Teaching on Homosexuality” by Stephen J. Rossetti and Gerald D. Coleman, both American priests, published in 1997 in the journal *America* (CCSSA, 2007, section 3). With the exception of the essay on chastity, the “backgrounders” are essentially apologies – formal defenses, justifications, and excuses – for the contentious piece of Catholic doctrine from the Vatican that both the Ontario and Alberta bishops cite in their pastoral guidelines, which states: “Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 3). By including these apologies in their teacher in-service manual, the authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* show they are aware this particular example of Catholic doctrine from the Vatican may cause alarm among the Catholic educators who take part in their workshop. Including essays from prominent Catholics who try to justify and excuse this official Catholic doctrine will hopefully assuage any concerns raised by Catholic educators who participate in the *Toward an Inclusive Community* workshop.

For example, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops’ statement titled “The Catholic Church’s Teaching on Homosexuality” denies the meaning of this portion of Catholic doctrine, claiming instead “when the Church speaks about homosexuality as an ‘objective disorder,’ it is speaking not of the tendency but of genital acts between people of the same sex” (cited in CCSSA, 2206, section 3). However, the original Catholic doctrine from the Vatican, quoted in the previous paragraph above, is clearly referring to
the homosexual “inclination” or “tendency.” This same statement from Canadian
Conference of Catholic Bishops’ titled, “The Catholic Church’s Teaching on
Homosexuality” is also included in the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Pastoral
Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation. Even if it were true that the
Church is not referring to a “homosexual” identity when it says the “homosexual
inclination” or “tendency” is “an intrinsic moral evil” and an “objective disorder,” but is
referring instead to “homosexual genital acts,” the Church is still singling out non-
heterosexuals and condemning them to a lifetime of celibacy in a manner that can only be
read as homophobic.

In a similar vein, the two American priests, Stephen Rossetti and Gerald Coleman
who wrote the article, “Psychology and the Church’s Teaching on Homosexuality,” also
try to defend the official Catholic doctrine from the Vatican, cited above, that refers to
homosexuality as “an intrinsic moral evil” and “an objective disorder” by claiming that
lay Catholics and others are “citing isolated phrases and concepts that, taken out of
context, are not in harmony with a comprehensive view of church teaching” (cited in
CCSSA, 2007, section 3). According to Rossetti and Coleman, the trouble non-clergy
Catholics have been having with this official statement on homosexuality from the
Vatican is not what it actually says, but rather that it is not taken within a broader view of
all that the church has to say on the matter. However, it is incongruous for the Catholic
Church to say on the one hand that homosexuality is “an objective disorder” and then, on
the other hand, to say that “it is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are
the object of violent malice in speech or in action” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 3).
The problem is not that these statements are taken out of context; rather, it is that the statements are themselves contradictory.

Faced with the monumental task of having to implement the Alberta bishops’ pastoral guideline that contains contradictory Catholic doctrine on homosexuality, the authors of Toward an Inclusive Community chose instead to remove the problematic portions and include various defenses from Catholic clergy members who twist themselves into semantic pretzels to explain away the condemning Catholic doctrine and try to convince non-clergy Catholics that Catholic doctrine does not discriminate against non-heterosexuals but affirms their dignity and right to the “pastoral care” of the Catholic church.

**Toward an Inclusive Community – Section 4: Student & School Perspective.**

Section 4 of Toward an Inclusive Community is a collection of three journal articles and one compilation of excerpted portions of a book titled Being Gay and Lesbian in a Catholic High School: Beyond the Uniform. The first journal article is titled “Gay Adolescents in Catholic Schools: Avoiding the Topic Won’t Make it Go Away,” written by Robert Mattingly, a priest and admissions director at a Catholic high school in the United States. It was published in 2004 in two parts in two separate editions of Momentum, the official journal of the National Catholic Education Association of the United States. Part 1, which appeared in the September/October 2004 edition of Momentum, examines research and church teaching about homosexuality. Part 2, which appeared in the November/December 2004 edition of Momentum, attends to the research that shows a majority of LGBTQ students in Catholic schools report being harassed without any intervention from staff.
The second journal article is titled “How Catholic Schools Are Creating a Safe Climate for Gay and Lesbian Students,” written by two authors: Sister Mary Ellen Gevelinger, the director of personnel and planning for Catholic schools in the St. Paul and Minneapolis Archdiocese, and Laurel Zimmerman, the chair of the guidance department in a private Catholic high school within the St. Paul and Minneapolis Archdiocese. Both authors are adjunct professors at two separate Catholic universities in the state of Minnesota. The Gevelinger and Zimmerman article was published in the October 1997 edition of *Educational Leadership*.

The third journal article is titled “Reflecting on Shattered Glass: Some Thoughts About Gay Youth in Schools,” written by Dr. Kevin Alderson, a clinical hypnotist and Adjunct Assistant Professor in applied psychology at the University of Calgary. The Alderson article was published in the Summer 2002 edition of *The Alberta Counsellor*.

This collection of three essays that the authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* included in Section 4 “Student and School Perspective” is followed by 12 pages of excerpts they selected from a 169-page Catholic study conducted in the United States titled, *Being Gay and Lesbian in a Catholic High School: Beyond the Uniform* (Maher, 2001). These excerpts conclude the section.

The first article, “Gay Adolescents in Catholic Schools: Avoiding the Topic Won’t Make it Go Away,” by Robert Mattingly offers a similar defense of contentious Catholic doctrine from the Vatican as the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, cited above. In his discussion of the Vatican’s 1986 document “Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” that describes homosexuality as “intrinsically disordered,” Mattingly admits that this phrase “may not sound pleasing to the ear” but he attempts to
minimize its sting by arguing that the phrase “must be seen as precise philosophical terms” having to do with the “immorality” of any sexual act that does not lead to the begetting of children (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4). These “precise philosophical terms” that underscore the “immorality” of non-procreative sex do little to detract from the powerfully oppressive phrase “intrinsically disordered.” In effect, Mattingly sends the same message as the Vatican, except with less explosive language.

The overarching thesis of Mattingly’s defense of contentious Catholic doctrine is his misleading declaration that “no modern church document labels a homosexual orientation as sinful” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4). Like the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops’ 2004 pastoral guideline, discussed in the first part of this chapter, Mattingly praises the American Conference of Catholic Bishops’ 1997 pastoral guideline called Always Our Children. Skipping over the sections of Always Our Children that recommend the special diocesan ministry called Courage for lgbtq people, Mattingly insists: “the church does not call for a homosexual to be ‘fixed’ but rather to be met with pastoral respect and care” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4). As uncovered earlier in this chapter, this special Catholic ministry called Courage does, in fact, support those who wish to change from a non-heterosexual orientation to a heterosexual one.

Characteristic of writings from Catholic clergy members on the topic of homosexuality is their inability to see Catholic doctrine as contributing to societal homophobia. Mattingly’s article is no exception. Mattingly recognizes “religions that communicate negative messages about homosexuals are destructive and can contribute to the young gay listener’s self hate” but he does not see the Catholic religion as a contributor of these negative messages. Another common element of writings from
Catholic clergy members on the topic of homosexuality is their protestations that they have nothing but love, compassion and justice to offer homosexuals. In this vein, Mattingly states: “Gay teens need to feel loved and accepted as they are by family, friends, school and church. Nothing could be more in keeping with church teaching” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4). Mattingly’s is a selective reading of Catholic Church teaching that denies the existence of damning Catholic doctrine on the topic of homosexuality.

One refreshing element of Mattingly’s article is his conditional acceptance of the idea of an in-school support group for lgbtq students. Mattingly acknowledges, “bringing students questioning their sexual identity together provides a powerful sense of support for these students, while it can also raise their visibility in the school” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4). Yet he cautions that “careful attention should be given to the name of the group, what external organization it affiliates with, how public the group is, and what guidelines the local Catholic School Office may have” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4). According to Father Mattingly, lgbtq students can have a support group as long as they are not too obvious about it and do not draw too much attention to themselves with provocative names and associations with outside lgbtq rights organizations. This American Catholic priest and Catholic school administrator’s concern over the name of an in-school support group for lgbtq students is also reflected in current Canadian Catholic education leaders’ consternation over the word “Gay” in Gay/Straight Alliances currently being fought for by students at the Dufferin-Peel and Halton Catholic District School Boards in Ontario (see “Participants” chapter and the introduction to this thesis for details). This preoccupation with the word “gay” shows the powerful force of
Catholic doctrine in directing policy and practice regarding sexual minorities in Catholic schools no matter where in the world the school is located.

Mattingly’s advice regarding the name of a support group for LGBTQ students is aligned with the Alberta bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline, *A Resource for an Inclusive Community*, which states, “to refer to a person as ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ in our culture is not only to use politically charged language but to succumb to a reductionist way of speaking about someone else. Such labeling is not only inaccurate but tends to re-enforce and, in some cases, legitimate an arrested psycho-sexual development” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 3). Similarly, the Ontario bishops’ *Pastoral Guideline to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation*, also cautions that “attaching a label” such as homosexual, lesbian, or gay is “problematic” because it “implies that they are their orientation... The orientation or act is homosexual or heterosexual but the person is not” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 26). The way in which these two Catholic documents attempt to “produce” (in the Foucaultian sense) LGBTQ students and teachers as particular subjects is explored in the upcoming “Theorizing the Data” chapter.

Despite Mattingly’s warning to Catholic school administrators that “establishing a gay support group could be complicated,” he nevertheless agrees they should exist because “research consistently shows [a Gay-Straight Alliance] is a major component for gay teens coming to self-acceptance” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4). Mattingly goes on to propose that gay support “groups could follow one of two models. A group could have lower visibility if it were run and known only in a school’s counseling office. If a school desired a higher visibility, this group could be run as a club open to anyone with questions about sexual orientation issues” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4).
upcoming discussion of Section 8 of *Toward an Inclusive Community*, I show that the Alberta bishops elected to avoid endorsing support groups for LGBTQ students altogether, preferring the one-to-one counseling approach available through the counseling and chaplaincy offices.

The second article included in the *Toward an Inclusive Community* workshop titled, “How Catholic Schools Are Creating a Safe Climate for Gay and Lesbian Students,” by Sister Mary Ellen Gevelinger and Laurel Zimmerman, makes no apologies for condemning Catholic doctrine, unlike Mattingly’s article. Instead, they prefer to proceed as though such doctrine does not exist. Although Gevelinger and Zimmerman state they were part of their Archdiocese’s “Study Group on Pastoral Care and Sexual Identity” for at least a year, involving a thorough examination of all Catholic Church documents on the topic of homosexuality, they concentrate solely on those aspects of Catholic doctrine that urge Catholics to “minister to all because all of us are God’s creatures” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4).

Perhaps because of their refusal to address the existence of condemning Catholic doctrine on homosexuality, the authors freely discuss their goals of offering general sensitivity training for Catholic school administrators, counselors, and teachers, as well as specific training for “safe staff” provided by a local group called Family and Friends of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Persons in Catholic Education (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4). Remarkably, the authors also encourage Catholic schoolteachers to “incorporate discussions of homosexuality into the curriculum” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4). They stop short, though, of advocating for Gay-Straight Alliances in Catholic schools, suggesting instead that Catholic schools could agree to the establishment of “an
off-site, interschool support group for students” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4).

Aware that some traditional Catholic readers may accuse them of advocating for change in Catholic schools that goes against official Catholic doctrine on the topic of homosexuality, Gevelinger and Zimmerman are careful to point out that their “basic assumptions and guidelines are aimed at promoting chastity” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4).

The third article included in the Toward an Inclusive Community workshop manual titled, “Reflecting on Shattered Glass: Some Thoughts About Gay Youth in Schools” by Dr. Kevin Alderson is a review of existing literature on human sexuality, specifically homosexuality among young people. He concludes his essay with suggestions for school counselors and recommendations on how schools can improve their treatment of sexual minority groups. Given that there are thousands of articles written by psychologists on this topic, the 2002 Alderson article was likely chosen for inclusion in the Toward an Inclusive Community teacher workshop manual for Catholic educators in Alberta because it is written by an Albertan psychologist who identifies as gay, but it nevertheless remains an essay that does not particularly challenge official Catholic belief around non-heterosexuality.

Presumably, adding Alderson’s perspective enables the authors of Toward an Inclusive Community to claim they are presenting a balanced view on the topic. The overarching thesis of Alderson’s article is: “Although teens are exploring same-sex behavior, it does not always lead to self-definition as gay. It is perhaps less well-known that some of those who identify themselves as homosexual will later change their self-definition to heterosexual” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4). Alderson therefore
“encourage[s] young people to take their time self-identifying” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4) – a suggestion echoed by the Alberta Catholic bishops whose 2001 pastoral guideline also cautions that: “parents and educators should not assume that same-sex attractions during adolescence are necessarily indicative of a fundamental homosexual orientation” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 3). Furthermore, Alderson writes that “youth should resist trying to self-identify for a few years, thereby avoiding a foreclosure on their identity” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 4) – an outlook that would not be out of place among the opinions of the conservative Catholic educators who wrote *Toward an Inclusive Community* and the Alberta Catholic bishops who provided guidance on this teacher in-service manual.

The authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* close section 4 with 12 pages of excerpts they selected from a 169-page Catholic study titled, *Being Gay and Lesbian in a Catholic High School: Beyond the Uniform* (Maher, 2001). The book’s author is Michael Maher who holds a PhD in education from St. Louis University, a Catholic Jesuit institution, and a Master of Pastoral Studies from Loyola University Chicago, a private Jesuit institution where he currently serves as campus chaplain (Maher, 2001).

Maher refers to all of the relevant, contradictory teachings from the Catholic Church on the topic of homosexuality, including several of the same pivotal pieces of Catholic doctrine contained in the Alberta and Ontario bishops’ pastoral guidelines discussed above. As a chaplain who studied in Catholic seminary college, Maher respects the Catholic Church’s mandate that its teachings on homosexuality must be clearly presented in Catholic schools, but he stresses that “the Church’s condemnations of
homosexual activity must not prevent those working for the Church from providing pastoral care for homosexual persons” (Maher, 2001, p. 114).

In terms of a target audience for his book, Maher envisions Catholic educators who are working towards pastoral care for non-heterosexuals in Catholic schools and who need an acceptable rebuttal to conservative Catholic educators resistant to the idea of even discussing homosexuality in Catholic schools (Maher, 2001). Maher’s book represents that rebuttal. In order to win over reluctant Catholic educators, Maher stresses the idea of “integration” – a recurring theme in Catholic educational philosophies that strives for education for the whole person. His thesis is that, rather than “integration,” non-heterosexuals in Catholic schools experience a kind of “dis-integration,” making the Catholic goal of integration in education out of reach for them (Maher, 2001, p. 4). According to Maher, one way of reversing the “dis-integration” experienced by sexual minority groups in Catholic schools is to develop understanding and empathy for their plight by telling their stories. To illustrate his point, Maher interviewed 25 lesbian and gay adults who attended American Catholic high schools throughout the 1980s and 1990s and presented 16 of their stories in his book. The focus of Maher’s study was to give a general impression of the experiences of some lesbian and gay students in some Catholic high schools.

In their brief introduction to the 12 pages of excerpts they chose to reproduce from Maher’s book, the authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* state, “teachers and pastoral counselors can become better attuned to the life stories of homosexual students by examining a number of case studies” (CCSSA, 2007, section 4). Establishing empathy and developing sensitivity among Catholic educators towards non-heterosexuals in
Catholic schools are the authors’ stated reasons for excerpting selected portions of Maher’s book. The authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* excerpted three of the 16 stories presented in Maher’s book: 1) Tom’s Story, 2) Kevin’s Story, and 3) Gina’s Story. Tom and Kevin’s stories are about denying their homosexuality while in Catholic school because they did not feel safe there. Gina’s story is about the sheltered homogeneity of her Catholic high school where the topic of homosexuality was generally avoided.

Instead of providing any commentary or analysis of Maher’s study, the authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* reproduce a condensed version of Maher’s own reflections on the stories of his participants. These reflections stress the students’ shameful repression of their homosexual feelings while in Catholic school, the importance of teachers in influencing how safe or unsafe the students felt in their Catholic schools, and the lack of family support available to most lesbian and gay students who attend Catholic schools.

The fact that the authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* have included these excerpts from Maher’s book in their teacher in-service manual suggests they anticipated a need to develop sympathy and understanding towards sexual minorities among workshop participants. I know when I attended a teacher in-service session called “Sensitive Issues in Our Catholic Schools,” which was the 2004 version of the 2007 *Toward an Inclusive Community* workshop, there was some resistance, on the part of the Catholic educators who were participating in the workshop, to the topic of sexual minorities in Catholic schools. This resistance was expressed openly with questions such as, “Why do we have to learn about this?” as well as through less public homophobic grumblings, mutterings and whispers among participants in the audience. Empathy towards sexual minority
groups can be challenging to establish among some educators in some Catholic schools. Reading excerpts from Maher’s book can be a way to reach out to reluctant workshop participants. Including these brief excerpts from Maher’s book is a step in the right direction, but the homophobic message underlying the Catholic doctrine at the centre of the *Toward an Inclusive Community* workshop is powerful enough to overshadow any empathy the excerpts from Maher’s book may have generated.

*Toward an Inclusive Community – Section 7: Curriculum Support.*

Section 7: “Curriculum Support” is a collection of four, one-page excerpted examples of existing curriculum materials Catholic educators can use to support curriculum and instruction on the topic of sexual minorities in Catholic schools. The topic of sexual minorities is formally addressed in the human sexuality component of a class simply called “Religion” among Catholic educators, though its formal title found in teacher resource manuals and curriculum guides is “Religious Studies.” In Alberta, Religious Studies offered at the high school level is divided into three separate courses for each grade: Grade 10 is Religious Studies 15, Grade 11 is Religious Studies 25, and Grade 12 is Religious Studies 35. The authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* include basic reference information in the top or bottom margins of the excerpted pages of existing curriculum support so that Catholic educators teaching Religion can consult the original text if they so desire.

The first excerpted page is day one of five days of teacher-directed lessons for the topic of human sexuality included in the Grade 10 course, Religious Studies 15, developed by the Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association.
The second excerpted page is from a chapter called “Be Loving” in the Grade 9 Religion textbook, *Be With Me*, developed by the National Office of Religious Education within the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (1997a) in Ottawa.

The third excerpted page is from a chapter called “Relating to the Other: The Voice of the Other in Me” in the Grade 10 Religion textbook, *Christ and Culture*, developed by the National Office of Religious Education within the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (2001) in Ottawa.


The first excerpted page included in the curriculum section of *Toward an Inclusive Community* titled, “Religious Studies 15: Human Sexuality Unit” is from a teacher’s guide that accompanies province-wide curricula on the topic of human sexuality for Catholic schools in Alberta. Religious Studies 15 is the name of the Grade 10 Program of Studies for a high school religion course, which is mandatory for Grade 10 students in Alberta Catholic high schools.

The Alberta Ministry of Education does not develop the program of studies for the Religious Studies classes taught in Catholic high schools throughout Alberta; instead, the Alberta Catholic School Trustees’ Association develops it (Alberta Education, 2003). This concession is enabled through a special arrangement between the Alberta Ministry of Education and the Alberta Catholic School Trustees’ Association called “Policy 1.2.2. – Locally Developed Religious Studies Courses” whereby Roman Catholic school
districts in Alberta receive provincial education credits and financial support for instruction devoted to the study of the Roman Catholic faith (Alberta Education, 2003 & 2011). The Alberta Ministry of Education granted its approval of Religious Studies 15-25-35 (for Grades 10, 11, and 12) on the condition that the Alberta Catholic School Trustees’ Association redirects its focus from instruction solely in the Roman Catholic faith to include 20% of course content in the comparative study of other world religions for each grade level of its Religious Studies courses (Alberta Education, 2003).

This 20% of comparative religious studies is normally taken care of in the first unit of the Religious Studies 15-25-35 courses offered in Catholic schools throughout Alberta through the use of an American textbook called *Exploring the Religions of the World* (Clemmons, 1999). This textbook follows the specific curriculum framework developed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. It takes the Roman Catholic faith as a starting point for comparisons with other ancient religions and newer religious traditions that developed out of America’s protestant roots (Clemmons, 1999). The American textbook, *Exploring the Religions of the World*, is widely used in the Catholic school districts of Alberta.

The one-page excerpt called “Religious Studies 15: Human Sexuality Unit” included in the “Curriculum Support” section of *Toward an Inclusive Community* does not contain any trace of an ecumenical dialogue between the Roman Catholic faith and any other religion on the topic of sexuality. Its “Materials and Resources” list includes the *Christ and Culture* Grade 10 textbook developed by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in Ottawa; *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*; and the full text of the Alberta Bishops’ document *A Resource for an Inclusive Community: A Teacher’s
Guide for and about Persons with Same-Sex Attractions (CCSSA, 2007). This list of teaching materials shows the substantial influence of the Vatican, the centralized association of Catholic bishops in Canada, and the Alberta bishops on the way the subject of human sexuality is taught in the Catholic schools of Alberta. It also shows the systematic school-level dissemination of Catholic doctrine that casts non-heterosexuals as “intrinsically disordered” (CCSSA, 2007, section 3) and sentenced to a life of celibacy if they are to be “good” Catholics. Despite the negative messages about non-heterosexuals contained in these curriculum materials, the stated overarching goal of this curriculum guide on human sexuality is to teach students the “Christian view of sexuality as a gift” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 7).

Sexuality is only a gift for some, however, as the second example of curriculum support included in Toward an Inclusive Community makes clear. The one-page excerpt from a chapter called “Be Loving” in the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (CCCB) Grade 9 Religious Education textbook, Be With Me, states: “The Church teaches that sexual intercourse belongs only in a lifelong, committed relationship that is open to new life” (CCCB, 1997a, p. 93). This one-page excerpt shows the dissemination of discriminatory Catholic doctrine in Canadian Catholic schools. This Grade 9 textbook, Be With Me, comes from a centralized Catholic organization in Ottawa and is used in Catholic schools throughout Alberta and Ontario.

The misleading presentation of the “Christian view of sexuality as a gift” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 7) is further propagated in the third example of curriculum support contained in Toward an Inclusive Community. The one-page excerpt from a chapter called “Relating to the Other” in the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Grade 10
textbook, *Christ and Culture*, contains an image of the famous scene known as “The Creation of Adam,” a section of the fresco painted by Italian Renaissance artist, Michelangelo, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Beneath the image is a Catholic interpretation of the scene stating that it “suggests God’s gift of sexuality to humanity” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 7). Further text on the one-page excerpt defines five acceptable kinds of love and describes “sexual love” as “instinctive” and restricted to “mutual attraction between a man and a woman” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 7).

The text on the one-page excerpt of this Grade 10 religion textbook concludes with the following warning: “There is no more powerful disorder in us than an unhealthy sexuality. Unhealthy sexuality hardens us in our selfishness. Nothing will make us more unhappy” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 7). Although the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the authors of the text from which this one-page excerpt is taken, do not define what they mean by an “unhealthy sexuality,” it would not be a great leap for students in Catholic schools to imagine non-heterosexual forms of sexuality as “unhealthy sexuality.” Catholic clergy members have written a great deal on the topic of non-heterosexuality in the form of Vatican encyclicals and local pastoral guidelines regarding “persons with same-sex attractions,” and these writings are included in the curriculum materials lists of Religious Studies courses in Canadian Catholic schools.

The final one-page excerpt of curriculum support offered as an exemplar in *Toward an Inclusive Community* is a selection from the chapter “Marriage Matters” in the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Grade 12 textbook, *In Search of the Good: A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living*. This textbook was published in 2004 during the
height of the same-sex marriage debates occurring across Canada – in 2005, Canada became the fourth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage (Hull, 2006).

Under the heading, “Secular society and homosexual partners,” the text of this one-page excerpt describes the fact that “people who are attracted to the same sex and cohabit have demanded the legal right of marriage” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 7). The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the authors of this one-page excerpt, cite one of their own open letters called, “Marriage in the Present Day,” which they published on their website on September 10, 2003 (CCCB, 2003). The portion of this letter excerpted in the CCCB’s Grade 12 Religion textbook and included as a one-page excerpt in Toward an Inclusive Community is as follows:

Marriage needs to be preserved as an institution uniting two members of the opposite sex. For the common good of society, it must be protected. . . . We reject the attempt of the State to reduce all intimate personal relationships to the same level, leading to the disappearance of the civil institution of marriage as understood in all human societies since time immemorial. Because of the recognized contributions that the institution of marriage brings to the stability of the family and to the future of society, legislators have the duty of preserving the distinction between marriage and other forms of relationship involving two persons. (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 7)

This use of a student textbook to propagate a particular world view and influence the political leanings of students in Catholic schools is a clear example of the kind of indoctrination, rather than education, that the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops would like to see take place in the Religion classes of Canadian Catholic schools. The
existence of uniform religion textbooks for Grades 9-through-12, developed by the
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops for use in Religious Studies classes in
Canadian Catholic schools, illustrates the influence of the Catholic Church and its
discriminatory doctrine on the curriculum of Canadian Catholic schools.

