

THE EQUITY WORK OF ACTIVIST TEACHERS: NAVIGATING EDUCATIONAL  
POLICY ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN NEOLIBERAL TIMES

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## Abstract

In the last fifty years, the transnational re-organization of the economy has similarly re-structured education in the West to reflect a focus on standards, assessments, accountability systems, and performance indicators (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Social democratic notions of equity in education have been reframed through a discourse of economism (Ball, 1999; Rezai Rashti, Segeren & Martino, 2017). Critical policy studies informed by Foucauldian notions of discourse have provided key insights on changing global governance relations in education – mediated largely by texts - and the impact these relations have had on local equity discourses of gender, sexuality and race embedded in various policy texts. However, less prevalent are empirical studies that show how these complex relations operate ‘on the ground’ in schools to (dis)organize the equity work of teachers and the impact these broad trans-national policies have on teachers and students in particular localized settings.

My dissertation project builds on this existing literature by applying the theoretical insights of Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990, 1993, 2005) in order to better consider how neoliberal forms of educational governance and extra local ‘relations of ruling’ are shaping equity policies on gender-based violence and the work of activist teachers who actualize these policies in schools. Drawing on G. Smith’s (1990) theorizing of standpoint from the perspective of people who occupy places and spaces outside politico-administrative relations, I begin from the experiences of activist teachers to explore the ‘equity work’ that they do to address gender and sexual (in)equities arising in classrooms and schools throughout the Toronto District School Board. In so doing, my work illuminates the “contradictions, complexities and inconsistencies” (Larner, 2001, p. 16)

inherent in notions of gender and sexual equity emerging through neoliberal projects in Ontario public education. I illustrate how first, global relations of power constrain teachers' work on gender and sexual equity projects in particular ways and also how activist teachers creatively and strategically disrupt the coherence of these relations. By applying these theoretical insights to my particular project, my work suggests new sites of intervention in critical equity endeavors to re-enliven democratic public education and move beyond the constraints of a contemporary and predominant neoliberal imaginary of schooling.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Education for critical consciousness... requires a reformulation of the knowledge-as-accumulated-capital model of education and focuses instead on the link between the historical configurations of social forms and the way they work subjectively... Resistance lies in self-conscious engagement with dominant, normative discourses and representations, and in the active creation of oppositional analytic and cultural spaces (Mohanty, 1990, p. 185).

In 2007, significant local and national media attention came to bear on the issue of sexual assault and gendered violence in school, following the school shooting death of a 15-year-old in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), and a subsequent investigation which revealed an unreported sexual assault of a 14-year-old and a context of sexual harassment targeting young Muslim girls at the same school (Alphonso & Akkad, 2008; Huber, 2008; Marlow & Rushowy, 2007). The school shooting and assault would spark significant dialogue and debate among teachers, school boards and Ministry of Education officials, about the role and responsibilities of school staff in addressing gun violence, racism, poverty, Islamophobia, and the need for changes in educational policies to better address “gender-based violence” and school safety (McMurtry & Curling, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2008; Safe Schools Action Team, 2008). At about the same time, an activist group known as “The Miss G Project for Equity Education” was placing significant pressure on the then Liberal government to institute a gender studies course into the high school curriculum (Ghabrial, 2008). In response to these various public pressures, the Liberal provincial government of the time began to take a number of steps to address gender and sexual equity in schools. First, as a response to the media release of the TDSB’s School Community Safety Advisory Panel (2008) report as well as results from the Ministry’s own commissioned Safe Schools Action Team (2008) report the

government amended the *Education Act* governing schools in Ontario through *Bill 157 Keeping our Kids Safe at School* (2009) to enforce mandatory reporting responsibilities of school staff and school administrators who became aware of serious incidents, including sexual assault and bullying. Within three years, the TDSB (2010b) had developed a specific policy on *Gender-Based Violence* to guide staff and students, as well as provided support for implementation of this policy through the establishment of the Gender-Based Violence Prevention Office (GBVPO), lauded as the first of its kind in Canada (TDSB, 2019). These policies were in addition to a comprehensive equity policy that activists within the school board and community had fought for and won during the provincially mandated amalgamation of five separate Greater Toronto Area school boards into one large board known as the TDSB in 1998 (McCaskell, 2005).

Throughout 2007 and 2008, I was listening with much interest to these media stories as they were reported on CBC Radio during my daily commute from Toronto to the high school in Markham where I had recently been hired to teach English and Social Science. As a new teacher and an activist, I welcomed the notion that the Ministry of Education, school boards and schools alike might be forced to take issues of sexual assault, sexual harassment, homophobia, transphobia, and gendered violence more seriously. By the time Bill 157 was implemented in 2009, I had been hired by the TDSB to teach at a large North York high school. At one of the first school staff meetings I attended, information about Bill 157 was presented as one item among many in an already full staff meeting agenda. The vice principal of the school presented the Ministry-approved video and PowerPoint emphasizing our ‘new’ duties to report serious incidents between students, including sexual assault, and the consequences if we did not.

The agenda item was given approximately 25 minutes and then we moved on to other matters. From my standpoint as an activist teacher, the passing of this Bill with its emphasis on mandatory staff reporting of serious incidents between students, seemed less relevant to my interests in social justice education, compared to my new teaching position at a Board that had been described throughout my Bachelor of Education training as one of the most progressive school boards in Canada. As someone who came to secondary school teaching after extensive involvement in the labour movement, the student movement, anti-poverty activism, feminist organizing and migrant justice campaigns, I was strongly attracted to working in a school board with robust equity policies where I felt my orientation to teaching and “education as a practice of freedom” (Freire, 1993, p. 62) would be supported. The provincial emphasis on mandatory staff reporting once an incident had occurred seemed short sighted and disconnected from substantively challenging gendered violence in all of its complexities in the TDSB. I was much more excited about the establishment of the GBVPO and the subsequent policies on gender-based violence as established within the TDSB.

Throughout my time as a teacher, I worked as intentionally as I could to integrate various critical equity issues, including gender and sexual equity, into my classroom content and to support student and staff equity initiatives when I could. Of course, I stumbled (and continue to do so) and made many mistakes along the way, particularly in occupying a position of racial privilege as a white teacher placed in various diverse Toronto classrooms that were themselves situated within a colonial institution that is the school. With my own limitations in view and despite the new policies on gender-based violence in my school board and the centrally assigned Board staff that I knew existed to

support equity in schools, I found that my attempted commitments to engage critically conscious education were constantly in competition with the daily grind of producing and delivering three lessons a day, five days a week, that supported provincial curriculum mandates, to large groups of adolescents who varied substantially in engagement and interests. In the first few years of my career, I planned lessons in the evening and graded papers on weekends. Upon my arrival in the TDSB, I was fortunate to find a few colleagues in my school who, like me, shared an interest in developing critical teaching practices and approaches to schooling. Despite our earnest and imperfect efforts to advance critical engagements with sexual and gendered equity issues in our school, our voices always seemed marginal to, and subsumed by, mainstream school discourses and institutional practices. In a Board described in academic policy literature as the most progressive in Canada (Ferfolja, 2013; McCaskell, 2005; Russell, 2006), along with new policy commitments to address “gender-based violence”, how was it that gender and sexual equity work performed by many activist teachers in schools still seemed marginal to the everyday work of most staff in school?

### **Institutional Ethnography as a Method of Inquiry**

This question and the ‘disjuncture’ I was experiencing as an activist teacher working in a supposedly progressive school board, would become the focus of my dissertation research when I began the doctoral program in 2011. I chose to pick up where I left off in my Master’s work where I drew on Dorothy Smith’s (1987) theories on the social organization of knowledge to consider the conceptual emergence of “gender based violence” in educational policy and the implication these emerging discourses had on the equity work of activist teachers in schools. With the support of Dr. Alison Griffith,

institutional ethnography was intended as my primary conceptual frame for this project (Smith, 1987, 1995, 2005). Specifically, I wanted to explore how activist teachers who stand at once inside and out of the “politico-administrative regime” (G. Smith, 1998, p. 631) of Ontario’s public education system, attempt to accomplish critical equity work on gender and sexuality in mainstream schools that have been historically organized to reproduce dominant (and violent) settler colonial projects and uphold hierarchies of knowledge and normative social relations of power. Activist teachers are often driven by what Mohanty (1990) describes in the epigraph of my Introduction as “the active creation of oppositional analytic and cultural spaces” in education (p. 185), or what Apple (2011) has described as “struggles to interrupt dominance” (p. 23) or what Ladson Billings (1995) has described as “preparing students for confronting inequitable and undemocratic social structures” (p. 474). In a mainstream school system characterized by hierarchy and the reproduction of inequities (Anyon, 1998; Apple, 2004; Bourdieu, 1977; Freire, 1993; Sefa Dei, 1999; Weis & Fine, 2001), I wished to explore how activist teachers’ varied responses to instances of sexual and gender (in)equity in schools are shaped, constrained and/or enlivened by contemporary equity discourses and institutional relations in schools.

Institutional ethnographic projects tend to investigate the “empirical linkages among local settings of everyday life, organizations and trans-local processes of administration and governance” (Devault and McCoy, 2006, p. 15). Inquiry is grounded in the actual activities that people engage in the everyday, in constructing the social world around them. From an institutional ethnographic framework, educational governance is understood as a “textually organized relation that is accomplished in the coordinated actions of people as they go about their everyday work” (Nichols & Griffith,

2009, p. 1). Within institutional ethnography, the notion of an ‘institution’ is understood to mean clusters of textually mediated relations organized around a specific ruling function – in this case, education - rather than a particular organization (DeVault & McCoy, 2006). By applying IE as a method of inquiry to my study, school staff experiences were an entry point into discovering how trans-local institutional relations shape participant experiences of sexual and/or gendered inequities as they unfold in the hallway or classroom of a school. Using an institutional ethnographic framework, my doctoral research began with this basic query: How are the institutional relations and discourses regulating sexual and gender expression in schools currently organized and how do they, in turn, organize activist teachers’ experiences of incidents involving students’ sexual and gender expression? In particular, I was interested in the process that occurs when an activist teacher identifies an incident involving a student as reinforcing sexual and/or gender inequities. Once officially reported, an activist teacher’s observation of inequitable or discriminatory sexual or gendered behaviour gets “hooked into” (Mykhalovskiy, McCoy & Bresalier, 2004, p. 317) particular institutional structures and processes. As activist teachers participate in this “hooking up” process with institutional structures and discourses, what problems emerge? How are such problems organized by social relations of sexuality and gender and the various institutional structures and discourses of the school? To what extent do activist teachers engage with and also resist these institutional relations of organization? How do social relations of power, such as gender, sexuality, and race, emerge in this process of making an incident of sexual or gender expression institutionally (in)actionable?

## **The Equity Work of Activist Teachers**

The work by activist teachers in making incidents involving inequitable or discriminatory sexual or gender expression institutionally actionable has not been a significant subject of scrutiny in sociological research on bullying or sexual and gender expression in schools. It is this institutional process that is the focus of my doctoral research. I use the notion of ‘work’ purposefully here since this is an important concept in Smith’s (1987) development of institutional ethnography. Smith (1987) employs a generous notion of ‘work’ that she defines as “what people do that requires some effort, that they mean to do, and that involves some acquired competence” (p. 165). My doctoral research was intended to uncover the efforts of activist teachers in attending to the complicated and complex gendered and sexual relations that unfold in schools alongside other social relations of power (i.e. race, class, and so on), among and between students and staff – what I refer to as their ‘equity work’ in schools. The aim of my project then is to begin with the standpoint of activist teachers in order to explore how their practical/everyday activities to address gender and sexual inequities in schools (i.e., their equity work), joined with the “vast network of institutional relations, discourse and work processes” (McCoy, 2006, p. 111) to transform an incident involving gender or sexual expression at school into something that is visible and institutionally actionable (or not).

Many school staff do not explicitly draw upon discourses of critical feminism, queerness, anti-racism, critical disability and so on, and in some cases, school staff actively reject such discourses. As a result, when a particular act among students occurs in a hallway or classroom or even outside of the school, many school staff do not

necessarily ‘see’ social relations of gender and sexuality (among others) in the activities and talk of their students. On the other hand, activist teachers’ active engagement with counter hegemonic discourses informed by critical feminism, queer theories, critical race and others, shapes their/our orientation to these relations and their/our consciousness. As someone who self-identifies as an activist teacher, I was interested in exploring with other activist teachers how gendered and sexual social relations of power become visible and acted upon. Therefore, as I explain in more detail in Chapter 2, beginning in the summer of 2016, I set up interviews with a number of activist classroom teachers about their experiences addressing sexual or gendered inequities in schools. My participants’ use of counter hegemonic discourses to understand their experiences and the experiences of their students was of particular interest to my research. Beyond the definitions of critical education I briefly described earlier in the academic literature, for the purposes of participant selection, I defined ‘activist teacher’ more practically as any teacher involved in critical social justice work outside and/or inside the school. Beyond the school, many of my participants belonged to local community organizations and groups with explicit engagement of feminist, anti-racist and critical race, anti poverty, decolonizing, queer and/or other discourses informing their efforts. Inside the school, many of my participants also acted as staff liaison for student social justice groups, incorporated critical equity issues within mainstream curriculum, and/or organized school plays and assemblies on topics such as homophobia, violence against women, racism, violence and war, and other topics.

While the experiences of activist teachers are the primary focus of my dissertation, in the course of my research I also interviewed a number of other school

board staff, many who engaged critical equity discourses through their work in schools and some who did not. My interviews with school staff other than classroom teachers were intended to explicate how activist teacher experiences were coordinated with and through the activities of others, and through various textually mediated relations within schools. As activist teachers spoke about their equity work, they also spoke about how other staff entered into this work, including social workers, Child and Youth workers, guidance counselors, school administrators and various centrally assigned Board staff, including staff within the TDSB's Gender Based Violence Prevention Office as well as TDSB staff occupying the roles of Equity Instructional Leaders and Student Equity Program Advisors. In order to better understand how my participants' experiences were coordinated with and organized by actual activities and practices that others were "doing elsewhere and at different times" (Smith, 2001, p. 160-161), I also engaged interviews with one Child and Youth Worker, a guidance counselor, two former Equity Instructional Leaders, three staff members who had worked at the GBVPO, and four school administrators. Throughout the dissertation, I make reference to these interviews with school staff who are not teachers in order to explicate the institutional relations that shape activist teachers' equity work but that are not wholly discoverable within their experiences.

Finally, I wish to state from the outset that while my intention in focusing on activist teachers in schools is to make more visible the work that my participants do to grapple with equity issues, I have not intended to position my participants as in some way morally superior to others who work in the field of education, or even outside of this particular field. The dangers in positioning particular subjects as somehow 'enlightened'

or morally superior to others is, of course, well documented in critical race feminist theorizing on the ‘Enlightened rational subject’ and associations with settler colonialism and the varied national and juridical subjectivities that arise through such colonial projects (Bannerji, 2000; Cooper & Stoler, 1997; Loomba, 1998; McClintock, 1995; Razack, 2002; Spivak, 1988; Thobani, 2007). A politics invested in an enlightened subject, who maintains ‘respectability’ and a position of ‘innocence’ in the domination of others, is premised on a disavowal of our own inextricable placement within these relations of domination, hierarchy and oppression (Fellows & Razack, 1998).

My examination of the work of social justice or equity-minded teachers in addressing gendered and/or sexual inequities in schools (many of whom were white) must begin by acknowledging the settler colonial context in which their work unfolds. As teachers, myself and my participants are actively embedded in various relations of power that exist in contemporary schools, and we/they are implicated in these relations, a fact that many acknowledged and actively struggled to reconcile in relation to their engagements with critical feminist, critical race, decolonizing, and other counter hegemonic discourses. My participants drew upon these latter discourses while simultaneously positioned within a profession historically (and contemporarily) shaped by moralistic discourses of innocence and goodness, including the teacher as a figure of “kind, charitable helper” (Badwell, 2014, p. 4). Such discourses of goodness, morality and virtue have simultaneously constituted relations of whiteness in Canada such that white moral subjects have depended upon non-white and ‘degenerate’ populations to attain this positional superiority (Dyer, 1997; Valverde, 1991). The social relations of whiteness *and* the social subjectivity of teachers have both been constitutive of and

through discourses of helping others, virtuosity and civility, charity and care (Badwell, 2014; Fellows & Razack, 1998; Heron, 1999; Valverde, 1991).

In this dissertation, I have attempted to forefront the messy discursive relations through which my participants are embedded as they struggled to address various gendered and sexual inequities in the classroom and schools of which they were a part. My intent was to lay bare for the reader the varied complications that exist interpersonally and institutionally as teachers work to challenge social relations of power while simultaneously operating from within such relations. Throughout the following chapters, I have attempted to maintain visibility on the interlocking structures of dominance within which my participants operate so as to avoid what Fellows and Razack (1998) identify as discourses of competing marginalities and the race to innocence that often operate among feminist and other activist communities.

### **A Brief Note on Methods**

In order to address my research questions, I employed a range of qualitative research methods including textual analysis, ethnographic field notes, as well as one-on-one qualitative semi-structured interviews with 18 Toronto District School Board staff. As the “hooking up” process occurs largely through texts, I examined the various laws, policy and program memorandum, regulations, and standard paperwork practices that organize the relation between subjective experiences of gender or sexuality in schools and school responses. The specifics of these methods are elaborated further in my methodology chapter.

I have been uniquely positioned to conduct this research project. As teacher in the secondary school classroom for over ten years, I have a working knowledge of current

policies and social practices in schools. Since moving to Ontario in 1999 and becoming a teacher in 2006, and as someone who self-identifies as an activist teacher, I have also developed well-established connections with various networks of activists and other self-identified activist teachers. Since becoming a doctoral candidate in 2011, I have also acted as research assistant on two projects that explored institutional and policy responses to school safety in Ontario. Both projects have been informed by institutional ethnography. Through these projects, I have assisted and led one-on-one interviews with youth and youth-serving professionals working with youth designated as ‘at risk’ in schools. I have also written extensive field notes and conducted several focus groups with suspension and expulsion school staff in the GTA. These experiences have strengthened my knowledge of educational laws and policies that school staff works with regularly to consider equity as well as disciplinary measures in relation to students who have been labeled as ‘unsafe’. My work on these two projects also assisted me in formulating better questions to ask my participants in relation to my own doctoral research. As a research assistant on these projects, I had opportunities to work with a team of researchers from various backgrounds, including more experienced mentors in the field of education and institutional ethnography. These experiences have added complexity and layers to my own analysis in this dissertation.

In the next section, I explore in more detail some of the theoretical concepts and ideas that have informed my approach to this doctoral project. In addition to institutional ethnography, I also draw upon Foucauldian scholarship on governmentality, critical whiteness and critical race feminist scholarship, and critical policy studies in education.

### **Conceptual Frameworks: Social Organization of Knowledge and Governance**

While my project is primarily informed by Dorothy Smith's (1987, 1990, 1999, 2005) theoretical contributions to the social organization of knowledge and her development of institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry, I have also drawn from Foucauldian scholarship on governmentality and governance. Like other institutional ethnographic researchers, I see many theoretical synergies between Dorothy Smith (1987, 1993, 2005) and Michel Foucault (1994, 1990, 1995) on notions of power, knowledge, governance and discourse. Both Smith and Foucault are identified as sharing notions of "power as multiply sited and exercised through relations of knowledge" (Mykhalovskiy, McCoy & Bresalier, 2004, p. 317). Smith (1987, 1993, 1999, 2005) conceptualizes power through 'relations of ruling', defined as "multiple activities of individuals, organizations, professional associations, agencies, and the discourses they produce and circulate" (Mykhalovskiy & McCoy, 2002, p. 19) that are organized around a particular function (such as education or health care) and which are predominately textually mediated, "connecting us across space and time and organiz[ing] our everyday lives" (Smith, 2005, p. 10). In Foucault's (1980) work, he underscores the constitutive and productive nature of power in that "it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (p. 119). Similarly, Smith (1987, 1993) speaks to people as active and skilled in operationalizing and coordinating these texts and discourses rather than simply 'dupes' or 'puppets', with people exercising "play... expertise... and pleasure in the exercise of competence" (Smith, 1993, p. 206) of dominant discourses.

In the late 1970's, Foucault introduced the concept of "governmentality" to encapsulate his ideas about the evolving nature of political power (Rose, O'Malley & Valverde, 2006). As Foucault (1995) noted, with increases in population and greater wealth through the expansion of agricultural production, the 'art of government' began to challenge the 'rule of the sovereign' in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Through the development of liberalism, there was an emerging distinction between state and society (Rose, O'Malley & Valverde, 2006). From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century as feudalism was being destroyed and great territorial, colonial and administrative states were emerging, philosophers began to consider the "art of exercising power" with the 'economy' becoming a central focus of political rule by the 1800's (Foucault, cited in Gordon, Miller & Burchell, 1991, p. 92). Greater efforts were made on the part of emerging forms of government to 'manage' and control populations through calculation in the form of demographics and 'population' studies along with statistical manipulation, including measuring the educational development of the population (Foucault, cited in Gordon, Miller & Burchell, 1991). The biology of individuals and populations was to be managed economically and financially (Foucault, 1990). To understand these shifts in the 'art of government', Foucault introduced the notion of 'governmentality' to direct scholars to pay attention to "the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections... that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power" (Foucault, cited in Gordon, Miller & Burchell, 1991, p. 102). Such complex forms of power were "employed by authorities for making up and acting upon a population and its constituents" (Rose, 1996, p. 328). As a result, governmentality scholars have studied the specific practices of various sites – schools, psychiatric institutions, families, state

agencies – that are orientated to shaping people’s subjectivities and behaviours or ‘conducting the conduct’ of individuals (Miller & Rose, 2009; Teghtsoonian, 2016).

Institutional ethnographic approaches and governmentality approaches share an analytic interest in investigating the relation between localized practices and broader relations of power and governance (Teghtsoonian, 2016). Much governmentality scholarship analyzes how power and governance operate through the “mundane business of governing everyday economic and social life, in the new forms of power, authority, and subjectivity being formed within these mundane practices” (Rose, O’Malley, & Valverde, 2006, p. 101). Similarly, institutional ethnography intends to investigate “how our lives are knitted into extended social relations of a contemporary capitalist society and economy” by “beginning in the actual worlds of people” (Smith, 1987, p. 109-110). This is where my project exploring gender and sexual (in)equity in schools begins. By starting with activist teachers, I trace how particular educational policy and funding specifications related to gender and sexual equity in a neoliberal context operate to shape, constrain, and also generate activist teachers’ equity work in schools. Such an analyses is important in at least two ways.

First, a material grounding of my research within the everyday talk and actions of activist teachers to illuminate ruling relations helps tackle a fundamental question raised by Marx and Engels (1972) in *Theses on Feuerbach*, and further examined by Smith (1987) in order to address the operation of existing power relations within the social: “Individuals always started, and always start, from themselves. Their relations are the relations of their real life. How does it happen that their relations assume an independent existence over against them? And that the forces of their own life overpower them?” (p.

99-100). Smith's (1987) development of an alternative critical feminist sociology attempts to unpack these relations in order to provide people with various political 'maps'<sup>1</sup> of ruling relations as they unfold in people's lives. This tracing of the contours of power provides us with a better sense of how such relations work to "assume an independent existence over against" us. Similarly, Rose, O'Malley and Valverde (2006) speak to the orientation of governmentality scholarship as directed towards an "empirical mapping of governmental rationalities and techniques" (p. 99) with the forms of analyses spanning "the macro spaces of national economies to confined locales or factories or workplaces" (p. 94). Governmentality approaches seek to expose the social construction of political rationalities otherwise presented as 'objective knowledges', with particular attention paid to the historical roots of such rationalities (McKee, 2009).

Second, by beginning with *activist* teachers to engage an empirical mapping of governmental rationalities and techniques as they arise 'on the ground' in schools, my intent is to train an analytic eye on the instabilities and incoherencies identifiable in such contours of power so as to consider how traditional power relations might be disrupted and destabilized even if these moments may be fleeting and temporary. In so doing, I wish to reinvigorate the "critical or liberatory goals" (Devault & McCoy, cited in Smith, 2006, p. 19) underscoring institutional ethnographic approaches that, in recent years, seem to have waned in some IE scholarship, in favour of focusing exclusively on the generalized and generalizing nature of governance operating through various institutional

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<sup>1</sup> Ng (cited in Kinsman, 2006) problematizes the imperial and colonial history associated with mapping as developed by white European colonialists who constructed maps to marginalize and oppress others. See also McClintock (1995). When the aim is to develop knowledge for social movements, institutional ethnographic and political activist ethnographic mapping must be contextualized as a decidedly political and social (as opposed to a technical) undertaking (Kinsman, 2006).

technologies and discourses. Through sustaining an analysis of discourses in official policy texts while also drawing attention to oppositional discourses arising among *activist* teachers' talk and actions in schools, it is my hope that those of us interested in "making change from below" (Smith, 2007, p. 1) might be inspired to consider how to build greater collective political capital in order to further challenge the messy actualities of hegemonic equity policy discourses and their implementation 'on the ground'. Such a specificity of analysis is also required to realize Foucault's (cited in Mill, 2003) concern in exposing "innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of power relations" (p. 256).

By closely examining the disjuncture between staff (and student) experiences of sexual and gender (in)equities in schools alongside the stated aims and goals of hegemonic educational equity discourses, I draw attention to particular discourses and policies that while well meaning, have destructive impacts on advancing more democratic and equitable ideas of education. My focus on activist teachers is also intended to enliven and make more visible the equity work that activist teachers are engaged in everyday. When brought together, my participants' stories can operate to uncover sites of dominance that require collective struggle for change as well as discursive and material sites of disruption or "targets for intervention" (O'Malley, Weir, & Shearing, 1997, p. 504) worth nurturing and extending to pursue a political project of social critique.

As has been noted by some governmentality scholars, governmentality studies have at times, been limited in both the form and extent of social critique they offer and have not been as informed by feminist, queer and critical race counter discourses as they

could be (O'Malley, Weir & Shearing, 1997; Valverde, 1996), thus neglecting to contribute to knowledge of social contestation and how such processes might be maximized. Moreover, some Foucauldian analysis has also neglected to examine how specific technologies of power have used discourses of race and gender to regulate and govern (Cooper, 1994; McKee, 2009). Here Dorothy Smith's (1987, 1990, 1999, 2005) feminist elaboration of the Foucauldian concept of discourse, and of other concepts such as power and social relations, contributes important insights into the material, empirical and political analysis of the social organization of knowledge. In the next section, I briefly address the development of these key concepts in Smith's (1987, 1990, 1993, 2005) work and how she uses these ideas in order to advance a political critique of governance.

### **Dorothy Smith on Discourse, Consciousness and Social Relations**

Smith (2005) builds on Foucault's notion of discourse and uses it to mean "translocal relations coordinating the practices of definite individuals talking, writing, reading, watching and so forth, in particular local places at particular times" with discourse constraining what people say and write, and what people say or write reproducing and modifying discourse (p. 224). While Smith articulates discourse as constraining speech and language, she is clear that we should not consider discourse as 'causing' us to speak or write in particular ways (Smith, 2005, p. 17). In the vein of Marx, she encourages us to resist mystifying the idea of discourse but instead to see discourse as actual activities and practices of people that occur through language and which is a part of forming our consciousness (Smith, 1999). Smith (1999) speaks to the 'determining' character in Foucault's articulations of discourse as "an order of concepts,

schemata, constituted objects, systems of representation, rules of evidence, and so forth with its own internal structure and relations which *impose themselves on subjects* as the medium of their thoughts” (*my emphasis*, p. 105). O’Malley, Weir and Shearing (1997) also identify a distinction made by Foucault between “serious statements” that are repeated, transformed and give rise to new statements, and “everyday discourses” that are casual and transient; within governmentality studies, a restrictive focus on ‘serious statements’ in much governmentality literature, has limited an analysis of contestations between the two and has ignored Foucault’s own assertions that the boundary between the two was unclear to begin with. Smith (1999) escapes this conundrum by drawing on language theorists Bakhtin and Volosinov to emphasize the agency of people who use both language and our/their sensory perceptions to actively create knowledge and shared meanings with one another through the social process - creating a “world in common” (p. 127). Smith (1999) sees knowledge making and consciousness as a part of people’s actual activities, unlike some Foucauldian-informed scholarship that implies “a separation between consciousness and people’s actions” (p. 98).

Throughout this dissertation, I use the notion of consciousness as Smith (1987, 1993, 1999) employs the concept in her work. Influenced by phenomenology and ethnomethodology, Smith’s notion of consciousness represents one’s process of constituting the world through our experiences, including our bodily experience, our perception of objects, and our forms and modes of knowing. Smith’s (2005) theory of the social organization of knowledge has been particularly concerned with the ways in which people’s embodied, lived experiences have increasingly over the last 200 years been (re) organized by objectified forms of consciousness as developed through the

relations of ruling – distinctive trans-local forms of social organization and social relations mediated by texts of all kinds (print, film, television and so on) and constituted externally to particular people and places. By beginning first in people's embodied experiences in the everyday world, Smith's (1987, 1990, 1993, 2005) aim is to unpack these relations as they operate in people's lives to show exactly how they coordinate and shape people's lives, how governance is practically accomplished (or not), and by what means we can disrupt these hegemonic discursive and textual relations.

Increasingly by the end of his life, Foucault was also paying more attention to the question of the embodied subject through his examination of biopower. In *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, Foucault (1990) speaks to the ways in which the development of the modern state from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward, came to regulate and control life and manage populations “through an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of the era of biopower” (Foucault, 1990, p. 140). In a 1982 lecture, Foucault (cited in Rabinow & Rose, 1994) reflected upon the last 25 years of his career, noting that his objective had been to focus on the ways in which humans develop knowledge of ourselves historically through particular sciences or ‘truth games’ that operate as specific technologies through which we understand ourselves. He noted that the encounter between technologies of power and domination, and technologies of the self had preoccupied his thinking the most, leading to his conceptualization of ‘governmentality’ as a concept used to encapsulate the study of the encounter between the two (Foucault, cited in Rabinow & Rose, 1994). In this same lecture, he defines technologies of power and domination “as determining the conduct of individuals and submit[ing] them to... domination, an

objectivizing of the self”, while techniques of self were defined as “permit[ing] individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality (Foucault, cited in Rabinow & Rose, 1994, p. 146).

Governmentality scholars such as Rose (1990) have picked up where Foucault left off in his later scholarship in order to further consider and explore the manner through which relations of power act on the inner world of individuals. Thus, governmentality scholars and institutional ethnographers share an interest in exploring the mundane experiences of people, as their lives have been coordinated by and through the relations of ruling and the art of government, although they often do so using different methodologies.

Smith’s (1999, 2005) emphasis on the embodied subject and the material nature of discourse - as specific acts and practices of people - provides the basis for the ethnographic impetus in institutional ethnography. Governmentality scholars have generally been less inclined to build empirical analysis through lived experience or to attend to people’s active participation with official texts and discourses (Larner, 2001; McKee, 2009; O’Malley, Weir & Shearing, 1997; Teghtsoonian, 2016), although Teghtsoonian (2016) points out that there has been a recent shift in governmentality studies that draw on interviews and observations. Smith’s (1987, 2005) conceptualization of people as active, experiencing subjects who are expert practitioners of their own lives, is derived from the origins of institutional ethnography in the women’s movement. Originally, institutional ethnography was intended as a form of analysis for feminists and others “who want to understand the social matrices of their own experiences” and how

their/our everyday worlds are shaped and determined by relations and forces external to them/us (Smith, 1987, p. 110). Since the origins of Smith's work are located within feminist concerns, her work is largely intended to reveal how power operates in the lives of people who are most marginalized by these relations.

Given that my project is focused on investigating how an activist teacher's identification of gender and sexual inequities is made institutionally actionable in schools, Smith's (1987, 1993, 1999, 2005) many writings on social relations of power were of particular interest as I began my research project. In keeping with her materialist methods, Smith (1993) and others who developed Smith's ideas, warn us to be cautious of using concepts such as 'gender' or 'homophobia' ideologically in our work; that is, we should avoid further reifying such concepts or using these notions as a 'conceptual... gloss' or 'speculative account' (G. Smith, 1990, p. 634) of events that stand in for how a politico-administrative regime actually works in people's everyday lives and through everyday activities 'on the ground'. Smith (1990) draws upon and extends Marx's (1972) notion of ideology as methods of thinking about social relations and society, such that concepts (i.e. competition, bullying, gender, homophobia) operate to stand in for or conceal actual social relations organizing people's activities. In order to avoid asserting notions of 'gender' as an already pre-determined object or discursive category, Smith (1993) argues for the necessity in explicating social relations *that gender* by staying grounded in people's everyday activities. According to Smith (1993), social forms of consciousness (including gender and race) can be examined as "actual practices, actual activities, taking place in real time, in real places" among people "using definite material

means and under definite material conditions” (p. 163). Texts and discourses should not be isolated from the practices in which they are embedded and which they organize.

### **Anti-Racist and Critical Race Feminism**

Smith’s (1987, 2002, 2005) analysis as it has been applied to social relations of/that gender has been taken up and further developed by a number of antiracist feminist scholars whose work I have found significant in thinking through my project, particularly in considering the interlocking nature of gender and sexuality with other social relations of power. For example, Bannerji (1995) draws on Smith’s (1987) historical materialist development of experience such that it can be understood as a valid beginning point for “interpretative relation rather than a valorizing of any person’s or group’s experience” (p. 87). Thus, experiences of, for example, non-white women in their classrooms can become the grounds for exposing and making more visible the social relations and discursive practices of racial-gendered Othering and objectification inherent within Western nation-state origin mythologies (Bannerji, 1995; 2000). In *Thinking Through*, Bannerji’s (1995) complex analysis of the sexual harassment of a Black woman on the factory floor of an Ontario workplace illustrates how this woman’s experience unfolds within particular socio-historical processes and practices of the Canadian labour market, class and state formation within settler colonial Canada.

In her explication of teaching within the academy as an anti-racist feminist, Ng (1993) deconstructs her own experience with a student complaint to show how an administrative representative of the academy (and Ng’s superior) as well as her white male student both use discourses of objectivity and neutrality to challenge Ng’s feminist and anti-racist pedagogical approach in the classroom. As critical race feminists and

post-colonial scholars have shown, such discourses are embedded in Eurocentric masculinist tradition within the academy and within settler colonial contexts (Mohanty, 1990; Razack, 1998; Said, 1979; Smith, 1987; Spelman, 1988; Spivak, 1988). In my doctoral research, many of my activist teacher participants also engage with feminist, anti-racist, queer, and decolonizing discourses in thinking about their own subjectivities in schools and in their talk about how they orient to their managers (principals and vice principals), colleagues, students, and their classroom curriculum. The work of critical race scholars as well as anti-racist scholars who have drawn from Smith's (1987) method of inquiry, have operated as important touch stones for me as I reflect on my participants' experiences and my own commitments to an analysis that attempts to explicate the complex social relations, and "multiple and competing discursivities" inherent in everyday lives of people (Bannerji, 1995, p. 29) while trying to avoid the use of reifying concepts or theories as 'stand-ins' for participant experiences.

### **Critical Whiteness Scholarship**

As has been noted in educational literature on North American schools, the teaching profession in North America continues to be predominately white, with research in the United States demonstrating that about 88% of teachers are white (Applied Research Centre, cited in Ladson Billings, 2005) with similar over representations reported in Canada (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009; Turner, 2015). Analysis of teaching staff within the TDSB and the former Toronto Board of Education reveal that only about 19% of the Toronto teaching staff are non-white compared to 47% of the Toronto population who identify as non-white (James & Turner, 2017). This reality was

reflected in my participant pool, of which six out of 18 participants could be read as non-white.

Critical whiteness scholars and anti-racist feminists alike have demonstrated how whiteness can be understood as a particular and historical racial discourse in the West (Frankenberg, 1993; Gillborn, 2005; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995; Roman, 1993a). Whiteness discourse is characterized by a process of ‘naturalization’ such that white becomes the norm by which other races are defined (Dyer, 1997; Bannerji, 2000; Gillborn, 2005). In Canada, Thobani’s (2007) careful analysis of state governance demonstrates the ways in which state policies and popular practices have produced white/European subjects as ‘exalted’ while non-white Others have been historically marked for conditional inclusion, estrangement, utter marginalization, or physical and cultural extinction.

When white discourses arise in interactional moments in ‘real time’ among people of various social locations, a discursive analysis reveals the systemic and historical ‘taken for granted’ character and quality of such discourses that operate to reaffirm particular relations of power as they arise within organizational and institutional settings (Ng, 1993). Throughout the following chapters, I pay special attention to how my participants drew upon hegemonic white discourses as well as anti-racist and critical white discourses in considering their experience in making sexual and gender inequities institutionally actionable in mainstream schools. In this way, my analysis exposes how social relations of gender, sexuality and race (among other relations) are socially accomplished by people every day within the social organization of schooling.

Through my participants sharing their experiences with me, I expose the social relations of gender, race, sexuality, and class (among others) that are constituted within the everyday experiences of activist teachers in mainstream school contexts in Toronto and how these relations are discursively mediated by various equity and disciplinary policies in schools. As I show in the following chapters, my participants engage in varied “courses of action” and work processes to insert critical, counter-hegemonic and interlocking discourses of gender, sexuality and race into mainstream schools so as to challenge institutional relations which reaffirm individualizing, adult-child protectionist, and disciplinary school responses over education for critical consciousness and a centering of “the politics of collectivity” (Mohanty, 1990, p. 204). By attending to social relations of power in schools through the standpoint of activist teacher experiences, my intention was to engage participants who held more conceptually complex notions of ‘sexual and gender (in)equity’ in education rather than ideological constructs of sexual and gender (in)equity rooted in simplified (white feminist) abstractions.

