Government Legitimacy and Anti-Discrimination: Considering the Implications for LGBTQ Bullying in Ontario’s Publicly Funded Catholic Schools when Religious and Secular Ideologies Conflict

By

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Abstract

In the fall of 2015, the long in development Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum was updated to reflect the current challenges faced by students in Ontario schools. It came not without much controversy, particularly from religious conservatives due to the changes made to language concerning sexuality, homosexuality, and gender identity. This study aimed to ascertain whether the existing environment in Catholic schools was more conducive to LGBTQ student bullying due to heteronormative religious doctrine, and how this doctrine might affect teachers in Catholic schools who must also adhere to secular curricula. It found that scholarly research appeared to be lacking in these areas, and that the lack of studies focused on these issues reflected the Catholic board’s reticence to participate in the research. Furthermore, findings suggest that LGBTQ discrimination might indeed be a greater issue in Catholic schools due to the presence of conflicting religious and secular ideologies, as well as the contradictory instruction given to teachers from various parties with differing beliefs on how Catholic children may be educated.

Key Words: Bullying, Catholicism, Curricula, Discrimination, Heteronormativity
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study and Context:

There is a great deal of research dedicated to the prevalence of bullying among children and adolescent students within schools. (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Smith & Brain, 2000; Yerger & Gehret, 2011; Rigby, 2014). Research has explored the diverse forms of bullying from verbal to physical, social to cyber, age-specific, gender-specific, and race-specific, with varied motivations ranging from peer pressure to perceived difference, inadequacy to power display. It has identified bullying as seriously dangerous and harmful to students’ health and sense of well-being (Smokowski, Evans, & Cotter 2014). It has shown how bullying can and has had negative effects with regard to academic achievement, student relationships, feelings toward school and course assignments, student emotional well-being, depression, and in some tragic cases, has even led to self-harm and suicide (Garnett et al., 2014). Studies recognize that bullying can take place for a multitude of reasons, manifesting itself in diverse ways, both overtly and covertly (Shariff, 2005, p.458-459). This research project explores the issue of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer bullying among children and adolescent students in schools. While there already exists some research regarding this subject (Check & Ballard, 2014; Addison & Coohart, 2011; Fetner & Elafros, 2015), this study contends that is not nearly enough to understand the complexity of the issue. With regard to LGBTQ bullying within the context of Catholic-specific school environments, the area around which this paper will be focused, research appears to be especially lacking.

1.1 Research Problem

This paper asserts, based on qualitative interviews conducted with professionals with extensive experience in Catholic schools, that LGBTQ bullying exists in many school
environments and that it is an issue which is exacerbated particularly within Catholic schools due to the increased emphasis on heteronormative structures. This study focusses on the causes, manifestations and results that LGBTQ bullying can have on Catholic students, particularly at an age when students are just beginning to understand their sexuality. This study asserts that many Catholic schools in Ontario (in practice) have yet to extend their understanding of the family, gender identity, and sexual relationships beyond the limited notions present within Catholic Catechism. Tonya Callaghan (2007) identifies this as a particular issue in Catholic schools in *That's so Gay! Homophobia in Canadian Catholic Schools*. While her text discusses this institutionalized heteronormativity with regard to the discriminatory experiences for LGBTQ teachers and staff working within the school environment, it provides important insight for the effects of that environment for students as well.

Alderson, Orzeck & McEwen, (2009) cite research completed by (Totten, Quigley, & Morgan, 2004; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2003), in stating that “schools (i.e., kindergarten to grades 12, or 13 in some jurisdictions) remain one of the most heterosexist and homophobic institutions in Canada (p.87). In this paper I hypothesize that it is this institutionalized heteronormativity, also discussed by DePalma & Atkinson (2010) which creates an environment ideal for the discrimination and bullying of LGBTQ students; particularly those in Catholic schools in Ontario. While the government of Ontario has designed and implemented an updated version of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum with a specific focus on sexual health and inclusionary practice to combat the heteronormative cultures present within many schools in Ontario, significant conservative groups have advocated against it. In the fall of 2015 the updated curriculum was incorporated into the classroom, but based on qualitative research I argue that those legal agreements made between the Catholic school boards and the
government of Ontario might face difficulties in being enforced and regulated in many of the Catholic schools in Ontario. This study aims to ascertain how educators employed within the various Catholic school boards in Ontario may provide a more inclusive, accepting and caring environment for those LGBTQ adolescents who face discrimination, hate, and bullying in their communities.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

In 2015 Kathleen Wynne, the first openly gay Premier of Ontario, made plans to mandate an updated version of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum for schools in Ontario. It came, not without much protest and controversy, primarily from conservative parent groups who saw the sexual content within the updated curriculum as inconsistent with the moral values of their religious denominations and the values they hoped to instill in their children. The Catholic School boards in Ontario had fought a similar update to the curriculum in 2010, successfully keeping it at bay as then-premier Dalton McGuinty acquiesced to mounting pressure from parents and conservative groups. Current premier Kathleen Wynne had not budged however, ensuring that school boards in Ontario comply with the updates. It must be noted however, that even though Wynne appeared resolute in her decision, the Catholic school boards in Ontario have acquired special permission to teach the updated curriculum through a Catholic lens, altering specific wording and language that it may better reflect Catholic principles and values. Toronto Cardinal Thomas Collins noted this when he responded in a (2015) statement to outraged parents and conservative Catholics who were concerned with what their children were being taught, stating “A group of Catholic educators will produce resources that support Catholic teachers so that the new curriculum is implemented in a way that is consistent with our Catholic teachings and appropriate within the context of a Catholic classroom (“Statement from Cardinal
Thomas Collins re: Ontario Health & Physical Education Curriculum”). How this lens will manifest itself into actual instruction is unclear, and more research in Catholic schools is required to determine whether this lens will significantly alter the ways in which the curriculum is taught. As such, this research paper is being written at a very particular time and context— that is to say, in the first years during which the newly mandated curriculum will be taught. While its effectuality for LGBTQ inclusion cannot be fully assessed until years from now, the purpose of this paper is to ascertain whether the existing environment in Ontario Catholic schools (despite the changes made to the Health and Physical Education Curriculum) are conducive to discrimination, bullying and other negative implications for the safety, security, and overall well-being for LGBTQ students.

1.3 Research Questions

This study questions: whether sexuality, when discussed in the environment of Catholic schools is inherently homophobic, and if so whether this is a result of individualized cases of teacher misconduct or institutionalized heteronormativity. This study also considers whether Catholic ideology conflicts in significant ways with secular teachings and if so, what issues arise within the Catholic school environment for those parties affected by it.

If the updated curriculum is viewed as the Ontario government’s attempt to make schools in Ontario more inclusionary, does it mean that Catholic school boards in fighting it, are advocating for an environment which continues to be discriminatory?

Court cases in the past in which discrimination has been introduced within the school environment, or even as a result of activities outside the immediate school environment have had significant negative ramifications for school staff. Can there be similar ramifications for the Catholic school board if they are held responsible for the environments they create in their
schools? What kind of environment is created by Catholic Schools with regard to inclusionary practice toward LGBTQ minorities? What implications does this have for heterosexual students who are not taught effectively about LGBTQ issues? Are they more likely to react with hostility to their LGBTQ classmates? Are they more likely to bully? How will the ideas reinforced to them through the Church and school affect their relationships with their peers? These are the areas in which further, Catholic school specific research is required.

1.4 Subsidiary Questions:

- Are Catholic teachings inherently homophobic? If so, are these teachings still promoted by Catholic schools and communities?
- What pressures are placed on Catholic educators in Catholic schools in teaching the updated Health and Physical Education Curriculum?
- Do conflicts exist when educators in Catholic schools have contrasting beliefs with the traditional doctrine of the Catholic faith and the values of the school with regard to homosexuality and gender identity?
- What is the “appropriate” age to address LGBTQ issues with children and students in Catholic communities?
- Is there a balance to be found between human rights, social rights, the rights of children, the rights of parents, the rights of educators and the rights of the government?

1.5 Reflexive Positioning Statement:

So far it may seem like I have just been critical of Catholic schools in Ontario. My intentions are not merely limited to this however. When I speak, I speak not as an outsider looking down on the ways in which Catholic schools are run, but rather as a person who understands and appreciates the profound effects Catholic education has had on my development.
as a student. I was born in 1993, brought up within the Catholic faith, even identifying myself with many Catholic beliefs and values. I was taught in a private school run by Comboni Sisters in Bahrain, a predominantly Islamic country in the Middle East. I have been an active member in my church community in Toronto, an altar server in my youth, and have attended various Catholic schools within the Toronto Catholic District School Board. Even as I hold to my Catholic beliefs however, beliefs which do recognize the importance of all life, the equality of all individuals and the rights of all human beings, I recognize that the Catholic Church has continually had issues of discrimination with regard to women, children, racial minorities, people of other faiths, sexualities and genders, as well as with respected scientists whose research had challenged fundamental Christian principles. I do not think that belief in the Catholic faith necessitates that we blind ourselves to the changing world around us.

My interest in LGBTQ issues stems from interactions I have had with peers of “nontraditional” sexual orientations and gender identities. It stems from conversations which feel no different than conversations with those who identify with those “traditional” sexual orientations and gender identities. It comes out of research and education; education not through the school environment but through media and social interactions. Because of these interactions I have come to understand that individuals who exist outside the traditional heteronormative conceptions of the human person deserve the same rights granted to everybody else.

My point is that ultimately, my understanding and acceptance of homosexuality and gender fluidity came, not from my Catholic education and upbringing, and not through the Catholic schools I was placed in. It came through my interactions with people who reflected the diversity in race, culture, gender, and sexual orientation present in Canada. It required that I become personally invested in it so that I may research it myself. What happens then, to those
impressionable children who do not become personally invested in these issues? What happens when they are not exposed to a diversity of thought with regard to sexual orientation?

Research indicates that greater education and knowledge on LGBTQ issues leads to increased tolerance and acceptance of LGBTQ peoples. (Alderson, Orzeck & McEwen, p.87)

Conversely I believe that lack of knowledge leads to hate and bullying, the marginalization of LGBTQ youth, and a culture of heteronormativity which breeds fear in those students who do not conform to traditional, Catholic notions of gender and sex. I still believe that Catholic education is an invaluable resource to be used as a tool by instructors and students in their learning and understanding of much of the world. Western architecture, art, history, politics, morals, ethics, laws, and a great deal more have been significantly influenced by Christian teachings and because of this I believe it is important to have a Catholic education. I do believe however, that Catholic education must include fundamental Canadian principles of social justice if we are to better serve our students.

1.6 Preview of the Whole

To respond to the research questions I will be conducting a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview professionals with extensive experience in Catholic schools. In my research I will incorporate ideas regarding the Church and sexuality in the overarching context of this paper but only in its relation to education and the teaching of sexuality to children in Catholic schools. This research project is organized into five chapters. In Chapter 2 I will review the literature in the areas of Catholic Catechism and governmental legislation, both within the context of LGBTQ bullying and inclusivity in the Catholic school environment. In Chapter 3 I will describe the research methodology and include information about the participants, the data collection, and limitations. In Chapter 4 I will report and discuss
the research findings based on the qualitative interviews conducted, particularly in the ways they relate to the current and emerging research reviewed in Chapter 2. I will conclude in Chapter 5 by reviewing the implications of the findings, making further recommendations for future directions. References and a list of appendices will be found at the end.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction to the Chapter

As this study is situated during the first years in which the newly mandated Health and Physical Education Curriculum is being implemented in publicly funded schools across Ontario, the perspective offered will be dynamic to the emerging data in schools. Before the study explores the positive effects the curriculum may have for LGBTQ minority students within the Catholic school environment it would be valuable to explore the research already conducted in this field. This chapter reviews the literature in the area of Catholic Catechism, particularly in its prevailing conceptions of the family, homosexuality, gender identity, and their combined effects on students educated in a Catholic school environment. This chapter will also consider how each conception has negative and contradictory implications for LGBTQ bullying in Catholic schools, particularly when contrasted with Bill 13: The Accepting Schools Act (2012) an amendment to the Education Act which gives greater focus on bullying and harassment within schools.

2.1 The Nuclear Family

To begin let us explore the Catholic Catechism regarding the nuclear family. The traditional notion of the family is that of two parents, a male and a female who act as the father and mother respectively, to their child or children (Besen, 2010, p.30; Čeplak, 2013, p.168). This has been referred to in western cultures as the ‘nuclear family.’ For the better part of the past hundred years, this conception of the family has prevailed. Though it is true that families are defined much more widely today, the heteronormative nuclear family is still the norm that all others are defined against, being held up as the ideal of family life (Michaelson, 2008, p.50-52). With regard to the Catholic perspective in particular, it is important to note that marriage and the nuclear family is to exist specifically between two consenting heterosexual adults, a partnership
of a male and female, with the intention and ability to procreate. According to the Catholic Church, “The key image of creation is reflected in the richness of the masculine and feminine dimensions of the heterosexual couple. The fact that human beings are created female and male, in God’s image, and that procreative power flows from their union are two fundamental aspects of marriage.” (“Pastoral Guidelines,” 2004, p.31). Because of their doctrine, the Catholic Church fundamentally opposes homosexual marriages, using the common argument that most who argue against same-sex marriages do, for fear that it would erode and destroy the idea of marriage itself, even possibly making heterosexual people more inclined to be homosexual and promiscuous (Michaelson, 2008, p.50-52).