**Toward an Inclusive Community – Section 8: Media Questions.**

The final section of *Toward an Inclusive Community* that has some implications
for this study is Section 8, labeled “Media Questions.” In this section is a single, two-
sided sheet dated November 19, 2004, listing eight questions under the heading “Possible
media questions to Catholic school districts on students and staff with same-sex
attractions” (CCSSA, 2007, section 8). The authority of this one-page handout is clarified
by a footnote at the end of the last question, which states: “This document was prepared
by a Committee of the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta for
implementing *A Resource for an Inclusive Community: A Teacher’s Guide for and about
Persons With Same Sex Attractions*” (CCSSA, 2007, section 8).

The need to develop stock answers to possible media questions is identified in a
September 17, 2004 business report for the CCSSA from its “Inclusive Communities”
sub-committee (CCSSA, 2004a). The second of two items under the heading in the
business report labeled “Our mandate” states: “To develop a mechanism whereby we can
all ‘speak with one voice’ when the public, especially the media, requires us to say where
we stand on the issue and on specific regulations” (CCSSA, 2004a, p. 1). This explicit
mandate shows the CCSSA’s desire to maintain control over what educators in Alberta
Catholic schools may say publicly on the topic of non-heterosexual students and staff.
The most illuminating question, in terms of this study, is question 8: “Would your district support a pro-gay or lesbian alliance within a school? Why or why not? Response: *We offer support for our students to meet their personal and pastoral needs usually through our counseling and chaplaincy programs*” (italics in the original) (CCSSA, 2007, section 8). This question is particularly insightful for this study because the issue of being able to establish a Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) in a Catholic school very recently rose to the forefront of discussion in the province of Ontario among educators, LGBTQ activists, and conservative Catholics after Xtra! (Canada’s foremost LGBTQ news outlet) broke the story in January 2011 about the ban on GSAs by the Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB). For more details on this story, please see the “Media Accounts” chapter of this thesis.

Even as I write this chapter, HCDSB is preparing for a final vote on its trustees’ policy recommendation that its schools adopt broad equity clubs called “By Your SIDE Spaces” instead of GSAs – SIDE is a Catholic acronym that stands for “Safety, Inclusivity, Diversity, and Equity” (Brown, 2011). By Your SIDE Spaces is a gesture toward making schools more welcoming for everyone by attending to all forms of discrimination such as racism, sexism, etc., and not just homophobia. A *Toronto Star* education reporter interviewed HCDSB trustee, John Morrison, who commented: “If this policy passes, there won’t be any GSAs in our schools because we’ve got something better” (cited in Brown, 2011). From a Catholic perspective, this non-specific equity club would be “better” not only because it would be more inclusive, but also because it would avoid the use of what the Ontario bishops call “problematic labels” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 26) and what the Alberta bishops call “politically-charged language” (cited in CCSSA, 2007,
section 3) by not having the word “gay” anywhere in its name. Noa Mendelsohn Aviv, an equality program director with the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, pointed out to the trustees of the HCDSB: “Not allowing the word ‘gay’ is sending a message to students that there is something wrong with that identity” (cited in Houston, 2011, p. 1).

Catholic education leaders in Alberta have not been faced with this public outcry for GSAs in Alberta Catholic schools. This is not because students have never attempted to start a GSA in an Alberta Catholic school. As I have described in a previous publication (Callaghan, 2007a), at a November 2004 University of Alberta education conference, a Catholic student spoke publicly about his success in setting up the first quasi GSA – called a “Diversity Club” – in a Catholic high school in Alberta during the previous school year. His school would not allow a Gay/Straight Alliance, but did eventually concede to a Diversity Club. “Diversity Club” is the most common name given to these Catholic versions of GSAs, though I have encountered other names such as “Rainbow Alliance,” “Equity Group,” and “Social Justice Club” in various school-based education conferences I have attended where I have been able to speak with LGBTQ students from Catholic schools in the provinces of Alberta, Ontario, and Saskatchewan.

In my discussions over the years with LGBTQ youth (including those who participated in this study) who managed to establish a version of a Diversity Club in their Catholic schools, I have discovered that Diversity Clubs vary considerably from school to school. Some Catholic schools allow students to form a Diversity Club, but the club may not meet on school property. Other Catholic schools that allow Diversity Clubs to meet on school property require the club’s members to meet in the chaplaincy or guidance counseling offices with the chaplain or guidance counselor as the adult moderator of the
club meetings. Most Canadian Catholic schools that do allow Diversity Clubs to meet on school property place a number of restrictions on the way the students can advertise the club, such as: limited-to-no use of the school’s Public Address system, and limited-to-no use of posters, with limitations placed on use of the words “gay,” “straight,” and “queer.” Most Canadian Catholic schools that do allow Diversity Clubs to meet on school property require club members to make no public references, via posters or other announcements, to outside organizations such as sexual health agencies where safe sex is promoted, lgbtq youth groups supported by a local lgbtq community association, or lgbtq community events such as Pride Day. Likewise, students who have successfully formed a Diversity Club in their Catholic high school are usually not allowed to use lgbtq pride symbols such as inverted triangles or rainbow flags on any posters advertising the club or the club’s events.

Some Canadian Catholic schools that do allow Diversity Clubs to meet on school property do allow club members to organize lgbtq events and celebrations such as the “National Day Against Homophobia” or the “National Day of Silence,” but only if these actions can be contained under a broader focus such as the “No Name Calling Week” or the “Anti-bullying Week.” The National Day of Silence is an American student-led action in which students take a daylong vow of silence in the month of April to symbolize the silencing of lgbtq students and their allies in the face of the ever-present threat of homophobic harassment in public schools (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, 2011b). The National Day Against Homophobia occurs in Canada on May 17, coinciding with the International Day Against Homophobia, also held on May 17, the day the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.
in 1990 (McCutchen, 2011). The Anti-bullying Week is a British action that takes place annually in November, and the No Name Calling Week is an American event that takes place in January of every year – both the British and the American events are focused on using educational activities to build awareness of bullying in schools with the goal of eliminating it altogether from schools (Actionwork, 2011; Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, 2011c).

The gay teenager who was able to establish a Diversity Club in his Edmonton Catholic school during the 2003-2004 school year was able to do so before Catholic education leaders in the province managed to develop their policy banning Gay/Straight Alliances from Alberta Catholic schools. As Ben (not his real name) recounted to me when I was a Master’s of Education student at the University of Alberta in 2004, his achievement was a hard fought battle. Ben and another gay teen called Kenan (not his real name) conceived of the idea to start a Gay/Straight Alliance in their Catholic high school while Ben was in Grade 11 and Kenan was in grade 10. It was just the two of them working together on this goal – no other students were a part of the initial groundwork for the club.

Ben and Kenan approached the chaplain of their school who told them they would have better luck getting their club approved if they called it something other than a Gay/Straight Alliance and if it had a broader focus. Ben and Kenan went away to do some research and to develop a proposal to give to the school’s administration. They came up with the name “Diversity Club” and wrote a brief proposal outlining the mission and focus of the club. Next came a lot of stalling on the part of the administration involving requests to change the proposal for the club so that its focus was more clearly
aligned with Church teachings on the topic of homosexuality. Then the two boys were required to accompany the chaplain of the school to a meeting with the head of Religious Studies for all Edmonton Catholic schools, as well as the Catholic Archbishop for Edmonton. Both Catholic education leaders were supportive of the Diversity Club, as long as the school chaplain and another teacher volunteer would serve as adult moderators of the club, the club respected Church teaching, did not discuss homosexual sex or promote safe sex, did not advertise an outside LGBTQ youth group offered through the local LGBTQ community association, and did not promote gay pride. Ben recalls that the process of getting official approval for their Diversity Club took a year and a half, meaning that Ben was only able to be part of the Diversity Club during the last semester of his Grade 12 year. Kenan was able to keep the club running, though, after Ben graduated and Kenan told me in a recent Facebook message that the last he heard in 2007, the club was still running in his former Catholic high school.

Given that the head of Religious Studies for all Edmonton Catholic schools and the Archbishop of Edmonton met with Ben and Kenan in order to determine if they would be granted their Diversity Club, it is conceivable that the head of Religious Studies and the Archbishop would have communicated the news of the first Diversity Club in an Alberta Catholic school to other Catholic education leaders, especially the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta who were developing policy on this very issue. The Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta had just formed its “Inclusive Communities” sub-committee one year earlier in 2002 and its members were in the midst of developing a support plan for “students with same-sex attractions,” as well
as devising ways to ensure that Catholic school personnel are provided with clear direction on “this sensitive issue” (CCSSA, 2007, section 2).

The “Inclusive Communities” sub-committee took several years to develop their final version of the *Toward an Inclusive Community* workshop for Catholic educators, which was finally available for Catholic schools in early 2005. A confidential draft version of the proposed stock answers to possible media questions, now available online, shows that the authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* did not have an easy time developing their answer to question 8 about GSAs included in the “Media Questions” section of their teacher in-service manual (CCSSA, 2004b). As quoted above, question 8 reads: “Would your district support a pro-gay or lesbian alliance within a school? Why or why not? Response: *We offer support for our students to meet their personal and pastoral needs usually through our counseling and chaplaincy programs*” (italics in the original) (CCSSA, 2007, section 8). However, a 2004 draft version of the prescribed answer to this possible media question shows support for a Catholic adaptation of a GSA, commonly called a Diversity Club. The 2004 draft answer to question 8 about GSAs is as follows:

A group could be organized to:

- develop an understanding of homosexual orientation and Church teaching;
- provide support and enhance dignity and respect;
- devise strategies to counteract negative images;
- provide a safe space to dialogue and to give further guidance regarding chastity.
Allowing a support group for gay or lesbian students would be consistent with the [Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta] document *Toward an Inclusive Community*. (CCSSA, 2004b, p. 2)

This early 2004 draft version of the official answer to a possible media question about GSAs in Catholic schools shows that, at least at one point, the authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* were in support of Diversity Clubs in Alberta Catholic schools. The fact that this supportive statement about Diversity Clubs has been removed from the final 2007 version of the *Toward an Inclusive Community* teacher in-service manual for Catholic educators means the official CCSSA policy is that GSAs are not permitted for queer and questioning youth in Alberta Catholic schools. As will become evident from the following data I collected for this study, Diversity Clubs are occasionally permitted in Alberta Catholic schools, but only under certain constraints. Students, like Ben and Kenan above, who ask for permission to form a Diversity Club must first be told to seek one-to-one counseling with either the Catholic school chaplain or counselor. If students respond by stating that personal counseling is not what they were seeking and persist in their quest to form a Diversity Club, then various excuses can be made to try to stall the students’ progress to the point that the students drop their interest in trying to establish a Diversity Club, or eventually graduate from the school. If excuses and stalling tactics do not dampen LGBTQ students’ resolve to establish a Diversity Club in their Catholic school, then the students can be permitted to start a Diversity Club, but only with several restrictions and close monitoring.

This policy surrounding the establishment of Diversity Clubs in Catholic schools is corroborated by the interviews I conducted with 12 LGBTQ students who recently
graduated from Catholic school in Alberta and Ontario. Each student’s individual story is
recounted in the “Participants” chapter of this thesis, using pseudonyms. Most of the
students I interviewed described their inability to start a GSA or a Diversity Club in their
Alberta and Ontario Catholic high schools. Of the lgbtq students from Ontario Catholic
schools, 3 said they did not even try to set up a support group because they assumed,
from the general homophobic culture of their Catholic schools, that the Catholic school
administration would never allow it. These 3 students’ stories are recounted in the
“Participants” chapter of this thesis under the pseudonyms Gabriel, Shiloh, and Junia.

There were 3 student participants who did make attempts to start up Catholic
versions of GSAs in their Ontario Catholic high schools – Jonas, Abigail, and Hannah.
Jonas, a gay student from southern Ontario discussed the possibility of starting a
Diversity Club with his other Grade 12 friends, but abandoned the idea after realizing
they would have no one to pass the club to after they graduated. Abigail, a lesbian student
from northern Ontario, sought the advice of an American novelist online who told her she
would not likely get a GSA in her Catholic school, but that she might have some success
if she tried to form a more general group calling it something like “Equality Awareness.”
Abigail successfully set up an Equality Awareness club in her school but the principal
chastised her for making the club too “gay centric.” Hannah, another lesbian student from
southern Ontario recounted how her lgbtq friends, who were two grades ahead of her in
the same Catholic school, tried to set up a Diversity Club while they were still students at
the Catholic high school, but to no avail. Even after four years has passed since Hannah’s
lgbtq friends graduated from her Catholic high school, the lgbtq graduates are still trying
to get a Diversity Club set up in their former high school by helping current lgbtq
students, whom they meet in the LGBTQ youth group at the local LGBTQ community centre, and by regularly visiting the guidance counselor at their former Catholic high school – still to no avail.

Of the student participants from Alberta, 2 (Judith and Caleb) said that they did not try to set up a Diversity Club because they believed the Catholic school administrators would never allow it. Jacob, a female-to-male transgender student from a Catholic high school in southern Alberta, said he knew of attempts to get a Diversity Club started in his Catholic high school, but they all were refused because the students were told the school’s parent council was opposed to the idea of a Diversity Club in a Catholic school. This is the same experience of Simon, a gay student from a Catholic high school in northern Alberta. Simon said he knew of several attempts to start a Diversity Club in his high school, but each attempt was shot down because administrators were fearful that some students’ parents would complain that their child was in jeopardy of being recruited into the “homosexual lifestyle” by such a club.

Mary, a lesbian student who attended a Catholic high school in southern Alberta said she and her friends tried to start a Diversity Club in their school but the first teacher they approached told them such a club would not be a good idea in a Catholic school. Esther, another lesbian student who attended a Catholic high school in northern Alberta experienced escalating levels of homophobic bullying, which culminated in an incident on a school bus in which the school bus driver not only did nothing to stop the homophobic bullying on the bus, but also contributed to it by blaming the lesbian victims for the abuse. Once Esther reported the homophobic school bus incident to the administration of her Catholic school, the principal directed the school guidance
counselor to solve the problem. The school guidance counselor sought the advice of the town’s equity officer who suggested the lesbian students should be allowed to form a Gay/Straight Alliance at the school. The Catholic school administrators told the town’s equity officer that GSAs are not allowed in Catholic schools, but conceded that the lesbian students could have a GSA only if they held their meetings off of school property. Esther’s Catholic school made a special arrangement with the town’s public library, which agreed to provide space for the Catholic LGBTQ students’ GSA.

According to the policy regarding GSAs outlined in the “Media Questions” section of the Alberta Catholic educator’s workshop *Toward an Inclusive Community*, GSAs are not permitted in Alberta Catholic schools. Catholic versions of GSAs, most commonly referred to as Diversity Clubs, may be grudgingly permitted, but only with certain restrictions and close monitoring, and only after LGBTQ students who request such clubs have already availed themselves of supports that currently exist in the Catholic school counseling and chaplaincy programs. Non-heterosexual students will have to take the initiative to approach Catholic school counselors and chaplains on their own if they feel they need guidance from Catholic educators on coming out or any other LGBTQ-related matter. Since Catholic school counselors and chaplains in Alberta will have likely attended the *Toward an Inclusive Community* workshop that trains them on the Alberta Bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline *A Resource for an Inclusive Community: A Teacher’s Guide for and about Persons with Same Sex Attractions*, it is possible that LGBTQ students seeking support from their school counselor or chaplain may find themselves being counseled to attend a summer sports camp run by *Courage*, the corrective 12-Step program non-heterosexuals. Catholic school counselors and chaplains who choose to
follow the Alberta Bishops’ directives outlined in the 2001 pastoral guideline may also counsel LGBTQ students that if they want to remain good Catholics, they must stay celibate for the rest of their lives.

The existence of prescribed Catholic answers to possible media questions shows the level of control the Council of Catholic School Superintendents seek to have over any public remarks Catholic educators may be called upon to make regarding issues pertaining to sexual minority groups in the Catholic schools of Alberta. In fact, the entire document, *Toward an Inclusive Community*, is a testament to the Council of Catholic School Superintendents’ desire to control the tenor of any discussions, school policy or curriculum that may be introduced on the topic of sexual minorities in Alberta Catholic schools.

**Concluding Remarks**

The main goal of the Alberta Catholic educators who wrote and selected the articles to be included in *Toward an Inclusive Community* is to ensure that the Alberta Catholic Bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline is thoroughly circulated, absorbed and adhered to in all Catholic schools in the province of Alberta. By writing an implementation guide for the Alberta Bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline, the authors of *Toward an Inclusive Community* are attempting to ensure that the official Catholic Church “authority” on the topic of homosexuality is the only resource for information on how to manage sexual minority groups in Alberta Catholic schools. As this “Catholic Documents” chapter has shown, with the Council of Catholic School Superintendents at the helm, there is very little room for queer affirming perspectives to be officially voiced in the Catholic schools of Alberta.
This chapter analyzed two primary texts: the first from Ontario Catholic bishops, the second from Alberta Catholic educators. The purpose of the Ontario text is to clarify for educators in Ontario Catholic schools the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on the topic of homosexuality, to promote the “virtue of chastity” for “persons with same-sex attraction,” and to advance the Catholic school as the “centerpiece of apostolic ministry to students experiencing same-sex attraction” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 11). The purpose of the Alberta text is to facilitate the circulation of the Alberta Catholic Bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline *A Resource for an Inclusive Community: A Teacher’s Guide for and about Persons with Same Sex Attractions*, and to ensure that all Alberta Catholic educators “speak with one voice” when faced with media questions about how sexual minority issues are managed in Catholic schools (CCSSA, 2004a, p. 1).

Both the Ontario and Alberta texts cite, or in some cases reproduce in entirety, other pastoral guidelines on the topic of homosexuality written by other groups of Catholic bishops, as well as the official Catholic doctrine on homosexuality from the Vatican. Both texts circulate the most egregious elements of Catholic doctrine, such as certain excerpts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that describe “homosexual acts” as “acts of grave depravity,” which are “intrinsically disordered,” and which count among the list of “sins gravely contrary to chastity” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 53). Both the Ontario and Alberta texts stress the Catholic doctrinal directive that non-heterosexual lay Catholics must remain celibate for the rest of their lives. To assist non-clergy LGBTQ Catholics in following through with this required celibacy, both texts recommend the corrective 12-Step program *Courage* as a reputable method for arresting same-sex desire or even transforming non-heterosexual orientations into the more morally acceptable
heterosexual orientation. This is in spite of documents included in these two same texts that insist non-heterosexuals do not need to be “fixed.”

Despite the many examples of homophobic discrimination contained in both the Ontario and Alberta texts, their authors maintain their texts are not homophobic. For example, the authors of the Ontario text state that they wrote their pastoral guidelines to “support school personnel in making Catholic school communities safe and nurturing for all students in their care” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 9). They also try to argue: “It should not be assumed … that to guide others away from the practice of homosexual genital activity comes out of homophobia” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 25). Similarly, in their summary of the Alberta Bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline, the authors of the Alberta text declare: “This is a document of HOPE!” (capital letters in the original) (CCSSA, 2007, section 3). This particular Catholic concept of “hope” and “care” for sexual minorities can be traced to official Catholic doctrine. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops’ clarify the kind of “care” they have in mind for non-heterosexuals in their 1997 summary of “The Catholic Church’s Teaching on Homosexuality,” as follows:

The church recognizes and defends the human rights of each person. However, it cannot recognize as part of these rights the fulfillment of acts that are morally wrong. All persons have the basic human right to be treated by individuals and society with dignity, respect and justice regardless of their behaviour. For sure, the homosexual community is not an exception to this; it has a particular right to pastoral care from the Church. (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 55)

The Catholic concept of “pastoral care” for non-heterosexuals derives from condemning Catholic doctrine that requires non-heterosexuals to commit to lifelong celibacy, and
advocates for conversion from a non-heterosexual to a heterosexual orientation via the Church-sanctioned corrective 12-Step program Courage. This is not any kind of “care” that most professionals in the “helping” professions (education, medicine, nursing, psychotherapy, social work, etc.) would recognize.

This concluding summary of the main messages contained in the two Catholic documents from Alberta and Ontario helps to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis. In terms of the first research question: “How does power operate within and across Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools?” the authors of the two Alberta and Ontario texts would have readers believe that power resides solely with the authority of the Catholic Church, whose power operates primarily by means of control, repression, and discipline. The goal of both the Alberta and Ontario Catholic documents is to control the message that circulates in these province’s Catholic schools about LGBTQ individuals.

Regarding this study’s second research question: “How do Catholic documents produce teachers and students as subjects?” the Alberta and Ontario Catholic documents frame LGBTQ students and teachers solely as “persons with same-sex attraction” who suffer from “an arrested psycho-sexual development” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 3) and whose behaviour should therefore be closely monitored, controlled and disciplined.

This chapter’s answer to the third research question, “What effects do Catholic documents have on the experiences of LGBTQ individuals in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools?” is an exposure of Catholic education leaders’ attempt to manipulate the message. The Catholic education leaders who authored the Alberta and Ontario texts work hard to convince readers that their texts are “documents of HOPE!” (CCSSA, 2007, section 3) for sexual minority groups and that their intention is to support the “pastoral
care” of “persons with same-sex attraction” and “actively promote a welcoming, safe environment rooted in gospel values of love, justice, and compassion” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 23). However, the contradictions inherent in the Alberta and Ontario texts undermine their authors’ attempts to smoothly persuade the reader of the pastoral and benevolent purpose of the two texts. The contradictions that plague these two Catholic documents reveal the underlying message of Catholic doctrine at the core of both texts that promotes the opposite of a “welcoming and safe environment” for sexual minority groups in the Catholic schools of Alberta and Ontario. Particular instances of the effects of these texts’ homophobic message are apparent in several examples from the “Participants” and “Media Accounts” chapters of this thesis.

This “Catholic Documents” chapter is a distillation of the Alberta and Ontario Catholic education leaders’ message contained in two obscure but highly influential Catholic educational policy and curriculum documents regarding sexual minorities. The authors of the Alberta and Ontario texts would have readers understand that “no” is the answer to the this study’s final research question: “Is resistance possible in an education context so dominated by the repressive force of religiously-inspired homophobia?” The authors of the Alberta and Ontario texts position the Catholic Church as the only authority to be recognized in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools when it comes to managing sexual minority groups. Several examples from the “Participants” and “Media Accounts” chapters certainly attest to the dominating force of the Catholic Church when it comes to regulating the sexual conduct of sexual minority groups. However, other examples from the “Participants” and “Media Accounts” chapter also show that resistance to this kind of doctrinal disciplining of non-heterosexuals is possible.
Chapter 6

Theorizing the Data: The Many Modes of Power

In order to uncover and explore the doctrinal disciplining of non-heterosexuals in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools, this qualitative inquiry and empirical research project examines three data sets: 1) participants’ experiences (of the 20 participants, 18 experiences are analyzed and transformed into narrative research texts: 12 LGBTQ students, 5 LGBTQ teachers, and 1 “straight ally” teacher, all from various Catholic schools in Alberta and Ontario); 2) news media accounts of homophobia occurring in Catholic schools throughout the provinces of Alberta and Ontario; and 3) Catholic documents written to clarify for Catholic educators in the provinces of Alberta and Ontario the official Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality. Each of these empirical data sets (the data of experience and of textual evidence) points to a systemic and active, school board-approved and church-sanctioned homophobia occurring in these Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools. This type of oppression represents one mode of power – the dominating control and authority that groups or institutions can have over others. Resistance to oppression represents another mode of power – the personal potential inherent in the everyday relations between people and institutions.

This qualitative study is certainly grounded in empirical matters, but it is also informed by the epistemology of critical theory. Critical theories of education – such as those of well-known critical pedagogues Paulo Freire, Michael Apple, and Henry Giroux – trace injustices to their source by revealing the institutional structures and processes that perpetuate inequality in educational practice (Gibson, 1986). Drawing upon critical theories is helpful in constructing an account of homophobia in Alberta and Ontario
Catholic schools that goes beyond participant experience and textual evidence. In particular, this study draws upon the following critical theories in order to help explain the phenomenon of homophobia in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools: Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemony (1971), Louis Althusser’s concept of the Ideological State Apparatus (1970/2008), and Michel Foucault’s theory of disciplinary surveillance (1975/1995).

