2018-04-11

Controversial Credits: Secondary Students' Education on Heteronormativity

Surette, Tanya Elaine

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Controversial Credits: Secondary Students' Education on Heteronormativity

by

Tanya Elaine Surette

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

CALGARY, ALBERTA

APRIL, 2018

Abstract

In January of 2016, the Alberta Government launched new Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments That Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities, and Gender Expressions (Alberta Education, 2016). This document was in response to the growing awareness of the ongoing oppression, marginalization, and discrimination affecting gender and sexually diverse children, youth, families, and faculty in schools across the province. These guidelines were met with a series of reactions, with much backlash and controversy erupting in Southern Alberta, which exemplified the ongoing homophobic and transphobic sentiments commonplace to many of the residents in this area.

This study explores the experiences of secondary students in public secular schools related to the topic of gender and sexual diversity and the impact of the heteronormative discourse operating within their schools and community on their developing attitudes, identities, and emotional and mental well-being. I employed a multi-method qualitative research framework involving 1) critical discourse analysis of the documents from three courses where topics pertaining to gender and sexuality are most likely to occur; and 2) multiple in-depth semi-structured interviews with 6 secondary students. The central questions driving this study were: Are high school students' perceptions of heteronormativity shaped by religious and secular aspects of the high school curriculum? If so, how? What practical insights can be applied to school policies and practices to inform more safe and inclusive school environments?

To answer these questions, I drew upon critical theory and social justice scholars to explore how the forces of heteronormativity and privilege, particularly Christian privilege, are produced and reproduced in schools and how these forces maintain an ongoing

oppressive and hostile school environment for gender and sexual minority students. The chief finding of this study is that, despite the efforts made through the recent release of the Guidelines for Best Practice (Alberta Education, 2016), gender and sexual minority youth are not experiencing a safe and inclusive school environment, with ongoing oppression experienced in multiple school spaces. This dissertation concludes with a discussion of participant-infused insights and wisdom for educators and educational leaders interested in creating more safe and inclusive learning environments.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Tanya Surette. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board, “What are Secondary Students Learning about Gender and Sexual Diversity at School?” Ethics ID: REB16-1328, August 16, 2016.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the remarkable participants who graced me with their stories, generously gave me their time, and allowed me to visit their most inner experiences, and;

to my daughter, Adele, who was born just four months before my PhD journey and who has inspired me from the beginning of my studies through my hope for her to witness a more just and equitable educational experience.

Acknowledgements

I must first thank my participants, who dedicated time and courage to participate in this project alongside me and be vulnerable in a way that allowed me, and those who will read this dissertation, an opportunity to better understand their experiences at school. Without their commitment to this project and their voices, this research and the insights it holds would never have been possible and I am forever grateful to them for their openness and generosity. I was truly honored and privileged to hear their stories and be entrusted with them to share with others. Special thanks as well to the superintendent and associate superintendent, principals, teachers, directors, clinical team leaders, family school liaison counselors, child and youth care workers, and support staff who supported this project and made it possible to recruit from within school spaces.

I am incredibly appreciative to the exemplary scholars who have helped me navigate the vast field of academia and come to land in a space that felt authentic to what I was curious about and provide me with direction and tools to explore this important topic. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Tonya Callaghan, who had the immense task of helping me become a skilled researcher, a better writer, and learn how to engage in the field of academia with intentionality and commitment. As your first graduate student, I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to receive your guidance and support in many ways through this journey. Thank you to Dr. Jim Fields, who introduced me to the many curriculum scholars who have informed this topic and whose warmth and genuine support helped me to better believe in my capabilities of succeeding in graduate studies. Thank you to Dr. Darren Lund for your guidance and support as my committee member and to your work and contribution to the field of social justice in education, which largely influenced and guided this study. I would also like to acknowledge the

expertise and warm support of my external examiner, Nancy Arthur, whose work in the field of multicultural infused counseling has influenced me as a clinician and researcher and I am grateful to have you on my committee.

I was incredibly fortunate to have an amazing support system outside of my scholarly endeavours who patiently listened to me ramble on and on about my topic, who helped me construct this dissertation, and who gave me the encouragement and affirmations to help me keep going. Your friendship, love, and belief in me carried me through the times of uncertainty, Serena, Angela, Laura, and Betty. A special thank-you as well to my mom, who has always encouraged me to never be limited by my gender or class. Your pride in my accomplishments has always meant a lot.

I am deeply grateful and indebted to my brother, Micheal, whose belief in my abilities has always been a driving force behind my academic successes. His resiliency and ability to overcome his own adversity with strength and tenacity have paved a path for me since I was too young to appreciate him. Thank you for all of your cheerleading, editing, critiquing, and modelling for me of how to beat the odds and never question my potential.

Most importantly, this dissertation was only possible with the support of my husband and life partner, Vernon. You have stood by me through many years of graduate studies and your unconditional love and support have been essential to my success. This dissertation is as much yours as it is mine. I am grateful to you most of all.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Context of Study

Schools have an integral role in socializing students to accept particular beliefs, values, and behaviours (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). Dewey (1929) classified the school as primarily a social institution, with education being a social process. Tyler (1949) also referred to schools as social institutions whose purpose was to help children obtain a philosophy on life that supports socially significant behaviour patterns. He went on to describe a primary function of education as a process to change the behaviour patterns of people, including their ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Tyler, 1949). Along similar lines, Biesta (2013) describes the three domains of education being qualification (i.e., the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions), socialization (i.e., ways of becoming part in existing traditions and ways of doing and being), and subjectification (i.e., interest in the subjectivity of the student) (Biesta, 2013, p. 4). All of these curriculum scholars highlight the importance of the social and interactional component to education and the role and responsibility of the school in not only shaping the facts and knowledge students learn in schools but shaping their subjectivity as well. Schools reproduce the society and culture in which they are embedded and reflect and contribute back to the dynamics of the social structure (Kedley, 2015; Kosciw, Greytak, & Bartkiewicz, 2014). As a consequence, it is a common practice of schools to reproduce cultural and religious norms, often with the inequalities and privileges of the larger society within which they are embedded (Blumenfeld, 2006; ; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Collins, 2009).

Schools participate in the process of normalization, which is the process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant

cultural values (Yep, 2003). Warner (1993) calls normalization the "site of violence" (p. xxvi) and Yep (2003) contends that one of the most powerful forms of normalization in Western social systems is heteronormativity. Heteronormativity refers to the belief that heterosexuality is the normal, natural, and ideal form of sexuality. A number of education scholars have commented on the reproduction of the belief that heterosexuality is the only "normal" and viable option that is perpetuated in schools (Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Lewis, & Schaps, 1999; Kehily, 2002; Kosciw et al., 2014). For instance, Kedley (2015) asserts that classrooms reflect, contribute to, and endorse the normative sex, gender, and sexuality categories through the school culture, rules, and rituals. These scholars claim this occurs through texts, policies, curriculum, language, and actions, which operate on varying levels of consciousness and intentionality. The sex and gender binaries, of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual, are pervasive in schools, and endorsed in both overt and subtle ways by teachers (Kedley, 2015). The public school curriculum maintains a dominant heteronormative bias through the limited or non-existent classroom discussions and curriculum content inclusive of issues pertaining to sexual and gender minority individuals (Depoian, 2009). As Sumara and Davis (2013) identified, to live within a heteronormative curriculum means learning to "see straight, to read straight, and to think straight" (p. 324). These heterosexist messages and rigid gender and sexuality rules are problematic in that students are constructing who they are based on what they feel on the inside in relation to messages they receive on the outside about what is acceptable (Crowley, 2014). Their beliefs about themselves and one another are directly impacted through their interactions with the curriculum on these various levels (Howe, 1997). A core aim of this research is to better understand how students come to experience the heterosexism operating at a systemic level in their schools and how this

impacts their developing attitudes, identities, and emotional, social, and psychological well-being.

There has been a vast body of research dedicated to understanding the experiences of sexual and gender minorities within schools in the past two decades; all of which highlight the ongoing oppression experienced by this population within educational institutions (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig 2009; Callaghan, 2007, 2009, 2016; Grace, 2001; Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010; Petrovic & Rosiek, 2007; Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack 2008; Taylor & Peter, 2011). The stress of having to come to terms with their sexuality while negotiating their school environment's heteronormative bias places sexual and gender minority youth at higher risks than their heterosexual peers for depression, suicidality, drug use, and school problems (Birkett et al., 2009; Burton, Marshal, Chisolm, Sucato, & Friedman, 2013; Pearson & Wilkinson, 2013; Savage & Schanding, 2012), with as many as 90% of sexual and gender minority students facing some form of harassment at school (Kosciw et al., 2010; Miller & Gilligan, 2014), placing them at further risk than their heterosexual peers for emotional and mental health issues (Burton et al., 2013; Pearson & Wilkinson, 2013; Savage & Schanding, 2012). Despite an awareness of the oppression experienced by sexual and gender minority students, public school educators acknowledge they routinely avoid discussing homosexuality in their classrooms out of a fear of reprimand (Fredman, Schultz, & Hoffman, 2015; Leonardi & Saenz, 2014; Puchner & Klein, 2011; Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009). Through the practice of eluding content inclusive of sexual diversity, heterosexuality remains privileged as the only acceptable norm, further oppressing and undermining the emotional and developmental needs of sexual and gender minority students (MacGillivray, 2000; Puchner & Klein, 2011).

Beyond these exclusory practices, there are also overtly homophobic messages included in the planned curriculum. For instance, there are a number of public high schools in rural Southern Alberta, which are designed to be religiously neutral spaces, yet they support particular religious teachings, which are non-affirming towards gender and sexual diversity, as part of the high school curriculum for students. Religious involvement is an important source of support and safety for many (Hardy & Raffaelli, 2003); however, when non-heterosexuality is factored in, living in a homophobic religious culture has been linked to higher rates of self-harm, drug use, depression, and suicide, due to internalized homophobia (Kubicek et al., 2009; Rostosky, Danner, & Riggle, 2007). As the upcoming chapters in this thesis reveal, gender and sexually diverse students living within the heteronormative culture present in rural southern Alberta schools continue to experience oppression and marginalization, which they attribute, at least in part, to the privileging of particular non-affirming religious discourses towards gender and sexual diversity.

This dissertation attempts to explore the current climate of schools in rural Southern Alberta through exploring the narratives of individual students regarding their experiences of day to day realities of life at school and contextualizing the curriculum inclusions and omissions related to gender and sexual diversity by analyzing key curriculum documents and resources. Through this inquiry, clarification on the gaps between Alberta Educations' (2016) Guidelines for Best Practice: Creating learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions (Alberta Education, 2016) are explored and student-driven insights are shared about what change they see necessitating the creation of more safe and inclusive learning environments for all students, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

1.2 Purpose

This study aimed to investigate if and how the lived curriculum of heteronormativity, referring to the privileging and normalization of heterosexuality, contributes to social inequality and oppression of sexual and gender minority students within public high school spaces. I am particularly interested in Aoki's (2004) phenomenological framing of the lived curriculum, which is used to describe how the planned and hidden curriculum are lived out through students' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences (Aoki, 2004). The planned curriculum refers to curriculum texts and documents, which outline the specific purpose, rationale, and objectives of specific courses. Jackson (1968) along with other curriculum scholars conceptualized the hidden curriculum as the norms and values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools and which are not usually talked about overtly, including the unwritten institutional demands for conformity (Apple, 1975; Flinders, Noddings, & Thornton, 1986; Hernandez, Gonzalez, & Sanchez, 2013; Walton, 2005). This socialization comes in many forms: only teaching about heterosexual individuals and identities, avoiding discussions about gender and sexual diversity, ignoring the commonplace homophobic slurs of students and staff, providing sex education focused solely on heterosexuality, and including homophobic religious teachings within the curriculum.

Through exploring the lived curriculum, I aspire to open up a space to explore how the bodies in the room, the ideologies and beliefs of individuals, the curriculum as planned, and the structural forces in place, influence what evolves as lived through the personal experiences and stories of individual students (Tilley & Taylor, 2013). Curriculum as lived develops as teachers, students, and texts interact within the classroom and the schooling structures (Aoki, 1993). Following this framework, curriculum is understood as both relational and situational, as

teachers, students, administrators, boards, parents, and communities shape, construct, and redefine their engagement with curriculum materials in response to the experiences they live out in the classroom and the schools (Tilley & Taylor, 2013). It is within this lived space that student narratives exist and become internalized as sense of self in relation to their lived experiences in school (Tilley & Taylor, 2013). The primary purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the culmination of influences on the internalization of these narratives related to heteronormativity amongst high school secondary students.

At the core of this dissertation are 13 interviews undertaken with six secondary students, from grades 9 through 12. Interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes each and individual participants engaged in one to three interviews, based on their interest in further exploring the dialogue from the initial encounter. In an effort to contextualize the participants dialogue around how the topic of gender and sexuality is taken up or omitted from the curriculum, I also employed critical discourse analysis to analyze the curriculum materials from three secondary courses: two mandatory secondary core health literacy courses and one optional religious course. These courses were chosen for their relevancy to this inquiry as spaces where the topic of gender and sexuality is most likely to emerge.

The experiences of these 6 secondary students are captured through the use of semi-structured narrative interviews, which are then re-narrated as personal experience narratives and analyzed for emergent themes through the qualitative research method of narrative analysis. All participants self-selected to participate in the study and parental consent was provided prior to the initial interview. At the time of the interview(s), five of the participants identified as a gender or sexual minority and one participant identified as heterosexual and an ally. The interviews were conducted in an open-ended fashion, with core questions and themes guiding the interview

to ensure it remained closely connected to the topic of this study. Through employing critical discourse analysis to interpret specific curriculum materials through the lens of heteronormativity, along with the narrative interviews, a richer understanding of the culture within these schools was provided and an opportunity to better answer the research questions guiding this study.

1.3 Research Questions

The central questions guiding this study are:

1) Are high school students' perceptions of sexual and gender diversity and heteronormativity shaped by religious and secular aspects of the high school curriculum? And if so, how?
2) What is the impact of the lived curriculum on the developing social, emotional, and mental wellness of sexual and gender minority high school students?
3) What practical insights can be applied to school policies and practices to inform more safe and inclusive school environments that support the diverse gender identities, sexual orientations, and gender expressions of all students?

1.4 Design Overview

This research is a qualitative investigation employing a social justice framework, in the tradition of emancipation and democracy in education. Social-justice education involves an ongoing effort to question school policies, curriculum, and institutional practices that support inequalities (Lund, 2011; Tilly & Taylor, 2013). Critical theory is employed as a means to explore the ways dominant structural forces (i.e., educational institutions) unfairly privilege some individuals while marginalizing others (Tilly & Taylor, 2013).

Students in grades 9 through 12 attending one of five public high schools within two separate school divisions were invited to participate in this study. The two school divisions both

operate within rural Southern Alberta, with one school division permitting the inclusion of particular religious teachings, whereas the other school division in close proximity does not. Both school divisions are situated in rural Southern Alberta communities with high levels of religious involvement, specifically sizeable populations of members of Christian faith with a non-affirming stance towards gender and sexual diversity. Teachers, administrators, and school counselors advertised the study and put up posters around the school. A more in-depth description of recruitment will be provided in Chapter 3 "Methodology and Study Design.." I interviewed 6 students using an open-ended narrative approach. All of the students were invited to participate in a second interview to explore some of the topics and themes that emerged in the first interview more deeply and 5 of the 6 participants participated in a follow-up interview, with two participants requesting a third interview. Through the use of narrative inquiry, participant stories were drawn out in an effort to obtain a view of their internal worlds through stories of encounters and experiences at school pertaining to heteronormativity.

In addition to the narrative interviews, the Health and Life Skills 9 (Alberta Learning, 2002b), Career and Life Skills Senior High (CALM) (Alberta Learning, 2002), and Seminary Materials for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (CJCLDS, 2012; 2013; 2014; 2016) were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). These course materials were selected because they are the most probable classes for topics pertaining to gender and sexuality to be discussed. These curriculum materials were described, interpreted, and analyzed through the lens of heteronormativity and in consideration of the conservative culture within rural Southern Alberta schools. The document analysis was undertaken to gain a better understanding of how gender and sexual diversity topics and issues were taken up in the planned curriculum and to compare the planned curriculum with the lived curriculum contained in student narratives of how

these topics and discussions are explored at school and the impact of these discussions or omissions on the perceptions, attitudes, and overall well-being of individual students.

1.5 Locating the Researcher

The research relationship is a human relationship. The inevitability of the influential role of the researcher in narrative inquiry should be valued and not disavowed (Josselson, 2013). However, for an effective narrative interviewer, there must be a great deal of awareness and reflexivity throughout the process to ensure this remains a benefit and not a detriment to the research. As a narrative inquirer, I have been deeply embedded within this research process. Polkinghorne (1988) declares meaning is not a thing or a substance, but is rather an activity that involves a relationship and a dialogue. My encounters with participants have followed Disch's (1994) notion of visiting, which involves constructing stories of an event from each of the plurality of perspectives that might have an interest in telling it (Disch, 1994). I brought to my encounters with participants and their stories my own personal experiences and my knowledge of the stories of others, all of which have and will continue to deeply impact me, including what I attended to in the research interview and the aspects of the dialogue that became focal points for this research.

I saw my role as a narrative researcher from a critical theory perspective as one of a collaborative partnership based on equality of power and esteem (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cohen et al., 2011; Josselson, 2013). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert the narrative researcher is in the middle of a nested set of stories, theirs and the participants. Josselson (2013) underscores it is extremely important for the researcher to understand their contribution to the process of the co-construction of experience that the interview transcript will come to represent. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain the interviewer must pay attention to content and process,

as it is their role to determine what is explored and what is shut down. In this sense, the interviews were co-constructed as two subjectivities intertwined, theirs and mine.

As a Registered Psychologist, taking on the role of narrative inquirer came both with natural benefits and challenges. My graduate training and over a decade of experience working in a therapeutic capacity and supporting individuals through times of trial prepared me very well with the tools to engage in reflective listening, explorative questioning, and empathic responding. I also brought with me into the interviews a comfort with sitting in emotions and the courage to keep the interviews open-ended. I had the confidence that I would be able to follow the participants' narratives and have intentionality in how I inquired, how I used silence, and to be mindful of not over-interpreting their experiences, in order to create space for them to place their own meaning on those personal occurrences. However, the same skills and experiences that prepared me well for engaging in narrative interviewing also created some difficulties of which I needed to stay mindful throughout the data collection stage of this work. The main hurdle I had to navigate was reminding myself I was not there to fix, to improve, or to add any value into the participant's life through our exchange. Rather, I was there to receive a gift from them. This proved more difficult than I had initially anticipated and I found myself, during the interviews, having to bite my tongue at my natural inclination to offer support in the form that resembled guidance. To promote the mindset of being at the receiving end of our exchange, I began every interview reminding myself that each participant was strong, capable, and resilient, evidenced by their participation in my project, and to extend guidance or advice stripped them from their empowerment and ability to navigate their current situation on their own and in their own way. I also ended each interview by extending heartfelt gratitude to each participant to remind both of us that I was on the receiving end of this exchange and that their story was a gift.

1.6 Locating the Study in Rural Southern Alberta

> I had a way...I figured a way out—a way to get rid of all the lesbians and queers—but I couldn't get it past the Congress. Build a great big, large fence—50 to 100 miles long—and put all the lesbians in there. Fly over and drop some food. Do the same thing with the queers and the homosexuals—and have that fence electrified so they can't get out. Feed 'em, and you know in a few years, they'll die out. You know why? They can't reproduce. (Whitlock, 2014, p. 85)

This statement, made in May 2012 by Charles Worley, pastor of Providence Road Baptist Church, in response to President Obama's declaration for the support of marriage equality went viral. This notion of fences and the marginalization of individuals who identify as anything other than heterosexual continues to be a dominant societal and institutional discourse (Whitlock, 2014). In Whitlock's (2014) paper on her research pertaining to gender and sexual minority families in southern schools, she points out the discouraging reality that "no matter how proper gays and lesbians and transgender folk behave (i.e., strive to stay invisible), no matter how we might attempt to assimilate into mainstream society by the 'same-except-for-one-difference' argument, fundamentalist Christians will want to put us in fences until we die out" (p. 85). This stance is not isolated to the Southern schools in the United States where Whitlock (2014) documented such strong heteronormative attitudes and biases. Some 2000 kilometers away, similar views and institutional fences can be found in the rural communities of Southern Alberta.

Southern Alberta is well known for its conservative attitudes and beliefs. These strong traditional beliefs have been captured through recent media coverage of local community events in celebration of national pride month. In the past month, Taber, Alberta caught the attention of local and national news with the repeated vandalism of the Pride flag–raised for the first time this

year—at the local community center. Six days after it was raised, vandals covered security cameras and shredded the flag and tied the pieces to tree branches (CBC, June 2017). The flag was raised a second time and steps were taken to prevent further vandalism; however, days later, someone applied an accelerant to the flag pole and lit the flag on fire (CBC, June 2017). Fifty kilometers away, Lethbridge experienced similar vandalism to the painted pride and transgender flag crosswalks, where visible skid marks and black paint were left in an attempt to demark the symbols of support (Fortney, June 2017). These individual or group acts of homophobia and transphobia highlight the continued hatred towards gender and sexual non-conforming individuals and illustrate the ongoing resistance to respecting diversity within Southern Alberta.

The conservative attitudes of many Southern Albertans came to the forefront during the heated debate that ensued after Alberta Education passed new legislature titled "Guidelines for best practices: Creating learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions" (Alberta Education, 2016). The introduction of these guidelines outline their intent to "support the creation of welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that foster diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self" (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 1). The guidelines promote a comprehensive, whole-school approach to promoting healthy relationships and preventing bullying by ensuring understanding, skills, and opportunities to contribute to a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment that respects diversity and nurtures a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self (Alberta Education, 2016). The guidelines also "require that schools proactively review policies and procedures related to school curriculum and extra-curriculum activities to ensure they are inclusive of all students, including students with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions" (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 1). The reaction in rural Southern Alberta,

captured by the media, underscored the ongoing homophobic and transphobic sentiments strongly held in these communities. Westwind School Board, located in rural Southern Alberta, made the news when they decided to ignore the guidelines, arguing they weren't legally binding and referring to them as a document, not legislation, asserting their interest was what is best for all kids, rather than trying to "define it in terms of specific groups, whatever that group might be" (Tumilty, March 2016). The introduction of the guidelines erupted controversy in Lethbridge, Alberta as well when a group of parents, feeling ignored and not included in the decisions about the policy changes, initiated a petition which was signed by over 2000 community members, compelling the board to call a special meeting, where community members voted to strike a six- member committee to make recommendations to the proposed Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression policy (French, March 2016). The committee itself caused controversy as it was later discovered all six voted members represented an opposing side to the creation of policies that were inclusive of gender and sexually diverse students and a new petition was drafted to reconvene to vote in a new committee that was more balanced in opinion on the topic. As a result, Lethbridge School District 51 was the only school board in the province who failed to meet the Alberta Education deadline for a draft of their LGBTQ policies (Fletcher, March 2016).

It has been supported by previous research that individuals living in rural communities support a more negative stance towards gender and sexual diversity (Herek, 1994). Contributing to the conservative environment in Southern Alberta is the strong religious presence, particularly within rural areas. Rural Southern Alberta is home to many of the provinces' 81,000 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), which is nearly half of the country's total membership (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, [CJCLDS], 2016). Like other

Christian denominations, the LDS church continues to be intolerant of same sex attractions and sexual behaviors (Dahl & Gallaher, 2012). The LDS Church is one of the fastest growing churches in the world, with more than 14 million members worldwide (Sinor, 2011) and it is speculated that millions of dollars are spent annually supporting antigay initiatives and politicians (Neff, 2005). The LDS church has received increasing attention over the past 15 years related to their stance on same-sex attracted individuals. The media attention has magnified since the church's involvement with political lobbying in the United States in favor of laws that restrict marriage equality (Crapo, 2002). Past media attention captured LDS church leaders' active involvement and support of California's Proposition 8 campaign, a campaign which attempted to overturn the California Supreme Court's decision that legalized same-sex marriage, giving an estimated 43% -$8.4 million- to the campaign (de Turenne, October 2008). Their involvement in the campaign and fiscal support shined a spotlight on the non-affirming and heterosexist stance of the church pertaining to gender and sexual diversity and the rights of non-heterosexual individuals.

The LDS church and their teachings are drawn into this research project to serve as an example of the impact of religiously affiliated non-affirming attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity may have on individuals, within the faith and outside of it, in the surrounding community. It is the religion of primary focus in this dissertation as it is the predominant religion practiced in the small rural Southern Alberta towns that were sites for this study and these areas are highly populated with members of this faith. The LDS faith, and the teachings of the church, are explored in this study in an effort to provide an important context for the predominant faith in rural Southern Alberta and the non-affirming messages pertaining to gender and sexual diversity that are prevalent in the teaching documents of this faith. Like other Christian denominations, the

LDS church guides members who find themselves attracted to the same-sex to remain celibate if they are unable to "repair" their same sex attractions to fit into the heterosexual norm (Dahl & Gallaher, 2012). The church has historically been involved in "curative" measures of homosexuality, including electroshock therapy as recently as the 1970s (Cates, 2007; Williams, 2011), and continues to try to assist members in overcoming same-sex attraction with their Evergreen International Program. In 2007, a manual prepared by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles titled *God Loveth His Children* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [CJCLDS], 2007), was released to provide guidelines for individuals who "are troubled with same-gender attraction" (CJCLDS, 2007, p.1) and asserts that individuals should avoid "obsession with or concentration on same-gender thoughts and feelings" (CJCLDS, 2007, p.4). The messages that their same-sex attraction is a temptation or a struggle, and not an essential part of their being, is further oppressive towards gender and sexually diverse members (Oaks, 1995). The manual reminds readers "without both a husband and a wife there would be no eternal family and no opportunity to become like Heavenly Father" (CJCLDS, 2007, p. 2). The leaders go on to assert it is "better to choose as friends those who do not publicly display their homosexual feelings" (CJCLDS, 2007, p.4), thus encouraging the discrimination and isolation of individuals who are same-sex attracted.

With the high levels of religiosity in rural Southern Alberta, Christian doctrine and influence can be seen infiltrating other spaces beyond the church walls, particularly those of the school. For instance, a small town in rural Southern Alberta made national headlines in November 2013 when the National Post covered the story of an elementary school facing backlash after banning the Lord's Prayer from their morning classroom ritual (Gerson, November 2013). This school was one of the last in Canada to include the Lord's Prayer as a part

of the school curriculum, a practice removed from public schools across the country due to it being deemed a symbol of Christian privilege and contradictory to public schools' role of maintaining religiously neutral environments (Gerson, November 2013). What didn't reach national headlines was the decision of the same school board to reinstate the Lord's Prayer into their morning announcements in April 2015 (Schnarr, April 2015). This controversy over the inclusion of religious materials within public school curriculum highlights the problematic practice of Christian privilege and the oppression of minority individuals who may be negatively impacted by its inclusion.

Many public schools in this same area permit the LDS church to offer its seminary class as a credited, publicly funded, option course made available to all high school students. The 2010 Church Handbook of Instructions of the LDS church (CJCLDS, 2010) used for the instruction of the seminary secondary course provided to public high school students states the following:

> Sexual relations are proper only between a man and a woman who are legally and lawfully wedded as husband and wife. Adultery, fornication, homosexual or lesbian relations, and every other unholy, unnatural, or impure practice are sinful. Members who violate the Lord's law of chastity or who influence others to do so are subject to Church discipline… Homosexual behaviour violates the commandments of God, is contrary to the purposes of human sexuality, and deprives people of the blessings that can be found in family life and in the saving ordinances of the gospel. Those who persist in such behaviour or who influence others to do so are subject to Church discipline. Homosexual behaviour can be forgiven through sincere repentance. (p. 195)

The inclusion of these types of non-affirming messages within the public high school curriculum may contribute to the support of the dominant discourse of heteronormativity within the school,

which, as will be discussed later, perpetuates the justification and normalization of bullying against, and oppression of, sexual and gender minority youth. The dissemination of this curriculum is incongruous with the School Act (Alberta Queen's Printer, 2002), which dictates that school boards have the responsibility to ensure that students and staff are provided with welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments that respect diversity and foster a sense of belonging. The inclusion of this non-affirming doctrine towards gender and sexual diversity within the school curriculum is a clear example of Christian privilege, and exemplifies the school's role in reproducing the cultural and religious norms, along with the inequalities and privileges, of the dominant group, while subordinating minority groups (Blumenfeld, 2006; Bowles & Gintis, 1976), such as gender and sexual minority students.

Over the course of this dissertation, the LDS church has been featured in a number of news stories related to their stance on and treatment of members who identify as gender and sexually diverse. In the Fall of 2015, the Mormon church made international headlines when they declared the decision of church leaders to exclude children of same-sex couples from being baptized and blessed until they turned 18 (Bailey, November 2015). The new rules would only allow children to be baptized if they disavow same-sex relationships, which disregards the legality of marriage equality, with the understanding that non-heterosexuals who marry legally are sinners who should be expulsed from the church (McCombs, November 2015). The policy change resulted in a backlash from many church members and was referred to by members as a "massive step backwards" (McCombs, November 2015, p.1). In September 2016, a related article, which covered the statements from the leaked policy, indicated that children of legally married same-sex parents cannot become members of the Mormon church until they turn 18 years old and will be forced to choose the church and renounce their parents and their sexual

orientation (Karger, September 2016). The press is also linking a number of gender and sexual minority teen suicides which immediately followed to the new policy (Karger, September 2016).

Just this past year, the media picked up the story of a thirteen-year-old Utah resident who had her microphone cut off at church during her address to her congregation that she is a lesbian and still loved by God (McCombs, June 2017). In an effort to explain why her microphone was cut off, Church leaders asserted it was okay for Savannah to come out as gay during testimony, however she crossed the line by mischaracterizing the church teachings by saying God would want her to have a partner and get married (McCombs, June 2017). Another story surfaced just weeks ago of a Mormon University Professor who was fired for an online post declaring that heterosexuality and homosexuality were both natural and neither were sinful (Le Miere, July 2017). Professor Robertson of Brigham Young University-Idaho was called in the following day and requested to take down her post, to which she refused, and after her final class she was told her fall semester had been cancelled (Le Miere, July 2017). These media accounts capture the ongoing efforts of the LDS faith to enforce a rigid and conservative stance pertaining to gender and sexual diversity and police members to maintain a heteronormative lifestyle that aligns with the teachings of the church. A core goal of this dissertation research is to question what impact the inclusion and sanctioning of these types of teachings within the public school curriculum have on developing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of students pertaining to gender and sexual diversity individuals.

1.7 Rationale and Significance

The first national climate survey exploring the experiences of gender and sexual minority students in Canada, Every Class in Every School, was published in 2011 and revealed most students (i.e., 70%) continue to hear homophobic remarks daily, with the majority of sexual and

gender minority students continuing to experience ongoing verbal, physical, and sexual harassment at school (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Similarly, the results of the most recent National School Climate Survey, a biennial survey documenting the school challenges sexual and gender minority students face across the United States, revealed that the experiences of gender and sexual minority students at school continue to be adverse (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). It has become common knowledge that gender and sexual minorities experience higher risks of psychological distress and that this difference in distress is almost exclusively the result of culturally maintained stigma, discrimination, and victimization (Crowell, Galliher, Dehlin, & Bradshaw, 2015; Meyer, 2003). This shared understanding demonstrates a need for continued research in educational contexts where these young people spend the vast majority of their time.

Much of the research done to date captures the experiences of sexual and gender minority youth in the United States, with fewer studies documenting the experiences of students in Canada, and fewer yet within rural sections of Canada. To date, there is a small number of studies published exploring the impact of curriculum materials on gender and sexual minority students within non-denominational schools (Depoian, 2009; Kosciw et al., 2014) and experiences of gender and sexual minority students within denominational institutions (Callaghan, 2007, 2009). This study is unique in that it explores the combined impact of both secular and religious curriculum materials, as well as hidden curriculum and systemic influences on the lived experiences of students pertaining to heteronormativity. As Dahl and Gallagher (2012) point out, research focused on the impact on sexual and gender minority individuals raised in a religious context is still in its infancy. There are many barriers to researching the experiences of gender and sexual minority youth in particular, and I think a great deal of courage is required for a researcher to explore the intersections of sexuality and religion in public

schools. It is clear from the existing research that an interaction exists between policies, inclusive programs, and prevalence and tolerance of harassment and victimization against gender and sexual minorities; nonetheless, more research is needed about the potential disconnect between actual school policies and student perceptions and experiences (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009).

It was in response to this growing awareness of the ongoing discrimination and oppression of gender and sexually diverse students in Alberta schools that the Alberta Government released the "Guidelines for Best Practice: Creating learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions" (Alberta Education, 2016) last year and called all divisions in the province to draft a policy that directly reflected procedures for protecting and creating inclusive learning spaces for gender and sexually diverse students. This request came out of an awareness that the zero tolerance policies related to bullying adopted by most schools were not overtly addressing the ongoing discrimination and microaggressions experienced by gender and sexually diverse students; rather, a more exact policy, which specifically addressed the needs and rights of gender and sexual minority students, was essential to move towards a more inclusive and respectful learning environment. While all provincial school divisions did draft, and submit, a policy as requested to Alberta Education, what the narratives of the students in this dissertation will show, however, is that official policies are often far removed from enacted practices in schools. This thesis draws attention to these incongruities in rural Southern Alberta schools and provides student oriented perspectives that may be useful for schools and divisions who are open and interested in developing practices that more accurately address the needs and rights of gender and sexually diverse students and matters of inclusion.

Fredman et al. (2015) points out students are the audience most receptive to the importance and relevance of addressing sexual and gender diverse topics in school but their voices are primarily unrepresented in the research, identifying an important area for future research. Despite their absences from the majority of educational research, queer sexualities and individuals are in schools and if they are to receive a meaningful education that helps them flourish as individuals, educators must have some knowledge and understanding of them (Montessori, 2013). This study is interested in making visible what is typically hidden from everyday view (Biesta, 2013) to better understand the needs of, and in turn, better support this vulnerable population (sexual and gender minority youth) within a vulnerable population (youth) to not only survive at school but to thrive as well. Not only was I interested in better understanding the day to day practices within schools in rural Southern Alberta, but, I was also interested in uncovering the perspectives and interpretations of these practices through the participants' lenses. I am curious about how they come to consider gender and sexual diversity and themselves and how this influences their developing identity and emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Through this understanding, this dissertation will draw out insights that can inform future school practices that move towards more socially just and equitable educational experiences for gender and sexually diverse students.

1.8 Definition of key terms

In this dissertation, *heteronormativity* refers to the belief that heterosexuality is natural, normal, and the ideal form of sexuality, with all other forms of sexuality being subordinate or devalued (Steyn & van Zyl, 2009). Thus, heterosexuality is privileged based on the assumption that heterosexual power and privilege are normal and ideal and the standard for legitimacy and authenticity (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Ngo, 2010; Yep, 2003). Heteronormativity also

fosters a belief that there is one ideal form of male and female, thus supporting a gender binary and privileges the expression of true masculinity and femininity. Heteronormativity fosters systemic disadvantages for gender and sexual minorities because it confers all social and cultural advantages to heterosexuals and gender-conforming individuals (Nunn & Bolt, 2015). *Heterosexism* is an ideology that not only privileges heterosexuality but also actively degrades and punishes any alternative, non-heterosexual and non-heteronormative relationships, identities, and behaviors (Nunn & Bolt, 2015).

Where heterosexism and heteronormativity tend to be silent, often unconscious, and presumed, *homophobia* and *transphobia* are the aftermath of heterosexism and I use these terms to refer to active and explicit attacks against sexual and gender minorities to reinforce rigid gender roles (Epstein & Johnson, 1994; MacGillivray, 2000; Walton, 2005). Homophobia and transphobia are more violent and extreme expressions of heterosexism that target nonheterosexuality for abuse (Nunn & Bolt, 2015). These aggressions and microaggressions can be individual in nature, which are physical or verbal attacks among individuals such as bullying, harassment, gossiping, exclusion and derogatory and abusive language. Sue (2010) defines microaggressions as the "everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostility, derogatory, or negative messages to either target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (p. 3). This dissertation also explores institutional forms of homophobia and transphobia, which is the discrimination that occurs against gender and sexual minority youth that is informed through systemic or structural forms of oppression, and is evidenced through the absence of discussions and content inclusive of gender and sexual diversity, along with lack of policies and practices which protect and support gender and sexual minority students, and the reactions or disregarding

of homophobia and transphobia by school personnel due to the desensitization or deprioritizing this as a relevant issue worth addressing.

I use the term *sexual minority* to refer to persons who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, pansexual, questioning, or any other category beyond the boundaries of heterosexuality. I use the phrase *gender minority* to refer to individuals who are transgender, transsexual, two-spirited, intersex, or identify as any gender that goes beyond the male/female biological binary. *Sexual orientation* is used to refer to whom an individual is attracted to. *Gender identity* refers to an individual's inner experience of themselves and may or may not align with their gender expression. *Gender expression* refers to the ways in which an individual express themselves and their gender in day-to-day life. Sexual orientation and gender identity are separated as they represent two diverse types of anti-oppressive educational needs and focus on one is not inclusive and encompassing of the other (Airton, 2009). Additionally, I use the language of sexual minority and gender minority to try to avoid the marginalization that can result from labeling with LGBTQ* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) categories, as this can be limiting and exclusive of individuals who do not ascribe to one particular label (Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009).

1.9 Dissertation Organization

This dissertation covers the exploration into the forces of religion and heteronormativity as they play out in the lived experiences of students in one conservative area, namely rural Southern Alberta. It employs a multi-method qualitative approach, which involves narrative interviews and critical discourse analysis. As Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) contend, the emphasis in qualitative research is on understanding, not causal explanations, predictions or generalizations, but rather to provide rich details within a context while connecting participants,

events, and experiences to the larger phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The data chapters comprising this dissertation are organized accordingly, beginning with the analysis of central curriculum documents and resources to contextualize the planned curriculum pertaining to the research topic, followed by a pause to meet each unique participant and understand their positionality and subsequently three chapters drawing connections between participant accounts and experiences and relating them back to the research questions guiding this study. I have organized the dissertation this way to ensure the rich nuanced understanding of each unique participant is honored prior to blending and building the data into more interconnected and cohesive themes.

Chapter Two of this thesis provides an overview of the primary theoretical perspectives, which guide this research: critical theory, social-justice, emancipation, democracy in education, and minority stress theory. It also summarizes the relevant literature pertaining to this study, including heteronormativity within multiple dimensions of the curriculum, systemic influences of homophobic and transphobic bullying, the emotional and psychological impact of living within an oppressive school environment, and finally the research to date on creating more safe and inclusive school environments. Chapter Three provides a detailed account of the methodological approaches and methods employed for this study, including narrative inquiry and analysis and critical discourse analysis. Chapters Four and Five contextualize the thematic analysis of the narrative interviews, which are summarized in Chapters Six through Eight.

Chapter Four discusses the analysis of two core health literacy courses, Health and Life Skills 9 and Career and Life Management 10 (CALM), which are both mandatory secondary courses that all high school students in Alberta are required to take. The third course analyzed using critical discourse analysis is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Seminary

curriculum materials. This is an optional course offered to secondary students in some public high schools in rural Southern Alberta. These courses were chosen for their inclusivity of topics pertaining to gender and sexuality and relevance to the research questions. The analysis of these documents was undertaken to provide the reader with a context of what the planned curriculum around gender and sexuality looks like and how this mirrors or differs from how this topic is or is not being taken up in the classroom and other school spaces, as expressed through the narratives of individual students.

Chapter Five, 'Meet the Participants', contains the personal experience narratives, or the narrative vignettes, compiled from the in-depth and multiple interviews with the six participants. This chapter gives a more detailed description of the population of the participants and explains in more detail how narrative analysis was used in the analysis and writing process involving the re-telling of participant narratives and experiences. This chapter provides the reader with a look into the inner working models and external influences on the six participants perspectives through the personal experience narratives, which were compiled by stringing together verbatim comments from the participants during their interviews. These personal experience narratives give a context for how each participant encountered the topic of gender and sexual diversity and their own positionality in relation to the topic.

Chapter Six, "School Spaces", is the first chapter of the thematic analysis of the interview data compiled through the analysis of the narratives and explores three areas discussed in the interviews of how gender and sexual diversity plays out in the culture of the school. The classroom space is explored in how the planned curriculum is enacted through classroom discussions and activities pertaining to gender and sexuality. The hidden curriculum and null

curriculum are also explored as the absence of gender and sexual diversity and practices supporting inclusion are explored pertaining to the classroom, vulnerable spaces, and peers.

Chapter Seven, “Structural Forces”, takes a look at the deeper structural forces of interest in this study and how the participants viewed their influence in the day-to-day realities of life in school. Parental influences, heteronormativity, and religion are taken up as three significant and consistently identified structural forces, which heavily influence the planned, hidden, and null curriculum pertaining to gender and sexuality.

Chapter Eight, “Final Thoughts”, attempts to answer the question of ‘now what?’ through an exploration of hopeful moments, practices, and experiences for each participant and their guiding words of wisdom to educators and educational leaders who are interested in creating more inclusive and respectful spaces for gender and sexually diverse students. Each participant is highlighted for their contributions related to what they see already happening in their school that is hopeful and the transformation they see as benefiting the movement towards more inclusive school spaces.

This dissertation concludes by reviewing the key findings from the interviews and curriculum analysis, connecting the findings back to the research questions, and theorizing the meaning and implications of these findings. The conclusion also provides a note on the limitations of this study and suggests directions and questions remaining for future research related to inclusive education for gender and sexually diverse students.

CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Inquiry Paradigm: Critical Pedagogy

Aligned with critical theory, this research follows the supposition that human nature operates in a world that is based on the struggle for power, which leads to interactions of privilege and oppression that is built on many forms of diversity, including race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, and identity (Bernal, 2002; Giroux, 2001; Kilgore, 2001; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Following Foucault and other critical scholars, this research is concerned with the relation between social institutions and the individual, where power is located and operates most clearly (Butler, 1993; Mills, 2003). Critical pedagogy is useful to social justice educators because it exposes the continued reproduction of hegemonic or pervasive ideologies while questioning individual and structural conditions that influence the possibilities of a just education (Freire 1970; Giroux 2001; Hinchey 2008; Tilley & Taylor, 2013). Grounded in a critical theoretical framework, I am concerned with the study of social structures, oppression, and power and control, as they specifically relate to heteronormativity (Merriam, 1991). Heteronormativity remains a powerful force regulating an atmosphere of "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1986, p.23) in public schools, which has been well supported by many scholars in the past decade (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2008; Kosciw et al., 2014; Taylor & Peter, 2011). A primary intellectual goal of this research is to explore the influence of this force in combination with other forces, namely religion, as it plays out on the lived experiences of secondary students and their developing identity, attitudes, and well-being.

Hinchey (2008) and other critical educators (Dlamini 2002; Giroux 1992; Kincheloe 2007; Milner, 2003) offer a reminder that enacting a critical pedagogy means critically exploring the ways dominant structural forces assign unfair privileges to some individuals while

marginalizing others. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) assert the privileging of certain views and underrepresenting of diverse perspectives is socially constructed but heavily influential in shaping the beliefs and values of the dominant culture. Along similar lines, Foucault (1978) was interested in the way power relations, like heterosexism, produced particular identities and Butler (1993) revealed how identities could be considered as performative rather than as innate or essentialist, dependent on the context of the power and forces of the institution (Mills, 2003). Biesta (2013) also asserts that through socialization forces, such as those operating within schools, individuals become part of the existing order and traditions. One powerful socializing force identified by scholars, as influencing the discourse of heteronormativity by rationalizing the institutional discrimination of non-heterosexuals, is religion (Callaghan, 2015; Dahl & Gallaher, 2012; Hillier, Mitchell, & Mulcare, 2008). This study is interested in students who identify across all diverse gender and sexual identities to better understand how all students are impacted by the structure and power of heteronormativity and the influences, which support it as a dominant discourse in schools.

Tilley and Taylor (2013) point out critical pedagogy acknowledges that power relations in society are reproduced in the classroom, which become a site where teachers and students can challenge and contest these relations. Biesta (2013) proclaims it is the task of critical science to make visible these relations, which generally remain hidden from everyday view. Beyond giving an account of society and behavior, critical theory aspires to realize a society based on equality and democracy for all members (Cohen et al., 2011). Likewise, my aim for this study is to move beyond pointing out the presence and power of heteronormativity and the influences that support its strength, but to find ways to make visible these "unconscious social power structures that

coerce our bodies and behaviours" (Jiménez, 2014, p. 261), in an effort to demystify heterosexism and make its power and harm known to all members of the school community.

2.2 Theoretical Influences

2.2.1 Social justice in education. Social justice education represents an ongoing effort to interrogate the curriculum, school policies, and institutional practices that support persistent inequalities in schools (Tilley & Taylor, 2014). Social justice education attends to both content (the actual materials teachers use in class) as well as process (the pedagogy which facilitates the inclusion and exclusion of curriculum materials) (Tilley & Taylor, 2014). In this study, I will attempt to attend to both through the critical analysis of both secular and religious curriculum materials and exploring the pedagogy of heteronormativity as lived out through the individual experiences of students. From the perspective of social justice in education, I understand oppression to be less as a simplistic attitude problem and more the result of the unequal relationships that are socially constructed and upheld through the dominant discourse (Kedley, 2015). Arthur and Collins (2014) argue that social injustices have a profound negative impact on the psychological health and wellbeing of many and that social justice goes beyond a concern for distribution of resources and is a fundamental value for supporting human potential and thriving. I believe for there to be more just educational practices, gender and sexuality norms must first be exposed, and second, be disrupted to permit the safety and inclusion that allows gender and sexual minority youth to have a space to live and to learn.

2.2.2 Emancipation and democracy in education.

> As long as a master remains a master, the slave can only ever become a former slave or an emancipated slave- but never a master. (Biesta, 2013, p. 83)

I have embedded this study in the conceptualization of emancipation as described by Biesta (2013), as one orientated towards equality, independence, and freedom. This definition varies from the classic conceptualization of emancipation, which requires an external force and by nature installs dependency at the heart of the act of emancipation, as the one to be emancipated is dependent upon the intervention of the emancipator (Biesta, 2013, p. 82). What is different from Biesta's (2013) conceptualization than the typical dependence based definition is emancipation is an escaping from a minority; as Rancière (1995) asserts "nobody escapes from the social minority save by their own efforts (Rancière, 1995, p. 48). This study is emancipatory in that it starts from Rancière's (1995) notion of equality and assumes equality as a given (Rancière, 1995, p. 48). Unfortunately, sometimes what is done in the name of equality, democracy, and emancipation can result in its opposite in that it reproduces inequality and keeps people in their place. For instance, the movement towards Gay Straight Alliances is one such example previously discussed as emancipatory in spirit but there is some support that it can also be further oppressive and marginalizing (Freitag, 2014; Robles-Fernandez, 2014). I aspire to meet participants from a place of equality and have the research data be co-constructed through what the participant brings forward and deems important to share in relation to the research questions.

The theoretical perspective of democracy in education as articulated by Lund and Carr (2008) has also influenced my conceptualization of this study. Their notion of democracy is an active one that goes beyond teaching about democracy and implicates *doing* democracy. Lund and Carr (2008) underscore that democracy is an integral piece of the educational experience and that it is infused in every aspect of school. In the effort of social justice, Tupper (2008) argues it is necessary to dismantle the dominant narrative for democracy to be realized. Additionally, the

necessity of dialogue between educator and educated has been articulated by many scholars committed to a democratic and socially just educational ideal (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1975; Gereluk, 2012; Orelus & Chomsky, 2014). Chomsky (2014) takes this notion of dialogue further and asserts all students need to have the opportunity to voice their opinions about the kind of education they feel they should receive and should actively participate in the co-construction of knowledge with their educators (Orelus & Chomsky, 2014). Students are the primary stakeholders in the types of conversations like those emerging from this research as they have the most to lose from the current oppressive realities of life in school and have the most to gain from transformative action. It is a natural extension from this stance that student narratives take up the core and the heart of this dissertation research in an effort to give a voice to those who are frequently left out of these critical conversations.

Freire (1972) asserts that for a dialogue towards anti-oppression to emerge, dehumanizing aggression must be prevented. Dehumanizing aggression is defined as the disruption or suppression of people's ways of being (Freire, 1972). He characterizes oppression as the situation in which individuals are disconnected from the world and exist as objects of the oppressor's actions rather than as objects of their own actions. I consider heteronormativity to be a form of dehumanizing aggression, which polices gender and sexuality and, as a result, suppresses authentic identification. In the context of the schools, Thornton (2013) argues the belief that to be human is to be straight belies an inclusive curriculum and encourages stereotypes. The constructs of emancipation and democracy were at the forefront of this research project as my primary focus was on engaging in dialogue to inform ways to interrupt the dominant discourse and hegemonic ideology of heteronormativity.

2.2.3 Minority stress theory. Meyer's (1995) conceptualization of minority stress guided this study through the focus on systemic and institutional forces of power and oppression beyond individual ones. Meyer (1995) describes minority stress as a psychosocial stress that results from minority status. Specifically applied to gender and sexual diversity, minority stress posits that sexual minorities are subjected to chronic stress related to the stigmatization of their sexuality, which results in elevations in mental health outcomes (Meyer, 1995). Minority stress does not transcend from one specific theory but rather was inferred by Meyer (2003) from several sociological and social psychological theories that discuss the adverse effects of social conditions on the lives of minority individuals and groups. The stress results not from the microaggressions or homophobic and transphobic actions of individuals, but is related to the conflict between individuals' internal experiences and the totality of living in the dominant heteronormative society.

The minority stress for gender and sexual diverse individuals has been complicated by the fact that homosexuality was classified as a mental disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) up until 1970's (American Psychiatric Association, 1973). Despite much debate with the creation of the most recent DSM in 2013, transgender continues to be classified in the DSM under the term *gender dysphoria,* which replaced the fourth edition's terminology of *gender identity disorder.* To obtain a diagnosis of gender dysphoria requires that 'the condition is associated with clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational/school, or other important areas of functioning" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, pp. 452-453). The inclusion of this diagnostic criteria denotes recognition that incongruence between assigned or natal gender and experienced or expressed gender, in and of itself, is not diagnostic or evidence of a mental condition, but rather the experience of distress

with the condition is required for the incongruence to be considered a mental health condition. Despite this consideration, the continued inclusion of gender dysphoria in the DSM reinforces heterosexist norms and arguably contributes to the experience of minority stress for gender minority individuals. While gender and sexual minority individuals continue to be at risk for higher levels of mental health distress than their heteronormative peers, this, in and of itself, should not justify its inclusion as a mental health condition; but rather, should drive a desire to understand the risk, as well as factors that alleviate the stress and contribute to mental health (Meyer, 2003). This was an intellectual goal of this project, to not determine whether or not gender or sexual minority youth were psychologically or emotionally disturbed and may or may not meet the criteria for a diagnosable mental disorder, but rather to explore the system's influence on both their emotional distress and their functional health. Through better understanding these influences, systemic forces came to be uncovered and extensions from this understanding guide meaningful implications and practical considerations for policies and practices more inclusive of gender and sexual diversity.

Meyer (1995) identifies three unique stressors involved in minority stress: internalized homophobia, perceived stigma, and discrimination and violence. Internalized Homophobia is described as the internalization of societal heteronormative attitudes and expectations (Meyer, 1995). Due to the strength of heterosexism and the early socialization process around heteronormativity, even as individuals come to accept their identity, Meyer (1995) argues internalized homophobia is unlikely to abate. This internalized homophobia has been associated with increased difficulty with the coming out process (Shilo & Savaya, 2012). Perceived stigma describes the defensive coping that develops, which results in high levels of vigilance related to expectations of rejection, discrimination, and violence, with regards to the minority components

of identity (Meyer, 1995). This vigilance is stressful in itself as it requires an internal policing and regulation of behaviors in order to avoid a perceived inevitable stigmatization or rejection and causes a general fear or mistrust and self-alienation to avoid the painful experiences of being discriminated against. The third stressor Meyer (1995) identified as discrimination and violence, and constitutes the most explicit sources of minority stress through the victimization, which interferes with the perception of the world and leads to self-devaluation. These encompass direct violence, abuse, and assault as well as the microgressions, such as slurs or derogatory language, both of which can evoke deep feelings of rejection and fears disproportionate to the events themselves. Meyer's (1995) study of over 700 gay men revealed each of these three stressors, independently and collectively, predicted psychological distress. His research in the field of minority stress reveals it is the social stigmatization of gender and sexual diversity that causes internalization of heterosexism and deeply impacts the emotional and mental well-being of minority groups, specifically gender and sexual minority individuals. This research inquiry aimed to explore all three dynamics of minority stress in how school practices and climates influence internalized homophobia and internalized heterosexism for all students, how the perceived stigma results in self-policing efforts as students work hard to hide their identity or modify their behaviors to better fit the heteronormative expectations, and the forms and impact of discrimination and violence in the school. As the discussion of the results from this dissertation will demonstrate, all three aspects of minority stress are a part of the lived curriculum of the participants in this study.

Additionally, research has demonstrated especially heightened minority stress for individuals affiliated with predominantly heterosexual institutions, such as conservative religious organizations (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009). High levels of religiosity have been associated

with decreased levels of expectation in others and increased internalized homophobia, since many religious denominations condemn homosexual relationships (Herek et al., 2009; Shilo & Savaya, 2012). Given the correlation between religiosity and minority stress of gender and sexual minority individuals, Crowell et al. (2015) assert that it seems practical that the influence of traditional Christian faiths be explored when inquiring into the sexual stigma of gender and sexual minorities. Crowell et al. (2015) emphasize heterosexist religious values perpetuate the stigmatization of gender and sexual diversity and impede the development of a positive identity, the implications of which undoubtedly contribute to minority stress and exacerbate the mental health risk of gender and sexual minority individuals. Lehavot and Simoni (2011) assert further exploration and information is needed about how various stressors function individually and collectively and contribute to minority stress.

Meyer (2003) describes stress ameliorating factors as factors that help minority members respond to prejudice and are valuable to members of minority groups. This understanding highlights the importance of better understanding what resources act as protective factors against minority stress and enhance coping and responding to prejudice through resiliency. Meyer (2003) differentiates between group-level resources (i.e., social support) and individual level resources (i.e., personality). The distinction between the two is difficult as group level resources are accessed differentially based on unique individual or personality characteristics, however, exploration into both offers valuable information about the importance and opportunities to foster self-enhancing strategies and access to group-level resources. Exploration into personal agency and important group-level resources were important goals of this research thesis.

2.3 Literature Review

2.3.1 Heterosexism and the Curriculum. I agree with Flinders et al. (1986) when they assert that the curriculum is intimately concerned not only with the nature of learning, but also with the nature of valuing and schooling. Schools reproduce the society and culture in which they are embedded and reflect and contribute back to the dynamics of the social structure (Kedley, 2015; Kosciw et al., 2014). Informally, students learn about values and norms of their particular school culture through peer socialization and interactions with school authorities (Walton, 2005). Schools participate in the process of normalization, which is the process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values (Yep, 2003). Warner (1993) calls normalization the "site of violence" (p. xxvi). Yep (2003) contends that one of the most powerful forms of normalization in Western social systems is heteronormativity.

Kedley (2015) asserts that classrooms reflect, contribute to, and endorse the normative sex, gender, and sexuality categories through the school culture, rules, and rituals. Mufioz-Plaza, Quinn, and Rounds (2002) refer to the classroom as "the most homophobic of all social institutions" (p. 53). Clark and Blackburn (2009) point out that heteronormativity in schools aligns with the gender binaries in the curriculum, pedagogy, and school culture. Through maintaining a heteronormative environment, Dinkins and Englert (2015) point out educators perpetuate an environment that eliminates the possibility for gender and sexual minority students to explore and express their identity. Nunn and Bolt (2015) remind that many teachers look at a group of students and unconsciously assume that they all identify as straight, thus rendering gender and sexually diverse students as invisible. Other education scholars have also commented

on the reproduction of the belief that heterosexuality is the only "normal" and viable option that is perpetuated in schools (Battistich et al., 1999; Kehily, 2002; Kosciw et al., 2014). They claim this occurs through texts, policies, curriculum, language, and actions, which operate on varying levels of consciousness and intentionality.

2.3.2 Curriculum as planned. Aoki (2004) describes the curriculum as planned as created by curriculum developers and planned for faceless children with a falsehood of homogeneity. As with any human creation, the planned curriculum is imbued with the orientations to the world and the beliefs and values of the planners (Aoki, 2004). Resultantly, curriculum materials tend to favour the normative and privileged topics, individuals, and perspectives. It has been well documented that the inclusion of curriculum texts reflective of sexual and gender minorities is exceptionally lacking (Banks, 2009; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Kedley, 2015). Unfortunately, the books that are included representing characters outside the heterosexual norm, tend to center on the character's struggle or learning to deal with their sexuality, reinforcing the idea that non-heterosexual identities are inherently controversial and conflicted (Banks, 2009; Kedley, 2015). For students, who are only exposed to gender and sexual diversity in this way, are encouraged to maintain the belief that gender and sexual diversity is inherently conflictual and controversial and the cause of distress and struggle. These materials maintain the experience of sexual and gender minority students as "other" and excluded, and do little to encourage heterosexual students to acknowledge and question their own position and privilege (Kedley, 2015).

