Anti-homophobia Legislation and Ontario Catholic Schools:

Navigating an Institutional Bind

By

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Abstract:

September 2012 marked the implementation of Ontario’s new “Accepting Schools Act,” Bill 13. The act addresses bullying in Ontario secondary schools by mandating teachers to “prevent inappropriate behaviour, such as bullying, sexual assault, gender-based violence and incidents based on homophobia, transphobia or biphobia” (Accepting Schools Act, 2012). For teachers in the publicly-funded Catholic system, the new legislation reveals an institutional bind: how to teach both Catholic values and an anti-homophobia curriculum? Bill 13 has been met with fierce resistance on the part of some Catholic educators and members of the Church, while other Catholic educators welcome the new piece of legislation and have long been engaged in struggles against homophobia in their schools. This qualitative research study collects the testimonies of four educators who act as allies to queer and trans students and work for inclusivity in Catholic secondary schools. It centers questions of resistance and autonomy, making visible the work of teacher allies who navigate difficult institutional contexts in order to further inclusion and stem homophobic violence in their school communities. Because of the implementation of Bill 13, Catholic school boards face a legislative imperative that appears to contravene the teachings of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario. This study evaluates the effectiveness of Bill 13 in the Catholic school context by researching the experiences and strategies of teachers who navigate this institutional bind.

Key Words: Anti-Homophobia Education; Catholic Education; Gay Straight Alliance; Bullying
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Chapter 1: Introduction

September 2012 marked the implementation of Ontario’s new “Accepting Schools Act”, Bill 13. The act addresses bullying in a variety of forms in Ontario secondary schools by mandating teachers to “prevent inappropriate behaviour, such as bullying, sexual assault, gender-based violence and incidents based on homophobia, transphobia or biphobia” (Accepting Schools Act, 2012). For teachers in the publicly-funded Catholic system, the new legislation reveals an institutional bind: how to teach both Catholic values and an anti-homophobia curriculum?

For the purposes of this study, I define homophobic bullying as any act, attitude, expression or norm which coerces students into accepting heterosexuality as the only valid expression of sexuality and identity. The prevalence of this type of bullying in Canadian secondary schools has been well documented (Callaghan, 2007; Haskell & Burch 2010; Meyer 2006; Taylor & Peter, 2010; Walton, 2004). While Bill 13 primarily targets student-on-student bullying, education theorists have identified a “hidden curriculum” (Apple, 1990), in which teachers, administrators and the larger institutional structure of schooling contribute to homophobic norms. Bill 13 has been met with fierce resistance on the part of some Catholic educators and members of the Catholic Church (de Valk, 2011; di Rocco, 2012). Other Catholic educators welcome the new piece of legislation and have long been engaged in struggles against homophobia in their schools (OECTA, 2012). This study collects the testimonies of teachers and administrators who act as allies to queer and trans students and work for inclusivity in Catholic secondary schools.

Terminology

Throughout this study I refer to non-heterosexual students and people using the acronym LGBTIQ. When using this acronym I am referring to the following groups: lesbian, gay,
bisexual, trans, two-spirit, intersex, queer and questioning. By expanding the more commonly used acronym “LGB,” I seek to include greater diversity of non-heterosexual identities. Sexual orientations such as lesbian, gay or bisexual may be more familiar to readers than other identities listed above. I will describe these other identities more fully here. “Trans” is an umbrella term used to describe transgender, transsexual and gender-queer individuals. “Trans” can include a range of sexual identifications and gender expressions, but is usually taken to mean a person whose gender identifications and/or expressions do not align with the gender assigned to them at birth. Conversely, the term “cis-gender” is used in queer communities and theory to describe a person whose gender presentation and/or identification aligns with the gender that they were assigned at birth. “Two-spirit” describes a form of indigenous sexual identity that, historically, has been accorded a great deal of respect by many indigenous cultures because of two-spirit peoples’ “unique abilities to understand both male and female perspectives” (Egale, 2012, p.37). Many individuals whose bodies do not fit into normative categories of “male” or “female” identify as “intersex.” Although the life experiences of intersex people may differ from those of queer and trans people, intersex individuals often experience oppression which stems from systems of sexism, homophobia and transphobia. It is important to note that a person may identify in multiple ways at the same time, making it possible for an intersex person to identify as trans, gay, etc.

“Queer” is a term that has come into popular usage both in non-heterosexual communities and in academia through the discipline of queer theory. I will discuss the complexities of this term further in Chapter 2, but here I will mention that queer implies a fluidity of gender and sexual orientation and emerges from a political history of resistance to dominant heterosexual norms. Queer theory troubles traditional categories of gender and
sexuality by deconstructing the way that subjects come into being as both gendered and hetero/homosexual (Haskell and Burch, 2010, p.10). “Queer” is also used as an umbrella term to describe non-heterosexual identities. The category of “questioning” applies to individuals who are unsure of their sexual orientation. I have chosen to include this group in the acronym because this study is in part about high school students, many of whom may be questioning their sexual orientations without clearly identifying themselves as lesbian, gay, queer, etc. It is important to note that while I have chosen to use the above terms to identify non-heterosexual populations, the language that people use to identify themselves is constantly changing and may be different in a variety of socio-economic, geographical, or cultural contexts.

This study contributes to a growing body of knowledge which benefits queer and trans youth and teacher-allies, as well as students who do not identify as LGBTIQ. These straight-identified students are also affected by issues surrounding sexism and gender normativity, such as heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged” (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p.565). Heteronormativity and homophobia structure and reinforce each other, meaning that whether or not students identify as LGBTIQ, the range of activities, dress and emotional expression available to them are affected and circumscribed by heteronormative culture. Thus, research that focuses on homophobia in high schools also addresses sexism and gender normativity – issues which negatively affect all students.
Locating Myself in the Research

This project is informed by an ongoing engagement with feminist theory which frames my academic, professional and community life. I first encountered the academic discipline of Gender Studies as a first year undergraduate at McGill University. At the age of 18, I already identified as a feminist and had frequently come into contact with basic concepts of gender and racial equity. My mother worked at a small feminist publishing press while my father was a journalist for a leftist political news magazine. Because of the politicized climate of my upbringing, I felt like I had a good grasp on gender politics. My self-assuredness, however, was quickly challenged by the brilliant department head who taught my introductory Feminist Theory course. Studying Gender Studies became a revelatory experience for me; I could make immediate links between the theory I was learning and my lived experience, and I felt engaged in learning as I never had before. I decided to pursue an honours BA in Women’s Studies.

Gender Studies introduced me to Critical Race Theory, Cultural Studies and Marxism/anti-capitalism, and I began to see the world as a series of interlocking systems of privilege and oppression born out of global histories of power and resistance. I began to prioritize historically marginalized voices in my research and to develop a critical self-awareness of the impact of researching from a position of white, middle-class power. I engaged in dialogue about my white, middle-class privilege and began a learning process, which is ongoing, about being an anti-racist ally. Moving in increasingly radical communities, I came to identify as queer and sought to incorporate feminist and anti-racist principles into my interpersonal relationships. I got involved in activism and community organizing, at first on campus and eventually in a variety of organizations and contexts in Montreal.
After the completion of my BA I worked at a drop-in center for teenagers in a working-class, historically Irish neighbourhood in Montreal. Although the youth who frequented the center lived in challenging social and economic contexts, I was repeatedly astounded by their resilience, courage and wit. I found that when they were treated with respect - when their understandings of the world were treated as valid and relevant - their confidence grew and they were able to take on new challenges and engage with new learning experiences. My time at the drop-in sparked an interest in student-centered pedagogies which promote learning, not as a tool of capitalist or nationalist indoctrination, but because students deserve access to tools that they can use to engage critically with the world. I think that responsible research and teaching must have a social justice orientation. Because our world is so riddled with power imbalances, academic and educational work that does not seek to subvert hierarchies will inevitably be complicit in their maintenance.

I strive to privilege autonomy and self-determination as guiding and integral principles of my research, activism and personal relationships. Working for the self-determination of all people means centering the concerns of indigenous people, people of colour, queer and trans people, working class and street-involved people, people with disabilities and women in my research and activism. In listing these categories separately I don’t mean to imply that a person can only occupy one of them. Instead, I want to recognize that people exist in complex networks of power which privilege and oppress them in different, interlocking ways. For example, I experience certain forms of oppression as a woman and as a feminine-identified queer person, but am afforded a great deal of privilege because I was born middle class, white, and in possession of Canadian citizenship. Because everyone is positioned differently within the social matrix of privilege and oppression, everyone experiences power differently. Oppression is often
compounded when its various forms intersect in a single person’s life – homophobic bullying, for example, is often enacted in a qualitatively different manner depending on if the survivor is read as white or as a person of colour. It’s vital, then, that I approach my current research topic with an understanding that LGBTIQ teenagers experience homophobia in diverse ways and are affected by multiple forms of oppression, including but not limited to racism, colonialism, ableism, sexism, classism and transphobia.

**Research Question**

This project examines the phenomenon of homophobic bullying in high schools as it relates to Ontario’s new anti-bullying policy, Bill 13, in the separate Catholic system. In the following chapters I analyse data collected through interviews with two teachers and two union employees who work in the Ontario Catholic system. These educators support queer and trans students through a variety of anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia initiatives in their school communities. In this study I will sometimes refer to these visibly supportive educators and union employees as “teacher-allies” or “administrator-allies.”

This study will center questions of resistance and autonomy by making visible the work of educators who navigate difficult institutional contexts and sometimes risk losing their jobs in order to further inclusion and stem homophobic and transphobic violence in their school communities. Queer and trans youth also survive hostile environments through creative and resilient means and cannot be defined by their experiences of victimization alone. Although I do not directly interview LGBTIQ students, I seek to privilege their experiences by seeking out the stories of teacher-allies. By centering these resistant voices as experts, I hope to move away from a charity model towards a paradigm of research-as-solidarity (Potts & Brown, 2005). I want to value people’s authority and expertise over their own lives. Rather than deferring to outside
“experts” who may tell us about subaltern “others,” I hope to make room for the stories and voices of groups that have been historically oppressed. This research will directly impact my future work as a teacher-researcher. Through it, I hope to create knowledge that will be useful to teachers who work to support queer and trans students within heteronormative institutional contexts.

Through the interviews I examine the ways in which individual Catholic educators negotiate the tensions and conflicts of anti-homophobia initiatives, addressing the following central research question: how do Ontario Catholic educators who act as visible allies to queer and trans students negotiate tensions between the anti-homophobia provisions of Bill 13 (Accepting Schools Act) and the mandate to teach Catholic values? I am interested in the ways that educators negotiate difficult institutional contexts in which they are called to perform contradictory behaviours at the same time. Because the Catholic Church maintains an explicitly negative position on homosexuality (Callaghan, 2012), the September 2012 implementation of Bill 13 places Catholic educators in a legislative double-bind. In this study I seek out the stories of teacher and administrator-allies specifically in order to prioritize the experiences of traditionally marginalized groups. Through interviews and analysis, this project investigates the following questions:

- How do Catholic teacher and administrator allies contend with heteronormative administrative and school cultures?

- Do teacher and administrator allies perceive Bill 13 as an effective tool for combatting homophobia and transphobia? Have they come into contact with the bill in their work environments?

- Does Bill 13 enable teacher-allies to better support queer and trans students in the context of Catholic education?
-How do teacher-allies reconcile the conflicting demands of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO 2004) and the explicit anti-homophobia component of the anti-bullying bill?

These questions are particularly timely, as Bill 13 became a legal requirement for Ontario schools as of September 2012. This is the first time that Catholic school boards are facing a legislative imperative that seems to contravene the teaching of the Catholic Church. Researching the experiences and strategies of teachers who navigate this institutional bind is a necessary first step towards evaluating the effectiveness of Bill 13 in combatting homophobia and transphobia.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Critical Pedagogy

In the first chapter of this study I laid out my personal investments as an activist and researcher in the topic at hand. I noted that a background in feminist and queer theory has strongly influenced both my research interests and my community work. Feminist and queer theories also form the theoretical foundations in which this study is anchored. In order to understand the complex ways that educator-allies negotiate tensions between anti-homophobia legislation and Catholic doctrine in their schools, I turn first to the work of scholars who have investigated the way that power functions in the context of queerness and education, as well as in educational contexts more broadly defined. Paulo Friere’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) is key to my understanding of education and power. In this foundational text, Friere claims that traditional education systems serve the purpose of instilling social hierarchy and inculcating students with normative values which reinforce the status quo. This takes place through what Friere labels a “banking” system of education, where students are conceived of as passive receptacles into which already-constituted knowledge is deposited. The banking system ensures that hierarchy and control are maintained through the establishment of the teacher as active agent and the student as passive consumer (Friere, 1970, p.72-73). Knowledge is taken to be already-constituted and agreed upon, rather than a site of contestation and possible conflict in the classroom. Friere suggests that radical educators should refute the banking system by taking up a process of critical consciousness-raising. He claims that the structure and function of the classroom must be radically transformed so that students may become active agents in both the creation of knowledge and the development of critiques of the status quo (Friere, 1970).
Michael Apple’s 1979 text *Ideology and Curriculum* is also foundational for this study. Apple posits that knowledge in the classroom is not simply constituted through the explicit curriculum, that is, the curricular content that is actually taught. Rather, he sees schools as sites of ideological production where students learn normative ways of being in the world. This happens both through the explicit curriculum and through what Apple calls the “hidden curriculum,” the implicit mechanisms of the school through which students learn common sense norms about what constitutes valuable behaviour, knowledge and identity (Apple, 1979, p.83). Part of the function of the hidden curriculum is to naturalize both social hierarchy and the “formal corpus of school knowledge,” so that students learn to respond to the “social and intellectual world in an acritical fashion” (Apple, 1979, p.82-83). By naturalizing the content of curricula, the passive absorption of knowledge, and the hierarchical structure of the school, the hidden curriculum helps to create the illusion that the world we inhabit is “the only possible world” (83). Thus, both Friere’s banking system and Apple’s hidden curriculum can be understood as part of a structure of hegemony through which systems of power constantly re-articulate themselves in order for social hierarchy to be maintained.