2.1.1 Same-Sex Marriages

Though still not legal everywhere, marriage between couples of the same sex has come to be accepted and has become less stigmatized in Canada and much of the western world, (Alderson, Orzeck & McEwen, p.87; Addison & Coolhart, 2011, p.535-536). Despite this, the Church still holds on to beliefs which primarily consider the image of the traditional family, thereby not openly recognizing homosexual unions. It takes the perspective that sexual intercourse, in accordance with God’s plan should exist only within marriage, which is uniquely “the permanent union between a man and a woman” (“Pastoral Guidelines,” 2004, p.54). The Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation (2004) document continues, stating “Consequently, the Church can in no way put a homosexual partnership on the same footing as a heterosexual marriage [and] the sexual (genital) expression of love must allow for the eventual creation of new life. For these reasons, the Church does not approve of homosexual genital acts.” The church has taken a strong positon that clearly identifies a difference between homosexuality
and homosexual acts, something which has influenced the legal penalties for those who engage in same-sex intercourse in many nations who hold to strong conservative values.

2.1.2 Implications for Bullying

People with same-sex attractions today are no longer as afraid as they were to be open about their sexuality, with “many LGBTQ youth coming out at younger ages” (Poteat, Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig & Russell, p.319). This has a great deal to do with the ways in which government has perceived homosexuality and the changing laws which lessen and erode the penalties for same-sex relations. Regardless of this fact, many still choose to keep their sexuality to themselves. This is particularly true of children, who may still be unsure about their feelings and afraid of how they may be perceived by their peers. Because of this, much interaction among members of varied sexual orientations is far more commonplace, whether people are aware of it or not. Within the context of the school environment, the interaction with peoples of diverse sexualities is especially unavoidable as adolescents grow and come to discover their sexuality in different ways. As children come to interact with more students and families with parents of the same sex, they will naturally be confronted with ideas they may not be informed about. How might they react to finding out that a fellow student has two mothers or two fathers? How would heterosexual students interact with male students who want to marry males and female students who want marry females? What about the ideal of the nuclear family? If anything outside of that construct is considered unnatural or abnormal, this could lead to a perceived difference or inadequacy among children who have parents of the same sex. This might also lead peers to bully a child with parents of the same sex. Moreover, an LGBTQ student who professes ideals of marrying a same-sex partner when she grows up may face harassment, bullying, name-calling and threats for her non-heteronormative views on marriage. While there is the possibility of this
occurring anywhere, it is especially the school environment, as “an arena for the exchange of ideas” in which LGBTQ students are most threatened (Ross v. New Brunswick School District No. 15 (1996) qtd. by Shariff, 2005, p.469).

2.1.3 Institutional Heteronormativity and the Role of Teachers

Evidence has shown that greater knowledge about LGBTQ issues has led to greater tolerance of LGBTQ people (Alderson, Orzeck & McEwen, p.87). Even the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario agrees that education can help alleviate the issues of LGBTQ discrimination in schools (“Pastoral Guidelines,” 2004, p.25). There is not nearly enough research to see whether Catholic Catechism has a clear effect on bullying. It certainly supports institutional heteronormativity within Catholic schools in Canada, with students learning that homosexual (genital) activities are “acts of grave depravity ... [that are] intrinsically disordered ... [and] contrary to the natural law” (CCCB, 1994, p. 480)” (Callaghan, 2007, p.75). Callaghan (2007) goes on to state that “In the human sexuality component of “religion” classes in Catholic schools, homophobia is manufactured, legitimized, and packaged for mass consumption” (Callaghan, p. 75). Callaghan’s perspective on religion classes in Catholic schools comes from firsthand experience in Catholic school environments which forced her as a lesbian teacher to conceal her sexuality for fear of reprisal. Dodge & Crutcher, (2015) assert this is a commonplace issue for teachers, who “worry about the repercussions of introducing LGBTQ issues in their classrooms, from pushback from parents to concerns about losing their jobs (p.103). Additionally they assert, both from firsthand experience as well as research, “teachers may face communities, cultures, policies, and even laws that impede or prohibit inclusion of LBGTQ YAL or validation of LBGTQ experiences” (p.103). These worries can certainly contribute to an environment of hostility towards LGBTQ teachers, who experience many conflicting messages on what and how
potentially sensitive material is to be taught from various parties. With regard to this 
environment’s effect on the bullying of LGBTQ students in Catholic schools, more research is 
required. This environment certainly exists, but is it enough to sustain discriminatory attitudes 
towards LGBTQ minority children?

2.2 Same-Sex Specific Risks and Catholic Compassion

Beyond the Catholic views on marriage, Catholic sentiments regarding homosexual 
persons have progressed over the years, no longer as explicit in condemning homosexual 
orientation as harshly as it previously had. In contemporary contexts, Catholic homosexual 
children have been greeted with greater care and compassion, particularly because of the 
progressive efforts of the Church. The Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, in its extensive 
document *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* (2004) acknowledges 
the difficulty for LGBTQ students with regard to bullying and depression, stating,

> When issues of prejudice and bullying are not addressed or when little or no support is 
offered, schools can be a very hostile place. Without the support of family, friends, the 
local parish and school communities, young people can feel isolated and overcome by the 
challenges a same-sex orientation presents […] In an attempt to escape the pain of 
isolation, fear and anxiety, some may choose to leave their home, school and community 
to live in anonymity on the streets where violence, illness and exploitation are common 
realities. Even when they do remain at home they can experience severe depression. For 
these reasons, these students are at a much higher risk for suicidal thoughts and attempts. 

These comments are certainly progressive as they do ultimately focus on help and support for 
LGBTQ children. They especially bring to light the issues facing homosexual youth to the
Catholic community and recognize the dangers present for homosexual youth particularly in the school environment. Alderson, Orzeck & McEwen (2009) conclude similarly, in stating that “…the potential for violence toward GLB youth in schools remains high. One Canadian study reported that about 20 per cent of gay and lesbian youth had been “physically assaulted at school in the past year” (McCreary Centre Society, as cited in Wells & Tsutsumi, 2005, p. 20)” (p.87). Barnes & Meyer, (2012) agree, citing (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009; Herek & Glunt, 1995; Meyer, 1995; Meyer & Dean, 1998; Rowen & Malcolm, 2002; Williamson, 2000) with regard to the effects of homophobia if internalized by students, stating that “Internalized homophobia has been linked to a host of negative outcomes, including anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, sexual risk-taking, problems in intimacy, and lower well-being and overall self-esteem” (p.506).

The Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation (2004) recognize how important the school is to the healthy development of children and how a negative environment can lead to negative health consequences for homosexual students. What is unfortunate then is that in practice, as will be evidenced in Chapter 4, many Catholic schools appear to not provide a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQ students. What is distressing is that even with Bill 13 and the updated curriculum, both created to further foster inclusivity and reduce bullying, the heteronormative environments present in many Catholic schools across Ontario still pose a threat to the safety and well-being of LGBTQ students. Administration typically impedes the way for students who wish to form gay-straight alliances, and many teachers, whether within the school environment or externally, hold discriminatory beliefs about LGBTQ minorities (Fetner & Elafros, 2015, p.563-564, 574). This study asserts that these issues are prevalent across all schools but are more pressing for students in Catholic schools.
2.2.1 Catholic Contradictions and Same-Sex Conversion

The issue with Catholic cultures in regarding homosexuality is that it is on many occasions varied and contradictory (Callaghan, 2007, p.38-39). It vacillates from love and acceptance to hate and condemnation. It is sometimes seen as a lifestyle choice and a sin and during other times outside choice and therefore not sinful (Michaelson, 2008, p.46-47). Sometimes it is seen as an illness meant to be treated (Michaelson, 2008, p.49-50; Callaghan, 2007), and at other times is seen as untreatable (“Pastoral Guidelines,” 2004, p.25). While the position of the Church towards the immorality of homosexual activity ultimately remains the same (“Pastoral Guidelines,” 2004, p.4), with regard to prescribed action towards homosexual children there exist many conflicting ideas.

The passage cited earlier presents a caring and understanding view of homosexuality in students. It is found on the website of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, and it professes a view that could be argued is inclusionary. Even here at OISE, in a course called Teaching in Ontario’s Catholic Schools, a course designed to help prepare Catholic teacher candidates for work within Catholic boards in Ontario, I have been guided towards these documents and resources. Again, as mentioned earlier, the issue with Catholic teachings is that they are often varied, vague, and contradictory. The selection referenced earlier used language which was far softer and caring than those the Church has traditionally ascribed towards LGBTQ peoples. The same Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation (2004) document cited earlier has been recommended to me in my instruction. However, instead of the caring and inclusive language with regard to bullying referenced earlier, sections of the document clearly characterize homosexuality in students as a problem, one which (among others) teachers should guide towards “a progressively better sexual morality” It further states
that “The steady progression of moral and spiritual conversion is the goal…” (p.5). If teachers took it upon themselves to act in line with these recommendations and were reported, they would certainly find themselves in front of a tribunal for engaging in discriminatory practice. Moreover, it is not congruent with the rights of students outlined in the Charter and in Bill 13 (among others). It is not in line with the recommended curriculum either. Yet, at the same time, the same guideline referenced above offers contradictory information in stating that administration and teachers should ensure “required lessons on homosexuality, chastity, and sexual morality outlined in educational curriculum documents […] are taught well” (p. 24) “Well” in this instance can be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways, making the teaching of the new curriculum, if filtered through a Catholic lens, very vague.

2.2.2 Church Recommendations for Administration and Parents

The very same document cited earlier follows with a discussion of tacit consent for school administration who suspect homosexuality in their students, stating that so long as the school “does not give approval to the situation under consideration,” administration, in not acting would not be considered as giving tacit consent or approval of the activity (p.44). It follows in stating that what would be serious for administration however, is if they came to suspect actual homosexual genital activity, an important distinction between homosexuality and homosexual acts which Callaghan (2007) effectively analyzes in That’s so Gay! Homophobia in Canadian Catholic Schools. The Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation document cited earlier continues in its recommendations for parents with homosexual children, stating “Do everything possible to continue demonstrating love for your child. However, accepting his or her homosexual orientation does not have to include approving of all related attitudes and behavioral choices. In fact, you may need to challenge certain aspects of a lifestyle that you find
objectionable, as all parents do with their children.” (“Pastoral Guidelines,” 2004, p.62). How are parents to treat their LGBTQ children? How are Churches and pastors prepared to interact with LGBTQ children in the Catholic community? How are teachers and school administration supposed to deal with the presence of homosexuality in their schools, all while following the lessons outlined in the education curriculum? The answers to these questions from a Catholic perspective are vague and contradictory.

2.3 Transgender-Specific Statistics and the Complexity of Gender Theory

Bowers & Lopez, (2013) based on U.S. numbers assert that there are approximately 80,000 transgender individuals in Canada (p.246). While the Church’s teachings on homosexuality are vague and contradictory, in terms of gender identity, the Catholic perspective appears even more obfuscating. This is because it has a very limited understanding of gender theory, (“Pastoral Guidelines,” 2004, p.25) but at the same time maintains its strong views against homosexuality, not giving adequate consideration of the sometimes interrelated nature of the two. Because of this limited notion, there is a real possibility for students in Catholic school environments to view anything outside or beyond the traditional heterosexual conceptions of the human person as “other,” or “monstrous.” Poteat, Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig & Russell (2013) cite (Coker, Austin, & Schuster, 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009) noting that transgendered youth, among other LGBTQ youth “experience frequent victimization at school and compromised health” (p. 319)

Statistics cited by Egale in a 2009 report are in line with these findings, noting that 87 per cent of transgender students see spaces such as change rooms, washrooms and hallways as unsafe spaces. (“Youth Speak Up”) Moreover, the 2009 report found that “A third of transgender participants heard derogatory comments daily about boys not being masculine enough, compared
to a quarter of LGB students. Transgender students were [also] more than twice as likely as LGB students to report hearing comments about girls not being feminine enough” (“Youth Speak Up”). The report also found that nine out of ten transgender students faced verbal harassment and two out of five faced physical harassment. In addition to this, Egale found that “95% of transgender students felt unsafe at school, compared to one-fifth of straight students…”, “almost half of transgender students had skipped school because they felt unsafe, compared to less than a tenth of non-LGBTQ” students, and that “Transgender students (over a third) were twice as likely as LGB students to strongly agree that they sometimes feel very depressed about their school that they do not belong there, and four times as likely as straight students” (“Youth Speak Up”).

