

“Taught to care for others despite the things that made them different”: Conceptualizations of
Gender and Sexual Identities Amongst Catholic-Educated Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role Ontario's Catholic schools play in determining students' attitudes and opinions towards gender and sexual diversity. Despite controversies surrounding treatment of LGBTQ issues in Catholic schools, exactly what is communicated to students in school and how they integrate curriculum teachings into their own lives is not clear. This project provides insight into the atmosphere fostered in the Catholic school system, how students mediate the curriculum they are taught, and their personal opinions and attitudes concerning gender and sexual diversity. In this paper, I utilize queer theory to unpack the data gathered from semi-structured qualitative interviews with 15 young adults who attended Catholic school for at least 5 years. This research suggests that despite a religious and highly heteronormative school environment, students reject the authority of the Catholic Church and its "official" teachings about LGBTQ identities. Instead, the former students interviewed expressed positive opinions informed by personal interpretation and an approach to gender and sexual diversity based on Catholic values like love and acceptance. They rejected the prevailing discourse on gender and sexuality propagated by educational and religious authorities, and utilized the values taught in school to queer Catholic theology and advocate an alternative reading of LGBTQ identities. This values-based approach to affirming diverse genders and sexualities has significant potential as a strategy for fostering inclusion in Catholic education.

INTRODUCTION

During the 2013-2014 school year, 639 011 students attended a Catholic school in Ontario. With 1637 schools across the province, Catholic elementary and secondary institutions educate almost 32% of Ontario's young people. While the influence of Ontario's Catholic schools cannot be disputed, the necessity of their funding often is. Critics of publicly-funded religious education cite selective admittance, compulsory religious teaching, and de-facto racial and ethnic segregation to discredit Catholic schools. However, it is indisputably the treatment of gender and sexuality in Catholic schools that garners the most criticism, especially after Catholic backlash to Kathleen Wynne's oft-praised 2015 sexual education overhaul. Educational institutions possess an undeniable capacity for influencing the formation of attitudes and opinions amongst young people. Therefore, it is necessary to consider how Catholic schools influence the way young people think about LGBTQ identities.

This paper will investigate the role Ontario's Catholic schools play in determining students' attitudes and opinions towards gender and sexual diversity. In 2014, fifteen former Catholic school students were interviewed to gain insight into the way issues of gender and sexuality were navigated in their schools. Several research questions guided this study, including what students were taught in Catholic school about diverse gender and sexual identities, how those teachings were communicated to them, and how students responded to those teachings. Inquiries were also made regarding the atmosphere fostered by Catholic curriculum teachings about sex and gender. Finally, it also sought to determine students' personal attitudes and opinions towards LGBTQ identities and individuals, and how their Catholic education might have influenced these attitudes. While they cannot definitively represent the opinions of all

students who attended Catholic school in Ontario, these interviews provide a necessary and detailed understanding of the values and attitudes propagated in a widely-accessed educational system.

After briefly outlining the history of the Catholic school system and providing an overview of sexual and family life education in Ontario, I present the methodological and theoretical framework utilized to analyze the data. Next, I outline several of the main themes that emerged from the interviews, including a pervasive culture of heteronormativity, the rejection of official religious teachings in favour of broad Catholic values, and positive attitudes amongst respondents towards LGBTQ individuals and identities. Finally, I utilize queer theory to unpack the insights communicated by this study's respondents and offer brief conclusions on the potential for fostering inclusion in Ontario's Catholic schools.

BACKGROUND

Catholic schools have long played a critical role in Ontario's public school system. The 1855 Tache Act mandated that Catholics could form separate schools and school boards in addition to the existing "common" public schools, and that they could build these schools, hire faculty, and elect trustees.¹ The Scott Act of 1863 solidified these rights so that by the time of Confederation in 1867, Catholic schools were positioned for permanence. A section written into Canada's new constitution confirmed the educational rights of religious minorities like Catholic Canadians. This Section 93 ensured that constitutional protection was offered to denominational schools, and has since been a touchstone in every legal case regarding Ontario's Catholic schools.² Full funding for Catholic high schools was announced by Premier William Davis in 1984, and was rolled out under the Liberal Peterson government by 1987.³ This funding was enshrined with the passage of Bill 160: The Education Quality Improvement Act (1997), part of Mike Harris' educational overhauls.⁴

In the years since Catholic education was made fully funded in Ontario, its relevance and inclusiveness has been consistently interrogated. A growing population of Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and atheists in the province--alongside a seemingly stagnant or declining Catholic presence--has led many to question whether Catholic schools are necessary, or why other religions are unable to access publicly-funded religious education where it is warranted by the population. Others wonder why *any* religious education should be funded in a society that is

¹ Robert M. Stamp, *The Historical Background to Separate Schools in Ontario* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, 1985), 9.

² Mark G. McGowan, "A Short History of Catholic Schools in Ontario," *Ontario Catholic School Trustee's Association* (2013): 2-3.

³ Stamp, *Historical Background*, 33.

⁴ McGowan, "Short History of Catholic Schools," 6.

purported to be secular and multicultural. In the past decade, issues surrounding sexuality and sexual health education have come to the forefront of critiques against the Catholic system, as former students and even faculty accuse Ontario's Catholic schools of hostility towards LGBTQ students and of providing inadequate sexual education.

Sexual and family life education in Ontario's schools has a history just as contentious as the Catholic school system. In order to understand how issues of gender and sexuality are navigated in both public and separate schools, it is helpful to review what this study's respondents were taught in Catholic school concerning sexuality and gender. Since the oldest respondent began Grade 1 in 1996 and the youngest respondent finished secondary school in 2014, the former Catholic school students interviewed for this project were (with the exception of one 24-year-old) taught according to the 1998 sexual education curriculum. 1998 was the first time sexual education was integrated into the common health curriculum, replacing the simple "teaching standards" that existed previously.⁵

For the purpose of understanding the educational context from which this project's respondents speak, it is useful to recount the main points of the 1998 curriculum as well as the 2010 "update." In grade 1, students were taught to name the "major" parts of the body (though genitals were not specified) and to understand inappropriate touching. Grade 2 students were expected to identify physical differences between themselves and others, while Grade 3s should be able to explain physical changes that come with aging and the reproductive process of egg and sperm. Students in Grade 4 were taught about the physical and emotional changes that take place

⁵ Jillian Follert, "Sex education in Ontario schools dates back more than 100 years," *Durham Region*, 3 June 2015, accessed 11 June 2016, <http://www.durhamregion.com/community-story/5646753-sex-education-in-ontario-schools-dates-back-more-than-100-years/>.

as one moves from childhood to adolescence, while Grade 5 required understanding of “secondary physical changes,” menstruation, and sperm production. Grade 6 learners were taught the functions of the reproductive organs, and by the next grade were expected to know how fertilization occurred. Grade sixes also tackled the transmission, symptoms, and treatment of STIs, and were taught about abstinence in the context of “healthy sexuality.” Grade 8 curriculum emphasized the importance of abstinence, and discussed the “consequences of engaging in sexual activity.”⁶

In 2008, Dalton McGuinty’s Liberal government embarked on a two-year consultation process with 700 students, 70 organizations, and more than 2000 individuals to develop a new sexual education curriculum. The proposed overhaul would have introduced several major changes beginning in Fall 2010, including learning about the correct names for genitalia in Grade 1. In Grade 3, students would be introduced to gender identity and sexual orientation, marking the first use of those terms in Ontario school curriculum. Grade 6 students would have learned about masturbation and wet dreams, while Grade 7s would be taught about oral sex, anal sex, and how to prevent pregnancy and STIs.⁷ Before this new curriculum could be unveiled, however, there was massive outcry from religious and conservative groups. On April 21st, McGuinty was aggressively questioned about the curriculum but defended its importance; by April 23rd, he had abandoned the proposed changes. Ultimately, Ontario's health and physical education curriculum received only minor updates in 2010. The words “homophobia” and “gender identity” were added to the curriculum, but only in a glossary to assist educators. Sexual

⁶ “The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8: Health and Physical Education,” *Ministry of Education and Training*, 1998.