All three of these theorists explore in different ways how institutional control operates in governmentally-controlled organizations such as schools, churches, and prisons. Perhaps because Althusser was once Foucault’s professor at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, like Althusser, Foucault conceptualizes power as a major oppressive force in Discipline and Punish. However, unlike Althusser and other Marxist theorists more generally, Foucault also conceives of what he calls “a micro-physics of power” (1975/1995, p. 26) whose field of operation is more minute, such as at the level of the body, operating between and among individuals in an exchange that allows for possible resistance to power.

At this point it is important to note the major differences among these theorists. For example, Althusser is viewed as a Marxist structuralist whose work critiques the humanist aspects of Western Marxism, allowing no room for human agency (Macey, 2001). Gramsci, on the other hand, is regarded as one of the principal representatives of Western Marxism – a movement within Marxism taking shape after the First World War generally characterized by a turn away from the economic theory of traditional Marxism and toward a more philosophically-oriented critical examination of ideology, culture and aesthetics (Macey, 2001). The chief contribution of Gramsci’s wide-ranging Prison
Notebooks (1971) is his notion of hegemony, or domination through consent, which adds a new element to Marxism’s understanding of ideology (Macey, 2001). Foucault, meanwhile, breaks from both Althusser and Gramsci, especially in his attention to multiple forms of power and his rejection of the opposition between ideology and truth. Although I do not adopt these thinkers as my main theoretical influences, I do treat their works as resources, providing useful concepts that help understand the dynamics of power and authority operating in Catholic schools.

There are many competing definitions of ideology. The Marxist conception of ideology posits that history is the product of class conflict whereby the ideas of the ruling class become the dominant ideology through an apparently seamless process of coercion (Macey, 2001). Gramsci’s notion of hegemony makes an important contribution to later Marxist theories of ideology in that it offers an alternative to the base/superstructure model, the original theory of ideology outlined by Marx and Engels in The German Ideology (1845-6), which contends there is a relationship of determination between an economic base (that is, the forces and relations of production) and a superstructure comprised of the state, as well as legal, political and ideological forms (Macey, 2001). Gramsci’s analysis of organic ideologies, or world-views of various social classes, stresses the cultural factors associated with ideology, thereby avoiding the economic determinism of the classic base/superstructure model of ideology and the original Marxist theory that ideology is a skewed manifestation of an underlying economic reality (Macey, 2001).

The work of Althusser, on the other hand, suggests a critique of Western Marxism, especially its humanist elements – for Althusser, individual subjects are the
supports not the agents of historical processes (Macey, 2001). Althusser locates ideology as a vital component in the reproduction of social relations in all societies, and theorizes that it is ideology’s mechanism of interpellation (a process of hailing a subject in such a way that the subject recognizes his or her own existence within the dominant ideology of his or her society, demonstrating that subjects are products of ideology) that constitutes individuals as subjects (Macey, 2001). Through his theory of interpellation, Althusser shows that his interest lies in the way that the state oppresses people and the way that ideology produces people as individuals. In Althusser’s schema, people are simply cogs in the ideology machine.

Unlike Althusser, Foucault conceives of a bottom-up model of power in his focus on how power relations permeate all aspects of society. This allows for an account of la vie quotidienne, or the daily, banal, and minute ways power is exerted and resisted, which showcases the individual as an active subject rather than a “passive dupe” succumbing to ideological pressures (Mills, 2003, p. 34). Where Marxist theorists use the term “ideology” to describe how the ideas of the ruling class dominate those of subordinate classes, Foucault employs the term “discourse” to describe relations of power. In The History of Sexuality, Vol. I, Foucault (1976/1990) argues:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it
reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (pp. 100-101).

Here, we see that Foucault’s analysis of power differs from the Marxist analysis of power. Foucault rejects the Marxist notion of ideology because it implies the existence of universal rationality and truth, a concept that Foucault strongly contests. Foucault breaks from Althusser in his attention to multiple forms of power and his rejection of the opposition between ideology and truth. Gramsci’s non-reductionist theorizing of hegemony and power conceives of power as being exercised at all levels of society, which is far removed from the Althusserian notion of power being localized solely in Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses. In this way, Gramsci’s theories on power have some resonances with the conception of power found in the work of Foucault. The upcoming discussion of Foucault’s theory of Panopticism explores further how Foucault sees power as the constant surveillance of a population based upon visibility and silence, rather than as a matter solely of repression in the traditional Marxist sense.

The preceding discussion emphasizes how ideology, hegemony and disciplinary surveillance are premised on different, and, in some ways, incompatible assumptions. Although Gramsci, Althusser, and Foucault belong to fundamentally different theoretical traditions, it is not impossible to imagine a basis for their convergence. Several scholars have made theoretically worthwhile links between Marxist thinkers and Foucault (Cocks, 1989; Kenway, 1990; Laclau & Mouffé, 1985; Mouffé, 1979; Olssen, 2006; Smart, 1986). Australian scholar, Jane Kenway studies the sociology and politics of education. In one of her earlier essays, Kenway (1990) successfully draws upon Foucault and Gramsci to explore what she calls the “educational right’s discursive politics” (p. 172).
Although her argument may be unconvincing to those who emphasize the incompatibility and difference between Foucault and Marxism, she nevertheless manages to underscore the more pragmatic advantages of drawing upon different aspects of each theorist to offer an explanation of the social phenomenon under study. Similarly, British political theorist and education scholar, Mark Olssen (2006) examines the utility of combining Foucault and Gramsci in a common frame of reference and concludes that the greatest advantage of such a combination is that each theorist moderates the weakness of the other. Olssen (2006) argues: “Foucault’s focus on the molecular and on the micro-physics of power supplements and enriches the Gramscian focus on structures in an analysis that enables a theorization of both the sources and structural basis of power in institutions as well as its consequences and capillary effects” (p. 96). Given their various and differing historical and national contexts and theoretical interests, Gramsci, Althusser, and Foucault each explain and explore power differently, but there is a definite overlap between their theories that facilitates an unpacking of the ways in which power and control function in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools. These theorists are helpful in illuminating various aspects of the empirical data of this study and I draw upon their theories in order to better understand the dynamics of power and authority operating in Catholic schools, but I remain attentive to the limitations of their theories, particularly around the issue of resistance. On the topic of resistance, none of the aforementioned theorists adequately conceptualizes the possibility of a social system with conflicting ideologies and competing power structures. This may be because resistance is more easy to conceive of when there are conflicting ideologies and power structures, and part of the reason perhaps that none of these theorists effectively theorizes resistance is that they conceived of
ideology and the state as unified systems. Of course, resistance may not be strictly a matter of resisting a dominant ideology. It may be just a matter of embracing an ideology and opposing a dominant one.

A critical theory of education has resistance as its central motif, and this chapter also draws upon the work of critical pedagogue Henry Giroux (2001) who has proposed an encompassing critical theory of education with resistance to all forms of domination as its central concept. Although Foucault makes room for resistance to power in some of his writings, how resistance might be realized is not often so clearly articulated in his work. Giroux fills in this gap by specifying how resistance can be achieved in a variety of cultural institutions, including schools. Giroux’s criticism of Althusser’s theory of power for its failure to account for the force of human agency and resistance is particularly illuminating and hopeful for this present study, as is his ability to see in Gramsci’s work an active human subject capable of affecting real radical change.

This chapter on theorizing the empirical data sets is divided into two sections. The first section draws upon the above theories to illuminate the participants’ experiences, and the second section draws upon the same theories to give further insight into the textual evidence of the media accounts and the Catholic documents.

**Theorizing the Participants’ Experiences**

As the “Participants” chapter explains, 20 participants were interviewed for this study, and 18 of their experiences are retold in the form of narrative research texts (2 were excluded due to insufficient detail and to avoid repetition). In the following summary of the participants’ experiences, tallies are based on the number 18 rather than the number 20 because the details of the summary can be verified by referring to the 18
narrative research texts included in the “Participants” chapter. Of the 6 teacher participants whose stories are recounted in this thesis, 3 were fired from their Catholic schools over LGBTQ-related issues; 1 teacher was harassed about her suspected – but never admitted – lesbianism until she finally left the Catholic school and the town; and 2 teachers remain closeted in their Catholic schools while having constant “nightmare scenarios” (Luke) of their homosexuality being revealed to upper administration and getting fired for living with their same-sex partners. Of the 12 student participants whose stories are re-presented in this study, 4 remained deeply in the closet while in their Catholic schools; 1 student was semi-closeted; 3 students, who were out to themselves and their friends, were outing to their parents by their Catholic school administrators; 1 student was ousted by bullies; and 3 students were able to be out on their own terms to varying degrees in their Catholic high schools.

The experiences of the teachers and students whose stories are recounted in this study can be approached via Gramsci’s (1971) notion of hegemony, Althusser’s (1970/2008) concept of the Ideological State Apparatus, and Foucault’s (1975/1995) theory of disciplinary surveillance. These theories reveal not only how the participants are dominated by the Vatican and its Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality, but also how power relations between and among individuals in Catholic schools manage to circumvent the power of the Vatican. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, however, Althusser, Gramsci, and Foucault’s conceptualizations of power have their limitations – especially when used to unpack the ways in which power operates in and around Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools.
**Gramsci’s notion of hegemony.**

The Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, is best known today for invigorating the conceptualization of ideology within Marxism, and for his theory of hegemony (Macey, 2001). Derived from the Greek *hegemon* (dominant state or leader), hegemony can be summarized as domination through consent, or the apparently seamless acquiescence of a subordinate group to the ideas of the dominant group (Macey, 2001). In order for general hegemonic dominance to function, the dominant group must first secure its ideological hegemony over the subordinate group. Schools are an efficient vehicle for achieving this. In schools, ideological hegemony is established first and foremost through the formal curriculum, but also secondarily through the routines and expectations of social relationships (Giroux, 2001). The way ideological hegemony functions through social relationships involving the regulation of sexuality in Catholic schools can be observed through some examples from the experiences of some of the participants in this study.

The two teachers in this study who continue to work in Catholic schools (Mark in Alberta, and Luke in Ontario) must closet or hide their non-heterosexual identity in order to keep their jobs. They strategically act out their consent to their own domination by pretending to live within the confines of Catholicity – namely the Catholic doctrine that requires non-heterosexuals remain celibate for the rest of their lives (see the “Catholic Documents” chapter for further details on specific Catholic doctrine). They experience a form of doctrinal disciplining in the tremendous amount of emotional and psychological energy they feel obligated to expend in order to pretend they are conforming to the Catholic doctrine that requires them to live a life of chastity and celibacy (i.e. not living as they do in committed relationships with their same-sex partners).
This dissimulation not only consumes a great deal of personal energy, but it also robs the two teachers of one of the privileges taken for granted by most heterosexuals in contemporary North American society – sharing information about the source of their romantic love and happiness with others. Nevertheless, these two teachers consent to their own domination in this regard in order to keep their jobs. This is not to imply that a teacher’s decision to remain closeted at school equates with compliance, consent, non-resistance or non-agency. As feminist scholar and critical pedagogue Didi Khayatt (1997, 1999) makes clear, it is not necessary for LGBTQ teachers to come out at school in order for the heteronormativity of schooling to be disrupted – LGBTQ teachers can be out at school in other ways besides openly declaring their sexual orientation. Gramsci’s writings on hegemony do not necessarily assume individuals undergo complete psychological acceptance of dominant ideologies. The teachers and students in this study personally reject the dominant homophobic ideology of their Catholic schools (they recognize and act on their LGBTQ identities) but some choose to hide their identity, beliefs, and behaviour for fear of the social consequences. This choice to remain closeted can be regarded as a kind of strategic consent to the dominant ideology of their immediate environments.

These participants’ decisions to remain closeted appears to be a conscious decision and in this way it reflects their own personal agency. For example, the fact that the two closeted gay teachers (Mark and Luke) do not actually live “celibate lives,” coupled with the fact that they chose to participate in this study, show that they have not consented entirely to Catholic heterosexist domination. As they explained to me during the early stages of setting up their interviews, both of these teachers chose to share with me their experiences of working as closeted gay men in their respective Catholic schools so that
others might learn of their working conditions and hopefully be moved to begin the necessary discussions that might reverse such workplace heterosexism and homophobia.

Similarly, the majority of the student participants in this study strategically consented to their own domination by remaining closeted about their sexual orientation or gender identity while attending Catholic school. For these students, the fear of what would befall them if they were to come out about their non-heterosexuality far outweighed the control of the closet. Like the closeted teachers, these closeted students told me they chose to take part in this study so that others might know of their plight and possibly start taking measures to make Catholic schools safer for all students, including the non-heterosexual ones who are too afraid to make themselves known while still in the Catholic school system.

**Althusser’s concept of the ideological state apparatus.**

According to Gramsci (1971), consent is as crucial as coercion for hegemony to function. This idea overlaps with the theories of Louis Althusser, the French Marxist thinker who came to prominence a generation after Gramsci. Like Gramsci before him, Althusser (1970/2008) posits that ideology is essential for the subtle influencing of members of subordinate groups to accept and reproduce dominant social systems – repression alone is insufficient to the task. According to Althusser, “ideology” is “the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group” (1970/2008, p. 32). As discussed above, the sociological concept of “ideology” originated with the work of Karl Marx and continues to figure prominently in the Marxist sociological tradition as well as in the social sciences more generally (Marshall, 1998). In the Marxist tradition, the state is conceived as a “repressive apparatus” (Althusser,
1970/2008, p. 11), represented by “the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc., which [Althusser calls] the Repressive State Apparatus” (1970/2008, pp. 16-17).

Recognizing that repression on its own is not sufficient in reproducing existing social relations, Althusser developed a category called the “Ideological State Apparatus” (Althusser, 1970/2008, p. 17) which includes religious organizations, the education system, the family, the legal system, trade unions, the political system, arts and culture, and the media. The function of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) is threefold: 1) to transmit the values of the dominant culture, 2) to ensure the majority of the populace consents to the dominant culture’s values, and 3) to render individual members of society “subjects” of the dominant social order.

In Althusser’s schema, the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) differs from the ISA in the following ways: the RSA is a singular, unified entity; it belongs to the public domain; and it functions by force (Althusser, 1970/2008, pp. 18-19). Althusser’s ISA, on the other hand, is a multiplicity of methods of inculcating consent; it operates in the private domain; and it functions by ideology (Althusser, 1970/2008, pp. 18-19). ISAs are powerful not by violence, but by gaining the implicit consent of the populace through accepted and repeated practices. For example, individuals tacitly learn to obey authority at home, in religious centres of worship, and at school. Of these three examples, the school is the most dominant in Althusser’s theory. Althusser (1970/2008) posits:

Behind the scenes of its political Ideological State Apparatus, which occupies the front of the stage, what the bourgeoisie has installed as its number-one, i.e. as its dominant ideological State apparatus, is the educational apparatus, which has in
fact replaced in its functions the previously dominant ideological State apparatus, the Church. (pp. 27-28)

In today’s information age and its attendant hyper credentialism, coupled with the increasingly secular culture of many knowledge societies, it certainly appears as though education has replaced religion as the principal and most effective Althusserian ISA. One could suggest that, in certain more politically conservative situations, the media have operated as a tool of the government (an Althusserian RSA) – in effect leading to the conclusion that the media may have replaced education as the dominant ISA. But within the context of resistance against the Vatican’s effect inside Ontario Catholic schools, the media can function as an effective tool of resistance against Catholic doctrine manifested in the schools. Just as it is ironic that the Canadian government (an RSA in Althusser’s schema) is in conflict with the Catholic Church, so are the many members of the media (an ISA in Althusser’s schema) ironically resisting the Catholic Church’s disciplining of what it calls “intrinsically disordered” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 53) LGBTQ students and teachers in Ontario Catholic schools.

In the Catholic schools of this study, one can see Althusser’s theory of the Ideological State Apparatus operating if one imagines Althusser’s “State” to be a combination of 1) the provincial governments of Alberta and Ontario via their respective ministries of education, and 2) the Vatican. In Canada, publicly-funded schools are required to teach the provincial curriculum and follow provincial educational policies. However, as both the “Media Accounts” and “Catholic Documents” chapters of this thesis show, special concessions are made by provincial (and ultimately federal) governments that enable Catholic schools to teach provincial curricula with a Catholic
slant and develop Catholic versions of particular provincial educational policies about accommodating sexual diversity. Despite the fact that the Ontario Ministry of Education has identified homophobia as being a major problem in all Ontario schools and has proposed various ways to redress this problem, the Vatican’s position on non-heterosexuality reigns as the ultimate authoritative position in the Catholic schools of Ontario. On the other hand, the Alberta Ministry of Education has not been as proactive about reducing homophobia in Alberta schools as its Ontario counterpart. In Alberta Catholic schools, the Vatican’s role as the ultimate authority on matters pertaining to sexuality has not yet been challenged by any Alberta Ministry of Education policy.

Therefore, when it comes to addressing homophobia in Catholic schools through curriculum and policy, it appears that the Althusserian State Apparatus that has the most force is not the provincial ministries of education, but the Vatican. Althusser’s theory of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) is helpful, but not sufficient for understanding how power operates in Catholic schools. Althusser’s notion of the ISA is limited, for example, in theorizing how one part of the ISA – the Catholic Church – comes to dominate another – the educational system – nor does it explain the role of other ISAs such as the media in circumventing the dominant ISA of the Church. Althusser (1970/2008) contrasts his theory of the ISA with his theory of the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) by stating: “while there is one (Repressive) State Apparatus, there is a plurality of Ideological State Apparatuses,” (p. 18 italics and brackets in the original) yet his theory does not explain hierarchies that can exist among ISAs or how one ISA can come to dominate another. The empirical evidence of this study, however, does show that the ideology being circulated in Catholic schools is not Ontario’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*,
but the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other statements on the topic of homosexuality issued from the Vatican. This evidence suggests the ISA of the Church is in a position of dominance over the ISA of the educational system, but Althusser’s theory of the ISA does not explain how hierarchies among ISAs come to pass. The dominant ideology in the Catholic schools of this study is not to respect and value sexual diversity, but to correct and control sexual diversity and to ensure that it finds no physical expression. The manner in which this particular Althusserian ISA of the Church partially functions in the Catholic schools of this study is best illustrated with a few examples of some participants’ experiences. It is important to keep in mind, however, that Althusser’s theories do not entirely fit the complexities of religiously-inspired homophobia in Catholic schools.

Abigail, Hannah, and Jacob are 3 student participants who were able to be out about their non-heterosexuality to themselves and most of their friends. Although not out to their parents, these students’ positive coming out experiences gave them the impression it was acceptable to be open about their sexuality at their Catholic schools. Abigail and Jacob opened up about their lesbianism to a trusted teacher (Jacob identified as a lesbian in school but now identifies as a transman). Hannah exclaimed in exasperation, “I’m gay and I don’t know what to do!” when two school administrators were questioning her about wearing the boys’ shirt and tie component of the school uniform and about her truancy. The two teachers in whom Abigail and Jacob had confided, informed their administrators about the students’ disclosure, and the administrators then arranged for the students’ parents to come into the school so the students’ disclosure could be shared with them. In Hannah’s case, she had hastily told
two school administrators that she was a lesbian and they responded by promptly calling Hannah’s mother into the school so she could be informed of what Hannah had just revealed to them. The experience of beingouted to their parents by the school was devastating for the students. Both Hannah and Jacob were kicked out of their family homes and ended up renting their own apartments at the age of 16, and Abigail had a terrible time with her mother at home and was placed under a quasi-restraining order at school.

School administrators who respect and value sexual diversity may be aware that others may not be so accepting of difference and therefore may be reluctant to inform the parents of a student who had just come out as LGBTQ at school, out of concern for the student’s safety in the home environment. They may also conclude on their own that a student’s sexual orientation is not even a matter worth calling parental attention to in the first place, as they would not view non-heterosexuality as a “problem.” The Catholic school administrators featured in this study who outed LGBTQ students to their parents appear to be more concerned for their reputations as good Catholic shepherds guiding LGBTQ students towards eventual salvation than the students’ immediate safety. Catholic school administrators who espouse the Catholic ideology that sexual diversity must be controlled and corrected are compelled by Catholic doctrine and Catholic school policy to inform the parents of a student who has come out as LGBTQ at school.

Here we see two competing ideologies in Canadian culture vis-à-vis sexual minority groups in schools: One represented by a provincial ministry of education and its policies that respect diversity and work towards protecting sexual minority groups from discrimination, and another represented by the Vatican and its Catholic doctrine that
characterizes the physical expression of sexual diversity as “intrinsically disordered” and “contrary to the natural law” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 53). Given that the Catholic school administrators in this study adhere more strongly to Catholic doctrine than to provincial educational policy when it comes to managing sexual minority groups, it appears that the more persuasive force operating in Catholic schools is Catholic doctrine rather than provincial educational policy. According to Althusser, societies that are able to carry on into the future are those that are able to reproduce themselves ideologically and materially through the judicious use of various ideological apparatuses. Catholic societies or cultures reproduce themselves through the Catholic Church and its close cousin the Catholic school. If Catholic schools made room for competing ideologies such as those represented by provincial ministries of education, they might be in danger of dying out, or at the very least being unrecognizably transformed. Therefore, Catholic cultures reproduce themselves by employing the ideological apparatus of the Catholic school to make Catholic subjects who adhere more strongly to Catholic doctrine than to secular law, represented in this case by provincial educational policy concerning sexual diversity and the elimination of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Even though the students in the above examples were not disclosing that they were sexually active, the word “gay” is often equated with “sex” for many people. The Catholic school administrators in the above examples may have felt it necessary to warn the parents of the students who came out as gay so that the parents could try to steer their children away from LGBTQ sexual activity, an objective that would be in accordance with Catholic doctrine. These Catholic school administrators’ warnings to the parents of LGBTQ students show the supremacy of Catholic doctrine over provincial educational policy in
Catholic schools. According to Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus, the “State” that is operating in the Catholic schools of this study, in relation to sexual minority groups, is the Vatican and the dominant ideology being circulated is Catholic doctrine. Because the LGBTQ students are in danger of falling outside of Catholic doctrine, their parents must be informed so they can be corrected. As Althusser (1970/2008, p. 19) explains:

The Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology [italics in the original], but they also function secondarily by repression. . . . Thus Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to “discipline” not only their shepherds, but also their flocks.

The Catholic Church’s position on sexual diversity is circulated in Catholic schools primarily by ideology (i.e. via curriculum taught through a Catholic filter) but also secondarily by repressive policy (informed by Catholic doctrine) that directs school administrators to reveal to parents of LGBTQ students the fact that their child has come out at school so that the parents can try to carry on the appropriate disciplining of their LGBTQ children at home according to Catholic doctrine.

Other examples of Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus functioning secondarily by repression can be seen in the stories of the 4 teacher participants in this study who were ousted from their jobs. Of the 6 teacher participants whose stories are recounted in this study, 3 were fired for not upholding Catholic doctrine related to non-heterosexuals: Job was fired for transitioning from female to male, Naraai was fired for attempting to get pregnant and raise a baby with her female partner, and Anna was fired for acting as a “straight ally” by offering her classroom as a “positive space” in which LGBTQ students could meet. A fourth teacher, Naomi, was not fired, but she was harassed
about her suspected lesbianism – to the point of almost being run out of the northern Ontario town where she had just moved to take up her first teaching job – until she was able to complete her temporary contract. Each of these teachers experienced the discipline of the repressive arm of Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus in the form of the Catholic Church and its doctrine because they were too open about their non-heterosexuality, or about their support for LGBTQ students, in their Catholic schools.

Job knew he would not be able to report for work in the fall as a man without explaining to his transition from female to male to his employers. Job chose to inform his employers of his medical condition and they responded by firing him.

Naraai thought she could be open about her lesbianism at her Catholic school and spoke freely with her work colleagues about her plans to raise a baby with her female partner. This caught the attention of the principal of the school who monitored her behaviour closely. When Naraai started taking time off of work to see a fertility specialist, the principal reminded her that he had warned her earlier about how the Catholic Church would not approve of her constructed family with her lesbian partner and initiated the process of terminating her employment on these grounds.

Anna’s lunchtime refuge for LGBTQ students might have gone unnoticed by the Catholic school administrators if it were not for Anna’s placement of “Positive Space” and pride flag stickers in the window of her classroom door. This brought the repressive force of Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus in the form of school policy down on Anna and her temporary teaching contract was not renewed because she helped LGBTQ students socialize with one another in a way that was forbidden by her school board.
Naomi was heavily monitored from the moment she moved into town to take up a temporary teaching assignment. Community members watched her to see if she was just sharing accommodation with her female friend, or if they were sharing the same bedroom too. Colleagues found ways to let her know they suspected her friend was really her lover and that “homosexuality is a sin.” Naomi responded by ignoring the subtext of her colleagues’ and neighbours’ close scrutiny of her life and by summoning all of her strength to complete her temporary contract.