With regard to suicide and suicide ideation among transgender students Egale cited (Scanlon, Travers, Coleman, Bauer, & Boyce, 2010) in a 2013 post on their website, stating that “In 2010, 47% of trans youth in Ontario had thought about suicide and 19% had attempted suicide in the preceding year” (“LGBTQ Youth Suicide”) Taylor, (2006) was also cited by Egale (2013) with regard to a study conducted in Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario revealing that “28% of transgender and Two Spirit people had attempted suicide at least once” (“LGBTQ Youth Suicide”). Egale (2013) also cited (Taylor et al. 2011), in an article which found that 49 per cent of transgender students had “experienced sexual harassment in school in the last year” (“LGBTQ Youth Suicide”).

2.3.1 Gender Theory Education and Catholic Schools

The statistics cited earlier demonstrate the difficulties children have when their bodies are defined by features not consistent with their gender identity. Because of their perceived differences, many of them are faced with a great deal of bullying and sexual harassment. Despite
these facts, conservative Catholics tend to see gender theory as simply too controversial and complex an idea for children to learn about in schools. I argue that it is not simply the theory that is too complex to understand, but rather the attempt to understand it while maintaining Catholic opposition to homosexual marriage. Even though same-sex marriages are not recognized by the Catholic Church, they are currently recognized and legalized by the government.” (Alderson, Orzeck & McEwen, p.87). At the same time, Catholic schools, as institutions which provide a “public service” (Callaghan, 2007, p.58) are constitutionally protected, particularly with religious rights and freedoms not granted to public institutions (Donlevy, Brandon, Gereluk & Patterson 61-64).

2.3.2 Church Complications for Transgender Marriage

The Catholic Church takes the position that since a man and a man cannot biologically have children, the marriage cannot be recognized. The same is true for two females. Where this becomes complicated however is with the notion of gender identity mentioned earlier. Bowers and Lopez (2013) note “…if a transgender child identifies as a male and is attracted to a child who identifies as a female, even though that child is a biological male, he is straight, not gay and vice versa. On the other hand, a trans child may in fact be gay when they are attracted to persons who identify as the same gender despite the birth sex of either individual” (p.246). If this argument is taken and placed within the context of the Catholic Church, the issue of marriage and family discussed earlier becomes even more complicated. The vague and contradictory nature of Catholic Catechism is perplexing. It would certainly challenge young learners attempting to discern what is and is not morally acceptable, while struggling with their faith, their sexuality, and the threat of being harassed and bullied.
2.3.3 Institutional Complications for Transgender Children

Egale asserts in a 2012 post after the passing of Bill 33 (a bill which protected gender identity and expression against discrimination in the Ontario Human Rights Code), that “Ontarians identifying as trans suffer from shockingly high levels of violence and harassment – much of it unseen and invisible to others. Upwards of 78% of trans people have attempted to commit suicide” (“Passage of Toby’s Act”). Bowers & Lopez, (2013) report similar findings, stating that “transgendered students suffer a higher rate of discrimination and harassment,” with 78% of K-12 students in the United States who identified with transgender or gender non-conforming gender identities reporting harassment, 35% reporting physical assault and 12% reporting incidents of sexual violence (p.259). Bowers and Lopez (2013) go on to cite Egale and the University of Winnipeg in a study showing that “95 per cent of transgender students felt unsafe at school, compared to one-fifth of straight students” (p.259). Many conservative Catholics argue that gender identity is confusing for their children, and should therefore not be taught to them at such an early age. As evidenced above, gender identity is only confusing when Catholic catechistic moral principles are introduced. Because gender binaries and heterosexual relationships are easier to understand, supported by Biblical texts, and endorsed by the Church, many conservatives believe that contradictory and confusing information which does not line up with Catholic Catechism should not be taught to children.

Children who identify with a gender identity not congruent with their biological body and physical characteristics may feel discriminated against in schools which choose not to recognize their gender identities. This is particularly true in gendered spaces such as washrooms, as some schools either only offer male and female washrooms, or do not allow transgender students to use the washroom congruent with their gender identity, regardless of their biological appearance.
Bowers and Lopez (2013) note this, stating “Public restrooms can be a major source of anxiety amongst transgender youth because the assignment of public restroom use based on sex does not conform to the self-identification of the youth based on gender” (p.252). Bowers and Lopez (2013) continue, stating “Trans students may be subject to ridicule, abuse, or even assault, physical or sexual, in public lavatories. It is the use of the restroom that may provide the first notice to a school that it has a child who is transgender” (p.252). Children not adequately educated about gender theory then might view those struggling with their gender identities and homosexual orientations as different and monstrous. Those LGBTQ students may be afraid of being bullied, many of them already seeing schools as an unsafe place (Fetner & Elafros, 2015, p.569). Those particular children who are unsure of their gender identity may face increased harassment because of the heteronormative structures placed in Catholic schools. Those transgender students who also identify as homosexual may find it additionally difficult because of all the contradictory information they receive.

2.4 Implications for Children within the Context of Technology and Education

The idea that children are to remain pure and innocent is dangerous foremost because it leads to the censoring of information deemed inappropriate for children of particular ages. Of course, there must always be guidance and instruction to that which is deemed age appropriate, but with the age of the internet, children seem to be growing up and encountering sex far earlier than they had before. This does not mean that media is to be censored, technology is to be banned and the internet is to be blocked. The ubiquitous nature of mass media has changed the world forever, and as such it is the responsibility of the government to adequately educate children towards its safe and effective navigation. With regard to sexual activity therefore, students who encounter sex within televisual entertainment, the internet and social media
regardless, without adequate education, are left unprepared when they encounter sex in real life. The Church’s Catechistic stance is based on abstinence only education, particularly for homosexual people (‘Pastoral Guidelines,’ 2004, p.53), but abstinence only education has been proven to be ineffective (Reyes, 2005).

The proposition that conservative religions are homophobic is not exactly a new discovery. Much research has been dedicated to the discrimination present in religious communities (Barnes & Meyer, 2012; Barton, 2010; Callaghan, 2007; Clarke & MacDougall, 2012; Michaelson, 2008). In addition to this, conservative adults face discomfort with the idea of children and sexuality, finding it inappropriate (Horowitz & Itzkowitz, 2011). What is happening is that the idea of “inappropriateness” with regard to sexual knowledge for young children is being tied to the ideas of homosexuality, gender normativity, and traditional conceptions of the family, not considering that LBTQ education and bullying in schools is less of a political issue and more an issue of safety and well-being (Alderson, Orzeck & McEwen, p.87; Poteat, Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig & Russell, p.320).

The argument from conservative Catholics tends to be that children are too young to learn about sex. They are therefore then too young to also learn about homosexuality or gender theory. As they are brought up, the only “appropriate” teachings for children then would be those dictated by the Catholic Church, particularly in its conceptions of the “traditional” family. What would end up happening for these children who would be exposed to sexuality, homosexuality, and persons of “non-conforming” gender identities regardless, whether within their school community, within their families and external communities, or simply through the media and internet, is that their in class teachings would not be reflective of the world within which they live. Because of their lack of knowledge in those subjects, children would be ill-equipped to
safely talk about or explore their adolescent sexuality, less likely to understand or accept non-heteronormative perspectives of sexuality and gender identity, more likely to react with negativity and hostility to those they encounter who do not conform to their heteronormative expectations and be easily influenced by peer pressure towards the bullying of those individuals (Shariff, 2005, p.460). They would have an understanding of the human person only in terms of male and female, and an understanding of the only acceptable and moral type of marriage to be that between a husband and a wife.

2.5 Conclusion

What can be gleaned from reviewing contemporary LGBTQ research is that religion can complicate ideas of discrimination and inclusivity. If people have the right to practice religion what happens if those religious beliefs are seen by others as inherently discriminatory? People are not allowed to bring their personal religious views into the classroom, but what about Catholic schools and administration who maintain Catholic concepts of marriage, sexuality and gender identity within schools, only hiring based on staff adherence to Catholicism? What about the Catholic schools which do adhere to the principles of inclusivity outlined in Bill 13, yet have teachers and staff who, outside of the school environment promote intolerant and discriminatory speech as part of their Catholic faith?

The traditional Catholic teachings have important implications for LGBTQ students and inclusivity as a whole. As Ontario makes important strides towards diversity and inclusivity within the educational environment, what message does it send if Catholic schools fight against the proposed changes? What message does it send about the moral aspect of homosexuality if Catholic schools are allowed to teach the new curriculum according to Catholic values? What is the likelihood of Catholic schools ensuring that their students grow up in an inclusive community
of diverse perspectives regarding human sexuality? The answer is, not very likely, as will be evidenced and explored in chapter 4 of this paper.

In this literature review I looked at research on Catholic Catechism with regard to sexual education in Ontario schools. This review elucidates the extent that attention has been paid to the diverse needs and perspectives of students when engaged with the interconnected nature of social media at an adolescent age. It also raises questions about the conflicts which arise between people, institutions, governments, and organizations when each party believes they hold the greatest responsibility in educating children. It also points to the need for further research in the areas of LGBTQ issues when being integrated into the Catholic School boards of Ontario due to lacking Catholic-specific research.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter details the research methodology guiding this study on the prevalence of LGBTQ bullying in Catholic schools in Ontario. The chapter will begin by reviewing the research approach and procedures before elaborating on the instruments of its data collection. Following this, the chapter will detail the participants, specifically considering the sampling criteria and recruitment procedures. The chapter will continue by explaining data analysis procedures, also considering the ethical considerations pertinent to this study. Naturally, this research project has a range of methodological limitations. These limitations will be identified and discussed alongside the strengths of its methodology and the benefits inherent in its limitations. Finally, this chapter will conclude by briefly summarizing key methodological decisions and the rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions of this study.

3.1 Research Approaches and Procedures

Conducting research on qualitative research can be a problematic task. Invariably as scholarly articles go, research tends to focus on specific issues with specific solutions, thereby less interested in making generalized claims. Conducting research on qualitative studies is complicated then, and as noted by Higginbottom, (2009) requires a self-reflexivity seldom employed in research papers (p. 6). While there certainly is a great deal of research on the purpose and value of qualitative research, by and large it tends to be populated within the fields of nursing, medicine, and healthcare (Cousin, 2013; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Galvin & Holloway, 2009; Higginbottom, 2009; Jack, 2010; Kitto, Chesters & Grbich, 2008; Tracy, 2010; Whittemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001; Williams, 2015). This appeared odd at first and was
rejected out of hand in an attempt to find qualitative research directly relevant to the field of education, the area that this research project is situated within. Upon further reflection however, clear and relevant parallels were drawn between qualitative research in the medical field and its applications and implications for qualitative research in education.

In the medical field there are a great deal of personal experiences that can be overlooked when simply collecting quantitative, “aggregate” data (Whittemore, Chase & Mandle, p. 524). (Galvin & Holloway 2009; Jack, 2010; Morrow & Crivello, Williams, 2015) agree, with Galvin & Holloway (2009) particularly singling out the humanizing value of stories which are not reflected in those kinds of data. In the medical field, it is important to not look at people simply as numbers. When this happens we distance ourselves from the human person and tend to focus only on situational factors, which may lead to their “dehumanization” (Galvin & Holloway, p. 69-70). This can pose a similar problem in the field of education because the experiences of patients can be similar to the experiences of students who face bullying in schools. They both deal with complex emotional and physical trauma on a daily basis. They may, along with health care professionals and teaching professionals respectively, both face barriers, whether it be legislative, financial, situational, bureaucratic or otherwise, in receiving and providing the care they need, whether it be healthcare or with regard to safety/education. As such, professionals in places of power with the ability to affect change in the lives of those students must be considered rich sources of data, invaluable when ascertaining a complex and nuanced perspective of the issues in the field. This is because researchers begin to have an in depth understanding of how people are affected on the ground level and on a personal basis when they develop a rapport with professionals through in-depth interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, p. 316). There appears to
be great value in this type of data, and this is the same approach this study employed when conducting qualitative research and interviews.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Given the parameters of the Master of Teaching Research Project, this study was limited to collecting data through qualitative research and semi-structured interviews. Before the semi-structured interview process is described, it would be of import to acknowledge its position in relation to other methods of interviewing. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) state that “…some research is designed to test a priori hypotheses, often using a very structured interviewing format in which the stimulus (questions) and analyses are standardised” further stating that “structured interviews often produce quantitative data” (p. 314). This research project, while including quantitative data, does not seek to produce it. As part the qualitative research process, this study is interested only in hearing consenting participant perspectives and reflexively interpreting that data. As such, while the study does seek to make credible claims, logically substantiated by the testimonies of credible participants, it is imperative to understand that the data gathered is not a quantifiable “truth,” but more of a “truthful perspective” (Cousin, 2013, p.126). To do this I needed to veer away from the rigidity of the structured interview format and more into a format where I was a part of the data I collected, and reflexive about that interpretive process (Cousin, 2013, p.127).