### **Critical Policy Analysis in Education**

Studies in the area of critical policy analysis (CPA) share with institutional ethnographic scholarship an interest in the impact that policy discourses have on people’s work and experiences in institutions, how policies contribute to (in)equities, and the examination of policy as discourse “to determine whose interests they serve” (Gale, 1999, p. 393; see also Winton, 2019 for a discussion of shared interests between IE and CPA). Stephen Ball (1993) specifically views policy as “textual interventions into practice” (p. 12) and policy as discourse, operating as “regimes of truth through which people govern themselves and others” (p. 14). Throughout this dissertation, I have drawn on the work of

many critical policy analysts investigating educational equity policies and benefited from their contributions to careful discursive explication of official policy texts. For example, Rezai Rashti, Segeren and Martino (2017) examine Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009b) policy document to consider how notions of equity, inclusivity and diversity have been re-defined by neoliberal discursive and technical incursions in public education. Building on Wendy Brown's (2015) assessment of secondary and higher education as functioning to support human capital development rather than notions of democratic citizenship, Rezai Rashti, Segeren and Martino (2017) show how equity discourses in Ontario education policy texts serve to support narrow notions of 'measurable' student achievement indices. While earlier iterations of provincial educational equity strategies alluded to systemic and structural inequities foundational to education systems, new equity policies reaffirm liberal multicultural ideologies of 'diversity', an erasure of racialized students, and the invisibility of social class (Rezai Rashti, Segeren & Martino, 2017).

In line with institutional ethnographic approaches, I begin with activist teachers rather than official policy texts to consider the impact that policies have 'on the ground' in schools. However, as I show in the following chapters, activist teacher experiences are organized in particular ways by such texts, and various texts and discourses also offer activation points for activist teachers in their efforts to engage transformative and humanizing responses to sexual and gendered (in)equities in schools.

### **Organization of Chapters**

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 explores my research methods and my use of institutional ethnography to

explore my research questions. In Chapter 3, I describe the context of teacher work time during the school day, with a specific focus on how the working day in mainstream schools has been re-organized by particular ‘institutional specifications’ (Smith, 2007) of neoliberal discourses in Ontario including: economic efficiency of public education expenditures; measurement and accountability indices of student success and student achievement; and a “policy as numbers” paradigm applied to equity work in the TDSB. As described by my participants, such neoliberal initiatives have given particular shape to the discursive and institutional resources available to activist teacher participants, and how such resources become institutionally (in)actionable and (in)accessible for activist teachers to address gender and sexual inequities in schools.

In Chapter 4, I examine the equity work of one activist teacher, Justin, who attempted to enrich the mainstream curriculum with queer positive and critical race curricular content. Justin’s experience illustrates the effect of increased regulatory control over teachers, specifically in relation to the institutional risks that activist teachers pose for schools that increasingly compete for funding, as well as the disciplinary risks that activist teachers face in introducing equity curriculum into their classrooms. I also spend some time considering the discourses and institutional practices that Justin used to respond to homophobic reactions to his equity curriculum, with specific attention paid to the complex interactions of heterosexism, homophobia, racism, and mainstream (white) queer rights discourses in schools.

In Chapter 5, I focus on the equity work that two of my participants engaged in their attempts to support students who revealed that they had survived a sexual assault. I illustrate the effects of provincial and local educational policies and laws that mandate

teachers to report incidents of sexual assault to both police and parents. Activist teachers struggle with their ‘duty to report’ as required to mitigate institutional risk, and their feminist consciousness over the harms done to survivors of sexual assault when their autonomy is doubly stripped by both the person who assaulted them and by institutional risk management discourses.

In addition to examining activist teachers’ one-on-one advocacy and classroom equity work, Chapter 6 is an examination of Sara’s equity work to address gender and sexual (in)equity at the school level. Sara’s experience shows how existing equity policies and resources can provide important leverage points for activist teachers to accomplish particular sorts of equity work at their schools. In a context of a school staff who regularly drew on white racist discourses, Sara uses her knowledge of equity policy and other counter hegemonic discourses to create a space in the school for students and staff to confront and engage with more complicated understandings of social subjectivities (i.e. race, class, gender, sexuality and others) that “happen altogether and all at once” (Bannerji, 2005, p. 144). While Sara has some success with her school initiative, her experience also shows how current ‘shared leadership’ discourses and a ‘policy by numbers’ approach to equity can operate to marginalize classroom teachers’ participation in school-based equity initiatives.

In Chapter 7, I conclude by drawing together the implications of these various chapters and reflect on what my doctoral research might mean for our understanding of gender and sexual equity in schools and education more broadly.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

### Institutional Ethnography

I am using institutional ethnography as my conceptual framework in order to investigate the “empirical linkages among local settings of everyday life, organizations and trans-local processes of administration and governance” (Devault & McCoy, 2006, p. 15). When using an institutional ethnographic frame, inquiry is grounded in the everyday experiences of people. For my doctoral project, I began with activist teachers to investigate the work that they do in responding to students’ gender and sexual expressions. When an incident involving what is considered ‘inappropriate’ gendered or sexual expression among youth occurs in a school, activist teachers must navigate between the messy experiences of students and staff ‘on the ground’ and the various institutional processes and discourses that regulate whether and how such an incident becomes institutional visible or actionable. I placed a temporary microscope on this work that activist teachers do to respond to gender and sexual expression among youth in school. However, my aim was not to investigate particular activist teachers’ ‘attitudes’, ‘beliefs’ or ‘choices’ about incidents involving youth sexual or gendered expression; rather, activist teacher talk and actions provided the analytic focus to examine the various institutional and organizational discourses and social relations that organized and coordinated activist teachers’ (and youth’s) experiences in schools. Using Smith’s (1987) generous notion of ‘work’ as “what people do that requires some effort, that they mean to do, and that involves some acquired competence” (p. 165), my focus was on the actualities of activist teacher experiences and the complicated and complex issues that arise for their students, as well as the institutional and discursive relations organizing the classroom and the school as a particular work organization.

As accomplished practitioners of their everyday worlds, activist teachers are active in the complex social relations organizing their schools and classrooms, which are part of larger social and economic processes which extend beyond our everyday worlds and are not wholly discoverable within it (Smith, 1987). Institutional ethnography aims to trace the social relations that organize and connect our everyday experiences that unfold in particular localized time and spaces, to national and international social, economic and political processes. In contemporary society, our everyday lives are organized by extra-local social relations, which Smith describes as ‘relations of ruling’ (Smith, 1987,1995, 2005). Relations of ruling are conceptualized as “multiple activities of individuals, organizations, professional associations, agencies, and the discourses they produce and circulate” (Mykhalovskiy & McCoy, 2002, p.19) that are organized around a particular function (such as education) and which are predominately textually mediated, “connecting us across space and time and organiz[ing] our everyday lives” (Smith, 2005, p. 10). These texts, broadly defined as “words, images, or sounds that are set into material form” can be, through replicability, “seen, heard, watched...in particular local... sites while at the same time, hooking an individual’s consciousness into relations that are trans-local” (Smith, 2006, p. 66). Texts create objective and ideological forms of representation, which allow an entire organization or system, such as the “school system”, to transgress time and space and be reproduced more or less the same in different contexts and different times (Smith, 2001, p. 163). These relations of ruling and the social forms of consciousness that arise from these relations, rather than people and their ‘attitudes and beliefs’, are the focus of study in order to ‘open up possibilities for people’ who are subject to ruling to have more room to move and act’ (Campbell, cited in

Smith, 2006, p. 91). The aim of institutional ethnographic studies is to provide knowledge of how exactly our lives come to be shaped by forces that often feel abstracted from our own life experiences or that we often experience as beyond our control.

For example, in my study, an activist teacher's experience in a particular school with particular students is shaped by social relations that extend beyond the local context, often resulting in standardized educational responses to complex and nuanced student experiences of gender and sexual expression. The particularities are important to attend to in every instance given the dynamism and complexities at play within the social world. When a student's gender and/or sexual expression becomes visible within the school, various laws, policies and discourses can emerge to shape how activist teachers respond, although these are far from determinate of staff (or student) experience. By staying close to activist teachers' experiences, I began to track the complex, complicated reach of legal, economic, and professional and other discourses and processes that influenced my participants' everyday actions in a school as well as 'common sense'<sup>2</sup> discourses of race, gender, sexuality and other social relations of power that interlock with one another and inform our consciousness and understanding of our experiences in the world.

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<sup>2</sup> I am using the term 'common sense' from Gramsci's notion, which is described by Lawrence (cited in Bannerji, 1995) as an appeal to 'good sense', to "the distilled truths of centuries of practical experience... to appeal over... logic and argumentation... to what all reasonable people know in their 'heart of hearts' to be right and proper" (p. 44). Such appeals foreclose discussion about particular ideas and practices while simultaneously legitimating them all at the same time (Bannerji, 1995). These common sense discourses are derived from common socio economic and cultural practices, which common sense also helps to organize. As Bannerji (1995) notes, it is through these "diffused normalized set of assumptions, knowledges and so-called cultural practices" (p. 45) that racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of discriminatory practices and ideas emerge.

During my doctoral work, I was especially interested in those instances where my activist teacher participants determined what might be an (in)appropriate expression of gender or sexuality among youth. This determination may be influenced by a legislative professional mandate, perceived professional or legal responsibility, and/or other discursive relations. There are a number of legal and policy documents that require a staff member at a school to report to the principal when a possible incident of inappropriate sexual or gender expression has occurred by students. For example, Section 300.2 (1) of Ontario's *Education Act* states "an employee of a board who becomes aware that a pupil of the school of the Board may have engaged in an activity" leading to possible suspension or expulsion "shall report to the principal of the school about the matter" (R.S.O. 1990, Chapter E.2, s. 300.2). Activities leading to possible suspension and/or immediate suspension and expulsion include suspected instances of bullying, suspected instances of sexual assault, "any activity motivated by bias, prejudice or hate based on... sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression" among other human rights grounds (R.S.O. 1990, Chapter E.2, s. 300.2). The Toronto District School Board's (2010a) Operational Procedure PR608 entitled "Sexual Misconduct by Students" mandates that employees must inform the principal or designate immediately when any person (including a student) reports an instance of sexual assault or sexual abuse allegedly perpetrated by another student. If the alleged perpetrator is 12 years of age or over, the principal is legally obligated to report the incident to the police and to the Board's Chief of Social Work and Attendance (TDSB, 2010a). Thus, when a staff member is provided with information that suggests an alleged sexual assault or discriminatory act based on gender identity, gender expression or sexual identity, the staff

member is legally liable to report such instances to the principal. In turn, the principal is compelled by policy to inform both police and parents. This required institutional response has implications for staff and student in sharing their experiences of sexual assault, which I explore in this dissertation.

### **Notions of Standpoint in Institutional Ethnography**

Another significant element of institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry is the notion of standpoint. Smith's (1987) early work began by crafting a 'sociology for women' and others who have been historically situated on the margins of ruling relations – Indigenous people, non-White people, persons with disabilities, queer folk, and others - in North American society. Institutional ethnographers direct ourselves toward an embodied subject located in a particular time and place, who is understood to be engaged in "sensuous, practical human activity and practices" (Marx, cited in Tucker, 1972, p. 121). By beginning with people, institutional ethnographers attempt to capture – often through people's words, talk and action – a moment in time that we then communicate through the writing process, which inevitably "freeze[s] for inspection and analysis... the complexly coordinated and historically embedded doings of people" (Smith, 2006, p. 2) but through which we must avoid treating particular concepts (i.e. gender based violence, race) as objects that exist 'out there'. The project of institutional ethnography is intended to avoid beginning with theoretical concepts which provide a pre-determined "conceptual clamp" filtering the complexities and disorder of people's lives into pre-organized frameworks (Smith, 2005, p. 50). Instead Smith (2005) asks us, as much as possible, to "sustain an engagement" with these nuances and complexities of people's ongoing,

unfolding lives in both our fieldwork and through our writing, in an attempt to capture, however imperfectly, the dialogic nature of the social (p. 50; also see Smith, 1999).

Many institutional ethnographers begin with experiences of people who experience marginalization and exclusion, with the intention of exposing possibilities for activist interventions; for example, see G. Smith (1998) work with people living with HIV/AIDS, or Ellen Pence's (2001) work involving women experiencing domestic violence. Still other institutional ethnographers explore the work of frontline service workers whose job is to work with the messy actualities of say, students (Manicom, 1995), patients (Rankin & Campbell, 2006), and homeless youth (Nichols, 2014), translating the experiences of the people they work with, into the conceptual relevancies of the institution they work for. Other institutional ethnographies have been concerned with studying the organization and control of work of frontline workers (Campbell, 1992; Rankin & Campbell, 2006).

This study considers all three of the above elements from the standpoint of the activist teacher. Like many institutional ethnographies, the standpoint that I chose to begin with has its origins in my own experience. My doctoral research was inspired by my experiences as a secondary school teacher concerned with social justice and equity in schools. Prior to becoming a teacher, I was actively involved in labour union struggles, as well as feminist, anti-poverty, and migrant justice organizing in the city of Toronto. Like other institutional ethnographic accounts starting with the researcher's own experiences (e.g., Smith, 1987; Griffith & Smith, 2005; G. Smith, 1998), my activism in these realms came from my experience growing up in a working class family and as

woman who had experienced sexism and witnessed and experienced male violence throughout my life.

Once I became a teacher, I attempted to integrate my activist, social justice interests with my classroom work with youth. I volunteered as a staff-support person for student groups focused on addressing various gender and sexuality issues in schools. I also attempted to bring a social justice lens to the curriculum I taught. In various moments of my time in schools, I personally advocated for, and attempted to support my students who had experienced violence, including female students experiencing harassment or violence at the hands of men, and queer students experiencing homophobia in schools. In doing this work at school, I often became frustrated with institutional and discursive texts that we (my students and I) were subject to, that could not often stretch to accommodate for the diverse individual complexities and specificities arising among youth and their families in schools. As a frontline education worker in the classroom, I found myself in a position of attempting to navigate these various dominant institutional and textual relations in relation to my own curricular choices, my advocacy for students, my political orientations, and my support work with students engaged in social justice issues at school.

As an example, a number of years ago, one of my students revealed to me that she was experiencing sexual coercion from a male relative whom she lived with, and whom her family was dependent upon for housing and economic support. As soon as my student began to reveal parts of her story suggesting sexual coercion, I began to warn her of my professional obligations as a teacher (as per the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*) to report any instance of familial sexual abuse to the principal and/or school guidance

counselor, who then was obligated to contact Children's Aid. This *Act* (2017) and our obligations under it were always emphasized at the beginning of every school year during a staff meeting by the school principal, with a particular fixation on teachers' "duty to report" any suspected child abuse in the family. If we did not report, we could be subject to sanctions, including professional sanctions through the Ontario College of Teachers, legal sanctions (in the form of a fine), and perhaps most damaging, sanctions through the court of public opinion if the situation was to garner media attention.

I knew from my student beforehand that her family had already had Children's Aid interventions in the past, which were not positively experienced by the family. My student's mother had come close to losing custody of her children several years before when her husband had been discovered abusing the children. Since then, my student's mother had left her abusive partner despite her precarious immigration status and economic situation; she had found assistance with a male family member who was renting out an apartment in his house to my student and her family. This was the family member who was also sexually coercing my student.

My student proceeded to confide in me the details of her male relative's sexual coercive behavior. We had a long chat over lunch about the problems with her relative's behavior towards her. I left that conversation feeling anxious for my student and unclear about whether I was legally responsible for reporting any of this information to anyone. As a new teacher only two years into the profession, I decided to confer with several trusted colleagues about what to do. The advice I received was to speak to our school's guidance counselor for further counsel. The guidance counselor walked me through the process she felt we should be following given the situation, which included contacting

Children's Aid. The call to Children's Aid was most upsetting to me. My fear – and that of my student's – was that her family (including several younger siblings) could be subject to separation from their mother - a single parent, whose first language was not English, who was on social assistance and who had recently left an abusive husband. It was clear that my student loved her mother and did not want anything untoward or stressful to happen to her parent given all that the family had had to deal with. On the other hand, my 16-year-old student was expressing feelings of stress and discomfort over her experiences with her male relative's sexual advances who exerted a significant degree of power and influence over her, given that the family was somewhat beholden to him for affordable housing. The situation was unfair and unjust; however, the institutional mechanisms in place for my student (i.e. involvement of Children's Aid) brought with it, its own forms of state power and control over an immigrant, working class, and single parent family. For example, if the solution to the problem from Children's Aid was that the parent should find new housing to protect her children, how would my student's mother afford such an option given the number of children she had (three), the affordability of market (i.e., not social) housing in Toronto and her economic circumstances? Would she lose her children if she was not able to move from her current location?

My concerns for my student and her family combined with my own anxieties about our relationship as student and teacher and how this might be impacted by what I might need to report based on my professional and legal obligations, all weighed heavily on me. I was attempting to navigate the institutional relations governing 'risk' faced by my student at the same time that I was confronting the risks associated with my

professional obligations to report any suspected sexual misconduct among my students. In the end, a Children's Aid worker met with my student and her mother to ensure that there were sufficient measures in place for my student to feel safe in her own home. My student had already shared her experiences with her mother who had suggested several strategies to ensure that her daughter's contact with the male relative was minimized. The family was provided with housing information, names of therapeutic counseling resources, and the Children's Aid worker appeared satisfied that the family was handling the situation in the best manner possible. While I was deeply relieved that the Children's Aid interventions did not include separating the family, my student's proximity to her abuser and her family's economic vulnerability remained the same. My professional responsibilities of reporting had resulted in what appeared to be very little tangible institutional support for my student and her family while temporarily exacerbating their stress in having Children's Aid involved with the family once again. My report had also provided a pretext for the school guidance counselor and Children's Aid to (re)intervene in the lives of this family. While the outcome of these interventions appeared rather benign this time, my knowledge of the history of Children's Aid and its over-involvement in the lives of Indigenous families, families struggling with poverty, and racialized families (Drake, Lee & Jonson Reid, 2009; King, Fallon, Boyd, Black, Antwi Boasiako, & O'Conner, 2017; McKenzie, Varcoe, Brown & Day, 2016) contributed to my feelings of unease and discomfort about my role as a teacher and 'agent of the state' embedded in these relations of power.

During my time as a teacher in the public school system, I also experienced significant job precarity combined with what felt like an overwhelmingly number of

responsibilities during the school day. Both my precarious job security and the responsibilities I held during the day led me to work late into the evenings and on weekends to keep up with the demands of the job and satisfy my principal enough to hire me back or at least provide me with a good reference. These structural elements of my work life made me careful about how and when I would choose to ‘push’ or challenge school practices that appeared potentially inequitable or school discourses that reaffirmed individualistic approaches to systemic problems within the system. For example, while I noticed that many school administrators and teachers seemed comfortable and adept at discussing issues of ‘bullying’ among students in schools – a discursive frame used by the provincial government in the early and mid 2000’s to speak to school violence - many of the conversations I initiated about say, homophobic incidents between students as constituting what many of my colleagues referred to as ‘bullying’ behavior, seemed less comfortable topics for many colleagues. As a precarious new teacher in a school, I chose to wade into these conversations carefully or in a limited way in order to avoid ‘rocking the boat’ or demonstrating I was somehow a ‘difficult’, risky, or trouble making colleague or employee.

Given what I knew about certain policy texts that existed to support equity initiatives on gender and sexuality in schools within GTA school boards, as well as emerging provincial policy on issues of gender-based violence in schools while I was teaching, the disjuncture between certain educational equity policies and practice in schools became a site of curiosity for me. It is this disjuncture that I explore in this dissertation. By beginning from the standpoint of activist teachers, my own biographical experiences of marginalization and privilege and that of my participants operate as a site

of knowledge to inform this work. Secondly, by beginning with a frontline teacher, I begin with someone who is trained as a kind of ongoing translator of the local, embodied experiences and practices of students in my classroom, converting these young people's particular experiences – of their thinking, their talk, their bodies – into the various institutional relevancies required by the educational system (report cards, disciplinary reports to the office, mental health needs, etc.). However, not only do I draw on hegemonic institutional discourses of education, but also critical discourses of equity to understand my participants' experiences. Finally, by beginning with the experiences and insights of frontline teachers, the everyday work organization of the teacher becomes more visible. This is important given that this work organization and the control exerted by and exerted on the frontline teacher over her work processes can have a direct impact on when and how she activates particular institutional processes and discourses.

### **My Methods**

Institutional ethnographic research uses a variety of methods to explore the various social relations embedded within and influencing people's everyday experiences, including, most commonly, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and textual analysis (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Smith, 2006). My study uses primarily in-depth semi structured interviewing, with questions focused on the work that staff did to address the behavior of a student(s) who they considered to be behaving or acting 'inappropriately' in relation to their sexual expression or through certain forms of gendered behavior (see Appendix B for interview schedule). During my interviews, I was also attentive to the various discourses, texts, laws and policies that school staff relied upon in order to respond.

I also engaged in a significant degree of textual analysis on a variety of provincial and Greater Toronto Area board policies and program memorandum, which I detail below. Additionally, I engaged in participant observation of a school safety plan consultation that involved centrally assigned equity staff, school administrators, and a school social worker. The consultation was triggered by observations of the social worker of many instances of sexual harassment issues occurring among students in a Greater Toronto Area middle school.

### ***Interviews***

In gathering participants, I began with my own school contacts, which I developed as a Toronto District School Board (TDSB) teacher since 2009. Upon receiving Ethics approval from both York University and the TDSB to conduct interviews with school staff, I specifically sought out teachers in the school system who either identified as teacher activists and/or who were engaged critical equity issues in their schools and communities. I began by emailing prospective teachers to explain my project and ask if they might be willing to speak with me for 45 minutes to an hour. I offered to provide the open-ended questions in advance (see Appendix B for my list of questions). During our interviews, many of my participants would suggest the names of other teachers and school staff that they thought might prove insightful for my project. Through my own contacts and snowball sampling, I interviewed a total of 18<sup>3</sup> TDSB educational staff, with teachers constituting half of my participants – nine in total. While I began with activist classroom teachers, the interview data I was collecting led me to

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<sup>3</sup> While I interviewed a total of 19 people, one person who verbally agreed to be interviewed via telephone, afterwards declined to submit the consent form and so their interview was not used in this dissertation.

request interviews from other school staff in order to trace how the activist teachers' work and the work of other frontline educational workers (i.e. a Child and Youth worker), was coordinated with that of other Board employees. In addition to nine classroom teachers, I also interviewed one guidance counselor who also did some classroom teaching, as well as one Child and Youth worker. As well, I interviewed four school administrators, three centrally assigned school board staff members who had worked at the Gender Based Violence Prevention Office, and two other participants who had been previously employed as Equity Instructional Leaders for the board.

Most interviews occurred in schools, at lunch hour or the end of the day, with a few interviews occurring in the participant's home and in one case, a park. I digitally recorded all interviews, which were transcribed by a professional transcription service afterward. I used a qualitative data program called *HyperResearch* to index recurring key words and concepts emerging from my interviews, which might provide clues for the social organization of institutional discourses and knowledge related to gender and sexual expression in schools. I used Smith's generous notion of work to assist me in determining what to look for. Smith defines work as "what people do that requires some effort, that they mean to do, and that involves some acquired competence" (Smith, 1987, p. 165). In my case, as I reviewed the transcripts, I keep certain questions in mind, namely: what was the work involved of activist teachers in addressing students who had experienced 'gender based violence' in schools? What discourses and texts did activist teachers mention in speaking about the work that they did? What or who supported their work to address gender and sexual expression deemed 'inappropriate'? What or who challenged their work? What work processes and courses of action did activist teachers

take? How did the work of the activist teachers I interviewed connect to the work of others? This latter question led me to interview several school administrators and Board staff charged with addressing gender and sexual (in)equities in schools so that I might see how the work processes of staff in different positions within a school board connect and diverge. For example, when speaking to many of my informants about their experiences identifying and addressing ‘inappropriate’ gender and sexual expression, many spoke about their frustration with the inaction that resulted when reporting such incidents to school administrators. Some participants also spoke to how their outreach to Board staff tasked with equity work helped them accomplish certain equity work at their schools. These conversations led me to explore the work processes involved for administrators and Board equity staff so that I could better understand what is was about the institutional process involved in addressing ‘gender based violence’ in schools that caused problems for, and also helped, activist teachers in the classroom.

### ***Textual and Discursive Analysis of Educational Equity Policies***

Like many other institutional ethnographic projects, I also engaged in textual and discursive analysis of various policy and program memoranda and laws that serve to regulate the gender and sexuality of youth in schools (and the work of staff in attending to students). Texts are often a vital component of institutional ethnographic research since they operate to coordinate people’s diverse subjectivities and consciousness into trans-local relations of ruling (Smith, 2006, p. 65-66). It is these relations of ruling that institutional ethnographers wish to expose and make knowable in order to better understand how these relations have assumed power over us and how we might disrupt

the incoherencies and instabilities inherent within these relations for greater collective benefit.

Smith defines texts quite generously as “words, images or sounds which are set into material form where they can be read, seen, heard, watched and so on” (Smith, 2006, p. 66). The focus of my research is the social organization of relations coordinating the work of activist teachers who are tasked with regulating the gender and sexual expression of youth among their many other duties. The work of activist teachers who wish to address instances of gender-based violence and gender and sexual inequity in its various forms (i.e. sexual harassment, sexual assault, transphobic and homophobic incidents, etc.) is frequently mediated by a variety of educational discourses, laws, reports, and program and policy memorandum, which exist in an “intertextual hierarchy” (Smith, 2006, p. 66). While the Ontario *Education Act* operates as the policy text at the top of the hierarchy of education as governed by the province of Ontario, various global policies (i.e. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and discourses (humanist, psychological, economic, disciplinary and so on) also coordinate and shape provincial laws and policy texts, as well as the actions of Ontario teachers and staff.

From an institutional ethnographic perspective, texts are analysed in relation to how they enter into and coordinate sequences of action (Smith, 2001, 2006). Once “a text is read, watched or heard, it brings consciousness into an active relationship with intentions originating beyond the local” (Smith, 2001, p. 164). Large-scale institutions such as schools are organized and recognized similarly across space and time largely through textually mediated relations. For the purposes of my study, I was attentive to

how particular discourses and institutional texts organized the talk and actions of my participants. For example, when my participants talked about the impact of recent “student achievement” and “student success” measures in re-organizing their everyday work routines, my analytic focus turned to notions of student achievement and student success circulating in various policy and educational discourses. When students used the word ‘fag’ in one of my participants’ classrooms, his decision to report the incident to the office was rooted in “rules and regulations” he had been provided through a training with Board staff hired to address gender-based violence in schools. My work as an institutional ethnographer was to locate these “rules and regulations” to see how these reports formed an action on the part of my participant (report to the principal) and what discourses were embedded in such policies (i.e. disciplinary).

My project led me to a variety of provincial policy texts that coordinated particular staff actions in responding to various sexual and gendered expression of students in schools, and which I set about reading, including: *Bill 13 Accepting Schools Act* (2012), *Bill 157 entitled Keeping our Kids Safe at School* (2009), *Policy and Program Memorandum 119: Development and Implementation of School Board Policies on Anti-racism and Ethnocultural Equity* (1993), *The Fewer School Boards Act* (1997), the Education Improvement Commission series of reports from 1997 to 2000, various provincial “Safe School Action Team” reports beginning in 2005, *Bill 212 Progressive Discipline and School Safety* (2007), *Regulation 472 entitled Behaviour, Discipline and Safety of Pupils* (2018), *Policy and Program Memorandum 144 Bullying Prevention and Intervention* (2012), *Policy and Program Memorandum 145 Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour* (2012), *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*

*Guide* (2009b) and many more. My analysis of texts also included Toronto District School Board policies and operational procedures focusing on equity, gender and sexuality, as well as school accountability and school improvement texts.

### ***Participant Observation***

Finally, I also engaged in participant observation, attending a consultation between centrally assigned school board staff charged with school planning in relation to gender and sexuality issues and their meeting with a school leadership team consisting of two school administrators and one social worker. During this meeting, I took field notes with a particular focus on the policies, texts and discourses used by staff during the process of developing a school violence prevention plan to address gender based violence, as well as the institutional processes, services and supports identified during the meeting to support staff in schools.

### ***Other Research Project Data***

In addition to this data collected for this project, this dissertation also draws upon qualitative data collected as part of a 5-year SSHRC project (SSHRC 435-2013-1518) entitled “Schools, Safety and the Urban Neighbourhood”. This project was designed to explore institutional responses to ‘safety’ from the standpoint of young people who had often been defined as ‘unsafe’ or ‘at risk’ by schools and other institutions. In my capacity as research assistant, I wrote a significant number of detailed field notes from 2013 to 2016. During my time with this project, I sat in on classrooms at an alternative community school program for youth who had been deemed ‘unsafe’ or ‘at risk’ by their mainstream schools. Once a week for 2-3 months at a time over a two-year period, I provided tutoring support for students enrolled in the program and wrote field notes of

my observations in classrooms and at the school. For two summers, I assisted in the design of a summer youth research internship at this same alternative school, where I continued to take field notes about my experiences working with youth, teachers and other support staff at the school.

Beyond writing field notes, I also engaged in various other forms of qualitative data gathering such as in-depth semi-structured individual interviews as well as focus group interviews. The majority of youth we interviewed and worked with, resided in communities that were designated as “Neighbourhood Improvement Areas” (NIAs) in Toronto. From 2014 to 2015, we interviewed 63 youth. We defined youth as people between the ages of 15 and 29 years of age, a range that reflects recent socio-economic shifts in Canada (Gaetz 2014; Nichols, Anucha, Houwer & Wood, 2013). We also interviewed and/or engaged in focus groups with 48 professionals who worked with youth in Safe Schools, mainstream schools and youth detention centres throughout the Greater Toronto Area. In addition to interviews and focus group discussions, our findings were also derived from a variety of relevant textual data we collected in relation to our research, which included policy, legislative and institutional texts in the fields of education, housing, and policing. For almost three years, I collectively worked alongside the principal investigator Dr. Naomi Nichols, two other research assistants and a number of youth researchers employed for this project, to review our experiences, analyse our notes and interviews, co-write reports and articles, and share our work with each other.

In this dissertation, I draw upon some of this data in order to explore the varied institutional, organizational and social relations that organize and coordinate activist teacher experiences of gender-based violence in schools. Some of the conceptual work

for this project informed my own project on gendered violence in schools. For example, many of the concepts and categories we identified as useful ‘codes’ in our transcription analysis for the “Schools, Safety and the Urban Neighbourhood” project, could also be found in my own participants’ transcripts. My experience on this research project deepened my insight into the complex matrix of institutional relations at work in the lives of youth and staff in schools, and contributed to my own project, including my analysis of activist teachers’ work in schools.

### **Choosing Participants: A Note on the Political Consciousness of the Activist Teacher**

As I indicated above, I began by specifically seeking out teachers in the Greater Toronto Area school system, primarily the Toronto District School Board, who either identified as teacher activists and/or who were engaged in work on equity issues in their schools and communities. I started with teachers I knew from my own experience as a teacher in the Toronto District School Board or through my involvement in various social justice and union activities in the city. Many of the activist teachers I interviewed were involved in social justice work outside and inside the school, as members of local community organizations engaged in feminist, anti-racist, anti poverty, queer rights and other issues. Specifically, my activist teacher participants were often involved in the following activities in their schools: supporting student Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Queer Straight Alliances (QSAs); supporting young women's 'empowerment' groups or clubs; supporting young men's groups on topics related to masculinity, gender and violence; assisting with December 6th (Women’s Remembrance Day) assemblies or International Women’s Day (IWD) school events; supporting professional development with staff on issues related to queer and trans students, sexual harassment and assault,

sexism in schools and other related topics; supporting a student who has disclosed a sexual assault, sexual harassment or harassment based on gender identity; and teaching or writing equity related courses and materials as part of the school curriculum.

As frontline service workers in education, teachers and other school staff work directly with children, youth and their families, listening and talking with the students in their classrooms, and responding to their needs – emotional, physical, practical – that emerge through this talk, observation and listening. Often teachers’ responses must take the actualities of young people’s lives and translate these needs into a discursive realm that precipitates institutional action. For example, teachers must be attentive to the child who has regular bruises on his body and/or who appears disheveled or unkempt; the bodily appearance of a teacher’s pupil is subject to an institutional gaze informed by concerns over educational authorities protecting children from abuse at the hands of parents and guardians. On a daily basis, teachers work with provincial curriculum texts, as well as discourses of child development, teaching and learning, applying these knowledges and discourses to their classroom with the diverse group of young people who walks through their classroom door everyday. The teacher develops expertise in working with various “categories and protocols of [the] professional regime” (Devault & McCoy, 2006, p. 27) of education.

Activist teachers do this ‘translating work’ of ordinary experiences of young people into institutionally relevant concepts and categories but they are also attuned to the problems with the categories deemed ‘relevant’ and actionable within the institution of education. Many of the activist teachers I interviewed were highly critical of schools and schooling, questioning the degree to which schools (and their own role within a

school) contributed to class inequalities, reproduced racism and colonial relations, and reaffirmed heterosexual, gendered social relations, among other issues. For example, as I describe in more detail in Chapter 5, one of my participants – an activist teacher I refer to as Shannon – saw school authorities as responsible for supporting her student who had been sexually assaulted at school; at the same time, Shannon was openly critical of the actions of school administrators and police who were required by policy to investigate reports of sexual assault in a particular manner that left Shannon’s student feeling betrayed and humiliated. Shannon’s critique was informed by feminist and critical race discourses in reporting sexual assault, discourses that were not the starting points of police and school administrators. By capturing activist teacher responses to gendered and sexual violence, we see both the current institutional constraints operating in schools as well as sites for alternative critical responses to gendered and sexual violence in schools.

In this way, my activist teacher participants operate within relations of ruling and in opposition to elements of these relations as they engage in various critiques of the relations organizing educational institutions. For example, through their actions and talk, many of my participants drew on discourses of schooling that position education as a potential ‘equalizer’ of populations, with many viewing schools as having the potential to support those students from families and social groups who have been historically marginalized based on social differences. This democratic progressive educational discourse (Carlson, 2005; Comber & Nixon, 2009; Weis & Fine, 2001) operates alongside discourses of schools as sites of reproduction for social relations of difference and marginality (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Giroux, 1983; Khayatt, 1995; G. Smith, 1998; Willis, 1983) as well as disciplinary discourses of schooling (Foucault, 1995),

among others. Activist teachers often critically engage with these conflicting discourses, acting as both expert practitioners of objectified educational knowledges about schooling and students, while also situated within “an alternative starting point to the objectified subject of knowledge” (Smith, 2005, p. 228) as social justice activists who engage in political practices, political commitments and hold political positions that challenge mainstream political practices, commitments and positions. Similar to the ethnographic accounts of teachers by Weis and Fine (2001), the participants in my study have intentionally acted to create spaces in communities and schools for youth and staff to challenge ‘common sense’ notions of themselves and others, and engage in ‘re-educative’ projects that are counter-hegemonic (Weis & Fine, 2001, p. 498), thereby attempting to destabilize relations of schooling that reproduce inequities. Through words and actions, many of my participants are invested in the notion that schools have the potential to act as a temporary site of ‘equalization’ for students from historically marginalized backgrounds, offering possibilities for social and economic mobility.

### **Consciousness, Discourse and Institutional Action**

Since many of my activist teachers engage with counter hegemonic discourses informed by feminism, critical race and queer theories and others, their consciousness of gendered and sexual social relations operating in schools is informed by these discourses. My participants’ use of such discourses to understand their experiences and the experiences of their students was of particular interest to my research. My aim was to investigate the varied language and discourses used by my participants when they witnessed or identified an incident of gendered and/or sexual violence, and how these discourses triggered various institutional processes in order for school staff to take action.

As a result, I needed to speak to school staff who would be able to recognize student (and staff) actions or behaviours that might constitute ‘gender based violence’ as it is institutionally and discursively organized. As I discovered in my own experiences as a teacher, when a particular act among students occurs in a hallway or classroom or even outside of the school, certain school staff might not recognize this behavior as necessarily something that might require anything different from a standard disciplinary response. Many school staff are not well versed in discourses of feminism, queerness, anti-racism, critical disability and so on, and in some cases, school staff actively reject such discourses. Given that my research interest was in exploring the institutional processes involved in transforming an incident in the hallway into ‘gender based violence’ in schools, these processes needed to be activated in order for my interests to be explored. Therefore, I needed to speak to school staff who would be able to ‘see’ social relations of gender and sexuality (among others) in the activities and talk of their students who were changing in the locker room, or rough housing in the hallway, or revealing with a teacher during lunch hour about an uncomfortable experience they had during a date last weekend. Without choosing participants who were able to ‘see’ and intervene in moments of say, sexual, gendered, and/or homophobic harassment, the information I collected on the social organization of ‘gender based violence’ in schools would be defined by other discourses – disciplinary discourses of the ‘misbehaving’ or disrespectful student, psychological discourses of bullying, and so on. Another study might wish to explore the discourses used by those teachers who were not engaged in active exploration of gender and sexuality issues in school and how they managed incidents that arose in their practice. This is not the interest of my study.