It is hardly a coincidence that, historically, the Catholic Church has explicitly operated as an Althussian Repressive State Apparatus. As a government/state, it acted and ruled through its religiously sanctioned military campaigns known as the Crusades, and also through its _Inquisitio Haereticae Pravitatis_ (inquiry on heretical perversity) known as the Inquisition. The Catholic Church’s historical RSA status can still be seen today in the repressive arm of its Ideological State Apparatus, the Catholic school, which effectively punishes and otherwise disciplines teachers and students who do not conform to Catholic doctrine.

Althusser offers a structuralist account of ideology, which looms large in his view of power and domination. Critical pedagogue Henry Giroux (2001), one of the original theorists of resistance in education, critiques Althusser’s conceptual orientation for relying too heavily on a reductionist concept of power and for dismissing the notions of struggle and human agency. Giroux (2001) is particularly critical of what he calls Althusser’s “undialectical” (p. 82) notion of ideology, which he says fails on two counts: 1) ideology is presented by Althusser as an abstract force able to diffuse all manner of resistance; and 2) ideology appears in Althusser’s schema as an institutionalized form of
domination, functioning so seamlessly that the Ideological State Apparatus becomes an “administrative fantasy” (p. 82). According to Althusser’s theoretical framework, when it comes to managing sexual minority groups the Catholic schools in this study effectively transmit the Catholic doctrine of the Vatican on the topic of non-heterosexuality, and ensure that most students, teachers, staff and other faculty in the school consent to the Vatican’s values regarding sexual minorities, all without any apparent opposition whatsoever.

The apparent lack of opposition may certainly appear this way given that the 3 lgbtq student participants in this study described above, who were out to themselves and their friends at school, had the challenging experience of being outed to their parents by their Catholic school administrators. However, a closer examination shows that these lgbtq student participants were not docile actors in a straightforward hegemonic play, but active agents in their own lives.

Jacob, for example, had the foresight to inform himself about other ways of living by getting up at 1:00 in the morning on a weekly basis at the age of 11 to watch *Queer as Folk* on TV, and by borrowing gay-related materials from the public library. Jacob’s autodidactic drive enabled him to learn to unlearn or, at the very least, rigorously question the Catholic ideology that permeated his school and informed the reparative therapy sessions his parents forced him to take after they found out from the school about his sexuality. Jacob’s newfound knowledge gave him the confidence he needed to put an end to the Catholic counselling sessions, find his own apartment at the age of 16 after his parents kicked him out of the house, and to also stand up to a homophobic religion teacher in his Catholic high school.
Like Jacob, Hannah had a terrible time at home once “all hell had broken loose” after the school informed her mother that Hannah had come out as a lesbian at school. Hannah’s mother laid down some restrictive house rules for Hannah and, when she didn’t follow them, Hannah got kicked out of the house. After bouncing between friends’ houses and the psychiatric ward of the local hospital (Hannah was suicidal), Hannah dropped out of school, took on full-time hours at the local café where she had formerly worked part-time, and at the age of 16 acquired an apartment with some friends. Despite the fact that she was emotionally and psychologically devastated, before she eventually quit school altogether Hannah managed to take on the homophobia of her Catholic high school by taking part in some courageous acts of resistance there. Together with another lesbian classmate, Hannah undertook a class project about the local gay community and drew the school’s attention to its homophobic “net nanny” that blocked all affirming websites about non-heterosexuals while allowing those that condemned non-heterosexuals to filter through. Amazingly, Hannah and her friend managed to convince the school to change its Internet filtering system. Hannah also attended a school board meeting to protest the banning of a book that presented homosexuality in a positive light, but the school board banned the book in spite of her efforts. Hannah learned what she could about lesbianism online and was able to use her newfound knowledge to counter her Catholic family counsellor who told her to avoid gay people because they are promiscuous and disease-ridden. Online, Hannah also learned about the Day of Silence and decided to observe it at school on her own, but teachers told her she couldn’t participate in this kind of activism because it was not approved by the administration. Overall, Hannah says there are some students, teachers, and administrators in her
Catholic high school who are willing to tackle the systemic homophobia and she’s “hoping that things are getting better and students are trying to get their voices out more because it needs to be done.”

Like Jacob and Hannah, Abigail also filled in the gaps of her Catholic education by informing herself about non-heterosexuality through regular visits to her town’s public library where she read every LGBTQ-themed young adult novel in the collection. Like most of the other LGBTQ student participants in this study, Abigail was a frequent user of the Internet and learned about Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs) and the Day of Silence online. Through these outlets, Abigail gained access to a vastly different perspective about sexual diversity than what she was learning in her Catholic school. This new outlook emboldened Abigail to start taking action at her school. She established a quasi GSA called “Equality Awareness,” managed to observe a toned down version of the Day of Silence, arranged for the school to host a benefit concert for the local AIDS group, and did a queer reading of Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway* for one of her Grade 12 English presentations. Abigail is convinced that more people will start to combat homophobia in Ontario Catholic schools because, as she says: “The resistance is already starting to happen. . . . It’ll change one day, but we have to change it.”

These examples of LGBTQ students’ attempts to change the systemic homophobia of their Catholic schools show that Althusser’s notion of the Ideological State Apparatus does not allow for the occurrence of smaller, subversive acts of resistance against a seemingly static and monolithic force. The Vatican (Althusser’s “State”) is certainly a powerful presence in the Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools of this study, and its homophobic Catholic doctrine (Althusser’s “Ideology”) is thoroughly disseminated in
these schools. However, as Giroux points out in his critique of Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus, the particular ISA of the Canadian Catholic school is not able to fend off all opposition to the way in which it institutionalizes homophobia, nor is it able to eliminate entirely the powerful, though often overlooked, force of human agency.

The inability of the Canadian Catholic school to be an absolute dominating force in the manner of Althusser’s ISA has a lot to do with the fact that these schools are located in a country whose social policies are often out of step with those of the Vatican. The examples from the data of this study, described above, highlight the limitations of Althusser’s theory in that it does not provide strategies for analyzing contradictions within the state or among different state apparatuses.

**Foucault’s theory of disciplinary surveillance.**

The 2 teacher participants in this study who remain in the closet about certain aspects of their homosexuality in order to continue being employed by their Catholic school boards are not only subject to the wiles of the Catholic Church ISA, they also experience a kind of Foucaultian disciplinary surveillance known as the Panopticon. In his book, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault draws upon the work of 18th century British utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) who describes the Panopticon as an architectural device that can be used in institutions such as prisons to observe all the prisoners without the observer being seen. Prisoners never know if they are being observed or not, and therefore must act as though they are always being observed. The power of the Panopticon is its ability to cause those being observed to discipline themselves and to “induce [within them] a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 201). The
Panopticon is a useful metaphor for the doctrinal disciplining of non-heterosexuals in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools.

Mark and Luke, the 2 teacher participants who continue to be employed by their Catholic school boards as a result of their ability to hide the fact that they live with their respective male partners, experience the disciplinary gaze of Foucault’s metaphorical Panopticon while at work, and, in some instances, even at home. Foucault (1975/1995) describes the efficiency of the Panopticon’s power as follows:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.

(pp. 202-203)

Mark and Luke become the “principles of their own subjection” by monitoring and adjusting their own behaviour to ensure that it outwardly appears to conform to Catholic doctrine. Luke, for example, stopped bringing his long-term partner to any school function because it had become too difficult to pretend they were not together as a couple. As a principal, the disciplinary constraints around Mark are tighter than those around Luke. In Mark’s case, Foucault’s Panopticon has an even greater field of visibility, capable of subjecting Mark to its disciplinary gaze even in Mark’s own home. Part of Mark’s role as a principal requires him to host staff barbecues and other colleague bonding events at his home. In order to prepare for such hosting duties, Mark has to “de-gay the house … do a major sweep” so that the evidence of his refusal to conform to the celibacy requirement of Catholic doctrine for non-heterosexuals will not be detected by
any of his guests who may have the power to get him fired. Both Mark and Luke harbour similar “nightmare scenarios” of being turned in to the authorities by someone, and they both worry that their nightmares may one day become a reality and they will end up losing their livelihoods.

The disciplinary gaze of Foucault’s metaphorical Panopticon also has a controlling effect on the student participants in this study. The 4 closeted students (Judith, Caleb, Shiloh, and Junia) do their best to hide their sexuality, gender identity and gender expression from everyone in their Catholic schools lest they be subjected to some kind of ill treatment for being different. Shiloh, for example, learned from his closeted gay drama teacher that it would not be safe to let anyone in the school know that the principal refused the drama teacher’s request to produce *The Laramie Project*, a play about the 1998 homophobic murder of a gay university student in Laramie, Wyoming. Shiloh would have liked to have protested the Catholic school administration’s decision, but he knew that doing so would only invite questions about why he was so interested in taking part in a play about homophobic violence. He worried that other people would assume that only gay people would be interested in the subject matter of *The Laramie Project* and that his interest in it would mark him as gay. Shiloh felt that remaining silent on the matter was safer than being subjected to close scrutiny that might reveal his sexuality. This is an example of the Panopticon’s continuous surveillance that enforces a regime of silent disciplining.

This example of Shiloh and his closeted gay drama teacher is not only about the doctrinal disciplining of homosexuals in Catholic schools, but also about the way power operates between and among different people within these institutions. As Foucault
points out in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, “Where there is power, there is resistance” (1976/1978, p. 95). The closeted drama teacher’s attempt to obtain permission from the school principal to produce *The Laramie Project* showcases the drama teacher as an active subject, as someone willing to resist the repressive heteronormativity of his Catholic school. According to Foucault, resistance is necessary in order for power to be effective. In an interview about truth and power, Foucault asks: “If power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we would manage to obey it?” (1972/1980, p. 119). Although the principal’s ultimate answer was “no,” the drama teacher must have thought there was a possibility for a “yes,” otherwise he would not have tried to get permission to produce the play. At first glance, this exchange between the principal and the teacher seems to be an example of the repressive influence of power, but it also represents the productive force of power in that the overwhelming heteronormativity of the Catholic school actually invites new acts of resistance such as the drama teacher’s asking for permission to produce the play.

The 2 teacher participants in this study who must remain closeted about their sexuality while in their Catholic schools (Mark and Luke) must be ever-vigilant about the information they reveal about themselves at school and elsewhere in order to avoid being reported to authorities within the Catholic school system who have the power to investigate their lives and fire them for not conforming to Catholicity. This form of disciplining surveillance is not entirely successful, however, as one of the gay men (Luke) is able to be open about his sexuality with select colleagues at work, and he is also able to express his commitment to social justice activism through various acts of subversion. Furthermore, both Luke and Mark are not totally dominated by the doctrinal
disciplining of their Catholic schools in that they both have long-term partners with whom they live, despite the fact that this is decidedly against Catholic doctrine. Through the power of personal will, Mark and Luke have managed to not fully internalize the disciplining gaze of the Panopticon. I can only guess at the number of closeted teachers who have internalized the gaze, however, and so would never participate in a study such as this – they have been effectively silenced, and, sadly, continue to silence themselves.

One problem in drawing upon Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* to examine how homophobia is exercised in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools is that the individual subject appears to be subjected to the point where resistance to disciplinary practices is futile. One way to begin to imagine the possibility of resisting an oppressive regime is to also draw upon another text from Foucault’s genealogical period: *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction*. In this book, Foucault (1976/1978) explores how the Victorian period’s characteristic repression of sexuality actually “speaks verbosely of its own silence” (p. 8) in the sense that it ushered in a new set of discourses on questions of sexual expression while under the guise of a forced silence on the topic. The oxymoron of articulated silence that Foucault points to has both repressive and productive elements – repressive in the sense that certain structural measures are put in place to try to control sexual expression, and productive in the sense that these very obstacles invite new forms of behaviour that effectively subvert attempts at disciplining control.

In this doctoral study, the Vatican appears to try to control the lived expression of non-heterosexuality by disseminating Catholic doctrine on the topic in Catholic schools. In its persistent refusal to recognize non-heterosexuality (and its various sub categories) as a legitimate sexual orientation, the Vatican and Catholic schools make themselves
obligated to define and to “take great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say” (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 8). The pastoral guidelines outlining what constitutes unacceptable same-sex behaviour, in effect, results in the Catholic Church declaiming at length on something it does not wish its followers to endorse or condone. More and more, the Catholic Church is obligated to defend and explain its position – thereby elaborating even more on a topic it does not want to address.

The Vatican also tries to control any objection to its homophobic message by limiting discussions about homophobia in Catholic schools to only those instances of homophobic bullying that occur among students, and by circulating incomplete definitions of homophobia that do not implicate the Vatican itself as a major contributor to homophobic discrimination. Some students and teachers in Catholic schools respond to these silencing attempts by “speaking verbosely” of them by taking part in studies such as this one and by also taking their stories to the media. In their raw and original forms, the interviews I conducted for the narrative research texts that appear in this thesis produced transcripts that were, on average, 20 pages long, single-spaced, at 10-point font. Many of the interviewees regularly ran overtime without any encouragement from me. Clearly, the participants in this study had a lot to say. The repressive silencing that arises from being a non-heterosexual student or teacher in an Alberta or Ontario Catholic school makes these interviewees quite literally “verbose” on their own institutional silencing. As a result of this active silencing by the Vatican and its Ideological State Apparatus the Catholic school, some Canadian LGBTQ students and teachers who have experienced institutionalized homophobia in their Catholic schools turn to the media as a way to bring their stories to public attention and as an attempt to find room to assert their Charter
rights. Examples from the “Media Accounts” chapter are the stories of Joseph Stellpflug, Marc Hall, and Lisa Reimer. An example from the “Participants” chapter is Job’s story. The Catholic school’s act of silencing is paradoxically becoming quite well articulated in the media.

The experiences of the participants in this study appear to show that the repressive force of doctrinal disciplining is more powerful than its productive force. Of the 6 teacher participants whose stories are recounted in this thesis, 4 have been ousted from their jobs in Catholic schools, and the majority of student participants were either closeted about their non-heterosexuality or outed against their will by school administrators and bullies. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the productive force of doctrinal disciplining is discernible in the existence of pastoral guidelines that the Catholic bishops have had to write in order to regulate non-heterosexuality in Catholic schools, which have in turn invited various acts of subversion on the part of some of the participants in this study who resist the homophobic repression that pervades their Catholic schools.

**Theorizing the Media Accounts and the Catholic Documents**

The “Media Accounts” chapter of this thesis reviews and discusses a collection of Canadian media stories about homophobia in Catholic schools. The media reports range from court cases (involving the wrongful dismissals of LGBTQ teachers and the discriminatory refusal of a same-sex date to the high school prom) to school policies (involving the censoring of a book about homophobia, the non-participation of any Canadian Catholic school district in a national survey about homophobia, and the banning of Gay/Straight Alliances). The media accounts offer a rare glimpse into the supremacy of the ideology of Catholic doctrine on the topic of non-heterosexuality over
the ideology of the education ministry on the topic of equity and inclusivity in Canadian Catholic schools.

The “Catholic Documents” chapter of this thesis examines two essential primary texts from the provinces of Alberta and Ontario written by Catholic bishops and education leaders to make clear to Catholic educators the official Catholic doctrine on non-heterosexuality. Both texts show the powerful influence of Catholic bishops and education leaders in ensuring that Catholic doctrine regarding non-heterosexuality is the ideology that governs the management of non-heterosexuals in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools.

Like the experiences of the participants in this study, selections from the media accounts and the Catholic documents data sets in this study can be examined through Gramsci’s (1971) notion of ideological hegemony and contradictory consciousness, Althusser’s (1970/2008) concept of ideology and interpellation, and Foucault’s (1975/1995) theory of the disciplinary surveillance of the Panopticon.

Foucault’s Panopticon.

The manner in which Foucault’s Panopticon disciplines the participants in this study is also observable in some of the media accounts describing teachers who had their jobs terminated because they contravened the Catholic doctrine that requires non-heterosexuals to remain celibate for the rest of their lives. Joseph Stellpflug, for example, took his story to the media after he was fired in 1997 from his job as a lay chaplain and religion teacher at a Catholic high school in Toronto once his school district learned about the commitment ceremony he had with his male partner. Although Stellpflug’s commitment ceremony was a private affair, an unknown person passed along one of the
invitations to Stellpflug’s Catholic board, which sparked the board’s investigation that lead eventually to Stellpflug’s termination. The act of slipping the Catholic board an invitation is analogous to training the Panopticon’s “full lighting and the eye of a supervisor” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 200) on a previously dark and obscured corner. In this way, Stellpflug’s secret was exposed and he became vulnerable to his employer.

Part of the investigation of Stellpflug’s sexual behaviour involved Stellpflug’s employers, together with the local archbishop, privately interrogating Stellpflug until he confessed that, yes, he does have a male partner, yes, they did have a commitment ceremony proclaiming their romantic love for one another. Foucault engages in a lengthy discussion of this kind of forced confession in his book *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (1976/1978, pp. 58 - 68). Foucault tells us that “from the Christian penance to the present day, sex was a privileged theme of confession. A thing that was hidden” (p. 61), yet Foucault argues that “it is in the confession that truth and sex are joined, through the obligatory and exhaustive expression of an individual secret” (p. 61). Foucault describes the confession as follows:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences,
produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation. (pp. 61-62)

In a collection of essays, Foucault (1980) describes knowledge as an intersection of power relations and information-gathering, a process he calls power/knowledge. According to Foucault, knowledge is a form of power – the search for knowledge is also an expression of a will to power over other people. When Stellpflug’s employers and archbishop subjected him to this form of forced confession, they were establishing their “authority” and their “relationship” of power and control over him. Stellpflug was controlled in his Catholic school not only by the disciplinary gaze of the Panopticon, but also by the authoritative discourse of truth known as the confession. In a way, Stellpflug was “liberated” when he confessed and also “intrinsically modified,” but the “liberation” was from his job and the “modification” was that he was now identified as gay rather than straight and therefore “punishable” as a gay man as far as his employers were concerned. Clearly, this “liberation” is not a positive condition for someone like Stellpflug. All the power of the confession in this case is plainly on the school’s side as it turns its “full light” on Stellpflug, ignores the Charter, and doles out its “judgement.”

The authority that enables and facilitates the firing of lesbian and gay teachers in Catholic schools who violate Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality by living with their same-sex partners or by raising children, is traceable to various pieces of Catholic doctrine developed by the Vatican. The goal of such Catholic doctrine is to “guide others away from the practice of homosexual genital activity” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 25). The Catholic doctrine on non-heterosexuality is itself a metaphorical Panopticon in the sense
that those who fully believe in its message can use it as guide when scanning the
behaviour of others, or even themselves, to determine if their behaviour conforms to the
expectations of Catholic doctrine. If an individual’s behaviour is found to be lacking,
such as Joseph Stellpflug’s was when he had a commitment ceremony with his male
partner, then the doctrine functions as a kind of “law” that can be enforced by initiating
the termination of his employment. The Catholic doctrine is a Panopticon, or scanning
device, that individuals can use to detect behaviour in others that is deemed to be contrary
to Catholicity, and then they can use that newly gathered information to justify taking
disciplinary action against the offending individual. In this way, Catholic doctrine about
non-heterosexuality functions like a metaphorical Panopticon to observe and correct any
lgbtq behaviour that appears to be against the values of the Vatican.

Another example that illustrates this point is the Durham Catholic District School
Board’s attempt to stop Marc Hall from taking his boyfriend to his high school
graduation dance. Prior to his raising of the issue of whether or not same-sex dates were
welcome at the very public and school-sanctioned prom dance, Hall did not attract the
disciplinary gaze of his school administrators. They may have known he was gay, but
according to Catholic doctrine, being gay is not a problem – being gay only becomes a
problem when gay people start behaving in ways that would lead to “homosexual genital
activity” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 25). From my observations so far in this study, students are
relatively more free to be queer within Catholic school environments compared to queer
teachers and staff. That is to say, teachers who are found to be lgbtq are regularly ejected
from the schools through termination of their employment; students, on the other hand,
are rarely kicked out of school although they are certainly policed by school administration in other ways.

Once Hall asked for permission to take his boyfriend to the prom, his Catholic school administrators had to examine his request through the filter of Catholic doctrine. Here, the Catholic doctrine functions as a Panopticon – a tool used to closely examine Hall’s request in order to determine if what Hall was proposing would conform to Catholicity. Hall’s Catholic school administrators concluded that a gay schoolboy who has a boyfriend, and who proposes to dance with his boyfriend in a public way at a graduation dance sanctioned by the Catholic school, is contrary to Catholicity and it was on these grounds that they refused Hall’s request. However, Marc Hall managed to escape the disciplining gaze of Foucault’s metaphorical Panopticon by appealing to another authority that in a limited fashion also governs Ontario Catholic schools – Canadian anti-discrimination law. Therefore, when Catholic doctrine is used as a kind of Panopticon scanning tool with Catholic school students (as opposed to teachers), it is limited in its ability to uncover, expose and discipline its subjects precisely because of the Canadian government (an example of an Altusserian Repressive State Apparatus), which, of course, represents an interesting irony.

*Althusser’s ideology and interpellation.*

The above description of Catholic doctrine functioning as a Foucaultian Panopticon overlaps with the threefold function of Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus. As discussed above, when examining the problem of sexual minority groups in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools, Althusser’s “State” is the Vatican, and his “Ideology” is Catholic doctrine. Also discussed above are the institutions Althusser lists
as examples of his Ideological State Apparatuses, namely: religious organizations, the education system, the family, the legal system, trade unions, the political system, arts and culture, and the media. This discussion is limited to the ISAs represented by religious organizations, specifically the Catholic Church, and the education system, specifically the Catholic school. Although Althusser’s logic operates at a very high level of abstraction, his ideas are still at least partially applicable to the kinds of institutions he identifies as Ideological State Apparatuses and the particular situations that can take place within those institutions involving individuals. Althusser’s theory of the ISA is helpful in elucidating aspects of the data collected for this study, especially in understanding the dynamics of power and authority operating in Catholic schools, but it is important to remain attentive to the limitations of his theory as well. One obvious limitation is that Althusser’s theory of the ISA does not help explain a system with competing ideologies and competing power structures, nor does Althusser explain how individuals might negotiate a social system with competing ideologies and conflicting ISAs. In the matter of how to manage sexual minorities in the Catholic school setting, Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus, the Catholic school, has a threefold purpose: 1) to teach the Catholic doctrine of Vatican, 2) to ensure that most people in the Catholic school consent to the Catholic doctrine of the Vatican, and 3) to render teachers and students in the Catholic school “subjects” of the Vatican. When Catholic doctrine functions as a Foucaultian Panopticon, it is occupied with the Althusserian task of ensuring that the majority of those involved in Catholic schooling consent and conform to Vatican’s values regarding non-heterosexuality.
In Althusser’s theory of the Ideological State Apparatus, ideology “interpellates” individuals as subjects (1970/2008, p. 44). Althusser describes his vision of “interpellation” as a “precise operation” through which ideology “recruits” subjects and “transforms” them in such a way that they recognize their own existence in the values of the dominant culture and therefore acquiesce to them (1970/2008, pp. 48-49). Althusser interchanges the word “interpellate” with the word “hail,” which he says “can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’” (1970/2008, p. 48). In this example, the individual in the street who is hailed by a member of the local police service then turns around and recognizes that s/he is being addressed. According to Althusser, in this simple act of recognition, the individual is rendered a subject. The manner in which ideology “interpellates” individuals as subjects is best illustrated with the following example from the particular Catholic doctrine pertaining to non-heterosexuals examined in this thesis.

The “Catholic Documents” chapter of this thesis analyzes two primary texts from Alberta and Ontario that were meant to clarify for Catholic educators the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on the topic of homosexuality. Although the two texts are clearly about the existence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (lgbtq) individuals in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools, neither text addresses these sexual minority groups by the acronym “lgbtq” nor as “non-heterosexuals.” Instead, the authors of these two Catholic documents prefer to call lgbtq people “persons with same-sex attractions.” The Alberta bishops who wrote the 2001 pastoral guideline called A Resource for an Inclusive Community: A Teacher’s Guide For and About Persons with Same Sex Attractions attempt to justify their use of the moniker “persons with same sex
attractions” by claiming that “to refer to a person as ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ in our culture is not only to use politically charged language but to succumb to a reductionist way of speaking about someone else. Such labelling is not only inaccurate but tends to re-enforce and, in some cases, legitimate an arrested psycho-sexual development” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 3). Similarly, in their 2004 Pastoral Guideline to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation, the Ontario bishops also warn that “attaching a label” such as homosexual, lesbian, or gay is “problematic” because it “implies that they are their orientation. . . . The orientation or act is homosexual or heterosexual but the person is not” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 26).

