DISRUPTING HETERONORMATIVITY IN SCHOOLS

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to examine the successes, challenges and actions of teacher leaders and administrators as they worked to disrupt heteronormativity. Our goal was to become more aware of how administrators and teacher leaders can create positive and equitable school experiences for all, irrespective of sexuality and gender identity. Specifically, the proposed research sought to answer the following questions: How is educational leadership discussed in literature with regards to the disruption of heteronormativity in schools? In what ways have recently retired educators led to disrupt heteronormativity in public schools? What factors contributed to the success/breakdown of these intended disruptions? What recommendations can be made to administrators and teacher leaders to help them disrupt heteronormativity in their schools?

This study also sought to make recommendations to educators based on the findings from interviewees. Five interviews were conducted with teacher leaders and administrators who had recently retired from the profession. The researchers analyzed interview transcriptions for emergent themes and for themes prevalent in literature, such as fear and silence, policing of administrators, policing of heteronormativity by administrators, and opportunities for heteronormative disruptions. The study found that fear and silence on LGBTQ issues in schools remain prevalent in British Columbia. This study also documents strategies administrators and teacher leaders can use to break the silence on LBGTQ issues and lead for systemic change. A complete list of recommendations for educators to build more accepting schools for LGBTQ students, staff and families is included at the end of the paper.

Keywords: LGBTQ, heteronormativity, acceptance, professional development, fear, silence

Preface

This graduating paper was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Education in the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Educational Administration and Leadership at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver). This collaborative study was co-conducted and co-written by Alysha Kothlow and James Chamberlain. Our study and preparations for our research began in September 2011 and the final paper was finished in May 2012.

The UBC Research Ethics Board (H11-03196) approved our proposal to conduct in-person interviews with recently retired teacher leaders and administrators. Potential participants were invited through the Pride Education Network (PEN), the Retired Teachers Association of B.C. (RTA) and the B.C. Principals and Vice-Principals Association (BCPVPA). Subsequent interviewees were invited to participate through snowball sampling.

Our research thesis is based on the information collected from these interviews and a large portion of the literature review was based on information gathered by researchers and authors specializing in this field.

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Dedication

We dedicate this paper to all members of the school community who have ever felt or continue to feel hesitant to be their true selves in a heteronormative school culture.

We dedicate this paper to Jean-Marie Russell for his continued patience and ongoing support.

<div style="text-align: center;">Alysha and James</div>

Introduction

Our school system has been shaped through a heteronormative lens that is rarely challenged or disrupted. It is important for administrators and teacher leaders to be able to identify and recognize how heteronormativity manifests itself in their schools in order to effectively disrupt it. For the purposes of this study heteronormativity refers to the way in which schools and society place expectations upon students and teachers to look and act heterosexual in all situations. This expectation within schools often serves to silence or further marginalize gender non-conforming and/or queer and questioning youth, staff and families. When heteronormativity is continuously reified in schools it poses a number of challenges for students, educators and the community. Firstly, it limits the choices for all students around gender identity and expression by potentially encouraging conformity to rigid gender role norms. Secondly, pervasive heteronormativity limits social, emotional and academic choices of students. It negatively impacts gender non-conforming individuals who may be viewed as transgressive and may be subject to further marginalization and discrimination. Finally, unchecked heteronormativity can impede one's ability to be who they are, irrespective of their gender and sexual identities, because it pressures people to deny their authentic identities and perform inauthentically.

Students' school experiences are directly impacted by how heteronormativity is identified, acknowledged, questioned and actively challenged by teacher leaders and administrators. How they collaboratively lead on all of these levels can have profound impacts on students' lives. One does not normally think of 'disruption' when discussing educational leadership in schools and yet, we argue, the disruption of heteronormativity is part and parcel of an education that is equitable and just and, therefore, should be part of the work of educational leaders.

As educators, it is our professional responsibility to create a school experience for students where they can thrive socially, emotionally and academically. Over time, the values, beliefs, perceptions and ideas around heteronormativity are slowly evolving. Just as culture changes, so must schooling, in order

to meet the educational and social needs of students and the communities being served. Over the past two decades, educators have begun to embrace anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobia education. The disruption of heteronormativity is a natural extension of this work. In our view, heterosexuality is the norm within schools, and more often than not educators reinforce it by what they consciously and unconsciously do and say.

Within the B.C. context, there has not yet been collective action on the part of administrators within any school district to disrupt heteronormativity. Generally, administrators and teacher leaders are working in isolation from one another in this capacity. Although the British Columbia Teacher's Federation (BCTF) and Pride Education Network (PEN) provide online resources and telephone advice, educators continue to tell their stories of loneliness, frustration and resistance when working on queer and LGBTQ[1] issues in schools. PEN is attempting to set up a peer-to-peer mentoring program to partially address this dilemma.

As researchers, we assume the disruption of heteronormativity by teacher leaders and administrators to be a necessary component of sound educational leadership. By leading in transformative ways with other like-minded educators, administrators and teacher leaders can work towards meaningful, systemic change. In order to disrupt heteronormativity in schools administrators and teacher leaders must first understand what heteronormativity is, reflect upon its underlying causes, and explore and question their existing beliefs about sexuality issues within educational settings.

<center>Background Information & Personal Context</center>

Alysha and James are both full-time educators and part-time graduate students in the Masters of Educational Administration and Leadership Program at the University of British Columbia.

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[1] For the purposes of this study we will use the terms queer and LGBTQ interchangeably as a positive, inclusive term and an example of reclaimed language. It is meant as an umbrella term to refer to people who self identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer or questioning.

Alysha is a full-time teacher at Southpointe Academy (Tsawwassen, BC). She has a strong background in independent and international school education, having taught in a variety of countries and school systems around the world. Alysha is currently in her sixth year of teaching with experiences from Kindergarten to Grade 11. This master's program is providing Alysha with an opportunity to further develop her understanding of the challenges of educational leadership, including the complexities involved in leading for social justice. With the knowledge and insight gained from this experience, Alysha hopes to be a more socially just leader. In 2012, Alysha will return to international education as a Humanities teacher and Community and Service Coordinator in the International Baccalaureate program at a K-12 school in Switzerland.

Alysha filters her experiences through a feminist lens. She sees herself as having a responsibility to be a changemaker who advocates courageously for social justice by embodying a genuine, active, and overt commitment to social justice. She believes in being 'critically educative' where we "not only look at the conditions in which we live, but must also decide how to change them" (Foster, 1986, p. 185). She believes in the need for educators to continuously assess the cultural politics of the school, as they "both reproduce and perpetuate the inequities inherent in gender, race, and class constructs" (Shields & Mohan, 2008). She believes more administrators and teacher leaders are needed who are willing to collaborate with and learn alongside staff in the pursuit of a common vision for a school.

James taught for most of his career within the Surrey School District. As a gay educator who has taught primary grades for most of his nineteen-year career, James values the teaching of acceptance of differences to young learners and their families. This includes, but is not limited to acceptance of differences in race, ethnicity, ability, gender, religion and sexual orientation. He was involved in a court case that challenged school board censorship of LGBTQ story books in elementary classrooms. Currently, he coordinates the Social Justice program at the B.C. Teachers' Federation (BCTF). In this capacity, he is responsible for the LGBTQ, anti-racism and anti-poverty programs in schools across

British Columbia. In 2012/2013, James will continue his career with the Vancouver School District as an elementary school vice-principal.

James believes that the decisions he makes in collaboration with others must focus on equity, social justice and systemic change. From his experiences, readings and reflections James realizes that he needs to take time, step back, and continually reflect on his core values. By doing so, he will be more attentive to everyone's voices and perspectives while leading staff and students towards his vision for a school which truly supports LGBTQ and gender non-conforming students (Rooney, 2010).

The UBC master's program is providing opportunities for James to learn more about the complexities of school leadership. He hopes to use the insights, challenges and successes described by participants within this study to assist him in continuing to lead to challenge and disrupt heteronormativity within schools.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to examine the successes, challenges and actions of teacher leaders and administrators as they worked to disrupt heteronormativity in schools. Our goal is to become more aware of how administrators and teacher leaders can create positive and equitable school experiences for all, irrespective of sexuality and gender identity. We hope to provide more insight into how administrators and teacher leaders can effectively disrupt heteronormativity. Lugg (2003) states that "education and educational leadership researchers seem stuck when it comes to conducting research involving gender and orientation," and that "these areas have been under examined by mainstream scholars" (p. 123). We would concur with this analysis, as there was limited research or data to be found on this topic at the time of this study.

As potential administrators, we want to learn more about the disruption of heteronormativity in schools. Specifically, the proposed research seeks to answer the following questions:

- How is educational leadership discussed in literature with regards to the disruption of heteronormativity in schools?

- In what ways have recently retired educators led to disrupt heteronormativity in public schools?

- What factors contributed to the success/breakdown of these intended disruptions?

- What recommendations can be made to administrators and teacher leaders to help them disrupt heteronormativity in their schools?

Significance of the study

There are four potential benefits of this study. The study may raise awareness among administrators and teacher leaders about heteronormativity in schools. Secondly, it may inform the practice of current teacher leaders and administrators with respect to how they navigate heteronormativity in schools. Third, educators may find the information useful, both personally and/or professionally, in examining their beliefs and values around sexuality issues in education. Administrators and teachers leaders who read our study may be better equipped to support all students, particularly those who are LGBTQ and gender non-conforming. Through educators' increased knowledge of heteronormativity in schools, students may benefit through exposure to teaching and learning environments that normalize sexuality and gender identity issues in education. Through this research, our intent is to draw attention to the importance of acknowledging and disrupting heteronormativity in schools.

Literature Review

We begin our review of literature by outlining our theoretical framework. We continue by highlighting the complexities of the panopticon of fear and silence around sexuality issues in education. Next, we paint a picture of the heteronormative paradigm and how it functions in policing sexuality and LGBTQ realities of schools. Through our research we acknowledge the limited data on this topic, and then go on to describe the ways in which silence is being disrupted through action in B.C. schools. Following this, we examine some of the possibilities for fragmented and systemic disruptions of heteronormativity in schools.

Theoretical framework

This paper is predicated in part on critical theory which is "grounded in the day to day lives of people, structures and cultures" (Brown, 2004, p. 78). The origins of critical theory are frequently attributed to the Frankfurt School of Social Research that promoted the critical examination of theory that undergirds social action. Critical theory acknowledges and critically analyzes social structures and hegemonic practices and poses questions such as: Who gets to make important decisions? Who is privileged by status quo structures? Who is disadvantaged and in what ways? Do they resist, and if so, how? In our view, though schools are assumed to be democratic equalizers for all students and staff, overt and covert power structures frequently influence how education is managed and delivered. Overtly, schools can be managed through a hierarchy based upon positions and titles (i.e. principal, vice-principal, teacher leaders, teachers, teachers on call, student teacher, etc.) where one party has more positional power than the other based upon their status. This hierarchy can be complicated by the culture of an institution and its covert power structures. These include interpersonal dynamics predicated upon class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other forms of identity.