To illustrate my concerns above through an example, several years ago I entered a shop class where students were studying car mechanics. I was covering the class for a colleague who was getting ready to attend a workshop outside of the school. The room was very large, organized similarly to a garage where you would take your car to get repaired. On the right hand side of the room were vehicles that were being worked on and various kinds of equipment for students to use. On the left hand side of the room there were two areas. In one of them, closest to the door, there was a small area of desks and a board, imitating the structure of a classroom. In the other area, farthest from the door and the traditional classroom set up, there was an area for students to clean themselves after working, including various sinks. As I was waiting for the teacher to provide me with instructions before he left for the day, I observed a group of students congregating in the 'clean up' area farthest away from the door. The group consisted of primarily young men and one girl. In one very quick instance, I noticed a boy's hand touch a girl's bottom and the girl backing away from the touch. Since there were so many male students in one area, it was difficult for me to identify exactly whose hand had touched the girl. Regardless, I understood this to be a moment where a young man had touched a young woman who did not appear to provide consent to being touched; I understood this to be an instance of possible sexual harassment and, potentially, a form of sexual assault. Immediately, I spoke to the teacher indicating that I had witnessed a boy touch a girl on her bottom and, by all appearances, without consent. The teacher responded with a version of 'boys will be boys' and before leaving, instructed the class to behave themselves. While my colleague's plea for students to 'behave' acknowledged that some norm might have been broken, he did not appear to identify the issue as

embedded in notions of sexual harassment or that the young man's unwanted touch was something to be specifically addressed as such. My concerns and those of my colleague appeared quite differently oriented, having consequences for how we would also intervene. While generalized notions of 'good behaviour' organized my colleague's interpretation of events, my own interpretation was much more specifically grounded in feminist understandings of gendered relations, including sexual harassment and sexual assault. Had this been an incident that had happened in my own classroom, my interventions might have drawn upon feminist curricular responses and existing equity policies on sexual harassment.

As noted by Smith (1999) in her analysis of language and consciousness, objects, ideas or acts come into presence for participants through social acts of talking, writing and reading. Through social interactions with one another, a participant may direct the other's gaze - and also their consciousness - to particular objects or acts in order to create shared understandings that are socially produced. In the simplest of terms, Smith (1999) provides the example of children who are learning language; both children and parents frequently point to objects and use words to describe and differentiate objects from one another to create a shared reality. In most instances, people draw on meaning that exists prior to the speaker or writer's intention in a particular moment of time. However, in certain instances, language and dialogue must be re-configured and re-made to adequately capture and illustrate particular experiences. For example, in the 1960's, women discovered that their experiences were often more difficult to name in the language and discourses that were available to them; the invention of feminist discourses in the 1960's and 1970's created moments where "dialogue tripped over into struggle"

and new words and a new language were created in order to “force the lexical givens of discourse, made in masculinity” (Smith, 2005, p. 127) – in addition to whiteness, heterosexism, ableism and so on. Smith (1999) draws on Bakhtin’s notion of discourse to think through language and experience whereby “each moment of discourse in action can be seen as both reproducing and remaking discourse”, moving away from Foucauldian notions of discourses that sometimes over-determine what can be written or said (p. 127). Similarly, for those of us involved in social justice struggles, the creation of discourses through issues centred on anti-racism, queer liberation, disability and class issues, among others, direct our gaze and our consciousness to create new understandings that we produce with one another<sup>4</sup>. Part of my interest for this project was in exploring the novel ways in which activist teachers with critical political and social consciousness drew upon counter hegemonic discourses informed by anti-racism, queer liberation, feminism, disability rights, and so on, to understand social relations of gender and sexuality as they intersect with other relations, unfolding among people in schools. By investigating the discourses and language of activist teachers, I explore and uncover new and novel understandings of schooling, equity, gender and sexuality, from the perspective of participants sitting at both the margins and the centre of the institutional matrix of schooling.

### **Social Location of the Activist Teacher**

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<sup>4</sup> For an example of this, see G. Smith’s (1998) essay “Ideology of Fag” where a participant describes drawing the symbol of the pink triangle over top of homophobic graffiti that has been written on his locker at school by a peer. As G. Smith notes (1998), the student was entering into the textually mediated relations of gay liberation discourses in this moment, drawing upon the symbols appropriated by the queer movement, to resist homophobic violence. Such a description by a participant in a research study would have been “inconceivable twenty-five years” earlier (G. Smith, 1998, p. 314).

In addition to their political consciousness and familiarity with various counter hegemonic discourses, many of my activist participants also occupied marginalized social locations based on relations of race, gender, sexuality, and ability (among others). Participants located in varied social locations experience their complex subjectivities of race, gender, class, sexuality and others as “all together and all at once” (Bannerji, 2005, p. 144) in their everyday lived experiences in the social world rather than aggregately or individually as sometimes implied through notions of intersectionality. People’s biographies and lived experiences of their social identities place them in different positions within the social, providing them with a particular standpoint through which knowledge is partial, situated and differentially distributed (Smith cited in Griffith, 1998, p. 369). Smith’s project is aimed not at investigating participant experiences and knowledge only but rather to begin with these experiences and knowledges as starting points. Our experiences and knowledges offer us a point of entry to elucidate the social organization of relations that shape our subjective experiences. Smith’s (1995) theory, informed by historical materialism, understands hegemonic, ideological knowledge production as rooted in and produced by particular human beings in their particular activities, located in particular spaces, and therefore, reflecting their interests. Knowledge production occurs within a social organization producing domination and oppression, unfolding within the social that can be defined as “finite and specific social and historical relations, organizations and institutions” that comprise complex socioeconomic and cultural formations (Bannerji, 2005, p. 146).

The significance of one’s social location and its contribution to situated knowledge production was demonstrated in an experience I had conducting interviews

with a small group of staff who ran an alternative school program in a ‘neighbourhood improvement area’ in Toronto where I was active as a researcher for the *Schools and Safety* project. This program served students who had been suspended, expelled or otherwise removed from their mainstream school. At the time, there were three teachers running a program for about 25 students. As I mentioned earlier, my interviews here were part of a larger project on safety in schools as experienced by youth who have been institutionally categorized as ‘at risk’ or ‘unsafe’. Thus, our interviews with school staff were directed by our analytic interest in the experiences of young people who had been institutionally excluded in schools. Young people (as opposed to staff) constituted the standpoint that directed the relevancies of our research. Our interviews with youth had demonstrated that we needed to speak to school staff to understand how young people had been institutionally determined as ‘unsafe’, a process that was, in fact, often initiated by and negotiated through, the actions of various school officials.

Consider the response of one of the teachers, Paul, when I asked whether any of his students had been placed in the program “for anything related to gender-based violence issues<sup>5</sup>”:

Paul: I don't think so. I think it's mostly, like, behaviour or, like, attendance, yeah.

Alison: Oh, attendance, yeah?

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<sup>5</sup> In retrospect, I realized that I was using institutional language within my question to identify a problem that may not have been primarily understood by participants in this way. For example, gender based violence may not have been a term that Paul might have used to describe students who for example, referred to each other as ‘fag’ or ‘slut’, although legally and institutionally the term does apply to such behaviours. Later, I made adjustments to the wording of questions I developed specifically for my research project to be more open ended and to avoid institutional language or ‘institutional capture’, a topic I explore later in this chapter (see questions in Appendix B).

Paul: But I know, like, just on the way to... like, especially the males, they talk about females. It obviously is very disrespectful in the way they address them and the way they talk about them. With that being said, I don't think the females do much to - just from what I hear and see, to... not saying it's right, but they almost like the attention that the guys give them... if they're, for example, wearing something scandalous, right? Yeah, but no real, like, violence or assault based on that. It's mostly they're just... general behaviour, disrespectful.

Paul identifies students having issues with 'behaviour' but no 'real violence or assault'.

While Paul recognizes that his male students' language has a gendered component – he identifies particular sorts of disrespect directed at young women by young men - he does not identify the content of the language other than associating the young men's comments with references to women's appearance and clothing choices. Paul's response is interesting when compared to that of his colleague, Lelah, in response to the same question:

Yeah. The male students, some of them, yeah for sure. We just had a student released from incarceration, the one that I said is on suspension here. He had been here before and he's continuing his suspension. His charge was assaulting his girlfriend. So he has like, I think, six charges pending. He's on bail right now, and that's something we suspected right away when he came here. Oh, I should say, that's when I said... this is actually another time where I didn't feel safe, where I said I would not be in a room with that student by myself ever, which you never should be anyway. But here it's different because there's people always around and stuff, and the doors are all open. But that student made me feel unsafe in terms of like- I just knew that the way he responds to women was very different than the way... he responds to men.... Me being younger, I think that a lot of the kids think that, oh, this is another young person that I can buddy up to...

Later Lelah described how her student would 'throw pens and pencils' at her to get her attention, instead of asking for help as he did with Paul and other male staff. The student also touched the clothes on her body and asked her and another female teacher if their male partners hit them (interview, 2014). Paul and Lelah both taught the same group of twenty-five students and their interviews were conducted within days of each other.

While Paul identifies having no students with a history of what might be institutionally

categorized as gender-based violence, Lelah immediately speaks about a student in the program who has been charged with assault of his girlfriend and whom she herself feels unsafe around. Her knowledge and experience with this student is strikingly different from that of her colleague as is her orientation to the notion of ‘gender based violence’; while she feels unsafe and understands her student’s behavior to be understood as ‘gender based violence’, her colleague experiences his students as ‘disrespectful’. Here Lelah’s standpoint in relation to this student is differently located compared to her male colleague. Lelah’s experience as an embodied being, in a body that is gendered as feminine, and younger<sup>6</sup>, in her mind provoked a set of behaviours from a male student (throwing objects, touching) and associated projected emotions (contempt, sexualization, over-familiarity) that Lelah associates with potential threat and/or danger. For institutional ethnographic analysis, the issue here is not whether her experience of her student is ‘true’ or whether Paul’s experience of this same student is somehow ‘untrue’ or ‘less true’ but rather to understand and explore both Lelah and Paul’s experience as organized by social relations of, for example, gender and age (among other relations) that Lelah, her colleagues and her students all actively participate in and that coordinate their different experiences.

For the purposes of my current study, my participants’ lived experiences of their social identities and the situated knowledge that arises from these experiences, offer important insights in understanding extended social relations of which each of our

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<sup>6</sup> Paul was about the same age as Lelah. However, through the interview, Lelah connects her student’s “buddying up” behavior towards her as having a sexualized connotation owing to both her age *and* gender. Lelah described similar experiences of sexualized talk directed at her by other male students in the program; however, she described feeling much less threatened by other male students, compared to this particular student whose behavior had resulted in his partner charging him with assault.

experiences constitute a part. Our experiences arise in an “ongoing organization of practices that continually and routinely affirm a world in common” within our concrete daily realities (Smith, 1987, p. 125). In the example above, Lelah’s experiences as a young female teacher allow us to explore the ways in which social relations of gender and age can unfold in schools among staff and students. Her experience disrupts the dominant notion that youth are *always* in positions of powerlessness relative to school staff<sup>7</sup>. Her consciousness as a young woman provides her with particular ways of seeing and understanding her experiences that differ from Paul and are worthy of analysis for what they make visible about how we can understand power as it operates in schools.

### **Situated Knowledge, Reflexivity and Institutional Capture**

Just as my participants’ knowledge is situated, so is mine as a researcher. In contrast to traditional sociological approaches which assume an ‘objective’ position or in the words of Smith (1987), an “Archimedean point” external to any particular position in society (p. 71), institutional ethnography assumes that the researcher is always located in a particular material setting and is an active participant in the social world of which she is also investigating. As I have just described, I am a research ‘insider’ in relation to the topic I study and the participants I contacted; that is, I have a lived familiarity with the group being researched since I, too, am an teacher, and I identify as an activist in my community and through my work as an teacher. In terms of my biography, I have

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<sup>7</sup> I do not want to overemphasize this point. By and large, staff in schools are institutionally positioned to exercise considerably more institutional power and control over youth. Nevertheless, power relations do unfold in complicated ways ‘on the ground’ in schools as evident in Lelah’s story. My description of Justin’s teaching experience in Chapter 4 also shows these complications. Epstein and Johnson (1998) offer additional ethnographic examples of youth who mobilize discourses of sex, sexuality and gender in schools to challenge the traditional direction of disciplinary power and disrupt social relations of control in particular moments.

experienced various forms of oppression related to my gender, my class background, just as I have also experienced various privileges through my whiteness, primarily heterosexual identifications, and my current middle class positioning as an employed teacher. Through my experiences of oppression, my social justice work, and my sociological training, I was drawn to, and I draw upon, related counter hegemonic discourses (discourses informed by feminism, Marxism, queerness, anti-racism, and so on) that are textually mediated. Such discourses organize my consciousness and are “brought into play in particular local settings of reading or writing or speaking” (G. Smith, 1998, p. 314) – in this case, through my interview talk with participants and in my analysis. Thus, my participants and I sometimes shared this consciousness and discourse through our talk.

In my researcher capacity I share some elements of ‘insider’ status with my participants through various social, political and professional identities (gender, class origins, political consciousness, being an teacher), which at times, provided me with a more informed entry point as a researcher compared to an ‘outsider’ researcher. As a teacher, I also had some understanding of the work involved for teachers who wished to address gender and sexuality issues in schools and how their work was institutionally organized. However, this ‘insider’ status was contingent on how my participants perceived me to be an ‘insider’ (Griffith, 1998). For example, my ‘insider status’ did not hold in relation to participants who experienced forms of racialization and racism that I did not, owing to my social positionality as white.

For me, as an ‘insider’ to the education profession, I had to be vigilant against “institutional capture” (Smith, 2005; McCoy, 2006) in conducting my research since both

I and my informants were adept in the use of various educational and activist discourses. I was constantly working to ensure that my analysis included explanation of ‘what actually happens’ and was descriptive of the work my informants engaged in, as opposed to an analysis that used conceptual glosses – that is, drawing on ‘edu-speak’ terms, discourses prevalent within educational circles - operating to cover over the actual work processes, activities and feelings of my participants as they consider the actions and behaviors of their students who may be the subject of, or instigator to, some form of harassment, assault, or harm based on gender and/or sexuality.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the focus of my doctoral research is on the work processes of school staff in determining the (in)appropriateness of sexual and/or gender expression among students in schools. My doctoral research is not about attitudes or beliefs of people but rather, how particular work processes are shaped by a variety of regulations, laws, policies and program memorandum and various professional and social discourses related to youth sexuality, sexual expression and gender. Through a combination of reflexive observations and interview analysis as well as textual analysis of myriad laws, policies and discourses contributing to the regulation of gender and sexual expression of students in schools, my research highlights some of the complexities, strengths and difficulties encountered by activist teachers in schools when they are placed in a position of regulating student conduct and behavior. Reciprically - and in a complementary fashion - interviews with activist teachers and other school staff illustrate how actual work processes in educational settings interact with these policies, laws and procedures to produce particular staff and student experiences of sexual and gender regulation in

schools. Interviews focused on the work that activist teachers do in navigating and coordinating various institutional relations that govern educational responses to youth expressions of sexuality and gender. By connecting the textual with the institutional processes of actual people in educational settings, my doctoral research situates particular activist teacher experiences of sexuality, sexual expression and gender, within broader social institutional relations and discourses. Concretely, this research contributes to identifying strengths and areas for improvement in how schools and school boards approach youth expressions of sex, sexuality and gender. This research will generate findings that (I hope) school board officials, researchers, practitioners, institutional leaders and policy decision makers will find useful in considering how to improve institutional and educational support for students in the areas of youth sexual and gendered expressions. It is my further hope that this research will also be particularly useful to activist teachers concerned with supporting students who are subject to harassment or violence based on gender and/or sexual expression.

### **Chapter 3: Neoliberal Re-organization of TDSB Teacher Time, Work and Equity Resources**

#### **Introduction**

In her institutional ethnographic study of elementary teachers, Manicom (1995) commented on the elasticity of teachers' workday set out against the finite resource of time that teachers have with students. Teachers' work is often without clear definition or boundaries and involves many unanticipated events requiring responses. While there are certain prescribed expectations of Ontario teachers in relation to curriculum delivery, assessment and evaluation, reporting and other administrative tasks as set out in collective agreements, policy documents and the *Education Act*, teachers' tasks also expand to include other demands such as health work (Manicom, 1995) and caring and emotion work (Hebson, Earnshaw & Marchington, 2007). Many of my participants were also driven by a profound investment in teaching from a critical equity framework. They were interested in developing curriculum and supporting activities in schools that embedded principles of decolonization, critical race theory, critical feminism, and other anti-oppression principles among other theoretical frameworks. However, this equity work must take place within the finite resource of time provided for teachers.

This chapter uncovers the social (dis)organization of equity activist teachers' work time in Toronto schools associated with the educational restructuring efforts in Ontario that have been informed by particular "institutional specification" of neoliberal discourses known as "the new public management" characterized by an emphasis on performance and accountability (Smith, 2007, p. 17). As I demonstrate through careful ethnographic analysis in the following pages, these neoliberal initiatives have re-organized teachers' work days such that even less time and resources are available for

activist teachers to draw upon in order to do the equity work that is most important to them. This chapter highlights the constraints on teachers' time and lays out the context in which the gender and sexual equity work of activist teachers in Toronto unfolds - the subject of the following three chapters. In this chapter, I highlight the impacts on teachers' time and resources that have directly evolved from three neoliberal 'moves' to restructure Ontario education: the first is changes to the education funding formula introduced in 1997 to reduce education spending in the service of 'efficiency'. The second includes provincial investment in narrow definitions of 'student success' and 'student achievement' associated with neoliberal concerns over performance, accountability, measurement and standards in schools (Carpenter, Weber & Schugurensky, 2012; Codd, 2005; Thrupp, 1997). The third involves the evolving contestation over equity discourses in Toronto schools, with resources once geared towards supporting critical pedagogical interventions of equity in increasing competition with a "policy as numbers" paradigm of equity (Rezai Rashti, Segeren & Martino, 2017, p. 161). Such shifts in equity discourses have had profound implications for the work that activist teachers do to engage critical equity approaches in their classrooms and schools. While this chapter demonstrates the formidable constraints placed upon teachers as a result of these neoliberal initiatives, the following chapters intend to show activist teachers' creativity and strategic mobilization of particular equity discourses, policies, and institutional resources to support critical equity work in schools and counteract such constraints.

### **Teacher “Survival” in an Era of Declining Enrolment and Funding for ‘Efficiency’**

At the time of our interview, Justin was a secondary teacher of English with 20 years experience teaching in a small inner city school in the city of Toronto. Throughout his career, Justin had been involved in supporting a number of student-focused equity initiatives over the years. For example, he helped initiate and facilitate the Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) at his school, and he was also a staff advisor to a social justice student group for many years. Justin was also active in his union and in grassroots community organizing on various issues impacting education. For many years, he worked alongside other teachers and community activists on initiatives to challenge military involvement in schools, to address racism and xenophobia, to improve the provincial minimum wage, and many other social justice issues. When I spoke to Justin about his experience doing equity work in schools, he highlighted the difficulties teachers often experience in attempting to successfully integrate equity issues into their classroom curriculum given the constraints on teachers’ time due to the impacts of declining enrolment in Toronto schools. According to Justin, teachers are operating from “survival mode” as schools struggle to maintain enrolment numbers. Justin explains the impact this has had on teachers’ workday:

Justin: Well for one thing, I mean increasingly with declining enrolment, it's wreaking havoc on people's timetables. Sometimes you don't even know where you're going to be teaching until like Labour Day or sometimes after. And because of low enrolment, classes are cancelled, they're combined. You're given one timetable in June, you show up in September with another timetable, and next week you get something else. You are frequently being asked to teach things that you haven't taught before, sometimes that you're not even comfortable teaching, or a subject you haven't taught in 20 years. And you just need to, like, "Just give me something." You turn to your colleagues, "What's been done? What did you do last year? Can you just give me something? I just need something for now." ...

Alison: And every day, how many classes do you teach? You're in a non-semestered school, right?

Justin: Yeah I... teach three, three [classes] a day, yeah, and with a two-day schedule so it's three [classes one day] and three [classes the next day]. So yeah very often, that's the mode you're in. You're in survival mode. You know, like, "Fuck, I don't know what to do with this class; I've never taught this before. What'd you do?" Like you can't reinvent the wheel every single day for every class, and so you just turn to what is there, what's ready to go, what somebody has given you, and it meets the curriculum standards so at least you're doing your job.

For school staff in particular school boards, declining enrolment has re-organized their work such that fewer teachers being hired has meant that the existing pool of teachers often have to teach a much broader array of classes to address the needs of shrinking secondary school populations. In Justin's case, his timetable was increasingly populated with classes that he had not taught in years, requiring more time spent preparing course materials. His non-semestered school means that he teaches six classes over a two-day cycle with one preparatory period a day. While many teachers take for granted the number of courses they teach a day and the preparation time they are provided, these requirements have been delineated over time through the collective bargaining process between teachers' unions and the school boards in conjunction with the province. For example, in Justin's school board, the collective agreement of secondary teachers outlines the schedule of the teacher's working day such that teachers "will be assigned core responsibility for six teaching periods... out of eight" with teachers in non-semestered or "full year schools... shall not be assigned... more than 3.0 teaching periods per day" (Collective Agreement between The Toronto District School Board and Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation for the 2014-2019 school years, 2017, p. Part B-25). This same collective agreement stipulates that all full time teachers will be assigned preparation time "which over the school year is equal to the time equivalent of one credit

course... in that school year” (Collective Agreement between The Toronto District School Board and Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation for the 2014-2019 school years, 2017, p. Part B-25).

Teacher workload has been subject to change especially in the context of reduced expenditures on public education in Ontario, with the most dramatic spending reduction following the election of the Conservative government in Ontario in 1995. The Conservative government ran on an election platform of reducing government spending, cutting taxes, eliminating the deficit with at least a \$400 million reduction in annual spending for education (Anderson & Ben Jafeer, 2003). In an effort to meet these goals, in the year 2000, the majority Conservative government of the time amended the *Education Act* through Bill 74 to increase the number of classes taught by teachers per day by one class (7 out of 8 classes in a year compared to 6 out of 8) in efforts to save money, and attempted to mandate teachers’ participation in voluntary extra-curricular activities, allowing school boards to change collective agreement provisions accordingly (Ontario Federation of Labour Education is a Right Task Force Report, 2001). Teachers’ unions challenged these provisions with some degree of success (Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2003).

While declining enrolment in schools has been salient in different historical periods in Ontario (Robertson, 2014), the current phenomena of a declining school enrolment since 2002 in many areas of Ontario has played a more defining role in teachers’ working experience since 1997, when changes were made to the educational funding formula tying funding more closely to student enrolment through the Conservative government’s *Fewer School Boards Act* (1997). Previously, local school

boards had control over setting the tax rate for education in their municipality and collected funds directly from municipalities to distribute to schools as they saw fit (Gidney, 1999). Despite the Ontario Conservative Party's rhetoric of 'less government', the *Fewer School Boards Act* (1997) centralized educational funding control in the hands of the government (Morgan, 2006). This new funding formula tied to enrolment meant that the province collected the percentage of property tax earmarked for education as part of the provincial general revenue stream and then doled it back to school boards based on per student grants, narrowly prescribed to address primarily in-class student needs (Gidney, 1999; MacLellan, 2007). While the new funding formula was intended to benefit northern and rural school boards, the benefits were diminished by the significant declines in enrolment in northern Ontario that began to take hold in 2002 combined with the Conservative government's narrow definitions of 'classroom-based budgeting' (MacLellan, 2007). The fixed costs of running a school – maintenance services, school buildings, computing and telecommunications, school management – could not easily be adjusted based on student enrolment (MacLellan, 2007; Morgan 2006).

From 2002 to 2009, particular schools were feeling the effects of this new funding formula since the number of school-aged children in Ontario had declined by 3.4%, with particular parts of the province experiencing greater reductions than others (Declining Enrolment Working Group, 2009, p. v). For example, the Toronto District School Board experienced a decline of 9% in this time period with northern Ontario schools hardest hit with a 12% reduction in enrolment (Declining Enrolment Working Group, 2009). This decline was attributed to a decline in fertility rates since the early 1990's combined with stabilized immigration rates (Robertson, 2014; Declining

Enrolment Working Group, 2009). The impact on educational staff was substantial. The Ministry of Education established the Declining Enrolment Working Group in 2009 to “provide advice and recommendations... to help school boards better respond to declining enrolment” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a, n.p.). The Declining Enrolment Working Group’s (2009) report noted that the impacts included staff reductions in the areas of literacy and numeracy, reductions in guidance and library staff, increases in the number of multi- grade and multi-level classes, and the number and variety of course offerings. The report also noted that many boards were forced to consider school closures in order to address the financial costs of declining enrolment (Declining Enrolment Working Group, 2009). While the Liberal government did introduce a Declining Enrolment Adjustment fund in 2002-2003 to help schools adjust, critics argue that the funds available continue to be based on unrealistic assumptions about fixed and variable costs of schools (MacKenzie, 2009).

In 2015, the TDSB advertised 60 schools that were being considered for closure or reorganization (Shum, 2015). At the time of our interview, Justin’s school was one such school earmarked for closure. As a result, a smaller group of more senior teachers like Justin found themselves in situations similar to many new teachers - having to teach courses they had not taught ever before or had not taught in years and with combined grade levels in one class. Such situations require more time to prepare materials and modify materials to meet expectations for different grade levels in the same classroom.

When one’s teaching schedule is provided with little advanced warning and suddenly includes unfamiliar courses, as Justin noted, many teachers rely on their colleagues’ curricular resources - “turning to what is there, what’s ready to go... [to]

meet curriculum standards”. However, not all colleagues choose material for their classes that have an explicit equity focus nor does the Ontario curriculum mandate such a focus as eluded to by Justin:

I don't have the time or the energy to start *going outside of the curriculum* and enriching it and bringing in all of this other stuff, which is what you have to do if you're going to be an equity teacher (*my emphasis*).

In the Ontario English curriculum – one of Justin’s teaching subjects - skills such as reading, writing, oral communication and media studies are emphasized over particular content (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b). Anti-discrimination education is listed as a “consideration for program planning” in the English Ontario Curriculum guide (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 33). Teachers are informed that choosing learning resources that “reflect the broad range of students’ interest, backgrounds, cultures and experiences are an important aspect of an inclusive English program” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 33). Inclusive English programs also include the “historical, cultural and political contexts for traditional and non-traditional gender and social roles” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 33). However, few suggested texts and accompanying resources are provided in these curricular documents to assist teachers in creating these resources and programs with an equity focus<sup>8</sup>. Local school staff collaborates with centrally assigned Board staff to choose new texts and resources. These choices are themselves constrained by local departmental budgets and the quality and quantity of existing resources. Local staff must justify whether current curricular resources require replacement. With declining enrolment in Toronto schools, creating

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<sup>8</sup> Two exceptions include resources to address boys’ literacy and another focused on supporting English Language Learners (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 27).

curricular resources and buying new materials with an equity focus becomes more challenging with the limited time and resources provided to teachers.

An overall reduction in public expenditures to education through the new funding model introduced in Ontario in 1997 combined with declining enrolment in schools corresponded with neoliberal notions of minimal state intervention (Larner, 2000) in areas formerly considered part of the public or collective good, such as education. In Ontario, recent Ministerial obsessions with ‘student achievement’ and ‘student success’ have been connected to various mechanisms of accountability and performance within the school system. My interviews with participants illustrate some of the ways these focuses have added to teachers’ workload and further reduced the time available for activist teachers to develop critical equity curriculum and resources – a topic I explore in the next section.

### **Teacher Accountability for Student Achievement and Student Success**

In addition to curriculum development, another significant element of teachers’ everyday work is their responsibility for the assessment, evaluation and reporting of student engagement with the curriculum. In this area, too, several studies have noted teachers identifying increased workload resulting from an emphasis on learning outcomes and standardized reporting mechanisms (Carlson, 2005; Carpenter, Weber & Schugurensky, 2012; Comber & Nixon, 2009). The increased focus on outcomes and reporting mechanisms in the Ontario education sector over the last thirty years is part of a broader restructuring and reorganization of public institutions through a particular “institutional specification” of neoliberalism (Smith, 2007, p. 17) known as ‘new public management’ which emphasizes, among other principles, an emphasis on public sector

performance and responsiveness to citizens (Aucoin, 1995). Increasingly, teachers are being asked to be more accountable and responsible for their students' credit accrual and academic performance. These accountability mechanisms require more time and energy on the part of activist teachers, which has an impact on the remaining time and energy they have left to support equity-rich extra-curricular student activities and clubs, to develop equity-based curriculum, and to do the 'emotion' and caring work with their students who may be seeking support from an adult over an experience of racial, homophobic, gendered and/or sexual harassment or assault.

***“Ongoing” and “Continuous” Teacher Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting***

Teachers' production of grade reports has increasingly become tied to textual constructions of transparency and accountability facilitated by managerial technologies of auditing, monitoring and reporting. When teachers report or anticipate reporting a student's failing grade, some of my participants identified increased workload attached to such reporting. Failing grades have been institutionally transformed by the Ontario Ministry of Education into data “indicators” of ‘risk’ (Zegarac & Franz, 2007, p. 8), requiring greater accountability on the part of teachers and school administrators. The shifts in teachers' everyday work experiences were made clear to me by one of my participants, Stacy, who had been teaching in the TDSB since 1998. Stacy taught both English and Canadian World Studies courses at the secondary level at a school she characterized as one with “a large working class population, large population of ESL students, racialized students, etc.” (interview transcript, 2017). When I spoke to Stacy she noted that in her current semester she was teaching a total of 75 students (“I have about 25 students in each [class] so I'm pretty lucky”). Despite having what she felt was a

manageable number of students, Stacy identifies experiencing a more intensified set of expectations and accountability requirements since she began her teaching career 20 years. Stacy describes having to do more work to address student attendance and missing or late assignments so as to avoid having students fail her Grade 12 course:

Stacy: Teaching has become so... I am working harder now than I ever have.

Alison: Wow. Why is that?

Stacy: Because of downloading, the intense amount of downloading around paper work, around phoning home, around- so let's say a student is missing from class. So the school will call home (Alison: Yup). Then you're supposed to call home and you're *supposed to call home in an ongoing way* (my emphasis). And if that student's failing because they aren't in class, not only do you send out an early warning letter [to parents] around that, you have to call home. And so – it and that's just with one little snapshot. ... So just the expectations around our workload have really increased...

Alison: So attendance sounds intense. Failure-

Stacy: Achievement, umm needing to massage the marks up always. Needing to ensure that there aren't any zeros. And so I was in a situation last week where our marks were due this past Monday and so I have two 12Us [Grade 12 University preparatory classes]. I had an essay due for instance in the one 12U class on March 27<sup>th</sup>. Last week I was chasing a group of ten students, begging them, begging them to send in the essay. And actually calling home "Can you please hand in that essay?" And I've never done that before. And that's because without that essay, their 12U mark would be 40-50%.

Alison: And you didn't do that ten years ago?

Stacy: No.

Alison: Interesting. Because of the pressure from admin?

Stacy: Because of the pressure from admin, the pressure from the students now. "So why is my mark?" "Well you didn't hand in the essay. "Well why would that one essay drop my mark that much? I need to get into university." Parents will call and say "Well now can you- he's just working on that essay now. Can he hand that in?" So it's just easier to go after it even before. And those are- that would not be my first

conversation with the kid. Like calling home and asking for [the essay]. It would have been many before that, so it's all very exhausting. And that's with 12U.

In Ontario, student achievement has increasingly become tied to measuring and comparing students' credit accumulation and graduation rates, most notably through the introduction of Ontario's *Student Success/Learning to 18* (Office of the Premier, 2004) initiatives. Part of the impetus for the Liberal government's focus on graduation rates and credit accrual came from concerns raised in earlier education reports commissioned by the province on the need to support the economic progress of the population by establishing programs supporting secondary school graduates to transfer successfully to the workforce (Begin & Caplan, 1994; see also Office of the Premier, 2005a).

Additionally, the province's student success initiative was informed by economic concerns, noting increased private income rates, higher monetary rates of return for high school graduates and a reduction in the possibility of individual and societal economic losses as a result of work restricting disabilities (Zegarac & Franz, 2007). As of 2007, the government had reportedly committed \$1.3 billion to various student initiatives with the aim of achieving an 85% graduation rate by 2010-2011, an increase of 17% from the 68% graduation rate of 2003-2004 (Ungerleider, 2007, p. 5) - a goal that was reported as "surpassed for the first time" in 2015 (Office of the Premier, 2016). In order for the government to achieve these graduation rates, they needed schools to attend to credit accrual among young people – what was impeding their ability to get credits and how could teachers and school administrators work to engage 'at risk' students and families? How could teachers improve teaching practice and evaluation in order to have students succeed in school?

Stacy's school has routinely had literacy test results about 10% lower than the school board average, and these scores are advertised on the school board's website. These test scores along with students' credit accrual and graduation rates are typically a part of a school's School Improvement Plan (SIP), which is structured by the Board's Improvement Plan (BIP) that is sent on to the Ministry. Board and School Improvement Plans were introduced in 2000 as part of a comprehensive accountability framework "for the public to hold schools accountable" and "to improve student achievement" (Education Improvement Commission, 2000a, p. 6). Board and school plans are structured such that both must have specific SMART goals - outcomes that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound. Such 'goals' come directly from corporate management models, including performance evaluation measurements (Drucker, 1954; Doran 1981). The SMART goals for most boards and schools are generally organized around four 'pillars' of student success as defined by the Liberal government's *Student Success/Learning to 18* strategy of 2003: literacy; mathematics and numeracy; pathways; and community, culture and caring (Zegarac & Franz, 2007, p. 17-18; Toronto District School Board, 2015). Board and School Improvement Plans impact the Ministry's own targets for graduation rates, reducing student achievement gaps, and increasing credit accrual among students. The reporting and collection of data is an integral component of 'measuring' whether these Student Success initiatives are working; Ministry officials noted that "a demand for evidence... supports a sense of responsibility for student success... a means was needed to ensure that leaders in the system would come to 'own' the problem (Zegarac & Franz, 2007, p. 8). In the very act of asking Board officials and school leaders for data on credit accrual and EQAO results and the

subsequent publishing of this data, this intentionally created “a heightening school board sense of accountability” to students, parents and the community” (Zegarac & Franz, 2007, p. 10).

Guided by concerns over economic prosperity and reducing the risk of future economic loss societally and individually, the Ministry of Education set out to ensure Board and school staff applied various assessment, evaluation and measuring techniques (through school plans) and use ‘measurable’ evidence, thereby placing greater responsibility for the ‘problems’ of student achievement onto staff (as well as parents and students). Stacy’s relation with parents, students and her principal has clearly shifted with the application of particular neoliberal technologies of audits, accountancy, standards and benchmarks (Larner, 2001; Rose, O’Malley & Valverde, 2006) as they have been applied in schools. Stacy and her school administration must “reduce the risk of their professional conduct” and “take responsibility for the calculations that they make, the advice they give and the success of their strategies... to monitor and manage that risk” (Rose, 1996, p. 349). Stacy speaks to ‘new’ expectations that she must contact parents in an “ongoing” way, language that matches recent provincial policy on assessment, evaluation and reporting as defined in *Growing Success: Assessment, evaluation and reporting in Ontario’s schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). With regard to late or missed assignments, the *Growing Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) document states that teachers may use particular strategies to help prevent and/or address late or missed assignments, including “maintaining *ongoing communication* with students and/or parents about due dates and late assignments, and scheduling conferences with parents if the problem persists” (p.43, *my emphasis*). In addition, “communication with

parents and students about student achievement *should be continuous* throughout the course by means such as parent-student-teacher conferences... interviews, phone calls, checklists and informal reports (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 54; *my emphasis*). While the policy suggests that “students must understand that there are consequences for not completing assignments for evaluation” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 43) and that it is up to the teacher’s professional judgment to use strategies to prevent or address missed or late assignments with students, the mechanisms of accountability and responsibility required of teachers and school administrators to report and publicize students’ credit accrual and graduation rates increasingly make these strategies a requirement for accountability rather than a choice. In this same document, principals are expected to “ensur[e] a consistent and continuous school wide focus on student learning... by using classroom, school and system data to monitor progress” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 36). Here we see superseding of the discretionary judgment of teacher professionals over evaluation in the service of managerial technologies of accountability such as target-setting plans (school and board improvement plans) (Smith, 2007).

School administrators have adopted different sorts of reporting mechanisms for teachers to account for the steps they took for any student who is failing or at risk of failing. For example, Sample 1 (next page) was a form provided to teachers in one particular Toronto school to complete for any student that was failing the course in the middle of the term. This form was submitted to school administrators along with a printout of all the assignments and grades for that student. The form has a section on “teacher actions” and interventions that have been attempted for the time prior to the first

report card (the first 2 ½ months of school) along with details of parent/guardian contact with requests for dates of when parents/guardians were contacted and how (via phone or email). This is the kind “intense amount of downloading around paper work, around phoning home” that Stacy was speaking about earlier. The Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation and its various districts have developed condensed FAQs and resource documents to help teachers wade through the 160 page *Growing Success* (2010) assessment policy, offering guidance to teachers on the requirements and responsibilities that the policy sets out for teachers as well as the setting of limits of the policy as determined by the union. For example, an OSSTF-produced leaflet outlining FAQs of

**SAMPLE 1:**

<p><b>School Name</b></p> <p><b>Report Card Feedback Form</b></p>
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Teacher Instructions:

- Complete this form for **each student who is earning below 50%**. Please attach a MarkBook Student Report (or its equivalent) for each student for whom you are making a report.
- Submit your form/s to the main office **by 3:00 pm, Monday November X, 20XX**.