According to Althusser’s theory, in these two examples of Catholic documents from Alberta and Ontario the ideology of the Catholic Church is attempting to interpellate or hail lgbtq people as “persons with same-sex attractions” and thereby render them a particular kind of subject that conforms to Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality. However, in order for the act of interpellation to function correctly, the subject being addressed must respond with some form of recognition, such as “Yes, it really is me!” (Althusser, 1970/2008, p. 52), otherwise a form of misrecognition occurs. Given that none of the participants in this study referred to themselves as a “person with same-sex attraction,” and often refer to themselves as lesbian or gay, it appears as though the Catholic ideology has not managed to interpellate these lgbtq individuals as the subjects it has determined for them.

Furthermore, some of the lgbtq students in this study attempted to form Gay/Straight Alliances in their Catholic schools, not “Persons with Same-Sex Attraction and Persons with Opposite-Sex Attraction Alliances.” The use of the word “gay” by
participants in this study suggests these LGBTQ people have failed to recognize the Catholic ideology attempting to interpellate and thereby further prescribe and limit them as subjects. It appears as though these LGBTQ participants were already successfully interpellated as subjects by another ideology – that of the LGBTQ human rights movement, not the Vatican.

**Gramsci’s ideological hegemony.**

Like Althusser’s theory of ideology, Gramsci’s (1971) theory of ideological hegemony regards ideology as a necessary component in the continued reproduction of social relations in any given culture. For Gramsci, the ideas of the ruling class are reproduced and circulated as the dominant ideology through a process of ideological hegemony involving the strategic use of cultural institutions, such as churches and schools, to secure the necessary consent of the masses. In schools, ideological hegemony is achieved primarily through the formal curriculum, but it is also maintained through the various informal ways knowledge is produced and controlled (Giroux, 2001). The way ideological hegemony controls the production of knowledge about sexual minority groups in Catholic schools can be observed through some examples from the “Media Accounts” and “Catholic Documents” chapters of this study.

Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is helpful, but not sufficient for understanding the functions of the curriculum. An example of how ideological hegemony partially functions in the formal curriculum of Catholic schools is evident in the media account describing the development of a special, Catholic version of Ontario’s 2010 *Health and Physical Education* curriculum. The architects of this Catholic version would have significantly excised elements of the ministry’s new *Health and Physical Education* curriculum that
actively discussed gender identity and sexual orientation as a way to redress homophobic discrimination in all Ontario schools. The excising of such information is clearly influenced by Catholic doctrine that regards LGBTQ people as “persons with same-sex attractions” (i.e. an affliction), designates the physical expression of non-heterosexuality as “intrinsically disordered” (i.e. a sin), and generally disapproves of any promotion of non-heterosexuality as a viable way of living (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 53).

As it turns out, there was eventually no need for the Catholic version of the province’s new sexual education curriculum due to the fact that the provincial government succumbed to opposition from a non-Catholic conservative religious coalition to revamp the curriculum. Reacting to conservative religious opposition, Ontario’s Ministry of Education ultimately chose to release a revised version of its 2010 *Health and Physical Education* curriculum that omitted all the controversial components having to do with the topics of non-heterosexuality and gender identity.

Religious opposition to this curriculum highlighted for the Canadian public a little-known arrangement between the provincial ministry of education and the Catholic school system that allows Catholic education leaders to revamp and reconstruct provincial curricula on matters of morality and sexuality so that these topics can be taught in Catholic schools through a Catholic faith perspective. This media account exposes the previously obscured inner machinations of Gramsci’s ideological hegemony operating in the formal curriculum of Catholic schools. It shows how the ideology of Catholic doctrine is more powerful than the ideology of the provincial curriculum when it comes to the topics of non-heterosexuality and gender identity in Catholic schools, despite (and perhaps especially because) of the fact that provincial curriculum and the Repressive
State Apparatus ideology it represents is the vehicle that allows for resistance. Seen through Althusser’s theory of the Ideological State Apparatus, this media account underscores how the Catholic Church (an example of an ISA in Althusser’s theory) is actually functioning more like an Althusserian Repressive State Apparatus (i.e. a government), or at the very least, is operating in collaboration with an RSA while simultaneously working against the RSA of the provincial government. This distinct arrangement in fact once again shows the limitations of Althusser’s theories, and also seriously convolutes Gramsci’s otherwise neat categorizations of ideology and hegemony.

Another example of how Gramsci’s ideological hegemony partially functions in Catholic schools is the media account describing Waterloo Catholic District School Board’s censoring of a book titled *Open Minds to Equality*, a curriculum resource that promotes diversity in schools by discussing various forms of discrimination, including homophobia. This censorship incident came about because of a local Christian organization, named Defend Traditional Marriage and Family, which demanded Waterloo Catholic District School Board remove the book from its schools and stop referring Catholic LGBTQ students and their families to queer positive therapists and support groups. A spokesperson for Defend Traditional Marriage and Family pointed out that the presence of a book about homophobia, along with Waterloo Catholic’s practice of making queer positive referrals, violated Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality.

As the “Catholic Documents” chapter makes clear, the Ontario Catholic bishops hold an incomplete understanding of homophobia: they see homophobia as confined to acts of mistreatment students may inflict on one another in the form of homophobic
bullying, but their definition of homophobia does not include the general condemnation of non-heterosexuality of which the bishops themselves are culpable. In absolving themselves of the charge of homophobia, the Ontario bishops declare that “it should not be assumed . . . that to guide others away from the practice of homosexual genital activity comes out of homophobia” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 25). The presence of a book about homophobia as a form of discrimination that should be redressed and hopefully eliminated from all schools poses a threat to the supremacy of the ideology of Catholic doctrine in Catholic schools. It is for this reason that *Open Minds to Equality* was removed from general circulation in Waterloo Catholic schools.

Although this media account is ostensibly about the banning of the book *Open Minds to Equality*, it also indirectly reveals the presence of vibrant resistance to the dominant ideology of homophobic Catholic doctrine in some Waterloo Catholic schools. The very existence of a book about homophobia in Waterloo Catholic schools is a form of resistance. A Catholic educator, or group of educators, would have had to make the conscious decision to purchase this book and make it available to teachers. This act goes against the Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality that these Catholic educators would have previously absorbed.

Other acts of resistance are detectable in this media account in the following approvals undertaken by the Waterloo Catholic District School Board’s Family Life Advisory Committee: 1) referring LGBTQ students in Catholic schools throughout the district to a queer positive “Rainbow Therapist;” 2) referring LGBTQ students in Catholic schools throughout the district to a local LGBTQ youth group called “OK 2B Me;” and 3) referring the parents of LGBTQ students throughout the district to a support group called
PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). Each of these referrals are to organizations that do not re-present Catholic doctrine on non-heterosexuality. This shows that the Catholic educators who approved these referrals have not completely absorbed the ideology of homophobic Catholic doctrine they would have previously learned at home, at church, and at school.

Gramsci (1971) describes this incomplete absorption of the dominant ideology as a “contradictory consciousness,” which he elucidates as follows:

The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding of the world in so far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. (p. 333)

Here, Gramsci makes room for human agency in his theory of ideological hegemony by accounting for the actions of everyday people who have the power to enact the “practical transformation of the real world.” As Giroux (2001) observes, Gramsci’s general notion of ideology has emancipatory implications for critical pedagogy in that it does not “obliterate the mediating faculties of ordinary people;” furthermore, as Giroux goes on to underscore, Gramsci’s concept of “contradictory consciousness,” in particular, points to a “sphere of contradictions and tensions that is pregnant with possibilities for radical change” (p. 152). At first glance, the above media account about the banning of the book
Open Minds to Equality appears to be about the ideological domination of Catholic doctrine in Catholic schools, but a closer look reveals the existence of ordinary Catholic educators performing relatively extraordinary acts of resistance and radical change.

**Concluding Remarks**

This qualitative comparative study about homophobia in the Catholic schools of Alberta and Ontario seeks to answer both empirical and theoretical questions. Empirical questions such as: “What effects do Catholic documents have on the experiences of LGBTQ individuals in Alberta and Ontario schools?” and “Is resistance possible in an educational context so dominated by the repressive force of religiously-inspired homophobia?” are answered by the evidence provided by the data. The evidence of the three empirical data sets collected in this study (participants, media accounts, and Catholic documents) point to institutionalized homophobia occurring in Catholic schools throughout Ontario and Alberta. This evidence, in turn, helps answer theoretical questions such as: “How does power operate within and across Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools?” and “How do Catholic documents produce teachers and students as subjects?”

In discussing the tensions inherent in the empirical and theoretical aspects of a research problem, sociologist Robert Alford (1998) points out that “evidence never contains its own explanation” and that “abstract concepts never perfectly fit the complexity of reality” (p. 29). It is necessary, therefore, to theorize the data in order to explain it, and to suggest its broader implications. One of the problems associated with attempting to theorize empirical data is that it will never be possible to find a perfect fit between abstract ideas and the knotty realities of everyday life. Nevertheless, drawing upon certain theories can be helpful in illuminating aspects of the empirical data that
would otherwise go unnoticed. Informed by the epistemology of critical theory, this qualitative research project draws upon the critical theories of Gramsci, Althusser, Foucault, and Giroux to at least partially elucidate the complexities of the three data sets that comprise the study.

Gramsci theorized that consent is as vital as coercion in order for ideological hegemony to function. In spite of their legal rights as Canadian citizens, out of fear of the possible consequences, several of the LGBTQ teacher and student participants in this study strategically consent to their own domination by remaining closeted about their sexual orientation or gender identity while teaching or studying in their Catholic schools. Gramsci’s ideological hegemony is shown to also control the production of knowledge about sexual minority groups in Catholic schools, as observed through some examples from the “Media Accounts” and “Catholic Documents” chapters of the study. Gramsci also theorizes a “contradictory consciousness,” which he describes as an incomplete absorption of the dominant ideology that can make room for human agency and acts of resistance leading to radical social change. Gramsci’s theories partially account for the overwhelming ideological domination of Catholic doctrine in Catholic schools, but they also allow room to theorize the occasional radical acts of resistance to that same domination.

Like Gramsci, Althusser underscores that repression on its own cannot reproduce the existing social relations of production in any given culture and that ideology plays a vital role in the reproduction of the status quo. Drawing upon Althusser’s theory of the Ideological State Apparatus to illuminate the problem of homophobia in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools reveals that the State Apparatus that has the most power in these
schools is not the provincial ministries of education, but the Vatican. According to Althusser’s theoretical framework, the Catholic schools in this study effectively transmit the Catholic doctrine of the Vatican on the topic of non-heterosexuality, and ensure that most students and teachers in the school consent to the Vatican’s values regarding sexual minorities, all without any opposition from the school populace. Althusser assumes a unified system of ISAs governed by the beliefs of the bourgeoisie or the “ruling class,” but his theory does not explain a system with competing ideologies and competing power structures (such as the Vatican vs. provincial ministries of education and the Canadian government). The Canadian government recognizes same-sex marriage, while publicly-funded Catholic schools in Alberta and Ontario prohibit the physical expression of non-heterosexuality. This conflict is readily apparent in the data of this study. Critical pedagogue Henry Giroux critiques Althusser’s schema for relying too heavily on a reductionist concept of power and for dismissing the notions of struggle and human agency. Several examples of student resistance to the apparently seamless transmission of the Vatican’s values in their Catholic schools show that Althusser’s notion of the Ideological State Apparatus is incomplete because of its inability to account for the power of human agency. But even Giroux does not anticipate the many forms this resistance can take or whether or not these acts of resistance have the power to lead to lasting change in the dominant system. Are these small acts of resistance merely anomalous blips that will result in no change after all? Or are they predictors of a sea change that could occur if they happen often enough? In the case of Canadian Catholic schools, so far the changes have been so localized and infrequent it is hard to say.
Foucault’s theory of disciplinary surveillance in the form of the Panopticon offers a partial explanation of how homophobia is institutionalized in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools. The power of the Panopticon is its ability to cause those being observed to correct their own behaviour and to conform to the disciplinary regime set out for them. Most of the teachers and the students in this study experienced the disciplinary gaze of Foucault’s metaphorical Panopticon and several effectively “policed” themselves, consistent with the Panopticon theory. Catholic doctrine also functions as a metaphorical Panopticon, or scanning device, that can be used to detect behaviour in others that is deemed to be contrary to Catholicity. Foucault’s Panopticon offers a partial explanation of the repressive force of the power of Catholic doctrine and its ability to monitor and correct students’ and teachers’ behaviour in Catholic schools. However, unlike Althusser, Foucault does not overlook the possibility of resistance. Foucault also theorizes the productive force of power, which can explain how the overwhelming heteronormativity of the Catholic school actually invites new acts of resistance.

The similarity between the participants’ experiences in terms of the heteronormative repression to which they were subjected shows that the provincial geographical location of the Catholic school makes very little difference on the lives of the LGBTQ students and teachers who study and teach in the Catholic schools of Alberta and Ontario. The ministries of education of the provinces of Alberta and Ontario are not the Althussian “State Apparatus” that has the most influence on how to manage sexual minority groups in Catholic schools. The Althussian “State Apparatus” that has the most control over matters of morality and sexuality in the Catholic schools of Alberta and Ontario is the Vatican. The Vatican exerts its power over non-heterosexuals through its
Catholic doctrine on homosexuality that is intended to be uniformly disseminated throughout those parts of the world where the Vatican has influence. Catholic doctrine contends that non-heterosexuality must be corrected and controlled so that it finds no physical expression, and this is why homophobia is institutionalized in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools.

Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, Althusser’s theory of the Ideological State Apparatus, and Foucault’s theory of disciplinary surveillance have been helpful in offering partial explanations of how homophobia is institutionalized and maintained in Catholic schools. Does the institutionalization of homophobia mean that non-heterosexuals will be forever subjected to a kind of doctrinal disciplining in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools? Not necessarily. According to Gramsci, Foucault, and Giroux, resistance to repressive forces is possible. Although the majority of the participants’ experiences in this study appears to show that the repressive force of doctrinal disciplining is more powerful than its productive force, various acts of subversion and resistance are discernible in some of the participants’ stories and in the subtext of at least one media account. Just because most media accounts show the domination of non-heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic schools, it does not mean that resistance is not occurring. As lesbian student participant Abigail says: “The resistance is already starting to happen. . . . It’ll change one day, but we have to change it.”
Chapter 7

Conclusion

Evidence of a particular kind of “holy homophobia” operating in some Catholic schools of Alberta and Ontario is discernible in the three different data sets of this dissertation: the participants, the media accounts, and the Catholic documents. This section reviews the important aspects of each data set, summarizes the arguments of the data chapters, and underscores the findings of each data chapter. In order to explain the doctrinal disciplining of non-heterosexuals in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools, this dissertation theorizes the data through the lens of critical theories formulated by Gramsci, Althusser, Foucault, and Giroux that have to do with how power is both wielded and resisted in institutional settings such as schools. This section summarizes these theoretical arguments. This section also offers specific suggestions for further research, and discusses the particular implications for practice that this doctoral study points toward.

Participants

Little is known about the experiences of non-heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic schools. Accordingly, this study sought the participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (lgbtq) individuals who have had some experience in Alberta or Ontario Catholic schools, either as a current or former teacher or as a former student. In terms of the participants, 20 individuals took part in the study, all of whom self identify as lgbtq, except for one female former Alberta Catholic schoolteacher who identifies as a “straight ally.”

Because this is a comparative study of the Catholic school systems of Alberta and Ontario, an even representation from the two provinces is ideal. Consequently, 10
participants are from various regions of Alberta and 10 are from towns and cities throughout Ontario. Of the Alberta participants, 4 are teachers (1 lesbian, 1 gay man, 1 transman, and 1 “straight ally” woman), and 6 are students (2 lesbians, 2 gay men, 1 transwoman, and 1 transman). Of the Ontario participants, 3 are teachers (2 lesbians, 1 gay man), and 7 are students (3 lesbians and 4 gay men). The most illustrative and potentially illuminating of the participants’ experiences are retold through the qualitative method of narrative inquiry. The stories of 18 of the 20 participants are recounted in brief narrative vignettes; 2 are excluded due to insufficient detail and also to avoid repetition.

Of the 6 teacher participants whose stories are recounted in this thesis, 4 are no longer teaching in Catholic schools. Of the Alberta teacher participants, 3 lost their jobs for contravening Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality: 1 for transitioning from female to male, 1 for attempting to get pregnant in order to raise a child with her lesbian partner, and 1 for offering her classroom as a “positive space” where LGBTQ students could meet at lunchtime. An Ontario teacher participant experienced such severe homophobic harassment in the northern Ontario town where she had moved to take up a temporary teaching position at a Catholic elementary school that she barely completed her contract and is now pursuing graduate studies. Of the remaining teacher participants, 2 (representing one in Alberta and one in Ontario) continue to teach in a Catholic school but do so by being closeted about their homosexuality.

The majority (5) of the 12 student participants whose stories are recounted in this study also felt it was safer for them to stay in the closet about their sexuality and gender identity while studying in Catholic schools. Of the student participants, 4 were outed at school: 1 lesbian student in northern Alberta was outed by bullies; 2 lesbian students (1 in
northern Ontario and the other in southern Ontario), and 1 female-to-male participant who identified as a lesbian while in his southern Alberta Catholic junior and senior high schools, were outed by school personnel who deemed it appropriate to call the students’ parents into the school to inform them about their child’s sexual orientation. Of the student participants, 3 (1 gay male in southern Ontario, 1 gay male in northern Alberta, and 1 lesbian in southern Alberta) were able to be out to varying degrees about their non-heterosexuality while in Catholic school. All 4 of the student participants who were outed against their will in Catholic school responded with explicit acts of resistance to the systemic homophobia of their schools.

Resistance on the part of teacher participants is less pronounced than that of the students. This is largely due to the fact that the majority of the teacher participants were swiftly fired for behaving in ways that contravened Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality and no longer had an opportunity to resist the systemic homophobia of their Catholic schools. Overall, the teacher participants in this study experienced greater degrees of doctrinal disciplining regarding non-heterosexuality than the student participants. All of the participants experienced some form of homophobia in their Catholic schools and none described a Catholic school environment that was accepting and welcoming of sexual diversity. This does not mean that positive experiences with Catholic schools do not exist among LGBTQ people and their allies. It only means that the 19 LGBTQ people and 1 straight ally who participated in this study experienced a homophobic environment in their Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools. This is not a surprising finding considering this study is about homophobia in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools and it accordingly attracted participants with stories of homophobia to
tell. The similarity of experiences among participants in terms of the heteronormative repression to which they were subjected in the distant provinces of Alberta and Ontario suggests that Catholic doctrine from the Vatican is directing school policy and practice regarding the management of sexual minority groups in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools. This contradictory Catholic doctrine, which casts LGBTQ students and teachers solely as “persons with same-sex attraction” who suffer from “an arrested psycho-sexual development” (cited in CCSSA, 2007, section 3) and are therefore in need of “pastoral care,” showcases Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools as the opposite of a “welcoming and safe environment” (OCCB, 2004a, p. 23) for sexual minority groups and conversely positions Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools as potential hotbeds for homophobia.

In keeping with the American “It Gets Better” project (Savage, 2010), which urges suicidal LGBTQ youth to “hang on” until they can graduate and escape their homophobic school environments, life did “get better” for the student participants in this study once they graduated from their Catholic high schools. One could argue that life also got better for the teacher participants who were fired and otherwise forced out for not upholding Catholic doctrine related to sexual minorities in the sense that they no longer had to contend with such an oppressive system. It does not get better, however, for those teacher participants who must remain strategically closeted in order to keep their jobs and who look mainly to retirement as a rescue from the institutionalized homophobia that rules their days.

**Media Accounts**

The Canadian media have been instrumental in shedding light on various clashes between Catholic canonical law and Canadian common law in relation to non-
heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic schools. The “Media Accounts” chapter of this thesis is a snapshot of some of the more high-profile Canadian media reports of homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools. The media reports are meant to provide a context for the stories shared by the participants in the study and to highlight the important role the media plays in animating discussion around this little-known aspect of Canadian schooling. The reports range from important court cases to incidents of homophobic school policies. The court cases show a progression of same-sex legal rights in Canada following the enactment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, specifically the use of Section 15 – the equality rights provision – to challenge discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in Canadian schools. The media accounts also show a concerted Catholic resistance to the advancement of same-sex legal rights. This particular Catholic backlash is discernible in the appearance of new pastoral guidelines on the topic of “persons with same sex attractions” since the highly publicized advancements of same-sex legal rights in Canada.

This Catholic backlash is most clearly evident in the 2002 case of Marc Hall, an Ontario student who was granted an interlocutory injunction that allowed him to take his boyfriend as his date to his Catholic high school graduation dance. The Ontario bishops responded to this court decision by developing a restrictive pastoral guideline about how to manage sexual minority groups in Catholic schools, which they claimed was necessitated by the Marc Hall case. This 2003 pastoral guideline titled To All Involved in Catholic Education eventually developed into a much longer policy document released in 2004 by the Ontario bishops called Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation. Both pastoral guidelines are the official Catholic Church directives that
Ontario Catholic school administrators use when deciding how to manage matters of sexual diversity in Ontario Catholic schools, resulting in a number of homophobic school policies that have caught the attention of the media.

The “Media Accounts” chapter of this thesis describes and discusses the following homophobic school policies taken in Catholic schools throughout Ontario: Waterloo Catholic District School Board’s banning of the inclusive education book *Open Minds to Equality* because it mentions homophobia; Ontario’s Institute for Catholic Education’s circumvention of aspects of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s proposed 2010 *Health and Physical Education* curriculum that address gender identity and sexual orientation; the unwillingness of any Catholic school board in Canada to participate in a national survey on homophobia in schools; and the general disregard for aspects of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* that attend to homophobia, culminating in Halton Catholic District School Board’s banning of Gay/Straight Alliances from all of its schools.

This brief review of the media reports of homophobic school policies covered in the “Media Accounts” chapter of this thesis may give the impression that homophobic discrimination dominates Canadian Catholic schools and that resistance to such oppression is scant, or non-existent. From my experience collecting media reports of homophobic incidents occurring in Canadian Catholic schools since 2006, I found that this topic is rarely covered in the media. Of course, rare media coverage of homophobic discrimination in Canadian Catholic schools does not mean that such incidents are not occurring; it only suggests that such incidents may be underreported or that the media are slow to pick up on the significance of such stories. If negative stories about homophobia
occurring in Canadian Catholic schools rarely appear in the media, then positive stories about resistance to homophobic school policies and curriculum are even more rare. An explanation for this may be found in the sayings that circulate among journalists, such as: “bad news sells,” and “good news is no news.” These truisms find validity in a recent study that shows the topics that dominate the global news agenda tend to be crime, violence, politics, and government (Cross, 2010). Nevertheless, resistance to homophobic school policies and practices is discernible in the subtext of one media report’s oblique reference to Waterloo Catholic school officials’ referral of queer youth and their families to queer support services. Furthermore, Marc Hall’s reversal of his Catholic school’s homophobic policy that forbade same-sex dates at the high school prom is a major success story of resistance to religiously-inspired homophobic discrimination. Other success stories of resisting homophobia in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools can be found in the “Participants” chapter of this thesis. Even though they may not receive the same level of media coverage as incidents of homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools, resistance to this kind of discrimination is certainly occurring.

The fact that most of the stories in the “Media Accounts” chapter are about incidents of homophobia in the Catholic schools of Ontario does not mean that this is exclusively an Ontario problem. As the stories from the “Participants” chapter of this thesis attest, homophobia is very much a part of Catholic schooling in Alberta. The fact that stories of homophobic school policies in Alberta Catholic schools are rarely covered in the media can be attributable to any number of reasons. One possibility is that Alberta’s Ministry of Education is more conservative and less proactive about reducing homophobia in schools than Ontario’s Ministry of Education. Unlike its Ontario
counterpart, Alberta’s Ministry of Education has not devised an overarching *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* that attends to homophobia in schools (among other forms of discrimination), nor has it proposed a *Health and Physical Education* curriculum that addresses gender identity and sexual orientation in the sexuality unit. The absence of these measures suggests a more harmonious relationship between the Alberta Ministry of Education (and, by extension, the long-standing provincial conservative government) and Alberta Catholic school districts in terms of possible ideological clashes over educational policy and curriculum related to sexual diversity.

The ideology that underlies the policies and curriculum proposed by the Ontario Ministry of Education clashes with the values and traditions of Ontario Catholic school districts and these clashes invite controversy, which in turn invites media coverage. The media has been instrumental in heightening Canadians’ awareness of conflicts between Catholic canonical law and Canadian common law regarding sexual minorities in Canadian Catholic schools. Without media coverage, initial discussions among ordinary Canadians about the problem of homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools – the necessary groundwork for initiating progressive change – may never take place.