⁷ Heather Shipley, “Challenging Identity Constructs: The Debate Over the Sex Education Curriculum in Ontario,” in *Religion and Sexuality: Diversity and the Limits of Tolerance*, ed. Pamela Dickey Young, Heather Shipley, and Tracy J. Trothen (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015): 102.

orientation is discussed in Grade 5; however, it is mentioned only within the context of potential reasons for discrimination or harassment.

Since Catholic schools are publicly funded in Ontario, they are required to teach the government-mandated curriculum for sexual education.⁸ However, the Catholic system has also historically been permitted to interpret curriculum points in a distinctively religious way. The Fully Alive program was developed to supplement sexual health and family life education by providing a Catholic perspective on the “God given” gifts of sex and relationships, and has been used in Ontario Catholic schools since 1992.⁹ The program is sponsored by the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops and is intended to “pass on a distinctively Catholic view of human life, sexuality, marriage, and family.”¹⁰ According to the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, the entire Grade 1-8 program is “designed to encourage children to become the people God wants them to be — to be fully alive.” When discussing the values regarding gender and sexuality held by Catholic-educated young people, it is important to understand that their government-mandated curriculum would have been mediated by the Fully Alive program. In fact, the Catholic family life education contained in “Fully Alive” accounts for 20% of the religious education program and is typically taught once a week.¹¹ As such, the values in the Fully Alive program would have been thoroughly communicated to the respondents of this study.

A final pedagogical element that must be considered alongside the sexual education mandated in Ontario’s health and physical education curriculum is what students would have

⁸ “Catholic schools must teach new sex ed: McGuinty,” *Toronto Star*, 21 April 2010, accessed 11 June 2016, https://www.thestar.com/life/parent/2010/04/21/catholic_schools_must_teach_new_sex_ed_mcguinty.html.

⁹ David Rayside, “Sex Ed in Ontario: Religious Mobilization and Socio-Cultural Anxiety,” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Concordia University, Montreal, June 2010): 7.

¹⁰ “Brief History of Fully Alive,” *Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario*, accessed 11 June 2016, <http://acbo.on.ca/englishdocs/Brief%20History%20Fully%20Alive.pdf>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

been taught in religion classes. Almost all Catholic school students take four years of religion classes, which feature a significant family life component. In Grade 9, the curriculum aims to help students “respect the sacred gift of human fertility,” “commit themselves to chastity,” and “respond with awareness and Christian compassion to the HIV/AIDS crisis.”¹² In Grade 10, students are taught to “respect the dignity of all forms of life – and in particular, of human life – at every stage of its existence,” and to “choose and promote chastity as the personal integration of sexuality in the service of love.”¹³ The Grade 11 curriculum aims to have students “recognize the ways in which sexuality is called to be loving and life-giving,” an expectation which relies on a heteronormative assumption of procreative capacity.¹⁴ Finally, Grade 12 students are expected to “research and apply the Church’s teaching on the sacredness of human life from conception to natural death to issues such as euthanasia, stem cell research, the impact of STIs, contraception including natural family planning, genetic and reproductive technology, and assisted suicide.”¹⁵ These religious values would have been a consistent presence throughout respondents’ years in secondary school.

While sexual education and religion class curriculum are crucial factors in the formation of Ontario students’ opinions, it must also be acknowledged that the curriculum detailed thus far is only one element that contributes to how and what students learn about sex and gender in Catholic schools. In addition to curriculum, students are influenced by peers, teachers, media, religion, and the environment cultivated in Catholic schools as they develop attitudes and opinions pertaining to gender and sexuality. This project hopes to identify prevailing attitudes

¹² “Ontario Catholic Secondary Curriculum Policy Document for Religious Education,” *Institute for Catholic Education*, revised 2006, 40.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

towards diverse gender and sexual identities amongst Catholic-educated young people, and to examine the role their Catholic schooling played in the formation of these opinions.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The purpose of this project is to investigate the role Ontario's Catholic schools play in determining students' attitudes and opinions towards gender and sexual diversity. Several research questions guide this paper: What were students taught about gender and sexuality in Ontario Catholic schools, and how were these teachings communicated? How would they characterize the atmosphere fostered by the Catholic curriculum concerning sex and gender? Did the students reject, mediate, or accept the curriculum taught in school? Finally, what are the attitudes and opinions of the students themselves concerning diverse gender and sexual identities? Were these attitudes and opinions shaped by their education? The author initially conducted this study using these questions while completing an undergraduate summer research fellowship in 2014 at Queen's University.

To gain insight into these questions, respondents were recruited to participate in an interview regarding their time in Catholic schools. In 2014, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 15 participants aged between 18 and 25. All respondents had attended a publicly-funded Catholic school in Ontario for at least five years, with more than two-thirds of participants attending for 14 years. With regards to gender and sexual identity, eleven participants were female, while three identified as male and one identified as female-to-male transsexual. Ten of fifteen participants described their sexual orientation as straight or heterosexual, and an additional participant identified herself as "straight but open." Three participants characterized their sexual orientation as queer, while one respondent identified as gay.

The majority of respondents were not racialized. Four respondents described themselves as Caucasian, three as white, one as Italian, and one as European. Two respondents described their ethnic origin as “French Canadian/Ugandan-Indian” and “White and black mixed race,” respectively, thereby providing biracial representation for this project. The final two respondents characterized their ethnic origin as Indian and Latina. Respondents were mostly in the midst of completing Bachelor’s degrees in university; however, one respondent was attending college, one was finishing a Master’s degree, and another was attending high school. Six participants described themselves as “Roman Catholic” or “slightly Catholic,” one identified as Christian, and another described her current process of conversion from Catholicism to the United Church of Canada. The remaining seven respondents characterized their religious affiliation as “agnostic,” “atheist,” or “none.” Generally, there was good representation amongst the respondents of southwestern, central, and eastern Ontario. Beyond the participation of Audrey from Sudbury there was, however, a notable absence in participation by Northern Ontarians.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through advertisements shared on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. After several brief demographic questions, respondents were invited to participate in an interview that followed a semi-structured format. Interviewees were asked a series of standard questions, but were free to engage in related conversations that emerged during the course of the interview. The interviewer also prompted respondents to elaborate when statements were unclear or ambiguous in meaning. The following questions were posed to interviewees:

1. Do you consider yourself religious? Describe your current relationship with religion and the religious practices you engage in, if any.
2. How do you view the authority of the Roman Catholic Church in your own life? Do your attitudes regarding Catholic authority lead you to accept or question Church teachings? In what ways?
3. What do you understand to be the Roman Catholic Church's teachings on sexual and gender identities and practices?
4. What were you taught about sexual and gender identities and practices in Catholic elementary and high school? Were you taught that some sexual and gender identities were more acceptable than others? In what ways? How was the Roman Catholic Church's position on these identities conveyed to you?
5. What are your personal views about LGBTQ sexual and gender identities? About persons who identify with one or more LGBTQ identities?
6. What were the most important influences in the formation of your personal opinions and attitudes towards LGBTQ identities and LGBTQ individuals?
7. Do your personal opinions and beliefs concerning LGBTQ sexuality and LGBTQ individuals align with those that were conveyed to you in the Catholic school system? If not, how do you negotiate the religious views you were taught with your personal views?
8. Have your opinions and attitudes towards LGBTQ sexuality and LGBTQ individuals changed since you exited the Catholic school system? How? If so, what factors influenced this shift?

9. Thinking back on your experience in the Catholic school system, are there any specific memories of issues concerning gender and sexuality that stand out? What happened? Where did the incidents take place (e.g. class, clubs)?
10. Is there anything else you wish to share about issues of gender and sexuality from your Catholic education?

Analysis

Upon completion of their interview, respondents were given the opportunity to withdraw their data if they so desired. No interviewees opted to withdraw so interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Pseudonyms were assigned to each interviewee to ensure anonymity. Inductive coding was used to analyze the data by asking questions such as:

- What is going on?
- What is the person saying?
- What do these actions and statements assume?¹⁶

After this initial coding, I produced a comprehensive list of all codes that emerged in the course of initial analysis. The large list of codes were examined using a hierarchical approach, which sought to determine major codes and “sub-codes” of these parent themes. Sub-codes typically related to their parent codes as “examples of,” “contexts for,” and “causes of” the phenomenon addressed in the parent code. For example, data that could broadly be classified as addressing “heteronormativity” could be further broken down into “binary gender and sexual identities,” “policed queerness in schools,” and the “‘open secret’ of queer identities in schools.” Once parent codes were broken into specific sub-codes, interview transcriptions were analyzed a

¹⁶ Kathy C. Charmaz, "Grounded Theory," in *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, ed. J.A. Smith (London: Sage, 2003): 94-95.

second time to ensure the data was accurately coded according to the hierarchical code developed for the data set.

Limitations

While a qualitative approach utilizing interviews was determined to be the best way to gain insight into the research questions of this study, there are several limitations to the data that must be discussed. The very limited sample size of this study means that the results cannot be assumed to be indicative of the opinions of all Catholic-educated young adults in Ontario. The experience of fifteen former Catholic school students should not be understood to represent the experience of all who were educated in the Catholic school system. The participants in this study are also disproportionately attending a postsecondary educational institution. All but two respondents attended university, while one attended college and another was a high school student about to begin university. The ability to attend college or university often exposes students to new perspectives, opinions, and individuals that they would not otherwise have access to; therefore, the results of this study likely would have been different if more students who did not pursue post-secondary education had been included. Additionally, the fact that many of the respondents were white and cisgender limits the ability of this study to comment comprehensively upon the experience of racialized, trans, non-binary, genderqueer, and gender-nonconforming individuals in the Catholic education system. A final limitation to consider is that for students who had a negative experience in the Catholic school system, the interview questions posed could have broached sensitive subjects that may have prevented respondents from speaking openly or fully about their experience in Catholic school.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When exploring how Catholic-educated young people think about gender and sexuality and the role that educational and religious institutions play in this thinking, it is critical to utilize a theoretical framework that can respond to the shifting and unfixed discourses that produce knowledge and sexuality. Queer theory seeks to disrupt what is considered normative and to destabilize the institutions that construct and regulate gender and sexuality, and therefore provides a useful theoretical perspective from which to analyze the data of this study. While it must be noted that queer theory is a diverse field often thought to elude definition, it is helpful to outline key ideas and conceptual turns in the realm of queer theory that pertain to this project.

The term “queer theory” was introduced by Teresa de Lauretis in 1991 in an attempt to interrogate and problematize the histories and frameworks typically employed in gay and lesbian studies.¹⁷ She proposed queer theory to challenge the ways in which contemporary discourses of sexuality and gender failed to account sufficiently for race, geography, and socio-political location in their analysis of non-heterosexual experience. De Lauretis suggested two areas of focus: “the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production,” and “the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own discourses and their constructed silences.”¹⁸ In its attempts to perform this important work of discourse deconstruction, queer theory has relied heavily on the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault is particularly crucial to the paradigmatic roots of queer theory because he was the first to argue convincingly that sexuality is not self-evident: rather, it is produced.

¹⁷ Teresa de Lauretis, “Queer Theory: Gay and Lesbian Studies,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3.2 (1991): iii.

¹⁸ de Lauretis, “Queer Theory,” iv.

In his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault employs a historical approach to demonstrate that modern understandings of sexuality are socially constructed. The nineteenth century's medical approach to sexuality served to reify dominant sexual morality under the guise of neutral science, positing queer gender and sexual identities as "inverted" in contrast to a particular heterosexual marital norm.¹⁹ Discourses of sexuality in the nineteenth century accomplished more, however, than outlining an ideal sexuality in contrast to an inverted "Other." Foucault argues that these understandings did not merely seek to *constrain* sexuality, but rather to *produce* it:

In actual fact, what was involved, rather, was the very production of sexuality. Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of social knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.²⁰

Scientific claims to sexual "truth" and their accordant discourses of sex serve to *produce* sexuality itself, which - according to Foucault - can be "deployed" in particular ways as an object of knowledge and a technique of power.²¹ The writing of Foucault and other poststructuralist thinkers problematized gender and sexuality as natural, static categories and highlighted the processes and institutions through which identity is produced--a critical notion in both queer theory and discussions of gender and sex in Catholic schools.

Equally important to this project and the field of queer theory is the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose influential *Epistemology of the Closet* draws upon Foucault's notion

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 53.

²⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 105-106.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

that meaning about our bodies is produced through discourse and social structures of knowledge and power. Sedgwick seeks to problematize the many binaries upon which discourses of gender and sexuality rest and, in doing so, destabilize them. Sedgwick is especially concerned with how language works to enforce a homo/heterosexual binary, a binary which results in myriad social consequences.²² Like Foucault, Sedgwick traces the emergence of the “homosexual” to the end of the 19th century, at which time the production of sexuality meant that every person was considered assignable to a hetero- or homosexual identity in addition to a male/female identity. The power of this homo/heterosexual binary was such that even the “ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal experience” were not exempt from the incoherences of polarized definition.²³ Thus, every aspect of one’s identity and behaviors is sorted into a binary identity category through dominant discourses of gender and sex, despite the reality that most individuals do not lead binary lives.