STUDENT: \_\_\_\_\_ SEMESTER 1 MIDTERM REPORT  
(Last Name, First Name)

TEACHER: \_\_\_\_\_  
COURSE & SECTION: \_\_\_\_\_

**Factors contributing to the lack of success for this student (select all that apply)**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Poor attendance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Often late for class</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Struggles with the following :             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> organization skills</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> oral communication skills</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> written communication skills</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> numeracy skills</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Socio-emotional concerns</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other : _____</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Behaviour in class not conducive to learning</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Frequently unprepared for class</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assignments not submitted</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Did not complete:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Final exam</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Culminating Activities</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
|--|---|

**Teacher Actions: (please indicate all interventions attempted during the semester)**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student Conferences<br><input type="checkbox"/> Extra Help<br><input type="checkbox"/> Parent Contacted<br><input type="checkbox"/> Caring Adult<br><input type="checkbox"/> Credit Rescue/Recovery<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Student was referred to:<br><input type="checkbox"/> Special Education<br><input type="checkbox"/> ESL teacher<br><input type="checkbox"/> Guidance<br><input type="checkbox"/> Student Success<br><input type="checkbox"/> Vice Principal |
|---|--|

**DETAILS OF PARENT / GUARDIAN CONTACT**

- 
- spoke to parent on \_\_\_\_\_
- 
- 
- voice mail left on \_\_\_\_\_
- 
- 
- emailed parent on \_\_\_\_\_
- 
- 
- advised parent that student should see guidance counselor
- 
- 
- unable to contact student / parent

**NOTES:**

teachers indicates that members should contact the union if principals attempt to “compel” a teacher to change a final grade or post marks on a website (OSSTF, n.d.; OSSTF Growing Success Policy Workgroup Report, 2010). The union’s attempt to mitigate the responsibility and accountability placed on teachers for student failure demonstrates the extent to which the Ministerial emphasis on goals, measurements and targets has turned on professionals themselves (Rose, 1996). Stacy speaks to her experience of an increased workload in order to reduce her own experience of pressure from various sources (i.e. students, parents) or risk of discipline (principals) while simultaneously helping students manage their possible failure. By beginning with what Stacy knows, we can see exactly how her everyday work processes have been impacted by her engagement with textually mediated trans-local policies such as *Growing Success*

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), the *Student Success/Learning to 18* initiative (Office of the Premier, 2004; Office of the Premier, 2005b; “Ontario youth will stay in school”, 2004), Education Improvement Commission reports (2000a; 2000b) and corresponding Board policies upholding these provincial texts.

Given the formidable time and workload constraints experienced by teachers due to the impacts of declining enrolment, as well as the accountability frameworks associated with provincial ‘student achievement’ and ‘student success’ initiatives, the resources and support offered by trained equity personnel *within* school boards can operate as invaluable support for many activist school staff. Centrally assigned school Board personnel with an equity focus can provide specialized knowledge and are given time to develop resources for equity-minded teachers, by offering materials that have been evaluated with an equity lens for specific use within local school contexts and that support the specific needs of school staff within a particular school community. With Board equity personnel in place to support activist teachers, and with adequate time, activist teachers should not need to go outside of their own workplace to search for classroom materials and resources for schools, nor should they need to spend time adapting particular equity materials from other contexts (e.g., equity guides from the non-profit sector, curricular resources developed for American school contexts) to make it relevant to Ontario curriculum and Ontario educational policy contexts. However, for reasons I explain below and in the following chapters, the resources provided by school board staff with an equity mandate are often difficult to access for activist teachers and other school staff. In the following section, I turn to an analysis of the particular equity discourses and staff resources available to Toronto teachers through the former Toronto

Board of Education and how these resources shifted and changed within the ‘new’ Toronto District School Board established through amalgamation in 1997. As I show below, the transformations in equity discourses have made it increasingly difficult for activist teachers to access resources most meaningful to them.

### **Shrinking Equity Resources for Activist Teachers in the ‘new’ TDSB**

The participants I interviewed for my doctoral research project were all employed in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), a board that had emerged in 1997 through the Conservative government’s passing of the *Fewer School Boards Act* (1997). This *Act* had reduced the number of provincial schools boards from 129 to 72 (Sattler, 2012) in order to engage in “more cost-efficient methods of operation” and help “save Ontario Taxpayers at least \$400 million (Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, 1995, p. 11). The Toronto Board of Education (TBE) was amalgamated with five other school boards in the Greater Toronto area including East York, Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough, and York school boards to create the Toronto District School Board (MacLellan, 2009). Out of the six boards, the former TBE serving metro Toronto had the most long-standing and robust equity guidelines (McCaskell, 2005; Russell, 2006) and more centrally assigned Board support staff with an equity mandate, compared to the other boards it was merging with. The TBE employed six staff in the Equity Studies Centre and two advisors in the Equal Opportunity Office (McCaskell, 2005, p. 229) in a Board consisting of about 169 schools, 4,800 teaching staff and with a student enrolment of approximately 78,000 full time students (Toronto Board of Education, 1996). The work of the former Equity Studies Centre in the TBE included a focus on developing equity curriculum initiatives for teachers as well as support for student equity concerns in schools (McCaskell, 2005).

The discourses of equity drawn on by the TBE's Equity Studies Centre were largely informed by principles of anti-racist education drawn from Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States (McCaskell, 2005; Russell, 2006; Thomas, 1984)<sup>9</sup>.

With the amalgamation of six boards into one, an equity subcommittee was set up to oversee the 'harmonizing' of the six different board equity policies where, as McCaskell (2005) documents in his book *Race to Equity*, "tremendous struggle occurred over the meaning of equity", with some participants only interested in addressing an anti-racist equity statement to align with the provincial policy introduced by the NDP government in 1993 entitled *Anti-Racism and Ethnocultural Equity* and other participants pushing for a more broadly-based board equity policy that would also include commitments on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, class and ability (p. 256). Finally in 1999, due to pressure from various community and labour organizations, members of the former TBE Equity Studies Centre, parents and activist teachers from other boards, the Board approved a comprehensive equity policy that became known as the TDSB's (2005c) *Equity Foundation Statement* with corresponding documents on racial equity, gender equity, sexual orientation and equity, socio-economic equity and

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<sup>9</sup> These principles included: assumptions that racism and other inequities were deeply rooted in our culture but could be changed since these ideas are "socially constructed" responses to 'differences'; that the force for change lies in marginalized communities; that equity education requires changes across the curriculum and in all subject areas; that an equity approach requires a pedagogy that encourages students and staff to understand power relations and to challenge unjust systems, beginning with people's lived experience; that anti-racist and other equity education must be system wide; and finally, that anti-racist education must engage in understanding other power relations (i.e. homophobia, classism, etc.) to improve our understandings of oppression (McCaskell & Russell, 2000).

equity for persons with disabilities (McCaskell, 2005; Toronto District School Board, 2005c).

The ‘new’ TDSB’s (2005c) *Equity Foundation Statement* began by recognizing the need for “equity of opportunity and equity of access to programs, services and resources” to ensure “the achievement of successful outcomes” for students and staff (p. 4). The statement further asserts that inequities based on social differences can lead to “educational, social and career outcomes that do not accurately reflect the abilities, experiences and contributions of our students, our employees and our parent and community partners” (TDSB, 2005c, p. 4). The statement acknowledged, “individual and systemic biases... exist in our school system” (p.4). One section of the new policy was dedicated entirely to ensuring an equity focus in the curriculum (TDSB, 2005c). For example, educational staff were encouraged to ensure classroom materials and learning spaces were free from bias and stereotyping, and to encourage diverse representations and contributions from equity seeking groups in their classroom materials, while school administrators and school staff were encouraged to provide programs to address and support the needs of students from equity seeking groups (TDSB, 2005c). The foundation statement also committed to providing “financial and human resources to support the work of staff, students, parents and community groups and for staff development, to promoting equity and inclusion in the school system” (TDSB, 2005c, p. 5).

In the 2001-2002 school year, TDSB Equity personnel were charged with engaging a system-wide effort to introduce the policy and its implementation (McCaskell, 2005, p. 277). Shortly after Stacy began her teaching career in the TDSB in 1998, she vividly remembered the trainings she had received from Equity personnel:

They [Equity resource personnel] used to- when I started teaching they had all kinds of training for teachers that you would go to .... [Equity staff personnel] would do small group activities. They would do kind of really diverse scenario training. “How would you handle this once you were aware of the policy?” It was much more teacher-centred versus having someone just stand up and deliver content to us. Clearly, it had a lot more thought and time around it and a mandate, I think – there was a mandate around providing this training perhaps.... Because the equity policy was getting rolled out in schools. “We want to make sure teachers are aware of this and kind of can practice some of this” and they had a mandate to deliver it.

In addition to trainings on the new equity policy, the centrally assigned Equity personnel also produced a number of curricular documents from 1999 to 2005 to support the ‘new’ TDSB (2005c) *Equity Foundation Statement*. Throughout my interviews, a number of my participants mentioned the importance of these curricular resource texts to their work in schools and their continued reliance on these documents for their current classroom teaching practice. Some of the documents mentioned by my participants included the TDSB’s (2003a) document *A teaching resource for dealing with controversial and sensitive issues in the classroom, Challenging Class Bias* (Toronto District School Board, 2005a), *Days of Significance: A Curriculum Resource* (Toronto District School Board, 2005b) as well as *Teaching about Human Rights: 9/11 and Beyond Grades 7–12* (Toronto District School Board, 2003b). In these documents, various sample lessons plans are included on a wide range of topics with an equity focus in areas such as gender, sexuality, class, ability and racial justice. The curricular documents included suggested resources (i.e. texts, short stories, poems, news articles), lesson plans, and accompanying provincial curricular expectations from various grades and subject areas that the lesson plans address. Given the time constraints that activist teachers experience during their day, these resources are invaluable for helping activist teachers infuse their curriculum

with an equity focus without having to do as much work to find and adapt materials suitable for particular grade levels and geographic areas.

However, by the mid-2000's, Stacy noticed a change in focus in the professional development being delivered by centrally assigned Board Equity personnel:

[training for teachers] really disappeared... I think it happened when they were integrated into Safe Schools. Umm and I think they lost a mandate to do training of staff members and what a tragic loss of- really you can see it in schools.... Later on [trainings] seemed to be request based.

Stacy's identification of particular shifts in equity approaches within the TDSB were also echoed by several other activist teachers in the TDSB, including Annie who had been a teaching in Toronto for about 17 years at the time of our interview. Her career as a teacher also began shortly after the TDSB had emerged from amalgamation. In our conversation together, Annie identified the TDSB's (2005c) *Equity Foundation Statement* as a something that she relied on regularly to accomplish equity work in schools, in addition to calling upon Board Equity staff when she needed support. She identified these equity policies and Board Equity personnel as allowing her to challenge fellow colleagues and school administrators at her school with confidence, knowing that "the equity policy has my back" (interview transcript, 2016). However, Annie used hand gestures to indicate 'scare quotes' when referring to the TDSB's "Equity department", explaining with laughter: "I'm using... scare quotes because it's kind of scary what's happened to it [*the Equity department*]" (interview transcript, 2016).

While TDSB Equity personnel had been mandated to provide training for schools on the new *Equity Foundation Statement*, they were challenged by the expanse of the new Board and the economic and human resource constraints placed on them. The TDSB was five times larger than the old TBE, with the same number of Equity staff (six)

expected to provide service to approximately 600 schools versus 129 in the former TBE (McCaskell, 2005), four times more staff (21,000 full time staff as compared to 4,800), and almost four times more students (300,000 compared to 78,000) (MacLellan, 2009)<sup>10</sup>. Of the six staff, four were Equity Instructional Leaders charged with curriculum and professional development, and two were Student Program Workers (SPW) charged with supporting youth equity initiatives and needs in schools. In addition, the TDSB continued to suffer severe funding losses post amalgamation due to both declining enrolment in the Board as outlined earlier, and the Conservative government's imposition of balanced budget requirements in the year 2000 (Lindgren, 2000). When TDSB Trustees refused to implement a balanced budget citing its negative impact on school resources (Carroll, 2003), a provincially appointed supervisor proceeded to cut the TDSB budget by a further \$90 million dollars (Carroll, 2003; MacLellan, 2007; Sokoloff, 2003).

### **“Safe Schools” and Equity: Competing Discourses in the TDSB**

Earlier Stacy spoke to her perception of equity training for teachers disappearing when Equity personnel were “integrated into Safe Schools”. While four Equity Instructional Leaders remained independent of the TDSB’s Safe Schools’ department, in 2002, the two Student Program Workers (SPW) within the Equity department were moved out and placed within the Safe Schools Department (interview transcript, 2016;

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<sup>10</sup> For a very brief period in the newly amalgamated TDSB, the number of centrally assigned Board staff allocated to do equity work was actually quite large. One equity personnel participant recalled that from 1999 to 2000 “there were 13 of us. And we had a \$1 million budget” (interview transcript, 2017). For 1-2 years immediately after amalgamation, staff with an equity mandate in the various pre-amalgamation boards were still working in their various equity capacities. However, as the amalgamation dust settled and financial restraints began to grow, the number of personnel centrally assigned to address equity issues with frontline school staff and students in schools settled on approximately six staff until about 2010.

School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008, p. 541). According to one of my participants who worked in the Equity department at that time, for the SPWs, the experience felt like “a constructive dismissal approach” to push SPWs out of their jobs, since the SPWs “spent more time on the other side of the table advocating for the students who were being expelled under Harris Zero-Tolerance Policy than... on the Safe School side of the table” (interview transcript, 2016).

In the year 2000, the provincial Conservative government’s Ministry of Education passed the *Safe Schools Act* (2000) who argued that such an *Act* was needed in order to get tough on youth ‘violent’ crime (Harris, 2000). Notions of “safe schools” and “bullying” had become more common in North American policy and media stories on education following the 1999 school shootings in Columbine, Ohio and Taber, Alberta (Sacco, Silbaugh, Corredor, Casey, & Doherty, 2012; Walton, 2004). The discourse of “safe schools” would continue to propagate with the newly elected Liberal government in 2003. In 2004, the Liberal government reacted to media attention resulting from a number of teen deaths in Toronto including stabbings and other forms of violence (Moore, 2004; Harvey, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008), by commissioning a Safe Schools Action Team to develop a “comprehensive province wide approach to bullying prevention in Ontario schools” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) and to combat “bullying and aggression in Ontario’s schools” (Moore, 2004). Sexual harassment, homophobic and racist remarks were characterized as illustrations or “components of bullying” (Ontario Safe School Action Team, 2005, p. 17).

Critical discourses of equity found in the NDP’s provincial policy *PPM 119 Anti-racism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy* (Ontario Ministry of Education & Training,

1994) had increasingly become drowned out and subsumed by “safe school” and bullying discourses, as evident in numerous educational policy texts beginning with the Conservative Party’s provincial election in 1995 and continuing with the Liberal government elected in 2004. As other critical policy scholars (Walton, 2005; Meyer, 2007; Renold & Ringrose, 2010) have noted, “safe schools” and zero tolerance discourses correspond with neoliberal and neoconservative discourses in that they emphasize the problem of the individual (over systemic issues) in relation to school violence; such discourses are often punitive in focus and lack a complex analysis of power relations and social difference that organize relations in our schools and communities as well as informing our consciousness. Certainly in the TDSB, the punitive and discriminatory nature of the *Safe Schools Act* was not going unnoticed or unchallenged. Early on, parents, community activists, and Student Program Workers of the former Equity department were highlighting the discriminatory elements of “safe schools” interventions and reinserting critical equity discourses of systemic discrimination into “safe schools” debates. In direct response to community concerns in 2003, TDSB Trustees struck a Safe and Compassionate Schools Task Force in order to determine whether “race, gender, sexual orientation, mother tongue of students, disability, socio-economic status, or other dimensions of diversity as listed in the Board’s *Equity Statement*” were impacting the application of the Safe Schools Policy (Toronto District School Board, 2003c, p. 190).

The report released several months later in May of 2004 concluded that the implementation of the Safe Schools policies was unfairly targeting racialized children and youth as well as students with disabilities based on the evidence they had collected from students, teachers and school staff who had participated in the Task Force

community forums, and based on some statistical data provided by the TDSB Safe Schools Department on suspensions and expulsions (Toronto District School Board, 2004b). An Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) submission to the Safe and Compassionate Schools Task Force advised that the TDSB collect and analyze data on expelled and suspended students based on race and disability in order to “prevent discriminatory effects” and the Task Force agreed, recommending further that such results become part of the “school improvement process” (Toronto District School Board, 2004b, p. 386). Further, it was recommended that the TDSB work with research institutes like the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and York University to study the impact of safe school policies on marginalized youth (TDSB, 2004b).

These recommendations would partially shape the direction of the work of Equity Department Instructional leaders and confirm what my participants felt as a turn away from Equity department development of curriculum resources and less professional development training for teachers. Jess began working as an Equity Instructional Leader (IL) in the Toronto District School Board in 2005. When I asked Jess about the decrease in the development of equity curriculum documents after 2005, he had this to say:

I think the work began moving into... school data because at that time you had more data, you had more of a link between social identity and academic success or acumen or whatever and so the work was beginning to move towards that as opposed to an Asian Heritage month curriculum guide. Because those documents were already produced. They- and sorry they were available at the [Board professional support library], right?

Jess went on to describe the data that was becoming more available to him as Equity IL:

... so you had the parent census, you had the students census that was new... and you had the demographic data. The demographic data was always available... but again that data was now beginning to be - at that early stage - triangulated right? Because the early stages of the research department was not just spewing

out the data, it was now making triangulation points as to- of students' racial background and academic outcomes right?

The TDSB's first student and parent census surveys were released in 2006 and 2008 respectively, based on a Board motion in 2004 to "develop research proposals that identify the factors within the school system which may inhibit student achievement... [to] include... gender, race, ethnicity, mother tongue, income and place of residence" (TDSB, 2004c, p. 795). In a context of school effectiveness and school improvement models introduced by the province in early 2000's, combined with the OHRC (2005) complaint of discriminatory application of the *Safe Schools Act* (2000) against the TDSB and the Ontario Ministry of Education, data on human rights and equity issues within schools was now being refined and quantified and added to school improvement plans. The TDSB's own analysis of the 2006 student census revealed that self-identified Black students had the lowest pass rates in provincial literacy tests (Brown & Sinay, 2008) and higher drop out rates compared to other racialized groups (TDSB Research and Information Services, 2011). Jess noted that Equity department personnel were sharing this data with schools and teachers so as to help staff "understand the make up" of their school and to show "which students were being under served and which students were struggling... you were able to make some correlations between school culture, school climate and academic success" (interview transcript, 2018).

While the curriculum documents were particularly useful for activist teachers who already recognized inequities within the school system, the Equity department's move towards providing all school staff with additional 'triangulated' school data from various sources (i.e. comparing OSSLT scores with socio-economic and racial demographics of students) provided opportunities to empirically demonstrate to mainstream (as opposed to

activist) teachers that inequities did indeed exist and required a response. Data provided the Equity personnel with greater legitimacy for their work and a rationale for less equity-minded school staff to engage with their message; however, for activist teachers who were already working within their classrooms and their schools to engage equity issues, the Equity department's move away from providing equity curriculum and professional development for activist teachers and towards 'whole school' data did not offer many new opportunities to critically advance their own knowledge or skills. Activist teachers were aware of inequities and were ready to think about how to integrate equity into their curriculum and pedagogy. A focus on data was geared more towards school staff who did not immediately see their work as having much to do with equity.

### **The Emergence of Gender Based Violence Policies in the TDSB and 'Whole School' Approaches to Equity**

Throughout the 2007 and 2008 school years, there was a sudden and renewed interest in equity issues when media attention turned towards the tragic shooting of 15-year-old Jordan Manners inside a Toronto school and the discovery of a sexual assault at the same school earlier in the year perpetrated against a 14-year-old Muslim female student that had gone unreported (Small, 2007). Race and religion became salient in the circumstances of this particular sexual assault when it was reported that Muslim girls at the school appeared to be targeted for sexual assault and harassment due to student assumptions that "(Muslims) are less likely to report it, because of their strict parents" and "cultural taboos" (Marlow & Rushowy, 2007; see also Doolittle & Rushowy, 2008). An independent investigative panel, hired by the TDSB following the shooting and led by human rights lawyer Julian Falconer, was expected to include an assessment of "the particular risks to the safety of female visible minority students that may exist in our

schools” (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008, Appendix B). Following media reports of the School Community Safety Advisory panel’s final report, the TDSB (2010b) created a specific “Gender Based Violence Policy” as well as a Gender Based Violence Prevention Office to help implement the new policy. The new policy expanded the notion of gender-based violence as it had appeared in the TDSB’s (2005c) *Equity Foundation Statement* to include violence based on gender identity, gender expression, as well as linking gender-based violence with sexual identity and sexual behavior<sup>11</sup>; however, despite the School Community Safety Advisory Panel’s (2008) emphasis on understanding gender-based violence in relation to race and other intersecting social identities, an intersectional approach to gender based violence was not elaborated in the policy document<sup>12</sup>.

Within the new Gender Based Violence Prevention Office (GBVPO), the staff who initially populated the office was mostly members of the Professional Support Services Personnel (PSSP) bargaining unit as opposed to the Ontario Secondary School Teachers and Elementary Teachers’ Federations bargaining units. The PSSP bargaining unit represents educational workers coming from primarily mental health, social work

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<sup>11</sup> The TDSB’s (2005c) *Equity Foundation Statement* defined gender equity as focused primarily on issues facing “diverse groups of girls and women in our communities” (p.15) with a separate section on anti-homophobia, sexual orientation and equity policy commitments. References to gender identity were included in the section of the document addressing anti-homophobia, thus erroneously associating trans experience to issues of sexual orientation rather than gender.

<sup>12</sup> One exception is a reference to the practice of female genital mutilation, commonly associated with populations from Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia. While issues of forced marriage and female genital mutilation do impact small populations of young women in Toronto, the inclusion of this issue without reference to more everyday, common forms of racism does not challenge cultural stereotypes of inferiorization associated with communities of colour, including the idea that Black and Muslim families are inherently more patriarchal and violent. For extended analysis of these stereotypes of inferiorization, see Flynn & Crawford, 1998, Razack, 1998 and Thobani, 2007.

and psychological fields (i.e. child and youth counselors, social workers, psychologists, behavioural analysts) who provide “assessment, intervention and referral” to students to address “the full spectrum of social, emotional, intellectual and physical barriers to success” (Professional Student Services Personnel, n.d.). The impetus for PSSP staff to populate the GBVPO rather than members of EFTO and OSSTF was due in part to available government funding at the time; a portion of funds had recently been secured through the PSSP provincial collective bargaining process in 2008-2009, whereby the Ministry committed to provide additional monies for staffing in exchange for PSSP members signing off on a four-year collective agreement in order to secure “peace and progress in education” (Naylor & Giroux, 2008, p. 1). Dale, one of my participants, had been involved in provincial bargaining, and he was also a member of a TDSB working group tasked with considering revisions to gender, violence and bullying policies following the release of the School Community Advisory Panel (2008) report. Once the working group had written the gender based violence (GBV) policy, they needed people to ensure its implementation. Dale was able to “pitch” the PSSP staffing model to the Board in order to secure the implementation plan established in the GBV policy itself (interview transcript, 2016).

As Dale described it, the work of the GBVPO was intended to take a different approach than the TDSB’s Equity Department staff, in that the GBVPO was informed by a “social science, eco-systemic model of thinking about prevention-planning work” that was substantially different from the Board’s “traditional equity” approach that was more curriculum focused:

It approaches the idea from a completely different way of thinking than traditional equity work and certainly the way equity work had been done in the board, which was more curriculum focused. Where this was, yes, curriculum, but *whole school (my emphasis)*. So not just curriculum. You can't just leave it as just an idea in someone's head. It has to be an accessibility. It has to be a climate. It has to be the content. It has to be the way you're delivering curriculum. It has to be every element of your school plan. That's what a successful prevention plan is and that's what capacity means at your school... here's the student. What's impacting the student, right? Peer group, family, community, school, all that kind of stuff. And how do I build a plan school-wide that takes that into account? That uses the components of school data and demographics, staff development and some kind of measurability to see if you're successful. That's something that traditional equity work had never done.

In his talk, Dale references a number of key concepts and terms used in the provincial Safe Schools Action team reports (2005; 2006; 2008) and in the Education Improvement Commission (2000a; 2000b) reports on implementing comprehensive accountability frameworks in Ontario schools. Dale speaks to implementing equity initiatives as part of the school improvement planning process, with school data and 'measurability' informing the GBVPO staff approach to gender and sexuality issues in schools. The first Ontario Safe Schools Action team report (2005) speaks to effective bullying prevention programs as "systemic" in nature such that it includes "parents, peers, classes, staff and the wider community and "targets the whole school community" (p. 26). The Safe Schools Action Team reports (2005; 2006) also introduced the notion of school climate surveys which would operate to collect data to identify bullying behavior and school needs, establish school "baselines", and help measure the effectiveness of bullying intervention programs. It was further recommended that these school climate surveys should be conducted on a regularly scheduled basis and results integrated into school improvement plans (Safe Schools Action Team, 2008).

The GBVPO and its staff of five to seven members<sup>13</sup> expanded particular sorts of equity resources within the TDSB; however, the resources available to frontline teachers were constrained not only by the limited number of staff in the GBVPO relative to system needs but also by the ‘whole school’ discursive frame organizing the work of GBVPO staff. Since “a ‘whole school’ approach to student achievement and well-being” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 3) is “evidence informed and starts with a review of data from school climate surveys” as well as “implementation at the individual, classroom, school and community level” in order to create “systemic change” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 1), the participation of school administrators was key in this work. The resources of the GBVPO were thus mostly focused on supporting school administrators and school leaders in developing school plans to address gender-based violence and “build capacity” in the school (interview transcript, 2017). While school staff, parents and/or students might initiate contact with the GBVPO, Dale noted that a follow up conversation should occur with the school principal “because they need to be on board. In fact, it is only effective if they are” (interview transcript, 2017). From Dale’s perspective, the GBVPO office required administrator buy-in since “the administrator owns the school. If there is an issue at the school, it goes to the administrator” (interview transcript, 2017).

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<sup>13</sup> Staff leaves of absence frequently occur throughout the Board, including in the GBVPO and Equity and Inclusive Schools department. These leaves of absences impact staffing levels. At the beginning of my data collection in 2016, the GBVPO consisted of five staff with two members on leave. These positions continue to remain vacant and unfilled at the time of writing. Within Equity and Inclusive Schools, there were three Equity Instructional Leaders (ILs) and four Student Equity Program Advisors (SEPA) in 2016. Since 2016, the position of Equity ILs no longer exists.

A focus on the buy-in of school administrators can create challenges of access for activist teachers who often seek support from the GBVPO in the face of ambivalent school administrators as well as school administrators who did not appear to fully understand how to address equity issues or, in the worst cases, school administrators who are completely resistant to addressing important equity concerns. As I explore in the following chapters, my participants' 'equity work' at schools often involved a significant amount of time and energy devoted to creatively working around their school 'leaders' in order to implement particular critical equity initiatives in schools. While the GBVPO staff were committed to challenging school administrators who were reluctant to engage gender and sexual equity issues or whose approach had contributed to particular inequities in schools, at times their focus on school administrator buy-in and 'whole school' planning alienated activist teachers, and often side-lining their needs and experiences in schools. I explore this latter experience more fully in Chapter 6.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have identified three aspects of neoliberal initiatives implemented in the Ontario education system that have placed stress on activist teacher time and space to engage in the kinds of equity work that they wish to do in their schools. Most of the activist teachers I spoke to were interested in developing equity curriculum for their courses, facilitating extra-curricular student groups (i.e. GSA/QSA, social justice groups, young women and young men's groups, etc.), as well as organizing various learning activities for students and staff on a variety of equity issues. With the introduction of an educational funding formula primarily based on student enrolment numbers, teachers in Toronto schools with declining enrolment have had less time for

equity work as they are forced to contend with developing curriculum material for new courses, split grades, and/or courses outside their areas of expertise. A Ministerial emphasis on student success and student achievement - narrowly defined by graduation rates and credit accrual figures – has intensified teacher workloads in relation to assessment, evaluation and reporting. School accountability measures in the form of school data and school improvement planning have meant an additional level of scrutiny of both teaching staff and school administrators to mitigate student ‘risk’ of failure. This chapter has also detailed the changes many activist teachers perceived with Board equity personnel in the TDSB. The work of personnel supporting the Equity and Inclusive Schools department as well as the newly emerging GBVPO began to shift from an emphasis on equity through teaching and learning, toward equity as understood through data driven, evidence based ‘whole school’ improvement models led by school leaders and administrators. For activist teachers, this meant fewer equity-infused curricular resources and professional development opportunities through which to learn and expand upon strategies, skills and approaches to equity education. As this chapter has revealed, the experiences of teachers on the ground are organized by textual and discursive relations that exist quite beyond the local parameters of the classroom and the school. Despite these constraints, in the next several chapters I illustrate the inventive and creative activities of activist teachers in ‘managing’ these constraints to re-centre critical, progressive equity discourses in the classroom and in the school more broadly.

## **Chapter 4: Activist Teacher Interventions to Curriculum: Navigating Institutional Risk, (White) Queer Rights and Homophobia in Class**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I focus considerable attention on the experience of one of my participants Justin, who actively worked to integrate and embed queer positive and critical race curricular content into a variety of courses he taught. While many of my participants spoke about their experiences in delivering equity curriculum, Justin's story stands out in revealing a diverse variety of local school (micro) and broader community and institutional (macro) challenges that activist teachers encounter in their pedagogical commitments to social justice education. As Justin pointed out in Chapter 3, one's professional development as an 'equity teacher' is frequently confounded by a finite amount of time and resources. It is further constrained by reduced government expenditures allocated to education since 1997 and the government's focus on narrow neoliberal notions of performance, accountability, measurement and standards. Within a neoliberal context, a skills-based 'outcomes' approach to curriculum has come to displace content development and knowledge production, while democratic progressive discourses of teaching - the teacher as public intellectual, as critical pedagogue, as curious and passionate purveyor of ethics and the public good - are discursively subdued within contemporary educational discourses (Apple, 2001; Carpenter, Weber & Schugurensky, 2012; Codd, 2005; O'Neill, 2016).

As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, the pressure to account for credit accrual rates and ensure continuous improvement in student achievement levels (i.e., performance and outcome discourses) often places very real material constraints on activist teachers who

have increasingly less time to devote to developing innovative critical, equity curriculum and who experience less support for their equity work within schools and school boards.

As a result of a provincial education funding formula tying school funding to student enrolment, Toronto schools with declining enrolment compete with one another for students in order to avoid school closure. Students who perform well on particular accountability and audit measures (i.e., standardized tests scores, graduation rates) provide less institutional risk to the school and are particularly sought after (Rassool & Morley, 2000). This competition process also means administrative concern over risks endemic to school ‘controversy’, including concerns over various equity issues (see Starr, 2012). As a result, some of my activist teacher participants spoke to their reliance on the TDSB’s (2005c) *Equity Foundation Statement* in case their school administrators attempted to ‘manage’ their curriculum content - discussions of abortion, ‘race’ and racism, debates over Palestine and Israel, homophobia and queer rights – with the knowledge that these curricular choices can evoke managerial, collegial, parental and/or student backlash as well as media attention. All of these issues could translate into school funding losses, in the context of enrolment-driven funding allocations, if parents and students decide to transfer schools.

It is within this context that activist teachers strategically draw on a variety of existing institutional mechanisms, such as equity and disciplinary policies and programs as well as critical equity discourses, to support their pedagogical and curricular choices and to manage the conflicts that arise from introducing equity curriculum. Through this creative and strategic equity work, activist teachers initiate and/or (re) introduce democratic progressive discourses into school spaces at a time when they are needed the

most. The work of the activist teacher to challenge homophobia and racism in the classroom that I detail in this chapter teaches us what we might need to build and make stronger public schools that offer new possibilities for social change and social transformation.

In the story that follows, I focus considerable attention on a number of experiences Justin shared with me when he went about incorporating issues featuring sexuality and race into his secondary school curriculum. His experiences demonstrate the complicated social relations unfolding between equity teachers, school administrators, parents and youth in the classroom in a context of neoliberal constraints on education in Toronto and how equity teachers are managing these social relations. I begin by paying attention to parental and school administrator backlash that Justin experienced when he sought to discuss Islamophobia in his classroom. Within the neoliberal context of Ontario education, teacher accountability and control mechanisms (i.e., Ontario Teachers' College) have been introduced, which, as I illustrate below, have disciplinary consequences for equity teachers like Justin.

Not only must activist teachers be prepared for challenges to their curriculum choices from parents and principals, but they must also consider how to manage *student* resistance to equity curriculum. Below I explore the institutional policies and strategies that Justin was encouraged to use to address his students' expressions of homophobia in the classroom. From Justin's experiences we see the inadequacies of standardized school responses - informed predominately by disciplinary and risk discourses - to address the complex reactions of students to equity curriculum focused on queer rights. When these policies and strategies failed, Justin tried to create some measure of 'choice' for his

students in a school system characterized by mandatory school attendance and mandatory courses. Along the way, Justin engaged in a significant amount of critical analytical work to understand his students' responses to his equity curriculum. As I describe below, Justin's analysis of his students' homophobic comments brings together critical race, feminist and queer discourses to consider the activities of the classroom and the school more comprehensively than existing provincial and local Board policies and approaches to homophobia in schools. Justin's consciousness as an equity teacher is shaped not only by institutional discourses of the school and hegemonic relations of race, class, and gender but also by critical discourses of queer rights, critical whiteness and race, and feminism. Drawing on G. Smith's (1998) early institutional ethnographic study of homophobia in schools, I assert that Justin's deployment of critical discourses to understand his experience and those of his students does not simply stay at the level of Justin's individual mental activity; rather, it influences Justin's actions and those of some colleagues who seek to explore alternative courses of action that create space for school community members to consider the complex interactions of heterosexism, homophobia, racism, and mainstream (white) queer rights discourses in schools.

### **Disciplining Activist Teachers: Equity Curriculum in a Context of Competing Schools**

As noted earlier in Chapter 3, Justin identified that his experience as a teacher in "survival mode" had taken a toll on his ability to develop his professional interests to support equity education. Nevertheless, over his 20-year career, Justin had managed to create a repertoire of resources that he used in the classroom to engage with critical equity issues. Justin's engagement with an equity approach to the curriculum had led to some controversy over his career, including negative administrative, parental and student

responses, a situation not uncommon among teachers who engage in social justice curriculum (see for example, Fredman, Schultz & Hoffman, 2015; Meyer, 2008; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2000; Robinson, 2005). Justin's curricular choices led to particular sorts of disciplinary measures from both school administrators and parents that, I argue, are highly influenced by the neoliberal context of school competition for funding and increased regulatory control over Ontario teachers through the establishment of the Ontario College of Teachers.

In one such example, Justin recounted an experience he had in 2005 while teaching a Grade 11 social science course entitled "Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology" that was part of the mainstream secondary curriculum but where the majority of students enrolled in Justin's class were part of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. The IB program is a specialized, highly competitive academic program; it is international in scope, with schools requiring accreditation and authorization from an IB Authorization team (International Baccalaureate, 2018). In a context of school funding tied to enrolment, many Toronto schools with declining student numbers have adopted specialized programming, such as the IB program in an effort to attract students to their school (Baker, 2014). Students in the IB program are academically oriented and particularly attractive to schools that are concerned with improving credit accrual and student achievement levels (Tarc & Beatty, 2012).

In this mainstream course populated by IB students, Justin had created a unit on equity and social inequality in Canada and assigned a chapter from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) in order to discuss issues of Islamophobia. Justin's focus on equity and inequality was supported by various pieces of the curriculum guide for the course

including the specific expectation within the section on sociology that stated students will “explain the relationship between prejudice and individual and systemic discrimination and describe their impacts on individuals and society” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 307). Islamophobia had been of particular concern in the Toronto Board following September 11<sup>th</sup>, inspiring the TDSB Equity Department to create a resource guide entitled *Teaching about Human Rights: 9/11 and Beyond Grades 7–12* (TDSB, 2003b). As Justin described it, a parent saw her son’s text book at home and called the school principal to complain that Justin was teaching a book by a ‘terrorist’ which was biased and ‘unbalanced’ (interview transcript, 2018). Justin was called to the principal’s office where he was told about the complaint and asked to consider teaching a more ‘balanced’ curriculum. In addition to contacting the school administrator, the parent also contacted the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), requesting an investigation of Justin claiming professional misconduct.

While the OCT had been established by the Conservative provincial government in 1996 with the aim of creating a greater level of professional ‘accountability’ of teachers to the public, unions and other critical assessors of public education, several Ontario teachers’ unions noted the College’s focus on punitive rather than rehabilitative discipline against members for professional misconduct and the lack of teacher representation within the College itself (MacLellan, 2009). Prior to the OCT, public complaints against teachers would be registered with local school officials and an investigation and/or mediation process would take place with teachers’ unions available to represent the teacher. The OCT was a more public body where disciplinary hearings could be attended by members of the public and disciplinary measures taken by the

College against Ontario teachers could be reviewed online on the OCT website and in their quarterly magazine publication to members (Ontario College of Teachers, 2019b). The introduction of the OCT was a local example of global neoliberal governance initiatives focused on imposing greater managerial control over teachers rather than strengthening collective responsibilities of public education between teachers and the public (Codd, 2005; O'Neill, 2016).