**Catholic Documents**

The homophobic incidents in Canadian Catholic schools, described in both the “Participants” and the “Media Accounts” chapters of this thesis, show that Catholic doctrine on the topic of non-heterosexuality is the guiding principle behind curricular and policy decisions taken in Canadian Catholic schools related to sexual minority groups and sexual diversity. Non-Catholics may not be aware of specific Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality and how it is disseminated in Catholic schools. Accordingly, the
“Catholic Documents” chapter of this thesis examines two important primary texts from the provinces of Alberta and Ontario written by Catholic bishops and Catholic education leaders to make clear to Catholic educators the official Catholic doctrine on non-heterosexuality.

The Ontario text is known as a pastoral guideline, a sanctioned letter from a bishop, or group of bishops, outlining official policy on a topic involving the moral care of a congregation. Several Catholic education leaders from the province of Ontario, along with members of the Education Commission of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, collaborated together to write the 2004 Ontario text titled *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation*. Catholic education leaders from the province of Alberta met regularly over a period of years to produce the 2007 Alberta text, a guide for Catholic educators called *Toward an Inclusive Community*, designed with a twofold purpose: 1) to facilitate the circulation of the Alberta Catholic Bishops’ 2001 pastoral guideline *A Resource for an Inclusive Community: A Teacher’s Guide for and about Persons with Same Sex Attractions*, and 2) to ensure that all Alberta educators respond in a similar manner when faced with media questions about how sexual diversity is managed in Alberta Catholic schools.

Both the 2004 Ontario text and the 2007 Alberta text liberally cite, or in some cases wholly reproduce, other groups of bishops’ pastoral guidelines (such as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*), including, of course, the all-powerful Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, and
relevant parts of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* dealing with the topic. Both the Ontario and the Alberta texts circulate and endorse the most damning elements of Catholic doctrine that describe “homosexual acts” as “acts of grave depravity,” which are “intrinsically disordered,” and which count among the list of “sins gravely contrary to chastity” (cited in OCCB, 2004a, p. 53). Both the Ontario and Alberta texts stress Catholic doctrine that calls non-heterosexuals to a lifetime of celibacy. Both texts recommend, in a subtle way, the corrective 12-Step program called *Courage* as a reputable resource to assist non-heterosexual Catholics in attaining the goal of lifelong celibacy. Sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church, *Courage* is a prescriptive program designed to arrest same-sex desire and even possibly transform non-heterosexual orientations into the heterosexual orientation, which the Catholic Church considers to be a more morally acceptable way of life.

The chief finding of the “Catholic Documents” chapter is that the Catholic concept of “pastoral care” for non-heterosexuals, derived as it is from condemning Catholic doctrine, is not any kind of “care” at all. The pastoral guidelines about how to manage non-heterosexuals in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools are not about developing empathy toward vulnerable sexual minority groups, but are instead guidelines on how to perpetuate the Catholic tradition of homophobia in Catholic schools.

*Theorizing the Data*

In order to help explain the phenomenon of homophobia in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools, the aforementioned data sets (participants, media accounts, and Catholic documents) are theorized using the following critical theories: Gramsci’s (1971) notion of hegemony, Althusser’s (1970/2008) concept of the Ideological State Apparatus,

Gramsci theorized that consent is as vital as coercion if ideological hegemony is going to function. Examples from the “Participants,” “Media Accounts,” and “Catholic Documents” chapters of this thesis show that many LGBTQ teachers and students strategically consent to their own domination by remaining closeted about their sexual orientation or gender identity in Catholic schools, and that hegemony controls the production of knowledge about sexual diversity in Catholic schools. Gramsci’s theories account for the ideological domination of Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality in Catholic schools, but they also allow for acts of resistance to Church-sanctioned homophobia.

Like Gramsci, Althusser posits that repression on its own cannot reproduce the existing social relations of production in any given culture and that ideology plays a vital role in the reproduction of the status quo. Drawing upon Althusser’s theory of the Ideological State Apparatus to illuminate the problem of homophobia in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools reveals that the State Apparatus that has the most power in these schools is not the provincial ministries of education, but the Vatican. In Althusser’s framework, resistance to ideological domination appears to be impossible.

Giroux critiques Althusser’s theory of the Ideological State Apparatus for relying too heavily on a reductionist concept of power and for overlooking the role of human agency in effecting change. Several examples of students in this study who resist the apparently seamless transmission of the Vatican’s values in their Catholic schools show
that Althusser’s notion of the Ideological State Apparatus is incomplete because of its inability to account for the power of human resistance to transform the status quo.

Foucault’s theory of disciplinary surveillance in the form of the Panopticon helps to explain how homophobia is institutionalized in Alberta and Ontario Catholic schools. The Panopticon reveals how the repressive force of Catholic doctrine causes students and teachers in Catholic schools to conform to the disciplinary regime required of them. Unlike Althusser, Foucault does not overlook the possibility of resistance. Foucault also theorizes the productive force of power, which can explain how the heteronormativity of the Catholic school unexpectedly invites new acts of resistance.

The chief finding of the “Theorizing the Data” chapter is that by analyzing the data collected for this study through the lens of critical theories, it is clear that the Vatican is able to assert a dominant and hegemonic power within Catholic schools. In terms of disciplining the sexual conduct of members of sexual minority groups, the Vatican’s power prevails over other governments such as provincial ministries of education and, by extension, the Canadian government in the publicly funded institution of the Alberta and Ontario Catholic school. The Vatican’s power is “panoptic” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 201) and operates by means of discipline, surveillance and self-regulation. Although the Vatican’s power is clearly a dominant force, it is not entirely successful in achieving total domination over sexual minority groups. This is evident in the instances of resistance that this study also documents. Institutions are certainly influential in forming individuals, but various critical theories show that the relations between institutions and individuals are not only those of repression and constraint. Analyzing the data of this doctoral study through the lens of critical theory shows that resistance is also
possible within power relations. Some vestiges of the influence of Canadian anti-discrimination law and equality rights legislation are discernible in acts of resistance undertaken by some participants in this study against the hegemonic homophobia of their Catholic schools.

**Further research**

This study is the only study of its kind in Canada, but further research is needed to test the findings of this study. Are other Canadian Catholic schools as homophobic as the ones in this study? Are other LGBTQ teachers and straight ally teachers in other Canadian Catholic schools at a similar risk as the teachers in this study for unfair dismissal due to a perceived violation of Catholic doctrine about non-heterosexuality? Are most LGBTQ students in other Canadian Catholic schools choosing to remain closeted about their sexual orientation or gender identity while still in Catholic school? Is resistance to homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools starting to gain momentum among students as lesbian student participant Abigail predicted?

This thesis examines homophobia in publicly-funded Catholic schools of Alberta and Ontario, but how homophobic are private Canadian Catholic schools? What are the experiences of LGBTQ students and teachers in the Catholic schools of Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories? Are other Canadian faith-based schools as unwilling to respect Canadian anti-discrimination law and human rights legislation regarding sexual minorities as the Catholic schools of this study do?

The scholarly studies highlighted in the literature review of this thesis show that proponents of anti-homophobia education have been relatively successful (to varying degrees) in introducing anti-homophobia education concepts in secular schools, but not in
faith-based schools. The resistance with which anti-homophobia education is met in Canadian Catholic schools points to a new challenge for this field of research. Anti-discrimination educational researchers must not overlook the monumental challenge to equity and inclusivity in public schooling posed by Catholic schools, operating under homophobic Catholic doctrine, that regularly disregard anti-discrimination law and human rights legislation pertaining to sexual minorities. This study’s revelations of the effects homophobic Catholic doctrine has had on students’ and teachers’ lives belies an apathetic attitude currently prominent in Canada that suggests it is normal for Catholic schools to perpetuate homophobic discrimination since that is simply a part of the Catholic faith. This type of silent, passive complicity is so normalized in Canada that attempting to point out the injustice of it makes this study stand out as bold and unusual. The plight of sexual minority groups in Canadian faith-based schools is a neglected research topic due to Canadians’ deep respect for the fundamental freedom of religion and a corresponding prevailing belief that religiously-inspired homophobic practices occurring in publicly-funded institutions such as schools are a normal part of religious freedom that should continue to go unchallenged. However, when the expression of particular religious beliefs calls for the suppression of the equality rights of sexual minority groups, it is no longer possible to experience diversity, equity and respect in Canadian faith-based schools. Anti-homophobia educational researchers must overcome their reluctance to include religious schools in their research.

**Implications for practice**

The practice of anti-homophobia education often begins in teacher education programs in schools of education throughout Canada. Although this doctoral study does
not specifically examine teacher education programs, schools of education are nevertheless an obvious way to begin the difficult work of redressing homophobia in public schooling. Teacher preparation courses about Canadian multiculturalism, diversity, equity and inclusion issues in education often feature a unit about sexual minority groups and the oppression these groups can face in schools. In these courses, pre-service teachers learn about their legal obligation to uphold various elements of Canadian law that protect against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in public schools. Anti-homophobia education for teacher candidates encourages beginning teachers to redress school-based homophobic discrimination by drawing upon age-appropriate, government-approved and school district-approved curricular resources that offer information about non-heterosexual family configurations, LGBTQ role models in history, the advancement of same-sex legal rights in Canada, and ways to reduce homophobic bullying in schools.

Much of this anti-homophobia education neglects to address ideological clashes between anti-homophobia education and religious education. Just because attempts to introduce anti-homophobia education in Canadian Catholic schools are met with strong resistance from Catholic education leaders does not mean that this problem should be ignored in Canadian schools of education. On the contrary, this particular clash between Canadian common law and Catholic canon law, articulated in the arena of Canadian public schooling, should be openly addressed in Canadian schools of education. Beginning teachers who are interested in redressing homophobic discrimination and who intend to teach in a Canadian Catholic school should be adequately prepared to navigate their way through these inevitable ideological clashes.
Developers of anti-homophobia education materials such as sensitivity training workshops, guides for creating safe and caring schools, and films about homophobia in schools should consider including specific sections about combating homophobia in faith-based schools. Religious freedom should not mean the freedom to ignore progressive educational policy and curricula designed to redress homophobia in Canadian schools in accordance with Canadian law. Developers of anti-homophobia education materials who may choose to design a specific set of materials for Canadian Catholic schools should not reference Catholic pastoral guidelines for managing “persons with same-sex attractions” in Canadian Catholic schools as these guidelines are fundamentally homophobic, counterproductive, and at cross purposes to the mandate of anti-homophobia education. Anti-homophobia education materials developed for use in Canadian Catholic schools may be more successful in reaching their intended audience if they convey a Catholic ethos and tone that reflects the language of the Catholic social justice tradition. However, the guiding ideology of any anti-homophobia education materials intended for Canadian Catholic schools should be the ideology of Canadian anti-discrimination law not Catholic canonical law.

Canadian provincial ministries of education have an important leadership role to play in promoting the practice of anti-homophobia education. The current government of Ontario attempts to move beyond basic coexistence and tolerance of difference through its innovative Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. The most progressive policy framework of its kind in Canada, Ontario’s Ministry of Education 2009 equity strategy identifies homophobia as a serious problem in Ontario schools and proposes the development of Gay/Straight Alliances as a way to mitigate this problem. The province
of Ontario has set the gold standard in promoting the promise of diversity to which other Canadian ministries of education should aspire. Other Canadian provinces and territories that continue to publicly fund Catholic schools, and where Catholic schools are subsequently well represented (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories), should take proactive measures to reduce homophobia in all their public schools, especially the religiously-inspired homophobia that this study shows particularly plagues Catholic schools.

These implications for the practice of anti-homophobia education at the levels of Canadian ministries of education and pre-service teacher education programs in Canadian schools of education may not assuage the frustration of members of the general public who are disappointed with the ongoing inability of education leaders to ensure schools are safe places for sexual minorities. An example of this frustration is the American It Gets Better campaign, which bypasses education leaders altogether and focuses instead on school-aged suicidal LGBTQ youth, urging them to persevere until they can graduate away from their homophobic schools. Changes at the levels of ministries and schools of education can take years to envision, create, and implement – years that suicidal LGBTQ youth simply cannot afford.

One way to implement anti-homophobia education more immediately is through the strategic use of grassroots organizations such as pride centres, LGBTQ youth groups, and camps for queer youth. The University of Alberta’s Camp fYrefly already trains LGBTQ youth to lead anti-homophobia education initiatives in their schools, but this excellent leadership training could be broadened to include strategies for LGBTQ youth in faith-based schools, especially Catholic schools. One of the chief findings of this study is
that students are more free to resist the doctrinal disciplining of their Catholic schools than teachers. Students are therefore more likely to lead the revolution against homophobic oppression in Canadian Catholic schools than teachers. Anti-homophobia education efforts should therefore concentrate on reaching student leaders.

Each of the key resistance leaders in this study (Jacob, Abigail and Hannah) tried to learn to unlearn the holy homophobia of their Catholic schools by visiting their local public libraries and by searching for queer positive information online. Leaders of LGBTQ pride centres across Canada could fulfill this pressing need on the part of LGBTQ youth in Canadian Catholic schools by devoting a section of their pride centre websites to information about undertaking anti-homophobia education initiatives in Canadian schools, including specific strategies for Catholic schools. Adult volunteers who work with LGBTQ youth in pride centres could also be specially trained to assist LGBTQ youth in planning anti-homophobia initiatives in their schools, with particular attention paid to the hurdles facing youth in faith-based schools such as Catholic schools. Similarly, Egale Canada (formerly Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere) could pay particular attention to the problems posed by Canadian Catholic schools in their latest campaign for anti-homophobia education in Canadian schools.

Although the stories of Jacob, Abigail and Hannah will not be familiar to LGBTQ youth in Canada hoping to undertake anti-homophobia initiatives in their Catholic schools, it is likely that many will be familiar with Leanne Iskander, whose story opened this dissertation. Iskander made national and international headlines for attempting to start a bona fide Gay/Straight Alliance at St. Joseph Secondary School in Mississauga, Ontario. Iskander’s story could be transformed into a teaching tool for future LGBTQ
students in Canadian Catholic schools who would like to follow her lead. With its new focus on assisting with anti-homophobia education in Canadian schools, *Egale Canada* could take the lead on this project and local pride centres throughout the country could post a link to *Egale Canada*’s profile on the steps Leanne Iskander took to resist the holy homophobia of her Catholic high school. That is, if Iskander is ultimately successful in establishing a bona fide GSA in her school – rather than the weaker version known as By Your SIDE Spaces (an acronym for safety, inclusivity, diversity and equity), which some Catholic education leaders reluctantly agreed to after much pressure and debate from Catholic students, Canadian human rights and civil liberties groups, the media, and members of the general public (Brown, 2011). Some Catholic education leaders accept By Your SIDE Spaces and other general equity clubs in Catholic schools on the condition that they do not have the word “gay” anywhere in their title and that they focus solely on homophobic bullying among students, rather than the anti-homophobia activism and lgbtq pride that typify a bona fide Gay/Straight Alliance.

Even as I write this, news reports appear daily in Canadian newspapers and online news outlets of the latest twists in Iskander’s fight to establish a GSA at St. Joseph Secondary School in Mississauga, Ontario. Coverage of the details and facts surrounding Iskander’s case by *Xtra! Canada’s Gay and Lesbian News*, *The Globe and Mail*, the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News*, and the *Canadian Television News Network* have the potential to ignite a spark that may encourage Canada-wide discussion and activism in Canada’s lgbtq communities. Catholic teachers, staff, and parents who do not agree with Catholic school policies regarding sexual minorities are increasingly stepping forward to express their opposition to homophobic discrimination in Canadian Catholic
schools. The outlook has been grim for many years, but these small pockets of discussion and youth-based activism provide hope that publicly-funded Canadian Catholic schools, should they continue to exist, will become actual places of learning rather than sites of homophobic oppression.
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Appendix A

Recruitment Script

From: tonya.callaghan@utoronto.ca
To: potentialparticipant@whateveraccount.ca
Date: XX January 2010 13:10
Subject: Invitation to participate in a research study
Mailed-by: gmail.com

Hi ________________________:

How are you? We met at _____________ – hopefully you remember. I don’t know if you recall, but I am doing this doctoral study at the University of Toronto. I’m tentatively calling it Holy Homophobia: Doctrinal Disciplining of Non-Heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic Schools. What do you think of that? As a lesbian, I certainly have experienced homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools both as a student and as a teacher, so I think the title works for now. Anyway, from some of our brief conversations, I remember that you identify as [insert one of the following: a lesbian, a gay man, a bisexual woman, a bisexual man, a trans-man, a trans-woman] and have had some kind of experience with a Canadian Catholic school. I am wondering if you might like to talk with me about some of your experiences? I am hoping to learn more about the conditions for other lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) people in Catholic schools and maybe get people to talk more about this little known aspect of Canadian schooling.

Rest assured, everything you would share with me would be kept completely confidential. You would even get to choose your own pseudonym. It wouldn’t be a major time commitment, 45 min. to an hour, max. It may take some energy out of you, though, so I plan to plan to reciprocate in the small ways that I am able to by offering you my time and expertise in return. This may take the form of helping you with some small task or problem, providing insight into the world of academia if this interests you, academic tutoring, providing some informal feedback on any writing you may be involved with such as applications for scholarships or study leaves, offering my extensive knowledge of resources available to LGBTQ individuals in Canada, and simply being an active and sincere listener. You will still be entitled to this type of compensation even if you leave the study.

If you’re interested, I will send you a couple of things soon. One will be the interview questions I will be asking, and the other will be a letter telling you everything you need to know about participating in this study and asking for your consent to participate in the form of your signature.

If you have any questions that you would like to ask me right now, go ahead and send me a return e-mail or, if you prefer, you can call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. I’m on Mountain Standard Time.

Please let me know either way if you are interested or not. Otherwise, I may think you didn’t actually get this message.

Looking forward to hearing back from you on this soon. I hope all is well with you.

Cheers,

Tonya

_____________________

Tonya Callaghan
PhD Candidate
Dept. of Curriculum, Teaching & Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M5S 1V6
Appendix B

Interview Guide (ON OISE/UT LETTERHEAD)

1. In what capacity are [or were] you involved in a Catholic school?

2. How do you self-identify as a sexual person or in terms of your gender?

3. What is your understanding of the Catholic Church’s teachings regarding homosexuality?

4. How did you come to learn about these teachings?

5. Are you aware of any lessons on the topic of homosexuality, sexual orientation, or gender identity occurring in any classrooms at your Catholic school? If not, how, if at all, do you think these topics should be addressed?

6. If there is no discussion of homosexuality, sexual orientation, or gender identity in formal classroom settings in your Catholic school, are there any other ways a person can learn about these topics in a Catholic school?

7. Has anyone attempted to bring guest speakers into your school to talk about their experiences as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) individual in a faith-based, Christian, or Catholic environment? If not, why do you suppose that is?

8. Has anyone attempted to set up in your school a support group for students such as a Gay/Straight Alliance or a Diversity Club? If not, why not?

9. What is your understanding of how the subject of human sexuality or family life is taught in your Catholic school?

10. Are you aware of any students from lesbian-led or gay-led families in your Catholic school? If so, what have their experiences been?

11. Are you aware of any school policies regarding LGBTQ students taking a same-sex date to the high school prom or a male-to-female transsexual participating in athletic competitions, for example? If not, what are your thoughts on these issues?

12. Are [or were] you aware of any other LGBTQ individuals in your Catholic school? Did you make any attempt to make yourself known to them? If so, how did this come about? If not, why not?

13. Are [or were] you able to be “out” about your sexuality or gender identity in your Catholic school? If so, to what degree? How important is this to you?

14. Have you had to be silent and secretive about your sexuality or gender identity while at your Catholic school? If so, how has this affected you? If not, what was your experience as an “out” individual like?

15. Have you experienced homophobia or transphobia during your time in your Catholic school? If so, how did you respond? If not, did you witness others experience this?

16. What supports or barriers affect your ability to be your true, authentic self in terms of your sexuality or gender identity in a Catholic school?
Appendix C

Informed Consent

January XX, 2010

Participant’s first and last name
Participant’s street address
Participant’s city or town, province, and postal code

Dear _____________________:

My name is Tonya Callaghan and I am writing to you as a Doctoral Candidate with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) to invite you to participate in a research project tentatively called *Holy Homophobia: Doctrinal Disciplining of Non-Heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic Schools*. As a lesbian, I myself have experienced homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools both as a student and as a teacher. I am interested in exploring the experiences of other self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals who have spent some time in a Canadian Catholic school. The purpose of the study is to learn more about the conditions for sexual minorities in Catholic schools and increase discussion about a little known aspect of Canadian schooling.

This research is part of my doctoral studies in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching & Learning at OISE/UT, supervised by Dr. Heather Sykes. The study has undergone a rigorous review process and has been judged to meet the ethical standards of the University of Toronto. I now seek your permission and consent to talk with you about your experiences and to share your story anonymously in the study.

If you agree, your participation would involve being interviewed either in person or over the telephone for approximately 45 minutes to an hour, at a date and time convenient to you. I will be recording and transcribing the interview for the purpose of further analysis. Once I have finished transcribing your interview, I will send it to you for your feedback. You will then be able to make any changes you want to it. Your insights, interpretations, and suggestions regarding the transcript and my preliminary re-telling of your story are most welcome.

The dissertation that results from this study will be published electronically on the University of Toronto’s research repository, which means it will be searchable by anyone with Internet access anywhere around the world. Additionally, the information you share with me will likely generate other forms of writing such as conference papers, journal articles, book chapters, or possibly a book. This type of public distribution of your experiences in a Canadian Catholic school may cause you to be vulnerable to someone else being able to determine who you are and what you have said. However, there are ways your identity can be protected. All real names of people and places that may identify you will be replaced with pseudonyms. You will be invited to modify these pseudonyms until you are satisfied about the degree of your anonymity in the data that will be analyzed. As the principal investigator, I will be the only person with access to the interview data (electronic tapes and transcriptions), which I will keep safe in both a password-protected area of my restricted-access computer and a locked filing cabinet. To allow for further analysis in the future, I will store the interview material for up to ten years and then shred or burn it. Any personally identifiable information that I will collect from you in the recruitment process (such as your name, address, etc.) will simply be used to keep the data organized and to stay in touch with you. This kind of information will not be used in any publicly disseminated materials.

Participation in this research project is voluntary. There will be no negative consequences attached to either declining to participate or withdrawing from participation in the study. You have a right to withdraw from this study up until January 30, 2011. At that point, I will be writing up the study and will not be able to remove your story. To withdraw from the study, simply contact me regarding your desire to discontinue your involvement and any information you shared with me will be destroyed.
I appreciate very much the time and effort required of you to participate in this study. I see this as a gift to the researcher and I plan to reciprocate in the small ways that I am able to by offering you my time and expertise in return. This may take the form of helping you with some small task or problem, providing insight into the world of academia if this interests you, academic tutoring, providing informal feedback on any writing you may be involved with such as applications for scholarships or study leaves, offering my extensive knowledge of resources available to LGBTQ individuals in Canada, and simply being an active and sincere listener. You will still be entitled to this type of compensation even if you leave the study.

Although you will have to expend your time and energy to participate in this study, you may also stand to gain in the form of personal empowerment. My pilot study shows that many non-heterosexuals experience a form of doctrinal disciplining that forces them into a Catholic closet while in Catholic school. Participating in a study of this nature may afford you the benefit of voicing feelings and thoughts about which you usually have to be extremely guarded and secretive. This may have a liberating effect on you. Conversely, the process of sharing your personal experiences in a Catholic school may also bring up complex emotions that may be difficult to manage. You have the right to refrain from answering any questions (attached separately), and you may stop the interview at any time.

If you would like any further information about your rights as a research participant, you are free to contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics at (416) 946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca

If you are not interested in reading the full dissertation that will be made available electronically via the University of Toronto’s research repository, you may request a brief summary of the research findings, which I would be happy to send you either as an e-mail attachment or through the regular post.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or tonya.callaghan@utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Professor Heather Sykes, at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or heather.sykes@utoronto.ca

Sincerely,

Tonya Callaghan
PhD Candidate

Please sign below if you are willing to participate in this research study. Be sure to retain one copy of this form for your own reference and return the second copy to me either as a scanned e-mail attachment or via the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided.

Signature
________________________________________

Print name
________________________________________

Date
________________________________________
Appendix D

Job's Termination Letter

Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools
6 St. Vital Avenue, St. Albert, Alberta, Canada T8N 1K2 • Telephone (780) 459-7711 • Fax (780) 458-3213

October 14, 2008

[Address]

Dear [Name],

This letter is to confirm the outcome of my telephone conversation with you October 8, 2008 and that is that you will be removed from the substitute teaching list effective Thursday, October 9, 2008.

The reason for removing you from the substitute teacher list follows a conversation we shared last June in which you indicated that you had been diagnosed with a gender identity medical condition and that you were undergoing physical gender changes from the female gender to the male gender.

In discussions with the Archbishop of the Edmonton Diocese, the teaching of the Catholic Church is that persons cannot change their gender. One’s gender is considered what God created us to be.