Ouchi (1979, as discussed by Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006) suggests that power structures within institutions, like schools, need to acknowledge and take into consideration outputs that are not easily measured. For example, student success, measured effectively, includes the social, emotional and academic factors that contribute to the growth of the whole child. Similarly, the way in which teacher effectiveness is assessed is also complex. Therefore, in institutions with high degrees of uncertainty and ambiguity in terms of outputs, Ouchi argued that symbolic control or "clan control - cultural values, norms and expectations that define proper behavior - offers the most effective form of control under these conditions" (cited in Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006, p. 264). Symbolic control requires that members internalize cultural values, goals and practices toward desired performances and outcomes. Once internalized, these implicit messages direct and coordinate the actions of members and help frame and

define what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. Conversely, symbolic control has the potential to restrict the actions of its members by encouraging strict conformity to the dominant culture of the profession and institutions in society. Symbolic control has been described by critical theorists as a hegemonic strategy whereby people in positions of power can dictate "the actions and decisions of [others] by articulating their interests and realities for them" (p. 267). This form of control, over time, can become so much a part of the organizational culture that specific beliefs and values thrive without question.

We believe that symbolic control represents a significant power structure within schools and thus encourages all involved to subscribe to and reinforce heterosexual norms. Symbolic control may become a managerial device for monitoring and controlling behaviour in organizations by shaping organizational culture and by appealing to organizational members' desires to belong. Managerial use of symbolism in schools and attempts to shape culture can, and should, be viewed as attempts to manage the identities of organizational members. (Poole, 2008). Attempts to manage member identities is inherently an ethical and social justice issue; thus symbolic control in schools must be subject to critical examination.

In situations where symbolic control pervades, we believe that it is important for administrators and teacher leaders to critically analyze the beliefs and values being reified within their schools. Lugg (2003) states that "mainstream politics of education and educational leadership researchers have paid far less attention to the deeper structural issues regarding socio-economic class, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, and religion, and how they shape 'who gets what, when and how' (p. 96). These social structural issues are means of symbolic control that operate within the broader society and within organizations that are microcosms of society, such as schools. Critical social theory relies upon educators to become activists who challenge educational power structures (Brown, 2004). Kaak (2011) also suggests that "institutional models of leadership are a means of oppressing would-be leaders, as well as the cause for the ongoing oppression of others" (p. 135). In our view, the disruption of heteronormativity

in schools is one way in which dominant power structures can be questioned, examined and transformed. Lugg (2003) reinforces the need for this work when she states, "when it comes to gender and sexual orientation, public schools remain stubbornly set in cold war concrete" (p. 123). From our perspective, this means that administrators and teacher leaders need to creatively examine and question dominant hierarchies, while working within education systems to create meaningful, systemic change. Administrators and teachers leaders can further examine the politics and power relationships within schools that work to reify heteronormativity as the accepted norm in society (Butler, 1993) and work to make them visible and to disrupt those norms.

Butler (1993) explains the notion of a 'heterosexual matrix' to explain the complex set of qualities that give heterosexuality superior status and power within society. We believe that the theory of symbolic control can aid in an examination of the heterosexual matrix and how heteronormativity is perpetuated in schools. Atkinson and DePalma (2009) suggest that by consenting, consciously or subconsciously, to being part of a heterosexual matrix, those same people are reifying "heterosexual hegemony and complicity" through this consent. Critical social theory can be used to question existing power structures within institutions that employ symbolic control and empower them to lead creatively to disrupt heteronormativity in their schools.

Heteronormativity and anti-homophobia education

In order to better understand heteronormativity, it may be useful to compare and contrast it with anti-homophobia education, which is more widely known and used. Though anti-homophobia education differs across schools and districts, it could involve raising awareness of LGBTQ terminology, understanding negative myths and stereotypes, and responding to homophobic incidents in schools. Rarely, in our experience, does this move beyond a discourse of students' physical safety. Anti-homophobia education occurs specifically within discrete teachable moments or events outside of the existing curriculum (i.e. after a homophobic bullying event occurs, or on The Day of Pink). In its

simplest form, anti-homophobia education may further allow educators to believe that they are doing enough, simply be creating safe spaces for LGBTQ and gender non-conforming students, staff and families.

Despite the efforts of a growing number of educators to engage in anti-homophobia education, school cultures remain heteronormative and LGBTQ realities continue to be marginalized. Disruption of heteronormativity builds upon anti-homophobia education in a few key ways. Firstly, it extends past an anti-bullying framework to promote schools as psychologically, as well as physically, safe spaces. Secondly, it requires educators to deeply examine their own beliefs around the socially constructed superiority of heterosexuality within schools. Finally, it challenges educators to take action to normalize conversations about LBGTQ realities in school communities, and embed these concepts throughout the existing curriculum. Leading to disrupt heteronormativity, then, is far more complex than anti-homophobia education. The disruption of heteronormativity may also involve more political risk for leaders than anti-homophobia education, since it moves beyond the removal of anti-social, bullying behaviour to address more fundamental aspects of the culture. The disruption of heteronormativity means challenging taken-for-granted assumptions and norms that persist due through fear and silence.

The panopticon of fear and silence

Foucault (1978) draws from Bentham's conception of the panopticon when he describes a prison where overtime, inmates become their own guards over time by employing self-policing behaviors. A panopticon comprises a central guard tower overlooking a penitentiary. From this vantage point, guards can see the entire compound and prisoners feel continuously policed, regardless of whether any guards are actually present in the tower. As a result, "the power of enforcement is always visible, and similarly unverifiable" (Foucault, 1979). Consequently, prisoners begin to police one another and themselves to conform to the expectations of the panopticon. Foucault further suggests that hospitals, factories and

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schools all resemble prisons in that they are highly regulated and subject to great degrees of surveillance by societal norms, institutionalized ethics and colleagues. He also discusses how sexuality becomes self-regulating through the same types of processes. Similar to the prison panopticon, members of school communities police themselves and each other to be silent on LGBTQ issues.

Fear and silence surrounds LGBTQ issues and realities in schools. In some school cultures this may be overt and reinforced through external means, where decision makers tightly control the professional autonomy and self-expression of community members. Such external controls may include fines, suspensions, restrictions, bans, and the implementation of regressive policies. An example of this occurred in Surrey School District where a ban of all books about same-sex families for Kindergarten and Grade One happened in 1998. Though initially this was an external attempt to control all teachers in the district, it also worked to perpetuate fear and silence about LGBTQ issues in schools. Because of the school district's policy and enforcement of this policy, teachers began to self-police and police co-workers to ensure that teaching about same-sex families in elementary schools did not occur. For example, teachers discouraged colleagues from discussing LGBTQ issues in Kindergarten and Grade One classrooms, specifically when teaching a unit about families. Rather than being inclusive, they urged a path of omission to avoid potential conflict with parents and colleagues. This created a chilling effect where silence and fear around discussing LGBTQ issues became norms. The book ban was eventually defeated by the Supreme Court of Canada which said, "instead of proceeding on the basis of respect for all types of families, the board proceeded on an exclusionary philosophy, acting on the concern of certain parents about the morality of same sex relationships, without considering the interest of same sex parented families and the children who belong to them in receiving equal recognition and respect in the school system" (Chamberlain vs. Surrey School District 36). Despite the Court's decision, the fear and silence continued for many years afterward.

Dalley and Campbell (2006) argue that heterosexual hegemony is perpetuated in schools through the silencing processes of "systematic exclusion" (ignoring the presence of LGBTQ people), and "systematic inclusion" (acknowledging LGBTQ realities only in negative contexts) (p. 12). Their study of a Canadian high school concluded that "any move by an individual student or teacher to introduce a queer perspective into classroom discussions was systematically negated, meeting with rejection (exclusion) or negative inclusion by teachers and students alike" (p. 15). In this study, two self-identified gay students chose to hide their sexual identities in school for fear of negative repercussions and chose to express their true identities only in "safer zones outside the school" (p. 15).

In the book *Retooling the Mind Factory*, Sears (2003) describes the historical context for the construction of heterosexual hegemony in schools and the ways in which rigid gender-role stereotypes are perpetuated and reinforced. Sears describes how "gender practices and sexuality" were historically constructed through a 1950's vision of working class males and domestic females to become viewed as the traditional family norm. The idealization of muscular masculinity and domestic femininity as superior attributes allowed for rigid gender roles to become proscribed and reified as traditional norms (pg. 159). Through schools, sports, the military and society at large the masculine male was viewed as "the crucial foundation of a gendered order" (p. 161). In schools, the perceived need to reinforce this "muscular masculinity" has the potential to become aggressive, involving violence and sexual harassment of girls. Frank (1994) concurs when he is quoted: "prowess at sports, success with girls and the ability to deploy violence and avoid any hint of homosexuality" was critical to the maintenance of male power and privilege in schools (p. 182). Conversely, a young female was described as being constrained to the expectation of a life of domesticity and subservience to men, with little reference to any sexuality of their own.

Sears (2003) goes on to state "by not addressing gender inequities, the education system is sure to reproduce them" (pg. 183). Furthermore, by making the assumption that all students are asexual at school

reinforces the taboo nature of comprehensive sexuality education. This is juxtaposed with events in secondary schools like dances, which serve to reinforce compulsive heterosexuality under the watchful eye of teacher chaperones. These events send strong messages about what is normative, namely heterosexist culture sanctioned by school officials.

The heteronormative school culture is one in which teachers, students, and communities willingly or unwillingly participate. The pressure to conform causes individuals to silence parts of their identity that reach outside heteronormativity. The inability for individuals in schools to transgress gender stereotypes perpetuates an atmosphere of fear. Sears (2003) states that this "is seldom challenged and gains official sanction through the chaste official heterosexuality of the school" (pg. 186). Clearly, the perpetuation of fear and silence are "multi-layered processes in which teachers, students, and communities participate" (Dalley and Campbell, 2006, p. 15).

In our view, a number of factors contribute to the fear and silence surrounding LGBTQ issues in schools. Historically, society has deemed conversations about issues of sexuality and gender identity as largely taboo, particularly with children. Discussion of LGBTQ realities in schools also has the potential to illicit strong emotions from a variety of cultural or religious groups. In addition, school systems and management often seek to maintain harmony and avoid conflict, which hampers dialogue. These factors work together to reinforce the heterosexual hegemony in schools. It also serves to create an organizational culture that is self-policed by its members, effectively becoming an educational panopticon.

Lugg (2003) discusses what she deems the "heteronormative school panopticon" as a main factor contributing to the fear and silence around action on LGBTQ issues in education (p. 46). Public schools overtly and covertly regulate how individuals perform gender (p. 37). Historically, these gender regulations have been shaped through a lens of sexism and heterosexism (Rottmann, 2006, p. 3). These

forms of oppression help shape and limit the process of identity construction and expression. In our view, sexism and heterosexism prevent escape from rigid gender and sexual role conformity. This reality creates educational environments where LGBTQ educators and students must engage daily in a gendered and sexualized identity performance that may be a misrepresentation of their true selves because they fear the consequences of non-conformity. In our view, sexism and heterosexism work together to limit the ways in which students can express themselves. As a result, authentic identities are often silenced and hidden.

Similarly, administrators and educators, both LGBTQ and heterosexual, are stifled by this ethos of fear and silence, negatively impacting their ability to integrate LGBTQ issues into classrooms and curriculum. Furthermore, individuals may fear a loss of social or professional status amongst their peers by speaking out. O'Higgins-Norman (2009) suggests that heteronormativity and homophobic behaviour may form a vicious circle: "Whether homophobic bullying and name calling has become pervasive in schools because teachers do not address it when it occurs, or whether teachers do not address it because it would not be practical due to its pervasiveness, is not clear" (p. 12). Fear of being labeled LGBTQ or a social radical, and being targeted negatively, could be the reason for lack of action on the part of an educator. We argue that in these environments, administrators and teacher leaders can become immobilized by fear, and silent with respect to heteronormativity in schools. O'Higgins-Norman suggests that educators are often unaware of their own fears or their rationale for not taking action. This is congruent with Foucault's description of a panopticon as an internal policing structure where individuals attempt to "fit in" with the values and norms of the dominant group and eventually come to take these for granted. In this way, it becomes increasingly difficult to question heteronormativity because it has simply become "the way things are".