**Theoretical Framework: Queer Theory**

While my examination of educator-allies in the Catholic school system has its theoretical foundations in critical pedagogy, it is also heavily informed by the work of feminist and queer theorists. For example, in *Queering/Querying Pedagogy*, Susanne Luhmann (1998) describes the way that heteronormativity operates in the context of the school. Luhmann draws on the work of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault to articulate an understanding of queerness which diverges from liberal, essentialist notions of sexual orientation. Similar to other queer theorists, Luhmann claims that the opposition between homo and heterosexuality is “central to Western societies and
constitutive of Western culture, modes of thinking, and concepts of the modern self” (Luhmann 1998, p.144, also see Sedgwick 1990). Queer theorists shift the lens of inquiry away from the rights-based approach of gay and lesbian studies towards an understanding of how subjects come into being as homo/heterosexual. They claim that heterosexuality becomes intelligible and situates itself as normal through its definitional opposition to homosexuality: through the process of negating the other, the normalized self comes into being (see Foucault, 1978). Because heterosexuality is defined through its opposition to homosexuality, the two share a “definitional interdependence” which poses a constant threat to the stability of the heterosexual norm (Luhmann, 1998, p.144). Thus, heterosexual life is permeated with the specter of homosexuality and requires constant reaffirmation of its normative status. Homophobia and transphobia serve as conduits for this reaffirmation; violence, harassment, silence and erasure exile queerness from the boundaries of normal life. Queerness is not the only abject other on which “normal life” depends; race, ability, class and gender also serve as markers of difference through which normative identity comes into being (Spade, 2011). It is not enough, Luhmann argues, to include LGBTIQ content in the curriculum and to create anti-discrimination regulations for educational institutions. These tactics simply “expand the definition of normal to include lesbians and gays”, rather than deconstructing the notion of normalcy itself (Luhmann, 1998, p.143). For a truly queer pedagogy to be possible, a radical revisioning of educational power structures is necessary so that critical questioning of who we are, what we know, and how we come to be and know can become central to the learning process (Luhmann, 1998, p.148).

Over the last decade, huge advances have been made in knowledge about LGBTIQ populations in North American school systems. Although much of this research focuses on American contexts (GLSEN, 2007; Meyer, 2006), similarities between Canadian and American
cultures mean that this research can also be applied to the experiences of Canadian youth. A growing number of Canadian scholars are examining the prevalence of homophobia and transphobia in Canadian schools (Callaghan, 2012; Clark & MacDougall, 2012; Gilbert 2004; Grace & Wells, 2005; Haskell & Burch, 2010; Taylor & Peter, 2012). In 2012, Egale Canada released the first-ever *National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools*. The report found that LGBTIQ students face a disproportionate amount of violence and discrimination at school, and that heteronormative school climates are often fostered by administrative collusion or neglect (Egale, 2012). Notably, the Bishop’s councils which govern Catholic school boards prevented Catholic schools from participating in the landmark study, citing concerns over “activities that affirm the viability of a “homosexual lifestyle,” such as filling out a homophobia survey” (Egale, 2012, p. 132). While researchers have explored experiences of homophobia in Catholic schools (Maher & Sever 2003, 2007; Bayly, 2007), to my knowledge there are very few scholars who have examined this reality within a specifically Canadian context (Callaghan, 2007a, 2007b, 2012; Grace & Wells, 2005). Because little research exists in this area, an examination of the ways that educator-allies negotiate anti-homophobia legislation in Catholic schools will be an important contribution.

**Beyond Rights Discourse**

Much of the existing scholarship on the intersection of LGBTIQ issues and Catholic education uses a rights-based approach which is more compatible with traditional gay and lesbian studies than with queer theory. For example, in their detailed case study of the 2002 legal case *Marc Hall v. The Durham Catholic School Board*, Grace and Wells (2005) emphasize the discrepancy between the protections guaranteed under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the discriminatory actions of administrators in the Ontario Catholic board. In this
ground-breaking case, Catholic high school student Marc Hall took his principal and school board to court over their refusal to allow him to take his boyfriend to prom. Hall won an injunction that granted the couple access to the prom hours before it took place. He later dropped the case, but not before it gained large-scale media attention and mobilized both LGBTIQ activists and anti-gay Catholic organizations (Callaghan 2012, p. 200). Grace and Wells describe a clash between the denominational rights of the Catholic Church and the individual rights guaranteed under the Charter. Under Section 93 of the 1867 Constitution Act, the Catholic Church is guaranteed the right to provide publicly-funded religious education, and to make decisions with respect to that education (Grace & Wells, 2005, p.240). Section 15 (1) of the Charter provides protection against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Conversely, the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO, formerly the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops), which plays a large part in shaping Ontario Catholic school policy, clearly states that homosexual acts are “an intrinsic moral evil” (ACBO, 2004, p.45). Because of this discrepancy, researchers have argued that Catholic school boards are unable to provide the Charter rights guaranteed to all Canadians (Grace & Wells, 2005, Callaghan, 2007, 2012).

The importance of the legal battles for LGBTIQ rights should not be underestimated: the policies and protections which emerge out of cases like that of Marc Hall have real impacts on the lived experience of students in Ontario Catholic high schools. This study employs concepts from queer theory which deconstruct notions of identity and normativity, while simultaneously recognizing that rights-based legal struggles have great bearing on the lived experiences and survival of LGBTIQ students in the Catholic system. Although allegations of homophobia are not new to the Ontario Catholic school system, the implementation of Bill 13 marks a change for
these boards. Catholic educators are, for the first time, facing a legislative imperative that contravenes dominant interpretations of Church teachings.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This research study looks at the ways that educators who are supportive of queer and trans students in the Ontario Catholic school system navigate the contradictory demands being placed on them by the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO) and by Ontario’s new anti-bullying legislation, Bill 13. In this chapter I outline the process that I undertook when designing this research study and I explain the ethical review procedures that I underwent before locating interview participants. I also explain the steps involved in gathering and analysing data, as well as the political motives behind my research design choices.

Background of the Researcher

As discussed in Chapter 1, research should be contextualized to take the social and political location of the researcher into account. Because knowledge is always political, I want to make transparent that the knowledge generated through this research serves specific political goals which are linked to my location as a queer, feminist researcher. In this section I will elaborate on the ways that my social location informed my methodological decisions, and thus informs the way that I make meaning through this research project.

I attended high school in Toronto, Ontario, but was never enrolled in a Catholic school. My family has historical ties to the United Church in Canada, but despite the fact that my grandfather was a United Church minister, I have spent very little time in the church. I come from a family and community context that is largely secular, meaning that I approach research on Catholic education as an outsider. My research is limited by a lack of familiarity with Catholic teachings, communities, and theological concepts. However, my identification as a queer woman gives me an “insider” status in some elements of this research – I have been involved in
supporting queer and trans youth in a variety of educational and community contexts and am invested in making a community that I identify with safer by addressing heteronormativity in schools. I have also been active as a student teacher for the past two years and have a growing familiarity with the world of Toronto high school teachers. I am a white, middle-class, cis-gendered, non-disabled researcher and educator. I strive to understand the ways that different forms of oppression interlock to create different experiences of the world, and to deconstruct my privilege so that I can be in solidarity with people who experience oppression through systems that I benefit from. However, I want to acknowledge that this self-reflexive process is ongoing and always incomplete, and that both my methods and analysis are circumscribed by the social location from which I engage with the world.

As a student in a Master of Teaching program I am both a researcher and a student teacher: I am located in the world of educational theory and in the world of the high school classroom. This location pushes me to constantly reflect on the practice that I am engaged in, using theory to understand daily interactions in the school and using my school experiences to inform my theoretical understandings of educational systems. In this project I look at how educators and administrators who are allies to queer and trans students contend with anti-bullying legislation, given the institutional demands of working in the Catholic school system. My desire to understand individual capacity to resist heteronormativity from inside an institution emerges from my location as both a student teacher and a researcher. I’m curious about the ways that individual stories can help me to better understand institutional power structures. I’m also interested in using theory that addresses the way that power functions in education to help understand individual experiences. I want to make connections between my practical classroom experience and my research.
Data Collection

This study gathers data from a variety of locations. Reviewing academic literature about homophobia and transphobia in education and Catholic schooling in Canada served as an initial way to collect information (see Chapter 2). I then examined institutional texts to understand the official policy of both the Ontario Ministry of Education and the ACBO on addressing homophobia and transphobia in schools. I looked at Bill 13, The Accepting Schools Act (2012), the ACBO’s 2004 document Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation, and the accompanying parents’ guide (2006), which are the two most recent official policy documents that the ACBO has published regarding the treatment of queer and trans students. The third stage of my data-collection process involved semi-structured interviews with two teachers and two administrators who work in the Catholic system in Ontario. Both administrators were white men worked for a Catholic teacher’s union. Both teachers were white women who taught at Ontario Catholic high schools, one at a suburban and the other at an urban board.

Ethics Protocol

The Master of Teaching (MT) Program in which I am enrolled has received a blanket waiver from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Toronto. This means that I was able to interview educators and administrators over the age of 18 without completing an individual ethics review process. My initial contact letter (Appendix A), Informed Consent Document (Appendix B), and list of interview questions (Appendix C) were thus reviewed by my supervisor, Dr. Heather Sykes, rather than by the REB, before I began my recruitment process. After agreeing to an interview, each participant was presented with my Informed Consent Document (Appendix B) which outlines the procedures that I am undertaking to protect their identity. Participants signed the agreement and were given a signed copy to keep. The
Informed Consent Document explained that participant confidentiality and anonymity would be assured by a) replacing all names with pseudonyms, b) changing all place, organization and school board names, and c) keeping all participant information in password-protected and confidential locations. During the transcription process I accordingly removed names and identifying information, as well as an excerpt that explicitly named people and organizations involved in supporting queer and trans youth in Catholic schools. In order to ensure that my participants are not being put at risk I sent them transcripts of their interviews before quoting or paraphrasing their words in my writing. Participants were given the opportunity to remove content if they wished, as well as to change the pseudonym that I gave them if they felt that it didn’t adequately protect their identity.

At the beginning of the interview participants were reminded of the central research question and were told that data collected would be used for my Master of Teaching Research Project. Participants were then told that they could stop or withdraw from the interview at any time, that they could refrain from answering questions without needing to provide an explanation, that they were welcome to take breaks, and that they would receive a copy of the interview transcript and could make changes to it before it was analysed and used in my writing. Procedures specified in the Informed Consent Document have not changed throughout the research process.

**Recruitment**

Because my research examines the ways that teachers resist heteronormativity in Catholic schools, I had go through unofficial networks to find participants. Official channels, such as contacting principals, were not open to me because I hoped to interview educators who were critical of the institutions that they worked in. Part of my research aim is to learn from people
who are engaged in activist work in their communities. By putting participant experiences into
dialogue with analyses of the way that power functions in the Catholic school system, I hope to
create knowledge that will be useful to my participants in their activist support work. I wish to
construct “knowledge that can be acted on, by, and in the interests of the marginalized and
oppressed” (Potts & Brown, 2005, p.262).

My research question is formulated to address the needs and perspectives of educators
who are working against a heteronormative institutional structure from the inside. In designing
this question, I borrowed from activist methodologies that seek to create knowledge that will
assist grass-roots activists in their struggles against institutional power (Miller, 2005; Potts &
Brown, 2005; Smith, 1990). My research goal is an explicitly political one: I am interested in
uncovering the complexities of educators’ institutional experiences with the goal of helping them
push back against systems that disempower and marginalize queer and trans youth. Rather than
interview members of the ACBO or Ministry of Education officials, I made a decision to center
the voices of educators who engage in activist support work on the ground with students. I do not
intend for my work to be objective or apolitical. Rather, by understanding how institutional
pressures play out in the lives of individual teachers and administrators I hope to create
knowledge about how power functions that may be illuminating or useful to those embedded
within educational systems themselves.