Sedgwick crucially notes that binarized understandings of sexuality do not represent two “nominally symmetrical forms of choice,” because sexual orientations are understood in the context of deeply homophobic pressure to elevate the status of heterosexuality.²⁴ Homosexuality is subordinated to heterosexuality, yet without the demonized homosexuality conceptualizations of ideal heterosexuality could not exist. This double bind of self-contradictory definition-- in which homosexuality is both crucial to and excluded from heterosexuality-- means that the very binary of hetero/homosexuality is unstable.²⁵ In this instability Sedgwick sees the opportunity for deconstructive efforts, since binaries of sexuality can act as “sites that are peculiarly densely

²² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 9.

²³ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation.” While she does not think that deconstructive analyses will sufficiently dismantle binaries, Sedgwick believes that interrogation of the hetero/homosexuality binary radically challenges those who currently benefit from particular discursive interpretations of definitional incoherence and instability.²⁶ The way that binaries are upheld and the role that they play in disciplining gender and sexuality are of the utmost importance in the institution of Catholic education.

Another critical voice insight in queer theorizing comes from Judith Butler, who challenges the relationship between gender and sex and emphasizes the fluid and non-binary nature of gender. She notes that the split between gender and sex began with good feminist intentions aimed at subverting “biology as destiny” arguments used to keep women in a maternal, nurturing role. Thanks to this early feminism, gender was increasingly understood as “the cultural meanings the sexed body assumes.” However, Butler argues that even if biology is binary (a contested assertion at best), there is no reason to believe that there will only be two genders or indeed that these genders should be statically attached to sex at all. She proposes that understandings of gender should be open-ended:

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one.²⁷

Therefore, Butler developed the important insight that gender and biological sex are not inherently related, and that gender identities can exist beyond the male-female binary. This

²⁶ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 37.

²⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 10.

information is useful in the context of Catholic education, where trans identities are often dismissed and where gender identities beyond maleness and femaleness are rarely discussed.

Official Catholicism considers men and women “different but complementary” and as such teaches that men and women have different roles to fulfil.²⁸ The Church’s assertion that men and women inherently “are” a certain way demands that Butler’s notion of gender as performance be outlined. Butler references Simone de Beauvoir’s famous assertion in *The Second Sex* to demonstrate that gender identity is not inherent: “One is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one.”²⁹ Gender is, in essence, performative: no “core” gender naturally exists before the expected expression of that gender, because the it is the performance of gender identity that constitutes the identity itself.³⁰ “Gender” should be understood as a verb, insofar as it requires “doing” in order to bring it into being. This deconstructive work is important to the work of queer theory because it illustrates gender and sex as categories constantly in the process of formation/becoming.³¹

Michael Warner provides another important voice in the work of queer theorizing, which he describes as “resistance to heteronormativity.”³² Warner names queer theory as that which is defined against the “normal” and “generated precisely in the context of terror,”³³ a field that accounts for the shifting and dynamic forces that bring power, oppression, even sexuality into being. Warner contends that studying through a “queer” lens has the power to broadly counteract the “normal,” meaning that it can tackle broad social terrain, like that of the Catholic school. In

²⁸ Prudence Allen, “Man-Woman Complementarity: The Catholic Inspiration,” *Logos* 9.3 (2006): 91-93.

²⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

³¹ Annamarie Jagose, “An Except from ‘Queer Theory,’” *Australian Humanities Review* 4 (1996): online, accessed 15 July 2016, <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-Dec-1996/jagose.html>.

³² Michael Warner, “Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet,” *Social Text* 29 (1991): xxvi.

³³ Warner, “Fear of a Queer Planet,” 16.

1991, Warner coined the term “heteronormativity” - a concept that will be crucial in understanding what was taught to students in the course of their Catholic education.

Warner and Berlant describe heteronormativity as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent - that is, organized as a sexuality - but also privileged.”³⁴ Heteronormativity can manifest in several forms, but each of these forms contribute to a sense of “rightness” embedded in heterosexuality even in aspects of life that seem to have no relation to sex practice. Heteronormativity is propagated by conceptions of heterosexuality as both an ideal way to live one’s life and a natural and “right” human state.³⁵ The supposed naturalness of heterosexual order is so pervasive, so “immanent in practice [and] to institution” that the fight for tolerance or equal status in society is insufficient. To truly challenge heteronormativity, Warner and others have noted that institutions and societal powers that rely on heteronormativity for their operation must be dismantled. Indeed, “the dawning realization that themes of homophobia and heterosexism may be read in almost any document of our culture means that we are only beginning to have an idea of how widespread those institutions and accounts are.”³⁶ These insights must be taken seriously when considering how students are taught about gender and sexuality in both an educational institution and a religious space.

Building upon Warner’s work on heteronormativity, Lisa Duggan contributes to queer scholarship by describing what she calls “homonormativity.” It is important to stress that Duggan does not mean to signal that there is any sort of societal force for queerness akin to the structures and institutions that enforce heterosexual coupling. Rather, she describes homonormativity as:

³⁴ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (1998): 548.

³⁵ Berlant and Warner, “Sex in Public,” 548.

³⁶ Warner, “Fear of a Queer Planet,” 6.

A politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.³⁷

A manifestation of homonormativity might be, for example, the recent conflation of queer rights with the rights to same-sex marriage. While same-sex marriage is undoubtedly important and is very significant to some members of the queer community, it must be noted that same-sex marriage merely gives queer couples the chance to access and partake in an institution founded upon and reinforced by heterosexuality. LGBTQ married couples are thus granted a particular level of respectability not afforded to other queer individuals who transgress heterosexual norms. Homonormativity, therefore, is a useful way to interrogate how acceptance of queer identities may be tied to expectations that LGBTQ relationships mirror traditional heterosexual procreative coupling. Consistent with Catholic teachings, Catholic schools uphold the importance of the family unit and childrearing. While respondents might personally support LGBTQ relationships, it is useful to consider how homonormativity may have led them to accept these relationships on the assumption that they would “look like” traditional heterosexual relationships.

This project aims to provide insight into what students were taught about gender and sexuality in school, and how those teachings were communicated to them. It asks how issues of gender and sexuality were addressed during the course of their educational experience, and whether students internalized what they are taught in the institutional context of the Catholic school. Queer theory provides a helpful theoretical lens through which to analyze these questions because it acknowledges that identities are constructed, and that certain identities are normalized,

³⁷ Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 179.

regulated, and upheld through discourse present in institutions. Queer theory posits that gender is constructed, fluid, and performative, and that sex and gender have no inherent relation. It eschews gender and sexual binaries and seeks to understand the many ways through which heterosexuality and cisgender identities are privileged. As dominant discourses on sexuality and gender are communicated in Catholic schools, queer theory provides the theoretical tools to grasp how these messages are communicated and the extent to which they are accepted by students.

RESULTS

Heteronormativity

Almost every respondent identified a culture of heteronormativity and cisnormativity in their Catholic schools, wherein cisgender binary identities and heterosexual relationships were held up as normal, preferred, and “right.” While exceptions such as individually supportive teachers or affirming classroom settings were noted in the research, Catholic schools were broadly considered heteronormative by respondents. Respondents noted that this preferencing of cisgender identity and heterosexuality was not always explicit, but often was communicated through silence and omission of LGBTQ narratives. They noted that when relationships or sexuality were discussed, the individuals presumed to be involved were always straight. Audrey attended an all-girls Catholic high school, where she rarely heard homosexuality disavowed outright but where “they only ever talked about man-woman relationships.” Cassie similarly felt that felt that heterosexuality was encouraged “very, very subtly” when teachers discussed relationships because “all the examples they gave were about heterosexual relationships.”