Another type of research, and one on the other end of the scale from structured interviews is the form of the unstructured interview. As their name suggests, these interviews are largely unstructured. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) note however, that “No interview can truly be considered unstructured” further stating that “some are relatively unstructured and are more or less equivalent to guided conversations” (p. 314). While I could certainly immerse myself in
qualitative data through the unstructured process, the issue is that it is typically “conducted in conjunction with the collection of observational data” data which this study is not permitted by the ethical parameters of this paper to obtain (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, p.315). Moreover, I believe it is important for this research project, particularly when regarding a sensitive and topical issue as LGBTQ bullying, to have some sort of guiding factor which while not as rigid as the structured interview, still does have some sense of focus. The semi-structured interview appears then, to be the best option available.

DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) note that unlike structured interviews, semi-structured and unstructured interviews involve research which “seeks to explore meaning and perceptions to gain a better understanding and/or generate hypotheses” (p. 314). This is certainly the kind of process I intended to immerse myself in, an interview process where both my participant and I are involved in the process of making meaning, rather than a process whereby my interviewee acts as a “conduit from which information is retrieved” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, p. 314). Moreover, rather than interviewing a group of people, once more not permitted by the parameters of this research project, I thought it would be important to conduct individual, in-depth interviews. This is because the individual in-depth interview process provides me with an opportunity to “delve deeply into social and personal matters” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, p. 315). The group interview would be limiting then, as even though I would have access to a greater set of experiences I would not be able to “because of the public nature of the process” be as absorbed as I could be with the individual experiences of my participants (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, p. 315).

While there certainly were limitations (as noted above) to the independence with which the interviews in this study could be conducted, these particular parameters gave the interviewing
a necessary focus, while at the same time not being encumbered by the rigid, structured interview process. True, regardless of my concurrence, I am necessarily bound to the semi-structured interview protocol by the parameters of the MTRP, but given the research purpose and questions of this study, I found the semi-structured interview to be the most suitable interview process regardless.

3.3. Participants

In the following subsections I will review the criteria with which the participants were selected, the processes by which they were found and the relevance their profession had for this research project. Being that this study considers the possibility of institutional heteronormativity within publicly funded Catholic schools in Ontario as well as the potential effects this has on LGBTQ bullying within those schools, particularly within the context of an Ontario governed by an openly gay Premier and her involvement in legislating an updated Health and Physical Education Curriculum with a greater focus on LGBTQ inclusion and sexual health (much to the dismay of conservative parent and religious groups), it would be important to engage with a variety of perspectives on the matter. This is an issue that arises at a particular time in history, within a particular situational context, with specific players, and significant implications for Ontarians including (but not limited to) parents, students, teachers, administration, school boards and religious leaders. As such, a diversity of perspectives is required on this matter. While this study is limited once more by the parameters of the MTRP, particularly with regard to children as its ethical review does not allow for them to be interviewed, it is not restricted to only interviewing teachers, something which will be discussed further in the following section.
3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

The parameters of the MTRP restricted this research project from interviewing children. It did not however limit the study to only teacher interviews. Because of this, the primary criteria with which participants were selected was diversity. This type of criteria is defined as maximum variation sampling, a method Kitto, Chesters & Grbich (2008) consider “the ideal when a holistic overview of the phenomenon is sought…” (p. 244). While this research project cannot necessarily be considered a “true” case of maximum variation sampling as its sampling size is quite limited by the parameters of the MTRP, it serves to illustrate the kind of criteria which was used in the interview selection process. The parameters of the MTRP also recommended that this study included 3 participant interviews, and while this was a limitation at first, I concluded that I needed only to include 2 for my research purposes. Tracy, (2010) concurs, citing Creswell (2007) in stating that the optimal range for narrative research [that is, research which takes the narratives of participants as relevant data] is between one to three individuals (p. 839). This research project included the perspectives of 2 diverse participants.

For this project I wanted:

1. The perspective of someone advocating for LGBTQ rights as well as the proposed changes in the Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum. A liberal perspective on the issues discussed.

2. The perspective of someone advocating for religious/parental rights but against the proposed changes in the curriculum. A conservative perspective on the issues discussed.

Naturally, at least one of the participants had to be a teacher. This participant had to be a full time teacher or retired teacher with experience in a Catholic District School board in Ontario.
for at least 10 years. I decided that a decade was a good way to track changes within a community. A teacher with 10 years of experience within the Catholic board should be able to speak to the level (if any) of LGBTQ specific violence occurring among students in Catholic schools and advocate more for LGBTQ rights in schools. They should also be able to comment on whether or not they have received institutional pressure to maintain a heteronormative environment within their schools, whether it be through their peers, administration, or otherwise. In addition to this, interviewing a teacher would allow me to obtain the perspective of someone who has worked with the curriculum on a daily basis. I believed that covering the perspective of someone on the ground level who actually worked with the curriculum to instruct students was important as it actually dealt with the application of the curriculum instead of merely its creation. I thought it was also important however to address the external perspective, one which was more conservative and fought against the changes in the curriculum.

On the side of those advocating against the changes in the curriculum, I thought it necessary to obtain the perspective of a member of a religious group or organization. Being that this research project is centered on Catholic specific doctrine, its possible implications for LGBTQ discrimination at the institutional level, and LGBTQ bullying at the student level, I thought it necessary to focus on a perspective that was uniquely Catholic. This member could be a part of a Catholic group or organization who advocated against the changes in the curriculum. This person could be a priest, perhaps a bishop, or some other religious leader in Ontario who could speak to Catholic specific doctrine and values, as well as their implementation and conflict with LGBTQ values in Ontario schools as a result of the updated curriculum. Moreover, a religious leader would add a religious focus to the data, which ultimately is more relevant to the issues covered in this paper anyway.
3.3.2 Sampling Procedures/Recruitment

The MTRP guidelines recommend that the participants be selected through a purposeful sampling procedure. Purposeful sampling is a procedure where participants are selected based on a set of sampling criteria, rather than at random. Kitto, Chesters & Grbich (2008) note that the goal of qualitative research is to “explore the behaviour, processes of interaction, and the meanings, values and experiences of purposefully sampled individuals and groups in their “natural” context.” (p. 243) Purposeful sampling is a broad sampling procedure within which there exist multiple sampling procedures. Maximum variation sampling involves the selection of participants representative of “all aspects of the topic,” homogenous sampling involves selecting participants based on a “group fitting specified criteria,” snowball sampling “involves networking from one difficult-to-access participant to a wider range of participants”, and convenience sampling “involves studying easily accessed individuals or groups” (Kitto, Chesters & Grbich, p. 244).

I mentioned earlier that my primary criterion in interviewing professional participants was diversity, namely, a diversity of perspectives. I also mentioned that this is regarded as maximum variation sampling or at least a smaller version of it. In addition to this I have discussed the type of research that was conducted (qualitative) and the interview process (semi-structured) also detailing the criteria by which participants were selected (diversity). In order to obtain participants however it was necessary that I become further involved in instructional practice within schools, Catholic doctrine within churches, and the ethical and legal concerns brought up by advocacy groups.

Being in a post-graduate program which allowed me to interact with teachers and teach in schools over four practicum blocks, I had great access to professionals who were willing to
participate in interviews. In order to find LGBTQ advocacy teacher participants specifically, I attended professional development conferences hosted by school boards, professional associations, teacher education programs, and subject-area specialization organizations. Being that OISE schedules many conferences and workshops with advocacy groups, I had ample opportunity to contact members advocating for LGBTQ rights and inclusionary practice within an educational context. Finally, in order to find members in religious organizations I contacted those within my religious community. As mentioned earlier, I have been involved with religious groups for a great part of my life thus far. I have been an altar server in my youth, led youth groups within the church and have identified as Catholic, attending mass on a regular basis. Because of this, I will be able to draw from the many connections I have already made within the Catholic community. Because my program is immersed in the literature and issues concerning many of these issues, and given the small-scale nature of the study and the methodological parameters I worked within, my interview process, in addition to purposeful sampling, also included participants I had accessed with relative ease, an aspect of convenience sampling.

3.3.3 Participant Bios

Ron (pseudonym), the participan in this study with the liberal perspective had been a teacher within Catholic boards in Ontario for over thirty years. He considers himself a devout Catholic and at one point even intended to become a pastor, going so far as the seminary before he met his partner and had to leave, Catholic churches not allowing pastors to marry or engage in sexual relationships. He advocates for LGBTQ rights and is a great proponent of Catholic schools as safe spaces.

Father Nick (pseudonym), the participant in this study with the conservative perspective has been a pastor in Ontario for over ten years and has been the parish priest for a church with
several attached elementary and secondary schools for three years. He has previously worked to develop curriculum in Catholic schools in Ontario and also considers himself a devout Catholic. Though his views are conservative, he understands the difficulties faced by LGBTQ children in Catholic schools. He tends to be more critical of the Ontario government and the rise in secularism, particularly among youth.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative research is diverse DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006), and as such involves analysis strategies which vary in their approaches. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree also identify data analysis procedures in their 2006 article “Making Sense of Qualitative Research” specifically discussing the “editing approach,” “template approach,” and the “immersion/crystallization approach” (p.318). With the editing approach “investigators review and identify text segments much as an editor does while making interpretative statements during the process of identifying patterns for organising text” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, p. 318). The template approach on the other hand “relies on using codes from a codebook for tagging segments of text and then sorting text segments with similar content into separate categories for a final distillation into major themes.” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, p. 318). Finally, the immersion/crystallization approach is a “…much less structured approach in which the analyst repeatedly immerses him or herself into the text in reflective cycles until interpretations intuitively crystallize” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, p. 318). I believed the most appropriate strategy to use in this research project was the template approach because it involved “applying a template (categories) based on prior research and theoretical perspectives,” something that worked well as an organizational tool within the framework of this paper and the interviews I conducted (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, p. 318).
After conducting the interviews with the participants the interviews were transcribed. Once they were transcribed, the transcripts were coded using the research questions of this study as an interpretive tool. Naturally, being that the interview process was semi-structured, there were occasions when the participants digress. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) note that these digressions are not completely irrelevant, being necessary and productive for qualitative data because “they follow the interviewee’s interest and knowledge” (p. 316). Using semi-structured interviews meant however that I was also able to guide the discussion with the research questions of this study and return to more relevant points when those digressions became unproductive.

Cousin (2013) notes that “qualitative researchers often look for patterns and frequencies, be this within a particular case study or interview or across a sample” (p.130). Kitto, Chesters & Grbich (2008) agree, noting that “Through constantly comparing the experiences and responses of the participants against each other, subtle but significant differences can be uncovered that can generate profound insights into the phenomena under study” (p. 244). As a qualitative researcher myself, I conducted my research in this way, highlighting specific sections within my transcript which directly pertained to my area of research that I could easily refer back to them. I also then cut these sections out and placed them in a separate document for easier access. Note that when I did this, I also included the relevant statements surrounding what is said, so that I could provide each argument within its proper context. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree state that many “experienced researchers listen to the audiotape while reading the transcriptions to ensure accuracy during interpretation” (p. 318). While this was a time consuming process, I employed this technique so as to maintain the integrity of what was being said. I identified categories in which to place my data, considering statements made about classroom instruction, ethical
teaching, and inclusionary practice. Once the data was categorized I searched for themes occurring within those categories.

Within classroom instruction this study considered the ways in which curriculum documents were reflected and defined by instructional practices, specifically considering whether they are responsive to culturally responsive pedagogy. Within ethical teaching this study considered the ways in which conceptions of LGBTQ groups and ethical dilemmas are shaped by evolving cultural values, specifically considering the ways in which Ontario laws have reflected these changes.

Within inclusionary practice this study considered the ways in which religious doctrine and religious instructions interacted with the aforementioned cultural values, specifically considering whether they coalesce, undermine, or merely coexist along with those values. Once thematically sectioned, the categories and themes were analyzed beside each other, and themes considering their overall and specific implications for LGBTQ bullying in Catholic schools were synthesized. The significance of the entire data analysis process was to find common themes and divergences in the data with regard to the research questions of this study.