**Purposeful Sampling**

I began tracking down participants through my own personal networks. I asked fellow
students, family and friends for referrals. In this way, I came into contact with a Catholic school
teacher who referred me to my first participant. This participant felt a strong connection to the
project and gave me contact information for two other participants. I found the fourth participant
by reading recent news articles about controversies around the presence of Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) in Catholic schools and contacting educators and administrators who were cited as being publicly supportive of GSAs. I contacted participants by both email (see Appendix A for initial contact letter) and phone.

Interview Process

The interview process provided me with real-life examples of the experiences of educators and administrators who support queer and trans students in the Catholic system. Interviews were conducted in person, either in private offices or study rooms in public libraries. I audio-recorded the interviews and transcribed them at a later date. Interviews were semi-structured and moved from straight-forward questions to more open-ended or complex questions in order to ease the participant into the interview. I began by brainstorming a list of potential questions, then refined the list to thirty-two questions which were divided into categories (Appendix C). Here I’ve included a list of the categories, accompanied in each case by an example of a question from that category: basic information (e.g. how long have you been working in the Catholic school system?); allyship (e.g. would you describe yourself as an ally to queer and trans students?); school environment (e.g. how does the administration at your school respond to homophobia and transphobia?); school/board structure (e.g. what changes need to be made at your school/board to combat homophobia and transphobia?); Catholic identity (e.g. many people think that it’s impossible to identify as a Catholic and support queer and trans students. How does your support of queer and trans students fit within your definition of Catholic education?); bullying (e.g. is there a difference between bullying and oppression?); Bill 13 (e.g. do you think that the bill will have a real impact on the experiences of queer and trans students in the Catholic system?); support networks (e.g. who supports you in the work that you do with
queer and trans students?); and beyond rights discourse (e.g. are there elements of Catholic education that constrain the possibility of safety for all students?).

These questions provided a loose structure for the interviews. In practice I asked about 20 of them in each interview while supplementing in other questions that seemed appropriate in the moment. This approach allowed for the individual experiences of participants to be explored in detail, while gathering similar types of data across the interviews.

**Data Analysis**

I began the data analysis process by transcribing the interviews using Google’s *Transcribe* App to slow down the audio recordings. Transcribing the interviews provided me with an opportunity to become familiar with their content, as I listened to the recordings repeatedly to ensure an accurate transcript. Before analysing the interview data I coded it into a variety of themes and subthemes. After narrowing down a list of themes, I created a ‘codebook’ which contained the titles of the themes and subthemes as well as a numerical designation for each. I then went through each interview transcript, assigning numbers from the codebook to sort the data into themes. The coding process familiarized me further with the interview transcripts, thereby facilitating my data analysis process. To analyse the data I worked between my thematically-coded interview excerpts and texts from the literature review. This process allowed me to produce meaning out of the data by putting participant experience in conversation with theory about the nature of power in Catholic school contexts. In the following chapter, I describe the findings that emerged from the process of analysing the data. The final chapter provides a critical discussion of these findings and takes up the question of the limitations of working within a “rights-based” framework.
Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

Sex and Identity

“It’s ok to be gay, as long as you’re not gay.” -Amy

In her detailed reading of texts published by Canadian bishop’s councils, Tonya Callaghan demonstrates that those who shape Catholic education in Canada perform a kind of “double speak” wherein they supposedly affirm homosexual people, while denouncing homosexual acts (2007a, p.4). This logic is evident in the document Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation, released by the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO) in 2004. The parents’ guide that accompanies the Guidelines cites a 1976 Pastoral Letter which “clearly distinguished homosexual orientation from same-sex behaviour” (ACBO, 2006, p.1). The guide states that students who have “same-sex attractions” should be provided with counselling and support and should be welcomed into the church (2006, p.3). However, this counselling is expected to be of a particular sort – it should “offer guidance in prayer and in leading a chaste and virtuous life” (2006, p.4), implying that if a Catholic identifies as LGBTIQ they should be committed to a lifetime of celibacy. Accepting a student’s identity, the ACBO makes clear, is different from condoning homosexual behaviour. Indeed, the Parent’s Guide states that accepting a child’s “homosexual orientation does not have to include approving of all related attitudes and lifestyle choices,” and that parents may need to “challenge aspects of a lifestyle [that they] find objectionable” (2006, p.3). Similarly, although the Pastoral Guidelines (2004) advocate acceptance of LGBTIQ students, they also assure educators that “the bottom line of Church teaching on gay sexual activity is simply: Don’t. Ever. This is called lifelong abstinence, or a celibate lifestyle” (p.70).

Three out of four of my interview participants brought up the phenomenon of affirming LGBTIQ identity while denouncing sexual acts. The frequency with which the identity/sex
division was talked about underscores the central role it plays in Catholic doctrine. While participants held a variety of opinions about the distinction, it featured prominently in almost all of their interpretations of anti-homophobia education (AHE) in Catholic schools. It is important to note that all of my research participants identified themselves as allies to queer and trans students. It is their interpretation of what that allyship supports – the inclusion of LGBTIQ students versus the right to have queer sex – that differ. In the following section I discuss the different approaches taken by my participants to the division between sex and identity articulated by the ACBO.

**Peter: Supportive of the Sex/Identity Distinction**

Peter (all participant names have been replaced by pseudonyms) is a white man who works for a Catholic teacher’s union. Rather than seeing the separation of sexuality from identity as homophobic, he understood it to be completely appropriate in the context of working with adolescents. In fact, Peter asserted that the attempt to conflate identity with sexual acts bolstered the claims of conservative Catholics, who he said discredit Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) by arguing that they promote queer sex:

I think people have difficulty separating [identity and sexual behaviour]. For instance when I speak with people who are hostile to some of the work we’re doing … they immediately think that this is going to lead every one of our students to go to bathhouses on Church… and I’m going, no you don’t get it. It’s exactly the opposite… every adolescent is having sexual confusion, that’s part and parcel of that stage of life. But to allow them to have that conversation in a warm, welcoming environment, you don’t drive people out who are going to participate in unsafe activities. Your fear is exactly why we need to do this.
Here Peter explains that gender identity and sexual orientation are different from sexual behaviour. I support Peter’s assertion that having a certain gender identity or sexual orientation does not necessarily lead to particular sexual acts. Such a claim essentializes sexual identity and erases the range of expressions that human sexuality and identities take. Peter’s narrative could also be read as an argument for human rights on the grounds of identity, but not on the grounds of sexual acts. It’s possible that the omission of sex acts from the picture of human rights could leave out an element that some LGBTIQ people consider integral to their identities.

Conservative Catholic opponents of Bill 13 have argued that discussions about sexual orientation are inappropriate in the school setting. In a 2012 article in *Catholic Insight* Dan DiRocco argued that open-forum conversations about sexual orientation and gender identity should be prohibited because they could be “used to promote the gay lifestyle as healthy and normal” (p.23-24). Two of my participants, both of whom support the bill, responded to such claims by referencing the division between identity and sexual acts articulated by the ACBO in its *Pastoral Guidelines*. They explained that (AHE) is about increasing awareness rather than encouraging sex. The identity/sex division allows these participants to counter the moral panic of conservative Catholics by arguing that AHE is appropriate for the supposedly de-sexualized space of the school. But by removing any discussion of sexual acts or safer sex practices from the equation, equity proponents who employ this strategy might also be contributing to stigma around queer sex. In the above quote Peter argues that the purpose of AHE is to provide support to students before they “go to bathhouses on Church [a major street in Toronto’s Gay Village].” Here Peter seeks to center students’ well-being and safety by articulating a harm-reductive approach. At the same time, the portrayal of queer sex as dangerous for students could be read as stigmatizing. Of the establishment of GSAs in Catholic schools, Peter says, “we’re talking about
a welcoming, accepting environment,” that is definitively “not a hook up club.” But would students who did decide to “hook up” still be accepted and welcomed into such a GSA? How do Catholic educators who agree with the Church’s distinction between identity and sexual acts contend with the reality of queer sex amongst students?

Like other participants, Peter maintained that his support of LGBTIQ students is not inconsistent with Catholic teachings. A key piece of Peter’s adherence to the distinction between sex and identity is his belief in the Catholic value of chastity. He explained that “Catholic teaching teaches chastity right through… [you shouldn’t be having sex] if you’re not in a committed, loving relationship, whether that be heterosexual, homosexual, whatever.” Peter explained that adolescence is a time of confusion around relationships, and that because “Catholic teachings say you maintain chastity until you’re able to have the maturity to handle committed relationships,” teenagers should not be engaging in sexual activity. If teenagers, because of their perceived inability to make informed decisions about sex and relationships, should not be having sex, then it follows that Catholic educator-allies might argue for human rights based on identity rather than on the freedom to engage in chosen sexual acts. However, the ACBO goes beyond the prohibition of explicit sexual acts in its Pastoral Guidelines when it describes romantic interaction between students of the same sex as “morally unacceptable” (2004, p.4).

Amy: Resisting the Distinction

In contrast to Peter’s view, another participant felt that the division between sexual acts and identity was central to the way homophobia functions in Catholic schools. Amy is a white woman who works as a high school teacher in a suburban Catholic board. She spoke about the
description in the *Pastoral Guidelines* (2004) of romantic interaction between LGBTIQ students as “morally unacceptable, because it points toward future sexual relationships that are non-marital” (p.4). The definition of romantic behaviour given here is vague: the document states that it cannot be “confined to a set of defined activities. It is a description of one-to-one relational behaviour which involves sexual attraction” (p.4). Because the guide does not specify exactly which behaviours are prohibited, determination of what constitutes immoral interaction is left up to the individual educator. This leaves a wide margin for misinterpretation and discrimination on the part of school staff.

According to Amy,

> In terms of the ideology [of the ACBO] it’s ok to be lesbian, gay, bi or transgendered, as long as you have absolutely no romantic engagement with anyone in your life. Because that type of sexuality is deeply pathological and sinful. So it’s ok for us to be nice to you and God’s not going to send you to hell, as long as you can cut off that part of your humanity. And that is the compromise; that is the negotiation – the tension – between the legislation [Bill 13] and its implementation in Catholic schools.

Here Amy demonstrates that the identity/sexuality division is at the heart of the ACBO’s response to anti-homophobia legislation.

The tension between AHE and Catholic education is often described as a disjuncture between the constitutionally-enshrined rights of the Catholic Church under Section 93 of the *Constitution Act* (1867) and the equal-rights protections of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. There appears to be a fundamental incompatibility between the claim that homosexual acts are “acts of grave depravity” (ACBO, 2004, p.53), and the protection from discrimination guaranteed to LGBTIQ people under the *Charter* and the *Code*. It is the theoretical separation of sexual identity from sexual behaviour
that enables Catholic doctrine to elide this legal dilemma: by differentiating between identity and sexuality, the Ontario bishops are able to claim adherence to anti-discrimination law while continuing to condemn queer sex. The ACBO can then assert that the Catholic system welcomes and supports all students at the same time as it describes queer sex as “intrinsically disordered” (2004, p.53).

Amy is critical of the imperative that students in Catholic schools be celibate. When discussing the Pastoral Guidelines, she said that “any kind of displays of affection quite explicitly are banned. Any kind of holding hands, dancing, any of that. And again the main message is that the only acceptable path [for a teacher] to council is celibacy.” Amy is concerned about the limitations imposed on educators by the rhetoric of the ACBO. There is a discrepancy between Amy’s view that sexuality is “part of [one’s] humanity,” and the imperative she perceives in the Guidelines to council queer and questioning students towards chastity and celibacy. Amy described this as a major point of tension in her work in the Catholic system.

Erin and Robert: A Strategic Approach

It is notable that some of my participants, all of whom have been active and vocal proponents of Bill 13, articulated a similar line of reasoning to that of the ACBO. Erin is a white woman who works at an urban Catholic high school with a prominent GSA. Like Peter, Erin claimed that bringing sexual behaviour into the conversation only bolsters claims made by conservative Catholics that GSAs bring immorality to schools. Erin explained that in her opinion GSAs have nothing to do with sex: “in the same way that the Black History Month group isn’t talking about sex – they’re talking about how can we forward the whole aspect of bringing awareness to black history – I think GSAs are doing exactly the same thing.” It’s worth noting that this equation of blackness with queerness could be seen as de-racializing sexuality by
portraying the two identity categories as mutually exclusive. This narrative might be read as implying that queer is a white identity while black history is unrelated to queerness, thus erasing the presence of black LGBTIQ students in past and present Catholic education.