Sarita, a queer Indian woman, echoed other respondents in noting that heterosexuality was implicitly promoted through a lack of discussion of LGBTQ identities. Sarita expressed that this aspect of her education was particularly painful for her, because she never saw her identity represented:

I think a lot of the ways that heterosexuality is taught is not just in the fact that people say explicitly, “You can only have sex with the ‘opposite’ gender,” but with lack of representation. It is never talked about, it is never shown. I knew about gay people, but I didn’t associate that with myself, or even as a possibility, because I had never seen it. None of my friends’ parents, none of my friends themselves, no one was out. Heterosexuality is taught in the silence.

Connor also felt heterosexuality was normalized through representation at his school, and expressed his fear for future generations of LGBTQ Catholic students if they remain unrepresented in their education. Informed by his experience as a gay man who spent 14 years in the Catholic school system, Connor observed:

If there's no representation, children and young adults going through the Catholic school system will have no idea what it's okay to be, which I think is a bit of a tragedy because they have to a) find those things out themselves, b) deal with the pressure of essentially not aligning with the very binary ideals that are established by the Catholic school board, and c) possibly experience trauma and a lot of negative feelings that are not brought up at all by the Catholic school system. So I think representation is important to see that these things are okay.

Binary Categories of Gender and Sexuality

Respondents felt heteronormativity and cisnormativity in Catholic schools also manifested through failure to discuss identities that lie beyond traditional binaries. Audrey said that discussions of sexuality were, at best, limited to “gay and straight,” and failed to account for identities such as asexuality, pansexuality, or bisexuality. Patricia was also taught this binarized understanding of sexuality, and her school did not address diverse gender identities: “You didn’t even get into transgender or genderqueer people, so it was just a binary between straight and homosexual –and not even like a straight person and a homosexual person, but a straight lifestyle and a homosexual lifestyle sort of thing.” As Connor observed, the Church’s teachings on sexual and gender identities “are very binary... you’re either one gender or the other gender. There’s no in between, and there’s not really much decision making or information about a potential grey area.” By avoiding what theorists now usually understand as a complex and widely varied spectrum of gender and sexual identities, respondents felt that cisgender identities and heterosexualities were held up as “normal” in their Catholic schools.

“Open Secret” of LGBTQ Identities

Respondents also expressed that heterosexual relationships were commonly sanctioned in Catholic schools, while non-heterosexual relationships and identities were “open secrets” discussed through rumours and whispered conversations. Heterosexual relationships were expected and condoned in Sam’s school, but relationships that were not between cis men and cis women were “known but not talked about.” Connor, too, felt that there were many queer students at his school “but the Catholic school board does not like to admit we exist or admit that it’s okay.” Especially at Audrey’s all-girls school, relationships between students were harshly condemned and it was common knowledge that “you could not show you were gay at school.” As a result, non-heterosexual relationships were taboo amongst members of the student body: “you’d kind of beat around the bush - you knew people were gay but you wouldn’t straight-out say it.” The contrast between highly visible heterosexual relationships and hidden queer ones exemplifies the culture of heteronormativity that dominated many respondents’ educational experience.

Policed Queerness

In some cases, LGBTQ identities were not merely omitted in students’ education - they were actively discouraged. Patricia was explicitly taught that “any other type of sexual expression beyond heterosexual marriage is bad, is selfish, isn’t really taking into consideration how God designed sexuality to be.” Students at Audrey’s school were specifically told that they could not have a relationship with another student there because they would be inappropriately engaging in same-gender relations at a Catholic institution. When asked whether certain sexual orientations were deemed more acceptable in her school, Sarita responded: “In terms of sexuality

it wasn't as though some were more acceptable, it was that heterosexuality is the ONLY acceptable sexual orientation. So if you are not straight in every way, you are abnormal. You are acting in a way that God did not intend you to. I heard that phrase a lot in my elementary and high school years." Several respondents in addition to Sarita recount being taught that homosexual sexual activity was condemned by the Catholic Church, typically in their Grade 12 religion class - though this school teaching was typically supplemented by a statement that "homosexual actions" - not individuals - should be condemned. These teachings were usually supported with passages from Scripture and commentary from Catholic figures like the Pope. The condemnation and policing of queerness described by some respondents reveals the way heteronormativity is fostered and maintained in some Catholic schools.

Values over Official Teachings

Another common theme amongst respondents was the internalization and acceptance of broad Catholic values alongside the rejection of "official" teachings on the topic of gender and sexuality. While these values are certainly not limited to Catholicism, many respondents spoke positively of their experiences learning in the Catholic school system about about love, kindness, acceptance, and responsibility to care for the marginalized. Several respondents, for example, noted that their support for diverse gender and sexual identities was informed by lessons about acceptance of difference taught in Catholicism. Allison, who was raised in a very religious home, was "more focused on the idea of accepting everyone" when thinking about LGBTQ individuals. For Kieran, Catholic education taught him far more about acceptance of difference than condemnation of diverse identities:

When I was thinking about how I wanted to address this stuff with you today, the thing that kept coming back to me was that for every questionable stance on gender and sexuality, there's so many more examples of acceptance of difference. And even though

it's not as blatant, and even though it's not the "progressive" mode of communication it could be, that's the message that comes through a lot clearer in Catholic teachings than the homophobic ones. Appreciation of everyone and acceptance of difference.

Evidently, these students prioritized the Catholic message of acceptance, which they characterized as more embedded in their education than Catholic doctrine on the topic of homosexuality.

Several respondents stated that they were taught of the importance of love during their time in Catholic school, and therefore rejected Catholic teachings on homosexuality because they were not seen as "loving." Audrey felt there was a "conflict" present in Church teachings when students were taught to love one another yet were discouraged from forming loving queer relationships. According to Audrey, the necessity of love was "a stronger teaching in the Catholic system than the fact that a certain sexuality is wrong." Jess also cited this "contradiction" in Catholicism, while Sarita felt that the Catholic Church "is not doing enough for people who feel like they are less loved and less valuable and less worthy because of their sexual orientation or their gender orientation. I think it's incredibly hypocritical for the Church to frame itself as an institution of love when it treats people so unlovingly." Here, students utilize the message of love communicated in Catholic school as a justification for the rejection of Church teaching on homosexuality.

Respondents also cited care for the marginalized as a Catholic value that negated official teachings on the subject of homosexuality. Most respondents identified the LGBTQ community as an oppressed population, and for several former Catholic school students, this meant that they felt called to care for them as a result of their Catholic values. Especially in elementary school, Kieran noted, students were taught to "care for other people regardless of the things that made

them different.” Sam characterized this teaching as “the most important one,” and described the Church’s official teachings on homosexuality as “trying to tell people things they should and shouldn’t do, which isn’t really any of the Church’s business.” For Sarita, the importance placed upon caring for others in Catholicism made it impossible for her to condemn homosexual acts, and in fact allowed her to make connections between her religious community and her queer community:

Both the queer community and the church community – in the positive sense, not the negative sense – really values community and taking care of each other. They both view people as whole people...knowing that lots of different parts of them are important. The emphasis on community is one of the biggest shared factors between them, in that “these are your people, you should look out for them.”