Macgillivray (2000) also highlights the inclusion of topics related to homosexuality remains very rare and, when present, the information is often missing important contextualization and is therefore taught in incorrect, unbalanced, and harmful ways. In

discussions pertaining to sexual health, homosexuality remains taboo (Zimmerman, 2014) and when it is covered it is generally related to risk-taking behaviours and in the context of AIDS or as a pathology, thus maintaining damaging stereotypes (Friend, 1993; MacGillvray, 2000; Meyer, 2009; Puchner & Klein, 2011). The result is that students are either being uneducated or mis-educated on topics related to gender and sexual diversity, which impacts not only gender and sexual minority youth but all students in their developing identity and beliefs. Ghiso, Campano, and Hall (2012) point out the integration of texts that are inclusive of gender and sexual diversity offer windows and mirrors for students to explore the world and themselves, by connecting complexities of diversity to their own and the lives of their peers. The inclusion of these topics better prepares students to engage in a democratic world, where diversity is understood as a normal part of society and can be celebrated.

2.3.3 Hidden curriculum.

Your comfort is my silence. (Kruger, 1981)

As many curriculum scholars have denoted, there is so much more that students learn at school than what they are taught based on the planned curriculum. The hidden curriculum reinforces basic rules and posits assumptions, which are internalized by the student, and establishes the boundaries of legitimacy (Apple, 1975; Walton, 2005). Ritzer (2007) describes it as the unofficial rules, routines, and structures of schools through which students learn what are appropriate behaviours, values, beliefs, and attitudes. Vallence (1974) notes that the hidden curriculum operates with varying degrees of intentionality. The elements of the hidden curriculum do not appear in the schools' written goals, formal lesson plans, or learning objectives; however, the hidden curriculum is, nevertheless, reflective of the culturally dominant social values and ideas about what schools should teach (Walton, 2005). Apple (1975) asserts

that the hidden curriculum or the consequences of what we choose to say and not say, teach and not teach, can have as much or more impact on students than the planned curriculum.

Hernandez et al. (2013) consider the hidden curriculum as a set of norms, customs, beliefs, and language forms that are manifested in the structure and function of the institution, and include environmental, academic, and administrative structures. The authors developed what they call the "Hidden Curriculum of Gender" (HOG), defined as the "an internalized, non-visible, and hidden set made out of the construction of thoughts, values, meanings and beliefs that structure, construct, and determine the relationships and social practices from and among men and women" (Hernandez et al., 2013, p. 90). The HOG is considered to operate at an unconscious level and is deeply embedded in the culture that perpetuates gender inequality (Hernandez et al., 2013). Sieben & Wallowitz (2009) declare no teaching is neutral, so creating classrooms free of discussions of controversial topics, such as gender and sexuality, does not situate the teacher as impartial or objective. In fact, a classroom devoid of such topics sends a very clear message that the teacher regards the topics of gender and sexuality as forbidden, taboo, and ill-suited for children (Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009). For students who are marginalized through constructs such as gender and sexuality, the effects of the hidden curriculum can render their lives particularly challenging to negotiate and even to survive (Walton, 2005).

From this, it appears the heterosexist bias is a part of the hidden curriculum, perpetuating the invisibility and marginalization of gender and sexual minority students (Leonardi & Saenz, 2014; Walton, 2005). A number of researchers have found many teachers avoid topics pertaining to gender and sexuality all together (Kedley, 2015; Schieble, 2012). Sieben & Wallowitz (2009) argue the more educators safeguard the classroom from topics such as homosexuality, the more students—for whom school seems foreign, hostile, or irrelevant—are silenced. Robinson and

Ferfolja (2002) found many teachers in training were resistant to including gay and lesbian concerns in their teaching, based on a belief that discussions of homosexuality were irrelevant to the schooling context. Even when mandated, anti-homophobic and anti-heterosexist curricula are still resisted or subverted (Mayberry, 2006; Walton, 2005). There also remains a dominant discourse that schools are not the appropriate venue for discussions about homosexuality (Epstein & Johnson, 1994; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2002; Walton, 2005). Avoiding the topic of gender and sexual diversity based on the assumption it is irrelevant to the curriculum or inappropriate for the classroom send messages to gender and sexual minority students about their place and relevance in the school.

Curriculum related to human sexuality is one area that clearly demonstrates the hidden curriculum of heteronormativity, and a site of socialization into inequalities (Connell & Elliott, 2009; Zimmerman, 2014). Numerous authors have observed that current sexual health curriculum disseminates heterosexist ideas about sexuality and sexual behaviours (Connell & Elliott, 2009; Fields, 2007; Trudell, 1993; Zimmerman, 2014), with sexual and gender minority discussions and issues being routinely neglected (Fields, 2007; Zimmerman, 2014). This practice contributes to the maintenance of compulsory heterosexuality (Connell & Elliott, 2009).

Martin (1976) identified teacher's use of language as another source of the hidden curriculum. In relation to gender and sexual minority students, teachers perpetuate heteronormativity through how they talk about homosexuality and gender diversity when these issues are raised in class and when they do not intervene in the harmful language used by students pertaining to this population (Puchner & Klien, 2011). Kosciw et al. (2010) found students reported teachers actively repeated harmful messages and blocked students attempts to disrupt dominant discourses pertaining to heteronormativity, reporting 50% of transgender

students heard teachers or staff make negative comments about their gender expression, 33% of students heard school staff make homophobic, sexist, or otherwise negative remarks about someone's gender expression either sometimes, often, or frequently in the past year, and 47% of the time school staff did not intervene after witnessing abuse of students based on their gender or sexuality presentation (Kosciw, et al. 2010; Walton, 2005). Kennedy and Covell (2009) also found most of the students in their study reported that teachers did not intervene in incidents of homophobic bullying and their analysis revealed that the attitudes of students towards sexual minorities were significantly more negative when teachers did not intervene. Kosciw et al. (2010) likewise found 34% of gender and sexual minority youth indicated staff did nothing in response to homophobic incidents that were reported to them. The lack of adult sanctions for homophobic slurs and name-calling and when inhumane attitudes towards sexual and gender diverse students are not challenged, homophobia is not only tolerated but normalized and justified (Leonardi & Saenz, 2014; Swearer et al., 2008). Sieben & Wallowitz (2009) contend remaining neutral or silent in the face of discrimination always condones the behaviour of the oppressor. Through this process, "othering" occurs – where sexual and gender minorities become less important, less worthwhile, less consequential, less authorized, and less human (Yep, 2003).

2.3.4 Curriculum of Christian privilege. Religiosity is the level of engagement in religious beliefs, services, prayers, and practice (Cotton et al., 2006; Rostosky et al., 2007). There has been a growing body of literature investigating religiosity among sexual minorities and how it impacts their occupational success, risk taking behaviors, social, emotional, and psychological well-being (Callaghan, 2015; Dahl, 2010; Halkitis et al., 2009; Hatzenbuehler Pachankis, & Wolff, 2012; Rostosky et al., 2008). These findings serve as a caution against overgeneralizing the positive and protective nature of religion and to consider a differential

impact on gender and sexual minority individuals. It is also important to be conscious of the difference between gay affirming religions and those opposed to sexual and gender diversity. Grace (2004) differentiates between no-heart 'Christians' "who fuel a Queer/straight binary of indifference with their dismissal, denial, or disregard of those they other as deviant fags" (p. 313) and brave-heart Christians, who "engage in political and pedagogical community work to achieve space and place lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender [LGBT] persons" (Grace, Hill, Johnson, & Lewis, 2004). Gattis, Woodford, and Han (2014) found students who belonged to religious denominations that supported gender and sexual diversity saw their religion as a protective factor, while those who were affiliated with religions who discriminated against gender and sexual diversity had more negative psychological consequences. The field is only just beginning to include studies that explore the intersectionality of religion and gender and sexual diversity, with few studies looking at the impact of religiosity among sexual minority and gender minority students (Stewart, Heck, & Cohran, 2015).

Schlosser (2003) attests that discussing Christian privilege is breaking a sacred taboo because both subtle and obvious pressures exist to ensure that certain privileges continue to be ascribed to Christians. Christian privilege is described as unearned, invisible, and largely unacknowledged arrays of benefits accorded to Christians (Blumenfeld, 2006). Schools have been well documented as sites of Christian privilege, through marginalization of non-believers or other faith communities in curricular materials which focus on heroes, holidays, traditions, accomplishments, and importance of a Christian experience (Blumenfeld, 2006). Schlosser (2003) draws attention to the influence of Christian privilege on the oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, based on the encoding of Christian religious beliefs and doctrine into laws that brand homosexuality as immoral. These principles infiltrate the

experiences of students into how they should live their lives, definitions of good and evil, normalcy and deviance, and justifications and rationalizations of social oppression (Blumenfeld, 2006). Kahn (2006) also argued Christian based beliefs continue to play a major role in maintaining heterosexual hegemony, which in turn influences laws and schooling practices. In a study of attitudes towards homosexuality in 29 countries, Kelley (2001) found that the stronger the religious conviction, the less tolerant individuals tended to be towards gays and lesbians. Kosciw et al. (2012) found sexual minority youth in a nonreligious private school had more favorable school experiences than those in public schools and those in private schools that were religiously affiliated. Stewart et al., (2015) found attendance at religiously affiliated schools increased sexual minority students' risk for alcohol use and decreased their ability to be 'out' at school. Other studies have also supported the relationship between religiosity and aversion to sexual diversity (Callaghan, 2016; Hinrichs & Rosensberg, 2002; Kahn, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 1993).

Kumashiro (2000) points out conservative religious groups are gaining more and more influence over education, helping to develop and impose standards that prescribe what students are to learn, and even, how teachers are to teach. They reinforce limited means of making sense of oneself and the world in which they live, especially ways that ignore or even justify an inequitable status quo. In a study exploring the effects of fundamentalist Christian educators on sexual minority students in schools, Kahn (2006) found many teachers felt justified using their religion as their rationalization for the prejudices held against gender and sexual minority individuals. Some of the possible consequences Kahn (2006) identified resulting from teachers who hold intolerant views of lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons included deliberately ignoring matters of sexual orientation, making derogatory remarks against gender and sexual minority

students, omitting curriculum that portrays sexual minorities in a positive light, behaving differently towards sexual and gender minority students and colleagues, attempting to offer religious guidance to students or colleagues who have come out, and outing students to parents (Kahn, 2006). Kumashiro (2003) also points out the unfortunate reality that students are often not learning things that help them recognize and challenge the different forms of oppression that are already at play in schools and society, like the oppression experienced through religiously inspired discrimination against gender and sexual diversity. The teachings and practices of one specific conservative religious group, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are highlighted in this study as an example of a conservative religious group whose influence in the educational institutions, in the communities under investigation in this study, is lived and felt through student experiences, as will be explored in subsequent chapters in this dissertation.

The general public has raised questions and concerns about the practice of supporting a hegemonic Christian position within institutions in Canada. For instance, British Columbia's Trinity Western University, the largest Christian university in Canada which provides undergraduate, graduate, and adult degree programs to 4000 students, received backlash for requiring students and staff to sign a Community Covenant in which they pledge to maintain biblical ideals and avoid relations outside of a heterosexual union (Mulgrew, December 2015; Smith, 2004). Deemed a clear violation of basic human rights, Trinity Western faced resistance when they initiated a teacher training program for the public education system in the mid-1990's. While their request to provide a teacher education program was eventually approved, Trinity Western University faced opposition again soon afterwards and remains in an ongoing battle to have their students graduating from their law program recognized by the provincial law societies across the country, due to their stance on homosexuality (CBC News, January 2016). These

resistances demonstrate the activism by members of the community against Christian privilege as religious rights become placed above basic human rights and freedoms.

Christian privilege operates in some public schools in rural Southern Alberta in which the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) is authorized to offer its seminary teachings as a credited option course. LDS church officials, who may or may not be registered teachers, teach the LDS seminary course during regular school hours, off-campus in the LDS church, and for up to 15 credits towards a provincially granted high school diploma. Typically, in these small communities, the church is located across the road or in close proximity to the schools and students walk to the church for the Seminary class and return back to the school afterwards to resume their academic day.

The LDS Church published a pamphlet in 1995 called *The Family: A proclamation to the world* (CJCLDS, 1995), which proclaims:

> Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities…We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets. We call upon responsible citizens and

> officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society. (CJCLDS, 1995, p. 1)

This pamphlet remains a teaching tool in the updated 2015 LDS Seminary Teacher Manual (CJCLDS, 2015) included in the curriculum of schools in rural Southern Alberta. Hillier et al. (2008) contend that the experience of Christian based homophobic discourse is commonplace in schools and it can have profound effects on the mental health of gender and sexual minority individuals. Research supports the negative impact of heterosexist religious cultures and specifically the LDS values and teachings, on gender and sexual minority individuals. For instance, Crowell et al. (2015) found active LDS individuals demonstrated higher rates of depression than those who had disengaged from the church, which they connected to increased minority stress affiliated with conservative religious traditions.

It is important to recognize religion itself is not necessarily what causes the emotional distress experienced by gender and sexually diverse individuals that has been well documented in the literature (Dehlin, Galliher, Bradshaw, Hyde, & Crowell, 2014; Dehlin, Galliher, Bradshaw, & Crowell, 2014), but it rather results from internalization of the non-biologically based views regarding the etiology of same sex attraction, and encouragement of same-sex attracted members to remain celibate or engage in mixed orientation marriages to follow the doctrine of their faith. The LDS faith engages this discourse, as evidenced by apostle Dallin H. Oaks:

> I think it's important for you to understand that homosexuality, which you've spoken of, is not a noun that describes a condition. It is an adjective that describes feelings or behaviour. I encourage you, as you struggle with these challenges, not to think of yourself as a 'something' or 'another' except that you're a member of The Church of

> Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and you're my son, and that you're struggling with challenges. (CJCLDS, 2006)

The message is that same-sex attraction results from an internal struggle that must be overcome and not an innate and biological aspect central to one's identity. The nature of faith discourse around gender and sexual diversity has differential impacts on the emotional and psychological well-being of gender or sexual minority individuals, as evidenced by Gattis et al. (2014) who found same-sex attracted members of gay affirming religious denominations had a protective effect against the negative psychological consequences of discrimination. This supports the notion that religiosity can be a protective factor for sexual and gender diverse individuals in the same way as it is for the heterosexual majority when the denomination engages an affirming discourse pertaining to gender and sexuality equality. A critical goal of this study is to explore what if any impact a non-gay affirming faith discourse, which is prevalent in the communities of rural Southern Alberta, may have on the internal climate and culture of the classroom and the school.

2.3.5 The lived curriculum. The planned curriculum and hidden curriculum alone do not signify the entirety of what students learn at school. Students bring with them their own experiences, histories, perspectives, and personalities, which impacts what they attend to, what they internalize, and how they make sense of what is taught implicitly and explicitly at school. Aoki (2004) describes the lived curriculum as containing the lived stories of the experiences of dwelling within the landscape of the school (Aoki, 2004). As Biesta (2013) describes, education is not an interaction between robots but an interaction between human beings (p. 1) and it is these interactions that become incorporated into the lived experiences of individual students. Curriculum, as lived, is a large space that encompasses everything that a student makes of their

school experience and includes their interactions with peers, teachers, and administration, involves nonverbal and verbal exchanges, as well as actual curriculum content (Aoki, 2004; Tilley & Taylor, 2013). It encompasses all the happenings interpreted through the lens of the student.

The literature pertaining to some of the influences on the lived curriculum are summarized in the next sections categorized as the systemic justification of bullying against sexual and gender minority youth, the harm of heteronormativity on all students, and the impact of internalized homophobia and transphobia on sexual and gender minority students. Much research has begun to highlight the academic disparities between gender and sexual minority students and their heterosexual peers. For instance, Aragon, Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig (2014) found gender and sexually diverse students had higher rates of truancy, earned lower grades, and had lower educational intentions, including not expecting to complete high school or attend post-secondary, when compared to their non-minority peers. They go on to discuss the reality that gender and sexual minority youth experience frequent victimization, which may partially explain the higher rates of academic truancy and intentions to leave high school before the completion of their diploma (Aragon et al., 2014). This victimization, much like the curriculum, takes on many forms and through implicit and explicit normalization, students are socialized around the heteronormative ideal. Grace et al. (2004) points out that normalization is a social/cultural practice which conceals diversity, and social transformation requires recognition of these differences.

2.3.5.1 Systemic bullying.

Though bullying is a problem that targets children by class, race, weight, appearance, sexual-orientation, geography, and intelligence, nobody has ever seriously suggested

> rich-poor, fat-thin, ugly-attractive, or stupid-smart alliances as a solution to bullying, because such clubs would not address the root causes of bullying. (Carpay, 2015, p. 1)

This statement, made by John Carpay, lawyer and president of the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, was in response to the decision on March 19, 2015, to modify Bill 10, the Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights To Protect our Children, which made it mandatory that the requests of students in Alberta to form a Gay-Straight Alliance at school to be granted (Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 2014). On the surface this amendment looked like a win for sexual and gender minority students. However, this revision did not address the dominant heteronormative discourse of the schools. Robles-Fernandez (2014) found that although GSAs have the potential to help sexual and gender minority youth, students who attend GSAs continue to feel marginalized as "the other" and continue to feel alienated from the heteronormative norms. GSAs allow for connection and normalization, but they unfortunately do not address "the beliefs and the taken for granted practices which sustain bullying as part of the habitus of the school and thus a part of what is taken for granted as normal in schools" (Carlson, 2014, p. 177). Additionally, GSAs and the creation of safe spaces bring to question what it means to be safe. As Freitag (2014) points out, safety goes beyond physical security, and includes belonging, feeling valued in one's contributions, and having one's needs taken seriously. The promotion of safety requires moving past the scope of a GSA club. To establish safety across all spaces of the school for sexual and gender minority students a deeper change at the systemic level is necessary. According to Carlson (2014), a truly safe school calls for a reconstruction of the school environment, making it no longer a safe space for bullying.

It is uncontested that sexual and gender minority youth continue to experience extreme harassment and bullying at school and, despite the increase in school resources over time and an

awareness of gender and sexual minority students, schools remain hostile places for these students (Grace, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2014). Compared to their heterosexual peers, Swearer et al. (2008) found that gender and sexual minority youth were three times as likely to be assaulted, threatened, or injured with a weapon, and four times as likely to have skipped school because they felt unsafe. Additionally, nearly nine in ten sexual and gender minority students experience harassment at school, with 84% being verbally harassed, 40% physically harassed, and 18% physically assaulted in the past year due to sexual orientation (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2010; Miller & Gilligan, 2014). Young (1990) defines violence as a social practice, which is less about particular acts and more about the social context that surrounds them. School environments have the propensity to breed, enable, perpetuate, or even encourage bullying behaviours against sexual and gender minority students due to the institutional socialization, which normalizes universal heteronormativity (Connell & Elliott, 2009; Leonardi & Saenz, 2014; MacGillvray, 2000; Walton, 2005).

Stemming from a heteronormative school climate, sexual and gender minority students experience oppression beyond the overt victimization in the form of physical harassment and assaults. Routine microaggressions are experienced by gender and sexual minority students, which become a part of the normative social fabric and order that compromises the school environment and are symptomatic of the gap in support for these students in school policy, curriculum materials, and support services (Leonardi & Saenz, 2014; Miller & Gilligan, 2014). Miller & Gilligan (2014) assert that these microaggressions operate at the overt (i.e., name calling and harassment) and the hidden domain (i.e., only teaching about heterosexual sexuality, excluding curriculum materials written by or about sexual and gender minorities, lack of resources, support services, or GSAs). Microaggressions therefore operate in a similar fashion as

the planned and hidden curriculum. An interesting finding from Taylor et al. (2016) research was that the vast majority of educators in their study considered their schools safe; while, at the same time, being far less likely to report that sexual minority or transgender students would feel safe in their school, suggesting that educators don't have gender and sexual minority students in mind when they think about school safety in general. This inconsideration makes the day-to-day microaggressions of avoiding or omitting topics pertaining to gender and sexual diversity, ignoring homophobic and transphobic slurs, and sustaining a heteronormative classroom environment normative and natural.

The current attention given to issues related to the experiences of gender and sexual minorities in education is focused on bullying and aimed at making schools "safe spaces" for diversity and protecting the rights of sexual and gender minority students (Carlson & Meyer, 2014). The common consequence of this movement is one of individualizing bullying, which resultantly deflects attention from the systemic nature of the problem. In an individualistic culture, it is too easy to blame individual students for something that is normalized and thus not really a deviant behaviour within the institutional and culture context that actively encourages bullying and harassment, as ways of policing heteronormative performances of gender (Carlson & Meyer, 2014). If sexual and gender minority bullying is going to be addressed, adopting zero-tolerance policies or better training teachers to report and respond to bullying is insufficient to address the root cause of the problem, being the dominant heterosexist bias present in schools (Carlson, 2014).

Although teachers have power over students, many actors in a school community have power over teachers, which heavily influences teachers' willingness to engage with materials and discourse related to sexual and gender minority content in their classrooms. As previously

discussed, teachers routinely omit or avoid topics pertaining to homosexuality and gender diversity in their class; however, research has supported that this also operates more at a systemic level than an individual one. Fredman et al., (2015) found teachers avoided topics of homosexuality primarily out of fear of backlash and evaluated the risk of job satisfaction and security and their capacity to exert the necessary energy to engage these controversial topics. One quotation from their study that highlighted the personal threshold limitation of teachers was the following:

> I think we get tired of fighting the good fight sometimes or standing up to principals. It's a horrible thing to say that but sometimes I think teachers sacrifice what they would do in a perfect world, just based with the realities we have. (Fredman et al., 2015, p. 70)

Another teacher, commenting on the force of the system, stated:

> You're moving a frickin' big ship: it's not a canoe." (Fredman et al., 2015, p. 69)

This study demonstrated the apprehension of educators about administrative responses as well as community and parental backlash. The narratives of the educators in this study reflect the way school systems reproduce heteronormativity by creating rules that brand sexual and gender minority issues as controversial topics and therefore to be avoided (Fredman et al., 2015).

2.3.5.2 Common harm of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity depicts our cultural, social, and in many cases legal management of gender and sexuality (Bryan, 2014). It represents the privileging of biologically male, masculine, men pairing with biologically female, feminine women and represents the "ideal" configuration of sex, gender, and sexuality (Bryan, 2014). Anyone who is perceived as falling outside these normative constructs of sexuality and gender, regardless of their actual sexual orientation or gender identity, is subject to violence, discrimination, and marginalization (Leonardi & Saenz, 2014). Butler (1999) points out the

naturalization of both heterosexuality and masculine sexual agency are constructions nowhere accounted for but everywhere assumed (p. 58). In the common minoritizing view of heteronormativity, the homo/heterosexual binary is viewed only as an issue of importance for a relatively small and fixed homosexual minority (Sedgwick, 1990; Yep, 2003). However, as Yep (2003) points out, heteronormativity is a site of violence against the "psyches, souls, and bodies" (p. 17) of women, men, and transgenders across the spectrum of sexualities" (p. 17).

Yep (2003) describes this violence against women in the form of compulsory heterosexuality, which channels women into marriage and motherhood in the service of men, and maintains male dominance and power. Along similar lines, Butler (1999) calls into question how the category of women, the subject of feminism, is both produced and restrained by the same structural powers that aspire for emancipation (p. 4). Through seeking a discernable singular form of women, the hegemonic structure of patriarchy and male domination is supported (Butler, 1999; Yep, 2003).

Heteronormativity is also violent against men, which operates on a level of shame and fear, and comes in the form of an exhausting and unending standard of what it means to be a "real" man, by which all men must compare themselves and to which virtually no man could attain (Yep, 2003). Kimmel (2001) describes this process as keeping real men afraid, ashamed to be afraid, and silent about their own fears. Other research has supported that gender and sexually diverse individuals who violate gender norms are subject to more prejudice than those who behave in accordance to the typical sex roles (Glick, Gangl, Gibb, Klumpner, & Weinberg, 2007; Lehavot & Lambert, 2007). This supports the notion that gender nonconforming behaviour is policed through a heteronormative discourse along with and maybe more severely than same-sex attraction (Aerts, Dewaele, Cox, & Houtte, 2014; Whitley, 2002). Peter, Taylor, and Chamberland (2015) found sizeable portions of heterosexual students across Canada experienced

abuse due to perceived sexual identity because they do not live up to the dominant discourse of heteronormativity within the school culture. Their analysis evidences that homophobia and heterosexism are not simply a 'gay issue' but rather a "safety issue" in which all students are impacted (Peter et al., 2015).

Practices and interactions in schools not only enforce compulsory heterosexuality but also teach dominance and subordination by gender (Connelly & Elliott, 2009). Research has depicted schools as deeply invested in maintaining a status quo that perpetuates the subordination of women, sexual minorities, people of color, and the working class (Connelly & Elliott, 2009). As Yep (2003) clearly outlined, even those who would by definition fall within the border of heteronormativity are deeply impacted by its normalization of what it means to be a "real" man and a "real" woman. Heteronormativity produces a norm of hypermasculinity, which uses physical intimidation and violence to establish a social "pecking order", silence opposition, and oppress those who perform their identities outside the heterosexist norm (Carlson, 2014). Tharinger (2008) observes that hegemonic masculinity and homophobia work to make sure both heterosexual and homosexual boys who do not conform to the requirements of hegemonic masculinity always have the potential to be oppressed within the organization of masculinity. Friend (1993) speculates heteronormativity and homophobia also function to put limits on same-sex intimacy and bonding that may not be sexual at all. The interruption of heteronormativity through the inclusion of gender and sexual diverse discourse in schools not only works to de-stigmatize homosexuality but also disputes gender role stereotypes which limit all students (Macgillivray, 2000).

2.3.5.3 Soul murder of gender and sexual minority students.

So much blood is flowing from the wrists of a child—of children shamed for those who

they choose to kiss. (Freitag, 2014, p.235)

Heteronormativity, as outlined above, is problematic for all youth and individuals, but it is most violent against those who fall beyond the heterosexual border and who identify as a sexual and gender minority. Yep (2003) and Meyer (2003) define this violence as *internalized homophobia* and as *soul murder.* Internalized homophobia refers to the internal injuries an individual inflicts upon themselves as a consequence of the internalization of self-hatred and self-destructive thoughts and behavioural patterns (Meyer, 2003; Yep, 2003). Yep borrows Shengold's (1989) term for soul murder as the "deliberate attempt to eradicate or compromise the separate identity of another person" (cited in Yep, 2003, p. 22).

The research to date has well documented the increased risk of sexual minority, gender minority, and questioning students for academic underachievement and emotional and mental health problems. For instance, sexual minority youth have been found to display more behaviour problems at school, have lower grades, feel less attached to their studies, have lower educational expectations, take fewer academically rigorous classes, and are more likely to receive failing grades (Busseri, Willougby, Chalmers, & Bogaert, 2006; Pearson, Miller, & Wilkinson, 2007; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). They are more than twice as likely to drop out of high school (Campos, 2005; Macgillivray, 2000), with as many as 40-50% of teen runaways being sexual minorities (Campos, 2005; Castro & Sujak, 2014). Sexual minority youth score higher on tests of depression scale symptoms (Birkett et al., 2009), are twenty times more likely than their heterosexual peers to engage in self-harm (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009; Castro & Sujak, 2014), and are two to five times more likely to attempt suicide (Leonardi & Saenz, 2014; Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2008).

Suicidal sexual and gender minority youth have internalized the voices of homophobia and heteronormativity that they hear all around them, voices that tell them they are immoral, should be ashamed of themselves, and that society would be better off without them (Carlson, 2014; Yep, 2003). The emotional labour required to sustain learned or detached tolerance and buffer one's self against the countless microaggressions experienced in a typical school day imprints students with emotional and sometimes physical scars that can last a lifetime (Leonardi & Saenz, 2014).

2.3.6 Queering the school (Freitag, 2014, p. 231)—Beyond Anti-Bullying Policies and GSAs.

> Equality is neither given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified. (Rancière, 1991, xxii)

Queering the school goes beyond reprimanding homophobic acts and providing zero-tolerance policies, it involves a questioning and reframing across all levels of the school structure, including programs, policies, curriculum, and supports (Freitag, 2014). Stemming from a model grounded in queer theory, queering the school shifts the focus from sexual and gender minority students to all students, and acknowledges that heteronormativity impacts everyone (Kedley, 2015). As such, all students benefit from a school that is inclusive and supportive of students regardless of gender and sexual orientation. Some of the research pertaining to specific movements aimed at inclusion and support for gender and sexual minority students are summarized by the categories of Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) and affirming and inclusive curriculum and school policies.

2.3.9.1 Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs). The movement in Canada in the past few years has particularly focused on the creation of safe spaces or gay-straight alliances (GSAs) within

schools. GSAs were developed out of the notion that they could be safe spaces to help gender and sexual diverse students survive school and manifested out of the growing awareness of the ongoing oppression and victimization of this population in schools. GSAs are often given as evidence by educators or educational leaders that their school is gay-affirming and a safe space for gender and sexual minority students. While there has been a substantial body of evidence about the benefits of GSAs, Freitag (2014) cautions that schools should not see the establishment of GSAs as sufficient in supporting sexual and gender minority students. Likewise, Herriot (2014) found students gave mixed reviews about the benefits and possible harms of GSAs, including resenting their establishment as resembling a "charity case" or as minimally impactful. Freitag (2014) and Herriot (2014) both assert schools need to take a step back and consider the larger systemic influences and work towards providing physical, social, and psychological freedom of all students along with a sense of belonging and a confidence that their contributions are valued and their needs taken seriously. Moreover, GSAs are found to be most effective when they are part of a more holistic safe school setting, including inclusive policy statements, supportive administrators and educators, accessible community supports, and in the presence of student leaders (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Fredman et al., 2015).

2.3.9.2 Curriculum and policy. A number of researchers have contributed to the dialogue about how to create school spaces that promote understanding and acceptance, not mere tolerance, of gender and sexual diversity. Macgillivray (2000) argues that for schools to be safe for sexual and gender minority students, the lives and concerns of this marginalized population must be represented in the practices, policies, and curriculum of the schools. Castro & Sujak (2014) identify that through gay-inclusive curriculum, spreading messages about knowledge, empathy, and acceptance could reduce internalized homophobia, stigmatization, discrimination

and violence. Birkett et al. (2009) found, in their study, that the inclusion of themes and discussions pertaining to sexual diversity resulted in a positive school climate for gender and sexual minority students and reduced negative outcomes. They note that these should not be considered as alternative readings or optional work but rather contained within the required curriculum (Birkett et al., 2009). Keeping in mind the negative impact of non-affirming religiosity, Blumenfeld (2006) also highlights queering the school provides students the freedom of religion as well as freedom from religion.

Szalacha (2003) reported that students from schools with inclusive policies, GSAs, and teacher training programs were more likely to perceive their school environments as safe, tolerant, and respectful than were students from schools without these resources. Macgillivray (2000) asserts a good place to start in making the schools safe for and inclusive of all students is with a critique of the school's ambivalence in regards to sexual and gender issues in general and minority issues in particular. For schools to become safe and welcoming for all students, homophobia and transphobia, heterosexism, heteronormativity, and heterosexual privilege must be explicitly addressed and interrupted in students' learning, which requires a movement beyond the focus on individual acts of aggression and microaggressions, and to the system that maintains this discourse (Airton, 2009; Macintosh, 2007; Nunn & Bolt, 2015). However, as Grace (2006) points out, despite legal and legislative progress in recent years, the translation into cultural and social change remains slow. For this reason, queering the school must move beyond policy and procedures and be embedded into all aspects of the school culture and curriculum. Kahn (2006) argues students need to know that what they consider normal and right are socially constructed categories and are therefore unstable, unfixed, and mutable. This practice of critical thinking teaches students to challenge the status quo and subsequently recognize and confront all artificial

constructs that dehumanize (Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009), including heterosexism. Yep (2003) furthers this idea in his assertion that to heal from heteronormativity, its invisible powers must be understood, unpacked, and demystified.

Although safety from physical violence is essential, Leonardi and Saenz (2014) argue that gender and sexual minority youth need internal safety as well, which requires both autonomy and self-determination. Research suggests that being "out" in school is protective against psychological distress, with 96% of students who were open about their identities and orientations identifying higher levels of psychological well-being (Kosciw et al., 2010). Making schools safe spaces includes promoting students to openly explore and express their sexual and gender identity. When sexual minority students are in a positive school environment free from sexual harassment and supportive of self-expression, they rate their experiences similarly to heterosexual students regarding truancy, drug use, depression, and suicide (Birkett et al., 2009).

Queering the school involves emancipation, which is ideally cultivated from the inside of sexual and gender minority students, and can thus result in their escaping from a minority (Biesta, 2003). Biesta (2013) asserts that to bring about emancipation, an explanation of the workings of power must occur. Emancipation from this conceptualization entails a rupture in the current order of things and requires starting from an assumption of equality (Biesta, 2013). This study was centrally concerned with better understanding the current order of school climates in rural Southern Alberta in hopes of uncovering opportunities and insights towards emancipatory efforts for gender and sexual minority youth in schools.

2.4 Summary

This chapter provided a framework of the inquiry paradigm of critical pedagogy and the theoretical influences of social justice, emancipation and democracy in education, along with

minority stress theory, which have all influenced and informed many aspects of this study. A review and description of the relevant literature was undertaken to situate this inquiry within the larger and growing field pertaining to gender and sexual diversity in the context of schooling, heteronormativity, and religiosity. The next chapter will introduce the methodologies of narrative inquiry and critical discourse analysis as employed in this study and a detailed description of sampling techniques and recruitment and pertinent ethical considerations in the undertaking of this project.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology and Study Design

3.1 Narrative Inquiry

Situated within a critical theoretical orientation and informed by social justice, minority stress theory, emancipation, and democracy frameworks, narrative inquiry was a natural fit for this study given the dialogical nature and freedom of speech that it embodies and the space it permits for the uniqueness of the individual to be heard and understood. Narrative inquiry has many different connotations and definitions. I align with the narrative inquiry methodology conceptualized by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), which was developed from Dewey's theory of experience, which he considered the fundamental ontological category from which all inquiry proceeds (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). As Field & Latta (2001) contend, "an ontological understanding of experience assumes a reciprocity between self and other" (p. 894). I ascribe to these conceptualizations of inquiry and the importance that exploration be initiated from experience and requiring dialogue. While closely connected to other post-structuralist and Marxist forms of inquiry, what differentiates narrative inquiry is the study of experience as it is lived (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), which is the primary site of interest for this study. From this conceptualization, narrative inquiry begins with an ontology of experience, and reality is conceptualized as relational, temporal, and continuous (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that narrative is the best way of understanding and representing experience because experience happens narratively.

Aligned with Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007) notion of the narrative inquirer, the individuals lived experiences are privileged as sources of insights, useful beyond the individual themselves and pertinent to the larger field of social science scholarship. Lived experiences are

considered the ultimate source of validation for knowledge (Clandin & Rosiek, 2007). A narrative is a form of knowledge that catches two sides of a narrative – telling and knowing (McQuillan, 2000). Narrative is one of the few human endeavors that is widely spread as a basic aspect of human life and an essential strategy of human expression (Kim, 2016). Narrative inquiry shares, with critical theory, an interest in analyzing the way larger institutions oppress and alienate certain individuals or groups of individuals within them (Clandin & Rosiek, 2007). Like Kozol (1991), whose research explores the marginalization of racially diverse children in American schools, I too "decided early in my journey to attempt to listen very carefully to children, and whenever possible, let their voices and their judgments and their longings find a place" (p. 7). This research was not only interested in how individual students experience the lived curriculum pertaining to heteronormativity but what they make of it and how, in turn, this enhances or limits what they make of themselves.

Narrative inquirers' interests differ substantially and draw out participant stories for various reasons. This project is interested in what Chase (2011) defines as storytelling as lived experiences, which is interested in how narrators make sense of their personal experiences in relation to cultural discourses, such as heteronormativity. Josselson (2013) argues narratives are the only means by which people can communicate what goes on inside of them and what links them to others as they construct their memory, organize time and create their identity through storying. Narrative inquiry, as a methodology, informed all aspects of this study. It was heavily influential in the conceptualization of the research questions and focus. It informed the ways data were collected, how nurturing relationships were created with research participants, and how field texts were selected as some of the complicated and numerous contextual factors influencing the constructs of interest, namely religiosity and heteronormativity in schools. Narrative inquiry

also informed how I analyzed the data collected in this study, in how the texts were analyzed for content and language representing oppressive and privileged discourses, how the interview transcripts were analyzed, and how I reported on the findings.

3.2 Sampling

Two school divisions operating in rural Southern Alberta were the sites for this study. The initial aim was to seek participants from seven different schools serving students from grades 9 through 12. All seven schools are rurally situated, have smaller sized student population of approximately 25-100 students per grade, and are non-denominational public schools. Each school was in a different town and all 7 towns spanned a 115km radius. One of these school divisions permits the practice of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) to offer their seminary class as a credited option course to high school students. Within that school division, two of the three participating schools sanctioned the inclusion of this credited option course as part of their academic schedule. The second school division in close proximity does not offer any religious teachings as part of their curriculum within the four schools selected for this study. Separate meetings were held first with the senior administration of each division about the study, followed by meetings with the principals at each school. After initial meetings with the 7 principles, 2 schools both from the same school division declined participating in this study. The administrators at both schools identified concerns with parental reactions to their inclusion in the study and fear of backlash from the surrounding community and that teachers would be perceived as promoting gender and sexual diversity. As a result, 5 schools were included as sites for recruitment for this study, three from one division and two from the other. All grade 9 through 12 students who were interested in participating were encouraged to contact me about the study. I chose not to selectively permit only students who identified as a gender or sexual

minority or with a particular religious affiliation to participate. Since the topic of interest for this study was heteronormativity, and stemming from Yep's (2003) conceptual framework that heteronormativity is harmful to all individuals across the spectrum of gender and sexuality, I was interested in hearing all students' perspectives and responses to the research questions.

This study employed purposive sampling techniques, which Maxwell (1997) defines as sampling in which "particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 87). The population of interest for this study was secondary students, between the grades of 9 through 12, that were currently attending a public secular school in rural Southern Alberta. Students of all gender and sexualities were invited to participate but participation required signed parental consent, which was a requirement of the school divisions who agreed to participate in this study and a practice which aligned with the best practices for research involving partially dependent persons, associated with the Canadian Psychological Association standards of practice (Canadian Psychological Association, 2000). The specific steps for recruiting for the sample were as follows:

1) Individual meetings were conducted with the superintendent of one school division and the associate superintendent of the other school division selected for this study. These meetings involved a description of the study through a brief PowerPoint presentation (Appendix D) and an opportunity to clarify any questions about recruitment, interviewing, consent, or use of the data. A letter was provided by the senior administrators indicating support for the study.
2) Following permission from the superintendent and associate superintendent of the two school divisions, meetings were held with the 7 principals of the schools selected and

granted permission by senior administration for sites of the study. The same PowerPoint (Appendix D) was reviewed with each principal and they were all give the opportunity to ask any questions. The senior administration of both divisions gave authorization to the principals to elect to participate or not.

3) Each of the 5 principals who agreed to participate in the study arranged to have me present the research project to their teaching and support staff to request their participation in the recruitment of students for the study. I attended a staff meeting at each of the 5 schools and provided the same informative PowerPoint (Appendix D) and provided recruitment scripts (Appendix E) and a study—advertising poster (Appendix F) to each teacher. I requested they each read the script and put up the poster in their classroom for students to access my contact information from and remind them of the study.
4) The 5 administrators, in consultation with their teaching teams, selected one block or period in the day when all teachers would read the recruitment script (Appendix E) to their entire class at the same time. This ensured all students in the school heard the same advertisement about the study at the same time and had an equal opportunity to participate in the study.
5) The 5 participating schools had a Family School Liaison Counselor (FSLC) and some also had a Child and Youth Care Worker (CYCW) who supported the students at their school. I attended a FSLC/CYCW meeting for both of the divisions and addressed the FSLCs' and CYCWs' assigned to the participating schools by reviewing the recruitment PowerPoint (Appendix D) and providing each of them with 10 advertising posters (Appendix F) and requested they distribute them in private and confidential

spaces in the school, such as their offices, bathrooms, stalls in the locker rooms, quiet hallways, and other spaces where students could take a picture or write down the contact information discretely. The FSLCs' were also requested as supports for participants who may require follow-up care and check-ins after the interview or based on information that arose in the interview. All 5 FSLCs' and 2 CYCWs' agreed to make themselves available to meet with any participant whom requested this support.

6) Students who contacted me to participate in the study underwent a brief risk assessment (Appendix G), which inquired into any possible risks or repercussions in their participation to ensure it was safe to participate in the study. Students were asked about parental support, possible backlash or reaction from parents if they requested their consent to participate, and access to supports. All six participants who contacted me had supportive parents that were aware of their gender and/or sexual identity and there were no identifiable concerns that emerged through this risk assessment to suggest any harm would result from their participation.
7) After the risk assessment was complete, the Parental Consent form (Appendix A) and Participant Assent form (Appendix B) were provided to the student. Two of the participants requested these be emailed to them and they were able to print them off to be signed and brought in a sealed envelope to our first interview together. The other four participants requested these be provided through their schools' FSLC and they were signed and sealed in the envelope provided and brought to the first interview. The consent forms were removed from the envelopes just to confirm they were signed and then were returned to the envelopes sealed and stored separately from all other data collected.

8) In hopes of obtaining a larger sample, I requested to attend the GSA meetings of the 2 schools that had this support group established in their schools during second semester. I was permitted to attend one of the schools' GSA meeting where I provided a brief description of my study to the participants. No further participants were obtained this way. The second school failed to follow-up with a day/time I could attend after multiple attempts were made to connect.
9) I also requested the FSLCs' and CYCWs' in the 5 participating schools remind any of their students they felt may be interested in participating to contact me. Each of the FSLCs' and CYCWs' put up a poster in or around their office areas to remind students of the study. No further participants were obtained this way.

Of the six participants that contacted me to participate, two emailed or phoned me the same day the study was advertised at their school. One participant reached out through their FSLC the same week their school advertised the study. The other three participants reached out by text or email within a month of the advertisement for the study. First interviews were conducted between September 2016 and November 2016 on site at their schools. These interviews took place in a private and confidential location that was pre-arranged with the administrator and/or FSLC and the participant, so the student was able to meet me at the assigned location without having to be called down from class.

The group of six participants was comprised of three grade 9 students, one grade 10 student, one in grade 11 student, and one in grade 12 student. The six participants came from 3 of the participating schools, with the other two participating schools having no participating students. Four of the six students were from one of the divisions and two from the other. Two of the six participants attended a school which provided the LDS Seminary class as a credited

option course. Two of the participants identified as transgender. One identified female-to-male and as pansexual and the other one as male-to-female and also identified as pansexual. The other four participants all identified as cisgender, female, with two identifying as bisexual, one as queer, and one as heterosexual and an ally. All six participants were Caucasian and Canadian born.

3.3 Encountering the Participants and the Narrative Interview

Narrative research is a collaborative practice and a partnership; it is one that empowers and does not objectify participants (Clandinin & Conelly, 2000; Josselson, 2013). Everything that emerges within the interview setting is wholly influenced by the dynamics of the research relationship (Clandin & Connelly, 2000; Josselson, 2013). This runs parallel to the experiences within a therapeutic setting, where the largest catalyst for change in therapy relies on a strong working relationship between therapist and client, one that is based on acceptance and understanding (Arthur & Collins, 2014; Castonguay, Constantino, & Holtforth, 2006; Leibert & Dunne-Bryant, 2015; Miragall, Banos, Cebolla, Botella, 2015; Nakamura & Kassan, 2013; Orlinsky, Ronnestad, & Willutzki, 2004). Aligned with therapeutic processes, when individuals feel heard, validated, supported, and accepted they are likely to tell more (Josselson, 2013). These dynamics cannot be forced or created, but rather must be nurtured within the researcher-participant relationship. In narrative inquiry, the relationship is a site for constant checking as the relationship invites content but the content will also impact the relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Josselson, 2013). To foster this relationship, in the short time that was shared with each participant, I relied on many of the same skills I use as a therapist, including empathic and reflective listening, silence, humour, paraphrasing, summarizing, reflecting, and validating.

Josselson (2013) reminds the narrative researcher that there must be a firm boundary between the roles of researcher and therapist, and a recollection that a client comes to therapy to be helped, but the researcher comes to a participant for help (p. 111). This distinction was one I reminded myself of prior to each encounter with the participants and remained mindful of during the interviews when I felt myself pulled into a helping disposition. Another reminder of Josselson's (2013) that I kept in the forefront was narrative inquiry is more of an interpersonal study than a collection of data, and as the researcher, I am the instrumentation, aligning myself with someone's internal world. To learn from them, I reminded myself to remain open and allow them to impact me and challenge my own thinking. In doing so, I was deeply affected, surprised, and inspired by their stories.

Following the traditions of emancipation and democracy in education, narrative inquiry not only serves the researcher but participant as well. Critical race theorist Delgado (1989) argues 1 (p. 2437). While I was at the receiving end and benefited most from the time and energy the participants expended in sharing their story with me, it is also possible they gained from our time together as well. The participants were eager to engage in the conversation that emerged and many expressed joy and gratitude having the opportunity to talk about a topic that was important to them but primarily absent from the dialogues at school. This sentiment was typically shared at the end of our interviews and included things like: "thank you for coming to talk to us"; and "you don't have a lot of conversations like this, especially with adults, so this is awesome"; and "it was my pleasure."

Over the course of the interviews, a lot of emotions arose and some of the participants became angry, upset, and distressed as they recalled experiences and reflected on the impact of these encounters. This was explained as a risk associated with taking part in the study and was

discussed in the letters of consent and reiterated at the start of the interview. Despite experiencing an emotional response to the dialogue, none of the participants had to pause or end the interview. Additionally, all participants were offered, at the closure of the interview, a follow-up with their FSLC or CYCW but none of them felt this was necessary and they were all grounded and emotionally calm by the end of the interview. No participants withdrew their interviews or data from the study either. Martin and Meezan (2009) point out that gender and sexual minority populations are vulnerable to exploitation and harm from participating in research due to their marginalized and oppressed social positions. To safeguard against this, all identifying information was removed from the transcripts, such as their name, the names of their schools, the names of their towns, and the names of any teachers, friends, or family members that were mentioned during the interviews.

Interviews were kept open-ended, invitational, and participant led and aimed for rich, nuanced, storied samples of subjectivity to discover how it has felt to live the life the participants have had in relation to living within a heteronormative school environment (Josselson, 2013). The aim of the interview was to investigate wholeness of the individual in relation to their lived experiences (Josselson, 2013). In preparation for the interviews, I had questions and themes drafted and used them to guide the interviews when needed (Appendix C). The interview started with collecting some demographic information including age, grade, school, ethnicity, and gender identity and sexual identity. Next, I reminded each student of the general purpose of the study, their right to take a break at any time, their right to end their participation at any time, and their right to remove their information from the study. Then each student was engaged in a dialogue around defining some terminology to ensure we had a shared understanding of some of the common descriptors of identity, including sexual and gender minority, sexual and gender

diversity, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer. I adjusted my language to reflect the definitions articulated by each unique participant. Each student was then asked a series of warm up questions that inquired about their reference points for gender and sexual diversity and their overall beliefs about the rights for gender and sexual minority individuals. At this point, the interview was opened up with a question about the influences on these beliefs and students were encouraged to speak to whatever they felt most relevant to them. From there, the interviews were distinct in where students took the topic and what other dialogue emerged. Each student brought to the interview a different history and interpretation of the question and thus their interview took a different direction. As a narrative interviewer, I followed the students' lead and lines of thought granted they stayed closely connected to the research topic.

Guiding the interviews were four general themes that each had a number of supporting questions for exploration. The four themes which guided the narrative interviews were; a) How are the topics of gender and sexuality taken up in the classroom; b) How are gender and sexual minority students treated, supported, and/or protected at your school?; c) What is the impact of the current curriculum on the attitudes and behaviours of all students towards gender and sexual diversity and on the emotional and mental well-being of sexual and gender minority students?; and d) How can schools become more safe and inclusive spaces for gender and sexually diverse students? Within these themes were several questions used to guide the interviews if they were getting off topic or to ensure each of these general areas was explored by each of the participants. These questions allowed for some consistency between the interviews without constricting participant responses or guiding them. Themes that were left unaddressed naturally through the students' narrative were brought forth through one of the supporting questions found under the themes on the interview guide (Appendix C). There was significant space for variation and

flexibility to follow the lead of the participant and allow their personal experience and what they felt was most valuable to share to guide the interview. At the end of the first interview, each participant had addressed some aspect of each of the four themes in the exchange.

Based on the rich sharing of experiences that occurred with each participant, at the end of the first interview all the participants were invited to participate in a second interview in a few months to further explore some of the topics of the study. All six participants eagerly accepted the opportunity to come back together again. Each of the participants were encouraged to keep a log of anything of interest that came up or things they thought about after the end of our interview that they wanted to add. Second interviews were conducted between March 2017 and April 2017. In preparation for second interviews, all first interviews were re-listened to and notes were prepared based on these first interviews of areas for further exploration. At the start of the second interview, each participant was again reminded of their right to take a break, end the interview, or remove their information from the study. I then asked an open ended question about what they found interesting after our first interview and anything they brought with them that they wanted to share. Three to four individualized questions were prepared for each participant going into the second interview of areas I hoped they could elaborate on or share more about. Space was kept open for each participant to bring forth any observations, thoughts, or experiences that they hadn't shared or had encountered since our first interview. Five of the six participants engaged in a second interview, with one participant not showing up for the scheduled time and did not respond to my singular attempt to reconnect with them. I only attempted to make contact one time to avoid undue pressure, and in this contact, reminded the participant they were under no obligation to meet with me for a second interview. At the end of the second interview, participants were encouraged to contact me if they thought of anything

further they wanted to discuss and I would schedule a time to return if that was of interest to them. Two participants followed-up and requested a third interview before the end of the school year. In both situations, this contact occurred after they each had an upsetting encounter that they felt was important to share and have captured in this research. At the conclusion of interview data collection, 13 narrative interviews were conducted and analyzed for this study accumulating a total of 12.3 interview hours.

All interviews were audio recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim (Maxwell, 2005). These interviews provided rich and informative information about the realities of life in school for gender and sexual minority students and their allies. The most unique, informative, and profound aspects of the narratives are selected using narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Josselson, 2013; Kim, 2016). I assumed that what was told to me in the interview was emotionally and psychologically true, but there is no way to know if it is indeed factually true and that is beyond the concern of this study (Josselson, 2013). Specific information pertaining to narrative interview analysis will be covered in Chapter 5: "Meet the Participants" and in Chapter 6: "School Spaces."

3.4 Curriculum documents.

At the heart of this dissertation are the narrative accounts of the six participants who participated in the narrative interviews. However, I felt it was important to provide some context to the lived experiences of the participants to situate their stories within an understanding of some of the key curriculum documents that support the dominant discourses under question in this dissertation, namely heteronormativity and conservative religiosity in schools. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind, there are a multitude of documents in any inquiry field and it is the researcher's job to determine which of these documents are relevant to the narrative inquiry.

They note that it is easy for the researcher to ignore or to forget the importance of supporting documents as "the researcher who establishes intimate participant relations can become so focused on the relationship that the flow of documents that help contextualize the work goes unnoticed" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 114). The documents that I considered relevant and essential to contextualize the narratives were core curriculum documents where topics and discussions related to gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity were most likely to emerge. Additionally, I felt it was pertinent to include curriculum documents supporting non-affirming religious discourse towards gender and sexual diversity that are used as teaching tools for a religious course offered in some of the schools that were sites for this study. These curriculum documents also contain insight into the religious discourse shared by a large portion of the population in the surrounding communities in the rural Southern Alberta towns that were sites for this study.

The curriculum materials from three specific courses were considered particularly relevant to contextualize this study. The first course is Health and Life Skills with a specific focus on the grade 9 materials and objective for the relevancy to the sample population for this study. Health and Life Skills is a core health literacy course taught from Kindergarten through Grade 9, and is primarily aimed at equipping students with skills and tools to make well-informed healthy choices and to develop prosocial behaviors that contribute to the well-being of others (Alberta Learning, 2002b). Health and Life Skills is also where the topic of human sexuality is covered, beginning in grade 4, and built upon in subsequent years through to grade 9. The second course taken up as field text in this study was Career and Life Management (CALM) which is the secondary-level core health literacy course and a required course for obtaining a high school diploma in Alberta. Like Health and Life Skills, CALM is considered a

comprehensive health literacy course and houses the topic of human sexuality (Alberta Learning, 2002). Given that all the students participating in this study would have taken one or both of these courses, and that these courses cover topics including relationships, wellness choices, identity, sexuality, health, self-worth, and controversial topics, they were deemed most relevant to contextualize the planned curriculum around gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity.

Religiosity was another area of interest of this study and its influence on the forces of heteronormativity operating in schools. As already explored in Chapter 1, rural Southern Alberta is home to a large Christian population and the predominant faith practiced in the small towns that were sites for this study is the LDS faith. The influences of Christian privilege have been evidenced in media capturing non-secular practices in these schools but one practice of Christian privilege that has not been captured in the media is the permission granted to the LDS faith to offer their seminary class as a credited option course to secondary students attending a non-religiously affiliated public school. To provide a context of what gets taught in this class and to establish a foundation for the discussion of the possible influences of the teaching of a conservative, and non-affirming, religious discourse pertaining to gender and sexual diversity on the school climate, resources and teaching materials from the Seminary class made up the third portion of field texts for this study. Specifically, four Seminary manuals with 2 frequently referenced resource guides were included for document analysis. The Seminary manuals and teaching tools of the LDS faith are used in this study as an example of the possible influence of predominant non-affirming religious beliefs towards gender and sexual diversity on school climate in general and individual students specifically. The LDS materials were chosen specifically for their relevance to the area where this study was conducted. A more in depth

description of the analysis of curriculum documents using critical discourse analysis will be provided in Chapter 4.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research interview is a fully human encounter that enables the intricate details and vulnerability that makes narrative interviews so rich and remarkable. However, knowing this requires the researcher to encounter participants from a stance steeped in an ethical attitude (Josselson, 2013, p. 13) as there is no way to be neutral or objective. An awareness of the power difference between researcher and interviewee is also essential, as participants must be met with sensitivity and respect. As a psychologist, this power dynamic is something I am acutely aware of in any encounter with a client and this transferred into my interactions with participants as I hoped to join them and deconstruct the researcher-participant dynamic and instead share an experience together. As the Canadian Psychological Association (2000) code of ethics asserts, psychologists have a higher duty of care to members of society than the general duty of care that all members of society have to each other. Resultantly, I entered my relationships with participants with an unspoken contract that was based on an attitude of respect and trust and a commitment to act ethically in conducting this research in a manner that assured that the welfare of each participant was placed above the importance and welfare of this project.

This study fits under the classification of sensitive research due to the fact that it involves participants documented to be a highly vulnerable population; being adolescents who identify as a sexual or gender minority expression (Cohen et al., 2011). Given the sensitive nature of this research and that it has developed from a social justice, emancipatory, and democracy framework, with an understanding of minority stress, it was imperative that I remained cautious and practiced intentionality and care not to add to the powerlessness or marginalization of the

participants in this study (Cohen et al., 2011; Munro, Holly, Rainbird, & Leisten, 2004). There are a number of ethical considerations that arose given the nature of this study and the demographic of interest. As a psychologist, there are four primary ethical principles, as outlined by the Canadian Psychological Association (2017), which guide my clinical practice and bridged to my work as a researcher. I will address many of the ethical issues arising in this study in the context of these four principles.

3.5.1 Principle I: Respect for the dignity of persons. This ethical guideline emphasizes moral rights and is given the highest weight of the four ethical principles. Adhering to this principle ensures each participant is treated as a person in and of themselves, and never as a means to an end. Each participant was appreciated for what came forth in their narrative and was not treated differently if they chose not to share certain experiences, decided to withdraw from the study, or offered narratives that expressed opposing beliefs or accounts. I optimized the protection of participants' rights to privacy by providing a confidential space for the interview, inviting students to meet me at our scheduled times rather than having them called down from class, by ensuring any identifying information was removed from the sections of the narratives reported on in the study, by not sharing any aspect of the participants involvement in the study, and ensuring all narrative documentation was handled, stored, and transported with a high standard of care to ensure confidentiality was protected. Additionally, given that participants were all under the age of majority and deemed partially dependant, all participants and their parents were provided informed consent (Appendix A and B), which clearly outlined the research purpose, nature of the interview, how information would be collected, stored, and reported, and their rights to revoke consent for participation at any time. Participants and their parents were given my contact information and the opportunity to discuss the research and any

questions with me at any point before and after the consent had been obtained. Finally, no participant was denied participation in the study based on any grounds besides failure to obtain parental consent.