In Erin’s view GSAs are human rights groups that shouldn’t be concerned with sex. Her students “aren’t interested in the how-to’s of sex, they’re interested in how can we educate our peers? How can we support other students?” However, earlier in the same interview Erin described the condemnation of queer sex as an infringement on the rights of LGBTIQ students: “[according to Catholic doctrine] you can be gay but you can’t act on it, all genital acts have to be procreative, any genital act that is not procreative is inherently sinful. Until they get rid of that, Catholic schools will never be one hundred percent openly welcoming to gay and lesbian people.” Although Erin recognizes the denunciation of queer sex as homophobic, she still argues that sex shouldn’t figure in conversations about AHE. Perhaps her argument that GSAs are strictly human rights groups and not spaces for sex education is strategic in that it quells accusations of immorality leveled by conservative Catholics.

My final participant, Robert, did not address the sex/identity distinction at length. Robert is a white man who works for a Catholic teacher’s union. While he did not speak about the sex/identity distinction in explicit terms, he did criticize the Pastoral Guidelines’ defence of “the institution of marriage” and the fact that it articulates “[which] people are supposed to have sex and under what kind of conditions.”

While differentiating between identity and sexual acts may be a politically useful argument for allowing GSAs to exist in Catholic schools, it ignores the fact that sexuality has been claimed by many LGBTIQ people as a part of their being which cannot be separated from identity. Amy explains that the condemnation of queer sex forces students to “cut off that part of
[their] humanity.” She recognizes that the attempt to salvage a person at the expense of their sexuality erases fundamental aspects of queer identity, thereby alienating students from the fullness of being human. The top-down imposition of the distinction between sex and identity on the part of the ACBO limits the kinds of critiques open to allies, making Amy’s criticisms seem particularly radical in comparison to those of the other participants and indicating that the range of possibilities open to allies might be circumscribed by their institutional context. Catholic schooling has produced “its own “regime of pedagogy,” a set of power relations, of discourses and practices, which constrains the most radical of educational agendas” (Gore, 1998, p.232) The current political landscape may impact the actions of educator-allies and the fact that they engage in human rights advocacy rather than in more radical, sex-positive activism. Although the human rights discourse articulated by most of my participants is a politically useful strategy, it requires the erasure of queer sexuality to render itself legitimate in the eyes of the ACBO.

Language, Naming, Visibility

Language Use in the Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same Sex Orientation

Documents published by the ACBO rarely use the word “gay” and never use the word “queer” to describe students because, despite the fact that many people use these terms to identify themselves, they are seen as implicitly condoning a “homosexual lifestyle” (Callaghan 2007a, p.32). In 2001, Bishop Henry of Alberta stated that Catholics should “work towards the day when we will be able to even avoid using the term ‘homosexual’ as a noun… [instead] we should seek to speak of… ‘persons with same-sex attractions’” (Henry, p. 6). Henry’s statement dismisses the political importance of queer self-identification. This same tendency is evident in the Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same Sex Orientation which, as its very title suggests, was created to aid teachers in working with students of “same-sex orientation” rather
than “LGBTIQ students.” The accompanying parents’ guide states that educators and parents should be cautious about using terms like “homosexual” to describe students because this might pigeon-hole a student before they are fully developed and deny them the “full range of interpersonal elements that together constitute their identity” (2006, p.6). This suggests a deeply homophobic hope that a student’s queer attractions might be a passing phase rather than an identification and dismisses the ability of LGBTIQ people to understand and name their own experience. The Parent’s Guide also states that “attaching a label to a person implies that they are their orientation” (p.6), implying in turn that it is illegitimate to claim sexual orientation as an essential aspect of one’s identity.

Peter explained that the Pastoral Guidelines contain tensions over the use of language because they reflect a diversity of Catholic interests:

On one hand you’ve got a really good counselling piece [which advocates using student language] and on the other hand you’ve got a section on same sex marriage, which is totally out of whack in terms of what the document is being used for. But I understand that in order to get consensus from all the parties who were at the table you had to provide some of that perspective.

Because the process of writing the Guidelines involved a variety of groups with differing political interests, the document is at times inconsistent in its approach. Although some passages advocate using “the language that the student uses” (2004, p.21), other sections suggest that “the label of homosexual should be avoided when discussing [a] person who expresses a same-sex orientation. The orientation or act is homosexual or heterosexual but the person is not” (2004, p.26).
Other participants had difficulty with the inaccessibility of the language of the *Guidelines*. Robert explained,

a large amount of that document is theological. If you don’t have theological training, it’s kind of like the LGBTQ language. If you’re not familiar with it then you’re not going to understand it, and if I as a teacher don’t have much time to begin with, then I’m not going to go there. So, when I do my in-servicing [workshops], I intentionally ask, how many of you have heard of the Pastoral Guidelines? And I get like, 3 or 4 hands out of 25.

Here Robert claims that a level of familiarity, and thus extra work, is required for teachers to understand both theological language and LGBTIQ language. Because teachers in the Catholic system are already overloaded, it is unlikely that they will find the time in their schedules to do this work independently. Instead, time must be allotted during paid work days for training about queer and trans issues and language. However, this approach requires administrative funding and support which is not always present in Catholic schools.

All of my participants anticipated that a new version of the *Guidelines* would be released in the near future but none of them knew how close the document was to being published. Peter emphasized that the 2004 document “has to be updated especially in light of the current initiatives from the ministry [Bill 13].” Participants were unsure whether the absence of a new set of guidelines constituted a breach of the *Accepting Schools Act*. At the time of publication it seems clear that the passage of Bill 13 has not led to the fast-tracking of a new, more linguistically-appropriate set of guidelines for Catholic educators.
Identity, Erasure, and the Naming of “Gay” -Straight Alliances

A similar language debate exists over the use of the word “gay” in the title of GSAs. According to Peter, “the bishops… had a problem with the naming because they were saying that it forced young people into a premature sexual identification of their nature which wasn’t giving honest respect to the developmental process that everybody undergoes.” The ACBO suggested that GSAs be named “Respecting Differences” clubs in order to avoid pigeon-holing LGBTIQ students, and so that “reverse discrimination” could be avoided (DiRocco, 2012, p.23). In 2011 Ontario students challenged the right of school administrators in the Halton Catholic District School Board to deny them the name “Gay-Straight Alliance” (Houston, 2011). Ultimately the board of trustees voted in favour of GSAs and the public conversation around the case led to section 303.1 of Bill 13, which “prohibits boards and principals from refusing the use of the name gay-straight alliance or a similar name for certain organizations” (Accepting Schools Act, 2011, p.ii). The act also states that “a board shall comply with this section in a way that does not adversely affect any right of a pupil guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (2011, p.9-10), reinforcing students’ right to choose the language that they feel best describes their identities. Erin relayed that even after the passage of Bill 13 a small group of trustees at the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) “put forward a motion trying to ban GSAs in Catholic schools, to call them “Diversity Clubs” or something like that. So they would have all of the various – it wouldn’t just be LGBTQ – it would be like race and class and gender and everything else in there, environmentalism.” Erin underscores the absurdity of grouping all identity categories and political causes into a broad “diversity club,” and implies that this language obscures the specificity of LGBTIQ student experience. The motion to ban
GSAs despite their legality under Bill 13 was overturned by a TCDSB vote in May 2013 (Alphonso, 2013).

Although Peter, who identifies as straight, initially thought that naming didn’t matter because “it’s the objectives we’re after,” he was eventually persuaded that “GSA had to be used because that was the name that specifically identified the issue to be challenged.” He used the example of his own anti-violence organizing to explain why the specificity of language is important:

I worked in organizing against male violence… and people would always get upset, saying, well why are you doing it for male violence? Why shouldn’t it be all violence? Because male violence accounts for ninety-eight percent of violence we experience in society, that’s why. …If you want to organize against other kinds of violence please feel free, go ahead. But don’t say not to do this because we’re not addressing all [violence].

By steering the conversation away from the specific issues of homophobia and transphobia towards a more generic conversation about inclusivity, conservative Catholics erase the violence experienced by LGBTIQ students in schools.

Robert has seen administrators respond to the requirements of Bill 13 by avoiding the topic of AHE in favour of broadly-defined anti-bullying training. According to Robert, this generalized approach means that [administrators] get off of the hook of specifically addressing the oppression that comes with homo-bi-transphobia. In other words, if I can roll my implementation of Bill 13 into all forms of bullying, then I don’t have to deal with any degree of depth or integrity to the specific needs of gay kids in schools.
By using language such as “students of same-sex attraction” and “respecting differences,” the ACBO and Catholic administrators are able to gloss over the specific problems of homophobia and transphobia in their schools. The use of vague and inaccurate language thus allows administrators to sidestep their obligations under Bill 13. As Peter explained, “that’s the key thing, to name it. That’s why the GSA movement was formed – to name the specific conditions in our environment that have to be challenged.”

**Language and Self-Determination**

My participants all identified LGBTIQ language as pivotal for the self-determination of queer and trans students. Erin asserted that “naming is important and everybody should have the right to name themselves and to call their own experience.” Robert called LGBTIQ language “a gateway” to understanding and combatting homophobia. The struggle over language is an ideological one – by claiming LGBTIQ language, queer and trans students and educators push back against structures of power that silence and delegitimize their experiences. Bourdieu (1991) claims that structures of power teach us “not only how to act. The power of suggestion… instead of telling the child what he must do, tells him what he is, and this leads him to become durably what he has to be” (p.52). Bourdieu points to the importance of naming – through the imposition of language, students are told what kinds of identities are acceptable and which are illegitimate in the eyes of the school. Imposed language such as “students of same-sex attraction” circumscribes the possible range of identities open to students. Conversely, following students’ lead in terms of chosen language might allow new possible expressions of identity to emerge. Amy recounted that,

the administrator I work for now has never said the word “lesbian,” “gay,” “trans” or “bi.” So what she calls LGBT kids when she’s addressing the issue, the times she has
addressed the issue, or speaks about it in a staff meeting, it’s “students with gender confusions.” So the kids have no idea what she’s talking about.

The refusal of Amy’s administrator to use the language that queer and trans people employ to describe themselves represents a willful erasure of the existence of these groups.

Chosen language is tied to visibility which can help people from marginalized communities feel a sense of safety and belonging. Representations and visibility have “real consequences for real people, not just in the way they are treated but in terms of the way representations delimit and enable what people can be in any given society” (Dyer, 1993, p.3). Queer and trans visibility in Catholic schools may help decrease bullying, but it might also open up a range of possible identifications for students who might not, given the current structure, see queerness as a viable option.

Some participants noted that queer and trans visibility is on the rise in certain Catholic schools where active GSAs create posters and public service announcements using chosen language. Others mentioned incidences of silencing and erasure. For example, Amy recounted that she was asked to take down a pride flag that she had put up in her classroom. She resisted and eventually kept the flag in her room, but said that she has been “quite severely punished” in subtle ways for her transgression. When I asked Amy about the rationale of her administration, she said that her LGBTIQ advocacy is always met with the argument that her actions “don’t fit with Catholic values, or this is not the time or the place, or we have to move slowly with these things, or … this is contravening to the bishops, or we want to wait until we have a school board approach.” A variety of strategies are thus employed by Amy’s administration to silence even a small symbol of support for queer and trans students. While Amy labels the excuses given by her administrator the “official approach,” she also recounted that she has heard “quite frequently…
from people in senior positions” that “there’s a strategy to wait until the Conservative
government is elected and then the legislation [Bill 13] will be thrown out.” Delaying the
implementation of the *Accepting Schools Act* might thus be a political strategy on the part of
some administrators who hope that the bill will be overturned if the Conservative party wins the
next provincial election, which will take place on or before October 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2015.

Grace and Wells (2005) claim that the Catholic power structure works to “pathologize
queer” (p.260). Indeed, the lack of visible administrative support in some schools may actually
impeded the anti-homophobia provisions of Bill 13 by reinforcing the idea that queerness is
pathological and should not appear in public space. Amy said that when addressing students’ use
of homophobic language she’s often “been told, “but Miss, it’s against the bible.” So that’s a
very, very common defense for a student... They’re resorting to the bible to not only tell me that
their behaviour is acceptable, but that it’s justified and sanctified.” Amy’s experience
demonstrates that institutionalized homophobia reinforces and justifies homophobic bullying
amongst her students. Experiences like this one have led Amy to believe that

homophobic bullying in Catholic schools serves a social purpose… I think that it is a
form of punishment that is used to silence and terrorize LGBT kids. So if you believe that
somebody who engages in same-sex sexual relations or romantic interactions is going to
go to hell and burn, then you could see that anything that oppresses that and shuts that
down is going to be valued.

Amy said that she didn’t think other staff had this conscious intention in mind, but that
regardless of good intentions, the refusal to intervene in instances of homophobic bullying
ultimately reinforced the legitimacy of violence as a tool to secure heteronormativity.
Although there has been a visible and vocal GSA at Erin’s school for many years, she thinks that the larger structure of the Catholic system silences queer issues:

Catholics don’t want these groups to become vehicles for activism. They think it should be just everybody with the chaplain and the guidance counsellor and social worker talking about how we can prevent bullying. And not how can we make the lives of LGBTQ people in general more visible in school. I think they’re afraid of that.