Finally, this study also explored null data, which is the relevance of data that is not presented through my qualitative interviews. Tracy (2010) notes the importance of this kind of data, as qualitative interviews do not merely involve “…taking note of who is talking, and what they are talking about, but also who is not talking and what is not said. Indeed, good qualitative research delves beneath the surface to explore issues that are assumed, implicit, and have become part of participants’ common sense” (p. 843). Tracy (2010) goes on to state that “noticing, analyzing, and unpacking this knowledge is key to understanding interaction and behavior in the scene” (p. 843). Null data was important because it spoke to what my participants did not speak
to, considering the significance and relevance of missing data, data that was redacted, and data that would have been covered if participants had not refused to speak to them, including considering what this refusal could mean. This data was important because this study is situated at a time where there is much conflict in the debate. The media has portrayed LGBTQ advocacy groups and religious advocacy organizations as oppositional at every level. With regard to teachers actually involved with the updated curriculum the narrative has also been viewed as intrinsically oppositional, with some teachers advocating for the changes, and some teachers advocating against it. What I hoped to ascertain with my interviews is a diversity of opinion which leads me to a more nuanced position on the debate. I definitely intended to explore fundamental oppositions on the matter, but in terms of moving forward, I hoped to highlight areas of convergence, because neither group truly intends for the issue of LGBTQ bullying in Catholic schools to continue.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

As with any research project with a significant research component an ethical review had to be conducted, particularly where children are concerned. Though the parameters of this research project did not allow me to interview children, the sensitive issues raised by my research and the controversial opinions considered warranted a process of ethical review. These included issues related to confidentiality and consent, the right to withdraw, the relevant risks of participation, and the storage of data. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) identified similar key ethical issues involved when conducting qualitative interviews. These include “reducing the risk of unanticipated harm […] protecting the interviewee’s information […] effectively informing interviewees about the nature of the study, and […] reducing the risk of exploitation. (p. 319) Tracy (2010) outlines several ethical review procedures essential to good qualitative research as
well in “Qualitative Quality: Eight “Big-Tent” Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research.” She singles out Procedural ethics, Situational Ethics, Relational Ethics and Exiting ethics in particular, as essential steps in the process.

Procedural ethics is at the very heart of the ethical research process. Procedural ethics involves striving for accurate data and “…avoiding fabrication, fraud, omission, and contrivance. Procedural ethics also suggest that research participants have a right to know the nature and potential consequences of the research—and understand that their participation is voluntary” (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). With qualitative interviews such as the one I conducted it was important to protect participant anonymity because as professionals, particular disclosures could jeopardize a participant’s professional career. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) assert then, that the data these individuals provide “must remain anonymous and protected from those whose interests conflict with those of the interviewee” (p. 319). In order to do this, all participants were assigned a pseudonym and they were notified of their right to withdraw from participation at any stage of the research study. Participant identities remain confidential and any identifying markers related to their schools, students, churches or activist organizations was excluded. Audio recordings from my interviews are stored on my password protected computer and will be destroyed shortly after the completion of this study. In addition to this and to confirm their consent, the MTRP guidelines required that participants sign a consent letter whereby their consent is given to be interviewed and audio-recorded. The consent letter given to the participants provided an overview of the study, addressed the ethical implications, and specified the expectations of interview participation, namely that they participate in a single, 45-60 minute interview.

Situational ethics involves constant reflexivity, considering at each level if the research and the processes by which the research is being conducted may be deemed ethical. According to
Tracy (2010) “A situational ethic assumes that each circumstance is different and that researchers must repeatedly reflect on, critique, and question their ethical decisions” in an attempt to ascertain whether there exist any harms to the research process and determine whether those harms outweigh any potential benefits (p. 847). While I am inclined to state that there are no known risks to participation in this study I must concede that, given my research topic, it is possible that a particular question could have triggered an emotional response from a participant, thus making them feel vulnerable. DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) note that “the act of listening itself” can be a danger because “When the interviewer listens and reflects personal information back to the interviewee, the process may develop in unforeseen ways. This can result in unintended harm to the respondent” (p. 319). I minimized the potential of this risk by reassuring my participants throughout the interview, as well as in the consent letter, that they had the right to refrain from answering any question that they did not feel comfortable with, restating furthermore that they had a right to withdraw from participation at any time, a process which DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) feel is important, as it “provides the opportunity for interviewees to reconsider their participation” thereby making them feel more comfortable with the interview process (p. 319).

Relational ethics refer to the ways in which researchers conduct their interviews and the rapport which participants help to generate based on the atmosphere that the researcher creates. Tracy (2010) notes that relational ethics “involve an ethical self-consciousness in which researchers are mindful of their character, actions, and consequences on others” (p. 847). DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) agree, noting that this rapport “…involves trust and a respect for the interviewee and the information he or she shares. It is also the means of establishing a safe and comfortable environment for sharing the interviewee’s personal experiences and
attitudes as they actually occurred” (p.316). I instilled this atmosphere and rapport with my participants by meeting with them before I discussed the possibility of interview. Naturally, these were people I already had interacted with through my sampling procedures, but I believed that by getting to know my participants beforehand and developing a relationship prior to my data collection, I was able to help make my participants feel more comfortable in sharing their narratives, becoming more comfortable situated in that interview environment myself.

Finally, exiting ethics deal with the ways in which interview data is shared and distributed after the research process is complete. This part of the ethical review process asks researchers to consider the ways in which their work may be read or interpreted, and attempt as best they can to avoid the misrepresentation of data gathered (Tracy, 2010, p. 848). In order to ensure the accurate representation of participant perspectives, once my interviews were conducted and the interviews transcribed, participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts in order to clarify or retract any statements before the data analysis was conducted. This process is called respondent validation, and it is an important activity because it is “part of a process of reducing error, which involves the generation of further original data, which then requires interpretation” (p. 244). Exiting ethics does not only refer to ethics before data analysis however, as I will (in order to maintain my relationship with my participants) remain in communication with them and be available to discuss these issues further, even after the completion of my program.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

What I covered in this research project was not limited to my qualitative interviews. The position I have taken is based on well documented research and aggregate data. This is however, merely where I begin. The prevalence of LGBTQ bullying in schools has been an issue for many
years and as mentioned earlier has been documented already (Check & Ballard, 2014; Addison & Coohart, 2011; Fetner & Elafros, 2015). The position I am in however, necessitates that my research was qualitative for several reasons. First, true quantitative research would require mass data collection, something that required a great deal of finances and time, both outside my grasp. Second, even if the finances and time were within my grasp, this research project is limited, in particular by the ethical board at the University of Toronto with regard to the MTRP at OISE. According to the parameters of the MTRP the research to be conducted in this paper had to be qualitative rather than quantitative. Moreover, and once more due to the MTRP parameters, I was limited in whom I could select for my interviews.

Data that is quantitative is useful, but focuses merely on overall data generalized to a few generic statements (Higginbottom, 2009, p. 5). Data gathered when conducting qualitative research however has a far greater depth of information, as participants are able to have an in depth and personal discussion from actual lived experience. Cousin (2013) notes that “It is generally accepted that qualitative researchers aspire to generate understandings and insights from an inquiry that comes from depth rather than breadth” (p.130). Whittemore, Chase & Mandle (2001) and DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) agree, Whittemore, Chase & Mandle noting in particular, that “qualitative research is contextual and subjective versus generalizable and objective” (p. 524). The participants I selected, in their diversity, allowed me to take both micro and macro perspectives into account. Ultimately however, as this was not a quantitative study, the claims made can only be regarded within the specific context of the research and can therefore not be generalized. The ethical review at the University of Toronto did not allow for interviews to be conducted with children. Moreover, because of the sensitive nature of child involvement, I was also not permitted to conduct surveys or base any of my findings on
classroom observations. On the one hand, this was problematic, as I missed out on collecting data I believed to be valuable concerning the actual lived experiences of students, LGBTQ students, and bullying, the focus of this paper. On the other hand however, this limitation might have allowed for greater accuracy in the data collected. This is because professionals in the field are able to relate to and relay the experiences of students in the school environment, and unlike students, are able to provide a context for that experience. As such, conducting interviews with professionals can certainly lend to the accuracy and credibility of the information collected in this paper. No doubt, their particular frustrations and experiences in the field may have affected the data collected – after all, no opinion is truly unbiased. Some participants may have exaggerated their claims, some may have downplayed situational factors. This in no way means that I discounted the narratives which bullied LGBTQ students provide. It is certainly an important perspective to take. Besides the fact that I did not have approval to interview them however, it made sense for the integrity of the paper to focus on individuals who could articulate their experience within a larger religious and educational institutional framework.

Finally, and as mentioned earlier in this paper, the legislation regarding the updated Health and Physical Education Curriculum is still in its infancy. It was only implemented in the fall of 2015, the same time during which this research project commenced. As such – there simply was no quantitative data regarding its implementation or its effects and if there were, it would certainly be inaccurate and not reflective of the current situation teachers, parents, students and religious professionals find themselves in. Because of this, it ultimately does not make sense to collect quantitative data at this moment in time. It may be collected years from now, when the curriculum has been fully implemented across the boards and data collected, specifically in Catholic schools, to ascertain whether a positive correlation can be made between
the updated curriculum and its hopes (among others) to normalize homosexuality and conceptions of gender fluidity. In the meanwhile, qualitative data is the only option, and a valuable one as well because it allows for data collection on the ground level in schools and churches as the changes are being implemented. While this research paper is limited, these concessions came with particular benefits, namely the accuracy of the information collected. Moreover, the limitations make sense within the context of this research project.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I detailed my research methodology. I began by reviewing my research approach and procedures and elaborated on the instruments of my data collection. I detailed my participants, and considered diversity in my sampling criteria and recruitment procedures. I also explained the methods by which I organized and analyzed the data which was collected, furthermore considering the ethical implications in conducting my qualitative interviews. I discussed the range of my methodological limitations, but also noted how those limitations were important and relevant to the nature of my paper. In the following chapter, I will report on the research findings.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.0 Introduction to Interview Findings

This chapter reviews evidence to suggest that the LGBTQ bullying which manifests itself as a result of heteronormative practices in schools across Canada, may be an issue particularly heightened within Ontario Catholic Schools. This may be due to the oftentimes conflicting nature of secular and religious ideologies, as well as the dual status of Catholic schools as both religiously protected and publicly funded institutions. The results of this research were obtained through individual qualitative interviews with Father Nick and Ron (pseudonyms), professionals who have an extensive amount of experience interacting with and educating children in Catholic churches and Catholic schools in Ontario. Being a Catholic myself, it is important to note then that my research and its subsequent findings were gathered and written (respectively) very much with a Catholic perspective in mind.

The research sought not to simply obtain and group similar perspectives with regard to the 2015 implementation of the Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum but those perspectives which were contrasted in relevant ways. They help to illustrate the ways in which there are questions regarding whether religiously conservative and secular values are able to coexist with one another, or if they ultimately conflict and generate issues of inequality when it comes to the education of children in Catholic schools. The Catholicity with which this paper is written is not a trivial matter then, as it (along with the Catholicity of the interview participants) speaks to the great divergence in opinions within the Catholic community on the updated Health and Physical Education Curriculum as well as its implications for LGBTQ students in Catholic schools. Furthermore, this divergence also helps to reinforce the qualitative nature of the data.
obtained in this research paper, acknowledging that while the participants provide important insights into the conflicting perspectives on the issue, the findings are ultimately not generalizable. Despite the often-opposing views of the two research participants, several themes appeared to emerge and re-emerge consistently as a result of the research. These themes are: the disputed legitimacy of government and perceptions toward curriculum changes, the conflict between morally incompatible value systems, and the barriers to effective education of children in Catholic schools. Within some themes there are several sub-themes, some which overlap. Evidence suggests that secular ideology is oftentimes at odds with religious ideology, a conflict which fuels a resistance to change among those who have negative perceptions of the change. This creates a mistrust of the government and hinders change from taking place through the challenging of government legitimacy on the basis of morality and religious beliefs with regard to updated school curricula. Because of this conflict between the educational expectations of the government and moral beliefs of religious conservatives, teachers in Catholic schools are placed in a precarious position, with vacillating expectations as to how new and changing curricula is to be implemented. Within this environment, the research shows that LGBTQ bullying and discrimination, though pervasive in schools across the country, is an issue which is likely greater for schools within the Catholic Board.

4.1 The Disputed Legitimacy of Government and Perceptions toward Curriculum Changes

A topic which appeared on multiple occasions during the course of my interviews was the place of the government with regard to its role and responsibility to the students in Ontario Catholic schools. Ron, a retired Catholic teacher who formerly intended to become a priest before he met his partner had taught in schools within the Catholic Board in Ontario, and Father Nick, a Catholic parish priest who formerly worked developing curriculum for Catholic Boards
in Ontario and currently preaches, as well as travels to Catholic schools educating children on religious matters, both agreed that the curriculum was in need of an update but differed in their perspectives on the process by which the updates were created, introduced and implemented.

4.1.1 Effective Communication, or Lack Thereof from the Ontario Government

Both Ron and Father Nick acknowledged that the Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum was in need of an update. According to the Ministry of Education in a news release on their official website, “The Growth and Development section of the elementary Health and Physical Education Curriculum [had] not been updated since 1998” an oversight which made it the oldest provincial curriculum in Canada at the time (Ministry of Education, 2015). Father Nick, who generally leans more toward conservative religious values stated, “there are things that are outdated that we should be updating, especially when it comes to sex education […] it is not a view of the Catholic Church not to update - we should.” As Father Nick demonstrates, the conflict between liberal and conservative perspectives on the curriculum may not lay in the updating in and of itself, as he believes the curriculum should indeed reflect the different circumstances that children find themselves facing today. Father Nick noted the vast advancements that have been made in terms of science and technology, particularly in people’s knowledge of health and disease, further asserting that it is important for curriculum to be continually reviewed and revised. His issue with the updating of the curriculum however, was that the Ontario government had not done enough to prepare parents and the general public for the updates. He stated “…the sex curriculum, the entirety of it, was never revealed to the public until it was the very last day. Even now it is very mysterious to a lot of people, what is actually prepared and taught to the teachers with the new curriculum. Often enough these are given to the teachers at their discretion to teach.” Father Nick was critical of the process by which the
The curriculum was updated, stating furthermore that much of the curriculum was shrouded in mystery and not revealed until the eleventh hour, just before it was to be implemented. His assertion reflects research by Stonehouse (2012) who argues that this resistance toward change is better handled when those implementing change communicate more effectively to those who will be affected by the change (p. 457). Stonehouse (2012) states furthermore:

> There should be no secrets or surprises and everything should be out in the open and therefore open to discussion. Questions should be encouraged and answered fully, even if people might not like the answer. It is better to be truthful from the beginning, as this will build up trust and support (p. 457).