It is clear that several respondents were willing to integrate values taught to them in Catholic school when forming their opinions on gender and sexual identities, and that they utilized these values to reject official Church teachings on homosexual acts.

Rejection of Religious Authority

Perhaps related to this dismissal of church teaching is the overwhelming rejection of traditional religious authority by this study’s respondents. When asked how they viewed the authority of the Roman Catholic Church in their own lives, all but one respondent said the Church’s authority did not affect their lives, decision making, or worldview. Seven of fifteen respondents described themselves at the time of the interview as agnostic, atheist, or having no religious affiliation, so their rejection of Church authority likely reflects this. Five respondents identified themselves specifically as Roman Catholic while another described herself as “slightly Catholic,” and these individuals also noted that the Church had no authority over their lives. For Eric, a self-described Catholic “female-to-male transsexual” of Italian heritage, qualms about

Catholic authority are rooted in institutional power: “My relationship to religion is incredibly fraught, because I cannot unlink religion from institutional power structures, so I just disengage completely from it.” Sofia labels herself as Catholic, but makes it clear that “I respect the Pope, but I don’t listen to anything that he says.” For Sarita, who is converting from Catholicism to the United Church of Canada, her academic background in history made it difficult to accept the institution of the Church, since she’s “learned plenty that tells me that the Church has been historically influenced and has made a lot of decisions that they claim are spiritual when they are really motivated by misogyny and materialism and power.” Thus, even amongst Catholic students, the authority of the Church is not recognized in their own lives. This rejection of Church authority may provide some insight as to why Church teachings on homosexuality were so readily rejected by respondents.

Importance of Personal Interpretation

When respondents utilize Catholic values to explain their rejection of Catholic teachings, it is apparent that personal interpretation is a crucial factor in how they conceptualize gender and sexual identities. Audrey emphasized the importance of making one’s “own informed belief” to “take away the values of the religion, rather than the exact laws and rules that they’re saying.” She feels you must “find the beliefs you agree with and can guide you” in order to “allow you to still follow your faith but choose to live in a world that fits your definitions.” Sam agrees with the importance of personal interpretation, finding that where Church teachings are concerned, “you should take that message for yourself and interpret it how you think you should live it.” Patricia observed that personal interpretation of religious dogma is a widespread practice amongst believers, noting: “I have met Catholics who don’t really go by what the Catholic

Church teaches, so it has kind of allowed me to see that while the Catholic Church says one thing, it doesn't mean that a Catholic has to believe that exactly." Amongst the respondents of this study, the prevailing approach to religion involved rejecting absolute Church authority in favour of core Catholic religious values according to personal interpretation.

Positive Student Opinions

Where their own current personal opinions were concerned, respondents were overwhelmingly positive about diverse gender and sexual identities. When asked to describe their personal views towards LGBTQ identities and individuals, respondents provided responses such as "supportive," "in favour," "good with it," "fine with it," and "accepting." Many respondents had answers that could be classified as positive, and often speculated that other students in their Catholic schools felt the same way. Audrey felt that despite school discouragement of LGBTQ identities, "students were very supportive of others who were gay." Sarita, a queer woman herself, was enthusiastically supportive of diverse identities and added, "I think it's so great that there are people who are willing to acknowledge that sexuality and gender are fluid." After expressing her own positive opinions, Ginny lamented: "I wish there were more safe spaces for LGBTQ people.... I don't understand the prejudice and discrimination people have against them, they're like any other people." These respondents felt personally supportive of LGBTQ identities, and also encouraged positive conceptions by others.

Several respondents expressed views towards diverse gender and sexual identities that could be characterized as "tolerant." Allison, a practicing Catholic, felt that her view could be described as "live and let live." She noted that she would not choose "that stuff" herself, but did not "have a problem if other people would." Allison was "frustrated" by other Catholics who felt

she was less authentically Catholic because of her tolerant views concerning LGBTQ individuals, but she expressed that this response from her religious community did not change her own opinion. Patricia's stance could also be characterized as "tolerant": "I guess I have no problem with it. Do what you need to do. I've never really thought about it." When asked about her opinions about LGBTQ identities, Sydney responded that she "didn't personally have a position on it." While these opinions are not explicitly supportive, they do not condemn LGBTQ individuals or their sexual conduct and they respect the right of those individuals to live as they wish to.

Role of Educators in Student Opinions

It is beyond the scope of this project to account for the contributing factors that led to the development of respondents' positive attitudes towards LGBTQ identities and individuals; however, three influences that emerged from the interviews should be noted. The first of these influences concerns the role of teachers in disseminating Catholic teachings on homosexuality. When discussing their time in Catholic school, several respondents felt it was important for them to know that they did not believe their teachers supported the curriculum they were required to teach in class. According to Eric, "the teachers who taught me those lessons were not 100% believing those lessons themselves I just want to hammer home that I don't authentically believe that half of the faculty at that high school believed what they were telling us." During high school, when Eric was living as a lesbian woman and was not yet out as trans, two of his teachers provided helpful resources for his burgeoning queer identity: an offer to join the newly-created Gay-Straight Alliance and a list of "prolific lesbian films." Eric speculated that many of his teachers likely supported the LGBTQ cause but were hesitant about openly

expressing that support. Similarly, “a lot” of Sophia’s teachers were accepting of gender and sexual diversity but she felt like they could not openly voice their opinions for fear of retribution by their school board.

Personal Relationships with LGBTQ Individuals

When discussing their positive conceptions of LGBTQ individuals and identities, many respondents cited personal relationships with LGBTQ individuals as a major factor in the formation of their opinions. Ginny discussed the importance of spending time at a local coffeeshop that often acted as a queer gathering space, which she feels allowed her to form close friendships with LGBTQ individuals. The events hosted at the coffeeshop “really opened [her] eyes” and allowed her to learn more about the struggles faced by LGBTQ people. Cassie believes her acceptance towards LGBTQ people truly began when her friends began coming out to her. Prior to that point, she said, her support for the LGBTQ community was purely intellectual. When her friends began identifying with that community, she felt compelled to advocate for LGBTQ individuals on an emotional and personal level. Similarly, Jess made “many close queer and trans friends” in university which allowed her to learn more and to develop her own attitudes and opinions.

Departure from Home to Post-Secondary Education

Like Jess, many respondents conveyed similar stories about making LGBTQ friends in university or college, or personally coming out at this time. This narrative demonstrates another possible contributor to positive attitudes and opinions regarding the LGBTQ community: a departure from one’s home in adolescence to a post-secondary institution. For Patricia, her acceptance and understanding of diverse sexual and gender identities was greatly aided when she

began attending university: “Since I left high school and came to university, taking different courses and meeting lots of people has made me understand more and made me continually accept other people and what they have to offer.” Jess grew up in a small town that she described as “religious and conservative,” so her “most important influence” was the ability to gain an education at a mid-size university known for the liberal arts. While Allison did not befriend any LGBTQ individuals in university, her school still “exposed [her] to that sort of thing much more often and it just became much more normal to be rather than like a ‘condition’ or a rare state of being.” Celeste speculated that positive opinions of LGBTQ individuals and identities were formed in post-secondary institutions because “in university, people are more free to be who they are, and there are more groups for LGBTQ people, like support groups and everything.”