3.5.2 Principle II: Responsible caring. A basic expectation outlined by this ethical principle is that activities pertaining to this research was to be of benefit to society and, at the very least, do no harm. Throughout this research, an active concern for the wellbeing of the participants during and following the data collection process was maintained. I completed a thorough risk assessment with each participant on the phone prior to releasing the informed consent forms to ensure there was little to no risk in their participation in the study related to family backlash, isolation, or abuse. Participants and their parents were informed of the possibility that sharing their lived experiences may elicit particular emotions and be difficult to talk about and may leave the student feeling vulnerable during and after the interview is concluded. Interviews would have been stopped immediately if the participant determined it was too difficult for them to continue to share. There were many times during the interviews that participants became emotional and space was given in the interview to allow them to collect their thoughts and they were reminded of their right to take a break or end the interview at any time if it was too upsetting. Resources for free counselling services were provided to participants and their parents at the end of each interview (Appendix H) should they determine they would benefit from further discussing any of the content that was brought up through the narrative interview. Additionally, the support of the school based FSLCs' and CYCWs' were recruited for follow-up counselling as needed by participants. All narrative interviews ended with a debriefing where participants were invited to share the impact of telling their story, express any concerns they may have, and ask any questions that remained.

3.5.3 Principle III: Integrity in relationships. Accurate and honest information was provided to participants and parents about the nature of the study and their participation in it. I responded openly to any question brought forward by participants, and worked to maintain an open stance during interviewing to capture their experience apart from any biases I held. Personal experience narratives were returned to participants for approval prior to their inclusion in this dissertation to ensure their experiences were composed accurately and authentically represented their perspectives. Throughout the research process, I engaged in reflexive writing about assumptions, reactions to participants, surprises, anxieties, and judgments that arose during the data collection and analysis stages. This helped me maintain an awareness of my role and influence in the data collection and analysis processes and minimize unconscious bias. Finally, I was very careful to maintain boundaries as a researcher and not cross these in an effort to fix or counsel the participant in relation to their stories or life circumstances. When I felt myself inclined to offer support or guidance, I reminded myself of the strength each participant brought into the room and my support would be disruptive to the research process and disrespectful to their own resiliency.

3.5.4 Principle IV: Responsibility to Society. The fourth and final ethical principle, pertaining both to my role as a psychologist as well as researcher, was the aim to increase knowledge and conduct research in a way that promoted the welfare of all human beings. Psychologists have a responsibility to speak out against policies that seriously ignore or oppose the first three principles listed above and advocate for change. In relation to this ethical consideration, a core function of this research was to provide relevant information about student experiences in an effort to promote transformational changes to better support marginalized students. After being gifted with their personal stories and experiences, I feel a deep sense of

responsibility to the participants in this study and the many gender and sexual minority youth who did or could not participate, to extend their insights towards transformative change that promotes equity and justice within school spaces.

3.6 Trustworthiness

Narrative inquiry is concerned with how people understand and make meaning of facets of their lives and tries to enlarge rather than reduce the picture in the literature through understanding the particular holistically (Josselson, 2013, p. vii). Bold (2012) stresses there are no certainties in narrative research but rather it seeks to "apply tentativeness due to the different interpretations that are possible" (p. 10). With the open-ended and unstructured format of this type of research study, it is imperative that trustworthiness of the results is demonstrated and to explain how the findings will contribute to the larger field in a meaningful and credible manner. It is important to reiterate my primary focus of this research was to better understand individual experiences and not for finding or generalizing facts.

Qualitative research relies on various criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, as opposed to the validity and reliability with which most quantitative research is concerned (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Guba & Lincoln (1998) propose the criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of a qualitative study involves credibility, dependability, and transferability. Credibility refers to whether or not participant perceptions match up with the researcher's portrayal of them (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Dependability refers to the traceability of the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Lastly, transferability refers to the fit between the research context and other contexts judged by the reader (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). To increase the credibility, dependability, and transferability of this study, I will rely on 3 strategies:

(1) member checking (Merriam, 2002); (2) triangulation of data (Merriam, 2002; Cohen et al., 2011); and (3) self-reflexive writing (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Josselson, 2013).

3.6.1 Member checking. In an effort to increase the credibility of the findings, member checking was employed to ensure my perceptions and interpretations of the participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences accurately reflected their recollection and inner experience of them. Following the transcription and re-narrating of the individual interviews, I provided participants with their personal experience narrative, which was created based on these records and they were permitted to make additions, deletions, and verifications as they saw fit (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants and I met in person to review their personal experience narratives so we could discuss any of the changes they wanted to make and so I could keep all copies provided and shred them in a confidential manner after we met. This protected against the risk of these narratives being found and connected to individual participants or schools. This in-person collaboration also allowed me to assess if the review of this narrative caused any emotional distress requiring further follow up and support and I was able to make appropriate recommendations as needed.

3.6.2 Triangulation. Triangulation was used to converge evidence from different sources to determine the consistency of the findings (Cohen et al., 2011; Merriam, 2002). By using multiple methods of data, including curriculum materials along with interviews, credibility was increased as participant experiences and discussions around the lived curriculum were contextualized and could be compared to and corroborated with the curriculum as planned. In addition to utilizing curriculum materials and student narratives, repeated interviews were another source of triangulation where questions were clarified and re-visited to ensure consistency in response between encounters with the same participant. This revisiting of the

initial encounter also allowed more depth to understand their perspectives and phenomenon of study.

3.6.3 Researcher reflexivity. Given the seminal role of the researcher in narrative inquiry, the trustworthiness of this study largely comes from my openness and reflexivity as the researcher. Aligned with Foucault's analytical stance, the activity of reflective writing is meant to help me be critical of my own position and judgments (Mills, 2003). Clandinin & Rosiek (2007) contends that the narrative inquirer must listen to a person's experience on its own terms first without a presumption of deficit of flaw. I engaged in reflexive writing throughout the data collection and analysis stages of this dissertation to remain mindful of assumptions about deficit within the narratives that may have caused me to miss illustrations of strength and resiliency. While narrative inquiry and critical theory lend well together, Clandinin & Rosiek (2007) caution the narrative inquirer operating within both frameworks to be wary of collecting stories of participants only to treat them as examples of an oppressive social structure and dismiss the lived experiences of participants as possible sources of insight (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). In an effort to safe guard against this, prior to each interview, I took down some notes of my expectations of the individual participant and my assumptions about them. Throughout the interview, I jotted down notes if I found myself triggered by any piece of the narrative so I could explore and reflect on this more deeply after the interview concluded and what aspect of myself was being called forward from their story. Immediately following each interview, I engaged in reflective writing about my reactions to participants, surprises, or judgments, and honestly reflected on my effectiveness as a partner and collaborator in the interview. These notes comprise the introduction in the personal experience narratives presented in Chapter 5: "Meet the Participants."

In addition to member checking, triangulation, and reflexive writing, I also aimed throughout this dissertation to provide detailed and thorough explanations of how students were recruited, how data was collected and analyzed, and provided detailed information about the context of this study to promote transferability and dependability of the findings. As Creswell (2007) asserts, "good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and, at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry" (Creswell, 2007, p. 15). Despite these measures taken to promote the trustworthiness of the study, it is important to reiterate the aim of this study was not to uncover a truth about the world or an objective truth about the topic of study. However, what the participants shared through the narrative interviews revealed important truths about the particular of what it is like to live in the heteronormative culture of their schools and the influence of non-affirming religious beliefs on the experience of being in that space. What I was most interested in, through this explorative study, was to generate more information about the experiences of students in secondary schools in rural Southern Alberta to uncover the possible influences of heteronormativity and the resulting impact on the emotional and psychological well-being and the attitudes pertaining to gender and sexually diverse students. The stories that emerged are relevant to other students in similar contexts and are likely relatable to many gender and sexually diverse youth also trying to navigate these hostile spaces.

Given the title of this dissertation, *Controversial Credits: Secondary Students' education on heteronormativity,* it may lend the assumption that I have already made conclusions or hold biases about the experiences and education of gender and sexually diverse students in rural Southern Alberta schools. This title and focus on the forces of heteronormativity and religious influences are informed by the literature, reviewed in Chapter Two, which strongly support an

ongoing culture of heteronormativity operates in all primary institutions, including schools. Additionally, my own experiences working in secondary schools for more than the past decade in rural Southern Alberta supports that this discourse is prevalent in these spaces. However, through this research I actively sought evidence and moments of hope that contradicted my own experiences and perspectives pertaining to this topic and attempted to highlight these moments through focused attention given to each participant related to aspects of their school experience that is going well. In this way, I have attempted to protect this thesis from yielding to researcher bias and to prevent conflating the woundedness of gender and sexual minority youth, which Harwood and Rasmussen (2004) assert has become commonplace in educational discourse. By intentionally searching out and highlighting moments of hope and stories of strength operating within the schools of each of the participants, I attempt not to flatten the lived experiences through a binary of being either wounded or a hero (Allen, 2015; Talburt, 2004). My attempt to balance out the narratives with positive encounters and social justice movements in schools aims to avoid further oppressing gender and sexual minority students and the participants in the study by over-emphasizing their struggle, but at the same time, I am cautious not to minimize the profound impact of the current practices in schools on the emotional, mental, and psychological development of gender and sexual minority students.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology of narrative inquiry and how it informed all aspects of this study, from conceptualization through analysis and reporting on findings. An in-depth description of recruitment and sampling procedures was described along with ethical considerations and issues related to validity. A more in depth description of data analysis is provided in the subsequent chapters coinciding with the data resulting from specific

methods of analysis being employed. Chapter 4: “Curriculum as Planned” includes a description of critical discourse analysis and how it was employed in the analysis of critical curriculum documents to contextualize the captured lived curriculum in the participant narratives. Chapter 5: “Meet the Participants” describes the use of storying stories as a method of analysis for re-narrating interviews into personal experience narratives to introduce the participants and better understand their inner experiences of life at school. Chapter 6: “Climate at School” will begin with a description of the use of thematic analysis with the interview transcripts to pull out themes and sub-themes to explore some commonalities between student experiences, which are presented in Chapter 6 through 8.

CHAPTER 4: Curriculum as Planned

4.1 Introduction

This is the first of 5 data analysis chapters and is primarily concerned with presenting key field texts to contextualize the personal experience narratives and emergent themes from the narrative interviews. This chapter begins with an overview of how critical discourse analysis was employed in the review and presentation of key aspects of these field texts to support a deeper understanding of how gender and sexual diversity topics and issues are discussed in the planned curriculum within Alberta high schools. Subsequently, the purpose and rationale of each of the courses is examined and three primary themes are discussed related to the analysis of these curriculum texts through the lens of heteronormativity and situated in the context of schools in rural Southern Alberta. These themes are (1) there is strong support for the necessity to embed topics and issues pertaining to gender and sexual diversity within the mandated Alberta Education core health literacy courses in order to meet course objectives; (2) significant barriers are created from the language of the planned curriculum in these core health literacy courses for teachers interested in including topics and issues pertaining to gender and sexual diversity; and (3) subtle and overt heteronormative and homophobic and transphobic messages are present within the core health literacy curriculum manuals and the religious-affiliated curriculum materials.

4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is frequently turned to in an effort to answer questions about the relationship between language and society (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005). Critical discourse analysis focuses on how language, as a cultural tool, mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of

knowledge (Rogers et al., 2005). Luke (1996) asserts language is not neutral because it is caught up in political, social, racial, economic, religious, and cultural formations. Critical discourse analysis is focused on how power and identity become legitimated, negotiated, and contested, and attempts to establish how textual constructions of knowledge come to count in institutional contexts (Van Dijk, 1993; Luke, 1996).

Luke (1996) declares the discourse of institutional life, such as schools, can be viewed as a means for the naturalization and disguise of power relations tied to inequalities. Discourse is taken to be the recurrent statements and wordings across texts that mark out systems of meaning and fields of knowledge, which in turn are tied to ways of knowing, believing and categorizing the world and modes of action (Foucault, 1972; Gee, 1990; Luke,1996). Luke (1996) considers all forms of discourse to represent forms of normativity. For the purpose of this study, I was interested in engaging critical discourse analysis to analyze how certain curriculum texts and documents work to normalize and disguise heterosexism and the oppression of gender and sexual minority students. Aligned with narrative inquiry, I consider the curriculum materials as important field texts and include them because of their importance in contextualizing this research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Luke (1996) asserts that students use texts to make sense of their world and to construct social actions and relations while, simultaneously, texts construct individuals, making available meanings, ideas, and versions of the world. It is through these texts that students learn to be and where cultural categories are built up and established in the hierarchical social grid of what constitutes normal (Luke, 1996). The texts included in this analysis contain the messages pertaining to gender and sexual diversity as sanctioned by Alberta Education and/or specific school divisions.

The analysis of curriculum texts will follow Gee's (2010) model of CDA which involves a set of connection building activities that includes describing, interpreting, and explaining the relationship between language use within the curriculum materials pertaining to sexual and gender diversity along with the cultural models and situated meanings in the context of heteronormativity (Gee, 2010). Through CDA, I will focus not only on what is said but also what is left out (Gee, 2010; Rogers et al., 2005). What makes the analysis of these curriculum documents critical is it centers on an interest to speak to and ideally intervene in the social problems, issues, and controversies pertaining to heteronormativity (Gee, 2010).

4.3 Introduction to the curriculum texts

4.3.1 Health and Life Skills 9. Health and Life Skills 9 is part of the Health and Life Skills Kindergarten to Grade 9 curriculum—a comprehensive school health and life skills program provided to all Alberta students from kindergarten through grade 9 (Alberta Learning, 2002b). The overarching goal of the Health and Life Skills Kindergarten to Grade 9 Program of Studies is to "enable students to make well-informed healthy choices and to develop behaviors that contribute to the well-being of self and others" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p.1). The Health and Life Skills program is made up of three general outcomes, which serve as the foundation of the course: Wellness Choices (i.e., students will make responsible and informed choices to maintain health and to promote safety for self and others), Relationship Choices (i.e., students will develop effective interpersonal skills that demonstrate responsibility, respect, and caring in order to establish and maintain healthy interactions), and Life Learning Choices (i.e., students will use resources effectively to manage and explore life roles and career opportunities and challenges) (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 3). Human Sexuality Education, offered in Health and

Life Skills in grades 4 through 9, is identified as a mandatory component of the program of studies.

4.3.2 Career and Life Management Senior High. Career and Life Management (CALM) Senior High is the secondary school component of the Comprehensive School Health Education in Alberta (Alberta Learning, 2002). Acting as a continuation from the Health and Life Skills Program of Studies, CALM is considered the core of senior high school health literacy (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 2). CALM is a required course for graduation with an Alberta High School Diploma in the province of Alberta. Like Health and Life Skills, the aim of CALM is to "enable students to make well-informed, considered decisions and choices in all aspects of their lives and to develop behaviors and attitudes that contribute to the well-being and respect of self and others, now and in the future" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 1). The general objectives of the CALM curriculum are Personal Choices (i.e., students will apply an understanding of health dimensions in managing personal well-being), Resource Choices (i.e., students will make responsible decisions in finances and other resources that reflect personal values and goals and demonstrate a commitment to self and others), and Career and Life Choices (i.e., students will develop and apply processes for managing personal, lifelong career development). Many sensitive topics and issues are dealt with in CALM, including personal relationships and sexuality.

4.3.3 Seminary Manuals for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has four Seminary Teacher Manuals, which reference many additional church documents and scriptures. The analysis of seminary materials involved all four manuals: The Book of Mormon Seminary Teacher Manual (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [CJCLDS], 2012); Doctrines and Covenants and Church History Seminary

Teacher Manual (CJCLDS, 2013); Old Testament Seminary Teacher Manual (CJCLDS, 2014); and New Testament Seminary Teacher Manual (CJCLDS, 2016). In addition, this analysis involved two primary church documents which were referenced repeatedly throughout the above-mentioned manuals: The Family: A Proclamation To The World (CJCLDS, 1995) and For the Strength of Youth (CJCLDS, 2001).

> Each seminary manual outlines the following purpose of the Seminary course: "our purpose is to help youth and young adults understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven. To achieve our purpose, we teach students the doctrines and principles of the gospel as found in the scriptures and the words of the prophets. (CJCLDS, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016)

All four seminary manuals are organized by lessons drawn from scripture, which offer a specific teaching related to the biblical text and how this lesson can be applied to the doctrines and principles of the church, as well as to everyday life. While human sexuality is not established as a distinct unit or specific lessons throughout the seminary manual, as it is in the Health and Life Skills and CALM curriculum, topics pertaining to marriage, relationships, and sexuality are interspersed throughout all 4 manuals and supplementary church documents.

4.4 Planned curriculum of heteronormativity and heterosexism

The materials from all three courses were read and re-read multiple times through the lens of heteronormativity to highlight discourses pertaining to heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia. This discourse was considered in light of the primary goals and objectives of the courses, as well as the responsibilities of schools to provide a safe and inclusive learning environment to all students, as mandated by the School Act (Alberta Queen's Printer, 2012). The

findings from this analysis are summarized into three themes. The first two themes deal primarily with the course content from the mandatory core health literacy courses; Health and Life Skills and CALM, and chiefly focus on the discourse of heteronormativity and contradictions between aspirations of health promotion and the absence and obstacles to include topics pertaining to gender and sexual diversity. The third theme includes the findings from all three courses and the connection between the planned curriculum and institutional heterosexism.

4.4.1 Course objectives necessitate the inclusion of diversity. The CALM and Health and Life Skills curricula include several general and specific objectives, which promote lesson planning and instruction consistent with the purposes of these school health literacy courses. Analysis of these documents reveal, to achieve many of these general and specific objectives, it is not only important but essential that topics and issues pertaining to gender and sexual diversity be taken up as key matters within both of these courses. For instance, at the beginning of the Health and Life Skills curriculum, it is highlighted that a primary aim of this course is to support students towards an "understanding of self as a basis for healthy interactions with others" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 1). The CALM curriculum includes a similar statement and includes the assertion that students "require an understanding of self as a basis for making health choices, having healthy interactions with others, and using resources wisely" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 1). The Health and Life Skills curriculum furthers the claim of the importance of self-knowledge by indicating an "awareness of the uniqueness of self and others is fundamental" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 13) to the objectives of this course, which aims to help students to "recognize and appreciate uniqueness in themselves and others" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 38). Given that gender and sexual identity are important aspects of the self, it would be necessary that students who do identify as a gender or sexual minority encounter curriculum content that

promotes understanding of gender and sexual diversity to support their growing understanding of their developing self. Without the inclusion of these topics and discussions, gender and sexual diverse students are left out of opportunities to become aware of and recognize their uniqueness, locate valuable resources, and navigate how to develop healthy relationships with others.

Both the Health and Life Skills and CALM curriculum promote the foundational purpose of both courses in supporting the developing well-being of students in a holistic and coherent way (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 1). In the Health and Life Skills curriculum, there is a section, which outlines the key characteristics of resilient students. One of the identifiers used to characterize a resilient student is the following:

> They have autonomy. They believe in the ability to influence life events around them and have a strong sense of their own identity, which does not waiver in the face of neglect or ridicule. (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p, 589)

Along similar lines, the CALM curriculum identifies well-being as stemming from "having the emotional/psychological, intellectual, social, spiritual, and physical dimensions of one's life in harmony with each other" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p.2). By excluding content inclusive of gender and sexual diverse students, they are not given the same support as their peers towards developing a strong sense of identity and creating the type of harmony with all dimensions of themselves that the curriculum illustrates is a necessary dimension of well-being and resiliency. Moreover, the same curriculum identifies stressors pertaining to sexuality, including "uncertainty, pressure to conform, and lack of information" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 598) as one of the nine most common life stressors encountered by students. It would be impossible for educators of these courses to evade gender and sexual diverse content and materials while still

managing to achieve the core objectives of developing the well-being and personal resiliency for all students, including gender and sexual minority youth.

There are clear guidelines provided for teachers of Health and Life Skills and CALM to consider in creating an optimal learning environment for these health literacy courses. In the Health and Life Skills manual, teachers are reminded of the importance of creating an environment of "acceptance, understanding, respect, and caring" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 2). Likewise, the CALM curriculum establishes the importance of creating a "safe and caring environment in which to explore feelings, ideas, and issues surrounding personal choice and decisions" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 3) and one that has an atmosphere of openness and acceptance (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 69). This educational resource also highlights five important characteristics that contribute to a healthy CALM classroom: "a sense of value and worth, a sense of respect, a sense of security and safety, a sense of engagement, and a sense of humour, enjoyment and fun" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 40). To establish this type of learning environment would require all students have their unique needs and developing identities reflected back to them through their encounters with the curriculum. In the Health and Life Skills curriculum, it is highlighted that within this course "there are opportunities for students to accept and appreciate diversity and the uniqueness of self and others in our global society" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 2). Exposure to and education around topics of diversity across multiple categories would be essential to the establishment of an open and accepting environment, where respect, security, and safety were the norms. The Health and Life Skills resource also emphasizes the importance of interweaving throughout the course "the awareness students are not alone" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 13). One of the justifications provided in the Health and Life Skills curriculum for adopting a comprehensive school health approach, such as the Health and CALM

courses, is that it results in "less student alienation" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 32). Gender and sexual minority students routinely express feeling marginalized and alienated at school, as will be evidenced in the analysis of the narrative interviews to follow, and as was outlined in great detail in the previous literature review. For this demographic to feel included and to have an experience that they are not alone, topics, which directly discuss gender and sexual diversity, would be fundamental.

Beyond the reasons already identified, there is further support for the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics and issues within these courses that are specifically outlined within these curriculum materials. Within both the CALM and Health and Life Skills course manuals, the following statement can be found: "the examination of controversial issues is an important part of the democratic process and has an important place in the classroom" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 43; Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 103). Controversial topics are defined in both curricula as:

> topics that are publicly sensitive and upon which there is no consensus of values or beliefs. They include topics on which reasonable people may sincerely disagree. (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 43; 2002b, p. 57)

Both curriculum materials indicate the opportunity to deal with these issues as "integral parts of student education in Alberta" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 43; 2002b, p. 57) and that by studying controversial topics students are more prepared for "responsible participation in a democratic and pluralistic society" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p.43; 2002b, p. 57). In the CALM curriculum, it is laid out that the "study of emotional and spiritual dimensions of health; topics related to family interactions; personal, family, and community values; personal relationships; and issues of sexuality are but a few of the topics that are sensitive in nature and need to be dealt with in a

responsible, respectful, and professional manner" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 3). The emphasis placed on the inclusion of controversial topics within both the Health and Life Skills and CALM curriculum clearly highlights the necessity to take up gender and sexual diversity topics and issues within the context of the safe learning environment established in these unique health literacy courses aimed specifically at student well-being, the developing self, and appreciating and respecting unique and diverse individuals.

4.4.2 Barriers to engaging students about gender and sexual diversity. Educators who see the value in engaging students in these types of critical discussions can find an abundance of support for the importance of doing so, as evidenced in the previous discussion on the necessity to include these topics to meet core health literacy outcomes. However, the analysis of the CALM and Health and Life Skills curriculum illuminate there are also many barriers within the curriculum documents that complicate and, may even, deter educators away from bringing these topics into the classroom. In both the Health and Life Skills and CALM manual, educators are reminded of the importance of family interests and involvement. The Health and Life Skills manual states "the family is the primary educator in the development of students attitudes and values" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 2). Similarly, the CALM manual asserts "activities and processes in CALM encourage family interest and involvement" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 1). Both documents also identify the school as playing a supportive and complimentary role to the family in building on students' attitudes and values. Inarguably the family is the primary socializing agent of a child; however, to describe the role of the school as supportive and complimentary to building upon the interests, values, and attitudes of the family unit is problematic. These statements make an assumption that all values and attitudes of the family should be supported equally and that the values of the family are always humanitarian and

respect the rights and dignity of all individuals. It leaves questions around if there is ever an appropriate context for educators to teach about values and beliefs that may be contrary to that of a family unit or to help students challenge some of the socialization they are experiencing outside of school that may be leading them to become discriminatory or prejudiced against certain groups of individuals. The CALM curriculum also acknowledges "much of what is learned is affected by influences outside of the classroom and that the likelihood of students adopting and maintaining healthy behaviours increases when messages from multiple sources are consistent" (Alberta Education, 2002, p. 6). Missing from this discussion in the manual is the context for teachers when it would be inappropriate to provide consistent messages to students that mirror the attitudes and beliefs of the family unit or other outside influences. Without clear guidelines for teachers to follow to make these ethical decisions, it leaves educators faced with the option to either support the dominant values of the families and the outside community or eliminate topics that may be sensitive and bring up differing values or beliefs to what students are taught outside of school.

Beyond encouraging teachers to provide education that is consistent and supportive of family values, the CALM and Health and Life Skills manuals also highlight the rights of parents to be heavily involved in these courses and to determine the extent to which their children may participate in them. For instance, the CALM and Health and Life Skills manual both clearly stipulate numerous times throughout the documents that parents retain the right to excuse their child from the school instruction in human sexuality and educators are reminded frequently of parents' rights to exempt their children from the human sexuality component of both courses. In the human sexuality component of CALM, teachers are required to communicate with parents the specific outcomes, topics, and resources prior to teaching them (Alberta Learning, 2002, p.

20). Teachers are also told to encourage students to share their learning and progress in CALM with their parents so that their "families have the opportunity to offer input that reflects their cultural beliefs and values" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 23). Also, it is outlined that students may be exempt from the entire CALM curriculum for two primary reasons: they are out of province grade 12 students or for religious beliefs (Alberta Education, 2002, p. 3). The determination of an exemption is at the request of a parent. These stipulations around parental interests being considered in course content and resources and family determination of students' engagement and involvement in certain aspects of the course places the rights of parents above the possible needs of students. This practice leads to questions around students' rights to information and education around health and well-being. Since both courses assert their importance as the primary provider of a comprehensive school health education, to restrict students' involvement in the course or limit their exposure to sensitive or controversial topics, leaves them ill prepared to engage in a democratic society, which is also identified as a fundamental goal of these courses. Throughout both documents, there is no description of how educators can protect the rights of students to obtain information that is critical to their well-being and development of a healthy self when their needs conflict with the attitudes of their parents.

With parental interests and rights at the center of the CALM and Health and Life Skills curriculum, teachers are also required to consider the larger community within which the school is embedded when planning and preparing the content of these courses. In the Health and Life Skills curriculum, teachers are reminded when planning lessons, which discuss controversial issues to "consider the neighborhood and community in which the school is located" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 38). The CALM curriculum also identifies the necessity to consider the "strengths and needs of the community in which students live in order to address relevant topics

in the CALM classroom (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 28) and to "be sensitive to the social and political realities of the community" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 65). The requirement to manage the needs, values, and attitudes of families, as well as the larger community may be a source of distraction away from the needs of individual students as well as fulfilling the requirements of these important curriculums to promote the development of attitudes and behaviors that contribute to the well-being of self and others. In the context of gender and sexual diversity topics and issues, where do these guidelines leave educators within conservative communities where children are taught within the family and larger community that marriage between a man and a woman is the only acceptable expression of sexuality? While the CALM and Health and Life Skills curriculum clearly stipulate the importance of including topics and issues that are sensitive and controversial, the language in these manuals ultimately limits teachers to the inclusion of such topics only if and when they do not run counter to the primary values and beliefs of the family and the larger community.

Even for teachers working in less conservative communities, there are obstacles to overcome in the language of the CALM and Health and Life Skills curriculum to include gender and sexual diversity topics in the classroom. Both curricula advise educators, when discussing controversial issues, they must present alternative points of view and a balanced approach unless information is restricted by federal or provincial law (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 18; Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 38). The CALM curriculum furthers this assertion by stating "presentations and course content that are limited to singular or narrow view are not consistent with learning outcomes and should not be part of the school program" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 22). Teachers are also expected to anticipate where a discussion is going to protect individual students from disclosing inappropriate personal information and must be vigilant in heading off

such revelations (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 45). As previously discussed, teachers must also ensure the CALM and Health and Life Skills classrooms are safe and open spaces, so students can explore difficult topics and issues comfortably. If a teacher wanted to bring in a guest presenter to talk about gender and sexual diversity and promote respect and understanding of this population, the language in the CALM and Health and Life Skills curriculum suggests this educator must also bring in a member of the community that is opposing to equal rights for individual who are a sexual or gender minority. Since this would be unethical, as it would compromise the safety of individual students, it is understandable, in this context, why teachers routinely evade topics and issues around gender and sexual diversity to protect themselves from the controversy that may emerge given that there are no clear guidelines around how to navigate these issues. Without specially addressing various forms of diversity, like gender and sexuality, and outlining important and ethical educational considerations in engaging in these topics, teachers preparing these courses from these planned curriculum documents are left ill prepared and unsupported in providing students with critical resources and information pertaining to this topic.

4.4.3 Heteronormative, Homophobic, and Transphobic Messages.

4.4.3.1 Heteronormative Bias in the Curriculum. Detailed reading and analysis of all three curriculum materials: Health and Life Skills, CALM, and the LDS Seminars Manuals, emphasizes each maintain a dominant heteronormative bias and the language across all three assumes the discussions around human sexuality and relationships pertains only to heterosexual and homogenous relationships, with no discussion or acknowledgement of the diversity which exists in human sexuality, gender expression and identity, or even the variability within individual relationships.

In the Health and Life Skills curriculum, several statements can be found which presume heterosexuality in discussions around human sexuality and relationships. For instance, in a discussion around safer sex practices, the Health and Life Skills manual provides the following list: "communicate with partner, maintain abstinence, limit partners, access/use condoms/contraceptives properly, identify and describe the responsibilities and resources associated with pregnancy and parenting" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 12). However, nowhere in this list or elsewhere in this manual is there a note to include resources or supports associated with sexual or gender diversity. The discussion assumes the reason sex isn't safe is because it could lead to pregnancy, which is not a universal issue for all partners in a sexual relationship. There is no acknowledgment that diverse sexualities and genders have different needs for safer sex practices. The entire human sexuality component of the Health and Life Skills course is focused on the consequences of a sexual relationship, being sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy, with most the attention being placed on unplanned pregnancy. One of the activities within this section of the course involves the following:

> Consider how the life of a grade 9 student would change with each of these events: an unplanned pregnancy, becoming a single parent, and leaving home to live on your own. Consider and report on the risks and health consequences of teenage pregnancy from three perspectives: the teen mother, the teen father, the newborn. (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 592)

While discussions around teen pregnancy are an important component of a comprehensive school health program, in isolation of the inclusion of discussions of gender and sexual diversity, these send a strong message of heteronormativity and marginalize gender and sexual minority students. Additionally, by not acknowledging diversity in sexuality, gender

identities, and relationships, students are ill-equipped to navigate how to engage in healthy relationships, safe sex practices, and protect against the harmful effects of unhealthy relationships. It also leaves all students unexposed and uneducated about diversity topics and issues that better prepare them post-graduation.

Heteronormativity is also present across the curriculum teaching materials for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A church pamphlet titled “For the Strength of Youth” (CJCLDS, 2001) includes discussions of topics that are considered relevant for young members of the church, including dating. In the For the Strength of Youth booklet, dating is described as “a planned activity between a young man and a young woman” (CJCLDS, 2001, p. 4) and that young men generally take initiative in asking for and planning the dates (CJCLDS, 2001, p. 5). This booklet also asserts that “marriage between a man and a woman is essential to His eternal plan” (CJCLDS, 2001, p. 14) and “God desires that all of his children come into the world as part of an eternal family with a mother and a father who love and care for each other and for their children” (CJCLDS, 2001, p. 14). In respect to sexual relationships, the For the Strength of Youth outlines “the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife” (CJCLDS, 2001, p. 35).

The seminary manuals have similar heteronormative messages interspersed across all 4 documents reviewed in this analysis. In one of the lesson plans in the Book of Mormon Seminary Manual (CJCLDS, 2012), the instructor is recommended to display a picture of a married couple and their children and encouraged to use a picture of their own family to demonstrate the sanctity of marriage (p. 36). The Doctrines and Covenants Seminary Manual (CJCLDS, 2013) covers in depth the importance of the covenant of marriage. In this manual, young people are reminded that, in order to obtain the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, they must enter into the new

and everlasting covenant of marriage (p. 488). This document also outlines the reasons why eternal marriage is essential to the Father's plan:

1) The natures of male and female spirits complete and perfect each other and therefore men and women are intended to progress together toward exaltation.
2) By divine design, both a man and a woman are needed to bring children into mortality and to provide the best setting for the rearing and nurturing of children. (CJCLDS, 2013, P. 488)

The Doctrines and Covenants manual also expresses the benefit of abiding by the everlasting covenant of marriage in receiving exaltation and glory, eternal increase in prosperity, their marriage will be in force through all of eternity, and they will become like God (CJCLDS, 2013, p. 493). Reiterated throughout this document is the assertion that "marriage between one man and one woman is God's standard for marriage unless he commands otherwise" (CJCLDS, 2013, p. 494). "Unless he commands otherwise" is clarified as referring to plural marriage, which is approved of when it is commanded by the lord (CJCLDS, 2013, p. 494). Furthermore, the Doctrines and Covenants manual also asserts that "gender is an essential characteristic of individual pre mortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose" (CJCLDS, 2013, p. 567) and "the Lord will hold us accountable if we do not fulfill our responsibilities in our families" (CJCLDS, 2013, p. 567). The Old Testament and New Testament Seminary Manual have many similar messages, reiterating the essential nature of marriage between a man and a woman and the creation of children as part of His eternal plan.

The seminary manuals and church documents highlight the blessings that are provided to those who follow the commandments, including those around marriage and sexuality. In the For the Strength of Youth Booklet (CJCLDS, 2001) it is outlined that following God's plan will lead

individuals to be free of harmful addictions and help maintain control over life (p. 25). The Book of Mormon Seminary Manual (CJCLDS, 2012) follows with the promises of eternal salvation (p. 7), happiness (p. 7), "blessings, strength, protection, assurances, guidance, loving-kindness, consolation, support, and spiritual gifts" (p. 20), prosperity (p. 23), ability to overcome temptation (p. 41), truth (p. 43), liberty and eternal life (p. 80), cleansing of unworthiness (p. 105), guidance (p. 173), and guiltlessness (p. 460) for those who ascribe to God's plan. Collectively, these messages provide clear privileging to heteronormative attitudes and beliefs and may be harmful to students who are gender or sexually diverse as they come to understand their gender or sexual identifies conflict with the teachings in the seminary manuals and church documents. They also support heterosexist beliefs of all students as they are justified in adopting a discourse that privileges heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships, thus promoting the continued marginalization and oppression of non-heterosexual identities and relationships.

4.4.3.2 Religiously Inspired Homophobia. While these heteronormative messages could be harmful against the well-being of gender and sexually diverse students, what is more concerning is how all of these resources reference the consequences of sexual sin, or acts which are contrary to sexual relations reserved for marriage between one man and one woman. The For the Strength of Youth (CJCLDS, 2001) booklet identifies the consequence of sexual sin to be heartache and misery (p. 4). The Book of Mormon Seminary Manual (CJCLDS, 2012) identifies sexual sin causes "suffering for ourselves and sometimes for others as well" (p. 62), withholding of blessings (p. 74), spiritual death (p. 77), captivity and death (p. 80), serious emotional and spiritual harm (p. 150), everlasting punishment, unique challenges, fire, never ending torment (p. 184), physical and spiritual pain (p. 221), judgment (p. 238), and suffering and regret (p. 323). The Book of Mormon Seminary Manual (CJCLDS, 2012) refers to a sexual sinner and a sexual

sin as an “awful monster” (p. 97), a “terrible disease” (p. 103), “whoredom” (p. 150), and “abomination” (p. 333). The Doctrines and Covenants Manual (CJCLDS, 2013) refers to sexual sinners as unclean (p. 18), an apostasy (p. 26), a whoremonger (p. 236), and someone who will remain in hell (p. 293). The For the Strength of Youth (CJCLDS, 2001) booklet informs young people that “in God’s sight, sexual sins are extremely serious” (p. 36). This document goes on to state the following:

> The prophet Alma taught that sexual sins are more serious than any other sin except murder or denying the Holy Ghost. Homosexual and lesbian behavior is a serious sin. If you find yourself struggling with same-gender attraction or you are being persuaded to participate in inappropriate behavior, seek counsel from your parents and bishop. They will help you. (CJCLDS, 2001, p. 36)

Similarly, the Book of Mormon Seminary Manual (CJCLDS, 2012) also iterates “in God’s eyes, sexual sins are very serious” (p. 150) and are an “abomination in the sight of the lord” (p. 333). Sexual immorality is “placed next to murder in seriousness” (CJCLDS, 2012, p. 333). The use of such descriptive language in relation to sexual sins is harmful as it promotes internalized and externalized homophobia for all individuals privy to these messages.

A number of lessons found within the seminary manuals encourage seminary instructors to take up the topic of sexual sin specifically with their class. The Old Testament Seminary Manual (CJCLDS, 2015) includes a lesson that speaks specifically about homosexuality as a sexual sin and engages the following discussion:

> How does the Lord view homosexual behavior? (As a very grievous sin. All violations of the law of chastity or sexual sin are very serious. Write the following truth on the board: **Homosexual behavior is a serious sin**). (CJCLDS, 2015, p. 103)

Also included in this same lesson is the following:

> Changes in civil law do not, indeed cannot, change the moral law that God has established. God expects us to uphold and keep his commandments regardless of divergent opinions or trends in society. His law of chastity is clear: sexual relations are only proper between a man and a woman who are legally and lawfully wedded as husband and wife. Just as those who promote same-sex marriage are entitled to civility, the same is true for those who oppose it. (CJCLDS, 2015, p. 103)

In another lesson in this same document, students are again reminded "any sexual relations outside the bond of marriage between a man and a woman, including homosexual behaviour, violates the Lord's law of chastity (CJCLDS, 2015, p. 192). The following class discussion is also included in this lesson:

> In what ways does homosexual behavior go against God's plan?
>
> Explain that those who experience same sex attraction can enjoy all the blessings of the gospel as they keep the covenants they have made with God. As they choose to live the law of chastity, they can have pure and virtuous thoughts and avoid lusting.
>
> Encourage students to set a goal to pray for those people who they know need Heavenly Father's help. (CJCLDS, 2015, p. 192)

Another lesson in the Old Testament Seminary Manual (CJCLDS, 2015) provided the following guidance to the instructor:

> Summarize Leviticus 17-18 by explaining the Lord commanded the people to avoid idolatrous practices, forbade marriage of close relatives, and identified homosexual behaviour and other sexual perversions as an abomination. God forbids homosexual behavior. (CJCLDS, 2015, p. 227)

The New Testament Seminary Manual (CJCLDS, 2016) includes similar lessons and messages. One lesson includes the following description:

> Explain that the phrases "change the natural use into that which is against nature" in verse 26 and "leaving the natural use of woman" in verse 27 refer to homosexual behavior. You may want to explain that from the beginning and consistently throughout the scriptures, the Lord has condemned violations of the law of chastity, including homosexual behavior…The church distinguishes between same-sex attraction and same-sex behavior. While maintaining that feelings and inclinations towards same sex are not inherently sinful, engaging in homosexual behavior is in conflict with the doctrinal principle, based on sacred scripture that marriage between a man and a woman is essential to the creators plan for the eternal destiny of His children. (CJCLDS, 2016, p. 358)

All of these lessons promote the beliefs that sexual diversity is a grave sin and individuals who are experiencing same-sex attraction are struggling and in need of repentance, prayer, help, and guidance. It is important to bear in mind these lessons are prepared for the seminary course that is taught as a sanctioned option course available to all high school students, is offered in the midst of a school day, and after receiving these lessons students return to the shared school space to resume their classes with their peers.

Beyond these clearly homophobic and heterosexist lessons and teachings, what is additionally problematic is that the LDS Seminary materials not only encourage young people to use the covenants and commandments to guide their own behaviours, but are also advised they must use them to make judgments of others. In the Book of Mormon Seminary Manual (CJCLDS, 2012), students are told the following:

> While it is true you should not condemn others or judge them unrighteously, you will need to make judgments of ideas, situations, or people throughout your life. The Lord has given many commandments that you cannot keep without making judgments. (CJCLDS, 2012, p. 429)

In the New Testament Seminary Manual (CJCLDS, 2016), students are told "if we choose to closely associate with those who embrace sin, we can be influenced by their wickedness" (p. 379). In the same lesson, instructors are asked to draw a picture on the board of a bowl of rotten fruit with one piece of fresh fruit in it. They are then asked to invite students to consider if they have ever wondered how to avoid sin when it is all around them (CJCLDS, 2016, p. 379). Not only does this send a clear message to the rotten fruit in this analogy, being the sinners or the sexual or gender diverse students, but it also normalizes the isolation of diverse students who may not ascribe to the same standards for behaviours and possibly encourages their ostracism and marginalization by their peers.

4.5 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the curriculum texts included in the discourse analysis portion of this research and demonstrated how each text maintains a dominant heteronormative bias as well as includes overtly homophobic and transphobic messages. While both the CALM and Health and Life Skills curriculum clearly articulate a necessity to include topics which promote the healthy development of a sense of self and relations with others, there are also clear obstacles for educators who believe in the importance of including topics pertaining to gender and sexual diversity. In contrast, the LDS Seminary manuals both overtly and covertly assert heterosexuality as the only legitimate sexual identity and expression. With the limited to no inclusion of gender or sexual diversity topics and issues within CALM and Health

and Life Skills 9 along with the permission given to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to include their seminary teaching as part of the high school curriculum, it is questionable how these influences interplay in the context of secondary schooling in conservative rural Southern Alberta. The subsequent chapters will discuss the outcome of narrative interviews with secondary students inquiring into their experiences of the lived curriculum of heteronormativity and unique encounters with religiously inspired homophobia and heterosexism within their schools.

CHAPTER 5: Meet the Participants

5.1 Falling in love with the participants

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that narrative inquirers must become fully involved in their study and must 'fall in love' with their participants (p. 81). This notion of love is not connected to a romantic form of love but rather an experience of deep caring about the participants. This becomes the foundation upon which a strong research relationship can be established and a space can be created that invites the sharing of personal and sometimes painful lived experiences. The incredible six youth that were interviewed for this study made it easy to develop a strong sense of care for them, along with an appreciation of their resiliency, their courage, and their insight that brought this topic and research question to life. As a narrative inquirer, I expected to be deeply embedded within the process. Polkinghorne (1988) declares meaning is not a thing or a substance, but is rather an activity that involves a relationship and a dialogue. I encountered the participants from Disch's (1994) notion of visiting, which involves constructing stories of an event from each of the plurality of perspectives that might have an interest in telling it (Disch, 1994). I brought to my encounters with participants and their stories my own personal experiences and my knowledge of the stories of others, all of which have and will continue to deeply impact me, including what I attended to in the research interview. I engaged in self-reflection while I was taken through the participants' stories, which were all very different from my own, and provided the "disorientation that is necessary to understand just how the world looks different to someone else" (Disch, 1994, p. 116). Biesta (2013) summarizes Disch's notion of visiting as not seeing through the eyes of someone else but rather seeing with my own eyes from a position that is not my own (Biesta, 2013, p. 115).

From a critical theory perspective, my role as narrative researcher was one of a collaborative partnership based on equality of power and esteem (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cohen et al., 2011; Josselson, 2013). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert the narrative researcher is in the middle of a nested set of stories, theirs and the participants. Josselson (2013) underscores it is extremely important for the researcher to understand their contribution to the process of the co-construction of experience that the interview transcript will come to represent. Clandinin and Conelly (2000) explain the interviewer must pay attention to content and process, as it is their role to determine what is explored and what is shut down. In this sense, the interviews became co-constructed as two subjectivities intertwine, theirs and mine. Josselson (2013) explains that it is also the researchers' job to be able to get out of the way as the participants are invited to share their stories, except to encourage elaboration and extension and always ensure the research relationship is strong and supportive.

The purpose of this chapter is to take the time to introduce the reader to each of these inspiring young people by providing a brief narrative of their story, how they came to their stance at the time of the interview, and the impressions each one of them left on me during and after our encounters. These re-storied narratives are meant to provide the reader with a snapshot into the inner working models of each of these students' current experiences at school to provide a context of how each student viewed their school climate and teachers and set the stage for the interview analysis chapters that will highlight the key themes which emerged across the 13 interviews. A description of the analysis employed in the creation of these narrative vignettes will be provided and will be followed with the personal experience narratives of each of the six participants.

5.2 Storying Stories

Stories are the way we understand and make sense of the world (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988). Experience happens narratively, which makes narrative inquiry a way of understanding experience, through collaboration, and actively listening to the stories that are told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Human life is comprised of stories and through narratives, people construct memories, organize time, and create identity (Josselson, 2015). Like other narrative research projects, this one is grounded in the idea that identity is organized narratively (Josselson, 2015). Through exploring the narratives of the participants engaged in this research, an opportunity unfolded to hear the voices of the youth who are often left out of the conversation and have a great deal of interesting things to say about what is actually going on in the spaces within schools. While three chapters of this dissertation are dedicated to the analysis of themes that emerged across participant interviews, this chapter is at the core of this project and offers a look into the unique experiences and inner working models of each of the six youth who participated in this study.

The participants' stories are introduced here using McCormack's (2004) storying stories. Storying stories is a process developed by McCormack (2004) as a response to the daunting task of dealing with vast field texts or transcripts collected from multiple interviews. McCormack's (2004) process of storying stories "both seeks personal experience stories and generates stories by composing stories about those experiences" (p. 220). This process was adopted for this research project as it aligned with the goal of exploring "individuals' understandings of their experience in the context of their everyday lives while simultaneously looking to the wider social/cultural resources on which people draw to help them make sense of their lives" (McCormack, 2004, p. 220). In relation to this study, I was curious about the inner experiences

of secondary students and how the context of heteronormativity impacted these experiences and the way they made sense of these encounters and themselves. Aligned with McCormack's (2004) method of analysis, full interview transcripts were transcribed and read multiple times through different lenses, such as active listening, language, contexts, and moments, to "highlight both the individuality and the complexity of a life" (McCormack, 2004, p. 219).

Storying stories involves a 2 stage process with 2 steps at each stage. Stage 1 involves constructing the interpretive story and includes: 1) composing the story's middle; and 2) completing the story by adding a beginning and ending. Stage 2 involved constructing a personal experience narrative through steps: 1) constructing the personal experience narrative; and 2) constructing an epilogue to close the narrative. Aligned with McCormack's approach, I initiated the process of storying stories by immersing myself back into each transcript through active listening of the interview recording and reading it once to remind myself of the interview. Then, going through it a second time, I highlighted critical moments and key aspects of each individual's experience relating to their own identity development and influences at school on their developing attitudes and beliefs about gender and sexual diversity and of themselves. Next, I began to construct the middle of their story by pulling out key stories and insights that were shared over the course of the interview(s) with the participants. For each key point, I wrote a short beginning and end to capture the important aspect of that story. After collecting these important moments or stories, I compiled them in a logical ordered sequence and then added the beginning of the story through reflecting on what moment stood out as a natural entry point into their inner working model. I then constructed an end by focusing on an important detail or moment that was shared in the interviews. These stories were created primarily through using verbatim quotations obtained during the interview and a process Kim (2016) discusses called

narrative smoothing, an integral method used by many narrative researchers to make participants' stories more coherent, engaging, and interesting to the reader and involves "brushing off the rough edges of disconnected raw data" (p. 192).

McCormack's (2004) model of storying stories involves placing an epilogue to close the narrative. However, this didn't feel like the right fit for this research project. It felt more authentic to have the participant's voice throughout the story and close the personal experience narrative with a moment that stood out during our interview. I chose to begin each of the personal experience narratives with an introduction that includes the notes from my reflections leading up to and after meeting each of the participants, what stood out about them, what surprised me, what I struggled with during and after the interview(s) was complete, and a quick description of the demographics of the participant. This process of creating and sharing the personal experience narratives is included in this dissertation so readers could have the opportunity to get to know the students in this study whose experiences and stories are not widely shared.

Polkinghorne (2007) points out that the narrative researchers' primary aim is not to discover the accuracy of the narrators' accounts of events but to understand the meaning they attach to those events. Thus, the criteria used to determine the value of claims made from qualitative data analysis requires different criteria than quantitative analysis. Mulholland and Wallace (2003) classify the criteria into 3 categories: 1) strength; 2) sharing; and 3) service. Strength refers to thoroughness and integrity, as evidenced through how the research was conducted. Sharing refers to how the research is presented and that it enables the reader to visit the world of the participant and become convinced of the study's claims. Service refers to the contributions of the study to the field. The personal experience narratives which make up the

duration of this chapter are considered to effectively meet these criterion. In terms of strength, substantial time was spent collecting the detailed experiences of each of the participants. Each participant was offered subsequent interviews and most of the participants engaged in two or more interviews. Additionally, substantial time was committed to transcribing the interviews and sharing the personal experience narratives back with the participants for member checking. The sharing component was fulfilled through the details provided in the personal experience narrative texts, which offers a window into their world through their own words and shared experiences. These narratives are recreated primarily with verbatim quotes to keep them as closely aligned to the participants' own words as possible. Lastly, the service criterion is met through the sharing of the stories of students, which is a rare occurrence given the difficult nature of accessing this population for research purposes and having six students with diverse gender and sexualities, from three different schools, two different divisions, and a variety of religious backgrounds—this combination offered many valuable insights to the field. Based on the satisfaction of Mulholland and Wallace's 2003) criterion, the narrative research texts that make up this chapter are considered legitimate analysis of this qualitative data. Moreover, it is important to reiterate that these narratives are invitational and exploratory and offered as an opportunity to better understand the experiences and impact of these experiences on the youth who participated in this study, (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) which can inform practical implications and transformations that promote more equitable and just school practices.

The personal experience narratives I created from the transcriptions of the multiple interviews with participants may not have focused on or included the details the participants themselves would have included. The decisions that I made around what aspects of the story should be told, highlighted, or included in this aspect of the analysis phase were made to keep in

line with the research questions and interview themes guiding this study. This was explained to the participants during the initial interview and again reiterated when we reviewed the personal experience narratives together. Each narrative interview was 50-80 minutes long, with some participants engaging in up to 3 interviews. Each transcribed document of the interviews was on average 20-25 pages of text, with up to 70 pages of text for one participant. This information was condensed to a 2.5 to 3-page narrative for each participant, with a half-page introduction where I provide my reactions leading up to and during the encounters with each student. This process resulted in a substantial amount of details being omitted. The process of deciding what would be included and what would be left out was undertaken through thorough and active reading and re-reading of the transcripts multiple times, highlighting key moments during the interviews that led to a deeper dialogue and exploration, and highlighting unique aspects of the conversation. For each participant, I re-read all of their transcripts, listened to portions of their interviews, and worked on their personal experience narrative to completion before initiating the next one. This kept the details and conversation fresh and focused on our interchange together.

In the personal experience narratives that follow, all identifying information has been removed or modified. Each of the participants selected their own pseudonym to replace their name and these are used in place of their real names. Participants' school, division, and town are not revealed to protect their confidentiality and privacy. Additionally, participants often named friends, teachers, or other school staff during our interviews together. These names are also changed to prevent identification of the participant by others who may read this dissertation. The remainder of this chapter presents the 6 participants' personal experience narratives and introductory reflections. Further analysis of the narrative interviews occurs in the following three

chapters where specific themes are developed and analyzed across the narrative accounts of all six participants.

5.3 Hunter

Hunter was the first research participant to contact me. Our first contact was over text and occurred within a few hours of her teachers' announcement of the study in her class. I would later discover this was the first and only time she had ever heard any teacher speak about gender and sexual diversity in school and hearing the advertisement for the study caught her attention. Our text conversation highlighted a strong social justice attitude well under way as she asked me if I was doing this study just to get information or if I was actually going to try to change things. Her maturity and advocacy immediately impressed me and I was excited to meet her. In our initial moments together, I quickly discovered a shared vision and passion in this insightful, fiery, young person who was acutely aware of the pressures of heteronormativity and forces of oppression operating at school. Hunter would be one of my most engaged participants, sharing three interviews, two at my request and one at her own, and spending more than three hours total discussing the topics of this study with me. At the onset of the first interview, Hunter indicated she did not identify as a gender or sexual minority herself; however, over the course of our three interviews, Hunter engaged in a great deal of self-discovery and exploration with friends and family members and, by our third interview, she identified herself as queer. It was exciting to get to witness and be a part of her dialogue, as she came to discover and better understand this aspect of herself.

Hunter is a Caucasian, Canadian born sixteen-year-old grade twelve student who identified in our first interview as a female. What was unique about Hunter was, unlike the other participants who had all grown-up hearing messages of inclusion and respect for diversity of all

kinds, Hunter had grown up as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints where she was socialized to believe certain forms of diversity, particularly related to gender and sexual deviance, were sinful and unacceptable. Hunter identified her entire family, both maternal and paternal, as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Meeting with Hunter was an exciting but also disheartening process as she confirmed many of the assumptions that I had brought into this study about the harm caused by living within an oppressive and non-affirming environment. Our time together flew by and I found her insights and interpretations of events fascinating and awe-inspiring that such wisdom could exist at such a young age.

5.3.1 Do I look happy to you? I always went to church as a kid up until I was like fourteen. I went to Seminary every day and to church every week. My family has been a part of *that* church for a long time, on both sides of my family, so pretty much I'm the first one to stop it, which is kind of a big deal. They would teach us that God made everyone differently and be nice to people because God made everyone differently; but then, if I was slightly different because I was a bit of a tom boy, as opposed to all the girls that had long pretty hair and always wore bright colors, I was seen as different and that was somehow bad and so I was treated differently. Even though we were taught to treat everyone the same and with respect, it just didn't make sense. I would listen to different music like hard core electronic music and not the uplifting soft music I was supposed to listen to and so I would get weird glances or looks like that's not good. I was always getting a judgmental look even though I wasn't even breaking any rules. About 2 years ago, I started to experience panic attacks at church because I felt like everyone hated me and I didn't belong. This really affected my self-esteem. It was dark at that time and I used to cut after I went to church because there really wasn't anything else that would

make me feel strong at that time. I think if I was still there I would still be doing that and creating even more body issues for myself to get over in the future.

I started to skip Seminary class or ask to go to the bathroom in class and then just walk home. It wasn't easy for me to do that but it was causing me pain and so I was willing to do whatever I had to do to stop feeling that pain. For a while my mom would force to me to go and I would ask her "why do you keep making me do this? You say you're doing this so that I'm happy but do I look happy to you?" Eventually my mom stopped making me go and then slowly my dad and my brother stopped going too. I think the panic attacks are what made me realize this wasn't an option anymore and obviously it wasn't right, so I needed to move on. I think fear stops a lot of people from doing the same thing; but for me, it was the fear of being in there that was so strong that it moved me out.

I still believe in God but I think, you know, people need to do what makes them really happy. I remember sitting in church and being so confused because we were being taught that God made everyone different so then it didn't make any sense to me why gender and sexual minorities like that would be offensive or wrong, just because they were made differently. I was always taught that homosexuality was a sin. It was a basic understanding, you know, if you kill someone that's a sin. It's the same basis, if you're gay that's a sin. I always felt that sucked because, I mean, murder is one thing because of course killing people is bad but in that religion it's like the same thing; being gay is bad. It was assumed in that church that nobody was gay because it was assumed that everyone knew it was an obvious thing that wasn't allowed. It just seemed so contradictory, going off everything they were telling me that God loves me no matter what, then why would being different matter so much? Anytime there was any show of

something different, somebody would say it's not normal and I think that's just because they are scared of change.

That pressure on girls to fit in isn't just at church though, it's here at school too. Girls are always being judged and if you don't fit in with what's normal and considered cool, then you're weird and ignored. Like if you wear leggings with your thong or a high waisted skirt so everyone can see your butt, then you're called a slut; but, if you don't wear that, then you're not pretty. It's all negative no matter what and it really sucks. I hear guys ranking girls a lot of the time based on what they are wearing and how they act and if a girl doesn't give the boys attention or just pushes them away, then she's called a bitch. Sports are really important at my school, but even when girls are playing sports like on the volleyball team, she might do a really great job and win for the team, but no one pays attention to that. All they pay attention to is the shorts she's wearing while she's playing. And if you're a girl that has short hair, doesn't wear make-up, wears a cap, wears clothes that are more boyish, than the boys don't know how to talk to you because you're not attractive to them so they don't treat you like anything and just ignore you. If by society's standards you're ugly than they'll ignore you. If by societies standards you're to boyish, they'll ignore you. If by society's standards you are kind of different, they'll ignore you. I think my school has a strong set of norms that are typically seen as: if you do this, than that's okay; you fit into this group. And, if you act like this, than you are put into this group and these are certain things that are okay. Because of that, minorities aren't seen as an option and when it does happen, it's just ignored.

I don't think school is challenging these stereotypes because I think teachers don't want to create a lot of extra conflict and just try to teach their subjects and the facts. Really, anything the teachers do, the students don't really care anyways because they don't respect the teachers to

begin with. The students don't listen to the teachers because they don't care about much. There's just really a lack of respect here and it really upsets me. For instance, shortly after you set up the posters, somebody posted on their Snapchat that they had tried to flush one of the posters down the toilet and snapped about it everywhere. This made me really mad because of how disrespectful it is. I see the same thing happening with the GSA posters too where they get ripped off the walls or defaced. I can't even imagine how people who identify under that community would feel. I wouldn't feel very welcomed. I don't even feel welcomed as a regular person. I think it's hard for schools too because the main influence on students is their parents, but I think that's the school's job—in contrast to the parents' job—is to present all of the ideas and perspectives and to have open places for kids to talk about things. School is where kids have to cooperate and be together so tightly, so it should be a place that kids can be comfortable no matter what gender or sexuality they ascribe to. Unfortunately, mostly the school only focuses on respecting teachers and the principal but not really teaching them to respect each other and everyone's perspective. I think it's the schools job to give facts and let students learn to think for themselves and to teach them, at the very least, be respectful of other opinions.