The fact that Father Nick appeared so resistant to the updated curriculum suggests that the Ontario government might not have done enough to effectively communicate with religious conservatives and parents about the updated curriculum. It might prove valuable for future curriculum development then to ascertain what more the Ontario government could have done to reduce negative perceptions. In Father Nick’s case, it is interesting to consider why he might perceive the changes in such a light, noting that like him, many parents and conservatives within the religious community also viewed the updated Health and Physical Education Curriculum negatively. The other participant in this study argued quite differently.

The other participant in this study argued quite differently from Father Nick, having a much more positive perception of the curriculum updates. Ron, who tends to side more with liberal values and principles did not concur with Father Nick’s assertion, arguing that in his estimation the Ontario government appeared to “have gone above and beyond what normally is done with the introduction of a new curriculum” noting furthermore, that the only reason for the outrage and backlash from conservative groups was not due to preparation, but due to the subject
matter covered in the updated curriculum. He stated furthermore “I think anytime policy or curriculum has to do with sex there’s always going to be a group in opposition. Sex is like politics and religion; big topics that people like to talk about and dispute.” It is interesting to consider why Ron and Father Nick, both practicing Catholics, viewed the changes in the curriculum in different lights. Research regarding the perception towards change implementation suggests that “change is not always welcomed,” that there is always a likelihood of it being perceived negatively, and for those parties who view it negatively can lead to resistance (Stonehouse, 2012, p. 456). Stoica, Popescu & Mihalciou (2012) concur, citing Collerette P. et al, (1997) in noting that “…resistance is the ‘paradoxical companion of change, it must be expected that this company will occur, until the time change takes place’” (p. 115). Stoica, Popescu & Mihalciou (2012) further citing Collerette P. et al, (1997) assert that those who negatively perceive change can associate the change with “…fear, worry, anxiety, hostility, intrigue, side-taking, the polarization of conflicts and even impatience,” a great deal of which was demonstrated during the initial protests when the updated curriculum was announced (p. 116).

4.1.2 Diverse Consultation and Transparency in Curriculum Development

Simoes & Esposito (2012) state that “by recovering the etymological root of the word “communication” one can find the Latin word “communicatione” meaning to participate, to pool or to take common action” (p. 325). They argue that according to this definition communication is not merely relegated to “the transmission of meanings but the joint construction of meaning” (p. 325). Though it might appear initially that Father Nick’s resistance to the change may be unwarranted, research suggests that a factor involved in revolting against change is the perception of those making the change and the “lack of trust in the strategies that determine
change” (Stoica, Popescu & Mihalciou 2012, p. 116-119; Grama and Todericiu 2016, p. 49). As Father Nick noted, the curriculum did indeed have to be updated to reflect the changing times and the new experiences children have to face. While the general public was indeed, in Ron’s estimation, adequately notified and prepared to receive the updated curriculum before it was implemented, according to Father Nick, the perception that the government had not effectively communicated with the public and that parents were not given enough notice or consultation still exists. Father Nick stated that he thought “the main problem, with the whole updating of sex education is not so much with the updating, but in forgetting that the primary educators are the parents.” Aside from the lack of communication and preparation given to the general public, Father Nick also argued that the main reason there was so much backlash and controversy surrounding the updates, was the lack of parent consultation. He stated furthermore that he still found it mysterious how much parents were involved in the changes made in the new curriculum. He argued, “I think if there is any parent who has been really upset by the whole thing; it is that first and foremost, they weren’t consulted. Whether they agree or disagree with the curriculum, I think it is an absolute right of the parents to know what has been proposed.” Research argues that effective consultation can lead to better acceptance of change. Stoica, Popescu & Mihalciou 2012, referencing Coch & French (1947) argue that people who might otherwise perceive change as unwarranted, unfair and unjust, would “accept change better when they contribute to its conception,” further suggesting that there be more group participation involved in the change process (p. 120). Stonehouse (2012) concurs, arguing that in order to avoid resistance, aside from effective communication, it would be of import to “involve everyone as far as possible” (p. 457). Stonehouse (2012) states furthermore that “By involving people you give them shared ownership and responsibility. It is no longer the change agent’s change alone, but is now a shared one” (p.
Father Nick, having developed school curriculum himself would indeed have extensive experience of the consultation process through which curriculum is created and implemented. The fact that he and many others in the conservative community continue to lack trust in the government and its implementation of the new curriculum, might suggest that the government could indeed have done more to involve religious members and parents in the consultation process.

It is interesting to note however, that this issue is perceived very differently by the Ontario government, in whose perception has consulted a great deal with diverse groups in updating the curriculum. According to a news release from the Ministry of Education on the Government of Ontario’s official website, the review consulted “parents, students, teachers, faculties of education, universities, colleges and numerous stakeholder groups including the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, The Ontario Public Health Association and the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition” (2015). Because according to the Ministry of Education there was such an extensive consultation process involved in updating the curriculum it is interesting to consider why Father Nick asserts that the government had not consulted religious leaders and parents enough. Research suggests that communication and participation are not effective ways to implement change if those making the changes merely seek compliance (Simoes & Esposito 2012, p. 328). Simoes & Esposito (2012) state “Genuine participation is based on respect, which comes from recognizing a real dependence on people’s contributions” (p. 328). Father Nick’s experience, and as he noted, the experience of many parents and religious conservatives of the process by which the curriculum was updated may suggest that the Ontario government did not fully consult, communicate, or involve the input from conservative religious groups and parents. Father Nick noted “…as much as the government has been trying to defend themselves that they
have consulted, but with any consultation and survey you have to also know the source of the people - which group of people we have surveyed, and what kind of source that we have used in order to come up with the statistics or conclusion.” Father Nick’s assertion raised some relevant concerns in discussing the problems of transparency in the Ontario government’s research and consultation process. He argued that it would be important to know which groups were consulted in the creation of the new curriculum and that it would matter whether the results were derived from a homogenous sampling of liberal parents or from a heterogeneous sampling that included conservative and religious perspectives. The Ministry of Education (2015) states that “Studies have shown that the vast majority of parents want schools to provide sexual health education” but does not make clear reference to the studies or to the participants.

While Father Nick was more concerned with placing more trust in the hands of the parents, Ron argued more for “…the trust factor that has to be had between parents and the educational system” noting furthermore with regard to children, that “…parents need to see that they’re by and large in good hands.” When discussing the research involved in updating the curriculum, Ron stated that parents need to understand that “curriculum doesn’t come out of a vacuum. It comes out of research around child development, it’s created by experts in their field, and it’s created to provide those kids with the information that they need at that particular age and stage of their lives.” Regarding the issue of transparency in research then, Ron instead suggested that data might be lacking from religious leaders and Catholic schools because they themselves did not want to be a part of the research around LGBTQ issues. He stated that he found it troubling why Catholic schools in Canada were so reticent to participate in studies which could determine the level of bullying occurring within their schools. He noted “…when the first national survey was done […] every Catholic school system across this nation declined
to participate. So the researchers can only conclude that the homo/bi/transphobia is as equal to or greater than what is happening in the rest of the school system.” Ron argued that the Catholic schools in Canada should have a greater amount of transparency, suspecting that the LGBTQ bullying in Catholic schools is likely worse because if there is limited data, then the problem cannot be identified and addressed, going on unchecked. He worried, “…if it’s going unchecked as the Catholic school system is not willing to participate, then what is it that they are trying to hide?”

4.2 The Conflict between Morally Incompatible Value Systems

Another issue which arose when discussing the government and its legitimacy with regard to the implementation of the changes in the updated curriculum was the possible ideological implications of the changes. Ron believed that the updates would have positive implications not only for LGBTQ students but for overall student health and well-being. Current research concurs similarly, noting that greater education on LGBTQ issues can lead to more acceptance and less intolerance (Shariff, 2005, p.460; Alderson, Orzeck & McEwen, p.87), an idea also reflected in Ontario’s Pastoral Documents (“Pastoral Guidelines,” 2004, p.25). In Ron’s opinion, school is a place where all children should be, moreover noting that to do well in school students need to be able to feel safe, a prevailing point of concern for LGBTQ students (Fetner & Elafros, 2015, p.569). He noted furthermore that this was not something that should be a difficult issue for Catholic schools, stating “Catholic schools can do that without jeopardizing their Catholic teachings but in fact using those Catholic teachings to create a wonderful environment that’s safe for everyone.” Ron appeared to be more open to the updating of the curriculum and the normalizing of LGBTQ people because of his concern for student safety, concerns which as noted above, are reflected in contemporary research (Alderson, Orzeck & McEwen, p.87; Poteat,
Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig & Russell, p.320). Though Ron noted that in some cases he could not reconcile the differences between the tenets in Catholicism and his beliefs on LGBTQ marriage and procreation, that it was ultimately inappropriate to discuss such complex theology with children.

Father Nick on the other hand stated that the true complexity actually lay in discussions on sexual activity, homosexuality, and gender identity, concepts which he found difficult to grapple with as an adult, and therefore especially inappropriate for young children in a school setting. Like Ron, he also had concerns about the difficulties faced by LGBTQ children in schools and concurred with Ontario’s Pastoral Documents in arguing that LGBTQ people should be treated by Catholics in a kind and caring manner, regardless of the differences in their opinions and beliefs. He noted however, that it was a different matter to accept the active promotion of values which normalized behaviors that undermined the faith. While the implications for student safety were valued, Father Nick appeared more concerned with the grander philosophical implications of a secular ideology being imposed on a religious institution. He stated “with any philosophical ideology […] there is an implication of a value system. This value system certainly needs to be looked at and I think the parents are people who might be against it is because the ideology, what’s been pushed to them brings all kinds of implications about the value system, especially when it comes to Christianity.” Unlike Ron, Father Nick believed that it is not so easy to reconcile the differences between Catholic and secular values. He asserted that in updating the curriculum, the Ontario government was not simply attempting to aid children in their growth and development, but pushing a secular ideology. He noted furthermore that this battle between secular and Catholic principles is challenging for parents then, as it requires that they “be more attentive and […] more vigilant, […] being able to also say
that certain ideology is not acceptable because of the implications it brings.” He argued furthermore that the updated curriculum normalizes things which are deviant and instead of offering truth to children instead seeks to rationalize and promote the subjective feelings of minority groups.

These ideological differences were alluded to prior in discussing Catholic perceptions toward marriage and the family, homosexuality, sexual activity and gender identity in Chapter 2. A great deal of research has noted that traditionally marriage had been seen as a heterosexual union between a man and a woman, the nuclear family, against which all other marriages are defined (Besen, 2010, p.30; Čeplak, 2013, p.168; Michaelson, 2008, p.50-52). Though the perception has begun to change, as noted by (Alderson, Orzeck & McEwen, p.87; Addison & Coolhart, 2011, p.535-536) homosexual marriages certainly do not reflect “the norm” in society, a union whose legality Father Nick asserted should be further discussed on the federal level. Father Nick argued furthermore, that because homosexual unions do not involve sexual intercourse for its intended procreative purpose and because secular societies are normalizing sexual intercourse prior to marriage, that there is a risk that we are objectifying people, rather than respecting them.

4.3 The Barriers to Effective Education of Children in Catholic Schools

In addition to the concerns surrounding the creation and implementation of the updated Health and Physical Education Curriculum the research found that there also existed a concern regarding the factors which impede children from receiving the best education. It must be noted that “best” is a problematic term in this context as both participants had differing views on what the “best” education for children could be. In addition to this, both Ron and Father Nick also differed in their beliefs on who was best in place to effectively educate children. The concerns
regarding the factors impeding children from receiving the best education are grouped under parent capabilities to educate, student pressures to identify, and teacher responsibilities to parents, students, and administration.