Faced with an OCT investigation, Justin was provided with legal defense through his teachers' union. The case went on for over a year. As part of his defense, Justin used the TDSB's (2005c) *Equity Foundation Statement*, a policy that supported curriculum choices that "provide opportunities for all students to understand the factors that cause inequity in society" and that "uses the variety of knowledge of all peoples as a basis for instruction" (p. 4). In the end, Justin was successful and the OCT concluded that there was no evidence of professional misconduct.

However, Justin's school administrator and several of his colleagues continued to be concerned about the influence of Justin's curricular resource choices on school programming. Based on complaints from parents and his OCT investigation, it was Justin's sense that the school administrator and IB program coordinator perceived Justin "as a liability" (interview transcript, 2018) and wanted him out of the IB program. While the course that Justin had been teaching when he was investigated was not an IB-specific course, Justin was a trained IB teacher and taught a number of IB courses at the time. While the school administrator could not find any reason for formal discipline, Justin found himself unceremoniously "yanked out of IB" and instead placed in the mainstream academic program, which from his perspective was intended to be "a kind of punishment"

for creating controversy and putting the IB program under scrutiny (interview transcript, 2016). The prestige of the IB program coupled with the students who enroll – highly academic, over achieving and very rarely disruptive in the classroom– made the IB program highly desirable for teachers and important financially for administrators since it attracted student numbers (and therefore student funding) to the school.

The experience Justin shared with me demonstrates the impact that particular institutional specifications of neoliberal initiatives have had on activist teachers' everyday experiences in schools. In the above example, Justin was a “liability” in the sense that the IB program was meant to attract more parents to choose Justin's school in order to boost school funding in the face of severely underfunded education system dependent on enrolment numbers for provincial funding. Increasingly, it is within this context of underfunding and school closures brought about by neoliberal ‘efficiencies’ that Toronto schools have been forced to worry about their public image, including publicly advertised test score results and teacher performance, especially within the context of parental ‘choice’ policies allowing parents to send their children to schools beyond their own neighbourhood (Carpenter, Weber & Schugurensky, 2012). With additional public scrutiny of schools and the increased competitive pressures on Ontario schools to attract ‘clients’, teachers who wish to teach equity issues that could be considered “controversial” in character must be willing and able to contend with the threats of disciplinary consequences and be prepared to defend their choices to school administrators and parents. These disciplinary consequences are both informal (through school competition) and formal (through the involvement of regulatory bodies such as the OCT). Through the engagement of more critical classroom material, activist teachers like

Justin experience greater potential for scrutiny of their ‘professionalism’. Although the stress that Justin faced did not discourage his continued engagement with equity curriculum (as I demonstrate in the next section), the negative impacts of such disciplinary responses on activist teachers and their approach to curriculum should not be underestimated.

### **Discipline and Punishment of Homophobic Students: Student Responses to Equity Curriculum**

While activist teachers must manage parent and school administrator reactions to their curricular choices, student reactions are often more immediate, often unfolding in the classroom as the curriculum is introduced and requiring teacher responses in the moment. During our interview, Justin shared with me a particularly difficult experience he had with a group of students in response to a unit he had developed on prejudice and discrimination about five years prior. Upon his temporary exclusion from the IB program, Justin was assigned to teach the mandatory Grade 10 Civics and Careers course, which Justin described as an unpopular course among teachers. Justin associated his assignment to teach the course as an intended ‘punishment’ from his school administrator for his previously developed unit on prejudice and Islamophobia. From Justin’s perspective, administrators perceived the Civics course as “low stakes” and therefore, it was often used “to fill holes in timetables” (interview transcript, 2018). In Justin’s words, “no one really cares about” about Civics since it was a junior level class and neither a “STEM course (science, technology, engineering or mathematics) [n]or literacy and numeracy” class (interview transcript, 2018).

Justin decided to carry on with his unit on social inequality, bringing it into the Civics class. However, Justin used different reading materials for his Civics class since it

was a de-streamed course with students who were one grade level lower than his previous class and with various abilities and literacy levels in the classroom. When I asked Justin to describe more about the content of his unit, he explained his approach in this way:

I would usually begin the unit by talking about the triangle of oppression- now like actually even before that, I would get into that- I would give them sort of a controversial scenario and have them sort of stake out positions, what were their thoughts and so forth and then introduce the idea of “what is the difference between prejudice and racism?” Umm you know umm and then get into the triangle of oppression... I would get them to chart how different forms of oppression would manifest themselves on the triangle? Like what would an ideological, institutional, individual expression of racism look like? Or homophobia or ageism or that type of thing... I would write up different scenarios, I would have them, you know put them in groups, I’d have some points and questions they would have to answer about the scenario so we would try to apply it to those kind of situations. ... Sometimes I would get them to give examples of different forms of discrimination [personal, structural, cultural] they would experience in their neighbourhood, their school, that type of thing.

Justin found these resources (i.e. triangle of oppression, scenario examples) from a close friend who had worked with Canada World Youth, an organization that introduced anti-racist educational resources to teenagers through its training.

When I asked Justin how he fit these resources into the Ministry’s Civics curriculum, he spoke about using particular concepts from the Ontario Ministry of Education Civics curriculum document that seemed to overlap with the material he had access to and wished to mobilize in order to speak to equity issues in his classroom:

I found some phrases in the curriculum guide that sounded like what I was doing. I can’t remember what the language was but there was some language about looking at issues of inequality. I think at one point I called the unit “Social Inequality in Canada” just so I could use- so I could say I used at least one of the words from the Ministry document [A laughs]. I- I have a long history of being kind of indifferent to what the curriculum says.

Justin was intentional and strategic about the decisions he was making in his approach to curriculum and his interests in equity. He drew on particular concepts and phrases from

Ministry curriculum documents in order to fulfill his duties as an Ontario public school teacher to follow the formal curriculum; yet, he also used his own professional autonomy and interests as an “equity teacher” (interview transcript, 2016) to interpret the language of the formal curriculum to inform his classroom content and practices. The Civics curriculum is part of the *Canadian and World Studies* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 2013) program and includes a section on elements that teachers should consider in their program planning, including “Anti-Discrimination Education”. In this section, it is noted that:

Students are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of citizenship, as well as willingness to show respect, tolerance, and understanding towards individuals, groups, and cultures... Students are expected to understand that... taking a stand against racism and other expressions of hatred and discrimination are basic requirements of responsible citizenship” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 24).

The specific expectations of the Civics course include students ability to “identify similarities and differences in the way power is distributed in groups, institutions and communities to meet human needs and resolve conflicts” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 65) and to “analyse Canadian issues or events that involve contrasting opinions, perspectives and civic purposes” (p. 67).

In line with these elements of the curriculum, Justin introduced his unit. Justin was also purposeful in how he chose to introduce issues of inequality to his students, giving consideration to the multi-racial particularities of his classroom. However, his attempts with students to link issues of discrimination on the basis of race to sexual discrimination did not go according to plan.

... I had a lot of racialized students in this class; most of this class is racialized And so I was hoping that we could talk about racism and then start to make

connections [*to homophobia*], but there were a few [*students*] who were hostile and very aggressive. And one of them I remember one time said, "Why do we keep..." like stood up and shouted aggressively, "Why are we always talking about fags? I don't want to talk about fags. I don't like them, I don't want to talk about them, I'm done with them. Why do you keep talking about them? Why do...?" and like using the word "fag" over and over again.

Of the 31 students in the class, a handful of boys in the Grade 10 class began to react against Justin's attempts to engage in conversations about discrimination and prejudice on the grounds of sexuality. This group of students had already been difficult to deal with beforehand ("they were there to hang out with their buddies and I couldn't even get them to stop talking"). With discussions of sexual discrimination, the classroom dynamics deteriorated.

### **Activist Teachers' Work to Identify and Respond to Homophobia in Schools**

While other teachers might have viewed these students' behaviour as purely disruptive to the classroom, through his interpretive lens as an *activist* teacher Justin responded to his student's use of the term 'fag' as not simply disruptive but also informed by homophobia and requiring a response in order to ensure the 'safety' and well-being of any queer or questioning students in his classroom.

I mean I would make a point of saying, you know, "I work on the assumption that about 10% of my students are somewhere on the spectrum, and I work with the assumption that in every class I've probably got about two or three students who are queer and questioning or whatever and who are quiet. So when you make comments like that, you jeopardize their safety and I have to respond to that. I can't allow that to happen, and I would do the same if somebody said something racist or somebody said something sexist".

Similar to G. Smith's (1998) participants, my informants spontaneously "entered textually mediated [queer] discourses" (p. 314) and other critical race and critical feminist discourses in considering the social relations of the classroom and the school and

people's actions and activities within this context. In the above excerpt, Justin is clearly drawing from queer discourses in his identification of at least 10% of his class as potentially 'queer or questioning' – a number that has been estimated in sexuality studies dating as far back as the Kinsey study and has been mobilized within the queer community to create more awareness and legitimacy in advancing the struggle for queer rights (Spiegelhalter, 2015). Justin had immersed himself in queer ally activism for many years at both his school and within his personal life, which clearly influenced how he spoke to his students about homophobic language in the classroom. Several years earlier, Justin had been one of two teachers in the school to help students establish a "Gay Straight Alliance", which was later renamed the "Queer Straight Alliance (QSA)" as the notion of 'queer' became more popular for its greater inclusivity of individuals who identified as gender and sexually variant. Previously, Justin had been facilitating a social justice club but began to feel that a QSA was "more important than the social justice club" since "kids were really going through very immediate kinds of crises around gender identity. They were like suicidal, depressed" (interview transcript, 2016). Justin also had a number of his own personal experiences with loved ones who had 'come out' as queer (interview transcript, 2016) and his engagement with various social justice communities both inside and outside of teaching had meant that he had been confronted with queer discourses regularly. As an active queer ally in his school, Justin felt strongly about ensuring that he was creating a classroom environment that felt safer for his queer students who had confided in him their feelings of violence and unsafety in school.

At the same time that Justin wanted to ensure that his classroom was a safer space for queer youth, he was also conscious of relations of race circulating in his school. In

the excerpt below, Justin identifies his social location as a white teacher in a classroom of mostly racialized youth where “all but one of these 10 boys [using homophobic slurs] was Black” (interview transcript, 2016). Justin drew on a critical analysis of adolescent masculinity and white authority in the school system to speculate about his students’ behavior:

...a lot of it has to do with social acceptance, right? So it's really a kind of performance. If they don't respond, their friends might look at them and say, "What are you, queer? Are you gay?" So a lot of that homophobia is performed. And how you intervene in that is a really, really good question. It would probably help if I looked like them, which I don't. I'm just yet another white teacher who's foisting my homosexual views on them.

So that dynamic of race and power definitely plays into it. If white people with power are saying that these are views you should be holding, then you assert your resistance to that authority by doing the opposite. And I think the more you respond heavy-handedly, the more you turn being queer-positive into something that requires being rebelled against, and then it becomes associated with whiteness and white authority.

The above excerpt demonstrates Justin’s complex weaving together of queer, feminist, and critical race discourses in an attempt to consider his students’ behavior in the classroom. In speaking to his students’ ‘performance’ of homophobia, Justin draws on social constructivist approaches to gender and masculinity as well as considerations of age and peer pressure dynamics among male youth in order to consider his students’ reactions while also reflecting on his position as a white teacher espousing sexual equity curriculum in a classroom that is predominately ‘racialized’. Justin identifies the social quality of homophobic ideas produced among a group of male students, highlighting G. Smith’s (1998) assertion that ideas constituting the ‘fag’ are not merely mental activities

among individuals but are, in fact, actively socially constituted, drawing upon historically situated notions of gender and sexuality.

Justin's consideration of his own social location as a white teacher speaks also to the social organization of Toronto schools and school discourse in relation to race. Here as an institutional ethnographer, I am less interested in Justin's individual beliefs or ideas about race and whiteness, but rather how his individual articulations of race and whiteness draw on broader critical discourses of/in schools and how these discourses get taken up by people through their activities and actions. Like his students' responses to queer curriculum, Justin's multiple references to whiteness and white identity in relation to his mostly non-white class of students are not simply reflective of Justin's own individual mental activity invented in the moment of our interview together but instead point to an underlying pattern of critical race discourses on schooling that Justin accesses and draws upon to consider his work in schools. In the above excerpt, Justin's comments imply the extent to which certain aspects of queerness (in this case, notions of civil rights for the LGBTQ community in Canada and sexual discrimination) have become increasingly normalized among the mostly white body of teachers working in diverse, multi-racial Toronto schools. Later in the interview, Justin noted that his small inner city school consisted of about 18 out of a total of 20 teachers who were white or white presenting, with two racialized teachers at the school working "half time" and about to be declared 'surplus' or redundant to the school (interview transcript, 2016). Not surprisingly, Justin's observations reflect most statistical studies that show the teaching profession in North America is predominately white, with research in the United States demonstrating that about 88% of teachers are white (Applied Research Centre, cited in

Ladson Billings, 2005) with similar overrepresentations in Canada (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009; Turner, 2015). The overrepresentation of white teachers in relation to more diverse student and community populations poses challenges in terms of the diversity of curricular content offered to students, the ability of teachers to critically engage in conversations about race and racism and to be culturally responsive to a diverse student body, and the ability of schools to provide spaces that accurately represent a multicultural, democratic society (Ladson Billings, 1995; Ladson Billings, 2005; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel & Campbell, 2005; Van de Kleut, 2011).

Later in our interview, Justin would reflect further on these challenges as they manifested in his own school— points I will return to later in the chapter in considering how Justin’s critical consciousness and his ‘thinking’ work, like many activist teachers, does not merely stay at the level of individual analysis but, rather, his consciousness “intends a course of action” (G. Smith, 1998, p. 309) to expand democratic progressive discourses that more fully acknowledge the complex simultaneity of social relations of sexuality, race, and gender operating within schools.

### **Institutionally Mandated Responses to Student Homophobia**

As Justin was struggling with how to address the homophobic slurs in his class in their immediacy, a TDSB staff person from the newly-formed Gender Based Violence Prevention Office (GBVPO) came to speak to the staff at Justin’s school about the new policies of the Board specific to gender based violence, including homophobia. As noted in the Introduction and Chapter 3, following the shooting death of a 15-year-old in a Toronto school in 2007, the TDSB-commissioned School Community Safety Advisory Panel and a provincial Safe School Action Team (2008) report both led to a specific

TDSB policy on gender based violence along with the hiring of a small group of employees to form the GBVPO, thus ensuring the implementation of the policy. Justin recalls the advice provided:

...we got some training in this. [Staff were told] "So these are the rules, these are the regulations. If a kid says something, you send him down to the office and you report him, and you report, and you report, and you report." So I said, "Okay well this is what they're saying, this is what I'll do."

The emphasis on reporting students who engage in some sort of “gender-based violence”, as defined by the new Board policy, must be understood in the context of the discourses of safety, violence, sexual assault and school staff’s “duty to report” gender-based violence circulating in the media following the Toronto school shooting. In the case of the TDSB student shooting, media attention provincially and nationally described negligent administrators and “cowed teachers” in the face of “out of control students” (“Culture of silence imperils school”, 2008) who had guns and knives stashed away in lockers (see also Coutts, 2007; Doolittle, 2008; Rushowy & Brown, 2008; Toronto Star, 2008). Media reports also described a ‘culture of fear’ among school staff who had described to the TDSB- commissioned investigative panel their rationale for why more reports were not made to the school office about student behavior – namely, that bullying and ‘bad’ behavior among students in schools had become a part of the ‘norm’ and ‘culture’ of particular schools (Alphonso & El Akkad, 2008; Huber, 2008). This ‘culture of fear’ was also exacerbated by staff fears that they might face disciplinary reprisal and career limitations by supervisors if they were in any way critical of their principal and/or Board responses to school safety (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008). Another fear of reporting ‘bad’ behavior involved staff concerns that they might be

perceived as unable to handle their students if reports about school safety were made to authorities (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008).

As I described in Chapter 3, the TDSB's (2010b) new policy on gender based violence included a specific clause focused on the reporting procedures required of school staff, including teachers who could be the focus of disciplinary action if reports about "any concerns... or incidents of gender based violence in the school community" were not provided to school administrators (p. 2). These specific reporting procedures in the TDSB's GBV policy were a reflection of the provincial response to the shooting and sexual assault incidents at CW Jefferys Collegiate Institute, which was represented through the passing of Bill 157 *Keeping our Kids Safe at School* in 2009. With Bill 157 (2009), the *Education Act* was changed to require school staff to report to principals any student behavior that might be considered for the purposes of suspension or expulsion or else be held "legally liable". Thus, in this context of emphasized reporting responsibilities for school staff, the process of reporting students operated largely as a behavioural and risk management tool for the school.

In the context of both Board and provincial policies threatening disciplinary action against teachers who did not report and based on the advice he was given by the GBVPO, Justin was fulfilling his duties to make school administrators aware of his students' behaviours by sending students to the school office when they used a homophobic slur in his classroom. Beyond his legal obligations, Justin was also genuinely troubled about the safety and security of queer students in his classroom. For educational researchers and policy analysts concerned with the prevalence of heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia and sexism in schools, policies to address student

behaviours and actions associated with such discriminatory ideas have often been considered politically important in order to make public and visible what has been typically relegated to the private sphere and historically treated as invisible or unimportant (School Community Safety Panel, 2008; G. Smith, 1998; Taylor & Peter with Elliott, Beldom, Ferry, Gross, Paquin & Schachter, 2011). However, once Justin sent his students to the office, it was then up to the school administrator to decide how to address the student's behavior.

At the time of Justin's classroom issues, the province had recently implemented progressive discipline policies in an effort to settle an Ontario Human Rights complaint leveled against both the province and the TDSB. The OHRC complaint had highlighted the disproportionate impact of school discipline introduced through the *Safe Schools Act* (2000) on racialized students and students with learning disabilities (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2007). Following provincial amendments to these disciplinary policies in 2007 to address OHRC concerns, TDSB staff - especially school administrators - had received training from the Ministry of Education on "ways to apply discipline in a non-discriminatory way" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a). The settlement reached between OHRC and the Ministry of Education included an agreement that principals and school officials must consider several mitigating factors prior to suspending or expelling a student, including, among other factors: whether the activity for which they were being considered for school exclusion was related to racial, gendered, sexual or other forms of harassment, "how the [school exclusion] would affect the pupil's ongoing education", and "whether the behavior was a manifestation of a disability" (Ontario Regulation 427/07, 2018, p. 1). With the lack of clarity in how

suspension and expulsion might fit in the case of students using homophobic slurs in a classroom without a specific ‘victim’, school administrators were in an interesting situation in responding to Justin’s students who – as Justin identified earlier – were primarily Black.

In the context of an underfunded and under-resourced school system where managerial and risk management discourses predominate, an alternative to discipline for Justin’s students would have required some effort on the part of school administrators to seek out. While the GBVPO and Equity Board staffs were available to support school administrators in their efforts to address gender-based violence in its many manifestations beyond disciplinary responses, they could only know there was a problem to address if school officials informed them. As far as Justin was aware, his school administrators did not appear to be reaching out to either the GBVPO or Equity Board staff for support.

In his own classroom, the advice Justin had received from the GBVPO to report students actually began to exacerbate the behavior rather than reduce it:

Justin: ...it turned into a game.

Alison: A game?

Justin: Yep. In fact I heard the kids say, "Hey, do you want to get sent out of the class? Just use the word 'fag' and you'll get thrown out." And it became the source of amusement, and like they would say it so that I would have to throw them all out. And it was like, "Cool, we're going to leave class. The teacher's telling us, we've got to go! Well we can't stay in class!" And then of course, would they actually make it to the office? Eh, sometimes, sometimes not. And then the office didn't know what to do with them. Okay they're down in the office and a form gets filled out, and then, "You shouldn't say that," and go back up to class.

The technique of ‘reporting’ students that was intended to mitigate ‘riskiness’ in school and address the issues at hand had the unintended effect of students *using* homophobic

slurs to control their experience in (or in this case, out) of the classroom. When school administrators did encounter students, from Justin's perspective, their interventions ('a form gets filled out') did not seem to be having much effect. As a result, Justin stopped sending the disruptive students to the office since "that was kind of reductive" and the office "did not know what to do with them".

With advice from the GBVPO staff that was working against his intentions, Justin moved on to other approaches, many of which are reflected in TDSB "progressive discipline" policies introduced in 2008. In the TDSB (2018) policy "Promoting a Positive School Climate", teachers are encouraged to use "a continuum of interventions, supports and consequences to address inappropriate student behaviour" that are intended to be "corrective and supportive" more than "solely punitive" so as to "help students make good choices" (p. 5). Examples listed in this document suggest a range of interventions such as: discussions with teachers and school administrators, behaviour contracts, reflections sheets, parental contacts and detentions (TDSB, 2018). The notion of 'progressive' discipline requires applying strategies that graduate in severity up to suspension or possible expulsion. Teachers and school administrators must demonstrate that they have used a progressive disciplinary approach prior to enforcing a suspension and that they have considered mitigating factors such as the student's ability to control his or her behavior or whether his or her activity that is being considered for suspension or expulsion is related to the student's own experiences of harassment on Ontario Human Rights Code grounds (TDSB, 2018). Failure of staff to ensure they follow such protocols may mean that the suspension could be challenged by the parent and/or student and over-

turned by a superintendent or, in the case of a long-term suspension or expulsion, the Board's Disciplinary Committee.

Justin began to apply various disciplinary interventions, which took a considerable amount of time and energy on Justin's part. For example, he attempted to co-create classroom rules with students; unfortunately, "the kids who were disruptive couldn't pay attention long enough to actually create the rules" and so they didn't "obey the rules... since they didn't feel any ownership over them". Justin also initiated one-on-one meetings with individual students; however, many of the students refused to meet with him and would "walk away" when Justin tried to initiate a conversation. When he began to feel like he was really falling behind in the course curriculum, Justin informed the class that if certain students could not get through the agenda for the day without disruptions, he would have to teach these students through their lunch. When he informed particular students at the bell that they would have to stay during their lunch to catch up, "several of them said, 'Fuck this. This is my lunch. I'm not sitting in here' and they got up and left." Finally, when these actions failed, Justin had conversations with administrators and "sometimes there would be meetings with parents". All had little effect on the students' behaviours.

### **Responding to Student Homophobia from "Outside the [Disciplinary] Box"**

When Justin's attempts to use institutionally defined traditional disciplinary techniques failed, he decided to try a new approach, one that he described as "outside of the box" and beyond the disciplinary and therapeutic frames characterized by 'reporting' students and engaging in various forms of progressive discipline. Justin had a school principal he felt he could trust, who Justin identified as having some (albeit limited)

understandings of gender and sexuality issues. As a result, he decided to discuss what he was about to try with his class while also acknowledging in his conversation with his principal that he knew it was a strategy the principal could not formally approve since the approach involved allowing ‘minors’ in his charge to be ‘unsupervised’ during class time, outlined as a duty of teachers’ under the Ontario *Education Act* [R.R.O. 1990, Regulation 298, Section 20 (d)]. Nevertheless, Justin wanted to keep the principal informed. In response, Justin’s principal smiled and told Justin to let him know how it all went. Justin describes what he did:

- Justin: ... I pinned a note on my door that said, “Go to Room 207.” So, 207 was an empty room. No furniture, except one chair and a desk. And so they all came. And they’re all like, “Oh, what are we doing here? What’s this? Why are we here?” .... when I had their attention I said, “Okay, you’re probably wondering why you’re here, why I’ve called you here today. So, I want to explain.”
- Alison: This is the whole class?
- Justin: Yeah. The whole class. I said, “Last class...” so I’ve been teaching about democracy in ... civics. And last class, I have to say I was very impressed you were willing to stand up for something that you believed in which was your desire not to learn in class. I’d be a hypocrite if I criticized you for that. That is the very principle of democracy. I have to respect that. So, I want to let you know I respect it. And I will respect that wish if that is what you wish.” So, I said, “At the same time I have a contractual and legal obligation to teach. So, I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. This is the compromise. I’m going to go back to my classroom, and I’m going to fulfill my contractual duty to teach. If you’re interested in learning, you can come. But if you do, you have to follow the classroom rules, which means one person...only one person speaks at a time. You raise your hand to speak, you know, like be respectful to each other. If that’s not something that you feel that you’re up to, that’s okay. Stay here. You can play dominoes, you can play cards, listen to music. The only stipulation is you have to stay in the room. You can’t go into the hallway and cause disruption. So, as long as you’re not disturbing anyone else, have fun.”

In leaving the students by themselves, Justin acknowledged that he was taking a risk:

“...the responsibly would have been mine, I guess, if anything happened, if there was any

legal kind of stuff”. Additionally, Justin’s “outside of the box” strategy involved reinterpreting his students’ homophobic comments and other forms of disruptions they employed (speaking over their peers, ignoring class rules, being disrespectful to others) as students’ “desire not to learn” and “standing up for what they believed in”. His initial appeal for his students to stop their homophobic interjections had not been effective nor had progressive discipline approaches or filing ‘reports’ (sending students) to the office. His new approach involved appealing to the Civics curriculum (“principles of democracy” and “standing up for what you believe in” as a form of civic engagement and empowerment) while also laying bare for students his own position within the institution and the textually mediated relations organizing his position in the classroom (“I have a contractual and legal obligation to teach”). Moreover, he placed a certain level of trust and agency in students to monitor their own behaviour and make decisions for themselves about their learning.

In reflecting on Justin’s strategy, we can observe conflicting discourses within Justin’s announcement to his students. For example, Justin identifies his students’ responses as exemplifying ‘a desire not to learn’ - a simplification for students of Justin’s own analysis that the use of ‘fag’, particularly by students who are racialized and/or working class, can operate as a tool to undermine relations of (white) teachers’ disciplinary authority in the school. In describing his creative solution during our interview together, Justin emphasized the importance of providing students with a ‘choice’, something he specifically addressed with students (“I’m not going to nag you; I’m not going to force you. It’s your choice [*to attend class*]”). Justin’s equity work involved challenging institutional notions of ‘risk’ in the sense that he was leaving

minors unattended in a classroom and instead calling upon discourses tied directly to his Civics curriculum as well as equity discourses involving protest and resistance.

Once Justin's application of disciplinary approaches failed, his actions also operated to challenge adult/child protectionist discourses circulating within schools that characterize adolescents as "immature, dangerous, and needing to be controlled" (Lesko, 1996, p. 153). According to Lesko (1996), such popular discourses operate to assert the positional superiority of adults over adolescents while "simultaneously legitimizing a dumbing down of curriculum" (p. 157). In small ways, Justin's emphasis on establishing student choice about coming to class placed more agency in the hands of his students, particularly racialized students who have historically experienced more surveillance and discipline than others. Mandatory course offerings imply that young people are not quite responsible enough to make the best choices about what they should be learning and that certain forms of knowledge are more important than others. The legal requirement of teachers to maintain continual supervision reaffirms school spaces as sites of surveillance and control, assuming that youth will be 'out of control' without an adult presence at all times. Disciplinary policies frame students who have issues with truancy, attendance, or who 'talk back' as irresponsible, acting inappropriately, at risk, troubled, and needing help to make "good choices" (TDSB, 2013a, p. 2). Justin's work to address homophobic slurs attempts to re-frame student resistance to authority in slightly more generous terms as an act of protest, of civic engagement and a 'right' that students have to choose how they wish to engage with their education. His own interpretive work saw students' responses as acts of resistance against white authority and institutional structures informed by systemic racism.

To Justin's relief, the strategy began to work. Initially, the students who had been disruptive chose to stay in their 'new' classroom. Justin recalled about twenty of his thirty students returning to the classroom the first day. Back in Civics, Justin attended to teaching his course curriculum, and he described hearing from students who had previously been quiet in class. More significantly, over the next week, a couple of the boys who had been disrupting the class returned. Their behavior improved. Things were going well. And then the vice principal (VP) intervened. The VP entered the classroom the 'disruptive' students were occupying and informed the students that if they did not return to their regular classroom they would all have detentions after school.

Next class, they were all there, and they were like, "Mr. Smith's going to give us a detention if we [*don't attend class*]..." and [*the VP*] ruined it.

So, I was leaving minors unattended in a room. But I needed to make their coming to my class a choice, which the system does not. The system is all about, like what they have to do. And that was working against me.

Justin's experiment in providing students with a choice as to whether to attend what was a 'mandatory' credit course in a school system requiring mandatory attendance until the age of 18 (*Education Act R.S.O. 1990 C. E2, Section 21.1*) meant that several of the students who had forcefully expressed homophobic attitudes and resistance to learning about homophobia, were returning to class with fewer confrontations in class. However, the Vice Principal's response re-asserted the duties of supervisory adults in schools, including the principle of *in loco parentis* established through Canadian legal precedent, placing teachers in the position of temporary guardians when parents are not present (Borden Lardner Gervais, 2006) as well as expected 'requirements of pupils' as outlined in provincial Regulation 298 Operation of Schools, Section 23 (d) (R.R.O. 1990 Reg. 298). Once activated, these institutional discourses of authority, control and legality did

not leave a lot of room for Justin's experiment to investigate the extent to which his students' homophobic disruptions could be addressed by extending students' choice and control over their curricular experiences.

Justin found himself back at the beginning, trying to address the homophobic slurs and disruptive behavior of certain students within the confines of a progressive disciplinary policy and *Gender-Based Violence* (2010b) board policy that did not seem to be working in the manner through which it was intended, and a curricular document that did not provide suggestions for how to move forward when students did not feel "respected" or "respectful of others' differences" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 49). Following the vice principal's intervention, Justin was at a loss for what to do after his experiment failed. The students continued to be disruptive until the end of the semester.

### **Critical Consciousness in Action: Justin's Reflections on Classroom Homophobia**

Earlier Justin drew on critical discourses of whiteness and race to consider his own social location among the diverse youth he encountered in schools and the relations organizing student experiences as he observed. In the case of Justin's students in his Grade 10 Civics class, the disciplinary response of the school in relation to this group of primarily Black students occurred in a context where from Justin's observations "the students who would get disciplined [at the school] would be primarily Black". These interrelations of gender, sexuality and race were underscored for Justin by an experience he had "a year or two" later when his colleague Karen, a fellow staff supervisor of the school QSA, became frustrated by the level of homophobic and slut-shaming comments circulating among students at school. As Justin described it, Karen approached the new

school principal – an administrator Justin had described earlier in the interview as “probably the most progressive principal I have ever worked with” - to request Board staff support for developing a “school plan” that would include “clear penalties, like clear disciplinary consequences” for homophobic and sexist comments (interview transcript, 2016). In turn, the principal contacted an Equity Instructional Leader for this support. When a meeting was convened, Karen expressed her frustrations with the lack of clear disciplinary responses to the homophobic and sexist behaviours. Justin described the Equity IL’s response:

In his meeting with Justin and Karen (who were both white), the Board Equity IL (who

Sean (Equity IL) was hesitant. He says you can't implement these kinds of disciplinary consequences for one set of infractions if there's no sense that you're committed to equity across the board, because then – and I tend to agree with him – you're actually going to create more inequities in the school because some kids are going to say, "Why is it the teachers get all upset when you talk about gay stuff but they don't do anything about racism?" And they're going to start to feel more targeted, particularly because there is a tendency among the staff to see and perceive homophobia as being much more pronounced among racialized students, particularly Black and Muslim.

was a non-white man) offered an analysis of school dynamics that identified white teachers’ participation in a set of social practices and procedures organizing white consciousness and a critical analysis of relations between teachers and students that matched Justin’s own observations and experiences. Observations of white teachers’ tendency to more easily ‘see’ homophobia among Black and Muslim students, demonstrates teachers drawing on various ‘common sense discourses’ of race and religion circulating more broadly beyond the school.

Many other participants commented on these ‘common sense’ racial discourses circulating among school staff. For example, in my interview with Annie (a white teacher), she suggested a number of racial stereotypes she observed being perpetuated at her school:

Annie: I think there’s a whole piece about how gender and sexuality relates to different cultures, religions and ...I think that there’s a tendency for people to make these blanket assumptions about particular communities, whether it’s a Black community or South Asian community, or Muslims or whatever... so, you know, like all South Asians want – is you know they’re going to abort their girl child...it’s just like... you know, fatherless Black students, you know...

Alison: And those stereotypes exist with students and staff?

Annie: Yeah. But, I would say they probably might exist even more with staff because of who the staff are. And so then, therefore...

Alison: I mean you said “who the staff are” - you mean white, middle-class, straight?

Annie: You got it. [Everyone laughs]

In the everyday experiences at school, Annie and Justin observed their fellow white colleagues drawing on notions of, say, Muslim or Caribbean students as more homophobic than white or other racialized student groups. With a predominately white staff having authority to interpret student behavior, including either real or perceived homophobia, and with the circulation of common sense discourses of particular student groups as more homophobic than others, it is easy to see how the majority non-white student body in many Greater Toronto Area schools, becomes more subject to

disciplinary institutional responses, thus contributing to racialized students' disproportionate school exclusion<sup>14</sup>.

When I asked Justin what came out of his meeting with Sean, the Board's Equity IL, Justin indicated that Sean suggested the development of an "inclusive equity plan" for the school, of which disciplinary consequences for homophobic and sexist slurs would constitute one part of a much broader strategy. Justin noted that his colleague Karen was "extremely frustrated and agitated" with this idea because it appeared to be "creating conditions that were impossible to actually achieve" (interview transcript, 2016). Justin felt similarly:

...we did have some follow-up meetings around this, but it was a tremendous amount of work. Like for example, one of the things we recognized the need for was to integrate equity into our curriculum, but you need time to figure out how to do that. You need time to meet with each other, you need time to read, think, to search out resources, but we're not given that time.

When Justin and his colleagues asked for professional activity (PA) days in order to work on the plan, Justin was told by his principal that they could probably manage "the odd half day" (interview transcript, 2016). For Justin and his colleague, the "odd half-day" was not enough to develop a "sustained and integrated" (interview transcript, 2016) plan for the school, especially with the 'survival mode' dynamics that teachers experience, as outlined in Chapter 3, and the restricted time and funding available locally and provincially for professional development. The Ontario Ministry of Education mandates

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<sup>14</sup> The School Community Advisory Safety Panel (2008) commented on these issues as well, speaking to the ways in which the violence experienced by racialized women and girls in schools is often attributed to 'culture' by various actors in school and out of school. This approach operates to, among other issues, reinforce stereotypes, assert cultural superiority of whites, and maintain silence among racialized women who may not wish to reinforce stereotypes, and it leads to the further alienation and marginalization of non-white women from schools.

three professional activity days for educational staff, with up to four additional PA days available for Boards to schedule (R.R.O 1990 Regulation 304). However, the subject matter for most of these PA days is highly prescribed and largely conforms to neoliberal approaches to education, including concerns over student achievement, standardized educational outcomes and school accountability measures. For example, at least one provincial PA day must focus on “improv[ing] student achievement in numeracy” and the other two PA days must support current provincial education priorities outlined in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2014) *Achieving Excellence* document. These priorities include: achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well being, and ensuring public confidence (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 3). In this document, equity in Ontario education is largely defined through an ‘equity of outcomes’ (Joshee, 2007) framework, characterized by ensuring that historically disadvantaged groups are “equitably represented in all facets of the society” (p.183). For example, the Ministry of Education (2014) speaks to “Ontario’s diversity as its greatest asset” such that schools must ensure that “every student has the opportunity to succeed regardless of ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender... physical and intellectual ability... race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status” (p.8). An ‘equity of outcomes’ framework borrows from traditions of liberal individualism, focusing on redistribution of goods and assumes that the particular outcomes as defined by the state (i.e. economic prosperity) are goals shared by everyone; however, such a framework neglects to challenge the premises upon which existing structures and programs operate and focuses largely on individual remedies rather than systemic change (Joshee, 2007).

I have pointed to the analytic work of Justin during our interview together as he considers how his social location and that of his students unfolds in complex ways in the classroom and the school. However, Justin's critical consciousness and his 'thinking' work did not merely stay at the level of analysis. His consciousness "intend[ed] a course of action" (G. Smith, 1998, p. 309) at his school and in his teaching work, evident in his 'outside of the box' classroom strategy but also in broader actions that Justin took at his school, such as co-facilitating his school's QSA and working with Equity board staff. Like many of my participants, Justin noted the importance of addressing issues related to gender and sexuality as social problems to be discussed among staff and students, rather than dealing with incidents on an individual level:

I don't have any answers for how you deal with those incidents individually... there's no short-term fix for this. You have to *transform the culture of the school* (*italics mine*).

Among many of my participants, phrases like the following were used often:

"transforming school culture", "shifting culture", "creating a culture of consent", "creating a culture of awareness and sensitivity", and "setting a tone of inclusion". When such phrases were used, the conversation would invariably turn to school projects that my participants were involved in to address issues of sexuality and gender with fellow colleagues and students in complicated and interesting ways, reflecting participants' active drawing upon of critical race discourse alongside feminist and class conscious discourses<sup>15</sup>.

