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Gay-Straight Alliances and Student Activism in Ontario Public Secular and Catholic High Schools

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Abstract

This study provides an in-depth examination of the educative and activist function of GSAs in two public secular and two public Catholic Ontario secondary schools. Queer theory, as elaborated by Foucault (1978), Sedgwick (1990/2008), Butler (1990, 1993a/b/c), Warner (1991), and Britzman (1995), provides a foundation for critiquing the heteronormative underpinnings of schooling, and the trans-informed insights of Namaste (2000), Stryker (2006), Serano (2007/2016, 2013), Malatino (2015), and Connell (2009) offers a lens to scrutinize cisnormative infrastructure, pedagogy, and practice as they pertain to the role and educative function of GSAs in selected Ontario schools. To generate knowledge on the particularities of the four GSAs (Patton, 2002), a multi-sited case study approach was undertaken (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005). Data were gathered by completing semi-structured interviews with 14 youth and five educators across the school sites, observing and participating in GSA meetings, collecting semi-structured diaries from 13 youth, and analyzing club-related visual materials - all of which were made sense of by employing queer and trans-informed theoretical perspectives. There was a concerted effort to speak with trans and gender diverse GSA members in order to (de)subjugate their embodied knowledges and understandings (Stryker, 2006), authorize their voices (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006), and document their agency in schooling by way of their club-inspired education and activism (see Elliott, 2015, Schindel, 2005, 2008). Three prominent themes emerged within the data: 1: each GSA was a student-driven democratizing space that enabled youth to explore and circulate anti-hetero/cisnormative discourses (Fraser, 1990); 2) all GSAs served as a proxy in the absence of an ongoing systemic commitment to queer and trans-informed education; and 3) pastoral care and its regulatory moral authority within Catholic education impeded GSA development and functioning (Martino, 2014). The implications of the study are outlined in terms of the need for systemic

support for anti-heteronormative and anti-cisnormative education so that the burden and responsibility for this education does not just fall on the shoulders of GSA members and gender and sexual minority youth in particular.

Keywords:

activism; Catholic; case study; cisnormativity; counterpublic; Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA); gender, sexual, and romantic minority (GSRM); heteronormativity; Ontario; proxy; queer and trans-informed education; secular

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List of Abbreviations

CSDCCS: Conseil Scolaire de District Catholique Centre-Sud

EGALE: Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere

ESCSF: École Secondaire Catholique Sainte-Famille

GLSEN: Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network

GSA: Gay-Straight Alliance and Gender and Sexuality Alliance

GSRM: Gender, Sexual, and Romantic Minority

HCDSB: Halton Catholic District School Board

ISP: Independent Study Project

LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning

LGBT2Q: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two-Spirit, Queer/Questioning

LOI: Letter of Information

NFL: National Football League

PD: Professional Development

PE: Physical Education

PGASO: Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation

PP: PowerPoint

OCCB: Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops

OHRC: Ontario Human Rights Code

SJCSS: St. Joseph's Catholic Secondary School

TCDSB: Toronto Catholic District School Board

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study and Theoretical Positioning

This investigation examines students' and teachers' involvement with Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA)¹ in Ontario public secular and Catholic high schools. Rather than focusing on how GSAs offer safety and support for gender, sexual, and romantic minority (GSRM)² youth and their allies,³ this inquiry explores their educative and activist influence in schools. It is particularly concerned with the proxy role that GSAs play as a result of the education system's failure to promote anti-hetero/cisnormative⁴ practices and pedagogies. Since the perspectives of queer,⁵ trans, and gender diverse students are routinely marginalized (Grace & Wells, 2015; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewsk, 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Rasmussen, 2006; Talburt, 2004; Taylor et al., 2011; Taylor et. al., 2016; Wyss, 2004), examining GSA members' experiences can produce new knowledge on the limits of anti-homo/transphobic⁶ education, and spotlight the need for queer and trans-infused⁷ approaches, which combat oppressive and binary understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Although some research has detailed the political significance and legal challenges of GSAs in American schools - primarily within postsecondary institutions (see Goldstein & Davis, 2010; McEntarfer, 2011), studies that explore how GSAs are engaging in sexual and gender diversity education, and influencing teaching and learning practices in schools requires further investigation (Collin, 2013). It is both timely and essential to examine the experiences and perspectives of Ontario public secular and Catholic high school GSA members and their advisors because there is limited research on: 1) Canadian GSAs (Grace & Wells, 2015; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Lapointe, 2012; St. John, Travers, Munro, Liboro, Schneider, & Greig, 2014); 2) the experiences of GSRM students in Canadian public secular and Catholic high schools (Callaghan, 2012, 2015, 2016a; Taylor et al., 2011); and 3) the development and functioning of GSAs in Canadian Catholic schools

(Grace & Wells, 2015; Lapointe & Kassen, 2013; Liboro, Travers, & St. John, 2015; Martino, 2014). As such, this study responds to Grace and Wells' (2015) call to investigate GSA's role in faith-based education and their queer and trans activist impact in schools. By addressing these empirical gaps, this study provides insight into why GSA members are compelled to confront heteronormativity - the naturalization and normalization of heterosexuality (Warner, 1991; Britzman, 1995), and cisnormativity – the legitimization and privileging of cisgender⁸ identities (Serano, 2007/2016; 2013; Stryker, 2006), and how their club initiatives are supported and/or stifled at school.

Research Questions

The overarching research question that this study addresses is: What knowledge can be gained about the role of GSAs in addressing gender and sexuality in schools? The specific research questions that guide this inquiry are: 1) What are the roles and purposes of GSAs, and how are these understood and enacted in schools, particularly in terms of addressing anti-hetero/cisnormative education? 2) To what extent are GSAs affecting broader educational change in schools with regards to supporting queer- and trans-informed curriculum and pedagogical reform? 3) What role do advisors play and what can be learned about the educative and activist work of GSAs from their experiences?

Research Purposes

The purposes of this investigation are:

- To generate further knowledge about the role and function of GSAs in secondary schools from the perspectives of student members and advisors.
- To investigate the extent to which GSAs are effective sites for addressing hetero/cisnormativity.

- To build deeper knowledge and understanding about queer and trans student activism and the involvement of straight and/or cisgender allies in GSAs.

GSRM Students' Experiences at School

The education system reflects and replicates hetero/cisnormative and hetero/cissexist^{9,10} standards that are omnipresent in wider society (Grace & Wells, 2015), making homo/transphobic prejudice and discrimination common in Canadian and American secondary schools (Elliott, 2016; Grace & Wells, 2015; Kosciw et al., 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Lapointe, 2014, 2015, 2016a/b; Meyer, 2014; Richard, 2015; Schindel, 2008; Sykes, 2011; Sykes & Smith, 2016; Taylor et. al, 2011; Taylor et al., 2016; Youth-Gender Action Project [Y-GAP], 2009). Within a Canadian context, EGALE Canada Human Rights Trust, a GSRM human rights organization, administered the first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools from December 2007 through June 2009. Survey results from over 3700 students indicated that 64% of sexual and gender minority youth and 61% of youth with queer parents found their schools to be unsafe (Taylor et al., 2011). In the United States, the 2015 national climate survey, with 10,528 participants between the ages of 13 and 21, revealed that “57.6% of LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 43.3% because of their gender expression” (p. xvi). Both of these large-scale studies indicate that: homo/transphobic remarks are prevalent at school; sexual and gender minority topics and people are not commonly and/or positively integrated into every day curricula; and many schools do not have and/or enact comprehensive anti-discrimination policies which enumerate sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression (Kosciw et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2011). These troubling statistics serve as a call for the education system to address the victimization and oppression of GSRM students by providing safer, more welcoming, and just atmospheres for GSRM youth by

instituting and upholding anti-homo/transphobic policies, and implementing anti-hetero/cisnormative practice and pedagogy. In the meantime, however, GSA development, as outlined by Bill 13 – *Accepting Schools Act* (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2012), is essential because these groups operate as *subaltern counterpublics* (i.e., counter-hegemonic spaces) where taken for granted notions of sexuality and gender may be disrupted, and hetero/cissexist pedagogies and practices may be countered (see Fraser, 1990).

Background to Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Development

GSAs began to form in the late 1980s in Los Angeles and Boston, United States (Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012), with the first documented union tracing back to 1988 in Massachusetts (Collin, 2013). In Canada, the first GSA was founded in 2000 (Wells, 2006). GSAs are school-based, extracurricular clubs for GSRM youth and their allies. In these groups, students can socialize, find support, create and distribute GSRM-positive materials; organize school-wide events (e.g., The Day of Silence, queer and trans-themed assemblies); and/or connect with other GSRM-based groups in the wider community (Collin, 2013; Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2004; Liboro, Travers, & St. John, 2015; Miceli, 2005). Historically, GSAs were formed with the purpose of bringing gay and straight people together to confront sexuality-based bullying and harassment (Collin, 2013), but today they may provide or promote: counselling and support, safety, visibility, education, and/or advocacy (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, 2009; Griffin et al., 2004; Grace & Wells, 2015; Lapointe, 2014, 2015, 2016b; Liboro, Travers, & St. John, 2015; Mayo, 2013a/b, 2015). According to Grace and Wells (2015), the roles and purposes of GSAs depend on the needs and desires of their group members, “GSAs are marked by a wide variety of ends and approaches. Just as school cultures differ, GSA cultures also differ...[and] provide an array of experiences for their participants” (p. 284; see also, Kassen & Lapointe, 2013).

Since GSAs serve unique purposes for each student (e.g., some students may join these clubs to support their GSRM friends, yet others may want to raise awareness of GSRM-based inequities) (St. John et al., 2014), it is important to explore whether the needs and desires of individual group members are being met.

Since GSAs are situated within particular political and social contexts that shape their existence and functioning in school communities (e.g., rural, Catholic, homogenous school population, etc.), they occupy varying degrees of acceptance, support, and celebration in schools. In Ontario, Canada, GSAs entered the public secular education system well before they became officially-sanctioned groups in public Catholic high schools (Liboro et al., 2015; St. John et al., 2014). Although there has been significant media coverage on the banning of GSAs in Ontario Catholic schools, both Ontario public secular and Catholic school systems have resisted their formation despite evidence which suggests that they cultivate safer and more inclusive learning environments for GSRM students (Conway & Crawford-Fisher, 2007; Kosciw et al., 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Kosciw et. al., 2012; Liboro et al., 2015; Taylor et. al, 2011; Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). Since GSAs enable students to learn about oppression and lobby for social change (Conway & Crawford-Fisher, 2007; Lapointe, 2014), their formation and functioning have been rejected, restricted, and regulated. This is problematic because club restrictions, "...do more than just prohibit gay youth from meeting – they also prohibit youth from critically analyzing sexuality, making alliances across sexual diversity, and reconsidering their own sexualities in supportive contexts..." (Mayo, 2008, p. 47). When Ontario Catholic school boards and schools resisted GSA formation and/or restricted their functioning in 2012, it exposed how GSRM youth are marginalized in publicly-funded Catholic education (Callaghan, 2010, 2012,

2014a/b, 2015, 2016a/b), and it highlighted how queer, trans, and gender diverse students' needs are routinely dismissed:

School board and in-school administrative support for GSAs sends the clear message that student voice and initiative are valued and encouraged. Student ideas are important and student contributions are recognized. In essence, in order to validate the life experiences of sexual minority youth, GSAs are one way to help to ensure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender/identity or expression (Clarke & MacDougall, 2012, p. 156).

Beyond devaluing sexual and gender diversity, MacDougall and Clarke (2012) contend that GSA prohibition or unwarranted restrictions counter national and Ontario provincial human rights legislation.

National, Provincial, and Educational Policies and Legislation for Gender and Sexual Minorities in Canada

Both public secular and Catholic separate schools in Ontario are "...under the mandates of local, provincial, and federal government" legislation (Liboro, Travers, & St. John, 2015, p. 164). Within Ontario, policy protects students' rights to form GSAs and to refer to them as such (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2012; see also Lapointe & Kassen, 2013). On a national level, GSAs involve issues of equal access and accommodation, "which are firmly established and protected in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and all provincial and territorial human rights statutes" (Wells, 2006, p. 26). Section 15 of the *Charter* has been instrumental in advancing the legal rights of sexual minorities in Canada (Callaghan, 2014a/b, 2015), and has been cited in relation to GSA formation (MacDougall & Clarke, 2012). According to MacDougall and Clarke (2012), "...[T]he *Charter* more broadly protects equality (rather than just non-discrimination) but

the human rights legislation applies in more contexts, as it is not confined to governmental activity or laws" (p. 199). Thus, the *Charter* guarantees equal protection under the law and *The Ontario Human Rights Code* (1990) prohibits sexual- and gender-based discrimination (MacDougall & Clarke, 2012). As for the banning of GSAs in publicly-funded Ontario Catholic schools, denying services, such as support and resources that are available to other people, is inconsistent with the civil liberties that are guaranteed to all Canadian citizens under the *Charter* and Ontario human rights legislation. Although these equality and anti-discrimination policies are clear, tensions have erupted because the *Charter* also affirms religious freedom (e.g., the right to believe and practice one's religion) (MacDougall & Clarke, 2012). But, "...with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, institutional rights cannot supersede individual rights, and vice versa" (Grace & Wells, 2015, p. 144). Thus, religious schools cannot discriminate against queer, trans, and gender diverse students.

Along with the *Charter* and *Ontario Human Rights Code* (OHRC), "Ontario's Education Act requires all schools to develop and implement a policy that promotes a safe and inclusive school climate that is accepting of students of any sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expressions" (Taylor et al., 2016, p. 117). In 2009, The Ontario Ministry of Education introduced an Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy that mandated school boards to create anti-homophobic and anti-heterosexist⁹ policies (St. John et al., 2014). Two documents, *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, and *Quick Facts: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, called for educational stakeholders to eliminate prejudice and discrimination - including institutional barriers - to enhance minority students' social and academic supports (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.). The strategy acknowledged the existence of homophobia and gender-based violence in schools and their consequences (e.g.,

rejection, exclusion, and isolation) (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.). Overall, "The strategy [was] designed to promote fundamental human rights as described in the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, with which school boards [were] already required to comply, subject to subsection 93(1) of the Constitution Act, 1867, and section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms" (The Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b, p. 3).

In addition to these guidelines, the Ontario Ministry of Education's Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 145 stipulated that school boards must assist staff in supporting students who wish to spearhead and participate in GSAs (or other student-driven initiatives) that promote understanding and the development of healthy relationships (Niblett & Oraa, 2014; see also Hammer, 2012). Still, Catholic education advocates argued that GSAs undermined the moral and pastoral authority of the Roman Catholic Church (Martino, 2014), and the guaranteed religious freedom that is granted to Catholic school boards under section 93 of the *Canadian Constitution*, 1867. The Constitution specifies that provinces are guaranteed the right to create their own educational laws (Short, 2014):

(1.) Nothing in any such Law shall prejudicially affect any Right or Privilege with respect to Denominational Schools which any Class of Persons have by Law in the Province at the Union:

(2.) All the Powers, Privileges, and Duties at the Union by Law conferred and imposed in Upper Canada on the Separate Schools and School Trustees of the Queen's Roman Catholic Subjects shall be and the same are hereby extended to the Dissident Schools of the Queen's Protestant and Roman Catholic Subjects in Quebec: (Government of Canada, n.d.).

Following such religious guarantees, Halton Catholic District School Board (HDCSB) trustees disagreed with PPM 145 and removed all references to "sexual orientation" and "gender" (Houston, 2011a) in addition to vetoing students' ability to form GSAs (Houston, 2011b) because their existence condoned a 'gay lifestyle' (Short, 2014). In March 2011, the principal at St. Joseph's Catholic Secondary School (SJCSS), Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board, in Mississauga, Ontario, rejected a student's request to establish a GSA (Grace & Wells, 2015), but encouraged them to create a generic anti-bullying group so long as the words 'gay' or 'rainbow' did not appear in the club name (Clarke & MacDougall, 2012; see also Niblett & Oraa, 2014; Martino, 2014). As such, the administration at SJCSS approved of naming the group, "Open Arms."

When the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009), The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (2012) responded by crafting the text, *"Respecting Difference": A Resource Guide for Catholic Schools in the Province of Ontario Regarding the Establishment and Running of Activities or Organizations Promoting Equity and Respect for all Students*, to guide the formation and functioning of clubs that involve GSRM topics. The *Respecting Difference* document reflects the interests of the Catholic education system, and exemplifies how Catholic education is "...a site of claims to power, legitimacy, and reality" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 232):

While there will be groups established to address the care and safety needs of students dealing with issues related to gender identity or same-sex attraction, GSA clubs, per se, are not acceptable in Catholic schools for the following reason: externally developed programs (such as GSAs) do not meet all of the objectives and administrative procedural concerns for "Respecting Difference" groups (as stated in this document) (Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, 2012, p. 1).

This passage simultaneously affirms generic anti-bullying clubs and disavows GSAs, which illustrates how the moral regulatory authority of the Catholic Church, as sanctioned by its publicly-funded status in Ontario, Canada, curtailed the rights of GSRM students (Martino, 2014). Moreover, the *Respecting Difference* resource reiterates that although “...students experiencing same-sex attraction should be treated with sensitivity and compassion” (Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004, p. 3), they should abstain from 'acting gay' because homosexuality is 'intrinsically disordered' (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997). Besides outlining what is inappropriate for an individual (i.e., homosexuality), the *Respecting Difference* document communicates what is unsuitable for a Catholic school (i.e., GSA):

5. Inappropriate Issues for Open Forum Discussion:

- a. Issues of gender identity, like those of sexual attraction, can be complex, delicate and highly personal. Pupils wrestling with such questions may well be in vulnerable psychological or spiritual conditions and may be exposed to unhelpful group pressure. For this reason such matters are best dealt with privately and confidentially with proper counselling and chaplaincy staff. “Peer counselling” in such a forum as a student-led group is inappropriate for such a dialogue and could, in fact, put students at risk. Confidentiality and respect limit what can properly be discussed in a group setting and supervisors should limit discussions of this sort.
- b. Student Activities or Organizations are not intended as fora for activism, protest or advocacy of anything that is not in accord with the Catholic faith foundation of the school (Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association, 2012, p. 11).

In this excerpt, support, education, and advocacy - three of the four main purposes of GSAs - are invalidated. That is, the *Respecting Difference* resource overtly dissuades students from disclosing

their sexualities and genders, and receiving invaluable peer support; instead, youth are expected to privately consult with a chaplain and return to the closet. Limits are also imposed on queer advocacy, which signals how youth should be complacent with religiously-sanctioned homophobia (see Callaghan, 2012, 2014a/b, 2016b).

While many religious leaders, school board employees, administrators, and parents contested GSA development in Ontario Catholic schools (Herriot, 2011; Martino, 2014), GSRM students, allies, and supportive adults advocated for their formation. Youth, with the support of Queer Ontario - a GSRM advocacy group, and queer media outlets (e.g., Andrea Houston of XTRA), confronted this human rights violation (Niblett & Oraa, 2014). They used social media as a mobilization tool and created the Facebook page, “Catholic Students for GSAs” to advance their political agenda (Niblett & Oraa, 2014). Student activists and Queer Ontario called for the Ontario Ministry of Education to enforce PPM 145 (Grace & Wells, 2015; Niblett & Oraa, 2014) and eventually persuaded politicians to develop Bill 13, the *Accepting Schools Act* (2012), which legally enables students to create GSAs and name them such in all publicly-funded Ontario schools. Unlike Bill 157, *Keeping Our Kids Safe* (2010), which encouraged GSA development, Bill 13 mandated all publicly-funded schools to develop supports for pupils who wish to spearhead activities or organizations that bolster positive learning environments (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2012). Although this explicit legislative support continues to be crucial in ensuring the ongoing success of GSAs (St. John et al., 2014; see also Lapointe & Kassen, 2013; Niblett & Oraa), there is an assumption “...that discrimination is solvable through policy and that policy leads the way in altering worldviews and behaviours” (Loutzenheiser, 2014, p. 8). Despite improved Ontario Safe Schools legislation, it is clear that there are still substantial objections to GSA development in Canadian Catholic schools (CBC News, 2015). Newly acclaimed chair of

the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) recently failed to clarify whether GSAs were institutionally-sanctioned support groups in her board:

Kennedy: I think that we have supportive programs for students and I think students need to have these supportive clubs.

Galloway: Does that include a gay-straight alliance?

Kennedy: We have different clubs in all of our schools and our secondary school students benefit from them. We have a mental health strategy.

Galloway: I think it's notable listeners would probably be able to figure out that you're not saying 'gay-straight alliance.' Do you think that gay-straight alliances belong in Catholic schools?

Kennedy: Matt, we have supportive clubs in our secondary schools. I think our students are benefiting from them. I hear very good things about the clubs that are running in all of our schools (CBC News, 2015).

Following Kennedy's elusive remarks, and the limited information that is available on the development and functioning of GSAs in publicly-funded Ontario Catholic high schools (Grace & Wells, 2015; Lapointe & Kassen, 2013; Lewington, 2016; Liboro et al., 2015; Metroland News Service, 2012), it is essential to investigate to what extent GSA efforts are resisted, policed, and/or supported in Catholic educational contexts (Grace & Wells, 2015). However, when examining this under-researched topic, it is important to keep in mind that:

...the problem isn't religion *per se*...Rather, the true problem is simply arrogance and entitlement – when other people assume that their ideology somehow trumps other people's life experiences and self-knowledge, or when they feel that somehow they have the right to force all other people to follow their ideology whether it resonates with those individuals or not...if you were to call me a sinner, or insist that I follow your religious laws, or if you believe that I need to be converted to your religion, then your ideology has become non-consensual... (Serano, 2012, p. 242).

Rather than comparing and contrasting the Catholic and secular education systems, this dissertation showcases the successes and challenges of GSA functioning across publicly-funded Catholic and secular schools. Particular attention is paid to examining heterosexism and heteronormativity in faith-based schooling, as evidenced through religious doctrine which teaches “It's okay to be gay, just don't act on it” and “Love the sinner, hate the sin” (Callaghan, 2010, p. 85), but is also intentional in including a focus on heterosexual and cisgender privilege in public secular schools. This investigation draws on queer and trans theoretical scholarship to analyze the contexts in which GSAs are situated, and illuminate the anti-hetero/cisnormative educative and activist efforts of GSA members within Ontario public secular and Catholic secondary schools.

GSAs as Subaltern Counterpublics

I draw on Fraser's (1990) writing on “subaltern counterpublics” (p. 67) to make sense of the role of GSAs in school communities. Since hetero/cisnormativity pervades the education system (Grace & Wells, 2015; Kosciw et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2011), these groups have emerged to “...help expand discursive space...” (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). As such, GSAs act as “...parallel discursive arenas” (p. 67) whereby GSRM youth “...invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and

needs” (p. 67). Through the existence of GSAs and the educative and activist work enacted by club members, queer, trans, and gender diverse experiences are affirmed and celebrated, and hetero/cisnormalcy is contested. These *subaltern counterpublics* provide positive spaces to be and discuss GSRM issues, and outlets to produce and disseminate counter-hegemonic discourses associated with queer and trans embodiment:

On one hand, [subaltern counterpublics] function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides. This dialectic enables subaltern counterpublics partially to offset, although not wholly to eradicate, the unjust participatory privileges enjoyed by members of dominant social groups in stratified societies” (Fraser, 1990, p. 68).

Overall, this study explicitly explores the queer and trans educative and activist potential of GSAs because they offer hospitable environments for GSRM students and straight and/or cisgender allies to reflect on, resist, and redress hetero/cisnormative regimes of truth.

Theoretical Frameworks

This section situates the study in terms of its theoretical underpinnings. The two frameworks that inform this investigation, queer theory and trans-informed theory, are discussed. The queer foundational work of Foucault (1978), Sedgwick (1990/2008), Butler (1990, 1993a/b/c), Warner (1991), and Britzman (1995) are examined to draw attention to institutionalized heteronormativity and heterosexism, and to problematize dichotomous sexuality categories (i.e., homosexual/heterosexual). Since queer perspectives expose heterosexual privilege in schools and

society, trans insights, as elaborated by Namaste (2000), Stryker (2006), Serano (2007/2016, 2013), Malatino (2015), and Connell (2009), are also employed to interrogate taken-for-granted assumptions about sex and gender. Moreover, since queer theory is insufficient for theorizing the experiences of trans and gender diverse folks, trans perspectives help fill these gaps (Namaste, 2000). As stressed throughout this study, queer theory is utilized to undermine heteronormative and heterosexist attitudes and behaviours that give rise to homophobia (see Walton, 2006), whereas trans perspectives are employed to problematize cisnormativity and cissexism, which engender transphobia (see Serano, 2007/2016, 2013). These particular theories explicate how “...heterosexism and cissexism are not merely abstract concepts, but rather institutionalized forms of marginalization: They ensure that same-sex relationships and cross-gender identities will be viewed as being less socially and legally valid than heterosexual and cissexual ones...” (Serano, 2013, p. 116).

Queer Theoretical Frameworks

In this section I explain how queer theory is understood in terms of its strategic interrogation of the heteronormative limits of sexuality, and clarify how it informs this study. Foucault (1978), Sedgwick (1990), Butler (1990, 1993a/b/c), along with Warner (1991) are credited with the development of queer theory – a critical framework with ‘anti-normative’ and ‘anti-identitarianism’ elements (Weigman & Wilson, 2015), which challenges taken-for-granted associations between assigned sex at birth, gender, and sexuality (see Butler, 1990). Queer perspectives focus on how sexuality, as it relates to gender, is socially constructed within particular sociocultural, political, geographical, and historical contexts. In this respect, such theoretical perspectives highlight how sexuality is re/configured within power networks. To illustrate the nexus of power and sexuality, Foucault (1978) theorizes “...knowledge of sex...not in terms of

repression or law, but in terms of power” (p. 92). His queer foundational work is central to anti-heteronormative insights into sexuality in that it examines “...the historical relationships of power and the discourse on sex...” (p. 90); Foucault problematizes “...juridical and negative representation of powers, and cease[s] to conceive of it in terms of law, prohibition, liberty, and sovereignty” (p. 90). His conceptualization of power as a productive force is pivotal to queer theory because it provides an entry point for exploring how sexuality is produced, prescribed, and policed in schooling, and, in this sense, speaks to the role of GSAs as productive sites of resistance and counter-hegemonic spaces (Fraser, 1990).

Foucauldian Informed Understandings of Power and Sexuality

This inquiry draws on Foucault’s (1978) theorization of knowledge-power relations to examine the production of sexual subjectivity in schooling. His queer foundational work exposes how heterosexuality is re/constituted as ‘natural’ and ‘normal;’ as such, it provides a framework for interrogating the heteronormative limits of formal education and conceptualizing the counter-hegemonic role of GSAs in schools (see Fraser, 1990). Foucault’s (1978) queer insights are employed to showcase how GSA members are leveraging power through their anti-heteronormative educative and activist work. Overall, Foucault’s writing informs my understanding of sexuality, and the role that GSAs play in displacing and combatting heteronormativity.

The production of the homosexual subject

Foucault (1978) laid the groundwork for queer theory when, in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, he specified how, rather than an innate or stable characteristic, sexual identity is historically produced within knowledge-power relations. Prior to the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the term ‘homosexual’ did not exist (Foucault, 1978), demonstrating how

"...sexuality, as we see it, is constructed, experienced, and understood in culturally and historically specific ways" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 1). Foucault claims that, "Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite has been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (p. 43). As such, sexual acts became the impetus for defining and categorizing people. This cultural shift enabled those who had queer sex to be prescribed a deviant sexual identity – they became a particular sort or type of stigmatized person. Mirroring Foucault, Sedgwick (1990) explains further:

...what *was* new from the turn of the century was the world-mapping by which every given person, just as he or she was necessarily assignable to a male or female gender, was now considered necessarily assignable as well to a homo- or hetero-sexuality, a binarized identity that was full of implications... (p. 2).

Foucault (1978) and Sedgwick's (1990) writing details how one's sex acts began to determine their personhood (e.g., men who had sex with men were labelled homosexual). The introduction of 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' distinctions incited queer denigration and bolstered the inequitable treatment of the 'abnormal' homosexual species. The treatment of queer desires and behaviours as abhorrent infiltrates the formal education where anti-heteronormative curricula are routinely scrutinized, restricted, and rejected (see Britzman, 1995). Due to the education system's failure to provide queer pedagogy and curricula, GSAs are instrumental sites for affirming and celebrating queerness. Beyond offering much-needed support for students with same-gender desires and behaviours, GSAs are venues where, through their educative and activist efforts, sexual minorities can reconfigure heteronormative discourses (Elliott, 2016). By leveraging power, youth

demonstrate how GSAs serve as localized sites of resistance to heterosexist understandings of sexuality (Fraser, 1990).

Foucault's (1978) insights into power focus attention on "...the production of sexuality rather than the repression of sex..." (p. 114). He claims that we must analyze knowledge of sex against the backdrop of power because power has historically been understood in terms of its capacity to represses sex:

Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden. Secondly, power prescribes an 'order' for sex that operates at the same time as a form of intelligibility: sex is to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to the law. And finally, power acts by laying down the rule: power's hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse that creates, from the very fact that it is articulated, a rule of law. It speaks, and that is the rule (p. 83).

For Foucault (1978), sexuality is the by-product of three interrelated concepts: power, knowledge, and discourse, whereas power embosses sex with particular 'truths' (i.e., social acceptability), which forms and stabilizes the homosexual/heterosexual and 'normal'/abnormal dichotomies. He argues that sexual identities are constituted in and through discourses - "...a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable...a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (p. 100). Foucault conceptualizes discourse as the product of power-knowledge systems, whereby discourses are "...neither uniform or stable" (p. 100), nor dominant or subordinate; they are in-flux just as power is. Since sexual identity is the product of discourses, which shift throughout space and time, they are produced within particular contexts that are underpinned by power systems:

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 tried 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 special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1978, p. 105-106).

Foucault (1978) purports that power is not an absolute, uni-directional, or hierarchical force (i.e., sovereign power); he contends that it is a network of relations whereby bodies are surveilled and disciplined. For Foucault (1978), biopower - "...an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations..." (p.140) - has usurped sovereign power, and this manifests in the enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality in schooling - as evidenced through heteronormative rituals, communication, and curricula (e.g., prom king and queen, LGB-exclusive sex education, etc.). Although the pull of compulsory heterosexuality in schooling is strong, "Where there is power, there is resistance...this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power...existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance...These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network..." (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). Since power is not an all-encompassing force that is simply exerted onto people (e.g., students), GSA members' queer existence and heteronormative resistance in schools may disrupt power relations, leading to social change (e.g., critiquing the homophobic underpinning of Catholic doctrine; pushing back against heteronormative curricula, etc.). Thus, Foucault's work, which demonstrates the necessity of destabilizing dichotomized notions of power

(i.e., educators have power over students), provides a framework for making sense of youth's anti-heteronormative educative and activist work. GSA members' queer work illustrates how power circulates, and sexual subjectivities are produced via discourses that shift throughout space and time:

...we must not look for who has the power in the order of sexuality (men, adults, parents, doctors) and who is deprived of it (women, adolescents, children, patients); nor for who has the right to know and who is forced to remain ignorant. We must seek rather the pattern of the modifications, which the relationships of the force imply by the very nature of their process...Relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are 'matrices of transformations' (p. 99).

Following Foucault's (1978) explanation of power networks, this study examines the extent to which GSAs are operating as counterpublics to transform heteronormative learning environments (Fraser, 1990).

Heteronormative learning environments

Foucault (1978) argues that discourses involving sex have been amplified rather than restricted in recent human history. This intensification is particularly prevalent in education where sexuality is regulated through the compulsory uptake and enforcement of 'norms.' He insists that it is vital to examine what is said about sex and by whom it is uttered, and for what purpose it is voiced:

The central issue...[is] to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said.

What is at issue, briefly, is the over-all ‘discursive fact,’ the way in which sex is ‘put into discourse’ (p. 11).

With respect to the education system, sexuality is inconspicuously taught through everyday heteronormative teaching and learning practices. For example, by avoiding, dismissing, and disavowing queer sexualities, students learn that heterosexuality is appropriate, ‘normal,’ and desirable:

It would be less than exact to say that the pedagogical institution has imposed a ponderous silence on the sex of children and adolescents. On the contrary, since the eighteenth century it has multiplied the forms of discourse on the subject; it has established various points of implantation for sex; it has coded contents and qualified speakers. Speaking about children’s sex, inducing educators, physicians, administrators, and parents to speak of it, or speaking to them about it, causing children themselves to talk about it, and enclosing them in a web of discourses which sometimes address them, sometimes speak about them, or impose canonical bits of knowledge on them, or use them as a basis for constructing a science that is beyond their grasp – all of this together enables us to link an intensification of the interventions of power to a multiplication of discourse. The sex of children and adolescents has become, since the eighteenth century, an important area of contention around which innumerable institutional devices and discursive strategies have been deployed (Foucault, 1978, p. 29-30).

It is this privileging of heterosexuality in and through formal curriculum and within personal interactions (i.e., teacher-to-student communications) that GSA members are compelled to

address. In the face of superficial anti-homophobic initiatives (e.g., empathy development, etc.) (Britzman, 1995), GSAs prove to be critical sites of institutional resistance.

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that the primary rational or logic governing education about the ‘Other’ (see Kumashiro, 2002) is centered around ‘coming out.’ That is, rather than encouraging learners to interrogate the taken-for-granted status of heterosexuality, formal education requires the abjected ‘Other’ to disclose their ‘abnormal’ sexuality against the backdrop of compulsory heterosexuality. In terms of making sense of the confessional as an ineffective pedagogical practice, queer people are often called upon to ‘confess’ their deviant sexuality to an audience to bolster empathy for the ‘Other.’ Foucault (1978) describes how the ‘confessional’ - a technique of biopower that is tied to a specific regime of self-surveillance and monitoring - has impacted the ways in which truths about sex and sexuality are re/produced. Moreover, the confessional is a ritual where people are constituted as aberrant, requiring personal information, such as queer sexuality, to be disclosed:

Since the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth...[it is] a central role in the order of civil and religious powers...it came to signify someone’s acknowledgement of his own actions and thoughts...It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and the most solemn rites; one confesses one’s crimes, one’s sins, one’s thoughts and desires, one’s illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell (p. 58-59).

Rather than simply ‘confessing’ egregious sexual acts, Foucault (1978) explains how the confessional’s Christian origins (i.e., confessing sins) have been supplanted by the necessity to reveal ‘individual pleasures’:

It is no longer a question simply of saying what was done – the sexual act – and how it was done; but of reconstructing, in and around the act, the thoughts that recapitulated it, the obsessions that accompanied it, the images, desires, modulations, and quality of the pleasure that animated it. For the first time no doubt, a society has taken upon itself to solicit and hear the imparting of individual pleasures (p. 63).

In the case of sexuality, individual pleasures signify shame. Since queerness is ubiquitously positioned as unnatural, it must be confessed – both to oneself and to others. At school, teachers and students (i.e., the authority) require queer confessions, which demonstrates how homosexuality is produced within power relations:

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

Foucault's theorization of the confessional illuminates how queer sexuality is stigmatized and 'Othered,' giving rise to its compulsory declaration in schooling (see also Rasmussen, 2004). It exposes the pedagogical limits of 'coming out,' which is predicated on empathy development, since queer disclosures are depicted as necessary and empowering experiences that lessen homophobic prejudice (Rasmussen, 2004). By contrast, "...the act of coming out may have the reverse effect of reinforcing heterosexuality because of its tendency to underpin the heterosexual/homosexual binary" (p. 148). Additionally, these universalizing discourses cultivate an in/out (of the closet) binary, which fails to take into consideration how racism, religious background, and family context can limit one's ability or desire to confess queerness (Rasmussen, 2004).

Sedgwick's Queerly Informed Understandings of Sexuality

Sedgwick's (1990/2008) anti-heteronormative arguments in *Epistemology of the Closet* have also been useful in building a foundational understanding of queer theoretical perspectives and their relevance for this study in terms of the potential counter-hegemonic role of GSAs in schools. Akin to Foucault (1978), Sedgwick (1990/2008) insists that it is essential to analyze modern Western culture through "...the relatively decentered perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory" (p. 1). For her, processes of knowing have impelled queer oppression. To explore the nexus between knowledge production and heteronormativity, Sedgwick (1990/2008) theorizes 'the closet,' "...the defining structure for gay oppression in this century" (p. 71). She claims that "...relations of the closet – the relations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit around homo/heterosexual definition – have the potential for being peculiarly revealing..." (p. 3). With this, Sedgwick (1990/2008) illustrates how queer oppression is rooted in heteronormative expectations and assumptions, which serve to undermine the existence

and appropriateness of queer desires and behaviours. Overall, Sedgwick (1990/2008) advances queer thought by spotlighting how "...sex desire is still structured by its distinctive public/private status, at once marginal and central..." (p. 22).

Sedgwick's (1990/2008) work informs my understanding of queer theory inasmuch that she problematizes sexual classification and polarization; debunks unified notions of identity; and contests dominant understandings of ignorance and knowledge. Firstly, she resists the dichotomous categorization of sexuality (i.e., homosexual and heterosexual), insisting that, "The dividing up of all sexual acts – indeed all persons – under the 'opposite' categories of 'homo' and 'hetero' is not a natural given but a historical process, still incomplete today and ultimately impossible but characterized by potent contradictions and explosive effects" (p. xvi). Here, Sedgwick describes how sexual subjectivities are socially fashioned rather than innately formed; this productive process is underpinned by heteronormative and binary power relations, which construct 'opposites' that are formed by contrasting something with its supposed counterpart (i.e., heterosexual and homosexual). Sedgwick's writing stresses how power is incited when sexualities are categorized, differentiated, and allocated meaning (e.g., heterosexuality is natural and 'normal' and homosexuality is strange and immoral):

...the now chronic modern crisis of homo/heterosexual definition has affected our culture through its ineffaceable marking particularly of the categories secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, private/public, masculine/feminine, majority/minority, innocence/initiation, natural/artificial, new/old, discipline/terrorism, canonic/noncanonic, wholeness/decadence, urbane/provincial, domestic/foreign, health/illness, same/different, active/passive, in/out, cognition/paranoia, art/kitsch, utopia/apocalypse, sincerity/sentimentality, and

voluntarily/addiction. And rather than embrace an idealist faith in the necessarily, immanently self-corrosive efficacy of the contradictions inherent to these definitional binarisms, I will suggest instead that contests for discursive power can be specified as competitions for the material or rhetorical leverage required to set the terms of, and to profit in some way from, the operations of such an incoherence of definition (p. 11).

Here, Sedgwick discusses how homosexual/heterosexual binary systems must be examined against the backdrop of power relations since ‘deviant’ queer sexuality is defined against and relation to the heterosexual ‘norm.’ Following Foucault (1978), her work further extrapolates how non-normative sexuality is socially produced and imposed through the privileging of heterosexuality, and this heteronormative system of ‘Othering’ precludes any consideration of non-binary understandings of sexuality. It is this pervasive heteronormative regime that GSA members are often working to address through their educative and activist work at school.

Sedgwick (1990/2008) also argues that, regardless of people’s ‘shared’ identities (e.g., a ‘group’ of ‘lesbians’), those who are captured within seemingly homogeneous categories are more different than they are similar: “...even people who share all or most of our own positionings along these crude axes [gender, race, class, nationality, sexual orientation] may still be different enough from us, and from each other, to seem like all but different species” (p. 22). This sentiment is echoed by Berlant and Warner (1998) who assert, “...heterosexuality...consolidates as a sexuality widely differing practices, norms, and institutions...” (p. 552). Since people with similar identities have varied experiences, it is nonsensical to assume that they are the same and to treat them accordingly. These problematic assumptions about personhood and their consequences (i.e., alienation, prejudice, and discrimination) are prominent issues that GSAs are concerned to expose and undermine.

Another of Sedgwick's (1990/2008) instrumental contributions is her retheorization of ignorance – a concept that was previously taken-for-granted as the passive act of unknowingness. Following Foucault's (1978) insights, Sedgwick (1990/2008) describes how power is embedded in the false knowledge/ignorance dichotomy:

...the fact that silence is rendered as pointed and performative as speech, in relations around the closet, depends on and highlights more broadly the fact that ignorance as potent and as multiple a thing there is as knowledge. Knowledge, after all, is not itself power, although it is the magnetic field of power. Ignorance and opacity collude or compete with knowledge in mobilizing the flows of energy, desire, goods, meanings, persons (p. 4).

As opposed to the definition of ignorance in Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, which stipulates that it is a "...lack of knowledge, education, or awareness," Sedgwick (1990/2008) asserts that queer knowledge is purposefully resisted and refused. In terms of unpacking power and its relationship with ignorance, Sedgwick articulates:

Inarguably, there is a satisfaction in dwelling on the degree to which the power of our enemies over us is implicated, not in their command of knowledge, but precisely in their ignorance. The effect is a real one, but it carries dangers with it as well. The chief of these dangers is the scornful, fearful, or patheticizing reification of 'ignorance' ...the more palpably sentimental privileging of ignorance as an originary, passive innocence (p. 7).

Since ignorance is "...produced by and corresponds to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth" (p. 8), it is more accurate to conceptualize ignorance as the privileging of particular knowledges over others, as Britzman (1995) explicates:

[Queer] theory insists, using the psychoanalytic method, that the relationship between knowledge and ignorance is neither oppositional nor binary. Rather they mutually implicate each other, structuring and enforcing particular forms of knowledge and forms of ignorance. In this way ignorance is analyzed as an effect of knowledge, indeed, as its limit, and not as an originary or innocent act" (p. 154).

Classrooms are sites which privilege and reinforce heterosexuality because homosexuality is falsely constructed as its non-normative counterpart (Kumashiro, 2002). Heteronormative curriculum is purposeful; it is designed to subjugate children and youth's bodies, or rather, teach them what is 'normal' and natural and encourage them to embody such learnings in ways that are not just explicit, but also implicit (see Foucault, 1978). For example, Taylor et al.'s (2011) research reveals that queer topics are not routinely and/or positively integrated into school curricula. In more recent survey research with Canadian educators (i.e., The Every Teacher Project), 51.1% of respondents indicated that they 'challenged homophobia' and 'used inclusive examples,' whereas only 18.3% reported 'critiquing heterosexual privilege' (Taylor et al., 2016). Following these troubling statistics, I am concerned to investigate how GSA members are working to address the heteronormative limits of their education by sharing their queer understandings of sexuality with the wider school community, and advocating for school reform (e.g., integrating queer content in classes) (see Elliott, 2016).

The Significance of Butler's 'Heterosexual Matrix' and the Materialization of Bodies

Butler's (1990, 1993a/b/c) work has been instrumental in calling into question the notion of stable identity categories. In this section, I draw on Butler's early queer work involving the heterosexual matrix, compulsory heterosexuality, the materialization of sex, and performativity, and highlight its relevance for my own thinking about gender and sexuality education broadly, and the anti-heteronormative role of GSAs more specifically.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) proposes that a map of cultural understanding (i.e., the heterosexual matrix) exists whereby bodies, genders, and desires become naturalized through heteronormative discourses. For Butler (1990), sex, gender, and sexuality are mutual and reinforcing concepts that are only understood when "...a stable sex [is] expressed through a stable gender...that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined though the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (p. 206). In other words, the heterosexual matrix is built on the notion that there are two fixed sexes (i.e., male and female) that give rise to two legitimate and stable genders (i.e., men and women), which in turn determine a person's sexuality (e.g., all men are exclusively attracted to women). These seemingly innate iterations produce "...the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (p. 173). Butler's (1990; 1999b) writing destabilizes alignments between bodies, gender, and sexuality (i.e., the pillars of heteronormativity) by refuting that sex predicts gender and gender determines sexuality:

There are no direct expressive or causal lines between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality. None of those terms captures or determines the rest. Part of what constitutes sexuality is precisely that which does not appear and that which, to some degree, can never appear (Butler, 1999b, p. 315).

Overall, destabilizing the heterosexual matrix is imperative to this study because it offers a platform to identify how “...heterosexuality naturalizes itself through setting up certain illusions of continuity between sex, gender, and desire” (Butler, 1993b, p. 317) in pedagogy and practice. In light of heteronormative school climates, I am concerned to investigate the role of GSAs in taking up the education system’s failure to contest these misleading linkages. By gathering to affirm queer desires and behaviours, and rallying to undermine circumscribed understandings about sexuality, I am interested in examining the extent to which youth are mobilizing via GSAs to transform their school communities.

Similar to Foucault’s (1978) writing on homosexual subjectivity, Butler (1993b) describes how compulsory heterosexuality positions heterosexuality as standard and homosexuality as atypical. Their relationship to one another gives each other meaning that would otherwise be absent (i.e., heterosexuality requires homosexuality as its ‘abnormal’ counterpart to be read as innate). Further, without discourses that depict queer sexuality as immoral and unnatural, heterosexuality would not be assumed, expected, and valorized:

The origin requires its derivations in order to affirm itself as an origin, for origins only make sense to the extent that they are differentiated from that which they produce as derivatives. Hence, if it were not for the notion of the homosexual *as* copy, there would be no construct of heterosexuality *as* origin (Butler, 1993b, p. 313).

Butler (1993b) critiques compulsory heterosexuality, not only because it positions queer subjectivity as abject, but because it is much more unhinged than it is perceived to be; heterosexuality requires its own repetition to be understood, and thus can rupture without citation, demonstrating its instability:

...heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself – *and failing*. Precisely because it is bound to fail, and yet endeavors to succeed, the project of heterosexual identity is propelled into an endless repetition of itself. Indeed, in its efforts to naturalize itself as the original, heterosexuality must be understood as a compulsive and compulsory repetition that can only produce the *effect* of its own originality; in other words, compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of ‘man’ and ‘woman,’ are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real” (p. 313).

Since heterosexuality requires reiteration, it is perpetually in jeopardy of failing, which demonstrates its sociological roots:

If there is, as it were, always a compulsion to repeat, repetition never fully accomplishes identity. That there is a need for a repetition at all is a sign that identity is not self-identical. It requires to be instituted again and again, which is to say that it runs the risk of becoming *de*-instituted at every interval (Butler, 1993b, p. 315).

In sum, Butler draws attention to how heterosexuality’s normalized status in school and society is based on nothing more than compliance with heterosexist cultural codes. This investigation is concerned to examine how GSAs are subverting heteronormalcy by embracing the instability and fluidity of identities, affirming queerness, advocating for anti-heteronormative educational change, and at times, influencing queer-informed curriculum and pedagogical reform (e.g., structured debriefing sessions after a GSA assembly).

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1993a) interrogates taken-for-granted assumptions about sex by asking, “Through what regulatory norms is sex itself materialized?” (p. 10). Following Foucault’s work on the productive nature of power, Butler (1993a) theorizes that people are constituted within networks whereby the “...reiterated power of discourse...produce[s] the phenomenon that it regulates and constrains” (p. 2). Rather than simply being what one has (e.g., vulva) or what one is (e.g., female), Butler argues that sex cannot be thought of apart from heteronormative regulatory schemas, which govern its sedimentation:

...‘sex’ itself is understood in its normativity, the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm. ‘Sex’ is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the ‘one’ becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility (p. 2).

For Butler (1993a), sex is congealed through its normative repetition, as exercised by power, and this lends itself to the qualification and categorization of people: “The process of that sedimentation or...materialization will be a kind of citationality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the ‘I’” (p. 15). Since "...a cultural norm...governs the materialization of bodies" (p. 3), Butler’s (1993a) scholarly work problematizes sex’s romanticized status as a biological given, and stresses how power is implicated in the materialization of sex in terms of the perpetuation and adoption of heterosexist regulatory norms:

...‘sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of

productive power, the power to produce -demarcate, circulate, differentiate -the bodies in controls...'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms (p. 1-2).

To further problematize sex-based assumptions, Butler (1993a) explains that sex is displaced and replaced by gender; thus, without sex, gender would be incomprehensible:

If gender consists of the social meanings that sex assumes, then sex does not *accrue* social meaning as additive properties but, rather, *is replaced by* the social meanings it takes on; sex is relinquished in the course of that assumption, and gender emerges, not as a term in a continued relationship of opposition to sex, but as the term which absorbs and displaces 'sex'...If gender is the social construction of sex, and if there is no access to this 'sex' except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that 'sex' becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy, retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access (Butler, 1993a, p. 5).

Since sex and gender require repetition to solidify their meaning, their reiteration can be altered to produce new understandings. In sum, Butler's (1993a) writing illustrates how norms, which constitute sex and gender, can be taken up or rejected, exposing their instability:

As a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and, yet it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or

exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm (p. 10).

In this sense, I examine the extent to which GSAs, conceived as counterpublic spaces (Fraser, 1990), are playing a role in resisting and reconfiguring hegemonic conceptualizations of sex and gender. Moreover, this dissertation explores if and how GSA's educative and activist work is helping to unsettle problematic sex, gender, and sexuality associations.