The contributions made by the authors we have discussed in this section provide insight into why effectively disrupting heteronormativity is so challenging for administrators and teacher leaders. It is

against this political and social backdrop of fear and silence that administrators and teacher leaders remain fearful and, therefore, resist supporting and advocating for LGBTQ issues in schools.

Heteronormative policing of administrators.

Queer administrators and teacher leaders are themselves targets of heteronormative policing and in the face of their own identity struggles, it is perhaps not surprising that educational leaders who do not conform to heteronormative expectations may not necessarily be strong proponents of disrupting heteronormativity. Lugg and Tooms (2010) describe how "identity erasure" works effectively within American schools to silence queer administrators and teachers. As an example, these researchers suggest that identity erasure occurs when LGBTQ administrators must dress and act in particular ways to "pass" as heterosexual and in so doing negate their lived realities and authentic identities. They described how LGBTQ educational leaders felt that they had to mask their true identities within a heteronormative, heterosexist profession for fear of being fired.

Lugg and Tooms (2010) give an example where power and privilege was inappropriately used in administrative hiring practices to maintain a heteronormative leadership team. In one school district they studied, the superintendent had been hired by a male patriarch who selectively chose "an entourage of interchangeable look-alikes" who were female, thin, blond, white and dressed in a classic style (p. 78). After his retirement, the subsequent superintendent "promoted a white, elite, professional norm for school administrators based on wearing a St. John's suit" (p. 79). A St. John's suit is described in the article as an expensive business suit for women often comprising a pencil skirt and a slim-fitted jacket. In our view, their hiring practices reinforced racism, sexism, heterosexism, and heteronormativity. It is possible that any administrator who looked or dressed differently would have been marginalized or excluded from employment. Lugg goes on to describe a queer administrator who was hired, yet soon became cajoled by her colleagues to look a certain way so she could "pass" as an educational leader in

their community. Colleagues advised her that her hair would "look more professional" if she coloured it in a different way. Though she initially conformed, including "investing in acrylic nails", she returned to her natural hair colour and cut after a one year in the principalship. This caused her political status to drop within administrative circles; she was no longer invited to key events or "put in the rotation to represent the district in television interviews". Over time, she began to feel like an outsider both "visually and philosophically" (p. 79).

This example illustrates that "public school administrators not only have to self-regulate (or pass as non-queer), but they are expected to enforce dominant and stigmatized notions of sexuality and gender on their staff" (Lugg, 2003, p. 37). It makes us wonder if 'out' administrators would be hired in any school districts that lack discrete LGBTQ policies. We would argue that in some school districts, "...public school administrators, regardless of their own orientation, have little option but to continue to function as gender and sexuality police, patrolling students, staff, teachers, other administrators, and themselves" (p. 49).

Atkinson and DePalma (2009) state, "The ways in which lesbian and gay teachers learn to construct little closets of safety in unsafe school environments suggest that hegemonic heterosexuality is indeed maintained by a active system of organized consent" (p. 20). The great irony for closeted, queer public school administrators "is they are both the jailer and the jailed" (Lugg, 2003, p. 50). Lugg and Tooms' work clearly juxtaposes the difficulties for queer administrators and teachers to be 'out' and their need to serve as positive LGBTQ role models for students. Yet, we argue that queer public school administrators have the opportunity to disrupt heteronormativity by questioning the social norms and heteronormative policies that may exist in their school. Though they operate within a heteronormative structure it does not preclude them from thinking critically and acting agentially to reshape the same social structures that may be constraining them. We suggest that queer teachers and administrators

challenge this system of organized consent by being 'out' positive role models for all youth. This will help to dispel negative myths and stereotypes about LGBTQ realities.

Research by authors such as Lugg and Tooms, adeptly explains the historical and political context of homophobia within the United States and how "educational leaders have had to be demonstrably non-queer" in order to keep their jobs (Lugg & Tooms, 2010, p. 80). Does the greater legal protection afforded LGBTQ issues in Canada grant educational leaders greater freedom to address heteronormativity? Scant research has examined heteronormativity and leadership in schools and our study begins to address this gap.

Wright (2010) also proposes that administrators take the lead in establishing LGBTQ policies within their districts. Once again, her paper falls short in providing practical examples of initiatives taken. In B.C., this process has rarely been motivated by the political will of administrators, school trustees and superintendents. The B.C. Principals and Vice Principals' Association (BCPVPA), the only association of its kind in B.C., has always been silent on LGBTQ issues in schools. Meanwhile, teachers, students and union leaders have led initiatives for creating change. In our view, the addition of the BCPVPA's collective voice would be very helpful in creating impetus for reluctant boards to be change makers. Despite the silence on the part of the BCPVPA, Canadian public school educators have protections within their collective agreements, as well as the Canadian Charter, which prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Heteronormative policing of other professionals by school administrators.

Administrators can play a significant part in policing heteronormativity. Atkinson and DePalma (2009) have completed extensive research with educators across Britain to discover that "fears, motivations and silences … have a significant impact on children, teachers and schools," and that these perceptions and histories support heteronormativity "but also hold the potential to disrupt it" (p. 889).

McGarry (2011) cites an example where an administrator blocked the actions of a gay student who was trying to distribute letters to his peers about the widespread use of anti-gay slurs within their school. In his writing, the student also took umbrage with the silence of educators and other bystanders. The initial response by the administrator was to confiscate and shred the letters. McGarry suggests that the administrator's actions "preserved the very silence" that this student sought to disrupt (p. 56). Over time, the administrative team realized its error and used this scenario as a learning opportunity with staff. While initially trying to control the situation by stopping the circulation of the letters, the administrators began to seek teacher information about how homophobia was manifesting itself within the school. The administrators realized that this was a chance to help "fill the gaps in teacher skills in responding to homophobic speech". They also realized that they needed to accept these conversations as legitimate professional development and let their opposition go (McGarry, 2011, p. 58). Doing so enabled teachers to have voice to "question their teaching practices and consider a broader array of educational possibilities," and to arrive at solutions to counteract incidents of homophobia in the school (p. 59). McGarry's work lacked a description of the strategies teachers developed. Despite that, it is important to note that the administrative team members admitted to their initial error after their knee jerk reaction of shredding the letters and gave teachers permission and time to develop their own potential solutions.

Disrupting heteronormativity

Breaking the silence. The refusal to be silenced is often the first step that LGBTQ students and educators take to disrupt heteronormativity. DePalma and Atkinson (2009) aptly describe Patai's concept of surplus visibility (1978) as "a phenomenon when marginalized groups begin to challenge society's expectation that they will be invisible and silent" (p. 887). Their status of "surplus visibility" stems from a deep ceded belief that their "mere presence seems excessive to others" (p. 887). This is apparent particularly in non-urban areas where LGBTQ individuals are seen as anomalies or as "flaunting it" by simply being who they are. In the late 1990's, a campaign in British schools sought to disrupt surplus

visibility by creating an edgy advertising campaign. Posters were created that suggested homophobes were flaunting their bigotry in schools. One poster read, "I can't stand homophobes, especially when they flaunt it" (Terrence Higgins Trust, 1999). In Quebec, a poster was also created showing two hockey players about to kiss with the phrase, "Shocking? For Who?" (International Day Against Homophobia, 2011). This was a part of the international campaign for The Day Against Homophobia.

In 1991, a group of lesbian and gay B.C. teachers began to challenge Patai's concept of surplus visibility in a more systemic manner when they formed an organization called Gay and Lesbian Educators of B.C. (GALE), now called Pride Education Network (PEN). When GALE became PEN it expanded to include bisexual, transgender, queer and allied educators and parents. In the mid 1990's, through its own structures and the media, GALE vociferously challenged the B.C. Teachers' Federation (BCTF) to begin to address the issue of homophobia in schools. In 1997, as a result of GALE's efforts, the BCTF became the first teacher's union in Canada to pass a motion to establish a program to combat homophobia in schools. Since then, PEN and the BCTF have worked collectively to produce LGBTQ curricular resources for teachers, offer professional development workshops, support LGBTQ staff and students, and host queer-friendly school conferences around the province. In 2008, they based a conference on LGBTQ issues in Abbotsford, B.C., which explored the intersectionality of sexuality and faith. Since 2004, the BCTF has employed one staff person dedicated specifically to LGBTQ issues in education. Through the effort of the BCTF and local teacher unions, discrete anti-homophobia policies have been implemented in seventeen school districts in B.C. since 2004. Many of these actions were the result of a small, vocal and determined group of LGBTQ teachers and allies who refused to be silent, organized together, and acted to disrupt norms surrounding sexuality in B.C. schools. These initiatives have helped to create safe spaces for more LGBTQ educators to be out in schools and actively disrupt the heterosexual matrix (Atkinson & DePalma, 2006).

Additionally, in 2000, through teacher and student initiatives, the B.C. Teachers' Federation passed a highly controversial motion at their Annual General Meeting to actively support the establishment of Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs in B.C. schools. Prior to 2000, there were no GSA clubs in Canadian schools. Since then, approximately 75 GSA clubs have formed across B.C. (Pride Education Network, 2011). This is a testament to collective work being done by LGBTQ educators, youth and allies who are challenging the silence.

Fragmented disruptions. Ideally, heteronomativity would be disrupted in a systemic manner. However, educators often begin this work in one-day events, conversations, assemblies, and classroom lessons spread out over time. We contend that collectively, a number of coordinated actions have the potential for significant impact within a school culture. Individually, these actions may be more disparate in their effect. For the purposes of this study, we refer to these types of disruptions as fragmented.

Though not specifically related to heteronormativity, Derman-Sparks (1995) adeptly describes one example of this fragmented approach when she discusses the dangers of the "tourist curriculum" in multicultural education. This occurs when one-day cultural celebrations are reduced to feasts, fashion, and folklore. Derman-Sparks argues that, in fact, these events reinforce division by "othering" the groups being celebrated or acknowledged. She argues that legitimate, non-dominant cultures are being turned into an exotic spectacle for frivolous enjoyment. These events, while important entry points for discussion with students, often permit educators to avoid deeper conversations about how both teachers and students can become more active players in anti-racist education.

Anti-homophobia education is often approached in a similar, tokenistic manner. An example of this is The Day of Pink. This one-day celebration began in 2007 in Cambridge, Nova Scotia as a student action to counteract an incident of the homophobic bullying of a Grade 8 student (Day of Pink, retrieved from http://www.dayofpink.org/en/information-zone). Within three years, this student action morphed into a national, annual event. Though this day is celebrated in many B.C. schools, it has been co-opted

by politicians as a generic anti-bullying day without any mention of its true origins. Elected officials of a variety of political parties wear pink in support of anti-bullying in general, but may remain silent about homophobia and transphobia in schools. In this way, the panopticon of silence and fear around this issue is continuously fortified. One annual, anti-homophobia day is clearly not sufficient on its own, but reclaiming this celebration would assist in the disruption of heteronormativity in schools. The Day of Pink may serve as a beneficial entry point for anti-homophobia discussions and awareness, but may conversely serve to reify a heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy by continuing to "other" LGBTQ realities (Rottmann, 2006). Just as Derman-Sparks cautions educators against the objectification of multiculturalism, we argue that the same phenomenon could occur through one-day anti-homophobia events.