Alongside support from teachers in high school and personal relationships to LGBTQ individuals, leaving home to attend college or university was evidently influential in the formation of respondents’ attitudes and opinions regarding diverse identities.

ANALYSIS

Queer theory has the ability to elucidate the power dynamics that underpin the culture of Ontario's Catholic schools, and to highlight the ways that normative discourses of gender and sexuality are produced. It can be used to interrogate educational and religious institutions which construct and regulate "normal" and "ideal" gender and sexual identities in the school environment. As such, queer theory is a theoretical framework that is well-equipped to unpack the data gathered from this study's respondents.

Heteronormativity

Many of this study's respondents described a culture of heteronormativity as dominant in their Catholic schools. Michael Warner describes heteronormativity as a system in which in which the "logic" of heterosexual order is so deeply embedded in social institutions that it has become normalized and standard.³⁸ Respondents identified several different ways in which heterosexuality and cisgender identities were communicated as ideal, including silence on the topic of LGBTQ identities, exclusively straight couples in discussions of sexuality, and a lack of representation and role models for LGBTQ students. The Catholic discourse that posits heterosexuality as standard is certainly bolstered by the family life curriculum, where students are taught about the God-given gift of family, which is always presumed to be nuclear, heterosexual, and procreative. Both the Catholic Church and Catholic schools have an interest in upholding heteronormative and cisnormative ideas about gender, sexuality, and what constitutes family because Catholic sacraments and family life are deeply invested in "God given" heterosexual marital conduct. Diverse identities and ways of living are potentially threatening to

³⁸ Warner, "Fear of a Queer Planet," 6.

the Catholic social order, which relies on idealized notions of (heterosexual) marriage and procreation.

Discourse privileging heterosexuality and cisgender identity can be easily destabilized, however, by the reality of families that comprise the Catholic student body. While students may learn both inside and beyond the classroom that nuclear, procreative heterosexual families and identities are the norm, this may not reflect their experiences. In reality, the student body certainly contains members of the LGBTQ community, and students' families are equally diverse. Guardians may be divorced, in same-gender relationships, trans, or biologically unrelated to the child they are raising. The home lives and relationships of Catholic school students already dismiss the normative notion that a Catholic family looks a particular way. It is critical that alternative families, couples, and individuals are shown and discussed openly in Catholic schools to disrupt dominant narratives that dictate that one must be cisgender and heterosexual to meaningfully engage in relationships and to live life fully.

Binary Categories of Gender and Sexuality

Respondents also discussed the way that their Catholic education relied heavily upon problematic binaries in discussing gender and sexual identities. Sexual orientations were considered "either gay or straight" and only male and female gender identities were mentioned - assumed, of course, to be the gender assigned at birth. During their interviews, the former Catholic school students noted that sexual identities such as bisexuality, pansexuality, and asexuality were never discussed, nor was the notion that one's sexual identity could change over time or defy definition. Similarly, gender identities beyond cisgender maleness and femaleness or the fluidity of gender were not mentioned. Students were typically taught a biological

essentialist perspective in which one's gender is assumed to be dictated by certain biological traits that have been determined to constitute "male" and "female" anatomy. Several respondents shared that in their school, this biological essentialism was taken further by teachings that men and women "naturally" possess different skills, abilities, and strengths. By teaching that individuals are either heterosexual or homosexual, "anatomically" male or female, Catholic schools continue to produce a normalizing and idealized view of how gender and sexuality "should" be. Catholic school curriculum fails to provide students with examples of the diversity of gender and sexuality, and in so doing produces an artificially constructed "truth" of gender and sexuality.

Policed Queerness

In some Catholic schools, the production and regulation of sexuality is made apparent through the policing and active discouragement of non-heterosexual relationships between students. Engaging in heterosexual relationships is considered an integral component of "growing up" and the classic high school experience as depicted in popular media. Often, schools play an important role in facilitating these relationships through events like dances or "best couple" voting in the yearbook. While these school-sanctioned opportunities for displays of affection are highly accessible to straight students, controversies over whether LGBTQ couples should be permitted to attend school events together make it clear that their relationships are not permitted in the same way. The Catholic school environment is presumed to be straight and its activities provide space for young heterosexual couples to be visible, but it is obvious that queer couples do not adhere to this norm and must ask to be included. Some high schools, like Audrey's all-girls school, explicitly prohibit queer relationships by banning any relationships

between students. These interventionary measures by schools demonstrate the way queer identities are policed in the Catholic school system while heterosexual relationships are sanctioned, supported, and considered an inevitable (or desirable!) part of growing up.

Values over Official Teachings

Overwhelmingly, the respondents in this study rejected Catholic teachings on diverse gender and sexual identities in favour of values they connected to their Catholic education like love, acceptance of difference, and responsibility to care for the marginalized. They often utilized these values to justify their personal pro-LGBTQ attitudes, finding that these values implored them to view LGBTQ individuals, identities, and behaviors as acceptable and good rather than disordered. These students likely would have awareness of the Catholic theological reasoning for the Church's position on LGBTQ, but chose to personally reject both the reasoning and the position. Instead, many of the respondents utilized a values-based approach to "queer" traditional Catholic understandings and to perform an alternative reading of theological teachings. By employing values that are taught by the Catholic system in a way that is not sanctioned by Catholic authorities, these interviewees subvert discriminatory teachings to achieve inclusive ends. For a few respondents, their teachers assisted them in queering metanarratives communicated by Catholic school authorities by refusing to teach the Church's stance on LGBTQ identities and instead emphasizing Catholic values. Both students and teachers, then, adopted an alternative, "queer" approach in the formation of their attitudes and opinions on diverse gender and sexual identities.

Rejection of Religious Authority and the Importance of Personal Interpretation

Related to students' willingness to reject Catholic teachings on the subject of homosexuality is their disavowal of religious authority. The authority of the Catholic Church is highly visible in Catholic schools, ranging from mandatory religious education to morning prayers to religious influence on school curriculum. All teachers, principals, and other educational professionals in positions of power are expected to be Catholic and espouse Catholic teachings, thereby locating power in Catholic schools with religious authority. These power structures privilege religious and normative ways of understanding gender and sexuality, yet the students interviewed reject the notion that religious authorities should determine their attitudes and opinions. As queer theory urges us to consider the way that institutions and power construct normative notions of gender and sexuality, it is illuminating to note that all respondents interviewed in this study were willing to reject both religious and education authorities and their teachings.