Butler (1993a) coined the term, 'performativity,' to signify how subjects materialize (i.e., how gendered subjectivity is realized through embodiment) within the process of adopting and adhering to compulsory norms: "Performativity is...not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (p. 12). When theorizing how power is implicated in subjectification, Butler (1993c) states:

Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech...performativities tend to include...statements that not only perform an action, but confer a binding power on the action performed. The power of discourse to produce that which it names is thus essentially linked with the question of performativity. The performative is thus one domain in which power acts *as* discourse (Butler, 1993c, p. 17).

In terms of further explicating the compulsory nature of gender, Butler asserts that gender is not a choice; it is the enforced repetition of norms that, if negated, are met with ridicule and punishment. For Butler (1993c), sex and gender materialize through the adoption of regulatory norms:

Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation,

punishment. Indeed, there is no 'one' who takes on a gender norm. On the contrary, this citation of the gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as 'one,' to become viable as a 'one,' where subject-formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimizing gender norms (p. 23).

Rather than a sole and purposeful act, performativity forms the subject (i.e., produces male and female sexes), to which gender (i.e., masculinity and femininity) is fashioned and heterosexuality is imposed:

...performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names...regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative (Butler, 1993a, p. 2).

Here, Butler provides a framework for interrogating the innate and interrelated 'nature' of sex, gender, and sexuality. Moreover, she stresses that gender is not a by-product of sex, although it appears to be such due to regulatory heterosexual ideals. Since gendered embodiment is the reiteration of 'norms,' gender is not a biological given and gender conformity cannot be assumed or expected. This inquiry investigates to what extent GSA members are openly rejecting and defying gender roles and norms outside the heterosexual imperative, thereby making the GSA a necessary site for their gender to be authorized and affirmed. In this sense and in drawing on Butler, my study is concerned to examine if and how GSAs are providing a platform to educate the wider school community about gender expectations as they relate to sexuality (Fraser, 1990).

In response to critics who accuse Butler of postulating that gender is a mere performance, Butler (1993c) purports:

In no sense can be it concluded that the part of gender that is performed is therefore the ‘truth’ of gender; performance as bounded ‘act’ is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’; further, what is ‘performed’ works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious un-performable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake (p. 24).

For Butler (1993c) there is a distinction between performance and performativity in that performativity is not a willful act; it represents how gender is fashioned (i.e., divided and hierarchized) through the compulsory uptake of heterosexual norms. Butler (1993b) explicates further by stating:

...gender is *performative* in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express. It is a *compulsory* performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with ostracism, punishment, and violence, not to mention the transgressive pleasures produced by those very prohibitions (p. 314-315).

Here, Butler theorizes the relationship between power and performativity, insisting that consequences exist for those who do not adhere to compulsory heterosexuality. These consequences can manifest as exclusion, harassment, discrimination, or silence in school communities, giving credence to GSAs and their potential role in mitigating heteronormative oppression.

Butler's (1993c) writing on performativity stresses how gender is constituted through the compulsory adoption of gendered norms, which is inextricably linked to heterosexual ideals. The illusion of uniformed genders (i.e., man and woman) is formed through this repetition and citation of norms, and produces sexual subjects according to the dictates of a binary gender logics (see Davies, 1989). Working to overturn these gendered regimes are of primary educative and pedagogical interest, particularly for GSA members and GRSM students in schools, many of whom are targeted due to their gender non-conformity (Kosciw et al., 2016; Taylor et al, 2011; Wyss, 2004):

Gender is performative insofar as it is the effect of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized under constraints. Social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment operate in the ritualized repetition of norms, and this repetition constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilization. To the extent that this repetition creates an effect of gender uniformity, a stable effect of masculinity or femininity, it produces the notion of the subject as well, for the subject only comes into intelligibility through the matrix of gender (Butler, 1993c, p. 21-22).

Here, Butler discusses how the policing and regulation of gendered bodies works to solidify essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity in relation to sexual identity.

Butler's body of early queer work also destabilizes sexual identity categories because they "...tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (1993a, p. 308). In *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex,"* Butler (1993a) states,

“I’m permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling-blocks, and understand them even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble” (p. 308). For Butler, and akin to Sedgwick (1990), monolithic categories are misleading and impose certain constraints and foreclosures because “...any consolidation of identity requires some set of differentiations and exclusions...” (Butler, 1993b, p. 311); these seemingly clear distinctions are false since people who are captured within a particular identity category are arguably as different as those who fall outside of such categorization (Butler, 1993a; see also Sedgwick, 1990). For example, Butler (1993b) purports, “...there is no necessarily common element among lesbians, except perhaps that we all know something about how homophobia works against women – although, even then, the language and the analysis we use will differ” (p. 310). Butler (1993c) communicates that all those who are lesbian may have common knowledge about homophobia, but their lived experiences (e.g., race, socioeconomic status, ability, etc.), which varies, will shape their personal understanding and perspectives on the topic. Butler’s work on sexual identity categories informs this study because it enables sexuality to be conceptualized beyond simplistic bifurcated understandings of ‘heterosexual’ and ‘homosexual.’ Her writing provides a lens to think about the counter-hegemonic potential of GSAs whereby members’ educative and pedagogical intervention can disrupt the stability of fixed gender and sexual identity categories, and promote thinking about gender and sexual differences in terms of destabilizing the heterosexual/homosexual binary system (Fraser, 1990).

Overall, I am concerned to investigate how GSA members are addressing questions pertaining to the regulation of gender and sexual identity. In particular, this investigation is committed to examining how GSA members are both embracing and rebuffing identity categories at school, which is very much aligned with Mayo’s (2017) recent scholarship on GSAs:

Many groups discourage people from identifying themselves or others with a label or indicate that public declarations of identify are not necessary or sufficient. Still, groups also use accepted labels that may seem stable to push them further or use terms like homoromantic to begin to describe the forms of relationality not captured by the more commonly circulating terms noted by LGBT. Even while group members disturb the seeming sedimentation of older labels (labels that have been under dispute and contestation since they were coined), they also understand the provisional necessity of fighting bias like “homophobia” and “transphobia,” even while complicating the root subjectivities in each (p. 3).

In this regard, this study investigates how GSA members are employing certain identity categories, and working to educate against certain limits and foreclosures in terms of addressing gender and sexual diversity in their own school communities.

Warner’s Theorization of Heteronormativity

Warner’s (1991) queer foundational writing also draws attention to the deleterious impacts of regulatory systems and the dichotomous framing of sexuality (i.e., homosexual/heterosexual), and has informed my thinking about the schooling of sexualities and the educative and activist role of GSAs. This scholar calls for a new form of ‘queer’ politics that “...challenge[s] the pervasive and often invisible heteronormativity of modern societies” (Warner, 1991, p. 3; see also Sedgwick, 1990/2008), and critiques the oppositional positioning of heterosexuality and homosexuality - “...one of the most pervasive, deeply felt, and distinctive structures of the modern world...” (Warner, 1991, p. 6-7). In alignment with Foucault (1978), Warner (1991) draws attention to “...institutions as problems” (p. 5), citing systemic heteronormativity as a key construct that queer

theoretical perspectives aim to dismantle. Berlant and Warner (1998) articulate that heteronormativity is:

...the institutions, structures, of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged. Its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms: unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment. It consists less of norms that could be summarized as a body of doctrine than a sense of rightness produced in contradictory manifestations – often unconscious, immanent to practice or to institutions... (p. 548).

Through identifying and analyzing the impacts of heteronormativity, Warner (1991) outlines an important basis for queer theorization, which is explicitly devoted to addressing "...resistance to normalized sexuality in terms that are not always initially evident as sex-specific" (p. 7). Put another way, Warner argues that we must examine how heterosexist ideologies are embedded in everyday social life (i.e., heterosexuality is assumed and society is built around this assumption). His theorization of heteronormativity calls for sexuality analyses to focus on issues beyond that of mere tolerance and equality, such as how "...themes of homophobia and heterosexism may be read in almost any document of our culture..." (p. 6). In this respect, I am concerned to investigate the educative role of GSA members beyond merely focusing on anti-homophobic education, and I am interested to explore the extent to which GSA members are exposing the heteronormative limits of education where sexual minority experiences are strikingly absent in formal education (e.g., lack of same-gender sex education and queer-affirming resources and books).

Warner's (1991) work exposes the taken-for-granted privileges that are afforded to heterosexual people in light of heteronormativity's stealth ubiquity in western society; as a result, he argues that, "The task of queer social theory...must be to confront the default heteronormativity of modern culture with its worst nightmare, a queer planet" (p. 16). This task is consistent with Butler (1993b) who maintains that it is politically necessary to address the limits of working within a system that oppresses and displaces queerness; by contrast, institutions require overhaul:

...lesbian sexuality can be understood to redeploy its 'derivativeness' in the service of displacing hegemonic heterosexual norms. Understood this way, the political problem is not to establish the specificity of lesbian sexuality over and against its derivativeness, but to turn the homophobic construction of the bad copy against the framework that privileges heterosexuality as origin, and so 'derive' the former from the latter (p. 310).

Here, Butler argues that we must not fall into the trap of defining and pitting queer sexuality against heterosexuality; rather, heteronormative systems must be interrogated and uprooted (see also Warner, 1991). This is particularly imperative in education where queer students routinely endure heteronormative curriculum (see Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewsk, 2016; Taylor et al., 2011). In this respect, this study examines the extent to which GSAs operate as queer safe havens, and create spaces for youth to discuss non-normative desires and behaviours, and share and learn about their peer's experiences in terms that move beyond merely educating for and about the 'Other' (see Kumashiro, 2002). Such a focus employs Warner's (1991) call to focus on heteronormative systems and their limits, and points to the problem of centering anti-homophobic education, which tends to position sexual and gender minority students as mere victims (Kumashiro, 2002). Overall, my focus within this investigation is to examine the role of GSAs in

their capacity to function as counter-hegemonic sites given the privileging of heterosexual subjectivities in the education system. As such, this study examines to what extent GSA members' educative and pedagogical work combats hegemonic understandings of sexuality (see Fraser, 1990).

Britzman and Queer Pedagogy

Akin to Warner (1991), Britzman (1995) declares that, "...Queer Theory is an attempt to move away from psychological explanations like homophobia, which individualizes heterosexual fear of and loathing toward gay and lesbian subjects at the expense of examining how heterosexuality becomes normalized as natural" (p. 153). For Britzman, heteronormativity is fashioned through structure and pedagogy where the normalization of heterosexuality is a "...problem of culture and of thought" (p. 154). Queer theory offers analytic tools for "rethinking [heteronormative] pedagogy" and "rethinking [heterosexist] knowledge" (p. 155).

For Britzman (1995), examining the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in schooling is particularly important since anti-homophobic educational initiatives, which are designed to develop empathy for the 'Other,' are ineffective in addressing heteronormativity. Quite often, schools simply *include* homosexuality in curricula or at a special event, which leaves the heteronormative foundation of education intact, as Britzman argues:

The case of how gay and lesbian studies has been treated in a sentimental education that attempts to be anti-homophobic serves my example of where arguments for inclusion produce the very exclusions they are meant to cure. Part of the tension is that in discourses of inclusion, there tend to be only two pedagogical strategies: provisions of information and techniques for attitudinal change (p. 158).

Here, Britzman expresses how simply providing education about the ‘Other’ (Kumashiro, 2002) and promoting positive attitudes towards queer folks fails to acknowledge or address how heterosexuality is privileged in and through schooling. Instead, as Britzman asserts, “In an odd turn of events, curricula that purport to be inclusive may actually work to produce new forms of exclusivity *if* the only subject positions offered are the tolerant normal and the tolerated subaltern” (p. 160). To reframe from perpetuating discourses that equate queer sexualities and behaviours with ‘Otherness,’ Britzman advocates for queer pedagogical reform that looks beyond individual accounts of homophobic name calling and harassment to examine how heterosexuality is privileged through policies, curricula, and practices. In effect, Britzman calls for people to examine what is learned and can be unlearned through formal education:

To work within the terms of gay and lesbian theories, then, allows for the consideration of two kinds of pedagogical stakes. One has to do with thinking ethically about what discourses of difference, choice, and visibility mean in classrooms, in pedagogy, and in how education can be thought about. Another has to do with thinking through structures of disavowal within education, or refusals – whether curricular, social, or pedagogical – to engage a traumatic perception that produces the subject of difference as a disruption, as the outside to normalcy (p. 152).

Britzman’s call for anti-heteronormative rather than anti-homophobic pedagogy is justified since the latter negates the education system’s responsibility in confronting heterosexual privilege. Since the education system is complacent with (sporadically) offering education about the ‘Other’ rather than providing education that is critical of privileging and othering (see Kumashiro, 2002), many GSAs operate as counter-hegemonic sites (Fraser, 1990) to combat heteronormativity (Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012; Elliott, 2016; Lapointe, 2014, 2015; Mayberry,

Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Mayo, 2013a/b, 2015). Overall, Britzman's call for queer pedagogical restructuring informs my conceptualization of GSAs as sites for anti-heteronormative intervention. Through their strategic educative work in the wider school community, GSA members can help fill much-needed queer teaching and learning gaps.

Queer Theory's Limits: The Need for Trans-Informed Theorization

Although queer theory provides a prominent lens to critique heteronormativity, this section outlines how its anti-normative limits obfuscate the examination of trans and gender diverse experiences. Wiegman and Wilson (2015) maintain that queer perspectives, which theorize non-normative sexuality, fail to account for trans experiences - particularly for those who desire some form of gender stability. As such, these scholars "...question the political common sense that claims that norms ostracize...or that 'normative' is a synonym for what is constricting or controlling or tyrannical" (p. 12). Queer theory's explicit theorization of sexuality has prompted many trans theorists, such as Serano (2007/2016, 2013), Stryker (2006), Namaste (2000), Malatino (2015), and Connell (2009), to provide trans-informed epistemological insights into questions of gendered embodiment, which expose systemic cissexism and cisnormativity by examining how trans "...erasure functions in culture, institutional practices, and social policy" (Namaste, 2000, p. 70). Such a focus is paramount because:

Although the violation of compulsory sex/gender relations is one of the topics most frequently addressed within queer theory, this body of knowledge rarely considers the implications of an enforced sex/gender system for the people who have defied it, who live outside it, or who have been killed because of it (Namaste, 2000, p. 9).

In the following sections, the foundational work of the aforementioned scholars will be explored as a means by which to “...articulate ideas about sex, gender, bodies, and sexuality that constitute transgender theorizing as part of queer theorizing more broadly” (Elliot & Roen, 1998, p. 231). Concerns with queer theory generally involve the following three topics: 1) the role of the subconscious/unconscious in accounts of sex; 2) sexed embodiment; and 3) anti-normativity. Unpacking these concepts is key to explicating the need for trans-specific insights which attend to a more epistemologically informed understanding of gender diversity and gender justice. In this capacity, trans theoretical perspectives and accounts are employed to draw attention to cissexist oppression and cisgender privilege vis-à-vis its impact on the schooling of gender. Such perspectives are brought to bear on an understanding of the instrumental and potential role that GSAs can play in affirming gender diversity, interrogating cisnormativity, and lobbying for gender democracy.

First, proponents of trans-informed theoretical accounts of gender embodiment maintain that queer perspectives depict gender as a mere social construct and that this conceptualization of gender undermines personal understandings of and felt experiences with the biologically sexed body, which predate gender identity and expression. In contrast to queer perspectives, which stress that gender is performative, Stryker (2006) insists:

To say that gender is a performative act is to say that it does not need a material referent to be meaningful, is directed at others in an attempt to communicate, is not subject to falsification or verification, and is accomplished by ‘doing’ something rather than ‘being’ something. A woman, performatively speaking, is one who says she is – and who then does that woman means. The biologically

sexed body guarantees nothing; it is necessarily there, a ground for the act of speaking, but it has no deterministic relationship to performative gender (p. 10).

Similarly, Serano (2007/2016) refutes queer perspectives since they position gender as “...something that we ‘do’ rather than something that we ‘are’ (p. xvi). More specifically, Serano (2013) contends that this line of thought invalidates subconscious sex - “...unconscious underlying urges or self-understandings” (p. 149). Unlike queer theory, trans perspectives offer insight into significant distinctions between subconscious sex and gender:

[Serano’s]...subconscious desire to be female...existed independently of the social phenomena commonly associated with the word ‘gender’...[her] female subconscious sex was not accompanied by any corresponding desire to explore female gender roles or to express femininity. Nor was it the result of [her] trying to ‘fit in’ to societal gender norms (Serano, 2007/2016, p. 82).

Here, Serano stresses the importance of distinguishing between unconscious self-understandings of sex and conscious experiences of gender. In her subsequent scholarship, she explains that “...when we discuss specific manifestations of gender and sexuality, we often are conflating two things: an unconscious urge or self-understanding that impels us toward a particular gender or sexuality, and the conscious way that we make sense of that urge of self-understanding (e.g., through identity labels, narratives, and meanings)” (2013, p. 149). Thus, Serano’s (2007/2016; 2013) writing speaks back to queer assertions that overlook the importance of subconscious sex, which is of particular importance to many transgender folks. Acknowledging and affirming subconscious understandings of sex are particularly important for transgender youth who, through cisnormative structures and interactions (e.g., gender-segregated spaces, sex-based assumptions, etc.), are consistently rendered invisible and invalid. This study affirms trans youth’s self-

identified sexes and genders, and it provides an outlet for them to share their cisnormative experiences in schooling.

Second, trans scholars are quick to point to queer theory's shortcomings in relation to its under-theorization of sexed embodiment (i.e., how bodies impact subjectivity). Queer theory inadequately theorizes bodies as historically-contingent products in terms of their materiality, but Elliot and Roen (1998) purport that, "...bodies do matter more than these theories acknowledge or in ways they cannot adequately account for" (p. 243). Elliot and Roen (1998) explain how bodies take shape and meaning through representation:

...subjectivity is more complex than, and not determined by, anatomical sex or gender identity or sexual identity taken alone. The fact of embodiment matters, as does the way we live in and with those bodies, always with reference to socially and historically defined meanings for the positions we take up (p. 235).

For Elliot and Roen (1998), sexed embodiment should be thought of as distinct from historically-specific norms that operate to name one as 'normal' or abject. Rather, these scholars declare that, "...one of the possible dilemmas expressed by transsexuals appears to concern not the question of whether one has a culturally intelligible or abject body but the question of how to assume an embodiment at all" (p. 244).

Third, trans-informed perspectives explore how queer theory's anti-normative tenet fails to adequately theorize gender in ways that speak phenomenologically to the lived and embodied experiences of transgender people. Elliot and Roen (1998) contend that "...although a person's gender identity and expression are not separable from socially and historically dominant representations of gender, neither are they reducible to those representations of gender" (p. 236).

This comment points to the limits of queer theory in its failure to explain why trans folks experience transphobic violence, ridicule, and harassment; thus, Elliot and Roen's (1998) work illustrates how trans folks are targeted for being trans rather than on the basis of gender non-conformity (see also Serano, 2007/2016), which invalidates queer theory's use when examining trans-specific phenomena of embodiment.

In light of the aforementioned queer shortcomings, this study draws extensively on trans-informed theory to acknowledge and explore the toxic effects of cisnormative school climates – particularly from the vantagepoint of trans and gender diverse youth. It examines the potential role that GSAs play in questioning and disrupting cisgender privilege, and advocating for structural and pedagogical interventions that support gender democratization (Connell, 2009).

Trans Theory

Trans-informed theory examines the nexus of power and knowledge by exploring the "...medical and psychiatric production of transsexuals" (Namaste, 2000, p. 33), but also addresses pivotal questions regarding trans erasure and embodiment that are not adequately addressed by queer theorists (Namaste, 2000). In this section, the trans theoretical insights of Namaste (2000), Stryker (2006), Serano (2007/2016, 2013), Malatino (2015), and Connell (2009) are stressed in order to destabilize cisnormative assumptions that equate bodily sex with gender. Elliot and Roen (1998) explain that, "Transgender theory...raises crucial questions about how dominant conceptions of the body, gender, and sexuality reduce what are complex and ambiguous processes to simple or natural 'givens'" (p. 237). This study employs trans theory to acknowledge the need to address trans and gender diverse erasure in schooling and to call for anti-cisnormative reform in the education system.

Namaste and the Issue of Trans Erasure

Namaste (2000) declares that queer theory's focus on the production of sexual subjects is inadequate for investigating the lived experiences of trans people. As such, Namaste (2000) spotlights how trans folks are socially, culturally, and institutionally *erased*, rather than produced, within discourse and institutions (e.g., education, medicine, psychiatry, and technology):

Whereas previous scholars contend that medical and psychiatric discourses produce transsexuals, I suggest that that transsexual and transgendered people are produced through erasure, and that this erasure is organized at a micrological level, in the invisible functions of discourse and rhetoric, the taken for granted practices of institutions, and the unforeseen consequences of social policy (p. 53).

Following Namaste's erasure argument, there was a conscious effort not to privilege the experiences of sexual minorities in this study; in order to meet this objective, trans and gender diverse student voices were magnified to draw attention to institutionalized cisnormativity (e.g., male- and female-designated washrooms) and signpost how GSA members are criticizing the system through their club-inspired education and activism.

This endeavor is significant seeing how trans people are removed "...in and through the production of knowledge" (Namaste, 2000, p. 3) and this plays out in three ways that sustain one another:

...the reduction of transsexuals to the figural dimensions of discourse preempts the possibility of transsexuality subjectivity; the exclusion of transsexuals from the institutional world reinforces a conception of that world that presupposes the existence of only nontranssexual men and nontranssexual women; and the act of invalidating the

very possibility of transsexuality bolsters rhetorical operations that exclude literal transsexual bodies while reinforcing institutional practices that do not consider the needs of transsexual and transgendered people (Namaste, 2000, p. 52).

Here Namaste explains that: 1) reducing trans people to a phenomenon that requires explication, for example, in medicine (e.g., gender dysphoria), forecloses the possibility that trans people exist outside of such discourses; 2) cissexist beliefs are ingrained in systems where trans people are excluded; and 3) the privileging of cisgender identities (i.e., cisnormativity) obfuscates institutional responsibility in addressing the needs of trans folks. Namaste purports that trans erasure requires a different theoretical positioning than does its production; thus, queer theory is inadequate for addressing the systemic preclusion of trans lives and bodies:

A theory that limits itself to how transsexual and transgendered people are produced is insufficient in this regard, since it can only study the production of transsexuality in sites where transsexuals have a priori been designated as the object of discourse (medicine and psychiatry the two most obvious sites herein) (Namaste, 2000, p. 57).

Following Namaste (2000), this study sought not to erase trans and gender diverse students from important educational conversations. A conscious effort was made to spotlight their perspectives and experiences given that empirical research has documented their role in providing sexual and gender diversity education in schools via GSAs (see Schindel, 2008). Seeing how GSAs remain prominent sites for gender activism (Schindel, 2008), trans and gender diverse group members play a pivotal role in combatting cisnormativity, especially in lieu of any sustained formal education that problematizes cisgender privilege.

Stryker and the Question of Trans Embodiment

Stryker's (2006) work also spotlights how trans-informed scholarship helps us address the 'T' in LGBTQ+, which is often elided, overlooked, and inappropriately subsumed under queer. Stryker (2006), like Serano (2007/2016) and Namaste (2000), rejects the problematic the application of queer theory to trans experiences due to its inability to address epistemological and ontological questions pertaining to trans embodiment and identity:

...though putatively antiheteronormative, [queer theory] sometimes fails to acknowledge that same-sex object choice is not the only way to differ from heterosexist cultural norms, that transgender phenomenon can also be antiheteronormative, or that transgender phenomenon constitute an axis of difference that cannot be subsumed to an object-choice model of antiheteronormativity...transgender studies is in many ways more attuned to questions of embodiment and identity than to those of desire and sexuality...Transgender phenomenon invite queer studies, and gay and lesbian communities, to take another look at the many way bodies, identities, and desires can be interwoven (Stryker, 2006, p. 7).

To supplement the shortcomings of queer theory, trans perspectives, as espoused by Stryker, provide a foundation for making sense of gender diversity and trans embodiment in schooling in terms of moving beyond simply thinking about transphobia and providing education about the 'Other' (see Kumashiro, 2002). Rather, by examining the experiences of trans and gender diverse GSA members via a trans-specific analytical lens, I consider the impact and effects of cissexism and cisgender privilege in and through formal education.

In terms of theorizing trans experiences, Stryker (2006) argues for the thoughtful disentanglement of sex from gender, and gender identity from gender expression and gender role to expose their artificial assignment and alignment:

...the materiality of anatomical sex is represented socially by a gender role, and subjectively as a gender identity: a (biological) male is a (social) man who (subjectively) identifies himself as such; a woman is similarly, and circularly, a female who considers herself to be one. The relationship between bodily sex, gender role, and subjective gender identity are imagined to be strictly, mechanically, mimetic – a real thing and its reflections. Gender is simply what we call bodily sex when we see it in the mirror of representation – no questions asked, none needed. Transgender phenomenon call into question both the stability of the material referent “sex” and the relationship of that unstable category to the linguistic, social, and psychological categories of “gender” (p. 9).

Stryker’s (2006) theoretical propositions signal how ‘men’ and ‘women’ are only perceived to be ‘real’ when cissexist discourses equate sex with gender – setting the groundwork for gender policing. Further, she maintains that sex is often only understood in relation to its repetitive inscription (i.e., it is perceived to be consistent, balanced, and predictable):

...what we typically call the sex of the body, which we imagine to be a uniform quality that uniquely characterizes each and every individual whole body, is shown to consist of numerous parts – chromosomal sex, anatomical sex, reproductive sex, morphological sex – that can, and do, form a variety of viable bodily aggregations that number far more than two (p. 9).

Stryker (2006) debunks scientific/medical knowledge that divides sex into two all-encompassing ‘male’ and ‘females’ categories, which are based on physical anatomy (i.e., genitalia). She contends that sex is far more complex than can be determined by one’s middle parts; on a physical level, it involves chromosomes, hormones, and primary and secondary sex characteristics, but it also involves subconscious understandings of sex (see Serano, 2007/2016). Since Stryker’s scholarship problematizes polarized accounts of sex, and its conflation with gender, her writing provides an analytic tool for examining cissexist educational structures and practices, such as female and male-designated washrooms, gender-segregated classes, and Prom King and Queen. As will be demonstrated later in the dissertation, GSA members in this study, many of whom are trans and/or gender diverse, relied on the club as a space to not only address trans erasure, but to educate others about cisgender privilege. These students also used the group as a platform to advocate for educational reform, specifically in relation to the development of an all gender washroom.

Serano’s Articulation of Cis Terminology

With regards to informing my understanding of cissexism and cisnormativity, Serano’s (2007/2016; 2013) body of work has been crucial. She introduces readers to cis and trans terminology, and also provides a critique of queer theory’s anti-normative limits. In particular, Serano (2013) unpacks cis and trans terminology to identify gender-based disparities, which disproportionately affect trans folks:

...cis terminology paralleled vital steps taken by gay and disability activists (among others) decades ago: Name the previously unnamed and unmarked dominant majority (cissexuals, analogous with heterosexuals and able-bodied people), describe the institutionalized hierarchy that marginalizes you (cissexism, analogous with

heterosexism and ableism), and discuss how this system creates many taken-for-granted advantages from the dominant majority (cissexual privilege, analogous with heterosexual and able-bodied privilege) (p. 265-266).

Here, Serano highlights how language can be employed to analyze and address trans-based oppression; to this end, she names how social and systemic cissexism and cisnormativity give rise to transphobia, as evidenced through the erasure or delegitimization of trans folks in educational policy and practice.

Serano (2007/2016) also argues that queer theory and its anti-normative properties do not necessarily serve the interests of trans individuals. That is, although queer people are oppressed based on their ‘non-normative’ sexuality, there is often a tendency to “...undermine the legitimacy of trans people’s identified genders rather than targeting trans people for breaking oppositional gender norms” (p. 185). In other words, Serano (2007/2016) maintains that trans people are not targeted because they do not comply with gender roles, “...but because we, by necessity, embrace our own femaleness and femininity” (p. 14); thus, instead of being targeted for gender non-conforming expressions, Serano asserts that trans people are suspect because they are not cisgender:

...transsexual bodies, identities, perspectives, and experiences are continuously required to be explained and inevitably remain open to interpretation. Corresponding cissexual attributes are simply taken for granted – they are assumed to be ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ and therefore escape reciprocal critique (p. 161).

Since cissexism and cisnormativity permeates social institutions, including academia, trans investigations are often incorrectly subsumed within queer theory due to underdeveloped

understandings about sex and gender. As such, Serano (2007/2016) calls for explicit trans theorization and political action:

...subconscious sex, gender dissonance, and physical transitioning are patronizingly dismissed by cissexual queers who favor social constructionist views of gender. It is evident in the way that queer theorists, ignorant of their own cissexual privilege, nonconsensually ungender us (or blur the distinctions between us and other queers) in order to artificialize genders; claim that ‘all gender is drag’ without recognizing how dismissive that is to the transsexual experience; and ignorantly apply the ‘gay rights’ tactic of calling for the all-out demedicalization of transgenderism without considering the effects this would have on transsexuals’ ability to access and afford hormones and sex reassignment procedures (p. 357).

Following Serano’s call for trans-specific analyses and political action, this study does not simply (and incorrectly) employ queer perspectives to examine trans experiences. Together, these theories complement one another and provide a foundation for making sense of GSA’s anti-heteronormative and anti-cisnormative role and function in school communities. In particular, the trans educative and activist potential and actualization of these clubs is examined and contrasted against the cisnormative backdrop of publicly-funded education in this study.

Serano (2007/2016) draws a distinction between transphobia and cissexism, noting that transphobia involves fear and prejudice where trans folks are targeted because their “...gender expression and appearance differ from the norm” (p. 184). She argues that “...confronting transphobia has done very little to ease cissexism, i.e., the belief that transsexual genders are less

‘real’ or legitimate [than] cissexual genders” (p. 91). As such, it is important to examine how cissexist and cisnormative ideologies communicate that *being trans* is abnormal and unnatural:

...the cissexual indiscriminately projects their cissexuality onto all other people, thus transforming cissexuality into a human attribute that is taken for granted...Most cissexuals assume that everyone they meet is also cissexual, just as most heterosexuals assume that everyone they meet is also heterosexual (unless, of course, they are provided with evidence to the contrary) (p. 165).

Furthermore, Serano argues that although trans women have similar experiences to cisgender women, trans women are “...generally mischaracterized as second-rate, as illegitimate, as an imitation of theirs...[They] have...to fight for [their] right to be recognized as female, while [cisgender women] have...the privilege of simply taking it for granted (p. 170). Here, Serano expresses how cissexist attitudes and beliefs function to systematically marginalize trans people, exposing “...the double standard that promotes the idea that transsexual genders are distinct from, and less legitimate than cissexual genders” (p. 162; see also Serano, 2013).

For Serano (2013) cissexism and transphobia stem from un/conscious bouts of gender entitlement where “...people make assumptions and value judgments about certain bodies and behaviors, and then nonconsensually project those hierarchies and stereotypes onto all people” (p. 242-243). Gender entitlement and cisgender privilege are interrelated concepts because (cisgender and gender-conforming) people often “...assume that they have the ability and authority to accurately determine who is a woman and who is a man, they in effect grant a privilege – cissexual privilege – to those people whom they appropriately gender” (Serano, 2007/2016, p. 166). Serano argues that because many cisgender people are comfortable with their assigned sex and gender at birth, and others affirm this, they “...develop a sense of entitlement regarding their own gender.

They feel entitled to call themselves a woman or a man” (p. 165-166). To combat gender entitlement, Serano (2013) suggests that people become more aware of their assumptions, and respectfully ask people about and listen to their lived experiences and identities. This study will demonstrate how GSA members are putting Serano’s suggestions into practice inasmuch that GSA’s educative and activist work goes beyond simply addressing transphobia. Youth members are, for example, alerting school officials to systemic barriers to existing and thriving at school (e.g., lack of all gender washrooms, mispronouncing, gender-segregated health and physical education, trans-exclusive curriculum, etc.) and advocating for structural, curricular, and interpersonal reform.

Serano (2013) disputes that gender is purely performative (see Butler, 1993a) because this argument, “...is a crass oversimplification that is as ridiculous as saying all gender is genitals, all gender is chromosomes, or all gender is socialization. In reality, gender is all of these things and more” (p. 105). For Serano (2013), gender is not merely a social construct because this insinuates that gender is “...a figment of our imaginations” (p. 106); instead, Serano (2007/2016) contends that gender is “...socially exaggerated...” (p. 76) and thus, socialization amplifies sex-based differences and cultivates cissexist standards (i.e., gender is assumed, assigned, and expected based on one’s genitals):

...socialization distorts biological gender differences to create the impression that essential differences exist between women and men. Thus, the primary role of socialization is not to produce gender difference de novo, but to create the illusion that female and male are mutually exclusive, ‘opposite’ sexes’ (Serano, 2007/2016, p. 74).

In sum, Serano (2007/2016, 2013), unlike many queer theorists, acknowledges both biological and sociological accounts of sex and gender, but emphasizes how cissexist assumptions, as evidenced through gender policing, gives rise to the privileging of cisgender identities in society.

Malatino and Trans Informed Pedagogical Insights

Malatino (2015) provides an analytic lens to make sense of trans-informed pedagogical interventions in schools. She, like Britzman (1995), disregards educative and pedagogical projects that are enshrined in empathy development. Malatino (2015) argues that superficial efforts to enhance people's compassion for trans folks leave people "...feeling more accepting without having to engage in any kind of critical self-reflexive process" (p. 401). Such empathy-developing practices and pedagogies are ineffective in addressing cissexist and cisnormative ideologies, and should be replaced with trans-informed education that is critical of privileging and othering (see also Kumashiro, 2002).

Malatino (2015) argues that trans and intersex people are portrayed as exceptional, which obscures how all people participate in gender systems that rein/enforce cisnormativity:

[Trans and intersex folks] are posited as exemplary disruptive bodies, the exceptional beings that expose the rigidity and coercion implicit in gendering processes... We are made to bear the burden of demonstrating the contingency and constructedness of gender through being positioned as privileged objects of inquiry, rarefied beings with a unique perspective on the gendering process; cis-gendered folk are let off the hook (p. 402-403).

Here, Malatino insists that cisgender folks are also gendered beings who are "...constrained and determined by hegemonic conceptions of gendered realness..." (p. 408). As such, Malatino insists that unsettling cissexism and moving towards gender justice involves acknowledging one's own

complicity in cisnormative regimes of truth, and engaging in the laborious process of un/re/learning. Fundamentally, this includes understanding gender as “...process, craft, and becoming” (p. 395).

Malatino (2015) also critiques the ubiquitous practice of bringing in guest speakers to address trans disparities because this is “...inadequate for increasing awareness and action regarding the intense institutional and systemic discrimination trans and gender nonconforming folk regularly encounter” (p. 399). Although guest speakers can promote understanding about the ‘Other’ (Kumashiro, 2002), they can easily function as proxies in the absence of a more institutionally-sustained commitment to trans-informed education. Thus, one-off speaking engagements demonstrate how the education system obfuscates its duty to combat transphobia and affirm gender diversity through anti-cisnormative pedagogy, policy, and practice. This study evokes Malatino’s (2015) argument against guest speakers to problematize individual school’s isolated use of this strategy. In ‘allowing’ GSAs to plan and execute such initiatives, schools abdicate their duty to promote and provide equitable education that “...teaches gender according to a logic of composition or craft, rather than one of naturalized determination, wherein gendered being is not about what one is but about what one does in the milieu(x) they inhabit” (p. 409).

Malatino’s (2015) scholarship speaks to Connell’s (2009) notion of gender democratization and its pedagogical realization in classrooms. Connell argues against the abolishment of gender because this school of thought “...assumes that there is a whole realm of human relations that cannot be democratized...” (p. 146). In place of de-gendering society, she advocates that we disrupt gender hierarchies and strive for gender democracy, which “...seeks to equalize gender orders, rather than shrink them to nothing...this assumes that gender does not, itself, imply inequality” (p. 146). According to Connell, gender democratization involves “...moving forward

equality of participation, power, and respect” (p. 151). In terms of advancing gender equality for trans and gender diverse students, schools need to be places where gender diversity is acknowledged and celebrated, rather than erased (Namaste, 2000) and penalized (Serano, 2007/2016). This calls for trans identities to be seen and treated as legitimate, rather than troublesome (Serano, 2007/2016). Following Connell (2009), this study is concerned to explore how GSA members are advocating for gender democracy in terms of affirming and celebrating trans and gender diverse experiences, and engaging in trans-informed education and activism. As such, it explores the extent to which GSAs are counter-hegemonic sites where members openly critique and work to address cisgender privilege (Fraser, 1990).

Conclusion

In addition to exploring the background and context of GSAs in publicly-funded Ontario high schools, this chapter identified the research problem, and the purpose and objectives of the study. It devoted much attention to examining the theoretical underpinnings of the inquiry: queer and trans-informed theories. The queer theoretical work of Foucault (1978), Sedgwick (1990/2008), Butler (1990, 1993a/b/c), Warner (1991), and Britzman (1995) were explicated to highlight the significance of heteronormativity for thinking about the educative and activist role of GSAs as counter-hegemonic sites in schools. The trans-affirmative insights of Namaste (2000), Stryker (2006), Serano (2007/2016, 2013), Malatino (2015), and Connell (2009) were also outlined to foreground key analytic concepts, such as cissexism, cisnormativity and cisgender privilege, as a basis for thinking about GSAs as sites for gender activism, and for addressing trans and non-binary youth erasure and invisibility in schools.

Overview of Dissertation

This study examines the queer and trans educative and activist influence of GSAs in Ontario public secular and Catholic schools from the vantage point of GSA student members and advisors. Chapter one introduces the research topic, outlines the research questions, provides background and contextual details regarding GSAs in the Ontario context, and explicates the significance and relevance of queer and trans-informed theoretical perspectives for the study. Chapter two examines significant literature in the field, and identifies how there is little empirical work on Canadian GSAs – specifically within Catholic institutions. Chapter three discusses the research design and its relationship to queer and trans theoretical considerations; it also summarizes the study’s data collection methods and analysis techniques. Chapter four explores the findings from the two public secular school GSAs, while chapter five focuses on the two faith-based sites. The final chapter provides a reflection on the overall significance of the research and outlines its implications.

Endnotes

1. Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) is used as an umbrella term to represent all school-based clubs whose purposes are to support queer, trans, and gender diverse youth and/or discuss GSRM topics and/or advocate for sexual and gender-based justice. Increasingly, GSAs have come to signify alliances beyond sexuality (i.e., relationship development between gay and straight people); as such, they are now commonly referred to as Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSA), Queer-Straight Alliances (QSA), Gay-Straight Trans Alliances (GSTA) or by other acronyms and names. I use the acronym GSA to refer to any school-based club which supports GSRM youth and/or educates and/or advocates for change with respect to sex, sexuality, romantic orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. It is important to note that GSAs were previously banned in

Ontario Catholic high schools, leading many youth and adult allies to lobby for students' right to form GSAs and call them such in all publicly-funded Ontario high schools. Although students won this fight with the passing of Bill 13, *Accepting Schools Act* (Ontario Legislative Assembly, 2012), some schools – as will be explored in this dissertation – are circumventing this policy and inhibiting youth from naming their groups, GSAs.

2. The term GSRM is used throughout this study, as opposed to the acronym, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) or a similar variation, since its deployment enables sexual and gendered ways of being to exist beyond limited and limiting identity categories. GSRM encompasses all queer sexual and romantic orientations, and trans and gender diverse identities and expressions (see Lapointe, 2016b/c).

3. Allies are people who actively support GSRM human rights and work to end sexual and gender-based oppression.

4. Hetero/cisnormative refers to the naturalization and normalization of heterosexual and cisgender identities and expressions.

5. The term queer is employed to describe non-heteronormative attitudes and actions (Sullivan, 2003).

6. Anti-homo/transphobic education seeks to diminish anti-GSRM attitudes and behaviours. Homophobia and transphobia entail anti-queer and anti-trans discrimination, but the suffix phobia implies that "...a few bad apples [are] irrationally afraid" (Serano, 2013, p. 264) of sexual and gender minorities. Anti-homo/transphobic education does not take into account that queer, trans, and gender diverse people are perceived to be less legitimate than straight and cisgender folks (Serano, 2013).

7. Queer and trans-informed techniques, approaches, or practices are actions that are grounded in anti-hetero/cisnormative thinking.
8. The term cisgender refers to people whose assigned sex at birth matches their gender identity. Serano (2007/2016) articulates that the prefix cis is utilized “...to name the unmarked dominant majority (i.e., people who are not trans) in order to better articulate the ways in which trans people are viewed and treated in society” (p. xvii). More specifically, “...cis denotes that one’s gender is viewed by society as inherently *legitimate*...” (Serano, 2013, p. 267).
9. Heterosexism, defined by Serano (2013), is “...the institutionalized belief that heterosexual attraction and relationships are considered valid and natural, whereas same-sex attraction and relationships are not” (p. 114).
10. Cissexism is defined as “...the double standard that leads people to view, interpret, and treat trans people differently (and less legitimately) than...cis counterparts” (Serano, 2007/2016, p. xviii).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Since this study conceptualizes GSAs as *subaltern counterpublics* (see Fraser, 1998), it is concerned to investigate the extent to which these sites disrupt hetero/cisnormative learning environments (see Kosciw et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2011). The following body of literature details the impetus for a study which explores the counter-hegemonic role of GSAs in relation to addressing gender and sexual hierarchies in schools. More specially, this chapter outlines how such an inquiry fills a significant empirical gap with regards to learning more about the educative and activist role and function of GSAs in publicly-funded Ontario secular and Catholic high schools (Grace & Wells, 2015; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Lapointe, 2014, 2015; Liboro et al., 2015). In particular, the review emphasizes how there is a need for Canadian studies to investigate the anti-cisnormative function of GSAs since there is limited knowledge on youth's trans-informed work in schools (Schindel, 2005, 2008). It also spotlights how there is an absence of research on the development of GSAs and their anti-heteronormative functioning in Canadian Catholic secondary schools (Grace & Wells, 2015; Liboro et al., 2015). Further, my study contributes to the field of GSAs and student activism since, to the best of my knowledge, there is no research that investigates the anti-heteronormative influence of GSAs across multiple Ontario Catholic high schools (Liboro et al., 2015).

This chapter begins by providing an overview of large-scale quantitative studies, which illuminate the hetero/cissexist foundation of teaching and learning practices (Kosciw et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2011), and predicate the need for school-based groups, such as GSAs to provide safer spaces for GSRM youth and their allies to find support, discuss and learn about GSRM topics, and lobby for social change (Griffin et al., 2004; MacIntosh, 2007). Thereafter, Callaghan's (2012, 2014a, 2015, 2016a) empirical work is examined to highlight how

sexual minorities are marginalized in and through Catholic education. More specifically, Callaghan's work draws attention to how Catholic schooling reinforces heteronormative hegemony by explicitly disavowing homosexuality (see Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004; Martino, 2014). Callaghan's research is used as a springboard to investigate how "...overwhelming heteronormativity of the Catholic school actually invites new acts of resistance" (Callaghan, 2014a, p. 35). Following Callaghan, my inquiry is concerned with exploring the development of GSAs in publicly-funded Canadian Catholic high schools, and the extent to which GSAs in these religious settings are promoting and providing anti-heteronormative education. This is a particularly timely and important research endeavor since Catholic schools did not participate in Taylor et al.'s (2011) historic national school climate survey on homo/bi/transphobia. Next, research related to the roles, purposes, and impacts of GSAs in a variety of educational contexts (e.g., public secular, public Catholic, secondary, postsecondary, etc.) is examined, drawing attention to significant knowledge gaps in the development and functioning of GSAs in publicly-funded Ontario secular and Catholic high schools (Grace & Wells, 2015; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Lapointe, 2012, 2014, 2015; Liboro et al., 2015; St. John, Travers, Munro, Liboro, Schneider, & Greig, 2014). By filling these empirical gaps, this study provides insight into GSA's counter-hegemonic educative role in addressing sexual and gender diversity in publicly-funded Ontario schools.

Hetero/cisnormative Curricula

Existing international research has found that queer and trans content is overwhelmingly silenced or omitted in formal education (Castrol & Sujak, 2014; Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville 2012; DePalma & Atkinson, 2006; Elliott, 2015; GLSEN, 2015; Grace & Wells, 2015; Kosciw et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2014; Mayo, 2013b; Richard, 2015; Taylor, 2014; Taylor et al., 2016;

Taylor et al., 2011), which is problematic because sexual and gender diverse curricula are correlated with less hostile school climates for GSRMs (e.g., students hear fewer homophobic and transphobic remarks) (Kosciw et al., 2016). Kosciw et al.'s (2016) large-scale American school climate research found that only 22.4% of GSRM youth received queer or trans-positive curricula and 17.9% encountered homo/transphobic content. Approximately 1/5 of participants (i.e., 16.7%) revealed that they were barred from discussing or writing about GSRM topics in school assignments and 16.3% of respondents had similar restrictions imposed in extracurricular activities. Within a Canadian context, Taylor et al.'s (2011) national school climate survey found that, "Many schools have a well-developed human rights curriculum that espouses respect and dignity for every identity group protected in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms except for LGBTQ people" (p. 27). These scholars found that few school districts provided teachers with sexual and gender diverse resources or encouraged educators in their board to combat homo/transphobia via the curricula. As a result, only 43.7% of students in the Prairies and 67% of pupils in British Columbia reported that their classes included 'LGBTQ' topics. On a more positive note, 79.9% of youth who were exposed to 'LGBTQ' topics indicated that the content was positive (i.e., school teachings did not equate queer sexuality with immorality, abnormality, or deviance).

In a more recent study on Canadian educator's beliefs, perspectives, and practices, Taylor et al. (2016) found that teachers were "...far more likely to approve of LGBTQ-inclusive education than to practice it" (p. 128). This mismatch between educators' beliefs and actions is related to their comfort level in delivering queer and trans inclusive education, and the perceived support they have from administrators, fellow teachers, and students in implementing it. This lack of support is mirrored in international research, which has documented how Catholic and secular

school educators often avoid queer topics due to real or perceived pushback from school administrators and school boards (Bower & Klecka, 2009; Maher, Sever, & Pichler, 2008). Regardless of their motivation (and quite frankly excuses), when educators fail to infuse queer and trans perspectives in their daily teaching, they are privileging heterosexual and cisgender identities and experiences at school. As a result of curriculum that does not recognize, affirm, and celebrate GSRMs, GSAs have become crucial sites for validation and for exploring knowledge that is off limits in formal education (see Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012; Lapointe, 2014, 2015; Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Mayo, 2015); these groups maintain a significant role, not just in terms of creating a social and supportive space for GSRM students and their allies, but for interrogating hegemonic sexuality and gender ideologies (Fraser, 1990) and actively combatting hetero/cisnormative learning environments (Elliott, 2016; Lapointe, 2014, 2015; Mayo, 2013a/b, 2015; Schindel, 2005, 2008).

In(queer)ies within Catholic Education

There is very limited research on the experiences of GSRM youth who attend Canadian Catholic high schools (Callaghan, 2012, 2015, 2016a; Taylor et al., 2011), and anti-heteronormative programming in these contexts (Grace & Wells, 2015; Liboro et al., 2015); however, some studies indicate that queer content is stifled (Callaghan, 2012, 2015, 2016a; Grace & Wells, 2015), and students encounter non-affirming teachers and administrators (e.g., educators speak about queer sexualities in disparaging ways and/or disapprove of marriage equality) in Canadian Catholic schools (Callaghan, 2012, 2015, 2016a), which Niblett and Oraa (2014) contend is associated with Catholic education employment agreements where teachers are expected to condemn queer sexuality.

Within Callaghan's (2007, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014a/b, 2015, 2016a/b) body of work that examines the experiences of queer Catholic school teachers and students, she argues that two colloquial expressions, "It's okay to be gay, just don't act on it" and "Love the sinner, hate the sin" (Callaghan, 2010, p. 85), are enacted to monitor, control, discipline, and police sexual minorities (Callaghan, 2014a). Callaghan (2015) explains:

The Catholic Church's position on sexual diversity is circulated in Catholic schools primarily by ideology (i.e., via curriculum taught through a Catholic filter) but also secondarily by repressive policy (informed by Catholic doctrine) that directs school administrators to fire LGBTQ teachers for behaving in ways deemed contrary to Catholicity (p. 21).

Her small-scale qualitative studies found that making Catholic schools more equitable places for sexual minorities is a "...much-needed undertaking" (Callaghan, 2010, p. 86) since students are routinely disciplined through religious doctrine (i.e., 'holy homophobia'), which condemns queer sexualities (see also Martino, 2014). Callaghan's scholarship necessitates a critical examination of Church and state conflicts where Catholic canonical law is privileged over Canadian common law, as evidenced through the discriminatory treatment of queer students and teachers (Callaghan, 2012, 2015, 2016a).