The establishment of GSA clubs. Wright (2010) suggests that administrators support the establishment of Gay Straight Alliance clubs in schools. While GSA clubs are important spaces for LGBTQ students to seek safety, social inclusion and support, they represent only one potential strategy for challenging heteronormativity within schools. GSA clubs are often criticized for placing too much onus on students for their own well-being within schools, and for the responsibility placed on students to be "spokespeople for homosexuality" (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009, p. 879). In our view, GSA clubs far too frequently displace the responsibility of educators to positively advocate for LGBTQ youth. They may allow administrators to falsely believe that they have done enough by simply endorsing GSA clubs and encouraging their formation.

The establishment and maintenance of GSA clubs in schools has the potential to be fairly fragmented without administrative support and leadership. If administrators and teacher leaders provide continuous support and mentor GSA leaders, these clubs have the potential to make significant change within heteronormative school cultures. Failing that, they may simply be places of safety and refuge for LGBTQ youth.

Child deficit thinking. The work of Ramalho, Garza and Merchant (2010) illustrates the need for school leaders to challenge the notion of child deficit thinking. Atkinson and DePalma (2009a) suggest a comprehensive approach to leading for social justice when they argue that "...teachers need to reach beyond passive and disingenuous tolerance of 'those LGBTQ people'" (p. 839). Specifically, Ramalho's article discusses children from immigrant families or those living in poverty as being perceived by educators as less able to learn. To disrupt this point of view, principals in the schools they examined were very clear with their staffs in not accepting blaming language, which viewed these students as less capable academically. By modeling and reinforcing the need to talk positively about the ability of all children to learn, their school culture began to shift.

We would argue that educators have the potential to further marginalize LGBTQ youth by viewing their lived realities through a child deficit lens. None of the literature we read discussed principals disrupting the idea of LGBTQ youth as socially or academically disadvantaged. In our view, what was missing from this discourse in Ramalho's article was any mention of heteronormativity and gender role stereotyping as forms of oppression and their possible impacts upon student learning.

Systemic disruptions

Teacher leaders and administrators can play a key role in the disruption of heteronormative beliefs and attitudes about gender and sexuality within their schools. Atkinson and DePalma (2009) suggest, "for sexualities (and not just heterosexualities) to be visible, … they must be talked into a state of ordinariness" (p. 884). Lugg (2010) implores educators and administrators to move beyond "simply the absence of hate" and the anti-bullying paradigm (p. 85).

Koschoreck, referencing the earlier work of Popkewitz, emphasizes that educational reform can only occur when educators critically question "issues of power that are entrenched" within our schools (p. 35). This requires LGBTQ and heterosexual educators to examine their own power and privilege by engaging in unfamiliar dialogue with colleagues. Courageous discussions about LGBTQ issues involve

conversations about personal values, morals, current classroom practices, and personal knowledge about LGBTQ realities. Administrative support is key to engaging in these conversations. Koschoreck concludes by calling upon educational leaders to "trouble the taken-for-grantedness" of the homo/hetero binary which is firmly entrenched within schools (p. 47).

Rapp (2002) reinforces this position when he states, "Educational administrators are trained, hired technicians of the status quo" (p. 26). Though he acknowledges this, he simultaneously encourages administrators and teacher leaders to question their own privilege within society and move beyond supporting the status quo. He questions: "How many of us are willing to interrogate how elitism and privilege are manifested in our political restraint?" (p. 231). This is a key question for administrators, superintendents and teacher leaders to ask themselves around supporting anti-homophobia education, discrete LGBTQ policy development, queer family visibility and curricular integration within schools.

Kose (2009) challenges educators by asking us to "relentlessly reflect on whether personal and school beliefs and actions perpetuated, interrupted, or rectified social injustice within and beyond school" (p. 643). This requires administrators to lead courageous conversations with staff in questioning school rules, dress codes, protocols, sporting events, dances, etc. which may act to reinforce heteronormativity or reify binary gender roles. In our view, it moves conversations far beyond the bullying of LGBTQ students towards systemic change.

One suggestion made by Koschorek (2003) encourages LGBTQ educators to be out within schools with students, colleagues and parents, despite the discomfort of others, and encourages them to challenge the "overshadowing conservatism of educational administration" simply by being who they are (p. 46). Koschereck describes the quandary that one gay principal felt in trying to support the placement of a gender non-conforming boy between grades during his primary years. The principal initially wondered how his staff would perceive "his paying so much attention to this case" (p. 45). In our view, this implies that he was worried that staff might think he had a gay "agenda" for the child. This example

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illustrates that LGBTQ principals should not have to feel the pressure to conform within a heteronormative, hegemonic institution. In this case, according to Koschoreck, the principal feared that his colleagues were in a collective position of power over him because of his sexual orientation. We argue that this simple act of keeping a student in a safe, supportive space should not be viewed as a transgressive act on the part of other educators. We believe that if this administrator had been 'out' to parents, students and colleagues, his fears may have diminished. Had this administrator felt more supported within his community, the act of simply being 'out' may have helped to deflate the power of the panopticon.

Similarly, Atkinson and DePalma (2009) effectively describe a vignette between a student and his openly gay teacher. In it, the student attempts to reify the caricature of an effeminate, gay male. His teacher tries to unsettle his uncertainties by simply being who he is and challenging the student's sense of humor (p. 22). This speaks to the power of LGBTQ teacher leaders and administrators in being 'out' role models for students as it makes it more difficult for the students to cling to any negative stereotypes of LGBTQ people that they may possess. Just 'being', helps disrupt heteronormativity in schools.

The need for collective action and mentorship. Increased collective action and school-based mentorship opportunities around LGTBQ issues in schools could also help reduce isolation of queer and allied teachers to further the disruption of heteronormativity. One administrator interviewed in a study conducted by Ramalho (2010) encouraged the pairing of experienced and new colleagues within her school in order to build greater understanding of the needs of ESL learners. Mentorship teams were established throughout the school and teachers worked collaboratively with others to improve their teaching skills. Teachers began to think more creatively about what they could do to support at risk learners, rather than what they could not do. This administrator provided collaboration time, funding, and multiple opportunities for professional development to staff, including courses for teachers to upgrade their ESL teaching skills. By creating mentorship teams and providing collaborative planning time, along

with team teaching opportunities, the staff improved their collective capacity to meet the needs of Latino/Latina students many of who were coming from conditions of poverty.

Building upon this model, administrators could pair teachers together who have successfully challenged heteronormativity in their schools with those less comfortable or experienced. Administrators could give those teams time to collaboratively plan the ways in which they can integrate LGBTQ issues into the existing curriculum, and provide opportunities to team-teach.

Administrators supporting educators. Research on the way in which administrators and school boards support LGBTQ and allied teachers is scant. One American scholar examined administrator attitudes and district policies that created safe environments for LGBTQ educators to teach in (Wright, 2010). Predicated upon previous research by Leithwood and McAdie (2007), Wright found that educators who felt safe teaching about LGBTQ issues had a higher level of efficacy as teachers.

In comparison, Wright's (2010) analysis of 514 American educators who self-identified as LGBT found that many felt at risk within their jobs if they were open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Schneider and Dimito (2008) discovered that LGBT educators in Ontario, Canada generally felt safe within their jobs, particularly in terms of tenure, being out, and teaching about LGBTQ issues. This sense of security may also be explained in part by the political landscape in Canada where same sex marriage is legal.

Despite the fact that LGBTQ issues are being embraced by teacher unions across the country, anti-homophobia professional development opportunities are varied. Therefore, we caution others to assume that this level of support is universal across Canada. At Pride events in Ontario, Schneider and Dimito attracted 132 LGBT and heterosexual candidates to fill out their surveys about their comfort in teaching LGBTQ issues, as well as their sense of safety and job security. In choosing only Pride events to locate their survey respondents, they may have researched a narrow subset of educators with a higher level of knowledge, comfort and skill in teaching about LGBTQ issues. The research of Schneider,

Dimito and Wright are clearly dichotomous and this may be partially due to the social and political landscapes of anti-homophobia education in both countries. These findings attest to the importance of administrators supporting queer teachers and allied colleagues in teaching curriculum and providing educational environments that are accepting of LGBTQ youth.

Professional development. Various scholars have examined professional development for social justice, however, research on LGBTQ support is lacking. Brown (2004) emphasizes the importance of educators leading for social justice by encouraging teachers to examine their beliefs, values, worldviews and practices. She states "transformative leadership changes the way in which people see themselves and their world" (p. 84). We believe that this requires potential leaders to consider their current knowledge and future learning through new lenses. We propose that by engaging in critical conversations about the power dynamics of heteronormativity, educators can begin to appreciate the worldviews and lived experiences of LGBTQ populations that they teach. In this way, educators may work with students to begin to re-examine school texts, by questioning who is represented or missing within them and discussing why.

Brown (2004) further suggests that "transformative learning actually poses threats to psychological security" of adult learners as it challenges the beliefs which may be central to their definition of self (p. 88). We would argue that professional development conversations about heteronormativity and schooling challenges many educators to examine deeply held personal beliefs about sexuality and gender identity. For teacher leaders and administrators with faith or culturally based values that clash with homosexuality, or other non-heterosexual identities, this can become especially difficult. In our opinion, they must directly confront their responsibility to lead from a place of wisdom and courage to honour every student and family within their care.

Rooney (2010) states, "the job of the principal is to meet teachers where they are and move them, step by step, toward improvement" (p. 85). We suggest that for LGBTQ issues, this requires

administrators to lead with purpose, to honour staff members' learning curves knowing that for some, these conversations may be very challenging. Professional development facilitators who teach LGBTQ workshops to colleagues must be highly in tune with their audience to acknowledge this discomfort while also celebrating the successes of participants.

In addition, we propose that administrators must simultaneously focus on discussions about the moral purposes of schooling. Fenstermacher (1990) states that teaching is not defined solely by a teacher's skill in a particular subject area, but by the "educative intentions and moral purpose with which they undertake their work" (p. 139). This may require leading specific staff members from their moral stances on sexuality issues towards a professional ethic of care for each student's social, emotional and physical well being. From that starting point they can begin to examine the politics of sexuality and gender issues in schools.

Rottmann (2006) proposes that LGBTQ and sexuality issues are still rarely discussed in public school curricula. Because of this, it is likely that LGBTQ topics and sexuality issues have been more routinely addressed outside the normative curriculum than integrated within it. Wright suggests that administrators provide professional support for teachers to infuse LGBTQ issues into the existing curriculum. While her paper provided no concrete examples of this, it has been done successfully in B.C. through BCTF professional development initiatives. The BCTF offers two workshops on LGBTQ issues, entitled *Breaking the Silence* and *From Silence to Action*. The first workshop focuses on how to begin to talk about LGBTQ issues in schools and disrupt homophobic name-calling. The second focuses on curricular integration of LGBTQ issues in secondary schools. We suggest that both of these professional development opportunities provide educators with support and strategies to begin to disrupt heteronormativity in schools.

In the Surrey School District, during the years of the banning of books about same-sex families, conversations between colleagues became heated and polarized along religious and cultural lines. Some

educators felt that teaching about same-sex families in Kindergarten and Grade 1 was completely inappropriate and morally wrong, while others believed that it was about teaching acceptance for all families. During this period, the Surrey School Board banned all professional resources for teachers produced by GALE. The B.C. Supreme Court quashed this decision by the Surrey School Board in 1998. The Surrey School Board chose not to challenge that ruling, but continued to challenge the use of books in classrooms about same-gender families at all grade levels. Allowing professional development opportunities at this time that encouraged dialogue between colleagues could have partially mitigated the fear around this topic.