While Justin felt that his ability to work with other school staff in a sustained and ongoing way to develop more critical consciousness was severely constrained by a lack

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<sup>15</sup> I continue to unpack my participants' notions of "changing school culture" in Chapter 6.

of institutional supports, Justin tried to create dialogic spaces for critical reflection among his school community in other ways. For example, as staff advisor to his school's QSA, Justin made a point of inviting speakers into the school who might complicate mainstream (white) queer discourses. Following the high profile media case of a father, his son and second wife, who were charged with murder in the killing of four women and framed in the mainstream media as an "honour killing" (known as the "Shafia family murders"; see Friscolanti, 2016, p. 1), Justin invited a well-known queer Muslim Toronto feminist activist into the school to speak to his school's QSA about her experiences. He explained: "the strongest opposition we have in school tends to be from kids who cite their faith, so I wanted to address that head-on" (interview transcript, 2016). Several teachers had also attended some of these QSA speaking events on queer identity and religion. More recently, Justin had helped his QSA organize a fundraiser to support a "Black Lives Matter" Toronto-chapter educational event for children. He regularly made announcements to the school about the initiative: "I kept calling it the QSA/BLM Fundraiser even though it was really more "Black Lives Matter", but that's fine, I wanted people to make that connection" (interview transcript, 2018).

In 1998, G. Smith (1998) noted that his informants "entered [textually mediated] gay liberation and feminist discourse" spontaneously throughout their interviews to produce accounts of schools that "would have been virtually inconceivable twenty-five years ago" (p. 314). These accounts were "critical to a description of schools from the standpoint of gay youth" (G. Smith, 1998, p. 314). George Smith's work in illustrating his participants' experiences itself contributed to strengthening these feminist and gay liberation discourses such that twenty-five years after G. Smith's (1998) landmark study,

we can see how activist teachers (and students) have built upon these discourses and attempted to operationalize them within schools and through school practices. While uneven, imperfect and unfolding alongside the backdrop of powerful, socio-historical institutional discourses organizing day-to-day school operations from neoliberal and other conservative discourses, the equity work of activist teachers to combat gendered and sexual oppression continues to hold schools accountable for the relations of oppression that they may perpetuate. Activist teachers challenge uncomplicated reproductive theories of schools (Weis & Fine, 2001) combatting individualistic and simplistic approaches to gender and sexuality in schools in favour of rich, interlocking approaches focused on building critical collective consciousness, action and responsibility. These interventions are the building blocks for enabling broader social change.

## **Conclusion**

Much of the literature on homophobia and sexual harassment in schools has characterized school staff as frequently complicit in these behaviours, either through non-intervention or through active participation (Chambers, van Loon & Tincknell, 2004; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Meyer, 2008; G. Smith, 1998; Smith, Bourne & McCoy, 1998). While I do not dispute these claims (nor would I expect my participants to either), this chapter intends to shed light on the attempts by particular teachers who *do* intervene so that we may recognize the “imbrication of resistance and rule” (O’Malley, 1996, p. 311) as struggles play out in the “messy actualities” of neoliberal projects ‘on the ground’ (Larner, 2000, p. 16). In so doing, my research intends to challenge the “programmatic coherence” implied or, in some cases, explicitly asserted of various analyses of advancing neoliberal ideologies and discourses (Larner, 2000, p. 15) evident in both

governmentality and institutional ethnographic studies. I suggest that a focus on the inconsistencies and contradictions associated with school staff addressing equity issues in schools highly influenced by broader neoliberal reform allows us to consider the implications of intervention, including how oppositional discourses dialectically operate alongside institutional specifications of neoliberal projects in complicated ways.

At the beginning of this chapter, I detailed Justin's experiences with parents, school administrators and the Ontario College of Teachers who responded to his incorporation of a critical literary text (Edward Said's *Orientalism*) into his classroom in order to consider issues of Islamophobia. This part of Justin's story illustrates quite powerfully how neoliberal-inspired models of school funding and increased managerial regimes of control over teachers can operate to stifle and discourage teachers to incorporate social justice curriculum. At the same time, Justin was able to draw upon his union for support as well as the particular equity policies of the TDSB – policies that were fought for by various activist communities at the time of Conservative cost-saving measures to amalgamate school boards from 129 to 72 (McCaskell, 2005; Sattler, 2012) – to successfully defend his professional autonomy of curricular development at his local school.

In the case of Justin's experience of *student* resistance to his equity curriculum, the institutional response Justin was encouraged to use - 'reporting' homophobic and other gendered harassment to the office – operated to satisfy two aims appearing to derive from oppositional discourses. For example, the advice Justin received to 'report' students was partly inspired by institutional risk management discourse as evident by recent changes to provincial and local Toronto policies requiring teacher reports of violence

following media fervor over school administrator mishandling of a sexual assault at CW Jefferys Collegiate Institute in 2007. On the other hand, many feminist and queer activists and researchers have also argued for stronger institutional responses to gendered violence and harassment in order to expose and make more public the systemic and often invisible violence against women, queer identified and gender variant members of public schools. Unfortunately, as demonstrated in this chapter and in Chapter 5, more ‘reporting’ of such issues in schools often leads to disciplinary (and sometimes criminalizing) responses rather than innovative and complicated interlocking approaches to the issues that (re)inspire and (re)ignite critical consciousness within school communities. This example provides support for Wendy Brown’s (1995) observation that counter hegemonic resistance is constituted by and within the regimes of power it contests.

However, counter hegemonic responses to dominant power relations can operate, in the words of Foucault, to expose “instability” and the possibility of “at least temporary inversion of power relations” (Foucault, cited in Mills, 2003, p. 256). Moreover, Justin’s own complex responses to his experiences - his ‘outside the box’ approach with his Civics students, his analytical work to understand students’ homophobic responses, and his active work to create counter hegemonic dialogic spaces - are important to investigate as they illustrate the active processes of social actors in responding to welfare state and public space restructuring. In certain ways, Justin’s efforts are in line with Fraser’s (1993) notion of “subaltern counter publics”, where members of subordinated social groups “invent and circulate counter discourses, so as to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” and which are indeed inherent to

liberal democratic notions of public space despite certain theorizations to the contrary (p. 14). Such spaces in schools are critical to challenge the normative nature of school spaces, where societal inequities have historically shaped the very foundation of Canadian schools. The work of activist teachers like Justin to challenge homophobia in the various complicated ways that he does means that particular democratic progressive discourses within the school are maintained and perhaps strengthened, building upon a discursive terrain of oppositional discourses evident in past and existing policy texts governing Toronto schools.

## Chapter 5: Activist Teacher Responses to Sexual Assault: Navigating ‘Duty to Report’

### Introduction

This chapter focuses specifically on the institutional relations and discourses regulating youth sexual assault in schools and in turn, how these relations shape and organize activist teacher responses with students who disclose. As governmentality scholars have argued, with the increased proliferation of neoliberal governance strategies, more techniques and tactics have been developed to reduce risk and danger, and encourage individualized risk management strategies among professionals (Lemke, 2001; O’Malley, 2000; Rose & Miller, 1992; Rose 1996). While notions of risk management have been debated in relation to teachers’ physical responses to students, as well as child protection and child abuse policies (Andrzejewski & Davis, 2008; Johnson, 2015; Piper, Garratt & Taylor, 2013), teachers’ ‘duty to report’ incidents of student sexual and gendered violence in secondary schools is a new and emerging area of risk studies in Ontario educational law.

In this chapter, I discuss recent changes to disciplinary policies in Ontario schools that place greater responsibility on teachers for reporting gendered violence between students in schools. My interview data show that such mandatory reporting laws for incidents of secondary student<sup>16</sup> sexual and gendered violence, while seemingly well intentioned to support survivors of gendered violence and ensure an institutional response,

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<sup>16</sup> My research is focused on the experience of secondary teachers and the students they teach who are typically thirteen years of age or older. As I will detail in this chapter, for youth 12 years of age or over, both provincial educational law and Board policies require school administrators to call police in sexual and gendered violence cases between students. For youth younger than 12 years old, police are called at the discretion of school administrators.

suffer from the same problems feminists have raised in relation to mandatory charges for domestic violence cases in Canada (see for example, Ontario Women's Justice Network, 2009; Johnson & Connors, 2017; Thobani, 1999) and in recent mandatory reporting requirements of U.S. colleges and universities in cases of gendered violence student disclosures (Weiss & Lasky, 2017). In line with this research, my interviews with teachers illustrate how mandatory reporting of student sexual violence in the secondary school context takes autonomy away from sexual assault survivors who have already had their agency violated through the act of sexual and/or gendered violence itself. The disempowering nature of mandatory reporting to police has particularly negative ramifications for Indigenous and racialized youth. My interviews with participants adds a new dimension to sexual assault research in schools – that is, how disciplinary measures and risk management regimes aimed at teachers shape the work of activist teachers, and how these same teachers simultaneously employ feminist discourses with their students and school administrators to counteract the impacts of mandatory sexual assault reporting laws.

In this chapter, I outline the various ways in which new public management restructuring of education and accompanying risk management discourses of accountability shape activist teachers' responses to sexual and gendered violence in schools. For example, in the last twenty years, greater managerial control exercised over Ontario teachers has affected issues of gendered violence by constraining critique of administrative responses to said violence. Where activist teachers are concerned over how school administrators are (mis)handling student disclosures of sexual violence, my participants expressed concern over the disciplinary consequences they may face in

discussing these concerns with school administrators who are their ‘superiors’ or reporting these concerns to more senior Board officials. Secondly, teachers’ new legal responsibilities to ‘report’ incidents of gendered violence have been accompanied by criminal and professional disciplinary consequences for failures to report. For activist teachers who draw on critical feminist discourses, the risk of professional disciplinary consequences for not reporting incidents of gendered violence has placed some of my participants in difficult situations of balancing these risks alongside their concerns over the harm done to youth sexual assault survivors who are forced to report to police and parents when they do not wish to proceed with such criminal or disciplinary approaches. Despite the predominance of various disciplinary and risk management discourses to address gendered violence in schools, my participants continually worked to re-assert critical feminist discourses into school responses in an attempt to mitigate the harm done to youth survivors of sexual assault while also re-enlivening the democratic progressive possibilities of schools.

### **Report ‘or Else’: The Policy Landscape Regulating Youth Sexual Assault and Teacher Responses**

In the course of my interviews with 18 participants, incidents of student sexual assault and sexual coercion came up again and again in various staff experiences in schools. The frequency with which these incidents arose in my interviews with a relatively small sample group of teachers and other school staff supports various other studies (Hlavka, 2014; Larkin, 1994; Wolfe & Chiodo, 2008) that suggest the significant scale of the problem of sexual assault and sexual harassment in secondary schools. Several of my activist teacher participants had a number of experiences assisting various students over the years who had been sexually harassed or assaulted at school or by

fellow peers from the same school. Stacy was one such participant. During our interview together, Stacy shared with me two specific experiences over her 20 year career where she had been involved in assisting young women who had shared experiences of gendered violence and sexual assault with her. One experience had occurred four years ago involving a young woman in her classroom who I will refer to as Anna. Stacy and Anna's experiences illustrate how a sexual assault is rendered institutionally knowable and actionable in a school through recent changes to educational laws in Ontario. Their experiences also expose the various problems with the institutional processes that currently exist to address gendered violence in Ontario schools and how they impact activist teachers' responses as well as students who are sexually assaulted.

During our interview, Stacy recounted a time when she had been teaching a Grade 11 Law class during the high profile sexual assault case involving Jian Gimeshi, a well-known Canadian journalist, author and musician. One day during class Stacy handed out a newspaper article on the Gimeshi<sup>17</sup> case. After class, Anna approached her, upset and in tears, and began to confide in Stacy what sounded like "something terrible" that had happened to her, possibly involving sexual assault. Immediately before Anna could reveal specific details, Stacy interrupted to inform her of Stacy's "professional obligation" (interview transcript, 2018) to report incidents involving sexual violence:

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<sup>17</sup> Jian Gimeshi was terminated from his position as a national radio broadcaster with the CBC in 2014 and turned himself into police several weeks later to face charges of sexual assault. Several months later, Gimeshi was acquitted on all charges on the basis that there was insufficient evidence to establish proof beyond a reasonable doubt (Fearon, 2016). Gimeshi's high profile Toronto trial invigorated much mainstream media and social media debate on the issue of sexual assault and the difficulties with demonstrating sufficient evidence beyond a reasonable doubt in sexual assault trials (Kingston, 2016).

Stacy: ...she started to talk about sexual assault but I wasn't sure whether it was going to come from her family, where it was going to come from. And I wasn't sure if it was actual- like if it was sexual assault or sexual harassment or if it was- where it's coming from because I stopped her before [and said] "Just to let you know...[of teachers' professional obligations to report]". Because I wanted to- to make sure that she was aware of that.

Alison: And then she said?

Stacy: She wanted to keep talking and I said "Would it be okay if I checked with [the school] admin[istrator] around- because she was 16, I think – "check with admin... around the age when I have to report... any possible harm to a student"?"

Alison: To Children's Aid?

Stacy: Yes.

Similar to my own experience as I outlined in Chapter 2, Stacy felt an obligation to inform Anna that the difficult and delicate story she was about to tell to someone she trusted was subject to institutional relations dictating a particular response on the part of the teacher subject to these relations. These institutional relations are framed as "particular responsibilities" that professionals (i.e. teachers, school principals, social workers, etc.) have who work closely with children and who have a "special awareness" of the signs of abuse and neglect of children (Ontario Ministry of Children, Community & Social Services, 2017, p. 5). Through the *Child and Family Services Act* of Ontario, professionals who fail to report a suspicion of abuse or neglect on the part of parents/guardians are "liable on conviction to a fine of up to \$5000" (Ontario Ministry of Children, Community & Social Services, 2017, p. 5). The Ontario College of Teachers also has a professional advisory that has been constructed with the purpose of "inform[ing] professional judgment and practice" and to serve as a reminder of teachers' duties to report suspected abuse and/or neglect of children and youth as reflected in the

*Child, Youth and Family Services Act*. Under the Professional Misconduct Regulation 437 of the *Ontario Teachers' College Act*, College members can be found guilty of professional misconduct if they do not comply with their duties, resulting in professional reprimand, requirements for additional education and/or teaching license suspension or revocation (Ontario College of Teachers, 2019a).

For cases of suspected sexual assault and sexual abuse of youth, legislative responsibilities vary depending on a number of factors. For example, in the above excerpt, Stacy indicates that she remained uncertain as to whether Anna was going to reveal either an experience of sexual assault or harassment or something else, “whether it was going to come from her family” and how to report based on the student’s age. The type of abuse experienced by a young person, how old the young person is, and the source of abuse, require different responses according to laws dictating teacher and school administrator responsibilities. For example, if a student was to reveal that a family member sexually assaulted or harassed her, Stacy is subject to the *Child and Family Services Act* as previously noted, which requires a teacher to report to the Ontario Children’s Aid Society directly if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that “the child has been sexually molested or sexually exploited, by the person having charge of the child or by another person” (*CFSA*, Section 72 (1), R.S.O. 1990). The ‘duty to report’ sexual abuse for teachers is mandatory if it concerns any young person in one’s charge who is or appears to be under the age of 16 and is otherwise voluntary if the concern is for any child 16 or 17 years of age (Ontario Ministry of Child and Family Services, 2017).

If, on the other hand, the sexual assault or harassment was committed by another young person, different legal directives apply to teachers under the *Education Act*. As I outlined in Chapter 1, the highly publicized 2007 school shooting death of 15-year-old Jordan Manners in Toronto, and the subsequent revelation that the school's vice principal had failed to report a sexual assault case to police, resulted in the release of two formative reports addressing gendered violence in Ontario schools - the TDSB-commissioned School Community Safety Advisory Panel (2008) report and a provincial Safe School Action Team (2008) report. The School Community Safety Advisory Panel (2008) report noted that the school administrator's failure to report the sexual assault to police was an individual failing rather than a failure of existing policy since school administrators' responsibilities for reporting such incidents were well established through the Ontario *Education Act* and other local board policies. However, despite the fact that a teacher at CW Jefferys *did* report the sexual assault to school administrators, both the School Community Safety Advisory Panel (2008) report and a provincial Safe School Action Team (2008) noted a gap in existing laws such that there was no legal *requirement* on the part of teachers and other professional staff to report if they became aware of an abusive or violent incident *between* students, including sexual assault, bullying and sexual harassment. Beyond reporting this gap in policy, both reports advocated for governments to improve funding for school and community supports and to better address systemic societal issues such as poverty, gender based violence, and racism in order to tackle violence in schools (see also McMurtry & Curling, 2008).

Despite the recognition of the systemic issues that contribute to school violence, the government responded shortly after the release of these reports with legislation that

focused primarily on holding educational staff legally liable for reporting violence in schools. Bill 157 entitled *Keeping our Kids Safe at School* (2009) amended the Ontario *Education Act* to make teachers responsible for reporting any activity that was a suspendable offense. Through the passing of Bill 157 (2009), any school board employee who became aware of a student who may have engaged in an activity leading to suspension or possible suspension (of which sexual assault and sexual harassment were included) “shall, as soon as reasonably possible, report to the principal” (p. 1). With the passing of Bill 157, if teachers failed to take the proper steps to report acts of school violence, including gendered violence, legal or other sanctions could be applied. Within Stacy’s Board, the development of a specific policy on gender based violence aligned itself with the requirements of Bill 157, noting that “all employees of the Board” were required to “report concerns about or incidents of gender based violence in the school community” to the principal, noting that a failure to comply with the policy “may lead to disciplinary action” (Toronto District School Board, 2010b, p. 1-2).

Rose (1996) has argued that state bodies have increasingly downloaded responsibility onto professionals and experts as the welfare state declines in an era of advanced liberal government. A “litigious mentality” increasingly frames much professional activity within the public service through the establishment of particular laws and professional codes of conduct (Rose, 1996, p. 350). Within the context of neoliberal discourse and practices, risk identification, assessment and management have become central to the role of professionals and experts in service to the government (O’Malley, 2006; Walklate & Mythen, 2011). In her analysis of child protection cases, Munro (2010) argues that the application of new public management techniques focused

on greater accountability and transparency in the field of social work has translated into demands for professionals to follow more detailed formal procedures outlining the ‘correct way’ to deal with cases that can be readily performed and measured. With neoliberal governance strategies turning towards projects aimed at reducing and eliminating risk, high profile cases of child abuse cases have led organizations to focus on reducing the institutional risks of professionals being criticized (Munro, 2011; Rothstein, Huber & Gaskell, 2006). Thus, organizational responses to tragic child abuse stories in the media often focus on ensuring that professionals engage in tasks that can be readily observed and recorded rather than assessing the competence of professional judgments and the complex contexts in which decisions related to child protection are made (Munro, 2011).

For its part, and in line with such risk management discourses emanating from neoliberal governance strategies, the Ontario government’s *Keeping our Kids Safe at School Act* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009c) positioned teachers in greater roles of responsibility and accountability for identifying and appropriately managing school violence. “Tick box” (Munro, 2010, p. 1139) forms of accountability were presented alongside Bill 157 through the “Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form” which was to be completed by teachers, and any other employees of a school board, in the event of witnessing an incident that constituted a student offense pending suspension or expulsion or if they became aware of such an offense that occurred off school property but could negatively impact the school climate (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018). Such a form demanded teacher compliance with reporting procedures while also ensuring principals’ accountability since principals were also required to return a receipt acknowledging the

form and to indicate whether action had been taken<sup>18</sup> (Ontario Education Services Corporation, 2017). Government communiqués noted that if principals discovered that a member of school staff had not reported an incident that could lead to a student being suspended or expelled “the matter should be dealt with... consistent with school board human resources policies and collective agreements”, with a note that teachers were also governed by Ontario College of Teachers Professional Misconduct regulations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009c, p. 5).

Since student disclosures of sexual violence are generally not an everyday occurrence for teachers, teachers often seek assistance from fellow colleagues and/or school administrators in understanding their responsibilities and duties in relation to the complex array of laws and policies associated with youth sexual assault and harassment. When I asked Stacy to explain why she wished to consult with her vice principal before hearing Anna’s story, she spoke to her confusion about the various policies and laws governing her “duty to report” and her anxiety about following correct procedures since there had been past incidents at her school involving teachers “being called in [to the school administrator’s office] for how they were dealing or not dealing with incidents with students” (interview transcript, 2018). Stacy’s call to the vice principal and her anxieties in following correct procedures with her student Anna were informed by her experience of another incident involving the alleged sexual assault of student at her school several years earlier where a teacher had been disciplined by the school principal

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<sup>18</sup> In practice, teachers are generally more aware of their duty to report than they are of this particular form. Teachers are reminded of their ‘duty to report’ annually as part of their compliance training but this particular form is not necessarily described in the training. While the form was emphasized in trainings immediately following the passing of Bill 157, it is not a regular part of the TDSB’s annual compliance trainings.

for ‘anonymously’ reporting concerns about the administrator’s management of the case to Board officials. In that situation, a number of teachers, including Stacy, became aware of a young girl who had been removed from a class and placed in another learning space in the school because she had accused a classmate of sexually assaulting her. When Stacy and her colleagues could not get satisfactory answers from the school principal as to why the young woman was being excluded from her class rather than the young man who allegedly assaulted her, one colleague decided to call a staff person in the Caring and Safe School department to report their concerns. While Stacy’s colleague made sure not to identify herself by name, she did have an accent. The next day Stacy remembered this same colleague called down to the office and questioned by the administrator as to whether she had made this call. Despite receiving support from the union, Stacy recalled that her colleague was disciplined for the incident and “was so traumatized [that] she was close to retirement... and she just decided to retire” (interview transcript, 2018). While prior to 1997, teachers and principals could go to their shared union for mediation services in such situations, with principals placed in positions of greater managerial authority and excluded from membership in teachers’ unions with the passing of *Bill 160 Education Quality Improvement Act* (1997), teachers became more subject to informal and formal discipline for critiquing their school principal.

This incident, along with other disciplinary incidents of colleagues that Stacy recounted during our interview, contributed to Stacy’s anxieties about ensuring she was following protocol in the case of Anna. In Stacy’s words, various disciplinary measures taken against teachers at her school over the years for speaking out against school administrators’ perceived mishandling of student incidents of sexual violence had

contributed to a “culture of silence” among staff, a phrase Stacy used in reference to findings from the School Community Safety Advisory Panel team after the CW Jefferys shooting (interview transcript, 2018). This “culture of silence” was described in the report as significant reluctance among TDSB staff to speak “on the record” about their experiences of school safety (including observations of sexual harassment and assault among students) for fear of reprisals and career limitations from those in positions of authority (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008, p. 417). This fear of scrutiny was found at all levels but was particularly strong among “the higher levels of administration or senior ranks of the Board” (School Community Safety Panel, 2008, p. 415). According to Stacy, despite some effort on the part of the school Board to address this culture (including the development of a Board “whistle blower” policy) since the report’s release ten years ago, her experiences reaffirmed the threat of disciplinary consequences for teachers for either not doing their due diligence in cases of gendered violence or for questioning the due diligence of their school principal.

While Stacy and her colleagues received annual compliance training on issues related to “duty to report” child abuse and sexual misconduct issues, at the time of Anna’s disclosure to Stacy, the training had occurred several months earlier and was, in the words of Stacy, “as clear as mud” (interview transcript, 2018). As Stacy described it, the school social worker had reviewed various policies via an 80-minute *PowerPoint* presentation during a school staff meeting:

It was all monotone and she droned on and there were a couple of points where she said “Well, this has just changed and it used to be this age and now it’s this age and it’s this age for this and it’s that age for this”. Basically in the end “If you have any cause to believe that a student is being harmed or even that someone in their family is being harmed, you have to report it directly to Children’s Aid.” ... and all about ‘You have to do this or you’re going to get

in trouble' kind of thing. Which was - kind of obviously that stuck with me [A: Yes.] [Both laugh] And so 'Okay I'm going to be *super* careful.' [laughs].

In calling the school administrator, Stacy was seeking more clarity on her own obligations 'to report', to whom she had an obligation to report, the risks that she was subject to in reporting or not reporting about Anna's particular experiences, as well as clarity on the implications that these obligations might have for Anna who wished to share her story. However, shortly after calling her school administrator to come to her classroom, Stacy felt significant regret over her decision. To the disappointment of Stacy, when the vice principal arrived, it was Stacy's feeling that the vice principal failed to adequately explain to Anna "the policy context" and the institutional obligations of school professionals in cases involving sexual assault disclosure (interview transcript, 2018). Instead, the vice principal "just forced... the student to tell her what had happened" (interview transcript, 2018). Upon sharing her experiencing of being forcibly kissed and touched by a fellow male student off of school property, Anna also made it clear that "she didn't want either her parents knowing or the police knowing... because she had been following the [Jian] Gimeshi story" where many of the survivors' stories were being debated and subjected to critique through media reports (interview transcript, 2018). According to Stacy, the vice principal "murmured sympathy" to Anna and left the room. Within a day, much to the dismay of Stacy and Anna, the police were called against Anna's wishes but in line with policy as I outline below.

### **Youth and Feminist Teachers Under Duress: The Consequences of Mandatory Reporting to Police and Parents of Sexual Assault in Schools**

Within 24 hours of meeting with Stacy and her student, the school administrator proceeded to call police, the school social worker, and the student's parents against

Anna's wishes. In this instance, while such actions were experienced with dismay by both Anna and Stacy, the vice principal's actions followed the laws and policies dictating school administrator responses in incidents involving sexual assault disclosures by young people in schools. The Toronto District School Board has five major policies outlining responsibilities of principals in cases where sexual assault and gendered violence have been alleged: Operational Procedure PR697 Promoting a Positive School Climate (2018), Operational Procedure PR560 Dealing with Abuse and Neglect of Students (2014), Operational Procedure PR608 Sexual Misconduct by Students (2010a), Operational Procedure PR698 Police/School Board Protocol (2011) and Policy PO71 Gender-Based Violence (2010b). Several of these policies were amended following the release of the School Community Safety Panel (2008) report and the passing of Bill 157, and the Gender Based Violence Policy was created as a direct result of the report's findings. TDSB policies "Promoting a Positive School Climate" (2018) and "Police/School Board Protocol" (2011) both outline the mandatory requirement of principals to contact police in cases of sexual assault. In the "Sexual Misconduct" (TDSB, 2010a) policy, in cases of alleged sexual misconduct involving students 12 years of age or over, the principal "shall report an allegation to the Chief of Social Work and Attendance who will assist the principal to determine... when and how to communicate with... police" (p. 3)<sup>19</sup>. In addition, this policy notes that in accordance with the *Education Act*, principals must notify the victims' parents when the principal believes a student has been "physically or emotionally harmed by the sexual misconduct" although notification "**shall not be given**

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<sup>19</sup> In cases involving sexual misconduct of children under 12 years of age, the policy states that principals do not have to call the police but instead should contact the Chief of Social Work and Attendance as the "first line of response since a student perpetrator under the age of 12 is under the age of criminal responsibility" (TDSB, 2010a, p. 6).

if, in the opinion of the principal to do so would put the victim at risk of harm from the parent/guardian” (bolded text in the original, TDSB, 2010a, p. 3).

The day following Anna’s disclosure, Anna was called to the principal’s office and placed in a room with three police officers - two of whom were described to Anna as “sexual assault specialists” (interview transcript, 2018) – as well as the school social worker. During a break in the meeting, the student came to Stacy’s classroom to ask for her support during the process. Anna described the meeting to Stacy as “horrendous” (interview transcript, 2018). Stacy joined Anna and was similarly appalled by the process that unfolded and which she had been a part of instigating:

And so I went in and it was terrible. [*A: Okay so tell me about that?*] Well so she did not want any- she did not want to make a report. She kept saying that. And they said “We’re just going to take notes. Are you okay with that?” She said “No”. And they continued to take notes. And she said “You’re not going to tell my parents, are you?” And umm [pause] I think they sort of hemmed and hawed over that although they had an obligation- the school had an obligation to tell her parents and no one really made that clear but in the meanwhile they were calling her parents and she hadn’t been told about that. But the part that really stands out is- they were trying to get the details from her of the actual incident so you know “When he did this to you, was it the type of thing that you know, guys will do something and the girl will sort of say ‘no, no, no’ but they really want to, and so you know, he just continued along but he may have... heard ‘no, no, no’ from you but he didn’t interpret that as an actual no?” That was the kind of discussion. That was the special sexual assault squad cop [who asked that].

According to Anna’s own written account, the police also told her that if she was not willing to provide the name of the student who assaulted her it would be her fault if he assaulted anyone else<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Stacy’s student later published a story in a magazine about her experiences, which I also draw upon to illustrate the problems with current educational policies on sexual assault. However to protect anonymity and confidentiality of my participant, I have chosen not to cite the specific magazine source.

While Anna seemed to be seeking some support in initially confiding in Stacy, she made it clear to both Stacy and the vice principal that she did not wish to report her experience to police or reveal the name of the student who assaulted her to the school. In the above excerpt, we see institutional authorities – in this case, both the police and school authorities who called Anna’s parents and police– disregard the expressed needs and desires of the young woman who was assaulted. An institutional ethnographic analysis of this situation asks us to move beyond an analysis focused solely on individual behaviours and statements of authority figures and instead to consider how the actions and thinking of the police and school authorities are coordinated within a set of institutional and discursive relations relevant to the particular setting of which they are a part. In this instance, the police officer’s questions and actions are guided by the federal *Criminal Code* and the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* involving sexual assault, and the evidence required to charge someone and ensure that such evidence will be strong enough to withstand a court challenge. Once a call is made to police (in this case by the school and not the student), the police open a file, which requires a ‘report’. This report will be filed even in cases where the survivor is not interested in taking further action but in case the survivor decides to proceed with criminal charges at a later date (Sexual Assault Care Centre, 2018). This report will require notes, which the police officer must produce to her/his superior officer.

As Wilson and Pence (2006) observed, communication between women who have been abused by their male partners and police is often characterized by “communication without dialogues” – that is, women are treated as ‘data’ to be mined for appropriate evidence that will support a criminal charge. In the above example, Stacy identifies the

police officer's question about the intent of the young man who assaulted her student as highly problematic since the officer implies that the young woman was saying 'no' when really she meant 'yes' ("the girl will sort of say 'no, no, no' but they really want to").

Experts working with police to improve how police handle sexual assault cases demonstrate that much of a police officer's traditional emphasis during an interview with a sexual assault survivor will involve establishing the credibility of the witness in case there is enough evidence to charge and the charge proceeds to the court room (Doolittle, 2017). Additionally, Section 265 (4) of the Criminal Code (1985) outlines that a suspect may argue that "he believed that the complainant consented"<sup>21</sup> (p. 301). If such a defense is made, a court must then determine whether there is "reasonable grounds" for the accused to believe that the complainant consented through evidence provided by the police. In Canada, the Crown must have sufficient evidence collected through the police investigation that it can dispute such claims.

School disciplinary responses toward the student alleged to have committed sexual assault and/or sexual harassment, are governed by the *Education Act* as well as the *Criminal Code*, with principals empowered to issue suspensions while they conduct an investigation, if they believe that the student may have committed sexual assault. Once a school principal becomes aware of a sexual assault allegation and the student is suspended, the principal is expected to conduct an investigation within five days after issuing the suspension but only after the police have finished conducting their

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<sup>21</sup> There are limitations to this defense based on the age of the complainant and the accused, and if the accused is in a position of trust or authority towards the complainant, or the accused is in an exploitative relationship with the complainant. Section 153.1 (3) of the *Criminal Code* (1985) outlines additional conditions when no consent can be considered obtained.

investigation, in order to determine whether a disciplinary response should be applied and to whom (Zheng & De Jesus, 2017). Educational authorities, too, are required to gather evidence for a variety of accountability and risk management purposes that are often at odds with the interests and needs of the young person who has been sexually assaulted. School administrators must keep written notes as evidence for the purposes of a possible student suspension or expulsion, which parents can appeal (Zheng & De Jesus, 2017). These reports are also required for board data management and school improvement planning processes. For example, sexual assault reports resulting in suspension and expulsion become data for the Board to record as part of its calculation of suspensions and expulsion rates over the course of the year. In the TDSB's Caring and Safe Schools (2013b) policy, the Board uses figures from schools to publish an annual report that includes the number of suspension and expulsions by student demographics, type of incident, interventions used by schools as well as academic achievement and school climate data, all of which is used to revise school improvement plans.

In the incident described by Stacy, Anna was neither interested in laying a charge nor seeking disciplinary action from the school. However, once she spoke about being sexually assaulted by another student in the presence of Stacy, Stacy's call to the vice principal made this student's experience institutionally visible and actionable, setting off a chain of events that neither Stacy nor her student could control. What is most striking in this case and in other experiences of my participants' involvement in cases involving young people's disclosures of sexual assault, is the detrimental impact that mandatory reporting of youth sexual assault to police and to parents can have on youth survivors, particular those who do not wish to proceed with criminal allegations. In Canada, adults

who experience sexual assault can choose whether they wish to file a report to the police, with the majority of sexual assault survivors avoiding the criminal process (Statistics Canada, 2017). However, youth under the age of 18 who speak to a trusted adult at school about an experience of sexual assault are involuntarily required to speak to police and school administrators about their experiences even when they are not interested in revealing the identity of the person who assaulted them or filing criminal charges. As feminist legal scholars and sexual assault advocates have argued, mandatory reporting of sexual assault often has chilling effects, leading to fewer reports of sexual assault and contributing to survivors' experiences of assault remaining as a 'private' trauma to be worked through by the survivor of her own accord and without the survivor being able to access any institutional supports (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008; Jiwani, Gorkoff, Berman, Taylor, Vardy Dell & McQueen Ferguson, 1999).

As Stacy's experience illustrates, current sexual assault policies operating in Ontario secondary schools primarily draw upon risk management and disciplinary/criminal approaches thereby contributing to potential institutional re-victimization of youth survivors who come forward and possible silencing effect for youth sexual assault survivors. Following the sexual assault at CW Jefferys, the School Community Safety Panel (2008) raised the problem of mandatory police and parental reports in cases involving sexual assault, noting that such a policy had the potential of violating the rights of a young person to her privacy and autonomy in circumstances when the young person has expressed that she is not interested in either police or parental involvement. In addition, the School Community Safety Panel also critiqued the gender and race-neutral aspects of existing Board policies involving sexual assault and

harassment, arguing that the invisibility of racial, gendered and sexualized elements of violence in existing policies obscure the root causes of said violence and behavior (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008). The Panel (2008) spoke specifically to the implications of mandatory reporting to police on racialized survivors who often experience disproportionate consequences from justice and educational systems shaped by systemic racist practices and who may also fear for the consequences of the person who assaulted them if s/he is racialized. These disproportionate consequences experienced by racialized survivors and perpetrators of sexual and gendered violence in both the education and justice systems has been well documented (see for example, Bannerji, 2002; Crenshaw, 1991; Murdocca, 2013).

In relation to mandatory police reporting, the School Community Safety Panel (2008) suggested that “further research was warranted on this issue” but recommended that “in the interim... a distinction be made at the age of 16” with 16 year-old students making the decision over whether to contact police for themselves (p. 386). In reference to schools contacting parents, the Panel also recommended that for youth under the age of 16, school principals and the Chief Social Worker should make the decision to contact parents “after consulting and supporting the student” (School Community Safety Panel, 2008, p. 390). The report used the age of 16 based on other legal precedents of youth autonomy and consent in relation to medical decisions under the *Health Care Consent Act* (1996), sexual consent under the *Criminal Code* of Canada, and in relation to support provided to youth for abuse or neglect under the *Child and Family Service Act* (School Community Safety Panel, 2008). The report concluded that youth 16 years of age and older should be able to decide for themselves whether the police and parents are

contacted in cases of sexual assault (School Community Safety Panel, 2008, p. 390).

While this was the recommendation of the report, the TDSB declined to operationalize this recommendation through their policies.

Mandatory policies of police contact following youth sexual assault draw from traditional adult-child protectionist and paternalist discourses which presume that young people and women ‘victims’ of sexual assault are in need of protection from their own sexual experiences and that adults ‘know best’ how a young person’s sexuality should be managed. As Cavanaugh (2007) notes, the paternalism driving the impulse to protect youth is often associated with a refusal to validate youth claims to sexual self-determination. In the case Stacy shared with me, her student’s insistence that she did not wish to involve the police or her parents demonstrates that she was not necessarily seeking ‘protection’ from adults in positions of authority over her, but rather a space of support, where she could share her experience of violation and express her needs in all of their complexity. As one centrally assigned TDSB staff person with an equity portfolio noted, in community agencies supporting youth sexual assault survivors calls are not made to police unless a survivor wants to file a report since “you don’t have much to say to the police without a victim” (interview transcript, 2016). However, following the media attention surrounding CW Jefferys in 2007 and the passing of Bill 157 shortly thereafter, there was much legal and institutional emphasis on the teacher’s professional ‘duty to report’ sexual assault as demonstrated through the Ontario College of Teachers’ professional advisories and annual Board compliance training for staff. With CW Jefferys school administrators placed on leave as well as facing charges following their failure to report sexual assault to police (CBC, 2008; Marlowe & Rushowy, 2007) many

TDSB teachers and principals were made very aware of the professional consequences of a failure to report, regardless of a young person's wishes.

### **Feminist Teacher Interventions in Educational Policy on Sexual Assault**

Thus far, I have described the policy landscape surrounding youth sexual assault and how Ontario secondary teachers' responses are regulated through various disciplinary and risk management frames applied to Ontario educational law. As I have described, these disciplinary and risk management frames were strengthened through the passing of Bill 160 *Education Quality Improvement Act* (1997) which removed principals and vice principals from teacher unions, providing school administrators with greater supervisory power over staff. Additionally, with the highly publicized school shooting in Toronto in 2007 and the discovery of a sexual assault that had not been properly reported at the same school, changes were made to provincial law and specific Toronto District School Board policies that focused primarily on implementing additional disciplinary and risk management discourses regulating teachers' duty to report gendered violence in schools rather than exploring systemic roots of gendered violence and the complexity of gendered violence in relation to other social relations of difference such as race.