In the book, *The Gay Agenda: Claiming Space, Identity, and Justice*, Callaghan's (2014b) chapter, which draws on the findings from her dissertation, stresses how Canadian Catholic schools are "hotbeds for homophobia" (p. 229; see also Callaghan, 2012, 2016a; Grace & Wells, 2015), and how anti-heteronormative education is resisted in Canadian schools. By hearing the perspectives and experiences of 13 former students and seven current and former teachers via

semi-structured interviews, Callaghan's (2012) ground breaking study documented the abjuration of homosexuality in Ontario and Alberta Catholic schools. In her study, all former Catholic school students experienced homophobia and voiced that their Catholic schools denounced queerness. Callaghan's body of work is extremely critical of core Catholic curriculum because:

Students in Ontario Catholic schools receive information on non-heterosexuality from Catholic educators, counselors, and school chaplains who have been trained to manage sexual minorities in Ontario Catholic schools through workshops about the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops' (OCCB, 2004) curriculum and policy document called Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation (PGASO) (Callaghan, 2014a, p. 30).

As previously discussed, this faith-based document stresses that homosexuality is 'intrinsically disordered.' Although Callaghan (2014a) contends that Canadian Catholic schools "...have a constitutionally protected mandate to offer educational policy and curriculum in keeping with Catholic canonical law, or doctrine..." (p. 28), these privileges cannot veto the rights of GSRMs, which are enshrined in Canadian common law and the *Charter*. Overall, Callaghan's research "...points to the systemic and active, school board-approved and church-sanctioned homophobia occurring in publicly-funded Canadian Catholic schools" (p. 31).

Since heteronormative curricular decisions are determined by filtering content through a Catholic lens, Callaghan (2015) reasons that Catholic education "...unexpectedly invites new acts of resistance" (p. 23) by causing students, parents, and teachers to "...ask pointed policy questions or agitate for curriculum reform" (Callaghan, 2009, p. 2). Following this line of thought, this study is concerned to investigate whether publicly-funded Ontario Catholic school GSAs are operating

as counter-hegemonic sites whereby students are contesting the heteronormative limits imposed by religious doctrine (Fraser, 1990). In sum, rather than examining how these clubs cultivate safer and more supportive spaces for GSRMs in Catholic educational settings (see Liboro et al., 2015) or focusing on how GSAs provide education for the ‘Other’ (see Kumashiro, 2002), my study explores the extent to which newly-legislated GSAs are opportune places to discuss and learn about queer and trans topics, and whether or not they function as counter-hegemonic sites where students actively challenge hetero/cisnormative systems of oppression and privileging.

Gay-Straight Alliances: Benefits and Resistance

GSAs are school-based groups that cultivate vital support for GSRM youth (Kosciw et al., 2016; Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Mussman, 2011; St. John et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2011). Large-scale American and Canadian school surveys have found that GSAs help foster safer and more positive school climates for GSRM students (Kosciw et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2011), with students believing that their schools are less homophobic when GSAs are present (Taylor et al., 2011). In schools with GSAs, GSRM students hear fewer homophobic comments; indicate that their schools are more supportive of GSRMs; feel safer at school; experience less victimization; are able to identify more supportive teachers; experience a greater sense of belonging; and are more likely to disclose their sexual orientation and/or gender identity with some or all of their peers (Kosciw et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2014; Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010; Taylor et al., 2011). In Ontario, Canada, St. John et al. (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with nine youth from six high schools, five GSA advisors from five different high schools, and one key informant to examine the impact of GSAs in the Waterloo region. Their research revealed that GSAs help youth develop rewarding relationships with their clubmates and local community members (see also Conway & Crawford-Fisher, 2007). This

finding was also evident in Mayberry, Chenneville, and Currie's (2011) study where they found that community development was "...the foundation on which activist projects could be developed" (p. 324).

Although GSAs were originally formed to bolster safety and support for GSRM youth (see Liboro et al., 2015), their mandate has moved away from simply protecting GSRM youth (i.e., education for the 'Other') to providing education about the 'Other' and education that is critical of privileging and 'Othering' (Kumarshiro, 2002; see also Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Schindel, 2005, 2008); thus, their roles have "...expanded to include advocacy, education, and awareness" (Graybill et al., 2015, p. 437). By opening up these clubs to straight and/or cisgender folks, GSAs have evolved to include educational and activist-based activities and goals (Lipkin, 1999; see also Conway & Crawford-Fisher, 2007). Although GSAs are more common today, these groups continue to encounter opposition from parents, religious leaders, school administrators, teachers, and even students (see Callaghan, 2012; Elliott, 2016; Grace & Wells, 2015; Herriot, 2011; Lapointe, 2012; Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Martino, 2014; McEntarfer, 2011; Steck & Perry, 2016; Watson, Varjas, Meyers, & Graybill, 2010; Wegwert, 2014). It is important to note that this opposition is primarily from adults, rather than students (Herriot, 2011; see also MacDougall & Clarke, 2012; McEntarfer, 2011), and it mainly centers around GSA members' work in the wider school community (Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011). For example, "[s]chool personnel, having established a GSA for the purpose of student safety, often place boundaries around GSA activities that aim to challenge heteronormative school environments" (Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012, p. 58). Often, anti-homophobic initiatives, which simply convey that sexual minorities should not be discriminated against, are supported, but anti-

heteronormative initiatives are resisted and rejected, as Mayberry, Chenneville, and Currie (2011) relate:

...school-wide GSA educational initiatives envisioned by members (e.g., classroom surveys and discussions on LGBT issues) were not strongly supported by school principals, whereas the club's right to exist, to provide emotional and physical safety to its members, and to participate in the tranquil national Day of Silence was strongly supported (p. 333).

Thus, examining the extent to which GSAs engage in anti-hetero/cisnormative education and activism, and the triumphs and challenges associated with any of this work is an extremely significant contribution this dissertation will be making to the field.

Gay-Straight Alliances: Education and Activism

Some studies have documented the queer educative role of GSAs in schools (Elliott, 2015; Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Network, 2007; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Lapointe, 2014, 2015, 2016a/b; Mayo, 2013a/b, 2015), demonstrating how youth are working together to challenge heterosexism and heteronormativity (Garcia-Alonso, 2004; Lapointe, 2014, 2015, 2016a; Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Mayo, 2013a), but few have investigated GSA's trans-educational and activist function in schools (Schindel, 2005, 2008). To the best of my knowledge, no published studies exist on GSA members' anti-cisnormative educative and activist work in publicly-funded Ontario secular and Catholic high schools. Likewise, the queer pedagogical agenda and role of GSAs has been well documented within American contexts (Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012; Elliott, 2015; Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Mayo, 2013a/b, 2015), but few Canadian studies have explored how these groups promote and provide anti-heteronormative education (see Lapointe, 2014, 2015).

Mayo's (2013a) ethnographic study details the impact of an American GSA advisor's use of critical pedagogy. To gather data, Mayo observed and participated in club meetings and completed eight semi-structured interviews with GSA members and their advisor. Mayo's scholarship examines how club members' promoted and partook in several events that encouraged their peers to examine their complicity in sexual-based oppression and refrain from acting unjustly (e.g., using homophobic language). Two prominent ways in which the GSA promoted their anti-heteronormative agenda were participating in the *Think Before You Speak Campaign* and *The National Day of Silence*. During mandatory grade nine homeroom sessions, GSA members discussed the *Think Before You Speak Campaign*, asked students to reflect on their language practices and its impacts, and challenged their peers to speak in non-oppressive ways. GSA members also recruited 1/3 of the school to participate in *The National Day of Silence*, a day where people remain silent to raise awareness of GSRM marginalization in society. This event, when supported and contextualized by school personnel, can help problematize heterosexual privilege (Wegwert, 2014). GSA members also participated in a panel discussion at a local university where they fielded questions from future teachers about the importance of supporting GSAs. During this event, club members reminded future teachers that they will surely have queer students in their classes; this lesson prompted educators to check heteronormative assumptions.

Mayo's (2015) subsequent work provides an in-depth exploration of the educative role of GSAs. Drawing on findings from the same ethnographic study on GSA functioning (Mayo, 2013a), Mayo (2015) describes how GSA members reviewed video clips from shows hosted by queer icons, such as Rachel Maddow, Wanda Sykes, and Ellen DeGeneres. These videos among others (e.g., video clips from the movie, *Milk*) helped promote discussions on marriage equality, and historical figures (e.g., Harvey Milk) and events (e.g., Stonewall). Mayo argued that:

These opportunities signaled to students that the GSA was an inclusive space where it was safe to explore knowledge that was unavailable or off-limits to them in other school settings. Acquisition of LGBT-focused information from history and current events signaled to students that a different kind of pedagogy was taking place at GSA meeting; one that tapped into their realm of interest and, for some, their lived experience as Other (p. 86).

Overall, Mayo's (2013a, 2015) study revealed how the GSA provided a critical space to participate in queer conversations and lobby for social change. In other words, it was a key site for "...engaged learning and activism" (Mayo, 2013a, p. 273). Similar to Mayo's (2013a, 2015) empirical work, my study explores the educative and activist influence of GSAs, but within a Canadian context. It details GSA members' initiatives and their impact from their vantage point. Unlike Mayo's investigation, my study generates knowledge on the anti-heteronormative educational and activist function of GSAs in publicly-funded Catholic high schools. It also develops further understandings about the trans-affirmative and anti-cisnormative influence of Canadian GSAs.

Wegwert's (2014) empirical work outlines challenges experienced by one American high school GSA in relation to their *National Day of Silence* initiative. In this qualitative study, where data were collected through observations, discussions, and interviews, administrators and educators did not support or contextualize the club's planned event, and they also failed to address anti-gay behaviours that surfaced in response to the club's *The National Day of Silence* initiative. Wegwert's findings reveal how heteronormative hegemony was reinforced when the administration and teachers failed to endorse and promote *The Day of Silence*. Following suit, my study generates further knowledge on the extent to which administrators and educators are

regulating GSA members' anti-hetero/cisnormative efforts (Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011) and whether school employees are aiding GSA members, thereby bolstering the club's success in the larger school community (Liboro et al., 2015). My study pays particular attention to unearthing whether the queer educative and activist efforts of GSA members are muffled or restricted in two publicly-funded Ontario Catholic high schools.

Elliott's (2016) ethnographic study in a large American high school has generated significant knowledge on the educative and activist influence of GSAs. Over a period of 18 months during 2007-2008, data were collected through a variety of means, such as participant observation, 15 in-depth student interviews, and 30 shorter student interviews, to investigate "...the work of a group of young activists as they sought to challenge institutional and cultural homophobia and gender normativity at their school..." (p. 49). Elliott's findings detail the club's anti-heteronormative and anti-cisnormative work at their school. It explores how GSA members worked to combat institutionalized hetero/cissexism by facilitating peer education presentations in grade nine health classes, and establishing a single stall, gender neutral washroom. By offering anti-heteronormative education to their peers, GSA members "...used the formal structures and practices of the school in order to transform it" (p. 58). However, through the reliance on 'coming out' testimonials, much like Mayo's (2013a) research, the school "...shifted the burden of creating cultural change to the most marginalized students" (Elliott, 2016, p. 59). Moreover, responsibility was left to the 'Other' to promote and deliver queer and trans-informed education (Kumashiro, 2002). GSA members also advocated for an alternative washroom to the standard male- and female-designated facilities. In doing so, they affirmed "...gender multiplicity and challenged the assumed link between biology and identity" (p. 56). Their advocacy efforts led the administration to approve of a single occupancy gender neutral washroom, which was attached to the nurse's

office. Due to safety concerns, GSA members only advertised the washroom through word of mouth. My study builds on Elliott's work by examining how GSA members lobbied for and were granted a multi-stall, all gender washroom at their publicly-funded Canadian secular school. The particularities associated with their activist work are explored and their perspectives on how others should learn about the washroom are detailed. Seeing how multi-stall all gender washrooms are a relatively new phenomenon in publicly-funded Ontario secondary schools, my study produces new knowledge on how GSA members' anti-cisnormative work is impacting structural change (Elliott, 2016; Schindel, 2005, 2008).

Through conducting a two-year qualitative case study, where 20 American educational stakeholders were interviewed (i.e., 12 student members, four advisors, two principals, and two district administrators), Mayberry, Chenneville, and Currie (2011) explored the triumphs and challenges associated with GSA functioning in relation to subverting anti-gay school environments. These scholars were particularly "...interested in better understanding the role GSAs play, and are restricted from playing in LGBT school reform" (p. 315). GSA members in this study participated in *The National Day of Silence* along with raising awareness of the group by attending Club Day and selling GSA shirts to students and staff. Although Mayberry, Chenneville, and Currie (2011) found that club activities empowered youth to address homophobia, GSA members and advisors "...desire[d] to become more proactive in the larger school setting and to engage other students and teachers in educational initiatives (p. 327) – a finding evident in Mayo (2013a, 2015), Elliott (2016), Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, and Laub (2009) and Lapointe's (2014, 2015) studies. GSA members and advisors believed that the group should not be the only place at school where the exploration of queer topics was permitted or encouraged. As such, they wanted to run anti-heteronormative initiatives in the wider school

community. For example, one student thought a school wide assembly would be a great idea, but they believed that parents would object to it:

GSA members and their advisors share the desire to move beyond the club's isolation and become more fully integrated and visible in the school community by initiating educational projects that extend beyond "speaking out" when confronted with antigay expressions. They envision the ways in which GSAs could play a more substantive role in developing a new set of school norms and rules that inhibit anti-gay expressions, illuminate the detrimental effects of homophobic remarks, and encourage educators to challenge unacceptable student behaviour (p. 328).

My study extends on Mayberry, Chenneville, and Currie's (2011) inquiry by examining how one public secular school GSA and one public Catholic school GSA planned, organized, and executed mandatory school-wide assemblies. In addition, since Mayberry, Chenneville, and Currie's study did not include trans and gender diverse participants nor did they investigate the anti-cisnormative functioning of high school GSAs, my study describes how gender minority GSA members are problematizing cissexist regimes through their educative and activist work.

Within a Canadian context, Kitchen and Bellini's (2013) online survey research with 30 GSA advisors found that the "...activities of the clubs, beyond building a supportive and safe environment through conversation, tended towards educational activities for members (75%), educational outreach at school (75%), and advocacy events at school (85%)" (p. 68). These results suggest that the primary function of many Canadian GSAs is to provide education and awareness, and to engage in political action. Unfortunately, Kitchen and Bellini's (2013) research did not describe the specific educative and activist work of GSAs or analyze its impacts in school communities. Expanding on Kitchen and Bellini's (2013) findings where three-quarters of GSAs

provided educational outreach (e.g., assemblies, presentations, etc.), but detailed accounts of their work were missing, this study provides an in-depth account of the educative function of four GSAs from the vantage point of student members and club advisors. It pays particular attention to the meaning participants associate with their school-wide work.

When GSAs focus on education and advocacy they provide youth with important opportunities to interrogate stereotypes, address misunderstandings, rethink prejudicial attitudes and beliefs, share stories of GSRM-based marginalization, and address inequities (Conway & Crawford-Fisher, 2007; Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012; Elliott, 2016; Lapointe, 2014, 2015, 2016a/b; Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Mayo, 2013a/b, 2015; Schindel, 2005, 2008). Currie, Mayberry, and Chenneville's (2012) two-year qualitative investigation found that club members were empowered to address homophobic remarks, substantiating McEntarfer's (2011) claim that GSAs enable youth to redirect power imbalances and provoke social change. Further, GSAs can politicize sexual and gender minority issues, and help students recognize that GSRM prejudice and discrimination are public issues (Mayberry, 2007). In terms of influencing school reform, research has found that GSA participation inspires youth to confront injustice and lobby for social change (Conway & Crawford-Fisher, 2007; Currie et al., 2012; Elliott, 2015; Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, 2009; Lapointe, 2015, 2016a; Mayo, 2013a/b, 2015; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009; Schindel, 2008; Wegwert, 2014). GSAs may adopt an activist agenda when club members spearhead political initiatives/events (e.g., advocating for gender neutral or all gender washrooms; participating in *The National Day of Silence*; planning and organizing events for International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia, etc.) (Elliott, 2016; Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Mayo, 2013a, 2015; Miceli, 2005; Schindel, 2005, 2008; Wegwert, 2014).

Schindel's (2008) two-year qualitative study, where data were collected via field notes, observations, youth interviews, and written documents, paid particular attention to how:

...youth are creating spaces to educate school administrators and fellow students about options for thinking beyond the binary and about how people live beyond the binary. Their efforts entail both practical options from transgender youth in schools, such as gender-neutral bathrooms and changing pronouns, as well as dialogue, exercises, and strategies for expanding the way people conceptualize gender and sexuality (p. 65).

Schindel's research captured how GSA members' trans-informed work involved discussing what rights trans and gender diverse students should have at schools (e.g., trans students should be referred to by one's affirmed/chosen name and pronouns; trans students should have access to washrooms that correspond with their gender identity; trans students should have access to locker rooms that correspond with their gender identity, etc.). Following Schindel's (2008) assertion that, "...little attention has been paid to the emerging activism and education surrounding gender identity issues within youth communities" (p. 58), my study spotlights GSRM students' instrumental role in undermining cisnormativity – a crucial, but challenging topic for GSA members to address as a part of their activist efforts (Schindel, 2005, 2008). To the best of my knowledge, there are no published Canadian studies which examine GSA members' anti-cisnormative educative and activist work (e.g., discussions and advocacy around gender diversity, pronouns, all gender washrooms, etc.); as such, my inquiry fills important empirical gaps on the anti-hegemonic role Canadian GSAs may play in relation to gender diversity.

Following the aforementioned scholars who conduct research on GSAs, my study stresses how GSRM youth are coming together "...to move beyond the club's isolation and become more

fully integrated and visible in the school community by initiating educational projects that extend beyond ‘speaking out’ when confronted with antigay expressions” (Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011, p. 328). The extent to which GSA members are spearheading and engaging in anti-hetero/cisnormative education and lobbying for educational reform is at the heart of this inquiry, which is a much-needed contribution to the field of GSAs and student activism, particularly within a Canadian context and within publicly-funded Catholic high schools (Liboro et al., 2015; Grace & Wells, 2015).

Gay-Straight Alliance Development in Religious Postsecondary Schools

Since there are limited empirical studies on GSA formation and functioning in Catholic secondary schools, this section examines how GSAs came to be official school-based clubs in Catholic postsecondary schools, providing themes that may extend to Ontario Catholic school contexts. Miceli's (2009) mixed methods study (i.e., 158 surveys and four interviews) examined the differences in campus climate for Catholic and secular postsecondary schools. Results revealed that pupils who attended Catholic institutions had fewer resources, such as GSAs, compared with those who went to non-religious universities and colleges. GSAs may be explicitly prohibited or resisted in faith-based education, as was the case in McEntarfer's (2011) collective case study on GSA formation in three religious colleges. Through interviewing current and former GSA affiliates (i.e., members, advisors, etc.), McEntarfer found that some staff members did not support GSAs at their small Catholic college because they feared they would lose their jobs. This study signposted how postsecondary religious schools resisted GSA formation because they believed students, parents, donors, and alumni would object to their development; they also feared that students would organize around issues that are inconsistent with fundamental Church teachings (e.g., marriage equality). As a result of these impositions, students employed a myriad

of approaches to establish GSAs at their schools. These tactics are documented below to provide some insight into how Ontario Catholic school GSA members may be navigating religiously-sanctioned homophobia (see Callaghan, 2012, 2014a, 2016a).

McEntarfer (2011) identified four approaches exercised by students who encountered GSA opposition: 1) collaborative – GSA members worked with administration; 2) conciliatory – students accepted limitations placed on them; 3) assertive – club members actively and publicly worked against discriminatory limitations; and 4) underground/subversive – students resisted limitations in less public ways. When GSAs were restricted, two GSAs in McEntarfer's inquiry formed in secret, organized their meetings via Facebook, and developed inconspicuous ways of advertising events/activities and distributing information. These members relied on social media for club-related activity after administrative directives limited their functioning. This underground work helped students plan and organize activities, and solidify their club status at school. In McEntarfer's study, all three GSAs made compromises to ensure their survival, which included accepting impositions on advertising, publicity, and language use. Unfortunately, succumbing to these limitations make GSAs invisible (Griffin et al., 2004; McEntarfer, 2011), and reinforce negative discourses about sexual minorities (McEntarfer, 2011). For example, at one of the colleges, students were not permitted to draw rainbows or use the words 'pride,' 'gay' or 'lesbian' in their club name or advertisements, which parallel the restrictions imposed at SJCSS in Ontario, Canada (see Niblett & Oraa, 2014; see also Clarke & MacDougall, 2012). Name restrictions are incredibly problematic according to Clarke and MacDougall (2012) since the GSA brand communicates the nature of the club, validates its existence in relation to other school-sanctioned groups, and symbolizes queer affirmation. The homophobic limits imposed by religious postsecondary institutions and the reactive strategies employed by students are useful in making

sense of the form and function of newly-legislated GSAs in publicly-funded Ontario Catholic high schools. My investigation fills significant empirical gaps on newly-formed GSAs in faith-based settings insomuch that it explores "...how student activists, working with and against other social actors, endeavor to build...their schools in line with their political beliefs" (Collin, 2013, p. 23).

GSA Functioning in Publicly-Funded Canadian Catholic High Schools

Liboro et al.'s (2015) qualitative study, where semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 Catholic school board stakeholders (i.e., one former and two current students, two teachers, a school administrator, two school board trustees, and two service providers), was designed "...to determine if strategies and programs deemed successful for supporting LGBT students in public, secular schools in the United States could also be successful in supporting LGBT students in publicly funded Canadian Catholic schools" (p. 158). This study, like much research on GSAs, focused on the safety and support that GSAs offer GSRMs. Liboro et al.'s findings reveal how, through group participation, GSRM youth could find acceptance and express their feelings. The GSA's efforts focused on anti-homophobic initiatives that aimed to foster a climate that bolstered tolerance and respect for sexual minorities through a "Kindness Matters" campaign (p. 168). The GSA spearheaded this initiative to "...promote a humane value that many Catholics espouse" (p. 168). Rather than prompting educational stakeholders to interrogate heterosexual privilege and its impacts in the education system, the objective of this campaign was to simply be kind to the 'Other.' The GSA also hosted a panel discussion for "Anti-Homophobia Day" (p. 168), but the researchers did not outline what this entailed or discuss its impact. My study picks up where this inquiry left off by generating further knowledge on the anti-heteronormative educative and activist role of GSAs in publicly-funded Ontario Catholic high schools. Following Liboro et al.'s (2015) recommendation that "...future research can expand on the lessons learned from this study by

utilizing larger or rural participation, and possibly concurrent, multiple sites...” (p. 177), my study purposefully includes a focus on two Catholic school GSAs – one of which is rural. I also included straight and/or cisgender participants to document their involvement in these clubs.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated how there is little knowledge and empirical work that examines the anti-hetero/cisnormative educative and activist functioning of GSAs in publicly-funded Ontario secular and Catholic secondary schools. It spotlighted how there is a particular need to investigate the extent to which GSA members are engaging in trans-informed initiatives in both education systems, and it highlighted a significant knowledge gap concerning the development of GSAs and their anti-heteronormative role in Ontario Catholic high schools. First, since formal education is underpinned by hetero/cisnormative assumptions and practices, this chapter highlighted how GSAs have become pivotal sites to share and learn about queer and trans topics, and lobby for educational reform. Thereafter, it examined how Callaghan’s queer scholarship, which documents sexual minorities’ experiences with ‘holy homophobia’ in Catholic school settings, provides an impetus for the exploring the extent to which GSAs are disrupting the heteronormative limits of Catholic education. Next, it provided an overview of relevant literature involving club formation and functioning in a variety of contexts, stressing how GSAs have evolved to occupy anti-hegemonic educative and activist roles in school communities. Lastly, this chapter provided an overview of how students who attended faith-based postsecondary schools mitigated homophobic sanctions imposed on their GSAs. This research was useful in making sense of how Ontario Catholic school students may be navigating and responding to similar restrictions that are grounded in religious freedom. Finally, this review ended by examining

findings from the only known study on the development and functioning of a singular GSA in an Ontario Catholic school context.

Chapter Three: Methodology, Research Design, and Methods

In this chapter, I provide justification for my methodology, research design, and data collection methods. First, I explore why qualitative methodology is commensurable with the nature and purpose of a study that aims to generate knowledge about the educative and activist influence of GSAs in publicly-funded Ontario secular and Catholic high schools. Next, I outline the research design and discuss my reasoning for selecting a case study approach. Moreover, I draw on the insights of Stake (2005) and Patton (2002) to ground my conceptualization of a case study on GSAs. Thereafter, I describe how the four sites (i.e., two Ontario public secular school GSAs and two Ontario public Catholic school GSAs), which constitute this multi-sited case study, were identified and recruited. I then explain how consent was (continuously) obtained from GSA members before I discuss how students and staff were invited to complete semi-structured interviews and/or diaries. In this chapter, I also provide an overview of each of the four GSA sites and present limited demographic information on each participant (e.g., site location, sexual orientation, and gender identity). Lastly, the specific data collection methods (i.e., participant observation, semi-structured interviews and diaries, and visual materials and documents) are outlined, and the analytic strategies that were employed to make sense of the data are discussed. More specifically, these sense-making strategies involved inductive analysis as informed by queer and trans theoretical frameworks.

The Relevance of Qualitative Methodology for this Study

Qualitative methodology was selected for this study because it provides a foundation for producing in-depth understandings and detailed accounts of a small number of people or cases (Patton, 2002; see also Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Since qualitative methodology “...seek[s] answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2005, p. 10), it is commensurable with my study, which generates new knowledge about the role and function of GSAs in Ontario secondary schools from the perspectives of GSA members and advisors. By adopting a people-oriented methodology (Patton, 2002) that offers a “...subjective, interpretive approach to the study of human group life” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 2), I was able to examine how GSAs are understood and experienced by students and educators (Patton, 2002).

Sexuality studies, such as those that involve GSAs or GSRM youth, focus on historical and political questions that have “...long been closely intertwined with qualitative research” (Gamson, 2000, p. 348). Investigating the perspectives and experiences of sexual minorities via qualitative methods is commonplace because they “...appear to be less objectifying of their [participants], to be more concerned with cultural and political meaning creation, and to make more room for voices and experiences that have been suppressed” (Gamson, 2000, p. 347; see also Browne & Nash, 2010). Similarly, Stryker (2006) communicates that qualitative methodology is well-suited for exploring trans phenomenon because it legitimizes trans experiences and valorizes the perspectives of trans folks:

Transgender studies considers the embodied experience of the speaking subject, who claims constative knowledge of the referent topic, to be a proper – indeed essential - component of the analysis of transgender phenomena; experiential knowledge is as legitimate as other, supposedly more “objective” forms of knowledge, and is in fact necessary for understanding the political dynamics of the situation being analyzed (Stryker, 2006, p. 12).

Because qualitative research offers “...a place for those who otherwise tend to be marginalized, disenfranchised, and excluded in the process” (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 14), this study adopts

queer and trans-informed qualitative approaches to align ontological, epistemological, and methodological considerations that are concerned to foreground the lived experiences and perspectives of GSRM youth in schools (Browne & Nash, 2010).

Queer and trans-informed ethics. In Pillow's (2003) discussion about “the politics of the gaze” (p. 176), researchers are encouraged to recognize and mitigate their privileged position in research by troubling issues of representation, interpretation, power, and authority. The choices and actions I engaged in throughout this study reflected a commitment to “reflexivities of discomfort” (Pillow, 2003, p. 175), where the perspectives and experiences of GSA members and advisors took precedence over my assumptions and ideas about what it is like to be a queer, trans, and/or gender diverse student, and how GSAs function in Ontario public secular and Catholic schools. By acknowledging and working to lessen my presumed authority as a researcher, I drew on the insights of Warner (2004) who writes:

...queer research methodology should be reflexively aware of the way it constitutes the object it investigates. The subject-object dichotomy presumed in many positivist research methods eludes the constitutive nature of knowledge production. When researchers are forced to acknowledge their role in knowledge production, we are already towards more equitable research (p. 334).

Following Pillow (2003) and Warner (2004), I worked *with* GSA members and advisors, rather than conducted a study *on* participants. In doing so, I minimized voyeuristic aspects of fieldwork by refusing to gaze upon queer, trans, and gender diverse people since this practice objectifies the 'Other' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Rather, I opted to observe and *participate* in club discussions and events – where appropriate – and assist where I was needed (e.g., helping GSA members clean up after an assembly, voicing personal understandings about Two-Spirit ways of being during a

group discussion, referring students to a local social group for GSRM youth, listening to students who were experiencing issues related to their transition, etc.). Instead of problematically swooping in to gather information about GSAs and their functioning in schools for my sole benefit (i.e., completing this dissertation), I ensured that my presence and actions were helpful on a group and individual level.

Research Design

Case study. Qualitative research encompasses a variety of research designs, such as a case study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), “The case study approach to qualitative analysis constitutes a specific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data...it represents an analysis *process*. The purpose is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest” (p. 447). Likewise, Stake (2005) contends that, “A case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (p. 444). Following Patton (2002) and Stake (2005), I conceptualize a case study as a way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data, and producing a case.

Since those who facilitate case studies can adopt a wide range of methods, including quantitative measures (Patton, 2002), “...case study is defined by interest in an individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used” (Stake, 2005, p. 443). Here, Stake elaborates that, rather than a methodological choice, a case study involves selecting a phenomenon to study. Following this line of thought, my primary motivation for adopting this research design was to “...study *the case*” (p. 443). What constitutes a case can range from individuals, groups, organizations, and programs (Patton, 2002). This qualitative, multi-sited case study produces in-depth knowledge about GSAs (i.e., the case) in publicly-funded Ontario secular and Catholic high schools. The overarching case of GSAs is comprised of four distinct GSA groups located across four school sites, which are

“...represented and understood as an idiosyncratic manifestation of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 450).

As advocated by Patton (2002), particular attention was paid to bounding the case by providing thick and rich description about the educative and activist role and function of each of the four GSAs in this multi-sited case study. Following Stake (2005), I employ an intrinsic, multi-sited case study design, where the “...case itself is of interest” (p. 445), to understand the particularities of GSAs across four schools (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005). Since it is not possible to understand everything about a case (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005), nor is it desirable to reproduce previous findings, I chose to focus on the educative and activist role and function of GSAs in publicly-funded Ontario secular and Catholic high schools to fill significant empirical gaps in the field (see Grace & Wells, 2015; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Lapointe, 2014, 2015; Liboro et al., 2015).

Overall, a case study approach is commensurable with the purpose of this investigation because it is concerned with providing “...depth, detail, and individual meaning” (Patton, 2002, p. 16) on the roles and function of individual GSAs in publicly funded Ontario secondary schools. Employing a qualitative case study on GSAs provided a platform to capture the subjective meaning that club members and advisors bring to their lived experiences (Patton, 2002). Moreover, by adopting this research design the perspectives, experiences, and “...stories of those ‘living the case’ [were] teased out” (Stake, 2005, p. 445).

In terms of executing a case study, Stake (2005) insists that researchers must tend to the following responsibilities:

- a. Bounding the case, conceptualizing the object of study;

- b. Selecting phenomenon, themes, or issues (i.e., the research questions to emphasize);
- c. Seeking patterns of data to develop the issues;
- d. Triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation;
- e. Selecting alternative interpretations to pursue; and
- f. Developing assertions or generalizations about the case (p. 459-460).

Here, Stake insists that researchers must first bound the case (i.e., decide what the case is and determine its parameters), then specify the research questions that guide the study, emphasize the case's particularities, look for and determine patterns within multiple data sets, interpret the findings, and lastly, provide robust case study conclusions. In terms of last three responsibilities outlined by Stake (i.e., triangulation, interpretation, and assertions), qualitative case study researchers are tasked with reviewing and interpreting a variety of data sources to determine patterns, analyze findings, and develop conclusions (Patton, 2002). Conducting a variety of data collection methods (e.g., interviews, observations, documents, etc.) enables the case's particularities to be documented and triangulated, setting the stage for data interpretation, as Stake (2005) explains:

...we want to learn what the selected case does – its activity, its functioning. We will observe what we can, ask others for their observations, and gather artifacts of that functioning...describing and interpreting these activities constitutes a large part of many case studies. These activities are expected to be influenced by contexts, so contexts need to be described... (p. 452).

This study was built upon the descriptive data that were collected through conducting semi-structured interviews, reviewing students' diaries, observing GSA-related activities and events,

and collecting and examining club artifacts at each of the four school sites. Altogether these methods elicited the raw data that were examined and analyzed (Patton, 2002). By utilizing multiple methods, I generated detailed accounts of club functioning (e.g., direct quotations) for each GSA, which set the stage for interpretation - "...attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order on an unruly but surely patterned world" (Patton, 2002, p. 480) - to be made about its meaning and significance (Patton, 2002).

Recruitment

To acquire GSAs, an email invitation to participate in the study was sent to high school principals in three school boards in Southwestern Ontario – one public secular and two public Catholic – by district employees, and interested schools were asked to reply to my email. In the public secular board, the email was initially sent to two principals who worked in schools where there was an active GSA that engaged in school-wide educative and activist work. I became aware of these group's efforts through word of mouth. From these two schools, one administrator responded positively to my invitation and one failed to reply. Since one school did not respond, the board agreed to embed the study information in their monthly newsletter to principals. The second public secular school confirmed their participation shortly after the newsletter was published. Once the first Catholic board approved of my study, a district employee sent my email to one school based on their previous club achievements and leadership in the board. The board employee also believed that this school would be the only one interested in participating. They mistakenly believed that I only needed one Catholic school GSA for this study. After this misunderstanding was clarified, the email was sent to another school in this board, but no response

was received. After this recruitment hiccup, I devoted more energy to recruiting a school in another Catholic board. Based on my knowledge of schools that had active GSAs and from reading media accounts of their work, I asked the board to send my email to two schools. A board employee then sent my email invitation to the principals at these two schools. As it turned out, one of the schools did not have a club, which was surprising since there was quite a bit of media coverage on their group activities the previous year, and the other school did not reply to the invitation. After further consultation, the district employee identified another school that was a known leader in the board unbeknownst to me. I came to understand that the club at this school was considered the most advanced in this Catholic board. The board member then sent my email invitation to the principal at this school; they promptly responded and voiced that they were interested in participating in the study. Altogether, two schools from one public secular school board, and two schools from two different public Catholic school boards confirmed their interest in participating in the study. I visited the principal at the first public secular school to discuss the study, but did not do so with the second principal in the secular system. The principal at the second public secular school approved of the study and elected not to meet with me. They forwarded my email to the GSA advisor, who contacted me shortly after to arrange a date for me to meet the group and discuss the study. I spoke with the first Catholic school principal at length on the phone and met with the second Catholic school principal before I visited GSA members at these schools to inform them of the study.

Informed consent. I visited each of the four GSAs to inform members and advisors about the nature of the study, distribute Letters of Information (LOI) and consent forms, and invite club members and advisors to participate in the study. In order to observe and participate in GSA meetings all student members at a particular school had to provide informed consent. Before I

could commence participant observation, consent had to be obtained from every GSA member. Each GSA member and advisor - longstanding or new - had the right to decide whether or not they wanted to participate in the study (i.e., approved of my presence at and participation in club meetings and events). Interested youth were asked to complete and return a consent form (Appendix B). GSA members, 18 years of age or older, were asked to indicate if they: a) agreed with my presence at and participation in GSA meetings/events; b) desired to be interviewed; and c) approved of having their interview audio-recorded. All participants except for one, agreed to have their interview audio-recorded. GSA members could also elect to complete bi/weekly online semi-structured diaries and submit them via their personal email. Students under the age of 18 were required to have their guardian(s) sign a letter of assent, which authorized their participation in the study. If students had not disclosed their GSRM status to their guardian(s) and were unable or unwilling to 'out' themselves due to safety concerns, they were not required to receive permission from their guardian(s) to participate in the study. Instead, they were permitted to sign a waiver form and consent to their own participation. This clause was approved the Western University Ethics Review Board, as well as the three school boards. GSA advisors were also invited to complete a semi-structured interview. Those who were interested in participating were asked to complete a consent form, which can also be found in Appendix B.

Participants were not compensated for their participation in the study; however, the four GSAs were offered an *Equity and Inclusive Education Resource Kit for Ontario High Schools* (EGALE Canada, 2011), valued at approximately \$100. The two public secular schools enthusiastically accepted the resource and the two Catholic schools did not. One Catholic board wanted to consult with staff to identify another resource, but they never provided an alternate suggestion.

Ongoing consent. Each student had multiple opportunities to voice whether they wanted me to attend and participate in club meetings. When I first visited each GSA to provide members with an overview of the study and distribute LOI and consent forms, I made it clear that every student had the right to veto my presence in *their* club. Additionally, at the beginning of each club meeting, I provided a short overview of the study and asked GSA members to indicate whether they still approved of my presence and participation in the club. To voice their decision, each youth was asked to write on a piece of paper: 1) YES - if they consented; or 2) NO - if they dissented. When students were indicating their response, I left the meeting room and remained outside until GSA advisors informed me of the results. Student responses were gathered by the GSA advisor, who then reviewed their ballots to determine if I could return to the room and resume data collection at the group level. Once youth's responses were tabulated and it was determined that no one opposed of my presence, I was invited back into the room. No student or staff member ever objected to my presence, but if they had chosen to withdraw consent - at any time, for any reason - I would have immediately left the school site, cancelled all future visitations, and refrained from collecting further data at GSA meetings/events. However, I would have continued to conduct individual interviews with consenting GSA members and advisors, and collect semi-structured diaries from consenting youth. Before each semi-structured interview, I reminded everyone of their participant rights. For example, I explained that they did not have to answer any of my questions, and that they had the right to walk out of the interview or withdraw from the study at any time.

School Sites

This inquiry examines the anti-hetero/cisnormative educative and activist functioning of GSAs at four publicly-funded Ontario high schools – two public secular schools and two public

Catholic schools. The two public secular school groups were called GSAs, and the two public Catholic school groups were referred to by other names (i.e., alternative acronyms). The first public secular school (i.e., site one) was unhappy with the name, GSA, and opted to change it the following year, but the second public secular school (i.e., site three) seemed content with their club name. Students at the first Catholic school (i.e., site two) liked their club name, whereas students at the second Catholic school (i.e., site four) wanted their club to be called a GSA.

Site one – Village High. The first public school GSA was situated in a large, urban community. The principal was supportive of the group and responsive to GSRM needs and concerns. There were two educators who were responsible for advising the group - one English teacher and one Science teacher. Both advisors had limited experience supervising the club, but were learning to work with students to support their collective needs. The Science teacher, Dylan, was the primary advisor and was present more often than the second advisor throughout the duration of data collection, but both advisors occasionally missed weekly meetings due to extra/curricular obligations. The group met once a week. Club membership fluctuated from week-to-week, but there was a core group of students who regularly attended - primarily grade nines and tens. Approximately 10 chatty students attended the group each week. Youth expressed that there were few straight and/or cisgender allies who were involved with the group. Although the students enjoyed participating in group discussions, educating the wider school community, and cultivating social and structural change, during the later part of the year - when data was collected - they appeared to simply want to hang out and eat lunch. This observation deviated from how they viewed and experienced the GSA in their interviews. That is, students desired to educate the community and engaged in such efforts, but they also wanted to socialize and have fun. Over the course of the year guest speakers visited the group, and some student members were invited to

speak in a Preservice class at a local university. The club planned and organized their second school-wide assembly, and helped set in motion the development of an all gender washroom.

Site two – Blessed Sacrament. The club at the first Catholic school was formed before the passing of Bill 13 with the support and leadership of the principal and a teacher. The school was located in an urban, average-sized board. The school had multiple clubs that were designed to support GSRM youth and advance gender and sexuality understandings. The group itself was quite large, with new members still joining near the end of the school year. Like site one, this GSA also had quite a bit of younger students – largely due to purposeful advertising in an advisor’s grade nine Science classes. There were several straight and/or cisgender members, but also queer and trans students who were out in the club. There were three advisors: a Religion teacher, a Science teacher, and a Guidance Counsellor. Each of the advisors were extremely invested in the group’s success, but the Religion teacher and Guidance Counsellor were, at times, too busy to attend meetings. All three advisors worked collaboratively with GSA members and administration to promote respect for and “tolerance” of sexual and gender diversity at the school. There were two official co-presidents of the club and the Religion teacher provided mentorship to support their development as club leaders. The group often met in a community circle to share their thoughts and they used technology, such as google docs and the Smartboard, to support their work in the wider school community. In the beginning of the year the GSA met once a month, but towards the end of the year - when they were planning and organizing their allyship-themed week - they met biweekly. Admittedly, the group spent more time preparing for their school-wide assembly and accompanying initiatives than engaging in personal discussions and furthering group members’ understanding of queer and trans topics.

Site three – Sunset High. The second public school GSA was located in a large, urban school. The school itself was located in a geographical area that served individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The group met weekly and was advised by an English/French teacher who had been involved with the group for quite some time. The advisor supported students' desires to take action in the wider community and mentored them in various capacities (e.g., nominating members for awards, co-constructing an GSRM-focused Professional Development presentation for staff, etc.). The group had a handful of regular members who were mostly good friends outside of the club. With the exception of one student, club members appeared to simply want a place to hang out, chat, eat lunch, and at times, sing. All members appeared happy to have a space to meet and be themselves. The group organized a couple school-wide events, such as singing the song, *True Colours*, during an anti-bullying assembly and viewing the movie, *Kinky Boots*. Group presence was evident at school-wide activities, such as a plant sale where they hosted a BBQ to raise money for their GSA shirts, and a grade eight day where they alerted incoming students to the existence of the group. The GSA had formal positions, such as president and vice president, but the teacher advisor led meetings for the most part. All core group members attended the board's annual GSA conference, where they started developing an idea for a Professional Development (PD) session with teachers at their school. The group's PD session encouraged educators to question personal biases, think about intersectionality, and integrate queer and trans content in their educational practice.

Site four – Holy Names. The last GSA was located in a rural, Catholic school – a research gap identified by Grace and Wells (2015) and Liboro et al. (2015). Gathering data from this site was particularly important because GSRM students in rural schools hear homo/transphobic language and experience victimization to a greater extent than students in urban schools; they also

report less access to queer and trans school resources and supports, including GSAs and GSRM-affirmative educators (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). The principal was instrumental in shaping the tone of the club in the greater school community, which was at odds with what students desired. Although the club was a GSA according to students and their advisor, the group was not portrayed as one beyond the four walls where the group met. The advisor was an English teacher who was supportive, but arguably tentative; however, this was understandable since it was his first year with the club. He was well respected by students because he was eager to learn and he supported students (e.g., provided guidance to a transitioning youth). The conservative nature of the school was palpable, especially compared to the first Catholic school. The advisor communicated that, "...we are a Catholic school and there is a part of our demographic that is a fairly conservative version of Catholicism...My guess is that a lot of schools especially rural schools whether they're Catholic or not have a very conservative bent to them." GSA members communicated that the school and the town itself had racist undertones, and was not particularly accepting of sexual and gender diversity. For example, when asked to describe her club and what it is like Peyton commented, "...our main motive is inclusivity, to include everyone and it just doesn't have to be LGBT type stuff. It could be like race and culture, and things like that. Because we're in a school where acceptance is very low...we just want to change that..." The group was comprised of 5-6 members who were mostly senior students and good friends outside of the club. The group met weekly and enjoyed engaging in queer discussions during club meetings, but they yearned to share their GSRM knowledge with the wider school community. Unfortunately, GSA members' discussions were not necessarily supported or encouraged outside of group meetings. In fact, queer content was purposefully silenced at this school as influenced by Catholic doctrine and enacted by the administration.

Participants

Akin to Schindel’s (2008) and Elliot’s (2015) inquiries, youth spoke openly about their identities and experiences; they often “...transcend[ed] familiar identity labels while acknowledging that such labels may be very personally meaningful” (Schindel, 2008, p. 58), and “...exhibited complex understandings of gender, sexuality and identity” (Elliott, 2016, p. 54). Table one provides some basic demographic information for each participant. School sites and participant names are pseudonyms, and information that could be used to identify participants was withheld to maintain confidentiality.

Table 1
Summary of Participants

Participant	Role	School	Sexual Orientation	Gender	Individual Data Collection Method(s)
Taylor	Student	Blessed Sacrament	“Straight”	“Female”	Interview, 2 Diaries
Azariah	Student	Blessed Sacrament	“Straight”	“Female”	Interview, 3 Diaries
Ryan	Student	Blessed Sacrament	Label-less	“Female”	Interview; 2 Diaries
Avery	Student	Blessed Sacrament	“Homosexual”	“Male”	Interview
Parker	Student	Blessed Sacrament	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	Observation only
Sawyer	Student	Blessed Sacrament	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	Observation only
Sage	Teacher	Blessed Sacrament	“Straight”	“Female”	Interview
Micah	Teacher	Blessed Sacrament	“Straight”	“Male”	Interview
Blake	Student	Sunset High	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	2 Diaries
Skylar	Student	Sunset High	“Pansexual”	“Female”	Interview
Zion	Teacher	Sunset High	“Straight”	“Female”	Interview
Andie	Student	Village High	Label-less	“Male”	Interview; 2 Diaries
Hayden	Student	Village High	“Pansexual”	“Male” and “Genderfluid”	Interview; 4 Diaries

Sasha	Student	Village High	“Asexual”	“Male”	Interview; 4 Diaries
Reese	Student	Village High	“Pansexual” (prefers cisgender women)	“Demiboy”	Interview; 4 Diaries
Kai	Student	Village High	“Gay”	“Non-binary”	Interview; 3 Diaries
Dylan	Teacher	Village High	“Gay”	“Female”	Interview
Hunter	Student	Holy Names	“Probably Pansexual” (prefer females)	“Trans guy”	Interview; 1 Diary
Roan	Student	Holy Names	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	1 Diary
Peyton	Student	Holy Names	“Lesbian”	“Female”	Interview; 2 Diaries
Harper	Student	Holy Names	“Asexual”	“Female”	Interview
Morgan	Student	Holy Names	Questioning Asexuality	“Female”	Interview; 3 Diaries
Drew	Teacher	Holy Names	“Straight”	“Male”	Interview

Data Sources

Case studies rely on triangulation - “...a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Stake, 2005, p. 454). Through the continuous triangulation of descriptions and interpretations, multiple realities are identified, which impact the development of case studies and their findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Stake, 2005). “Qualitative findings grow out of three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). Employing multiple modes of data collection are essential since, “What details of life the researchers are unable to see for themselves is obtained by interviewing people who did see them or by finding documents recording them” (Stake, 2005, p. 453). To capture the perceptions and

experiences of GSA members and advisors, data were collected through a variety of methods, such as semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and documents (e.g., personal diaries, club posters and other artistic works, GSA emails, etc.) (Patton, 2002). By employing a combination of data collection strategies, the trustworthiness of the study's findings were enhanced since the strengths of some approaches compensated for the weakness in others (Patton, 2002).

Prior to fieldwork, a document analysis explored the current context of GSAs in publicly-funded Ontario high schools. This entailed reviewing academic and educational articles that described the tensions surrounding the development and functioning of GSAs in Ontario, Canada. A detailed policy analysis of Canadian human rights legislation and provincial anti-discrimination and safe schools' policies were also completed, resulting in the identification of various local, provincial, and national policies that prohibit GSRM-based prejudice and discrimination, and uphold students' rights to form GSAs. Following this, data in the forms of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, semi-structured diaries, and visual materials and documents were collected for a five-month period from March 2015 through July 2015. I attended each of the four GSA's scheduled meetings during this time frame, participated in discussions, activities, and events, and took strategic field notes on GSA members' actions and behaviours. All data were organized with the use of labels, which indicated the dates, places, and descriptions of who was observed or interviewed (Patton, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews. Interviews help go beyond external behaviour to explore feelings and thoughts, and the meaning people associate with specific events and experiences (Patton, 2002). The quotations that are produced through interviews are foundational to qualitative case studies because they reveal "...respondents' depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions"

(Patton, 2002, p. 21). They alert researchers to social life that is unavailable through observation alone (Stake, 2005). For this study, one-hour semi-structured interviews (i.e., a flexible interviewing method where both predetermined and probing questions are posed) with GSA members and advisors allowed participants to discuss content and events that they felt were meaningful and afforded them opportunities to “...express their own understandings in their own terms” (Patton, 2002, p. 348). These interviews provided insight into participants’ experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2002). In total, 14 youth and five educators across the four schools were interviewed: five GSA members and one advisor from site one (i.e., Village High), four students and two teachers from site two (i.e., Blessed Sacrament), one youth and one advisor from site three (i.e., Sunset High), and four club members and one educator from site four (i.e., Holy Names). Specific interview questions can be found in Appendix D. As advocated by Patton (2002), when questions were posed, particular attention was paid to hearing the exact words of interviewees and their sentiment, and understanding the context in which they situated themselves. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, and direct quotations were assembled for analysis. Every participant, except for Azariah, agreed to have their interview audio-recorded.