Kose (2009) discussed and identified the ways in which administrators and teacher leaders encouraged professional development opportunities within their schools. By conducting interviews with administrators in three schools he found that these leaders all used common strategies. Key strategies included:

- Encouraging risk taking amongst staff
- Focusing on equity issues within the school's mission statement and values
- Allowing for multiple forms of professional development (formal, informal, spontaneous)
- Focusing on self-reflection by showing yourself as a learner

Kose described administrators who guided significant change by bringing a critical mass of teachers on board before moving towards school-wide change. In our view, Kose's suggestions of risk taking, focusing on equity issues, professional development and self-reflection are all important components of how teacher leaders and administrators can effectively lead for change in the disruption of heteronormativity.

Conclusion

Through our initial research we have found limited discussion of how administrators lead to disrupt heteronormativity in schools. Atkinson and DePalma (2009), in their 'No Outsiders' project, briefly described how two administrators justified supporting sexuality issues and gender work in their

schools. One administrator relied upon rewriting the school's inclusion and anti-bullying policy to ensure that references to homophobia were in the policy before undertaking any work with teachers (p. 846). Conversely, another administrator helped teachers to begin to disrupt heteronormativity by bridging sexuality equality work with previous professional development on issues of race and disability equality. These examples provide limited information on how British administrators lead to disrupt heteronormativity in their schools. We wonder what strategies are being used in B.C.

Our research thus far has touched upon the issue of heteronormativity in schools, largely through fragmented disruptions. These include anti-homophobia education, single day events, anti-bullying efforts, and the establishment of GSA clubs in schools. While all of these have the potential to create systemic change, specific details on exactly how they worked to effectively disrupt heteronormativity were lacking. As a result of the above mentioned gaps in the literature, we began to critically question how heteronormativity could be systemically and specifically disrupted. Furthermore, we began to wonder how teacher leaders and administrators could help to effect change. This led us to develop research questions for use in semi-structured interviews with our retired colleagues.

Research Methods

This study employed interviewing as a research method in order to achieve in depth responses and allow participants to elaborate upon what is meaningful or important to them, in their own words. Since discussions of heteronormativity are still taboo in many schools, we hoped that the interview process might allow participants to feel more relaxed and candid in sharing their knowledge and experience.

 In-person interviews were conducted with recently retired administrators[2] and/or teacher leaders who are self-described leaders on LGBTQ issues in schools. Participants were sought through electronic

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[2] For the purposes of this study, 'recently retired' will be defined as educators who have left the profession within the past three years.

invitations sent to members of Pride Education Network, the Retired Teachers' Association of B.C., and the B.C. Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association.

The researchers coordinated and conducted the interviews over a three-week period in January and February, 2012. Interviews were approximately one hour in length. The venues for these interviews varied based on what was comfortable for participants and what was mutually convenient for participants and researchers.

The administrators and teacher leaders were given a copy of the interview questions and a consent form to review in advance and were asked to sign the consent form after the researchers have verbally explained it. The researchers then asked the participants the following questions from the question sheet:

1. In your opinion, what are some effective ways you, or other leaders, worked to disrupt heteronormativity in schools? Give examples.

2. What do you see as the main factors that contributed to these successes?

3. What do you see as the main challenges you, or other leaders you have seen, have faced in disrupting heteronormativity?

4. What do you notice are the effects (positive and negative) of heteronormative disruptions on staff, students and the school culture?

5. As a teacher leader or administrator, what education/training did you receive to assist you in disrupting heteronormativity in schools? What strategies have informed your practice in this regard?

6. What recommendations and/or advice can you provide to teacher leaders and future administrators about disrupting heteronormativity within their schools?

7. What school or district supports might have assisted you or could assist practicing educators in this process?

After each interview, audio recordings were transcribed and emailed to the interviewees for feedback and approval.

Ethical issues

This study was submitted to UBC's Behavioral Research Ethics Board for approval. All participants received a copy of the consent form that described what they would be asked to do and their rights as research participants. Participation in this study was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw their responses at any point. No identifying information was included in the interview transcripts or the final report to ensure anonymity. All data collected and analyzed by the researchers will be kept secure in password-protected computers and electronic copies will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal researcher's alarm-secured office. The electronic copy of the data, including audio files, will be kept for at least five years after the completion of the study in accordance with the UBC's research and ethics policy.

Limitations of the Study

We recognize that there are specific limitations inherent in the design of our research study. Firstly, the representation of administrators and teacher leaders who participated in our study limits the scope of our research. Ideally, if greater time allowed, we would expand the sample size. We were also limited by the fact that our respondents self-selected, by voluntarily coming forward to participate. It is possible that because of this, respondents may offer similar perspectives on the topic. We assume that participation in our study appealed to those who favoured the disruption of heteronormativity in schools.

Our research did not reveal dissenting perspectives, therefore, it may be limited in scope. As researchers, this may have prevented us from uncovering the key issues that lead to why some people may be hesitant or opposed to the disruption of heteronormativity in schools, as well as valuable ways that would encourage educators to work with those opposed to the disruption of heteronormativity. Our research would also have greatly benefited from hearing the perspectives of people who may have been too fearful to participate.

Another limitation to this study is the fact that all interviewees were recently retired at the time of interview. Because of this, a potential lack of resonance may be found from current classroom practices. We attempted to minimize this by interviewing individuals who had retired within the past three years.

Though our interviewees represent seven districts across British Columbia, the perspectives of people from the other 53 districts of the province are not reflected in our study. Though our study included two self-identified, out gay educators and three heterosexual educators, we lack representation from lesbian, bisexual, queer, or transgendered educators. Additionally, all respondents were Caucasian and people of color were not represented in our research. These perspectives may have created a more diverse spectrum of responses in our research.

Out of the five interviews, only one interviewee drew on experience in elementary schools. Because we believe that the disruption of heteronormativity is equally important in elementary and high schools, this perspective was under represented in our research. Furthermore, the perspectives and views of interviewees are subjective. Their perspectives may be influenced by heteronormative lenses, which inform their own interpretations and decisions.

Due to limitations of time and resources, we focused specifically on leadership from teacher leaders and administrators. As researchers, we recognize that the stakeholders who can play a positive role in disrupting heteronormativity represent a much wider range of roles, including students, parents, community members, teachers, district principals, superintendents, and trustees. Including these stake holders would have greatly benefited our study by providing a wider breadth of perspectives. Additionally, we were only able to elicit responses from educators who were able to participate over a two month period.

Finally, we would surmise that the word *heteronormativity* is not widely used or understood by recently retired administrators and teachers leaders. As a result of this, the use of this word in our advertisements and invitation letter could have hindered participation in our study.

Further research on this topic would be beneficial in drawing a more comprehensive understanding of the disruption of heteronormativity in schools.

Findings and Discussion

The purpose of our research study was to examine the successes, challenges and actions of administrators and teacher leaders as they worked to disrupt heteronormativity in schools. Our goal was to become more aware of how administrators and teacher leaders can create positive and equitable school experiences for LGBTQ students and staff. Through analyzing the responses to five interviews, our findings and discussion section addresses the following questions:

- In what ways have retired educators led to disrupt heteronormativity in public schools?
- What factors contributed to the success/breakdown of these intended disruptions?
- What recommendations can be made to administrators and teacher leaders to help them disrupt heteronormativity in their schools?

The respondents in our study represented a range in terms of years of service, grade level, subject area, and role in their schools and district. Altogether, the respondents were:

- male and female
- gay and straight
- teacher leaders, administrators with ten years of experience, and a counsellor;
- educators with teaching experience ranging from 15 to 35 years;
- educators with elementary and secondary experience;
- educators from a variety of districts in B.C., both rural and urban

The following profiles provide a brief background for each of the interviewees.

Bill:

Teacher Bill taught for 35 years in a variety of districts in two Canadian provinces. During his career he taught First Nations Support, Learning Assistance, and a variety of subjects in secondary schools. For the final twelve years of his career he was a secondary school counselor. He described his last school district as being "very much a white Christian enclave ... lots of church mentality." He referred to it as a community in transition, with more ethnic groups appearing over the past few years. The district encompasses both urban and rural communities. Bill states, "You can tell the older people

aren't comfortable with diversity for the most part. It is an interesting place to work...working closely with diversity issues. It's been eye-opening for sure."

Roger:

Vice-Principal Roger taught for thirty-two years in a metropolitan, multicultural school district. The majority of his career was at the secondary level where he was a teacher leader, district consultant and vice-principal. For the ten years prior to his retirement, he was a vice-principal in two large secondary schools. He described his school district as generally supportive and encouraging, and, as an openly gay administrator, he "never sensed people were being held back because of sexual orientation issues."

Liz:

Principal Liz worked in two rural school districts in B.C. over a period of thirty years. She began her teaching as a primary teacher and later became a principal of three different elementary schools over an eleven-year period. She described both communities as "working class and somewhat isolated" and described the changes she has witnessed throughout her career. She noted that both communities saw the school as central to the community and that both towns had large Aboriginal populations. In describing both communities she talked about the multi-generational nature of the towns, with their lack of transiency or exposure to new people or ideas, and their resistance to embracing change.

Jacky:

Teacher Jacky was a secondary teacher in a large metropolitan school district over a twenty year period. She taught a variety of subjects from Grade 8 to 12 and described her school as a "very multicultural environment [with] twenty or more countries that students come from." She characterized the school as generally having "very good support" for the Gay Straight Alliance that she sponsored for seven years. As a straight ally, she talked a lot about the importance of this club in creating a safe space for students in her school.

George:

Teacher George was a secondary teacher in two school districts over fifteen years. He taught a variety of subjects, was involved on many committees, and coached athletic programs at the school and district levels. He described both districts as being multicultural and differing in size. When describing the first district, he stated, "Because of the various religious influences, there was always that perceived fear that something is going to be controversial." His second district he characterized as "less rural but more metropolitan ... but for as small and affluent as it is, it still exists in its own little bubble." In the latter district he taught as an openly gay man.

Strategies for disrupting heteronormativity

All respondents expressed a lack of familiarity with the term heteronormativity; some stating that they had explored the definition of the word before coming to the interview. Others asked for clarification during their interview. In the first interview, George was not provided a definition of the term by the researchers. However, all subsequent interviewees were emailed a brief definition of the term to allow for greater clarity. It is interesting that respondents chose to participate in this study, considering their limited knowledge of the concept. The definition we provided to interviewees was as follows: "For the purposes of this study heteronormativity refers to the way in which schools and society place expectations upon students and teachers to look and act heterosexual in all situations." Additionally, we observed a general lack of familiarity with the term within our graduate courses, where colleagues more often than not asked for clarification of the term. We believe that this term is not currently being used in educational settings in British Columbia. Within this context, we would argue that the limited understanding of this term may have resulted in interviewees focusing on anti-homophobia education and student safety, as they are more familiar concepts.

Our interviewees identified three major ways in which they worked to disrupt heteronormativity in schools. Specifically, they looked for opportunities to integrate LGBTQ issues into the existing

curriculum, took advantage of teachable moments as they arose in the classroom or hallways, and encouraged and supported the formation of GSA clubs in secondary schools. In our view, these strategies are limited in scope and primarily address issues of student safety in schools. We argue that although well intentioned, they do little to challenge school communities to question heteronormativity and genuinely disrupt it.