Positive Student Opinions

All of the respondents in this study expressed views towards the LGBTQ community that could be characterized as positive. Some respondents were quite comfortable rejecting dominant cultures of heteronormativity and cisnormativity, and clearly expressed their disappointment with aspects of Catholic education they felt were not inclusive. Either members of the LGBTQ community themselves or allies to that community, these respondents had clearly given thought to the way that discourses construct certain sexual and gender identities as "normal." For other respondents, their position on diverse gender and sexual identities was something they "had never really thought about" or on which they had no position. The individuals that expressed these opinions (which could be characterized as "tolerant" rather than "positive") were all

heterosexual. It is important to acknowledge the ability to distance oneself from the position of LGBTQ students in Catholic schools is a privilege, one that LGBTQ students are not afforded in a heteronormative and cisnormative educational setting. The reality that some students could have graduated from the Catholic school system without thinking about diverse gender and sexual identities speaks to the way straight, cisgender students are made to feel comfortable, supported, and normal in Catholic school.

Role of Educators in Student Opinions

Teachers also have the capacity to play an important role in queering hetero- and cisnormativity discourses in Catholic education. While teachers may be personally supportive of LGBTQ identities, they may feel afraid to voice their opinion at the risk of workplace consequences. As a result, teachers often find unorthodox ways to circumvent expectations about how gender and sexuality should be addressed in a Catholic context. A few respondents who shared anecdotes of encouraging teachers expressed that the teachers approached them outside of class hours in a private setting to express their support. Other teachers avoided explicitly teaching the Church's stance on LGBTQ identities at all. Still other teachers emphasized Catholic values rather than strict teachings, as a way to technically conform to expectations while implicitly offering their personal support. Through each of these approaches, Catholic teachers "queer" the curriculum and dogma they are assigned to teach and offer alternative approaches to the conceptualization of sexuality, gender, and family life relationships. The LGBTQ respondents interviewed for this study found that a supportive teacher was often the highlight of an otherwise contentious time in Catholic school, demonstrating the potential for authority figures in Catholic education to dramatically alter the experiences of LGBTQ students.

Personal Relationships with LGBTQ Students

For many respondents, their personal relationships with LGBTQ friends and acquaintances were highly influential in the development of their attitudes and opinions about diverse gender and sexual identities. Personal connections to those affected by heteronormativity and cisnormativity illuminated the difficulties experienced by LGBTQ individuals, especially the difficulties they experience as a result of attending Catholic school. Heterosexual respondents also stated that these relationships gave them a personal interest in the rights of LGBTQ individuals and demonstrated that they are members of the broader school community like any other Catholic student. Despite highly heteronormative and cisnormative teachings both within schools and without, heterosexual respondents often gained significant support for the LGBTQ community from one or two personal relationships with members of that community. Meaningful relationships with LGBTQ individuals are evidently a powerful influence and highlight the ability for personal narratives to overcome powerful and dominant discourses that fail to normalize diverse gender and sexual identities.

CONCLUSIONS

Much of the discussion concerning Catholic schools in Ontario has rightly focused on the potential for harm to LGBTQ students. As early as 2002, the case of Marc Hall drew the nation's attention to the issue of anti-LGTBQ discrimination in Catholic schools when an Oshawa teen was not allowed to bring his boyfriend to prom. Since that time, Catholic school resistance to the formation of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), parent opposition to Catholic post-secondary teachers marching in Pride celebrations, and the rejection of an anti-bullying policy that protects LGBTQ students in Hamilton all seem to indicate that LGBTQ students are not welcome in Ontario's Catholic schools. Opposition to Kathleen Wynne's 2015 sexual education overhaul from some Catholic trustees and parents - largely on the basis of inclusion of diverse gender and sexual identities in the curriculum --also appeared to signal a need for change in Catholic education.

The curriculum taught in Catholic schools also seems to imply that students will learn discriminating and possibly damaging attitudes towards LGBTQ identities and individuals during the course of their education. By reflecting Roman Catholic teachings on homosexuality, Catholic schools instruct students that diverse gender and sexual identities beyond the cisgender, heterosexual "norm" deserve compassion, but are inherently disordered if acted upon. While some schools may opt not to be forthcoming with this position, the fact that Catholic schools are bound to reflect Catholic theological teachings means that these attitudes towards LGBTQ identities and individuals will likely be reflected in some way in the school setting. Respondents

in this study highlighted the many ways that heteronormativity and cisnormativity are embedded in Catholic education, ranging from the assumption that gender assigned at birth determines one's gender identity to heterosexuality as the frame of reference in discussions of relationships. Evidently, much of the discourse in Catholic schools seems to discourage the acceptance of diverse gender and sexual identities.

It is clear that heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and a curriculum that does not affirm the inclusion of all students are indisputable realities at most Ontario Catholic schools. What is not often considered in critiques of these aspects of Catholic education, however, is whether students actually internalize and adopt the teachings about diverse gender and sexual identities that are communicated to them in school. This study suggests that while heteronormative and cisnormative narratives are highly prevalent in Catholic schools, students do not adopt these teachings themselves. Firstly, almost all respondents rejected the authority of the Catholic church in their own lives, meaning that they were unlikely to accept official Catholic teachings regarding LGBTQ identities simply because they were mandated by the Church. Further, many of them problematized heteronormativity in Catholic schools, speaking of heteronormativity as a potentially harmful part of Catholic education which failed LGBTQ students. Finally, these respondents--contrary to the teachings of the Catholic church--all held positive attitudes and opinions towards the LGBTQ community, or counted themselves as members of that community. While the respondents of this study cannot be considered representative of all Catholic school students, their near-unanimous agreement in rejecting Church authority, condemning heteronormativity, and supporting LGBTQ individuals indicates a clear disconnect between what Catholic schools teach and what attitudes students adopt. While more research is

needed to gain further insight into the reasons Catholic church teachings fail to resonate with students, this project suggests that students of Catholic schools do not personally adopt the teachings that are communicated to them.

A failure to communicate official teachings on LGBTQ identities does not mean that students' opinions are not shaped by Catholic school; in fact, many of the respondents in this study indicated that their core values were shaped by religious education. Respondents referenced values like love, kindness, acceptance, and responsibility to care for the marginalized when discussing what they were taught in Catholic school. They often asserted that these values were taught "better" or for a longer period of time throughout their education, resulting in these values being integrated into respondents' personal opinions far more thoroughly than Church teachings on diverse gender and sexual identities. While it is not clear whether these values were embraced by students simply because they aligned with their existing system of belief, it is obvious that for the participants of this study, Catholic values override official Catholic teachings. Many respondents explicitly utilized values they associated with their Catholic upbringing, including care for others and acceptance of difference, as justification for their pro-LGBTQ attitudes and opinions. Respondents associated these values with Catholicism and actively integrated them into their wider worldview.

Ultimately, it seems it is not a question of *whether* Catholic schools shape the beliefs of their students but *how* and *where* Catholic education succeeds in shaping these beliefs. It may be tempting to conclude that because respondents reject Church authority and official Catholic teachings, Catholic schools are not successful in influencing opinions. To the contrary, this study suggests that Catholic education actually *does* succeed in shaping the opinions of young people

where values are concerned. Rather than adopting the dominant discourse about gender and sexuality propagated by school and religious authorities, this study's respondents utilized the Catholic values they learned in school to "queer" traditional Catholic theology and argue for an alternative reading of LGBTQ identities. This values-based approach to affirming diverse gender and sexual identities has significant potential as a strategy for fostering inclusion in Catholic education in a way that is both religiously-informed and student-approved.

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