In applying an institutional ethnographic analysis to interviews, McCoy (2006) suggests researchers consider the accounts of participants who use oppositional talk – that is, talk that takes a stance highlighting “the differences between the institutional discourse and the forms of knowing and being the speaker feels to be preferable” (p. 120). Further, McCoy (2006) emphasizes that the analytic interest in identifying oppositional talk in IE research is primarily concerned with what difference it makes for people not to participate in institutional discourses rather than “celebrating the resistance

of those who don't do institutional talk" (p.121). For Stacy and other activist teacher participants in similar situations, participating in institutional discourses of mandatory reporting of sexual assault centred on the application of criminal and/or school disciplinary forces did not resolve their concern for youth who disclosed their sexual assaults. Instead, the mandatory reporting processes initiated more efforts on the part of activist teachers to ensure the well-being and integrity of their students who were forced to participate in these disciplinary processes without consent. As I have demonstrated, in circumstances in which youth who have been sexually assaulted seek professional support from school authorities but who are uninterested in disciplinary or criminal action, the educational policy landscape in Toronto secondary schools can have the effect of alienating youth from school and contributing further to youth survivors' experiences of disempowerment, violation, fear, guilt and danger. Activist teachers' professional responsibilities to report conflict with their allegiances to feminist discourses of supporting and empowering sexual assault survivors to make their own decisions about who they tell their stories to and what sort of support they desire. In an effort to deal with such conflicts, my participants often engaged in additional emotional labour with their students to provide the support and care that other school authorities were unable to provide.

Take Stacy's case. Throughout Anna's meeting with police and school staff at her school, Anna continued to refuse to provide the name of her assaulter. Since she was neither interested in laying criminal charges nor having the school take disciplinary measures, neither the police nor the school administrator could proceed. However, both Stacy and her student continued to process the experience individually and together.

From Stacy's perspective, her student was left feeling "really alienated from the school" following the school's interventions (interview transcript, 2018). Stacy herself spoke about her own anxieties and guilt about the role she had played in her student's experience. She admitted that she "debated all of this intensely with myself for months after" (interview transcript, 2018). Following the police interview, Stacy engaged in relational repair with her student for the part that she played in the process of making her student's experience of sexual assault institutionally visible and the re-victimization Anna had experienced from both police and educational authorities:

Sometime thereafter you know I –we talked, we talked about it. And you know I apologized for how everything unfolded and talked to her about – because I then found out what, you know, the legislative responsibilities were for sure and I said "You know when I asked you, when I told you [that] you might not want to go forward, that's really what I was alluding to". And then- we both talked about how problematic it was- the cop made that comment to her and how she had asked them not to take notes.

Much of Stacy's work throughout this process involved a significant degree of emotional labour (Hochschild, 2003) characteristic of many 'service' occupations in the helping professions, of which teaching is a part. Stacy invested time and energy in supporting her student's needs "on the job", while also wrestling with her own emotions about the process on her own time.

In her own written account of her assault, Anna identified Stacy as warm, attentive and receptive to listening to students whenever they were upset. Stacy's equity work included supporting Anna's request for an advocate and ally to sit in the room with her while the police conducted their interview, something Stacy did willingly within the finite constraints of her time at work. Stacy also did work to try to repair any damage to the trust and confidence she had developed with her student by reconnecting and

speaking with her student about her professional obligations and how they conflicted with Anna's needs. Additionally, Stacy drew on feminist discourses about sexual assault by problematizing with Anna afterwards the police officers' disregard for Anna's requests that no notes be taken and the officer's questions to Anna over whether she had done enough to communicate clearly with the youth who assaulted her. As Stacy described, Stacy and Anna continued to keep in touch well after Anna had graduated. Later, Anna confided in Stacy that the entire experience had led her to change one of her majors in university to gender studies (interview transcript, 2018). It seems highly plausible that the analysis Stacy offered to Anna to understand her experiences with her peer who assaulted her, as well as the police and school officials, had a significant influence on Anna's later interests in gender studies at university.

In considering her experiences and what she might have done differently, Stacy felt that her student "would have been better off without the school's involvement" given the educational policy context regulating youth sexual assault. Stacy's experience led to her resolve that she would be more clear and "definite about the implications of... sharing any details of harm" with any student who approached her in the future (personal communication, 2018). The institutional relations governing Stacy's 'duty to report' precipitated a greater awareness for Stacy of the existing policies shaping sexual assault disclosures and the problems inherent with these institutional responses for youth involved. Her own response, governed by both her professional and legal obligations and her feminist analysis developed prior to her career as a teacher, lead her to adopt a new approach to disclosures, that involved informing youth of the consequences of their

disclosure in a school context so that they may make the most informed choice for support.

### **Other Feminist Interventions to Support Youth Survivors of Gendered Violence**

Throughout our interview together, another participant, Shannon, also demonstrated her use of feminist and critical race discourses that she drew upon to augment the dominant disciplinary discourses shaping her students' experience of gendered violence at school. Shannon had been a teacher in the Toronto District School Board since 2011. In a case reminiscent of Stacy's experience, a 16 year-old female student, Gabriela, had disclosed to Shannon and another teacher an experience she had of being sexually assaulted at her school the previous semester. Gabriela revealed to Shannon that her peers "were calling her a slut" based on an incident the previous year where "a group of boys had coerced her into doing some kind of sexual activity in the bathroom, and she felt really humiliated about the whole thing and it was affecting her attendance" (interview transcript, 2016). Gabriela told Shannon this information after having already spoken to another teacher about the experience a week or two before, a teacher who "had been there for longer... but who [Gabriela] had more of a long-term relationship with" (interview transcript, 2016). When Gabriela shared her experience with Shannon, a report had already been filed with the office so Shannon hadn't needed to file one. Similar to Anna, Gabriela told Shannon that she had been neither interested in reporting the incident to police nor alerting her parents to her experience of assault. Nevertheless, the school administrator followed the existing sexual assault protocol and both police and parents were called into the school. Like Anna, Gabriela refused to disclose the names of the students involved.

From Shannon's observations, the involvement of the police and the school's notification of her parents exacerbated rather than helped the student's mental and emotional well-being. Gabriela confided in Shannon that:

... she was really, really stressed out about [the police interview] and she just, she felt humiliated. She hadn't wanted her family to know. Her family was not supportive. And, she just, she told me that she felt like further isolated, and there was nothing else, there was nowhere for her to go.

After Shannon's student revealed her assault and her experiences with police and the school authorities to Shannon, Shannon noted that Gabriela's attendance at school continued to worsen. As a result, when the student did attend school, Shannon spent much of their time together, trying to figure out ways to support the young girl who continued to appear distressed, sad and anxious. In Shannon's words, "...she was... crying in my classroom at lunchtimes. And, I was trying to offer whatever supports I could although that was - I felt like my abilities were really limited". In an effort to "establish *something* positive in her life, some kind of positive social interaction", Shannon drew on her knowledge of Gabriela's interests in dance, researching local class offerings "that were, you know, free or really cheap and near her house" and encouraged Gabriela to become involved in these programs, since it was "the one thing she liked to do and she felt some degree of confidence" (interview transcript, 2016).

Shannon also had a number of conversations exploring with Gabriela what might be helpful for her to handle the isolation she felt from her peers. In private discussions with her student at lunch times, Shannon had asked whether her student was interested in transferring schools "if she felt unsafe" since the students who had assaulted her were still in the building. Beyond discussions with Gabriela, Shannon had also gone down to the office to ensure that the vice principal was following up on offering Gabriela student

counselling through the social worker at the school; however, Shannon was wary that the school social worker had the tools to effectively and sensitively intervene with her student's experience of sexual assault. As noted by Shannon during our interview, the school social worker who was charged with counselling her student had recently expressed her anger with other school staff members over the high media profile sexual assault allegations laid against Canadian radio personality Jian Gomeishi, whom the social worker felt was "wrongfully accused and all the women in the case were lying, and was railing loudly about it in public spaces" (interview transcript, 2016). As a result, Shannon felt no "reasonable expectation" that her student's experience of sexual assault would be believed by the school professional in charge of counselling her. Thus, Shannon researched several other counselling service organizations in the community to share these with Gabriela.

Where the policies regulating professional responses to youth sexual assault had failed, Shannon stepped in to offer her student a space to cry and vent her frustrations and to consider how she might continue her schooling and feel more empowered in a school context where she felt violated by her fellow peers and, arguably, by school board policies requiring her to report her story of sexual violation to police and parents against her will. Shannon's efforts took a significant amount of work inside and outside of the classroom: researching alternative schools, local and accessible youth dance classes, and youth counselling services; making time to speak to school administrators; and sitting with her distraught and crying student during her lunch hour. Shannon's work with her student was in addition to her regular teaching responsibilities at a new school. Much of Shannon's approach was very clearly rooted in feminist discourses of sexual assault and

survivor empowerment, particularly evident in her critical assessment of the school social worker's expressed sympathy for alleged perpetrators as potential victims of false accusations and smear campaigns.

A few weeks later, Gabriela confided to Shannon that she had raised the incident again with the teacher who had originally reported the incident to the office. In raising the issue again, "because she [*the student*] had disclosed some further details, the other teacher again felt like she had to, by policy, she had to re-report to administration" and the entire process began again (interview transcript, 2016). As per school board policy, school administrators called the police and the officers conducted a second interview with the student despite the fact that Shannon's student continued to assert that she did not want to speak to police:

...she told me that the police had called her down for another interview. She was really, really fearful and ashamed and uncomfortable. And, they told her that because she wasn't willing to say anything about the situation, she needed to understand that, in the future, if she ever contacted the police again to say she was sexually assaulted, that she probably wouldn't be believed.

Similar to the story of Stacy and her student Anna, we see police making comments to Gabriela that demonstrate an investment in establishing the future credibility of Gabriela in a court room context, rather than beginning with Gabriela's expressed fears and considering what role they could play for her (i.e., educating Gabriela about her rights should she wish to press charges in the future). Police comments centred on criminal justice requirements to charge and convict serve to reinforce victim-blaming narratives of sexual assault survivors, since the application of normative 'standards of evidence' are less applicable in sexual assault cases where the 'crime' leaves fewer physical traces and often unfolds in spaces with few witnesses.

In response, Shannon's advocacy work with her student advanced further, focusing on ensuring her student felt believed. Following the second police interview, Shannon's private conversations with Gabriela centred on beginning from feminist principles of support for survivors of sexual assault:

I was trying to offer her like unconditional belief in, in what she was saying, and reassuring her that she had the right to choose whom she spoke to and how much she said. And, that there were lots of really legitimate reasons why she might not want to speak to the police and that had nothing to do with whether or not her complaint was valid. [Hmm, hmm] So, you know, and I was trying to just help her cope with just day-to-day, how do you get to school? And, how do you sort of develop allies? Or develop outside interests, and mental health supports and that kind of thing.

As Gabriela's emotional and mental health appeared to deteriorate with each school-based intervention, Shannon focused on re-affirming Gabriela's decision to control her own experience of the assault. In the very act of offering such support, her words provided to Gabriela an analysis of sexual assault that placed the survivor's needs and choices ahead of seeking punishment of the assaulter without the consent of the survivor. Her work to support Gabriela challenged the narrative of the police and school administrators who expressed doubt over Gabriela's story and positioned her as lacking in credibility, weak, difficult and unstable. Shannon's work with Gabriela attempted to undo these damaging messages, instead focusing on the right of Gabriela to determine for herself what she needed and to whom she wished to tell her story. Shannon did all of this intense emotional work while also managing the many other demands of her job.

Despite the fact that she was new at the school and on a short-term contract, Shannon also asked the vice principal to speak to the police officers about their comments to Gabriela suggesting that she would not be believed if she ever decided to

report an experience of sexual assault to police. However, she did not feel she received a very satisfactory response:

...[the vice principal] said something along the lines of - sort of an [*sic*] apologist kind of - “well, you know her story has kind of changed over time. And, you know, almost a “you can’t blame people for having questions, given the way that she’s presented herself and she has a lot of problems”.

Shannon’s complaint to the school administrator over the police officer’s response to Gabriela challenged the school’s traditional disciplinary focus on youth experiences of sexual assault as well as the taken-for-granted relation between the education system and the criminal justice system. Her challenge to the school administrator disrupted the normalization of criminalizing responses to women’s experiences of sexual assault.

When I asked Shannon whether she felt race played a part in some of the examples she spoke to me about, Shannon identified ‘race’ as “a structural issue” in schools but that racism was often difficult to identify in particular incidents since so much remained unspoken.

So in the case with this girl, she was a Latina girl. And I- I have to wonder if that played any kind of role in terms of how her complaint was heard, right? Like because of all the terrible stereotyping around Latina girls.... stereotypes that Latina girls are promiscuous. That they don’t have a lot of morals. That they are kind of troublemakers. So, I don’t know. I mean, I think in this world, those biases, they have to play some role, and there has to be lurking underneath to some degree. But, it’s challenging. It’s so unseen that’s really challenging to put your finger on it.

In the above example, Shannon draws upon her knowledge of critical discourses of race, specifically racialized sexist stereotyping of Latina women (see for example, Perales, 1999), to consider Gabriela’s experience with school administrators and police. In addition, Shannon wondered to what extent the historical relations of race and schooling might impact student disclosures of sexual assault:

Like if, in most of the schools where I've taught...I'm...so, I'm white and almost overwhelmingly my students have been kids of colour. In some situations, I've literally had no white kids [in the classroom]. And, I think race is always present as an issue in the classroom. And, it's always present in the way that we interact with one another. And if kids are coming into that situation, and outside of whatever my own behaviors might be, or my own personal failings, they've already had a history of really challenging or untrustworthy interactions with white people, or with white women. Then, I think it becomes extremely difficult to create an environment of trust because why would somebody trust you if they've been robbed in the past? And, they don't think, they may already feel like they're not going to be believed. But, if they have additional reason to feel that way because they think, "You're not my ally."

White teachers continue to comprise the majority of teachers in North America (Bascia, 1996). In her discussion of femininity as discourse, Smith (1993) identifies underlying historical discourses of femininity that 'stand in' for their embodied correlates. For example, Smith speaks to how various textual discourses of femininity (in fashion magazines, television ads, cosmetic displays) organize women's responses to their bodies (their dress, whether they wear make up) and to other people in localized settings. In the above excerpt, Shannon draws on critical race discourses to consider her relationships with her students and the relations her students have with other (white female) teachers. Shannon's analysis of the education system, of which she is a part, is informed by considerations involving trust or lack thereof, between communities of colour and authority figures of the school who are typically white. Regardless of whether racial and gendered stereotypes were or were not at play in this instance, Shannon's responses to Gabriela and school authorities were informed by critical race and feminist discourses, particularly in how Gabriela's experiences were perceived by other authority figures ("how her complaint was heard") and in her efforts to unconditionally affirm Gabriela's experiences ("I was trying to offer her like unconditional belief in, in what she was saying").

## Conclusion

In instances of sexual assault, it is clear from the cases I have described above that the institutional mandate of the school focuses on evidence gathering for the purposes of applying a disciplinary lens, with a view to mitigating institutional risk and professional liabilities. In a neoliberal context where professionals are increasingly scrutinized for their ability to properly manage risk, professional responsibilities have been legislatively tied to compliance with a protocol that can harm more than help sexual assault youth survivors. For students who are not interested in criminal or disciplinary responses but who are seeking support from an adult they trust, school officials' enactment of policies regulating sexual assault demonstrate that schools cannot currently hold space for student stories without violating the integrity and desires of the young person seeking support. In the examples involving Stacy's student Anna and Shannon's student Gabriela, both students shared with their teachers the incredible degree of shame, humiliation and disempowerment they suffered from the mandated institutional response of the school. From the perspectives of these activist teachers, such policies led to greater alienation of their students from school, creating more harm rather than less.

Within this context, the activist teacher must contend with the inconsistencies of their consciousness as a teacher and their consciousness as feminists. As teachers, they have been made aware of their professional obligations to report sexual assault regardless of the particular desires or needs of their students. The issues of liability, of risks to their professional reputation and careers, of discourses focusing on adult protection of youth through *in loco parentis*, are at odds with my participants' feminist consciousness and sensibilities. During our time together, Stacy spoke to the mental anguish she experienced

in attempting to address these incongruences in the best interests of her student Anna. Activist teachers are placed in positions of having to temper their desire to be fully present and listen to the stories of their students who trust their teacher enough to disclose painful experiences of sexual assault. The trust they have worked hard to develop with their students is compromised by a risk management discourse that gives primacy to protecting the institution from legal and reputational harm, more than the needs and harms experienced by youth who has been sexually violated.

In the context of an under-funded educational institution where educational professionals are increasingly positioned as responsible for effectively and efficiently managing risk, and ‘protecting’ youth, decisions to challenge institutional protocol can bring significant public scrutiny. This public scrutiny often focuses on the intentions and actions of individual practitioners rather than an analysis of the organizational context in which decisions are made or the full context of professional judgments (Munro, 2010). The sexual assault at CW Jefferys provides a case in point. Media reports focused considerable attention on school staff mishandling of the case, including the failure of school administrators to report the assault to police as dictated by policy (Rushowy, 2008) with no consideration of the problems associated with mandatory reporting of sexual assault to police. All of the school administrators at CW Jefferys were initially suspended and criminally charged for their perceived mishandling of the case (Doolittle & Rushowy, 2008). Such high profile cases, although rare, are powerful in influencing educational policy as well as the decisions that professionals are forced to make ‘on the ground’ in schools when disclosures are made. As my interviews demonstrate, activist teachers engaged in an incredible amount of labour to counteract the institutional effects

of such disempowering policies on the young people they work with. Both Stacy and Shannon took time out of their workdays to manage the feelings of their students, Anna and Gabriela, as well as their own emotions as the various institutional processes in place to address sexual assault between students went awry. The work of my participants inserted sorely needed feminist discourses into school responses to youth sexual assault, providing youth with alternative forms of support and challenging the implementation of educational laws and policies focused primarily on disciplinary and criminal responses to sexual assault.

## **Chapter 6: Activist Teachers Challenge White Feminism in Neoliberal Schools**

### **Introduction**

As I have highlighted in previous chapters, gender and sexual equity work that activist teachers engage in takes many forms. In Chapter 4, I highlighted the work of activist teachers when they engage with gender and sexual equity (among other social justice considerations) in their classrooms through curriculum. In Chapter 5, I explored activist teachers' work with students who have approached them for support in experiencing sexual and gendered violence. As Stacy's experience exemplified in that chapter, activist teachers' equity work can include significant one-on-one advocacy on behalf of students with various school authorities including among others, school administrators, police and social workers. This chapter moves the focus on activist teachers' equity work beyond one-on-one advocacy with students and beyond classroom equity work to examine activist teachers' equity work on gender and sexuality issues as they emerge at the school level.

In the following pages, I focus on one of my participants, Sara, who decided to organize a day-long student workshop for all students at her school on issues of sexual consent, sexual assault, and media representations of gender (among other topics). Sara's work to garner support for this school initiative and to organize these student workshops at her school was precipitated by an incident at her school where a female student was suspected of being sexually coerced by a group of male students just off of school grounds. As I demonstrate, Sara's work to organize a school response to gender and sexual equity is multi-faceted. First, Sara moves the incident away from an individualized frame or 'private problem' (Weis & Fine, 2001, p. 520) to a broader social and political issue that demands collective consideration. Furthermore, she uses this

incident to “get something done” (interview transcript, 2016) at her school not only to address gender and sexual equity at the school but also to challenge various white racist and white feminist discourses circulating within her school. Sara’s work to organize sexual and gender equity workshops includes intentional and strategic engagement with critical race discourses. In so doing, Sara thereby challenges the omission and denial of race common within discourses of white racism (Bannerji, 1995; Jiwani, 2006) as advanced by many of Sara’s white colleagues and embedded in the gender-based violence policy of the Board itself.

In this chapter, my analysis is informed by a number of academics working in the field of critical race and critical policy studies, as well as scholars who have been informed by Dorothy Smith’s work and whose analysis has focused on the simultaneous experience of social relations of gender, race, sexuality and class (specifically Bannerji, 1995; Ng, 1993; see also Andre-Becheley, 2005; Kinsman & Gentile, 2010; Maraj Graham, 1998; Manicom, 1995). In keeping with the analytic focus of institutional ethnographic analysis, my examination of Sara’s experiences is not an analysis of individual ‘attitudes’ and ‘beliefs’ of either Sara or her colleagues, but rather an examination of the “systemic character of sexism and racism” as it is exhibited through interactional moments between people as well as the routine operations of the school (Ng, 1993, p. 192). The ‘common sense’ discourses of white racism as echoed through the mouths of school staff are not only individual responses to particular incidents arising on a moment-by-moment basis within social interactions, but they also exemplify historical sedimentations of racist and colonial discourses that have defined Canadian nationalist projects from the beginning of state building enterprises, including the Canadian

education system. I am drawing from Gramsci's analysis of ideology and his articulation of 'common sense' ideas as "uncritical, episodic, and disjointed, but also... powerful because [they are] taken for granted" (Gramsci, cited in Ng, 1993, p. 194). One such example of 'common sense' racism in Canada is the notion that particular 'immigrant' and racialized communities are inherently more patriarchal, sexist, violent and homophobic than their white counterparts and need to be controlled and contained (Bannerji, 2000; Jiwani, 2006; Murdocca, 2013; Razack, 1998; Thobani, 2007). As noted by Jiwani (2006), in positioning particular non-white communities as 'backward immigrants', Canadian discourse on gender and sexual violence maintains these communities as "perpetual outsiders to the nation" (p. 19). It is through these "diffused normalized set of assumptions, knowledges and so-called cultural practices" that racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of discriminatory practices and ideas emerge (Bannerji, 1995, p. 45) and that were also challenged by my activist teacher participants.

Below I begin by tracing some contemporary 'common sense' discourses of race, and sexuality that Sara identified at her school. While these common sense discourses of sexuality and race have their roots in the development of Canada as a nation-state, neoliberal policy initiatives in education over the last 20 years have contributed little to challenging these discourses and, in fact, in many instances could be interpreted as strengthening such discourses (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). As Sara's experience illustrates, localized Board policies, such as the TDSB's (2004a) *Human Rights Policy*, as well as Board Equity staff who were employed to support the implementation of the TDSB's (2005c) *Equity Foundation Statement* provided important support for Sara to engage her school's staff and students in more critical analyses of gender and sexual equity at her

school. Despite the Board's development of a specific policy on gender-based violence and the engagement of staff to support this policy in 2010, Sara was not able to effectively mobilize as much support for her equity work through these channels. By engaging an institutional ethnographic analysis, my research demonstrates how the discursive organization of contemporary equity and leadership education policies in Ontario contributed to fewer resources for activist teachers in schools to carry out equity projects in schools. These discursive formations within Ontario educational policy texts are linked directly to neoliberal public education restructuring projects that are occurring more broadly across the Western hemisphere.

Just as G. Smith's (1998) gay participants drew from homophobic discourses in establishing a gay consciousness, the social organization of whiteness of and in speech as well as critical race discourses shaped Sara's consciousness and actions, including her attempts to combat white racism with a more integrated, interlocking approach to gender and sexuality. Below I trace the institutional texts and resources that Sara strategically engages to accomplish her goal of providing educational workshops on gender and sexuality issues to students (and teachers) that are embedded in "anti-oppression" and "intersectional" principles (interview transcript, 2016). Sara accomplishes a significant amount of equity work to actualize a school response to alleged sexual coercion among students, which challenges simplified white conceptualizations of gender and sexuality. Sara's equity work creates a space in the school for students and staff to address more complicated understandings of social subjectivities (i.e. race, class, gender, sexuality and others) that "happen altogether and all at once" (Bannerji, 2005, p. 144).

### **Sara's School Context: White Racism and White Feminism**

Sara had been a secondary teacher for over 20 years at the time of our interview together; however, her teaching was punctuated by frequent one-year leaves every 2-3 years, which Sara felt was necessary “mostly because I can’t handle the institution too much” since from Sara’s perspective, “its main focus is to ensure its own legitimacy” rather than to facilitate student learning or exchange of learning between teacher and student (transcript 2016). Despite being a teacher in a system she described as “horrible”, Sara “very much enjoy(ed) working with young people” and building relationships with young people which she described as “enriching” (transcript 2016). Sara’s orientation as a teacher was to work with the curriculum so that it better reflected student experiences and to have “more social justice values embedded” in both the curriculum and in classroom practices (interview transcript, 2016). Outside of her classroom, Sara worked on a variety of extracurricular arts and drama projects with her students, supporting student plays and assemblies on issues related to mental health, immigration, and violence against women, including the issue of murdered and missing Indigenous women in Canada.

Sara had been teaching at her present school for most of her career. When she first arrived, she described the school as one where “an old white guard... had been holding down the fort” for some time and consisting of “senior staff that had been there for awhile, the administration and the guidance [who had been] holding down power in terms of decision making for the school” (interview transcript, 2016). Sara was one of a handful of teachers of colour at a school of about 60 staff, a reality that as I identified in Chapter 4, continues to be common in most North American schools (Abawi, 2018; Bascia, 1996; Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009). Despite the significant cultural

diversity of the city, the current teaching staff of the TDSB and the former Toronto Board of Education are not proportionally reflective of Toronto, with James and Turner (2017) reporting that only 19% of the Toronto teaching staff are non-white compared to 47% of the Toronto population identifying as non-white. While an NDP provincial government in the early nineties passed employment equity legislation and accountability measures for public institutions to ensure compliance, these employment equity goals were dismantled with the election of the provincial Conservatives in 1995; consequently, while the new TDSB developed an employment equity policy in 2005, accountability measures for this policy remain internal to the Board.

As Sara described her school, this ‘old white guard’ consisted of a small group of senior teachers who had strong relationships with the school administrators when she first arrived at the school. When Sara joined the school, school administrators were still part of the teachers’ union. After 1997, these dynamics would change once principals were removed from teachers’ unions with the passing of Bill 160 *Education Quality Improvement Act* (MacLellan, 2009). Prior to 1997, Sara described a “much more dynamic relationship between staff and administration. Like, you could have conversations, and there could be negotiation and discussions” (interview transcript, 2016).

Based on her experiences of the school in the first 10 years of her employment there, Sara found the staff leaders to be “very white, quite racist in their idea of the school’s way” (interview transcript, 2016). In one example Sara provided during our interview, she described how the surrounding community had been undergoing a demographic shift in the late 1990’s when she joined the school. As she described it, a

larger population of immigrant and working-class families were moving into the community. In reviewing Statistics Canada analysis of immigration rates in Sara's school neighbourhood, while approximately 13% of the ward population surveyed had identified immigrating to Canada between 1981 and 1990, that percentage jumped to 30% from 2001 to 2010 during the period that Sara was working at the school (City of Toronto, 2019)<sup>22</sup>. Sara observed her primarily white colleagues expressing comments suggesting fear over these changes in the student population: "They're all worried about, you know, the 'violence' that had come to the neighbourhood" (interview transcript, 2016).

Discourses of racialized poor and immigrant communities as posing risks of 'violence' and threats to white populations in Canada is historically rooted, stretching back to Canada's development as a colonial settler state (Bannerji, 2000; Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2007; Valverde, 1991). More recently, Siciliano's (2010) analysis of public and policy discourse concerning violence and crime in Toronto demonstrates the continual dominant linkages made between racialized poverty and crime with much less attention paid to systemic racism and relations of capital that have supported racial and economic divides within the city's geography.

As a racialized teacher, Sara was routinely confronted by staff who vocalized fears over their non-white students. As Sara described it, the consequences of this "culture of fear" (interview transcript, 2016) on the part of white staff led to school policies involving greater surveillance and control over youth in the school. For instance, many of Sara's white colleagues "really wanted the no-hat policy and...the ID tags"

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<sup>22</sup> To maintain confidentiality of my participant, I am not identifying the specific ward of Sara's school.

(interview transcript, 2016). School dress codes that include ‘no hat’ policies are routinely advanced by staff and school authorities who assume – often based on information by the police - that particular style, colours and hat insignias worn by youth are representative of gang affiliations. Thus, the attire of students of colour is singled out as ‘dangerous’ and students of colour become targets for racial profiling and school discipline, with educational spaces mapped out to contain dangerous ‘Others’ (Razack, 2002). As many scholars have noted (Aghasaleh, 2018; Gallagher & Fusco, 2006; Garot & Katz, 2003; Raby, 2005), such surveillance techniques in schools operate under the guise of creating ‘safety’ through racialized, classed and gendered technologies and to identify and exclude ‘outsiders’ so as to more effectively manage the ‘risk’ of ‘Others’.

Sara also remembered a staff that perceived “equity... [as] a bad word” which Sara attributed to the fact that many of the white staff had been accused of racism by parents:

Sara: ...you’d hear comments like, ‘Oh, that parent pulled the race card’. Those sorts of comments. Even one science teacher said to me, “Oh, it’s not... racism is not the issue here. It’s homophobia.” She herself was a gay woman, and it’s because they’re...

Alison: Was she white?

Sara: Yes, and quite racist too... But because the population, the demographics had shifted [at the school] so, people [school staff] have that misunderstanding that you’ve got the majority people of colour [students] and all of a sudden racism is not an issue because they don’t understand what racism is, right?

Sara’s white colleague denied parents’ accusations of racism, instead re-framing these claims as ‘really’ about homophobia. Sara’s white queer colleague deftly re-directs a claim of racism against her as evidence of homophobia among an increasingly racialized and immigrant population of students who were also described by Sara as “predominantly

Muslim but from various different countries of the Muslim world” (interview transcript, 2016). Such ‘discourses of denial’ are a common feature of white responses to racism, operating to “erase, trivialize and contain” the experiences of racial violence (Jiwani, 2006, p. xii). In making this comment in a context of a predominately racialized school, Sara’s colleague’s comments reaffirm stereotypes of racialized communities as inherently homophobic and patriarchal while also maintaining focus on issues of relevance within white queer communities. By simultaneously denying racism while situating homophobia as the ‘real’ issue of the school, Sara’s colleague also ignores the possibility of interlocking and simultaneous experiences of homophobic racism among racialized youth and staff at the school.

### **An Incident of Youth Sexual Coercion**

In the 2007- 2008 school year, about twelve years or so into Sara’s time at the school, Sara was provided with an opportunity to engage a number of equity discourses with both students and colleagues through an incident that occurred with a 15-year-old young woman who was “giving blowjobs to a lot of boys in an abandoned structure that was right across the school” (interview transcript, 2016). The interpretation of this event became contested between the youth involved as well as staff and school administrators. As Sara remembered the incident, concerns over the young woman’s activities were reported to the office by her colleague who became aware through both the student speaking to her and the student’s friends. As Sara understood it, when school administrators investigated, the young girl insisted that the sex was consensual.

So [school administrators] were saying that, “Oh well, there’s consent”. But the laws of consent had changed, and I think it had shifted to the age of 16, and nobody had been aware of that. So she - I think - was 15 at the time or on the... I can’t remember exactly. She was really sort of on that border in terms of the

laws. So they didn't want to do anything about it... I don't know how the cops got called in... They even themselves didn't know the age of consent had changed. So nothing got done.”

Sara is referring to the *Tackling Violent Crime Act* that was passed by the federal Conservative government in February 2008 and became law in May of the same year (CBC News, 2008). This *Act* raised the age of consent from 14 to 16 years of age in the Canadian *Criminal Code*, with a close-in-age exception allowing 14 and 15 year-olds to have sex with someone who is less than five years older (CBC News, 2008).

However, Sara and her colleague remained concerned about the student. Sara's colleague who had the young woman in one of her classes, had been observing what Sara described as “a deterioration in [the student's mental and physical] health” (interview 2016). This same teacher had also learned from the student's friends that the young woman “was actually struggling with some mental health issues, and also that she had a history of gender violence” (interview, 2016). As a result, Sara remembers her colleague pushing school administrators for additional support for the young woman, eventually securing counseling services from the school social worker.

As a result of the administrator's reticence to provide supports to the young girl, Sara and her colleague perceived that the administration “did not want to do anything about the case” (interview transcript, 2016). The administrator's reticence fueled an already growing animosity among staff that experienced the principal as “very heavy handed and somewhat autocratic and extremely ignorant” (interview 2016). As Sara's interests and concerns aligned with her colleagues, including the “old white guard” of her school, she began to strategically mobilize for a more collective school response. As we shall see below, Sara's work involved strategically managing and challenging both school

leadership opposition as well as white staff discomfort with integrating ‘race’ with conversations about gender and sexuality.

### **Activist Teacher Engagement and Challenge to White Racism in Schools**

For Sara, who had experienced feelings of alienation with fellow staff around understandings of race and racism within the school, this incident provided her with an opportunity to ally with her colleagues over their shared concerns while also providing an opening for Sara to engage equity discourses that challenged the erasure of race analysis by her white colleagues. In Sara’s words: “I was using this incident because I wanted something at the school, you know, to change *the culture of the school (my emphasis)*”. Sara would use the notion of ‘school culture’ several times throughout our interview, as did several other participants in their talk, including Justin as I described in Chapter 4. As many of my activist teacher participants mobilized the term, changing ‘school culture’ meant addressing and challenging hegemonic understandings of gender, race, sexuality and so on, as part of a social and collective initiative in schools, rather than as individual teachers acting on their own.

The notions of “school culture” and “school climate” are readily accessible for school staff to use and arise from various educational discourses accessible to teachers in schools. The idea of institutional “cultures” is derived from organizational studies, often rooted in disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, while ‘climate’ has been used more routinely in psychological studies (Hoy & Feldman, 1999; MacNeil, Prater & Busch, 2009; Schein, 1996). School climate has recently gained more common parlance in education largely through the proliferations of its use in ‘safe schools’ and bullying discourses that have become more prevalent over the last 20 years (Walton, 2005; Meyer,

2008). Both concepts are embedded in multiple policy documents and various educational laws in Ontario, including the provincial *Education Act*. These “ideological discourses” (Smith, 2005, p. 225) associated with notions of school culture and school climate – like the notion of ‘equity’ - stand in for a variety of social practices and processes in schools. For example, Sara’s notion of her school’s ‘culture’ when she first arrived was one where discourses of white racism permeated staff talk and influenced institutional practices that impacted the schooling experiences of increasingly larger immigrant, non-white and working class students and families moving into the area (i.e., ‘The parent pulled the ‘race’ card’; ‘Racism isn’t the problem here’; ‘violence [has] come to the neighbourhood”).

Like Justin, Sara viewed this student incident of alleged sexual coercion as an opportunity for both students and staff to collectively engage in dialogue and more complicated conversations about issues involving sexuality, gender and race, among other equity issues. Specifically, Sara was interested in supporting the young woman at her school by pursuing “a certain kind of [school] intervention that wasn’t punitive” (interview transcript, 2016). Not surprisingly, as a teacher, Sara pursued a pedagogical intervention through the organization of a series of one-day workshops for students at her school in order to consider issues of sexual consent, sexual assault, femininity and masculinity, media representations of gender and sexuality. However, Sara also wanted to ensure that these workshops approached gender and sexuality in a manner that did not occlude discussions of race, religion and culture. Sara envisioned workshops that incorporated “an anti-oppression lens” but “I didn’t say that to the staff. There are certain things that you say and don’t say to move things through” (interview transcript, 2016).

Since incorporating issues of ‘race’ and racism into workshops on gender and sexuality might be interpreted as threatening to a predominately white staff, Sara kept silent on her plans to include such an analysis into the workshops. Instead, in order to accomplish her vision, Sara, like many of my activist teacher participants, began to strategically engage a variety of institutional discourses available to her as a teacher working within the system that she hoped would help her accomplish her goals.

### **All schools are dealing with this! Mobilizing School Staff Buy-In Through Equity Policies**

Sara began by approaching the school’s guidance counselor with the workshop idea. However, the guidance counselor was not supportive:

... I think she was just so scared about, I guess, liability around this particular incident that she was, like, “No, we don’t need to.” Like, she just sort of shut the conversation right down.

Sara used the notion of liability several times throughout or interview, including referencing what she perceived as her principal’s concerns about liability in organizing such workshops. Notions of liability were brought up by a number of other participants, including two school principals. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, school leaders and school principals who have been placed in a managerial role in schools must consider how they might ‘manage’ any incident deemed ‘controversial’ (i.e. sexual coercion, sexual assault, racism) or that might attract parental or media attention. Within the TDSB at around the time of this incident in Sara’s school, the school leadership at CW Jefferys had been very publicly disciplined for not reporting a sexual assault to Board officials and had been placed on administrative leave (Rushowy, 2008). Sara also noted that a year before, her school had attracted significant negative media attention after several students had been identified as being involved in a high profile criminal case. Much of the neoliberal public

policy initiatives in Ontario (i.e., school rankings based on standardized test scores rankings, school improvement plans) have fallen on school leaders to manage, as evidenced by the Institute for Education Leadership's (2013) *School and System Leaders Guide* document, which suggests that school effectiveness planning is a 'key focus' for principals and is designed to "identify the characteristics of highly performing schools and systems" for school leaders to be successful (p. 5). In Ontario as well as in other educational contexts where similar neoliberal policy accountability, performance and measurement standards have been applied, principals and other school leaders have identified their efforts to avoid 'danger' and engage in a variety of risk management activities to avoid negative media attention, aggressive parents and catering to students identified as 'at risk' which may itself become 'risky' (Carpenter, Weber & Schugurensky, 2012; Starr, 2012).