I think one thing schools need to give more facts about and talk more about is in sex-ed and not just how abstinence is 100% effective; they should stop saying that all together. I wish they would teach about the positives about sex too and how you should be careful, not only just don't have it ever but do it when you're ready and this is how to know when you are ready. I wish there was a different attitude or a different side that got talked about. Homosexuality needs to be talked about too and transgender because that would be really helpful, but I think that the reason it is taught the way it is right now is to stop kids from having sex. The only time I have ever even heard a teacher talk about gender and sexuality outside of heterosexual sex was when

my teacher read the advertisement for your study. I just wish there was more that schools were doing to help people who are questioning when they are young so that they won't struggle so much with it. Even just teaching students that there are different labels and different terms for things. For me now identifying as queer, it's nice to be able to describe all of the confusing and conflicting feelings in just one word. For me finding the word queer has made me feel a lot happier and I feel more sure of myself and more confident. I think understanding these differences better would help gender and sexual diverse people create healthier relationships in the future if they actually had the tools that they need in order to start relationships early on and practice being comfortable and confident.

I think back to when I was in the church and, if I was still there, I definitely would not have allowed myself to explore my sexuality and discover that I am queer. I wouldn't even know who my parents are as actual people. I would still be hiding and deleting everything and I would still be in pain and afraid. I'm really grateful that my parents supported me in that decision and that I've been allowed to discover more about myself.

5.4 Jayce

Jayce is a sixteen-year-old Caucasian grade eleven student who identified as transgender, female to male, and pansexual at the time of our interview. Jayce grew up in the same small town he lived in when we met and, this past year, he began the process of changing his pronouns at school and requesting to be called by a different name. Jayce was introduced to me through an email from his school counsellor, at his request, to have her contact me to set up our interview. I knew from the school counsellor that he was transgender and I began to formulate an opinion that he would have a lot to share about heterosexism and transphobia in his school. I later realized this expectation was unfair and stemmed from my own bias about what it would be like

to be transitioning as transgender in one of these rural schools. Encountering Jayce, I was anticipating discovering details about how he was able to be so brave in his small rural school to make this transition after knowing his peers and teachers for so many years. I was embarrassed in my reflections after our meeting to realize I never even considered the possibility that Jayce was going to share with me the most hope out of all the participants about the support that he felt resulting from his transition. Jayce was my second participant to interview and I was grateful for the interruption our dialogue had to my own assumptions and the reminder it gave me to stay attuned and aware of these biases, as they were emerging.

Upon meeting Jayce, he was a ray of sunshine who had a lot of positive things to say about how his school was trying to accommodate his requests and appeared quite sure of himself. I was surprised at what a positive experience Jayce was having with this transition at his school and his resolution to come out despite never having met another person who identified as transgender in person. Jayce's interview left me in awe of the importance of peer relationships and internet resources and with a realization that teachers may not be as influential as peers were in supporting the coming out process for some students.

While Jayce provided a predominantly positive narrative of his experiences at school, his non-verbals were inconsistent, at times, and made me question if he may be minimizing some of the emotional impact of this journey, which left me wondering why and if he was worried of my reaction or afraid to paint his school with any negativity. I reflected if this was my own transference based on my assumptions about what it would be like to come out as transgender in a small rural school or if he was working hard himself to maintain a narrative of acceptance and support, so he could continue with his transition. Unfortunately, he didn't show up for our scheduled second interview, as these would have been wonderful questions I would have liked to

explore further; but, his interview provided some amazing insight into some of the ways his teachers had supported his transition at school and made him feel like he could come out and identify with the gender of his choice.

5.4.1 You do you bud. You know my favorite quote that I say all of the time is "you do you bud", which means you can do what you want; I'm not here to judge you. It's all about you bud. I think everyone should be treated like people, no matter what. I'm really lucky because I grew up with a family that's always been a little bit more open or okay with people who are different. Growing up, I always thought that I was a boy. When I was little, I used to always say to my mom "hey, when is my penis going to grow in?" but it wasn't until last year that I really put the label transgender on it because it wasn't until then that I wanted it so bad. When I first started the process of coming out, I started by telling my friend that I love to wear boy's clothes and we were talking about different kinds of boxers and stuff and then it grew into 'oh I like this shirt' when I was shopping in the boy sections at the store. And then, I told her, like a week later, that I think I'm transgender. She responded great because she told me she kind of already knew that. Having my friend's support and acceptance has really helped a lot and made this whole transition easier for me.

At the start of this year, I decided to tell my school and ask for them to change my pronouns. I've been really happy since I made the decision to do this. I think the best way I can explain how I felt is: I was born a caterpillar and I didn't know whether I was a moth or a butterfly or what I wanted. I didn't know if I was a moth or if I was going to turn into a butterfly; but, between that was a cocoon and I just felt really safe in the cocoon and I knew that either way, while I was in my cocoon, I could be whoever I wanted to be—like by myself I felt safe. But, when I did finally decide to come out of the cocoon, it felt really good and I got to choose

whether I wanted to be a butterfly or a moth and I was able to choose to be a moth, which in my case means I could choose to be a boy. I don't think before I came out, true to myself, that I had felt finally free and not locked away by what I'm supposed to be.

When I first decided to tell my school, I wasn't sure how to go about it so I told a supportive teacher and she encouraged me to maybe talk to the principal or the office admin assistants to send out an email or something. So I went down to the office to see if they could do that and the principal saw me and asked if I was okay. There was a big line up at the office, so I asked if I could get into the office and see if I could send out an email about changing my pronouns and my name. I just said it straight out like that. So she said she could send a giant email out to the assistants and teachers if I would write down what I wanted her to say. I talked to the school counsellor and wrote down the conversation and just said I wanted them to know my pronouns and my name. Unfortunately, they couldn't change my name in the system because I need to bring in a changed birth certificate, but they were supportive in sending out the email. The teachers have been good so far and my school has been really supportive of my decision. Once in a while, a teacher will call me by my legal name, because my name is still in the system as my birth name, but most of the issues have been around pronouns. My one teacher accidentally called me madame because he sat down next to me when I was arguing with him about a math conversation. I told him I was going to stab him with my pen and, he did apologize, but said 'you gotta give me some slack though, it's like your second week into school'. It didn't really affect me all that much because he did apologize. I think that my teachers don't want to be creepy and ask me questions or stuff, but I did have one teacher talk to me after getting the email from the principal and clarify that I wanted to be called by different pronouns and name. I'm proud of them for how they are handling things. I do wish they would call me out more in class

because I think they say ‘you’ a lot or they forget who I am or they won’t call on me because they forget which pronoun to use. But overall, I’m proud of them for how they’ve handled it all.

I’m pretty open and I feel good that I have come out to my teachers and classes and stuff, but it still isn’t talked about at school. When we learn about sex-ed, it is still just about straight sex, heterosexual sex, and it’s just about condoms and contraceptives. I don’t know if it really affects me that much, but it is unfair that they don’t teach about all sexualities just in case somebody has a hint in the back of their brain that they might be gay. I do think they should be teaching all kids different kinds of keeping safe with different genders. I think it would work so much better if they could tell people it is okay if you want to be a girl or a boy, or if you want to like girls or boys. I think the younger kids are when they can get these messages, the more comfortable with their bodies they’ll grow up to be.

One thing that I have a bit of an issue with is the bathroom spaces. I don’t think anybody really talked about it personally after those guidelines came out, but they did open the handicapped bathroom for me to use. The main issue I have with it is that it is really far away from all of my classes and so I have to ask my teachers for an extra 5 minutes to go pee. I feel like they should have a handicapped or transgender bathroom on every floor. That would be a lot easier for me. At the beginning I was thinking I had to hold my pee until the class bell rings and our classes are 90 minutes long; but now, I do get permission to leave for a few minutes so I can go. That’s the toughest thing about that.

I would say my school is doing a good job to support me but it hasn’t all been completely easy for me. There were rumours and stuff that I was just doing this to get attention, but I know I just need to block that out and realize I am who I am, and I am special.

5.5 Elisabeth

Elisabeth is a grade 9 Caucasian student who identified as cisgender, female, and bisexual at the time of our interviews. Elisabeth sent me a very enthusiastic email after hearing about my study in her class and got in contact with me right away to see if she could participate. Elisabeth struck me as an incredibly insightful and respectful young person whose description of the day-to-day realities in school was incredibly intuitive but so forgiving. She had such a unique ability to forgive her peers for their biased and homophobic attitudes and behaviors because she had a deep understanding of systemic influences and parental forces that shaped the way they think and feel. Elisabeth filled the room with love and with compassion, as well as had many incredible ideas of how schools could be transformed to be more inclusive and safe.

Elisabeth attended preschool in the small rural town that she resided in at the time of this interview, but spent her first 4 elementary school years at a Catholic school in a nearby town and returned to her current school in grade 5. At the time of our first interview, Elisabeth had come out to her mom about her bisexuality and, in between our first and second interview, she came out to her dad, which she had assumed would be a neutral or positive experience, but was somewhat let down by his reaction and concern. I shared in her sadness and disappointment and had some concern that she may have shared this with him after feeling somewhat inspired discussing the topic in our last interview. Elisabeth did not identify openly at school as bisexual, as she felt it was really no one's concern, but did not fear the idea of coming out at some point if she found herself in a relationship that meant she would need to. I found myself softening through our dialogues together and being impacted by how caring and understanding she was towards the attitudes and behaviors of her teachers and peers.

Like most of the other participants, Elisabeth was raised to be open minded and respectful of diverse people and opinions, which was very evident in our interactions and she made so much space for everyone to be their own person and have their own voice. What struck me about her was how relatively unaffected she herself was with the day to day microaggressions she saw happening at school, but was significantly more impacted by the harm they did to her friends and those she feared for that were not open about their sexuality. Elisabeth was incredibly articulate and it was apparent she has always been encouraged to have a voice and to be confident that she had something worthwhile to say.

5.5.1 It's not their fault. Growing up, I wouldn't say anyone in my family is super liberal, but I don't think anyone generally cared about things like marriage equality because it didn't affect them. So I wasn't raised to think about topics like gender and sexual diversity from a hatred point of view, just more that it didn't concern me. My mom had a couple of friends who were gay and I met them when I was quite young and that opened me up to the idea. I've always thought that it's important to be nice and think about others, and so, I just grew up trying to have an open mind and understand other people's point of view. Even though I've always kind of thought about the idea of being diverse myself, I just recently admitted it in the past year. Even as a kid, I liked boys but I wasn't opposed to liking girls. I always had friend crushes and, when I look back now, I'm sure I would call it something different. But, at the time, I didn't look at it, I just said 'I'm not this, I'm straight, I'm straight like that pole'. It wasn't until I became friends with such accepting people that I was able to think: well ya, I'm not straight. Now, this is probably the happiest I've been just knowing that I can be myself. Even though we live in a really conservative area, we have a small group of friends that is like a community here that still make it safe to be ourselves.

Before I moved here, my family had me attending a Catholic school, even though we weren't Catholic; I think it was just close and they knew people there. Some of my friends were Catholic, so sometimes, I would go to Sunday school with them if I slept over on Saturday night. It wasn't my favourite thing but I was always respectful of it. I don't remember any specific times when I went to that school or to Sunday school that I ever heard anyone say 'don't be gay', but I did hear them talk about stories of counsellors who didn't say the nicest things about it or who said it was wrong. I wouldn't say I had any traumatizing experiences there, but definitely not a welcoming hug either and not a place to go and talk about this kind of stuff. We definitely didn't touch on any topics about being gay or stuff like that because the assumption was everyone was straight. Until I came here, it was the same standards and I didn't want to jump out of the water too much. Just coming here and getting to know different people allowed me to evolve more into my mindset. I think my friends have played a big part in who I've become. If I didn't come here or have them, I think I would not have accepted this part of myself and I would still be asserting that I am straight and just ignored the rest.

I think I go to a really accepting school but I don't think our school knows how to address the topic of gender and sexual diversity or how to even bring it up. There are a lot of very right wing people in this school who I find are super close minded. I try not to blame kids, at our age, who are homophobic because I understand a lot of it is from parents because you learn a lot from your parents. I'm not angry with them; I just feel kind of sad for them. I feel bad that they were raised so closed minded I guess. I do hear them use derogatory terms like 'faggot' and 'that's so gay' or 'you're gay' often, but unfortunately, it seems like people are becoming desensitized to it because it happens so much. Everyone just brushes the comments off. I think that's bad though because, when it's not addressed, I think it sends the message that it's okay. I don't necessarily

blame the teachers for it because some teachers just generally don't hear it. I do get the sense in the school that the teachers aren't against gender and sexual diversity, but they're also not the most informed on these topics and the stigma makes them not know how to bring it up. Even in classes where it could be brought up, like sex-ed class, it's still not talked about because I don't think they want to deal with the kids that are homophobic or close minded. I think it's an aspect of Health class that could be improved. Even if a question does get brought up, it's either ignored or answered in a whisper, and then quickly, the class moves on. As a teacher, I understand it may be easier just to teach about heterosexual sex and get through it and move on because, you know, it's only health, it's not a main course, so why try to bring anything you know difficult up?

I think there are even a lot of sexist messages too that happen that are so conditioned into the way we speak. For example, in gym class, if a group of certain guys is on one team everyone complains that it's stacked, but nobody looks at the more athletic girls, who are maybe even equal to them, and complains about their teams. The girls don't get appreciated even though they might be more capable of some things. I remember another time, when there were tables that needed to be lifted, and the teacher asked if some strong boys could come and lift this and a couple of the girls were like 'we could do it too'. I don't think the teachers or staff mean to be limiting, but it is so conditioned into what we say that we don't step back and realize how it's coming out. I think these messages limit girls to an extent.

I don't think teachers know how to open up their minds to talking about some of these topics. The other day I was in class and I was talking to my friend about what one of our peers said because I didn't understand it and she was correcting what he said because it didn't make any sense. The student heard her talking to me and they couldn't stand being corrected, so they turned and called her a 'fucking feminist'. When my teacher heard it, she said 'oh I hope I heard

that wrong' and then said 'yah she is a feminist' and continued on with the lecture. The teacher said it in a way to tell the student to watch his language but didn't address the negative notion of calling her a feminist. I found it weird to see that they didn't know how to handle the situation and so they just brushed it off and continued. I think a lot of it comes down to how teachers are trained to teach because, you know, you can only do what you're taught how to do. It's easier if they brush it off than to totally try to fix the problem. I think teachers need to be able to, not just bring up these controversial topics, but also teach students how to communicate and respect each other's viewpoints, instead of belittling someone who doesn't agree with you.

The way kids around here think is partly why I don't broadcast my sexuality to everyone. I have told my close friends, my school counsellor, my step sister, and my parents, but it's not like I'm keeping it a secret; it's just that not everyone needs to know right now and I'm not in a rush to tell everyone, especially in such a conservative environment. I only recently came out to my dad and I wouldn't say it was traumatic, but his reaction was weird. He became instantly panicked and a lot of distrust came up. I think his reaction was because of the stigma about being bisexual that it means you're a slut or that you get around and that was a big concern for him. After that conversation, I just left it. I feel like it would be more trouble than I need to worry about right now to bring it up anymore.

It's not something that really comes up at school because I keep it to myself. I did have one encounter when I was in the locker room and a peer said she wouldn't be comfortable changing in front of someone who was a lesbian or bisexual and this bothered me and made me think that people might start to look at me differently. I'm so fortunate though because I have people I can talk to about it and I can surround myself with loving and accepting people and I know that's not the case for a lot of people. I know some people are put through way worse and it breaks my

heart because I don't think it's fair. No one asks for that. No one was like 'I want people to hate me just because of this' or 'I want my parents to kick me out'. I wouldn't wish that pain on anybody and it is just so sad people have to go through that daily. It's like trying to take a really dark blue fabric and make it bright pink. It's not going to work that way; you might as well just accept everybody for who they are.

5.6 Rosie

It was 8pm in the evening on the day one of the sites for this study had advertised with the student population when I got the call from Rosie. She sounded nervous but excited about the study. I was immediately impressed that, of all the choices she had of methods to contact me, she chose a personal phone call rather than a text or an email. As I would come to discover, Rosie was mature far beyond her years and has a very strong sense of herself and her place in this world, as an advocate for change. Rosie was an amazing participant and took it upon herself, between our first and second interview, to collect artifacts and images from her school related to the topic. When we came together again, she showed me pictures of stickers and posters up around her school, articles that her social studies class was asked to engage in a dialogue about, and a newsletter from the school website that talked about transgender. Growing up with two teachers, as parents, Rosie had an incredible understanding of the forces operating within schools and the sometimes-oppressive position of teachers trying to operate within the demands and powers at play. Like the other participants, Rosie was raised to be very respectful of diversity and to ask questions and challenge the status quo as needed. In addition, Rosie's parents raised her to be very articulate, but to also think for herself, even when it goes against the grain.

One aspect of our time together that surprised me and challenged my own thinking and bias was her acceptance of gender role stereotypes and resistance to the idea that most gender

stereotypes were socialized. I reflected after our interview about this as it struck me in our discussion that she was so aware of the socialization around sexuality but not gender. In our second interview, I tried to explore this with her more but came to the conclusion that this was her stance, that most gender differences were innate, and it was not my place to question or challenge this. Yet, I was left wondering how much of this belief was socialized into her or if it was her response to fitting many of those stereotypes herself.

Rosie is a fifteen year old cisgender, female, Caucasian, grade 10 student. When asked to classify her sexuality, she chose other and defined herself as 'straight by default', which she described as straight until proven guilty. She wasn't willing to assign herself to a category, but at this time, felt she was straight but was open to the idea that this could change. This was one of the many moments in our two interviews together that Rosie made me smile with her ability to challenge labels and to think outside the box.

5.6.1 You can't talk about that here; it's a public school. I'm young and don't really know how I identify sexually because I haven't really dated, so for now, I'm straight, but that could change. My parents have always been in support of gender and sexually diverse individuals having all the same rights. I remember when I was little, like maybe 6 years old, my mom even told me that no matter what my sexual orientation is, she will love me no matter what. I just grew up thinking that it was a normal thing that some people had different sexualities or identified with different genders. My parents were always really open with me and my sister. I only remember ever hearing 'I'll tell you when you are older' come out of my mom's mouth one time in my whole life, because she would just tell us.

Even though I'm not really ready to completely define my sexuality, I have never really struggled with the whole gender role thing or heteronormativity because I think there are

biological differences between boys and girls and I've always been a super girl, like really feminine my whole life. My social teacher was talking about this the other day and he said gender roles could be an important part of who you are. He talked about having brothers and sisters and how his role, as the guy, was to look out for his sisters and take care of them and I think that's a good point that maybe gender roles aren't all evil. I think people just take that too far sometimes when they try to fight the whole innate gender role thing.

Last year, my school started its first GSA club and I joined the club as the only grade 9 student in it. We didn't have very many people in it and it was mostly student led and no one really knew what to do, so we didn't get to do too much, but we are having it again this year and so maybe it will be a bit better. Our teacher supervisor has almost no involvement. I think he wants it to be the students' group, so he just, mostly, sits at his desk and doesn't say anything. So even when we sit in silence and stare at each other, he doesn't say anything. I'm assuming he is kind of supportive because he does have a sticker on his door but I'm not sure. This year, we did get our group to organize a fundraiser for the GSA and that's been our first event. I had one friend who really wanted to go to the GSA meeting but she wouldn't go because she was afraid of being bullied. She thought people would tease her and pick on her and give her a hard time if she went. I told her that, if she's afraid of being bullied for someone thinking she is queer, then change needs to happen and she should come to the meeting, but she wouldn't. So I just had to go by myself.

I hear students say 'that's so gay' a lot and, sometimes, the teachers don't do anything. Kids say stupid things all the time, so they don't feel like fighting over it and would rather just get on with the class. It's almost become normal; it's just kind of what people say. I have one friend that talks about how she hears people say certain sexualities aren't real or its gross and she

hears people say really homophobic things and she just sits back and doesn't say anything, but wants to punch them in the face. I think, generally, my school has a lot of neutral people, but some people are definitely homophobic in a big way and I think we have a smaller queer community because it is the bible belt of Alberta, so a lot of people grew up in really religious households and it's just not part of their world. I think if they could talk more about it in school and help students not be so afraid of it, but then, maybe, I can't ask that because students probably would go home and tell their parents and the teacher would get into trouble. I like the idea of actually getting stuff done, like having conversations about the bathrooms or having protocols on what to do for students. I feel like even just giving a presentation or lecture wouldn't really address the issues because students don't always want to listen. I feel like even when teachers do bring up controversial topics, like evolution, they do it in a cautious way. My teacher in grade 7, when she taught evolution, told us 'you don't have to believe this. It's fine for you to believe whatever you want to'. Which I think is ridiculous because evolution isn't a theory anymore; it's a proven fact, and maybe, the facts butt heads with your religious beliefs, but I don't think it's the teachers job to say 'oh well I'm not going to say this or that' if it's a true fact.

There's some things I think my school is doing well to try to be supportive. Last year, some of the teachers put little stickers on some of the classroom doors that said 'I'm an ally' and some classrooms have safe space posters up as well. However, none of my teachers talk about it and I think, in general, a lot of the teachers are cautious and don't want to talk about it or let students talk about it because someone is going to go home and tell their parents about it and the teacher is going to get into trouble. I even have some teachers who outright tell students topics around homosexuality aren't allowed in their class. Part of me wants to be like 'that's not right',

but I know, from my parents being teachers, that it is hard for teachers to say stuff. I still feel like there's a bit of a problem there. I remember one time when I was in grade 8, we were doing an assignment in Social Studies where we were writing speeches to present to the United Nations and got to choose a human rights issue. I wanted to choose equal rights for queer people for my issue and my teacher told me I couldn't because it was a public school, but I thought that was dumb, so my teacher heard me out and let me go and talk to the principal about it and, eventually, he did let me do it. I knew my teacher wasn't telling me I couldn't choose that topic to be homophobic or anything, but it still made me upset that he said 'we are doing human rights issues but because it's a public school, you can't talk about homophobia'. I don't get the whole public school thing; they're allowed to talk about religion in public schools, but I can't give a presentation on homophobia? Just this year, my social studies teacher had us do an assignment on current events and they brought a bunch of articles for us to read and discuss. There were a lot on Islamophobia and two on gender and sexual diversity. Both of the articles they brought on gender and sexual diversity were pretty scathing and from the same viewpoint. My teacher does make a point of saying go and research for yourself and think for yourself, but then the only content he showed in class was a certain viewpoint and ideology that were not supportive of gender and sexual diversity. Even on the topic of Islamophobia, the articles my teacher picked were not supportive of Islam and he has told me, explicitly, that Judeo Christian society is responsible for pretty much all good things in the world.

I think the point of schools is to prepare you for your future and educate you on how to live life and be a good citizen. I think banning certain topics doesn't prepare you well for life and being a good person.

5.7 Nicole

Nicole contacted me by email a couple weeks after her class had the recruitment script read. Nicole was completely unconcerned with people finding out she was coming to participate in the study and committed to meeting with me after school so she wouldn't miss class, which demonstrated to me, right away, her commitment to this topic. Nicole really impacted me with how self-assured she was, despite having had some prejudiced encounters with peers. Like Hunter, Nicole also had to navigate religiosity and her sexuality, being raised Catholic and still identifying with her faith. I was really fascinated by her ability to navigate the contradictions in the doctrine of her church and maintaining a belief that she is loved by God. Nicole also really highlighted the profound impact of supportive parents and peers and the protective influence they had on the experience of distress from the microaggressions she too experienced at school.

Nicole is a fourteen year old, Caucasian, grade 9 student with a positive attitude and strongly connected to a community of peers of whom she is very protective of and feels a great deal of protection and support by. Nicole identified, at the time of our interview, as a cisgender, female and bisexual. Unlike the other participants, Nicole wasn't raised in Southern Alberta, but rather, moved to the area from a larger city in grade 6 where she attended a Catholic school. Nicole struck me as having this really genuine kindness that allowed her to recognize the good in her teachers, in her peers, and in her community, yet still being aware that there are many things that needed to be changed. Nicole participated in two interviews and our second interview really opened up some amazing dialogue about her vision of what schools need to do differently and how they are really letting students down by not addressing topics and issues pertaining to gender and sexual diversity.

Like most of the other participants, Nicole's family was very open and supportive when she came out to them and their response was really inspiring for parents who are unsure what their child needs from them in that moment. Their permission for her to be herself gave her the freedom to really explore who she was and she is already blooming into a strong advocate and leader for other gender and sexually diverse students. While Nicole's school doesn't have a GSA established yet, and she didn't think it would have a very big interest, I could see our dialogue got her really thinking about how to establish a more clear presence of support for LGBTQ+ students in her school. I left our interviews feeling like our encounter together had a positive impact on her as well and she was becoming curious about ways she could begin to make an impact on her school.

5.7.1 Just talk about it! I was raised Catholic and, before moving here, I always went to a Catholic school. It's not like my parents aren't understanding or didn't bring any of this up, but when you're in an environment where it's not talked about and it's frowned upon, then it's just never something you can explore. I did always feel different; I felt weird and I always used to think I was weird, but I didn't know what it was. I had the word bi put into my head from one of my friends when I was twelve, and I just kept thinking about it and it was really scary for a while because I didn't want to be something different. I had a friend, at that time, that explained to me what bi was and I thought it made so much sense, but it wasn't until I moved here that I really allowed myself to think about it and it felt like it fit. The first person I told was one of my friends and she was like 'yeah that makes sense'. After that, I started to tell some people for the wrong reasons. I told this one person because I liked them and they went and told someone else and this really freaked me out because I was scared that someone was going to tell my parents. I had already been thinking about telling my parents for a long time but I was really worried because

even though I knew they would still accept me, there was this worry still: what if they didn't? So one day, I was crying and sobbing and my dad came in and so I told him to go and get mom: I have to tell you something. And then I told them and it was kind of funny because when I told them they were waiting for me to say something awful. They said 'What? That's it? You're not sad about something? Oh that's fine, we get that'. And it hasn't been a big deal since.

Even though I identify as bisexual, I do still identify as Catholic. I had to stop thinking that the church and the religion were the same thing. Everybody interprets everything differently, and so, I just decided I'm going to take the parts that I like and I'm going to leave behind the parts that I don't and I'm still going to worship and I'm still going to be who I am. I know God loves me no matter what, no matter what I am, he says it.

Since coming to this school, I've built a really strong friendship group with about seven peers and five of us identify as queer. It feels really safe and a small community we have built here for ourselves. When I went to my other school I was pretty young, so it wasn't something that ever came up, but the school did feel supportive and the teachers felt supportive but I don't think I would've come out there. One time in grade 5, in sex-ed, I do remember my teacher got an anonymous question about gay sex in the question box and she outright said it was a sin. I think I would have waited until I had left and gone to a public school before I ever allowed myself to think about being different.

I've come out to a lot of people now and I think most of my class knows. I didn't go up and shout it in front of the class, but I don't hide it either. I try to treat it as a non-issue, as a non-deal, like it's nothing. There are some kids who will say mean or derogatory things, not even just about this, but are racist and homophobic and transphobic and all that kind of stuff, and it is a small portion of the school population, but it's very vocal about it. It doesn't bother me because

I'm very vocal too and will stand up to them, but I think it scares some people. I just don't want peers to feel alone so, I think, if I talk openly about it, then maybe they feel like they could talk openly about it. That's why my friends are so important though because it's nice to be in an environment with people who understand what you're talking about and support you in being yourself. I feel like having this group gives me room to grow and explore my identity, whereas if I didn't have them, I wouldn't even have acknowledged that I was bisexual and I would have been denying it still.

I very rarely hear gender and sexual diversity talked about at school. Maybe it has been mentioned twice. Once in social class, I had a teacher that was saying the LGBT community has the same rights as everyone, as they have always had, under the constitution. It bothered me though the way he said it because it sounded like they were saying that the LGBT community is almost complaining, like they've always had these rights. I do also hear kids say 'that's so gay' a lot and I don't really hear it get addressed by teachers, but teachers only hear so much. I feel like teachers avoid the topic because they bunch it in there with the whole religion thing, where it is separation of church and state, and oh, also because this is awkward and it intermingles with the other, so we aren't going to talk about it. I even read the sex-ed curriculum last year because I was curious if they were actually going to talk about it and it got me really angry because it wasn't in there. It really bothered me because this was a designated safe space in the classroom with everybody there. This should be where they address this issue. I think talking about it would make kids more open minded and a lot more comfortable coming out and being who they are. It would also probably make it a lot less okay to say things like' that's so gay' or 'you're a faggot'. In social class once, the teacher prefaced showing a picture of the Berlin wall with 2 guys kissing. The teacher told the class 'now I know this is gross but it was a protest and they weren't

actually gay, it was just a political statement'. I was upset about this and thought 'well even if it was, why do you need to say that?'

I think social class is another place it should be talked about. I feel like history books are filled with old white guys and old straight white guys and I feel like we could highlight a lot more queer people, people of colour, and women who have shaped all sorts of history because they were there too. Even in science, my teacher was talking about biological diversity and about genes that determine gender and he kept referring to it as gender and classifying gender as a finite thing, rather than describing it as biological sex. There was no discussion of intersex or transgender or gender fluid or anything besides boy and girl. The way teachers talk about these subjects just sends an unwelcoming message. Sometimes I wish I could just put a t-shirt on that says 'I'm bi' and walk around and tell kids to read the shirt and talk to me. I want to stop the comments about gay people and the word faggot and I also want to start a conversation in a positive way.

5.8 Dana

Dana got in contact with me by text after she heard her teacher read the advertisement for the study. Dana was very eager to participate and was incredibly engaged in the study, not only participating in two interviews, but requesting a short third interview near the end of the school year after experiencing verbal abuse by a peer. Dana identified in our first interview as transgender and her sexuality as pansexual. She is a Caucasian, Canadian born, fourteen year old who was born and raised in the same small southern Alberta town she still lived in when we met. Dana was inspirational in how open and upfront she was in discussing the topics of our interview because she had not begun her transition openly at school. While she had discussed her gender and sexuality with a close group of friends, most of her teachers and peers had no idea about her

identity, but she hoped to begin this transition before finishing high school. Dana's interviews were the most emotional of all the participants and I felt really grateful that she let me into her inner working model and experiences at school, as a transgender student, who has not been able to be open about her identity. She struck me as wanting to be very brave and develop a thick skin that wouldn't allow her peers to ever see they got to her, but underneath that in our dialogue and time together, it was apparent that aspects of school were really difficult for her.

What was incredible about the time I spent with Dana was watching her growth from our first interview in the fall to the second interview in the spring, as I saw increases in her hopefulness about the possibility of being able to begin her transition through connecting with medical professionals to discuss hormone therapy. Furthermore, I admired the strength of her assertion that she has a right to the same rights as everyone else in her school and she was not going to allow herself to be oppressed when she decided it was time to begin this transition. I think Dana has the opportunity to have a huge impact on her school, as a role model for other students who are afraid of the backlash from being open about their identity and expression, and for teachers, in her ability to articulate her needs and assert her rights.

5.8.1 It's not my belief; it's who I am. I wouldn't say my parents forced their beliefs on me, but they made it really clear why they believed in not discriminating and this shaped my beliefs to. I grew up with everyone in my family being really liberal and my mom really enforced, right from day one, women's rights and equality. I knew something was different about me from a young age probably around age 5. My earliest experience with being discriminated against for being different, in a sense, was at a birthday party when somebody came in my room and I had like Polly Pockets or something on my shelves and a kid came in and said 'oh my god, that's so weird, you like girl stuff'. It wasn't until last summer I began to identify as trans, and

pansexual was a bit before that. At first, my mom and I struggled talking about it because she just didn't understand, but now we are on the same page and I already went to a doctor and I'm waiting to go to a gender psychologist who can help with hormones. Other than my mom, I've only come out to my friends here at school, but most of the kids here just assume I'm gay; they don't know anything about me.

I don't want to do anything extreme until I don't have to deal with gym and the whole locker room situation anymore. I think I could deal with the whole bathroom thing, but I could not deal with the whole locker room thing. I absolutely hate gym class because, like as a trans person, I'm obviously insecure about my body already. Until I can 100% transition, and even then, sometimes, it's never like your body will feel exactly how you want it to be or how it should be. Gym class is just a space where my body is on display and I don't even have the freedom to dress the way that would make me feel most comfortable in my body. One of my pet peeves about gym that gets me so upset is when my teacher splits up the boys and girls. I literally die because, not only am I split from all of my friends, but he is just splitting up teams without even taking into consideration the possibility that someone in that class might not identify with the gender they were born into. It's like, you don't know what's in that person's pants, first of all, and you don't necessarily care what's in their heart or what they identify with because they think it doesn't have anything to do with it. I wish they could just take the extra thirty seconds and number us off because it is seriously one of the worst feelings ever. Until I don't have to deal with gym, I won't start the transition process, and even after I start, I don't want to tell anyone until I look the part because I don't think they'll take me seriously if nothing is going to change but my looks. I'm not going to feel any happier if I keep just being treated like a dude.

Kids seem to think it's fine to go around and say derogatory things like 'that's so gay' all the time and no one even cares and nothing gets done about it. I think, honestly, for someone to actually address this something serious would have to happen, like someone would have to get killed. I have been called a faggot twice and both times happened this school year—once in gym and once in class. In gym, it was because I wasn't able to catch a football or something. There was another time in class when I overheard some of the guys talking to me and one of them was like "oh what, is he a fucking drag queen?." I didn't tell the teachers or anyone about the incidents because then the kid would just say I was a snitch and I honestly don't think anything would be done about it except maybe they would be told they have to be tolerant of everyone's beliefs. That's how our school talks about it, like it's our beliefs, but it's not my belief; it's who I am. The one time I did bring a concern up about someone outing me as gay, I was told they can't do anything about it because there was no proof; so I feel like this is the same thing. Nothing would be done because it's just my word against his. More recently, I did have a kid call me a faggot in class and the teacher heard it and the kid actually got sent to the office and suspended. It did help me to know that the school was on my side, but I also don't think it will affect him because there wasn't any conversation or anything that addressed why that was so wrong to say. I think it would have helped if they had talked to the class and compared it to the 'N' word or something. Now I feel like I have to watch my every little movement when he does come back. Even though I was glad the way my school handled it, except for not really talking to the class about why that was such a big deal, it still reinforced that I'm never going to be accepted no matter what.

Our school didn't do anything to address the whole bathroom space thing either, but I think there's a bathroom in the sick room that kids are allowed to use, but I wouldn't want to use

that because then I'm singled out as someone who is the other. I feel like the bathroom issue really got thrown on a back burner because it's a new thing that not everyone accepts yet, but that's not how the race issue got solved and I don't think we're going to get anywhere by not taking it into consideration just because we don't understand it. It upsets me that everyone's like 'I'm not comfortable having a dude in the girl's locker room' or 'I'm not comfortable having a dude in the girl's bathroom', because they haven't even taken the opportunity to start learning about it or to even get the gist of what it is even about and they're making this snap decision about it because it's something new or something different. They think a man will take any chance they get to dominate a woman and women are just sex objects because a man can't be in a woman's private space without treating them like it's his property. So then, they think I'm just a creep for going in there. What really gets me is guys can go around and brag that they sleep with anything that moves and treat girls as sex objects, but then think it's not okay for a trans person to want to get into the girls bathroom. Best case scenario for me would be allowed to use the bathroom that I want, but I know that will never happen. I think this will be way less an issue once I've graduated high school because even if I do go into a women's washroom, as an adult and someone says something, I won't have to deal with the same people over and over again every day for eight hours a day, so it's not a constant stressor.

It also feels like everyone here takes freedom of religion over freedom of identity or stuff you can't change. So many kids here have been sheltered by these traditional ideals and think change is something bad. I get that people's religion is important to them, but so is my right to be who I am. Your religion isn't who you are as much as it may be a part of who you are; it's not all of who you are. This is the biggest part of my identity and that should take priority over whether or not you think there is a God.

No one is addressing it at school, which I think just leaves kids to think these uninformed opinions. Even in sex-ed, no one talks about anything other than pregnancy and abstinence and STIs. Last year, our teacher had an anonymous question box and I know more than one person put in a question to talk about gender and sexual diversity, and she never did. I think it goes back to the freedom of religion thing that you don't want to piss anyone off, so you just leave it. If a kid went home and told his parents that his teacher was shoving gay stuff down our throats, she would get in trouble. It's frustrating too because the school has no problem teaching us about religion, but yet, there's such a problem teaching us about LGBT stuff. It's not like I want to throw my gayness in your face; I just want you to accept me. Is that so hard?

For me, I feel like I already know everything there is to know about this topic. But, I feel like it's not doing anybody a service by leaving it to them to just figure it out for themselves, because none of them are educated on it; they all just think it's weird or it's dumb or that it's the whole gay agenda thing where it's being pushed down their throats or it's all about guys just trying to get into the girls bathroom to rape them. I think not teaching about it just closes their minds more because they don't teach it in schools. Schools need to teach this stuff from a really young age, so it would just be more okay to be different and for guys to not want to play sports or to like the color pink. I think if that was taught right from the beginning, I wouldn't be having this conversation with you because it would just always have been accepted.

Even though all of the stuff that goes on at school hasn't helped me or made it easier for me in my transition, it has at least made me be able to realize if I am going to do this, I have to do this on my own and I don't need anyone's support to be able to do it. I know that I won't have their support because they're not supportive now and they don't even know what I identify as. But, I know I have four or five good friends who will support me no matter what. It would be

totally nice to have that support, but it's not something I'm going to get, so I've had to accept it's not something that I need. It's kind of cool to think that I could maybe even educate some people at school; even though I think it's unlikely, it's a cool idea to think about. I think when I come out, it will be the first time this school has ever had to deal with it.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided an opportunity to give a glimpse into the inner working models of each of these unique participants and a snapshot into what day-to-day life in school is like for them. Five of the participants shared some narrative of a coming out story, be it to friends or family or everyone, and the reactions and support they have received that has allowed them to live with varying levels of authenticity at school. What ties all six participants together is an incredible sense that schools are not fulfilling their roles when it comes to supporting and creating inclusive learning environments for gender and sexually diverse students. All six participants had role models, primarily in their family of origin, to treat others with respect, kindness, and acceptance, which has fostered a sense of advocacy in them towards the ongoing oppression they experience, or witness their peers experience, regularly at school.

The following 3 chapters will now summarize three predominant themes that emerged across the 13 narrative interviews and amongst all 6 participants. The first theme explores the experience of the participants in the different spaces at school and includes exploration into the climate in the classroom, in the bathroom and locker-room, and in-between spaces. The subsequent chapter provides a discussion of the students' perspective of three primary influences on these spaces, namely parental influence, religion or religious rights, and a predominant discourse of heteronormativity. The final theme summarizes the observations the participants made about what is working well in their school and their perspectives of what needs to change

in order to make schools more inclusive, safe, and welcoming for gender and sexually diverse students.

In the following three chapters, many of the key quotes from the participants' narratives that were used to create the personal experience narratives are shared again to organize the collective voices of the participants into themes. The decision to use as many verbatim quotes as possible in the personal experience narratives, in an effort to maintain authenticity of participant voice, was validated through the process of member checking, with all of the participants sharing that they enjoyed and were moved by hearing their stories read back to them in their own words. Four of the participants became emotional when hearing their personal experience narratives and indicated pride in having their stories captured so authentically. Following the thematic exploration in the next three chapters, a summary and discussion of these themes and the implications of key findings will be provided in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 6: Climate within School Spaces

6.1 From personal experience narratives to thematic analysis

Kim (2016) uses the term *flirtation* when discussing the data analysis and interpretation of narrative research, which asks us to undo our commitment to what we already know and question its legitimacy. Kim (2016) asserts "flirting with ideas allows us to dwell on what is unconvincing, uncertain, perplexing, rendering surprises and serendipities, and of course disappointments as well" (p. 187). This process creates a space where our research can reach new possibilities and cultivate ideas for finding new stories. The data analysis of narrative research involves interpretation, which inevitably is the result of what the researcher chooses to attend to when reading and re-reading the narrative accounts. Thus, at every stage of the analysis, narrative research is always interpretive, as the narrative researcher is not separate from or outside of the text (Josselson, 2006 ; Kim, 2016).

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert, the process of moving from field text to research text is very complex, involving many hours of reading and re-reading field texts to construct chronicled or summarized accounts and begin to narratively code the field texts. They contend that questions of meaning and social significance ultimately shape field texts into research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through repeated questioning around meaning and significance, field texts transform to research texts, with negotiations from beginning to end (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this thesis, I have focused on how the forces of heteronormativity and religiosity influence the day-to-day realities and experiences of secondary students in public high schools in rural Southern Alberta. The narrative interviews were read and re-read through the lens of these forces. However, aligned with Kim's (2016) notion of flirtation, I returned to the transcripts multiple times during the data analysis stage, looking for new,

surprising, and unique findings that highlight moments of hope, insights, and opportunities for change.

Polkinghorne (1995) differentiates between two types of analysis of narrative data: one is narrative analysis and the other is analysis of narratives. Narrative analysis involves the configuration of data into a coherent whole, while sustaining the metaphoric richness of a story (Kim, 2016; Polkinghorne, 1995). Through the narrative analysis, stories are created by integrating events and happenings into a temporally organized whole with a thematic thread (Kim, 2016). This was the process engaged in Chapter 5 'Meet the Participants', as personal experience narratives were constructed from the narrative accounts of the participants across their interviews. Alternatively, analysis of narratives, also called the paradigmatic mode of analysis, attempts to fit individual details into a larger pattern (Kim, 2016). Through this analysis, common themes are discovered and organized under several categories using stories as data (Kim, 2016). Polkinghorne's (1995) conceptualization of the analysis of narratives are summarized by Kim (2016) as:

1) describing the categories of particular themes while paying attention to relationships among categories
2) uncovering commonalities that exist across multiple sources of data
3) producing general knowledge from a set of evidence found in a collection of stories.

Analysis of narrative was utilized to arrange the data around common themes across the collected stories (Kim, 2016; Polkinghorne, 1995). The remaining three data chapters; Chapter 6-8, employ analysis of narratives to weave together patterns, threads, tensions, and themes within and across the experiences shared by the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Both forms of narrative analysis were drawn upon for this dissertation, as they were both conceived of

having something valuable and unique to offer the reader and, in combination, provide a richer account of the individual and collective experiences of the research participants.

Due to the large quantity of data contained in the interview transcripts, the analysis of narratives was initiated early and frequently, engaging in what Miles and Huberman (1994) termed 'progressive refocusing', which allowed for continual and deeper investigation to be conducted, as new data was collected and considered in light of previously collected data. This was engaged through early transcription of the interviews and careful reading and re-reading of the interviews multiple times before the second interviews were conducted. During this first analysis, a number of themes were identified, which were then areas targeted for further follow-up in the second interviews. The same process was undertaken following the second interviews, with each interview being transcribed and considered in context of the previous interview with the same participant and the collective interviews across participants.

Bruner (1986) asserts that humans make meaning through storied text, which captures the human condition, intentionality, and vividness of human experience and lived realities. Narrative not only conveys information, but it brings it to life (Cohen et al., 2011). Keeping in line with narrative analysis, the three thematic analysis data chapters include a substantial amount of direct quotes in an effort to continue to capture and explore the themes through the experiences shared in the participants' stories. A number of verbatim quotes are incorporated in the thematic analysis chapters to add life and convey the point without being mediated or softened by academic language (Cohen et al., 2011). Through this process, the text and content are kept together, retaining the integrity of the participants, rather than fragmenting them into common themes or codes (Cohen et al., 2011).

The first step of the analysis occurred during the creation of the personal experience narratives for each participant. This involved highlighting interesting findings from each of the interviews and weaving together the stories shared in Chapter 5: "Meet the Participants." Upon completion of the personal experience narratives, the interview transcripts were uploaded to NVivo, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis program, for more ease of sorting and coding the substantial amount of interview data. Using NVivo, thematic categories were found and refined for instances of repetitions, recurrences, contradictions, and differences (Owen, 1984). Following the primary coding, secondary coding involved in re-reading of transcripts to further refine, combine, and elaborate upon the themes identified in the first phase of coding and organizing the results into subthemes. In keeping with constant comparison, encouraged in the process of thematic analysis, the relevant literature outlined in Chapter 2 informed the coding and analysis continuously throughout this analysis phase (Charmez, 2000).

Beyond general thematic categories, I was also interested in the unique findings and anomalies that emerged in the narratives and that went beyond the current literature relating to the topic. I aimed to stay away from seeking out direct causal relations and rather, aligned with Foucault's framework; I analyzed events as overdetermined, with a multiplicity of possible causes (Mills, 2003, p. 114). Rather than seeking out causal relationships, various influences on the experiences found in participant stories were considered as one force among many others that led to the narrated events and experiences (Mills, 2003).

All interviews were coded by assigning specific sections or quotes to particular nodes. From this initial analysis, eleven themes were identified as having substantial support across the narrative interviews. A second level analysis occurred within these 11 themes and sub-themes and regrouping of themes occurred, resulting in three primary themes with sub-themes:

1) The climate of school spaces

a. Classroom Spaces

b. Vulnerable Spaces

c. In-between Spaces

2) Forces at play

a. Parental Influences

b. Heteronormativity

c. Freedom of Religion

3) Future Direction

a. Moments of Hope

b. Words of Wisdom

The next three chapters each take up one of these themes, with this chapter beginning with an exploration of the climate of school spaces.

6.2 Overview

This chapter pulls together dialogue with each of the participants, as it relates to the overall school climate, as they experience it in their school spaces. Included in this chapter is exploration with participants into the various spaces in the school categorized as classroom spaces, bathroom and locker-room spaces, and the in-between spaces. Classroom spaces predominantly looks at teachers' involvement in the topic of gender and sexual diversity and how they address conversations around this topic, as well as the language of students. This space also looks at how sexual education addresses or omits conversations pertaining to diverse expressions of sexuality and gender and what students are or are not learning about sex and sexuality at school. The second main space that emerged within the context of overall school

climate was vulnerable spaces, which includes the gym, the locker-room and bathrooms. All of the participants provided a commentary on how their schools addressed the bathroom wars, which emerged from Alberta Education's release of the Guidelines for Best Practice: Creating learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions (Alberta Education, 2016), which required schools to provide safe access to washroom and change room facilities (Alberta Education, 2016). This topic was most relevant to the two participants who identified as transgender and the discussion in this section will highlight their experiences related to their school's commitment to adhere to these guidelines. The final space explored in this chapter is the in-between space, which explores the norms, both explicitly and implicitly, regulated around language of peers in the hallways or school yard, students' general stance towards the topic of gender and sexual diversity, and the impact of the internalization of these norms on the participants involved in this study.

6.3 Instructional Spaces

6.3.1 Keeping gender and sexual diversity in the closet. It was a unanimous observation from all the participants in the study that topics and issues pertaining to gender and sexual diversity are almost completely absent from classroom discussions. Four of the participants made the comment that the first time they had ever heard a teacher talk about this topic was when they had the advertisement for this study read in class. Elisabeth recalled her reaction to hearing about the study in class:

> There's never been a time other than when my teacher, you know, brought up the poster thing for this. I was kind of like 'oh what'? That really got my attention. I was like, this is odd. I even looked over at some of the more conservative people in my class and their

> looks were like, I could just see their face, and I was like really, they literally haven't even gotten into it and you're already dismissing it.

Hunter shared a similar reaction to the advertisement read in her class.

> Yah, I was paying attention to that because I was listening and I was like 'ya I feel like I want to do this'. And I was looking around and a lot of people just were looking at each other and laughing like 'come on, is our school really doing this' and stuff like that.

The reaction of Hunter and Elisabeth not only highlight how these topics are excluded entirely from the classroom, which caused such surprise for both participants to hear their teachers bring them up, but also the sense that they were quickly dismissed as unworthy or inappropriate, as observed by the reactions of their peers. The other four participants also noted the advertisement for the study caught them off guard because it was so rare to have heard this conversation come up in class. The routine avoidance and elimination of these topics supports students' stance that they don't belong in the classroom and by eradicating this topic from pertinent classroom discussion teachers contribute to this belief.

The perspectives of the participants demonstrated a belief that teachers were intentionally avoiding this topic for a variety of reasons, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The discussion around the avoidance of the topic mostly centered around the sex-ed portions of the Health and Life Skills courses and CALM, which all the participants identified as the most obvious places for these conversations to emerge. Nicole took it upon herself to read the Health and CALM curriculum out of a curiosity about why her teachers never taught about it, and was disappointed to find the planned curriculum void of this topic all together:

> Last year, I was looking up what they have to teach you in sex ed. Like I said, I'm a nerd okay. And it was like protection and abstinence and it got me really angry because I was

> like, they should have this included in here. This should be a part of this and it's not. And I was like, they should talk about it here because it is a designated safe space in class in full classroom setting with everybody there. This is where they address this issue. And they should also say that people can't be saying that's a sin or that's not right or that should be illegal.

The other five participants concurred that discussions in the sexual education portions of their classes were completely absent of any conversation around sexual or gender diversity, even though it seemed like an obvious space to include this topic. After clearly establishing gender and sexual diversity was not talked about in sexual education, I asked the participants what was talked about and all of the participants had a similar response, indicating sexual education solely addressed abstinence, how not to get pregnant, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Rosie made the observation that sexual education was taught from the assumption that it was heterosexual sex. Hunter discussed dismay that the sexual education curriculum she has been taught thus far in school has not even acknowledged that "sex can be a good thing" and shared the belief that the only reason schools taught about sex was to discourage kids from having it. When the participants talked about their general experiences related to their sexual education, there was a common sentiment that it was failing to equip students with information about readiness for sex, diversity in sexuality, and resources for finding out information about safe sex practices. The students all shared pregnancy prevention as being the primary focus of sexual education in their schools, which Elisabeth acknowledged was an important part of the conversation but reminded "sex is obviously not one thing." The way sex and sexuality are being taught in the schools in this study, however, is teaching that it is one thing, and this one thing is heterosexual, immoral, shameful, and harmful.

Beyond commenting on the intentional exclusion of the topic of gender and sexual diversity, some of the participants discussed times when there were clear opportunities to bring it up and it was avoided or quickly shut down. Dana talked about her Health and Life Skills course last year, taught by a teacher she believed was open minded and supportive of diversity, and her disappointment that she was not able to answer a question about gender and sexual diversity that was put in an anonymous question box:

> The teacher even did this thing last year where you could put in anonymous questions in this box. And I knew more than one person put in a question about gender or talk about sexuality and she like never did. I know the teacher wasn't against it but I feel like why? What is the issue answering those questions?

Dana's observation not only captures an instance of the null curriculum, with her teacher intentionally omitting the topic from the conversation, but it also sends a strong message to the student who posed the question or those who knew it was asked anonymously that gender and sexual diversity aren't legitimate topics or forms of sexuality and do not belong in classroom discussions around sexual education. Elisabeth shared a similar example of the anonymous question box in her Health class:

> In the past, you know, someone might ask a question anonymously like why are gay people gay? I think that came up once, but as you know, they might say there's certain things, but going into detail or explaining it or really shining light on it, it's not there. Like it gets brought up like a little whisper and then moving on and anyways.

For Elisabeth, she couldn't recall if the question was addressed, but observed if it does come up during sexual education, it's a topic that is uncomfortable for teachers, and so, if they don't ignore it altogether, it gets quietly mentioned and quickly moved on from. Bringing the topic up

in this guarded way does nothing to address the stigma associated with gender and sexual diversity and further fosters the belief that it is an uncomfortable topic and there is something inherently shameful in acknowledging it is even there. Jayce commented on his position on the exclusion of the topic in sexual education:

> We even had this conversation with my GSA class about how it is unfair that they don't teach you all sexualities. Just in case somebody has a hint in the back of their brain like 'oh I might be gay', like a hint of something.

Jayce's comment about the unfairness of excluding all diverse sexualities gets at the responsibilities of schools to create equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of race, religion, sexuality, and gender, as outlined in the School Act (Alberta Queen's Printer, 2012). Schools and educators are not fulfilling their responsibilities to gender and sexually diverse students when curriculum pertaining to human sexuality does not contain a place where their identity can be reflected to them as normal and natural.

Beyond the specific teaching of sexual education, the participants indicated gender and sexual diversity didn't find its way into conversations around relationships in general. Nicole talked about her observation of the language of her teacher that excluded gender and sexually diverse youth from important information about safety in relationships:

> The fact that they say 'one third of women are abused by their husbands or boyfriends' but it's like what about all these other things? There's a lot of other things that go along with that. A stat I learned a while ago that is somewhat terrifying is bi people are twice as likely to be abused, abuse alcohol, suicide, suicide attempts, depression. All these things are totally raised for groups of LGBT and trans people, bi people, and pan people; it's

> even so much higher than even just for lesbian and gay people. And it's not talked about. At least just talk about how queer people, in general, they're abused too.

Nicole's remarks touch on the unethical practice of excluding these topics from all conversations across the core health literacy courses of Health and Life Skills and CALM, as students are left uninformed and ill-equipped with the tools to have healthy relationships if their gender or sexuality happen to fall outside the heterosexual norm.

The avoidance of discussions and exploration into gender and sexual diversity was witnessed in other classrooms beyond Health and Life Skills and CALM as well. Other moments were captured in the interviews, which highlighted rigidity from teachers, as they interrupted teachable moments where students themselves tried to authentically bring in the topics of gender and sexual diversity into educational spaces. Rosie described an encounter in her drama class a couple of weeks before our first interview:

> A couple of weeks ago we were in drama and trying to come up with roles for the people on stage and we're like 'okay these people are father and son' and one boy said 'poncho's my husband' and we were like 'oh yah, okay' and the teacher was like 'no you're not allowed to portray gay relationships or homosexuality because someone might take it too far', and she said the things she didn't allow in her class were portraying drug abuse or substance abuse, gay relationships, or things that make people uncomfortable. She didn't allow those. She said someone might take it too far and it could get to a weird place. But it could get to a weird place with straight relationships and people; students are allowed to portray that on stage. Something interesting to note about that is she said no drug abuse and no things that make people uncomfortable, but then she kind of allowed it anyway.

> But I noticed the one time we were trying to figure out relationships for the people on stage, then she says no you can't, that's not allowed.

Not only does this example highlight teachers joining the discourse of homophobia, but the categorization of 'gay relationships' with substance abuse and things that make people uncomfortable; maintains that this topic and individuals, who identify as a gender and sexual minority, are offensive. Rosie shared another instance of blocking gender and sexual diversity from entering the classroom with a more positive outcome, a few years previously when her class was engaging in a human rights activity and she wanted to complete her assignment on marriage equality:

> When I was in grade 8, we were supposed to write speeches to present to the UN and I wanted to choose equal rights for queer people for my issue and my teacher said I couldn't because it was a public school and I was like 'that's dumb, that doesn't make any sense'…so he took me to the principal's office and I was like 'what are you talking about? The whole public school thing is ridiculous'. So I talked to him about it and he eventually let me do it.

While a much more supportive outcome and an inspiring example of youth activism, this story highlights the ongoing rigidity these students experienced with teachers continuing to try to eradicate gender and sexual diversity from their classrooms and lessons. By doing so, teachers protect classroom spaces from the possibility that controversy may emerge through students' reactions to the conversation; however, teachers are also supporting the hidden curriculum of heteronormativity and participating in the heterosexist discourse already common place in schools.

6.3.2 Harm of misinformed conversations. While all the participants shared the sentiment that they felt their teachers intentionally avoided the topic of gender and sexual diversity across Health and Life Skills, CALM, and all other courses, many of them shared examples of times it did come up in class, but in a misinformed or harmful manner. All of the examples participants gave of times this topic had come up in class, it was identified as supporting a discriminatory attitude or bias against this population. Nicole talked about an incident in her social studies classroom where she believed her teacher was trying to make a point about the rights of gender and sexual diversity, but the way it came across made her feel that the ongoing struggles of this group were being minimized:

> There was one time when they were talking about bullying and the teacher was talking to us about it, this kind of bugged me; he was like, the LGBT community has the same rights as everyone, as they always have, under the Constitution, and I was like 'you're joking right'? You're kidding me right now, right? I mean, they just passed the law that any school where kids wanted to have a gay straight alliance had to have a gay straight alliance. They had just passed that. It felt like they were almost saying like almost complaining about it. Like they've always had these rights, what are they talking about? I think that he meant they've always had these rights, but that's not how it came across. It came across kind of complaining about it.

While it is impossible to know the true goal and message her teacher was trying to send, Nicole's example sends an important message to educators about being intentional with how they approach the topic. Without important context or discussion, it can come across as further marginalizing or minimizing to the experiences of this group. Rosie also shared an instance in social class this school year where her teacher engaged the class in a discussion of current events

and brought in articles for the students to read and on which to provide a commentary and summary on. Rosie's teacher brought in several articles on Islamophobia, as well as two articles on gender and sexual diversity. While excited at first to see these articles included in the assignment, she was disappointed to find they both took a particular stance on the topic. The first article was from CBS News titled 'Should drag shows be used as a teacher tool in Alberta schools' (Huncar, November 2016). The article focused on two proposals from the Prism Toolkit for Safe and Caring Discussions (The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016), and featured the commentary of a mother, former teacher, and parents' rights activist who were opposed to the proposed lessons and content. The article also provided commentary by Andrea Berg, head of the Alberta Teachers' Association's Human Rights and Diversity Division, but the primary focus of the article was on the backlash over the toolkit by the critics who called for a more balanced resource for all views.