Tactical notes were made during the interviews to compliment the audio recordings, and post-interviews were completed to provide a structured opportunity to reflect on the process, make pertinent observations, and learn from the experience (Patton, 2002). Although member checking (i.e., offering participants the opportunity to review transcripts and make corrections), increases the trustworthiness of data (Patton, 2002), this method was not utilized for this study. To ensure that I understood the underlying intention behind participants’ words, I paraphrased participant responses during interviews and inquired about anything that was unclear. Interview transcriptions

were compared with observational notes, semi-structured diaries, club documents, and visual data to determine broad-based patterns and themes across the data (Patton, 2002). Unless stated otherwise, quotes in the following chapters are derived from participant interviews.

Although interviewing participants is a rich source of data, there are inevitably limitations to this method. For example, Patton (2002) explains that personal bias, anxiety, anger, or unawareness - to name a few - can distort participant responses. Likewise, interviewees may have issues recalling events or their specific experiences (Patton, 2002). To mitigate some of these limitations, participant observations were also employed.

Participant observation. Observations compliment interviews since they provide "...the opportunity to move beyond the selective experiences of others" (Patton, 2002, p. 264). They help capture a more comprehensive and contextual account of social life by documenting it first hand (Patton, 2002). Through observing GSA meetings and events, I became more familiar with each site and more able to understand its complexities (see Patton, 2002). Further, through observations, which "...consist of detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviors, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of the observable human experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 4), I became an insider – to a certain extent - within each GSA and refrained from objectifying and gazing upon the 'Other' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Following the Western University Ethics Review Board stipulation, I had to receive permission from each GSA member before I could observe and participant in group meetings. In some instances, it took up to four visits to collect each member's consent form so I could attend and participate in club functioning. I observed and participated in seven GSA meetings and

witnessed one club assembly at Village High over the period of March 25th through June 10th, 2015. At Blessed Sacrament, I observed one GSA assembly and participated in two GSA meetings over the span of May 7th through May 21st, 2015. Since this club met less frequently (i.e., monthly to biweekly), there were fewer meetings to attend and observe. For example, following their culminating assembly they only met once more. From April 7th to June 9th, 2015, I observed and participated in seven club meetings at Sunset High, and I attended four meetings starting on May 19th and ending on June 9th, 2015 at Holy Names.

During GSA meetings and events, participant's actions and behaviours were documented in descriptive detail (Patton, 2002). In the following quotation, Patton (2002) describes how completing detailed field notes helps researchers build their case study and interpret the raw data:

Fieldnotes...contain the ongoing data that are being collected. They consist of descriptions of what is being experienced and observed, quotations from the people observed, the observer's feelings and reactions to what is observed, and field-generated insights and interpretations. Fieldnotes are the fundamental database for constructing case studies and carrying out thematic cross-case analysis in qualitative research (p. 305).

Following the insights of Patton (2002), I took detailed field notes at each GSA meeting/event (e.g., assemblies), which included pertinent information on the meeting/event location (e.g., physical setting), people in attendance and significant interactions, and direct quotations of what was said. Through observing and scribing detailed field notes, I made "...firsthand observations of activities and interactions, sometimes engaging in those activities as a participant observer" (Patton, 2002, p. 4). Since contemporary observation-based research acknowledges researcher and

participant interactions as a site for research collaboration (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011) and researchers can assume active participatory roles in study settings (Patton, 2002), I adopted situational community membership roles, which enabled power to be shared (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011; see also Browne & Nash, 2010; Warner, 2004). I acted as a participant in group discussions, activities, and planned events, taking on a membership role to learn *with* and *from* youth. Since it was awkward and arguably inappropriate to jot down notes in some instances (e.g., one-on-one conversations or personal topics), after each GSA meeting or event, I promptly audio-recorded my observations to build a rich account of what I had witnessed. The audio-recorded observations were transcribed along with semi-structured interviews. Both field notes and audio-recorded observations were cross referenced to develop a vivid picture of what was happening at each school (see Patton, 2002).

Like interviews, there are also inherent limitations associated with observational data. For instance, participant actions and behaviours may have been influenced by my presence at GSA meetings and events, and my background and predispositions may have impacted what I observed and how it was interpreted (see Patton, 2002). To further build the case study and develop a more nuanced and accurate account of the educative and activist functioning of GSAs at each school, consenting youth also completed semi-structured diaries. Information collected through this method was cross-referenced with interview and observational data.

Semi-structured diaries. Beyond interviews and observations, GSAs members were invited to complete online semi-structured diaries, which provided insight into their perspectives on and experiences with GSA discussions, activities, and initiatives (see Patton, 2002). After each GSA meeting, I contacted consenting students via email and asked them to respond to a question

that helped produce further understandings about their GSA and/or their experiences with the club.

Some sample questions are listed below:

Have you learned anything new from participating in GSA? If so, what was it?

Have you had an opportunity to share any lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirit, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual (LGBT2QIA)-related information with your group (e.g., social media, news article, app, resource, community event, etc.)?

During the GSA meeting today, Dylan said that your school will have an all gender washroom starting in September 2015. a) What are your thoughts/feelings towards this? b) Did the GSA help with this in any way? If so, how? Dylan also said that the teachers at your school will be informed about the all gender washroom at a staff meeting and that someone will speak to them about inclusivity. c) What are your thoughts/feelings towards this?

In total, 33 diaries were completed by 13 youth. Five youth completed 17 diaries at Village High over the period of April 22nd through May 27th, 2015. At Blessed Sacrament, three students completed a total of seven diaries from April 26th to May 27th, 2015. Only one youth completed two diaries at Sunset High in the month of May 2015. Unfortunately, no other students at this school were interested in submitting diary entries. At Holy Names, four GSA members turned in a total of seven diaries from May 12th through May 30th, 2015.

Diary entries provided supplementary information about GSA members' perspectives and experiences, which helped broaden my understanding of each club and consolidate patterns that were evident across multiple data sources (see Patton, 2002). That is, what was said within interviews and what was observed throughout GSA meetings and events, were often mirrored in diary entries, and this helped authorize the overall case study findings (see Stake, 2005).

Visual materials and documents. Physical artifacts were observed and photographed to document GSA members' efforts in the wider school community (Patton, 2002). All visual images created by the club, such as posters, PowerPoints, emails, online announcements, signs, displays, T-Shirts, and pamphlets, were co-examined with participants during their production – when possible, and/or discussed with participants during semi-structured interviews to garner information about their meaning, purpose, and impact according to GSA members and advisors. I also documented my preliminary thoughts and interpretations of their content in field notes during school visits and via audio-recorded observations. Where possible, I compared official GSA materials (e.g., posters, pamphlets, etc.) and communications (e.g., emails, online announcements, etc.) with private memos (e.g., student diaries), conversations (e.g., semi-structured interviews), and observations (see Patton, 2002). This strategy became particularly fruitful in terms of fleshing out what information was not sanctioned for public viewing in the two Catholic schools (e.g., marriage equality, the name “GSA,” etc.).

Data Storage

I printed physical copies of the data (e.g., field notes, interview transcripts, photographs of visual materials, such as posters and pictures, club documents, and semi-structured diaries) and separated the data from the four school sites into distinct file folders that were stored in secured cabinet at my house. Participant names and contact information were not stored in the same location; instead, this information was placed in a locked cabinet at my office at the University of Western Ontario. All electronic copies of data were safely stored on my password-protected personal computer.

Analysis of Data

The following section describes the specific analytic strategies and processes that were utilized for this qualitative, multi-sited case study on GSAs. First, the significance of theory as it relates to data analysis is explored. Thereafter, the specific techniques that were employed to organize and interpret the data are outlined.

The use of theory. Patton (2002) contends that “...theoretical orientations [have] implications for analysis in that the fundamental premises articulated in a theoretical framework or philosophy are meant to inform how ones makes sense of the world” (p. 482). Anyon's (2009) book, *Theory and Educational Research: Toward Critical Social Explanation*, provides a foundation for understanding the enmeshed relationship between theory and data analysis. In it, she asserts that theory and data “...imbricate and instantiate one another, forming and informing each other as the inquiry process unfolds” (p. 2). For Anyon, theory informs empirical findings since it determines what is studied, and the meaning that is associated with what is found. Said another way, one’s theoretical positionality determines what patterns or themes emerge and how the data is understood and interpreted:

Every datum embodies and encodes – and is therefore understood through – theory laden explanations. One does not go into the field to ‘see’ – one goes to ‘look’ for various sorts of patterns and themes. Theory – acknowledged or not – dictates what kinds of patterns one finds. And any explanation, no matter how small, involves a theory waiting to be explicated. When we ‘understand’ or try to explain an observed event or recorded interview, we are calling on theories, large or small (p. 4).

The queer and trans theoretical frameworks that were explicated in the first chapter of this dissertation were foundational to understanding and explaining patterns and themes that emerged upon the examination of data across the four school sites. Queer theory provided a lens to identify and critique the heteronormative experiences of GSA members, and spotlight how their counter-hegemonic work was grounded in a critique of heteronormality (see Fraser, 1990). Moreover, by exercising queer perspectives, I became more attuned to how sexual subjectivities are produced and regulated in the education system (Foucault, 1978) and how gender is performed and policed to meet the heterosexual imperative (Butler, 1990, 1993a). Foucault's (1978) theorization of knowledge-power relations enabled me to make sense of power as a network of relations whereby students, who are typically thought of as 'powerless,' worked to disrupt heteronormative hegemony. Trans-informed insights also guided data analysis in terms of helping me disentangle sex and gender (Stryker, 2006) and recognize how trans folks are routinely erased in schooling (Namaste, 2000). More specifically, through filtering what was witnessed and heard through a trans theoretical lens, the delegitimization of trans and gender diverse identities and experiences were identified (Serano, 2007/2016, 2013), and GSA members' work that interrupted cisgender privilege was magnified.

Constructing the case study. To construct a case study, one must first assemble the raw data (i.e., organize all information that was collected about each GSA), then build a case record, which involves sifting through and condensing the data to ensure it is "...organized, classified, and edited into a manageable and accessible file" (Patton, 2002, p. 450), and finally, write a descriptive case study. The following sections describe how the data were compiled and analyzed according to this process.

Developing site records. After data collection was complete (i.e., July 2015), I developed a record for each of the four school sites, which enabled me to organize the data into a manageable resource package (Patton, 2002). Each record was a condensed version of the raw data; I cut, paste, and thematically arranged the most significant information from each GSA site in one document, and this information was used to complete the final case analysis and write the case study (Patton, 2002). Compartmentalizing the four school sites enabled each GSA to be studied in-depth, which enhanced the case study analysis (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) conveys that, "...the investigator has two primary sources to draw from in organizing the analysis: (1) the questions that were generated during the conceptual and design phases of the study, prior to fieldwork, and (2) analytic insights and interpretations that emerged during data collection" (p. 437). Following Patton, data were deemed important by examining it against the research questions and the theoretical frameworks. This process helped me determine what data were significant to the study, which made analyzing and writing the final case study more manageable (Patton, 2002).

The following analytic strategies describe how the four school sites were analyzed to engender individual patterns and themes, and generate the overall case study findings (Patton, 2002).

Analysis. I began to loosely analyze data by recording and tracking insights during data collection; this signalled the beginning of qualitative analysis (Patton, 2002). This process involved looking for patterns and themes "...across stories, experiences, and perspectives" (Patton, 2002, p. 6). The early stages of fieldwork analysis were generative and emergent, whereas the later stages involved corroborating established patterns (Patton, 2002). During data collection, it became evident that there were religiously-sanctioned impositions placed on the two Catholic

school GSAs (e.g., at Holy Names the club was not called a GSA despite students' desire to name it such; marriage equality was a topic that was purposefully silenced in Blessed Sacrament's educative work; the GSA at Holy Names was prevented from using queer terminology during school-wide initiatives). What also became apparent from participating in club meetings and listening to participants' experiences was that GSA members were compelled to address their hetero/cisnormative school environments by engaging in school-wide education and activism (e.g., students planned queer and trans-related assemblies, and advocated for an all gender multi-stall washroom, etc.). Further, due to the privileging of heterosexual and cisgender identities and experiences in everyday teaching and learning, participants believed that the role of the GSA was to educate others. Insights, such as these, that surfaced during preliminary analysis were documented via field notes and audio-recorded observations. Following Patton (2002), this analytic strategy helped build this case study and make sense of the data since, "...overlapping of data collection and analysis improves both the quality of data collected and the quality of the analysis so long as the fieldworker takes care not to allow these initial interpretations to overly confine the analytical possibilities" (p. 437).

Content analysis was the strategy that supported data analysis. It involves reducing and making sense of qualitative data to identify core consistencies and meanings (Patton, 2002). Content analysis is commonly used to examine texts, such as interviews, diaries, or documents, for "...reoccurring words or themes" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). It involves "...decid[ing] what things go together to form a pattern, what constitutes a theme, what to name it, and what meanings to extract from case studies" (Patton, 2002, p. 442). The core meanings, which are discovered by employing content analysis, are patterns and themes. A pattern is a descriptive finding (e.g., almost all participants reported feeling fear when...), whereas a theme is topical or categorical (e.g., fear)

(Patton, 2002). To further explain this process, the following pattern and theme were identified through content analysis: when all interviewed youth indicated that their classroom curriculum was hetero- and/or cisnormative, a pattern emerged. The theme associated with this pattern was hetero/cisnormative curricula.

By employing content analysis, I was tasked with “...identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labelling the primary patterns in data. This essentially means analyzing the core *content* of interviews and observations to determine what’s significant” (Patton, 2002, p. 463). In terms of determining what was significant, all data were inductively examined (i.e., uncovering patterns, categories, and themes in the data) by filtering it through queer and trans theoretical lenses (Anyon, 2009; Patton, 2002). These theoretical frameworks alerted me to hetero/cisnormative educational issues (e.g., binary washroom system; tolerance rather than affirmation of sexual minorities, etc.) and anti-oppressive opportunities (e.g., cultivating an anti-heteronormative coalition in Catholic education; sharing and learning about sexual and gender diversity at GSA meetings, etc.). Data representing “reoccurring regularities” (Patton, 2002, p. 465) were then grouped together to examine their likeness and make sense of their relationship (Patton, 2002). With this technique, data were arranged based on similarities, and I ensured that there were clear distinctions between groupings (Patton, 2002). After I established primary patterns, themes, and groupings through inductive analysis, I re-examined the data (i.e., deductively analyzed the data) to affirm “...the authenticity and appropriateness of inductive content analysis, including carefully examining deviate cases or data that don’t fit the categories developed” (Patton, 2002, p. 454).

Conclusion

To start the chapter, I explained that qualitative methodology was selected because it produces in-depth understandings and detailed accounts of a small number of people or cases, and

that it is the preferable methodology when working with queer, trans, and gender diverse folks (Gamson, 2000; Stryker, 2006). Thereafter, I justified the use of a case study approach (see Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005) to explore the educative and activist role and function of GSAs in publicly-funded Ontario secular and Catholic high schools. I framed this inquiry as an intrinsic, multi-sited case study on GSAs (Stake, 2005) and discussed the importance of understanding the particularities of each of the four GSAs (Patton, 2002). Moreover, I identified how four sites (i.e., two Ontario public secular school GSAs and two Ontario public Catholic GSAs) constituted this qualitative, multi-sited case study on the educative and activist role and function of GSAs. Next, I summarized how the schools and participants were recruited, and briefly described the sites and participants. I then outlined how semi-structured interviews, participant observation, semi-structured diaries, and visual materials and documents were utilized to collect data. Finally, I discussed how patterns and themes were identified through content analysis, and I explained how filtering the data through queer and trans theoretical lenses helped me make sense of it (Anyon, 2009).

Chapter Four: Results - Publicly-Funded Secular Schools

In this chapter, I provide an in-depth examination of the two publicly-funded secular school sites in this multi-sited case study that explores the educative and activist role and function of GSAs in Ontario public secular and Catholic high schools. Initially, I turn to the first school site, Village High, to describe how, in response to their hetero/cisnormative schooling experiences (i.e., queer and trans-exclusive pedagogy, curricula, architecture, etc.), their GSA operated as a counter-hegemonic space (Fraser, 1990) where students explored and discussed GSRM topics that are primarily off limits at school (Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Mayo, 2015), and produced and disseminated alternative discourses. The GSA at this school – like other clubs in this study - served as a proxy in the absence of a more institutionally-sustained commitment to queer and trans-informed education. Moreover, due to an absence of formal education that is critical of privileging heterosexual and cisgender experiences, and ‘Othering’ queer and trans identities (Kumashiro, 2002), responsibility fell to the GSA to provide school-wide anti-hetero/cisnormative education. Although many GSA members voiced that the purpose of their group was to adopt an educative function, students were compelled and even expected to counter hegemonic understandings of sex, sexuality, and gender, given the inaction on behalf of the school and school board to adequately address pervasive institutionalized systems of hetero/cisnormativity. As I argue throughout this dissertation, GSAs should not be obliged to tackle and alleviate hetero/cisnormative school regimes; schooling and the system itself must take on much of the responsibility of promoting sexual and gender democratization in the education system (see Connell, 2009).

Next, an overview of the results from the third school site, Sunset High, are analyzed. Data from this school are limited due to the social and supportive nature of the club. Additionally, few GSA members volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews and complete online

diaries, which hindered – to a certain extent – what could be learned about the club’s role and function at this school. Despite these logistical barriers, I learned that the GSA planned and offered some educative initiatives and lobbied for curricular reform. Findings from this school focus on unpacking the pedagogical limits of a one-off Professional Development (PD) presentation that was created by the GSA advisor in partnership with youth, and delivered by a club member at a staff meeting. Further, rather than validating sexual and gender diversity, such isolated events run the risk of reinforcing heteronormativity (Britzman, 1995) and cisnormativity (Malatino, 2015). The educative and activist work of Sunset High GSA members in partnership with their advisor demonstrate how, in the absence of a sustained anti-hetero/cisnormative curricular commitment by their school board, school, and educators, GSRM members were left to take on such a pedagogic responsibility.

Village High

The GSA as a Counter-Hegemonic Site

Fraser’s (1990) writing on *subaltern counterpublics* is helpful in framing the role of Village High’s GSA as a student-driven democratizing site. In contrast to GSA members’ oppressive hetero/cisnormative schooling experiences, the group at Village High offered a venue for GSRM students and their allies to unite, discuss queer and trans topics, and resist taken-for granted assumptions regarding sexuality and gender - both within and outside of the club walls. This sentiment is reflected in how Reese, an outspoken grade 10 student who identified as a pansexual¹ demiboy,² viewed the purpose of the GSA at their school. They believed that the GSA’s role was to: “Educate [club members] and also educate people who are outside of the GSA.” For Reese, the GSA was a prominent site to discuss GSRM content that was generally off limits at school

(Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2011; Mayo, 2015), and disseminate counter-hegemonic discourses through school-wide initiatives.

The GSA at Village High was well attended, particularly by queer, trans, and gender diverse students in grade nine and ten. Group members gathered in smaller friendship groups within the classroom meeting space, but everyone got along just fine. I began observing and participating in the group towards the end of the year, when classes were winding down and end of term anxieties were amplified. The warm spring weather tempted regularly-attending GSA members to spend their lunch hour outside in the sunshine. Club attendance dwindled towards the end of the school year (i.e., May-June), and some youth trailed into the meeting room much later than usual. This waxing and waning of GSA participation over the course of the year emphasized the importance of institutionalized support of and responsibility for undertaking queer and trans-informed education. Students were not overly enthusiastic about doing anything other than socializing, least of all participating in planned activities organized by their primary GSA advisor, Dylan, towards the end of the year. It was a laborious year after all; one where GSA members took it upon themselves to counter their erasure in schooling by engaging in queer and trans-informed conversations, and looking for ways to counter hetero/cisnormative discourses in the wider school community. Their roles as students shifted to that of educators as they planned and organized a week of activities that aimed to affirm sexual and gender diversity, and advocated for an all gender washroom to "...build a fluid and less exacting plumb line, one that does not mirror an essential connection between sex and gender, body and identity, but makes room for new and unexpected configurations of gender and sexed embodiment in space" (Cavanagh, 2010, p. 26).

Queer and Trans-Informed Conversations and Learning. Following Kitchen and Bellini's (2013) research, which found that student- and teacher-led discussions were essential to GSA

functioning (see also Lapointe, 2014), and Poteat, Heck, Yoshikawa, and Calzo's (2017) argument that "...the lack of [empirical] attention to the content of [GSA] interactions is striking" (p. 259), this study examines the particularities of GSA discussions and their influence on club members. This section describes how Village High's GSA operated as a counter-hegemonic site inasmuch that students shared anti-hetero/cisnormative understandings, and harnessed their queer and trans-informed knowledges to address public misunderstandings about sex, sexuality, gender, and relationships (i.e., polyamory³), both within and outside of club meetings.

Many Village High GSA members described the role of their GSA as primarily educative. Kai, a non-binary gay student, contended that "proper meetings" involved "...lessons or videos to discuss..." and opportunities to "...talk about the issues and learn..." Although Kai declared that they did not learn new things in GSA meetings "super often" because they "...do a lot of research on the internet and things like that," all other interviewees at Village High indicated that GSA participation enhanced or reinforced their understanding of sex, sexuality, and gender-related content. For example, Sasha, who identified as an asexual⁴ male stated, "Sometimes...I learn and sometimes it just enforced things that I already knew."

Reese discussed how the GSA offered a significant opportunity to problematize how homosexuality is constituted as abnormal through the widespread sensationalization of 'out' queer athletes, such as the ex National Football League (NFL) player, Michael Sam:

We did talk...about the football player Michael Sam and the problems that he faced when he came out and why he faced those problems. It was nice to talk about that kind of thing, because *I think when you come out as gay, you're in the media a lot, its stigma, but they also expect you to be stereotypically gay all the time and never do*

anything that's heteronormative. I think it's a shame because, you know, why, why if I am this thing, do I have to be specifically that thing all the time? It's a big issue with the trans community because if you come out as trans, you're expected to follow that gender, and follow the norms of that gender strictly [emphasis added]. If you're a trans man, you're not allowed to be feminine at all...you're supposed to 'pass' all the time...no matter what gender you are...I identify as a demiboy, but I don't wear stereotypical boy clothes most of the time. Unless you count pants as boy clothes...mostly I dress in a feminine way.

Reese appreciated speaking about this topic because it provided a platform for "...resistance to treating homo/heterosexual categorization...as a done deal, transparently empirical fact about any person" (Sedgwick, 1990/2008, p. xvi). They were fond of this discussion because it offered an opportunity to reflect on gender performativity or the way in which "Gender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones which are almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond" (Butler, 1993c, p. 22). Reese also identified how trans people are often suspect when their gender identities and/or expressions do not align with heteronormative cultural codes; such conflicts with gender democratization (Connell, 2009) fail to "...embrac[e] the livability and viability of one's gendered personhood" (Martino, 2016). By participating in the GSA, Reese engaged in conversations which helped validate their identification as a demiboy and affirm their non-conforming gender expression; thus the club offered members a venue to "...freely express themselves and discuss their experiences...[and communicate]...understandings of sexuality and gender as fluid and socially constructed, understandings that echo the tenets of queer theory" (Elliott, 2016, p. 50).

Many GSA members at Village High were openly trans and often shared their experiences as gender minorities with the group. Sasha, a trans student, communicated in his second diary that he enhanced his understanding about gender diversity from gathering and conversing with trans and gender diverse GSA members: "...I've learned...how fluid gender and identity can be depending on the individual. I mainly learned that just by being around so many different people who identify on the spectrum in one way or another." As a cisgender male, Andie appreciated how the GSA operated as a counterpublic space "...for transgender people to provide accounts of their own embodied experiences and 'of their relationships to the discourse and institutions that act upon and through them'" (Martino, 2016, p. 383):

I think hearing it from someone who's experienced it. I think makes it more impactful and kind of makes it easier to say that that's not necessarily right, but more appropriate way because if they're telling you that's how it should be then it makes it more crystal clear instead of kind of like researching it or hearing it from other people. You're like, 'I'm not sure if that's right,' but, like, hearing it first hand. You're like, 'Okay, I can see where you're coming from, that makes sense.'

Although Andie most certainly enhanced his understanding about gender diversity by listening to his peers, and the GSA provided a democratizing space for trans and gender diverse students to be heard, gender minorities should not be obligated to teach their privileged cisgender peers and act as sole sources of anti-cisnormative education. After all, this educative burden can become tiresome and not all trans and gender diverse students may want to share their 'Othered' experiences or engage in conversations that draw attention to their gender minority status. Andie's commentary brings to mind Kumashiro's (2002) argument that anti-oppressive education (i.e., trans-informed teaching in this case) should not fall squarely on the shoulders of the 'Other'; rather,

there needs to be a systemic commitment to and support of addressing gender diversity at school. To move towards achieving gender democratization (Connell, 2009), such education should emphasize how gender is "...first and foremost an individual experience, an amalgamation of our own unique combinations of gender inclinations, social interactions, body feelings, and lived experiences" (Serano, 2007/2016, p. 225).

In his first diary Andie also disclosed that GSA membership prompted him to reflect on how language is often inadvertently deployed (by cisgender folks) in ways that delegitimize trans identities:

From participating in the GSA, I have learned a lot more about the transgender community. Prior to joining I knew next to nothing about what it meant to be transgender. I can think of one time that sticks out in my memory when we were talking about people who use the adjective, transgender, as a verb (e.g. she has transgendered). I never really thought about the message that it gives when you say someone has transgendered compared to someone being transgender; to me the first option implies that the person has made a choice, for example, to change from a girl to a boy instead of the latter option which implies that the person has always been a boy despite their anatomy (which I have been told is more correct).

By listening to his peer's personal experiences and engaging in trans-informed GSA discussions, Andie acquired an understanding of how to refer to trans people in a respectful and affirming manner. In particular, he learned that transgender people are their felt and experienced gender, regardless if they choose to socially, medically, and/or legally transition; using transgender as a verb implies that a person was, at some point, their assigned gender at birth (see Ross, 2017). GSA participation provoked Andie to problematize taken-for granted linkages between sex and gender

(Stryker, 2006) and comprehend how subconscious sex, "...a deep-rooted understanding of what sex [our] bodies should be" (Serano, 2007/2016, p. 87), although applicable to all people, is particularly salient for many trans folks. He further communicated this new-found, trans-informed understanding of sex when he stated: "Transgender people aren't changing gender, they've always been that gender and it just happens that their body didn't agree with the gender that they are..." Since Andie felt right in the sex he was assigned at birth, his subconscious sex was previously 'hidden' from his view (Serano, 2007/2016); by participating in a club where anti-cisnormative discourses were voiced, Andie came to question "...the advantages experienced by people who do not face a particular form of marginalization [i.e., cissexism]" (Serano, 2013, p. 297).

As a cisgender male who benefits from widespread gender entitlement in terms of having people recognize and validate his felt and assigned gender (Serano, 2013), and being able to easily navigate male-designated spaces, Andie's trans-informed understandings of sex and gender emerged in the GSA:

So, because for me I've never really known much about that community and kind of how it feels for someone who's transgender dealing with transphobia from both communities, like straight or LGB communities because the people just don't understand it. And I think it's probably become a greater issue, I think, because it's just becoming more prominent. Like, people are coming out more and it just becomes an issue of, like, where are these people going in the washroom, where, like, 'what do I call my friend now'? It's...just educating people on addressing those issues, so that kind of opened my eyes to those issues facing anyone in the transgender community - how hard it can be.

Here, Andie explained how trans and gender diverse folks found refuge from the cissexist education system since the GSA functioned as a “...parallel discursive arena where members of subordinated social groups invent[ed] and circulate[d] counterdiscourses...” (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). Through GSA participation, Andie became more sensitive to how trans people are marginalized in both straight and queer communities (Serano, 2013), which, as will be discussed later, motivated him to take action to address trans oppression at school. He was also able to unpack his taken-for-granted ability to access male-designated school washrooms – a privilege that many of his transmasculine peers do not have (see Cavanagh, 2010). Moreover, through internalizing the anti-cisnormative perspectives of his trans peers, Andie became increasingly aware that:

Toilets and locker rooms represent the convergence of public and private in spaces designed around a dichotomous conceptualisation of gendered and sexualised bodies. They are some of the clearest demonstrations of how dominant constructions of gender and heterosexuality are institutionalised in the school to the extent of being built into the school itself (Elliott, 2016, p. 55).

From listening to the experiences and perspectives of Sasha and Andie, it is clear that Village High’s GSA was a counter-hegemonic hub for trans-informed education (Greytak, 2015) where, “On one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides” (Fraser, 1990, p. 68).

Learning about gender diversity through GSA participation influenced Andie to lobby for a more gender inclusive prom. Prom is arguably one of the most important rites of passage for

high school students, but as Grace and Wells (2015) explain, its rituals are incredibly hetero/cisnormative:

As a hyper-heterosexualized cultural event, the school prom has not only functioned to replicate norms of the masculine, the feminine, and the heterosexual pairing of male and female, but it has also operated to mark and police heterosexuality as the desired and assumed expression of sexuality (p. 155-156).

Andie utilized the knowledge he learned about gender identity and expression to help re-shape the oppressive tradition of prom king and queen (see Elliott, 2016), and forge a more trans-affirming 'rite of passage':

Andie *So this year on prom committee, instead of having a prom king and queen, we just decided to call it prom royalty so no one felt that they had to conform to a gender binary...So one student I heard...they said that because it's prom royalty, we were excluding the normal people [emphasis added] and I thought, like, that's a really harsh thing to say. But that's not the general opinion. Most people, like, when we put the word out that that's what we were doing, everyone was like really supportive of it. It's unfortunate that you still hear things like that, but I think overall the school is very supportive of it.*

Researcher: Yeah...I find that really interesting about the prom royalty. So how did that decision come to be?

Andie: Well, myself and the other chair of prom committee were talking about how - just outside of the actual meeting - how there are students

at [Village High] who don't identify as one gender. *And we just felt like if they were going to win, it wouldn't be really fair for us to impose a gender on them. To say, like, 'Oh, you're prom king,' when they're like, 'Well not, not really' [emphasis added].*

Researcher: Yeah.

Andie: So, if we leave it open to prom royalty, it leaves it open for anyone to be chosen and to feel comfortable saying, “Yeah, we're the prom royalty,” just giving people opportunity to feel included.

Here, Andie explained how he and another prom chair committee member elected to democratize the prom king and queen competition by renaming it “Prom Royalty.” In doing so, they affirmed non-binary gender identities. Although Andie encountered a cissexist response from a student who defensively declared that this amendment excluded ‘normal’ people (i.e., cisgender folks), by listening to trans GSA members, who prompted him to interrogate cisgender privilege, Andie was privy to how “...institutions...simultaneously produce various possibilities of viable personhood, and eliminate others” (Stryker, 2006, p. 3). Andie’s GSA-inspired activist efforts demonstrated how he adopted counter-hegemonic sex and gender discourses, which empowered him to tackle institutionalized cisnormativity by “...disseminat[ing] one’s discourse into ever widening arenas” (Fraser, 1990, p. 67).

Besides sharing their trans-formed knowledge with fellow students, trans and gender diverse GSA members at Village High were compelled to educate a teacher who visited their club. At a GSA meeting in the early part of the school year a cisgender male teacher, who was interested in co-advising the club, gave a presentation where he incorrectly assumed that the musician he was

speaking about was transgender, much to the dismay of trans and gender diverse GSA members. According to Reese, “[The teacher] just assumed because they cross dress [the singer is transgender].” Although youth attempted to correct him, the teacher refused to listen, as Kai explained: “...one of the teachers came in one day to do his own presentation, and when some people tried to explain things, it kind of felt like he was ignoring what they were saying. It made for a very uncomfortable space and it was disrespectful.” This unintentional, yet problematic misgendering - “...mistakenly assign[ing] a gender that does not match one’s identified gender” (Serano, 2007/2016, p. 164) - was very upsetting to Sasha who, when speaking about the teacher, stated:

...you're just making really weird assumptions and, like, using a bunch of terms wrong and stuff. And so I wanted to correct him on some of the terms...[another student and I] were arguing with him and he...was not having it. He just...would not take it. I don't know, he just didn't want to take my corrections. *I don't know if it's because I was younger or something. Like, I'm pretty sure I know more about this, being a trans person myself* [emphasis added]. He's not and it's like, ‘dude, just listen to me.’ And he just wasn't having it so I just got up and left because I was so angry...Because it made me really mad.

Although the teacher made inappropriate assumptions about the musician’s gender, Sasha was more upset that he would not concede that he was incorrect, despite being told by trans students (who clearly knew best) that he misspoke. Unlike the students in his care, this teacher was oblivious to the fact that “...drag queens and transsexuals generally have very different experiences and perspectives regarding gender, despite the fact that they are often confused with one another by mainstream society” (Serano, 2007/2016, p. 26). This student-teacher

confrontation exhibited how language is a site where power is negotiated; it demonstrated how power can be redistributed in the network of relations when youth contest taken-for-granted assumptions voiced by their educators (see Foucault, 1978). It also spotlights the necessity of system-wide efforts to provide trans-informed teacher education since the teacher's uniformed imposition of knowledge was linked to his position as an educator, and responsibility was left to individual trans students to counteract his educative authority. While the GSA functioned as a counter hegemonic public space, this altercation accentuated limits associated with engaging with the broader publics of the school system and its authoritative representatives who fail in their anti-cisnormative educative duties.

Like Kai and Sasha, Reese was also frustrated – not necessarily because the teacher misgendered the singer, but because the teacher would not acknowledge that he was wrong or apologize and learn from his mistake:

[He] brought up that mentality, and 'well I'm trying.' I'm like, you're giving out false information, and you're labeling someone falsely and I appreciate that you're trying, but when you won't accept that you're wrong, that just says a lot. It just says that you want to be right, you don't actually want to learn about any of this, and he didn't comeback as a staff advisor again. We haven't had him come in again.

Here, Reese communicated that the teacher failed to bolster his understanding of and sensitivity to trans topics because he was unwilling to authorize student voice (see Cook-Sather, 2002). The teacher enacted gender entitlement and his cisgender privilege by assuming he knew someone else's gender (Serano, 2007/2016), which exemplified how trans identities are "...constantly comment[ed] upon, and openly debate[d],...whereas...cissexuality typically receive[s] little

attention or discussion” (Serano, 2013, p. 115). Akin to Sasha, Reese voiced that the teacher attempted to exert his authority as an educator to undermine students’ knowledge, and by doing so he further perpetuated cissexism at school:

...when you say something against an authority member and they take it badly because you are below them or younger than them. I think that’s also another thing that we need to kind of eliminate because they’re people too [emphasis added]. Like, it doesn’t matter how young they are, if they have an opinion, they have a right to voice that opinion. I mean sometimes that opinion’s not great, but I mean it’s not fair to give one person the opportunity to speak about something and then silence the other person because you don’t like what they’re going to say. And if what they’re going to say is hurtful, then it’s up to you to help them see that’s hurtful to some people. Hopefully educate them...

Although the teacher tried to wield power to discipline students and dismiss their subjugated knowledge under these conditions, GSA members’ educative response demonstrated how “...where there is power, there is resistance...” (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). This contestation mirrored Foucault’s assertion that: “...the points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities” (p. 96). By standing up to the teacher, trans students articulated that the practice of confusing trans women with drag queens is cissexist (Serano, 2013). Reese’s account speaks to Fraser’s (1990) notion of counterpublics in that this altercation expanded “...possibilities for self-government as a basis for participatory democracy and a revisioning of the ethical principles of mutual relationality and respect as they pertain to a politics of trans subjugation” (Martino, 2016, p. 392). The GSA provided a space to redress hierarchical power relations in working towards building a more democratized dialogic space for addressing, educating about, and envisioning

gender democratization (Connell, 2009). In sum, the club helped bolster the ‘transgender imaginary’ since “...transgender and transsexual people...account[ed] for their embodied experiences of gender on their own terms” (Martino, 2016, p. 393).

In addition to the dispute with the aforementioned teacher, Reese was offended when their secondary GSA advisor made a rude comment about polyamory (i.e., consensual non-monogamous relationships) (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2010; Serano, 2013). Although polyamory “...refers to people (of any sex or gender) who have [consensual] sexual relationships with more than one person (of any sex or gender)” (Serano, 2013, p. 17), at a club meeting the advisor insinuated that it was like cheating – a bias articulated by Pallotta-Chiarolli (2010). Reese was an advocate for polyamory awareness because it is largely conflated with being unfaithful: “I would never impose polyamory on [a partner], if that’s not what they were okay with. Cause that’s not what polyamory is about. It’s not cheating.” They wanted to share their knowledge with GSA members to demystify this non-normative relationship structure:

...I also occasionally bring [in] the information that people don't really think about, like...polyamory, or, like, different romantic things. Different types of relationships, and I think it's important to bring some of those to the table too.

To help educate others about polyamory, Reese posted a video on the GSA’s Facebook page and they also brought up the subject when the group was planning an assembly. When Reese discussed polyamory at the GSA meeting their second advisor responded rather poorly:

...what happened was I posted [a video on polyamory] because, you know, we never really talked about romantic alignment in there and I think it's important because you know it's not really the conventional way to have a relationship or relationships. I

posted it and we were talking about it in GSA the next day, and I brought it up. *And our [teacher] advisor kind of made a statement...it wasn't necessarily rude, but it wasn't exactly the way you should define polyamory. I mean a 'side hoe,'⁷ side hoes are the opposite of what polyamory is [emphasis added]*, and I just remember the entire GSA looking at me like, 'oh my god, did that just happen'? I felt like maybe I should have said something, but I didn't.

Although Reese's intention was to unsettle prejudicial assumptions about polyamorous relationships, their advisor appeared to perpetuate widespread hypersexualized beliefs about polyamory (see Kacere, 2013). Ironically, the purpose of posting the video was to showcase how "...existing terms such as 'adultery,' 'cheating,' 'affair,' and 'extramarital' are deliberately negative and inappropriate when applied to [polyamorous] relationships" (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2010, p. 43). Whether joking or not, the advisor communicated that polyamorous relationships were less desirable than monogamous ones, as Reese expressed:

I think it was meant as a joke, basically the way it was phrased was, 'oh so you brought that up, well you know not everybody is really into side hoes'. And I kind of just went, wow, wow, that's—you obviously did not watch the video at all. It was a little hurtful honestly because it's like—that's not what its about; not at all.

The advisor's prejudicial remarks highlight a need for system-wide educative work on relationship diversity, including consenting non-monogamous relations. Reese's empowered understanding of polyamory was influenced through their involvement in wider online subaltern publics (Fraser, 1990) that embraced counter-hegemonic discourses in relation to sexual and romantic diversity. As Bryson and MacIntosh (2010) contend, "Discourses concerning QLGBT youth and the

potentially democratizing significance of the Internet as a cultural technology highlight mobility, play, and possibilities for a redistribution of rights of recognition, community, and knowledge in a significant public sphere...” (p. 105).

Reese also disclosed that, due to their relationship dynamic (i.e., teacher/student), it was difficult to address the advisor’s inappropriate comment, which magnifies the complexities of interactional learning spaces associated with this counter-hegemonic public space. Reese was understandably uncomfortable with correcting their advisor in front of the group, but did refute what was said and addressed the question of polyamory with fellow GSA members when their advisor was absent:

...I did talk about it, not the next GSA meeting, but I think it was the one after that. I kind of brought it up and I voiced my concerns to my students and they were all in agreeance. I discussed what it actually was and what it’s not...the advisor hadn’t really been right in her definition of that.

By taking initiative to address polyamorous misunderstandings, Reese utilized the GSA to disseminate counter-hegemonic knowledge on sexual and romantic relationships (Fraser, 1990). Although Reese facilitated a debrief with their fellow GSA members at a later date, below they describe why they initially chose to remain silent:

...I just wish I had the courage to stand up and say, you know, ‘that’s not okay, that’s not right. This is what you said, that was wrong. I would appreciate it if you righted it. I would like to educate you more on this’ [emphasis added]...it’s just kind of awkward now because I feel like I should have said something and I’m disappointed in myself because I didn’t say anything. I just wish people didn’t think like that... I just

wish people would start thinking about this too because the people who are non-binary...or who are gay, are not the only people in the community who face that stigma and there are a lot of people out there that openly actually advocate against polyamory. Who are extremely opposed to it and I think it would be nice if we could just change their minds and show them that we are who we are and no matter how much you say, 'that's wrong.'

The power differential between Reese and their advisor was a significant factor that influenced Reese's decision not to confront her. As a student, Reese felt that they could not challenge their teacher, despite their more informed understanding of the subject. Although Reese was still able to subvert the prejudicial message when they were alone with GSA members, they were unwilling to challenge the advisor's educative authority for fear of any repercussions. This finding stresses the need for teacher education and systemic support that validates non-monogamy.

In addition to teacher- and student-directed club discussions, the GSA at Village High participated in a knowledge exchange program with preservice educators who attended a local university, demonstrating how the GSA operated as a counterpublic site for building dialogic and productive partnerships with the community (see Fraser, 1990). An instructor at a local university reached out to Dylan to propose a knowledge exchange between GSA members and preservice educators. With this initiative, a few teachers-in-training facilitated various sexuality and gender-themed workshops (e.g., sex education, gender diversity) with GSA members during one of their regularly-scheduled meetings, and a couple GSA members spoke to preservice educators in an equity-based elective class. Workshop topics were generated by GSA members and preservice teachers selected one of these areas, and designed and facilitated a workshop for the GSA to fulfill

the requirements of a final assignment in the elective course. Reese was happy that future teachers were interested in GSRM topics, and were working to affirm queer sexualities and trans identities:

It was actually really educating to have someone who was closer to our own age, to come in and talk about this and be all cool about it, and that—to feel like they don't really perceive that stigma around us...It's nice to just be treated like normal people. Because we are normal people, there's nothing extremely different about us...we're just people, and we're just humans. Just because, I don't know, one girl likes to kiss a girl, one boy likes to kiss a boy, or you're not a girl, you're not a boy. It's just — we're just people. We're not aliens; we're just people. There's nothing strange about us.

Here, Reese described how the queer and trans-informed preservice workshops offered a counterpoint to their hetero/cisnormative schooling experiences and their stigmatizing effects. Unlike Reese's standard educational experiences, the preservice workshops bolstered sexual and gender democratization (see Connell, 2009). Like Reese, Sasha was appreciative that future teachers were learning about sexual and gender diversity, and putting their new-found understandings into practice at his school:

It was really interesting. Just to see people who weren't from the school come in...especially students who are also learning about this stuff. Because it kind of feels more like a shared learning experience, like, we have things to tell them about how we feel and they have things to show us about what they've seen, like, research wise.

Here, Sasha stressed the dialogic nature of the counter-hegemonic public space of the GSA (see Fraser, 1990). As was the case with the teacher who misconstrued the musician's gender, GSA members had a wealth of knowledge to share with preservice teachers. This information exchange was powerful considering teachers are generally ill-prepared to work with GSRMs and integrate queer and trans content in the curricula (Bellini, 2012; Taylor et al., 2016). Despite some workshop shortcomings (e.g., youth's understanding of GSRM topics were not necessarily enhanced), Sasha, Kai, and Reese were all happy that preservice teachers were learning and teaching about sexual and gender diversity. In particular, Sasha was content that future teachers had the opportunity to "...understand [sexuality and gender-related topics] and figure things out" because he thought it was an effective way to improve teacher training - an essential undertaking according to Kitchen and Bellini (2013). Like Sasha, Kai declared, "I think it's a good thing to have just because then they...can understand and learn more from students." Following Sasha and Kai's sentiments, Reese exclaimed:

I loved it. I thought it was great. It's finally teaching the teachers that they need to try to be accepting even if it's something that they're learning slowly, as long as they're learning...that it's not okay to treat LGBT students differently and that they go through a lot of things that cisgender heterosexual people don't go through.

By facilitating workshops, preservice teachers were encouraged to interrogate hetero/cissexism and counter hegemonic discourses that equate queer and trans people with abnormality, immorality, and pathology (see Foucault, 1978; Serano, 2007/2016). For GSA members, this educational initiative signalled a chipping away of institutionalized hetero/cisnormativity since future teachers facilitated educative sessions on gender diversity, and queer and trans-inclusive sex education.

As a trans student, Sasha was ecstatic that one of the preservice workshops involved gender diversity. According to him, the future teacher spoke about "...trans and gender identity and genders, and also gender expression...[They] talked about the difference between gender expression and gender identity and that was nice because...[it] often get[s] mashed into the same thing..." This workshop helped affirm that: "...gender,' as it is lived, embodied, experienced, performed, and encountered, is more complex and varied than can be accounted for by the currently dominant binary sex/gender ideology of Eurocentric modernity" (Stryker, 2006, p. 3). In addition to exploring gender-related concepts, another preservice workshop introduced the topic of dental dams, which was particularly important to Reese because in "...health class, I mean, we were never educated on safe non-heterosexual sex. We weren't educated on that at all." Kai extended on Reese's comments by describing a particularly oppressive encounter in their sex education class:

Kai: There was that one where we learned to make a dental dam out of a condom; that was new...

Researcher: Yeah, because that's probably not something that you do in your regular health class, right?

Kai: *Regular health classes, the word 'gay' is like, taboo. I tried to bring up the topic and I was just immediately shut down, like, no [emphasis added]...*

Researcher: Oh, your Phys. Ed. teacher?

Kai: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay and that was this year?

Kai: Yeah.

Researcher: So, you tried to talk about...

Kai: Yeah, we were talking and then...I don't even remember how I tried to bring it up, but *I remember, like, trying to bring it up and she just shut it down immediately, like, 'no, let's get back to the heterosexuals'* [emphasis added].

Both Reese and Kai emphasized the heteronormative nature of their health classes (see Craig, 2013; Taylor et al., 2011), and expressed the need for queer-inclusive safer sex content. In addition to queer-inclusive sex education, Malatino (2015) argues that health classes must affirm trans experiences because there is a "...tendency to utilize cis-bodies as the unmarked referent when discussing sexual health and reproduction" (p. 400). Such inclusions were evident in the sex education workshop GSA members experienced because the preservice educator refrained from gendering body parts and condoms. That is, the educator purposefully referred to condoms as either internal (i.e., placed inside the body, for example, in a vagina or anus) or external (i.e., placed outside of the body, for example, on a penis), rather than 'male' or 'female.' In this way, the educator was speaking about safer sex in relation to genitals, not gender. This trans-affirmative distinction is significant because if the educator referred to external condoms as 'male condoms,' this would have reinforced cissexist assumptions that connect sex and gender (Stryker, 2006), and insinuated that trans women are not 'real' women (Serano, 2007/2016). As opposed to the hetero/cisnormative status quo, the GSA operated "...in response to exclusions within dominant publics...[to] expand discursive space" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67) by offering queer- and trans-informed

sex education. The preservice sex education workshop helped compensate for oppressive healthy sexuality curriculum, which Kai purported was pervasive: “[There was] nothing about safe practices, nothing about how things would work [in health class], you know?...I mean, I'm a teenager, I want to know those things but can't learn them at school...”

Anti-Hetero/Cisnormative School-Wide Initiatives. The GSA at Village High functioned as a proxy in the absence of a committed effort on part of the education system and school to address anti-hetero/cisnormative education. Since hetero/cissexist assumptions were embedded in their every day teaching and learning, GSA members took it upon themselves to introduce and educate about queer and trans-informed understandings of sex, sexuality, and gender in the wider school community. In terms of the GSA’s educative role, Kai thought it was necessary to: “...Get the word out about what things are, help build understanding...just organiz[e] more things that reach the general community because it’s always the same people going to GSA. It’s the gay people and the gay people’s friends.” For Kai, it was essential to educate non-GSA members because they were most likely unfamiliar with queer and trans topics since they are rarely covered at school (Taylor et. al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2016). Although most GSA members indicated that the club’s purpose was to engage in educative and activist work, they were most interested in socializing, particularly towards the end of the school year when data was collected. This was echoed by their GSA advisor, Dylan, who stated: “...they want stuff done, but they don't want to get it done.” Dylan’s insights speak to how students may have felt obligated to fill anti-hetero/cisnormative gaps in lieu of formal education that disrupts GSRM-based oppression. As Andie indicated there is a strong sense of responsibility felt by GSA members to address this problem and to make a difference: “I think [GSA members] have a responsibility to improve some aspect of the community.” Andie’s commentary spotlights how anti-hetero/cisnormative

education was arguably the GSA's burden; but, with such a responsibility there is the potential for fatigue and burn out among members who are committed to doing this work, which speaks to the waning or winding down of such activities later in the school year. Responsibility should not fall upon the group to bare the brunt of this work; school boards, schools, and educators are ultimately accountable for delivering queer and trans-informed pedagogy and curriculum. As Callaghan (2009) contends, "Changing deep-rooted convictions or prejudices requires sustained discussion and intellectual probing, activities that are usually available in classroom settings..." (p. 1).

GSA members at Village High organized a week-long initiative that led up to a mandatory assembly - their culminating event. Although the GSA's assembly was a step in the right direction, it was ultimately a band aid solution for a systemic issue. It did not move beyond simply examining homophobia in sport and providing education about the 'Other' (see Kumashiro, 2002). Reese's testimony demonstrates the limits of such one-off events in absence of sustained and integrated anti-heteronormative (Britzman, 1995) and anti-cisnormative (Malatino, 2015) pedagogies and curricula:

...we get swept under the rug a lot...we have our [GSA week] here...it's like there's LGBT people for one day a year and then they all go away...I just want people to be interested in this and I want them to know that we're still here and we're not going to be forgotten just because you don't remember what LGBT stands for.