Factors contributing to successful attempts at disruption

When interviewees were asked what factors contributed to the success and/or breakdown of heteronormative disruptions in their schools, the majority of feedback related to the challenges they faced. Specifically, interviewees spoke about fear and silence, entrenched bureaucracies, administrative lack of action, and the policing of heteronormativity in schools. Conversely, when they were asked for specific examples of factors that contributed to their success, they were often unable to provide these. They did, however, comment on the critical importance of administrative leadership and its role in shaping LGBTQ accepting school cultures. As researchers, we were surprised that interviewees could not identify specific factors that led to the successful disruption of heteronormativity in schools. Generally, interviewees worked in isolation and lacked opportunity for dialogue with others about successful disruptions. Based upon the data we have collected, we believe that barriers far outweigh successes.

Administrators' role in shaping school culture

All interviewees commented on the importance of administrative leadership on LGBTQ issues in schools, and more specifically, on the positive influence an administrator can have on shaping a supportive and accepting school culture. George described the collective power of adults to work together to disrupt heteronormativity: "I think staff and administration need to set a proper role and attitudes... Never underestimate the power of the administration to affect the school culture." George emphasizes the importance of sending "a clear and consistent message through the school from the top

down." Bill's advice to administrators was to "take leadership on it. Don't wait for some activist to do it." Specifically he stated, "Administrators have no trouble encouraging staff to be a basketball coach or … supervise dances." He suggests that they "drum up business. Drum up somebody to take over the GSA." Furthermore, Bill explains that administrators "have some responsibility to become proactive and not just wait for situations where you have to deal with homophobic language, or a bullying situation."

While George recognizes the importance of administrative leadership, he is also cognizant of the fact that adults in a school are "probably slower [than the students] to adapt or change their behavior or mindsets." Otherwise, George says, "we may be the inhibitors of positive change." Roger recognizes this as well but goes one step further when talking about administrators who may be homophobic: "Your job as an administrator is to take care of children and if you are not prepared to set aside your personal beliefs [about LGBTQ issues] for the safety of children, then you need to be in a different profession. You certainly need to be out of administration." Roger further suggests that staff who are uncomfortable with LGBTQ issues, need to refocus on "the children and what is good and healthy for them; and your feelings don't matter a hoot quite frankly."

Roger describes a situation in a supportive and accepting school culture where he began work as an administrator. A teacher complained that he was "not wanting to work for a faggot administrator." Over time, this staff member found himself "gently but unequivocally ostracized [by his peers]. All of a sudden he found himself eating lunch by himself ... because there were other people that didn't want anything to do with that particular opinion." Later in the interview, Roger described this same teacher as eventually becoming a supporter of the GSA club. Roger attributed this change in attitude to the staff member learning about LGBTQ issues and people. This scenario speaks to the potential influence of a positive school culture on intransigent or overtly homophobic staff members. All interviewees emphasized the importance of the administrator in shaping the school culture.

Barriers to the disruption of heteronormativity

Our research results related to the barriers faced when attempting to disrupt heteronormativity are congruent with our literature review and research questions. We highlight the themes of fear and silence, entrenched bureaucracies, administrative silence and inaction, and the policing of heteronormativity in schools. These four barriers, if left unchecked, pose significant, if not insurmountable, challenges to the disruption of heteronormativity in schools.

Fear and silence

In our literature review, we commented extensively on the impacts of the panopticon of fear and silence on school cultures. All of our interviewees described how fear and silence worked to inhibit discussion of LGBTQ issues in their schools. Bill hypothesizes about its source: "I think a lot of adults are still exploring their own attitudes towards homosexuality and the fact that it is not a hetero world; that there is a spectrum of possibilities. I think a lot of people are struggling with that."

Bill provided a number of specific examples of how fear manifested itself within his community. Over a decade ago, Bill began a GSA club in his conservative school district. Administrators felt uncomfortable naming it a GSA and allowed it to run on the premise that it was called a 'Diversity Club'. When asked about what he had seen from the leaders in his school and community around the formation of the GSA, he replied, "Timidity. Quietly supportive. Nervously supportive." As a known advocate on LGBTQ issues within his district, Bill also provided support to two other educators from two neighbouring middle schools who came to him as an ally for assistance. One expressed nervousness around the formation of GSA clubs and the other of the integration of a transgendered student into Grade Eight. Bill summarized one of the main challenges of leadership in his district: "Administrators are afraid of controversy. They are afraid of straying from the path. I think that is the biggest challenge; getting them to move outside the box."

Similarly, George described how a school in his district was nervous about addressing LGBTQ issues with the broader school community through advertising and performing the play, *The Laramie*

Project, about hate crimes against LGBTQ people and the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard. George participated as part of the panel, debriefing the discussion after the play. He described how the play was not very well advertised because of administrator fear that it might be controversial with parents. Afterwards, a parent responded that they were disappointed that the school did not have enough confidence in them, and that they would have supported it had they known it was going on. George summarized this situation by saying, "If you live in fear and worry about those who may revolt or create some sort of conflict around an issue, you're also ostracizing those that may support [it]."

Bill also described a situation where there was a lack of support from administrators who were "afraid of the backlash from the community, which has never happened." This occurred when students from his school began to speak out in the media about the need for a discrete anti-homophobia policy in the district. "We have had lots of press with the school board [on this issue] … I thought there would be people with placards outside the school board office but it was a non-event locally. I mean, it didn't even raise an eyebrow." When asked specifically why principals were silent, Bill stated, "I think the principals get their tails in a knot whenever anything different is happening in their schools and this was very different and so they just weren't sure."

Speaking specifically about his personal experience as an out, gay administrator, Roger recounted the tone of his school district as being supportive and was pleasantly surprised that he had never experienced any overt homophobia himself. But at the same time he said, "I was always waiting for some kind of bomb to drop, or some kind of door to be closed, and it just simply did not happen … Every time I thought there was going to be an issue, it was a non-issue. It existed in my mind only." Bill, Roger and George all refer in some way to fear, on the part of administrators and educators, that is over-estimated and unrealized. These observations help to explain how the panopticon of fear and silence continues to pervade in schools.

Jacky gave a particular example of how fear contributed to silence at her school, and in doing so, impeded educators' ability to keep LGBTQ students safe. She described a staff meeting one September where staff members were taught how to use Epi-Pens to address severe allergic reactions. Administrators emphasized this as a critically important health and safely issue. While Jacky supported this workshop, she drew a comparison to the need for teachers and counselors to be adequately trained about LGBTQ issues. She explained that "one September we met and were told that somebody's body was found in the river. I mean, that is life and death, too." Teachers "assumed that he [the dead student found in the river] was gay [but] there was no discussion or anything … I don't think there was enough support for that young person; somewhere that he could go and talk." Jacky states that addressing LGBTQ issues "is also life and death." Furthermore, she expressed frustration that the counselors at her school had no training on LGBTQ issues and her astonishment that there had been no support for this student when he needed it. She summarizes her feelings by saying, "When there is silence on this issue, it is lethal. So I don't think it can be silent."

These insights that fear and silence around LGBTQ issues in schools remains commonplace. It can have an immobilizing impact on administrators and educators, but more importantly, a potentially lethal impact on students.

Entrenched bureaucracies and traditions

Moving beyond the atmosphere within a specific school, a common theme addressed by interviewees was the need for a supportive school and district culture. They described some of the challenges they experienced in their schools or districts.

George described two districts he worked in as being intransigent in different ways. One of which was, "the old boys' club and it was always like that and would always be like that because those that are in power culturally or ideologically maintain that grip on a district." The other, he described as a "strong

religious culture which dictated that fear" around LGBTQ issues. Roger also mentioned "personal faith systems" as a potential barrier to change.

Roger worked in another district, which he characterized as bureaucratic when he stated, "Bureaucracies don't like taking a step in any direction of any kind. A large bureaucracy settles itself down in one place and establishes itself for what it is, whatever its function. No bureaucracy likes moving anywhere. North, South, East, or West, left or right politically. They just don't."

Liz described the cultures of two schools in different districts as both having set ideas about embracing educational change: "That mentality of 'we've always done it this way' is very hard to change, especially in isolated communities." This resistance is partially rooted in tradition. She expands on this by highlighting the difference between rural and urban communities in acceptance of LGBTQ issues: "In an urban community you have a diversity of cultures, classes, styles, and the way people dress and talk. Whereas in rural communities, you know, it is not that rich." She hypothesized that in urban schools, the disruption of heteronormativity might be easier. In school cultures like the one Liz describes, we would argue that traditional norms combined with tacit compliance have the potential to solidify existing practices to a point where they become bureaucratically entrenched over time.

In summary, all of our interviewees described situations where their districts clearly posed cultural, religious and bureaucratic challenges for the successful disruption of heteronormativity in schools.

Administrative silence and inaction

All teacher leaders interviewed expressed frustration and concern regarding administrative silence, inaction and lack of leadership on LGBTQ issues in their schools. Jacky was a sponsor teacher of a GSA at her school for seven years. The administrators said, "We support a GSA. We are happy that it happens in our school." Beyond this, Jacky was unable to identify any specific actions they took to support the GSA beyond that tepid statement.

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Similarly, Bill expressed disappointment on the complete lack of action on the part of administrators to address a variety of LGTBQ related issues in his school. For example, he mentions the routine ripping down of posters that challenged heteronormativity. These included GSA posters, "No H8" posters, and students' posters depicting same-sex couples holding hands in silhouette form. He further described an annual event where LGBTQ and allied students take part in the Day of Silence within his school. This day is meant to bring awareness to the plight of LGBTQ youth who must remain silent within their schools about their personal realities. Bill described how allied youth got "spat upon or had their car keyed" for showing their support for their LGBTQ peers. When asked if there was an administrative response, he stated, "I know there wasn't. Maybe we didn't make an issue of it and we probably should have."

Beyond this, Bill and George describe some administrative strategies for justifying inaction on LGBTQ issues. George stated: "I think a lot of times it's felt that the administration leave it up to the committees, yet the committees are still fearful … I think that at the administrative level, a lot of them hide behind the fact that, 'OK, let someone else deal with that'. So while everyone else is passing the buck, nothing gets done or addressed." Bill describes another strategy used by principals and school board administrators to "lump everything together … We've got racial issues and orientation issues and they just want to blend it all together so that they don't have to name things in a particular way." George illustrates a personal experience with an administrator's inability to publicly name and honor his marriage to his partner. The principal stated to the staff, "Well, we're here to celebrate George's event." George described in his interview his irritation with the principal by exclaiming, "It's a marriage! Just say marriage. … Don't try to hide what it is."

Roger discusses the importance for LGBTQ educators to be out in their schools and districts and to be well supported by their school districts in order to best serve the students in their care. He describes a situation while teaching where he was asked by a student, "Are you funny?" Understanding this to be a

question about his sexual orientation, Roger replied, "I'm not sure this is the time or the place for that conversation." Upon refection within the interview, Roger expressed regret for his actions and said, "I'm not particularly proud of that now … I wasn't officially out at that time. I'm pretty sure the young woman was lesbian and she was looking for some support. I didn't have it for myself, so I didn't have it to give to other people at that point."

All of these experiences illustrate the need for administrators to move beyond silence and inaction to actively take leadership in acknowledging LGBTQ issues, and actively leadig to disrupt heteronormativity in their schools.