This argument is, in fact, articulated by Bill 13 opponent Dan DiRocco (2012) who states that queer and trans issues should be “dealt with privately, with proper counselling and chaplaincy staff,” because “open forum on these delicate issues could put students at risk, psychologically and spiritually” (p.24). In the above quote Erin makes a distinction between the vague concept of “bullying prevention” and the visible mobilization of LGBTQ activism in schools. It is this visibility which she says frightens conservative Catholics because it represents a real shift in the way queer and trans people take up space and are recognized on their own terms in schools.

Bourdieu claims that the world is constituted through symbols and language – when we stifle or make room for queer and trans visibility, we are “confirming or transforming the vision of the world and thus the world itself” (1991, p.170). The privatization of queerness allows for the dominant vision of the world as heterosexual to be maintained, while on the other hand queer visibility and public activism threatens to destabilize the status quo and transform reality.

The struggle over language is deeply political; when administrators use inaccurate language, they are refusing to recognize the centrality of language to queer identity. Conversely, by resisting against normative language LGBTQ students and staff forcibly create space for themselves in the school system. The ban on the title “gay straight alliance” is a part of a process of hegemony in that normative understandings of sexual identity, having been challenged by the
chosen language of student activists, must be re-affirmed. The very need for this re-affirmation reveals that heterosexuality as a norm is not fixed or natural, but is a social construction that requires constant maintenance to sustain its power. Haskell and Burch explain that “homophobic and transphobic bullying, as forms of power and discipline, function as lessons (often referred to as the hidden curriculum), teaching us which behaviours and associated identities are valued and which are not” (2010, p.91). While the violence of homophobic and transphobic bullying is one tool through which heteronormativity is enforced, collusion and erasure on the part of school administration is another, perhaps equally damaging, method.

The desire to have students contend with their coming out processes in private, as Erin explains above, is an attempt to distance the issue of LGBTIQ rights from the public sphere where it could be potentially disruptive to the status quo. By confining discussion around LGBTIQ topics to the private sphere the ACBO individualizes, and thus de-contextualizes and attempts to render apolitical, students’ non-normative sexual identities. Grace and Wells describe this process as the “privatization of queer” in the Catholic educational context (2005, p.237). The refusal to use students’ chosen language to describe student sexual identities might thus be perceived as part of a “larger narrative… of the Catholic Church’s institutional efforts to privatize queer – to keep it hidden, invisible, silent, unannounced – in religion, education and culture” (Grace & Wells, 2005, p.239). It is important to note that queerness is silenced here in order to reassert a form of power – heteronormativity – that is vulnerable rather than fixed, and therefore open to change.

Catholic Identity and Anti-Homophobia Education

As part of my initial research question I asked how educators in the Catholic system negotiate institutional contexts in which they are called to perform contradictory behaviours –
homophobia prevention under Bill 13, and support of the ACBO’s position on homosexuality – at the same time. The interviews that I conducted revealed that participants often reconcile this tension through their personal understandings of Catholicism. All participants felt that it was possible to interpret Catholicism in a way that entailed openness to sexual diversity and a responsibility to create inclusive school environments. Erin explained that her difficulty is not with Catholicism as a whole, but with a particular group of vocal, right-wing Catholics:

The main stumbling block in the Catholic system isn’t your average Catholic parent; it’s not your average Catholic teacher or Catholic student. It’s a … very small minority of extremely right-wing Catholics who want to make Catholicism about excluding people, who want to define Catholicism by really stringent things like abortion rights, anti-gay attitudes … and not about the things that I think most Catholic schools are about, which is social justice, we would call it gospel values, which is completely antithetical to what these super right-wing, rosary-carrying Catholics are putting out.

Erin saw no tension between her own social justice-oriented Catholicism and the mandate to prevent homophobic and transphobic bullying under Bill 13. Similarly, Peter’s interpretation of Catholicism “perceives education as a means of integrating the whole person.” Peter claimed that while LGBTIQ language might be new for many educators, the philosophy of inclusivity has always been part of Catholic education. He explained that it would be “totally consistent” with core Catholic values to “make special changes to our program in order that LGBTQ students feel welcomed [and] are able to fully participate in the growth towards achieving the fullness of what it means to be a human person.”
Robert described two pillars of Catholic teaching: the dignity of the human being and the common social good. Working as an ally to queer and trans students, he argued, is consistent with both of these core teachings:

It doesn’t matter how a person presents themselves to me. What really matters according to my Catholic teaching is that there’s a human being in front of me. And if I don’t know how to respond as a professional or personally to the person sitting in front of me, than as a teacher or administrator I have an obligation to find out. So if I have a trans kid sitting in front of me that is being harassed because of the washroom that they want to use, and I don’t know as an administrator what to do, then I’ve got to find out. Because really all that matters is that kid who’s hurting around a basic human right – to be included. Robert sees no tension between being a Catholic and supporting LGBTIQ students. Rather, his interpretation of Catholic teaching is a major impetus for his work as a teacher-ally.

Unlike other participants, Amy questioned her allegiance to institutional Catholicism during our interview. While she grew up in a progressive Catholic household and identifies as Catholic, her experiences of ostracization and repression in Catholic schools have led her to question her commitment, not to her faith, but to institutional Catholicism. Amy recounted that the way Catholic rhetoric is deployed in schools can be deeply harmful to students:

I have kids who have been taught that they need to go to the religion department because they’re on a serious path on the road to hell and somebody needs to pray the gay out of them. And they’ve come to me in tears. I’ve had children ask me, with tears running down their face, “Miss, am I evil, am I going to go to hell?” This is not something that’s an aberration; this is a norm in the system that I work in.
Amy’s perception that institutionalized homophobia is endemic to the Catholic system has contributed to her questioning of Catholicism. When asked how her support of queer and trans students fit within her definition of Catholic education, Amy replied,

I think that when you ask that question it reflects a gap – maybe a chasm is a better word – between the left and the right in the Catholic Church itself. There are people whose sense of their Catholicism is defined by Rome and if Church doctrine says “A,” then you do A. I am far removed from that. So am I Catholic? I have been told by several people at my school vehemently that I’m not Catholic, because I don’t agree with core beliefs … Every day I think, what was the original message, what was the beginning idea? And from a historical perspective, where has that continuum developed in terms of hierarchies of power, and what have they done with that power? … When I look at what Catholic means these days, I think, yeah, actually, maybe I’m not [Catholic]. And maybe I’m ok with that.

Amy’s disillusionment with Catholicism comes out of her teaching experience. While she was raised to believe that the “number one message of Jesus Christ was social justice,” her work life has led her to feel cynical about the possibilities for LGBTIQ inclusion in the Catholic school context, leading her in turn to question Catholicism as a whole. During our interview, Amy ultimately came to the conclusion that “the only chance [queer and trans students] have of having any kind of security is if [school] policy is directed by the government and not the bishops.”
Educator Isolation and Mutual Support

Isolation, Silencing, Punishment

Although Bill 13 has increased visibility for some LGBTIQ students who have been able to establish GSAs, queer educators and staff are often left feeling invisible and isolated in their workplaces. Similarly, many straight allies have small networks of support that often lie outside of their school environments. The isolation that many of my participants spoke about is part of a climate of fear in which staff are afraid of repercussions they might face for visible LGBTIQ advocacy. Amy said that although many of her colleagues “really care for our kids, [they] are just silent because they’re afraid.” She claimed that the new legislation has had no effect on her colleagues’ fear of being punished for supporting queer and trans students. These fears are not unfounded, as some teacher and administrator allies have been penalized through a combination of overt and subtle means. As the only vocal proponent of queer and trans rights in her school, Amy said that she has “definitely been punished for my attempts [to create change]… I’m not going to go into details… But I would just say that my principal worked rather diligently to attack my reputation at every opportunity, in a very, very detrimental way.” Bourdieu explains that mechanisms of power are not always overt. Instead, power is often asserted through subtle but effective means: “ways of looking, sitting, standing, keeping silent or even of speaking (“reproachful looks” or “tones,” “disapproving glances” and so on) are full of injunctions that are powerful and hard to resist precisely because they are silent and insidious, insistent and insinuating” (1991, p.51).

According to Robert, part of the way teachers are silenced is through insinuation as administrators use a “really crafty, insidious ways of almost implying, you know – are you queer?” In order to work as a teacher in Ontario Catholic boards, an applicant must present a
letter from a Catholic priest affirming their Catholic status. This process effectively closes off these publicly-funded jobs to applicants who are not Catholic and may impede hiring for applicants who are out as LGBTIQ. Insinuations from administrators about sexual orientation, then, have a powerful effect on teachers, whose jobs may literally be on the line if they are outed as LGBTIQ. Peter recounted that recently in Vancouver, “another gentleman lost his job after being in a Catholic school… so I still have to advise people not to [come out] – they don’t have the complete freedom yet, you know, to be open. And so don’t make yourself a visible target in that respect.” That straight-identified teachers are hesitant to take on visible ally roles for fear of being labeled queer speaks volumes about the silencing that educators who do identify as LGBTIQ might be experiencing in Catholic schools.

Communication and group organizing can also be a struggle for educator-allies, especially if they are LGBTIQ-identified and want to connect with other teachers who are also queer and/or trans. Robert clarified that while overt punishment makes this kind of organizing difficult, silence due to fear also has an impact:

Even in the age of social media I can’t put out an email and say, “here’s an opportunity to get together for teachers who identify within the LGBTQ community”… That would not happen! One, I would get my hand slapped big time. But two… no one would respond… So if you’re a queer teacher in a Catholic school and I know that you’re interested, I say hey, in a few months we’re having this thing on a Friday night. Would you be interested in coming?

Because teachers fear for their job security, official support networks between LGBTIQ educators cannot exist. Any networks that do arise are, according to Robert, “all word of mouth,”
meaning that those who do not come into contact with other queer and trans teachers might be left without resources or knowledge of organizing that is going on.

Although Bill 13 technically permits teachers to mentor GSAs in Catholic schools, Robert explained that as an administrator, he could still “make it damn difficult for you as a teacher to do it, cause I [could] put up every roadblock along the way.” Robert also noted that the career trajectories of teachers could be threatened by disapproving administrators, so that “if [a teacher-ally] wants to go on to be an administrator” themselves, they might find that “they’ve kind of been blacklisted.” Isolation and a lack of job security can be wearing for educator-allies. Amy explained that the constraints of her school environment have led her to question whether it’s possible to be an effective ally there at all:

You’re constantly coming across limitations, feeling like you’re walking in a poisonous environment every time you get up for work. You know, it takes its toll. A lot of my friends say, “those kids need you there.” And a lot of the kids when they graduate say, “I wouldn’t have made it without you.” But it’s getting to the point now where it’s just – I feel like my bones are ragged, you know? I feel so tired of it… I’m very much ready to leave the system.

Amy’s experience of burnout demonstrates how important mutual support can be for educator-allies. Of all the participants, Amy had the smallest professional support network – she was only aware of one other professional in the Catholic school system who did work to support queer and trans students. Although other participants had been ostracized to different degrees throughout their careers, their connections to a growing community of educator-allies enabled them to keep doing support work.
All participants negotiated the tension between Bill 13 and Catholic values through their personal interpretations of policy as well as through their perspectives on Catholic teaching. However, participants differed in the degree to which they were self-reflexive about this negotiation. Some participants engaged in rights-based activism in a strategic way: their interviews suggested that while the sex/identity distinction was necessary for working in schools, desire and subjectivity might actually be more complex than this strategy implied. Other participants lacked reflexivity about using rights-based approaches. While support networks are important for helping allies to avoid burnout, they might also serve another vital purpose: networks allow allies to be together, which in turn opens greater possibilities for self-reflexivity and discussion around strategy, tactics, and the nature of subjectivity, identity and desire. Spaces of mutual support might thus act as a bridge between the seemingly disparate tactics of identity-based work and queer activism. While educator-allies may engage in rights-based work out of necessity, support networks provide the space for these tactics to be understood as one of many strategies, rather than remaining uninterrogated as the only possible kind of activism.

**LGBTIQ Teachers as Role Models**

Participants claimed that the positive effects of Bill 13 are limited by the fact that most LGBTIQ teachers and administrators are unable to come out in Catholic schools. They said that the forced closeting of teachers impacts the wellbeing of queer and trans youth. Erin explained,

Bill 13 pushed the envelope with respect to protecting students. But Catholic schools will never be normal and healthy until gay and lesbian teachers and other staff members are free to live open lives… I don’t think that you’re a good role model, or a good ally, or a healthy human being when you’re always walking around with this fear of being fired.
Erin has a number of colleagues whom she considers to be allies. However, as a lesbian-identified teacher, she is concerned that it might compromise her job if she were to officially come out to her students. When she first started working in a Catholic school, Erin said she “jumped back into the closet, as far back as I could go because the attitudes and talk that I heard from my colleagues pertaining to gay and lesbian people was so backward and so offensive that I thought holy shit, if I say anything I’m gonna be toast.” Although the attitudes of her colleagues have shifted over the years, she still believes that young LGBTIQ teachers coming into the system will have to “go back into the closet.” Even after the passage of Bill 13, Erin said that she doesn’t come out “officially to my classes. I don’t talk about my life in any kind of normal context, which is a tension for me.” Erin noted that while straight teachers talk casually about their spouses with students, LGBTIQ teachers must omit this important part of their lives from their relationships with students. In this instance heterosexuality is perceived as being about relationships, while queer relationships are perceived as being about sex, and are thus seen as inappropriate to the school setting.