4.3.1 Parent Capabilities and Taboos Surrounding Child Sex Education

The research found that there exists a great deal of debate among people around who holds the rights and responsibilities to educate children effectively on matters of sex. Father Nick asserted throughout that it was not the place of the school, teachers, or the government to decide when or how children were to receive “sex education,” but parents, whose legal rights he found were not being respected. Father Nick’s focus on the sexual aspect of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum and the rights of parents is interesting, a point that Ron sympathized with, being a parent himself. However, even though Ron believed in the rights of parents and stated that he understood where they were coming from, he argued that most parents were not adequately prepared to teach their children about their sexuality. Acknowledging that it should be a parent’s right to review and scrutinize what is being taught to their kids, Ron ultimately stated “…it’s a pretty rare breed of parent that can capably educate their kids around their sexuality” arguing furthermore that “…protecting kids is not necessarily the best thing to do…” This was an interesting position for Ron to take, particularly as a parent, as he seemed to find that many other parents lacked the ability to openly discuss matters of sex with their children. When probed further regarding why he took this particular perspective on the issue, Ron argued that many adults may have been brought up in an environment during their childhood where sexuality was not discussed in a healthy way. Research also suggests that this might be the case among some parents, as Grossman, Charmaraman & Erkut (2016), citing Eastman, Corona, Ryan, Warofsky, & Schuster (2005) state, “Parents whose families of origin did not discuss
sexuality may struggle to communicate about sex with their own children, because they lack role models for sexuality communication” (p. 179). Ron stated that even today there exists a great deal of sexualized material, particularly concerning media, advertisements and technology that parents do not discuss with their children, stating “when it comes down to sound curriculum [being] taught to their kids so that they know about themselves and about how to be in a healthy way in the world, then why would we want to pull kids out of that conversation?”

Sridawruang, Pfeil, & Crozier (2010) cite Huebner & Howell (2003) and Jaccard et al. (2003) in stating that “Parents can be a primary source of information for their children and good communication between parents and children results in increased contraceptive use and a lower number of sexual partners […] as well as negative attitudes to early pregnancy in teenagers (p. 437). Father Nick had a more hopeful attitude toward parent capabilities in discussing sex and like the research suggests, saw parents as the primary educators for children on this matter. Father Nick’s issue with the updated curriculum however was not about the fact that children need to be educated on matters of sex. His primary issue appeared to be that the government was superseding the authority of the parents to educate their children, something he was not comfortable with. He stated “…I think that right now the curriculum leaves no room for the parents. And obviously different parents have different parenting, a different mindset, and when that right is taken away, and when our children or even parents are imposed to have our children go through this, I think that that is something that really needs to be talked about properly.”

Father Nick acknowledged that parents may have different capabilities when it comes to educating their children, but noted that the rights of the parent should supersede the role of the government when it comes to educating children. When asked about the concern that parents may not educate their children because of their discomfort dealing with issues of sex Father Nick
stated “There are a lot of things that might be uncomfortable in parenting” noting that while the “hope is that they will [educate children…] it cannot be that we just leave it to the school system to be the primary educators.” Father Nick noted furthermore that he understood that Canada, as a country with a diversity of cultures and ethnic backgrounds was bound to have parents who may not necessarily talk openly about issues of sexuality with their children, noting however that this was “the parent’s right regardless.” Grossman, Charmaraman & Erkut (2016) suggest that this taboo around the discussion of sex can lead to many parents avoiding the subject with their children altogether, communicating very little about sex to their children, sometimes instead offering made up stories about procreation, or even warning against it without providing any explanation or reasoning as to why (p. 184). It is important to note however, that Grossman, Charmaraman & Erkut (2016) citing Wansley (2007), also state that “A qualitative study found that many participants who expressed distress at the lack of sexual information received from their parents were actively engaged in sharing sexual information with their own children” suggesting that it is possible even without having effective communication with their own parents when they were children, that current parents would indeed be willing to discuss matters of sexuality with their children (p. 179).

Father Nick’s position is interesting as it contrasted very much with Ron’s assertion. Though they both acknowledged that parents may have different abilities, even agreeing that some, due to their particular background would be unable to educate their children effectively, they disagreed on whom the responsibility should fall upon. Ron appeared doubtful that most parents were up to the task and argued that the government and schools were in the best position to teach children for the sake of their own safety and sexual health. Father Nick on the other hand, appeared hopeful that children would all be educated effectively at the appropriate time as
determined by their parents, noting that even if this was not the case, it was still the right of the parent, rather than the right of the government or schools to do so.

These differing beliefs could have important implications for the kinds of environments that LGBTQ students may face in schools. Research suggests that children who are not adequately educated or primed to accept their LGBTQ peers may discriminate against them, possibly contributing to a heteronormative environment which may be more conducive to LGBTQ bullying (Alderson, Orzech & McEwen, p.87), a need for education even reflected by the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario in order to reduce LGBTQ discrimination (“Pastoral Guidelines,” 2004, p.25). Because of Father Nick and Ron’s different perceptions on the role and ability of parents in sex education it would be of import to consider how the school environment might be affected if educating children on matters of sex were left entirely up to parents. As noted, some research suggests that many parents might avoid the subject because it was always considered a taboo and it was never modelled for them as children, an idea which gives supports the Ron’s claim that parents are inadequately prepared to teach their children about sex. However, research also suggests that parents who did not receive adequate sex education from their parents as children may seek to do things differently with their own children.

4.3.2 Variance in Interpreting Legislation

The government faces a problem in terms of perception as Father Nick appeared very critical of the administration, arguing that it had perpetuated too much of a secular ideology into Catholic schools, allowing students to adopt more liberal values. Like Father Nick, Ron was also very critical of the government, but for very different reasons. Ron argued that while the government had done a great job in updating the curriculum, that it ultimately had not done
enough to validate or include LGBTQ student experiences. An issue of note in particular was the ways in which law around GSA (Gay-Straight Alliances) is written. Ron asserted that LGBTQ children are particularly vulnerable in school and may face a great deal of difficulty in their schools and homes. As noted before, the Pastoral documents go into great detail about the complexity of the issue and the difficulties LGBTQ children face (“Pastoral Guidelines,” 2004, p.27). At the same time however, research suggests that children are becoming more comfortable with their sexuality, willingly identifying at much earlier ages than they used to (Poteat, Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig & Russell, p.319). Ron argued that the problem with the ways in which the laws concerning GSA’s are written is the pressure that children who do not want to identify face when they wish to create GSAs. Ron stated, “The legislation around Bill 13, the Safe Schools act is all around how Catholic Schools in Ontario can initiate Gay-Straight Alliances and the language in there has always been problematic in that it puts the onus on kids to initiate that.” Ron hoped that the language used in creating the legislation was more expansive, rather than restrictive, as he felt that LGBTQ children face a great power imbalance when they have to initiate the formation of the group to administrators, particularly if those administrators are unwilling to support them in creating a safe space for their learning, an issue recognized by Fetner & Elafros (2015, p.563-564, 574). While Father Nick suggests that the government has done too much damage in attempting to normalize something that is unnatural, Ron argued that the government should be doing more, placing more responsibility on schools and administration rather than on students. Though Ron noted that there are many great schools and administrators who do not stand in the way, there are also Catholic School Board officials and principals who do stand in the way of the legislation as they feel a greater pressure to enforce Catholic principles. He stated, “Instead of recognizing what the students are asking for and what they
need to ensure their safety and sense of belonging, in my experience – and the research bears this out too is that there are some Catholic administrators that stand in the way and put up barriers.” Callaghan (2007) and Dodge & Crutcher, (2015) concur, having found similar institutional pressures in place not only for students, but also for teachers.

4.3.3 Expectations of Catholic Teachers in Publicly Funded Catholic Schools

Ron argued that because teachers have to deal with children on a daily basis in a role that necessitates they be accountable both to parents, administration, and to the law, they are placed in a very difficult position when the groups they have to be accountable to have conflicting ideologies. He stated furthermore that these problems can be exacerbated if Catholic teachers have their own inner conflict to deal with, particularly if their role as teacher is compromised by their beliefs as a Catholic and alternately if their role as Catholic is compromised by their responsibilities as a teacher. According to the Government of Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada (2014) schools should be designated as safe spaces for LGBTQ children, being free from any kind of discrimination. At the same time, Canada still holds the denominational rights of the Catholic Church in great esteem, constitutionally protecting Catholic schools with religious rights and freedoms and public funding (Donlevy, Brandon, Gereluk & Patterson p. 61-64). Because of this, the Catholic Boards in Ontario were granted special rights to alter the curriculum and teach it through a Catholic lens, something which Ron noted reflected their “denominational rights that are enshrined in the constitution…” arguing furthermore that “as long as those rights are enshrined in the constitution then the Catholic Church pulls a fair amount of weight around what gets taught or what gets interpreted in that curriculum.” Callaghan (2007) notes that the issue which arises with Catholic schools in Canada is the fact that they are, like public schools, publicly funded, and as she notes, provide a “public service” (p. 58) Ron
understood how this dual status of Catholic schools was problematic due to the conflict between secular and Catholic values, stating “…when the Catholic school system or the Catholic Church wants to enforce their denominational rights, I think there needs to be a measured and careful response about what gets included and what gets excluded.” He noted that for teachers then, this poses a problem because, as outlined in the previous sections, secular laws and ideology conflict in many significant ways with traditional Catholic doctrine. He argued that these conflicts start to build on teachers as they begin to feel the weight and pressure from conflicting sides, both internally and externally. Ron noted that though he did not wish to generalize the experiences of all Catholic teachers, that “in Catholic schools teachers feel the weight of how they are to be with LGBTQ students.”

The weight that Catholic doctrine can place on teachers who have to deal with issues of sexuality is also noted by Callaghan (2007), who argues that these issues can be particularly difficult if the teacher is pressured to conceal their own sexuality. Ron suggests then, that for Catholic teachers it can be very difficult to both teach conservative Catholic values within the Catholic school environment while at the same time promoting the conflicting secular and religious values outlined in the curriculum and promoted by the administration. Ron, in discussing an example of a peer he dealt with, spoke about a teacher who received a great deal of complaints from Catholic parents, administration, and colleagues who questioned why he thought it was appropriate to place a rainbow flag in his classroom as a Catholic teacher within a Catholic school. When that same teacher later on decided to introduce gender neutral pronouns to his class he received more complaints from parents. Ron stated that the “whole purpose behind that was to try to be as inclusive and welcoming, loving and tender and caring – all Catholic values – but it’s not always appreciated by folks.” Dodge & Crutcher, (2015) concur similarly,
noting that teachers face a great deal of pressure from different parties when LGBTQ issues and material is introduced and discussed in school (p. 103).

Father Nick recognized the need to be kind and caring to all people, regardless of their differences, but asserted that the school should not be the place where matters of sexuality are discussed, questioning furthermore why society was so concerned with education in this regard. When it came to teachers educating children within Catholic schools then, he stated, “…if one is going to teach in a Catholic school system, it is expected that they teach Catholic values - whether they disagree or not, whether they believe in everything that the Church is teaching or not.” Father Nick argued that if a teacher is teaching in a Catholic school, then that teacher has a responsibility to be teaching Catholic values, regardless of how that teacher might feel with regard to their faith. He noted, as did Ron, that he felt that by and large, most teachers educating children within Catholic schools were good but felt however, that even though this was the case that there were “…also a good number of teachers who [were] teaching very openly things that are very against Catholic teachings and the values that we hold.”

Both Ron and Father Nick saw the problems with introducing secular ideology into Catholic school environments, as it placed a great deal of pressure on teachers on how they are to teach the curriculum. Given that the curriculum is still being implemented and that teachers are still in the process of figuring out how to teach it, Father Nick noted that it was best for Catholic teachers to respect the law, and teach the curriculum as they are required. Father Nick also stated however, “…at the same time if the law is against your conscience, then that law is not a good law.” Father Nick stated that law should be respected, but also appeared to suggest that Catholic values are paramount and that the laws are not effective or right if they conflict with the values of Catholic teachers in Catholic schools. Ron notes that the issue which arises from these
oftentimes conflicting value systems, particularly when they arise in teachers who have a duty to teach the curriculum as well as to abide by Catholic values is inadequate, unclear, vague, and sometimes contradictory instruction. While in other curriculum areas students will by and large receive the same instruction, when it comes to a topic as controversial as sexuality, the findings suggest that there will be much divergence with what material is covered by teachers.

4.4 Summary of Findings

The research found that there are many barriers to effective education in school, problems which appear to be exacerbated when there exists a conflict between parties holding differing interests, all who believe they have the best interests of children in mind. The research suggests that parents, administration, and the government conflict in many ways when it comes to legislature in Catholic schools as conservative beliefs do not work well with liberal beliefs where religion is concerned – particularly in the educating of young minds. Because of the oftentimes contradictory instruction given to Catholic teachers by the government, the Catholic school administration, and the parents of their students, teachers are left in a difficult position in Catholic schools, particularly when considering their own personal religious beliefs. Moreover, as the most direct link to children and their education, teachers are lacking in support from the government and are left without the necessary tools in Catholic schools to help promote a more inclusive and welcoming environment for LGBTQ children and students as a whole. This is problematic then, as Catholic teachers have a responsibility to teach the curriculum in the way it is intended and if Catholic, must also adhere to the Catholic values which conflict with some sections of what is being taught.