Policing of heteronormativity in schools

Our interviewees explained a variety of contexts wherein administrators, parents, and school communities sometimes knowingly or unknowingly police everyone to subscribe to heteronomativity. In some cases, our interviewees attributed this policing to pervasive fear and silence. George, Bill, and Jacky speak specifically to the potential power of the parent and broader community over administrators. George describes administrators as being "almost dictator puppets of the parents." Bill outlines an example where his school was criticized in the community newspaper for putting on the play Cabaret and "highlighting [a] youth who was in the play as a gay man." The community member wrote to the newspaper and complained, "That's fine in Vancouver and New York. We don't have those kids here." Bill challenged this perspective and replied to the community member, "We do have these kids here."

Jacky details a complex example where her personal choice of clothing led to assumptions about her sexual orientation and a negative complaint by a parent. She then goes on to describe the reactions of some staff members and students. Jacky premised this example by characterizing her school as having "a very strong heteronormative culture. It just seems to be very entrenched." Jacky described herself as not conforming to the conventions of heteronormative dress for women, stating that as a drama teacher she sometimes "sat on the floor and wore pants to school." Jacky was called into the vice-principal's office

one day and told, "This mother phoned in and her daughter is claiming that you are flaunting your

sexuality." In response to the vice-principal's comment, Jacky thought, "Oh, [the parent] thinks I'm a

lesbian. So, ok. Fine." Jacky then called the parent on another matter, out of concern for her daughter's

lack of attendance at school. At the end of the conversation she asked, "Is there anything else you'd like

to talk to me about?" The parent responded, "No, no, no. That's fine."

Afterwards, rumors began to circulate within the school that Jacky was a lesbian. She was not

questioned directly by students or parents but was approached by a colleague who reacted, "I was really

upset because they were calling you a lesbian and I told them you weren't." Jacky responded, "It is nice

of you to defend me, but it doesn't really matter what they think. Maybe it will make them question their

perceptions of stereotypes." In this example, Jacky was being policed for her perceived sexual

orientation by a parent. Subsequently, a colleague believed that being assumed to be lesbian was

negative, derogatory and possibly hurtful. In an attempt to protect Jacky, the colleague felt that she had

to defend Jacky's heterosexuality.

The apprehension of Jacky's colleague is mirrored in Bill's interview when he describes how

people might perceive an educator who is supportive of a GSA or an LGBTQ initiative to be LGBTQ

themselves. He states, "I think sometimes [educators] are worried about how they will be perceived as

well, "Are you running this club because you're gay? Are you this or that?" Again, Bill's comment

reinforces how negative perceptions of LGBTQ identities leads to heteronormative policing.

As researchers, we asked Jacky if it was more common for LGBTQ staff to be closeted at that

school. Jacky replied, "Oh yeah, absolutely." Over the years, Jacky became a confidante around the

school whom LGBTQ students and staff came out to, yet remained silent publicly and with each other.

Jacky remembered a time when four teachers were sitting together in a classroom with her and they had

all previously come out to her personally. She stated, "I don't know if they knew about each other, but all

four of them were gay."

Bill describes how he was marginalized in a different way amongst his staff, for being a LGBTQ ally. Bill felt alone at times in his work to disrupt heteronormativity in schools. He described a situation where men on his staff would edit their language when he was in the staff room and state, "Oh, we better be careful. Bill's in the room." Bill said that in his presence, homophobic and sexist language would cease but he questioned the authenticity of his colleagues' actions: "The attitudes that people don't show anymore because of political correctness are still there but they have learned to behave differently even if their thoughts aren't completely matching up with the mask on the outside. Similarly, Roger describes his administrative colleagues as not "wanting to be seen as the redneck, whereas just ten years ago they were hesitant to be seen as the 'left leaning, fag loving person.' That pendulum has moved. It seems to me to be a matter of how you want to be perceived in your community." Both Bill's and Roger's examples speak to how both school staff and administration have become more aware that overt homophobia in schools is less acceptable. As a result of this awareness, some staff members may modify their behavior accordingly in specific situations. These instances of feigned acceptance are thin veneers that attempt to mask the individual's own homophobia and do not serve students or school cultures positively. As researchers we would argue that incidences such as these serve to reinforce heteronormativity in schools and continue to marginalize LGBTQ student and staff realities.

Reflecting upon his career, Bill is puzzled by the lack of progress that has been made on LGBTQ issues in schools: "We've got a long way to go and it boggles my mind that we haven't made as much progress as it would be nice to be able to announce. I still can't get my head around how emotional and strongly some people feel about same-sex interactions. They fear it and they loathe it and it has got nothing to do with them … I don't see what people get so worked up about … how can you hate someone so vehemently?"

Findings-Based Recommendations

Despite the barriers the interviewees faced, they provided a plethora of recommendations for current and future administrators and teachers leaders. Their recommendations are discussed below.

Recommendation 1: Discrete LGBTQ policies are needed at the provincial and district levels with concrete implementation plans that positively impact school cultures.

George and Jacky both asserted that there was currently a lack of leadership on LGBTQ issues in schools at the district and provincial level. George complained, "You feel like it has to come from the bottom up. It needs to be a more concerted effort. There needs to be provincially mandated and explicit policies." He recommended that policies be "consistent throughout the province so there is no wiggle room for doubt and fear." Bill further suggests that when administrators and teacher leaders are well supported, they can be systemic change makers: "If district staff, people who are in administrative positions of authority, are showing they stand behind these people, then it is more powerful." More specifically, Roger recommends that the BCPVPA and the Superintendent's Association be more proactive in supporting LGBTQ issues in education.

As a result of teachers and students challenging the board about homophobia in schools, Jacky was asked to sit on a policy development committee within her district. She described her frustration with the subsequent development of a generic anti-harassment policy. During the policy development process, she complained that it was too vague. She challenged district officials saying, "This is just the Human Rights Code. I mean, why are we even discussing it?" She stated that on the part of school board officials "there was some unwillingness in the district to push it too much." Jacky expressed concern about the fragmented way the policy was eventually implemented. She described how administrators only received one presentation from union officials and "that it didn't filter down to staff. I don't remember our administrator mentioning [the policy] at all." She also described how the board took "a couple of student leaders from each high school to a convention. And that was sort of their idea of enacting the policy."

Similarly to Jacky, Bill became a key player with students in advocating for a stand alone LGBTQ policy within his district. When students made a public presentation to school board trustees on the need for a discrete anti-homophobia policy, the trustees responded with silence: "It was obvious that they really didn't know how to react or how to respond. They really weren't sure how to even talk about the issue or how to address the concern." Bill believes that the silence on the part of these educational leaders was based in part on "real fear that talking about homosexuality, sexual orientation or even anything to do with sex, is the same thing as putting ideas into kids' heads, that the board members think are not already there." School board trustees eventually voted to embed LGBTQ language into their existing *Safe Schools* policy. Despite the success of students and educators to pressure trustees for LGBTQ inclusivity within existing policy, Bill believes that little action has been taken. When questioned about the origins of that, he replied that it was "fear mostly and reluctance to address things head-on. It is still something that is uncomfortable for people to even consider." Since Bill had recently retired, he expressed further concern as to who would continue to advocate for LGBTQ youth in his district. These scenarios poignantly illustrate that fragmented approaches to policy development have little impact on shifting district or school cultures.

As researchers, we could not locate any evidence of the B.C. Ministry of Education acknowledging the importance of addressing LGBTQ issues in schools. Recognizing that LGBTQ policies are usually developed locally, the majority of school districts in B.C. still lack a discrete anti-homophobia policy. These policies give educators permission and support to begin the disruption of heteronormativity in schools. Without these, educators will likely continue to feel isolated and may be disproportionately influenced by a panopticon of fear and silence surrounding this issue. This problem is also compounded by a lack of administrative leadership. We argue that a Ministerial Order that would require mandatory protections of LGBTQ students, staff and families within the School Act would send

an unequivocal message to superintendents and administrators about their responsibility to lead on this issue.

A specific example of how the Ministry of Education can demonstrate leadership would be to provide targeted funding to the B.C. Teachers' Federation to develop an Inquiry Group on LGBTQ issues in education. This would allow educators from across B.C. to meet, discuss, analyze and reflect upon how they can effectively work to disrupt heteronormativity in schools. Our interviewees all supported the need for opportunities to share strategies and successes with other educators, as a means to overcome feelings of isolation and lack of support.

Recommendation 2: School district employees should receive mandatory professional development on LGBTQ issues.

When the interviewees were asked about their formal education on LGBTQ issues, all respondents commented on their lack of professional development. Most attributed their knowledge on LGBTQ issues to life experience. All interviewees commented on how helpful it would have been if they had been afforded these opportunities within their careers.

Bill implores administrators to "be proactive and encourage anti-homophobia initiatives" with staff. Bill went on to describe optional professional development (Pro-D) events in his district specifically aimed at disrupting heteronormativity and homophobia as being poorly attended. Furthermore, he said, "Most of the people who were there … had gay or lesbian kids themselves. [For] the people that attended … it was a personal thing, rather than a general, 'Oh, I should learn about this.'" While teachers in B.C. have the professional autonomy to choose their own Pro-D, this example emphasizes the need for mandatory Pro-D. Principal Liz equates the importance of mandatory Pro-D on LGBTQ issues with the mandatory course she attended for administrators on Harassment in the Workplace.

As an administrator herself, Liz explained the critical importance of giving staff time to talk together, reflect on their practice, ask questions, and analyze how they will move forward through a "wave of conversation" on LGBTQ issues without feeling pressure. In order to move from fragmented to systemic disruptions of heteronormativity, Liz recommends to teacher leaders and administrators that they take into account the "implementation dip." She likens the disruption of heteronormativity to the establishment of other programs in schools when she states, "Whenever you did something new, all of a sudden the ground changes. Even though you were taking a step, you [weren't] sure how or what was going to be happening." As researchers, we would further suggest that as the ground shifts, educators need to be honored by administrators and teacher leaders as they move along their own LGBTQ learning continuum.

Recommendation 3: Educators have a responsibility to integrate LGBTQ realities throughout the curriculum.

Jacky described how she used Drama, Planning 10 and English as entry points for conversations about LGBTQ issues with her students. Similarly, George taught specifically about LGBTQ issues in Planning 10. Roger and Bill both emphasized the importance of using teachable moments to address homophobia and begin conversations about LGBTQ issues.

During his interview, Bill connected his earlier learnings in Native American Education with his more recent understanding of LGBTQ issues. He commented on learning about the interrelated concepts of hidden curriculum and hegemony: "I never thought about it until now, those courses were completely unrelated, but those concepts are pretty closely connected. That hidden curriculum that is driving everyone to be the heteronormative, acceptable person, [by] white middle class standards … I started to see things differently because of those awakenings." We believe that educators continued silence in talking about LGBTQ issues in the classroom reinforces the hidden curriculum of heteronormative hegemony.

Recommendation 4: Provide opportunities for students to learn and express themselves beyond a rigid gender binary.

Bill, Jacky, George and Liz all described the importance of disrupting gender-role stereotypes in elementary and secondary schools. Specifically, Liz mentioned the encouragement of all children to become involved in activities they were passionate about, irrespective of their gender. She uses examples of girls participating in rugby, hockey, mountain biking, trail building, and "giving girls an opportunity to be techno geeks." For boys, she mentioned the exploration of cooking, child care, and peer leadership. In summarizing this she stated, "I tried to allow the definition of gender to be a bit more broad."

Jacky describes students in her secondary school as moving beyond the gender binary by dressing "as Goths or wearing their hair in different colours, or dressing unusually." She surmises that some students were doing this "out of distress. … [T]hey didn't really feel like they could be who they were and they were trying to figure their identity out, but they didn't want to be put into these [heteronormative] boxes."