Following Britzman (1995) and Malatino (2015), it is clear that school-wide assemblies do not offset the importance of a more integrated and sustained queer and trans-focused approach to education. As Britzman (1995) asserts, singular events, such as assemblies, exemplify how "...the

lived effects of inclusion are a more obdurate version of sameness and a more polite version of otherness” (p. 160).

Since the assembly was an one-off event, some students were able to avoid this educational offering. More specifically, because the assembly was a limited initiative, students could easily ‘opt out’ of queer and trans-informed education (e.g., skip, religious accommodation), unlike if such content were routinely integrated into formal curricula. Interestingly, as Callaghan (2015) notes, “...lgbtq students...cannot so easily absent themselves from homophobic curriculum or faithful activities” (p. 18). To avoid the assembly, many students turned in notes that excused them from attending this event, which was well within their right as Dylan explained: “Generally parents are free to do what they want. If they say their kid is not going to an assembly, we can't stop them...” When I asked, “Have you heard of any other situations where students were opting out of assemblies or was it just the [GSA assembly],”? Dylan responded, “Just this one...I haven't heard of other ones...Even our secretary said, ‘I've never seen this before until this year.’” Dylan further explained how religious accommodation was a mitigating factor:

Dylan: Well I didn't know that [opting out] was happening until the day of, we didn't even consider it because it is an assembly. It's an accepting of everyone assembly and my assumption is everyone goes. So, after it, the secretary told me, ‘what do I do with the students, they brought notes from home saying they are excused from the assembly’? So, she was like, ‘I just sent them to the student lounge to do work.’ I was really upset about it. I haven't really addressed it. *I need to talk to the principal about it because if it was an anti-racism assembly and a kid brings a letter from home and says, ‘we're members of the Ku Klux*

Klan so they can't go to this' or something like that, then you'd be, like, 'sorry, you're going...' [emphasis added].

Researcher: Do you know how many students approximately?

Dylan: Like 10 or so - if that. I think they were mainly Muslim students.

Researcher: Okay.

Dylan: Some from just really, Christian households.

Researcher: I'm just wondering how did they go about - how did they know they could opt out? Was there a conversation with administration?

Dylan: ...there's a newsletter sent home to parents through email every week about what's going on in the school. It must have said [GSA] assembly is going on. So, I'm assuming parents wrote notes for their kids saying, 'my daughter or son is not attending it'...I'm just really offended that parents would want to shelter their kids from acceptance, right? It's like we had a multicultural assembly like a few weeks after, like a month after that and it was like if I had kids writing notes being like, 'my child will not go to the multicultural assembly because they are only their culture and that's it,' like it's the same thing *I feel. It's, like, learning how not to be accepting. If it's against your religion you can still go...it just says we accept everyone right...we're not trying to indoctrinate your kids, right? We're trying to teach*

human rights actually, and how to be a good human being [emphasis added]...

As Dylan contended, it was unthinkable for students to opt out of anti-racist or multicultural assemblies, so when students were permitted to opt-out of the GSA's assembly it magnified the subjugation of queer and trans knowledges - "...a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified an nonconceptual knowledges, knowledges that are elaborated knowledges, naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity" (Foucault, as cited in Stryker, 2006, p. 13), and how staff were peddling to homo/transphobes by exempting them from encountering queer and trans-informed education.

GSA members at Village High were largely disappointed with their school-wide assembly. There was a clear difference between their desires and expectations and the outcomes, as Sasha stated: "The assembly was entirely different from the plans, but that was because it was just easier to let it happen..." The theme for the assembly evolved from an Independent Study Project (ISP) that Andie completed in his grade 12 leadership class:

...for [my] leadership class, our final ISP was to do a TED Talk about something that involves leadership and is important to you. So, then my topic was about labels and how good leaders don't let labels divide them and they kind of create a definition for themselves. And I also kind of turned the speech into like a coming out type speech at the same time. So, from that...I also was inspired by [a sports'] campaign to say that every student at [Village High] is important...And so I kind of made, like, a really bad T-shirt, but people liked it. So, when I was talking to [the GSA advisor, Dylan] and also our leadership teacher talked to her. And I said I have this idea for a theme

orientation...[which] promote[s] tolerance but not acceptance of sexual diversity and differences” (Goldstein et al., 2007, p. 184). This safe moment is distinct from positive moments, “...where students and staff learn to respect, accept, and affirm their own identities and those of others” (p. 185), and queer moments that “...not only aim to promote the acceptance, tolerance, and affirmation of queer students and educators, but also, seek to transform how we think about sexuality and desire” (p. 187).

After Andie discussed his ISP project with Dylan, the advisor was eager to utilize his idea for the assembly, much to the dismay of GSA members, such as Sasha. The assembly theme was initially resisted by students who preferred a focus on identities that “...lack mainstream currency” (Grace, 2015, p. 52; see also Mayo, 2017), such as pansexuality, asexuality, genderqueer,⁵ and genderfluid.⁶ Below, Dylan discussed how she approved of Andie’s idea, despite widespread reservations:

...so, this year [the topic was] ‘it’s okay to be gay’ and male athletes, which I thought was really good because -- I asked the kids if they wanted that and they were like, ‘no.’ Then no one planned anything else and [Andie] presented this whole idea and we were like, ‘great, we’ll go with it’ because he had already done the research and contacted people, so we’re like, ‘is everyone agreeing?’ ‘Yeah’! And I’m like, ‘three months ago you said no to this idea, but now that it’s actually presented to you because none of you have anything else planned...’

Dylan was clearly unimpressed that students rejected Andie’s assembly idea, and that they failed to propose and plan an alternative event. Dylan’s insistence that the group prepare something

spotlights how GSA members were unfairly expected to organize anti-hetero/cisnormative events and educate their peers (Kumashiro, 2002).

If it were up to Sasha, Kai, Reese, and Hayden, Village High's assembly would not have focussed on "homosexuality" – a concept that is perceived to be more palatable in schooling than trans and gender diverse topics (GLSEN, 2013, 2014), and anti-discrimination. In the following quote, Kai explicitly critiqued the assembly's anti-bullying theme:

Kai: ...it was kind of more of an anti-bullying thing than really a LGBTQ thing in a way. *We're talking about, like, 'don't bully,' things like that rather than just educating people on terms and things [emphasis added]...*

Researcher: Okay, so you would have liked to have seen maybe more information about the community?

Kai: More information about the community rather than saying stop bullying, you know?

Researcher: Oh, okay.

Kai: Because we've all heard, 'don't bully, don't discriminate,' things like that. And so, *it wasn't really leaving a powerful message because it's the same message we've been hearing for our entire lives [emphasis added]...* So I think it would be more effective if instead of just saying, 'don't discriminate,' if we added in the message of this is what this is and helping people understand it

because that's where most of the discrimination comes from.

People don't understand it. They don't get it.

Kai wanted the assembly to focus on positive and queer moments rather than safe 'anti-bullying' moments (see Goldstein et al., 2007) to advance people's understanding of and appreciation for queer topics. Furthermore, they expressed a desire for a more queer-informed approach to education which "...disrupts heteronormativity and promotes an understanding of oppression as multiple, interconnected, and ever changing" (Goldstein et al., 2007, p. 187). The assembly's depoliticized focus on safe schools negated opportunities to explore queer-informed understandings of sexuality, and it illuminated how individualizing queer harassment abdicates the education system's "...responsibility for challenging power systems and culture that privilege heterosexuality over homosexuality" (Goldstein et al., 2007, p. 185).

Following Butler (1993b) who states, "I'm permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling-blocks, and understand them, even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble" (p. 308), GSA members wanted to expose their peers to identities and expressions beyond a consideration of the stabilizing categories of 'gay' and 'lesbian.' Below, Reese describes how privileging sexuality content elided the exploration of gender (Stryker, 2006) and romantic minority content:

We're teaching the same thing over and over again...it's like, 'oh, okay, there's gay people out there'. But we need to talk more about romantic minorities, and gender minorities, and non-binary genders not just the male and the female. I think a lot of people are really interested in that. And they would be really interested in that if they knew it existed.

Reese's commentary spotlights how, beyond providing queer-infused education, formal schooling needs to prompt students to question a barrage of oppressive understandings about romantic alignment (e.g., non-monogamy is deplorable) and gender (e.g., trans people are illegitimate). With respect to gender, validating its diversity would provide a foundation for countering cissexism – a crucial endeavour since "...gender-variant people are oppressed by a system that forces everyone to identify and be easily recognizable as either a woman or a man" (Serano, 2007/2016, p. 161). Such a focus on gender diversity was especially important to Hayden, a sexual and gender minority:

I find at the school it's a lot more accepting to like gay and lesbians...I think it's because they're used to it more...But when they hear stuff like trans or agender, genderfluid, they don't know what that means so they don't really trust it...they just avoid it because they don't understand how it works.

Here, Hayden disclosed that gender diversity was not celebrated at his school. He voiced how cissexist discourses were employed to dismiss trans people and reject gender identities that fall outside of the gender binary; as Stryker (2006) notes, "Transgender people who problematize the assumed correlation of a particular biological sex with a particular social gender are often considered to make false representations of an underlying material truth, through the willful distortion of surface appearance. Their gender presentation is seen as a lie rather than as an expression of a deep, essential truth..." (p. 9). Hayden's insights call for the education system to consider their complacency with cissexism, and fulfil their responsibility in providing education that is critical of privileging cisgender experiences and othering trans and non-binary identities and gender diverse expressions (Kumashiro, 2002). Unfortunately, like the standard curriculum, the GSA's assembly failed to interrogate cisnormativity in sport.

Village High's assembly was held in a large auditorium, which could not accommodate the entire school. As such, the school population was divided into two and the assembly was delivered twice. I observed the first assembly. It began with two students, Andie and a grade nine GSA member, welcoming the attendees and posing questions to the audience with Poll Everywhere software. The first question asked attendees if they were aware of the acronym, "LGBTQ." The online response rate was low, but a handful of people were unfamiliar with the term. Next, they played a video that Dylan created in consultation with GSA members. The video conveyed the message that every student, staff member, educator, or administrator belonged at school simply because they were a community member. The video depicted a variety of people quickly describing why they belong at school. For example, in the video people stated, "If you're a drama student, you're a [school mascot]...If you identify as transgender, you're a [school mascot]...If you're Muslim, you're a [school mascot]...If you're pansexual, you're a [school mascot]." The audience responded by clapping to this positive moment, which moved beyond safety and tolerance towards affirming diversity (Goldstein et al., 2007). Yet, this inclusive moment ultimately failed to elicit critical thought on how queer, trans, and gender diverse people and topics are routinely marginalized at school because it "...construct[ed] sexuality as a private issue...[and] foreclose[d] the possibility of thinking about queer sexuality outside of the effects of heterosexism and homophobia" (Goldstein et al., 2007, p. 186).

After the video played a guest speaker from a local sport agency, who was recruited by Andie, spoke primarily about safe and positive moments in sport (i.e., anti-discrimination and affirmation) rather than queer moments (i.e., systemic deconstruction) (see Goldstein et al. 2007). As will be outlined below, using a guest speaker as a proxy (i.e., relying on a guest speaker to educate and speak on behalf of all GSRMs) is a limited and limiting educational practice (Malatino,

2015), which Sasha, Kai, Reese, and Hayden were particularly upset about. Hayden's subsequent quote illustrated his frustration with bringing in a guest to speak for queer, trans, and gender diverse youth:

...[the GSA] didn't really do as much in the assembly. We just got that guy to talk there who was working to end stigma in sports...it kind of just made it as if we were just bringing someone else in to talk about LGBTQ rights, but, we ourselves didn't really get a chance to talk about that.

By focusing on sexual inclusion, the guest speaker erased the marginal experiences of trans people in sport and physical education (see Sykes, 2011; Sykes & Smith, 2016). Besides privileging cisgender experiences, the guest speaker also reinforced the false gay/straight dichotomy – "...one of the most pervasive, deeply felt, and distinctive structures of the modern world..." (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 6-7) - through his words and actions. The guest speaker spoke about sport inclusion through the lens of the local anti-homophobic organization that he founded. He stated that the purpose of his 'inclusive' sporting organization was to "bring straight and non-straight athletes together." By using such monosexist language, the guest speaker reinforced the gay/straight binary (Warner, 1991) and erased non-binary sexualities, such as bisexual and pansexual – a significant oversight considering many youth do not identify as exclusively gay or straight (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2010). Further, the speaker's comments were oppressive since they supported "...the assumption that being exclusively attracted to members of a single sex or gender is somehow more natural, real, or legitimate, than being attracted to members of more than one sex or gender" (Serano, 2013, p. 84).

The guest speaker also felt entitled to assume and declare audience members' genders when he responded to their questions throughout the presentation (e.g., 'He said;' 'her question was,')

etc.), which exemplified how he believed he had "...the ability and authority to accurately determine who is a woman and who is a man..." (Serano, 2007/2016, p. 166). In doing so, he reaffirmed cissexist assumptions that invalidate personhood when bodies, identities, and expressions do not align (Stryker, 2006). The speaker also further entrenched the fe/male binary by using the cissexist salutation, "ladies and gentlemen," on a PowerPoint he displayed during his presentation, as opposed to using language that affirms gender diversity, such as, "assembled guests," "folks," or "all." Similarly, the guest speaker preserved dichotomous notions of gender by inviting all male athletes on stage to recite and repeat the phrase, "It's ok to be gay." It was unclear, but highly improbable that trans men and trans masculine folks were invited to participate. After the guest speaker asked all male athletes to accompany him on stage, he stated, "Sorry girls," which, once again, reinforced the gender binary and consequently excluded non-binary students. The purported purpose of this activity was to break down homophobic tendencies among male athletes, but this activity was blatantly underpinned by heteronormative beliefs that all (cisgender) male athletes are heterosexual, and thus homophobic. Altogether, these blunders strengthen Malatino's (2015) argument that a guest speaker approach cannot be used as a sole strategy for addressing GSRM education: "I understand the 'guest speaker' approach to addressing trans, intersex, and gender-nonconforming issues as part and parcel of this neoliberal management of difference, and I find it inadequate for increasing awareness and action regarding the intense institutional and systemic discrimination trans and gender-nonconforming folk regularly encounter" (p. 399).

Hayden, Sasha, and Reese were all alarmed by the presenter's cisnormative language and content, which raises the need for educators "...to rethink our assumptions about who can and should be an authority on educational practice..." (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 9). Hayden was

especially annoyed that trans issues in sport were omitted because athletics are incredibly gendered (Sykes, 2011; Sykes & Smith, 2016):

Well the problem is he didn't really talk about gender identity, he was more focusing on gay and lesbian and bi people in sports and I thought that was kind of ... it's the same thing again that more people focus on the sexual preferences rather than the gender preferences...I was kind of disappointed with the lack of gender identity stuff that he talked about because I personally think it's more of a problem having transgender people in sports than people who are gay or lesbian or bi.

When discussing change rooms, the guest speaker failed to acknowledge how gender-segregated spaces are especially unsafe for trans folks (Taylor et al., 2011) who are often forced to use the locker room that corresponds with their legal sex (Kosciw et al., 2016). Instead, the guest speaker declared: “Guys have an issue with changing with LGBTQ people,” and by doing so made it clear that he did not consider trans men to be ‘guys’ (see Serano, 2017/2016). For Sasha, a trans individual who was “...excruciatingly aware of any gendered space....” (Serano, 2007/2016, p. 181), this omission was unacceptable. Sasha insisted that you cannot discuss change room challenges without examining their impact on trans folks: “...let’s look at trans people for a second...Change rooms aren’t the best... it's even worse almost because first is you go in the one you're assigned at birth, and second is if you don't - well if you haven’t had surgery – I think, well ‘no,’ have a guy with boobs in the guy’s change room, right?” Like Hayden and Sasha, Reese saw the assembly as a missed opportunity to educate people about the implications of cissexist infrastructure (i.e., locker rooms) and practices (i.e., gender-segregated sports teams) for trans and gender diverse folks. To promote trans and gender diverse justice in sports, Reese communicated that the guest speaker should have disentangled sex and gender and articulated how gender “...is

lived, embodied, experienced, performed, and encountered...” (Stryker, 2006, p. 3). They also stressed how “Space is...relevant to the way we negotiate gender identity and social difference” (Cavanagh, 2010, p. 12) inasmuch that cissexist assumptions give rise to gender segregation, which in turn erases trans and gender diverse people (Namaste, 2000):

...there’s more things that people aren’t educated on that we need to educate them on too. Such as gender identity because...some people still don't know the difference between your sex and your gender...we do have a few transgender or non-binary individuals at our school who do play a lot of sports. *I think it would have been nice if [the guest speaker] could have just kind of added...a little bit...[about] gendered sports teams...they’re not good...especially for people who don't identify with a gender [emphasis added].* I think it’s...supposed to be based on sex, but I think it shouldn’t be like that. I don't think we should have a girl team and a boy team. I think we should just have teams. And it also helps to reinforce that stereotype of girls need to be on a different team than guys because they are somehow different than guys...It’s a bit sexist, but it’s also not inclusive...

Here, Reese stressed the importance of authorizing GSRMs’ voices in educational conversations and reform since this is vital and central to counteracting adult-centric constructions of schooling, the curriculum, and education more broadly. As noted by Cook-Sather (2006), “...young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling...their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults...they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education” (p. 359). Stryker’s (2006) writing on (de)subjugated knowledges is useful here in terms of recognizing what students bring to educational development (Cook-Sather, 2002). Stryker (2006) stresses the importance of “...the kind of knowledge that transgender people,

whether academically trained or not, have to their own embodied experience, and of their relationships to the discourses and institutions that act upon and through them” (p. 13). Altogether, the guest speaker’s oppressive words and actions helped expose the limits of guest speakers as a proxy in that this pedagogic strategy fails to “represent and authenticate trans experiences, perspectives, and political engagements” (Malatino, 2015, p. 395) in two prominent ways. First, it was incredibly problematic that the guest speaker was tasked with addressing oppression in sport, but neglected to acknowledge and critique its cisnormative foundation. Second, following Britzman (1995), one-off events (e.g., school-wide assemblies) do little more than provide education about and promote tolerance of the ‘Other’ (Britzman, 1995; Kumashiro, 2002); when schools rely on guest speakers to do their educative work the irregularity of the event strengthens cisnormative discourses (Malatino, 2015).

By bringing in a guest speaker to speak for GSRM communities (Malatino, 2015), GSA members were silenced and denied space for legitimacy, recognizability, and recognition in education (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006), and it limited their ability to “...take action for social change” (Mayo, 2013a, p. 271), as Hayden contended:

...I think that we really should start actually doing it ourselves and having our own assemblies where people tell their own experiences which I think we were going to do, but then didn’t. I don’t know what really happened with that...I don’t know why but we have a tendency to kind of drag other people in...to speak for us when I think we should be speaking for us...

Following Cook-Sather (2002) who calls for “...count[ing] students among those who have the knowledge and the position to shape what counts as education, to reconfigure power dynamics and discourse practices within existing realms of conversation about education” (p. 3), Hayden

described a need for more democratized participation in the form of student input in education (e.g., curriculum and policy development) as a basis for countering adult-centric approaches to schooling. Although responsibility for providing anti-hetero/cisnormative education should not fall on the shoulders of youth, Hayden, Reese, and Sasha preferred that they spoke at the assembly. Authorizing student voice (Cook-Sather, 2002) was particularly important for Reese who declared: “I feel that the students need to have more of a voice...I always feel like we’re being silenced a little bit...” A student-led assembly was ideal for Sasha because it would be: “Where we do everything, we bring up stuff, we bring up stories, we bring up issues and not like marriage equality even though that is an issue, but more issues that students are concerned about.” By increasing student involvement, Sasha believed that the assembly topics would be more relevant (e.g., trans embodiment) and the information would be more accurate. As opposed to the cisgender guest speaker, Sasha thought he was better equipped to answer trans-specific questions and although this can be a harmful educational practice (Malatino, 2015), Sasha was eager to educate others in this manner: “I’d answer any questions about being trans...Stuff like that because they’re going to ask someone, right? And might as well be me and they won’t go bother someone else who’s going to be bothered by that question.” Here, Sasha stressed how many adult cisgender folks are unfamiliar and/or uncomfortable with trans and gender diverse topics, giving credence to Cook-Sather’s (2006) assertion that students should be granted the “...opportunity to speak one’s mind, be heard and counted by others, and...have an influence on outcomes” (p. 363). Sasha’s insights magnify the importance of trans-informed teacher training and PD to facilitate educator’s comfort with and ability to implement anti-cisnormative curricula (Taylor et al., 2016; see also Graybill et al., 2015). In filling this educative gap, schools would take ownership for addressing institutionalized cissexism, and become less reliant on guest speakers and GSA members to do their teaching.

Educators and students at Village High did not discuss the assembly in their classes to the best of Andie, Sasha, and Kai's recollection, perhaps because educators "...did not feel empowered or obligated to *teach*...students the information provided by the GSA as a way to contextualize the...event" (Wegwert, 2014, p. 539); by privileging the standard curriculum over educational dialogue about GSRM human rights, educators maintained "...reproductive structures of privilege and marginalization" (Wegwert, 2014, p. 542), as evidenced in the following interaction with Andie:

Researcher: So, after the assembly, in any of your classes, did the teacher or the students talk about it formally in the class or...

Andie: Not in any of my classes. I only have two of them so I - and they're both pretty heavy course loads, like it's 12U biology and 12U physics so it's not really - the teachers say there's not really extra time to, like, you can't miss a day, we've got to stay on track so we can cover all the material.

Here, Andie explained how the regular hetero/cisnormative curriculum took priority over addressing GSRM-based marginalization in school and society. Like Andie, Kai reiterated that their educators did not take the opportunity to contextualize the GSA's assembly. They did, however, overhear students saying that the assembly targeted straight people. This unwarranted and offensive suggestion highlights the problem of using the assembly to do queer and trans-informed educative work in the absence of a more sustained and integrated curricular approach (Britzman, 1995; Malatino, 2015):

Researcher: ...did you talk about the assembly in your classes, any of them?

Kai: No. Not as a group. I mean the guys were joking around it, they were like, 'Oh yeah, that was so dumb. Oh, they were targeting straight people, whoa,' blah, blah, blah.

Researcher: Is that your tech class or...

Kai: Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah. Okay, so they were saying they were targeting straight people?

Kai: Yeah.

Researcher: Did they elaborate on that a little....

Kai: Well no. *Like they're just like, 'Oh yeah, [the guest speaker] was singling out the straight people because like, 'oh hey, you guys are all jerks' [emphasis added], when I don't think he was, but they were just taking it the wrong way because they're - they take a lot of things the wrong way I think...And I think the topic might make them a little uncomfortable, which makes them complain even more [emphasis added].*

Although a more integrated approach to queer and trans topics is preferable, a formal debrief and discussion of the assembly's content could have helped counter how "...the normal of the normative order produces itself as unmarked sameness and as synonymous with everyday..." (Britzman, 1995, p. 159). By purposefully forgoing the standard curriculum in place of discussing GSRM issues, teachers could have helped counter pervasive anti-hetero/cisnormative educative gaps. However, leading a debrief is easier said than done because many teachers need guidance and support to engage students with queer and trans topics (Taylor et al., 2016), as Kai articulated:

Kai: ...I think, yet again, some of the teachers may have been uncomfortable talking about it in a way just because as much as it doesn't seem like such a new thing, it is still a newer thing. Like all the acceptance and talking about it in schools and stuff...It was kind of a taboo subject for a while and it still a little bit is.

Researcher: So do you think that many of your teachers are not comfortable or knowledgeable?

Kai: I think that's - yeah.

Interviewer: Both of them, comfortable and knowledgeable?

Kai: Yeah.

Due to teacher discomfort and insufficient knowledge (see Kitchen, & Bellini, 2013; Taylor et al., 2016), it is suggested that teachers engage in ongoing personal research and PD so they may infuse GSA content in their classes, and more importantly, provide and sustain a queer and trans-informed approach to teaching and learning.

Lobbying for an all gender washroom

Following Stryker (2006), GSA members' desire to create an all gender washroom (i.e., a multi-stall washroom for anyone of any gender) "...concern[ed] itself with what we – we who have a passionate stake in such things – are going to do, politically, about the injustices..." (p. 3). The following section outlines trans and gender diverse GSA members' perspectives on the two gender neutral washrooms (i.e., single stall restrooms) at their school – a critical empirical contribution considering there is limited research on their impact in secondary schools (Davies, Vipond, & King, 2017), and how they influenced school officials to develop an all gender washroom. Examining how GSA members lobbied for an all gender washroom is noteworthy considering "...little attention has been paid to the emerging activism and education surrounding gender identity issues within youth communities" (Schindel, 2008, p. 58).

Gendered assumptions and expectations, based on one's (perceived) sex, determine who can access male- and female-designated spaces and who has the authority to determine who can (Cavanagh, 2010). The steadfast policing of gender is, of course, based on normative regulatory schemas, which are grounded in the assumption that sex is a bodily given that determines one's gender (Stryker, 2006). GSA members at Village High were particularly critical of how the gender binary is implicated in the maintenance of cisgender privilege through social spaces. Reese, for example, was adamant that the ubiquitous allocation of male and female washrooms needed an

overhaul. For Reese, cisnormativity could be challenged by de-gendering such oppressive spaces: “...it would just be nice to take all the gender signs off the bathrooms and just be like, ‘Ta-Da.’” Reese’s thoughts on washroom structures reflect that of Cavanagh (2010) who problematizes the binary restroom system:

The architectural design and gendered codes of conduct mandated in lavatory all support the illusion that there are two binary genders – male and female – both of which are visible, identifiable, and natural... ‘sorting out,’ the differences between male and female, masculine and feminine is a function of today’s gender-segregated toilets (p. 52).

Here, Cavanagh (2010) theorizes how male- and female-designated spaces are sites of regulation, surveillance, and control, and they function to delegitimize (Serano, 2007/2016) and erase (Namaste, 2000) trans and gender diverse people through their architectural design. The washroom, therefore, is not simply a space to excrete waste; it is a site where gender is regulated and policed (Cavanagh, 2010).

Since male- and female-designated washrooms are often unsafe and unwelcoming places for trans and gender diverse people due to escalated levels of harassment and abuse in gendered spaces (Cavanagh, 2010; Elliott, 2016; GLSEN, 2015; Kosciw et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2011; Wyss, 2004; Y-GAP, 2009), Hayden, and Sasha refrained from using school washrooms that corresponded with their gender identity (i.e., male-designated lavatories). Sasha was particularly uncomfortable with entering gendered spaces because he was fearful that others would object:

...a lot of people know me as a girl so I can't go into the guy's washroom, but I don't feel comfortable going into the girls' as well as a lot of people don't know me so I pass, but I go into the girls' washroom and they either freak out or, 'Oh, she's a girl.'

Due to discomfort using the standard washrooms, some Village High GSA members occasionally used the two single-stall, key-entry gender neutral washrooms that were inconveniently located in the school. Although these single person spaces can provide safety and privacy for trans students (Elliott, 2016), Sasha purported that they were "...really weird, like, one-stall washrooms." As Sasha related in his third diary, the two gender neutral washrooms were out of the way and required a key.

...we do have single stall washrooms that anyone could use, they're in really odd places (the auditorium, which you need a key for, and the nurse's office). I've often had to debate with myself if I really have to go, where I should go if the auditorium isn't available. This way, there's a place I can go and I don't need to worry about anyone wondering if I belong in the washroom.

Likewise, Reese declared:

...I know we have one gender neutral washroom that was always gender neutral, but it's off the side of the stage in the auditorium, and it's so inaccessible and I do believe there is a door to the hallway that locks and sometimes you can't get in there. It's just horrible that we have to inconvenience people who would like to use a gender-neutral washroom like that...

In using these gender neutral facilities, trans students spent more time travelling to and back from the washroom than their cisgender peers, drawing attention to their ‘Otherness.’ Since the auditorium washroom was always locked, this created another barrier for students who did not want to ‘out’ themselves to secure a key. Similarly, if students forgot their key, they had to ask a custodian to open the washroom, further extending their time outside of class and magnifying their transness. The nurse’s office was no better since it was not located in a discrete place.

Following Sasha’s sentiments, Hayden discussed the ostracizing and isolating nature of single occupancy washrooms, which quite literally function to segregate and contain the ‘Other’:

...it’s kind of encouraging the segregation part...Because then you will see kids using that washroom. if students see that they’ll be like, ‘why do they need to use that washroom? Is something wrong with them or something?’ I’m not sure; it just kind of draws more attention to you when you use those washrooms...

Here, Hayden’s insights raise questions about the policing of gendered spaces (Cavanagh, 2010) – issues that are not necessarily solved through the implementation of gender neutral washrooms. Although “The institutionalization of gender-neutral toilet designs is an urgent and important political project to ensure access for all who depart from conventional sex/gender body politics” (Cavanagh, 2010, p. 5; see also Elliott, 2016), Sasha insisted that gender neutral washrooms were “weird” and Reese stated that they “[made] people look at [trans people] strangely, or [trans people] feel that way...And they don’t like that...” According to Hayden, Sasha, and Reese, the alternative washrooms for trans students intensified gendered surveillance and exemplified “...the importance of public space to the production of gender and social difference...” (Cavanagh, 2010, p. 12). As GSA members astutely noted, funnelling trans students into visibly different lavatories exemplified how: “Social space is designed to render people ‘in’ and ‘out’ of place. LGBTI folk

are often rendered ‘out of place’ in public lavatories. This is because gender and sexual minorities are perceived to disrupt cissexist and heteronormative designs of the bathroom” (Cavanagh, 2010, p. 12).

To combat trans exclusion and diminish the gendered surveillance that arose from male- and female-designated and gender neutral washrooms, GSA members lobbied for an all gender washroom - a “*Regular* washroom, just [with a] different title,” according to Sasha. This space was important to GSA members because it had the potential to subvert rather than reinforce hegemonic gender regimes, and affirm rather than preclude trans embodiment. In Kai’s second diary, they described how the GSA offered an opportune venue to advocate for an all gender washroom: “I think having the GSA just brought the subject up and having the group of students saying ‘yes, we want this’ really helped push it through.” In the following passage, Hayden disclosed that during a GSA meeting he and another trans student voiced that they were unable to use the gendered washrooms, and by doing so convinced Dylan to speak to the principal about instituting an all gender washroom:

Researcher: ...so how did the all gender washroom kind of come about?
Did students in the GSA talk to someone and that's how it came about?

Hayden: Yeah. I was kind of - well me and my other friend in the GSA who is also transgender, we were the main ones complaining. *We were just like, ‘we're sick of not being able to use the bathrooms! Let us use bathrooms’!* So, we kind of encouraged our GSA advisor to talk to our principal about that [emphasis added].

Researcher: Yeah, awesome.

Hayden: Yeah, I think it was mainly at the beginning of the year we talked about it and stuff and our advisor said they were going to talk to the principal about it and we were like, 'yay'! Then when we found out they actually were going to get [an all gender] bathroom we were like, 'yay'!

Dylan discussed how the GSA members' washroom request was inspired by the recent success of students from another school within the board who lobbied for and were granted an all gender washroom. This school unveiled the all gender washroom the previous year, and was the first school within the board to do so. Village High became the second school in the board to open a multi-stall washroom for anyone of any gender, according to Dylan:

[Another school in the board] came out with the all gender washroom and that was in the news and [the GSA] talked about that. It was really good. The kids were really pushing for an all gender washroom early in the year because we have this one wing of the school that has just a male washroom because it was the tech wing. Back in the days when only guys did tech and, so there's just a male washroom on the one side of the school. *We don't have very many washrooms in our school so the kids were like, 'can we get this pushed'? So, I sent that through and it's a slow process, but it's happening and I told the kids and they are so excited. I go, 'this is all because that's what you wanted'* [emphasis added].

As Dylan explained, although many GSA members needed immediate access to a washroom that affirmed their gender identity, implementing an all gender washroom was a 'slow process' since

the school elected to convert a male-designated washroom which contained urinals. According to Dylan, she acted as a liaison between GSA members and administration (see Watson et al., 2010), and used her authority as a teacher to advocate on behalf of students who required an all gender washroom. This demonstrated how the GSA helped build partnerships for “discursive contestation” (Fraser, 1990, p. 67) in terms of teachers and students working collaboratively to agitate the school’s binarized washroom system, and lobby for an all gender washroom. As a GSA advisor, Dylan was familiar with trans-related issues at school (e.g., alienation associated with gendered spaces and practices) and thus, did not need to be convinced of the need for an all gender washroom or require further trans affirmative and gender expansive education to act. Dylan’s insights illustrate how youth activism prompted the school to reconceptualize and reconstruct a washroom space that recognized and affirmed gender diversity. This gender-based activism resembled Elliott’s (2016) findings where students advocated for a single, gender neutral washroom by “...petition[ing] the administration for the space, rais[ing] awareness of transgender issues through designing a poster to hang in the cafeteria, and debat[ing] where the space should be located” (p. 56).

The GSA provided a supportive platform for trans youth to voice their political concerns about institutionalized binary washrooms (Cavanagh, 2010). Through advocating for recognition at school (Namaste, 2000), trans youth were successful in securing an affirming space for trans and gender diverse students, as Hayden exclaimed, “I think it’s just like one small step for man, one giant step for LGBTQA!” In Hayden’s third diary, he described feeling a sense of relief knowing that he would have access to an all gender washroom the next school year: “...[it] certainly made me feel more relived about next year, since I still cannot use public washrooms, even at the school, unless [they] are all gender. It will hopefully help with making me more

comfortable attending school.” Here, Hayden stressed how, since he could not use male-designated washrooms, he hoped that the unveiling of the all gender washroom would help him feel more at ease at school.

Although GSA members were looking forward to having an all gender washroom, they were concerned with how it would be perceived by the wider school community. Some students argued that the space would help promote understanding about gender diversity, but others believed that the all gender washroom would be stigmatized much like the two gender neutral facilities. Hayden contended that simply having an all gender washroom could evoke curiosity and prompt people to learn more about it:

...if you put in a[n]...all gender washroom then teachers are going to ask about it more and they might be more inclined to look into that sort of thing. Then it’s at their school so they would kind of feel maybe more obligated to learn about it...That will encourage people to learn about it, not just the teachers maybe even some of the students. When they see an all gender washroom they...will think ‘why does that have to be there’? and maybe they’ll try to look for it.’

Besides incidental learning, GSA members, along with their advisor, called for the school community to be educated about trans topics broadly and the all gender washroom more specifically. The next section explores how the all-gender washroom space can be harnessed to promote gender democratization (Connell, 2009) in terms of discussing current trans and gender diverse foreclosures in male- and female-designated washrooms, and examining how “...the public toilet is designed to discipline gender” (Cavanagh, 2010, p. 5). Overall, I argue that GSA members’ trans-informed activism offered “...spaces to educate school administrators and fellow students about the options for thinking...[and] liv[ing] beyond the binary” (Schindel, 2008, p. 65).

Trans-informed education as a result of student activism. Grace and Wells (2015) contend that school staff need to receive training that builds their knowledge of and capacity to support trans students. In response to the privileging of cisgender identities in policy, practice, and pedagogy, and a lack of preservice training and PD on gender diversity (Graybill et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2016), Dylan took it upon herself to educate fellow teachers about trans experiences at a staff meeting early in the school year (i.e., November 2014). She explained that fellow employees attended a sexuality and gender-related training at the board and these people were expected to share their learnings when they returned to school:

The athletic directors and guidance counsellors all over the board from every school went to training and it was under the guise that those teachers that went to the training would come back and train the staff, which never happened in our school so our principal...she was like, 'okay, can you give the teachers a refresher on inclusive strategies within the school.'...so we talked and she was like, 'I was under the impression that everyone had been trained,' and I said 'no.'

Dylan described how athletic directors and guidance counsellors who attended the training were supposed to train the staff members at her school, but this never occurred. As a result, the principal asked her to facilitate a session on gender diversity at a staff meeting. To prepare for the session, she first consulted with GSA members. She recalled how their contributions advanced her own understanding, and how she harnessed their knowledge to educate school staff:

...some of the students helped plan, like, 'what messages do you want me to send through?'...I'll make sure those messages get...pushed through...it's even given students – you can be that voice to give them power to have their voices heard. So,

it's a way to advocate for student voice and learn...I've learned a lot from the kids.

They know so much.

Here, Dylan disclosed that youth activism influenced her commitment to educate others and to transform cisnormative systems. Thus, the GSA's democratizing potential for building relationships was evident as Dylan used her authority as an educator to share youth's needs and desires with school staff, thereby interacting discursively "...to disseminate one's discourse into ever widening arenas" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67) to effect and initiate transformative change.

The suggestions offered by youth were primarily gender-related, as noted in previous sections of this dissertation. In the following passage, Dylan summarized the PD she facilitated with staff:

...I led a half an hour training...just a presentation about transgender students. A day in the life of a transgender student, like, going to the washroom and not knowing which one to use. Not feeling comfortable in either one. Things like that and letting the staff know what it means to be transgender and that you have students in your classes. My favorite part of that was going, *'no matter what your religion, you're a teacher first...and you have to put your religion aside no matter what your thoughts are on any of this. Human rights come first before your religion, so sorry'* [emphasis added]. I knew there were a couple teachers who were - I think I heard of one teacher rolling her eyes during the presentation. That's one teacher who one of the students had a problem with too. So...that was an issue, but the teachers responded really, really well to it. The number of questions I got after about, 'how do I address this student'? I go, 'have a conversation with them.'

As was the case in Valenti and Campbell (2009) study where the GSA advisor was protective of GSRM youth, Dylan wanted to support trans and gender diverse students by encouraging educators to confront cisnormative assumptions, and develop trans-affirmative teaching and learning practices. She explicitly described institutional (e.g., male- and female-designated washrooms) and interpersonal (e.g., cissexist beliefs that cause teachers to think that all their students are cisgender) barriers that prevent trans and gender diverse students from receiving an equitable education (GLSEN, 2014, 2015). She noted how most staff were appreciative of the training and planned to adjust their practice moving forward (Taylor et al., 2016), but there was one teacher who dismissed and resisted the content. She also outlined how, as with Catholic education (Callaghan, 2016b), religiosity can also impede GSRM students' right to equitable learning environments in public secular schools. Although, unlike publicly-funded Catholic education, this is more of a personal rather than institutional issue in public secular schools. That is, Catholic doctrine, which denigrates homosexuality (Callaghan, 2014a/b), is not foundational to publicly-funded secular education, and as such, individual educators, rather than the system as a whole, are to blame for religiously-founded heterosexism.

Beyond facilitating the trans-informed PD session, Dylan planned to educate teachers about the newly-approved all gender washroom because, as with Kitchen and Bellini's (2013) study where GSA advisors saw themselves as a critical educational resource, she believed she could help cultivate trans-affirmative change as school. Dylan was compelled to raise awareness of this space because a school board member – who was charged with overseeing equity and inclusive education in the district - visited Village High during a year-end staff meeting to facilitate a session on gender diversity, but ironically failed to mention that an all gender washroom was opening the following year. Rather than explaining and problematizing the cisnormative underpinnings of gender-

segregated washrooms (Cavanagh, 2010), Dylan disappointingly communicated that "...all it was a repeat presentation of what I did in November. I was like, 'well that was pointless.'" Below she elaborated further on the school board employee's significant oversight:

...I feel like this is so redundant...but for staff who weren't there for first semester they got the messaging too. But I think it would have been more effective if they had said we are getting an all gender washroom. I think our principal said it to the staff, but it wasn't really the focus, which I thought was going to be the focus of it. Saying in September when you come there will be an all gender washroom. Here's the messaging that needs to happen if you hear conversations in the hall this is what you need to say. They didn't do that and I was kind of disappointed with regards to that.

Although the board employee's session was similar to Dylan's, she was happy that those who were absent in November were exposed to the trans 101 content. Yet, if queer and trans content were regularly integrated into PD, rather than treated as an atypical endeavor (Britzman, 1995; Malatino, 2015), Dylan would not have had to keep tabs on educators at her school. In sum, Dylan argued that teachers required information and strategies to address misconceptions associated with the all gender washroom – if they should arise.

Since the school board employee failed to discuss the all gender washroom when presenting on gender diversity, Dylan wished to educate the staff at Village High at their first school meeting in September 2015:

I'll have to get in touch with our principal for our September, like before school staff meeting - just a 10-minute talk about...the messaging...[that should be] portrayed to the students...it's close to the office and the main part of the school so...if we see

anything...it's a case of, 'what would you do if you saw this'? or like, 'how do you address if parents are like, 'well what if kids are gonna go in there and have sex'?...if kids are going to have sex in a bathroom then they are going to do it...I'm hoping in September I can address that a bit...informing them about what it means to be transgender, what it feels like to go somewhere that you feel uncomfortable.

Following Beauchamp and D'Harlingue (2012), Dylan disputed that female- or male-designated washrooms are somehow safer than all gender washrooms since "...multi-stall, binary-gendered bathrooms...may still be unsafe, even for many normatively gendered individuals, in a variety of ways; for example, racism, classism, and sexual assault are still possible, even if all occupants of a space are nontransgender women" (p. 45). Dylan wanted to address these cissexist assumptions because they are purposefully deployed to discredit desegregation efforts, which recognize and affirm gender diversity. Dylan needed teachers to question taken-for granted ways in which gender is implicated in the physical design of schools since it precludes trans embodiment (Cavanagh, 2010). Overall, Dylan's educative work was vital because GSAs cannot be solely tasked with addressing cisnormativity at school; more (cisgender) educators must challenge cisgender privilege at school through implementing trans-informed teaching and learning practices.

Like Dylan, Reese, Hayden, and Kai all remarked that explicit messaging on the all gender washroom would help further their teachers' understanding about gender diversity and help them become more trans-affirmative practitioners. At a GSA meeting in May 2015, Dylan announced to the group that teachers would be notified about and educated on the all gender washroom. Reese voiced that they were delighted about this in their third diary: "I'm really glad that teachers are being informed more and more about these kinds of things. It would be nice to go to a school in

which every teacher is well informed and accepting!” Here, Reese insinuated that teachers at Village High lacked both understanding about and acceptance of gender diversity. Likewise, Hayden was confident that teachers needed to confront the ways in which they implicitly valorize the gender binary, and denigrate trans and non-binary identities:

...if we teach people about [the all gender washroom] I’m pretty sure that will help end the stigma against it because then more people will understand it and people will then trust it. Most people don’t trust what they don’t understand so that will definitely help.

In Hayden’s third diary he suggested that: “...having the teachers being notified about the all gender washroom will help educate the teachers about gender identity.” In this way, teachers could interrogate cissexist assumptions that associate sex and gender (see Stryker, 2006) by recognizing how all gender washrooms validate gender diversity. Kai’s second diary entry provided more insight into this issue; they highlighted how male- and female-designated washrooms are built upon the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990), and how non-binary identities are invalidated by the gender binary (Serano, 2007/2016):

...I think it's good to make sure the teachers know what's happening with the washroom as well as a reminder of the fact that not all girls like boys, not all boys like girls, not everyone is a boy or girl, etc.

All GSA members stressed how trans and gender diverse issues required more attention at their school. Reese wanted key school employees, such as administration and counsellors, to further their understandings of gender diversity so they could in turn support other staff members. Most

importantly, they advocated for education that is critical of privileging and othering, rather than education for and about the ‘Other’ (Kumashiro, 2002):

...we should be talking about this more often. We should be informing our staff at the school. Especially the principal and the counselors, more on this so they can better aide the students and better instruct the staff...tell them why it’s an all gender washroom, and not just brush it under the rug. Not just, take the gender sign off the door, just explain why they are doing it and explain the progressiveness of the situation, and what we’re actually doing.

Through speaking with GSA members, it was clear that they wanted their teachers to not only understand, but affirm trans experiences by supporting desegregated washrooms (Davies, Vipond, & King, 2017). Since ...not all transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are able to or want to pass within the male/female gender binary...it is necessary to have safe(r) and accessible washroom spaces for them where they do not feel the pressure of cisnormative and heteronormative surveillance” (Davies, Vipond, & King, 2017, p. 12).

Although Kai appreciated that teachers were going to learn about the all gender washroom, they suggested that the session should be facilitated by GSA members:

Kai: I feel like almost a cool thing to do would be to have the GSA bring in the teachers for a meeting and have the students say it just because maybe they’d listen better if it was coming directly from the students.

Researcher: Okay, so maybe the GSA puts together some kind of presentation or workshop for all the staff members?

Kai: Yeah.

Kai and other GSA members stressed the importance of educating teachers about gender diversity through the introduction of the all gender washroom because, as Dylan argued, they often lag behind students. Whether it was because students were excited about the space or incited to educate their teachers, anti-cisnormative education must also be taken up by the school board, administration, and teachers. Overall, schools and teachers must take ownership for affirming gender diversity.

In addition to educating teachers about the all gender washroom, GSA members also wanted their peers to receive trans-informed education. Hayden was adamant that: “[Students] should definitely be educated about it.” Following Hayden, Reese believed that students needed to unpack cisnormative assumptions embedded in male- and female-designated washrooms because they foreclose trans and gender diverse identities and experiences (Cavanagh, 2010), and alienate those students who are not cisgender:

...even students in our classrooms, they don't understand why it's important for people...to have a bathroom...Just to go to the bathroom and feel comfortable about being able to go where you are allowed to—you're supposed to go...And I think a lot of the students are only against it because they don't know about it. They don't know the feeling that transgender or non-binary individuals feel when they're forced to go into a bathroom that does not meet their gender identity...And that creates a lot of ignorance and a lot of rudeness and a lot of...hateful comments.

Reese then provided an example of how a cisgender male in their French class objected to using all gender washrooms because they made him uncomfortable. In Reese's grade 10 French class

their teacher asked students: "...if you were [the principal], or part of the administration, what would be the first thing that you would change..."? After Reese offered the answer, "bathrooms," the cisgender male student began to argue with them:

He was like, 'well, I would be uncomfortable,' and I was like, 'well, don't you think they're uncomfortable being forced into a bathroom that they don't identify with? I mean, I don't see why your suffering is any more different than they're suffering'...your uncomfortableness isn't any more important than them being uncomfortable because you know what, they don't go through the same things that people who are non-binary [do]...I don't think they understand how much it can affect somebody to be forced into a bathroom that doesn't coincide with their gender.

Here, Reese's rebuttal stressed how cissexist beliefs emboldened the cisgender male student to automatically dismiss the significance of an all gender washroom for trans and gender diverse folks in terms of its role in legitimizing trans embodiment and non-binary identities. Reese called out this student's gender entitlement by highlighting how his discomfort was associated with the taken-for-granted ways in which he could access male-designated washrooms since his gender identity was validated by others who shared and policed these spaces (Serano, 2007/2016). As opposed to this cisgender male student, many trans and gender diverse students cannot enter gender segregated washrooms and/or they feel unsafe accessing these spaces (Cavanagh, 2010; Taylor et al., 2011), and are thus, left with no where to go. Cisgender students need to understand that all gender spaces recognize and affirm gender diversity, and do not infringe on their right to use the washroom. If cisgender students, like the one in Reese's French class, are uncomfortable with using an all gender washroom, they can access any of the copious gendered washrooms that correspond with how they feel and identify. Alternatively, these students can use gender neutral

washrooms – an accommodation for cisgender folks rather than trans and gender diverse youth. With trans-informed training, educators can help students, such as Reese’s classmate, interrogate assumptions that privilege cisgender people and marginalize those whose sex and gender do not align.

Overall, findings from Village High demonstrate how the club operated as a counterpublic at school in terms of producing and circulating counter-hegemonic discourses in relation to sexuality and gender (see Fraser, 1990). It also served as a proxy in lieu of an absence of a systemic commitment to providing anti-hetero/cisnormative education. Both the counter-hegemonic role and proxy function of GSAs will be explored further by examining findings from with the third school site, Sunset High.

Sunset High

Sunset High had a rather small GSA, with only a hand full of regularly-attending youth - most of whom were friends outside the club. Like Village High, GSA members and their advisor believed that the purpose of their group was to educate the school community; however, the social and supportive nature of the club was observably more appealing to youth than planning, organizing, and facilitating activities and events. Since this club operated primarily as a haven for GSRM youth, there is substantially less data on the GSA’s educative and activist work at school. Although I observed and participated in this GSA more often than the other school sites, few club members elected to complete a semi-structured interview and submit online diary entries. Both the roles of Sunset High’s GSA and a lack of participants restricted what knowledge could be generated on the group’s educative and activist influence in the wider school community. Despite these limitations, the anti-hetero/cisnormative efforts of the group are documented below. Particular attention is paid to examining a PD session that the GSA created and presented, which

encouraged educators to integrate anti-oppressive perspectives into their classes (Kumashiro, 2002), and to exploring how the school board exerted pressure on all GSAs within the district at an annual GSA conference to address homo/transphobic school culture. The GSA's response to the school board's lack of culpability is a significant empirical finding. Data herein illustrate how GSRM and allied GSA members in this public secular board were not supported in their efforts to combat the marginalization of sexual and gender minorities in schooling, but expected to alter their oppressive circumstances. The board's actions demonstrate how their strategy for addressing hetero/cisnormative school climates was to employ youth to do their work (for free). By passing off their educative responsibility, this board left GSA members no other choice but to advocate on their own behalf (Kumashiro, 2002).