As evidenced in this chapter, there exists a great deal of debate between conservative and religious perspectives on the updates in the Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum’s
sexual component. These debates may contribute to creating environments in schools where LGBTQ students can feel marginalized. Based on the evidence, it appears that the marginalization of LGBTQ students can be greater in Catholic schools due to:

- the continuing disputes around the changes in the curriculum, particularly due to a negative perception of the government and the process by which it has implemented its changes,
- the conflicting nature of religious and secular ideology, particularly when placed within curriculum dealing with sexual health in Catholic schools, and
- the enormous weight placed on Catholic teachers in publicly funded Catholic schools who struggle with how they may effectively educate children on sexual health, particularly considering the oftentimes conflicting and vacillating expectations of parents, government legislation, and administration.

This chapter reviewed the different ways in which the curriculum changes were viewed, not merely in terms of its particular updates but also in terms of the process by which the changes were made, the ways in which secular and religious values conflict, and the barriers to educating children due to the many conflicts which arise between parties who are ultimately in good faith concerned about what children are learning. In the following chapter, conclusions will be made from the evidence gathered, implications will be reviewed and recommendations for how to deal with the issues presented will be discussed.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this research project was two-fold. It aimed firstly, to ascertain whether the existing environment in Catholic schools was inherently heteronormative and more conducive to LGBTQ student bullying than other schools in Ontario. After ascertaining the issues faced by LGBTQ students in Catholic school environments, this study sought to highlight the issues faced by teachers working in Catholic schools in Ontario, many of whom might be struggling with conflicting ideologies and contradictory instructions. These discussions were framed within the context of the updated Health and Physical Education Curriculum, one which drew significant controversy and protest due to the particular changes made to the curriculum’s sexual component. The fall of 2015, the time during which the updated curriculum was introduced across schools in Ontario, is the same time during which this research study began.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

Scholarly research regarding LGBTQ bullying within Catholic school environments was found to be lacking, as much of it was concerned primarily with LGBTQ bullying outside the Catholic context. Qualitative interviews with teaching and religious professionals suggest that LGBTQ bullying is an issue which might be exacerbated in Catholic schools due to the oftentimes conflicting instruction given to teachers. The study found furthermore, that due to the Catholic board’s reticence to participate in studies which could gather relevant data on the issue, much of the bullying that occurs goes unregulated and unchecked. Because there is a great deal of information is missing, the study found that LGBTQ bullying in Catholic schools, if not at least on par with public schools, might actually be greater.
5.2 Implications/Recommendations

Oftentimes when change is implemented, its legitimacy is called into question. In this research project I found that the liberal participant, whose position on the updated curriculum tended to side more with the government and in support of secular values, the updated curriculum appeared to be more legitimate, with appropriate consultation of diverse groups and adequate notice given to the general public before its implementation. My conservative participant however, sided more with conservative religious values and found that the changes made to the curriculum were illegitimate as religious groups and conservative parents were not consulted enough, perceiving that the changes were implemented without providing the general public with adequate notice. It is interesting to note that the divergence in opinions here from people, both within the Catholic community, suggests that the government faces a problem of perception, which might be rectified if there was more consistent transparency in its approach to dealing with teachers, parents and religious groups.

In terms of secular and religious ideology, it appears that marriage, gender, and sex are still contentious topics when it comes to curriculum, as parents and guardians have different ideas on what constitutes the appropriate age to educate children on these issues. If a standard is not met or directed in schools, then this can have negative implications for children as they interact with others without the adequate information to deal with matters of sexuality which affect their daily lives. The research project found that both the conservative and liberal perspectives included in this paper argued for education on these topics. It also found however, that an important point of contention was the ideology which the curriculum presented, one which normalized aspects of marriage, gender, and sex that were counter to religious doctrine.
Finally, with regard to education and the barriers to effective education, both the church and the government appeared to have vacillating expectations on how the curriculum was to be taught to children. The study found that Catholic teachers are ultimately left with the responsibility to reconcile the differences between the two ideologies and are placed in a precarious position where they feel both the weight of the curriculum, as well as the weight of Catholic doctrine. This has negative implications for students then as teachers are not provided with adequate resources or appropriate instruction, lacking the tools necessary to deal with issues of LGBTQ bullying and discrimination, creating a space within which LGBTQ abuse can continue unchecked.

While this research project was initially centered around LGBTQ bullying and the particular prevalence of LGBTQ bullying in Catholic schools, the evidence gathered through the participant interviews led me towards greater questions surrounding the oftentimes conflicting nature of religious and secular ideologies, particularly when these issues become politicized and those in government who attempt to negotiate power and control become involved. As evidenced in Chapter 4 through my interviews, these issues are further complicated when they are presented within the Catholic educational context, as Catholic teachers have dual responsibilities to contend with, one which promotes Catholic ideology, and one which undermines it. As a teacher I have found that the Catholic school environment is far more politicized than I had initially expected, and that it is necessary to keep up to date with government decisions regarding education, as they can change drastically depending on the people in power and the socio-political climate at the time. Practices which might be acceptable at one point in time may be unacceptable in another, and as a Catholic educator an additional pressure exists on me to teach Catholic concepts which some may view as being offensive or discriminatory. Based on my
research, I have found that much of these problems arise due to the public funding of Catholic institutions. Canada has had, no doubt, a rich and complex historic relationship with Catholicism, but as the government attempts to negotiate and reconcile the differences between religious and secular ideology, the public funding of Catholic institutions in Ontario appears to become less reasonable. The Ontario government has two options, to either cut or to continue the public funding of Catholic schools. In either case, Catholic values and traditions should be valued and accepted, much like they are in private denominational institutions. The Catholic Board also has two options to contend with, to either accept secular ideologies that undermine their faith in order to continue to receive public funding, or to refuse public funding in order to maintain their religious teachings and practices.

5.3 Limitations

It is important to note once more that due to the qualitative nature and limited scope of this research project, that the evidence gathered is not subject to generalizable claims. While research has shown that LGBTQ bullying can exist in many schools due to the heteronormative structures in place, there is not enough research demonstrating that LGBTQ bullying is greater in Catholic schools despite research which argues that heteronormativity itself has a very powerful presence within Catholic contexts. Based on participant interviews it is suggested that LGBTQ bullying is at least on par with public schools, if not greater. Because of the reticence of Catholic schools to participate in research which may substantiate this claim however, a great deal of information is lacking. Moreover, due to the University of Toronto’s ethical review for this research project, data about LGBTQ bullying experience in Catholic schools could not be obtained from LGBTQ Catholic students themselves, those who are likely most affected by the issue.
5.4 Further Study

In researching I was perplexed as to why there had not been a greater focus on the possible connection between heteronormative environments in Catholic schools and the possibility it has to marginalize LGBTQ students to a greater extent than public schools. In discussing the issue with many people, the connection was simply assumed to exist, without relevant research for support. As a teacher-researcher I am interested therefore in exploring further why this perception exists, and why it is taken for granted and accepted without the need to affect change. It has led me to greater research in complacency, the code of silence, and the general uneasiness to openly discuss controversial subjects out of fear of backlash.

Through my research I also became more interested in issues of free speech and the nature of schools as safe spaces. Children are all different in terms of their intellectual capabilities and social maturity and this begs the question; what is the process by which it is determined when children are to be educated on a particular subject matter, and when is the responsibility to uphold free speech greater than the need to maintain safe spaces? Moreover, what is the place of the government in religious matters and when should religious rights and freedoms be respected or rejected? Because Ontario prides itself on its diversity and tolerance, what issues might arise by its tolerance of beliefs that are themselves discriminatory? These questions bring to light the conflicts that are present in the education system when policies are viewed in isolation. The Ontario Government and the education system cannot assume that policy regarding inclusivity and anti-discrimination will be accepted by all parties, as many parties have beliefs which run counter to tolerance. Policy regarding safe schools might benefit the LGBTQ community, but might also help normalize something which is against the beliefs of Catholic schools. Policy regarding religious rights and freedoms might benefit the conservative
Catholic community, but might also lead to discrimination of LGBTQ youth. When these conflicts arise, whose discrimination takes precedence? Should the Catholic board be able to choose what curricula best reflects their religious positions, or should it be forced to teach something it does not believe in? Furthermore, would forcing the Catholic schools to do so be discriminatory?

As this study focused primarily on Catholic schools and its particular disposition toward the updated curriculum, another important area of further study for me would be in the area LGBTQ discrimination and bullying in religious schools not publicly funded in Ontario. The questions outlined above regarding the conflict between LGBTQ inclusivity and religious and secular ideology might be an even more pressing issue in those private schools then as there is even less research and less regulation in those schools. When many religious conservatives have pulled their children from public and Catholic schools to be taught in those private schools, aside from possible the level of LGBTQ tolerance, what might be the level of the education itself?

5.5 Conclusion

Because of the contradictory and conflicting nature of secular teaching and Catholic theology, particularly within regulations that are not clearly written, it is very unclear how LGBTQ bullying manifests itself into the Catholic school environment. Research suggests that there is a great deal of LGBTQ abuse and homophobia taking place in elementary schools, and based on my qualitative interviews, I suggest that the issue is likely worse in Catholic schools as much of it is going unchecked because teachers are not adequately prepared to deal with it. Part of the reason for this rests on the lack of aggregate research conducted in Catholic specific schools, often due to the unwillingness of educators to participate in it. Based on my research, many problems have been identified, and they tend to rest more with the ways in which
secularism and religiosity conflict. Both participants do not intend for LGBTQ abuse to continue and argue that more should be done in order to help care for students struggling with their gender and sexual identities. While the liberal opinion in this paper argues that Catholic schools and churches have a lot to stand on in order to respect the dignity of students, the conservative perspective worries about the damaging nature of introducing sensitive topics and issues with a political and philosophical ideology that can be viewed as contrary to Catholic morals, normalizing what has been historically seen as deviant. The solution to this situation is to have greater research to see whether homo/bi/transphobia exists more prominently in Catholic schools because of institutional heteronormativity. In either case, the government should have a greater discussion about the ways in which to effectively introduce new curricula into schools, and consider seriously whether Catholic schools that challenge the implementation of new curricula should remain publicly funded institutions.
References


Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

Date: October 25, 2016

Dear

My Name is Lynbert Fernandes and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the diversity of perspectives on the updated health and physical education curriculum. I am interested in interviewing participants who can offer their perspectives and professional expertise concerning the ways in which the curriculum is implemented into Ontario Catholic schools, particularly concerning its implications for overall inclusivity. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, (for teachers) outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school, students or organization will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Lynbert Fernandes

Phone Number:

Email:
Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer
Contact Info: rose.fine.meyer@utoronto.ca

Consent Form
I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Lynbert Fernandes and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature

Name: (printed)

Date: October 25, 2016
Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

Date: November 16, 2016

Dear

My Name is Lynbert Fernandes and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the diversity of perspectives on the updated health and physical education curriculum. I am interested in interviewing participants who can offer their perspectives and professional expertise concerning the ways in which the curriculum is implemented into Ontario Catholic schools, particularly concerning its implications for overall inclusivity. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, (for teachers) outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school, students or organization will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Lynbert Fernandes

Phone Number:

Email:
Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer
Contact Info: rose.fine.meyer@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Lynbert Fernandes and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature:

Name: (printed)

Date: November 16, 2016
Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn more about your perspective on the updated health and physical education curriculum for the purpose of creating a more inclusive environment in Catholic schools and reducing LGBTQ discrimination. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your experience with the issue. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information

1. Can you please describe your professional practice?
2. How did you come to take this position?
3. How long have you been active in this position?
4. What experience do you have interacting with children?
5. Did you experience any bullying as a child?

 Perspectives/Beliefs

1. What do you know about the updated health and physical education curriculum?
2. Do you approve of the changes? Why/Why not?
3. Can you speak to your knowledge of LGBTQ issues?
4. What do you know about the Catholic perspective on LGBTQ issues?
5. Can you describe how your personal belief systems relate to that of LGBTQ values?
6. Are your personal beliefs on the issue consistent with values of your own profession?
7. What can you tell me about your experience with homophobia in Catholic schools?
Practices
1. How have you reacted to the changes in the updated health and physical education curriculum?
2. How do you feel the issue of LGBTQ bullying in Catholic schools should be addressed?
3. Have you faced any opposition or institutional pressure on the ways in which you conduct your professional practice?
4. Can you describe a specific instance where you encountered homophobic attitudes or violence within a Catholic school? If so, how did it make you feel and what did you do about it?
5. Do you think LGBTQ bullying and violence is less of an issue outside of religious contexts? Why / Why not?

Supports and Challenges
1. Do you believe there are any institutional changes to make within your own professional practice to better address this issue?
2. Do you feel like Kathleen Wynne is addressing this issue in the best possible way? Why / Why not?
3. What kind of support do you receive from your professional peers in addressing these issues?

Next Steps
1. How do you think beginning teachers can begin to address this issue in practice?
2. What do you think the conversation surrounding this issue will be like, 10 years from now? Why?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.