The fact that Erin must remain closeted at school impacts the work that she is able to do as an ally to queer and trans students. Although her school has had a GSA for many years, Erin has never been the mentor of the group. The central reason, she stated, is “it becomes a little disingenuous to invite… students to be open to potentially come out where I feel that I could not come out explicitly to them… It makes me angry because I think that probably the best thing that queer youth could actually have in order for them to feel safe and feel welcome… is to see role models.” Erin’s argument evokes the point that media frequently represent queer and trans lives as tragic, a sentiment which is mirrored in much official Catholic rhetoric about queerness. Given this context, it is often assumed that examples of happy LGBTIQ teachers will have a
positive impact on the wellbeing of queer and trans youth. This model assumes that positive identity moves in a causal and linear fashion from teacher to student. Deborah Britzman (1993) argues that the role model approach portrays students as “stable subjects [or] empty vessels waiting to be filled with the goodness of essentialized role models” (p.39). It misconstrues identity as existing in an idealized essential form, rather than as being a “mobile and shifting… contradictory place to live” (Britzman, 1993, p.25). Britzman invites us to question which roles get construed as worthy of modeling and why: “whose version of goodness and clarity are valorized?” (1993, p.38). I would suggest that only those identities seen as palatable within a heteronormative, colonial, capitalist context get taken up as role models, thus the prevalence of individuals who appear to have made “important” contributions to society as sanctioned role models (women CEOs, politicians of colour, successful lesbian and gay professionals, etc.). If teachers were able to come out as LGBTIQ in the Catholic system, which of them would be seen as appropriate role models? Would certain identities, such as those of polyamorous queers, still be construed as inappropriate to the school setting?

Britzman argues that students are not passive receptacles into which essentialized identities can be deposited (1993, p.39). Instead, students may identify in unpredictable and surprising ways with the models in their lives. Heather Sykes notes that student identifications “sometimes reach across, against, and in spite of the sameness of gendered, racialized and bodily identities” (2011, p.78). When a student is expected to identify with a teacher because they share a single, essentialized identity marker, the multiple shifting identities occupied by both the teacher and the student are ignored. Sexual orientation does not exist in isolation from other categories of identification, but is necessarily implicated in the construction of race, gender, class, dis/ability, and other social markers. It would be impossible for one teacher to represent all
of the multiple facets of identity that students inhabit (Sykes, 2011, p.83). Role modeling presumes identification on the basis of sexual orientation, but does not take into account the intersectional and mobile nature of student and teacher identities. Students may use their teachers for a variety of non-linear identifications and disidentifications, meaning that straight teachers who act as allies also have the potential to positively impact queer and trans students (Sykes, 2011, p.81).

Erin said that in order to overcome internalized homophobia and transphobia, LGBTIQ youth need to “feel like their lives are going to be good and healthy.” Robert concurred that “until the students can see teachers being comfortable with their sexual identity, it’s still sending the hidden message that [students] can’t quite come out, you can’t quite be honest yet, because the teachers can’t be honest.” The argument that role models have a positive, causal impact on students might be an important tactic in the fight for LGBTIQ teacher job security and emotional safety. At the same time, teachers might recognize that role modelling discourse closes down space for the work of straight allies and misrepresents the shifting nature of identity and desire. Perhaps the argument for role models could be employed as a strategy that might exist alongside a queer critique of the nature of identification.

**Strategies Employed by Educator-Allies**

**Building Solidarity & Momentum**

LGBTIQ educators’ job security may be at risk if they are outing, meaning that it can be difficult for them to mentor GSAs and engage in other visible support of queer and trans youth. Because LGBTIQ teachers are targeted, the participation of straight allies is needed in the push for anti-homophobia education. As mentioned above, Erin felt unable to mentor her school’s GSA because of her identification as a lesbian. In contrast, Peter thought that his straight identity
allowed him to do advocacy work from a position of relative safety: “when I started getting involved with supporting LGBTQ in the schools it was much easier for a married white male to take on that responsibility. Nobody’s going to attack me for that. I was not at risk. Whereas if a person who identified themselves in that way took that role they were much more at risk and much more questioned.” Because of this level of risk, relationships of solidarity between LGBTIQ and straight teachers is an imperative part of building momentum in the movement to keep queer and trans students safe in Catholic schools.

Although all participants have faced obstacles to their support work over the course of their careers, most of them recounted having some experiences of success. The participants, with the exception of Amy, felt that Bill 13 had provided them with more capacity to talk about LGBTIQ issues in schools. Peter claimed that the bill had “provided a little bit of additional space for lack of fear of consequences because now it’s mandated by the ministry.” While legislation does not solve many of the problems faced by educator allies, it does provide them with a sense of legitimacy and a policy document to point to when their work is questioned. Although Robert still felt “a bit isolated” in his support work, recently he has found that “when I open my mouth and talk about this with other educators – when I give workshops, for instance – I find more allies than I do detractors.” Robert’s mostly positive experience doing teacher trainings indicates that many Catholic teachers are open to supporting queer and trans students but need to be provided with tools, support, and the knowledge that their work is mandated by the Ministry. Peter claimed that the number of GSAs in the province’s Catholic schools is increasing rapidly since the passage of Bill 13: “when we first started doing [workshops] I was probably the only one in the room who had ever mentored a GSA. Now when we do the workshops at least half of the people there are already working with the students in that way.”
This experience of positive change has given most of my participants a sense of growing momentum with respect to queer and trans student rights in Catholic schools. As Peter said, “are we there yet? No… I don’t want to pretend it’s been addressed, but the momentum is certainly clearly there.” Importantly, Robert noted that “somebody at [every] school board is responsible for this portfolio now,” meaning that at the very least Bill 13 has forced a conversation about LGBTIQ issues to begin to take place in Catholic boards.

**Individual Classroom Activism**

Even in instances where administrators refuse most advocacy initiatives, educators manage to find ways to support queer and trans students. Despite repeated punishment and ostracization, Amy makes space to question heteronormativity within her own classroom:

> when the doors close… I always teach a love of diversity and so I use equity education and anti-racist, anti-homophobia, sustainable – just how not to be an asshole! [laughter] in my class at every opportunity that I can. And I try to reflect the diversity of everybody, including my LGBT kids [through] the curriculum in terms of who we’re studying and the types of work that we look at, and contributions from diverse peoples as well.

Amy’s emphasis on inclusivity does not go unnoticed by her students, some of whom have told her that her support is vital to their ability to stay in school. Even in schools like Amy’s where attempts to visibly support LGBTIQ students are “shut down quite forcefully,” educator allies are able to have an impact on the wellbeing of their queer and trans students. As allies become better connected through growing support networks, stories like Amy’s might demonstrate to other educators that individual classrooms can provide space for anti-homophobia education even in hostile institutional environments.
Support for Administrator-Allies

While Bill 13 undoubtedly contains important protections for students, its implementation depends, according to my participants, largely on the views and career aspirations of individual administrators. Erin noted that although some administrators are very fundamental in their beliefs, many others are “just very, very frightened of backlash and parental [complaints] – or people who aren’t even parents – people from outside the school community coming in and giving them grief. Like professional Catholic activists.” Several participants claimed that the increased visibility that such a public debate can bring to a school can be detrimental to an administrator’s career opportunities. Robert, who has conducted teacher trainings on LGBTIQ issues at many schools across the province, said that although he has seen reluctant administrators, he has also seen principals who are excellent. Who take to full measure the permission and the obligation [of Bill 13]. And within that involves some risk, right, because this is not an easy topic to deal with, they undoubtedly will get some kick-back from parents, perhaps some teachers and staff, etc. But I’ve seen schools in the GTA [Greater Toronto Area] that have done fabulous jobs.

While some administrators are motivated – whether out of fear for their jobs or genuine conviction – to stifle LGBTIQ visibility, others are taking real steps to address homophobia and transphobia in their schools. Robert, Erin and Peter all claimed that administrators may actually need more training and support to help alleviate fears that can prevent them from taking action and backing educator-allies amongst their staff.
Activist Histories

Robert recounted a fascinating story that demonstrates the resilience of LGBTIQ educators and the importance of mutual support and community building. He explained that twelve years before Bill 13, queer and trans-identified Catholic teachers organized a monthly secret gathering where they shared experiences and strategies, and made space to “just hang out, or socialize, or bitch, or whatever.” Teachers had a “cordon of people that we sent covert letters to through the board courier system” to plan meetings. Eventually an administrator “broke confidence and opened one of the letters and confronted myself and another person who was organizing it. And we were told to shut it down… that kind of blew our cover because that was our method of communication – there was no email.” Despite the fact that the group was forcibly disbanded, Robert cites the meetings as “a strong experience because people who had been silenced and made to feel invisible got this little opportunity, in this pocket, to be who you are.”

Robert’s story demonstrates that resistance to heteronormativity in the Catholic system has been happening for some time. It shows us that teachers who engage in contemporary advocacy work are part of a legacy of educators using both subtle and overt tactics to challenge heteronormativity in their schools. Connecting to this history of struggle might provide a sense of legitimacy and longevity to allies who are doing support work in the present.

Collective Bargaining

Although Bill 13 has provided educator allies with some ammunition, Amy’s experience of isolation and punishment demonstrates that policy does not always play out as intended on the ground. Because job security can be compromised through the suggestion that a teacher-ally may be LGBTIQ, most participants suggested that the union was the best place for organizers to go for support. As mentioned above, participants felt that until queer and trans teachers are visible
and out in their schools, students will be unable to have a truly supportive environment. Robert claimed that the right for teachers in the Catholic system to be open about their sexuality is integral to the protection of LGBTIQ students. He argued that “the only way to win that right is through collective bargaining, to guarantee protection for our members.” Peter said that “equal rights for all our members,” including job security and benefit packages for partners, had been voted in as a bargaining priority for his union. So while Bill 13 is an important step towards protecting student rights, some allies see the fight for job security for queer and trans teachers as the next phase of the struggle.

**Student Leadership**

Along with unions, Robert cited students as being an important source of leadership in the movement to protect LGBTIQ rights in Catholic schools:

> Students are really, even more so than the union I would venture to guess, taking the lead on this. They don’t have the political or religious [obstacles] – they don’t have to navigate those waters… They just want to graduate, and this issue is happening to them right now. And so, because they’re not afraid of the politics and the religion, they kind of go for the jugular… some of it comes out of a passion of just wanting to do what’s right in terms of social justice. And for many of them it’s because they’re queer themselves and they’ve finally been given a crack of opportunity to put into action what their Catholic teaching had told them all along.

Robert reminds us that while teachers are certainly impacted, students are at the center of the struggle for inclusivity in their schools. Student resilience and activism may be a source of motivation for educator-allies who find themselves lacking in institutional support.
This section has detailed a number of strategies employed by participants in their school communities. Depending on their particular institutional context, allies may engage in a variety of these strategies simultaneously. Some participants alluded to the fact that many of the strategies they use employ a rights-based framework that conceives of identity as fixed. The self-reflexivity of these allies indicates that they are engaging in multiple kinds of activism simultaneously: while they understand the need for rights-based strategies, they are aware that this kind of activism is strategic. Rights-based tactics involve building solidarity, networks and momentum, which in turn provide openings for the kinds of self-reflexivity that enable a queer politic to emerge. Multiple strategies and frameworks are thus employed by allies at the same time.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This study has examined the ways that educator-allies in the Catholic system negotiate an institutional bind in which they are simultaneously called to prevent homophobia and to foster Catholic values. Participants described being affected by this tension in their workplaces, but did not feel that Catholic teachings were incompatible with their support of LGBTIQ students. Instead, participants perceived the tension to lie between Bill 13, The Accepting Schools Act, and the interpretation of Catholicism of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO). The ACBO, as well as other dominant forces including school trustees and what one participant called “professional Catholic activists,” articulate a negative view of queerness which can be seen as contradicting two of the requirements of Bill 13: that school boards create a plan to prevent homophobia and transphobia, and that schools allow Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) at their students’ request. In contrast, participants explained that their own views of Catholicism encouraged social justice. For many of the participants, religious beliefs were the impetus that led them to do support work for queer and trans students. They explained that opposition to Bill 13, rather than being inherent to Catholicism, came from a specific group of vocal, right-wing Catholics. When Catholic student Marc Hall was refused his request to take his boyfriend to prom, he said “I had learned in religion class to love thy neighbour and to treat everyone the way you want to be treated. It felt like my pastor, the school board, and [my principal] were all contradicting those teachings” (Grace & Wells, 2005, p.6). Similarly, participants interpreted Catholicism as promoting inclusion and social justice and saw attempts to ban GSAs and queer visibility as antithetical to Catholic teachings. Religious interpretation was thus a key means through which participants negotiated their institutional bind. By differentiating their own
religious beliefs on sexual orientation from those of dominant Catholicism, they were able to reconcile their location in a Catholic school with their LGBTIQ advocacy work.