Compelled to Educate School Community Members

As previously stated, the two GSA members I spoke with at Sunset High insisted that the main function of their GSA was to elicit anti-hetero/cisnormative change at school. For example, Skylar, a pansexual female grade 12 student asserted: "...we're here to do business. We're here to help the people around us because we are just good people trying to make change." She explained that the GSA's:

...mission statement is to help lessen and hopefully, eventually eradicate discrimination and homophobia in our school. We know there will always be people that are homophobic, but we're hoping to lessen the effects and just how judgmental they can be towards people who are a part of the community.

Here, Skylar emphasized that the purpose of the GSA was to combat homophobia and as a cisgender person, notably overlooked transphobia. Blake, who never self-identified, also viewed

the club as a counter-hegemonic space where group members could "...invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). Blake had been a GSA member at two different high schools in the same school board. At their previous school, Blake was unsatisfied with their GSA's educative efforts because they wanted to raise awareness of GSRM issues in the wider school community. Upon transferring to Sunset High and joining the GSA, Blake exclaimed that: "...it felt good to finally be a part of something that works so hard to make a difference!" (Diary 1). Since institutionalized hetero/cisnormativity was rarely acknowledged or effectively addressed at their school, Skylar and Blake felt compelled to better their experiences in the education system by occasionally engaging in anti-hetero/cisnormative educative and activist initiatives, as will be detailed further.

Although Skylar and Blake insisted that the GSA should work to end GSRM oppression, they both took refuge in the group because their every day school experiences privileged heterosexual and cisgender students. Zion, a straight, female GSA advisor, noted that the group provided a sanctuary for GSRM youth who were looking to decompress and socialize. When asked what the purpose of the GSA was, she explained that it was multi-functioning:

I think number one is to give them a safe place. There are times when they come in and nobody feels like doing anything and you can tell because they are exhausted and stressed. So sometimes you come in and the meeting will just be them sitting around playing a tournament of magic. That's all they're doing. Other times they want to do fundraising or we're talking about issues or doing something in the way of activism. So, there are a couple of roles in place - 3 or 4 roles probably. *There's...having a safe place to land, a soft place to land. Number 2 is probably finding a place to get together*

and share and socialize and trade stories. Then third would be to have a voice, to get together [emphasis added].

Here, Zion stressed the social and supportive role that the GSA occupied (Griffin et al., 2004) – a significant outlet considering the high prevalence of GSRM oppression at school (Taylor et al., 2011). Similarly, Skylar indicated that: “And even [for] people who are upfront about their sexuality like me, it’s good to know that this club will help support me even though other people won’t.” Although GSA members voiced that the club’s primary objective was to address GSRM-based inequities, it appeared that most members preferred to simply meet up and socialize, and thus felt compelled to educate their peers in lieu of the education system’s failure to counteract standard hetero/cisnormative pedagogy and curricula.

Leadership Expectations

Zion expressed that the GSA and by extension its members were unfairly expected by the school board to lead initiatives at their schools (see Kumashiro, 2002). At the annual GSA conference, school board employees continually placed pressure on GSRM youth, rather than privileged heterosexual and/or cisgender folks in the wider school community – including administrators and educators, to change people’s mindsets and foster social change. The conference began with adult after adult speaking at GSA members. In fact, much of this gathering involved adults telling youth that *they* must contest sexual and gender-based marginalization at their school, effectively transferring accountability for addressing GSRM inequities to youth. During the conference, several school board employees repeatedly declared, “you can make a difference,” it’s “up to you to make a difference,” “change the mindset of your school,” and “we are the change,” which annoyed Skylar:

Just kind of focussing it on [students] and [students] being the change and I like that, but at the same time, it's hard to be changed when you're just one person in a school of 1400 people [emphasis added]... Each of us is one person. And I know one person can make a huge change, but it's hard to make a huge change when that change is being opposed by everybody or it feels like it's being opposed by a large amount of people. Or if the ideas get shut down, things just don't get accepted as easily.

Skylar's insights draw attention to the board's abnegation of its responsibility and commitment to providing institutional support and education for teachers to work alongside students in a collaborative counter-hegemonic fashion. To Skylar, it was unfair to place the onus on GSA members to be *the* sole force to address oppression at Sunset High because GSRMs were numerical and cultural minorities, and often dismissed by their straight and cisgender peers and educators. Skylar's commentary echoes Kumashiro's (2002) argument that: "Those who are traditionally marginalized remain outsiders, called upon as 'experts' to speak with their own voices to educate the norm, only to be deemed not rational because they speak from a visible (i.e., a non-dominant) standpoint" (p. 39). Throughout the day, school board members continued to insist that students take the lead; one such way in which they communicated this was by suggesting that the name of the conference should be renamed, "Leadership Conference." When asked how she felt about the board-suggested name, Skylar stated:

I was mixed with that because...if you just say we're a Leadership Conference, then other people are going to be like, "Oh, they're just leaders." No, we're GSA leaders. We're supporting and we're leading a group of people that are usually suppressed and subdued.

By proposing this name change, the school board erased GSRM-specific needs and interests and further communicated that the GSA is *the* primary anti-oppressive hub, and that student members were expected lead GSRM educational reform. In this way, the board placed pressure on each GSA to take on work they should be completing themselves in partnership with individual schools and educators. Zion further problematized the board's insistence that all GSA members are or should be leaders by declaring:

I think they have a false idea of what leadership is anyway, um, one is not born a leader and then always a leader. I think you fulfill different roles throughout your life depending on what is required of you. There are times when you shouldn't be leading you should be stepping back or being a supportive or simply being the observer or not participating at all. I think every issue and every moment of your life demands that you make a choice of war. You're not born into one and that's where you stick.

Here, Zion stressed how particular events or circumstances incite one to become a leader or to step back. In the case of GSA members, their inequitable schooling experiences arguably compelled them to address hetero/cisnormalcy (i.e., the 'choice of war'). If the board and educators fulfilled their educational duties, perhaps GSA members would not feel obligated to engage in queer- and trans-informed education and activism. Overall, by provoking the GSA to take on such a leadership role, the board abnegated its responsibility for providing education and resources that are needed to educate about sexual and gender diversity necessary for teachers to feel confident in addressing anti-hetero/cisnormativity in a more sustained manner through policy and curricular development.

Opposition to GSA Events

As a part of the conference, GSAs across the board were allotted time to strategize and plan for International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia. During this time, students at Sunset High began developing an idea for a school-wide assembly. GSA members were eager to organize a school-wide rally “...about the LGBTQ community...” according to Skylar who communicated that the purpose would be: “...helping to promote safer schools for anybody...and hopefully making it just more accepting as a whole, and just promoting not being afraid to be who you are and accept everybody.” The group, along with their advisor, wanted to garner the support of teachers before moving forward, so they approached a teacher in the Physical Education (PE) department who was responsible for managing pep rallies. The GSA received cautionary advice from this teacher who did not approve of hosting a mandatory school-wide assembly involving GSRM topics due to safety concerns. In response to the teacher’s disapproval, GSA members reluctantly discussed making the assembly optional – mostly to appease the teacher who believed that forcing students to attend would be ‘dangerous,’ despite knowing this restriction was unfair.

The PE teacher’s apprehension derailed students’ efforts, and exposed the extent to which heterosexual and cisgender regimes of truth are maintained at school. The censoring of a sexuality and gender-related assembly resembled the pervasiveness of heteronormativity and cisnormativity in GSA members’ formal education. It demonstrated how unjust it is to deny a GSA assembly when students are forced to attend annual sports assemblies, as Skylar declared: “Where’s the equality with the sports group if ours is optional?” Zion elaborated further by asserting:

...there was resistance – actually came from a gay member of staff who is a Phys Ed teacher. She said, ‘you want to have this [GSA assembly]; you’re kind of herding

people into the gym and forcing them to support something they might not necessarily support.’ I said, ‘oh, you mean like football? Or volleyball? Or basketball?’

Here, Zion spotlighted how requiring all students to attend athletic assemblies, but not equity-themed events is hypocritical, particularly because schools are mandated to equip students “...with the knowledge, skills, attitude and values to engage the world and others critically, which means developing a critical consciousness that allows them to take action on making their schools and communities more equitable and inclusive for all people, including LGBTTIQ...people” (Legislative Assembly, 2012). By dismissing the GSA’s proposal, the PE teacher reinforced heteronormativity (Warner, 1991) and cisnormativity (Serano, 2007/2016), as Skylar alluded to:

I’ve had teachers that reject proposals because the fact that we changed one name and we changed what it’s for, and it instantly becomes “dangerous” for students and for people. I don’t see how changing a mandatory rally from a sport’s one...to one that’s outlining how to be positive about the LGBTQ community is so freaking dangerous. Do you?

Skylar’s insights magnify how educational content that disrupts compulsory heterosexuality and interrogates cisgender privilege was refuted because it had the potential to unsettle hetero/cisnormative cultural codes that underpin foundational teaching and learning practices. At Sunset High, even one-off events organized by the GSA were met with resistance; thus, the implementation of sustained anti-heteronormative teaching that “...refuse[s] the unmarked and obdurately unremarkable straight educational curriculum” (Britzman, 1995, p. 151), and anti-cisnormative curriculum, which is “...pedagogically attentive to gender diversity” (Malatino, 2015, p. 407) was out of question.

Professional Development Session with Educators

GSA members at Sunset High took it upon themselves to educate their teachers about sexual and gender diversity – an important feat considering that only 32.7% of staff in Graybill et al.’s (2015) study reported that their school provided PD in this area. During a meeting towards the end of the year, GSA members brainstormed ideas for a group-led PD session with educators. Their ideas were incorporated into a PowerPoint (PP) presentation, which was constructed by Zion, but delivered by Skylar. As it appeared on the PP, the aim of the presentation was: “To bring the work of the GSA to the forefront.” At the beginning of the session Skylar defined the LGBTTQ2 [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, two-spirit] acronym, and then discussed the club’s aim, which was: “To work towards changing our school to address explicitly sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and the questioning of all these things...to include LGBTQ2 material in our school’s curriculum.” Since GSA members and their advisor were keenly aware of queer and trans curricular deficiencies (Kosciw et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2011), they wanted staff to make a concerted effort to integrate sexual- and gender-expansive content into everyday learning (see Kumashiro, 2002) – an important undertaking considering only 46.9% of educators in Taylor et al.’s (2016) study indicated that they used LGBTQ inclusive language and examples in their classes.

On the first PP slide was a picture of the club’s T-shirt, a list of GSA members, and the slogan, “Reflection Before Projection,” which was summarized as: “reflecting on questions of gender, reflecting on questions of sexuality, reflections of personhood, projecting an attitude of acceptance.” Skylar explained that the slogan, “Reflection Before Projection,” was adopted because they wanted educators to: “...reflect on what it is you’re going to say or how it will affect somebody before you project it out...There are people who don’t think before they speak and this

is great to reinforce that. So, no one is being a complete and utter jackass.” For Skylar, it was imperative that educators examine how taken-for-granted assumptions about sexuality and gender are embedded in language, which can marginalize sexual minorities, for example. The GSA’s PD session stressed this message because the group felt that educators needed to unlearn hetero/cissexist notions of sexuality and gender, and replace them with queer and trans-informed understandings, which emphasize how “...systems of subjection and domination...are experienced unevenly, more intensely for some than others” (Malatino, 2015, p. 405).

After encouraging educators to engage in ongoing personal reflection, they were called upon to address GSRM disparities at school via the standard curricula. In doing so, the GSA attempted to extend their educative mandate into the classroom space and influence what was taught by educators. The following text on another PP slide detailed students’ expectations for Sunset High teachers:

What we’d like to do in the future...bi-semester activities where the whole school participates in a lesson surrounding the issues of gender and sexuality: Why is it important to you and our students?

A Call to Action: We ask that each teacher choose one class, regardless of subject, to reflect upon the challenges of the LGBTQ2 community. Together with your class, come up with ONE activity that students and staff can participate in on a [GSA] day that would be: engaging; enjoyable; emotional; educational.

Zion explained that they also wanted to pair the in-class activity with a mandatory assembly:

It would be each class deciding on one fun activity that they think they could do to be supportive of equality in terms of gender or sexuality...each class is talking about

gender issues and sexuality issues before we [have the assembly], which will be probably late September or early October.... Period 1, Period 2, and Period 4: they'll be doing at least one activity that has something to do with gender or sexuality; than in period 5 we have the pep rally. So, they've been dealing with it all day and, in theory, when they get to period 5 it should be, 'oh yeah, we're doing this again, okay.'

Through advocating for pedagogical reform, the GSA insisted that their message of action be taken up by all teachers at Sunset High. The group called for every educator to co-develop an engaging GSRM-focused activity that could be facilitated on a special day that corresponded with a school-wide assembly – a step towards legitimizing and valorizing sexual and gender diversity at their school. Although students cannot and should not be expected to undertake such a task, the GSA's call for change was a limited one-off event. Rather than advocating for teachers to consistently integrate GSRM content into curricula, such an event would further entrench heterosexuality (Britzman, 1995) and cisgender identities (Malatino, 2015) as the 'norm.' Here, Britzman's (1995) work is relevant since a "...liberal desire for recovery and authenticity" (p. 159) prevails when one-off activities, such as the one proposed by the GSA, merely tacks sexuality and gender content on to the standard curriculum. In the absence of a school-based commitment to anti-hetero/cisnormative educational reform, students were left to take on such a pedagogic responsibility.

In addition to persuading teachers to, at least, temporarily alter their practice and pedagogy, the PD session alerted educators to an unfamiliar concept, intersectionality. A slide titled, "intersectional issues" helped to demystify the topic for teachers:

Many of our students and staff experience 'multiple acts of discrimination simultaneously' or intersectional discrimination [emphasis added]. For example, a racialized, HIV-positive lesbian could be subjected to:

- Heterosexism
- Lesbophobia
- Misogyny
- Racism
- Ableism
- Classism
- Ageism

Those issues that arise out of gender or sexual stereotyping are no less important than other acts of discrimination that students and staff experience and therefore should be treated with the same degree of gravity.

This passage noted that oppression must be thought of as a layered and complex phenomenon whereby "...different forms of marginalization compound one another" (Serano, 2013, p. 211). This was a significant teaching because it enabled educators to conceptualize oppression as "...a multidimensional web of marginalization" (Serano, 2013, p. 212), as Zion purported:

...there are multiple issues at a time sometimes, there could be a race issue intermingled with a gender issue intermingled with a sexuality issue. So there are multiple issues to deal with and multiple discriminations happening at the same time.

To further address compounding inequities, GSA members prompted teachers to reflect on their own commitment to teaching for social justice when they asked, “Are we going to be part of the solution?” “Are we going to try to do a better job of supporting students and staff who struggle with intersectional discrimination?” These questions reflected the GSA’s activist strategy of “...focus[ing] on questions, rather than on answers” (Shlasko, 2005, p. 128).

Although the youth’s activist efforts were undeniably powerful because “...the GSA used the formal structures and practices of the school in order to transform it” (Elliot, 2015, p. 10), a lack of systemic support resulted in the pedagogical burden resting on the shoulders of GSA members. As Griffin et al. (2004) contend, if “...the GSA is the sole agent for such activism it is questionable how much systemic or even personal change can occur or continue. Without participation and leadership of other adults and students, addressing LGBT issues can become marginalized” (p. 19). Skylar echoed this argument when she exclaimed: “...we need more support from people and outside sources so that we’re not just the only ones fighting for equality...It’s like the GSA against the world.”

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the results from the two publicly-funded secular school sites, Village High and Sunset High. Against the backdrop of GSA members’ hetero/cisnormative educational experiences, they found refuge in the counter-hegemonic nature of their GSAs since they provided an essential venue for problematizing and subverting hetero/cissexist school regimes. Throughout this chapter, I argued that the GSA served as a proxy in the absence of a more institutionally-sustained commitment to queer and trans-informed education. Particular attention was paid to exploring the educative and activist work of Village High’s GSA in terms of the specific anti-cisnormative discussions that were had, and trans students’ advocacy for an all gender washroom.

One-off events, such as the GSA's school-wide assembly, were also critiqued since they reinforce the heterosexist and cissexist status quo (Britzman, 1995; Malatino, 2015). Although data at Sunset High were limited since the club was largely social/supportive and few GSA members volunteered to participate in a semi-structured interview and complete online diaries, the group planned a PD session with their teachers and lobbied for a school-wide assembly, which further exposed the pedagogical limits of stand alone activities. However, at the same time their actions drew attention to the incredible efforts, commitment, and skillset of individual GSA members to undertake and direct such GSRM transformative and anti-oppressive education initiatives, which are clearly the pedagogical responsibility of educators. In this sense, GSA members were positioned as transformative intellectuals, exposing the deficiency of the system and many of its teachers (Giroux, 1985). In sum, when schools and educators within them fail to regularly integrate queer and trans-informed understandings of sexuality and gender into the curricula, GSA members are left to take on such a pedagogic role.

End Notes

1. Those who are pansexual have the potential to be attracted to people of any sex or gender (Taylor et al., 2015).
2. Demiboy "...is a gender identity describing someone who partially, but not wholly, identifies as a man, boy or otherwise masculine, whatever their assigned gender at birth. They may or may not identify as another gender in addition to feeling partially a boy or man" (Demiguy, n.d.).
3. Polyamory is "The practice, state or ability of having more than one intimate, sexual and/or romantic relationship at the same time" (Polyamory, n.d.).

4. Asexuality is “A sexual orientation where a person experiences little or no sexual attraction” (Asexuality, n.d.).
5. Genderqueer is “...a gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman; or as an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary identities (e.g., agender, bigender, genderfluid)” (Genderqueer, n.d.).
6. Genderfluid “...is a gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of boy and girl. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, but may feel more man some days, and more woman other days” (Gender fluid, n.d.).
7. A side hoe is “A girl/s you got on the side other than your main girlfriend. She initially is someone who is just used to get sexual pleasure from and nothing else that is serious” (Side Hoe, n.d.).

Chapter Five: Results - Publicly-Funded Catholic Schools

This chapter provides an overview of findings from the two publicly-funded Catholic schools in this study. To begin, I briefly describe how GSA members at Blessed Sacrament made sense of their club; thereafter, I discuss the club's anti-hegemonic role at school, and explore how its sporadic educative and activist efforts do not abdicate educators from their responsibility to combat hetero/cisnormativity. Much attention is paid to unpacking the club's week-long allyship themed initiative, which culminated with their first school-wide assembly, and exploring how heteronormative regimes were reinforced vis-à-vis faith-based pedagogy. Next, I examine the role and function of the GSA at Holy Names. Results reveal how Catholic doctrine heavily influenced how the club was publicly portrayed. In particular, the privileging of religious freedom over sexual and gender minority rights adversely impacted GSA members' anti-hetero/cisnormative efforts in the wider school community. Foucault's (1978) theorization of power is employed to make sense of how school administration leveraged their authoritative power to enact Catholicity, thereby reinforcing a heteronormative hegemony at Holy Names.

Blessed Sacrament

The GSA at Blessed Sacrament had a large and active group of youth who worked in partnership with their advisors to fulfill their educative and activist goals. Two student co-leaders, Ryan and Parker, facilitated meetings under the mentorship of a Religion teacher, Micha, who advised the club and took pride in helping GSA members develop their leadership skillset. The club was well-attended by grade nine students since Sage, another GSA advisor and Science teacher, explicitly advertised the club in her classes with junior students. It was difficult to decipher the ratio of GSRM youth to allies because GSA members did not openly disclose their sexuality or gender identity during club meetings, according to Micah. Unfortunately, few queer,

trans, and gender diverse youth expressed interested in completing an interview and submitting diaries. There was one 'out' trans student who had a key role in providing anti-transphobic education the previous year. One self-identified "homosexual" "male" student, Avery, participated in an interview, which helped generate knowledge on a queer GSA member's experiences in a publicly-funded Ontario Catholic high school. Rather than gathering to find support, socialize, and participate in discussions, the group spent much of their time spearheading initiatives in the wider school community, according to Micah, one of three GSA advisors, who explained: "...this year the purpose has been advocacy and activism within the community. It's been very much about getting that week sorted and everything else."

The Function of a Catholic School GSA

GSA members and advisors whom I spoke with described the educational role that their GSAs played and its relationship to activism. As opposed to Schindel's (2008) study where education and activism were pitted as separate entities, Micah discussed their intertwined relationship and influence at Blessed Sacrament. He suggested that the GSA's in-group education was the foundation on which their activism in the wider community was built; thus, the GSA's educative mandate was made possible through group members' activist efforts: "...we've always talked about a two-tier educational focus: education for the group to support the activism and their advocacy, and then education for the community through activism and advocacy." Both education and activism were essential to the group according to Avery, a self-identified "homosexual" "male," because many people were unaware or ignorant of GSRM identities, expressions, and experiences:

...the role of [the GSA] is to raise awareness and increase people's knowledge about LGBT topics and subjects. Just make it a thing that everyone is educated on so people

aren't so ignorant about it and...so that everyone understands it so they don't just sort of make their own assumptions about it; so they're more knowledgeable about the subject so that everyone can see that it's an okay thing.

Here, Avery's insights resemble Sedgwick's (1990/2008) writing on the "...epistemological privilege of unknowing..." (p. 5) since he describes how school community members need to interrogate preconceived heterosexist and cissexist assumptions. For Avery, knowledge that de-normalizes heterosexuality (Britzman, 1995) and validates trans identities (Serano, 2007/2016) is inherently resisted; thus, rather than education about the 'Other,' heterosexual and cisgender privilege must be countered (Kumashiro, 2002). Although GSA members, such as Avery, were willing to take on this anti-oppressive educative role, GSAs should not be solely tasked with addressing hetero/cisnormative school climates, as Micah astutely recognized:

I just keep coming back to the idea that it's not about these groups alone [emphasis added]. That the groups are a critical piece, they're are critical piece about making it visible...they're critical piece about giving students a very pointed opportunity...the more opportunities there are in any community or in any culture to name those connections, to foster those connections, it becomes mutually beneficial at the end...If you're going to talk about change in a culture, it has to be felt everywhere and by everybody [emphasis added]...

Micah's insights reflect the work of Griffin et al. (2004) who insist that "...the potential positive effects of GSAs are most likely to be long lasting when they are part of a broad, on-going, organizational-level plan to affect institutional policies, programming, and practices" (p. 9-10). As was argued elsewhere in this dissertation, GSAs should not be obligated to educate staff and students; school boards, schools, and educators must be held accountable for preventing and

addressing hetero/cissexism. By problematizing the heterosexual matrix (i.e., contesting linkages between sex, gender, and attraction) (Butler, 1990), and disrupting cissexism (i.e., teaching that sex does not equal gender) (Stryker, 2006), educators can work alongside GSA members in partnership and collaboration to achieve such goals. Educators have a professional duty to engage in this work and as such, must ‘catch up’ to youth, as Micha contended: “...in many cases, our issue was trying to get the staff to catch up to the kids.”

Problematizing the Pedagogy of the Panel Presentation. In the beginning, the school board vetted Blessed Sacrament’s GSA activities, as Sage, one of the GSA advisors, recalled, “...we had to get the board’s approval to allow [public events] to happen...” but over time the club gained more independence and freedom. This management demonstrated how the board exercised authority to surveil and police the GSA in reference to doctrinal Catholicity (Callaghan, 2014a). By regulating the GSA against faith-based standards, the board fell into the trap of pitting religious freedom against sexuality and gender-related rights, which “...are increasingly seen as oppositional within the sphere of education” (Rasmussen, 2017, p. 6).

Despite these systemic impediments, the GSA’s educative work began with two opt-in anti-homophobic panels a few years prior to this study. Seeing how these events occurred well before the study, I will speak briefly about their overall impact and devote more attention to exploring the group’s most recent initiatives (i.e., trans panel presentation and school-wide assembly). At the first panel event, recently-graduated sexual minorities spoke to some classes about their experiences as the ‘Other’ (Kumashiro, 2002). At the second panel, which occurred the following school year, an ‘out’ police officer discussed his coming out journey. To participate in these public panel presentations, interested teachers signed up their classes, demonstrating how anti-homophobic education was optional at Blessed Sacrament. In terms of the first panel, Ryan, a

grade 12 “female” who self-identified as an ally, communicated: “...when I was in grade 10...they focused on, like, students in our school who were gay.” Sage, a “straight” “female” advisor, elaborated further by describing one student who spoke at the first panel:

I mean, one was very athletic and very popular, and didn't actually ‘come out’ until university, and wanted to in high school, but didn't feel comfortable. But wanted to come back and talk to the students to talk about, you know, what she had gone through and how it might have been different had she found the support here that she needed.

Both special event panels spearheaded by the GSA were limited to education about the ‘Other’ (Kumashiro, 2002) – an empathy development strategy that is ineffective in addressing heteronormativity (Britzman, 1995). Such a focus on promoting positive attitudes towards sexual minorities neglected to acknowledge or address the enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality or how “heterosexuality sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real...” (Butler, 1993b, p. 312). Rather than countering compulsory heterosexuality, the two panels perpetuated a generic anti-bullying stance, which failed to address the Catholic education system's teaching that homosexuality is 'intrinsically disordered' (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997).

Beyond simply inviting classes to attend the panel sessions, the GSA prepared educators for and supported their pedagogical response to the opt-in events. They provided teachers with an abundance of information to ensure that they understood what they were committing to when they signed up their classes. Sage communicated that they “...wanted teachers to sign on that would take the time afterwards to debrief their class and get some really good conversation going about it. So, that was a very deliberate kind of thing.” To help facilitate classroom conversations after

the panels, the group constructed a script for educators to follow. By design, teachers who agreed to participate were expected to debrief with their students, as Ryan explained: "...all the teachers, by signing up...they made that commitment and said, 'yes, we want to have these discussions,' so we sent [information] out to them so they kind of had prior knowledge before." Below, Sage discusses the group's intention behind such a structured initiative:

...it meant that you needed the teachers not just to give up one period to bring their class down, but to take some time leading into it. The first year we actually had a...script that we wanted them to kind of go through just to kind of let the kids know what it was about. Again, that's a bit of a time commitment taken from your regular subject material...we made that a condition of coming down. You also had to commit to some follow-up, and we had a sort of a set of questions to kind of cover that as well. *So, we tried to provide the teacher with material that they could just go with* [emphasis added]. It worked really, really well. In later years, we found it wasn't quite as necessary, but at least initially, it was quite helpful.

Although the group's efforts were commendable, Sage's insights expose the limits of relegating such pedagogical labour to the GSA; in this way, the school board, administrators, and educators can absolve themselves from addressing GSRM topics and issues, and promoting equitable learning environments. Sage described how the GSA served as a proxy in terms of preparing teachers to facilitate discussions about sexual minority issues with their students. This design demonstrated how the GSA's initiative blurred curricular boundaries (see Mayo, 2013a) since anti-homophobic content was purposefully integrated into and privileged over the standard curriculum. Yet, the way in which the panels were enacted was superficial in that they involved education about the 'Other' (Kumashiro, 2002), which is based on the minimal goals of safety and tolerance

(i.e., safe moments) (Goldstein et al., 2007). Unfortunately, Blessed Sacrament's GSA did not move beyond this ineffective pedagogical strategy when they organized another opt-in panel, which aimed to develop empathy for trans folks.

Avery discussed how the panel topics shifted over time to include trans content (i.e., the third opt-in panel event): "...in the beginning years - from what I've heard because I wasn't there - it was mostly lesbian, gay, bisexual sort of. Then last year is when they realized we're pretty sure that everyone sort of gets it and we need to move onto...more difficult things that people don't understand as much." In this way, GSA members built partnerships with educators to consolidate and reinforce their club goal of "...widening discursive contestation..." (Fraser, 1990, p. 67) by implementing pedagogical and curricular initiatives involving gender diversity. Consistent with Taylor et al.'s (2011) findings that trans students frequently encounter verbal, physical, and sexual harassment, Ryan communicated that the trans panel was a particularly significant undertaking since two trans students felt unsafe at Blessed Sacrament: "...in grade 11 we focused specifically on transgender students. I know when I was in [grade] 9 and 10 we did have a couple [trans] students, but they didn't necessarily feel safe in our school..." When asked to elaborate further on the trans panel, Ryan explained that, in addition to the safety concerns outlined above, there was little anti-transphobic education in and beyond the GSA, let alone trans-informed pedagogy and curriculum (Malatino, 2015). As such, the GSA served as a proxy for system-wide and school-based trans-specific educative deficiencies, as Ryan explained:

Ryan: ...Yeah so that was grade 11...I don't think [student safety] was the whole reason, but I think it was *there isn't enough work being done on this* [emphasis added] and I know even me going in I was like, 'I don't really know if I fully understand this'...So, for us in the group

to be like, ‘I don't know if I fully understand; we need to educated’ and that's when we said, ‘*we need to educate ourselves and then we go out and educate*’ [emphasis added]... It started with the teachers that we needed to make sure all the teachers were on board and then the students...I think that was really impactful, and I think a lot of people did take away a lot from that panel.

Here, Ryan admitted that she was quite unfamiliar with trans embodiment, but she recognized that she needed to educate herself in order to educate others. She identified how the GSA was a crucial venue for exploring trans identities and expressions (Greytak, 2015), especially since educators rarely, if at all, challenge transphobia (Taylor et al., 2016), and there is a lack of systemic commitment to and accountability for promoting and providing trans-informed education (Malatino, 2015). Although GSA members’ trans educative efforts were commendable, when GSAs serve as a proxy, school boards, schools, and educators are largely absolved from tackling cissexism through pedagogy and curriculum. For example, Serano (2013) stresses that there is a need to critically examine “...how individuals, organizations, and governments often refuse to respect trans people’s lived experiences in our identified genders/sexes...” (p. 45). This failure to address cissexism raises important concerns about the education system’s abnegation of its responsibility to respect gender diversity – a fundamental guarantee within the *Ontario Human Rights Code* (OHRC), and spotlights the reliance on the GSA and guest speakers to do the job of educators. In the absence of anti-cisnormative teaching and learning practices, GSA members, in partnership with their advisors, demonstrated how their anti-transphobic work began with “...trying to convince the dominant majority that [trans people] are reasonable legitimate human beings who deserve to be treated as such” (Serano, 2013, p. 265).

As with Sunset High's GSA, Ryan's club was concerned with educating teachers and garnering their backing so they could support student learning after the opt-in trans panel (i.e., facilitate a debriefing session with youth):

Researcher: So, what was done about staff?

Ryan: ...I wasn't so much in a leadership role last year so I didn't know, like, all of the details; but they basically - at a staff meeting - showed some videos. We had the [trans] student at our school, who is still currently going to our school, speak at the meeting and a lot of teachers made comments to her like, 'that was a really great job,' 'I'm glad you came and spoke.' So, she spoke and then...the vice president, who's very involved with the [GSA], did a little more background and talked about what [the GSA] wanted to do.

Researcher: Okay.

Ryan: *The biggest thing is we can kind of throw all of this information at the students, but if they don't have a teacher to kind of talk them through it to work through it and say, 'what are you thinking'?* [emphasis added] because it could be overwhelming for some students. Or some students could not understand or...that understanding could kind of lead to like, some negative comments coming back; so, we wanted to make sure the teachers understood it first. It was just really educating the teachers.

Here, Ryan described the challenges associated with the GSA undertaking trans education at Blessed Sacrament. Her commentary magnifies the limits of the GSA's proxy function, where members felt compelled to take action in the absence of an institutional commitment to trans-informed education (Malatino, 2015). The group drew heavily on the expertise of a trans student, demonstrating how personal narratives are frequently and unfairly relied upon to teach about trans identities, expressions, and experiences (Beauchamp & D'Harlingue, 2012; Malatino, 2015). Below, Sage unknowingly summarized problematic expectations associated with having trans people speak at such special events:

...the student...got up in front of a large number of classes and basically talked about 'this is who I am.' Just was very open to any question...and there were some really interesting questions. We were really worried about possible backlash, but there wasn't any and, in fact, students were very supportive, even more so. It was pretty powerful, I think.

Although Sage believed the panel was successful, by relying on trans people to speak about their 'Othered' experiences (Kumashiro, 2002), they are often further marginalized, as Malatino (2015) purports:

A troubling contradiction shapes this practice: it centers attention on trans and gender-nonconforming individuals in an effort to highlight the discrimination we encounter, while simultaneously being shaped by a dynamic that risks further harming us. There is an enormous psychic cost to answering the sometimes well-intentioned but often misinformed and deeply intimate questions that crop up (p. 397).

Besides potentially being exposed to invasive and inappropriate questions, Beauchamp and D'Harlingue (2012) argue that, "While [they are] often assumed to undo assumptions about the sex-gender binary, question-and-answer sessions based on personal experience might instead (re)produce ideals of normative gender as attached to particular bodily configurations, positioning the transgender-identified speaker as an abnormal object of inquiry" (p. 44). Unfortunately, rather than affirming gender diversity, guest speaking engagements, such as the trans panel at Blessed Sacrament, tend to 'Other' trans folks (Beauchamp & D'Harlingue, 2012; Malatino, 2015).

Although Sage stated that the trans student did not encounter any 'backlash' from the event, Ryan recalled: "last year...after the panel...there was some negative feedback, but then a lot of people stood up for that. So, we're working toward more acceptance and we're getting there..." Here, Ryan explained that the group was working on anti-transphobic education (i.e., safety for and tolerance of trans folks) (Kumashiro, 2002), rather than anti-cisnormative education, which broadly addresses questions of gender privilege in which we are all implicated. (Serano, 2007/2016). Ryan disclosed that in response to a student who 'tweeted' a transphobic comment following the panel event, some of her peers interjected by calling the student out and informing staff members. Despite this troubling act of transphobia, Ryan wholeheartedly believed that the trans panel was successful because the school community learned about the 'Other' (Kumashiro, 2002):

I know from the two panels I saw in grade nine and ten and then from the panel last year...it's a more personal connection. You see that person in the halls. I know in grade nine it was like, an eye opener for me; like, 'oh this is a student I ride the bus with.' It really brings the students back and all the kids sitting in [the room] can...realize, 'oh it's just another student I have class with' or 'I never would have known'...[It] reaches

out to students more when there are students from our school on it [emphasis added]...It...engaged students a bit more to know this is a student that's in the halls every day...*It's the students we're trying to target so it's better to go from a student's perspective* [emphasis added]...It's really important to have that student involvement and that's where [GSA] this year has been very student run, and there have been times where it doesn't work out so much and, like, there isn't enough student involvement, but it's our group. It's students we're trying to connect with, so it's really important for it to kind of come from us in a way.

Despite Ryan's argument that speaking engagements are particularly effective because they promote empathy development for the 'Other,' Britzman (1995) insists that "...techniques for attitudinal change" are unsuccessful in unsettlingly heterosexist beliefs which underpin anti-gay prejudice and discrimination (p. 158). Consistent with Britzman, Malatino (2015) articulates that there are clear limits and problems to this approach since invited speakers stand in for and are used in lieu of a systemic commitment to a more sustained and integrated trans-informed approach to education. In particular, Malatino (2015) points out that anti-transphobic pedagogical strategies, such as panels, are "...inadequate for increasing awareness and action regarding the intense institutional and systemic discrimination trans and gender nonconforming folk regularly encounter" (p. 399). Rather, she argues that guest speaking engagements frame trans and intersex people as "...exemplary disruptive bodies" and obscure cisgender people's complicity in gender systems that reinforce cisnormativity (p. 402). In this respect, as opposed to relying on the 'Other' to educate the masses (Kumashiro, 2002), formal schooling must prompt critical discussions that enable staff and students to unpack cisgender privilege through more formal and integrated

educational and curricular programs that are driven by and have more institutional support for the provision of resources and implementation.

Organizing Around the ‘Other’: Negating Systemic Issues. The three GSA-spearheaded panels helped build a foundation for further school-wide educative work according to Ryan and Parker who were the official co-leaders of the club. During the year when data were collected, Blessed Sacrament’s GSA planned and organized an allyship week, which culminated in a mandatory assembly where an ‘out’ athlete spoke about her experiences in competitive sport. An email that Micha sent to all staff members described how Blessed Sacrament was selected by the Catholic Teachers’ Association, who partnered with two community agencies (i.e., a GSRM organization and a sport association), to have the ‘out’ female athlete speak at their school. This athlete was described as someone who “...has committed herself to working to combat homophobia in sports and to provide resources for LGBT athletes.” Importantly, the email did not explicitly mention transphobia, and this absence was reflected in the way that the athlete inadvertently, but problematically, erased trans athletes in her talk. The email also communicated that the assembly was a “...celebration of the international day against homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.” Micah admitted that the mandatory assembly was monumental considering the Catholic system’s history of vetting anti-homophobic initiatives (see Callaghan, 2012, 2016; Grace & Wells, 2015; Love & Tosolt, 2013). He exclaimed: “...the fact that the Catholic Teachers Association in coordination with [a GSRM organization] and [a sport organization] was able to bring someone in without any context other than get up on the stage...I remember...when EGALE put that survey out and no Catholic board participated.” Although Micah hailed the board as supportive since the “...superintendent was sitting front row, was very supportive of it,” he also highlighted the pervasiveness of “...Catholic heterosexist domination” (Callaghan, 2015, p. 20) at

Blessed Sacrament. After all, the superintendent was not simply there to show support; they were arguably there to "...both intentional[ly] and nonsubjective[ly]...imbue...with calculation" discussions about non-normative sexualities in a Catholic educational context (Foucault, 1978, p. 95).

To inform educators about the GSA's week-long activities, an email was developed by the three GSA advisors, Micah, Sage, and a third advisor - a guidance councillor at the school, and sent to all staff members. It read as follows:

...students and staff are invited to wear purple as a sign of solidarity in combatting hate and harassment directed towards those individuals who identify as a sexual minority...In order to build awareness there are facts concerning members of the LGBTQ community on [the school website] throughout the week, students are able to have their nails painted at lunch (one colour of the rainbow each day) as a sign of solidarity, and posters are placed throughout the school.

This email listed allyship as the purpose of the group's planned initiatives. Wearing purple and nail painting were two prominent ways in which the GSA's pedagogy/activism was organized around key events where school members could visibly support sexual and gender minorities. Although the email described wearing a purple shirt as an act of support for "...individuals who identify as a sexual minority," when asked if trans identities and experiences were included under the umbrella of "sexual minority," Micha responded: "Yeah...but, because it's only one named student and then a couple of other students you anecdotally connect with, there isn't that same sort of drive." Here, he insisted that trans people were included in the term that was commonly employed at Blessed Sacrament, but most of the club's focus was on sexuality issues since there were only a few 'out' trans students. The club's lack of attention to gender minorities within their

educative initiatives exemplifies Johnson, Singh, and Gonzalez's (2014) assertion that "...the experiences of LGBT youth often focuses more on sexual orientation than gender identity/expression, thereby rendering the experiences of TQQ [transgender, queer, and questioning] students virtually nonexistent" (p. 421).

Ryan, a "female" student who preferred not to label her sexuality, explained that the purpose of the group's week-long efforts was to "rais[e] awareness" and the "...whole idea was to gain allies..." Taylor, a straight cisgender female, echoed Ryan's insights by explaining that the GSA wanted school community members to take action to demonstrate their solidarity (see Utt, 2013) rather than simply learning about (Kumashiro, 2002) and developing empathy (Britzman, 1995) for the 'Other':

Taylor: ...[the GSA] been educating people for the last few years so they wanted to focus on ally[ship]. *So, they wanted to focus on people accepting more than being taught things* [emphasis added].

Researcher: ...So, in the first few years, learning more about the community and some issues, and now moving towards...actually being supportive?

Taylor: Yeah, they had panels and things with transgender people, and people that have had problems in their past and they just cannot talk about that. And, they have those, kind of interview kind of panel things for the school to watch...

Researcher: So, was the club's goal to encourage students to be allies?

Taylor: It was to bring awareness and to see [who took] interest in being an ally and understanding.

Researcher: So, what would you like students to do to be an ally?

Taylor: *It's usually just being accepting and not saying derogatory terms or you stand up for people that are LGBTQ and you're just there for people, a friendly community* [emphasis added].

Researcher: ...so you would hope from all of the work that you've done in the club that it would inspire people to do that?

Taylor: Yeah.

Above, Taylor relayed that the group's efforts were aimed at motivating others to refrain from using homo/transphobic language, accepting sexual and gender minorities, and lobbying for 'LGBTQ' human rights. Here, the club was solely depicted as inciting empathy; yet, as Britzman (1995) contends, "...normal techniques of attitudinal change via provisions of information cannot address the problem of identification: how affective investments in identity as a means through which the self and the other can be secured actually work to dismiss gay and lesbian perspectives" (p. 159). Thus, these anti-discriminatory outcomes were grounded in a generic anti-bullying agenda (Clarke & MacDougall, 2012; Niblett & Oraa, 2014) that was sanctioned at their Catholic school; "...[b]ecause underlying gender and sexuality norms [were] not challenged, the safety and tolerance focus [was]...less threatening...to adopt" (Griffin, 2004, p. 21).

As previously stated, on the day of Blessed Sacrament's first school-wide assembly, school community members were "...invited to wear a purple shirt with uniform bottoms to show their support of a community inclusive for all" (Online Announcement). In the gymnasium, where the

assembly was held, I observed many staff and students wearing purple shirts, but on the whole, most people did not. Azariah, a grade 10 student who identified as “straight” and “female,” agreed stating that “...barely anyone wore purple;” however, Taylor thought that a lot of people wore purple. GSA members, such as Azariah and a grade nine student named Sawyer, suggested that most students were unaware that it was purple shirt day and oblivious to what it represented, despite the GSA’s efforts to advertise the event. For example, an online announcement publicized the event and teachers were sent a reminder email about it, which stated: “[This Friday] will be a spirit day in which students and staff are invited to wear purple shirts as a sign of solidarity in combatting hate and harassment directed towards individuals who identify as a sexual minority.” It is unclear if teachers did in fact promote the event in their classes as they were expected to, which further illustrates the problem with one-off events as opposed to more systematic and systemic efforts to affirm sexual and gender diversity at school.

In addition to wearing purple, students were invited to paint their nails at lunch. Avery recalled that they “...managed to get a good amount of people the first day...We managed to convince a lot of people.” He went on to explain: “...we had our posters and everything [and] they would come and we would explain...‘oh, this is in support of [the GSA],’ you know, ‘being an ally and this is in preparation for [the] assembly.’” Avery found that the nail painting was successful in terms of its uptake, but there were a few students who mocked the activity: “Some of the younger grades were kind of like, ‘oh yeah, this is cool. We should be doing this,’ but then [there was] the younger, more immature ones who were...doing it as a joke sort of, like, the male ones.” The homophobic behaviours of Avery’s peers call for formalized education to move beyond the anti-bullying messaging that the club offered, but should not be expected to deliver. In particular, there needs to be more systemic support of the GSA’s efforts, and an integrated

approach on behalf of educators to combat “...illusions of continuity between sex, gender, and desire” (Butler 1993b, p. 317) vis-à-vis their heteronormative pedagogy and curriculum; this would go a long way in educating these male students about heteronormativity, heterosexism and compulsory heterosexuality. Engaging in ongoing anti-heteronormative educational reform is essential since the anti-homophobic call of the GSA was lost to a student whom, shortly after the assembly (i.e., when students were exiting the building at the end of the school day), called their friend a “faggot.”

Reinforcing Heteronormative Hegemony and Erasing Trans Experiences. As with their previous three opt-in panels, the GSA scaffolded their first mandatory assembly by disseminating an email about the event to all staff members. This email was delivered to ensure that all teachers could competently facilitate a debriefing session after the assembly. Through their planned in-class discussions, the GSA “...travers[ed] boundaries of formal and informal education and expand[ed] the scope of activism and education...” (Schindel, 2008, p. 59). In previous years, teachers could opt out of the panels (e.g., choose not to participate due to discomfort with subject matter); however, with the school-wide assembly teachers were expected to support students’ exploration of the subject matter, as Micah mentioned:

Researcher: ...so...we just briefly talked about the emails that went out to staff alerting them about purple shirt day and the assembly and things like that. So, I was wondering if you could talk more about the debriefing questions for teachers...Not every school does that.

Micah: ...I think part of that is a perceived capacity...I know in the early days...there was a lot of, ‘if you feel comfortable’ kind

of conversation because there are staff members in here with just their body language if not their direct comments tells me they're not comfortable with what we're doing...So they just theoretically opt out anyway. *So, the idea of having [the email with debriefing questions] was very practical just in case [the guest speaker] went short there was something to do. But also for those folks who were comfortable having the conversation, just that there was something to direct it. It wasn't just, 'hey what do you think' [emphasis added].*

Here, Micah stressed how the GSA wanted to prepare educators to have conversations because, as noted in Taylor et al.'s (2016) research, they were largely ill prepared to discuss gender and sexual minority topics, and unable to engage in meaningful dialogue about the GSA's work without such prompts. In this way, educators would be more inclined to opt in to discussing this content in their classes, rather than automatically dismissing it due to uneasiness or even disagreement. Although imperfect, this strategy prepared educators to lead conversations in ways that reflected the intentions of the club (i.e., promoting safety and tolerance). Consistent with Fraser's (1990) work on counterpublics, it was clear that the GSA emerged "...in response to exclusions with dominant publics..." with the goal of extending their work into the wider school community (p. 67). This demonstrated GSA members' commitment to fostering a counter-hegemonic pedagogical and dialogical space at their Catholic school.

An email was sent to educators one week prior to the assembly to provide teachers with ample time to review its contents and become more comfortable with the material. The email is detailed below:

On behalf of [the GSA], please find attached a timetable and two seating plans for the full school assembly next Friday....

As described at the April staff meeting, [Blessed Sacrament] was selected by [an LGBTQ organization] and [a sport organization] to host an [athlete] who identifies as a sexual minority...[The athlete] has committed herself to working to combat homophobia in sports and to provide resources for LGBT athletes.

The assemblies will be interactive with [the athlete] sharing her story and then taking questions from the audience. Students will be invited to ask questions via roaming microphones staffed by teachers and members of [the GSA]. Due to the nature of the address, timing will be fluid and so, while each assembly is scheduled for one hour (plus travel time), teachers may want to be prepared for a slightly shorter event...If time does remain, please feel free to debrief with your students. Possible questions could include:

- * What struck you about what [the guest speaker] shared? Did anything she shared challenge you in any way?
- * Was there anything she shared that you found yourself agreeing with?
- * What struggles might a sexual minority athlete face?
- * *What changes might make it easier for an athlete who identifies as a member of a sexual minority?* [emphasis added].
- * In light of what the speaker shared, what are some ways that our school might be more supportive of people who are LGBTQ so that they feel safe and welcome?

The pedagogical logic behind this special event was to provide education about the ‘Other’ (Kumashiro, 2002), with the ‘out’ female athlete confessing her difference to the audience who had authority to judge, punish, forgive, and tolerate her queerness (Foucault, 1978). Contrary to the GSA’s intention, the demonstrative act of ‘coming out’ was an ineffective pedagogical strategy since it strengthened heteronormative hegemony by reinforcing the hetero/homosexual binary (Rasmussen, 2004); further, it perpetuated compulsory heterosexuality since the guest speaker’s public declaration of homosexuality reaffirmed heterosexuality as the ‘norm’ (Butler, 1993b). The debriefing questions, which were created by the GSA advisors and the principal, captured how students were invited to discuss sexual minority issues in sport and extrapolate how they could take action to mitigate oppression at their school. Although the majority of questions prompted youth to ponder how they could create safe moments for queer students (Goldstein et al., 2007), the fourth question prompted youth to analyze the heteronormative underpinnings of sport (i.e., identify queer moments) (Goldstein et al., 2007), and explore how heterosexuality is privileged and homosexuality is ‘Othered’ in sport (see Kumashiro, 2002). Despite this thoughtful scaffolding, Sage believed that most teachers did not lead the assembly debrief: “I think what happened once people got back to class is - I would say more teachers just said, ‘okay, back to business,’ so I don’t think there was a lot of discussion.” Sage’s commentary demonstrates how, in the absence of sustained institutional leadership, there was no real pedagogical commitment on behalf of teachers to affirm sexual diversity. Sage’s observation was echoed by Avery who contended: “Usually when an assembly happens they discuss it the day and get that over with.” Both Sage and Avery’s insights demonstrated how sexual diversity content was marginal in comparison to the standard curricula, which relentlessly produces and privileges heterosexual subjectivity at school.