Moreover, the second article came from The National Post called 'Rex Murphy: Jordan Peterson – A real professor, at last' (Murphy, October 2016). This article covered the story of a University of Toronto professor who refused to use ersatz pronouns for students who identify as a gender minority. The article captures Murphy's dissent towards the University of Toronto's letters to Peterson regarding his refusal to adopt these pronouns and promotes Peterson's right to academic freedom and freedom of speech and paints Peterson as the victim in the whole debacle. Murphy calls Peterson "a brave man. Better, he is an actual, a real, university professor. May his stamina and courage hold. Parents, send your children to his classes" (Murphy, October 2016). Rosie's class assignment required students to select an article, provide the source, five key points from the article, and the significance of the article, including what could be learned from reading it and how it connects to what they have been learning in the course. Rosie expressed concern

with the one-sided nature of articles that were provided and the lack of any discussion and follow up to them:

> They were biased quite a lot. Both of them were actually pretty scathing. That was the same with the whole bunch of articles on Islam. They're all against it and there were just two articles on gender and sexual diversity, but they were both of the same viewpoint and were pretty scathing actually. My teacher particularly didn't maybe do a great job of showing different viewpoints in the class. He always made a point of saying 'oh go research for yourself' and I was like 'oh that's good', but then the only content he showed in class was a certain viewpoint. He showed us a bunch of videos from Prager University and they kind of have a common ideology for things. Oh and Rebel Media, which is quite a scathing organization and he showed us a lot of stuff from there too.

Rosie's recollection of her social studies project highlights the problematic nature of teachers' attempts to engage in discussions around gender and sexual diversity, but not providing curriculum grounded in anti-oppressive education. What was additionally problematic about this example was, as Rosie noted, none of the articles pertaining to gender and sexual diversity were debriefed, discussed, or contextualized in class, leaving students to take them at face value. In another example, Nicole recalled an instance when her science teacher's discussion of genetic diversity and his use of language came across in a way that was inconsiderate towards gender diverse students:

> Our teacher was talking about types of spectrums for genetics, where you can be tall or you can be short, and that's a spectrum. But one of them he kept referring to as gender and he kept referring to it, he kept saying your gender. It's your gender. And I kept sitting

> there like, I know you're the teacher and it's probably not what you want to think and it's probably not what you think, but in my opinion, gender is not a finite thing.

It is probably safe to assume Nicole's teacher meant no malice in the way he approached the topic of genetic diversity, as it pertained to biological sex; however, without consideration of the possibility students in her class were gender diverse or fluid, it was another instance of a microaggression where these students were left alienated. Nicole discussed another instance pertaining to the harm of teacher language use related to the topic:

> The social teacher showed a picture of the Berlin wall and there's two guys that are kissing and it was a big thing and the teacher prefaced it and said, 'now I know this is gross, and it was protested, but they weren't actually gay, it was just a political statement'. But even if it was, why do you need to say that? They're putting a trigger warning in front of it and I hate that word and I hate that phrase because it puts it in a negative connotation and I don't feel it is necessarily bad. They're saying that it is something that is offensive. That's basically what they're saying to people and it's like, by the way, this is going to happen, so don't freak out. And I'm like 'but they shouldn't freak out anyways'.

Nicole's recollection illustrates missed teachable moments where educators have an opportunity to interrupt the homophobic reactions of students and challenge the heteronormative discourse that encourages these reactions. Instead, the teacher joined in on the heterosexist beliefs and heteronormative discourse. Moreover, her social teacher's use of a 'trigger warning' serves to belittle the legitimacy of sexual diversity.

Another example shared by Rosie, which highlights educators' language demeaning the reality that gender and sexually diverse students continue to be marginalized is illustrated in the picture above. In our second interview, Rosie shared this picture (see above) of a safe space sticker that she discovered on the art classroom door that her teacher had written "so are heterosexuals! We respect everyone!!." The defacing of this sticker, which is meant to represent the support for an oppressed and marginalized group of students, adds to the justification that gender and sexual minority students do not need special protections or acknowledgements and, in turn, minimizes the ongoing reality that life in schools for them is unjust. All of these examples highlight that educators, across each of these schools, are predominantly and intentionally avoiding topics of gender and sexual diversity for the most part, but when they are engaging in them, it is in a haphazard manner, which appears to be further oppressive and marginalizing and, arguably, promotes discriminatory attitudes and beliefs towards diverse gender and sexual identities.

6.3.3 Normalization of name calling. Beyond failing to engage the topic of gender and sexual diversity in the curriculum in an anti-oppressive and informed manner, the participants also consistently highlighted their teachers failing to address derogatory and discriminatory

language within classroom spaces. Each of the participants highlighted that discriminatory language, such as ‘that’s so gay’, ‘fag’, and ‘faggot’, were commonplace at school and universally reported that their teachers did little to nothing to address this language. Dana commented:

> If someone says ‘that’s so gay’ right now, no one even cares. I know nothing gets done about it at least once a day.

There was a general sense that this language has become so commonplace that not only are their peers desensitized to its use, the teachers are as well. Elisabeth reported:

> As soon as you use gay, it’s like, well, turn the blind eye. Everyone just brushes it off.

Rosie concurred that teachers are dulled to the comments of students and don’t see it as a worthwhile fight:

> Sometimes they don’t do anything. Kids say stupid stuff all the time so they don’t feel like fighting over it and just get on with the class

The few times that the participants recalled the homophobic and transphobic language of their peers was addressed, it was done so in a minimal or generalized manner, drawing from a zero-tolerance discourse, and not addressing the underlying problem with the language itself. For instance, Dana discussed what she observes her teachers do in response to hearing ‘that’s so gay’ or other pejorative terms:

> They usually say ‘you can’t be a jerk to them’ but it’s not necessarily that you can’t be a jerk to them because of that, you just can’t be a jerk to them. It’s like you can’t be a jerk to anybody.

Similarly, Hunter pointed out it’s not really addressed when peers speak to peers in this way because the primary focus at school is just respecting teachers and principals:

> Mostly the focus at the school basically is just respecting teachers and principals. Like the principal. Not like a principle. When they do address it, they just say 'hey don't talk like that in my classroom' but it's not treated, as you know, it's kind of seen as a bad word to say but the reason behind it isn't addressed.

These statements illustrate teacher's failing to protect gender and sexually diverse students by standing up against the routine verbal abuse that is still commonplace in these schools. While teachers and their heterosexual peers may be desensitized to the language, research strongly supports that gender and sexually diverse students are not and this language is harmful to their well-being. Additionally, the lack of response to these slurs sends a message to those using them that they are permissible in the school environment. There was a feeling of hopelessness also shared with the idea of informing teachers when they have been victimized or when they heard this language, and some participants discussed feeling little to nothing would be done. In addition, by telling the teacher or principal, they would put themselves in a position to be further targeted. Reflecting on an incident earlier this school year when she was called a faggot in physical education class, Dana recounted her decision around keeping it to herself:

> I told my best friend. It was more just who cares; he is just an ignorant piece of garbage. I don't feel the need to tell my teachers about it because, honestly, that person would be like 'you're such a snitch anyways'. And I honestly don't think anything would be done about it except like you gotta be tolerant of everyone. Even like if someone yelled out the term 'fag' in class, I think the teacher would say like don't say that, but they wouldn't get sent to the office or something.

Dana also discussed the ways she has heard teachers addressing this in the past creates a further experience of oppression and possibly justify the minimization of the importance of gender and sexual diversity:

> They would probably say something like 'you've got to be tolerant of everyone else's beliefs and that's not my belief; it is who I am. The excuse I got when I brought something to them last time when someone outed me as gay, they said they can't do anything about it because we have no actual proof that it happened, so we can't technically do anything about it.

This outlook that either the language and abuse will not be addressed at all or that it would be framed in the context of respecting someone's belief, as opposed to their being, leaves students with little recourse when they are experiencing emotional, verbal, or physical harassment and leaves them further vulnerable, as their peers internalize the norm that this behavior is acceptable and commonplace.

In all the interviews with the participants, only one instance was shared of a teacher taking a homophobic or transphobic slur seriously. In our last interview, Dana discussed her teacher recently addressing her being called a faggot in class, but identified there was still a missed opportunity in addressing the underlying problem and not just the verbal assault:

> On Tuesday, I had this kid call me a faggot and I know it's only one incident, but it just got me thinking, I don't know, a lot of people don't know how much it can affect you. The teacher actually heard it and he got suspended. I think what the teacher did in the class was good like sending them to the office and stuff. I feel like I guess they should talk to the class about it, but I don't know if they would understand that it's any different

> than calling someone a piece of shit in class. Maybe they should compare it to the N-word or something.

While her experience captures a positive example of a teacher defending her right to safety and that this teacher took it seriously enough to send this student to the office and the principal took it seriously enough to reprimand the student with a suspension, a missing piece was the discussion with the class about why this was so serious and the systemic oppression contained in this word. As Dana remarked, this lack of a discussion left her peers not understanding that being called a 'fag' is different than other slurs and it's a deeply painful experience of which to be the victim of. The participants commentary of the routine ignoring of this hurtful language used in the classroom emphasizes a call to teachers to tune their ears and be more intentional about calling out the language of students and sending the message that such use is not acceptable either on the individual level but also at the systemic level by taking the time to challenge the hidden curriculum that normalizes this language.

6.3.4 Students' insights into teachers' eradication of gender and sexual diversity from their classrooms. While disheartening to hear, the participants' consistently recount feeling gender and sexual diversity was minimized, discounted, and absent entirely from their educational experiences; the most interesting aspect of the discussion was their beliefs as to why teachers were or were not addressing this topic, the language, and challenging the norms of the school. There were three primary reasons, identified by the participants, about their beliefs why teachers were avoiding this topic or failing to reprimand derogatory language. The first was out of fear. The second reason was being uneducated themselves and so ill equipped and ill prepared to bring up and address the topic. The third reason was they felt teachers were taking the easy

road out and choosing not to make things more difficult for themselves and/or believed it was a hopeless effort, so there wasn't any point.

6.3.4.1 Fear. A positive finding that came from many of the participants' narratives was how they spoke about their teachers and believed that many of them were allies. Dana and Elisabeth both felt it wasn't because their teachers didn't care or weren't supportive that they weren't talking about these topics. Dana identified a belief that most of her teachers were "not against it, but they just don't say anything." Elisabeth also shared her positive impressions of her teachers:

> The faculty here just don't seem like the kind of people who are, you know, against it. I know some teachers are very trusting and you can just get a sense when people are more open minded than others. I think a lot of teachers have grown up to try to be accepting of everything; I mean they're teachers right.

Jayce and Nicole also had a positive experience of their teachers and shared a sentiment that they are caring and safe to talk to. Jayce indicated he felt his teachers were "really supportive and are somebody you can talk to." Nicole shared the same feeling that she felt her teachers were "very supportive." Yet, despite feeling their teachers were supportive individuals and having the best intentions to create safe learning environments, a number of the participants also had a keen awareness of the pressures facing teachers that interfered with their intentions. Many of the participants articulated that teachers were part of a complex system, which places constraints on them as individuals in what they taught and how they conducted themselves in their classroom. Several of the participants discussed this system and, the pressures to conform to the norm of the surrounding community, instilled a sense of fear in teachers about straying from what the planned curriculum stipulates they teach or from what they believe the majority of parents want

them to teach. The primary fear identified as regulating teachers' behavior was a fear of parents. Several participants commented on the possibility that teachers could get into trouble from parents or from administration if they approached the topic. Dana shared her perspective on the issue:

> I think there's kids in the class who would go home and be like Ms. G was shoving gay stuff down our throats in class and she would get into trouble or something. I think the parents would find some way to pin it on the teachers and like, it's your fault and you're at fault for this one.

Rosie shared a similar belief, which she identified she understood first hand having grown up with both of her parents being teachers, that there was a real risk in students complaining to their parents and the teacher ending up in trouble:

> I think they don't want to talk about it or let students talk about it because someone is going to go home and tell their parents about it and then the teacher is going to get in trouble. I don't think I've ever encountered any teachers that are explicitly homophobic, but there are a lot that could possibly be in support, but they don't want to get into trouble, so they don't say anything. Probably people would say 'oh you shouldn't allow this in class' and if they did she would be blamed.

Hunter also discussed her belief her teachers didn't talk about it because they feared it would cause unnecessary conflict:

> There's not a lot of things teachers won't talk about unless you go to talk to them about it. Because they are a teacher and because they want to like, you know, create an environment where they won't cause extra conflict.

The other three participants also shared this belief that their teachers were fearful that they would get into trouble if they brought these topics up in class. Across all the interviews, only one example was shared of a teacher addressing a topic pertaining to gender or sexual diversity directly. Hunter talked about one of her teachers being courageous enough to talk about intersex in the context of genetics in her science class, despite this awareness of the possible backlash:

> I think he knows the repercussions that he might create for himself, but he is very strong on the fact that I'm going to teach these facts and, no matter who likes or dislikes these facts, I'm going to teach them regardless.

This consensus amongst the participants, that their teachers allow their classrooms to be policed by the fear of backlash from students and parents, highlights a problem with the level of support and backing teachers may feel they have from their administration or senior administration in addressing these topics and issues. It is understandable that teachers would avoid these topics if they believed it could offend some parents and, more importantly, if a parent did express discontent, they would not be supported at a senior leadership level in their decision. What is hopeful is that none of the participants expressed a belief that their teachers were avoiding these topics out of their own biased or discriminatory views, but rather were fearful of the repercussions stemming from the beliefs of parents or students that opposed their own. However, it still raises some issues about how educators are failing to teach students to have difficult conversations and consider controversial topics in an informed and democratic way.

6.3.4.2 Uneducated educators. The second main reason students believed their teachers were not able to engage in discussions or appropriately address the language around gender and sexual diversity is that they lacked education and training themselves in how to address this. Elisabeth articulated this belief concisely:

> It's weird to see them not know how to handle it in a way and just brush it off and continue. I think a lot of it goes back to how teachers are trained to teach because, you know, you can only do what you're taught how to do. If you don't know how to do something, obviously you don't know how to do it. So, I guess if teachers aren't taught to address these issues, then, you know, especially if it's controversial, you have to be careful what you say because you can be in deep water.

She also discussed her belief that even if they were informed on how to discuss it, they may not have any guidance of where it belongs:

> I think it's just the stigma, they don't know how to bring it up. They're not informed about it; they don't know how to bring it up in conversation. I mean, for someone, where do you bring it up? I don't think they would know where to bring it in to not seem like such a sore thumb, like in the middle of math class.

Nicole also discussed, after reading the sex-ed sections of the Health and Life Skills curriculum, that teachers aren't expected to teach it and, not only did teachers not have any guidance of how to talk about it, but it also gave them permission to eliminate the topic entirely. Elisabeth shared a similar observation:

> If it's not in the curriculum and because they work so hard everywhere else, if it's not in the curriculum why teach it? You have to work on other things.

Elisabeth and Nicole's commentary mirror the findings from the discourse analysis of the planned curriculum of Health and Life Skills and CALM that it is not explicitly explained how, when, and where this topic should be included within the curriculum. Without this kind of guidance from curriculum documents and not having direct training in how to discuss topics of gender and sexuality in their teacher training programs, teachers are ill-equipped themselves to

equip students with appropriate education on the topic. Dana also identified an awareness that teachers lacked training in this area and that they were not kept up to date on the changes happening in schools and this left them ill prepared to address the changes being called upon them from Bill 10 or the Alberta Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions (Alberta Learning, 2016):

> They don't say anything out of not caring. They just don't know how. It would be great if, when they passed the bill, if every teacher had to go to a workshop or something that would have educated them on it.

These students demonstrated a keen awareness that those adults entrusted with their education of important topics, like sexuality and identity, were not trained themselves or equipped with tools to do it well or even attempt to address the topic at all. Without proper training and preparation, this left the topic of gender and sexual diversity too intimidating or uncertain to invite into their classrooms, which is evidenced in the reality that it is almost entirely absent.

6.3.4.3 Easier not to. Connected to the other two reasons why teachers were not engaging in these topics, facing possible repercussions and without proper education themselves, it was discussed that it was easier for teachers to maintain the status quo and eliminate unnecessary stress and tension in the classroom or for themselves. One reason provided by Dana was that teachers may feel there is no point in putting the effort into addressing it because the students are not going to change:

> Either they don't care or they don't think it's worth it to shut them up once because they're going to do it again when they're not looking. I feel like that is such a big issue that, no matter how much the teacher tells you to stop or how much they get someone to

> come in and have a big presentation to talk about it, it never stops. There is nothing they can do to stop it.

Hunter shared a similar feeling that students weren't going to respond to it anyways so teachers knew it is not worth the effort to open up a possible controversial area:

> You know it becomes a fight between those students and that teacher and it just makes everything more difficult. I just think that students in this generation are not smart enough or will not take the time; they do not care enough to sit there and hear an opinion or make intelligent thoughts on it. I really don't think this population can do that.

Along similar lines, Elisabeth shared her thoughts on why teachers weren't addressing the topic in class:

> I'm going to be honest, as a teacher, what's easier? Just using the typical Jennie and Tom or you know the more controversial one? Especially if you just want to teach the class or just want to get it done. It's near the end of the day. As a teacher, and I understand as a teacher it may be easier just to, you know, think it's only health. It's not a main course, so why try to bring anything, you know, difficult up I guess. I get that. It's a long day, you know, I do understand. It's not the easier choice, but it's also damaging to an extent when it's not being talked about. So, it's just thinking about well this is easier, but what is more beneficial?

Elisabeth's observation about teachers not taking the Health and Life Skills curriculum seriously contradicts the program plans of this course, which identifies it as the core health literacy course for Kindergarten through Grade 9. It is possible that this course is not being taken as seriously by students because teachers are playing it safe and sticking with content that is neutral, not

controversial, as opposed to challenging students to think about themselves and others in new and more socially just ways.

The comments of Dana, Hunter, and Elisabeth illustrate these students have a general fondness of their teachers and are sympathetic to their teachers' inabilities or hesitations to bring up these topics. However, they also clearly exposed that, while their teachers could escape repercussions and uncomfortable moments in the classroom, this practice of avoidance had serious consequences for gender and sexually diverse students, as well as the general student population.

6.3.5 Impact on gender and sexual diverse students. All the participants discussed how disappointing it was to not have their teachers address homophobic and transphobic language or discuss topics pertaining to gender and sexual diversity and how this continued to foster an experience of exclusion. They discussed the impact of this practice and how it fed into the current discourse of exclusivity of this topic and individual students who identified as a diverse gender or sexuality. Elisabeth reflected on what message it sends to students when it's not talked about or the language isn't addressed:

> I think it sends the message that it's okay. I mean the students don't get into trouble. It's just really unfortunate that it's not talked about because it does a million more times harm than it does good. It just gets deeper and deeper into our thoughts and if that person isn't corrected ever, they grow up thinking the same stuff and they have children and it goes on and on and it's never fixed. It may not be magnified, but it's not fixed either; it's still there. It's like the elephant in the room that no one knows how to address.

Hunter shared a similar belief about the impact of ignoring or avoiding this topic:

> I think it kind of keeps it as a not normal thing. I think it keeps it as different and out of the norm, like something that isn't important enough to talk about. And that's why it's kind of seen as, you know, anything that is different is bad, at first, so I think that is why so many people who don't talk about it regularly enough see it as a bad thing because they haven't been exposed to it.

Hunter and Elisabeth's remarks get at the systemic reinforcement of heteronormativity that results from the common practice of eluding this topic and the reality that, if left uninterrupted, generations to come will continue to have these conversations and experience the same oppressions as is commonplace now.

The participants who identified as a gender or sexual minority also explored the emotional and psychological impact of these exclusory practices on their well-being and experience of safety and support at school. Dana was the participant who had encountered the most homophobic and transphobic harassment out of the participants and, to help her educators understand the impact, she discussed what this did to her:

> When kids say something, like 'that's so gay' or 'you're a faggit or stuff like that, it's a lot more than just a joke. I don't want to be the kind of person saying you can't have free speech, but it's more than that. I also don't want to have to be one of those people saying 'it's free speech, gosh get over it'. You have to do something about it because it's so much more than a joke. That really impacts someone like a lot more than even just making them sad for a day. It's just so much and I don't feel like they know that. They just don't understand that. It makes you feel like you can't be yourself and like school isn't a safe environment and they're always like school is a place for learning, but it's

> like, well, then make school a place for learning. Don't let that shit fly. What are you doing?

I asked Dana to elaborate on what she meant that it made school difficult to learn and her response was:

> Because it's such a distractor. Not in the sense that it's just a little annoying thing, it just ruins everything. It's all you can focus on. And not feeling safe in the class, how do you learn when you feel like that? They do all this stuff like 'oh we're going to do this reading comprehension test' or 'we're going to do this and do that because we want to make sure you're really learning', or 'we're introducing a new way of math that's more hands-on and helps you learn' and it's like, as crappy as the old ways of doing things were, they would've been good enough if I could actually focus on learning at school.

Dana's exploration into the impact of not having a space in the curriculum that reflected her identity and not feeling protected from the routine microaggressions from her peers highlights the disparity between her school and her educators' practices and their obligations to create safe and inclusive spaces that are conducive to learning for all students. Nicole also reflected on the impact of a couple of students who she came out to that threw it back in her face and stopped being her friend. However, Nicole described herself as being very open and vocal about her identity and identified that, because of this, most of her peers don't say things to her face. The impact of the lack of response and discussion from teachers came out in Nicole's dialogue more as a concern for her fellow gender and sexually diverse peers, who were not able to be as open as she was and are experiencing the same heteronormative discussions and instruction as her:

> It scares me a little bit because there are kids in the classroom that are queer that might be closeted or aren't closeted but don't have the resources to search out things like search

> out statistics and studies and stuff about that kind of stuff. They don't know that abuse can happen in queer relationships and it happens just as much. If not more. And they won't know the resources to go to when it does happen and that, to me, is dangerous. It's neglectful.

For Elisabeth, she indicated she feels really safe at school in general, but when it comes to this one area, she feels her school is not doing all they could and, by avoiding the topic, her teachers are sending a powerful message to gender and sexually diverse youth about their place at school:

> In most areas it's welcoming, but in that area, it's kind of just dark and put in the corner, like we don't know how to deal with this, so cover it up. We don't know how to talk about it, so we are just going to turn the lights off and throw it in the storage room kind of thing.

The participants created a clear picture that the exclusion of gender and sexual diversity topics and issues minimized the very identity of gender and sexually diverse students and interrupted, not only their ability to feel safe at school, but their ability to even learn.

6.4 Vulnerable Spaces

Beyond the classroom, two other spaces were identified consistently by the participants as vulnerable spaces, where students experienced a lack of support and safety resulting from inconsideration of the rights and needs of gender and sexual minority students. The first vulnerable space that was discussed by a number of the participants was the gymnasium/physical education class and the locker-room space. The second vulnerable space highlighted, as an uncomfortable and unwelcoming environment, was the bathroom.

6.4.1 Physical Education and the Locker Room. Dana was the participant who spoke the most about the discomfort she experienced from having to take physical education and using

the boys' locker room to change for class. This was the primary barrier she identified in her ability to transition from male to female and feel safe doing so:

> I don't want to do something totally extreme until I don't have to deal with gym anymore. The whole locker room situation, like I can handle the bathroom thing, but I don't think I could deal with the whole locker room thing.

While Dana was able to cope with the locker room now because she still outwardly identified as a male at school, she discussed feeling unsafe in this vulnerable space in general and changes in a stall and quickly gets out of there. The locker room was identified as a place where the guys could talk unsupervised and this conversation tended to be racist, derogatory, and disrespectful. Elisabeth also recounted a vulnerable experience in the girls' locker room where a group of peers could talk openly and unsupervised about their assumptions about sexual diversity:

> There was one time in particular when I was in the locker room and this one girl said 'I don't know if I would be comfortable changing in front of someone who was a lesbian or bisexual'. This wasn't like a struggling point to make me scared to come out, but it definitely brought out a different point of view where I was like 'oh how many people would consider that'?

It would be an unreasonable expectation that these spaces could be supervised always and these conversations interrupted amongst peers. However, considering no alternative dialogue on the topic is being provided at school and there is little to no overt reprimand to discriminatory beliefs and language expressed towards gender and sexual diverse individuals, students are free to share these feelings and beliefs unchallenged and unfiltered in these already vulnerable spaces.

Outside of the locker room, the gymnasium and physical education class was identified by 4 of the participants as an uncomfortable or unsafe space. For Hunter, her school placed high

emphasis on sports and physical education class was a place for judgment of worth, value, and how interesting you were based on your athletic abilities. Elisabeth also made a note that students in her school take physical education very seriously and act like it's "the Olympics", breeding intense competition and seriousness that make it a less comfortable space. Nicole also commented on the chaotic nature of the physical education environment that made it one of the two most uncomfortable spaces in the school for her. Dana talked about the vulnerable nature of physical education class specifically in the context of being transgender, as being a time when her body was on display and how this felt:

> As a trans person, you're obviously insecure about your body. Like, as satisfied as you could be about your weight or all that kind of thing, until you like 100% transition, and even then sometimes not, it's never what you feel it should be or what you want it to be. You were born into the wrong body, so I feel like that's just on display in gym when you're running around and stuff. And then there is the girls who… are running around in spandex shorts up to their cervix and it's not that that's what I want, but it's like I want to be able to have the freedom to do that.

Beyond the unavoidable discomfort from the fast paced, intense, loud, and competitive environment of physical education class, Dana also discussed a specific practice in physical education that made this class particularly challenging for her to navigate:

> One thing that gets me so raging is when the teacher splits up the class by boys and girls. It's like literally I die. Like what is that accomplishing?...First of all, it's separating me from my friends, which I really wouldn't have that big of a problem with if he was splitting the teams up fairly, but because he is just splitting up the teams by something that is just so... They are assuming that someone is a guy because they have short hair or

> because they have a strong jaw line or because they don't have boobs or because they've got a dick or whatever. It's like you don't know what's in that person's pants first of all.

As Dana and I explored this practice, I responded by saying it sounded like the teacher is concerned more with what is in their pants than what is in their heart, to which Dana replied:

> I think it goes deeper than that because they don't necessarily care what's in your heart or what you identify as because they think that it doesn't have anything to do with it. It's hard because you don't want to be like going against what's easiest just for everyone else because there's a chance that someone in that class might not feel the gender that they were assigned. But I just feel like, are you that lazy that you can't just take it into consideration. Number people off. Because that is seriously one of the worst feelings ever.

It was emotional for Dana to share the distress of the times she has been marginalized this way and her sharing this example highlights the many microaggressions encountered by gender and sexually diverse students daily through common and routine practices at school. This practice of numbering students off by gender is an example of gender-segregated activities that the Alberta Guidelines for Best Practice: Creating learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions (Alberta Education, 2016) recommended be minimized or eliminated entirely. The guidelines note that, by reducing gender segregated activities, "this increases opportunities to respect students' full expression of who they are and allows them to play, learn, dress, present, and express themselves in flexible and diverse ways that are congruent to their gender identity or sexual expression" (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 7). By taking such an arbitrary determiner to select teams, students lose the right to participate in

physical education in a manner that is congruent with their gender identity. The guidelines specifically state:

> Schools work to reduce or eliminate the practice of segregating students by gender as much as possible. For example, they avoid structuring courses or activities based on gender-specific roles such as "boys" versus "girls" in academic, athletic, or talent competitions. (Alberta Education, 2016, p.7)

Dana's narrative of her experiences in physical education highlights small and simple steps teachers can take out of consideration of the possibility someone in their class may be diverse in their gender or sexuality. By just taking a moment to consider that possibility, a difficult and vulnerable time in a students' day can be made bearable. The participants' narrative around the vulnerable space of physical education and the locker room also calls for further dialogue about how to make these spaces, and this required course, more amenable to the needs of gender and sexually diverse students.

6.4.2 Bathroom Wars. One of the questions posed to each of the participants in their first interview was to discuss their observations of their schools' response to the Alberta Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions (Alberta Education, 2016), which mandated for schools to provide students with safe access to washroom and change-room facilities. All six participants indicated there was no communication at all within their classes, with the student body, parents, or surrounding community to their knowledge, about what spaces were going to be made available to students who were gender or sexually diverse. Here are what a couple of participants had to say when asked how their school addressed this aspect of the guidelines:

> It flew over everyone's head. Nobody brought it up. Nobody talked about it. Me and my friends talked about it. But it never came up even in like a big group discussion in class (Nicole, 2016).

Rosie shared a similar sentiment:

> I don't think there has been any change since then in school. I didn't hear anyone in the school talk about it.

Dana echoed Rosie and Nicole:

> Literally nothing changed.

Elisabeth recounted a similar experience but also shared why she felt nothing was addressed:

> No, I don't think they talked about it. I mean, they should have, I mean obviously talked about it. I think they probably, honestly, just assumed no one was so then they were like we don't need that.

When I asked them what they would do if they needed to access a safe bathroom space, four of them had no idea what they would do. Dana and Jayce, both of whom identified as transgender, did know what space would be delegated as a neutral space for them to use and had a very different reaction to the spaces their school had available. Jayce's school didn't specifically address the topic but, with his transition, he asked and the school opened the handicapped bathroom for his use. He shared his feelings about his school's accommodation:

> They opened a transgendered and handicapped bathroom from the handicapped bathroom. The only issue I have with it is it is in the grade 8 part of the school, and well, all of my classes are on the 4th floor and I have to ask the teachers for 5 extra minutes to go pee. I feel like they should have a handicap or transgender bathroom on every floor. It

> would be a lot easier for me. Like at the beginning of it I was thinking I had to hold my pee until the class bell rings.

For Dana, she was not in need of an alternative bathroom space at the times of our interviews, but she had a different reaction to the space she believed had been opened up for students requiring an individual bathroom space:

> I think there is a bathroom in the sickroom you can use, but even then, I wouldn't want to use it because then it's like I'm being singled out as someone who is the other. I don't want to go into the sick person's bathroom. Why would I be any different than anyone else who uses their bathroom?

Upon further reflection, when I returned for our second interview, I asked Dana to elaborate on her resistance to using the designated neutral bathroom, she said:

> It's like because, one, I'm not neutral. And two, I'm not sick. So what's the issue here?

The fact that four of the six participants had no idea how they would obtain safe access to a washroom or change room and the other two participants had never heard any dialogue around the bathroom spaces highlights their schools' failure to fulfill the recent guidelines from Alberta Education which stipulate:

> Students with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions have a right to accommodation when it comes to use of washroom and change room facilities that are congruent with their gender identity…Although creating separate spaces may sometimes be necessary, emphasis should be on creating safe and inclusive spaces. (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 9)

Specific indicators that were neglected included:

1. Strategies are in place to ensure that clear behavior expectations are communicated to and understood by students, staff, and volunteers and that washrooms and change-rooms are adequately supervised.
2. Schools provide a non-gendered, single-stall washroom for use by any student who desires increased privacy, regardless of reason. This washroom is in an easily accessible location within the school.
3. The use of a non-gendered, single-stall washroom is a matter of choice for students, staff, volunteers, or visiting family, and not a compulsory requirement.
4. When possible, schools have more than one non-gendered washroom for use by all members of the school community.

Beyond failure to fulfill the above best practice indicators, the allocation of the 'sick' and 'handicapped' bathrooms for transgender students sends a powerful message about the stance of the school towards them. While Jayce was content with this accommodation, Dana did not feel this was much of an accommodation at all and indicated she was aware this would need to be a larger dialogue with her principal and teachers when she was ready to begin her transition that she had the right to use the girls' bathroom.

Through witnessing media and public response and outcry to the mandate of schools to create safe and welcoming bathroom and locker room spaces, Dana also picked up on the assumptions within her school and her peers' uninterrupted language around her right to use the washroom she chose:

> It's like I'm not comfortable having a dude in the girl's locker room or I'm not comfortable having a dude in the girls' bathroom. It's like you haven't even taken the opportunity to even start learning about it or even get the gist of what it is even and

> you're already making this snap decision about it because it's something new and something different and you can't interpret it because you've been sheltered by these ideals that tradition is the way to go and change is something bad and like that a man will take the chance to dominate a woman every chance he gets and like women are sex objects because a man can't be in a woman's private space without treating them like it's his property. It's because I'm a creep going in there to creep on girls and the assumption is that I'm gay. And even then, it's like why are you going in there? That's not yours.

When asked if she had any experiences that supported her assumption of how her peers would perceive her desire to use the girls' washroom, she shared the following account:

> There is this one instance on the wildlife camping trip last year and this chick used the guys bathroom because there was a huge lineup to the girls one and, as soon as she went in, he said "see this is what is going to happen if trans people get rights."

This example highlights that students are talking about these issues and bringing in biased or discriminatory beliefs on the topic without any acknowledgement from the school, leaving them with only one side of the argument and uninformed on the topic and the human rights implications contained in the dialogue. The collective discussion of the participants relating to the washroom wars demonstrates, at least within their schools, the guidelines were inadequately followed and students who require a safe and welcoming space to change or use the washroom remain vulnerable and at risk to the emotional consequences and physical repercussions of having to use the washroom of their ascribed gender.

6.5 In Between Spaces

Beyond the classroom and the vulnerable spaces discussed above, the other consistent variable that had a dramatic impact on the participants in this study was the language and norms

of their peer groups. While the limited to absent response of teachers to discriminatory language was discussed previously, this section primarily focuses on the participants experiences related to their interactions with peers beyond the classroom and explores their perceptions of how supportive their school is in general, which is heavily influenced by the ways their peers talk about and treat students who are diverse.

6.5.1 Language. As was discussed in the section on teachers' responsiveness to the routine microaggressions of homophobic and transphobic insults, there was a general consensus that, not only are teachers desensitized when it comes to homophobic and transphobic language, their peers are as well. Elisabeth, Hunter, Jayce, Nicole, and Rosie all expressed the open use of the phrase 'that's so gay' in the following:

> I think it's definitely desensitized to where it's not used more often; it's just used with less precaution.

Hunter shared a similar response:

> A lot of the guys sit in front of me and if something happens it's just the stereotypical 'oh that's so gay'. It kind of bugs me, but I don't know, I just hear it way too much.

Jayce also felt the language had become commonplace:

> Oh gosh the word faggot is just around everywhere.

Similarly, Nicole found a desensitization to the language and also the negative connotations associated with these derogatory slurs:

> I hear gay tossed around a fair bit when someone is doing something and they're like 'oh that's so gay'. That's so gay like you do something or you mess up and you're like 'you're so gay'. You're not good at a sport or you're stupid. You're so dumb. You're so gay. You're so bad.

Rosie also reflected on her frustration with the free use of these slurs:

> I hear 'that's so gay' a lot of the time. That makes me mad. One of the girls in my class last year, someone put on a song and she was like 'that song is so gay' and I was like, there is no sexual orientation ties to the song. Get over it.

The participants described the language of their peers as often disrespectful and inconsiderate of the feelings and impact on others. Dana discussed her experience that her peers cared more about making a joke than the feelings of one another:

> Kids are just really ignorant about some stuff and a joke is more important to them than someone's overall happiness and feeling safe where they have to go every day of their lives.

Elisabeth shared in this feeling as she indicated the jokes that come up frequently with her peers are "so inappropriate." Left unaddressed, these student narratives support the idea that their peers enjoy discipline free use of prejudiced terms that maintain the status quo that leaves gender and sexually minority students the butt end of the joke and routinely under attack.

As highlighted previously, Dana reported several encounters of being called a 'fag', 'faggot, 'gay', and a drag queen. She discussed finding the boys at her school didn't know how to treat her because she is different, so they just assumed she is gay and make flippant and disrespectful comments. When asked how she feels when they categorize her as gay, she responded with:

> It's better than nothing. Actually, it's not better than nothing. I would like you to treat me like a person and not the gay kid.

Dana's response highlights the experience of being 'othered' by peers based on identifying as a diverse gender or sexuality. Most of the participants discussed a belief that the majority of the

student population at their school was quite conservative, and so, gender and sexual diversity did not fit in with the norms of the student body. This perspective and the possible backlash from peers was identified as a limiting factor on being able to be open about their identities, participating in classroom discussions, or joining a GSA. Elisabeth discussed her perspective on some of her peers:

> I think just knowing certain kids in my class are not super open minded, I would even go so far as to say some of them are homophobic because that's basically what they are, so I mean I think anybody who, I think even myself, I don't know that I would want to bring anything up because it's just trouble to deal with.

Nicole discussed hearing kids talk in very conservative ways outside of class about the legitimacy of being sexually diverse and she perceives this conservative stance is held by many of her peers:

> I heard outside of school that being gay should be illegal. They should make it illegal. I don't want to say there's lots of homophobic kids but there are. It feels like there's a lot of homophobic and transphobic kids.

Rosie also discussed hearing negative comments towards gender and sexually diverse peers:

> People say that certain sexualities aren't real or it's gross.

All six participants identified the language of their peers left a tone that the majority of the student population was conservative and not supportive of gender and sexual diversity, and in turn, not supportive of them. Left unchallenged, peers continued to share their harmful and prejudiced opinions about non-normative gender and sexual identities in the classroom and beyond. Outside of the classroom, this left gender and sexual minority students policing

themselves in an effort to fit in and avoid unnecessary attention and backlash as the result of being different.

6.5.2 General Tone of Disrespect. The experience of disrespect shared by the participants moved beyond terms like ‘that’s so gay’ or ‘fag’ and into the actions of what the participants witnessed around their school. Hunter discussed one particular example that occurred shortly after the initiation of this study:

> The one thing that really made me upset that I saw really quickly after you had set all the posters and stuff. Somebody had posted on their Snapchat that they had taken one of the pieces of paper that had all of your information on it and they put it in the toilet and tried to flush it. Somebody else saw it in the toilet and took a picture and snapped about it everywhere. And people would like jokingly just talk about it. I can’t even imagine how the people in our school who are part of that community feel. If I were a person who identified under that community, then, I wouldn’t feel like welcomed.

Hunter recounted other times in her school where she had seen similar disrespectful behaviors, including times the GSA had put up posters to advertise meetings and these would be ripped down or someone would bring a marker and draw on them, which then made them be taken down because they were inappropriate. These instances represent a justification felt by, at least, some of the student population to eradicate the school space from any efforts to disrupt the heteronormative landscape.

Dana, Hunter, and Rosie all expressed the idea that kids are really stuck in their beliefs and it would take something profound to change their attitudes. Dana felt violence would be the only way for the attitudes of her peers to actually shift:

> For the kids’ perspective to change, a group of people would have to go and beat a gay

> kid or a trans kid to death. For people to really be like whoa, we fucked up.

This is an alarming impression that Dana gets from the way her peers treat her and the overall tone of the school. Hunter felt even with large presentations, the students' attitudes were so rigid it would do little to disrupt their way of thinking:

> This school, if there was an assembly, not a lot of people would show up or people would just show up and laugh and make jokes and they would bully specifically the people that either stand up to talk or are known to be involved with it.

Rosie shared a similar feeling that more needs to be done and students are so set in thinking about this topic as something to joke about that small attempts would be ineffective:

> You can put posters up on gender awareness and diversity and you can have presentations all you want, but I don't know if that stuff is really all that effective. It's just something else for people to poke fun at.

Hunter, Rosie, and Dana's comments get at how rooted the heterosexist attitudes and beliefs of their peers are and the efforts of educators to bring in a one-time presentation or talk would do nothing to uproot them. They all affirmed more significant efforts were needed to begin to challenge the strong beliefs they perceived were held by their peers.

6.5.3 Not safe to be different. A number of participants commented on the more general feeling that being different in any way wasn't a safe or viable option at their school. It was acknowledged by 5 of the participants that, specifically being gender or sexually diverse, was not an acceptable option if they wanted to fit in and avoid ridicule by their peers at school. The participants also highlighted the felt norm of conformity that existed within their peers. Hunter expressed:

> Yeah basically if any group does anything out of the blue or that gets into the media that

> is relatively negative, then they're like, oh well, they all must be bad. I think this school in particular has certain set norms that are typically seen as if you do this that's okay, you fit into that group, and if you do this than you're put into that group, and you know there are certain things you are okay to be, so it's okay if you change, but only to one of these other certain things. You know and minorities like that aren't seen as an option and when it does happen, because it doesn't happen very often, but when it does happen it's just kind of ignored.

Hunter and Rosie also talked about the risk of being a visible gender or sexual minority through involvement in their schools' GSA. For Hunter, she talked about the necessity of the GSA to stay contained to their meeting room because it would be unsafe for them to engage in more advocacy or activist types of activities:

> I think especially considering this school and this town, it's I think best that they stay where they are right now because it would almost be more endangering to what they already have to further publicize themselves. It could be more damaging than it would be helpful.

Rosie recalled her experience of starting to attend the GSA last year and a conversation with a friend of hers who had wanted to attend, but wouldn't out of fear or backlash from her peers:

> I asked my friend Jamie to go with me but she wouldn't go because she was afraid of being bullied. She thought that people would tease her and pick on her and give her a hard time if she went. Yah, because if you go into the GSA room then you're obviously like a lesbian right and everyone will think that about you and you are going to be bullied.

These experiences capture a shared sentiment that being an outward gender or sexual minority is either not an option or possibly harmful. They also illustrate, beyond the classroom, peers' work to maintain the status quo and heteronormative model through the ways they talk about and act towards gender and sexual minority peers and symbols representing support for gender and sexual diversity.

6.6 Summary

This chapter explored the first main theme drawn from the narrative interviews, which highlighted the experience of the participants in the various spaces at school and how these experiences influenced their well-being and perceptions of their schools' safety and support. This chapter also explored some of the problematic school practices identified through the narratives and placed them in light of Alberta's Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientation, gender identities, and gender expressions (Alberta Education, 2016) and in light of the School Act (Alberta Queens Printer, 2012), and illuminated some of the capacities which schools continue to fall short of their mandate to create safe and inclusive school environments for all students. As demonstrated by the many aspects of the school culture explored in this chapter, which was identified as having an impact on the unique experiences of each participant, there are many forces at play that affect teacher practices and school culture. The following chapter will explore the systemic forces, which emerged across narratives that are perceived by students to have a strong influence on the day to day practices within these schools.

CHAPTER 7: Structural Forces at Play

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter broke down the school into the various spaces and explored the narratives of the participants regarding the discourse of heterosexism and the routine-evading, exclusion, and desensitization towards addressing this issue and the needs of gender and sexually diverse students within each of these areas. This chapter considers the narrative accounts of the participants as it relates to three primary influences on the norms and practices that were discussed in Chapter six. The first of these influences or forces that will be discussed is parental influences over a student's ability to be open minded and accepting of gender and sexual diversity and of themselves. The second force considered here is how heteronormativity is experienced in the context of school and how its influence impacts the perception and acceptance of diversity in general. The third and final force considered here is religion or religious freedom and religious beliefs.

7.2 Parents

It was not entirely surprising that all 6 of the participants, at the time of their interviews, perceived their parents as loving, supportive, and accepting of their identities, given that parental consent was required to participate in the study. Certainly, parental support played a role in the participant's ability to partake and engage in the narrative interviews to discuss these topics. For four of the participants, it was this acceptance and support of gender and sexual diversity, in general, that allowed them to enter adolescence with an open mind and open heart to the possibility they may not fit within the heteronormative box. When asked what they believed should be the rights of individuals who identify as a gender or sexual diverse, each of the participants indicated, in their own way, their belief was for equal rights regardless of gender or

sexual orientation. When asked what has influenced this opinion, five of the six participants identified the open mindedness of, at least, one parent or both parents, which influenced their ability to be open minded themselves from a young age. Dana discussed her support for diversity initially starting with her mother socializing her to be committed to women's rights and equality. She recalled:

> I don't want to say my parents forced their beliefs on me, but they made it really clear why their beliefs were the right ones and I kind of picked up on it. I remember my mom from day one being especially like sex equality like women's rights and she enforced that from day one and I'm 100% supportive of that.

Elisabeth's family took a more neutral position and taught Elisabeth not to be concerned or discriminatory towards things that don't affect her:

> I don't know if all my family is super liberal, but I don't think anyone is super like, I don't think they should get married. I just don't think they generally care. That's why my dad says all the time, it doesn't affect me. So, it's not really from a hatred point; it just doesn't concern them.

Jayce also recalled finding his family always open minded about topics of diversity:

> My family has just always been a little bit more open or a little bit more okay with stuff like that.

For Rosie, growing up with two teachers for parents, she recalls never feeling patronized or encouraged to be discriminatory against any form of diversity:

> My parents have always been in support of it and my mom told me when I was little 'oh whatever your sexual orientation is, I will love you no matter what'. When I was like six and I was like, whatever but yeah, it was nice, but it was a little weird too because they're

> older, they're in their 50's, which is weird because you would think they would be more old fashioned.

The other two participants, Nicole and Hunter, were raised in religious families and both of them were brought up to believe sexual and gender diversity was a sin and it was either not talked about or not even an option. However, at the time of our interviews together, Hunter's family had left the church and she felt very supported by her immediate and extended family who had also left the faith and knew her parents would support her no matter what. While Nicole's family continued to be involved in the Catholic faith, she also felt unconditional love from her family and knew they supported her no matter what.

The belief of parents related to gender and sexual diversity is a strong and important force that was evidenced as a protective factor for the participants in this study and likely the main reason they were able to participate and had the courage and tenacity to be as forthcoming and have the insights they did related to this topic. However, parental influence was also described as a risk factor for students who grew up being taught to discriminate or have a negative belief about gender and sexual diversity. Dana, Elisabeth, and Hunter all strongly felt it was the parents who were socializing their children to continue to be discriminatory and this was the primary force influencing their peers' attitudes about and use of homophobic and transphobic language towards gender and sexual minority students. Elisabeth had a very politically correct and empathetic way of looking at it:

> I try not to blame kids at our age who are homophobic because I understand a lot of it is from parents because you learn a lot of things from parents. I'm not angry with them; I just feel kind of sad for them. I feel bad that they were raised with such a closed mind I guess.

Hunter also identified parents as the primary influence over students' acceptance of differences:

> I think the influence is mostly parents. When they grow up because, even when I was growing up, I didn't even know that being gay was a thing until I went to school and other people told me about it. I think a lot of people are afraid of that because they're like 'what am I supposed to tell my kids?' But it's really simple and kids are not as hard to understand things as you think they are.

Dana also credited parents with the socialization of students to think a certain way about the topic of diversity:

> They're uneducated on it or because it's like the way they were brought up and it's so burned in their brains that even if they were educated on it, then it wouldn't change anything.

As the primary and first socializing agent of children, parents' beliefs have a profound impact on the developing attitudes and beliefs of their kids. These beliefs, unfortunately, play out in the way students talk about and treat gender and sexual minority peers at school and in the community. Given that the schools that were selected as sites for this study were all located in rural Southern Alberta, which is well known for the predominant conservative attitudes and beliefs, it puts in context why many of the participants, as highlighted in the previous chapter, perceived a large portion of the student body in their schools maintained discriminatory and prejudicial views towards gender and sexual diversity.

7.3 Collective harm of heteronormativity

Across the narrative interviews, there was evidence of heteronormativity operating within the classrooms, through interactions with teachers and with peers, and the internalized beliefs of the participants. I was surprised at the level of insight the participants had about the power of

heteronormativity in its regulation of the behaviors and attitudes shared by themselves and their peers. Several participants recalled moments where they were confronted with the pressures of heteronormativity and felt the consequences for non-conforming. For Dana, she could remember the harm of heteronormativity from a young age as she reflected on an incident from her early childhood:

> My earliest experience with being discriminated against for being different in that sense, it was a birthday party and somebody came into my room and I had like Polly Pockets or something on my shelves in the room, and I was like literally six, like calm yourself down. And it was like 'oh my god, that's so weird, you have like girl stuff'. It's like out of the womb, you know, that it's like you're a dude, you wear blue, you like camo, you like trucks.

For Hunter, the influences of heteronormativity first played out in the exclusion she experienced within her young women's group at church. She recalled being treated different for her choice in style and music:

> I was a little bit of a tom boy as opposed to all the other girls that had long pretty hair and always wore bright colors. I was always seen as a different one and that was bad somehow and I was treated differently. I was always the one that, when we went to mutual they would always form their own little groups and always be best friends and then, I was always the one who had to get put with the last person, you know, the last person picked. I wasn't breaking any rules.

Elisabeth recalled a more recent interrupting moment when, in conversation with a friend over the phone, highlighted for her the limiting nature of how women are viewed from a heteronormative stance:

> I was talking with this one person and they were like 'oh you seem to be doing well in life', and I was like 'well really I'm just winging it', and they were like 'well don't worry, when you get older you can just cook for your husband and bake them cookies. And I kind of stopped and it was like wait, what? That limits me to an extent. You know you always have that to fall back on. You are responsible for that kind of stuff anyway.

In the context of school, Dana recalls one of the times she was called a faggot was in gym class and it was because she didn't catch the football, and thus, fell short of the heteronormative ideal of what it means to be masculine or a male athlete:

> I didn't catch the football or something. It was like 'you're masculine, catch the fucking football'.

Dana talked about feeling really uncomfortable with the boys at her school because of the way they treat her and the expectations she feels when in their presence:

> Because I'm not straight, they totally distance themselves from me in the most obvious way. Like, just because I don't act like that, you think I'm like some kind of freak of nature you can't even tolerate being around? …When I'm with the guys, I feel like it's someone trying to push you down and make you lesser and conform to what they think is the ideal like be a man. They just come at it so much more aggressively.

Elisabeth also saw the forces of heteronormativity operating within the attitudes of her peers. She recounted an example of her peers' attitudes about athleticism and how these highlight how the language of heteronormativity is conditioned and unconscious. The example with her peers was the following:

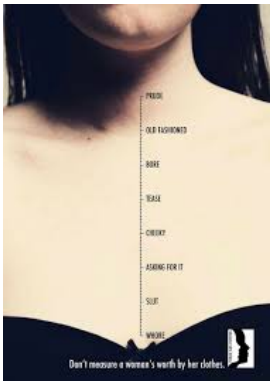
> In gym class for example, if a group of certain guys are on one team they're like 'oh no, they're stacked' but nobody looks at the more athletic girls that are maybe even more to

> that, they just think they are the alphas in the gym class. They are the best ones when, in reality, I was kind of noticing they're really not. There's a lot of girls that are equal to them. But everyone gets so intimidated over the guys and doesn't really appreciate, you know, any of the girls who might be more athletic or capable of doing something.

Hunter also described how the achievements of girls in sports are minimized and, instead, focus is placed on their appearance:

> Even though maybe that girl is on the volleyball team, maybe she did a really great job and won the game for the rest of the team. Nobody really pays attention to that. They just pay attention to the shorts she's wearing while she's playing.

These instances shared by Dana, Hunter, and Elisabeth all capture how their peers routinely enact their socialization around heteronormativity through interactions with one another. Their experiences get at the unconscious level on which this socialization operates that, left uninterrupted, has a profound impact on peer relationships and identity development. As young people try to navigate their new desire for independence, close connections with peers represents a core developmental need to developing a healthy sense of self. These instances represent moments of ruptures between gender and sexually diverse individuals and the connections they are attempting to form with their age mates.



(Terre des Femmes, 2015)

The narratives also illuminated some of the rules that were policed by their peers pertaining to appropriate behaviors and attire based on gender. In our interviews it was clear that Hunter felt the presence of a heteronormative bias was very strong at her school and had a powerful conforming impact, particularly on the girls. Hunter pulled up a couple of images on her phone that she thought of during our conversation that contextualized this well (see above):

> It's basically if by societal standards you are ugly, they'll ignore you. If by societal standards you are too boyish, they'll ignore you. If by society's standards you are kind of different, they'll ignore you. But if you're up in these three (asking for it/slut/whore), if you're within those degrees of attractiveness, and then you are okay with them touching you, harassing you, you know, all of that gross stuff. If you're okay with that and you go along with it, then they will pay attention to you. But, if then, you stand up for yourself and say 'hey, I didn't like that, why are you doing that?', then she's a whore and they ignore you.

Hunter went on to highlight many other rules the girls at school had to follow to avoid the consequences of being ignored or called derogatory names. Some of the other rules she highlighted were girls can't cut their hair, need to wear makeup, can wear comfortable clothes, but they have to be sports related, and must wear a thong with their tights. While she works hard to fight against the suffocating nature of all of these rules, she admitted to times when she finds even herself succumbing to the pressure:

> There's this thought of 'yes, this is what I'm meant to do in society. I'm supposed to look good and I'm supposed to get comments and that means I'm going to be a successful woman. If I'm having a really bad day and I'm just wearing my tights and I'm worried,

> then, I'll just wear the tights or I'll wear a low cut shirt because I don't feel like dealing with having to challenge myself today. I'm not up for the challenge today.

What Hunter and I came to after exploring the long and exhaustive list of rules and expectations placed on girls at her school was: you can't win. Here's her take on the unattainable rules and regulations placed on the girls at her school:

> It doesn't matter how you dress: there is going to be no way you dress that there isn't going to be someone who sees something negative. And it really sucks. A lot of the time, I hear groups of boys that will, you know, judge, well not really judge, but almost like rank girls depending on what they are wearing and how they act around them. It always seems like there's something negative like everyone's always doing it wrong.

Hunter's honest and insightful conversation about the rules of heteronormativity primarily operating on the girls at her school illuminate a missed opportunity of educators to challenge and address this norm that is harmful for all girls, regardless of gender and sexual identity. Teachers have an important role in calling to attention these rules that they see operating within their schools, teaching young women how to notice how girls are objectified in the media, and how these messages both limit and reduce them down to one thing: their appearance.

The previous instances illustrate heteronormativity playing out through peer interactions and the re-enactment of their early socialization into rigid binaries of what it means to be a man and a woman. The participants also discussed instances of heteronormativity captured in the classroom through the language of educators. Elisabeth described an instance that was common enough many could likely relate:

> I remember one time there was tables or something that needed to be lifted and the

> teacher was like ‘can I get some strong boys to come and lift this?’, and I think a couple of the girls were like ‘we could to’. And it’s just none of the staff members here are intentionally limiting. They’re not like guys can only do this and girls can only do this, but I think it’s so even in society and how we talk is just conditioned into what we say, so we don’t step back and realize maybe it’s not just strong boys that can do it, but it just comes out of our speech.

For Rosie, she identified never having an issue with heteronormativity because she has felt like a “super girl” and identified as being really feminine in her entire life. She discussed a conversation that occurred in her social studies class that fit well with her stance on gender roles, but may have had a different interpretation for a student who did not fit the stereotypes of their ascribed gender:

> My social teacher was just talking about it like yesterday or maybe the day before that. He was talking about what I said that he doesn’t quite agree with people insisting there are no differences at all between men and women and he said maybe your kind of gender roles could be an important part of who you are. He said he had brothers and sisters and it was his role, as the guy, to look out for his sisters and take care of them and I think that is a good point, like maybe the gender roles aren’t all evil and maybe people do have different natures.

Both of these experiences highlight teachers contributing and reinforcing the gender role stereotypes and binaries that hold up the system of heteronormativity. These examples also highlight the impact of even the most subtle language on the routine re-establishment of the norms and values that are commonplace at school and the devaluing of certain genders and sexualities at school, namely female-identified individuals and minorities. With Rosie’s example,

while this discussion felt true to her and did not contradict the way she has seen herself as a girl, it is questionable if that message would be quite so affirming for a student who was gender non-conforming and struggling with the roles of the gender assigned to them, or for a student who was gender fluid and trying to negotiate the pressures of society to conform to the norms of one gender. Moreover, both examples also portray a stereotypical view of what it means to be masculine, which is to be protective and strong, and by default what it means to be feminine, namely weak and in need for protection. This type of dialogue in the classroom can have many consequences on students who do not feel aligned with these expectations and are deeply impacted by the routine pressure to fit a particular norm, as they are developing a sense of who they are.

Some of the participants also discussed heteronormativity in the context of privileging certain relationships over others, in the classroom, and the halls. Nicole talked a lot in her interview about the context of all discussions around relationships and sexuality being entirely heteronormative:

> They talk about relationships a lot, like a fair bit, and it's like abusive relationships and healthy relationships. They talk about it in very heteronormative terms.

Beyond the privileging of heteronormative curriculum content around relationships, Hunter also picked up on the privileging of public displays of heteronormativity at school. She discussed her reaction to teachers addressing non-normative forms of affection and not others:

> There are a lot of people who walk down the hallways of the school that hold hands. That's being shown right in front of you and are you complaining about their sexuality being shown and pushing it onto you? And when it's not a straight couple, it's not that

it's being pushed onto them, it's just that it's different and they notice it and it bothers them.

These were heavy conversations that emerged, particularly with Dana and Hunter, who seemed most attuned to the pressures to conform to a heteronormative standard and experienced first-hand the exclusion and isolation that non-conforming brought upon them. The dialogues of all the participants support that heteronormativity is alive and well in their schools and has consequences for all students, regardless of gender and sexual identity.