Sara pushed on, deciding to bring the issue up at a staff meeting where she knew a number of her white female colleagues were concerned about this young woman and were frustrated with what they saw as the principal's perceived inaction. Sara decided to capitalize on her colleagues' frustration by proposing workshops to the school principal at the staff meeting, knowing that she would have their support.

I think the Wynne Report had also just come out too, around gender violence in the schools....so I didn't approach it in a confrontational way. I just said, 'This is an issue that all schools are dealing with, as that report says, and here would be the great opportunity to have workshops for all grade nines and tens'. So I laid out what the idea was, and people were really happy about it. I think afterwards they were just, like, so thrilled because they thought the meeting was going to be so tense and it turned out to be very productive.

Sara was thoughtful and deliberate about how she introduced the idea of workshops for students. While there was not any official provincial document released as the 'Wynne

report' in the last ten years, after some discussion, Sara and I determined it was most probably the Safe Schools Action Team Report released in 2008 and entitled *Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools: Safe Schools Action Team Report on Gender Based Violence, Homophobia, Sexual Harassment and Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour in Schools* commissioned by Kathleen Wynne, who occupied the role of Minister of Education at the time. At the time, the issue of gendered violence was a prevalent topic in the media following the CW Jefferys shooting and subsequent leaks to the media regarding the sexual assault of a young female student that had not been properly reported to the authorities by TDSB school administrators (Small, 2007). While the intersecting and interlocking relations of race and religion with gender-based violence were discussed in the TDSB-commissioned School Community Safety Advisory Panel (2008), the provincial Safe Schools Action Team Report (2008) avoided addressing issues of race, other than to recognize in one sentence of the report that female students from marginalized groups, including racialized women, are more vulnerable to sexual harassment and gendered violence. Sara drew on the significant media attention of school safety and gendered violence as well as the Ministry of Education's report, to successfully argue amongst her primarily white staff for a pedagogical intervention at the school to address issues of gender, sexual consent and sexual coercion.

Following the staff meeting, a committee was formed to plan the student workshops on sexuality and violence against women. Within this smaller venue, Sara led the conversation about the workshops but continued to experience resistance from the school principal. As Sara described it, the principal tried to "put some obstructions in the way" by suggesting that the school would be required to get parental consent for students

to participate in the workshops. In response, Sara mobilized the Board's *Human Rights Policy* (TDSB, 2004a) to successfully challenge him on this issue during a committee meeting, to suggest that parental consent was not only unnecessary but was "in violation of the human rights code" and in contravention to current Board policy which Sara provided to the principal (interview transcript, 2016). The TDSB's (2004a) *Human Rights Policy* suggests that the Board must "prevent harassment and discrimination" and take such allegations seriously while also engaging in "preventative education and proactive practices" which are identified as "the best long-term strategies to achieve an inclusive learning environment"; managerial personnel are identified as having a specific duty to implement the policy with any failure to do so possible leading to "legal implications for the Board" (p. 3). Sara's invocation of the Board's (2004a) *Human Rights* policy was successful: "That shut him down" (interview transcript, 2016).

Since Sara knew school staff well, she was intentional about identifying particular staff for involvement in the committee and the workshop initiative who might be more responsive to the curriculum she was developing with Equity department staff:

We chose...selected certain staff. I approached them to see if they would like to facilitate these workshops and what it would entail. So the staff that I selected were already at a certain point on that continuum, right.

Sara made a specific point of reaching out to a colleague who was a white, male and well liked among staff, who had a "liberal kind of equity analysis". In Sara's words, "I sort of had him start to take lead a bit" on various gender equity initiatives she was facilitating, as a strategic measure because "people loved him" and his presence was a way to guard the initiative from relying only on Sara's involvement and participation. Her work to

involve this staff member was also a way to create greater legitimacy for gender equity projects within a primarily white institution:

What I was trying to do was institutionalize this initiative, so it wasn't just a one-off, you know. So I was sort of setting things in place so that it was acceptable to a larger, broader group of people and not just people that might be equity minded or have that opening. It's the reality, right? I mean, it's, like, you know, especially a white male speaking about gender violence, makes it more palatable to lots of people, right, and particularly administration. So yeah, and it's not uncommon for women of colour to do that, is to sort of, like, partner up with white allies. They don't necessarily know that, but that's kind of, like, a strategy that we definitely use. In institutions you definitely have to do that, yeah.

And later:

So if you're shifting culture, then an initiative has to be sustainable. It has to have that long-term impact because it's not just about students, but it's staff, right.

As demonstrated, Sara's efforts and actions to organize school staff buy-in for various equity initiatives at her school were very strategic, purposeful and intentional. As a woman of colour working in a largely white work environment, creating sustainable equity initiatives to address gendered violence required "buy in" from white and male staff. Even though in the above excerpt, she identified her white male colleague as having more of a "liberal kind of analysis" (interview transcript, 2016) as opposed to a more critical feminist or anti-racist analysis, Sara felt that having him lead or "be the face of" various equity initiatives at her school would have longer term benefit, especially for the primarily white and/or conservative staff members.

Sara's talk shows how her equity work involved engaging white, male institutional actor participation within a predominately white institution so as to ensure the legitimacy and success of equity initiatives led by non-white activists in school. Sara strategically leveraged white teachers' participation in order to advance equity projects that she herself played a leadership role in organizing. Sara works with her experience as

a racialized teacher within a context of white teacher and school administrator resistance to equity discussions, by actively engaging a white male to lead such discussions in order to minimize staff guilt and create more acceptance (“make it more palatable”) of an explicit examination of equity issues. The legacy of white supremacist patriarchal social relations of schools is revealed through Sara’s experiences. White resistance and defensiveness are well documented in equity literature examining white responses to discussions of equity and race (see for example, Blackmore, 2010; Frankenberg, 1993; Lopez, 2003; Roman, 1993a; Roman 1993b). Given the whiteness of school leadership more broadly, Sara’s experiences illustrate and expose the social relations of racialization that school staff draw upon and use to coordinate activity and action in schools.

### **TDSB Equity and Inclusive School Support**

In addition to drawing on the Board’s human rights policies, Sara’s equity work also involved drawing on support from the Board’s Equity and Inclusive Schools department in order to support her vision of school workshops that focused “on myths around rape culture, gender and sexual violence, *but* with that understanding of intersectionality because all the students, you know, they are basically having intersectional experiences of oppression. So that was really important” (*my emphasis*, interview transcript, 2016). In this excerpt, Sara’s use of the word ‘but’ draws out an important distinction between mainstream (white) feminist discourse and critical feminist discourse informed by critical race analysis. As she implies, terms such as “consent”, “sexual assault” “masculinity and femininity” often operate without attending to issues of racialization and other experiences of power, thus reaffirming whiteness as the social relation organizing such discourses derived from (white) feminist legal theory. The

conjunction ‘but’ illustrates the extent to which processes of racialization (beyond processes of constructing whiteness) and other social relations of power must be deliberately (and covertly) inserted into white feminist discourses of gender and sexuality in institutional spaces such as a mainstream school. In her talk, Sara also regularly used conceptual notions of ‘intersectionality’ and ‘anti-oppression’ to signal that her operational and conceptual practice of equity at her school and her actions to improve her school’s ‘culture’ are rooted in thinking through gender and sexuality in ways that attend to other forms of oppression and privilege. In our interview together, Sara emphasized that her intent was always to ensure that the workshops used an “intersectional lens” (interview transcript, 2016).

As I described in Chapter 3, the staff of the TDSB’s Equity and Inclusive Schools Department were charged with supporting the implementation at the TDSB’s (2005c) *Equity Foundation Statement*. While this document separated out equity commitments on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, class and ability, references to interlocking experiences of inequity are referenced throughout the document. As I noted in Chapter 3, inequities in experience on the basis of gender are described as issues facing “diverse groups of girls and women in our communities” (TDSB, 2015, p.15). Further, the TDSB (2005c) commitment to gender equity includes a statement on the need of the Board to reflect “the diverse viewpoints, needs and aspirations of... women” including “Aboriginal, racial, ethnocultural, faith, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, disabled, working class, low income, poor, and other historically disadvantaged groups of women” (p. 14). The staff of the Equity and Inclusive Schools department, comprised of Equity Instructional Leaders and Student Equity Program Advisors, were tasked with working

with front line educational workers and students on “developing teaching and learning strategies which ensures that students are engaged, included and respected” (TDSB Staff Directory, 2016, p. 53). Sara was very aware of narratives about the historical development of the TDSB *Equity Foundation Statement*, as well as the former TBE equity programs which centred around “what activists have fought to put in place” in order to address “intersectional” experiences (interview transcript, 2016). While Sara saw specific policy language on gender, race, class and other social experiences as “not ideal” since they were siloed and separated from each other, this policy document nevertheless allowed activists such as herself to take up the language and “use the mechanisms but in the way that I felt better about” (interview transcript, 2016). Thus, Sara “pulled on institutional mechanisms, like Equity” (interview transcript, 2016) in order to realize her goals to organize a workshop that included other social relations beyond narrowly circumscribed notions of gender. Sara saw the Board’s centrally assigned Equity staff as being able to help her ensure that “the content and methodology [of workshops had] that [anti-oppressive lens]”.

Sara developed a close working relationship with two members of the Equity Department to develop and facilitate the workshops. As Sara’s initiative became an annual event, Sara maintained her relationship with Equity staff who provided support for her initiative:

They worked with me and they worked with the teachers that came, and they moved, every year they pushed people a little bit further along... they [Equity staff] tried to keep the same people because they would know... have that experience a bit more, and also the kids would know them, right. So that’s really important.

With their consistent involvement, Equity staff built relationships with other teachers and students at Sara's school year after year to develop and add to the content and methods of the workshops over time. For example, in consultation with Equity instructional leaders, Sara paired school staff facilitators with community teachers from various diverse organizations to lead the workshops. Sara purposefully chose community organizations that addressed sexuality and health from the standpoint of particular racialized communities. These organizations included HIV/AIDS service organizations serving East Asian, South Asian and Black communities in the Greater Toronto Area as well as public health officials, Indigenous leaders, and organizations such as Planned Parenthood. In addition, Sara had also adjusted the method of content delivery of workshop material to be inclusive and responsive to developmentally disabled students and English language learners at her school.

When I asked Sara to elaborate on how these workshops “pushed staff a little bit further every year”, she spoke to observing a ‘normalization’ among staff and students over the years since the workshops began, in speaking about particular issues such as sex, sexuality, consent, gender, and intersections with racialization – “like talking about a Black student who is accused of sexual assault and that situation... how to unpack that” (interview transcript, 2016). Through more exposure to these conversations in the workplace, Sara felt that staff has been moved to think more about how race and ‘culture’ intersect with gender and sexuality issues. In later years, Sara had also worked with Aboriginal Education centre within the Board to “indigenize the [workshop] module” which had initiated interesting discussions about certain pedagogical concepts (i.e. grandfather teachings) and issues of cultural appropriation (transcript, 2016). In these

various ways, Sara's work to organize these workshops, while intended for students, were also important sites of action for maintaining and advancing democratic progressive discourses in schools among staff as well, including more complicated conversations about sexuality, gender and equity that challenged mainstream white feminist discourses.

### **TDSB Gender Based Violence Prevention Office Support**

When I asked Sara whether the TDSB's Gender Based Violence Prevention Office had ever been involved in the organization of workshops, she indicated that she had contacted the Office a year or two after the first workshop event at her school and in the first couple of years of the GBVPO initial formation (about 2010 to 2012) to ask for their participation as workshop facilitators. The response Sara received "rubbed the wrong way":

[a GBVPO staff member] wrote back saying this long sort of thing saying, "Well, we don't usually use our resources that way". It was sort of like they... the sentiment was, "We don't feel our resources are used best in a one-off situation".

Later in the interview, Sara indicated that while the GBVPO indicated they did not do "one-off events", they did offer to "come in and consult with the admin and the teachers who were involved and set a plan", including "assessing the climate" at the school in relation to "homophobia... gender and sexual acceptance", and "around gender non-conforming... and non-heterosexual kids" (interview, 2016). Sara agreed that school planning was "important... because you can't just have one-offs" (interview transcript, 2016). However, at the same time, the GBVPO staff person's lack of engagement with the initiative struck Sara as "sort of insulting".

"..at that time this [event] was like a coup... 20 of the staff were involved in doing this. Like, you have to start where people are at, and the fact that this was going on at this school - because when I landed there, *it was so different*. To me, I felt it was, like, huge and it just... they [GBVPO staff person] didn't even get that

because it was just, like, right off the bat “This isn’t the best use of our resources. But if you’re in a pinch, we’ll lend you a facilitator” (interview transcript, 2016, *my emphasis*)

From Sara’s perspective, the GBVPO staff person’s failure to inquire with her about the event or get involved, had meant a missed opportunity to work with school staff who had previously been very resistant to equity discourses. Her work ‘on the ground’ to create more space for critical, intersectional and interlocking equity discourses of gender and sexuality among a resistant white school staff and administrators remained invisible, unacknowledged and unsupported by an office with a mandate to support this initiative.

Sara’s experience with GBVPO staff is partially the result of the way in which each of these facets of equity work in the TDSB has been socially organized. As I noted in Chapter 3, while school staff, parents and/or students might initiate contact with the GBVPO, one participant who had worked at the GBVPO noted that the Office would typically engage in a follow-up conversation with the school principal “because they need to be on board. In fact, it is only effective if they are” (interview transcript, 2017). This same participant viewed administrators as key to a “capacity building” approach in schools, offering a promise of greater efficiency in engaging equity work with far fewer resources than had been available in the past. As I noted in Chapter 3, the GBVPO included a staff of approximately five people serving a Board of approximately 250,000 and 582 schools. In the words of one of my participants who had worked in the GBVPO:

So, that notion, when the GBVPO go out to do a consult, it's never to just go and do, it is to build the capacity at the school. Always, always, always. So, the GBVPO doesn't do one-offs. They don't do anything that they feel is going to be, well, a bit of a waste of time, to be perfectly honest with you. So, if it's something [a local school staff] just want a whole blitz of speakers coming in and talking, you know, to the Grade 8's, GBVPO staff will find a resource that will do that - some community partner or something. That's the whole advantage of...working with all of the partners who partner with the board. GBVPO staff never try to turn a school's request away but because there's so few [staff], the GBVPO want to make sure that when they devote time to putting a school plan in place, it's going to help build capacity at the school, because the staff, frankly, can't keep going back to each school. Staff wants to be able to do this in each school in the district and so that's time consuming.

From the standpoint of at least one staff member at the GBVPO, setting up school plans through a formal leadership-focused approach was considered far more effective than previous models of equity work within the Board (interview transcript, 2017). In fact, one staff person who had worked for the GBVPO described the organization of the Equity department within the TDSB as a “terrible model” since, from their perspective, equity had become associated with particular staff people who held the expertise for others to draw upon, rather than equity becoming the responsibility of everyone in the system (interview transcript, 2017). The implication was that a GBVPO-focus on school leadership buy-in meant that equity plans had a greater chance of being actualized, coordinated and ‘shared’ with a broader swath of school staff as well as community members, parents and students, compared to Equity department staff working one-on-one with teachers.

As new public management regimes have proliferated within public education globally, so too have discourses of shared leadership and distributed leadership as described by my participant above. Shared or distributed leadership approaches centre on engaging expertise and knowledge among groups of people within schools beyond those

in formal positions of authority such as the principal (Bush & Glover, 2014; Fullan, 2001; Woods, Bennett, Harvey & Wise, 2004). While discourses of shared leadership suggest that the ‘whole school’ should be involved in addressing issues such as equity, there remains a privileging of the role of school administrators in mobilizing this shared leadership. For example, in *The Leadership Framework*, established as a guide for leaders in education, while shared leadership is encouraged among various social actors in the school (including those “whose voices typically have not been heard”), such leadership models depend on the “active encouragement and attention of the school’s principal” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 10). In critical analyses of educational leadership discourse, it has been observed that notions of shared leadership (also known as distributed or transformational leadership) have been used alongside an increasing array of regulatory and performance management techniques to ensure teacher compliance in a more congenial manner compared to more authoritarian forms of management (Hatcher, 2005). Storey (2004) argues that over the last 30 years as public sector organizations were forced to downsize while also facing increased competition and performance monitoring, the role of leaders in successfully addressing associated problems with such public sector de-funding, provided a simplified and comforting response. While the notion of sharing leadership among many participants sounds rather innocuous and positive, questions must be asked about who does the distribution and what distributed leadership looks like within a performance management regime (Gunter and Ribbins, 2003).

As Sara has described her experiences with predominately white school staff, Sara would certainly qualify as “a voice that was not typically heard” at her school. However,

as we have seen, the principal's and school guidance counselor's concerns over 'liability' and their obstructions to explicit school-sanctioned workshops on gender and sexual equity, meant active discouragement of Sara's experiences and perspectives. Sara's school principal has different accountability pressures of equity to address compared to Sara whose equity work was largely driven by her commitments to challenging white feminist and white racist discourses of staff as well as supporting greater critical awareness among her students.

By beginning from the experience of Sara to consider gender and sexual equity issues in schools, problems with institutional investments in leadership-facilitated, top down equity planning become more visible and exposed. First, prioritization of particular sorts of equity support for staff in positions of managerial leadership fails to problematize the hierarchal decision-making power that exists in schools. More radical notions of democratic participatory schooling models operating through non-hierarchal structures are not considered (Hacker, 2004). In this way, the equity projects pursued by Sara and activist teachers like her in schools could be dismissed as "ineffective one-offs" even though Sara's initiative had involved one third of the staff of her school and half of the student body, and it had become an annual event over the last ten years. Secondly, since 1997, Ontario school administrators are a part of the managerial class in schools and operate from different accountability frameworks as articulated through the Ontario *Education Act* compared to teachers. The critical equity discourses used by activist teachers like Sara do not always complement the sorts of accountability regimes that school administrators are required to meet. The impacts on staff and students of educational workshops incorporating sexual and gender equity issues from an

intersectional lens are not easily measured or quantifiable nor was Sara's intent. Sara's experience also draws attention to the fact that predominately white school leadership ranks are facing pressure to meet external performance and accountability measures through policies that fail to acknowledge systemic and historical relations of power operating within schools, including race and white racism and its intersections with gender, sexuality, class and other such relations. As I have noted, the TDSB's *Gender Based Violence Policy* (2010b) does not attend to issues of race and racism and how such experiences interlock with gender and sexuality, despite the significant non-white population within the TDSB. This erasure of race and an analysis of systemic racism are also evident in examinations of the provincial *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (Rezai Rashti, Segeren & Martino, 2017). A cursory review of the *Ontario Leadership Framework* (2012) demonstrates the same pattern. Instead, words such as "recent immigrant", "diverse and disadvantaged groups" and "visible minorities" operate in these policy texts to create a distinct 'Othering' from whiteness, which gets characterized as the norm. With school leaders positioned to ensure that such policy texts are instantiated at schools, we can see how and why tensions with activist teachers like Sara unfold in schools.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on one activist teacher's experience of engaging critical equity initiatives on a school-wide basis. While Sara's proposed workshops on gender and sexual equity issues were directed at students, another critical dimension of this work was also intended to indirectly challenge various white feminist and white racist discourses circulating among staff in schools. In order to accomplish her goals, Sara

strategically engaged with a range of institutional texts and resources in order to “get something done” on sexual and gender equity in school. Some of these texts and strategies worked better than others. While the TDSB’s (2004a) *Human Rights Policy*, Equity department staff support and provincial policy texts on gender-based violence provided important leverage for her to challenge her school administrator and senior staff, the Board’s GBVPO and accompanying policies were less effective.

The existing dominant educational discourses and policy texts shaping contemporary Ontario schools remain largely silent on the systemic, historical relations of power shaping schooling as well as interlocking approaches to equity. Institutional and populist notions of educational leadership in North America continue to be shaped by an erasure of race (Blackmore, 2010; Gooden, 2012) and uncritical acceptance of school hierarchies. School administrators find themselves accountable to Board and Ministry equity policies largely driven by a ‘policy by numbers’ approach while also being extended greater power over teachers through managerial regimes of control. As a result, school principals have different accountability pressures compared to my activist teacher participants who are largely driven by their commitments to critical equity discourses of schooling. Educational discourses espousing ‘shared leadership’ in schools have been mobilized alongside an increasing array of regulatory and performance management techniques to ensure teacher compliance such that ‘shared leadership’ discourses have become firmly rooted in “neoliberal versions of the performing school” (Gunter, 2001, p. 28). Despite the challenges of a white hierarchal institution deprived of financial resources, Sara showed incredible perseverance in creating an important pedagogical space for both students and staff to engage more complicated and critical equity

discourses in understanding gender and sexual equity. Sara' equity work contributes to the (re)assertion of critical equity discourses that are otherwise marginally present in mainstream schools and corresponding equity policies and infrastructure.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

“Let's just shut the whole thing down. There are days I think that would be the best plan. Let's shut it down, rethink it, and start over. It might be better off.” (school administrator, interview transcript, 2014)

“Part of the task of the critical scholar/activist in education is to make public the successes in contesting the unequal and at times simply repressive control over policies, curricula, pedagogy and evaluation – over all of our work. While public documentation and ‘story telling’ may not be sufficient, it performs an important function. It keeps alive and reminds ourselves of the very possibility of difference in an age of conservative modernization... The narratives of their (our) political/pedagogic lives can bear witness to the possibility of taking steps toward building a reconstituted public sphere within the spaces in which we live and work” (Apple, 2011, p. 29-30).

This dissertation has intended to explore the work that school staff do in making incidents involving ‘inappropriate’ sexual or gender expression institutionally actionable. In engaging in this project, I found synergy early on with Dorothy Smith’s (1987, 1990, 2005) analytic and political approach, particularly her feminist and materialist orientation to understanding the everyday world and her interest in preserving the presence of subjects as knowers and actors and experts in their everyday lives (Smith, 1987). As I outlined in my Introduction as well as in Chapter 2, Smith’s (1987) approach begins with people and our experiences (as opposed to beginning with sociological theory) in order to consider how our everyday worlds are shaped and determined by relations and forces that often appear as external and operating under, over and above us. Institutional ethnography offers us a method of inquiry that explicates how our lives are knitted into extended social relations of a contemporary settler colonial, capitalist society and economy (Smith, 1987) so that, among other analytic interests, we may understand and consider how we might make ‘change from below’ (Smith, 2007). Smith’s (1987, 1990, 2005) approach and the path of many others who have followed in her footsteps is decidedly political, constituted by and constitutive of Marxist, feminist,

ethnomethodological, and phenomenological traditions in sociology and intending “an institutional analysis that explicates generalized bases of the experience of oppression” as a form of consciousness raising (Smith, 1987, p. 154).

As an activist teacher concerned with the state of our education system, my interest in exploring the work of fellow activist teachers to confront issues of gender and sexuality was two-fold. First, I felt it important to highlight the various constraints and dominant hegemonic discourses that operate to directly curtail and hinder progressive, critical educative possibilities and approaches. This was important, from my perspective, so that we can understand exactly *how* it happens that schools facilitate so many daily cruelties, experiences of exclusion and difference, exercises in shame, and personal diminishments experienced by both young people and many teachers who enter school buildings for 194 days of the year. However, equally important to me was my desire to expose the creative, strategic and deliberate techniques and actions of so many teachers who fight with and for youth to experience the ‘democratic progressive’ possibilities of education, including the development of critical social consciousness and movement building for social change and transformation. By paying attention to and learning from activist teacher achievements, however small they may appear, new spaces of possibilities, new communities and new political consciousness may expand and emerge in unexpected ways.

Global neoliberal initiatives in education have manifested in particular ways in Ontario, some of which I have outlined throughout this dissertation as they show up in activist teachers’ experiences. My particular focus has been on the emergence of gender-based violence and related policies and laws on gender and sexual (in)equity since 2007,

when a highly publicized Toronto school shooting also revealed the unreported sexual assault of a young Muslim woman and re-opened debates over gender and sexual inequity in schools. Despite the salience of religion, race, sexuality and gender in this particular case, particular laws and policies developed in the wake of this event, tended to separate out and focus on gender and sexual (in)equity to the exclusion of other social relations of power (i.e. Ontario Safe Schools Action Team report of 2008 or TDSB's *Gender Based Violence* policy of 2010b), in so doing, 'gender' and 'sexual' (in)equities become reductive conceptual categories that were decidedly ideological. Through the production of such simplistic categories, subjective experiences of complex and interlocking relations of power as they temporally unfold in a shifting soci-historical maze of relations known as the 'everyday' world of schools, are, in the words of Bannerji (1995) "segmented into different social moments, made a victim of discrete determinations" (p. 49). As such, these particular policies were of limited help for many of my activist teacher participants, such as Sara, as she struggled to challenge her white colleagues and to support her primarily racialized students in navigating gendered and sexual experiences. Or for Justin, as he struggled to understand and progressively respond to homophobic statements from a group of racialized, mostly Black young men in his classroom. However, other Board policies and resources that drew from human rights, critical feminist and anti-racist discourses, proved more helpful for my participants in order to accomplish critical equity work with youth in schools.

Beginning with the standpoint of the activist teacher, as I have, provides a unique vantage point from which to consider the institutional relations of school and how such relations can organize staff and student experiences. The activist teacher does the

‘translating work’ as does the mainstream teacher – that is, taking the ordinary experiences of young people and fitting them into the various institutionally relevant concepts and categories that precipitates institutional action. However, the activist teacher is also very often critical of the various institutional categories deemed ‘relevant’ and actionable in schools. Such criticisms are evident throughout Chapters 4 to 6, as my participants work to provide opportunities to engage students and fellow staff through critical curricular initiatives, through extracurricular workshops and clubs to address gendered violence, consent, and homophobia, and to support students who reveal that they have been sexually assaulted and harassed.

Throughout chapter 3, I demonstrated how various institutional specifications of neoliberalism (i.e., overall decreases in funding to public schools, increased accountability mechanisms exemplified through government publications of school credit accrual rates, literacy and numeracy test scores) have placed more strain on the time of, and resources available to, activist teachers in schools. With activist teachers having to invest more time and energy to attend to various evaluation and assessment accountability measures, or to teach a greater number of students in subject areas outside their expertise, they face even more material constraints as they engage in what they are most passionate about: developing and nurturing critical equity projects in schools to challenge the oppressive roots and reproductive inequities inherent in Canadian systems of education. Additionally, as my activist teacher participants shared with me, not only has a ‘policy as numbers’ (Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, & Martino, 2017; see also Ozga, 2009, and Rose, 1991) discourse infiltrated education policies broadly, but such a discourse has also increasingly inflected equity discourses and the equity work of centralized school

staff within the TDSB. This move of centralized equity staff towards equity discourses concerned with “mapping the scale of inequalities to generate school level approaches” (Gillborn, 2006, p. 17) is concerning in at least two ways. First, as identified by Gillborn (2006), when such an approach is adopted by critical education scholars and activist teachers, it can curtail more radical turns towards addressing broader, socio-historical systemic relations of power that continue to shape educational systems. And, second, as I hope has been evident in this dissertation, a move towards quantifying inequities also moves us away from attending to the very human experiences of pain and power inherent in marginalization, oppression, and privilege that shape our everyday realities and which activist teachers are particularly privy to, given their daily contact with the many young people who fill their classrooms each and every day<sup>23</sup>.

Various equity discourses have directly impacted staff and students on the ground in Ontario schools, sometimes in unexpected ways. While critical equity initiatives and activist teachers have - perhaps unsurprisingly - been increasingly characterized within a neoliberal context as additional ‘risks’ to be managed in schools, my research has demonstrated that activist teachers mobilize these institutional concerns about risk for broader public, political purposes - often in the service of creating critical educative and pedagogical spaces for staff and students and re-centering democratic progressive notions

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<sup>23</sup> While my work has identified the ways in which particular forms of quantification can work against critical equity engagement in schools, I do support the important work of many critical feminist, anti-racist and critical race scholars, activists and organizations in advocating for the collection of particular types of data based on social identities such as race, Indigeneity, gender, ability, and other identities as codified in human rights law. Activists can (and have) strategically used such data to force policy makers and government actors to acknowledge problems and demand change (see for example, James & Turner, 2017; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2009; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2011).

of education. These spaces provide opportunities for exploring social relations of power as they impact people individually and through systems (including schools). As a result, the equity work of the activist teacher operates to directly challenge the constraints of a contemporary and predominant neoliberal imaginary of schooling.

Of course, I do not want to over-state the work accomplished by many of my activist teacher participants. The spaces that my participants have created, as I have described in this dissertation, could be considered rather small in scale. In the cases of Stacy and Shannon, the ‘equity work’ they undertook was primarily through one-on-one relational work with their students. In the case of Justin, his equity work and attempts to challenge hegemonic notions of queer and racialized subjectivities among youth occurred mainly at the individual and classroom level. While Justin and Sara both engaged in particular sorts of equity work to create and support broader critical dialogic spaces at the school level for various school community members, such initiatives were often voluntary (i.e., Justin inviting speakers at lunch or after school for anyone who wished to attend). In Sara’s case, the sexual and gender workshops she organized were limited by grade level (only Grades 9 and 10 students) and constrained by time (two mornings of the school year). However, as noted by Apple (2011), in order to expand critical democratic spaces of schools and more broadly in our society, the work of activist teachers and youth must be made more visible and connected to broader, collective movements for change. Given the reproductive and oppressive roots of school systems, such small-scale projects and spaces continue to operate in the shadow of the powerful tentacles of neoliberal governance projects – projects that operate to significantly constrain activist teachers’

time and resources as I documented throughout the dissertation, most notably in Chapter 3.

Nevertheless, the work of critical teachers in classrooms and schools as I have documented here is, I believe, cause for hope and possibility. Struggles over schooling have often provided a site of convergence for larger social movements dedicated to equity and social change (Gandin & Apple, 2002; Haig Brown, 1988; Ladson Billings, 2009; Gillis, 2017). Future research endeavours would benefit from more empirical exploration of how exactly extra-local relations of ruling and governance are organizing the experiences of youth and adults in localized settings within schools, and the ways in which activists in schools are responding to these relations. For example, participant observations of progressive activists in school spaces, in addition to interviews, would offer a window into the kinds of dialogue and discourses that unfold and are drawn upon in ‘real time’ and spontaneously ‘on the ground’ in schools. By closely examining such discourses, progressive teachers and scholars may further “develop and refine our strategies for confronting... problematic regimes and technologies” (O’Malley, Weir & Shearing, 1997, p. 504). In Brown’s (2004) careful assessment of human rights discourses, she suggests that it is incumbent upon progressives to consider the forms of political power enacted through the use of various rights-based discourses so that we may consider the constraints of our imaginary when leaning on ‘human rights’ to advance particular collective political, social and economic justice initiatives. Human rights discourses and liberal multicultural ideologies are the dominant equity discourses of many Ontario provincial educational policies and TDSB equity policies (Joshee, 2007; Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, & Martino, 2017). However, as I have demonstrated, activist

teachers re-assert other counter-hegemonic discourses in schools, re-enlivening critical educative possibilities and laying the groundwork for broader collective and transformational change. Thus, it is incumbent upon critical teachers and activists to continue to tell our/their stories so that we/they may build upon our successes and humanizing endeavours within institutions and regimes of power that discipline, brutalize and disaggregate our lived experiences. Activist teacher interventions offer us powerful new visions of what critical equity projects and democratic public education could look like.

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## **Appendices**

## **Appendix A: Informed Consent Form: Professionals and School Staff Interviews**

### **Date:**

**Study Name:** Educational Equity Policy and Practice in Neoliberal Times: the social organization of equity and gender based violence in Toronto schools  
Former draft title: MORAL, PEDAGOGICAL AND DISCIPLINARY CONUNDRUMS: AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF SEXUAL AND GENDER REGULATION IN SCHOOLS

**Researcher:** Alison L. Fisher, Graduate Student, Faculty of Education, York University

**Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of this research is to examine the specific work processes, Ministry and Board policies and program memorandum, and professional discourses that shape school staff responses to sexual expression and/or gendered behaviour among students. I am interested in mapping the institutional processes through which a student's behaviour is deemed 'inappropriate' based on their sexual expression or gendered behaviour and the subsequent outcomes of these processes.

This research will advance knowledge in the area of educational laws and policies on youth gender, gender identity, sexuality and sexual expression, as well as community-educational partnerships, and improved institutional responses to youth in the areas of gender and sexual expression. This research will also advance knowledge in the area of coordinated institutional responses to youth who may have experienced harassment or violence as a result of sexual expression, gender and/or gender identity.

### **What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:**

You will be asked to participate in an individual interview with the researcher, where you will be asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions about your experiences as a professional or school staff person involved in a school, school program or educational setting that serves youth at the secondary level. This interview will be recorded. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes.

You may choose to participate in some aspects of this project and not others.

**Risks and Discomforts:** Researchers and school staff who are in contact with Board students are legally obliged to inform authorities if it has come to their attention that a student may have been sexually assaulted or abused by an adult or fellow student.

I do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:** This research will contribute to identifying strengths and areas for improvement in how schools and school boards approach youth expressions of sex, sexuality and gender, including the improved coordination of institutional responses to youth sexual and gendered expressions in schools. This research aims to propose ways to better support staff and students in determining positive expressions of gender and sexuality in educational settings.

The research will develop materials aimed at assisting various institutional partners (school boards, educator unions, individual school staff) in helping both staff and youth navigate various institutional processes relevant to young people in relation to youth sexuality, sexual expression and gender. These will be shared with schools, school boards, educators and other professionals who work with young people.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision *not to volunteer will not influence* the nature of your ongoing relationship with the researcher, or York University either now, or in the future.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher or York University. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

**Confidentiality:** All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Audio data recorded during interviews will be collected using a digital recorder. It will be transcribed. Digital copies of the data will be stored on a secure server through the Faculty of Education at York University. Paper copies will be kept in a locked office at the researcher's home and only the researcher will have access to this information. The data will be stored for five years, and then destroyed. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions About the Research?** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact the principal investigator, Alison Fisher by e-mail ([alison\\_fisher@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:alison_fisher@edu.yorku.ca)). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Faculty of Education Graduate Programme Office by telephone at 416-736-5018 or the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914) or e-mail ([acollins@yorku.ca](mailto:acollins@yorku.ca)).

**Legal Rights and Signatures:**

- I consent to having my interview audio recorded.
  
- I do not consent to having my interview audio recorded.

I \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in “Educational Equity Policy and Practice in Neoliberal Times: the social organization of equity and gender based violence in Toronto schools”. I understand the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: School Staff Interview Guide

Educational Equity Policy and Practice in Neoliberal Times: the social organization of equity and gender based violence in Toronto schools

Former draft title: MORAL, PEDAGOGICAL AND DISCIPLINARY CONUNDRUMS: AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF SEXUAL AND GENDER REGULATION IN SCHOOLS

Thanks for agreeing to chat with me. The goal of this interview is to learn from you about the work that you have done to address gender-based violence (including homophobia and trans-phobia) with youth in schools.

1. What is your job title at (*insert organization title here*), and what do you do in this role? How long have you worked here?

(prompt for: institutional processes engaged; institutional texts used; policy references; interactions with other organizations; clarity regarding particular workplace discourses/knowledge/jargon).

2. Can you describe the work that you have done to address the behavior of a student(s) who you or other staff and/or students considered to be behaving or acting ‘inappropriately’ through sexual or gendered bullying (*sexual activity in schools, harassment in the hallway, homophobic slurs, trans-phobia*)? What supports did you receive from the school and/or Board and/or community, in order to address these issues (i.e. professional development and/or support from GBVPO, support from special education instructional leaders if applicable, culturally responsive supports if applicable etc.)? What local and/or provincial policies/laws/texts did you rely on, in order to act in this situation (i.e. TDSB P071 Gender Based Violence)?

(prompt for: institutional processes engaged; institutional texts used; policy references; interactions with other departments or organizations; clarity regarding particular workplace discourses/knowledge/jargon).

3. Have you ever worked with a young person who was disciplined in some way for sexual or gendered bullying behavior? Can you describe what happened in general terms (i.e. without naming the student, school, staff, etc.)? What role did you play for this student before, during and after his/her discipline? Were other aspects of the student’s identity considered in determining his/her discipline (i.e. cultural identity, disability, sexual or gender identity, etc.)? What supports did you receive from the school and/or Board and/or community, to assist you in your work with this student(s) (i.e. culturally responsive supports if applicable, support from GBVPO, support from special education departments if applicable, etc.)? What challenges did you face?

(prompt for: institutional processes engaged; institutional texts used; policy references; interactions with other organizations; clarity regarding particular workplace discourses/knowledge/jargon).

4. Earlier you told me about how your work with youth involves interactions with (*insert references to professional fields and organizations here*). Who else do you work with on a regular basis (both internal and external to your organization)?

(prompt for: stories about communication; stories about coordinating between institutions; issues impacting coordination; policies, official processes, and funding practices that shape these interactions)

5. Are there services, processes or policies related to gender and/or sexuality that are missing for school staff and/or the young people you work with (i.e. services/processes/policies that are culturally responsive)? What would make your work with youth easier/more effective? (prompt for: specific changes to particular processes, practices, services, cultural shifts, training, service delivery models etc.)

Thanks for speaking with me today. I've learned a lot about (*insert a significant learning/discovery here*). Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?