Unlike her colleagues, Sage led debriefing sessions with her classes. She believed that the conversations inspired by the GSA permitted students to reflect on their own experiences with educators – some of whom made homophobic remarks (see Kosciw et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2011):

...I would say I had the best discussions with grade 9...They had kind of a refreshing honesty about them; they often say what they think. I think they certainly have a lot of curiosity about, well, what's it like to be gay or to be lesbian or to be trans...It sort of went from them asking specific questions to them just sort of talking, sort of amongst themselves...Or they might have had friends that are still struggling and they would say, 'well, I have a friend that and you know,' and a number of them wanted to know what can I do to help somebody out that's going through that. *They are pretty good at putting themselves in someone else's shoes and trying to imagine what that would be like, they're empathetic in that way* [emphasis added]. They got talking about bigotry and you know it's just human nature and their sort of urge to make life better for people now compared to what it might have been like years ago...a lot of them discussed how they thought their parents might react if they were to come out to their parents and so there was a bit of time talking about that. Talking about, well, if I didn't feel I could come out to my family, 'what can I do'? Some of them - well it depended on their personal experiences, but surprisingly most of them knew of somebody that was going through that or somebody that they suspected was going through that. I think by talking about it we were trying to get them to think about don't just be a bystander, especially in the early days we talked a lot about —well in the environment within [Blessed Sacrament] do you hear people making negative comments? *So, that generated a lot*

of conversation about not just other kids saying things, but comments by teachers, and that really bothered them [emphasis added]. I think they almost expect some of their classmates to be - I don't know what the word would be. *But they, I guess they were disappointed that there were teachers that were also not particularly supportive and they sort of felt, 'if you can't support it, then don't say anything'* [emphasis added]. But, I gather there were some teachers that were joking about it, and I had run across that too with teachers saying, 'why are you involved in that group'? Kids pick up on that, so that was a good part of the discussion.

Sage believed that the debriefing activity was impactful since students were able to imagine what it would be like to be a sexual minority (i.e., sympathize with the 'Other') (Kumashiro, 2002). Contrary to Britzman's (1995) insights, she insisted that empathy development was a successful pedagogical technique. Yet, the combination of its isolated nature and its focus on education about the 'Other' (Kumashiro, 2002) unfortunately failed to promote critical thinking about heterosexist assumptions (Britzman, 1995). As Griffin et al. (2004) note, "...a limitation of many [GSA] efforts is their focus on changing individual behavior and awareness rather than making more substantial institutional changes. Although individual change is an important first component of making schools safe for LGBT students, sustained changes in school climate and structure require a systemic approach" (p. 20). Sage's commentary also spotlights how the GSA and its members were standing in for teachers who should be routinely engaging in this work. Overall, the club's activist efforts were linked to their anti-homophobic pedagogical agenda inasmuch that the GSA was seeking to create dialogic spaces not only for students, but for educators.

An 'out,' cisgender female athlete spoke at Blessed Sacrament's assembly. This athlete conveyed that the purpose of her talk was to speak about "...ways to make world of sport inclusive

for everyone.” Despite this declaration, her talk focused explicitly on sexuality in sport, and akin to Village High’s guest speaker, she failed to discuss trans issues in athletics (Sykes, 2011; Sykes & Smith, 2016). She began by describing her specific sport, which spanned the majority of the talk. This observation was reflected by Sawyer, a grade nine student who recently joined the club; they thought that the assembly focused too much on her sport and not enough on “inclusion.” Likewise, Micah was admittedly disappointed with the speaker and described the assembly as “...a missed opportunity” to adequately explore gender and sexual minority issues. After discussing her sport in great detail, the guest speaker shared her ‘coming out’ journey as an athlete. She outlined how, after she ‘came to terms’ with her sexuality and came out to her coach, she was promptly advised not to tell anyone else. This response, among other minority stressors, caused her to internalize the homophobic tendencies of others. She feared that people would think she was “...using sport to be inappropriate” or in other words, leverage sport to meet woman. The guest speaker also spoke about her rocky relationship with her mom. After her formal presentation, she welcomed questions from the audience. One student asked, “Did your mom get used to the idea of you being gay?” to which the athlete answered: “...it’s not easy for everyone to wrap their head around immediately.” Unfortunately, her response unintentionally naturalized heterosexuality and justified homophobia by positioning non-heterosexual orientations as odd and challenging, and unlike heterosexuality, something to be tolerated. Similarly, the guest speaker’s response to the following question was problematic. When asked: “How did you figure out you were gay?,” she stated that she discovered her sexuality by comparing her feelings for (cisgender) men to that of (cisgender) women; by doing so she dismissed non-binary folks and unconsciously insinuated that transwomen are not ‘real’ women. Moreover, the guest speaker’s assertion was cissexist because when she examined her feelings towards ‘women’ “...it’s a given that she [was]

referring only to cissexual women” (Serano, 2007/2016, p. 167). Again, like the guest speaker at Village High, she assumed the gender and pronouns of a student who was posing a question, and by doing so she further perpetuated cissexism. Besides these cisnormative blunders, the guest speaker naturalized sexual desire by insisting that everyone develops sexual feelings and that they “[don’t] just happen over night.” The speaker discussed this process as ‘naturally’ unfolding throughout maturation – a problematic assumption that undermines the experiences of many asexual folks (AVEN, n.d.). Rather than assuming that all people “...experience sexual attraction and that that attraction will be monosexual in nature...” (Serano, 2013, p. 202), the speaker should have refrained from essentializing sexual identity development and packaging it as fixed (Sullivan, 2003).

Although the assembly exposed the limits of guest speaking engagements (Malatino, 2015), it was a step in the right direction according to Ryan who viewed the *mandatory* assembly as progress compared to *optional* panels. In fact, Ryan was hopeful because she witnessed more people taking interest in the topic and less people speaking negatively about the group’s work afterwards: “Every year there has been more and more build up...with the speaker this year there wasn't much negative feedback. A lot of people were interested in it...So we're kind of moving forward and I've definitely seen that over the last few years.” It was clear that GSA members wanted the whole school to receive sexuality and gender-related education, which is why they were compelled to take on the educative responsibility of teachers and administrators. If educators followed the lead of GSA members and regularly integrated queer and trans-informed understandings into their classes, these students would probably not have felt obligated to do so themselves.

Enacting Catholicity: Vetting GSA's Educative Content

GSA members were also motivated to educate the wider school community through a poster campaign and a variety of online announcements. Unfortunately, both of these passive initiatives were vetted through school staff in ways that silenced queer and trans content at Blessed Sacrament. In terms of the posters, Taylor stated that students "...picked school appropriate quotes and stuff," which demonstrated how they policed their own work based on the expectations of school employees. Following Callaghan (2014b), Taylor's commentary exposed how school authorities (i.e., GSA advisors) scanned the posters and online announcements to ensure that it did not contravene Catholic doctrine (e.g., affirm marriage equality). Taylor expressed that the posters were meant to "...promote our [GSA] week and...catch people's attention about the LGBTQ society." To attract attention, Ryan said that celebrities who were "...popular for being LGBTQ or being an ally..." were selected. Ryan explained that they were originally looking for quotes from allies, but the group eventually decided on the four well-known celebrities (i.e., Figure 1: Ellen Page, Figure 2: Wanda Sykes, Figure 3: Ellen DeGeneres, and Figure 4: Pope Francis). The posters were drawn from online images that showcased a celebrity and one of their infamous quotes. Group members printed multiple copies of each of the four posters and displayed them around the school a couple of days before the commencement of their allyship week.

Figure 1: Ellen Page - “What I have learned is that love, the beauty of it, the joy of it, and yes even the pain of it is the most incredible gift to give and to receive as a human being and we deserve to experience love fully, equally, without shame and without compromise.”

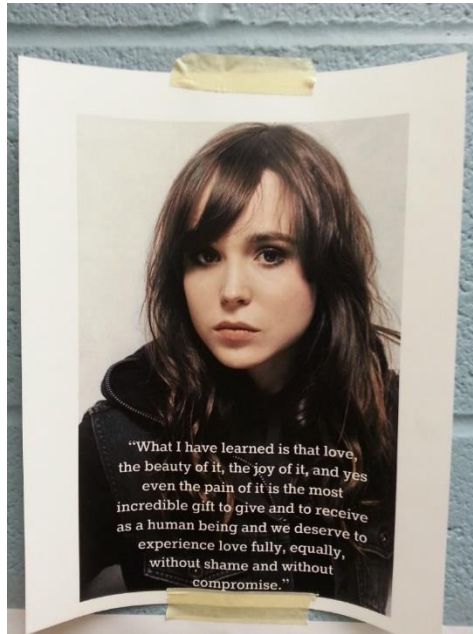


Figure 2: Wanda Sykes – “How can you stop people from loving each other? How can you get upset about loving?”

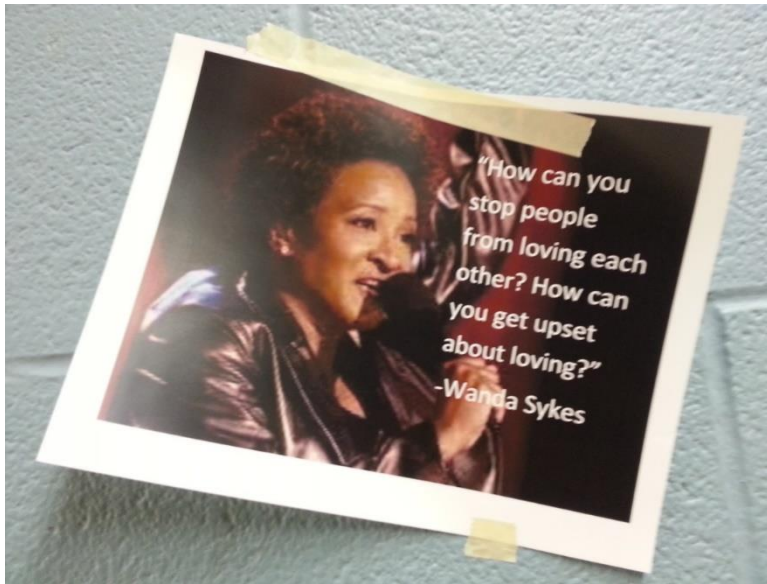


Figure 3: Ellen DeGeneres – “I was raised around heterosexuals, as all heterosexuals are, that’s where us gay people come from...you heterosexuals.”

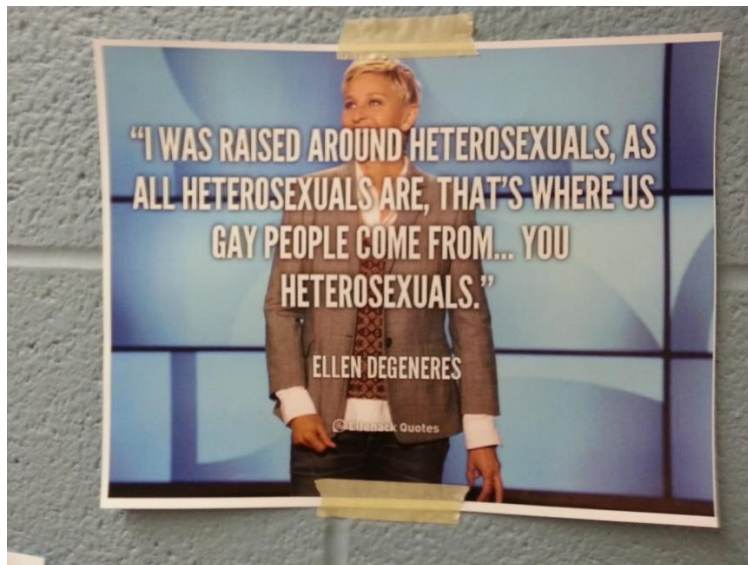
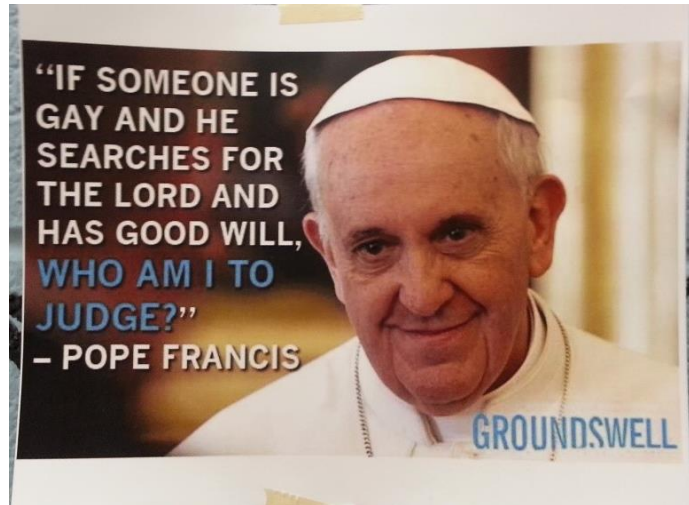
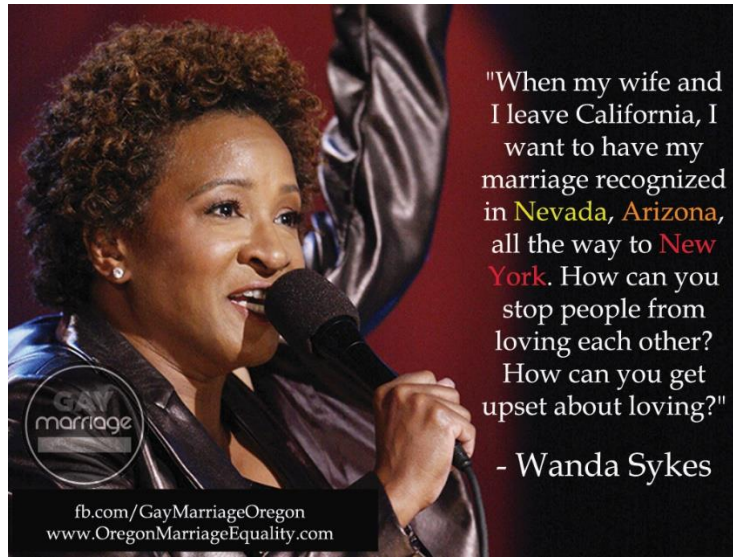


Figure 4: Pope Francis – “If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge”



The first two posters, Figure 1: Ellen Page and Figure 2: Wanda Sykes, reflected a Catholic pastoral view that reminded staff and students that: “In a Catholic school we recognize and accept each and every student as a child of God who is to be treated with respect and love” (Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association, 2012, p. 6). But, contrary to the affirming messaging on Ellen Page’s poster, the faith-based force in operation at Blessed Sacrament produced stigmatizing discourses about queerness (Foucault, 1978); as Callaghan (2010) argues, a caveat of Catholic education is, “Love the sinner, [and] hate the sin” (p. 85; see also, Martino, 2014). The Wanda Sykes poster exposes the limits of a Catholic view on pastoral care because, whether intentional or not, her quote was taken out of context to promote love and tolerance, rather than marriage equality, which was her intention. Wanda Sykes’s true sentiments are outlined below in Figure 5: Wanda Sykes (Gay Marriage Oregon, n.d.).

Figure 5: Wanda Sykes – “When my wife and I leave California, I want to have my marriage recognized in Nevada, Arizona, all the way to New York. How can you stop people from loving one another? How can you get upset about loving?”



When decontextualized, Wanda Sykes's political view on marriage equality was lost. It is unknown if staff or students purposely censored this specific quote, but Ryan did mention that the GSA contemplated including marriage equality quotes on their posters, but they ultimately conceded due to their Catholic school context:

...we are a Catholic school we do have to be careful [emphasis added] and there were a bunch [of people] talking about [how] all people should be able to get married and we're like, 'we need to step back from that' because the Catholic Church, I guess, hasn't fully like, don't agree with that and don't agree with marriage [equality] ...just because we are still a Catholic school and we have to be careful [emphasis added]. So, we took a couple quotes out that we couldn't show...there were just some we couldn't really, that we didn't want to put up because we didn't want to rock the boat and kind of stir stuff up. Because...admin was very much, like, 'okay, yes you can do this, but you know we have to be careful'...

Regardless of the club's aim, the censoring of marriage equality reinforced "...Catholic doctrine that confines homosexuals to a lifetime of chastity and celibacy..." (Callaghan, 2015, p. 20). Rather than contesting theological provisions, the GSA conceded to the limitations exerted on them (McEntarfer, 2011), and by doing so, internalized how it is somehow "...acceptable to *be* lgbtq but not to *do* lgbtq..." (Callaghan, 2015, p. 10). Figure 3: Ellen DeGeneres is an interesting poster because it can be read both literally and figuratively. First, Ellen describes how, as a gay woman, she was born to two heterosexual (cisgender) people. In effect, her gayness is ironically a product of a male and female partnership. Second, by employing the queer theoretical insights of Foucault (1978) who states that in the "Nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage...a type of life, a life form, and a morphology" (p. 43), Ellen's words problematize how sexual acts have come to determine who a person is (i.e., queer people have queer sex and this is strange). Unlike the previous two posters (i.e., Figure 1: Ellen Page and Figure 2: Wanda Sykes), which advocated for love and acceptance, Ellen's poster calls for sexual democratization.

In the following quote, Avery, a sexual minority, summarizes how GSA members settled on these particular celebrities: "...the Pope because the whole Catholic perspective and Ellen DeGeneres and Ellen Page, you know two big lesbian icons. Wanda Sykes. People that people know and like; people that people enjoy. So, I thought it would be really positive." Like Avery, Taylor communicated that "since we're a Catholic school, it was kind of like a Catholic point of view, so I think that's why they put [the Pope] there." It was clear that the group was savvy in that they consciously navigated their Catholic context by displaying posters that promoted the acceptance of sexual minorities. Because students attended a Catholic school, the group strategically and knowingly worked the limits of doctrinal constraints by "...pick[ing] school appropriate quotes and stuff" that would not contravene Catholic doctrine, as Taylor recalled.

Although GSA members, such as Avery, Ryan, and Taylor, were content with the posters, the Pope's infamous quote, much like Wanda Sykes' comment, was taken out of context; this oversight elided the heterosexist undertones that are masked in the illusion of acceptance. With this quote, the Pope does not indicate that he or the Church 'accepts' queer sexuality (Kuruvilla, 2016); rather, he voices that sexual minorities should not be treated poorly – a safe moment (see Goldstein et al., 2007). By no means does the Pope condone or affirm queer sexualities (Kuruvilla, 2016) – a positive moment (see Goldstein et al., 2007). When asked to clarify the intention behind his words, the Pope emphasized that sexual minorities must repent for their sexual deviance and remain chaste:

I prefer that homosexuals come to confession, that they stay close to the Lord, and that we pray all together. You can advise them to pray, show goodwill, *show them the way* [emphasis added], and accompany them along it.” (Kuruvilla, 2016).

Here, the Pope reaffirmed heterosexist Church teachings that champion sex as something that should only exist between a married man and women who intend to procreate – a feat that is unfairly projected onto cisgender queer folks:

All actions involving human sexuality are morally assessed in reference to its two-fold meaning and purpose, mutual love of the spouses and an openness to life. If a person acts in a way that goes against this meaning it is also viewed as an act against the virtue of chastity. This assessment is the same for all people, whether heterosexual or those with same-sex attraction (Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, 2012, p. 8).

Although Avery declared that: “The Pope was, like, the ally of it all,” this assertion is questionable since the Pope's words reiterated the Church's moral regulatory authority in Catholic education

(Martino, 2014). On the one hand, the obscure poster campaign and its anti-homophobic proxy functioned to magnify the anti-heteronormative educational deficiencies at Blessed Sacrament, but on the other it also represented a strategic pedagogical intervention and savvy on part of the students to navigate a doctrinal context that disavows same-gender desire and sexual diversity. Although Callaghan (2009) contends that “Changing deep-rooted convictions or prejudices requires sustained discussion and intellectual probing, activities that are usually available in classroom settings...” (p. 1), these students demonstrated that despite limited systemic support and integration they found ways to strategically navigate the system, and to work at its limits with the view to mobilizing power in productive ways that led them to creating a space for affirming and embracing GSRM individuals; albeit, according to the delimited terms of a logic of “love the sinner, hate the sin” discourse. The students navigated such trade-offs and were at the heart of the productive effects of such pedagogical manoeuvres.

In addition to the poster campaign, the GSA created gender and sexual minority-related online announcements. Like the posters, the proposed announcements were also reviewed by school staff before they could be published during the group’s allyship week. One of the grade nine GSA members, Taylor, was tasked with developing facts that could be posted each day during allyship week:

Taylor: I was just kind of looking for facts on different websites and stuff. And then, I had to find eight or something different facts and I put them in a PowerPoint. And then, I submitted them to [the advisor] who put them on the -- who gave it to somebody else and put it on the [school website].

Researcher: Okay. And it was a one fact a day?

Taylor: Yeah, *we did it one fact a day and then I just had that PowerPoint with different ones, and then she just kind of chose from the different facts to put on the day* [emphasis added].

Researcher: Okay. So, can you give me some examples of some of the facts? If you don't know them offhand, it's okay.

Taylor: There was one that was saying that Native American tribes found same-sex relationships were sacred and stuff. And then, *there's different facts about how stuff became legalized like same-sex marriage* [emphasis added]...and there's a whole bunch of stuff about that.

Researcher: Yeah.

Taylor: And, there was *one about how trans men or trans women...like, they're still women and men* [emphasis added]. They're not what they were before they were trans I guess. I don't know how that -- yeah.

Taylor communicated that she developed a list of facts on a PP presentation and submitted it to the GSA advisors for approval. Her list was important because, in her words, people at school "...needed knowledge on what was going on" about Two-Spirit peoples, marriage equality – a prominent topic in the news at the time, and trans identities. To find different facts she explored a variety of websites and selected the "good ones." Although Taylor's list provided much needed anti-colonial, anti-homophobic, and anti-cisnormative educational moments, much of her suggestions were not published online. Micah described his role in monitoring and approving the

content in relation to the expectations of school administration (see Wernick, Kulick, Dessel, & Graham, 2014). He was willing to take chances so long as it would not comprise the group:

I happened to be in [another advisor's] office. She said, 'Hey, look at this.' I said, 'Hmm, I'm not sure about that one, but okay, if we're going to get push back, that's where it will be. Let's go for it.' She said, 'Okay.' And then, she emailed...the secretary, and they went out.

Censoring marriage equality – a prominent issue raised by Catholic bishops and trustees (Liboro et al., 2015) - was to be expected because Micah previously cautioned the group about including such information. He informed GSA members that including content on marriage equality could compromise the strides they had made as a group and force administration to step in. Ryan, who did not identify as a sexual minority, was happy that her advisor was truthful because, as she related: "I'd rather them say straight up, 'okay, admin's going to be mad about this; let's not do it.' We don't want something to happen and them say you can't do this next year." While it was clear that GSA members were strategically navigating the Catholic education system to push their agenda forward, they unfairly encountered obstacles to their work. Micah acknowledged this by signalling that the vetting process was flawed:

...whether it's good or bad, [the online announcements] wouldn't have been the way it would happen five, six years ago. Five, six years ago, it probably wouldn't have been there anyway. If they were there, it would have gone through two levels of screening with the school, the supervisor, the administrator...got kicked up to the consultant. It depended on the timeframe it would have gone from the consultant to [an advisory committee]. That would have taken a year...

Although the process was more streamlined than in previous years, students were tasked with expertly navigating the system; as such, they "...utiliz[ed] forms of pedagogy that embod[ied] political interests that are emancipatory in nature" (Giroux, 1985, p. 195). For example, Taylor spoke out against social injustices by creating online announcements that contained 3/8 facts that affirmed marriage equality and others that validated gender diversity. While many of Taylor's facts were dismissed because they contravened Catholic values (i.e., marriage is reserved for a man and a woman), addressing marriage equality within Catholic education may be futile because it is not condoned by the Church. However, the filtering of these facts is curious since same gender couples have had the right to marry in Ontario since 2005. In this way, it demonstrates how "The marriage relation [is] the most intense focus of constraints...it [is] under consent surveillance..." (Foucault, 1978, p. 37) in Catholic education. The filtering of online announcements through a Catholic lens exemplifies how compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 1993b) was enforced at school through the imposition of "canonical bits of knowledge..." (Foucault, 1978, p. 30). Overall, it begs to question how marriage equality is permitted to be censored since "Canadian Catholic separate schools are publicly-funded and are accordingly operated by civil authorities, which makes them accountable to provincial governments rather than Church authorities" (Callaghan, 2015, p. 25).

Taylor's list also included the following facts: "In ancient Greece and also in Native American Tribes, same sex relationships were considered sacred" and "It's definitely a myth that trans women aren't 'real' women, or that trans men aren't 'real' men. Your gender doesn't necessarily mean the gender you had at birth, it's the gender you truly identify as." It is unclear whether these two suggestions were published because I could not locate all of the approved announcements, but I believe that this is highly unlikely since the first fact affirmed queer

sexualities and the second questioned cissexist assumptions that invalidate trans identities (Serano, 2007/2016). The following two facts were not developed by Taylor, but appeared online: “40% of homeless teens identify as LGBTQ” and “LGBTQ teens are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than straight kids.” As opposed to Taylor’s suggestions, these facts positioned GSRM youth as mere victims of oppression (see Grace & Wells, 2015; Elliott, 2015; Mayo, 2008; Talburt, 2004). The creation of alternative facts, which emphasized how sexual and gender minorities are in need of protection, was consistent with the Catholic educational stance of social justice in terms of promoting safe (i.e., anti-discrimination) rather than positive (i.e., affirmative) or queer (i.e., anti-heteronormative) moments (Goldstein et al., 2007). The next case also explores how school staff attempted to dilute the GSA’s anti-hetero/cisnormative agenda, and how youth responded to faith-based constraints imposed by their Catholic school.

Holy Names

The GSA at Holy Names was a small group of senior students who were good friends outside of the club. All students who were interviewed and/or completed diary entries were GSRMs; as such, the following data fill significant empirical gaps on the experiences of sexual and gender minority GSA members in publicly-funded Catholic high schools within Canada (Callaghan, 2012, 2015, 2016a; Grace & Wells, 2015). To combat their hetero/cisnormative curricular experiences, GSA members desired to share their queer and trans-informed insights with their peers and teachers. Although these students had a good relationship with their advisor, Drew - a straight male who believed that he had “...a good rapport with all the members of the community including the core conservative element,” which made him a “...a good mediator at times,” and the GSA offered a much-needed counter-hegemonic space to explore sexual and gender diversity at school, youth were unanimously discontent with the disciplining effects of the

Catholic education system's "regulatory moral authority" (Martino, 2014, p. 215). This section documents the tensions that exist between religiosity and queer rights at a publicly-funded Ontario Catholic school.

Club Formation at Holy Names

Morgan, a "female" youth who was questioning whether she was asexual, and Hunter, a "trans guy" who was "probably pansexual," explained that, despite the recent passing of provincial policy to protect students' rights to form GSAs in Ontario Catholic schools (Ontario Legislative Assembly, 2012), their former principal did not support the development of the club at Holy Names:

Morgan: ...when it started we had a principal who wasn't, like, into GSAs or anything like that, so it was more so just accepting and embracing everyone no matter what, rather than just focusing on that.

Researcher: ...just to be clear, your previous principal didn't want the group to focus on sexuality and gender stuff?

Morgan: Yeah.

Here, Morgan communicated that religiosity impacted students' ability to form a GSA (Callaghan, 2016b). As was the case in Callaghan's (2016a) study, the prior principal steered students away from sexuality content and insisted that they focus on the broader goal of acceptance and inclusion – a more palatable endeavor in a Catholic educational context. I followed up by asking Morgan, "Okay, so this principal actively didn't want the group?" and she replied, "Yeah, [a student] had went to him and said that she wanted a GSA...And he said, 'no' that he was afraid that it would become a 'dating club.'" By inferring that a GSA was a dating club, the principal displayed anti-

gay prejudice because no other clubs were positioned as such. Hunter astutely knew that the principal was contravening educational policy since students were legally entitled to develop GSAs (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2012): “So, our last principal he was very ‘blah’ about it. He didn't want to have the group in the school, even though by law you're allowed to. If someone wants to make it, you're allowed to have one.” Thankfully, Morgan noted, “...we got a new principal and kind of brought it back together and made it more GSA rather than [club name] doing everything in general.” Morgan’s insights spotlight how sexuality and gender diversity were limited by the disciplining effects of Catholic doctrine as embodied by the institutional authority of the principal. This Catholic conditioning was enacted by administration at Holy Names to craft the GSA in the image of the Church. Although the new principal and the group’s current advisor, Drew, were more supportive of queer and trans-informed discussions *within* the club itself, GSA members still experienced homophobic impositions that hindered the group’s functioning *outside* of group meetings (i.e., the group’s public image and their educative and activist initiatives were monitored and policed by school staff). Far from only experiencing homophobic resistance from their former principal, broader systemic issues were at play, illustrating an institutional commitment to erasing sexual and gender diversity.

Catholic Conditioning: Crafting the GSA’s Image. The public image of the GSA at Holy Names was crafted by school officials who took great efforts to regulate the club in the image of the Church. Below, I will outline how administration made the club visible at school by distancing it from the traditional GSA brand (see Grace & Wells, 2015). This was accomplished through a variety of efforts, such as calling the club a religiously-inspired name (i.e., an acronym which was assigned to the club by the principal), and creating pamphlets, posters, and a display case that conveyed a generic anti-bullying message (see Clarke & MacDougall, 2012; Niblett &

Oraa, 2014). By contrast, GSA members did not believe that these materials represented their club. In fact, Harper and others insisted that the name on these ‘club resources’ caused confusion because: “...people don’t know...Because it’s not called the GSA, it’s called [club acronym]. So, people – they don’t really know what’s going on there.” Hunter and Harper voiced that the ‘club’ posters and pamphlets were created by staff the previous school year without their consultation.

The GSA’s public image was rooted in Catholicity, which is why participants believed that others thought it was a religious club. All club promotional materials were ingrained with Catholic doctrine. Pamphlets, which were widely available and on display in the main office, included the following quote from the *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students with Same Sex Orientation* (2004): “Catholic schools have a clear obligation to transmit the Church’s moral teaching faithfully” (p. 9). By spotlighting a quote that was derived from a blatantly homophobic resource, the school re-institutionalized the Church’s oppressive position on homosexuality; thus, rather than promoting the acceptance of or even tolerance for sexual minorities, it pathologized queer sexuality. The pamphlet also contained the quote: “Journeying together on the path to discernment,” which communicated that students should embrace spirituality to guide their understanding and judgments. This message reflected the Pope’s call for sexual minorities to be ‘shown the way’ and to remain chaste (Kuruvilla, 2016).

The club’s mission statement, which was crafted by educators, was also listed in the pamphlet. It confirmed that the group’s purpose was “...to promote acceptance and equality in our school community...to create a peaceful learning environment and raise awareness for mental and physical challenges, sexual orientation and gender and racial inequality.” This mandate illustrated the school’s commitment to providing a safe and welcoming atmosphere, rather than challenging institutionalized oppression (Kumashiro, 2002), which exemplifies Airton’s (2013)

argument that "...making space for queerness in education has generally meant making space for queers (p. 541). Rather than being explicit about the club's sexuality focus, this statement also served to privilege Catholicity and subjugate queer knowledges at Holy Names (Foucault, 1978). The school's call for tolerance and love, rather than anti-heteronormative critique, was also evident in the following pamphlet quote: "We are all children of God, created in His image, called to love and accept everyone." The pamphlet and poster, which will be detailed later, both bolstered a 'love the sinner, hate the sin' moral philosophy, as evidenced in the following Jean Vanier quote: "...glory of human beings is not power, the power to control someone else; the glory of human beings is the ability to let what is deepest within grow." What is interesting about this quote is its reference to power and control, and the moral regulatory authority that is imbued across the poster and pamphlet messaging (see Martino, 2014). More than embracing and celebrating heterogeneity – including queer and trans identities and expressions, the pamphlet was designed to reallocate power that was yielded by students who won the right to form GSAs in Ontario Catholic schools as a result of Bill 13 (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2012), and to reinstitute Catholic spiritual authority at Holy Names (Callaghan, 2014b, 2015; Martino, 2014). Following Martino (2014), manipulating the club's public image reflected how "...GSAs are constituted as undermining the moral and pastoral authority of the Church" (p. 214).

Like the 'club' pamphlet, 'club' posters occupied much public space at Holy Names; in fact, almost every wall in the school (e.g., main office, classrooms, hallways, etc.) contained posters that the principal along with a few teachers created on behalf of the club. These posters were so far removed from students' experiences with the group that Morgan did not even know they existed. When speaking about her ideal club she discussed the importance of being visible in the community, which to her meant displaying GSA posters:

Morgan I don't know if that means doing posters or anything.

Researcher: Okay. I noticed you have posters now.

Morgan: Do we?

Researcher: Well they're [club's name] posters.

Morgan: Oh.

...

Researcher: ...you don't remember seeing any of the [club name] posters anywhere?

Morgan: Well I've seen the [club name] ones I guess, but *I know our group hasn't put up any specific GSA information kind of posters* [emphasis added] because of the fear that they might get taken down by people.

Akin to Callaghan's (2010, 2012, 2014a/b, 2015, 2016a/b) body of work, Morgan discussed how her Catholic school was not exactly accepting of sexual and gender diversity, which was undoubtedly linked to its purposeful silencing through the generic 'club' posters. Like Morgan, Hunter did not consider the administrator-made posters to be the group's; he was especially bothered by them because: "...they are kind of everywhere and they're not very good. It's like, 'thanks.'" He insisted that the posters were "really crappy" because they did not mention or even infer that the club was a GSA, which was how all youth participants perceived and experienced the group. Instead, the poster fashioned the group's assigned name (i.e., acronym) – a name that was "...a little bit too general..." according to Hunter. This generic acronym failed to capture the

essence of the club, as Hunter, Harper, and Peyton discuss below. When describing the posters, Peyton exclaimed:

I mean, it has acronyms on it, but *it doesn't really express what our actual motives are. I think it misrepresents us* [emphasis added]...they don't really tell you anything about the group. It just has [the club acronym] on it and that's about it. Because this doesn't tell you what we are or what we want to do to the community.

Here, Peyton described how the generic club name misrepresented the group because it failed to communicate how GSA members were interested in sharing queer- and trans-informed understandings of sexuality and gender. The purposeful omission of the GSA name was grounded in the Catholic education system's disciplinary commitment to erasure, which is fundamental to the politics of shame (Martino, 2014). GSA members were frustrated by this purposeful omission because, as Harper clarified, "...we all know it's a GSA, why don't we just call it a GSA,?" but "...people are really sensitive in the school about hearing the word gay" Likewise, Hunter expressed that: "[Our club] tries to be - it is a GSA, but because it's a Catholic school they have some issues with anything non-heterosexual." It was clear that the authorities at Holy Names (i.e., the principal and partnering teachers) had issues with associating the word 'gay' with the group, which is why they manufactured the group's public image to conform to the moral ideology of the Catholic Church. Peyton and Harper's insights signify how educators framed the club in an attempt to simultaneously celebrate differences whilst denying gender and sexuality specificity. By privileging anti-bullying discourses in and through the generic branding of the club (Callaghan, 2014a), Holy Names enforced the erasure of sexual and gender diversity.

As opposed to GSA members, Drew – the GSA advisor, loved the acronym, although he initially had reservations about it:

I got to admit, at first, I was really worried about the language we were using. I love the idea behind [the group's acronym] as a name. *I was initially concerned that -- are we just doing this because we don't want to call it a GSA? I think that's how it may have started out in the first year [emphasis added]...the year before...I got involved there was some push back from the community based on the fact that the group existed.*

Despite policy that enables students to form GSAs and call them such in all publicly-funded Ontario schools (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2012), Drew confirmed that the school purposefully named it another, non-specific acronym, and that this decision was partially influenced by people in their small rural community. Similar to Mussman's (2011) findings, where school officials received disparaging phone calls from parents and community members in response to the GSA's formation, parental surveillance shaped the development and functioning of the GSA at Holy Names. When the group initially formed, a parent wrote a demeaning four-page letter about the GSA and submitted it to the principal; in it, they positioned the GSA as a 'gay dating club,' which influenced the administration to exercise excessive caution with the group. As was the case in some Ontario Catholic schools before the passing of Bill 13, Holy Names still "...did not use the word 'gay' anywhere in their title..." (Callaghan, 2014a, p. 30), which signified their unwillingness to follow Bill 13.

Rather than the assigned acronym, Hunter wanted a club name with: "...words that describe us and what we stand for... A bunch of gay stuff!" To authentically represent the group and convey the group's queer and trans-informed nature, Hunter suggested that 'club materials' (i.e., posters and pamphlets) should include the acronym, GSA, and explicitly embrace sexuality and gender-related content. Although Hunter suggested that the assigned acronym was not 'bad,' it was inconsistent with a queer and anti-cisnormative focus on sexual and gender diversity:

Hunter: *I have a lot of issues with the name of the group...It's not bad, it's just - it really puts off what we're actually trying to do. In no way does it tell people that it's a GSA just from hearing it [emphasis added].* There are a lot of people who think it's a religious group or something totally different. Even like the -- have you seen the posters? where it's [club acronym].

Researcher: Yes.

Hunter: They're not that great.

Researcher: So, what about the posters is not great?

Hunter: Doesn't mention GSA anywhere.

Researcher: Yeah.

Hunter: Never...it's kind of almost beating around the bush that this is what it is, but they're not really telling people that...

Researcher: So, what would you do to change the posters if you could?

Hunter: *Either change the name to just calling it a GSA or have it stated somewhere clearly that it is a Gay-Straight Alliance [emphasis added].*

Here, Hunter described how the current name was problematic since recognizing discrimination and mobilizing against it is more effective when identity boundaries are clear (Ghaziani, 2011). Further, generic names are not always easily linked to GSRM support, education, and advocacy,

and thus, may only be understood by specifying an explicit LGBT identity (Ghaziani, 2011). As opposed to other acronyms, the name, ‘GSA,’ is a highly recognizable and meaningful brand in North American schools, as Grace and Wells (2015) purport: “...different names suggest that some individuals and institutions have a problem with what the GSA embodies or a problem with making spaces for SGM youth...A different name for a GSA raises questions about SGM presence and place” (p. 270). Harper noted that if staff did not object to it, she would name the club a GSA because it carries significant meaning:

Researcher: ...so if people weren’t apprehensive about that would you want to call it a GSA?

Harper Yeah. Because everyone knows when they hear GSA...

GSA members’ concerns about their assigned club name are particularly salient seeing how the ‘GSA brand’ has been historically opposed in Ontario Catholic high schools (Houston, 2011a/b; Lapointe & Kassen, 2013). What is striking about GSA members’ commentary is the hetero/cisnormative disciplining effects evident at this Catholic school in relation to the club’s name (see Callaghan, 2014a). More than apprehension, the administrator exercised power to uphold Catholicity (Callaghan, 2016b) and contain sexual and gender diversity within a broader façade of social justice.

In addition to ‘club’ pamphlets and posters, school officials designed and distributed ‘club’ T-shirts, which again did not represent GSA members’ collective identity or the group’s foundational GSRM focus. The ‘club’ shirts: “...just...popped up and like, ‘This is the [club] shirt,’” as Harper recalled. Like other ‘club’ materials, these shirts were developed without any input from GSA members, which spotlights how staff crafted the group’s public identity around

Catholicity (see Niblett & Oraa, 2014). The staff-designed shirts were unsatisfactory to Roan because they wanted tie dye shirts or: "...something prettier than [school colours]." Morgan thought a colourful club shirt would help get their name out, as opposed to having a generic school shirt that people did not associate with the GSA:

Researcher: I remember Roan was talking about having tie-dye [shirts]...So is that something you would be interested in? Having a tie-dye shirt?

Morgan: Yeah. I think it would be good because it gets our name out there. We are a group, we're not just that [school colours] shirt over there that kind of does stuff, but you don't really know about.

Researcher: So, are they [club] shirts or are they just shirts in the school that people can buy that's like, 'yay, let's all treat each other with respect?'

Morgan: I think it's more so the latter than the first even though the intention might be for it to be the first.

Here, Morgan expressed that the 'club' shirts, much like GSA restrictions documented in other publicly-funded Catholic schools (Clarke & MacDougall, 2012; Niblett & Oraa, 2014; Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, 2012), communicated the generic message of respect and inclusion rather than explicit queer and trans affirmation. By creating and selling generic 'club' items, the school espoused a concern for promoting homosexuality. In essence, school officials tried to market the GSA as a social justice club rather than legitimize its anti-hetero/cisnormative premise. Roan, Morgan, and Harper spoke specifically about the importance of designing GSA shirts that could be used to lobby for visibly and recognition at Holy Names – an anti-

hetero/cisnormative political act given their Catholic educational context. Besides being sold to staff and students, the 'club' shirt was proudly displayed in a front-of-school display case.

Upon walking into Holy Names, a prominent display case helped reiterate the school's unwavering commitment to tolerance rather than anti-oppression (Kumashiro, 2002). The display case was yet another way in which administration enforced Catholicity at Holy Names by shaping "...the production of discourses on sex" (Foucault, 1978, p. 98). The display case contained the following materials:

- A banner with a picture of the Pope and his quote, "Who am I to judge"?
- Two sets of hands – one rainbow and one with varying skin shades
- An incomplete puzzle with 26 wood and 3 rainbow-coloured pieces
- A 'club' shirt with the words: inclusivity (bolded), together, fun, we, pray, peace, think, love, etc.
- A 'club' poster
- A photo of arms with varying skin tones and the quote, "we are all equal"
- An anti-bullying pledge, which reminded community members that since everyone is made in the image of God everyone should be respected and treated with dignity.

The display case was another example of how administration attempted to pass the GSA off as an anti-bullying group (see Clarke & MacDougall, 2012; Niblett & Oraa, 2014). Although some of the materials in the display case showcased queer symbols of pride (i.e., 3 rainbow-coloured puzzle pieces), they were partnered with more prominent messaging about inclusion and non-judgment, which typified how "...queerness...[is]...defined centrally by discourses of morality" Warner, 1991, p. 13). By advocating for tolerance, inclusion, equality, and non-discrimination, the school dismissed queer concerns about systemic inequities. This was problematic because, much more

than individual bouts of homophobia, "...queer struggles aim not just at toleration or equal status but at challenging...institutions and accounts. The dawning realization that themes of homophobia and heterosexism may be read in almost any document of our culture..." (Warner, 1991, p. 6). Unfortunately, this Catholic conditioning impacted GSA members' work in the larger school community.

Institutional Barriers to the GSA's Educative Work

Mirroring Callaghan (2016a) findings, the principal at Holy Names surveiled and regulated the queer educative and activist work of students, and GSA members found it challenging to work with the restrictions imposed on their club. Harper, a "female" student who was "asexual," disclosed that there were "...hoops and some extra ones..." to jump through. These hoops were more apparent when it involved anything with: "...how the school sees us... We have to check and make sure." This institutional resistance stemmed from religiously-inspired tolerance, which threatened the club's existence and overall functioning in the wider school community. Harper expressed that the 'hoops' were not optional because she felt, at any time, the club could be disbanded if the group did not comply with administrative demands, as was the case in McEntarfer's (2011) study with postsecondary students:

Researcher: Okay. So that's something that you're worried about; that something could happen and maybe there wouldn't be a club anymore?

Harper: Yeah...Like if we didn't jump through all the right hoops and follow all the right instructions.

Researcher: And, do you feel that it's like that in other schools, too?

Harper: I feel like more of the Catholic schools because *we had a lot of difficulty getting started, so we worry that it can be just quickly taken away* [emphasis added].

Harper's fear was grounded in her own knowledge of and experience with GSA resistance in Catholic education (see Callaghan, 2014a/b; Lapointe, 2013; Martino, 2014). Because of the extra 'hoops,' GSA members felt discouraged, yet remained optimistic because, as Harper contended, it: "...Might not be to our standards, but it's there." It was clear that Harper was disgruntled by, yet still accepted the use of Catholic doctrine to vet the club's activities and requests. Above all, she embraced the school's terms of condition in order to have a club. Her insights illustrate how school staff sidestepped their professional duty to affirm sexual and gender diversity by insisting that the group "...focus mainly on Church teaching regarding homosexuality and the problem of homophobic bullying among students, rather than the anti-homophobia activism and LGBTQ pride that typify Gay/Straight Alliances" (Callaghan, 2014a, p. 30).

Hunter experienced religiously-inspired vetting and authoritative resistance when he tried to include the words, 'Gay-Straight Alliance,' in a school announcement:

I had made announcements that never got through, but I made them...*They didn't want gay straight alliance in it* [emphasis added]...it was kind of a mess where I would have to walk down to [the principal's] office and be like, 'hey, does this sound better'? And she'd be like, 'no, fix it.' I didn't want to keep doing this so I think I just forgot after a while...as of right now it's fine, but with certain things it's kind of a pain.

Rather than supporting Hunter's educative efforts, the principal acted within the constraints of a "...series of [heteronormative] aims and objectives..." to silence sexual diversity at Holy Names (Foucault, 1978, p. 95); this ultimately disheartened Hunter and caused him to disengage from his

activist work. Hunter's announcement initiative demonstrated how he had to 'jump through hoops' that were tethered to the regulatory moral authority of the Church (Martino, 2014). This unjust vetting demonstrated how the GSA's educative function was a constant site of relational negotiations of power (Foucault, 1978); it confined non-heteronormative sexualities to the private space of the GSA and located deviance and pathology within GSRM youth instead of the heteronormative learning environment (Linville & Carlson, 2010). In effect, the GSA became an 'Othered' space to contain and regulate queerness (Rasmussen, 2006). The following exchange further documents how the school publicly silenced sexual and gender diversity, but permitted content involving other marginalized groups:

Researcher: Have you ever put anything on the announcements to do with LGBTQ people?

Hunter: Uh uh. [no]

Researcher: But, you have put on announcements for other things. How do you feel about that?

Hunter: Hearing it like that it's like, okay, *they'll do other minorities, but not [LGBTQ people] that they are okay with hearing about on the announcements, so it's kind of like, hmm [emphasis added]...*

Here, Hunter reflected on the oppressive nature of his Catholic school since they unfairly imposed sexuality and gender-based restrictions on the GSA. Akin to Hunter, Peyton experienced, but ultimately accepted, religiously-inspired club restrictions:

Peyton: *...since it's a Catholic school, there are certain views and beliefs that we need to keep in mind [emphasis added].* But at the same time, it's

not fair to us to have to listen to language like “gay” or whatever being used daily.

Researcher: So, you said especially because this is a Catholic school, so I was wondering if you could talk about that just a bit more.

Peyton: Well, I mean, not all Catholics are like this, so I don’t want to put that stereotype on there, but I know these people that have certain negative views against gay people, thinking that’s wrong or it’s a sin and disgusting, and things like that...

For Peyton, it was clear that people at her school held homophobic beliefs that were rooted in the Catholic moral imaginary (see Callaghan, 2016b). This “...state of being in accordance with Catholic doctrine” (Callaghan, 2016b, p. 343) dictated what was moral and acceptable (i.e., heterosexuality) and what was immoral and shameful (i.e., homosexuality), and such heteronormative codes impacted school-wide GSA initiatives (e.g., announcements). Although she refrained from labelling all Catholic people as homophobes (i.e., an individual manifestation of anti-gay beliefs), she understood that Catholic doctrine had heterosexist underpinnings - a systemic issue (see Warner, 1991). Overall, what was fundamentally amiss about GSA members’ experiences at Holy Names was that “Canadian Catholic separate schools are publicly-funded and are accordingly operated by civil authorities, which makes them accountable to provincial governments rather than Church authorities” (Callaghan, 2015, p. 25).

The GSA’s Limited School-Wide Reach

Although “...it should not fall to members of a particular marginalized group to teach others about the oppression they face” (Serano, 2013, p. 289), GSA members at Holy Names felt

compelled to educate their peers and teachers because, as Callaghan (2014b) declares, in publicly-funded Catholic schools “...the reigning authority is not Canadian common law, but Catholic canon law” (p. 226). The following provides more insight into why youth took on such an educative responsibility. For Morgan, the purpose of the GSA involved “...spreading information and awareness and being like, LGBTQ people exist in our world...” Likewise, Peyton communicated: “...we do a lot of group discussions, so I think it’s time to take that next step to becoming more involved in the community and not just within our group...*all I want really from [GSA] is to just raise awareness and educate people. That’s the most important thing*” [emphasis added]. This sentiment rang true for Roan who voiced the club should “...[try] to maintain the positive small community environment while inviting the greater community in” and that they wanted the group to “...expand into [the] larger setting...[it] doesn’t have to be 7 people.” Like Roan, Morgan also desired a visible club “...that’s more active.” According to these GSA members, the queer and trans-informed discussions that were had amongst each other within the GSA were not common outside of club meetings; as such, they wanted to widen their anti-hetero/cisnormative net. In particular, Morgan envisioned a club that would help facilitate understanding about “...the proper use of words and pronouns when it comes up in conversations with people outside the club.” Similarly, Hunter discussed the group’s felt responsibility to educate school community members: “...I think [the GSA] has the role of and responsibility to educate people. And keep them informed of what’s going on in terms of the LGBT community and encourage and promote positive change in the world.” Overall, GSA members’ insights stressed how they were compelled to educate others and transform their school community.