This school division is a Catholic school division that is both bound by the teachings of the Catholic Church and a division that lives these teachings. This school division purposely hires teaching staff who are models and witnesses to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Since you made a personal choice to change your gender, which is contrary to Catholic teachings, we have had to remove you from the substitute teacher list. Your gender change is not aligned with the teachings of the Church and would create confusion and complexity with students and parents as a model and witness to Catholic faith values.

I understand that you have served the schools well in your role as a substitute teacher.

Please know that if this division can assist you pastorally, do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Deputy Superintendent of Schools

[Signature]

[Name]

Superintendent of Schools

[Signature]

Dedicated by God...Nurtured by community...Every student a success!
Appendix E

Sample Transcript
Pseudonym: Hannah – names of pertinent people & places are fictitious

PI: In what capacity are (or were) you involved in a Catholic school?

Hannah: Ok, so I've been going to Catholic schools since kindergarten right through to junior high and high school. And, I was an altar server at Church and all that fun stuff.

PI: How long were you an altar server at church?

Hannah: I started altar serving in Grade 3 and I went right until Grade 8.

PI: And, was there any issue about females serving at the altar in your community?

Hannah: Umm, no. The priest that we had was actually really nice and accepting and pretty awesome.

PI: Oh, that's good! And so how do you identify, Hannah, in terms of your sexuality or gender?

Hannah: I am a lesbian.

PI: Ok, and when did you come out about this identity to yourself?

Hannah: I came out three years ago when I was sixteen, at school.

PI: At school. Right. And did you want to get into that right now?

Hannah: Sure.

PI: Ok, so why don't you just go ahead and tell me about that?

Hannah: All right. While I was in high school, I came out to my friends and my friends were actually really accepting. But, I found that some of the staff weren't. There was a guidance counselor that I could go to, but I found that ... the one day, I was going to an acceptance assembly and a teacher stopped me in the hallway because I was bugging her class and she told me to: "Be on your way 'mam' or 'sir' or whatever you are!" And, I brought that to the attention of administration, and they did nothing. And, with this same teacher, I was pulled out of the washroom once, and I was told that I was male and that I should be in the male washroom.

PI: Could you describe your appearance at the time so that I can get a sense of what you looked like?

Hannah: I had shorter hair, not too short but you could still kind of tell that I was female-ish. Like, it was kind of just below my ears, and I wore the guys' uniform but with the girls' shorts, so. Yeah, she wasn't very nice.

PI: So, she had a real issue with how you were presenting in terms of your gender? She couldn't understand you?

Hannah: Oh, yeah! And she -- with another one of my friends who was more masculine looking -- she was the same way towards her and did the same washroom thing to her as well.
PI: Oh, really? And, what's your take on this teacher? Like, is she a really traditional Catholic or something?

Hannah: I think she was, but, really, I met her for three seconds for her to apologize and say that "in no way was my remark meant to be hurtful towards you, or homophobic, or anything like that."

PI: And, what was it meant to be, then, if it wasn't those things?

Hannah: Well, exactly! We'll never know.

PI: Wow! And that's what came out of you bringing it to the administration? They said: "Ok, let's have a meeting with you and this offending teacher."

Hannah: Yep. She sat down with my guidance counselor for an hour and explained to my guidance counselor how "in no way did she intend to hurt my feelings or anything."

PI: And then you were brought into the room for a three second apology?

Hannah: Yes, I was brought into the room, I shook her hand, and she said: "You should try out for wrestling!" It was interesting.

PI: So, you don't know her very well, but what's your impression of her? Like, does she seem really conservative to you?

Hannah: She seems very conservative. She's not an open-minded teacher at all. She's definitely not someone I would ever feel safe approaching.

PI: Do you think that she espouses really traditional Catholic beliefs in her classroom?

Hannah: A few people I knew who were in her classes said she was very strict regarding that and she is very conservative.

PI: Does she teach religion? Or, what's her subject?

Hannah: No, she's actually a math teacher. But, I think she did some religion courses every now and then. You know how they switch them up.

PI: Yeah. And, so, that's what led to you wanting to leave school?

Hannah: Um, that is what pretty much threw me over the edge because it happened about two weeks after I had come out at school and, like, my family had already told me: "You are not a part of our household any more because you're this way."

PI: Oh, you got kicked out of your house, too?

Hannah: Yeah. I was kicked out of my house.

PI: Well, where did you end up living then?

Hannah: Um ... I ended up going to stay with my friends and I was there for about three months and then I switched over and stayed with my other friends and him and his dad and then, um, two friends and I ended up sharing a bachelor apartment. So, the three of us were there.

PI: At the age of 16?
Hannah: Yes.

PI: You had your own bachelor apartment?

Hannah: Yes.

PI: How did you pay for that?

Hannah: Um ... I worked. I ended up dropping out of school and getting a night shift job and working night shift at Tim Horton's.

PI: Holy cow!

Hannah: Yep. And, they had their jobs and ... it was good having three people in a bachelor. It was tiny. I slept in a closet, but we joked that I got to come out of the closet every morning.

PI: [laughs] That's excellent! Well, this is quite the bomb you're dropping here. Like, you had problems at home and problems at school. Wow! You mustn't have felt very safe at all in any environment, it sounds like.

Hannah: Oh, yeah. It was ... well ... before I ended up getting an apartment, I was in and out of the hospital because I did try to kill myself.

PI: Oh! I am so sorry to hear that.

Hannah: Yes. And I had to ... um ... I was admitted to hospital through the school. And, when I got there, the doctor tried to diagnose me with gender dysphoria because I looked like a man. He's like: "You look like a man, you talk like a man, you want to be a man!" I was like: "No! No! I really, really, really don't! I just like girls!"

PI: So, you don't identify as Trans in any way, I guess?

Hannah: No.

PI: That's interesting that they wanted to introduce you to becoming Transsexual at the hospital.

Hannah: Yeah. I was like: "Wow! What I just came out of and now you're telling me I want to be a man? No! Can't deal!"

PI: That is really interesting that you were so solid on that point because it seems like a lot of people are sort of "toying" with that. I don't know if you've noticed, but a lot of butch lesbians are sort of moving into the Trans territory; maybe just feeling it out for a bit, you know?

Hannah: Yeah. I've noticed that, for sure.

PI: You noticed that. And how come, in your case, you were so certain? Like, you were like: "Oh, no, that's not for me." How did you know that?

Hannah: Well, because I am fully comfortable in my body and I love my boobs. I love my vagina. I wouldn't trade them for anything. And, I know that's what I like.

PI: Right.

Hannah: They're beautiful!

PI: Ok. Well, good! So, that's good. That's a good realization because I work with a lot of youth
and there seems to be a lot of confusion about that. Like, if it's a young woman who is presenting as male but just because that's her aesthetic. Like, it's aesthetically pleasing for her. Then, they can sometimes move into confusion, brought on by others maybe, or, I'm not sure exactly how it works, but they start thinking: "Well, if I'm looking and walking like a guy, maybe I can just become one!" You know? And, I wonder about the thought process behind that.

Hannah: Yeah, that's really interesting. I know a few of my friends are Trans and I was like: "Wow! I thought you were just gay and now you're Trans! I can't wait until I get to hear your voice crack -- it's going to be so cute!"

PI: [Chuckles] So, those were two trans guy friends of yours?

Hannah: Yeah.

PI: Is that going ok for them?

Hannah: Yep. I know the one was having problems with his doctor because he was trying to get referred to a specialist and everything, but ...

PI: And, do they ever try to sway you over to that side and say: "Hey, why don't you try it too?"

Hannah: Well, I know they're like: "Go do drag! You should be Justin Beaver!" But, that's about it.

PI: Oh, really? Oh, interesting. So, back to that story you just mentioned about your parents ... so, what happened? Did they out you? Or did you come out to them? Did you say: "Hey, I'm a lesbian," and they said: "There's the door!" Or, how did it happen?

Hannah: No. It's an interesting story.

PI: Oh, good.

Hannah: What happened is that I ended up coming out at school. I didn't come out. My Guidance Counselor and my Vice Principal told my mom.

PI: Without your permission?

Hannah: Um ... I told them already that I was gay and I asked if they could help me and then ... um ... I know they went into a meeting because the day before I had made a fake field trip for my student slip and my mom called in to say that I had skipped and I was in the guidance counselor office saying, like: "I'm gay and I don't know what to do!" So, she came in -- my mom came into the school -- and I sat in the guidance counselor office while my guidance counselor and my VP were in another room with my mom talking about it and they came back and they're like: "So, your mom knows now, but she's not very accepting," and I said: "I tried to tell you this one!"

PI: Oh, you tried to warn the guidance counselor that your parents were not going to be accepting of this, so don't tell them?

Hannah: Oh, yeah. I said that I had been trying to tell my mom that I'm gay for, like, three months and every time I try to bring it up, she's like: "No, it's just a phase. It's the friends you're hanging out with. Gay people go nowhere in life. You should just kill yourself now."

PI: Your mom actually said that to you?

Hannah: Yep.
PI: You should kill yourself now?
Hannah: Yep.
PI: Your own mother said that to you?
Hannah: Yep. And, I'm going to amount to nothing in life because gay people go nowhere.
PI: Holy! Where was your father during all of this?
Hannah: Um, I actually have the fortunate circumstance of not living with him at all, so.
PI: Ok, he's a difficult man?
Hannah: Yeah.
PI: Oh. Ok. Huh. Wow! So, do you have any supportive family members? Like, an uncle or aunt ... someone like this?
Hannah: My uncle hates me so much that we got into a fist fight two days before Christmas because I'm gay.
PI: Oh. Oh, dear. What did he say to you?
Hannah: It was just that I'm not right, I'm an abomination, and I wasn't created in God's image.
PI: So, he used the Catholic language on you?
Hannah: Yes. And then he went to punch me and tell me to get out of the house and I was like: "No. We don't play this game."
PI: Whose house was that? Your mom's?
Hannah: That was at my grandma's house. Well, she was in the hospital.
PI: Oh. So, you were, at the time, in your bachelor pad, right?
Hannah: Um, well ... now I'm not. I live with my two guy friends.
PI: Ok. But, I mean, when this incident happened, like you were not living at home, right? You were living with your friends in a bachelor apartment?
Hannah: Oh, yes.
PI: Ok. So, you had just come over to grandma's for some kind of gathering at the house?
Hannah: Yes. It was a Christmas thing -- about two days before Christmas.
PI: And, so, you were invited there?
Hannah: Yep.
PI: And, then, this is how you were treated when you were there?
Hannah: Yep. And, he did the same thing at Easter, too.
He also tried to squeeze you out of the family gathering?

Hannah: Oh, yeah! I'm not invited to anything anymore. I've completely lost contact with everybody in my family except for my grandma.

What does your grandma say about all of this?

Hannah: Uhhh, my grandma thinks that I'm the best person ever. She's always like, "Well, let me tell you, during the war ..." and I'm like: "Awww grandma, let's not talk about that!" So, she's pretty great, but she's still, like, I would have expected her to be a little bit more traditional, but she's like: "People are people and just give them time. They're coming around." Like, my mom is coming around a lot.

Oh, really? Oh, that's good!

Hannah: Like, big time! In fact, if I'm dating someone, she'll be like: "Oh, I want to meet this person. Bring her over for dinner."

Oh, really? That's interesting! She's come a long way. Did she go to counseling or something?

Hannah: Yeah, we actually went to family counseling, but it was through a Catholic agency and I didn't get to say much.

So, the counselor was Catholic?

Hannah: Yes. It was through Catholic counseling.

And, they espoused those Catholic beliefs, like: "It's okay to be gay, just don't act on It."

Hannah: Yeah, pretty much just keep it to yourself. You don't have to let everybody know. You shouldn't tell everybody. It's for selective people to know.

This is what the counselor told you?

Hannah: Yeah.

Did the counselor try to get you to go to one of those conversion camps, where you're supposed to be transformed into straight?

Hannah: No, but my mom did.

Your mom tried to get to you go to one of those Courage Camps, or whatever they are called?

Hannah: Yep.

You're kidding? How did you get out of that, Hannah?

Hannah: I don't know. I really don't know. I would like to think it had something to do with me being like: "No. I'm not talking to you at all. This is the limit. This is the line. You're putting me as a person in danger doing this! It's not going to help me."

How did you know that, Hannah? Did you read about it? Or, you just had a gut feeling that this is wrong?

Hannah: Oh, I've read about it and I've done the online research and stuff.
PI: So, you know that every reputable psychological association in the western world has denounced it and that reparative therapy causes more harm than good?

Hannah: Oh, yeah.

PI: Did your mom listen to you when you tried to explain all of that research to her?

Hannah: She didn't at first. But, then, I kind of explained it like: "Okay, what if I were to send you to a camp and try to make you gay? And tell you that this isn't right? What if I were to tell you that your beliefs aren't right?" And so, I think that kind of hit home for her.

PI: Oh, ok. That's good. So, back at the counseling session with the Catholic counselor, basically, he or she just told you to be really quiet about it, to just be closeted?

Hannah: Yeah. You don't need to tell everybody. You shouldn't flaunt it because flaunting is inappropriate. I should just try to keep it to myself as much as I can. So, I was like: "Well, I'm not running down the street with a big Pride flag, or selling toasters, so I think I'm doing a pretty good job of keeping it to myself."

PI: And, there are some things that are not possible to change, like: the way you look, the pitch of your voice ... these things are how you are born, you know, so you can't do a lot about that. Did you get a chance to argue with this counselor at all? Or, did you just sort of shut up and take it?

Hannah: I just shut up, sat there, listened for my 45 minutes, nodded my head, agreed and left. Because whenever I tried to challenge anything, it would just be, like, this huge debate as to why I feel I should be this way, or why I feel I should be "out" in the gay community, and gay people are more promiscuous and I am more likely to get diseases. And I'm like: "No, I'm not, actually."

PI: Um-hmmm. So, you had the research to back that up -- you knew that's not true, right?

Hannah: Yeah.

PI: Ok, good. And, how many sessions did you have to go to?

Hannah: Um, I had seven sessions.

PI: With your mom there as well?

Hannah: Yep, that I went to with my mom. And, then, I had my separate counseling at a gay-positive counselor that I went to.

PI: Did that help you?

Hannah: Oh, yeah. I met her through "Ok-2-Be-Me" because I was helping that group. I saw her once a week. And, I did that for a year because I was in and out of the hospital. I tried to kill myself. So...

PI: Was that just one suicide attempt? Or, were there others?

Hannah: Oh, there were multiple. I tried to kill myself and I was admitted to the hospital. I wasn't allowed to see anybody because I was still under 18 and my mom had to give consent.

PI: Oh, great!

Hannah: So, of course, I saw none of my friends or anything, even though they attempted to
visit. And, they would let us out on day passes if we had good behavior, so at this point, I hadn't left the hospital for a month and a half. I was on just one tiny floor. I got out on a day pass, and my mom just let in and was like: "See? Being gay is just causing more trouble! Do you really want to do this? Bla-bla-bla-bla-bla-bla."

PI: And, of course, it was the homophobia that was causing you the trouble.

Hannah: Oh, yes. So, while I was out on the day pass, I ended up overdosing again and going back to the hospital and I was in isolation for a week and a half. And, then I tried overdosing again.

PI: At the hospital?

Hannah: Yep.

PI: How did you get access to the drugs?

Hannah: Well, it was while I was out on a day pass or, like, while I was in the hospital, I would cut. I would take the paper clips from paperwork and dig into my arm or I would get extra salt at lunch and put the salt on ice, because I would ask for ice to squeeze because it was a coping mechanism, and I put the salt on ice so it would burn me. And, I used pens and stuff.

PI: That's terrible! So, you're in a much better place now, though, it sounds like?

Hannah: Oh, yeah, definitely. It's been a long time and it took a while to even be able to talk about it, without fearing relapsing or anything.

PI: Um-hmm. Is it bothering you to talk about it now?

Hannah: Oh, no!

PI: So, back to the school because this is amazing that the school didn't have any regard for your safety by bringing your mother in and telling her that you're gay, even though you told the school: "Listen, she's not going to be amenable to this, you know." But, they still went over your head and just brought her in. And, then, lo and behold, right after that, you get kicked out of the house.

PI: Did the school recognize their responsibility in this regard? That is, were they aware that they outed you and were complicit in all the resulting consequences?
Hannah: Well, I know while I attended school, pretty much the guidance counselor would come and talk to me every single day and pull me out of class and be all like: "What's going on?" "Are you safe?" "Is there anything we need to do?"

PI: Do you think he or she felt guilty?

Hannah: I think she might have. I think she didn't know what she was in for, and I honestly didn't think it was going to balloon to what it did. I thought maybe, okay: "You're an abomination! Go to church! Pray! Go to confession! Pray more … pray at home! Go to church every Sunday. You're in deep crap!" But never did I expect all of this to happen.

PI: Wow! So, how did you arrive at the point of finally leaving school? Was it because you were in the hospital?

Hannah: Yep. It's because I was in the hospital and I missed the last month of school and I ended up failing my exams and then I tried to go back to school, and just because all the kids were saying: "Oh, Hannah just dropped off of the face of the earth the last month of school" -- because I was in all of the sports teams and everybody knew me -- and then I went back in September and I was there for not even three weeks because, like, I got back and no one was talking to me anymore, we had to do projects and people didn't want to do a group project with a lesbian.

PI: Really?! Your classmates?

Hannah: Yep.

PI: People who used to be your friends?

Hannah: Yep. People who we used to be on sports teams together ... we used to go to the gym ... all that stuff.

PI: Do you think this was something of their own choice? Or, do you think someone talked to them and said: "Okay, you should shun Hannah when she comes back."

Hannah: Ummm ... I think it was a combination of the two. Like, of course, the teachers were probably like, "Okay, Hannah is coming back to school now, bla, bla, bla." But, of course, one person finds out: "Oh, Hannah is gay" and then news travels fast.

PI: So, when you think back on St. Mary's, do you think that's a devoutly Catholic school? Like, are the people really strong believers there?

Hannah: Oh, yeah. Like, the kids ... I would say the kids are more rebellious, like: "Oh, yeah, religion sucks! Our parents are making us come here!" But, the staff and the faculty, they're definitely very: "We're going to go by our mottos."

PI: Well, weren't you surprised, then, that the students were doing that? Given that you said they were kind of rebellious and didn't like religion.

Hannah: Oh, yeah. I was totally surprised.

PI: Did the school know the reason for your dropping out?
Hannah: Um ... they knew most of it. I was just like: "Do you know what? It's not a good time for me right now. I can't deal with this." I know the one girl in my class was on the school newspaper and she was going to do a newspaper article because I was "the only lesbian in the school" and what it was like to be gay in the Catholic school, and the first question she asked me, in front of my guidance counselor, was: "Why did you choose to be gay?" And I stood up and said: "If you're asking me that question, I'm not doing this interview."

PI: Did she understand what you were upset about?

Hannah: Oh, yeah. Like, I tried to explain it to her and the guidance counselor tried to explain it to her, and she was like: "But I don't understand!" And, I said: "Okay, why did you choose to be straight?"

PI: Wow. Interesting. What is your understanding of the Catholic Church's teachings regarding homosexuality?

Hannah: I knew that it was very taboo. It was not accepted. I know, I remember sitting with the old ladies in church with the teas and talking about that: "Oh, that girl over there who has her friends over and she has that girl that lives with her and that's not right at all, and we don't approve of that kind of thing."

PI: So, you learned about the Catholic beliefs through the old ladies at the church?

Hannah: Oh, yes.

PI: Did you learn about the Catholic beliefs in any other way? Like, at school for example?

Hannah: Not regarding homosexuality, especially not in elementary school.

PI: So, they never mentioned homosexuality? Or, "Persons with Same-Sex Attraction" or anything like that?

Hannah: They did. When they did, it was just: "Oh, and there's gay people too. Now, onto why you should renounce it." And that was it.

PI: That was during a sexuality class I guess? So, they never actually told you about the Catholic doctrine regarding homosexuality?

Hannah: Nope, never, ever. We were never informed, even in high school. In high school, you did not talk about that subject. And, no one talked about it and you had to do that tiny unit in religion, but that unit was saved till last, until, like, the end where: "Okay, if we need to do it, to fill up some time, then we'll do it."

PI: You mean the sexuality unit?

Hannah: Yeah.

PI: Did you ever see any lessons about the history of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer people? Like, the Stonewall Riots, or homosexuals during the Holocaust?

Hannah: Nope. When we did our Holocaust unit, they just said: "Yeah, and homosexuals were branded with this," and that was it. Never, ever, did we talk about the Stonewall Riots or any influential member of the homosexual community in the past or in the present.

PI: Or, you never heard of any literature being taught that has LGBTQ characters or themes,
or anything?

Hannah: No.

PI: Or, teachers mentioning any LGBTQ people that are famous, or celebrations such as Pride Day, or events such as the National Day Against Homophobia or the day of silence?

Hannah: Nope. And, when I tried to do the Day of Silence, I got in trouble.

PI: Oh, really? What happened there?

Hannah: Well, I talked to my guidance counselor and I said: "I googled this fun thing to do and it's the Day of Silence, so I'm going to give it a try!" And, the teachers were like: "Why aren't you talking? Why aren't you answering questions? This is not approved by administration, so you can't do it." Even though I was just one person.

PI: Just one person. And when you went online, did you see that they had those downloadable little cards that you could give the teachers saying: "I'm observing the National Day of Silence ..."

Hannah: Yep. I didn't use them because I didn't have a printer. I wore a sticker. I tried to explain to the guidance counselor and she was, like, "You can do it, I'm just not telling you that it's approved or anything and it's off the record, as in, you can do it as an individual, but you have to follow rules, and, if a teacher asks you to speak, you should probably speak. It's not worth the fight."

PI: So, you went to see the counselor the day before just to get guidance about how to go through this Day of Silence?

Hannah: Yep.

PI: So, were you satisfied with her answer?

Hannah: Oh, no.

PI: During your schools, like either junior high or high school, did anyone attempt to bring in guest speakers to talk about their experiences as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer individuals in a faith-based, Christian, or Catholic environment?

Hannah: I know my guidance counselor wanted to get people to talk, but she actually approached me after I dropped out of school, and asked: "Would you like to talk?" And, I was like: "Well, I think that, with students you need someone a little more stable and able to talk about my experiences." Like, now, I could do it fine. But, it's definitely needed.

PI: Yeah. So, that guidance counselor was thinking later: "Maybe we should get some queers in here to talk to the youth in school."

Hannah: Yeah, and she even wanted me and my friend to go to the Guidance Counselor Convention in Toronto -- the big one. She was, like: "You should speak there and share your experience and just give us some insight and help us help the gay kids that are following you."

PI: Uh-huh. And, do you happen to know if that was a Guidance Counselor meeting for those teaching in the Catholic system, or was it for both systems?

Hannah: Yeah, it was for the Catholic system in Ontario. They have their yearly meeting in Toronto, I guess.

PI: Ok. And, what did you say to that request?
Hannah: I didn't end up getting back to her because it was, like, just after I got out of the hospital and I still wasn't comfortable.

PI: So, you weren't even, at all, together or stable at that stage to be doing something like that. Didn't she realize that?

Hannah: I think, maybe, after she asked me and maybe when I said: "No. Not right now. It's not a good time." And she was, like: "Ok. I understand."

PI: Did you feel, in your conversations with her, that she might have felt guilty about outing you to your family?

Hannah: I know she felt really bad. And, she was like: "I'm putting in all the supports I can." I know she hooked me up with -- like, when I couldn't do my counseling appointments because I was in school, they had a counselor come to the school and see me, and they set up a room. And, so ... she felt bad.

PI: She did the best she could after the fact. After "all hell broke loose," as you said earlier.

Hannah: Yeah. And she was like: "I didn't know it was going to get this bad." And, I was like: "I didn't know it was going to get this bad, either." And, I know, like, my mom was harassing her at her place of work. That's how bad it got.

PI: What was your mom doing?

Hannah: Just calling her and telling her that she didn't have her permission to talk to me and she shouldn't be speaking to me and she doesn't want her to be talking to me at all and to just leave me alone.

PI: Is that because your mom thought this guidance counselor was too affirming of homosexuality or lesbianism?

Hannah: Yeah.

PI: So, she didn't want you to hear anything positive at all?

Hannah: No.

PI: Didn't your mother realize that that could lead to another suicide attempt? That is, if you had no one affirming around you?

Hannah: I don't know if she realized that or not, but she definitely thought it was going to solve everything. I was pretty much in isolation in my own home.

PI: Wow. So, where did you get the strength to help you get through that at the time? That was a tremendous time in your life.