7.4 Christian Privilege

A very interesting finding that came out of the participant interviews was that, early on in most of the interviews, religion was brought up spontaneously, as a primary contributing factor to the way their teachers and peers felt towards and discussed gender and sexual diversity and how students who identified within that community were regarded and treated. Two of the participants had been raised in a religious household, with Hunter raised LDS and Nicole raised Catholic. However, despite not having a religious upbringing, Dana, Rosie, and Elisabeth also alluded to the role of religion in the current school culture around gender and sexual diversity. In discussing the role of religiosity in the current climate in their schools, 5 of the participants referenced the predominant religion practiced by the student body and in their communities being the LDS faith.

Throughout the interviews, the influence of religion came up in the context of freedom of religion being more important than freedom of identity. In other words, the religious beliefs held by their peers and their families, as well as their teachers, directly contradicts respect for diversity, and the internalized pressure to conform to a heteronormative standard that permeates certain religious teachings. Dana, Rosie, Nicole, Elisabeth, and Hunter all discussed an

awareness that having their school embedded in a community that had a high population of members of a non-affirming faith towards gender and sexual diversity influenced the climate within their schools.

7.4.1 Freedom of Religion undermines Freedom of Identity. There was a shared perspective amongst several participants that religious rights were protected and prioritized over the rights of identity and expression. This was expressed as a feeling that some of the participants got that, religion was so important in the area that they lived, with the predominant religion being LDS, that it was given more consideration than their rights as students to a safe and inclusive learning environment. Hunter acknowledged the privileging of one particular religion due to the large population of members where she lived:

> There's a church right across the school that we see like every time we go outside. And just because it's that certain religion, no one makes a big deal out of it.

Hunter's remark calls into question the influence of this religion based on the church's proximity to the school and the sanctioning of their teachings within the curriculum. Along similar lines, Dana shared her feeling of her school that:

> Everyone here takes freedom of religion over freedom of stuff you can't change.

Dana and Hunter both felt the teachings of conservative religious beliefs were being taken more into consideration than the needs of gender and sexual minority students to be provided with a safe space to be authentic. One of the areas they felt this played out was in the reason teachers were so cautious or unwilling to talk about anything related to gender and sexual diversity. When asked why she thought teachers avoided this conversation, Dana said:

> I think it goes back to the freedom of religion thing. You don't want to piss anyone off so you are just going to leave it. I get your religion is important to you, but so is my right to

> be who I am. Your religion is not who you are, as much as it may be a part of who you are; it is not who you are. But, this is the biggest part of my identity and is who I am, what I identify as, so that takes priority over whether or not you think there is a God.

Nicole also felt religion had a role to play in why teachers were hesitant to pick up this topic:

> I feel that teachers kind of bunch it in there with the religion thing. Where it's like separation of church and state; oh and also this because it's awkward and intermingles with this other. And so we are not going to talk about it because it's going to be awkward and we can't share our viewpoints on things with students. And now I'm fading away and we are going to move on to something else.

Nicole's comment gets at the previously illustrated point that, when teachers do find themselves having to encounter the topic of gender and sexual diversity, it is uncomfortable and so it is quickly glossed over or avoided in an effort not to upset anyone's beliefs. What Hunter, Dana, and Nicole's commentary illustrates is this discomfort, in their opinion, is not about individual beliefs, but educators being cautious about providing information that contradicts religious beliefs.

Elisabeth also felt religion had something to do with the way teachers responded to peers who were using homophobic and transphobic language. She shared:

> It's weird because there have been times when someone will say 'oh my god' and you hear a teacher out of nowhere say 'don't use that', but I don't know if I have ever seen a teacher really actually say something to a student that calls another student gay, which is so weird to me.

Elisabeth's recollection is alarming in the type of message this sends to gender and sexual minority students to know it's not okay to use a slur related to religiosity, but it is acceptable to be called a derogatory and prejudiced term that discounts the legitimacy of their very being. Despite unanimously acknowledging they had never heard conversations specifically addressing the respect of individuals who identified as a gender or sexual minority, a number of the participants could recall multiple examples of times they had encountered explicit religiously infused lectures and content within their public school experience. Rosie had a number of examples of instances religion was taught in her earlier school years. She discussed her confusion with the reason she had been given by her teachers to not address gender and sexual diversity topics, because 'it's a public school'.

> I don't get the whole public school thing. They're allowed to talk about religion in public school. When I was in elementary school, I went to a public elementary school and they had bible time every week. When I was in grade 5, in middle school, they brought someone to give out copies of the New Testament and brought the classes to the foyer for that and they let these people give a presentation, and so, it's like these people can give a presentation on the bible in a public school, but I can't give a presentation on homophobia in a public school. Because it's a public school?

While no religious class was offered at the high school she attended, Dana remembered her elementary school had an optional religious class in which she did not participate. She also could remember times in her education that she had to learn about religion in her class, but yet pointed out:

> It's not enforcing religion but we learn about religion. So, it's like, if you have no problem teaching us about religion, why do you have such a problem teaching us about LGBT stuff?

Nicole also remembered, last year, learning about religion, but only because it's part of the curriculum and gender and sexual diversity is not:

> Unless it's part of the curriculum, it's not talked about. Last year you learn about the Protestant Reformation. And then they bring it up a little bit in science when they're like this is evolution, this is what we mostly think; you may not believe this, that's okay, just write it on the test.

Interestingly, the topic of evolution came up in 3 of the participants' interviews as a topic that was either also avoided or approached cautiously and/or apologetically. Rosie recalled her grade 7 teacher giving a caution for her class when she briefly touched on the topic of evolution:

> I was in grade 7 at the time and my teacher just said, she kind of touched briefly on the idea of evolution, but then, you have to follow it up with 'oh but you don't have to believe that' and 'oh don't go home and tell your parents. It's fine, you can believe whatever you want', because people will go home and say that. And it's kind of ridiculous because evolution isn't a theory anymore; it's a proven fact, so yah maybe your facts kind of butt heads with your religious beliefs, but I don't think that's your job to say 'oh well I'm not going to say that', if that's a true fact. I don't think you should have to refrain from saying it. I feel that needs to be their problem, and not the school's problem. You can get upset and not agree with evolution, but it still needs to be taught in the school.

Hunter also brought up how one of her teachers prefaced the topic of evolution for the Christian students who may take offence:

> It's the same way that Mr. G deals with evolution because he has to teach about it and because he knows there's a lot of people who are Mormon or who are Christian in the school and because he doesn't want them to be the person that's like 'no but that's not right'. He starts out the class saying 'I'm only here to teach you this theory. If you believe it that is totally fine. If you don't, that is totally fine, but it's on the diploma and I don't want you to fail so here you go'.

The recollection of the participants regarding the manner their teachers approached the topic of evolution is a clear example of Christian privilege and an attempt not to offend or contradict the religious beliefs of the majority or large percentage of the student body and surrounding community. However, the same caution, as evidenced by these interviews and in depth exploration into sexual education and other health topics, is not provided when teachers approach sex or relationships and only give a heteronormative example, which may be offensive and even harmful to gender and sexual minority students who do not experience sex or relationships in that way. Rosie also pointed out, for students who are not religious or ascribe to the teachings of the predominant faith, they're not considered in the equation:

> And if you take offence to someone portraying a gay person on stage, I don't know if that's that person's problem. I take offence to your religion maybe, but I don't get a say in whether or not you get to practice it.

Not only do these narratives highlight that these students are aware that their school is providing a religiously influenced educational experience in their secular public school programming, they also see a disconnect between the inclusion of these teachings, which can be homophobic and

transphobic in nature, while excluding more accepting and inclusive content that supports their identity development.

7.4.2 Man shall not lie with another man. When prompted to discuss further the issue the students took up with the privileging of religious freedom over the rights of students' identity expression, the participants discussed seeing the religious beliefs that were predominant in the areas in which they resided to be contradictory to the respect for diversity related to gender and sexuality. For Dana, her experience was that her teachers bought into the religious discourse around gender and sexuality when they addressed the routine homophobic and transphobic slurs as needing to respect their belief:

> Most people here, even if they talk about the research about this, would still be like 'God made you the way you are for a reason and that's a sin'. They think it is such a belief, but then, why is it any different than your belief? If it's such a belief and not something that I can change?

Dana's remark gets at her teachers buying into the discourse that gender and sexual diversity is a choice or a belief, as opposed to an identity and a core aspect of one's personhood. By calling diverse gender expressions or sexual orientations a belief, teachers are promoting the attitude that gender and sexual minority students are choosing their minority status. Elisabeth also talked about her peers taking aspects of the religious teachings that are sanctioned at school and using them as justification for the mistreatment of gender and sexually diverse individuals.

> I think people take one line from the bible or one line from this and then just blow it up into a big thing and people who aren't good with change or don't understand it, just use that to their ability to just spread it around. Which, you know, the bible is interpreted really if you think about it, it was interpreted into English and stuff. So I don't know how

> seriously I take it, but there is that one line that you know people are raised with and grow up to think it was wrong. So they interpret it as in the box of sin and grow up thinking that it's a sin. Thinking that it's wrong. And you know if they are not taught to keep their opinions to themselves, then it comes out and, often times, opinions become hateful, because wording is very important.

Rosie also felt the discrimination that was commonplace in her school towards gender and sexual diversity was heavily influenced by and more prevalent due to the demographic of her area:

> I think it probably happens more here than in other parts because we are in the Bible belt of Canada. We have less of a community here of queer people, just cause a lot of people grew up in really religious households and religious communities and it's just not part of their world.

Rosie's comment highlights how the schools in rural Southern Alberta areas, that were sites for this study, may be more prone to including certain religious teachings due to the predominant conservative and fundamentalist religious beliefs, predominantly the LDS faith, of the surrounding communities. However, in light of the schools being situated within these same communities, and the attitudes and beliefs shared by the large portion of the student body, the inclusion of these messages is arguably even more harmful in these areas due to the limited-to-non-existent exposure to alternative messages or beliefs. Said another way, gender and sexual minority youth living in rural Southern Alberta may be in need of more protective school policies and practice that eradicate homophobic and transphobic religious discourse, given that they are already prone to receiving more negative feedback from their peers and the community in which they live.

Religion came up frequently in our discussions over the course of the interviews and the participants all felt its presence in the classroom, in their interactions with peers, and in the curriculum. What was interesting was their awareness of this force despite, for some of them, having no religious upbringing. However, just by nature of their school being enmeshed in communities in the bible belt of Canada and their communities having high membership of the conservative LDS faith, this religious discourse was infiltrating schools and impacting the culture of safety and inclusion related to gender and sexual diversity.

7.4.3 Heteronormativity + Christian Privilege = I'm straighter than that pole. While religion emerged across the interviews as a strong force at play on the external climate and environment at school, for three of the participants there was an internalization of this pressure to conform that resulted from their own involvement in religion as children. These three participants all talked about, while involved in their faith, gender and sexual diversity was not even an option and they each fought against innate tendencies and desires due to the pressure to be something else.

For Elisabeth, she felt this pressure as a younger elementary child attending a Catholic elementary school. She recalled her experiences as early as grade 2 experiencing the internalization of the norms she was being socialized into:

> Just everyone was straight. Even the older kids, everyone was straight, so it was very, you know, I'm straight. I'm with these people. I'm like them. And you know you're little and when you're little, because there's a certain point when you're little where you don't care, but then you grow up to a point where you do start caring and then, you're like, I have social norms that I have to fit now. It's not like I can go eat a bug while Greg picks his nose. I have to fit in because there are standards, so you know, I didn't want to jump

> out of the water too much. So, when I was little I was like I'm straight. Definitely. Straighter than that pole.

Nicole felt a similar pressure to conform to the standards at her Catholic school where she attended up until grade six. She recalled her experience:

> I went to a Catholic school and I was raised Catholic and it's not like my parents aren't understanding or didn't bring it up or anything, but when you're in that environment where it's not talked about and it's kind of frowned upon, then they don't really explore it, like you never talk about it with your friends and if you do it's very one off.

Elisabeth and Nicole had both left their Catholic schools by late elementary school, but both identified a belief if they had stayed in their Catholic schools, they would not have entertained the thought that they identified as a gender or sexual minority and would have maintained their efforts to fit in with the heteronormative standard. They both identified the pressure to conform to a heterosexist ideal was stronger in their Catholic schools than their current secular schools.

For Hunter, changing schools did not alleviate the pressure she experienced from the affiliation with her church. Hunter had always attended a secular public school but the struggle with the internalization of the scriptures and teachings of her LDS faith had a more profound impact, resulting in substantial emotional distress, including panic attacks, and eventually, needing to leave the church. She recalled how sexual diversity was discussed within her faith:

> Growing up, I was taught that it was bad, so having not ever experienced it or hearing about it, I was like okay, that's bad; it's not really affecting me, so I'll believe that it is bad. It's mentioned as the basis understanding, you know, if you kill someone, that's a sin; it's kind of like that basis. If you're gay, then that's a sin. You know, it's one of those base things that are kind of obvious in that religion and that kind of sucks that it is that

> way. I mean murder is one of those things that you associate, okay, killing people is bad and like, in that religion, it is like the same thing, being gay is bad. It's just the common knowledge there.

When asked specifically about her seminary class that she attended up until grade 10, she identified:

> Anytime they talk about marriage it was, you know, and sex, even the whole premise around that is you don't have sex until you are married and when you are married, you are married in the temple, and like you know stuff like that. It wasn't even like one of the rules, it was like if you're gay you can't be married. It's just assumed that nobody was. They assumed everybody already knew it was an obvious thing that wasn't allowed. There is no rules that, you know, if you killed someone you can't be married. It's just like murder is bad and then they don't ever talk about it again, which is the same thing.

Hunter recalled her confusion with the contradictory teachings of her church, which caused her the dissonance and distress that led to her eventually ending her involvement in the faith.

> After going to church for that long and then suddenly realizing they would teach us 'hey God made everyone different, be nice to people because God made everyone different' but then if I was slightly different, I was always seen as the different one and that was bad somehow and I was treated differently. It just didn't make sense to me. So, in my opinion, there are so many religions and there are so many sexualities and there are so many genders because God made everybody different. So, it doesn't make sense to me why minorities like that would be seen as offensive or wrong just because they are made

differently because that is the whole idea around people being created is for them to be different.

While there is a growing body of literature that draws attention to this ongoing tension between religiosity and gender and sexual diversity and the presence of homophobia and transphobia in religiously affiliated schools, what is alarming about Hunter's narrative is that the LDS faith is permitted to continue to teach their beliefs in the seminary class as a credited option course. Given that the majority of the participants were already acutely aware of the influence of religion on the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of their peers and teachers, it raises critical questions about the implications of allowing heterosexist teachings, as highlighted above, which directly contradict the rights to safety and inclusivity for gender and sexually diverse students. The sanctioning of courses containing non-affirming discourses pertaining to gender and sexual diversity, like that contained in the LDS Seminary course, is not only a clear example of Christian Privilege, but is arguably contributing to an already alarming environment of hostility and oppression for these vulnerable youth.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided an exploration of three major influences or forces that the participants consistently identified as influencing the current climate and culture around gender and sexual diversity at their schools. Parental influences, heteronormativity, and religion were all identified as having a strong impact on their schools' stance on the topic and interfering with their day-to-day experience of safety and inclusion. Understanding these forces offers some insight into possible sites for interruption to begin to cultivate a safer and more supportive school environment, which shields students from these influences in a more intentional way.

The following chapter is an opportunity to explore what some of the schools in this study are doing well that are providing a hopeful experience of safety and inclusion, as well as the words of wisdom from these insightful and articulate young people of the direction they see their schools need to take to fulfill their roles of educating young people to engage in a democratic society and protect school spaces for the next cohort of gender and sexually diverse students.

CHAPTER 8: Moments of Hope and Words of Wisdom

8.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters, which have focused on the thematic analysis of the narrative interviews, have painted a fairly negative picture of the current realities of school for these six individuals. It was an intellectual goal of this study and deemed important that the moments of hope and the positive initiatives these students are seeing in their schools also be highlighted. To protect against the risk of portraying the participants as overly wounded and their schools as hopeless systems, each student was able to share at least one example of something their school was doing well or at least one teacher who was demonstrating a more inclusive approach to their education and these are highlighted here. The second section of this chapter will bring together the perceptive and transformative words of wisdom shared over the course of the thirteen interviews, as the participants were asked to speak directly to their teachers, administrators, and senior administrators about what they could do better to make schools more safe and inclusive of gender and sexually diverse students.

8.2 What's Working

8.2.1 School based initiatives that seem to matter. Each of the participants were asked to reflect, during their interviews, about anything they could see their school was doing well in regards to the topic of the study. Across the interviews, a number of different moments that demonstrated movement in the direction of being more inclusive were discussed. For Dana, what stood out when I asked this question was a recent presentation that was put on by her school on gender equality and domestic violence that, while not directly connected to gender and sexual diversity, at least illustrated a challenge to the oppression by gender. She felt this showed her

principal's support for more positive change. Dana felt it was a step in the right direction towards challenging the heterosexism that was strongly felt in her school.

Another positive factor that came out of the interviews was the presence of Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) in schools. Rosie, Hunter, and Jayce all had GSAs in their schools and mentioned the GSA as a positive factor that demonstrates the school's support to try to have a safe space for gender and sexually diverse students. Hunter described her positive thoughts on the GSA at her school:

> I like that it exists and I think that it's a very, it's a good way to show people that they are not by themselves if they are trying to figure themselves out and they feel like they're having to do that alone.

For Jayce, he saw the GSA as an important place that he and his peers could be themselves:

> I think GSA is really just a fun place to go where you can be like 'I'm as open as a rainbow' or as the quote would go. It's just a place to be who you are and welcome other people to be who they are and stuff like that.

Rosie also joined her school's GSA and felt this was a space for students to at least gather and be together. The presence of a GSA in these rural conservative communities illustrates hope that the administrators in these schools are upholding the requirements of Bill 10 and hopefully recognizing the importance of having designated safe spaces for gender and sexual diverse youth to be affirmed and to connect.

Beyond the GSA, Rosie had two other examples of observations at her school that she felt were portrayals of support:

> Last year they put up these little stickers on some of the classroom doors. I

> don't know if some of the teachers put them on the doors but they said 'I'm an ally' and whatever it's welcome in this room. I don't think all of the classrooms have them but a lot of them do.

The other instance Rosie brought forward of support was an article that appeared in her school's newsletter:

Alberta Health Services

Healthy Teens
Parent Newsletter
February 2017

Understanding Gender Identity

Gender is more complex than most of us have been taught. Gender is made up of 3 parts:

- gender biology (our bodies or biological sex – our sex at birth based on the appearance of genitals)
- gender expression (how we dress and act), and
- gender identity (how we feel inside)

Not all youth fit neatly into being male or female. For some, the sense of being "both" or "neither" best describes their reality. Sometimes they may identify more as male or more as female on different days; this is described as being gender fluid and is a normal variation of human gender. A person's gender is not what others tell them, but it is how they feel and who they know themselves to be.

As a parent, you can be a great influence in your teen's life, but you can't change their true gender identity or expressions of their gender. However, you can help them to have a healthy, positive sense of themselves in relation to their gender. Some people are very young when they become aware of their gender identity – some as young as 3. It is important to not focus on your teen being male or female, but support them in exploring a wide variety of age appropriate interests and talents. Your teen may turn to you if they're feeling worried, scared, or confused about their own gender identity. This may seem overwhelming as a parent, but it's important to listen to your child with an open mind and open heart. You don't have to have all the answers; together you can find more information and support. Understanding who they are can bring joy, relief, and peace of mind to everyone.

Your child's gender identity is a gift, and like their intuition, creativity, and intellect, they are a part of the foundation that makes them who they are. For more information and support please visit the Alberta Health Services www.teachingsexualhealth.ca

Rosie's response to seeing this article on the school website on the newsletter was that she thought it was a good message and was surprised to see this was included. The safe space stickers was something Rosie brought up numerous times in her interviews as something that she felt really demonstrated an attitude of care and respect by her teachers. She identified this small symbol as going a long way towards acknowledging the existence of gender and sexual minority students at her school.

8.2.2 Moments of Hope. While the narrative interviews with the students brought a great deal of pain and frustration and grief into the room, within each of their narratives was, at least, one moment of hope. This section will provide an example from each of the participants of what they found most hopeful about their school experience so far. These examples are provided to

illustrate what students find meaningful as group level resources and interpret as symbols of support.

8.2.2.1 Rosie. Rosie's example of hope came out of her own advocacy towards change that allowed her to experience some movement and support from her teacher and her principal. Rosie's story, from her grade 8 United Nations project and her resistance to being told she was not allowed to complete her project on gay rights, led to a shift when her principal supported her decision to make this the focus of her project. Rosie's interpretation of the outcome of this event shows a belief in the goodness of her teacher and a positive perspective on, at least, his desire to have a safe classroom:

> My teacher listened to me because he was a great teacher and I knew he wasn't refusing because he was homophobic, but he was just being cautious. Because he was a really great teacher, he allowed me to say that it was stupid and he was like 'okay I will go try to talk to the principal if you want' and I was like 'no I want to talk to the principal'. So he took me to the principal's office and it was only because he was such a great guy and he allowed me to do that. Some teachers would be like 'well you can go and sit in the hallway', but he allowed me to fight my case.

Not only was Rosie allowed to complete the written assignment on this topic, but she gave a presentation to the whole class on it. When I asked her how that was received, she said:

> Good. My class was small. It was a great class too. Good teacher and good class. I didn't have any problems with it.

This was a beautiful example of a teacher making space for students to feel heard and setting up a path for them to advocate for what they believed in. It also gave, not just Rosie, but her whole class a unique moment where gender and sexual diversity found its way into the classroom. Her

example also highlights that the students typically don't have an issue holding and receiving information related to gender and sexual diversity, but the overly cautious and inhibiting nature that surrounds this topic in schools steals from them opportunities to have it normalized. The impact of Rosie's presentation on her classmates, her teacher, and even her principal are unknown, but it was a really hopeful moment where a shift happened, at least, for her.

8.2.2.2 Jayce. There was a good deal about Jayce's interview that was incredibly hopeful and he articulated how he was very fortunate to have his principal be supportive of his request to email the entire teaching staff to notify them of his decision to change his name and pronouns. Jayce was informed that, legally, they couldn't change his name in the system until his name changed on his birth certificate, but they could all call him by his preferred name and pronouns regardless. Jayce's narrative exuded gratitude for how his school had navigated his decision to transition and his teachers' openness to changing his name and pronouns. One of his most hopeful moments was when one teacher went out of his way after receiving the email to connect with him and ensure he had the right name and pronouns to be respectful:

> I think my teachers are really supportive. I'm really proud of them. To the point where they don't want to be creepy and ask me questions and stuff like that, but the first day my math teacher pulled me away from the class and he is like 'I got an email and I just wanted to confirm it, so you want me to call you Jayce?' And he was like 'okay I just wanted to make sure'.

What bred the hope that infused Jayce's narrative was in great deal attributed to his capacity to stand up for himself and to be courageous enough to call his teachers out when they weren't using the right name or pronoun. Jayce also was very gracious and never personalized his teachers' shortcomings in calling him by the wrong name, using the wrong pronoun, or even on

one occasion referring to him as ‘Madam’. He gave them compassion that many of these individuals have known him since he started school and it was just a habit. It would be interesting to know how Jayce’s transition has impacted his teachers, classmates, and principal as well and how his drive to have his external environment respect and honor his internal experience have given them all an opportunity to learn something about transgender and possibly their own assumptions and biases. His story exudes a hopeful possibility for other transgender students in rural Southern Alberta schools.

8.2.2.3 Hunter. For Hunter, there was little hope shared in her sentiments towards her peers and the culture of her school around acceptance and appreciation of diversity. However, two of her teachers came up very frequently across our 3 interviews as educators she felt were doing it right and doing their best to prepare youth for adulthood and engaging as democratic citizens. Hunter described these teachers as unbiased and encountering their students from a stance of “I’m here to teach and not preach.” She also felt both of these teachers portrayed an attitude of caring and commitment towards social justice and an openness that students could talk to them after class if they needed a supportive space. Hunter had a philosophy about teachers’ jobs was to teach facts, in as unbiased of a way as possible, to give students tools to form their own opinions and do what they need themselves to further them. She identified these tools as being really important for people’s happiness. These two teachers, she felt, were really grounded in their teaching principles. Her reflection on why she believes they are very accepting and honoring of diversity was:

Both of those teachers are really good at rewarding unique ideas. If somebody says

> something that isn't usually said, but that is a really important point, then they will be like 'that's a good point. Thank you so much for bringing that up'. And they both recognize and praise that.

In our dialogues together, Hunter talked about these two teachers challenging racism, pushing the envelope to include more controversial topics that could raise conflict or parental discontent, and encouraging students to learn to think for themselves. This was particularly important to Hunter as she believed:

> You create more powerful and more stronger people, more influential people, more smarter people, because if they have all the facts and then can find ways to better things. I just think the only way to create solutions is to ask questions and get all the information out there so that people can start actually looking for answers.

These two teachers had a profound impact on Hunter's ability to feel empowered to think for herself and provided her with reprise in her days when she could go and be in the presence of these teachers where she felt a sense of shared values and hope that maybe there were other people who thought the way she did. Hunter's story is a powerful reminder of the influence of good teachers and how appreciative students are when given the tools to think for themselves.

8.2.2.4 Dana. In our first interview, when I asked Dana to reflect on what her school was doing well, she had no response. There was not one thing she could identify as positive, supportive, and protective about her school experience. She could not think of a single moment she heard a teacher stand up for a student who was being discriminated against based on their sexuality or gender and had never encountered this topic in the classroom. When I returned for our second interview, Dana's hope had shifted slightly and she was able to articulate a sense that her school's principal was taking a harsher stance on discrimination in comparison to her

previous principal. She couldn't articulate a specific instance or what exactly was different but it just felt like she was more protective of gender and sexual diverse students. This feeling manifested into an experience between our second and third interview out of an unfortunate event when Dana was called a 'fag' in the middle of class. She expressed both shock and relief that her teacher and principal took the incident seriously and responded better than she had ever witnessed in the past. When I asked Dana what it meant to her to see her teacher and principal react the way they did, she said:

> It helped me to know that the school was on my side with that kind of thing.

She also recalled that her teacher did give her permission to leave and work in an alternate space, at her request, for the rest of the period and also checked in with her when she returned to class to see if she was okay, which let her know that they cared. Our interviews were emotional for Dana and it was evident that she puts on a brave face, but she has also been deeply affected by the way she has been, and continues to be, treated at school. This was an important moment for Dana to feel a sense of hope and an ally in her teacher and principal and, in the midst of her deciding to initiate her transition in the next couple of years, came at a critical time for her. It also demonstrated hope that, with the right administrative support, teachers may feel more protected in addressing the language of students and the follow-through could deter others from engaging in this homophobic and transphobic language.

8.2.2.5 Elisabeth. Although Elisabeth had very few positive examples about what her school was doing well in terms of supporting and addressing topics pertaining to gender and sexual diversity, she was a very optimistic and hopeful person in general. Her compassion was inspiring in her ability to see the good in people and extend understanding and empathy for how her peers or their parents or others came to their discriminatory and oppressive views. There

wasn't one initiative or moment that Elisabeth could recall as a hopeful moment or something her school was doing well, but she had a strong fondness and connection to her teachers and genuinely believed in their humanity and desire to do good work and care for students. She talked about her teachers as follows:

> I like to give all my teachers the benefit of the doubt. I mean, I really like them; they're really amazing people. They really care about us and, you know, I think if it comes up, they might be uncomfortable, but they're never super hateful. And I think that's good; you can't always go to places where teachers, you know, make you feel like I'm literally friends with some of my teachers. They're just amazing staff here, but so they're doing a really good job of that, but they just don't always know how to address this.

Elisabeth's respect and admiration for her teachers was really protective for her and her belief that they do sincerely care about her and this belief encouraged her to look for other reasons why they may not be able to talk about or appropriately address the topic of gender and sexual diversity. Based on our conversations, Elisabeth sincerely believed that, with the right tools and resources and supports, her teachers would be more than willing to engage in these difficult conversations and be the support that she and her peers needed them to be. While her teachers may not be fulfilling best practices related to creating safe and inclusive learning environments for gender and sexually diverse students currently, they were doing a great job in Elisabeth's eyes of providing a safe and supportive space for students if they needed.

8.2.2.6 Nicole. Nicole echoed the sentiments of Elisabeth and she too felt her teachers cared a great deal for the student body and most whom she believed did not hold homophobic or transphobic attitudes themselves. For Nicole, though, the biggest source of hope was her group of peers. Leaving a Catholic school and moving to the rural Southern Alberta town she resides in

now, Nicole expressed a lot of gratitude that she was able to find a group of like-minded and supportive individuals that created a safe space for her to explore her sexuality. Many times in our two interviews together, Nicole talked about the safety this group gave to her not just to be able to identify openly as bisexual, but to also feel empowered to advocate and defend others who may be experiencing oppression or discrimination based on their gender or sexuality. For Nicole, she believed that had she not moved away from her previous school and been immersed in such a supportive group of peers, she would still have questioned her sexuality, but felt she would not have been able to explore this until much later on in her life, certainly after leaving high school. She described this group as a gift to her as a safe space to begin what she believes may be a long journey towards discovering herself:

> Yeah because I think even if maybe, what I think now isn't what I think later. I think, oh, I'm bisexual now and maybe, later on, I'll be like maybe not? Maybe I'm pan? Maybe I'm something else. Well, at least I'm thinking about it. If I wasn't thinking about it at all and there was never really a question or if I refused to think about it then I just never would. It gives me room to grow in my identity.

For Nicole, the hopefulness comes from the fact that she and a group of 5 or 6 of her peers have navigated the conservative community in which they live and in which their school is embedded and found one another. Together, this group of students has created a sense of community that acknowledges and respects one another and operates as an informal GSA support group. This exemplifies a beautiful possibility for young people who do not have access to the kinds of community resources, support programs, and more gender and sexual equality based curriculum discussions. In Nicole's case, this has allowed her to be a strong advocate in her school to the point where she wants to take on what her teachers aren't:

> Now I sometimes just want to be, like, I just want to put a shirt on that says 'I'm Bi' and just walk around and be like read this shirt. Talk to me. I want to tell people I am part of this and I want to start a conversation in a positive way, but a part of it is also I want people to stop making comments about gay people and saying things like faggot and that kind of stuff around me because and I just want, I don't know, I just want people to know.

When I asked her what was stopping her from wearing this T-shirt to school, her response was simply 'I haven't gotten a t-shirt made yet'. The protection Nicole felt from her peer group provided her with the agency to take this controversial topic on herself and that is incredibly hopeful as we see more and more young people taking on these conversations and being the ones who are challenging the norms and leading the way to a more democratic experience at school. She reiterated for me why the heart of this research was located in the stories of students.

8.3 Insiders' insights

The participants in the study had a great amount to explore about what moments and experiences they had that demonstrated ongoing oppression and discrimination of gender and sexual diverse youth, as well as moments they identified as hopeful and forward thinking. Each participant was also asked to discuss the opportunities they saw their schools could take to move towards meaningful changes. Their advice and observations are summarized into three themes below, organized by how their educators could bring these topics up into the classroom, how they could better address the language of their peers, and final thoughts or words of advice that each participant would want to share in a closed meeting with the principal of their school and superintendent of their division.

8.3.1 Just Talk About it. The most articulated advice provided by each and every participant in this study was a recommendation for teachers to just talk about it. Most of the

participants empathized why their teachers frequently avoided conversations involving this controversial topic, but still asserted it was important enough that it should be included despite the possible backlash, which could be encountered from their fellow students or parents. What was most interesting about their consistent assertion of the need to talk about it was the missed teachable moments or opportunities where it could be included appropriately. The first area a number of the participants identified, as an obvious space to have the topic discussed, would be sex-ed. Hunter discussed the relevancy of the current topics included in the sex-ed curriculum, but expressed the need to expand on this greatly to benefit all students.

> While I think sex-ed should be taught in order to, you know, stop the spread of diseases and stuff that can happen and help people be safe and help people know what's normal and what it should feel like and what it shouldn't feel like and if you're doing it right and if you're doing it wrong because that can be really helpful. I think that it should also be taught homosexuality too and that type of sex…More sexually diverse and gender diverse people would be able to create healthy relationships in the future if they have the tools that they need in order to start relationships early on and to like practice being comfortable and confident with that.

Jayce also felt the current sex-ed curriculum required some expansion to educate not just the straight students in the classroom:

> I think everybody should be safe sexually. No one should have to get STDs or get pregnant or something weird. Like they should be teaching all kids different kinds of keeping safe and stuff like that – instead of learning different kinds of pill and stuff like that – you should be teaching them different ways of keeping safe with different genders.

Dana also placed the conversation in sex-ed, but very insightfully considered the possible repercussions of singling the topic of gender and sexual diversity out as its own unit:

> I would hope they would teach it in like a mandatory health class like sex-ed or just the health course. I feel like if we had a whole unit on it in health that wouldn't help if we had a whole unit because then it's just singled out as something different than everything else. I think it should be just part of the sex-ed course.

Elisabeth had the same concern about singling the topic out specifically and causing a further othering experience:

> Not just obviously like putting a spotlight on it to the point where, you know, you're making it look like it's foreign, but just maybe have a unit or a thing about diversity so you could include everything in it and just like go throughout the year including it and maybe having one unit where it's like this is diversity and this is what it looks like and this is how our world is changing now and this is what you're going to see outside in the world because, you know, there's more than just this small town.

Nicole not only commented on the relevancy of this topic in sex-ed but across the Health and Life skills and the CALM curriculum:

> Talk about it. Please just talk about it. Just have a portion that it's talked about and talk about it in other things too like in relationships, in sexual health, in things that it can affect. Maybe talk about it when we're talking about self-esteem or even like health things like when you're talking about dieting and exercise and how you might not feel comfortable joining a sports team because that sports team might be mean to you because you are gay or you are trans or you might not know what sports team to join because you are gender fluid or don't know how you identify. Just talk about it.

Sexual education in the Health and Life Skills and CALM curriculums weren't the only place the participants identified as appropriate and critical moments to invite the conversation to include gender and sexual diversity, as the participants were able to identify other classes and curriculum content that could be expanded to include this relevant topic. For Nicole, social studies was one obvious location for the topic of diversity:

> Social studies pops out to me a lot because I think that history books and social studies textbooks are filled with old, white guys, and old straight white guys, and I feel like we could highlight a lot more queer people, people of color, women, that have shaped all sorts of history because they were there. They're still there.

For Dana, it belonged across the curriculum:

> I think any reasonable opportunity you have to talk about it, you should. Like if we're learning about slavery in the human rights course, not saying you should go out of your way like when you're talking about that time period, but if you're talking about human rights and you're talking about slavery, talk about the fact that one in two trans people have been sexually assaulted. Don't just totally close that window.

Rosie felt the same sentiment than any opportunity should be taken to bring this topic into the classroom to draw awareness about it:

> Maybe everywhere, just like kind of more awareness in a lot of classes. Like in drama, drama deals with life and like homosexuality and stuff like that is part of life. And allowing people to talk about it and do stuff on it like the presentation in drama class and stuff like that would be a good place to start.

Rosie, Dana, and Nicole offer valuable insights to educators that fitting gender and sexual diversity into a neat unit or rigid box focused on the topic does not interrupt the continued

'othering' of these individuals. Instead, these young people called educators to be creative and find relevant moments across the curriculum to invite the conversation to include gender and sexual diversity, which serves to normalize the conversation and these individuals' identities.

The timing of these discussions was also taken up by the participants and they had some insightful things to say about when these conversations needed to begin. Dana really felt if these conversations happened very early on this would become a non-issue because attitudes would be shifted at the same time those attitudes about diversity were beginning to be formed.

> I know it's like hard to get them to do it, but if they really want to make the education system easier for everyone, make it so they learn early on. I think accepting people regardless of whether or not you understand it should be enforced like starting with preschool, but I would say not talking specifically about gender and sexual diversity at the same time you start learning about sex, maybe at the time you start learning about puberty, because that's like the same time you start developing your identity, so like grade 5ish. I feel like if it was put into the school system it would just be a generational thing like you tell your kids that, I don't know, it's okay to be different. It's okay to have a big nose, or not want to play sports, or if you're a guy it's okay to like the color pink.

Similarly, Nicole and Hunter both thought to bring up these conversations, at the point they are currently at in school, would be a pointless endeavour, as students' attitudes and biases are already well established. They also felt an appropriate opportunity to bring the topic up would be when students begin to learn about sex, in general, beginning in grade 5. Hunter offered her advice to her teachers:

> I think that it needs to be even in grade 5 when they are talking about it for the first time

> ‘hey just so you know, girls get periods and boys get, you know, their voices drop’, and stuff like that. It needs to be brought up like also some boys will choose to be with a girl and they will have to do this and this and when they are talking about sex they shouldn’t just say this penis goes into this vagina. They should say sometimes other people love each other in different ways.

Nicole also expressed the need to begin the conversation much younger than high school:

> Not now because it’s already in there by now. Because they start talking about sex-ed in like grade 4ish. They should start bringing it up there. And no matter the school system, it should be in around there. Because that’s when kids start to identify. Kids start to, their self-confidence starts to drop and when they develop anxiety in all these kinds of stuff. It’s right before that’s just the edge right there and if you start right there, kids are still really malleable then, like their brains and their opinions and everything. It almost sounds like you’re taking advantage of them, but you’re not, because you’re trying to make them more open rather than less open.

Not only did the participants have important things to say about where and when to address it, they also gave teachers some guidance on how they could address it with students to better normalize the whole topic. Elisabeth gave the following insights into the use of language to normalize it:

> I think when it comes to talking about it, even with teachers educating people, just try to make it have less of a stigma. To address it as that’s just how they were born. Just like if you were attracted to say a male or a female depending on who you are. They are just attracted to this or they just feel that way and that’s just who they are. You could try to

> break it down scientifically and go into it, but at the end of the day, that's just how they feel and that's just who they are. I mean, no one would tell you that you can't be straight.

For Hunter, this process of normalization involved giving students the space to come up with their own opinions based on teachers fulfilling their role of providing students with facts:

> If I was talking about sexual diversity and gender, I think I would approach it as, I don't know, I think I would like to use a lot of questions myself like, you know, if they are nice to you and they treat you with respect, how are they different? What are they doing wrong with you that makes you need to care about it?

The process of normalization for Jayce would come from his teachers just validating that identifying with your non-ascribed gender was an option:

> I think it would have been better to just tell people it's okay if you want to be a girl or a boy, if you want to like girls or like boys.

Nicole discussed normalization being interrupted when teachers preface any content that could offend students, which furthers the stance that there is something wrong with depictions of diversity of gender or sexuality:

> Don't in class sometimes you don't have to like preface if you're showing a video and there's a gay couple in it and they're kissing or something like that. Like you don't have to explain it away because it's a normal thing. Even if kids are getting it from their parents that it's not normal and it's not okay, if they are in school and their teachers are saying that it's okay and the kids around them, older or their age or whatever, are saying it's okay or think it's okay, then they'll think it's okay. And it's important.

Each of the participants felt this was one of the biggest barriers to creating schools that, not only protected gender and sexual minority students from overt harassment, but was actually working

to shift the ongoing discriminatory attitudes and behaviors of their peers. Without beginning to open the dialogues, the participants and their gender and sexually diverse peers continued to be forced to the margins and left discounted while their heterosexual peers were permitted to continue to develop a strong normative bias towards heterosexuality and a negative perspective towards topics of diversity. The suggestions provided by the participants were not complicated, but demonstrated simple and small ways teachers could begin to interrupt the heterosexism in their schools and open up a space for the gender and sexual minority students to be validated.

8.3.2 Lock Down on Language. The second main point driven home by most of the participants was the importance of seeing and hearing their teachers address the homophobic and transphobic language of their peers and more diligently respond to the verbal discrimination that they all reported was commonplace amongst the student body in their schools. This included addressing the word 'fag', 'faggot', or phrase 'that's so gay' every time and with intentionality, which involved addressing the message underneath these derogatory terms and statements and the systemic forces of oppression at play. A number of the participants expressed the importance for teachers to strictly and consistently address homophobic and transphobic language. Elisabeth expressed the following:

> I think really cracking down on it, that it's not okay to use the word 'gay' as a harsh slur or to make people feel like they should be singled out just to make it feel normal, but also to make sure to have safe spaces and be able to tell someone, so they can put an end to whatever is going on and stop people from potentially using those slurs or being hateful.

For Elisabeth, it was one thing to address the language when they heard it, but teachers also needed to demonstrate a stance that they were safe and supportive people that students could turn to and report homophobic and transphobic slurs slung at both themselves and their peers, and

have a sense of confidence that these would be addressed. Dana also expressed that to see any change start happening, teachers needed to tighten up the slack students currently have for free speech:

> I feel like they would have to really crack down and be vigilant for people who are saying fag and 'that's so gay', because kids aren't going to snitch to the teachers about it. Enforce that discrimination isn't okay and have a zero tolerance policy, like all that effort they put into a zero-tolerance bullying thing a few years ago, they need to put that into this and like racial issues because that's who's getting bullied. Your enforcing no bullying, but you're not enforcing no bullying against the people getting bullied.

The participants also identified that addressing language goes beyond telling students to stop using these terms. For Elisabeth, she felt it involved more direct education about minimizing any one person to this one aspect:

> Removing the stigma that's making people treat others differently. Just taking that away and being like 'yeah, they're just people'. It's really a small part of who they are. I mean, I guess it depends on who you are because some people feel heavily this is who I am, but really who you like, that's like one part of you out of a million of other things you do or like or dislike. It's just one component or preference over how many others. It doesn't make a person an elephant all of a sudden, they're still a person. They just have a different preference. I think people don't realize they're going to have to accept it. They can't just like bleach it away.

Likewise, for Dana, there was a systemic piece that needed to be addressed beyond just telling kids to stop talking in that way and an educational component as well to challenge the

assumptions that permitted the derogatory language in the first place:

> That when kids say something, like 'that's so gay or you're a faggit', or stuff like that, it's a lot more than a joke. You have to do something about it because it is so much more than just a joke. That really impacts someone like a lot. Compare it to the 'N' word or something. Teach them that it's not a choice and they need to know all the proper terms like the pronouns are really important. They need to respect people's choices about pronouns and stuff like that.

Dana and Elisabeth really captured the importance of teachers taking the homophobic and transphobic insults and slurs seriously and demonstrating a true zero-tolerance to bullying. They also highlighted the importance of teachers to see these terms as different from other swear words and begin to address the violence and oppression contained in these insults.

Beyond protecting students from verbal assaults, spreading messages of consistent support and appreciation of gender and sexual diversity was also expressed as an important form of support in a few different forms. Nicole expressed this was demonstrated through the actions of teachers and administrators that allowed gender and sexual minority students to move about their school in a safe and supportive way:

> Clearly laying out that no matter what your gender identity is, whatever you identify, you will be protected for that. And you can use whatever bathroom and change room you want from the beginning. It doesn't matter, we will, they will, support you no matter what. Just showing support and making it obvious that, no matter what, they will support you and they won't tolerate bullying on the grounds of sexual or gender identity or anything like that. Everybody deserves to love whoever they want. And everybody should be able to use whatever bathroom they want.

For Jayce, showing support also involved checking their own language and his advice was to "make sure you keep your tongue on pronouns." Elisabeth felt teachers needed to take a more active approach to demonstrate unconditional support and actually teach students about how to communicate and treat one another, in general, to combat the issues around language:

> You know, there's people that get almost uncomfortable like they don't know how to treat people. Like, oh, you're gay; do I have to treat you differently? Do I have to act differently? Are you going to try to hit on me? Maybe having a unit on communicating with others better and not just, you know, being nice, but actually communicating properly. And including and maybe saying you know the word 'fuck' put in context, showing that obviously you can't swear in school, but that's much different than swearing at someone. And doing things that shine a light on communication and how you should talk to each other and how you should look at people and how you know diversity doesn't mean you have to carry a cross around every time you see someone different. Making it so it's more normal and just shining way more light on it because that's what we need obviously.

Dana also felt teachers acting as allies involved a number of aspects and included protecting their right to use the bathroom and identify with the pronouns and names they choose:

> Definitely let them use the bathroom. Don't let kids discriminate against them for pronouns. And I also feel like the name changing process needs to be a lot easier.

Language was consistently identified as another big issue interrupting the capacity for schools to be, not only safe environments, but environments conducive to learning about oneself and the world. As Dana expressed very eloquently, experiencing these microaggressions in the form of derogatory slurs or the teachers lack of reprimand for these assaults, are a big deal and

hearing a teacher address their peers in an intentional and informed way that interrupts not just the use of a word, but the context and systemic forces behind the word, would demonstrate support and encourage a new way to talk to and about gender and sexual minority individuals in general.

8.3.3 Dear Principal and Superintendent of Schools. In each of our interviews together, I reminded the participants one of the aims of this research, beyond a dissertation project, was to bring concrete information back to their principals and divisions about their experience of their school's culture around gender and sexual diversity. I asked each participant to imagine that meeting happening and what they would most like to hear me tell their administrative team about their experiences and their ideas of what they felt needed to be changed in their school. I will share a moment from each of the participants about what the take home message would be for them to have shared to their administrators and senior administrators for their school and division. For educators and educational leaders who are open to listening, their insights share incredible words of wisdom which, taken seriously, could shift not just the practices, but the attitudes of students and staff alike.

8.3.3.1 Actions speak louder than words. Rosie's biggest piece of advice to the leadership at her school and her division was to actually do something about it:

> I like the idea of actual stuff getting done. Like you talked about the bathrooms and nobody has ever talked about that and if our school set up something and kind of made a protocol sort of what you would do and this is what would happen, those sound like real things because I feel like a lot of the time schools and other places are like 'oh we have an issue and let's do a presentation on it, let's do a lecture', and I just feel like those

> things are ineffective, especially with teenagers, because you don't want to listen. We want to do other things and you don't care.

This isn't surprising getting to know Rosie's personality over the course of our 2 interviews together. She has taken this approach herself towards challenging the status quo and doing her middle school social project on gay rights, participating in her school's GSA club, and engaging in this research study. For Rosie, her school needs to show, through their actions, that they support the needs of all their students through meaningful and sustainable social change.

8.3.3.2 Walk the Walk. Nicole expressed such fondness of her teachers at her current school and humanitarian belief about them as being fundamentally kind and caring individuals. However, her words of wisdom came from a disconnect she observed between the way they were as individuals and how they were as educators regarding fulfilling their role in shaping the next generation of students to engage in a democratic society:

> Talk about it. Even if it's not necessarily what you agree with. Even if you don't necessarily think gay or trans people, that they are, that they should be equal. You're in a public school. Stick up for those kids. Those kids are going to be beaten down and it's your job for them to not be beaten down because you're constantly toting how we're not supposed to bully each other in any form, but if you're not getting in there when you overhear some kid being mean to another kid because they're, because of how they dress, because of how they talk – and they're calling them gay or queer or whatever – then, you're not walking the walk that you're telling us to. So, just get out there and help those kids because you care about them. Why should who I am change that really?

This space between what her teachers demonstrate as individuals, and the actions they are taking, or not taking, to better address the homophobic and transphobic culture in her school, is a space

she herself has been trying to find ways to fill through her being open about who she is to her student body, her unwillingness to see her peers be belittled or bullied and determination to stand up for them, and her desire to put her sexuality on a T-shirt just to start a conversation. Nicole's advice calls teachers to uphold their ethical obligation to support and protect all students, regardless of their gender and sexuality, and regardless of their own beliefs.

8.3.3.3 I'm not doing this for attention. Like Nicole, Jayce shared a positive experience of the support he had received from his teachers and administrator in response to his transition this past year and request to be referred to by a different name and pronouns. His advice speaks more to the policy in place within his school division that they are unable to change his name in their system until he has had a legal name change and how important it is, despite this policy, to legitimize a students' desire to express themselves and be addressed congruently with their identified gender.

> I think teachers need to realize that yes you can't legally change the name, legally you can't change your name in school, but why can't they send an email themselves anyways? That was my thing; I was going to send an email myself to every single teacher and say the exact same thing and stuff like that. I think even though you can't legally change your name in the computer system without sending the papers out, I think it would just be great if they could just be like 'oh yah, you can send an email to them even though we can't legally change it'. I think that would be a little bit better. And just for them to understand like the feeling and stuff like there was like rumours where they're like 'oh you're just doing this for attention', like those kinds of people and it happens and you need to just block that out and realize you are who you are.

What Jayce spoke about in his words of wisdom was breaking down the barriers for students who do want to change their name and pronouns and creating a safer space where students could feel comfortable enough to email their teachers themselves because they would know their teachers were going to be supportive. Jayce's advice also speaks to the importance of interrupting discriminatory comments and rumours, such as the ones he experienced that de-legitimize his experience as a transgender student and minimize his transition process and right to identify with the gender he identifies as.

8.3.3.4 It starts young. Hunter's words of advice touch on the relevance of this conversation starting from a really young age and for educators to know and understand most gender and sexually diverse individuals have felt something was different about them from a young age. Hunter's advice is more about cautioning both educators and parents about the harm that can come by not considering the possibility that your child or your student could be sexually or gender diverse or gender fluid and, by not considering this possibility, it is setting them up for struggles:

> You know, as a kid you're growing up in this school and I know the whole transgender sexual diversity, and that kind of stuff only came up when you were old enough to be on the internet and discovering it for yourself because, you know in school, they don't teach about it and I think they should have something dedicated to that. Like, not really calling out on those people, but like calling out that you may feel like you're something different and that's totally okay because it might be, you know, give people some help with that because there are some two year olds, when my cousin was two all of my aunties and uncles looked at him and were like yah there is something different about him, even when

> he was like two, and now he is gay. I wish there was something that could help people with that when they are young, so they aren't struggling with that so much.

Hunter's advice has a preventative nature to it of challenging teachers, not to just consider talking about this in high school sexual education, but for educators across grades to invite this topic into their classrooms, so students can be exposed to the idea that it is normal to identify with a diverse gender or sexuality early on. That way, if at any point they are questioning, they can feel assured they are still normal. This type of early inclusion could prevent the shame, secrecy, and denial that many youth with diverse genders or sexualities experience, which fuels the emotional and mental health conditions that they are at higher risk of experiencing, like depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, substance abuse, academic underachievement or truancy, and anxiety.

8.3.3.5 If you aren't going to address it, don't expect it to go away. Elisabeth took a very rational approach to our dialogues together and extended a great deal of empathy and understanding towards her teachers, her peers, and their parents for their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Her advice took the stance, however, that while she could understand the reasons behind it, that didn't excuse the reality that little progress was happening to address the underlying issues that were causing the conservative attitudes and beliefs to continue to interfere with creating safe and inclusive learning environments for her and her gender and sexually diverse peers.

> If you're not choosing to educate students, don't expect the problem to be fixed. Because a lot of, you know, learning goes hand-in-hand with so many things and, you know, knowledge is very important and, if you're not willing to put in the effort to change it a bit, so, you know, you can teach people how to be more inclusive, don't expect people to

> be more inclusive. That's kind of common sense, I guess. If you don't teach it, then it's not learned.

What Elisabeth's advice gets at is the role of teachers moving beyond teaching facts, but also teaching morals, values, and beliefs. Elisabeth's advice touches on the hidden curriculum of her school and how, by not teaching anything about gender and sexual diversity, by not modeling and teaching inclusion and interrupting homophobic and transphobic transgressions, heteronormativity remains normalized and so too does the ongoing oppression of gender and sexually diverse students.

8.3.3.6 You gotta work at it. Like Rosie and Elisabeth, Dana too had the stance that, without intentionally working at this issue, it's not going to get better. Dana's advice addresses the need for her administrator and senior administrator to know the legitimacy of the topic and the issue and her awareness that it is something that has been ignored, intentionally, because it is misunderstood or interpreted through a conservative or cautious lens.

> I would like for them to not necessarily know about me, but just to know how this is like a legitimate issue and you can't just throw it on the back burner because it's like this new thing that not everyone accepts yet. Like that's not how the race issues got solved, and even then, they're still not solved. Like you gotta work at it dude. You're not going to get anywhere by being like 'it's a new thing that I don't understand yet, so I'm not going to take it into consideration'.

This notion of considering came up often in my multiple dialogues with Dana. Her advice is challenging her education team to consider that she and other students like her are in their classes and in their schools, struggling to survive the constant microaggressions stemming from the decision to ignore their identity and needs, and finding it difficult to learn in a distractingly

heterosexist environment. Dana is also challenging her educational leaders to start somewhere and work at it, and just like racism, there's a long way to go, but seeing her school team starting somewhere would give her and her peers a great deal of hope that they aren't in this battle alone.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided a look at some of the more positive initiatives happening in the schools that were shared through the participant interviews, with a focus on what each participant found as the most hopeful aspect of their school experiences regarding gender and sexual diversity. The second section of this chapter pulled together the key highlights of what the participants indicated were areas they saw needing to be addressed and opportunities for change, with specific guidance given by each participant for their schools and divisions' leadership teams. This chapter really exemplifies the incredible insight that is held by the student body within these schools and their ability to consider what kinds of changes could be really meaningful to move towards a more safe and inclusive school of diversity. These students were able to articulate their advice in not just abstract, but concrete terms of specific topics, courses, and spaces where these conversations could emerge, explicit details of how their teachers could better address the language of their peers, and where to begin to interrupt the current patterns of oppression based on heteronormativity operating in their schools. These youth are inspiring and reveal the rich possibilities for change if their school leaders could actively listen and get behind them.

CHAPTER 9 – Key Findings and Implications for Practice

9.1 Introduction

As the previous three chapters lay out the findings from the thematic analysis of the narrative accounts of the participants in this study, continued oppression and marginalization of gender and sexual minority students remains commonplace in rural school settings in Southern Alberta. This final chapter will provide a review of the key findings of the curriculum discourse analysis and narrative analysis of the data in this study; it will also summarize the key themes discovered from the narrative accounts and the implications for practice. The findings will be put in context of the larger body of literature in the field of gender and sexuality studies and highlight the unique contributions of this study to that field. Lastly, a discussion of the limitations of this research along with questions and possibilities for future inquiry will be explored.

9.2 Study Review

Most research undertaken with gender and sexual minority individuals seeks out larger samples from more urban locations, where student recruitment is made easier with a larger population from which to draw. Accordingly, this study sought to better understand the less explored demographic of students who live in more rurally located schools and pursued a deeper understanding of how the forces of heteronormativity and religion played out in these more conservative areas. To better understand this question, this research employed a multi-method qualitative framework involving critical discourse analysis and narrative analysis to contextualize and explore the current realities of life in school for rurally located gender and sexually diverse students in Alberta.

9.2.1 Curriculum Discourse Summary. Three curriculum documents were critically analyzed using critical discourse analysis to provide context of how the planned curriculum, being curriculum materials created by the ministry to guide teachers in their lessons and objectives, took up or avoided topics and issues pertaining to gender and sexual diversity, as well as supported a heteronormative discourse. Health and Life Skills 9 and Career and Life Management 10 (CALM) were chosen for analysis, being Alberta Education's core health literacy courses and the spaces where sexual education was included in the curriculum. These were also courses that would be relevant, as recently experienced by the student population targeted for this study. Additionally, 4 primary Seminary Teaching Manuals along with 2 supplementary teaching brochures were analyzed from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These documents were selected because they are included as an optional curriculum for secondary students in two of the three schools in one of the divisions participating in this study. These documents provided a context for the planned curriculum of religious teachings that are non-affirming towards gender and sexual diversity and included in the public school curriculum. They also contextualize the religious discourse practiced by large portions of the population in these small communities.

The analysis of the curriculum documents provides a critical context to understanding the guidelines for talking about sexuality in the core health literacy courses along with the school sanctioned religious courses. The analysis revealed the two core health literacy courses outlined a number of objectives regarding the development of student well-being and identity that would necessitate the inclusion of the topic of gender and sexual diversity to meet these goals. Unfortunately, also found within both curriculum documents, were many barriers for teachers who were interested in engaging in this topic and a number of statements which justified the

exclusion of the topic all together. These documents encouraged teachers to consider the larger community beyond the school, to take parental values and beliefs into consideration, and to be cautious to offer a balanced education around controversial topics. In the context of rural Southern Alberta and the discussion of gender and sexual diversity, the language in the core health literacy curriculums makes it too ambiguous and risky for teachers to consider the inclusion of this topic. Additionally, the CALM, Health and Life Skills, and Seminary manuals contained overt heteronormative and heterosexist lessons and discussions, with the LDS Seminary teachings also including several homophobic and transphobic statements and discussions. Having no requirement to take up the topic of gender and sexual diversity from a social justice and antioppressive educational framework, the inclusion of these messages not only perpetuates the beliefs that gender and sexual diversity is abnormal and inherently controversial, but also minimizes and oppresses the needs and rights of gender and sexual minority students.

9.2.2 Narrative Analysis and Analysis of Narratives. In terms of participants, 6 individuals contacted me to participate in this study, five of whom identified at least at some point in the study as a gender and sexual minority youth, and one whom identified as an ally to the community. Only secondary students were considered for participation in this study and the student participants spanned this age group, with three currently enrolled in grade 9, one in grade 10, one grade 11, and one grade 12. Two divisions participated in this study, with eight schools total being requested as sites for recruitment, with four schools in each division. During the recruitment stage of the study, when administrators were invited to include their school in this project, two administrators from one of the divisions declined the invitation, both expressing fear of parental backlash and possible belief they were promoting sexual diversity to students, which

could upset parents and the surrounding community. As a result, five schools advertised this study to their entire student population and the participants who self-selected to participate attended one of three schools. Two of the schools did not have any students contact me to participate. Both divisions were represented in the sample, with four students from one division and two from the other.