In light of this felt duty to educate the public, Harper explained that the group “...think[s] of ways how of we can educate people around [sexuality and gender].” More specifically, Harper,

an asexual youth, wanted to educate others about marginalized sexualities because students “...believe that there’s only straight and then there’s gay, and there’s nothing in between the very wide divide between them.” Her insights parallel Sedgwick’s (1990/2008) argument that sexual subjectivities are socially produced and this productive force underpins binary power relations (e.g., heterosexual/homosexual). Breaking these binaries was important to Harper since they elide asexuality; this, in turn, leads to its abnormal status in society (see AVEN, n.d.). For example, the assumption that all people are or should be sexually attracted to other people is reflected in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) where asexuality is listed as a mental illness (Serano, 2013). This pervasive belief manifests in commonly-deployed microaggressions such as, ‘one day you’ll feel it,’ which aggravated Harper:

...people’s understanding of things isn’t very educated...with asexual, a lot of people don’t realize that it means you feel no sexual attraction to anyone. They just feel like, ‘Well, you must feel a little bit.’ ‘No, not really.’... [in] a small community, a lot of people don’t have the chance to get the understanding of what’s happening and they don’t learn about things.

Here, Harper referenced how geography (i.e., being located in a small, rural town) impacted people’s mis/understanding about sexuality, as evidenced in Palmer et al.’s (2012) empirical work where they found:

Compared to students in urban and suburban areas, LGBT students in rural schools are more likely to hear negative comments about gender expression and sexual orientation; feel unsafe at their schools due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression; and experience verbal and physical harassment and assault due to these characteristics. In addition, the more hostile climates experienced by students in rural

and small town schools may be further exacerbated by the lack LGBT-related resources relative to their suburban and urban counterparts, including a lower prevalence of GSAs, supportive staff, inclusive curricula, and comprehensive anti-bullying policies (p. xiii).

Since people often dismiss asexual people as confused – even within queer and trans communities (see Serano, 2013), Harper felt that it was necessary to educate her peers about asexual experiences to demystify this minoritized sexuality, especially since her Catholic school normalized sexual relations between married men and women for the purpose of procreation.

Although the GSA at Holy Names was mostly ‘all talk and no action’ according youth, they did manage to implement a few of their ideas at school. For example, Peyton created a video about the club for a curricular project; she informed the GSA about it and the school supported its viewing in all classes. In Roan’s first diary, they described the video as “...a proper ad for our club, with information and a hook to get people interested and involved.” Morgan explained that it was “...about...GSAs in general and just what they do and how they support people,” which stressed their safety function (Griffin et al., 2004; Kumashiro, 2002). When asked to explain the meaning of the video, Peyton communicated that it was: “Just kind of an introduction to [the GSA], what it is, and I did play some statistics about the LGBT community and how there’s a lot of bullying in schools, obviously.” Like Morgan, Peyton confided that the video was simply intended to generate awareness about the group and develop empathy for the ‘Other’ (Britzman, 1995; Kumashiro, 2002), which typified a Catholic anti-bullying stance (Callaghan, 2014a; Clarke & MacDougall, 2012; Niblett & Oraa, 2014).

The video was supposed to be viewed in all classes, but Morgan recalled that “...[it] actually didn't play in a lot of classrooms, which is really sad. I know it was supposed to play in my

Sociology classroom, but we couldn't get it to work. We tried a lot too..." It is unknown if the technology did not work in other classes, if teachers simply forgot to play the video, or if they purposefully refused to do so. Regardless of the reason, Roan indicated in their first diary that they were disappointed that the video did not reach all students because they thought it was the group's "...best chance of getting [their] name out there to the school again." It is unclear to what extent, if any, teachers debriefed Peyton's video with their classes, but she expressed that her class did not speak about it afterwards:

Researcher: After the video was played, did your class talk about it?

Peyton: And people clapped.

Researcher: Oh, people clapped.

Peyton: And that's about it. And then, we've got right back into class. So, the teachers didn't talk about it I guess...

Rather than discussing the video's content, Peyton stated that her class simply clapped:

Researcher: So, one of the reasons you created the video was to raise awareness of [the GSA], right?

Peyton: Yeah. To make our presence known, yeah.

Researcher: So, when you were thinking about the video...did you want teachers or classes to talk about it afterwards?

Peyton: Well, initially, I just made a video as a side project, but I wasn't planning on making it for publicity sake so I didn't

want students and teachers to see it, but I decided to do it anyways. And so, I mean, I wasn't really expecting anyone to talk about it at first.

The video by itself fell short in moving beyond education for and about the 'Other' (Kumashiro, 2002) since it simply created an isolated opportunity for inclusion at Holy Names. Consistent with Martino's (2014) critique of Catholic education, it demonstrated how the video was sanctioned since it promoted "...a particular heteronormative lens for addressing what counts as equity and inclusion..." (p. 209).

The group also created a display in the school hall that addressed the issue of conformity. According to Morgan, the display was a combination of images and text designed by the group. There was a person who was tearing down a black background, which had flowers underneath it. In her second diary, Morgan shared that the meaning behind the display was: "...you can be yourself." The club's intention was to affirm those who do not conform to societal expectations. Below, Morgan explains further:

...I thought it was a good way of catching peoples' attention and helping them understand the message [the club] is trying to send to members of our school community, which was that we need to embrace members of the LGBTQ2QIA community and not be afraid to shift away from conformity/conforming to conventional social values and 'norms.'

Like Morgan, Peyton maintained that the underlying display message was: "You don't have to conform to...like social standards, you can go outside of that..." She clarified that it was supposed to prompt people to "...embrace others' rights and not to just view things as black and white." – a

noteworthy critique of false binaries (Sedgwick, 1990). Although Morgan communicated that the display was supposed to signify how: "...we need to embrace members of the LGBTQ2QIA community..." Morgan acknowledged that "...it was pretty general so there wouldn't be any GSA kind of material that they could take down or be offended by..." Considering Holy Names is a Catholic school, Morgan communicated that their display was only palatable without queer specificity. As opposed to the closed quarters of GSA meetings, the display was posted in a public space, which impacted youth's ability include queer-specific signifiers (e.g., the name "GSA" or rainbows). Morgan's insights demonstrate the disciplining effects of 'holy homophobia' operating through the erasure of explicit sexuality content at her Catholic high school (Callaghan, 2014b). To follow up, I asked Morgan: "...did you want to have GSA-related things in the case? to which she stated: "Yeah. It probably would be good to get more information out especially in our community because people tend to be a little bit hesitant - I don't know if it's just because it's smaller, but yeah." Like Harper, Morgan expressed that explicit sexuality and gender-related content could help curb anti-gay/trans prejudice at her small, rural school (see Palmer, Kosciw, & Bartkiewicz, 2012), yet GSA members conceded to the doctrinal limitations placed on the group (McEntarfer, 2011). By contrast, the next section provides an overview of the queer and trans-informed conversations and learning that were permitted *within* GSA meetings.

Queer and Trans-Informed Conversations and Learning Within GSA Meetings

GSA meetings became a significant outlet for students to explore queer and trans content, as Morgan wrote in her second diary:

I have learned a lot of new things by participating in [GSA]. At the beginning of my high school career I thought that the...community was limited to LGBTQ (I didn't know the other letters existed, which in hindsight is quite ignorant of me). [GSA] made

me realize that there are more sexual orientations and identifications than just heterosexual and cisgender. Overall, [GSA] has made me more informed...

Here, Morgan described how the GSA was a central site for producing and sharing counter-hegemonic understandings of sexuality and gender (Fraser, 1990). Likewise, Peyton, a self-identified “lesbian,” penned in her second diary that the group discussed “...common misunderstandings and prejudices towards topics relating gender-identity, sexual-orientation and nationalities...” She went on to describe how GSA participation enhanced her personal understanding of trans identities and experiences:

Before [GSA] began, I had known quite a few things about the LGBT2QIA community, however, this club has definitely expanded my knowledge immensely. I learned more about different orientations and identities such as asexuality, pansexuality and transgendered [sic] individuals. I have also learned quite a bit about gender fluidity. Relating this all together, it *re-solidified my knowledge and beliefs in differences between biological sex and gender* [emphasis added].

Like Morgan, Peyton explained that the GSA provided a critical platform to explore identities which are not commonly acknowledged or affirmed in the standard curriculum, such as asexuality, pansexuality, and genderqueer (see Lapointe, 2016b/c). Peyton emphasized how the information exchanged within the GSA strengthened her conviction that sex does not equal gender; thus, the club provided a pivotal space to disentangle cissexist assumptions (Stryker, 2006). Similarly, Harper explained: “We learned this is male, this is female and that was always it. So, I don’t really remember learning about anything other than [GSA] and the internet, and my friends.” Here, Harper expressed that, unlike her cisnormative classes, the GSA “...function[ed] as [a] space of

withdrawal and regroupment...” (Fraser, 1990, p. 68) since it was, “The only place where we really talk[ed] about [gender diversity]...”

Following Harper, Hunter suggested that the GSA was one of the only spaces where GSRMs could converse about the oppressive actions of their peers and educators:

Researcher: What kind of things do you have discussions about?

Hunter: It’s mostly issues in the school, like we’ll start ranting if something happens. Like, if someone says something or we notice that people are doing certain things; if teachers are kind of ‘meh’ about things - it’s just kind of bringing attention to things we notice in the school that aren't okay.

Researcher: Okay, and things that are not okay – what does this involve? Homophobic stuff, transphobic stuff?

Hunter: *A lot of it is that just because it happens a lot. There’s also been racism, been ablest stuff...I think there has been cultural appropriation... [emphasis added].*

Besides debriefing GSRM issues that arose at school, Hunter explained that the group discussed racial, cultural, and ability issues, which are more in line with the Catholic framing of GSAs as “...general equity clubs...” (Callaghan, 2014, p. 30). This tactic was both promising and problematic to Hunter since ‘broad’ groups can entice more people to join the group, but also limit the club’s queer and trans focus:

If its broader I feel that we could get more people because then it's not just people who are interested in strictly GSA stuff, which is how I got the other person yesterday...It's also kind of a bad thing because we can't do what we really want to do at some points because they'll say, 'oh no that's too selective' and we can't do it.

Although focusing on multiple, intersecting equity issues is a significant task – especially since racialized minorities often do not feel welcome in GSAs (Mayo, 2015; Mayo, 2017; McCready, 2004, 2010), there is a legacy of silencing queer content in Ontario Catholic schools by broadening the scope of GSAs (see Callaghan, 2014a; Niblett & Oraa, 2014). Moreover, exploring and taking action against social justice issues, such as racism or ableism, is far less threatening or controversial than addressing heteronormativity in Catholic schools. Regardless of the school's intentions, racism was a prominent issue at Holy Names. According to Morgan, the previous school year, the club "...was more focusing on broader stuff. I think it was more focused on racism and stuff. That can be kind of an issue in our school just because it's so small and it's not a big town." To combat racism, Hunter related that "...for Halloween...[the GSA] made announcements about, you know how people will dress up like Mexicans or Black people and it's like, 'don't do that.'"

Morgan, Hunter, and Peyton all agreed that racism was pervasive at Holy Names due to the school's small and rural typography. Peyton, a visible minority, believed that the group should focus more on race: "...LGBT issues are definitely our main focus, but we also do focus on things like culture and race...I think we should probably talk about race a bit more..." Upon hearing Peyton's wishes, I inquired, "...you talk about sexual orientation, you talk about issues to do with race and things like that. Do you ever talk about those things together?" Peyton then replied, "I don't think we have at the same time...that's actually really interesting. I never really thought

about that.” Although the group’s broader group function arguably opened up opportunities to explore multiple forms of marginalization, the group did not necessarily address intersectional oppression - “...a concept that has come out of the work of feminists of color, and which examines how different forms of sexism, and other forms of marginalization (e.g., racism, classism, ableism, ageism, sizeism), can intersect with and exacerbate one another” (Serano, 2013, p. 16). Unfortunately, the group did not discuss how oppression is compounded for those with interlocking marginalized identities or how “...it is possible for a particular group (in this case, homosexuals) to be delegitimated by one hierarchy (heterosexism), yet be viewed as relatively legitimate according to another hierarchy (monosexism)” (Serano, 2013, p. 209). Neither did they explore how it is possible to occupy a privileged position in terms of race (i.e., White), while maintaining a marginalized position in terms of sexuality (e.g., gay). In lieu of a sustained systemic approach to educating youth about intersectional oppression, the burden was placed on GSA members to educate themselves. If school boards, schools, and educators were at the forefront of anti-oppressive education, it would help alleviate the pressure GSA members feel to engage in such work.

Conclusion

This chapter examined findings from the two publicly-funded Ontario Catholic high schools, Blessed Sacrament and Holy Names. It provided a detailed account of the development and functioning of GSAs in Catholic high schools. Following Griffin et al. (2004), it described how safety and tolerance were promoted at both schools at the expense of a systemic commitment to anti-hetero/cisnormative education. At Blessed Sacrament, the GSA was shown to function as a proxy for queer and trans-specific pedagogical deficiencies. Despite the GSA’s noteworthy efforts in the wider school community, their work was underscored by a commitment to upholding

Catholicity (Callaghan, 2014a). The GSA at Holy Names was particularly impeded by club restrictions. Despite housing queer and trans-informed discussions *within* the GSA, this club was burdened by limitations on their *public* work, which were linked to the Catholic moral authority exercised by their administrator. Much attention was devoted to unpacking how power was negotiated among GSA members and school officials at Holy Names. Overall, this chapter produced new knowledge on the tensions that exist between religiosity and sexual and gender minority rights within two publicly-funded Ontario Catholic high schools.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The research conducted as part of this dissertation was concerned to provide an in-depth examination of the educative and activist function of GSAs in two public secular and two public Catholic Ontario secondary schools. Such research was considered important, especially in light of the debates that have continued to surface about the clash between secular and religious values in the public education system with regards to addressing gender and sexual diversity (see Houston, 2011a/b; Karas, n.d.; Maimann, 2017; Ostroff, 2015). Queer theory, as elaborated by Foucault (1978), Sedgwick (1990/2008), Butler (1990, 1993a/b/c), Warner (1991), and Britzman (1995), provided a foundation for critiquing the heteronormative underpinnings of schooling, and the trans-informed insights of Namaste (2000), Stryker (2006), Serano (2007/2016, 2013), Malatino (2015), and Connell (2009) offered a lens to scrutinize cisnormative infrastructure, pedagogy, and practice, as they pertain to the role and function of GSAs in selected Ontario schools. Three prominent themes emerged:

1) **GSAs as student-driven democratizing spaces that enabled youth to explore and circulate anti-hetero/cisnormative discourses** (Fraser, 1990). The research showed the extent to which GSA members partook in school-wide educative work that undermined the presumption “...that there is first a sex that is expressed through a gender and then through a sexuality” (Butler, 1993b, p. 318), and interrogated cissexist and cisnormative beliefs that position gender as a by-product of sex within a dichotomous bodily system (Stryker, 2006; Serano, 2007/2016);

2) **GSAs as a proxy for queer and trans-informed education in the absence of a systemic commitment to addressing gender and sexual diversity**. The research revealed that these efforts were largely confined to superficial one-off events (e.g., assemblies). As Malatino (2015) contends, this pedagogical strategy is problematic because it is grounded in “...a neoliberal politics of inclusion that fails to move students to deal with their own deep complicities in upholding

understandings of sex and gender that are fundamentally transphobic, as well as...fail[s to] prompt pragmatic understanding and address of the maldistribution of life chances for trans, intersex, and gender-nonconforming subjects” (p. 395); and

3) **GSA efficacy impeded by a Catholic pastoral care ethic and its regulatory moral authority** (Martino, 2014). The research highlighted the extent to which an anti-bullying agenda was valorized at the expense of anti-hetero/cisnormative education in order to promote safe moments (Goldstein et al., 2007), which are more aligned with a Catholic social justice stance that is consistent with its doctrinal position of ‘love the sinner, hate the sin’ logics (Callaghan, 2014b).

As demonstrated in this dissertation, students are not simply acted upon by educational stakeholders (e.g., administrators, educators, and religious leaders); they are educative leaders who are helping schools move ‘...toward[s] the flourishing of queerness...’ (Airton, 2013, p. 534) and the democratization of gender (Connell, 2009). Although their queer and trans-informed pedagogical leadership and labour is to be commended, GSA members were unfairly expected by others and took it upon themselves to educate community members and advocate for change since their school boards, schools, and educators failed to cultivate anti-oppressive learning environments. Most prominently, trans and gender diverse students had to lobby for the “...recognition of their identities in schools, often without institutional backing in place to do so” (Frohard-Dourlent, 2017, p. 2). In this way, queer, trans, and gender diverse youth worked on behalf of a hetero/cisnormative system, despite being in grave need of institutional protection, support in the form of creating space for their self-determination, and systemic LGBT2Q curriculum development and implementation. Overall, this study demonstrated a need for systemic support for anti-hetero/cisnormative education so that the burden and responsibility for

this work does not just fall on the shoulders of GSA members, and gender and sexual minority youth in particular.

My Own Investment in the Study

Following my Masters research, which focused on straight allies' involvement in public secular school GSAs, I became increasingly interested in GSRM's participation in GSAs and the educative and activist work of these group members because my previous study centered the experiences of straight and cisgender students. During the completion of my program, the *Accepting Schools Act*, was also passed, which prompted me to extend my research into the Ontario Catholic education system. After students were legally able to form GSAs and call them such in all publicly-funded Ontario schools (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2012), I co-wrote an article that questioned the development and functioning of GSAs in Catholic education:

Once a upon a time Gay-Straight Alliances were granted in Ontario Catholic secondary schools...It's been one full school year since the passing of the Accepting Schools Act, Bill 13, which legally enables students to form Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and name them such in Ontario Catholic (and public) schools. However, it is difficult to gauge how the new legislation is impacting school communities. Are students attempting to create these clubs, now that they are legally able to? If so, are school boards, administrative staff, and educators supporting GSA creation and development? Are they working with students to facilitate GSAs' growth in school communities? Does this story have a 'gay' ending after all? (Lapointe & Kassen, 2013, p. 12).

This study sought to provide insight into the questions that we posed. As a queer and gender non-conforming educator, I was particularly interested in how Catholic schools and youth who attend them would respond to the *Accepting Schools Act*.

This investigation found that "...characteristics of the broader community (e.g., level of political conservatism...)...account for variability across GSAs in the activities they are able to pursue and the types of experiences youth have in GSAs" (Poteat et al., 2017, p. 512). For example, although students are legally able to form student-led clubs and name them, youth at Holy Names were blatantly denied the right to call their group a GSA, and affirm and celebrate sexual diversity in the wider school community. This finding exemplifies how Bill 13 does not guarantee that all students who attend publicly-funded Ontario schools will be supported in their pursuit to create and name clubs that support GSRM youth and combat hetero/cisnormativity since educational policy may be c/overtly dismissed by school officials. The issue here is that there is a law, but faith-based schools may actively work around it by privileging Catholicity; thus, simply having a policy is inadequate since schools may deliberately refuse to enact it, particularly if there are no real consequences for negating their legal responsibilities. When schools are unwilling to comply with the *Accepting Schools Act*, it may very well mean that students and parents have to agitate the system and force it to take responsibility, as illustrated through the advocacy efforts of Halton District Catholic Schools Board students and adult allies who lobbied for and won the right to form GSAs (see Houston, 2011a/b). In this way, "...heteronormativity of the Catholic school unexpectedly invites new acts of resistance" (Callaghan, 2015, p. 23), which draws attention to "...the broader issue of schools as a battleground for queer rights and representation of sexual minorities as self-determining subjects" (Martino, 2014, p. 207-208).

The dissertation raises key questions about the role of Catholic schools as publicly funded institutions and their requirement to adhere to stipulations as dictated by the *Ontario Human Rights Code* (OHRC) for ensuring that the human rights of GSRM students are respected. When schools fail in meet their lawful responsibilities, GSRM students are left to advocate on their own behalf

to ensure that their needs and demands are met; by building partnerships and alliances with the broader community, including peers, teachers, parents, and activists, they can take charge of their educational circumstances and force the system to respond. For example, when two grade six students who attended a Catholic elementary school in Ottawa, Ontario came home with the news that their principal would not permit them to complete a ‘gay rights project,’ their mothers promptly scheduled a meeting with the principal to advocate for their children. Since the principal did not succumb to the students’ or parents’ requests, they contacted local media, and “Not long after the media started calling, [the principal] agreed to let the girls do their project” (Ostroff, 2015). The two elementary school students also lobbied to start a GSA and “After six months of struggle, their ground-breaking GSA club [was approved], Canada's first ever in a Catholic elementary school...” (Ostroff, 2015).

When student and parent activism, and media pressure does not persuade schools boards and individual schools to fulfill their legal obligations, students and their families may appeal to existing legislative frameworks, which may be the only course of action that they are left with. For example, after the passing of Bill 13, Christopher Karas “...challenged his then French Catholic School Board, CSDCCS, Conseil Scolaire de District Catholique Centre-Sud and his school, École Secondaire Catholique Sainte-Famille at the Human Rights Tribunal when the school board barred him from putting up posters of his civil rights hero Harvey Milk and [stifled] a Gender and Sexuality Alliance that Karas and his peers had tried to build through high school” (Karas, n.d.). While having explicit anti-homo/transphobic policies and legislation does not always ensure that GSRM students will be supported or that anti-hetero/cisnormative education will be provided, it is clear that appealing to the law as an ultimate course of action, though not ideal, can lead to some productive change at the systemic level. By engaging in such activism,

students and their adult allies are refusing to remain complicit with hetero/cisnormative school environments and taking the lead to transform the education system.

Religious Freedom: A Guise for Religious Bigotry

This inquiry reiterated Callaghan's (2009) argument that Canadian Catholic schools' human rights policy is "...regularly being sidestepped due to perceived conflicts with religious beliefs" (p. 1). It demonstrated how Holy Names and Blessed Sacrament privileged Catholic doctrine over the human rights of sexual and gender minorities, which raises significant questions about the acceptability of religious accommodation when it is harnessed as a means to trump sexual and gender minority rights in publicly-funded Ontario Catholic schools. In this respect, the research findings documented in this dissertation highlight the extent to which religious freedom may be used as a guise for religious bigotry within the Ontario Catholic education system (see Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998). Moreover, when publicly-funded Catholic schools adhere to religious doctrine at the expense of the fundamental human rights of queer, trans, and gender diverse students, it calls into "...question the very legitimacy of a publicly-funded Catholic school system" (Martino, 2014, p. 210). This study demonstrated how religiosity, or "...excessive religiousness or an inappropriate devotion to some aspects of the rituals and traditions of religion" (Callaghan, 2016b, p. 341), was enacted to regulate GSA functioning at the two publicly-funded Ontario Catholic schools, which exemplified how school officials refused to uphold the Ontario Education Act. By refuting their educational accountability, the schools arguably operated in such a way where "...religious bigotry [underpinned] the claim of religious freedom" (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998, p. 30).

This religiously-justified bigotry not only extends to the policing of GSAs, but to curricular development and implementation. Shortly after the revised Ontario Health and Physical Education

curriculum was released by the Ministry of Education, Cardinal Thomas Collins, the Archbishop of Toronto and President of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, dismissed Catholic educators' professional responsibility to teach updated content (e.g., marriage equality) (Pickles, 2015):

While Catholic schools have a responsibility to follow the curriculum set out by the Ministry of Education, they have always sought to do so in a way that conveys, respects and models Catholic Christian principles to our students. They will continue this tradition. 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 (Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, 2015).

Here, Cardinal Thomas Collins, a staunch supporter of generic anti-bullying clubs rather than GSAs (Schwartz, 2012), defended the Catholic education system's 'right' to privilege religious freedom over sexual minority rights.

Similarly, the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association recently voiced concerns about school board autonomy in light of Bill 24 (Bartko, 2017), an act that supports GSAs and prohibits club members from being outed to their parent(s)/guardian(s) (Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 2017). There has also been much religiously-inspired opposition to the updated sexual health curriculum within Alberta, as Maimann (2017) reports:

Sexual Health educators are criticizing Alberta's Catholic superintendents for developing their own abstinence-based sex ed curriculum. The Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta is working on a parallel human sexuality curriculum, as the council anticipates touchy subjects making their way into the

provincial government's curriculum rewrite...consent contraception, same-sex relationships, anal and oral sex, and masturbation [are] among topics that would be problematic to teach in Catholic schools.

Here, the familiar religious discourse evident in Callaghan's (2009, 2010, 2012, 2014a/b, 2015, 2016a/b) body of work and within this study is currently at play in Alberta. With The Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta's strategic deployment of religiosity, it is clear that faith-based stakeholders within a publicly-funded Catholic education system are aiming to suppress sexual and gender diversity in light of dominant readings of the Bible (Kumashiro, 2002). As with the banning of GSAs and their unjust regulation within publicly-funded Ontario Catholic schools, Catholic educational leaders are attempting to evoke religious freedom in order to sidestep their legal responsibilities to do no harm to gender and sexual minorities. These hetero/cisnormative actions raise pressing concerns about "...the legitimacy of an education system...originally designed to protect religious minority rights, but [is] now being deployed quite deliberately and politically as a weapon of discrimination against sexual minorities in Catholic schools" (Martino, 2014, p. 211). When publicly-funded Ontario Catholic schools neglect or negate their duty to provide equitable learning environments for GSRMs, it raises pressing concerns about whether public dollars should be allocated to institutions that clearly oppress sexual and gender minorities. My study has provided significant insights into the consequences of such contingencies involving public education in Ontario and raises important questions about the tensions that exist between adequate provision of GSRM education, as well as support for gender and sexual minority students especially in Catholic schools, where tensions arise as a result of religious freedom or accommodations rubbing up against the need to ensure the human rights of GSRMs. It also raises important questions about the legitimacy of Catholic-funded schooling and its responsibilities to

support the education and human rights of all students, especially in light of OHRC legislation and the *Accepting Schools Act*.

Transforming Teaching Practices: Preservice and In-Service Training

Just as introducing GSRM-affirming policies and explicit GSA protections do not guarantee that schools will enact them, simply stating that educators should embrace and engage in anti-oppressive practices will not alleviate hetero/cisnormative practices and pedagogies, particularly if educators do not feel comfortable or confident in addressing GSRM issues at school, as Taylor et al.'s (2016) research demonstrates. Data across the four school sites draw attention to tensions associated with implementing and enacting queer and trans-informed education since it is not always clear how to begin and proceed. Findings reveal how educative intentions may be at odds with their impact, and the learnings that are stressed (i.e., anti-discrimination and anti-bullying) frequently do not mirror what queer and trans theorists and pedagogues understand as ideal. How then do we marry theoretical teachings, pedagogy, and practice?

It is clear that there is a lack of educational provision and support to bolster teacher's understanding of and capacity to provide anti-hetero/cisnormative education, which limits educator's ability to incorporate queer and trans-informed teaching and learning practices in their classes. Because teachers are tasked with ensuring schools are places for all students, they must be prepared to teach about oppression and work to "change society" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 47). In terms of facilitating educators' ability to implement an anti-hetero/cisnormative pedagogical agenda, preservice training and in-service PD must assist future and current educators develop and hone their anti-oppressive teaching repertoire. For example, Taylor et al. (2011) recommend "That Faculties of Education integrate LGBTQ-inclusive teaching and intersectionality into compulsory courses in their Bachelor of Education programmes so that teachers have adequate opportunities

to develop competence before entering the field” (p. 21). Such an anti-oppressive approach would help educators learn about how particular ways of being are privileged in schooling (i.e., heterosexual, White, Christian, cisgender, etc.) while others are marginalized (e.g., queer, racialized, trans, gender diverse, Muslim, etc.), and provide them with the necessary wherewithal to teach for social justice.

In light of various calls to provide secular and non-secular educators with opportunities to enhance their knowledge about GSRM issues and develop their skillset to teach in an anti-oppressive manner, I lobbied the Associate Dean, Preservice Education, at the Faculty of Education, Western University, to create and teach a course entitled, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two-Spirit, Queer/Questioning (LGBT2Q) Issues in Education. For the last four years, I have taught this elective class, which aims to assist preservice educators develop a comprehensive and critical understanding of the political and cultural landscape of education for GSRM youth. In particular, students learn how to recognize and address homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism, cissexism, heteronormativity, and cisnormativity in school and society, and queer, trans, and anti-oppressive theories are drawn upon to spotlight GSRM-based inequities and spotlight what educators can do to support queer, trans, and gender diverse youth, and cultivate safer, more inclusive, and just school environments. Although developing this elective course was a step in the right direction, offering a single course is clearly not enough; since LGBT2Q Issues in Education is optional, not all preservice teachers are exposed to its queer and trans-affirming content, and due to programmatic structure (i.e., inability to take particular courses due to program restrictions), over the last two years, prospective elementary teachers were unable to enroll unless they overloaded, and secondary teacher candidates who planned to work in Catholic schools were unable to take it because they had to enroll in another elective, Teaching in Roman Catholic

Secondary Schools. Beyond these logistical issues, introducing one course does not square with Taylor et al.'s (2011) recommendation for GRSM-specific content to be integrated across preservice programs. It is clear that there is both a need for a specific course as well as the infusion of queer and trans-informed material across the preservice education. Yet, implementing such education throughout the program can be challenging as a result of systematic hetero/cisnormativity.

Similarly, in K-12 education, GSRM topics cannot be relegated to Social Science or Gender Studies courses, but must permeate all classes, such as Science, Math, and History. Integrating anti-hetero/cisnormative content across the curriculum, however, is easier said than done, particularly if there is a lack of support of such work and leadership at the school board and school levels. Systemwide anti-hetero/cisnormative PD was not undertaken at the schools in this study, illustrating institutional barriers and forces at play, which function to undermine the positive and long-lasting effects of GSAs (Griffin et al., 2004). Central leadership and a whole school commitment are vital components to ensuring the provision of queer and trans-informed PD and its impact in classrooms. Yet, even if school board employees and principals are committed to and take responsibility for organizing such PD, simply providing one-off sessions on anti-homo/transphobic policy and anti-hetero/cisnormative practices is still not enough. School boards and individual schools must prioritize and be accountable for enacting policies, pedagogies, and practices that fulfill their legal duty to do no harm to GSRM students.

Looking Forward: Future Studies

This study filled prominent empirical gaps on the educative and activist work of Canadian GSAs (Grace & Wells, 2015; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Lapointe, 2012; St. John, Travers, Munro, Liboro, Schneider, & Greig, 2014), and the development and functioning of these clubs within the

Ontario Catholic education system (Grace & Wells, 2015; Lapointe & Kassen, 2013; Liboro, Travers, & St. John, 2015; Martino, 2014). Although this investigation made an important contribution to the field of GSRM students and student-led clubs, findings do not extend beyond the four schools that were selected for this inquiry. Future studies should build on this research by examining the role and function of GSAs in a variety of schools to paint a more robust picture of student-led clubs and youth activism in publicly-funded Ontario schools. Researchers should also examine the extent to which Canadian GSAs explore and address intersecting oppressions, specifically in relation to race, gender, and sexuality (see McCready, 2004). Since there is limited research on GSAs in Ontario public Catholic schools (Liboro et al., 2015), further research is required to document the extent to which school boards, administrators, and educators are complying with the *Accepting Schools Act*, and supporting group members' anti-hetero/cisnormative educative and activist work. Researchers should also investigate the impact of Bill 24 on the development and functioning of GSAs or similar themed clubs in Alberta, Canada. Finally, researchers ought to examine GSA participation and club-specific activities and initiatives in publicly-funded Ontario secular and Catholic K-8 schools, due to their recent emergence in elementary education (Ostroff, 2015). Overall, much can still be learned about GSAs and their anti-hetero/cisnormative educative and activist impact in Canadian K-12 schools.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Summary of Participants

Table 1
Summary of Participants

Participant	Role	School	Sexual Orientation	Gender	Individual Data Collection Method(s)
Taylor	Student	Blessed Sacrament	“Straight”	“Female”	Interview, 2 Diaries
Azariah	Student	Blessed Sacrament	“Straight”	“Female”	Interview, 3 Diaries
Ryan	Student	Blessed Sacrament	Label-less	“Female”	Interview; 2 Diaries
Avery	Student	Blessed Sacrament	“Homosexual”	“Male”	Interview
Parker	Student	Blessed Sacrament	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	Observation only
Sawyer	Student	Blessed Sacrament	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	Observation only
Sage	Teacher	Blessed Sacrament	“Straight”	“Female”	Interview
Micah	Teacher	Blessed Sacrament	“Straight”	“Male”	Interview
Blake	Student	Sunset High	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	2 Diaries
Skylar	Student	Sunset High	“Pansexual”	“Female”	Interview
Zion	Teacher	Sunset High	“Straight”	“Female”	Interview
Andie	Student	Village High	Label-less	“Male”	Interview; 2 Diaries
Hayden	Student	Village High	“Pansexual”	“Male” and “Genderfluid”	Interview; 4 Diaries
Sasha	Student	Village High	“Asexual”	“Male”	Interview; 4 Diaries
Reese	Student	Village High	“Pansexual” (prefers cisgender women)	“Demiboy”	Interview; 4 Diaries
Kai	Student	Village High	“Gay”	“Non-binary”	Interview; 3 Diaries
Dylan	Teacher	Village High	“Gay”	“Female”	Interview
Hunter	Student	Holy Names	“Probably Pansexual” (prefer females)	“Trans guy”	Interview; 1 Diary

Roan	Student	Holy Names	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	1 Diary
Peyton	Student	Holy Names	“Lesbian”	“Female”	Interview; 2 Diaries
Harper	Student	Holy Names	“Asexual”	“Female”	Interview
Morgan	Student	Holy Names	Questioning Asexuality	“Female”	Interview; 3 Diaries
Drew	Teacher	Holy Names	“Straight”	“Male”	Interview



**Western
Education**

**Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA)/Respecting Difference Clubs
in Ontario Public and Catholic High Schools**

LETTER OF INFORMATION: GSA/Respecting Difference Club Members

Introduction

My name is Alicia Lapointe and I am a PhD student at the Faculty of Education at Western University. My supervisor is Wayne Martino. I am carrying out research to examine the experiences of high school students and teachers who are involved with Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA)/Respecting Difference clubs and I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of the Study

My purpose is to produce more knowledge about high school students' and teacher's involvement in Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA)/Respecting Difference clubs. I will be observing/participating in GSAs/Respecting Difference clubs in 2 Ontario public and 2 Catholic high schools; interviewing 5 GSA student members and 1 advisor from each school. I am also interested in interviewing 5 students who lobbied for the development of GSAs at their Ontario Catholic high school. The current GSA members will also be asked to complete weekly semi-structured diaries where they will reflect on their participation in these groups.

If you Agree to Participate

I am seeking your permission to attend your GSA/Respecting Difference club meetings for a period of 4-5 months. There are two components to the study that require consent – I need to have permission from all GSA members to attend the meetings, and observe and participate in club activities. If you agree can you please indicate this on the consent form. In addition, you may choose to complete an hour interview in a private location at your school or in a nearby location that you suggest to explore your experiences with the Gay-Straight Alliance/Respecting Difference club and complete weekly semi-structured diaries. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed into written form. You may still participate if you choose not to have your interview audio recorded. If you are willing to complete semi-structured diaries and an interview, please indicate this on the consent form. If you choose to be interviewed and consent to have your interview audio recorded please indicate this on the consent form.

Confidentiality

The information collected will be used for research purposes only and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential and your privacy will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. I will securely store the data for five years and then it will be destroyed confidentially. Representatives from the Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may have access to study related information in order to ensure that the study is following the proper laws and regulations.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks to participating in this study. If you choose to participate you will contribute significant knowledge about students' involvement in Gay-Straight Alliances/Respecting Difference clubs.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from this study at any time without any repercussions.

Questions

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at [REDACTED] or the Principal Investigator, Wayne Martino, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] If you have any questions about this study please contact Alicia Lapointe at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Alicia Lapointe



Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA)/Respecting Difference Clubs in Ontario Public and Catholic High Schools

LETTER OF INFORMATION: GSA/Respecting Difference Club Advisors

Introduction

My name is Alicia Lapointe and I am a PhD student at the Faculty of Education, Western University. My supervisor is Wayne Martino. I am carrying out research to examine the experiences of high school students and teachers who are involved with Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA)/Respecting Difference clubs and I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of the Study

My purpose is to produce more knowledge about high school students' and teacher's involvement in Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA)/Respecting Difference clubs. I will be observing/participating in GSAs/Respecting Difference clubs in 2 Ontario public and 2 Catholic high schools; interviewing 5 GSA student members and 1 advisor from each school. I am also interested in interviewing 5 students who lobbied for the development of GSAs at their Ontario Catholic high school. The current GSA members will also be asked to complete weekly semi-structured diaries where they will reflect on their participation in these groups.

If you Agree to Participate

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to complete an hour interview in a location that you suggest to explore your involvement with Gay-Straight Alliances/Respecting Difference clubs. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed into written form. You may still participate if you choose not to have your interview audio recorded. If you choose to be interviewed and consent to have your interview audio recorded please indicate this on the consent form.

Confidentiality

The information collected will be used for research purposes only and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential and your privacy will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. I will securely store the data for five years and then it will be destroyed confidentially. Representatives from the Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may have access to study related information in order to ensure that the study is following the proper laws and regulations.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks to participating in this study. If you choose to participate you will contribute significant knowledge about the development and functioning of Gay-Straight Alliances/Respecting Difference clubs in Ontario secondary schools.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions.

Questions

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. or the Principal Investigator, Wayne Martino, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. If you have any questions about this study please contact Alicia Lapointe at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

**Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA)/Respecting Difference Clubs in Ontario Public
and Catholic High Schools**

Alicia Lapointe, PhD Candidate, Western University

CONSENT FORM:

Current GSA/Respecting Difference Club Members (18+)

I have read the Letter of Information and I understand the nature of the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I will participate in the study in the following way(s):

- The researcher may attend GSA meetings, and observe and participate in club activities
- I will complete weekly semi-structured diaries and an interview
- The researcher may audio record my interview

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA)/Respecting Difference Clubs in Ontario Public and Catholic High Schools

Alicia Lapointe, PhD Candidate, Western University

CONSENT FORM:

Current GSA/Respecting Difference Club Members (<18)

I have read the letter of information, have had the nature of the study explained to me. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. My child may participate in the study in the following way(s):

- The researcher may attend GSA meetings, and observe and participate in club activities

- My child may complete weekly semi-structured diaries and an interview

- The researcher may audio record the interview with my child

Name of Student

Student's Signature

Date_____

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

Parent/Guardian's Signature

Date_____

Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA)/Respecting Difference Clubs in Ontario Public and Catholic High Schools

Alicia Lapointe, PhD Candidate, Western University

WAIVER FORM: Current GSA/Respecting Difference Members (<18)

Since I have not disclosed my sexuality and/or gender identity to my guardian(s), I will act as the primary person who will decide if I will participate in this study. I have read the letter of information and I understand the nature of the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I will participate in the study in the following way(s):

- The researcher may attend GSA meetings, and observe and participate in club activities
- I will complete weekly semi-structured diaries and an interview
- The researcher may audio record my interview

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

**Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA)/Respecting Difference Clubs in Ontario Public
and Catholic High Schools**

Alicia Lapointe, PhD Candidate, Western University

CONSENT FORM:

GSA/Respecting Difference Club Advisors

I have read the Letter of Information and I understand the nature of the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I will participate in the study in the following way(s):

- The researcher may attend GSA meetings, and observe and participate in club activities
- I will complete an interview
- The researcher may audio record my interview

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Appendix C. Ethics Approval Form



Research Ethics

Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board NMREB Full Board Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Wayne Martin
 Department & Institution: Education/Faculty of Education, Western University
 NMREB File Number: 105885
 Study Title: Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs)/Respecting Difference Clubs in Ontario Public and Catholic High Schools
 Sponsor:
 NMREB Initial Approval Date: January 17, 2015
 NMREB Expiry Date: January 17, 2016

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Recruitment Items	Email to principals	
Revised Letter of Information & Consent	Revised Information and Consent Forms	2014/1/22
Advertisement	Email to Principals/Social Media Advertisements	2014/1/22
Instruments	Interview Questions	2014/1/15
Revised Western University Protocol	Ethics Protocol	2014/2/18

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer, on behalf of Wayne Hanson, NMREB Chair

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

Erika Hasle ehasle@uwo.ca	Grace Kelly grace.kelly@uwo.ca	Mina Mikhail mmikhail@uwo.ca	Vikki Tsou viki.tsou@uwo.ca
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This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

Appendix D. Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Respecting Difference Club/GSA Members

- 1) Can you describe your sexuality.
- 2) Can you describe your gender.
- 3) What is it like/do you think it's like to be a gender, sexual, romantic minority (GSRM) student at your school?
- 4) What are some issues that GSRM students face at your school?
- 5) What is it like/do you think it's like to be a straight ally at your school?
- 6) What do you believe is the role of a straight ally?
- 7) Can you describe your GSA and what it is like.
- 8) What are some activities/events that your GSA has facilitated this year?
 - a) What were the purposes of these activities/events?
 - b) What impact did they have on you (e.g., learning)?
 - c) What impact did they have on other group members?
 - d) What impact did they have on other students in the school?
- 9) What do you believe is the role or purpose of your GSA?
- 10) What motivated you to join the GSA?
- 11) What motivates you to:
 - a) attend GSA meetings
 - b) participate in GSA-related events?
- 13) Can you describe your role in the GSA.
- 14) Is there anything else you would like to add or speak about?

Interview Questions

Respecting Difference Club/GSA Advisors in Ontario Public and Catholic High Schools

- 1) Can you describe your sexuality?
- 2) Can you describe your gender?
- 3) Can you speak about what it is like to teach at your high school?
- 4) What do you believe it is like to be a gender, sexual, romantic minority (GSRM) student at your school?
- 5) What do you believe it is like to be a straight ally at your school?
- 6) What is the purpose of the GSA/Respecting Difference club you advise?
- 7) Why are you interested in advising the GSA/Respecting Difference club at your school?
- 8) What personal characteristics make you a good candidate to advise a GSA/Respecting Difference club?
- 9) What are some activities/events that the GSA has engaged in this year?
 - a) What were the purposes of these activities/events?
 - b) What impact did they have on you (e.g., learning)?
 - c) What impact did they have on other group members
 - d) What impact did they have on other students in the school?
- 10) What are the following people's roles/relationship with the GSA/Respecting Difference club:
 - a) GSA/Respecting Difference club members?
 - b) Students who are not members of the club?
 - c) Teachers at the school?
 - d) Administrators at the school?
- 11) If you could change one thing about the GSA/Respecting Difference club what would that be?
- 12) Is there anything else that you would like to add or speak about?

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Alicia A. Lapointe

Post-secondary Education and Degrees:

Doctor of Philosophy, Education Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2018

Master of Education, Curriculum Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2012

Special Education, Part 1
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2009

Bachelor of Education, Intermediate/Senior Division
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2009

Bachelor of Arts, Honors Kinesiology
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2006

Honours and Awards:

Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
Doctoral Fellowship
2014-2017

Eric Rofes Travel Grant Award [declined]
2017

Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS)
2013-2014

Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS)
2014-2015 [declined]

PSAC 610 Academic Achievement Scholarship
2014

Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching
2017

Education Students' Council Undergraduate Teaching Award
2017

University Student Council Teaching Honor Roll Award of Excellence
2014-2015; 2015-2016; 2016-2017

**Related Work
Experience**

Instructor, LGBT2Q Issues in Education
The University of Western Ontario
2014-present

Research Associate, Centre for School Mental Health
The University of Western Ontario
2016-present

Facilitator, Open Closet (LGBT2Q+ Youth Group)
Regional HIV/AIDS Connection
2013-2017

Research Associate, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
London, Ontario
2014-2016

Teaching Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2012-2014

Research Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2010-2011 and 2013-2016

Publications

Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

Lapointe, A. (2017). "It's not pans, it's people": Student and teacher perspectives on bisexuality and pansexuality. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 17(1), 88–107.
[doi:10.1080/15299716.2016.1196157](https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2016.1196157)

Crooks, C., Exner-Cortens, D., Burm, S., **Lapointe, A.**, & Chiodo, D. (2017). Two years of relationship-focused mentoring for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit adolescents: Promoting positive mental health. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 38(1), 87–104.
[doi:10.1007/s10935-016-0457-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-016-0457-0)

Lapointe, A. (2016). Queering the Social Studies: Lessons to be learned from Canadian secondary school Gay-Straight Alliances. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 40(3), 205-215. [doi:10.1016/j.jssr.2015.07.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2015.07.004)

Lapointe, A. (2016). 'Queering' youth studies: Exploring the queer pedagogical insights within the *Critical Youth Studies Reader*. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 13(3), 300-304.
[doi:10.1080/19361653.2015.1089808](https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2015.1089808)

Lapointe, A. (2015). Standing 'straight' up to homophobia: Straight allies' involvement in Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA). *Journal of LGBT Youth*. 12(2), 144-169.
[doi:10.1080/19361653.2014.969867](https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2014.969867)

Lapointe, A. (2014). Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) members' engagement with sex education in Canadian high schools. *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning*, 14(6), 707-717.
[doi:10.1080/14681811.2014.914024](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2014.914024)

Peer Reviewed Journal Articles (In Review)

Lapointe, A., & Crooks, C. (2018). GSA members' experiences with a structured program to promote wellbeing. Manuscript submitted for publication in the *Journal of LGBT Youth*.

Lapointe, A., Dunlop, C., Crooks, C. (2018). Feasibility and fit of an evidence-informed mental health promotion program adapted for LGBTQ+ youth: Lessons learned from a healthy relationships pilot. Manuscript submitted for publication in the *Journal of Youth Development*.

Non Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

Kassen, J., & Lapointe, A. (2016). Growing into resilience: Sexual and gender minority youth in Canada (Book Review). *Canadian Journal of Education*, 39(1), 1-5.
<http://journals.sfu.ca/cje/index.php/cje-rce/article/view/2279/1832>

Book Chapters

Lapointe, A. (2018). Cycling back to move forward: Indigenizing teaching and learning practices in LGBT2SQ+ studies. Manuscript accepted for publication in N. M. Rodriguez (Ed.), *Teaching LGBTQ+ Studies in Education: Theoretical Perspectives*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Crooks, C., Chiodo, D, Dunlop, C, Lapointe, A., & Kerry, A. (2018). The Fourth R: Considerations for implementing evidence-based healthy relationships and mental health promotion programming in diverse contexts. Manuscript accepted for publication in A. Leschied, D. Saklofske, & G. Flett (Eds.), *The Handbook of School-Based Mental Health Promotion: An Evidence Informed Framework for Implementation*. New York, NY: Springer.

Lapointe, A. (2016). Postgay. In E. Brockenbrough, J. C. Ingrey, W. J. Martino, & N. M. Rodriguez (Eds.), *Critical concepts in queer studies and education: An international guide for the twenty-first century* (pp. 205-218). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kassen, J., & Lapointe, A. (2016). Working 'with' and 'within': 'Weaving' queer spaces with cycles of resistance. In sj Miller & N. M. Rodriguez (Eds.), *Educators queering academia: Critical memoirs* (pp. 69-78). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Kassen, J., & **Lapointe, A.** (2014). Taking change to the street: Kicking homophobia and heterosexism to the curb. In D. Gosse (Ed.), *OUT PROUD: Stories of pride, courage, and social justice* (pp. 333-342). St John's, NL: Breakwater Books.

Professional Publications

Lapointe, A. (2017). *Teen Relationship Violence and Wellbeing among LGBTQ+ Youth*. London, ON: Western University. Retrieved from:
https://www.edu.uwo.ca/csmh/docs/hrpp/knowledge_summary/teen-relationships-violence-and-wellbeing-among-lgbtq-youth.pdf

Lapointe, A., & Kassen, J. (2013). After the happily ever after: One year post-Bill 13, are Ontario Catholic schools supporting gay-straight alliance development? *Education Canada*, 53(4), 12-17.

Lapointe, A., & Kassen, J. (2013). Martin's map: His journey, on his terms. *Our Schools Our Selves*, 23(1), 61-66.

Kassen, J., & **Lapointe, A.** (2013). Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) and waves of change in school. *Our Schools Our Selves*, 22(4), 163-173.

Kassen, J., & **Lapointe, A.** (2013, June). Putting the pieces together: A youth engagement strategy for student-led groups. *Agenda*, 1, 6.

Programs

Lapointe, A., Kassen, J., Snooks, S., Townsley, D., Crooks, C., Dale, S., & Hughes, R (2017). *Healthy relationships program for LGBT2Q+ youth: A Fourth R small groups program to promote healthy relationships and positive mental health* (2nd ed.). London, ON: Western University.

Lapointe, A., Kassen, J., Snooks, S. Townsley, D., Hughes, R., Crooks, C., Kirkham, A., & Messinger, A. (2016). *Healthy relationships program for LGBTQ+ youth: A Fourth R small groups program to promote healthy relationships and positive mental health*. London, ON: Western University.