Hannah: Well, I remember, at one point, I was so down. I was sitting in front of my counselor and I was looking at her and I was, like: "My 17th birthday is coming up and I'm not going to be alive for it." I was like: "I'm telling you this right now. This is how it's going." And she was like: "Never say never. You're amazing. You're strong. Look what you've been through." And I kind of sat back and I was like: "I've been through a hell of a lot, and I'm still going through a lot and, as much as I just want to give up and call it quits, and how easy it would be to do that, there's unfortunately other people that are going through the exact same thing, or worse. They know how I feel and I know how they feel, and they're not giving up either and things will, eventually, get better."
PI: Yes! That's one of the reasons I am doing this research as well so people can hear these stories, you know, and become more empathetic to the problems that exist in Catholic schools for sexual minority groups. So, would you say that the counseling that you received at the time was also a source of strength for you?

Hannah: Oh, yeah, definitely. I know that, without that, I can guarantee that I would not be alive today, for sure.

PI: So, you really liked the counselors you had -- even the one that you had at the school -- she was decent?

Hannah: Yeah.

PI: Despite the fact she called your mom in and everything, but still she tried to help you afterwards.

Hannah: Yeah.

PI: Well, that's good. And, what about your friends? Did they stick by you?

Hannah: Yeah. Ummm ... I actually have my three friends ... one is my friend Jane. She went to high school with me and she's a lesbian, too, and we both went through the same stuff at the school. We're still friends now. We went through a lot and my two straight boys -- I call them -- they were there when I came out and I'm, like: "Guys, like, I'm a lesbian." And Kevin looked at me and he's like: "I knew it! I knew it, man! You're one of the guys!"

PI: Oh, that's nice!

Hannah: Yeah, and I was so happy and they were like: "Now, we're two and a half men!" So, I was like: "Liam's the half!" So, we always joke about that.

PI: So, they were friends of yours for quite some time, I gather?

Hannah: Yep. We actually met in Grade 10 auto class.

PI: Oh, auto shop? Wow! How did you become friends with two straight guys?

Hannah: Well, what happened is me and another girl that were in the class, we were the only two girls, and we got stuck cleaning the tools in the tool room and washing the oil rags.

PI: Is that because you're female you had to do this?

Hannah: Yes, because we're female and that's what we do best. So, we were doing that and they were like: "We don't want to do welding right now. We don't want to do anything." And, they just came and sat with us in the tool room and then they threw the oil rags around and lit something on fire and I was, like: "We're best friends! It was meant to be!"

PI: [Laughs] So, they stuck by you during all of this?

Hannah: Yeah. They stuck up to the auto teacher whenever he tried to get us to not be included in stuff, and they stuck up to the one teacher that pulled me out of the washroom. She was my friends' wrestling coach. He was like: "I'm not going to practice anymore. You can go screw yourself!"

PI: Wait a second ... this really conservative teacher was also the wrestling coach?

Hannah: Yep.
PI: So, did you get any lesbian vibe off of her?

Hannah: Uhh ... no.

PI: I just think that's interesting, like, it's harder to imagine a straight woman doing wrestling, you know?

Hannah: Yeah. It was the rugby coach that was lesbian.

PI: Ok. Did you get to know the rugby coach?

Hannah: Ummm ... kind of ... not really.

PI: Did she know you were going through all this crap at school?

Hannah: Ummm ... I don't think so.

PI: Didn't the guidance counselor try to hook you guys up and maybe allow you to have a mentor in the school?

Hannah: No. They're not allowed to talk about it. They're not allowed to out each other.

PI: Yes, the confidentiality requirement.

Hannah: Yep.

PI: But, she never suggested that you could be friends with other lesbians in the school, if you found any?

Hannah: No.

PI: Did you know of any other lesbians in the school?

Hannah: Ummm ... it was Jane and me and then, when Jane graduated -- she was a year before me -- I was left on my own.

PI: You know, of course, that the conservative estimate is that 10% of the population is queer, so there had to be other lesbians and gay students there in the school, but they just weren't out, I guess.

Hannah: Yes, but they weren't out.

PI: So, you couldn't figure out who was who?

Hannah: I, actually, one day one of my friends, Kevin, he's like: "Yeah, I'm gay, but don't tell anybody." I was like: "Okay. I won't." But no other lesbians did I ever meet in my grade.

PI: And, you never tried out for rugby?

Hannah: Oh, I was on the rugby team. But, like, the coach -- because we had three coaches -- the lesbian coach ... she kind of kept to herself and made it to practice and did stuff, but she never really did get too involved with this commitment.

PI: Yeah, and do you have any theories about that? As to why that was?

Hannah: Ummm ... I think it's just to cover her own ass.
PL: Yeah, so she wouldn't be outed, kind of thing, if she befriended a lesbian student?

Hannah: Yeah.

PL: Right. Interesting. Wow, this is quite the story. So, back to the school questions ... did anyone ever attempt to set up in your school a support group for students such as a Gay/Straight Alliance or a Diversity Club?

Hannah: They've been trying for four years.

PL: You know the people that are trying?

Hannah: Yep.

PL: They're students, right?

Hannah: It's, actually, students that graduated three years ago to when I dropped out. And, I think, even now some people are still pushing for it. But, it will never happen. Ever.

PL: So, these people are trying to make it happen because they feel bad about what happened to you?

Hannah: No. They actually -- because before what happened to me, there was worse!

PL: You're kidding!

Hannah: Other people got worse.

PL: You're kidding ... there's a worse story?

Hannah: Oh, yeah.

PL: Like, actual suicide or something?

Hannah: There's a lot worse. There's, like ... because, about three years before my grade, there was a bigger homosexual population in the school. And, they were trying to get a GSA set up ... they're still trying, even though they're graduates. I know I still go in to talk to that guidance counselor.

PL: Oh, do you?

Hannah: Yeah, oh yeah. Her and I are, actually, really good friends.

PL: That's good.

Hannah: I'll go in and say "hi" and ask if anything has gotten better and she'll say "no," as always.

PL: Huh. So, what's the roadblock?

Hannah: It's the board. I know administration would totally -- well, at least when I was there - - administration would kind of be on board for it, but it's pretty much the school council -- because you have to run it by the school and the parent council, and, if they don't give approval, you're going nowhere! And, in my year, they actually ended up taking out the one book on homosexuality.

PL: Out of the library?
Hannah: Out of the library, yeah. And, just making it a teacher resource only.

PI: You're kidding!

Hannah: Yep. And, I went to that board meeting and I put up my hand to speak, because I was going to talk about what happened to me, and they looked directly at me and said: "Oh, well, I guess if there are no more questions, or comments, we can close the meeting."

PI: And they knew your hand was raised, but they just skipped right over you deliberately?

Hannah: Yep.

PI: Did you say anything? Like, "Hello? My hand is raised here!"

Hannah: Oh, I was standing up and a few of the older ladies said stuff too and they came up to me afterwards and I told them my story and they were, like: "Holy crap!" I was, like: "Hey, my story is nothing compared to other people's!"

PI: Wow! So, do you know of actual suicides, then?

Hannah: I know of one person in the hospital, while I was in there ... he ended up ... uh, he killed himself because his parents ... every time he got out on a day pass, they would bring him to church to go to confession.

PI: He was from a Catholic family too?

Hannah: Yeah.

PI: Was he also at your school?

Hannah: Um ... no, he wasn't at my school.

PI: Wow! That's horrible. I think that's really interesting, though, that there are people who have already graduated and they still feel so strongly about this that they want to be mentors to the students that are currently in the school to help them to set up a GSA.

Hannah: Yeah. Well, I guess we're a caring bunch. We know what we went through and how we suffered alone and I don't want anybody to have to do that alone. Because I had the strength -- just barely -- but, that doesn't mean someone else will.

PI: So, of all those people who supported you during that time, mostly counselors and your friends, can you think of who was the strongest support for you?

Hannah: My strongest support would probably be my two best friends, Jane and Cheryl, when they were dating because I was like: "Oh, look at my lesbian friends that I know and I know no one else," and they were like: "Ok, we're going to bring you here, we're going to bring you to AQUA, and we're going to bring you here, and we're going to get you a fake ID and sneak you into the gay bar, and we're going to sneak you out of your house and you can crash at our house, or whatever!"

PI: Were they living together?

Hannah: They were living together, yeah.

PI: So, they had graduated just for one year and they were already living together?
Hannah: One was -- Cheryl -- was in college and living in Jane's parents' basement, and Jane's parents didn't know they were together. Three years! They dated for three years and the parents had no clue.

PI: [Laughs] That is so funny! They're clueless parents, hey?

Hannah: Yeah!

PI: So, you mentioned earlier about the human sexuality component of religion class, do you remember how it was taught in school?

Hannah: It had a primarily straight theme, being like: "Ok, save yourself for marriage. When you get married, your goal is to procreate and procreation is good. Never mind overpopulation! And, sex isn't fun. It's only for procreation and you shouldn't do it. And, if you do it with someone of the same sex, well that's just shenanigans."

PI: So, they actually mentioned same-sex attraction?

Hannah: They mentioned it. They'd be like: "it's frowned upon in our community ... it's not ideal."

PI: So, you did learn a little bit about the Catholic Church's doctrine on homosexuality in those classes, I guess?

Hannah: That's all I learned. Like, what I just said.

PI: Just that one-liner?

Hannah: Yep. And then: "Okay, back to raising children."

PI: So, they actually said, like: "It's not accepted within the church and it's an abomination, just so you know."

Hannah: Yes.

PI: Hmmm. And, are you aware of any students from non-heterosexual families, so students who are being raised by two moms or two dads in your Catholic school?

Hannah: I know there was one in elementary school and everyone made fun of him. Everybody. Every single person made fun of him.

PI: So, you were only in school with him when you were in elementary school?

Hannah: Yes. That was from Grade 4 to Grade 7.

PI: He was really bullied then?

Hannah: Yeah, everybody picked on him and said that he is gay ... and he ended up going out with this girl, just to prove that he wasn't.

PI: He had two moms or two dads?

Hannah: Two moms.

PI: Do you know if the administration ever got involved to try to protect him?
Hannah: I have no clue.
PI: Did you ever befriend him?
Hannah: We talked a little bit and I know we went ice skating one time ... like, he's a really nice guy. But, other than that, he just kind of kept to himself and then he just stopped going to school.
PI: Hmmm ... or, he went to a different school maybe?
Hannah: Yeah, I think he moved.
PI: So, how would the students bug him? They would call him names?
Hannah: Oh, yeah. They'd say: "You're a fag!" "You have two moms because your mom can't get a dude. She can't blow cock, bla, bla ..." All of that stuff. "How were you created? You have two moms, you fucking queer!" All that.
PI: How did they know he had two moms? Because they would come and pick him up?
Hannah: Ummm ... I think so. That was it. Or, I think what happened one day someone went over to his house for a project and ended up seeing that he had two moms and just kind of spread it around from there.
PI: That's terrible. So, are you aware of any school policies regarding LGBTQ students taking a same-sex date to the high school prom, or a male-to-female transsexual participating in athletic competitions, for example?
Hannah: I know Jane was allowed to take Cheryl to prom. That was the year before I would have graduated. She checked with administration and everything and I know that, like, I think it was three days and then it was the day of the prom when we finally found out and Jane came running down the hall, like, crying to me, being like: "I can bring her to prom, I can bring her to prom!" And then Leslie ended up bringing her girlfriend to prom too.
PI: Oh, Leslie is another friend of yours?
Hannah: Yep.
PI: Leslie is a lesbian who was in your grade?
Hannah: She was a grade older than me. She was in Jane's grade.
PI: So, how did she get that permission to bring her girlfriend?
Hannah: She just went and talked to the guidance counselor and the guidance counselor explained the need that, hey, this is someone in our school community. This is their prom; let them do what they want. And the students agreed, too. They were like: "We don't care."
PI: Oh, she approached the Student Council about it?
Hannah: Yes. And they were, like: "Yeah. You can buy a ticket for anybody else."
PI: Did the counselor tell your friend, Jane, the kinds of things that other counselor told you, like: "Tone it down. As long as it's not in everybody's face ..." and that kind of stuff?
Hannah: I think it was a general, like: "Don't be all, like, making out," and stuff. But, from the pictures that I saw, there were no restraints that night.
[Laughs] And, did they dress in, kind of, butch-femme? Or, did they both go in dresses?

Hannah: I know Jane and Cheryl kind of did the butch-femme dynamic, kind of thing. They went like that. And Leslie mixed it up and wore a dress, mostly as a joke.

PI: Oh, interesting! So, two girls went together in dresses?

Hannah: Yeah, and Leslie's girlfriend is very androgynous so she went more of the masculine side.

PI: Oh, so she had a pants suit on, or something like that?

Hannah: Yes, and the guidance counselor actually ended up going and she wore a pants suit too.

PI: Oh, really?

Hannah: Yeah.

PI: So, what do you think about that guidance counselor? Is she straight?

Hannah: No, she's not. Definitely not.

PI: She's not?

Hannah: No.

PI: That was a lesbian guidance counselor?

Hannah: Yep.

PI:Wow! That's interesting to me ... is she closeted at school, then?

Hannah: I don't know. I think that most of the faculty knows, or they assume. But, like, she'd have pictures of her and her partner on, like, kayaking trips and stuff in her office. But, like, nothing, like, too risky. There would also be, like, the advertisement for the local gay group and, like, a rainbow on the wall saying: "Be positive!" But, that's about it.

PI: So, she was allowed to put that advertisement up in her office?

Hannah: Yep.

PI: That's interesting because that is usually considered to be contrary to Catholic directives because often times they only want things like Courage being mentioned, like the Catholic groups for what they call "Persons With Same-Sex Attractions" kinds of things. They don't usually want any affirming information being given out by the counselors, so I guess she was going against the rules there.

Hannah: Apparently.

PI: Um-hmmm. Wow! So, did she come out to you as a lesbian? Like, how did you know?

Hannah: She never came out to any of us, she just kind of took Jane and I under her wing and would be like: "Hey, hey, there's a meeting going on tonight for the board to take out this book that promotes homosexuality, or shows it in a positive way." Or: "Hey, this is happening, go to this!" And, like, we'd go and she'd be there with her "friend." She goes: "Oh, this is my friend."
PI: But, that's her lover, though, right?

Hannah: Yep.

PI: So, she has to introduce her lover as her friend?

Hannah: Yep.

PI: Is she married to that woman?

Hannah: Uhhh ... no.

PI: Uh-huh. Wow. So, looking back now, this guidance counselor was probably closeted at school, right?

Hannah: Ummm ... at school, I am definitely going to say for her professional life she is. Like, and I know that I would be like: "Ohhh, guess what? I'm friends with a lesbian!" And my friends would be like: "No, she's not! You're just crazy! You think everyone's a lesbian, Hannah! Just because you are, doesn't mean everybody's a lesbian. Sorry."

PI: Wow! That's just incredible! That counselor must have felt so bad when you got kicked out of your home ...

Hannah: Oh, yeah! She definitely did! She was like: "I never would have expected any of this to happen." I was like: "I didn't expect it to happen, either, but I warned you she wouldn't take kindly to it."

PI: So, that guidance counselor is Catholic, right?

Hannah: Yep.

PI: So, prior to coming out at the age of 16, did you have to be silent or secretive about your sexuality or gender identity while you were in your Catholic school?

Hannah: Ummm ... I didn't tell anybody that I didn't trust. I just kept it to myself.

PI: Ok, for how many years did you do that before you came out?

Hannah: When I was in Grade 7, I was like: "Yeah, I'm bisexual. Like, I really like this girl in my class and she likes me and this is hot!" And, then, I know the one girl who had mostly guy friends, and one day she looks at me and says: "How come all your friends are guys? You must be a lesbian!" And I was like: "No, I'm not!" I was like: "What are you talking about? I'm not a lesbian!" And then, lo and behold, Grade 10 comes around and who's a lesbian! So, I kept quiet from Grade 7 till Grade 10.

PI: Hmmmm. And, how did that affect you, having to stay quiet like that?

Hannah: Ummm ... I stopped going to church. I used to go to church all the time. I didn't go to church because I didn't feel safe anymore. I was like: "My appearance! What are they going to think? They're going to know! They're like mind readers! They can tell!" And, I stopped altar serving. I completely withdrew from the parish ... completely ... 100% ... just stopped going to youth group, stopped helping out at youth groups ... everything!

PI: Was that really hard for you? Because, it sounds like you were a devout Catholic before?

Hannah: Oh, yeah! Like, it was really hard because it was my belief; it was something that was supposed to be my rock. Those beliefs are what I was raised on. They got me through. This is what I
was taught was right. And, then, all of a sudden -- bam! In just one second, everything just turns around
and then something that you had -- all this faith that you've placed your whole life on, and based it around -
- is all of a sudden not for you any more, it's against you. And, you're like: "Wow! What do I do?"

<>3163492>PI: Did you have a lot of grief over that? Over losing that?

<>3165514>Hannah: Oh, yeah, definitely. Because I know, like, religion was a huge part of everything.
Like, I wasn't raised in the greatest of neighborhoods, so I'd go to church and that was my out so I didn't get
in trouble and, all of a sudden, that out was just taken from me. And, I wasn't accepted there any more.
And, it's almost as bad as your family turning around and saying: "you're not accepted in our family any
more."

<>3198125>PI: When you say you weren't accepted, you describe it as you self-selecting and choosing to
leave but now you're saying the people were not accepting you?

<>3207557>Hannah: It was just kind of, like, once someone in the parish finds out, it's just kind of like:
"Oh, did you hear so-and-so's daughter is a ... goes this way?" And: "Oh, well, we better keep our daughters
away." Or: "Oh, maybe we should just introduce her to a nice boy. A nice boy will fix her up good." Or:
"Oh, it's just a phase!"

<>3226919>PI: So, they knew you were a lesbian, then? Before you came out, they knew?

<>3231027>Hannah: Yep.

<>3231451>PI: Just because of the way you were looking?

<>3232536>Hannah: Yep.

<>3233680>PI: And, then, you felt that they were not accepting you because of that realization?

<>3237078>Hannah: Yep.

<>3239086>PI: Oh, I see. And, then, you decided to just take yourself out of that scenario because of that
lack of acceptance?

<>3243202>Hannah: Yep. I was like: "I'm just going to draw back and not place myself in situations like
this."

<>3253422>PI: I see. So, other than the major experiences of homophobia that you just described at
school, are there other incidents that happened to you that were maybe not as heavy as that one where you
were outed by your guidance counselor?

<>3269279>Hannah: Um ... I think I'm a magnet for homophobia, actually. Like, I'm the biggest walking
stereotype so the one day ... this year, on St. Patrick's Day, I was with the guys and we went out to one pub
and I left to go get a drink and the bartender, she looks at me and she's like: "Can I have your ID please?"
So, I was like: "Oh, ok." And I gave her my ID. She looks at the ID and she looks back at me and she goes:
"No, I can't accept this ID. This ID is for a woman. You are not a woman." And, I was like: "You're
kidding, right? I have a passport, too. You want to see that?" And she was like: "No." And then she was
like: "Why are you doing this to yourself? Like, why are you dressing like this? You shouldn't be doing this
to yourself!" The guys stood there and they were like: "Wow! Did she just say that?" And I'm like:
"Welcome to my life!" They're like: "What? Are you upset?" I'm like: "No. The person is just ignorant. I
don't care. I'm still going to drink beer."

<>3327236>PI: Did she sell you a beer in the end?

<>3327602>Hannah: Yeah.
PI: What about in school? Did you experience anything like that in school?

Hannah: Other than that teacher that I told you about, there was just ... one day my friend and I ... we were trying to do a project on the LGBTQ community, and we tried to access some gay positive websites, but they were blocked. Then, we went on the Christian reform -- all those websites that say, like, "Gay people should burn in hell," and one actually had "Burn in hell," etc. -- and they were allowed.

PI: Wow!

Hannah: They didn't have them blocked, but they had every single gay positive site blocked.

PI: So, with one of those Net Nannies or something?

Hannah: Yes. So, we were like: "Ummm ... hello! We're trying to do a project and we can't do it because everything that says we're positive is blocked and everything that says we should "Go die and burn in hell" we can access."

PI: You brought that up to the teacher?

Hannah: Yes.

PI: And, what did the teacher say?

Hannah: We brought it up to the teacher, the teacher went to the administration, and administration talked to the computer person and they ended up unblocking and blocking sites and stuff.

PI: Oh, really? Just temporarily for you guys? Or, for the rest of the school?

Hannah: Ummm ... I don't know if it's still like that or not, but ...

PI: Wow! So, did you feel really vindicated, then, that you got your way in the end?

Hannah: Oh, yeah! Jane and I were, like, triumphant! We were like: "Triumphant Tim Horton's!" We felt like Rocky. We were like: "Yes! Yes! Projects! Queers are good!"

PI: [Laughs]. I love that story! That's excellent! So, that's a great example of resisting discrimination. Do you know of any other ways that a person can resist discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity that may be occurring in a Catholic school?

Hannah: I know what I learned is that you pretty much have to stick up for yourself. And, just like they won't take "No" for an answer, you can't take "No" for an answer. And, I know, like right now, like, I regret just settling for a handshake from that teacher. Because that could have killed me, and they never would have known!

PI: Can you elaborate on that? Like, what do you mean?

Hannah: Well, that's what ... after that experience is what really sent me down. I was like: "Wow! My family is not accepting me, I have no support, and now a random teacher comes up to me in the hallway and does this to me? She doesn't even acknowledge that I am a sex ... she just calls me "whatever you are" and I am, like, at least ... I would have rather been called an "it."

PI: Did your guidance counselor at your school know about that incident?

Hannah: Yeah, I told her. She was like: "All the school wants me to do is sit down with her and explain to her how it hurt you."
PI: Oh, because that was the guidance counselor that handled the matter, right?

Hannah: Yes.

PI: Oh, ok. I see. Wow. So, you weren't satisfied with that at all?

Hannah: No. Because, well, if I would have turned around and said that to a teacher, I would have been expelled! Like, or detention, or something. And, all I got was a handshake?

PI: Well, looking back now, Hannah, at that incident, and how it was handled by your guidance counselor, aren't you a little surprised at how she handled it, given that she is a lesbian herself?

Hannah: Oh, yeah. I was totally surprised that she didn't push for more, but I also feel that she was stuck between a rock and a hard place. Like, there was nothing else she could do. It was pretty much ... "I tried everything, and this sucks, but we're screwed. And, this is the best we're going to get."

PI: Ok. So, what supports or barriers affect your ability to be your true, authentic self in terms of your sexuality or gender identity in a Catholic school?

Hannah: Well, the supports are definitely my friends and the guidance counselor and the other working with the youth groups and stuff. But the barriers were ... the big thing was my religion for a long time. I was like: "Do I just want to say: 'screw it!' to this gay thing and just hide who I am because I am losing a huge part of me because of this? Like, I don't have my religion any more. It has left me." And, then, I was like: "Whoa! Now, what is the other faculty going to think? Because this one is obviously going to talk to the other ones in the staff room and now I'm just going to be the 'gay kid' that causes trouble. And what is everybody else going to think? What are the other students that aren't my friends going to think? I don't want to be the poster lesbian child at Catholic school." So, that was the big issue for me.

PI: So, basically, your faith was the main barrier?

Hannah: Oh, yeah. Like, it was the biggest battle that I've ever had to fight: "Do I choose between this -- my identity -- and being able to be who I am, or do I just continue with how I have been living? Because it's been working for however many years, it's fine. I can just continue on doing it and still have my faith and still have, like, a big, solid rock. And then, I'm like: "Ahhh, ok. I have to reevaluate."

PI: Yeah, after a while you cannot deny what your body is doing and what your body is telling you and how you are feeling about women and other girls around you, etc.

Hannah: Definitely.

PI: And the very last question for you, here Hannah -- I know you are busy -- throughout your time in Catholic schools, would you say that the school climate became more or less homophobic?

Hannah: Ummm ... it reached a plateau ... like, there was a good mix of homophobia and acceptance. There was the staff that were willing to, like, try to make changes and stuff, and be like: "No, this isn't how it should be. We really need to reevaluate stuff." And, then, there's the staff who are like: "No. We're doing the Catholic teachings. These are our guidelines and this is what we are doing -- no exceptions!"

PI: So, would you say it is a 50/50 split, or 70/30?

Hannah: I'd say it was a good 50/50 split. Of course, now, I'm hoping that things are getting better and students are trying to get their voices out more because it needs to be done. But, there's been no change.
PI: Do you anticipate there being any change?

Hannah: Ummm ... maybe in thirty years from now, but everybody knows it's fear. Fear holds everybody back. Of course, I'm going to fight for this, but I'm just going to lose in the end, so why should I even invest any time in it, right?

PI: Right, right. Because, it's such a powerful enemy to be up against.

Hannah: Oh, yeah. You cannot break the Catholic school board at all. They are very hard and stuck to their ways.

PI: Um-hmmm. So, Hannah, I just wanted to thank you so much for a powerful interview today.

Hannah: No problem.