All the participants concurred that their school was not engaging in discussions pertaining to gender and sexual diversity and even actively avoided the conversation if it did come up. Their reasoning behind this was that their teachers feared backlash or reprimand; they were uneducated themselves on how to bring it up, or simply didn't want the aggravation. The impact of this null curriculum included isolation, harmful lack of sexual health education, and oppression for those students who fell outside the heteronormative norm. Student participants also revealed bathroom, locker room, and physical education continued to be vulnerable spaces that were inadequately addressed to support the needs of gender fluid students, as was outlined in the Alberta Education Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expression (Alberta Education, 2016). Additionally, the homophobic and transphobic language of peers continued to be problematic and insufficiently addressed by teachers, leaving the student body justified in continuing to engage in these routine microaggressions against their diverse peers.

The narratives revealed the primary forces driving the current practices around gender and sexual diversity were heteronormativity, parental influences, and religious freedom. Many of the participants discussed the positive influence of their own parents on their ability to be open about their sexuality, as well as the negative influence of some parents on the attitudes of their more conservatively aligned peers, who continued to express prejudice against gender and sexual

minority students through their language and actions. Heteronormativity was explored by a few of the participants and the social norms that regulate the behaviors of all students, but particularly females, and how this force maintains the privileging of heterosexuality and heteronormative behaviors. Finally, five of the six participants pointed out religion, and specifically freedom of religion for the predominant LDS faith in their communities, as both influencing teacher resistance to inviting gender and sexual diversity into the classroom, as well as having a more pronounced space in the school than protecting the rights for gender and sexual minority students. Religion was identified as a force operating both outside of the school, as well as within the school and was repeatedly acknowledged as an authority that was interfering with the acceptance and inclusion of gender and sexually diverse students.

The narratives of the student participants also revealed moments of hope and positive change they were seeing in their school. Two of the three schools had an active GSA, which was considered a positive support for students to experience safety and connection with others. One of the schools had ‘safe space’ posters and stickers visible on several classroom doors and walls. Some of the participants had a positive experience of their teachers, as safe and caring individuals, and others found hope in the support and close relationships they had formed with peers. The consistent feedback given by the students regarding what change was needed involved educators talking about gender and sexual diversity topics and issues across the curriculum and, specifically, in sexual education. They also highlighted the critical importance of teachers to consistently and intentionally addressing the homophobic and transphobic language that was commonplace in the schools for all six participants. Lastly, each student shared their advice to their school leadership team that emulated a belief that if teachers were not willing to take a

stance and become more actively involved in interrupting the current heteronormative system operating in schools, the possibility and hope for change was dismal.

9.3 Key Findings

Narrative inquiry is undertaken when there is a desire to understand a certain phenomenon in a more intimate and nuanced way. It is a method used to invoke empathy through the use of individual stories that capture the realities of personal experience in the context of the topic of study. With a sample size of six, this study was not concerned with generalizations and statements about what life was like for all gender and sexual diverse students in all schools, but rather, through a deeper exploration into the individual experiences of these six participants, the impact of certain school practices could be explored deeply and the implications of how these practices may impact students offer valuable insights that can inform safer and more inclusive school spaces. These students shared important and relevant details about the particular of what it is like to live within the heteronormative and hostile spaces of schools and the felt impact of non-affiring religious discourses on these spaces. While their stories may not be generalizable to all gender and sexually diverse youth, there are many aspects of their narratives that are likely to connect with other youth in similar environments who have encountered and continue to try to navigate the same institutional and individual forms of oppression shared by the participants in this study.

Consistent with the previous literature outlined in earlier chapters of this dissertation, the findings from this study support that schools remain oppressive and hostile environments for gender and sexual minority students. This study, which confirmed many of the issues already identified in the literature as deficiencies in schools to create safe and inclusive environments for gender and sexual minority youth, also illustrated how common these issues are in the rural

Southern Alberta schools that were sites for this study. Schools continue to omit and avoid topics pertaining to gender and sexual diversity, gender and sexual minority students continue to hear derogatory slurs on a regular basis with minimal response from school staff, and there continues to be a general silencing of gender and sexual minority students in schools. This section will summarize the main findings of this study into three categories: uneducated educators endorse heterosexism, Christian privilege, and sanctioning homophobia and transphobia through silence.

9.3.1 Uneducated educators endorse heterosexism. The findings from this study support the claims made by previous researchers that secondary schools endorse heterosexist and heteronormative discourse, resulting in environments that fail to be conducive to the learning, growth, and educational needs of gender and sexual minority students (Chesir-Terin, 2003; Swearer, 2008). This study offered a unique look into the specific curriculum materials that are meant to guide educators of core health literacy courses as well as religiously affiliated teaching materials that were non-affirming towards gender and sexual diversity. The planned curriculum, as analyzed through the critical discourse analysis, reveals little to no support or encouragement for teachers to talk about diverse gender and sexual identities. Through the reading of these documents, teachers are left justified to exclude the topic all together or would be fearful of trying to include it in a balanced or unbiased way, while still creating a safe classroom space that is respectful of diversity.

Similar to Abbott, Ellis, and Abbott's (2015) findings from their analysis of the United Kingdom's sexual health education materials, a number of contradictory discourses exist in the curriculum documents analyzed in this study that undermine any real commitment towards diversity and shifting the heteronormative discourse. This leaves gender and sexual minority students with little to no education about sex that is reflective of their personal experiences, thus

preventing them from receiving accurate information necessary to practice safe sex and develop healthy intimate relationships. Additionally, the planned curriculum from CALM and Health and Life Skills 9 reinstate the power of parents routinely by emphasizing the importance of collaborating and consulting with parents about lesson plans and that parents have the right to remove their child from lessons pertaining to sexuality. The lack of support for teachers on how to address topics of gender and sexual diversity provides ample justification for teachers who are uneducated on the topic and/or wary about bringing it in to avoid it all together.

An important contribution from this study is the revelation that the student narratives all supported this to be the case, in that their teachers routinely avoided the topic or occasionally brushed over it when it found its way into the discussion, thus leaving students entirely uneducated about gender and sexual diversity. What was also a unique contribution of this study was the discussion of participants around the reasons gender and sexual diversity were part of the null curriculum. Unanimously, the participants in this study were keenly aware that this eradication of the topic was mostly the result of their teachers being under-educated or uneducated themselves on the topic and fearing potential backlash from parents with opposing beliefs. What the narratives of the participants highlight is that the silencing that occurs when their teachers routinely omit any content inclusive of gender and sexual diversity, or discuss it in a cautious or harmful manner, they are contributing to the heteronormative discourse operating in the school and possibly perpetuating the homophobic and transphobic attitudes, behaviors, and comments of the student body. Their avoidance of the topic not only sends the message that discussions of gender and sexual diversity do not belong here, but gender and sexual minority students do not either. The hope shared across several of the participants was that with further education, their teachers could become allies and better know how to challenge heterosexism on

an individual and systemic level and that this would have profoundly positive effects on the emotional well-being of individual students and their capacity to thrive in their learning environments.

9.3.2 Religious community culture influences student experiences. As highlighted in previous chapters, religiosity is often viewed as a protective factor and important support for many individuals and has been found to reduce the risk of negative emotional and physical health outcomes. However, there is a growing body of research supporting that this finding is not generalizable to gender and sexual minority individuals (Rostosky, Danner, & Riggle, 2008; 2010). The LDS church was used as an example in this study as a faith which sanctions non-affirming discourse pertaining to gender and sexual diversity. They were also a focal point of this study given the large population of LDS members in the communities that were sites for this study. The influence of the LDS church in these communities, as highlighted in this study, offers an example of the impact of religion that is felt and lived within schools when they are embedded in communities with large portions of residents practicing a conservative Christian faith. This study supports that religiosity, specifically fundamental Christian religious doctrine, contributed to more minority stress for the participants in this study through their perception that Christian privilege had a role in the maintenance of a heteronormative discourse in their schools and inhibited their teachers from interrupting homophobic and transphobic instances, routinely heard at school, through reprimand or education. Religiosity was identified also as a primary influence on the attitudes and beliefs towards gender and sexual diverse students held by their peers.

It would be inappropriate for schools to aspire to alter the religious beliefs held by students or the teachings of parents, regardless of the discriminatory or prejudiced nature of these

teachings. It is beyond the capacity of the school to control what students are taught at home or in their community. However, certain practices that occurred within the school were identified as contributors to this climate of prejudice and discrimination. For instance, when teachers call out derogatory language related to religion, yet avoid language that is aggressive against gender and sexually diverse students, this sends a strong message about whose rights and needs are more valued and protected in that space. At a systemic level, when schools engage in religious teachings, through elementary bible studies, including certain aspects of religious education in Social Studies or History class, allowing religious groups to come in and give lectures about their faith and hand out church doctrine, or permit the heteronormative teachings of one particular faith and sanction it through assigning public school credits, a message is sent to students that the school supports the teachings and values of these faiths. Where this becomes problematic is when these teachings are in direct contradiction to creating safe and inclusive school spaces for all students, regardless of gender and sexual identity. To include them anyway, despite having a strong heteronormative bias, privileges the Christian beliefs over the right for students to freely and safely express their gender or sexuality. While students are typically given an option to opt out of these religious classes, an important finding from this study was that those religious teachings still find their way into the school spaces through the other students who do engage in these teachings who become more justified in their stance, as their perspectives become sanctioned by their school. Arguably, it is the role of the school to protect the educational space from any messages or direct teaching that contradict respect and safety of any of their students. By taking a stance to not include any non-affirming religiously affiliated learning materials, students who have a religious affiliation are not marginalized and can continue to practice their faith in their families and community outside of school. However, by including these teachings,

students who are not Christian or who identify as a gender and sexual minority, are marginalized as they are exposed to non-affirming messages about their worthiness and legitimacy and cannot escape their impact when the entire student body is invited to participate in this non-affirming discourse.

9.3.3 Sanctioning of homophobia and transphobia through silence. All the participants in this study identified a desensitization in their schools, both with staff and students, around language and derogatory slurs directed at or about gender and sexual minority individuals. Peter, Taylor, and Chamberland (2015) point out, regardless of the intended meaning, the widespread use of anti-gay language in schools sends a symbolic message that school settings are unsupportive of sexual and gender diverse students. More alarming is their finding that this can lead to an increased likelihood of non-physical abuse and physical violence (Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015). They contend that being complacent about the ostracism and cruelty directed towards gender and sexual minority students not only increases the likelihood of more serious forms of abuse but reinforces the systemic heteronormativity of the whole school community (Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015). The results of Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland's (2015) study supported the homophobic and transphobic discourse at the peer level is routinely downplayed or ignored and this was considered a factor in maintaining the heterosexist attitudes of the student population. Not only did their study find non-physical abuse can be a stepping stone for more serious forms of bullying, such as physical assault, they also remind of the powerful impact that verbal abuse itself has on individuals, particularly young people (Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015). The participants in this dissertation research shared the powerful messages sent through the lack of teachers' response to the routine derogatory slurs used by their peers and captured the personal narrative of the lived experiences

of these aggressions at school. Contained in the narratives in this study was the impact of these words, as being more than just name calling, but having a detrimental impact to their well-being and their ability to focus and learn.

This study offered some important insights derived from the student participants regarding important ways to address heterosexism in schools. The students in this study articulated clearly that teachers can protect against the influence of heterosexism by taking a hard stance, a zero-tolerance approach, against any kind of discrimination and bullying by being more intentional in their methods of educating about this topic. This stance moves beyond addressing language and involves creating a culture of empathy, curiosity, compassion, and humanity. As many of the participants discussed, this requires more than teaching that gender and sexual diversity exists in the context of sexual education, but normalizing that gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, queer, pansexual, and questioning students are just people, who happen to have a different gender expression or sexuality than the majority, and belong in conversations across the curriculum from an early age. This education includes teaching students how to communicate with one another kindly and not permitting the use of any language that is influenced by an oppressive socializing force, such as racism, ableism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, or genderism. Beyond the classroom, it also involves actions in the school to show their stance on respecting diversity, through having designated safe bathroom and locker room spaces and communicating about this to the student body, allowing students to choose to use the bathroom of their choice, supporting students to select their pronoun and name, promoting GSAs and proactive equality efforts, such as having a PRIDE day, hosting a fundraiser to raise money for local gender and sexual diversity organizations, or bringing in guest presenters for staff and/or students to learn about the community. The students shared simple and practical ways their

teachers could take a stand against the bullying that remains commonplace in school by, as Dana articulated, protecting the students who are actually being bullied.

9.4 Implications

The results of this study substantiate a lot of the findings of previous research in the field of gender and sexual diversity, including the contributors to minority stress as conceptualized by Meyer (2003), the negative implications of being involved in a homophobic religious culture on gender and sexual minority students, and the ongoing hold of heteronormativity in schools. There are also unique findings of this study that have important contributions to the literature by providing a deeper understanding of individual students' experiences in high school through the reflections of current high school students. This study provides some important considerations into the impact of the inclusion of religious teachings along with the influence of non-affirming religious cultures towards gender and sexual diversity on the climate of schools. This study was conducted in small towns with high religiosity, specifically large populations of members of the LDS faith, which is a conservative and non-affirming faith towards gender and sexual diversity. Situated in these areas, this research offers unique insights into the experienced influence of high levels of religiosity on school culture and individual students. The students who participated in this study provided a unique opportunity to listen to the voices of those most impacted by the current day-to-day realities of school and to listen to what they are paying attention to and what seems to really matter to them. The following section summarizes the implications of the three main contributions from this study discussed above and examines the possible future directions for teacher education, student-informed insights into the needed revamping of the planned curriculum, and initiatives students indicated would be meaningful towards queering the school.

9.4.1 Teacher training to address the hidden curriculum of heteronormativity.

Dinkins and Englert (2015) assert that the teachers' role in the classroom is more important in developing a safe and supportive environment, serving as allies and addressing homophobic and transphobic hate, bullying, and routine victimization, then in teaching facts or meeting objectives. Since teachers play a critical role in the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers must see themselves as political beings. Kahn (2006) asserts teachers need to have affirmative attitudes towards sexual and gender minority students and high expectations of their students to accept diversity to promote the type of learning environment conducive for learning. By not addressing critical moments where heterosexism operates in the interactions between teacher-student, student-student, or student-curriculum, teachers fail to acknowledge the power embedded in this marginalization and invites the force of heteronormativity of the larger school environment to dwell within their classroom.

Kearns, Mitton-Kükner, and Tompkins (2017) point out the importance of explicit instruction around gender and sexual diversity in teacher education. Likewise, Dinkins and Englert (2015) underscore it is of critical importance that educators be trained how to incorporate gender and sexual diversity into the classroom and develop an awareness of current practices that perpetuate heterosexism. Beyond an awareness of the presence of gender and sexual minority students in their schools, teachers must establish a practice rooted in anti-oppressive education, where they consider the systemic processes and forces that influence and maintain a heteronormative bias, which directs teachers to consider not just the presence of their gender and sexual minority students but the ongoing marginalization and denigration they continue to live at school (Taylor et al., 2016). By addressing the issue in this way, teachers can become educated on the issue as a pedagogical problem rather than simply an attitudinal one (Taylor et al., 2016).

A key implication that came from the narrative interviews in this study is the students' awareness of the lack of teacher training as it relates to gender and sexual diversity. There was a shared experience amongst many of the participants that their teachers were ill-equipped and uninformed, not just on how to teach the topic, but uneducated about the topic itself. A hopeful finding from this study was that most of the students sincerely believed their teachers cared about the well-being of students. However, many of them also noted they didn't believe their teachers had the tools or education themselves or the support from their administration to address these topics effectively. Aragon et al. (2014) suggest meaningful teacher training moves beyond workshops and professional development activities and must first begin with an internal reflection and examination on teacher's own attitudes towards LGBTQ students, and opening themselves up to the possibility they themselves may be contributing to creating and perpetuating homophobia and transphobia in their schools. Grace (2006) concurs that teachers must first study their own lives, and the intersection of their personal values and beliefs and their professional practice, to better understand how they profoundly impact students' lives and learning.

While the students in this study felt a fairly unanimous position that their teachers in general were not homophobic themselves, they all identified a gap in their teachers' awareness not only on topics and issues pertaining to gender and sexual diversity, but of the messages they were sending—perhaps subconsciously or unintentionally—through their use of language, what they attended to and didn't attend to in the language of the other students, and their teaching practices. This finding expands upon Sear's (1991) finding that educators' personal beliefs about supporting all students typically didn't translate into affirmative practices towards gender and sexual minority students. Britzman also asserts that the inclusion of literature that encompasses

minority sexualities is not sufficient in disrupting heteronormativity, but rather teachers should investigate ways to consider the limits of their own socialization and biases and their tendencies to place gender and sexualities into opposing binary categories (as cited in Schieble, 2012, p. 220). Specifically, in relation to transgender students, the results from this study mirror what Johnson, Singh, and Gonzalez (2014) found in that their participants wanted cisgender people, like their teachers, to be able to self-reflect on their assumptions about their own gender and what they expect from others. Calling to attention one's own socialization, bias, and privilege is a difficult and often emotional process that may induce feelings of guilt and shame. It will require courage on the part of the educators who desires to create a more safe and inclusive classroom space for their students who identify as gender or sexually diverse.

After examining personal biases and beliefs, the data from this study support Aragon et al.'s (2014) second recommendation that educators need to examine their curriculum for inclusivity. Positive representations of gender and sexual minority individuals promote respect and, as Kosciw et al. (2010) found, gender and sexual minority students in schools that included topics and issues pertaining to gender and sexual diversity were more likely to report their classmates as somewhat or very accepting towards the topic. As evidenced by the narratives in this study, omitting this topic from the classroom is having more than just a negative impact on the gender and sexual minority students, who are missing out on valuable learning opportunities around relationships, sexuality, and identity development, but the entire student population is missing out on opportunities to learn about and develop an understanding and respect towards gender and sexual diversity. The students, in this study, unanimously support a discourse of negativity amongst their peers around gender and sexual diversity topics and minority individuals. Inclusion of these topics in a more intentional, informed, and conscious manner

arguably could go a long way in interrupting the heterosexism occurring within and beyond the classroom spaces.

This discussion highlights the gap in teacher training as it relates to gender and sexual diversity and also their own awareness and understanding of their socialization around the gender binary, heterosexism, and heteronormativity. For teachers who are invested in creating more safe and inclusive school environments, a starting place is to begin exploring and challenging their own normative notions of gender and sexuality and critically exploring the way their classroom discussions, lectures, lesson plans, curriculum outlines, and interactions may perpetuate heterosexism in their classroom. For educational leadership, the implication of this finding highlights the importance of seeking out appropriate and informed training opportunities for teachers, support staff, administrators, and senior administrators to better understand gender and sexual diversity and the needs of minority students. Relevant areas include understanding proper terminology and pronouns, practices which contribute to minority stress for students, safe-sex practices for gender and sexually diverse youth, current risk factors gender and sexually minority students face, opportunities for programs to bring into the school to incorporate inclusion, how to establish and support GSAs, how to establish and communicate safe bathroom and locker-room spaces, curriculum lessons and objectives that could invite discussions around gender and sexual diversity in a safe and respectful way, and how to be an ally to gender and sexually diverse students through action and reaction.

It is critical to underscore that it is unfair to place all of the ownership and blame on classroom teachers, but rather to consider the system from which teachers operate within and the level of support they perceive they have or would have to engage in these controversial conversations. Taylor et al. (2016) found many of the educators felt school administrators or

colleagues would be unsupportive if they were to address gender and sexual diversity topics and issues. This was the assumption held by many of the students in this study, that teachers were fearful and do not perceive they have or do not have the support of the principal who would back them up if they were to discuss these topics in the classroom. A key implication of this finding is the importance of not only having these conversations with students, but with educators as well. Educators need to understand the stance of their administration, what processes and policies are in place to protect teachers from parental backlash or negative repercussions that may occur if they do engage in these conversations, and to ensure teachers feel safe and secure in their positions to give them the freedom to explore these topics with students from an informed position. Without these conversations from the top down, it is unreasonable to expect teachers to take a leap of faith and hope they will have administrative backing and support if they do open up the classroom space to these critical dialogues.

9.4.2 Revamping the curriculum as planned. Dinkins and Englert (2015) remind educators that the mere inclusion of texts that include gender and sexual diversity topics or gender and sexual minority individuals does nothing to address the pervading heterosexism of the classroom and larger school environment. As illustrated by the data collected both from curriculum documents and student narratives, teachers aspiring to create safe and inclusive classroom spaces, must not only look for opportunities to infuse the current curriculum with gender and sexual diversity affirming lessons and materials, but must also work to create a classroom space that is free from heterosexual dominance and rigid gender binaries. While the students in this study acknowledge the pressure on teachers to conform to the heteronormative assumptions and biases of the communities, they also called to their teachers to take a stand against the ongoing oppression and victimization and exclusion of gender and sexual diversity

from the texts. In the past number of years, there have been excellent additions to the resources made available to teachers to find tools on how to engage their class in these topics. The Alberta Teacher's Association created toolkits called Prism that provide resources for teachers to promote safe and informed classroom discussions about gender and sexual diversity (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2017). The American Library Association (2017) provides an annually updated bibliography of books with content inclusive of gender and sexual diversity that teachers can draw upon to initiate conversations in the classrooms. These represent a few of the growing list of resources made available to educators who are interested in inviting this conversation in their classroom, but, due to not having substantial training or education on the topic, are unsure where to begin or how to go about it. Nunn and Bolt (2015) remind educators that gender and sexual minority students are not the only ones who benefit from these inclusive curriculum and classroom practices, but that their majority heterosexual peers benefit as well by challenging their own biases and expanding their own understanding of gender and sexual minority individuals and their struggles against homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism. As is highlighted above, what is critical for educators to remember is that it is not just important to consider what needs to be talked about, but how it is talked about to avoid unintentionally contributing or perpetuating heterosexism.

The student narratives and critical discourse analysis highlight a gap in the curriculum as planned and curriculum as lived pertaining to the adequate education of gender and sexually diverse students and their heterosexual peers when it comes to sexuality. McCall, McKay, and the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada (2004) identify schools as having an important and unique position to provide education that enables all young people to acquire appropriate knowledge and skills related to reproductive health, since they are the only formal

institution to have meaningful contact with nearly every young person. The Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education recommends school based sexual health education includes a wide range of topics such as puberty, STI prevention and awareness, contraceptives, relationships, communication, sexual orientation, and media literacy (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008). McKay, Byers, Voyer, Humphreys, and Markham (2014) point out a number of factors influence the development and implementation of high quality sexual health education programs, with perceptive parental support being one of them. Based on the results of the interviews and analysis of the sexual health sections of the Health and Life Skills 9 and CALM curriculum, and the conservative context of rural Southern Alberta, it is reasonable to assume this is a factor in the lack of inclusion of sexual and gender diversity in the curriculum. When parental rights are taken over student rights, this leaves questions about a student's right to education and schools' negligence in preparing all young people to engage in safe, healthy, and informed relationships and sexual behaviors. McRee, Madsen, and Eisenberg (2014) found teachers who involved guest speakers for sexual health education reported covering a greater number of sexuality topics in their classes, thus delivering a more comprehensive education to their students. For teachers in these rural conservative communities experiencing the stress and pressure to avoid controversy with parents and the community, who may or may not have their own biases and beliefs around heteronormativity that interfere with their ability to invite conversations around gender and sexual diversity in their classroom, or who may not have the education themselves to be able to provide informed educational materials and information in a safe and appropriate way, guest speakers are a viable option to consider for sexual health education. An implication for teachers in these communities is to seek out community resources that have individuals who are educated

and trained to discuss and address the topic of gender and sexual diversity in a way that is respectful and informative.

The findings from this study pertaining to religiosity draw important questions about the inclusion of non-affirming religious teachings towards gender and sexual diversity in the planned curriculum and the privileging of religious rights over students' rights to a safe and inclusive learning environment. When these two rights conflict, the question that remains is what should be given priority? Taylor et al. (2016) found in their study of educators' perceptions and attitudes relating to gender and sexual diversity that nearly 20% of their participants felt "teachers should be able to opt out of LGBTQ-inclusive education if it is against their religion" (Taylor et al., 2016, p, 129). These findings support the notion that, at least, some educators believe religious rights have priority over other rights (Taylor et al., 2016). This was highlighted across the narrative accounts as a substantial barrier to students feeling supported in their need to have the freedom to explore and express their identified sexuality and gender. The implication from this present study and studies such as Taylor et al.'s (2016) is freedom of religion must not interfere with or be privileged above freedom of identity and expression if schools aspire to create safe and inclusive learning environments for gender and sexually diverse students. This then raises questions about the appropriateness and harm of including and sanctioning religious doctrine, like that of the LDS faith, as part of the credited high school program in some rural Southern Alberta schools. Dehlin et al. (2014) found—in their large study of the psychosocial health implications of 1600 LDS same-sex attracted members—that remaining active in the LDS church, remaining single, and engaging in mixed orientation marriages, all recommendations of the LDS church towards same-sex attracted members, were associated with higher reported levels of internalized homophobia, sexual identity distress, and depression, and lower levels of

self-esteem and quality of life. With the non-affirming nature of the LDS teachings, as evidenced through the critical discourse analysis, and in light of the participants' overall perception that their schools' already privilege religious freedom over identity, the inclusion of this type of curriculum material may be impeding the safety, support, and well-being for students who identify as a gender or sexual minority.

9.4.3 Interrupting heterosexism – Queering the School. Despite an abundance of research supporting the reality that gender and sexual minority students continue to experience discrimination and oppression in schools, these institutions routinely fail to meet the emotional needs of this population. Johnson et al. (2014) point out that this lack of progress seems to be due to the insidious forces of heterosexism and homophobia and it is these systems of discrimination that appear to be the main obstacles in implementing training and advances on heterosexism and homophobia. Aragon et al. (2014) suggest one way to ameliorate the inequalities between the academic attainment and success of gender and sexual minority youth and their non-minority peers is to address the social contextual factors operating in schools, and creating school environments that are free from homophobic victimization. The results from this study and the dialogue with the students reveal an ongoing need to address heteronormativity at school beyond an individual level, but rather at a contextual, social, and institutional level for meaningful change to occur. As several participants in this research indicated, to begin addressing it with guest lecturers or individual reprimand is too little too late.

To address and disrupt the heteronormativity operating in the schools that were sites for this study, educators need to first identify the everyday practices already facilitating this normative discourse. The participants in this research offer excellent insights into the areas they see as contributing to the hostile and unwelcoming environment for gender and sexual minority

students and educators would benefit from reading their narratives and gaining a better understanding of the implications of some of the common practices in school. For instance, Dana really highlighted the harm of gender segregated activities like in gym class. Elisabeth talked about the heteronormative messages teachers gave that limited girls when they asked for strong boys to help with physical tasks. Rosie recalled a class discussion with her teacher asserting that gender role stereotypes were innate and beneficial, as men take on the roles of protectors of women. These illustrate the sex and gender binary remain endorsed in these schools through both the intentional and unintentional messages of educators.

Queering the school, as illustrated by these participants, means adopting policies that specifically address the disparities encountered by this population. For instance, a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to bullying or discriminatory language was consistently identified as a necessary step towards eradicating the common use of abusive insults within the student body. As confirmed by Taylor and Peter (2011), homophobic language affects most students, with 58% of the students in their study indicating they felt distressed to some degree when they heard homophobic language. Thus, adopting a zero-tolerance policy on the discrimination of gender and sexual minority students serves the entire student population. Another gap to queering the schools that emerged through the student narratives in this research was related to policy. Despite a new policy being drafted by their divisions in response to Alberta Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions (Alberta Education, 2016), these policies were not communicated to them in any way and, as far as they knew, no real change came from it. Taylor and Peter (2011) found that gender and sexual minority students attending schools that had effectively communicated anti-homophobia policies were exposed to fewer homophobic and

transphobic comments and incidents of harassment. Taylor et al. (2016) also found a strong association between the presence of anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia policies and educators' perceptions of the safety of the school for gender and sexual minority students. The information obtained in the narrative interviews evidences a gap between policies and practices, with the students not witnessing any change since the drafting of the policies pertaining to the support of gender and sexual minority students. While Schneider and Dimito (2008) found in their survey of 132 educators that respondents whose school districts had anti-harassment policies directly addressing gender and sexual minorities felt more supported, comfortable, and protected in raising topics and issues pertaining to gender and sexual diversity in the classroom, this conclusion was not supported by the findings in this study where it appears that educators in these schools, all backed by a recently drafted policy pertaining to gender and sexual diversity as mandated by the province, are not engaging in these conversations. The practical implication to this is drawing attention to the importance of communication pertaining to these policies to the student population and staff. Left uninformed, students do not benefit from these policies, as their perceptions about their school remains unchanged and they are unaware of the positive actions their school would initiate to support their need for safety and inclusion. Future research is needed to continue to explore the relationship between policy and practice and what, if any, positive changes are occurring in schools in the aftermath of these recent policy additions.

Another aspect involved in queering the schools that came up in several of the interviews was the creation and participation in GSAs. Two of the schools with student participants in this study had an active GSA and three of the participants attended the GSA either regularly or sometimes. The literature strongly supports the positive impact of GSAs on gender and sexual minority student well-being and connectedness (Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2004; Heck,

Flentje, & Cochran, 2011). Two of the participants in this study did discuss their involvement in the GSA and indicated it was a positive space; however, they both highlighted some concerns pertaining to the level of staff involvement and leadership and resulting stagnation or limited activity and conversation. This reiterates the practical implication discussed above that teachers really need to be educated on the intentional use of these group-level supports that can have a positive impact on minority stress when implemented in an informed and appropriate manner. Schools should not only consider having a GSA available, but also mandate training for the teacher leaders and provide some guidance and expectation around the role of the facilitator to make this a meaningful space for students to access support. The GSA represents an important group-level resource that can support minority coping (Meyer, 2003) and can be invaluable for young people at this developmental stage, particularly those who lack parental support or other group-level support systems. However, without appropriate guidance and leadership, the benefits of the group are limited and, as one of the participants identified, students may be deterred from accessing this important resource because it isn't well managed or supported.

Beyond policies and GSAs, the participants in this study had a great deal of additional insightful ideas for educators to create safer school environments. Bathrooms were identified as another site needing to be addressed to create more safe school environments. Aligned with Johnson et al.'s (2014) findings, some students in this study identified bathrooms as particularly dangerous and frightening spaces. However, it is important for educational leaders to understand the needs between two transgender students may differ, as they did in this study between Jayce and Dana. Jayce was comfortable with the neutral space provided for him to use and only articulated he felt it was an inconvenient location. Dana, who had not yet transitioned at school, did not feel a neutral washroom space was an equitable option and felt this was disrespectful and

oppressive to her right to use the bathroom of the gender she identified. This highlights the importance of schools to be sensitive to the needs of gender and sexual minority students, but also watch their assumptions about what they may need and involve them in collaboration to make these types of decisions together.

While the findings of this study are not generalizable to the experiences of every gender and sexual diverse student in every southern Alberta school, the results of this study do highlight a miss between current educational practices and the recent Alberta Education Guidelines for Best Practice (2016). There was evidence in the narrative interviews that some of the guidelines were being addressed based on the experiences of the participants. For instance, Jayce's experience with his transition and the support of his school to change the name and pronouns they used to address him demonstrated that his school was making efforts towards respecting his right to self-identification (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 5). Unfortunately, most of the experiences shared in the narrative encounters highlighted areas needing further work on the part of the schools related to these guidelines for best practice. For instance, some support was offered by Jayce's school by providing safe access to washroom and change room facilities by allocating a non-gendered single stall washroom; however further inquiry into the spaces Dana and Jayce's schools allocated revealed these spaces were not easily accessible, communication lacked with the student body about the availability of the spaces, and students were not able to access the washrooms congruent with their gender identity (Alberta Education, 2015, p. 9). Dana's painful recount of gender segregation in physical education class exemplifies the failure of her school to minimize gender segregated activities to allow students the right to full expression in flexible and diverse ways (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 7). Hunter's discussion of the heterosexist teachings of the LDS Seminary class, in conjunction with the critical discourse

analysis of these course materials, conflicts with the practice of enabling students with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions to have full, safe, and equitable participation in curriculum activities, as this course does not promote respect and support of diverse sexual and gender identities (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 8). Put in context of these recent guidelines, recommended to all school authorities for creating welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments that respect diverse gender and sexuality, the results of this study support more work is needed on the part of educators and educational leaders to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

9.5 Limitations and questions left to explore

There are a few limitations that became apparent in this investigation that are important to mention. The first involves the process of informed consent that created a skewed sample of participants. Parental consent was required for student participants in this study, which involved taking home a parental consent document (Appendix A) and having their parents sign it. It was brought to my attention by 2 of the participants that they had a friend who had wanted to participate, but was unable to request their parent's consent, as it would be unsafe for them to risk their parent questioning their sexuality. It was understood, at the outset of this study, that this would inevitably be a barrier for the more marginalized youth who did not have parental support to participate. The resulting sample represented six youth who all had strong family support and unconditional acceptance regardless of their gender and sexual diversity. Their perspectives on the topic of this study are impacted by this level of support, including their ability and willingness to stand against the oppression they witness at school, participate in their schools' GSA, and be open enough about their identity to speak to a researcher about it. However, this, in a way, strengthens the findings of this study since despite having the support of

their parents, these participants still experienced and were impacted by the microaggressions directed at gender and sexually diverse students in their schools. This demonstrates parental support does have a positive effect on the ability for these youth to be open about their sexuality, but it does not protect them against the forces of heteronormativity or religious freedom as they operate in their schools.

Another limitation worth mentioning is the number of schools and divisions that were selected for this study. Rural Southern Alberta is a vast area, spanning from Calgary south to the Montana border. This study only included one small area within Southern Alberta and within that small area, students who self-selected attended only 3 of the 8 initially requested schools. While this sample only represents one small area in rural Southern Alberta, the demographics of rural Southern Alberta are not tremendously diverse, with most areas having a strong conservative affiliation and large populations of fundamentalist Christians. As was previously mentioned, the results of this study are not primarily concerned with generalizability; however, the implications on the practices, which were explored in this study, are believed to be relevant across other rural Southern Alberta schools in the context that they all teach the same Health and Life skills 9 and CALM curriculums, many sanction particular religious teachings as part of their programming, and the parental influences in the surrounding communities are strongly conservative. Additionally, the LDS faith is an example of the possible influence of a non-affirming faith towards gender and sexual diversity and the impact of such faith on schools embedded in communities with high levels of religiosity. These findings may have important considerations for schools embedded in communities with high levels of religiosity and involvement in other conservative and non-affirming faiths.

The final limitation considered here is that this study only took up the stories of student participants. This was intentional to ensure the time was adequately given to individual student narratives and there would be the opportunity to have multiple interviews with selected participants to explore a more rich and nuanced understanding of their experiences at school in depth. In qualitative research, it is well understood that researcher bias is a factor that must be acknowledged and accounted for. By focusing strictly on the stories of students, I allowed myself to stay immersed through the lens of a secondary student and not be impacted or biased by also empathizing with the realities of teachers, support staff, administrators, and senior administrators about the pressures they face to maintain the status quo. However, it would have added to the understanding of the forces of heteronormativity, parental influence, and religious freedom if the stories and perspectives of the other members of the school community had been included. This is a site for future study and comparative data would be interesting to analyze how the beliefs and biases of teachers, support staff, administrators, and senior administrators impact the established rituals and norms within a given school environment.

The students who participated in this study illuminated a number of practical areas for educators and educational leaders to consider toward creating safer and more inclusive school spaces. The data generated from this study establishes a foundation on which future research can be based on regarding how gender and sexual minority youth can be better supported in high schools and, specifically, in high schools embedded in highly conservative and/or religious cultures. The findings from this study underscore the need to continue to examine the unique experiences of individual gender and sexual minority high school students to assess current educational policies and collaborate with young people about what types of resources and

practices seem to be most helpful for them. As this study illustrated, students have a great deal to say and a great deal of value to add to the conversation.

Through this exploration, other areas were opened up as sites for future inquiry. For instance, only one participant in this study had attended the LDS seminary class, which gave an important context, but limited the rich exploration into the interaction between the religious curriculum in a secular school and the attitudes of the student body pertaining to gender and sexual diversity. It would be interesting to explore further, in a larger scale study, the views of the entire student population regarding gender and sexual diversity and where these values and views came from and the incurring justification towards the microaggressive behaviors that were routinely reported by the participants in this study. Additionally, case studies of schools in rural Southern Alberta taking on gender and sexual equality initiatives would be great opportunities to explore the reactions of students, teachers, parents, administrators, and community members towards these initiatives and the impact of them. Longitudinal studies within individual schools would also be important sites for data collection to see how schools who have adopted more diversity affirming practices are impacting the attitudes of students in future generations compared to today.

9.6 Conclusion

Pulling the pieces of this dissertation together coincided with the 5th annual pride parade in Lethbridge, the Southern Alberta town I call home. I remember going to Pride for the first time 4 years ago and the few dozen people who had come out to show support were joined with hateful signs and picketing from conservative locals and groups. This year, standing on main street with my husband and daughter, I was inspired to see the sea of thousands of rainbow flags and smiling faces. We have come a long way in such a few years. While the event caught media

attention from the vandalism that occurred on the Pride and Transgender Flag crosswalks, I witnessed the city band together and have an amazing celebratory event. The stories of the participants in this research have the same hope that dwells beneath the discouraging realities of the ongoing oppression experienced in their day-to-day life in school. There is movement happening and it is more evident in the larger areas, such as Lethbridge, but this study highlights the need to catch our rural areas up to speed and move them towards a more democratic and inclusive reality.

References

Abbott, K., Ellis, S., & Abbott, R. (2015). "We don't get into all that": An analysis of how teachers uphold heteronormative sex and relationship education. *Journal of Homosexuality, 62,* 1638-1659. doi:10.1080/00918369.2015.1078203

Aerts, S., Dewaele, A., Cox, N., & Houtte, M. V. (2014). Homonegativity in the technical and vocational track: A survey of secondary school students in Flanders. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 11,* 364-387. doi:10.1080/19361653.2014.910485

Airton, L. (2009). From sexuality (gender) to gender (sexuality): The aims of anti-homophobia education. *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society, and Learning, 9*(2), 129-139. doi:10.1080/14681810902829505

Alberta Education. (2016). *Guidelines for best practices: Creating learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.* Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/media/1626737/91383-attachment-1-guidelines-final.pdf

Alberta Learning. (2002). Career and life management (Senior High). Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/media/160199/calm.pdf

Alberta Learning. (2002b). Health and life skills kindergarten to grade 9. Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/media/160196/health.pdf

Alberta Queen's Printer. (2017). *Province of Alberta: School Act.* Retrieved from http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/s03.pdf

Allen, L. (2015). Picturing queer at school. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 12*(4), 367-384. doi:10.1080/19361653.2015.1077766

Almeida, J., Johnson, R. M., Corliss, H. L., Molnar, B. E., & Azrael, D. (2009).

Emotional distress among LGBT youth: The influence of perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*(7), 1001-14. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/204636129?accountid=9838

American Library Association. (2017). *Rainbow booklist.* Retrieved from http://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/rainbow-books-lists

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.)*. Arlington, VA: APA.

Aoki, T. (1993). Legitimating lived curriculum: Towards a curricular landscape of multiplicity. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 8*(3), 255-268.

Aoki, T. (2004). Teaching as indwelling between two curriculum worlds. In W. Pinar & R. Irwin (Eds.), *Curriculum in a new key* (pp. 159-165). New York, NY: Routledge.

Apple, M. W. (1975). The hidden curriculum and the nature of conflict. In W. F. Pinar (Ed.), *Curriculum theorizing: The reconceptualists* (pp. 95-119). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.

Argon, S. R., Poteat, V. P., Espelage, D. L., & Koenig, B. W. (2014). The influence of peer victimization on educational outcomes for LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ high school students. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 11*(1), 1-19. doi:10.1080/19361653.2014.840761

Arthur, N., & Collins, S. (2014). Counsellors, counselling, and social justice: The professional is political. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, *48*(3), 171-177.

Bailey, S. P. (2015, November 6). Mormon Church to exclude children of same-sex

couples from getting blessed and baptized until they are 18. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/11/05/mormon-church-to-exclude-children-of-same-sex-couples-from-getting-blessed-and-baptized-until-they-are-18/

Banks, W. P. (2009). Literacy, sexuality and the values of queer young adult literatures. *English Journal, 98*(4), 33-36. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/40503258

Battistich, V., Watson, M., Solomon, D., Lewis, C., & Schaps, E. (1999). Beyond the three R's: A broader agenda for school reform. *The Elementary School Journal, 99*(5), 415-432. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/1002297

Bernal, D. D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical race-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry, 9*(1), 105-126. Retrieved from http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/doi/pdf/10.1177/107780040200800107

Biesta, G. (2006). *Beyond learning: Democratic education for a human future.* Boulder: CO: Paradigm. doi:10.1177/107780040200800107

Biesta, G. (2013). *The beautiful risk of education.* Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Birkett, M., Espelage, D. L., & Koenig, B. (2009). LGB and questioning students in schools: The moderating effects of homophobic bullying and school climate on negative outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*, 989-1000. doi:10.1007/s10964-008-9389-1

Bishop, H., & Casida, H. (2011). Preventing bullying and harassment of sexual minority

students in schools. *The Clearing House, 84*, 134-138. doi:10.1080/00098655.2011.564975T

Blackburn, M., & Smith, J. (2010). Moving beyond inclusion of LGBT-Themed literature in English language arts classrooms: Interrogating heteronormativity and exploring intersectionality. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 53*(8), 625-634. doi:10.1598/JAAL53.8.1

Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2012). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Blumenfeld, W. (2006). Christian privilege and the promotion of "secular" and not so "secular" mainline Christianity in public schooling and in the larger society. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 39*, 195-210. doi:10.1080/10665680600788024

Bold, C. (2012). *Using narrative in research.* London: Sage.

Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. New York, NY: Basic.

Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (2002). Schooling in capitalist America revisited. *Sociology of Education, 75*(1), 1-18. doi:10.2307/3090251

Bruner, J. S. (1986). *Actual Minds, Possible worlds.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bryan, J. (2014). Tomboys, sissies, and "that's so gay": Exploring gender and sexuality diversity in early childhood and elementary education. In E. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in education: A reader* (pp. 240-256). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Burton, C., Marshal, M., Chisolm, D., Sucato, G., & Friedman, M. (2013). Sexual

minority-related victimization as mediator of mental health disparities in sexual minority youth: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 42*(3), 394-402. doi:10.1007/s10964-012-9901-5

Busseri, M. A., Willoughby, T., Chalmers, H., & Bogaert, A. R. (2006). Same-sex attraction and successful adolescent development. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 35*, 563-575. doi:10.1007/s10964-006-9071-4

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Callaghan, T. D. (2007). Contra/Diction: How Catholic doublespeak in Canadian Catholic secondary schools furthers homophobia. *Canadian Online Journal of Queer Studies in Education, 3*(1). Retrieved from http://jqstudies.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/jqstudies/article/view/3281/1429

Callaghan, T. D. (2009). The historical, philosophical and sociological foundations that contribute to the institutionalization of homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools. In J. Nahachewsky & I. Johnston (Eds.), *Beyond presentism: Re-imagining the historical, personal, and social places of curriculum* (pp. 61-72). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.

Callaghan, T. D. (2015). Doctoral disciplining of queer educators in Canadian Catholic schools. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 173,* 9-27.

Callaghan, T. D. (2016). Religiosity. In E. Brockenbrouh, J. Ingrey, W. Martino, & N. M. Rodriguez (Eds.), *Critical concepts in queer studies and education: An international guide for the twenty-first century,* (pp. 223 – 230). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Campos, D. (2005). *Understanding gay and lesbian youth: Lessons for straight school teachers, counselors, and administrators*. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.

Canadian Psychological Association (2000). *Canadian code of ethics for psychologists* (3rd ed.). Retrieved from http://www.cpa.ca/cpasite/UserFiles/Documents/Canadian%20Code%20of%20Ethics%20for%20Psycho.pdf.

Carlson, D. (2014). The bully curriculum: Gender, sexualities, and the new authoritarian populism in education. In E. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in education: A reader* (pp. 175-187). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Carlson, D. & Meyer, E. (2014). Introduction. In E. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in education: A reader* (pp. 1-8). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Carpay, J. (2015, March 24). Alberta's Bill 10 leaves parents powerless in deciding their children's education. *The Calgary Sun.* Retrieved from http://www.calgarysun.com/2015/03/24/albertas-bill-10-leaves-parents-powerless-in-deciding-their-childs-education

Castonguay, L.G., Constantino, M.J., & Holtforth, M. (2006). The working alliance: Where are we and where should we go? *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training, 43,* 271–279. doi:10.1037/0033-3204.43.3.271

Castro, I., & Sujak, M. (2014). "Why can't we learn about this?" Sexual minority students navigate the official and hidden curricular spaces of high school. *Education and Urban Society, 46*(4), 450-473. doi:10.1177/0013124512458117

Cates, J.A. (2007). Identity in crisis: Spirituality and homosexuality in adolescence. *Child and Adolescence Social Work Journal, 24,* 369-383. doi:10.1007/s10560-007-0089-6

CBC News. (2017, June 26). 'We'll raise it every day if we have to': Twice vandalized, pride flag rises again in small Alberta town. *CBC News.* Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/taber-alberta-pride-flag-burning-raised-1.4178806

CBC News. (2017, June 13). 'Direct attack': Pride crosswalks in Lethbridge left with tire marks days before festivities. *CBC News.* Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/lethbridge-pride-crosswalks-vandalized-1.4159008

CBC News. (2016, January 5). Trinity Western law school decision appealed by Law Society in B.C. *CBC News.* Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/trinity-western-law-society-bc-appeal-1.3390980

Charmez, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 509-536). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chase, S. (2011). Narrative inquiry: Still a field in the making. In N. Denzin & S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 421-434). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chesir-Teran, D., & Hughes, D. (2009). Heterosexism in high school and victimization among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning students. *Journal of Youth Adolescence, 38*, 963-975. doi:10.1007/s10964-008-9364-x

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. (1995). *The family: A proclamation to the world.* Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/topics/family-proclamation?lang=eng

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (2006). Interview with Elder Dallin H. Oaks and

Elder Lance B. Wickman: "Same-gender attraction." Retrieved from http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. (2007). *God loveth his children.* Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/manual/god-loveth-his-children/god-loveth-his-children?lang=eng

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. (2010). *Church handbook of instruction: Handbook 2: Administering the church.* Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/bc/content/shared/content/english/pdf/language-materials/08702_eng.pdf?lang=eng

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. (2012). *Book of Mormon:Seminary Teacher Manual.* Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/manual/book-of-mormon-seminary-teacher-manual-2017?lang=eng

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. (2015). *Old Testament: Seminary Teacher Manual.* Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/manual/old-testament-seminary-teacher-manual?lang=eng

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. (2016). *Facts and Statistics.* Retrieved from http://www.mormonnewsroom.ca/facts-and statistics/country/canada/province/alberta

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. (2016). *The New Testament: Seminary Teacher Manual.* Retrieved from https://www.lds.org/manual/new-testament-seminary-teacher-manual?lang=eng

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and story in*

qualitative research. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Clandinin, D. J. & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland, spaces, and tensions. In D. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 35-76). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Clark, C., & Blackburn, M. (2009). Reading LGBT-themed literature with young people: What's possible? *The English Journal, 98*(4), 25-32. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/40503257

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Collins, J. (2009). Social reproduction in classrooms and schools. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 38,* 33-48. doi:10.1146/annurev.anthro.37.081407.085242

Connell, C. & Elliott, S. (2009). Beyond the birds and the bees: Learning inequality through sexuality education. *American Journal of Sexuality Education, 4*, 83-102. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2010.01321.x

Crapo, R. H. (2002). *Latter-Day Saint gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered spirituality.* Retrieved from https://www.mormonsocialscience.org/2008/01/04/richley-crapo-latter-day-saint-gay-lesbian-bisexual-and-transgendered-spirituality/

Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crowell, K. A., Galliher, R. V., Dehlin, J., & Bradshaw, W. S. (2015). Specific aspects of

minority stress associated with depression among LDS affiliated non-heterosexual adults. *Journal of Homosexuality, 62*(2)*,* 242-267. doi:10.1080/00918369.2014.969611

Crowley, M. S. (2014). Defending themselves: LGBQS youth online. In E. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in education: A reader* (pp. 90-109)*.* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Dahl, A. (2010). The religious experience of sexual minority youth: Identity, integration, and minority stress. *ProQuest Information and Learning, 70*(8), 5204.

Dahl, A., & Galliher, R.V. (2012). The Interplay of Sexual and Religious Identity Development in LGBTQ Adolescents and Youth Adults: A Qualitative Inquiry. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research, 12(3),* 217-246. doi:10.1080/15283488.2012.691255

D'Augelli, A. R., Grossman, A. H., & Starks, M. T. (2006). Childhood gender atypicality, victimization, and PTSD among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 21*(11), 1462-1482. doi:10.1177/0886260506293482

Dehlin, J. P., Galliher, R. V., Bradshaw, W. S., & Crowell, K. A. (2014). Psychosocial correlates of religious approaches to same-sex attraction: A Mormon perspective. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Mental Health, 18*(3)*,* 284-311. doi:10.1080/19359705.2014.912970

Delgado, R. (1989). Storytelling for oppositionists and others. A plea for narrative. *Michigan Law Review, 87*(8), 2411-2441. doi:10.2307/1289308

Depoian, C. (2009). Homosexuality, the public school curriculum, and the first amendment: Issues of religion and speech. *Law & Sexuality: A review of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender Legal Issues, 18,* 163-181.

de Turenne, V. (2008, October 9). Mormon church steps into the Prop. 8 battle. *Los Angeles*

Times. Retrieved from http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2008/10/now-the-mormon.html

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy in education.* In J. A. Boydston (Ed.), *John Dewey, The middle works, 1899-1924. Volume 9.* Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Dewey, J. (1929). My pedagogic creed. *Journal of the National Education Association, 18*(9), 291-295. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/651519

Dinkins, E. G., & Englert, P. (2015). LGBTQ literature in middle school classrooms: possibilities for challenging heteronormative environments. *Sex Education, 15*(4), 392-405. doi:10.1080/14681811.2015.1030012

Disch, L. (1994). *Hanna Arendt and the limits of philosophy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Dlamini, N. (2002). From the other side of the desk: Notes on teaching about race when racialised. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education, 5*(1), 51-66. doi:10.1080/13613320120117199

Epstein, D., & Johnson, R. (1994). On the straight and the narrow: The heterosexual presumption, homophobias, and schools. In D. Epstein (Ed.), *Challenging lesbian and gay inequalities in education* (pp. 197-230). Buckingham, UK: Open University.

Evans, D., Foa, E., Gur, R., Hendin, H., O'Brien, C., Selligman, M., & Walsh, B. T. (2005). *Treating and preventing adolescent mental health disorders: What we know and what we don't know.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Fields, J., & Hirschman, C. (2007). Citizenship lessons in abstinence-only sexuality education. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, *2*(2), 3–25. doi:10.1300/J455v02n02_02

Field, J. C., & Latta, M. M., (2001). What constitutes becoming experienced in teaching and learning? *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*(8), 885-895. doi:10.1016/S0742-051X(01)00038-5

Fletcher, R. (2016, March 31). All but 1 Alberta school board submit LGBTQ policies by deadline. *CBC News.* Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/eggen-lgbtq-transgender-school-boards-bill-10-policies-1.3514941

Flinders, D., Noddings, N., & Thornton, S. (1986). The null curriculum: Its theoretical basis and practical implications. *Curriculum Inquiry, 16*(1), 33-42. doi:10.2307/1179551

Fortney, V. (2017, June 30). Fortney: Vandalism won't dampen gay pride in Lethbridge and Taber. *Calgary Herald.* Retrieved from http://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/fortney-vandalism-incidents-wont-deter-lgbtq-supporters-in-lethbridge-taber

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge.* New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction.* New York, NY: Random House.

Fredman, A., Schultz, N., & Hoffman, M. (2015). "You're moving a frickin' big ship": The challenges of addressing LGBTQ topics in public schools. *Education and Urban Society, 47*(1), 56-85. doi:10.1177/0013124513496457

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York, NY: Continuum.

Freitag, M. (2014). Safety in unity: One school's story of identity and community. In E. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in education: A reader* (pp. 230-239). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

French, J. (2016, March 24). Lethbridge parents force parents in public school board's LGBTQ

policy. *Edmonton Journal.* Retrieved from http://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/lethbridge-parents-force-delay-in-public-school-boards-lgbtq-policy

Friend, R. (1993). Choices, not closets: Heterosexism and homophobia in schools. In L. Weis & M. Fine (Eds.), *Beyond silenced voices: Class, race, and gender in U.S. schools* (pp. 209–235). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Gattis, M. N., Woodford, M. R., & Han, Y. (2014). Discrimination and depressive symptoms among sexual minority youth: Is gay-affirming religious affiliation a protective factor? *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 43*(8), 1589-1599. doi:10.1007/s10508-014-0342-y

Gee, J. P. (1990). *Social linguistics and literacies.* London: Falmer.

Gee, J. P. (2010). *Introduction to discourse analysis; Theory and Method* (3rd ed.). Florence, KY: Routledge.

Gereluk, D. (2012). *Education, extremism, and terrorism: What should be taught in citizenship education and why.* New York, NY: Continuum International.

Gerson, J. (2013, November 14). Alberta school board faces backlash after banning Lord's Prayer in classrooms. *National Post*. Retrieved from http://news.nationalpost.com/holy-post/alberta-school-board-faces-backlash-after-banning-lords-prayer-in-classrooms.

Ghiso, M. P., Campano, G., & Hall, T. (2012). Braided histories and experiences in literature for children and adolescents. *Journal of Children's Literature, 38*(2), 14-22. Retrieved from http://www.childrensliteratureassembly.org/docs/38-2-GhisoCampanoHall.pdf

Giroux, H. A. (1992). *Border crossing: Cultural workers and the politics of education.* Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Giroux, H. A. (2001). *Theory and resistance in education: A pedagogy for the oppression* (2nd ed.). Boston: Bergin & Garvey.

Glick, P., Gangl, C., Gibb, S., Klumpner, S., & Weinberg, E. (2007). Defensive reactions to masculinity threat: More negative affect toward effeminate (but not masculine) gay men. *Sex Roles, 57*(1), 55-59. doi:10.1007/s11199-007-9195-3

Grace, A. P. (2006). Writing the queer self: Using autobiography to mediate inclusive teacher education in Canada. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 22*(7), 826-834. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2006.04.026

Grace, A. P., Hill, R. J., Johnson, C.W., & Lewis, J.B. (2004) . In other words: Queer voices/dissident subjectiviites impelling social change. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 17*(3), 301-324. doi: 10.1080/0951839042000204670

Grace, A. P., & Wells, K. (2001). Getting an education in Edmonton, Alberta: The case of queer youth. *Journal of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Studies Association, 3*, 137-151. Retrieved from https://torquere.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/torquere/article/viewFile/36619/33267

Greene, M. (1993). Diversity and inclusion: Toward a curriculum for human beings. *Teachers College Record, 95*(2), 211-221. Retrieved from http://wp.vcu.edu/hhughesdecatur/files/2013/01/Toward-a-curriculum-for-human-beings_Maxine-Greene.pdf

Griffin, P., Lee, C., Waugh, J., & Beyer, C. (2004). Describing roles that gay-straight alliances play in schools: From individual support to school change. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education, 1*(3), 7-22. doi:10.1300/J367v01n03_03

Halkitis, P. N., Mattis, J. S., Sahadath, J. K., Massie, D., Ladyzhenskaya, L., Pitrelli, K., Bonacci, M., & Cowie, S. E. (2009). The meanings and manifestations of religion and

spirituality among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adults. *Journal of Adult Development, 16*(4), 250-262. doi:10.1007/s10804-009-9071-1

Hardy, S. A., & Raffaelli, M. (2003). Adolescent religiosity and sexuality: An investigation of reciprocal influences. *Journal of Adolescence, 23,* 731-739. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2003.09.003

Harwood, V., & Rasmussen, M. (2004). Studying schools with an "ethics of discomfort." In B. Baker & K. Heyning (Eds.), *Dangerous coagulations: The uses of Foucault in the study of education* (pp. 305-324). New York: NY: Peter Lang.

Hatzenbuehler, M. L., Pachankis, J. E., & Wolff, J. (2012). Religious climate and health risk behaviors in sexual minority youths: A population based study. *American Journal of Public Health, 102*(4), 657-663. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2011.300517

Heck, N. C., Flentje, A., & Cochran, B. N. (2011). Offsetting risks: High school gay-straight alliances and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. *School Psychology Quarterly, 26*(2)*,* 161-174. doi:10.1037/a0023226

Herek, G. M. (1994). Assessing heterosexuals' attitudes towards lesbians and gay men; A review of empirical research with the ATLG scale. In B. Greene & G. M. Herek (Eds.), *Lesbian and gay psychology. Theory, research, and clinical applications* (pp. 206-228). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Herek, G. M. (2009). Sexual stigma and sexual prejudice in the United States: A conceptual framework. In D. A. Hope (Ed.), *Contemporary perspectives on lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities* (pp. 65-111). New York, NY: Springer Science and Business media.