**Institutional Location**

Participants occupied a variety of locations within the institutional structure of the Catholic school system. These locations affected their differing experiences of the institutional bind described above. While I did not ask participants to disclose their sexual orientation, two of them came out to me as queer and another identified himself as straight. Sexual orientation played a major role in the kinds of advocacy work open to participants, since queer educators’ job security could be compromised if they were outing publicly. Because of the lack of job security for LGBTIQ teachers in the Catholic system, one lesbian-identified educator decided to engage in activism at the union level and on an individual basis with students rather than acting as a visible mentor for her school’s GSA. In contrast, the participant who identified as straight acknowledged that his heterosexual privilege allowed him to be able to take on ally work without fear that his own sexual identity might come under attack. Institutional location, such as working for a union or as a teacher, also had an impact on the work that allies were able to do. Those who either worked for a union or were involved with union organizing around LGBTIQ issues were in contact with other educator-allies. These networks provided them with mutual support and strengthened their ability to do advocacy work. It’s also possible that LGBTIQ advocates who are union employees do not face the same kind of job insecurity as teachers. This may have contributed to union employee participants being able to engage in more visible activism than teacher-allies.

In contrast, Amy worked as a teacher in a school where she was the only visible ally to LGBTIQ students. This relatively isolated location opened her up to a variety of punitive
strategies on the part of her administrators. Her experience of punishment and isolation led Amy to have a more cynical view than other participants of the possibilities for LGBTIQ safety in Catholic schools. She had no sense of the momentum towards inclusion that more networked and supported participants had. Amy’s experiences as a teacher in the Catholic system also led her to question her allegiance to the Church because she felt that the rhetoric of the ACBO contradicted the social justice activism that was central to her own religious beliefs. Institutional location may also have impacted the kinds of critiques open to participants, limiting the types of activism that could become thinkable given their institutional context. Participants largely articulated anti-bullying strategies that fit within an anti-discrimination, human rights paradigm, rather than basing their activism in a “queer pedagogy” approach (see Luhmann, 1998). It is possible that the dominant position of the ACBO, coupled with the threat of repercussions for activism, circumscribes the kinds of conversations and actions open to educator-allies. Institutional location thus impacted participants’ experiences of burn-out and support, their perceptions of momentum and movement building, their relationships to their faith, and the kinds of activism available to them.

**Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research**

A major limitation of this study is that all four participants are white. This study was restricted to four interviews, making it difficult to know if the whiteness of the participants is typical of educator-allies in Ontario Catholic schools. However, 2009 census data indicates that at the time only 9.5% of teachers in Ontario were “visible minorities” (Childs et al., 2010, p.4). The fact that the majority of teachers in publicly-funded Ontario schools are not racialized may have contributed to the probability that all of my participants would be white. An important avenue of future study might be to consider how racialized educators negotiate the Catholic
system and whether experiences of doing LGBTIQ support work differ for teachers of colour in a predominantly white-staffed school environment. It might also be important to look at how race plays out in relationships between LGBTIQ youth and educator allies, and to examine whether the supports provided by teachers take the intersectional nature of student identities into account.

When I asked participants whether they thought students experienced homophobic and transphobic bullying differently if they had multiple marginalized identities, participants said that intersectionality was not a part of the conversation about LGBTIQ inclusion at their schools. Because whiteness often operates as an unmarked norm (Rasmussen et al., 2001, p.10), there is a risk that discussing queer and trans issues without talking explicitly about race might inadvertently inscribe queerness as white. This study does not grapple with issues of racialization and queerness in the Catholic school context. As a white researcher interviewing white participants without specifically investigating race, I risk erasing the power that white supremacy holds in educational institutions in Canada. The involvement of Catholic schooling in Canada’s history of colonialism might be an important subject to take up in future work, as the policing of bodies and desire in Catholic schools has been intimately related to a project of white supremacist colonization in Canada for hundreds of years. The control of bodies and desires experienced by queer and trans students and educators in contemporary Catholic schools is connected to this history of oppression – this connection might be an important avenue of future study for which this work could serve as a jumping off point.

**On Strategy and Tactics: Queering & Rights-Based Approaches**

This project has examined the distinction between identity and sexual acts made by the ACBO. This same distinction figured heavily in the interviews of most of my participants. Maher
and Sever explain that “official Catholic teaching splits sexual activity from sexual identity. In the case of homosexuality, sexual identity is “tolerated,” and the person is viewed as an oppressed minority needing “pastoral” care, while at the same time, homosexual behaviour is condemned” (2007, p.81). I have argued that by making a distinction between identity and sexual acts, the ACBO is able to evade its obligations under Bill 13. Catholic schools can then claim to be inclusive of queer and trans students while simultaneously condemning queer sex.

Accordingly, a 2001 Ontario Catholic Family Life Educators Network (OCFLEN) document states that “a pastoral sense of compassion for young people struggling with issues of sexual orientation must be balanced with a very clear challenge to chastity” (Podgorsky, 2001, p.13). In this description, LGBTIQ people are portrayed as tragic figures in need of care who must be rescued from their inherently sinful sexualities. Some participants agreed with institutional Catholicism’s distinction between sex acts and identity, arguing that their advocacy work was strictly about human rights and in effect agreeing with the ACBO that discussions about queer sexualities, including queer safer sex education, had no place in schools. This distinction may be strategically useful to educator-allies in that it allows them to counter the critiques of conservative Catholics who argue that GSAs and other advocacy work are inappropriate because they evoke sexuality in the school context. At the same time, this tactic can be seen as exclusionary in that it dismisses the importance of sexuality to the identities and humanity of LGBTIQ people.

Susanne Luhmann (1998) explains that rather than seeking to increase queer curriculum content or visibility, a “queering” approach to pedagogy might investigate how we come into being as homo/heterosexual, as well as how we come to “possess” knowledge and how that knowledge is constituted. Luhmann is critical of what she calls an “assimilationist” gay and
lesbian politic that seeks “equal cultural and political representation” through curriculum reform and anti-discrimination policy (1998, p.122). According to Luhmann, these strategies “look to expand the definition of normal to include lesbians and gays, rather than attacking and undermining the very processes by which (some) subjects become normalized and others marginalized” (1998, p.122). The demand for increased visibility requires a stable subject to be represented – it needs lesbian and gay identities to be knowable and static. But, as Luhmann and other queer theorists have argued, identity is always a process, and therefore cannot be assumed in the way that representational identity politics require. Indeed, Luhmann asserts that heterosexuality can only be constituted by defining itself in opposition to homosexuality, meaning that the two identities exist in “epistemic symbiosis” with each other (1998, p.122). Because it depends on the rejection of homosexuality for its coherence, the heterosexual norm is always at risk of collapse – it is “always threatened in its epistemic arrogance by [homosexuality]. Thus the relations between hetero and homo are irresolvably unstable. Their definitional interdependence poses a threat to heterosexuality’s distinctness” (Luhmann, 1998, p.123).

Heterosexuality must continually reassert its dominance and the myth of its stability; homophobic and transphobic bullying can be understood as a means of recuperating heterosexuality as a stable norm. More subtle methods of recuperation, Luhmann claims, include various “normalizations,” such as “gestures of toleration of lesbians and gays as “different but equal.” These normalizations restrain the potentially disruptive force that homosexuality possesses” (1998, p.123). The inclusion of LGBTIQ students in Catholic schools so long as they do not engage in queer sex can be understood as a kind of normalizing technique. While the ACBO explains that chastity should apply to all Catholic students (2004, p.12), their
conceptualization of queer sex as “objectively disordered” (2004, p.53) means that the call to celibacy is temporary for straight students and a life-long mandate for LGBTIQ youth. Queer and trans students are thus configured as being “different but equal,” and the potentially disruptive force of queerness is contained through the assertion that Catholic schools have made room for the inclusion of LGBTIQ identities. Rather than being displaced or challenged, heterosexuality is re-established as the norm while homosexuality is maintained as an “other” to be tolerated without fundamentally shifting existing relations of power. The threat to normalcy posed by queer sex, however, cannot be so easily disavowed. As Erin stated, the bishops “know that eventually, somewhere down the line, someone’s going to have sex, and that scares the hell out of them.”

The logic of the sex/identity distinction is thus about expanding the definition of normalcy to include various “others,” rather than deconstructing the process of normalization and its necessary exclusions. In order for a norm to be maintained, an abject other must always be disavowed: “only through a drawing of (identity) borders do self and other come into being” (Luhmann, 1998, p.122). In the case of the sex/identity distinction made by the ACBO, the borders of “normal” are expanded to tolerate “students of same-sex orientation,” while students who engage in queer sex are disavowed and conversations about queer sex are rendered illegitimate. Luhmann is critical of struggles for inclusivity that require fixed and knowable identity categories. Instead, she proposes that we question how we come to be and know. This questioning might enable an understanding of the ever-shifting nature of identity, allowing us to query not just who is excluded, but how such exclusions allow heterosexuality to be solidified as normal. This “queering” approach is a very different tactic – and requires a different understanding of subjectivity and identity – than anti-discrimination approaches such as Bill 13.
The rights-based approach of Bill 13, following the Charter and the Ontario Human Rights Code, seeks to protect LGBTIQ people who fit into legally recognized identity categories. While such legal recognition is undoubtedly important for people who are able to access these supports, appealing to the Charter, and thus to the legal protections of the state, can be seen as an exclusionary tactic. We need to ask ourselves who is erased by the very existence of the Charter and the legal frameworks that make up the Canadian state. I would contend here that indigenous people and undocumented migrants are just two of the groups that are systematically marginalized by the governing regimes of the nation state.

Andrea Smith argues that struggles for recognition by gay and lesbian communities are often coopted to serve the interests of capitalist settler states (2010, p.49). This process, wherein privileged gays and lesbians obtain official state sanction and protection, has been termed “homonormativity” or “homonationalism” (see Puar, 2007). The “gay-friendly” state purports to have addressed the issue of homophobia by protecting and accommodating privileged queers, primarily wealthy, able-bodied gay men. But who, asks Smith, is excluded in this normalizing process? If the existence of the white, capitalist settler state is premised upon the ongoing erasure, dispossession and disappearance of indigenous people, then indigenous queers will necessarily be excluded from its legal frameworks. Indeed, the ongoing dispossession of native land, chronic underfunding of indigenous communities and the large-scale removal of aboriginal children from their families demonstrate the current reality of settler colonialism in Canada. The promise of legal protections on the part of the settler state cannot address the multiple forms of interlocking oppression experienced by two-spirit, queer and trans indigenous people. An anti-colonial queer politic, Smith claims, “should not be premised on the notion that the U.S. [and Canada] should or will always continue to exist” (2005, p.50-51). Enshrining the rights of
lesbian and gay subjects under the protection of the state might thus exclude those indigenous queers who understand their self-determination to be bound up not simply with freedom from homophobia and transphobia, but with freedom from the colonial settler state. As in the identity/sex distinction discussed above, the disavowal of a group of abject “others” is necessary for certain LGBTIQ people to be understood as “normal.”

Similarly, activist and lawyer Dean Spade (2011) argues that seeking recognition and inclusion through legal channels actually reinforces structures of domination that have historically contributed to the marginalization of queer and trans people. Spade claims that changes in the law do not often better the lives of the most marginalized LGBTIQ people because the poorest, most criminalized groups rarely have access to legal representation. He contends that although the passage of legal protections for LGBTIQ people are often seen as evidence of an increasingly tolerant society, similar legal protections have done little to alter the material realities of racism, ableism, or sexism, in the United States (2011, p.81-82). Further, Spade argues that legal reform has made life worse for some groups, predominantly poor trans people of colour (2011, p.68). For example, because people of colour and indigenous people are hugely over-represented in North American prisons, creating anti-hate crime legislation – the function of which is to criminalize and incarcerate perpetrators – may not actually benefit the most marginalized and criminalized queer and trans people (2011, p.88). Instead, this legislation becomes another justification for the existence of the prison industrial complex, thus strengthening the very system which, Dean argues, perpetrates the most violence against marginalized communities (2011, p.90).

Anti-discrimination law also depicts the violence of homophobia and transphobia as existing only when immoral individuals decide to act in discriminatory ways. By individualizing
homophobia and transphobia, anti-discrimination law erases the systemic nature of these forms of oppression. It portrays the state as benevolent and tolerant, and in doing so obscures the violence perpetrated by the state against the most marginalized queer and trans people (Spade 2011, p.84-85). Creating anti-discrimination laws to address homophobia in Catholic schools may not, then, improve the circumstances of the most marginalized LGBTIQ students. As Spade points out, it is often wealthy, white gays and lesbians, seen as normal but for the one aberration of their sexual identity, who are able to access the protections of anti-discrimination law. This logic of LGBTIQ inclusion into the heterosexual norm takes the status quo to be both legitimate and fair (Spade 2011, p. 86). As an anti-discrimination law rooted in this logic, Bill 13 could be seen as benefitting only the most privileged LGBTIQ students.