When asked if Liz thought the disruption of heteronormativity was important in elementary schools, she responded, "I think it is tremendously important in elementary. This is the time that we get them ready to understand different ideas and to be comfortable with grey. Kids think in black and white and it is only as we get older that we … realize that there are millions of shades of grey … I think they become much more reflective thinkers, bigger thinkers, appreciative of diversity, and comfortable and accepting of difference."

Recommendation 5: Educators need to work to normalize LGBTQ realities in schools.

Jacky, Roger and George all described the importance of colleagues getting to know LGBTQ people as a way of them reducing or eliminating their negative stereotypes of sexual orientation issues.

Furthermore, George suggests that having a positive attitude with staff and supporting colleagues on a variety of educational issues is a way to create support and allegiance for LGBTQ issues in schools. He states that, "normalizing LGBTQ issues and your reality [as a gay educator] without being

confrontational … will probably bring more supporters and allies with you." Similarly, Roger stated, "I didn't ever enter into confrontational tactics surrounding sexual orientation for myself and it just seemed to be accepted more easily. I think the matter-of-factness approach to most things in life is an easier and better and the more successful way to go. When you don't push people's buttons they tend to not push you back. … If you are offensive, you will get a defensive reaction. That is just the way any game is played, whether it is football or coming out."

George cautions educators to note that, "anytime you see it as anyone who is trying to disrupt anything I think you are seen as an outcast or a troublemaker … You are bringing an issue to something that people don't want to be an issue." Roger described his personality on staff in the following terms: "I am not a flag waver or foot-stomper, or parade-down-the-street person, and I wasn't doing any of those things, I simply lived my life; … no in-your-face stuff at all. It was just a matter of living my life and I happen to be a gay man with male partner."

While these educators are describing non-confrontational approaches to the normalization of LGBTQ realities in schools, we would argue that this has limited impact on the disruption of heteronormativity. Roger does, however, contradict himself when he recognizes that there are times "as an administrator where you have to step up … be prepared and say, 'We are not doing it that way here.'" Bill reinforces this when he states, "You can't be politically correct and be a leader. You have to stand out."

Recommendation 6: Educate and engage parents around LGBTQ issues.

Based on her administrative experiences, Liz attests to the importance of engaging with the parent community as an integral strategy for moving forward. Specifically, she suggests that parents need to be given time to understand "what heteronormativity is, what it looks like … the literature about it, and give them an opportunity to go read something and talk to somebody." Liz suggests that by working with Parent Advisory Committees to educate them about heteronormativity, school leaders can help to reduce

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or eliminate parental fear. She encourages administrators to educate parents so they don't end up saying,

"'Oh my gosh, they are trying to change my children' … and just go off the deep end."

Recommendation 7: LGBTQ issues should be integrated into undergraduate and graduate coursework in education.

As researchers we suggest the following recommendation in addition to those which came from interviewees. Given the continued fear and silence surrounding LGBTQ issues in schools, we feel that universities and teacher training programs have an important role in breaking this silence. We believe that all teachers would benefit from discussion, reflection and analysis around the way in which heteronormativity manifests itself in schools and inhibits student success. Furthermore, educators need to develop concrete skills to effectively disrupt heteronormativity in schools. Thus far, within our graduate program in educational administration and leadership, with the exception of one article and class discussion, there has been no discussion of LGBTQ issues or heteronormativity in schools. Part of our interest in this research topic arose from taking an undergraduate elective course focusing on sexuality in education. In hindsight, we believe that we would have benefited from taking this course as part of our pre-service teacher training. Based upon the interviewee responses and our own experiences, we believe that education could facilitate the sharing of positive skills, strategies, and examples of success between educators. In our view, this is critical for the effective disruption of heteronormativity in schools.

Concluding Discussion

Administrators and teacher leaders in B.C. continue to face difficulties in their attempts to disrupt heteronormativity in schools. We would argue that our literature review, research findings and subsequent recommendations are congruent. Therefore, we believe that our study provides a springboard for further research.

We argue that heteronormativity is perceived by some teachers and administrators to be an important issue. Overtime, the normalization of LGBTQ issues in schools has been embraced not only by

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LGBTQ teachers, but also by a growing number of straight allies. In our view, this is a positive development. However, we believe that many more educators need to take up this challenge in order to achieve significant, positive change in schools.

There continues to be overwhelming fear, silence and lack of coordinated action on LGBTQ issues in schools in B.C. Furthermore, this situation is exacerbated by the reality that many educators are still uncomfortable discussing LGBTQ issues in schools. People's real or perceived personal fears, combined with a lack of accurate knowledge of LGBTQ people and their realities, and insufficient professional training, significantly impedes their ability to effectively disrupt heteronormativity in schools. These factors create a challenging landscape within which some teacher leaders and administrators are attempting to make change.

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Appendix A UBC REB Approval Certificate

The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Wendy L. Poole	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/Education/Educational Studies	UBC BREB NUMBER: H11-03196

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:

Institution	Site
N/A	N/A

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): James Braedon Chamberlain

SPONSORING AGENCIES: N/A

PROJECT TITLE: Disrupting Heteronormativity in Schools

CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: January 9, 2013

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:	DATE APPROVED: January 9, 2012	

Document Name	Version	Date
Protocol:		
Disrupting Heteronormativity in Schools - Proposal	6	December 20, 2011
null	N/A	December 31, 1969
Consent Forms:		
Consent Form	4	December 22, 2011
Advertisements:		
Advertisement for Recruitment	3	December 22, 2011
Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:		
Disrupting Heteronormativity - Interview Questions	2	November 24, 2011
Letter of Initial Contact:		
Disrupting Heteronormativity - Subject Invitation	2	December 20, 2011

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

This study has been approved either by the full Behavioural REB or by
an authorized delegated reviewer

Appendix B Invitation Letter

Department of Educational Studies
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel: 604-822-5374
Fax: 604-822-4244
Web: http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca

Dear Educator,

You are invited to be a research participant in a research study entitled *Disrupting Heteronormativity in Schools*. Dr. Wendy Poole, Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Studies at UBC, supervises our research team of Alysha Kothlow and James Chamberlain, both Master's students in the Educational Administration and Leadership Program in Educational Studies at UBC. Alysha is a full-time teacher with a K-12 independent school and James Chamberlain is a primary school teacher currently on leave from Surrey School District.

The purpose of this study is to explore various ways in which recently retired administrators and teacher leaders (retiring in 2008 onwards) have worked to disrupt heteronormativity in schools. We are also interested in examining the factors that contribute to the success and breakdown of these disruptions. This information can be important to informing leadership practices.

The in-person interview is an opportunity to engage in discussion about the leadership practices that contributed to the disruption of heteronormativity. The interview will be approximately one hour long. If you choose to participate, please sign the attached consent form.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any point. All interview responses and identities in this study will be kept completely confidential. All identifying information will be deleted from the interview transcripts and final report. The researchers will work and store the data on a password-protected computer. Electronic copies of the data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the research supervisor's alarm-protected office and will be kept for at least five years, in accordance with the University of British Columbia's research and ethics policy.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact James Chamberlain at ███████████████ or our research supervisor, Dr. Wendy Poole, at wendy.poole@ubc.ca or 604-822-5462.

It is our hope that the findings of this study will inform ethical and effective leadership practices related to the disruption of heteronormativity in schools. Thank you for your time and consideration of this request. We look forward to learning from you.

Sincerely,

Alysha and James

Appendix C Consent Form

Department of Educational Studies
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel: 604-822-5374
Fax: 604-822-4244
Web: http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca

a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Consent Form

Disrupting Heteronormativity in Schools

Principal Investigator: Dr. Wendy Poole, Associate Professor
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
wendy.poole@ubc.ca

Co-Investigators: Alysha Kothlow
Masters Student in the Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
Phone: ██████████
██████████

James Chamberlain
Masters Student in the Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
Phone: ██████████
██████████

Research Purposes:
The purpose of the proposed study is to gain a better understanding of how educators have led to disrupt heteronormativity in schools. This information can be vital to informing administrative practices.

For the purposes of this study, heteronormativity refers to the way in which schools and society place expectations upon students and teachers to look and act heterosexual in all situations. This expectation within schools often serves to silence or further marginalize gender non-conforming and/or queer and questioning youth, staff and families.

Research Procedure and Participation:

The study consists of up to six interviews. All participants, who will be drawn from educators who have retired in 2008 or later, will be invited to participate in an interview where they will be asked open-ended

questions. All participation is completely voluntary and participants may chose to withdraw their responses at any point with no repercussions.

Interviews will be approximately one hour in length. The venues for these interviews are to be determined, based on what is comfortable for participants and what is mutually convenient for participants and researchers.

Confidentiality and Data Storage:
All interview responses and identities in this study will be kept completely confidential. All identifying information will be deleted from the study and a number code will be assigned. An electronic version of the data, including audio files, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's office for five years.

Contact:
If you have any further questions or concerns, you are encouraged to contact the Principal Investigator, Wendy Poole wendy.poole@ubc.ca, or the Co-Investigators, Alysha Kothlow ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ or James Chamberlain ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ .

If at any time you have concerns about your rights or your treatment as a participant in this research study, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598 or if long distance email to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca

Consent:
I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

I am a recently retired administrator or teacher leader, retiring in the year 2008 or later, who self-identifies as an educator who has worked to disrupt heteronormativity in schools.

I have retained a copy of this consent form for my own records.

I consent/give my assent to participate in the study: *Disrupting Heteronormativity in Schools*

Interview:

_____   _____

Participant Signature   Date

Please return the consent form to Alysha Kothlow at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ ▓▓ or scan and email to ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ by Friday, January 21, 2011.

Appendix D Interview Questions

Interview Questions

The researchers will take turns asking the questions from the question sheet. We will ask the participants seven questions as follows:

1. In your opinion, what are some effective ways you, or other leaders, worked to disrupt heteronormativity in schools?

2. What do you see as the main factors that contributed to these successes?

3. What do you see as the main challenges you, or other leaders you have seen, have faced in disrupting heteronormativity?

4. What do you notice are the effects (positive and negative) of heteronormative disruptions on staff, students and the school culture?

5. As a teacher leader or administrator, what education/training did you receive to assist you in disrupting heteronormativity in schools? What strategies have informed your practice in this regard?

6. What recommendations and/or advice can you provide to teacher leaders and future administrators about disrupting heteronormativity within their schools?

7. What school or district supports might have assisted you or could assist practicing educators in this process?

Appendix E Email Advertisement

UBC a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Educational Studies
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel: 604-822-5374
Fax: 604-822-4244
Web: http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca

Initial Email Advertisement:

Disrupting Heteronormativity in Schools

"Recently retired British Columbia administrators and teacher leaders are invited to be research participants in a study entitled, ***Disrupting Heteronormativity in Schools***. Eligible participants are educators who have left the teaching profession in 2008 or later and self-identify as educators who sought to disrupt heteronormativity in their practice. We will be selecting up to six respondents based on representation from a variety of experiences and school districts.

The purpose of this study is to explore various ways in which recently retired administrators and teacher leaders have worked to disrupt heteronormativity in schools. The research is being conducted by teachers, Alysha Kothlow and James Chamberlain as part of their Master of Education program at UBC, under the supervision of Dr. Wendy Poole, Associate Professor (wendy.poole@ubc.ca; 604-221-1071).

Interviews will be approximately one hour long. If you are interested in participating, please contact, Alysha Kothlow at ██████████████████ for an Invitation Letter with more detailed information. Thank you for your interest."