Herek, G. M., Gillis, J. R., & Cogan, J. C. (2009). Internalized stigma among sexual minority

adults: Insights from a social psychological perspective. *Journal of Counselling Psychology, 56*(1)*,* 32-43. doi:10.1037/a0014672

Hernandez, M., Gonzalez, P., & Sanchez, S. (2013). Gender and constructs from the hidden curriculum. *Creative Education, 4*(12), p. 89-92. doi:10.4236/ce.2013.412A2013

Herriot, L. (2015). Multi-case study with Canadian Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs). *Education and Research Archive.* Retrieved from https://era.library.ualberta.ca/files/3f462827n#.WaugQdOGM0E

Hillier, L., Mitchell, A., & Mulcare, H. (2008). 'I couldn't do both at the same time': Same sex attracted youth and the negotiation of religious discourse. *Gay & Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review, 4*(2), 80-93.

Hinchey, P. H. (2008). *Becoming a critical educator: Defining a classroom identity, defining a critical pedagogy.* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Hinrichs, D., & Rosenberg, P. (2002). Attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons among heterosexual liberal arts college students. *Journal of Homosexuality, 43*(1), 61-84. doi:10.1300/J082v43n01_04

Howe, K. R. (1997). *Understanding equal educational opportunity: Social justice, democracy, and schooling.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Huncar, A. (2016, November 1). Should drag shows be used as a teaching tool in Alberta schools? Not according to a critic of a new LGBTQ Guidebook for Alberta Teachers. *CBS News.* Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/should-drag-shows-be-used-as-a-teaching-tool-in-alberta-schools-1.3830417

Jackson, P. W. (1968). *Life in Classrooms.* New York, NY: Holt, Rinchard, and Winston.

Jiménez, K. (2014). Off the script: A study of techniques for uncovering gender-bending

truths in the classroom. In E. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in education: A reader* (pp. 257-271). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Johnson, C. W., Singh, A. A., & Gonzalez, M. G. (2014). "It's complicated": Collective memories of transgender, queer, and questioning youth in high school. *Journal of Homosexuality, 61*(3), 419-434. doi:10.1080/00918369.2013.842436

Josselson, R. (2013). *Interviewing for qualitative inquiry: A relational approach.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Kahn, M. (2006). Conservative Christian teachers: Possible consequences for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Intercultural Education, 17*(4), 359-371. doi:10.1080/14675980600971368

Karger, F. (2016, September 14). Mormon church leaders: There's an easy fix to prevent Mormon LGBT teen suicides. *Huffington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/fred-karger/mormon-church-leaders-theres-an-easy-fix-to-prevent-mormon-lgbt-teen-suicides_b_12012620.html

Kearns, L. L., Mitton-Kükner, J., & Thompkins, J. (2017). Transphobia and cisgender privilege: Pre-service teachers recognizing and challenging gender rigidity in schools. *Canadian Journal of Education, 40*(1), 1-27.

Kedley, K. (2015). Queering the teacher as a text in the English language arts classroom: Beyond books, identity work and teacher preparation. *Sex Education, 15*(4), 364-377. doi:10.1080/14681811.2015.1027762

Kehily, M. J. (2002). *Sexuality, gender and schooling: Shifting agendas in social learning*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Kelley, J. (2001). Attitudes towards homosexuality in 29 nations, *Australia Social*

Monitor, 4(1), 15-22. Retrieved from http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/documentSummary;dn=707642389657085;res=IELAPA>

Kennedy, C., & Covell, K. (2009). Violating the rights of the child through inadequate sexual health education. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 17*, 143-154. doi:10.1163/092755608X278939

Kilgore, D. W. (2001). Critical and postmodern perspectives on adult learning. In S. Merriam (Ed.), *The new update of education theory: New directions in adult and continuing education* (pp. 53-61). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kim, J. H. (2016). *Understanding Narrative Inquiry.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kimmel, M. (2001). Masculinity as homophobia: Fear, shame, and silence in the construction of gender identity. In S.M. Whitehead & F.J. Barrett (Eds.), *The masculinities reader* (pp. 266-287). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Kincheloe, J. (2007). Critical pedagogy in the twenty-first century: Evolution for survival. In J. Kincheloe & P. McLeran (Eds.), *Critical Pedagogy: Where are we now?* (pp. 9-42). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Kirkpatrick, L. (1993). Fundamentalism, Christian orthodoxy, and intrinsic religious orientation as predictors of discriminatory attitudes. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 32*(3), 256-268. doi:10.2307/1386664

Kosciw, J., Greytak, E., & Bartkiewicz, M. (2014). Failing progress: Changes in school climate for LGBT youth over time. In E. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in education: A reader* (pp. 188-201). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Kosciw, J., Greytak, E., Diaz, E., & Bartkiewicz, M. (2010). *The 2009 National School*

Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York, NY: Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network. Retrieved from http://www.glsen.org/content/2009-national-school-climate-survey-full-report

Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools.* New York: GLSEN. Retrieved from http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2013 National School Climate Survey Full Report_0.pdf

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage Inequalities: Children in American Schools.* New York, NY: Random House.

Kruger, B. (1981). *Your comfort is my silence.* Retrieved from http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/feminist/images/BarbaraKruger-Your-Comfort-is-My-Silence-1981.jpg

Kubicek, K., McDavitt, B., Carpineto, J., Weiss, G., Iverson, E.F., & Kipke, M.D. (2009). "God made me gay for a reason": Young men who have sex with men's resiliency in resolving internalized homophobia from religious sources. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 24(5),* 601-633. doi:10.1177/0743558409341078

Kumashiro, K. (2000). Toward a theory of anti-oppressive education. *Review of Educational Research, 70*(1), 25-53. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/1170593

Legislative Assembly of Alberta, (2014). *An act to amend the Alberta bill of rights to*

protect our children. Retrieved from http://www.assembly.ab.ca/ISYS/LADDAR_files/docs/bills/bill/legislature_28/session_3/20141117_bill-010.pdf

Lehavot, K., & Lambert, A. J. (2007). Toward a greater understanding of antigay prejudice: On the role of sexual orientation and gender role violation. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 39*(3), 279-292. doi:10.1080/01973530701503390

Lehavot, K. & Simoni, J. M. (2011). The impact of minority stress on mental health and substance abuse among sexual minority women. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 79*(2), 159-170. doi:10.1037/a0022839

Leibert, T. W., & Dunne-Bryant, A. (2015). Do common factors account for counseling outcome? *Journal of Counseling and Development, 93,* 225-235. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.2015.00198.x

Le Miere, J. (2017, July 19). Mormon University professor fired for saying that homosexuality isn't' sinful. *Newsweek.* Retrieved from http://www.newsweek.com/mormon-university-professor-homosexuality-sin-639358

Leonardi, B., & Saenz, P. (2014). Conceptualizing safety from the inside out: Heteronormative spaces and their effects on students' sense of self. In E. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in education: A reader* (pp. 202-216). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies,

contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. Denzin & S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research,* (4th ed., pp. 97-128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Luke, A. (1996). Text and discourse in education. An introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis. *Review of Research in Education, 21,* 3-48. doi:10.3102/0091732X021001003

Lund, D. E., & Carr, P. R. (2008). Introduction. In D. E. Lund & P. R. Carr (Eds.), *Doing democracy: Striving for political literacy and social justice* (pp. 1-29). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Lund, D. E. (2011). Examining shades of grey with students: Social justice education in action. *Journal of Praxis in Multicultural Education, 6*(1), 79-94. doi:10.9741/2161-2978g

Macgillivray, I. K. (2000). Educational equity for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and queer/questioning students: The demands of democracy and social justice for America's schools. *Education and Urban Society, 32*(3), 303-323. doi:10.1177/0013124500323003

Macintosh, L. (2007). Does anyone have a band-aid? Anti-homophobia discourses and pedagogical impossibilities. *Educational Studies, 41*(1), 33-43. doi:10.1080/00131940701308874

McQuillan, M. (Ed.). (2000). *The narrative reader.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Maher, M. J., & Sever, L. M. (2007). What educators in Catholic schools might expect when addressing gay and lesbian issues: A study of needs and barriers. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education, 4*(3), 79-111. doi:10.1300/J367v04n03_06

Maldonado, L., Huang, Y., Chen, R., Kasen, S., Cohen, P., & Chen, H. (2013). Impact of early adolescent anxiety disorders on self-esteem development from adolescence to young adulthood. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 53(2),* 287-293. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.02.025

Martin, J. I., & Meezan, W. (2009). Applying ethical standards to research and evaluations involving lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations. In W. Meezan & J. I. Martin (Eds.), *Handbook of research with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations* (pp. 19 – 39). New York: Routledge.

Martin, J. R. (1976). What should we do with a hidden curriculum when we find one? *Curriculum Inquiry, 6*(2), 135-151. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/1179759 doi:1

Maxwell, J. A. (1997). Designing a qualitative study. In L. Bickman & D. J. Rog (Eds.), *Handbook of applied social research methods* (pp. 69 – 100). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mayberry, M. (2006). School reform efforts for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered students. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, *79*(6), 262–264. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/30182141

McCall, D., McKay, A., & Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada (2004). School-based and school-linked sexual health education and promotion in Canada. *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Canada, 26,* 596-600. Retrieved from https://sogc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/146E-PS-June2004.pdf

McCombs, B. (2017, June 24). Mormon church leaders cut microphone after girl reveals she is

gay. *USA Today.* Retrieved from https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2017/06/24/microphone-cut-after-mormon-girl-reveals-shes-gay-at-church/103160494/

McCombs, B. (2015, November 12). Mormon LGBT policy change triggers widespread backlash. *The Associated Press.* Retrieved from http://www.sltrib.com/news/lds/3170210-155/mormon-lgbt-policy-change-triggers-widespread

McCormack, C. (2004). Storying stories: A narrative approach to in-depth interview conversations. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 7*(3), 219-236. doi:10.1080/13645570210166382

McKay, A., Byers, S., Boyer, S., Humphreys, T., & Markham, C. (2014). Ontario parents' opinions and attitudes towards sexual health education in schools. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 23*(3), 159-166. doi:10.3138/cjhs.23.3-A1

McRee, A. L., Madsen, N., & Eisenberg, M. E. (2014). Guest speakers in school-based sexuality education. *American Journal of Sexuality Education, 9*(2), 205-218. doi:10.1080/15546128.2014.903816

Merriam, S. B. (1991). How research produces knowledge. In J. Peters & P. Jarvis (Eds.), *Adult Education.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis.* New York, NY: Jossey-Bass.

Meyer, I. H. (1995). Minority stress and mental health in gay men. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 36*(1), 38-56. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2137286

Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual

populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin, 129*(5), 674-697. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674

Meyer, E.J. (2009). *Gender, bullying, and harassment: Strategies to end sexism and homophobia in schools.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Miles, M. & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Miller, s j., & Gilligan, J. R. (2014). Heteronormative harassment: Queer bullying and gender non-conforming students. In E. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in education: A reader* (pp. 217-229). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Mills, S. (2003). *Michel Foucault.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Milner, R. H. (2003). Reflection, racial competence, and critical pedagogy: How do we prepare pre-service teachers to pose tough questions? *Race, Ethnicity, and Education, 6*(2), 193-208. doi:10.1080/13613320308200

Minnich, E. (1990). *Transforming knowledge.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Miragall, M., Banos, R., Cebolla, A., & Botella, C. (2015). Working alliance inventory applied to virtual and augmented reality (WAI-VAR): Psychometrics and therapeutic outcomes. *Frontiers in Psychology, 6*(1531), 1-10. doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01531

Montessori, M. (2013). A critical consideration of the new pedagogy in its relation to modern science. In D. Flinders and J. Thornton, (Eds.). *The curriculum studies reader* (4th ed., pp. 19-32). New York, NY: Routledge.

Mufioz-Plaza, C., Quinn, S., & Rounds, K. (2002). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender

students: Perceived social support in the high school environment. *High School Journal, 85*, 52-63. doi:10.1353/hsj.2002.0011

Mulholland, J., & Wallace, J. (2003). Strength, sharing and service: Restorying and the Legitimation of research texts. *British Educational Research Journal, 29*(1), 5-23. doi:10.1080/0141192032000057348

Mulgrew, I. (2015, December 9). *B.C. Supreme court rules in favour of Trinity Western University law school.* The Vancouver Sun. Retrieved from http://www.vancouversun.com/news/supreme+court+rules+favour+trinity+western+university+school/11580281/story.html

Munro, A., Holly, L., Rainbird, H., & Leisten, R. (2004). Power at work: Reflections on the research process. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 7*(4), 289-304. doi:10.1080/1364557021000024758

Murphy, R. (2016, October 28). Rex Murphy: Jordan Peterson—A real professor, at last. *National Post.* Retrieved from http://nationalpost.com/opinion/rex-murphy-jordan-peterson-a-real-professor-at-last

Nakamura, N., & Kassan, A. (2013). Understanding the experiences of immigrant sexual minority women through a cultural identity model. *Women and Therapy, 36*(3-4), 252-267. doi: 10.1080/02703149.2013.797848

Ngo, B. (2003). Citing discourses: Making sense of homophobia and heteronormativity at Dynamic High School. *School, Equity, and Excellence in Education, 36*(2), 115-124. doi:10.1080/10665680303513mt

Neff, L. (2005). *Mormons on a mission.* United States *Advocate, 936,* 50-64.

Newman, B. M., & Newman, P. R. (2009). *Development through life: A psychosocial*

approach. New York, NY: Cengage Learning.

Nunn, L. M., & Bolt, S. C. (2015). Wearing a rainbow bumper sticker: Experiential learning on homophobia, heteronormativity, and heterosexual privilege. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 12*(3), 276-301. doi:10.1080/19361653.2015.1045963

Oaks, D. H. (1995). Same-gender attraction. *Ensign* (October), 6-14. Retrieved from: https://www.lds.org/ensign/1995/10/same-gender-attraction?lang=eng

Orelus, P., & Chomsky, N. (2014). *On language, democracy, and social justice: Noam Chomsky's critical intervention.* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Orlinsky, D.E., Rønnestad, M.H., & Willutzki, U. (2004). Fifty years of psychotherapy process-outcome research: Continuity and change. In M. J. Lambert (Ed.), *Bergin and Garfield's Handbook of psychotherapy and behavior change* (5th ed., pp. 307-389). New York: Wiley.

Osberg, D., & Biesta, G. (2008). The emergent curriculum: Navigating a complex course between unguided learning and planned curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 40*(3), 313-328. doi:10.1080/00220270701610746i

Owen, W. F. (1984). Interpretive themes in relational communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 70,* 274-287. doi:10.1080/00335638409383697

Patterson, C. J. (2013). Schooling, sexual orientation, law, and policy: Making schools safe for all students. *Theory Into Practice, 52*(3), 190-195. doi:10.1080/00405841.2013.804312

Pearson, J., Miller, C., & Wilkinson, L. (2007). Adolescent same-sex attraction and academic outcomes: The role of school attachment and engagement. *Social Problems, 54*, 523-542. doi:10.1525/sp.2007.54.4.523

Pearson, J. & Wilkinson, L. (2013). Family relationships and adolescent well-being: Are

families equally protective for same-sex attracted youth? *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 42,* 376-393. doi:10.1007/s10964-012-9865-5

Peter, T., Taylor, C., & Chamberland, L. (2015). A queer day in Canada: Examining Canadian high school students' experiences with school based homophobia in two large-scale studies. *Journal of Homosexuality, 62*(2)*,* 186-206. doi:10.1080/00918369.2014.969057

Petrovic, J., & Rosiek, J. (2007). From teacher knowledge to queered teacher knowledge research: Escaping the epistemic straight jacket. In N. Rodriguez & W. Pinar (Eds.), *Queering straight teachers: Discourse and identity in education* (pp. 201-232). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (2007). Validity issues in narrative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 13*(4)*,* 471-486. doi:10.1177/1077800406297670

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration as qualitative analysis. In J.A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life History and narrative* (pp. 5-25). London, UK: Falmer Press.

Province of Alberta. (2015). *School Act.* Retrieved from http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/s03.pdf

Polkinghorne, D. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences.* New York, NY: Albany State University of New York Press.

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2008). *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health* (3rd ed.). Ottawa, ON: Public Health Agency of Canada. Retrieved from http://sieccan.org/pdf/guidelines-eng.pdf

Puchner, L. & Klein, N. (2011). The right time and place? Middle school Language Arts teachers talk about not talking about sexual orientation. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 44*(2), 223-248. doi:10.1080/10665684.2011.563182

Quick, V., Loth, K., Maclehose, R., Linde, J.A., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2013). Prevalence of adolescents' self-weighing behaviors and associations with weight-related behaviors and psychological well-being. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 52(6),* 738-745. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.11.016

Rancière, J. (1991). *The ignorant schoolmaster: Five lessons on intellectual emancipation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Rancière, J. (1995). *On the shores of politics.* New York, NY: Verso.

Rich, A. (1986). *Blood, bread, and poetry: Selected prose, 1979-1985*. New York: Norton.

Ritzer, G. (2007). *The Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Robinson, K. H., & Ferfolja, T. (2002). A reflection of resistance: Discourses of heterosexism and homophobia in teacher training classrooms. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, *14*(2), 55–64. doi:10.1300/J041v14n02_05

Robles-Fernandez, R. (2014). A GSAs impact on students' beliefs and attitudes toward civic and political participation, civic engagement, and social justice. In E. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in education: A reader* (pp. 284-297). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Rogers, R., Malancharuvil-Berkes, E., Mosley, M., Hui, D., & Joseph, G. (2005). Critical Discourse Analysis in education: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 75*(3), 365-416. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3515986

Rostosky, S. S., Danner, F., & Riggle, E. D. (2007). Is religiosity a protective factor against substance use in young adulthood? Only if you're straight! *Journal of Adolescent Health, 40,* 440-447. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2006.11.144

Rostosky, S. S., Danner, F., & Riggle, E. (2008). Religiosity and alcohol use in sexual minority

and heterosexual youth and young adults. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 37*(5), 552-563. doi:10.1007/s10964-007-9251-x

Rostosky, S. S., Danner, F., & Riggle, E. (2010). Religiosity as a protective factor against heavy episodic drinking (HED) in heterosexual, bisexual, gay, and lesbian young adults. *Journal of Homosexuality, 57,* 1039-1050. doi:10.1080/00918369.2010.503515

Russell, S. T., Seif, H., & Truong, N. L. (2001). School outcomes of sexual minority youth in the United States: Evidence from a national study. *Journal of Adolescence, 24*, 111-27. doi:10.1006/jado.2000.0365

Savage, T. A., & Schanding Jr., G. T. (2012). Creating and maintaining safe and responsive schools for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youths: Introduction to the special issue. *Journal of School Violence, 12*(1), 1-6. doi:10.1080/15388220.2012.724357

Sawyer, M. G., Miller-Lewis, L. R., & Clark, J. J. (2007). The mental health of 13-17 year olds in Australia: Findings from the national survey of mental health and well-being. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 36,* 185-194. doi:10.1007/s10964-006-9122-x

Schieble, M. (2012). A critical discourse analysis of teachers' views on LGBT literature. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 33*(2), 207-222. doi:10.1080/01596306.2011.620758

Schlosser, L. Z. (2003). Christian privilege: Breaking a sacred taboo. *Multicultural Counseling and Development, 31,* 44-51. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/openview/0ff5dbbbc412306709c6eb8bd3ca1a31/1?pq-origsite=gscholar

Schnarr, J. (2015, April 29). Lord's prayer returns to Dr. Hamman. *The Taber Times.* Retrieved from http://www.tabertimes.com/news/2015/04/29/lords-prayer-returns-to-dr-hamman/

Schneider, M.S., & Dimito, A. (2008). Educators' beliefs about raising lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues in the schools: The experience in Ontario, Canada. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 5,* 49-71. doi:10.1080/19361650802223003

Sears, J.T. (1991). Educators, homosexuality, and homosexual students: Are personal feelings related to professional beliefs? *Journal of Homosexuality, 22,* 29-79. doi:10.1300/J082v22n03_03

Sedgwick, E. K. (1990). *Epistemology of the closet.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Shilo, G., & Savaya, R. (2012). Mental health of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth and young adults: Differential effects of age, gender, religiosity, and sexual orientation. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 22*(2)*,* 310-325. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2011.00772.x

Sieben, N. & Wallowitz, L. (2009). "Watch what you teach": A first year teacher refuses to play it safe. *English Journal, 98*(4), 44-49. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/40503260

Sinor, J. (2011). Out in the west: The Mormon church is going mainstream—and leaving its gay members behind. *Washington*: *The American Scholar,* 8, 76-87.

Smith, M. (2004). Questioning heteronormativity: Lesbian and gay challenges to education practice in British Columbia, Canada. *Social Movement Studies, 3*(2), 131-145. doi:10.1080/1474283042000266092

Stewart, B. T., Heck, N. C., & Cochran, B. N. (2015). A comparison of sexual minority youth

who attend religiously affiliated schools and their nonreligious-school-attending counterparts. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 12(2), 170-188. doi:10.1080/19361653.2014.969864

Style, E. (1996). Curriculum as window and mirror. *Social Science Record, 33*(2), 21-28.

Sue, D. (2010). *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestation, dynamics, and impact.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2008). *Suicide risk and prevention for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth.* Retrieved from http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/SPRC_LGBT_Youth.pdf

Sumara, D., & Davis, B. (2013). Interrupting heteronormativity: Toward a queer curriculum theory. In D. Flinders and J. Thornton, (Eds.). *The curriculum studies reader* (4th ed., pp. 315-329). New York, NY: Routledge.

Swank, E., Frost, D. M., & Fahs, B. (2012). Rural location and exposure to minority stress among sexual minorities in the United States. *Psychology & Sexuality, 3*(3), 226-243. doi:10.1080/19419899.2012.700026

Swearer, S. M., Turner, R. K., Givens, J. E., & Pollack, W. S. (2008). 'You're so gay!': Do different forms of bullying matter for adolescent males? *School Psychology Review, 37*(2), 221-227. Retrieved from http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE|A181130849&sid=summon&v=2.1&u=ucalgary&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=e8434200477219584c77f0f23b1c5857

Szalacha, L. A. (2003). Safer sexual diversity climates: Lessons learned from an

evaluation of Massachusetts safe schools program for gay and lesbian students. *American Journal of Education, 110*, 58–88. doi:10.1086/377673

Talburt, S. (2004). Intelligibility and narrating queer youth. In M. Rsmussen, E. Rofes, & S. Talburt (Eds.), *Youth and Sexualities: Pleasure, subversion, and insubordination in and out of schools* (pp. 17-39). New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

Taylor, C., & Peter, T. (2010). Left behind: Sexual and gender minority students in Canadian high schools in the new millennium. In T. Morrison, M. Morrison, D.T. McDermott, & M. A. Carrigan (Eds.), *Sexual minority research in the new millennium* (pp. 127-157). Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science.

Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schachter, K. (2011). *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report.* Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust. Retrieved from http://egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/EgaleFinalReport-web.pdf

Taylor, C., Meyer, E., Peter, T., Ristock, J., Short, D., & Campbell, C. (2016). Gaps between beliefs, perceptions, and practices: The Every Teacher Project on LGBTQ-inclusive education in Canadian schools. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 13*(1-2), 112-140. doi:10.1080/19361653.2015.1087929

Terres des Femmes. (2015). *A woman's worth campaign.* Retrieved from https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaign/terre-des-femmes-miami-ad-school-03-2015

Tharinger, D. (2008). Maintaining the hegemonic masculinity through selective attachment, homophobia, and gay-baiting in schools: Challenges to intervention. *School Psychology Review, 37*(2), 221-227. Retrieved from

http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE|A181130854&sid=summon&v=2.1&u=ucalgary&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=b40eab0ca1c2c8c73ff607836892c7a4

The Alberta Teachers' Association. (2016). Prism: Toolkit for safe and caring discussions about gender and sexual minorities. *ATA*. Retrieved from https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Research/PD-80-15e%20PRISM.pdf

Thornton, S. J. (2013). Silence on gays and lesbians in social studies curriculum. In D. J. Flinders & S. J. Thornton (Eds.), *The Curriculum Studies Reader-Fourth Edition* (pp. 331-338). New York: Routledge.

Tilley, S. & Taylor, L. (2013). Understanding curriculum as lived: Teaching for social justice and equity goals. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education, 16*(3), 406-429. doi:10.1080/13613324.2011.645565

Trudell, B. N. (1993). *Doing sex education: Gender politics and schooling.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Tumilty, R. (2016, March 21). Alberta school boards question weight of LGBT guidelines. *Metro News.* Retrieved from http://www.metronews.ca/news/edmonton/2016/03/20/alberta-school-boards-question-weight-of-lgbt-guidelines--.html

Tupper, J. (2008). Interrogating citizenship and democracy in education: The implications for disrupting universal values. In D. Lund & P. Carr (Eds.), *Doing democracy: Striving for political literacy and social justice* (pp. 71-84). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Tyler, R. W. (1949). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Vallence, E. (1973-1974). Hiding the hidden curriculum: An interpretation of the language of justification in nineteenth-century educational reform. *Curriculum Theory Network, 4*(1), 5-21. doi:10.2307/1179123

Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse and Society, 4,* 249-284.doi:10.1177/0957926593004002006

Walton, J. (2005). The hidden curriculum in schools: Implications for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth. *Alternative Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research, 21,* 18-39.

Walton, J. (2011a). Spinning our wheels: Reconceptualizing bullying beyond behaviour-focused approaches. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 32*(1), 131-144. doi:10.1080/01596306.2011.537079

Walton, J. (2011b). TV bullies: How *Glee* and anti-bullying programs miss the mark. In E. Marshall & O. Sensoy (Eds.), *Rethinking popular culture and media* (pp. 216-222). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.

Warner, M. (1993). Introduction. In M. Warner (Ed.), *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (pp. vii-xxxi). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Whitley, B. E. (2002). Gender-role variables and attitudes toward homosexuality. *Sex Roles, 45*(11), 691-720. doi:10.1023/A:1015640318045

Whitlock, R.U. (2014). LGBT Families and Southern Schools: Thinking about people,

place and education. In E. Meyer & D. Carlson (Eds), Gender and Sexualities in Education (pp. 75-89). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Williams, A.M. (2011). Mormon and queer at a crossroads. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, 44(1),* 53-84.

Yep (2003). The violence of heteronormativity in communication studies: Notes on injury, healing, and queer world-making. *Journal of Homosexuality, 45*(2/3/4), 11-59.

Young (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University.

Zimmerman, J. (2015). *Too hot to handle: A global history of sex education.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

APPENDIX A: Parental Informed Consent

Greetings!

YOUR YOUTH HAS BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY ➔ YOUR PERMISSION IS NEEDED.

WHO IS THE RESEARCHER? My name is Tanya Surette and I work in schools as a Registered Psychologist. I am studying to earn a PhD at the University of Calgary and as part of my studies I am required to conduct a research project on a topic of interest to society.

WHY THIS HANDOUT? To provide you with tons of information about my research study and to seek your permission for your youth to participate in my study. For example, on page 2, it tells you what my research study is about. On page 3, I spend a lot of time telling you how I will protect your youth's privacy and the risks/benefits to giving consent. On page 4 and 5 I discuss potential risks of participation, yours and your youth's rights, and how this research data will be used.

CAN I CONTACT YOU? YES! Please do. My phone number is - and my email address is -

WHERE DO I SIGN TO GIVE MY CONSENT? The last page. Please read the handout first ☺.

IF I GIVE PERMISSION, THEN WHAT? Sign the consent form (see last page), and put the signature page into the envelope provided, and seal it. Please give it to your adolescent who will give it to me when we meet. Why sealed? I will store this page separately from the research data so no names are associated with the study.

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Participant (Parent/Guardian) Consent Form

What are secondary students learning about gender and sexual diversity at school?

1. WHY ARE YOU ASKING MY TEEN TO BE IN THIS STUDY? All high school students (grades 9 through 12) are invited to take part in this research study.

2. WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

1. To discover what students' views and opinions are about gender and sexual diversity.
2. To learn what students want to know and not know, about gender and sexual diversity.
3. To learn what schools/community agencies can do to help resolve and manage issues related to gender and sexual diversity.

3. WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY? Gender diversity is a term to describe any and all gender identities, including male, female, cisgender, transgender, intersex, and other. Sexual diversity refers to any and all sexual identities and orientations, including heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, and other.

4. WHY IS THIS STUDY IMPORTANT? To offer information to various helpers and teachers on how to address gender and sexual diversity within and outside the school system, that is maybe unique to those that live in Alberta.

5. WHAT WILL MY TEEN NEED TO DO IF I GIVE CONSENT?

a) Answer general questions about their background (E.G., age, grade, school, race/ethnicity, and identity)

Meet with me, for about 30-60 minutes, during school time (e.g., lunch) to answer questions about their experiences in school related to gender and sexual diversity topics and issues, like how these topics are talked about in the curriculum, how students perceive gender and sexual minority students, and how they are treated at school. If your youth and I decide after their first interview they have more they would like to share or we did not get through all

b) of the questions, I may request that we schedule a second interview. The choice to participate in a second interview will be completely up to them and they may decline this request. These interviews will take place between Oct 2016 and June 2017 and will be audio recorded.

6. PRIVACY ISSUES: WILL MY ADOLESCENT'S NAME BE USED IN THE STUDY?

NO. There is NO need to collect your teen's last name.

Here are all the ways I will protect you and your teen's privacy:

- I will never ask a teen to reveal or record their last name, or their parents/guardian names.
- The only place I will collect your teen's last name is on this informed consent document and it will be sealed and stored in a locked cabinet separate from all other information collected in this study.
- Interviews will occur at school but will be in a private and confidential location. Your teens' teachers, administrators, and other support staff will not be notified of your teens participation in the interview nor will they be informed of any of the information that your teen shares.
- All teens will be asked to select a pseudonym or made-up name that will be used to replace their first name on any information collected.
- The background information collected will also be kept in a separate location from the data collected during the interview.
- Any individual who assists in transcribing the interviews after the data is collected will be selected out of province and will be required to sign a detailed confidentiality agreement.

- Research data will always be stored in a locked cabinet and/or on a computer with a password and data files will be encrypted and password protected.
- Computer files and other files associated with the research will be saved under participants' pseudonym and never by their name.
- The list matching the pseudonym to the participant's names will be kept in a locked cabinet for two years after the research has concluded and at this time the list will be shredded. Audio recordings will be destroyed as soon as they are transcribed.
- All other research materials will be kept locked up for a period of 10 years to allow for any future analysis and reporting on the results. After this time, all information will be shredded in a confidential manner.

7. HAS THIS STUDY BEEN APPROVED TO BE RUN IN THE SCHOOL? YES!
Your teens school division and school have approved this study and given me permission to ask their students to participate. In addition, I received approval on August 16, 2016 from the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns about this study contact me or the people listed on page 5 of this handout.

8. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO MY TEEN PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY? There are no material rewards for participating in this study. Your teen may gain the experience of helping out with a research study. Many participants like to share their perspectives and opinions. The answers your teen provides may help educators and other professionals learn how to best handle gender and sexual diversity in the school system.

9. And… ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO MY TEEN BY PARTICIPATING IN THIS RESEARCH? As with all research studies, there is the potential that specific questions may be raised or discomfort experienced in the process of talking about events and experiences. For this reason, it is standard practice to provide appropriate resources to research participants. For this study, all participating teens will be:

1. Told the Family School Liaison Counselor at their school will be available to them to check 'in with them if they or their parents/guardian makes a request.
2. Given a list of referrals to community agencies providing support services
3. Given my contact information to call or email if there is any distress or concerns resulting from their participation and I will provide additional referrals for supports at your request.

10. DO I HAVE TO GIVE CONSENT? NO. This is an optional activity for your teen to participate in. You are under no obligation to give consent. There is also no consequence if you decide not to give permission (e.g., teachers will not be told who participates and who does not participate).

11. CAN I KEEP THIS CONSENT HANDOUT? Yes please. I just need the signature page. Feel free to copy the signature page for your records.

12. WILL MY TEEN BE ASKED TO GIVE PERMISSION TOO? Yes. And, I will tell your teen what I am telling you… about how I will protect their privacy, they can stop the study at anytime, they can decline to answer any questions, etc.

13. CAN I WITHDRAW MY PERMISSION? YES!! This option is available to you anytime. Once all data collected is combined, which will occur sometime between April 2017 and July 2017, it will be impossible to identify which data came from your teen.

Therefore, it cannot be removed after this time. To withdraw your teen from the study you just need to call or email me. No explanation from you is required.

14. CAN I GET A COPY OF THE RESULTS: Yes! Please contact me on or after September of 2018 for a summary of the results. A summary will also be provided to your teen.

15. HOW WILL YOU USE THIS RESEARCH DATA? This research study is part of my PhD dissertation project. The results of the research may also be published in academic journals, presented at academic conferences, and discussed in training and supervising professionals and community members. Your teen's name and identifying information will never be associated in any way with the published results.

16. IS THERE ANYONE ELSE I CAN CONTACT ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH? Yes! In addition to being able to contact me (see page 1 for my contact info), you may also contact your teens school or school division to verify their approval of this study. In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study or raise any concerns you might have by contacting the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 210-9863 or by email at cfreb@ucalgary.ca.

Participant (Parent/Guardian) Consent Form

Signature Page

WHAT AM I SIGNING?

By signing below, you are indicating to me that you have:

a. Read the 4 page handout (attached to this page; for example, see pages 2 for information as to the purpose of the study and pages 3, 4, and 5 for information about the risks, benefits, and ways I will protect your teen's privacy).

b. Given me permission to meet with your teen to participate in my research study.

c. Given your consent willingly.

d. No questions for me (Tanya) but that you know how to reach me if you have any questions or comments (see page 1).

BUT IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO SIGN/GIVE PERMISSION, that is ok. Please do not sign this page. Just leave it blank as this will tell me you do not give me permission to interview your teen. That is ok – there is no consequence for this decision.

Name of your Teen

Name of Parent/Guardian	Signature (Giving Consent)	Today's Date

Name of Parent/Guardian	Signature (Giving Consent)	Today's Date

LAST STEP: Please put this page (signed or not) in the supplied envelope and ask your teen to bring it to me when we meet. For more details about this envelope procedure, please see page 1.

APPENDIX B: Participant Assent Form

Hi!

WHY AM I GETTING THIS HANDOUT? You are being asked to be a part of a research study called *What are secondary students learning about gender and sexual diversity at school?* This handout is going to tell you about the study so you can decide if you want to participate. You do not have to join this study.

WHO IS THE RESEARCHER? My name is Tanya Surette. You might remember me from your school assembly at the start of the school year when I came in to talk about what it means to be a research participant. I am a student just like you and this research is part of my PhD studies.

CAN I CONTACT TANYA IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH? YES, Please do! I can be reached at -

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT? I want to know first-hand from students just like you what and how you learn about gender and sexual diversity at school. You might be wondering what I mean by "gender and sexual diversity"! Gender diversity is a term to describe any and all gender identities, including male, female, cisgender, transgender, intersex, and other. Sexual diversity refers to any and all sexual identities and orientations, including heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, and other.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Discussions about what schools should teach and what students should learn usually involve adults talking about their perspectives and opinions. I think it is also really important to hear YOUR VOICE about what you are actually learning about.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS? Well there is no reward or prize to participate. But, you do get to come and talk to me about YOUR opinions and thoughts for 30-60 minutes during the school day at a time that doesn't interfere with your academic schedule. I think students have really interesting things to say about their education and this is your chance to have your thoughts be

heard! Also, what you have to say matters and may be important in influencing changes in how your school talks about and handles diversity issues in the future. This is also a chance for you to experience what it is like to be part of a research study and to help out a fellow student!

DO I HAVE TO BE IN THIS STUDY? NO! It is a choice to participate. If you do not want to be in the study there is no pressure to participate.

WILL MY TEACHERS OR PRINCIPALS FIND OUT THAT I AM IN THE RESEARCH STUDY? NO! Well, not unless you tell them! No one will know you participated in the research study. We will meet at the school but in a private location that is confidential and this meeting will be arranged by you ahead of time. Your teachers and principal will also not have access to the information you share.

WILL MY NAME BE USED? NO! All students who participate in this study will choose a pseudonym or fake name to replace their name on any information that is collected. No one will know your name if you join the research study. I will also ask you to never reveal your last name to me. I will only know you by your first name and this will be removed from any of the information that I collect about you. Anyone who reads about the study will NOT EVER be able to know it is you since your name will never be shared and I will eliminate all identifying information from what you share to ensure the information will not lead back to you.

WHAT WILL I HAVE TO DO?

Talk to me! If you decide to participate in this study, I will invite you to have a one-to-one interview with me where we talk about your unique experiences and perspectives at school related to gender and sexual diversity topics and issues. I will be interested in hearing what you think is important to share. I may ask you specific questions to keep the conversation related to my research topic or to help you come up with specific experiences to share. The interview will take about an hour. You will be able to pick a time that works best for you and doesn't interfere with your class schedule. If we did not get through all of the questions or you have more you want to share, I may request that we schedule a second interview. The choice to participate in a second interview will be completely up to you and you can say no to this request.

Besides the interview, I will ask you to fill out a one-page questionnaire that gives me some basic information about you: your first name, school, grade, age at the time of the interview, and your gender identity and sexual orientation.

After our interview is transcribed (this means copied down word for word) I will give you the option to have me send you a copy of it so you can read it and make sure I got your perspective right. You will have a chance to request any additions, deletions, or changes at this time.

WHAT WILL BE COLLECTED IN THE RESEARCH? Our interview will be audio recorded so that I can focus on listening to you and following your story when we talk and can play it back later to transcribe our conversation. I may get someone to help me transcribe the interviews but this person will not know any of the personal information I collected about you, they will be from a different province, and they will have to sign a form agreeing never to talk about the recording.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE MATERIALS USED IN THE RESEARCH? I will keep all original materials under lock and key. I will keep our interview transcript locked up separately from the personal information I collect about you. This will ensure your name will not be able to be connected to what you share in the interview. I will destroy the audio recording as soon as it is transcribed.

CAN I QUIT THE STUDY? You can stop/quit the study at anytime and you do not have to tell me why you want to quit the study. It is okay to stop/quit the study. If you don't want to be in the study, just contact me or let your parents/guardian know and have them contact me at the phone number or email on the first page. If you drop out of the study, I will remove all of your information and destroy it in a confidential manner. After all of the data has been collected and combined together, between April and July 2017, I will no longer be able to remove your information. It will be impossible to find your information after all of the data has been combined. Remember—your name is NEVER attached to your information.

CAN I KNOW THE RESULTS? I'll be using the results of this study for my final project for my PhD. The results may also be published in academic journals and presented at conferences or may be used for professional development. I will send you a summary of the results by September, 2018. I will be asking you to set up an email account using the fake name you select to replace your name and this is where I will email you our interview and the summary of the results.

ARE THERE RISKS TO PARTICIPATING IN THIS RESEARCH? With any research study there is the chance that specific questions may be raised or discomfort experienced in the process of talking about events and experiences. In case this happens during your participation, the following resources will be made available to you if you need:

1. The Family School Liaison Counselor at your school can be asked to check in with you at some point after the interview at your request.

2. A list of referrals to community agencies providing support services to adolescents will be provided to you at the end of the interview.

3. You and your parent/guardian will have my contact information see page 1) to call or email if there is any distress or concerns resulting from your participation and I will provide additional referrals for supports if requested.

Also, it is my ethical and legal responsibility to report any imminent risks of danger to the appropriate authorities. This means that if during our interview I become aware of you or someone else who is at risk of harming themselves, someone else, or a child is being abused or neglected, I have to report this information to ensure the safety of anyone who may be at risk.

DO MY PARENTS/GUARDIANS HAVE TO AGREE TO THE STUDY TOO? YES! Your parents/guardians will receive a similar letter asking them to say it is okay for you to participate in the study.

HAS THIS STUDY BEEN APPROVED IN MY SCHOOL? YES! Your school and your school division have approved this study. You can talk to your school principal to confirm that they support this study. In addition, this study has received ethical approval through the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary. You may verify the ethical approval of this study or raise any concerns you might have by contacting the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 210-9863 or by email at cfreb@ucalgary.ca.

Participant (Youth) Consent Form
What are Secondary Students Learning About Gender Diversity at School?

SIGNATURE PAGE

THE FINAL STEP:

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY,
PLEASE DO NOT ANSWER THE NEXT QUESTION UNTIL
YOU HAVE TALKED TO ME (TANYA) ABOUT THEM!

DO YOU WANT TO JOIN THE RESEARCH STUDY DESCRIBED IN THIS HANDOUT AND AS DESCRIBED BY YOUR PARENT/GUARDIAN?

(Answer by putting a checkmark in the box or circle your answer)

☐ Yes – **I want to be** in the research study

☐ No—**I do not want to** be in the research study

Your Name(first name only) Signature Today's Date

PLEASE PUT YOUR SIGNED FORM IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED, SEAL THE ENVELOPE, AND BRING IT WITH YOU TO OUR INTERVIEW. I LOOK FORWARD TO OUR CONVERSATION!

APPENDIX C: Interview Guideline

Introduction:

Hello! Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my research study. As you read in the informed assent form, I am keen to learn about your experiences at school related to gender and sexual diversity. Before we get started I want to remind you of your rights. You can choose to decline to answer any of the questions I ask at any time. You can also ask for a break or to stop the interview at any time. You have the right to withdraw your participation at any time as well. Do you have any questions about this or the information document you signed before we get started?

To begin….

a. What comes to mind when you hear the terms: gender diversity? gender minority? sexual minority? sexual diversity?

b. Thank for your answers. What do the words gay/lesbian/bisexual/queer/transgender mean?

At this point I will ensure there is a shared understanding of what these terms mean before initiating the interview.

For this research study, I define gender diversity as any and all gender identities, including male, female, cisgender, transgender, intersex, and other. I define sexual diversity as any and all sexual identities and orientations, including heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and questioning. What do you agree with or disagree about this definition?

Do you know anyone personally who identifies as a diverse gender or sexuality?

What references/TV characters/media figures do you think of when you hear about gender and sexual minorities?

Now that we have finished the warm up questions, I will ask you two questions that you can answer however you want:

1. Overall, what is your view/opinion about those who identify as being from a gender minority or sexual minority group?

Probing questions will be limited to the following, asked in general to specific depending on the needs of the participant:

- for example, what rights do you believe they should or should not have (E.G. marriage equality, to choose what bathroom to use, public displays of affection, inclusion in education discussions/textbooks)?
- do you believe those who say that are gender minority is a choice they make or do you believe it is a biological drive?

2. Why do you think you believe what you believe about those who identify as a gender or sexual minority? For instance, what experiences have you had at school that have contributed to or shaped these attitudes and beliefs?

At this point I will follow the student's lead and allow them to share the experiences they deem important. I will ask for clarification and elaboration and will respond with empathic responding, paraphrasing, summarizing, and reflecting feelings during the interview. If the student gets off topic or the interview seems to be losing focus, I will redirect with one of the following questions. I will ensure each student has spoken to each of the 4 core themes listed below and if they do not speak to them on their own I will directly ask one of the listed questions.

Theme 1: How are sexuality and gender diversity taken up in the classroom?

Questions:

1. What discussions have you had in class related to gender and sexual diversity? Have these been enough, too much, too few?
2. Have you encountered any overtly homophobic or transphobic messages in class discussions or materials?
3. Have you encountered classroom discussions that were overtly supportive and protective of respecting gender and sexually diverse students and individuals?
4. In what textbooks or class materials (i.e., novels, essays, news articles, presentations, etc..) have you encountered discussions around sexuality and gender diversity? Have you had experiences where discussions related to these issues were purposefully included or avoided?
5. During sexual education in Health 9 or CALM class, how are homosexual or transgender individuals and issues discussed?
6. During any religious classes you've taken (if applicable), how are homosexual or transgender individuals and issues discussed?

Theme 2: How are gender and sexual minority students treated, supported, and/or protected at school?

Questions:

1. Does your school have any supportive programs or policies that you know of for gender and sexually diverse students (i.e., Gay Straight Alliances, Pride Day, etc.…)?
2. What have you heard about/how has your school addressed the 'bathroom' issue?
3. How does your school address homophobic bullying?
4. How are gender and sexual minority students talked about or talked to in the hallways or outside of the classroom by school staff or other students?
5. How do teachers and other students respond to homophobic language (i.e., gay, fag, dyke, etc..) in and outside of the classroom?
6. How safe do you think your school is for gender and sexually diverse students? Why?

Theme 3: What is the impact on the current curriculum on the attitudes and behaviours of all students and on the emotional and mental well-being of sexual and gender minority students?

Questions:

1. What beliefs appear to be most accepted within your school environment related to gender and sexual minority individuals?

For Gender and Sexual Minority Youth Specifically:

2. What is your perception of the attitudes and beliefs of school staff and peers related to gender and sexual diversity?
3. What do you believe about yourself as a result of how you are treated at school?
4. How has your school experiences impacted you emotionally and socially?

Theme 4: How can schools become more safe and inclusive for gender and sexual minority students?

Questions:

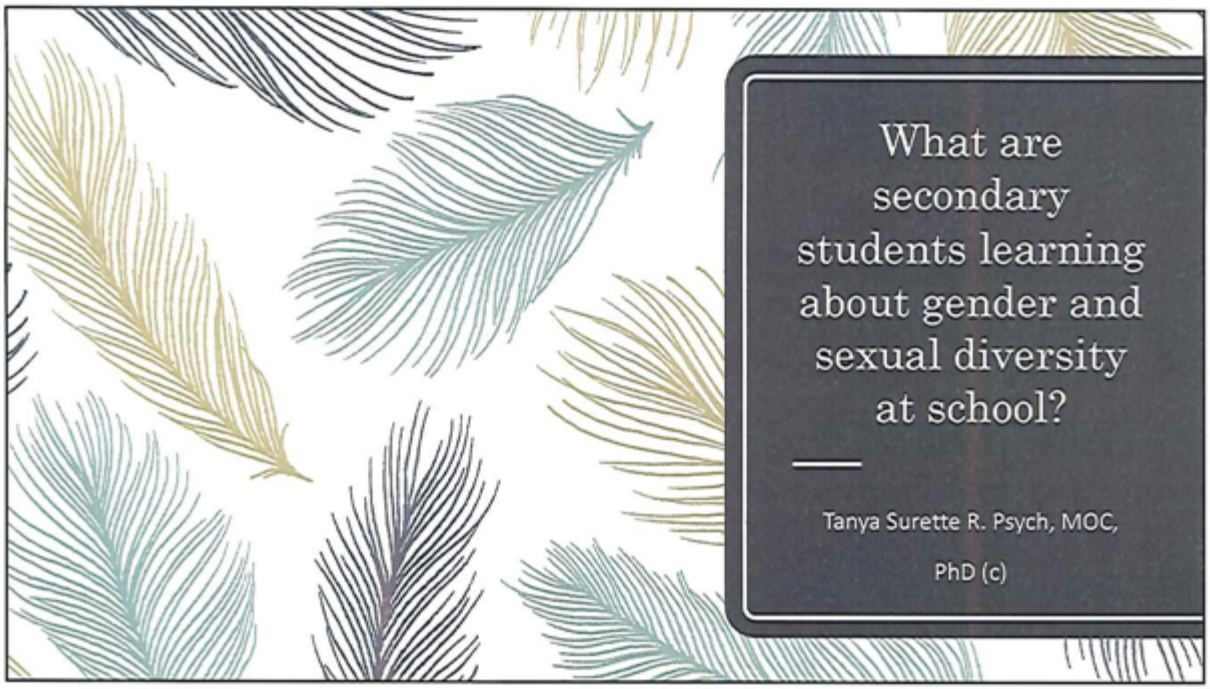
1. In what ways is your school doing a good job supporting gender and sexual minority students?
2. How do you see your school could improve on how gender and sexual minority issues are discussed and supported?
3. Where do you think the change has to start for your school to become more safe and inclusive?

Conclusion:

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today and to share your experiences. I want to check in with you on how you're feeling after talking with me about your experiences? Do you think you would like to talk to a counselor further about your experiences or any of the feelings that have come up from our interview today?

At this point, I will debrief with the student about their experiences participating in the interview and any feelings that may have come up. If the student demonstrates any visual signs of distress we will discuss the counseling options available to them and I will provide referrals both for their Family School Liaison Counselor (FSLC) and an outside agency that they can access support. I will offer to have the FSLC check in with them on the next day they will be at their school if they would like. This will be arranged with the FSLCs' at the start of the school year.

APPENDIX D: Recruitment PowerPoint



EGALE Canada – 2011 Survey

Almost two-thirds (64%) of LGBTQ students and 61% of students with LGBTQ parents reported that they feel unsafe at school

70% of all participating students, LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ, reported hearing expressions such as "that's so gay" every day in school and almost half (48%) reported hearing remarks such as "faggot,""lezbo," and "dyke" every day in school.

74% of trans students, 55% of sexual minority students, and 26% of non-LGBTQ students reported having been verbally harassed about their gender expression

More than one in five (21%) LGBTQ students reported being physically harassed or assaulted due to their sexual orientation.

Levels of sexual harassment are high across the board for LGBTQ students, with sexual harassment reported by 49% of trans students, 45% of students with LGBTQ parents, 43% of female bisexual students, 42% of male bisexual students, 40% of gay male students, and 33% of lesbian students

"To individualize bullying is to reduce a complex, social and institutional phenomenon to a problem 'owned' by individuals"
Carlson, 2014

JANUARY 2016

Guidelines for Best Practices:

Who?

- High school students (grades 9 – 12) across gender identities and sexual orientations
- Attending ERHS, VHS, WRM, PBHS, KAHS, and CHS
- Who have received parental consent to participate

What?

- Provide basic demographic information
- Participate in a one to one semi-structured interview
- Some may be offered to participate in a follow-up interview

Where?

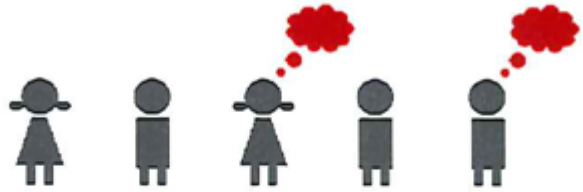
- At school in a private location away from the main office

When?

- September 2016-June 2017

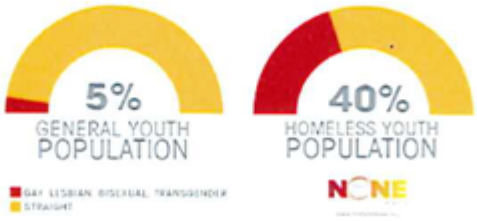
How?

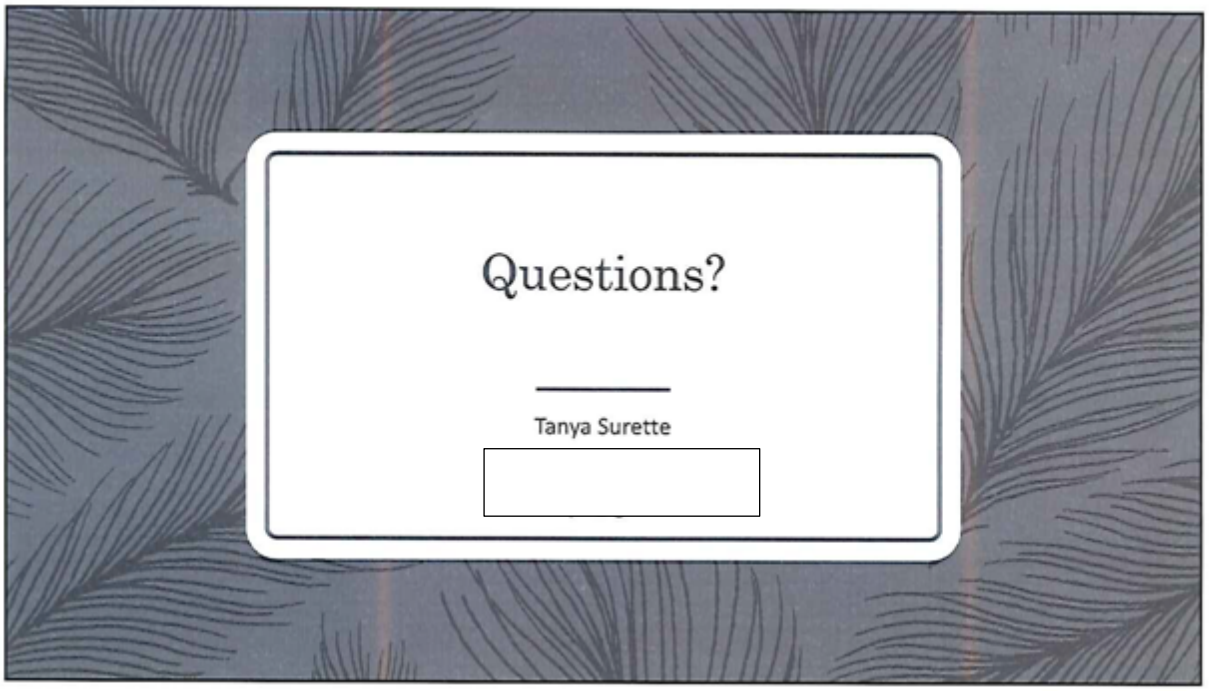
- Posters, FSLC's, Teachers & Support Staff, and Administrators.



More than 2 in 5 gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth think of suicide often. 1 in 3 have attempted it.

Why?




Questions?
Tanya Surette

APPENDIX E: Recruitment Script

Our school is taking part in a research study and you are all invited to participate. The study is called 'What are secondary students (that's all of you) learning about gender and sexual diversity at school'? Gender and sexual diversity is another way to say LGBTQ. The researcher, Tanya Surette, is a PhD student and she wants to know from all of you, first hand, how our school talks about and addresses LGBTQ topics and issues. She doesn't just want to hear from students who identify as LGBTQ, she wants to hear from all students what you currently learn about and what you think you should learn about these topics at school. Students who decide to participate will meet with Tanya one on one and talk about your ideas and experiences related to this topic. No one at school has to know if you decide to participate and she won't share what you say with anyone, including your teachers, principals, or parents. So if you think you might want to participate in this research project, you will see these posters up around school (**hold up the poster)** and they have her contact information on it. You can call/email/text her and she will give you more information about her study and talk to you about getting involved. If after talking to her you do decide to participate, she will have you take a form home for your parent to sign and will schedule a time to come and meet you at the school to hear what you have to say.

APPENDIX F: Recruitment Poster

Ever feel like you don't often have a say in what you're learning?

SPEAK YOUR VOICE

COME AND PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY!

WHAT ARE SECONDARY STUDENTS LEARNING ABOUT GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY AT SCHOOL??

I WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

If you're willing to share your thoughts and opinions with me, text, call or email to become a participant in my research:

Tanya Surette

[redacted]

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoing Faculties Research Ethics Board

APPENDIX G: Risk Assessment

The following questions were asked at initial contact with students prior to informed consent being requested from their parents to assess if there is a possible risk to their requesting their parents' consent to participate in the study.

1. In order for you to participate in this study, I need your parent/guardian to sign a form that discusses the study and that I am interested in learning more about your opinions about how gender and sexual diversity is talked about at school. How do you think your parent/guardian is going to react when you ask them to sign the form?

2. Do you have any concerns that if you ask to participate in this study your parent/guardian may question you about your gender or sexual identity?

3. If your parent/guardian questions you about your gender or sexual identity, are they likely to become emotionally, physically, or psychologically abusive towards you if they suspect you might identify as anything other than being straight?

4. If your parent/guardian reacts negatively to your asking them to fill out the consent form, who will you contact for support?

5. Do you feel comfortable and safe asking your parent to give you permission to participate in this study?

If any of the responses to these questions identify this student is at any risk by asking their parent for permission to participate, they will be thanked for their interest, provided support resources to access if interested, but will not be permitted to participate in this study. I will explain to the youth that this decision is for their safety and to avoid placing them at risk of any harm from asking their parents for consent to participate.

APPENDIX H: Community Support and Counselling Resources

Kids Help Phone
1 800 668 6868
http://kidshelpphone.ca/Teens/Home.aspx
Offers free, confidential support provided 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year.

Connecteen
403 264 8336 (Available 24-7)
TEXT: 587 333 2724 (Evenings/Weekends)
http://calgaryconnecteen.com/need-to-talk-urnotalone/
Offers free, confidential peer support provided 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year by either phone, text, or online chat.

Crisis Line
1 888 787 2880 (Available 24-7)
http://www.lethbridge.cmha.ab.ca
Offers free, confidential support provided 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year.

Barons-Eureka-Warner Family and Community Support Services
Coaldale: 403 405 4466
Taber/Vauxhall: 403 223 7230
Milk River: 403 752 5430
Picture Butte: 403 732 5470
http://fcssaa.org/
Offers free, confidential, one-on-one counseling services and support programs to adolescents and families.

Community Mental Health Service (Alberta Health Services)
Lethbridge: 403 381 5260
Taber: 403 223 7244
Vulcan: 403 4853356
Offers free, confidential, one-on-one counseling services and support programs to adolescents and families.