Despite these queer critiques of rights-based approaches, the importance of Bill 13 should not be underestimated. The bill empowers educator-allies by giving them a policy document to turn to when their activism comes under attack and their job security is threatened. While many of Spade’s arguments are certainly applicable to Bill 13, some of its provisions function differently than standard anti-discrimination law. For example, the Accepting Schools Act actually avoids the punitive approach that is often taken in anti-bullying and anti-discrimination legislation, focusing instead on prevention and support. Section 29.1 of the bill mandates all boards to come up with a plan to prevent homophobia and transphobia (Accepting Schools Act, 2012). While participant interviews revealed that some administrators sidestep this obligation, Robert said that at the very least every board must now report back to the ministry, meaning that “somebody at the school board is responsible for this portfolio now, for these kids.” Bill 13 has, to an extent, broken the silence around LGBTIQ issues in the Catholic system: Robert claimed that Bill 13 had given educator-allies a sense of legitimacy and the feeling that they “don’t have
to hide under a rock anymore.” The preventative approach taken by Bill 13 indicates an important shift in the way safety is conceptualized. In his recent study on homophobic bullying in Canadian high schools, Donn Short explains that “conventional conceptions of bullying focus on static definitions of power relations, usually understood as limited to and existing between specific individuals; accordingly, responses have often been restricted to reacting to “incidents.”” (2013, p.232). Instead of limiting its tactics to reactionary, punitive measures, the Accepting Schools Act takes a preventative approach, demonstrating that it conceives of homophobic violence as a symptom of systemic, institutionalized power structures rather than as anomalous or pathologically-motivated incidents.

Similarly, Bill 13’s support of GSAs indicates that its authors see solidarity and coalition building as necessary parts of violence prevention. Rather than understanding bullying as “a non-specific form of aggression, as a mere pathological outburst” (Short, 2013, p.232), both the bill and the educator-allies I interviewed see bullying as a manifestation of larger systemic oppression that has to be challenged as part of any anti-bullying strategy. As Short explains, “broadening our conception of safety must include a consideration not only of immediate physical, verbal, relational, or cyber-based threats but also of the hetero-normative culture in which queer [and trans] students experience schooling and heterosexist oppression (2013, p.232).

Luhmann’s queer pedagogy (1998) points us towards the work of deconstructing oppressive systems and intervening in their reproduction. This “queering” approach may be essential if we want to address processes of normalization that continue to exclude and marginalize queer and trans students in schools. At the same time, educator-allies are currently doing the vital work of supporting students on the ground. Their work takes a variety of forms, ranging from individual counselling, referrals, public activism, teacher and staff training,
increasing visibility through poster and announcement campaigns, and mentoring GSAs. While queer critiques of human rights activism are important, they should not discredit the immense impact that participants’ ally work has on student lives and school communities. Students literally depend on these educator-allies for survival, and their bravery and resilience in the face of institutional pressure is remarkable. Much of the work that these educators do can be seen as situated within a human rights framework that seeks inclusion based on static identity categories. However, it’s possible that elements of a queer pedagogy exist alongside this rights-based work – rather than seeing the two forms of activism as opposed to one another, we might conceive of some ally work as incorporating both.

Goldstein et al. (2007) argue that “promoting AHE [anti-homophobia education] as human rights education (“and not sex education”) …ultimately limits the range of projects that might take place” (p.196). Despite this, they contend that “queering moments” surface in and through human-rights based projects (p.188). Although the current institutional structure forecloses the possibility of a “queer schools” approach, it does “not necessarily foreclose the surfacing of queering moments” in Catholic schools (Goldstein et al., 2007, 188). While all participants in this study were engaged in identity-based human rights activism, some were more strategic about their use of the sex/identity distinction employed by the ACBO. In these moments of self-reflexivity participants implied that their use of institutionally-recognized identity categories was one amongst a range of possible strategies. This self-reflexive move can, in and of itself, be seen as a queering moment because it calls the naturalness of identity categories into question. Spivak’s notion of “strategic essentialism” is helpful here: allies might fight for LGBTQ inclusion as if these identity categories were straight forward and clear, while at the same time recognizing the contextual and shifting nature of identification and desire (see Spivak,
It’s also possible that the space of support networks, such as the clandestine queer teacher group described by Robert, might provide openings for queer interpretations of rights-based work. Opportunities for queering moments might arise through conversation in the support groups that allies create for themselves and each other. Similarly, working together on rights-based projects and actions provides a forum where allies might discuss support, solidarity, and the nature of identity in the context of the Catholic school. Being together, then, always serves more than one purpose: it enables rights-based activism to take place, while at the same time providing opportunities for increased self-reflexivity, for questioning how we come to be and know (Luhmann, 1998). Allies might then be able to choose from a repertoire of tactics depending on what is feasible given their institutional context. We also need to consider who gets to make these tactical decisions given that the majority of Ontario teachers are white.

Ultimately, I hope to have forwarded a queer critique of rights-based discourses while valorizing the important, sometimes rights-based, work that allies are currently doing on the ground. I want to mark the importance of the Accepting Schools Act, and of the possibilities it opens for queer activism and support, in the context of endemic homophobia and transphobia in Ontarian schools. Rather than constructing rights-based and queering approaches as separate, I have discussed how these two discourses might surface as moments alongside one another, especially through the self-reflexive strategizing that takes place in supportive, allied spaces.
Appendix A: Initial Contact Email

My name is Alice Martin Ellwood. I'm working on a research project about educators who support queer and trans students in Catholic high schools in Ontario. My work is supervised by Dr. Heather Sykes, from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT).

My study looks at the implications of Ontario’s new anti-bullying legislation, the Accepting Schools Act (Bill 13), for educators in the Catholic system. I’m hoping to learn more about the ways that Catholic educators who are allies to queer and trans students navigate the tension between Bill 13 and the mandate to teach Catholic values.

I invite you to participate in a 45-60 minute interview about your experiences as an educator who supports queer and trans students in the Catholic system. If you are interested or know of other educators or administrators who might be, please reply to this e-mail or contact me at alice.martinellwood@mail.utoronto.ca.

Thank you so much. I look forward to hearing from you.

Alice Martin Ellwood
Appendix B: Informed Consent Document

Anti-homophobia legislation and Catholic schools: navigating an institutional bind

Thank you for offering to participate in this project. This letter explains what is involved so you can make informed decisions about taking part.

My name is Alice Martin Ellwood and I am a Master of Teaching candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). I am inviting you to participate in a research study that I am conducting about the implications of Ontario’s new anti-bullying legislation, the Accepting Schools Act (Bill 13), for Ontario educators in the Catholic school system. The research project will be called Anti-homophobia legislation and Catholic schools: navigating an institutional bind. It will examine the ways that Catholic educators who are visible allies to queer and trans students navigate the tension between Bill 13 and the mandate to teach Catholic values.

Although I attended public school in Toronto, my identifications as a queer feminist organizer and a teacher candidate give me a personal stake in this research – I am interested in reducing the violence experienced by members of queer and trans communities, and increasing the safety of all students who attend Ontario schools.

This research will contribute to a Master’s thesis which I am currently writing at OISE/UT in the Master of Teaching Program, part of the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning. My research is supervised by Dr. Heather Sykes from OISE/UT.

I am asking for your consent in participating in a 45-60 minute recorded interview. During the interview, I will ask you questions about your experiences supporting queer and trans youth in the Catholic system, as well as your thoughts on the implications of Ontario’s new anti-bullying legislation.

I will keep a written transcription of your interview for 3 years in my password-protected computer. It will be shared only with my supervisor. I will replace your name and the names of people and places mentioned in the interview with pseudonyms. Once I have transcribed the interview, you will have the opportunity to review the information to ensure that you feel comfortable with the pseudonyms I have chosen.

You may withdraw from the interview at any time before April 2014, at which point the thesis will be submitted for grading. There will be no negative consequences for deciding not to participate. Any of the information that you volunteer may be removed from the study at your request until this date.

While I will maintain a record of your name, email address, address and phone number in order to contact you in future, this information will never be included in interview transcripts or the text of my thesis.

There is a small risk that sharing personal stories and experiences could evoke difficult or complex emotions. You are welcome to end or take a break from the interview process at any
time. You may also choose not to answer certain questions – in this instance, you will not be required to explain your choice.

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to read this document and to participate in my research project. It is my hope that by contributing to the existing knowledge around queer and trans youth in Catholic high schools, we can reduce homophobia and make our school system safer for all students.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me or my research supervisor. I can be reached at alice.martinellwood@mail.utoronto.ca, or at 416-837-8754. My research supervisor, Dr. Heather Sykes, can be reached by phone (416-923 6641 ext 2439) or e-mail (hsykes@oise.utoronto.ca).

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Alice Martin Ellwood

Master of Teaching Candidate, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, University of Toronto

If you give your consent to be interviewed and understand your rights as a participant in this project, please sign below.

Printed Name: _________________________________________

Signature: _________________________________________

Date: _________________________________________
Appendix C: Guiding Interview Questions

After going over and signing the Informed Consent Document:

Thank you for agreeing to this interview – I appreciate that you’ve taken time out of your busy schedule to contribute to this research. Before we begin, I wanted to reiterate that the purpose of this interview is to gather knowledge about the experiences of secondary school teachers and administrators in the Catholic system who are engaged in supporting queer and trans students. Your name and contact information will be kept confidential, and pseudonyms will be used when I transcribe the interview. I have a series of guiding questions that I’d like to ask you, but it’s possible that other questions will arise as the interview proceeds. You can answer in any way that feels comfortable for you, and you are under no obligation to respond to every question. If you’d rather not answer a question, just let me know and we can move on. Feel free to ask for clarification at any point. The interview will take 45 minutes to an hour. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Basic Info:

What grade levels do you work with / have you worked with?

What subjects do you teach / have you taught?

How long have you been working in the Catholic school system?

Are you / have you been actively involved with clubs, campaigns or activities that support LGBTQ students at your school?

Allyship:

Can you describe your experiences working with queer and trans students?

Would you describe yourself as an ally to queer and trans students?

(How do you define allyship? What does it mean to be an ally to these students?)

School Environment:

How does the administration at your school (or schools you’ve worked at) respond to homophobia and transphobia?

How do your colleagues respond to homophobia and transphobia?

How do students at your school respond to homophobia and transphobia?

Do students feel comfortable coming out in your school environment?
Would you call your school environment ‘heteronormative’? [explain the term] Does it privilege heterosexuality as the normal way to live?

**School/board structure:**

What changes need to be made at your school to combat homophobia and transphobia?

Should these changes be made at the school level? Do they need to happen at the board / ministry level as well?

Do you think these changes are possible given the stance of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (formerly the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops) on homosexuality?

**Catholic identity:**

Many people think that it’s impossible to identify as a Catholic and support queer and trans students. How does your support of queer and trans students fit within your definition of Catholic education?

**Bullying:**

How would you define bullying?

Is there a difference between bullying and oppression? (Is bullying different from forms of oppression such as homophobia, transphobia, racism, sexism, ableism, colonialism or classism?)

Ministry documents often use the term ‘bullying’ rather than talking more specifically about homophobia, transphobia, or other terms that describe oppression. Why do you think that is?

**Bill 13:**

Is there an awareness of the passage of Bill 13, the *Accepting Schools Act*, at your school / the schools you’ve worked at?

Are teachers and administrators at your school supportive of the bill?

Before scheduling this interview, had you looked at the text of Bill 13? Were you aware of the existence of the bill? How had you heard about it? What did you know about it?

Have you received any new training about combatting bullying since September 2012? (Did the training discuss homophobia and transphobia? Did it address other specific forms of oppression?)

Are you aware of an action plan to address bullying being developed by your school / board?

Are you aware of any new policies which specifically address homophobia and/or transphobia?
There seems to be a tension between the ACBO’s position on homosexuality and elements of Bill 13. How do you deal with this tension at your school? Does this tension come up when you’re working to support queer and trans students?

In your experience, has the bill made it easier for you to support queer and trans students?

Do you think that the bill will have a real impact on the experiences of queer and trans students in the Catholic system?

**Allies / support networks:**

Are you aware of or in contact with other Catholic educators or administrators who support queer and trans students?

Who supports you in the work that you do with queer and trans students?

Do you think it’s possible for educators, administrators or students who don’t identify as LGBTQ to be in solidarity with queer and trans students? How can people support each other if they have different experiences?

**Beyond rights discourse:**

Do your students experience homophobia or transphobia differently if they also face other forms of oppression, such as racism, ableism, or sexism?

Are there elements of Catholic education that constrain the possibility of safety for all students? Do you think queer and trans students will every truly be ‘safe’ in the Catholic school system? What about in the public system?
References:


