

“People Who Are Different from You”: Heterosexism in Quebec High School Textbooks

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Heterosexism exists throughout Canadian society, but to what degree is it present in classrooms? In this article, I explore this question through content analysis of twenty francophone Québec secondary-school textbooks, examining how sexuality and relationships are discussed in five different subjects. These texts are persistently and overwhelmingly heterosexist: 95 per cent of pages discussing sexuality or relationships make no reference to same-sex sexuality or same-sex relationships, and 80 per cent of references that do occur appear in a negative context. Heterosexism in textbooks is not an isolated phenomenon, however, but part of a larger process of institutionalised heterosexism and homophobia.

Key words: heterosexism, textbooks, content analysis, sexuality, curriculum, gender

L'hétérosexisme est une donnée omniprésente dans la société canadienne, mais qu'en est-il dans les écoles ? Dans cet article, l'auteure aborde cette question en analysant le contenu des manuels scolaires utilisés pour cinq matières distinctes dans vingt écoles secondaires francophones du Québec, notamment en ce qui concerne la sexualité et les relations humaines. Ces textes sont très largement hétérosexistes : dans 95 % des pages traitant de sexualité ou de relations, il n'y a aucune référence à la sexualité entre des personnes de même sexe ou à des relations entre des personnes de même sexe et 80 % des mentions qui y font référence sont négatives. L'hétérosexisme dans les manuels scolaires n'est pas un phénomène isolé et s'inscrit dans un vaste processus d'hétérosexisme et d'homophobie institutionnalisé.

Mots clés : analyse de contenu, sexualité, programme scolaire, rapports sociaux entre les sexes.

For decades education scholars have raised concerns about prejudice in textbooks and called for an emphasis on diversity, yet this has generally been in the context of studies of racism and sexism (e.g., Ferree & Hall, 1990, 1996; Gaskell & Willinsky, 1995; McDiarmid & Pratt, 1971). In this article, however, I argue that much more attention is needed on the ways

that textbooks exhibit heterosexism: the assumption that heterosexuality is superior to all other types of sexuality. This presumption is pervasive in Canadian society today (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2002), manifesting itself in subtle expectations and assumptions as well as blatant, even violent, homophobia. But to what extent does heterosexism exist in Canadian textbooks?

This study responds to this question through a content analysis of high-school textbooks in Québec, arguably one of the most liberal regions in the country in regard to sexual diversity. In 1977 Québec was the first province to add sexual orientation to its Human Rights Code, civil union legislation has included same-sex couples since its inception in 2002, and same-sex marriage is now legal as well. Therefore, I viewed Québec as an ideal location to analyze the content of twenty francophone secondary-school textbooks (Appendix 1) to examine how these texts addressed issues of sexuality and relationships. This analysis enabled me to describe the nature and extent of heterosexism in these texts, examining the often subtle ways that the school system can both reinforce and resist heterosexism.

FEMINIST CRITICAL REALIST PERSPECTIVE

I wish to clarify the perspective from which I approach the topic of heterosexism in education. Following New (1996), I consider my perspective a "feminist critical realist" approach. By this I mean several things. I recognize that each person can know the world only from her or his own perspective, and that claims to objectivity simply serve to disguise the standpoint being taken (Fraser, 1989) and to exclude other perspectives from other experiences (Smith, 1987). I see the world as existing independently from descriptions of it at any particular moment, "though it may, the next moment, be affected by such descriptions" and assert that although people can know things about the world, "our knowledge is always fallible and incomplete" (New, 1996, pp. 6-7). Therefore, although I present my own analysis of these textbooks and argue for its usefulness, I also acknowledge that my reading is one of many possible. Finally, I consider my approach feminist in that I pay particular attention to the power dynamics of sex and gender, and the

ways these are intertwined with heterosexism.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: EDUCATION AND HETEROSEXISM

Many theorists have expressed concerns about the relationship between education and dominant, oppressive ideologies (Apple, 2000; Bernstein, 1996; Giroux, 1989; Wotherspoon, 1991), arguing that education in Western society can be seen as part of a hegemonic process, one where the world is taught from the point of view of dominant groups while ignoring the knowledge of marginalized groups. In this way, students learn that only certain types of knowledge are legitimate (Apple, 2000; Bernstein, 1996; Giroux, 1989). Through this process of legitimation, "schools reproduce the social organization of inequality at multiple levels" (Smith, 2000, p. 1148). Yet schools are involved in a continuous process of compromise, and therefore "are also places where dominant and subordinate groups define and constrain each other through an ongoing battle and exchange..." (Giroux, 1989, p. 141). Texts are an important part of this process, and can play a key role in organizing social relations. Studying texts, then, can reveal these "relations of ruling" (Smith, 1990, p. 5).

I understand heterosexism as the presumption that heterosexuality is superior to all other forms of sexuality, often through claims that it is the only natural or normal sexuality (Buston & Hart, 2001; Shortall, 1998). An understanding of heterosexism, however, depends in large part on how one defines sexuality. Early theorists argued that sexuality cannot simply be divided into heterosexuality and homosexuality, but is instead more of a continuum of sexual behaviour (Kinsey, Pomroy, & Martin, 1948). Later, others pointed out that it is not so much behaviour itself that is key, but the meanings attached, including sexual and romantic feelings (Weinberg 1994). Foucault (1978) further complicated sexuality's connection to identity, arguing that the idea of a homosexual as a type of person did not exist until the nineteenth century. Others saw heterosexuality itself as a modern invention, insisting that "the concept of heterosexuality is only one particular way of perceiving, categorizing, and imagining the social relations of the sexes" (Katz, 1990, p. 7; see also Sedgwick, 1990). Today, theorists often use the term queer to denote

sexuality that defies sex and gender norms, and the term queer theory “to propose a focus not so much on specific populations as on sexual categorization processes and their deconstruction” (Gamson, 2000, p. 349). The distinctions between heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality are socially constructed in many ways then, but these concepts can also have important meaning in everyday lives, “shaping the very way in which ‘reality’ is experienced” (Epstein, 1994, p. 162).

Heeding Fraser’s (1989) reminder that “ideology loves dichotomies” (p. 8), I suggest that it is possible to complicate sexuality even further by critiquing the concept of sex itself. Butler (1990), for instance, suggests that “‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender” (p. 7); that in fact, the physical and psychological differences between individuals may be more complex than these two categories represent. Butler goes on to argue that society’s conceptualization of sex (and sexuality) reinforces “institutionalized heterosexuality,” that “[t]he institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire” (p. 22). Thus “compulsory heterosexuality” and the heterosexist oppression of other sexualities are deeply connected to the oppression of women (Rich, 1980, p. 631) as well as of men who do not fit into the hegemonic masculine norm (Connell, 1995).

Wittig (1996) argues that a patriarchal, heterosexist system creates a “straight mind” that “cannot conceive of a culture, a society where heterosexuality would order not only all human relationships but also its very production of concepts and all the processes which escape consciousness, as well” (p. 146). It is important, then, to look at “heterosexuality as a social and political organizing principle” (Seidman, 1996, p. 9), examining “the ways the very homo/hetero distinction underpinned all aspects of contemporary life” (Gamson, 2000, p. 354). Schools have been called one of the “major heterosexist institutions” (p. 355) pointing to the need to question how they “work to heterosexualize and gender, and with what material effects” (p. 358). Grace, Hill, Johnson, and Lewis (2004) note that heterosexism is intricately bound up with other oppressive systems.

[H]eteronormativity, as well as Whiteness, have infiltrated educational practices and policies, such as desegregation, resulting in (1) the erasure of issues of class, gender and sexual orientation and (2) the construction of discursive and social practices that have replicated rather than dismantled power and privilege. (p. 305)

I see "institutionalized heterosexism," then, as the reinforcement in and by institutions of the belief that heterosexuality is superior to other forms of sexuality (Butler, 1990; Gamson, 2000).

The curriculum is one aspect of this reinforcement, but the entire school environment "combines official asexuality with an aggressive, indeed punitive, heteronormativity" (Sears, 2003, pp. 185-6). In other words, while heterosexuality is reduced to social interaction according to specific gender norms, and thus made acceptable, same-sex sexuality is reduced to sexual activity, and thus prohibited. Yet schools can also be places of resistance to heterosexism. Despite the risks to teachers (Shortall, 1998) under formal policies of silencing, "some teachers and community advocates continue to struggle for an empowering sex education curriculum both in and out of the high school classroom" (Fine, 1988 p. 34).

In Canada, Wotherspoon (1998) states that "curriculum materials that depict gay lifestyles are commonly protested if not banned from classrooms" (p. 98). Shortall (1998) notes that "Family Life classes rarely discuss gay and lesbian families as viable options, history classes overlook the gay and lesbian civil rights movement, and Canadian law classes ignore the discrimination against gays and lesbians" (p. 91). Resistance, though, also exists here: in 2002, British Columbia teacher James Chamberlain succeeded in having the Supreme Court of Canada overturn his school board's decision to ban three children's books from kindergarten and grade-1 classrooms because they depicted same-sex parents (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2002). In that same year, the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2002) published a document called "Seeing the Rainbow," a guide to help teachers understand "bisexual, gay, lesbian, transgender and two-spirited realities" (p. 1). This guide specifically addressed curriculum issues, advising teachers to "add books to the classroom" discussing same-sex relationships and sexuality, to "integrate the curriculum" by addressing sexual diversity and incorporating mention of sexual minorities into subjects such as

literature, history, art, law, and science, and to “provide appropriate education about sexuality,” including sexual diversity (pp. 36-37).

Although a number of general studies of heterosexism and homophobia in education exist (e.g. Buston & Hart, 2001; Harrison, 2000; Mac an Ghail, 1991; Rengel Phillips, 1991; Shortall, 1998), currently there is an absence of studies that specifically examine textbooks. This study, therefore, has directly analyzed the content of high-school textbooks and how they address (or do not address) the issues of same-sex relationships and sexuality. I focused on high-school texts in particular because issues of relationships and sexuality are discussed more extensively at this level. In this article, then, I have addressed the question: Are current French Québec high-school textbooks heterosexist? If so, in what ways and to what extent?

In terms of social significance, this study is perhaps even more important. The issue of extending the right to marry to same-sex couples has been the subject of heated debate across Canada in recent years, with Parliament finally voting to recognize same-sex marriage on June 28, 2005. Thus the issue of whether or not Canadian education systems teach respect or disdain for same-sex relationships becomes a very important issue. Furthermore, the high-school curriculum is presently undergoing reform in Québec, opening up the possibility of directly addressing issues of heterosexism in these texts.

CONTEXT: THE QUEBEC EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Québec secondary school system covers five years: Secondary 1 through 5, for students aged about 12 to 17. Texts for these schools are approved by the Minister of Education, who is advised by a Curriculum Resource Evaluation Committee including representatives from university education faculties, school boards, principals, parents, publishers, and pedagogical experts. This committee recommends texts as well as criteria for their approval, and may hear from concerned individuals or groups on any subject. The Law on public instruction governs textbook choices, stating that texts must represent the diversity of Québec society, be free of discrimination, and respect moral and religious values (Ministère de l'éducation du Québec, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

Analytic Themes

Building on findings of previous studies (Buston & Hart, 2001; Harrison, 2000; Mac An Ghail, 1991; Rengel Phillips, 1991; Shortall, 1998), I divided the results of my analysis into four themes: ignoring; mentioning; negative contexts; and positive contexts. These four themes collectively structured my content analysis.

Ignoring is the phenomenon where same-sex sexuality and relationships are simply never discussed. Buston and Hart (2001), for instance, found many examples of ways that the topic of same-sex sexuality is avoided. "Examples include defining sexual activity as vaginal intercourse, even when discussing condom use, talking solely in terms of sexual relationships between males and females, and failing to discuss condom use in terms of anal penetrative sex as well as vaginal penetrative sex" (p. 100). Negative contexts indicate discussions of same-sex sexuality or relationships in a context that was discouraged in the text. For example, the subjects of abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and prostitution were all considered negative contexts in this coding. As Mac an Ghail (1991) explains, "on the few occasions when [homosexuality] was introduced, it was presented in a negative way; most recently in relation to aids" (p. 299). Positive contexts signify discussions of same-sex sexuality or relationships in a context that was either encouraged, or at least discussed without discouragement. Examples include family life, puberty, and sexual pleasure. Mentioning differs from the last two themes in that there is little context at all: instead, these are brief items on same-sex sexuality mentioned separately from the general discussion. Rengel Phillips (1991), for instance, found that discussions of homosexuality were physically separated from the rest of the text and contextually separated from discussions of other aspects of human life.

Definitions

Though sex is often seen as biological and gender as social, a definition

of sex as two opposite human biologies has its problems. Understanding of both sex and gender is further complicated by intersexuality (when an individual is born with ambiguous genitals), and transgenderism (identification as born with a wrongly sexed body). To simplify this analysis, however, I have used current standard sex and gender terminology, with the understanding that lived experiences of these terms are much more complex.

The concept of sexuality is perhaps even more difficult to specify. As well, though there is an assumption of a direct link between sexuality and identity, "fixed identity categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power" (Gamson & Moon, 2004, p. 50). Thus I do not assume that all identities are based on sexuality, nor deny the validity of those that are. With this caveat in mind, as well as arguments of sexuality theorists discussed above, I understand sexuality as a fluid, complex, and changing ensemble of an individual's sexual feelings, desires, and behaviours. In a practical sense, however, this definition does not translate into a clear method of coding because codes must allow me to reflect the ways that sexuality and relationships are discussed in these texts. To illustrate how these texts dichotomize sexuality as heterosexuality/homosexuality (with the second category very occasionally including bisexuality), I have chosen to use the terms heterosexuality and same-sex sexuality. I define heterosexuality as sexuality oriented exclusively towards members of the opposite sex. This is a much narrower category than the one I created for same-sex sexuality, which includes sexuality that is oriented at some time or in some way toward members of the same sex. I have allowed room in this definition not only for homosexuality and bisexuality, but for sexualities not tied to a particular identity yet which happen to involve sexual feelings for or behaviour with someone of the same sex. I emphasize that I do not wish to conflate homosexuality and bisexuality because I recognize that for many people these are very separate positions and identities. As well, though I support the use of the term queer as empowering, I want to be careful to keep the term complex (Sedgwick, 1990), and not slip into a queer/ heterosexual dichotomy (Gamson & Moon, 2004) by using it in coding.

Following the definition of heterosexism above, I considered texts to

be heterosexist if they presented the perspective that heterosexuality is superior to other forms of sexuality, for example as the only normal or natural sexuality. I also considered texts heterosexist when same-sex sexuality was presented as inferior, for example as abnormal, unnatural, or problematic. In my findings section, I have discussed how I found these criteria to be related to the dichotomizing of sex/gender and sexuality.

Content Analysis

Although content analysis has the advantage of being unobtrusive, it also has the limitation of being restricted to written material. I acknowledge, then, that my analysis excludes the supplementary resources, classroom dynamics, or teacher initiatives that impact upon students' overall learning experience. This said, however, this study provides important insight into the presence of heterosexism in key educational materials.

I have examined only those courses that directly discuss sexuality and/ or relationships, basing this choice on a similar decision by Buston and Hart (2001), who in delimiting their study to sex education, argue that "[s]ex education is a site where a heterosexist slant may be most obvious and damaging to those growing up identifying as gay or lesbian" (p. 96). I examined 20 texts currently approved for French Québec secondary schools in five subjects: Personal and Social Education; Moral Education; Family Economics; Human Biology; and Catholic Moral and Religious Education.

I coded the textbooks by page, a unit of analysis that has the advantage of clear physical separations. I coded only those pages that included themes relevant to this study, for a total of 610 pages. For each page, a main theme and citation were recorded.

I identified eleven sexuality/relationship themes discussed in high-school texts, coded in the following manner: (a) personal sexuality (e.g. feelings), (b) reproduction, (c) dating/relationships, (d) marriage, (e) sexually transmitted diseases, (f) abuse/assault, (g) prostitution, (h) laws, (i) contraception, (j) families, (k) effects of drugs on sexual behaviour.

I also recorded the presentation of sexuality for each page, as follows:

(a) sexuality defined exclusively as heterosexuality, (b) heterosexuality in a positive context, (c) heterosexuality in a negative context, (d) same-sex sexuality in a positive context, (e) same-sex sexuality in a negative context, or (f) sexuality that does not specify either heterosexuality or same-sex sexuality. Originally, I had planned separate coding of neutral contexts, but did not find this code useful. In addition to this coding, I noted whether pages that mentioned same-sex sexuality included only homosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality, or a broader definition.

I entered coding data into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a program that allows a researcher to examine patterns in the data (such as tendency for negative or positive contexts for heterosexuality or same-sex sexuality) with regard to a large number of variables (such as a particular school subject). In this case, these variables included subject area, school grade, textbook title, publication year, and page number.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Throughout these books, I found evidence of institutionalized heterosexism in four clear ways: through the maintenance of a rigid dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality; through 'heteronormativity' (Grace et al., 2004), which posits heterosexuality as the only 'normal' sexuality; through the problematization of same-sex sexuality as unnatural, abnormal, or otherwise inferior; and, as an integral part of these three processes, through maintaining a strict distinction between male/masculine and female/feminine. This distinction, of course, is necessary to the dichotomization of sexualities (Butler, 1990).

In the basic statistics of this analysis, one analytic theme stands out most clearly: ignoring. In fact, 577, or nearly 95 per cent, of the 610 pages coded made no reference at all to same-sex sexuality. As well, 133 pages, or 22 per cent, explicitly defined sexuality as heterosexuality, and only 33 pages (5.4 per cent) mentioned same-sex sexuality in any way. I see this ignoring of same-sex sexuality as part of the process of institutionalized heterosexism: a way of making clear that heterosexuality is the only normal sexuality and thus the only sexuality relevant to students. As

Grace et al. (2004) identified, ignoring same-sex sexuality is part of the way that heteronormativity erases issues of sexual orientation, constructing discourses that further the "power and privilege" of heterosexuality (p. 305).

In addition, the authors of these textbooks rarely discussed same-sex sexuality in terms of everyday life, relationships, families, or life events. In fact, I found same-sex sexuality in negative contexts almost 80 per cent of the time, on 26 of 33 pages, in topics such as abuse, prostitution, and STDs. As Sears (2003) has described, same-sex sexuality is reduced to sexual activity (and its potential harm) in contrast to desexualized heterosexuality, which is made safe. I understand this as another part of the process of institutionalized heterosexism: problematizing same-sex sexuality and creating it as the unnatural other to natural heterosexuality.

I noted that the definition of same-sex sexuality in these texts was nearly always limited to homosexuality, rarely including bisexuality, and broader discussions of sexuality not found at all. I view this definition itself as a key part of institutionalized heterosexism. The definitions in these texts dichotomize heterosexuality/homosexuality, setting the stage to see sexuality in terms of opposites of normal and abnormal dichotomies essential to maintaining and reproducing ideologies (Butler, 1990; Fraser, 1989).

I also examined each subject separately. The *Personal and Social Education* course covered sexuality and relationships most thoroughly, making up 45 per cent of all pages analysed (273 of 610 pages). Although the theme of ignoring was most evident here, mentioning also occurred, and this course contained 58 per cent, or 15 of 26 pages, of negative contexts of same-sex sexuality. The texts for *Human Biology*, however, exemplify just one theme: ignoring. In fact, not one mention of same-sex sexuality or relationships was found here. These books discussed sexuality only in terms of heterosexuality, assuming the heterosexuality not only of their readers but the rest of the world. In *Family Economics*, ignoring is once again the most common theme, with 30 per cent of the pages explicitly defining sexuality as heterosexuality. One example of positive context does occur here, though, as discussed below. In *Moral Education*, textbooks contained examples of ignoring and mentioning, yet

also of positive contexts. In fact, of all the texts, these presented perhaps the most ambivalent messages about same-sex sexuality. Though at many points, these texts defined sexuality only in terms of heterosexuality, 6 of 7 positive contexts of same-sex sexuality were also found here. Finally, the textbooks for the *Catholic Moral and Religious Education* course presented the most negative messages towards same-sex sexuality and relationships, exemplifying the themes of ignoring and negative contexts. Although at 137 pages, this subject made up 22 per cent of all pages analyzed; it accounted for 42 per cent of examples of negative contexts for same-sex sexuality.

Ignoring

"Inside the classroom what is not said is more significant than what is said" (Shortall, 1998, p. 61). Indeed, in the texts that I studied, the theme of ignoring is distinctly present throughout, regardless of subject, school year, publication year, or publisher. There is a near constant assumption of heterosexuality. For example, in a typical discussion of puberty in a Personal and Social Education text: "All of these transformations are accompanied by an awakening of interest in the opposite sex. Bit by bit, boys become interested in girls and girls in boys"¹ (Pleins Feux, p. 67). Discussions of families also assume that parents are of the opposite sex: "You rebelled first against mom and dad..." (*Formation personnelle et sociale, 4e secondaire*, p. 12). As well, Catholic Moral and Religious Education texts showed a particularly explicit type of ignoring: "The characteristics of a couple, according to God's plan: a couple that is heterosexual, loyal, stable, united, egalitarian, and fertile" (*Tant qu'il fait jour*, p. 254; my emphasis). Finally, part of this ignoring involves emphasizing differences between men and women, sometimes combining heterosexism with blatant sexism: "Men, no matter what their personal sexual experience, have a marked preference for women with limited sexual experience." (*Formation personnelle et sociale, 4e secondaire*, p. 153). I see such examples as further reinforcing heterosexism through maintaining dichotomies that enforce rigid definitions of what it means to be a man or a woman (Butler, 1990).

Through all subjects, discussions of sexual behaviour tended to focus

on vaginal intercourse. Sex, for instance, is defined as "a physical act of introducing the penis into the vagina" (*De la tête aux pieds*, p. 334). In particular, these texts emphasised avoiding unwanted pregnancy (preferably by abstinence): "Sexual relations involve certain consequences, the most significant of which is an unwanted pregnancy" (*Formation personnelle et sociale, 4e secondaire*, p. 130). Condom use, then, is discussed only in the context of birth control and vaginal intercourse: "The condom traps the sperm from ejaculation, preventing them from spreading into the vagina" (*Comme un souffle de vie*, p. 344). Such definitions of sexual activity pose heterosexuality as the only natural sexuality, an important way that schools exclude same-sex sexuality (Sears, 2003).

I see all these examples as a creation of a completely heterosexual worldview. This is a silencing of same-sex sexuality that operates by erasing same-sex sexuality from the classroom and making experiences of same-sex relationships or sexuality irrelevant in education (Wotherspoon, 1998). I view this silencing as an integral part of heteronormativity: "the discursive and social practices that legitimize heterosexuality as the norm and make homosexuality and queerness invisible" (Grace et al., 2004).

Mentioning

Mentioning was also a very common theme in these texts, and the subtlety of these examples further complicated my understanding of the workings of heterosexism. In one Personal and Social Education text, for instance, the only mention of same-sex sexuality occurred in a list of adolescent girls' and boys' reasons for wanting a sexual relationship: "Girl's motives: wanting to prove to her boyfriend that she loves him; Boy's motives: trying to prove that he is not a homosexual." (*Formation personnelle et sociale, 1er cycle*, p.129). In this short passage, I note two very important elements of heterosexism. For one, though brief, this is yet another erasure of same-sex sexual experience (Grace et al., 2004), presenting a homosexual identity as unquestionably undesirable and presuming that any sexual activity that an adolescent would engage in would be only with the opposite sex. Secondly, this text maintains a

rigid differentiation between girls and boys, again, a key way of reinforcing institutionalized heterosexism (Butler, 1990).

Another example of mentioning occurs in a Moral Education text, which begins one chapter with a definition of "sexual preference": "This has to do with sexual preference for masculine or feminine partners. Thus we mean heterosexuality or homosexuality" (*Trajectoires*, p. 26). However, although themes of sex and gender are elaborated in great detail, no more is said about sexual preference, and there is no acknowledgement that the term sexual preference itself can be seen in a negative light. As Fine (1988) asks, "How could we speak of 'sexual preference' when sexual involvement outside of heterosexuality may seriously jeopardize one's social and/or economic well-being?" (p. 41).

The most subtle and troubling example of mentioning that I found was one separate, very brief chapter (one and a half pages), entitled "Understanding and Respecting Sexual Orientations." Although this chapter claims to discuss respect, I see it as representing a very powerful form of heterosexism. In fact, this chapter was written with the assumption that you, the student reader, are of course heterosexual, but you will just have to learn to tolerate these other, different homosexuals and bisexuals: "You may find that it is difficult to respect *people who are different from you*, but it is worth it if you want to live in harmony in society" (*Formation personnelle et sociale, 1er cycle*, p. 149, my emphasis). In this way, heterosexuality is normalized (Katz, 1990), and same-sex sexuality is othered; there is no room for students to identify with experiences of same-sex sexuality. This chapter also takes pains to assure students that teenagers who like to spend time with members of the same sex are certainly not homosexuals, that they are simply developing according to their own rhythm, and will of course develop interest in the opposite sex eventually. I see this representation of same-sex sexuality as a phase not only as condescending, but as reinforcing "the acceptance of the corollary that certain expressions of sexuality are 'natural', while others are therefore 'unnatural'" (Epstein, 1994, p. 189). Again, this is one of the key parts that I identified in the process of institutionalized heterosexism.

Negative Contexts

In many of the texts, discussion of same-sex sexuality tends to be limited to negative contexts such as sexually transmitted diseases, sexual abuse, and prostitution. "But have you wondered who resorts to young female and male prostitutes? They are almost exclusively men aged 25 to 65 and may belong to any social class. As many are homosexuals as are heterosexuals" (*Formation personnelle et sociale, 5e secondaire*, p. 143). Fine (1988) has argued that schools create "discourses of sexuality as violence, as victimization, and as individual morality" with a "discourse of desire" almost completely absent (p. 29). In these texts, a similar pattern is found: same-sex sexual desire is erased from the context of everyday life (Grace et al., 2004), with a focus only on violence and victimization.

I also note this erasure in discussions of morality in Catholic Moral and Religious Education: "A Suspicious Relationship -- 'My brother has been living with a buddy for a few months. One of my friends thinks that he is a homosexual. I am worried about him. Can he be happy?'" The reply and discussion go on to say that the Catholic church does not condemn homosexuals, but homosexuality is not the way that God wants people to live their lives. The text explains that homosexuals are often marginalized and have difficulty accepting themselves, that homosexual relationships are not complete, and that homosexuals are "invited to grow as a person by accepting themselves and directing their life in a constructive way" (*Tant qu'il fait jour*, p. 265). This last line implies that homosexuals should avoid all sexual activity, as it is homosexual sex that is a sin. This description of a "love the sinner, hate the sin" perspective is a stark example of the heterosexist reduction of same-sex relationships and identity to sexuality (Sears, 2003). This perspective negates the elements of love and support in a same-sex relationship, maintaining the division between natural, desexed heterosexuality, and unnatural, problematic, sexualized same-sex sexuality.

Another of these Catholic Moral and Religious Education texts also discussed homosexuality with the use of stereotypes: "many homosexual persons live in a closed world, they meet in places that are not very open to heterosexual persons"; "there is often a great deal of instability within

homosexual relationships”; “for homosexual persons, access to happiness is more difficult because of their marginality, the impossibility of having children, the feeling of guilt that returns them again and again to the question ‘Am I normal?’”; “We might however wonder if the homosexual person, upon entering into such a life as a couple, risks closing themselves in a habit that they would have been able to do without?” (*Les enjeux du présent*, p. 179-183). This image of a same-sex relationship as a troublesome habit is starkly contrasted with discussions of opposite-sex relationships as loving, life-fulfilling, and blessed by God. Again, I see these texts as exemplifying the problematization of same-sex sexuality, setting it in rigid opposition to naturalized heterosexuality (Epstein, 1994). Furthermore, I view this as an important example of why the issue of heterosexism is directly relevant for those who identify as straight: with an idealization of heterosexual relationships, this dichotomy leaves little room to acknowledge violence or other problems in relationships between women and men.

Positive Contexts

In total, there were seven codings of same-sex sexuality in a positive context. Some of these, however, involved simple reference to sexual orientation, stretching the limits of my coding definitions. Other examples, however, were a little more thorough, for instance, in a discussion (now outdated) of how families are changing: “Some legal experts believe that the next step in the growing concept of the family will affect same-sex couples. More and more visible, these couples have been demanding their rights for more than 25 years in Canada. It may be that their ‘family status’ will one day be defined in accordance with Canadian human rights law” (*Economie familiale*, p. 22). Another example occurred in a Secondary 3 moral education textbook, which, when talking about changing values, gave an example of a soap opera that depicts two women in a couple, and the process they go through to get their families to accept them. The text says that in this program “the message sounds clearly: lesbianism is not a shameful illness. Such a positive message leaves positive traces in the minds of those who receive it” (*Au-delà du miroir*, p. 156).

Overall, I see these positive contexts as revealing potential for change, particularly in their connections to processes outside of the school. After all, textbook selection does not take place in a vacuum, but in a particular context. I view the context in Québec as involving a tension between the historical power of the conservative Catholic church, and the increasing liberalism that has come with rapid secularization. I theorize, however, that from this tension can come a process of negotiation where same-sex sexuality can begin to be incorporated into the curriculum. Indeed, this is particularly relevant for Québec, because its education system is presently undergoing reform. This could create important potential for resistance to heterosexism and an opportunity to make the curriculum more inclusive. Unfortunately, Personal and Social Education, the subject where sex education is now most thoroughly discussed, will no longer be included as a regular subject in the Québec curriculum. Instead, sex education may be incorporated into a number of other subjects, but only at an individual teacher's initiative (Duquet, 2003). Aside from concern for teacher workload, I also have grave concerns about what this will mean for the possibility of consistently inclusive sex education. With no curriculum guide or text to draw on, teachers may be even more hesitant to initiate discussions of same-sex sexuality. As Shortall (1998) points out, no matter how they identify, teachers have reason to fear being labeled homosexual, risking serious social sanctions or even (in some jurisdictions) losing their job.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND HETEROSEXISM

I found Québec high school textbooks to be fiercely heterosexist. These texts strictly enforce the ideology of heteronormativity (Grace et al., 2004) by dichotomizing heterosexuality and same-sex sexuality, normalizing heterosexuality, problematizing same-sex sexuality, and emphasizing a rigid distinction between male and female. Perhaps most notable are the silences: nearly 95 per cent of the pages analyzed completely ignored same-sex sexuality and relationships. Over and over, the texts defined a couple as a man and a woman, parents as mother and father, and adolescence as the time to become interested in the opposite sex. In these ways, heterosexuality is continually established as the norm.

In contrast, the tiny fraction of mentions of same-sex sexuality (33 of 610 pages) tended to be limited to vague references, warning against the dangers of sex. In the absence of fuller discussions of healthy sexuality and relationships, such isolated statements serve to problematize same-sex sexuality. Indeed, in my view these texts are a key part of schools' reproduction of a larger system of "institutional regulation and management of sexualities" (Gamson & Moon, 2004, p. 51).

The implications of these findings for the curriculum in Québec, as elsewhere, are that heterosexism in textbooks needs to be addressed by emphasizing diversity in all areas: including same-sex relationships in any discussion of relationships or families, discussing all varieties of sexuality in every lesson on sexual activity or identity, always being careful not to limit sexuality or gender identity to rigid dichotomies, and assuming that students will identify in a variety of different ways. Friend (1997) argues that the goal for schools should be inclusiveness. He says that

[when] books on the shelves, posters on the walls and pamphlets in the racks include mention and images of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, then inclusiveness is promoted. The message, while subtle and powerful, helps to build an inclusive learning community that recognizes multiple voices. (p. 12)

Beyond the curriculum Friend recommends clear anti-discrimination policies, support groups for students identifying outside the heterosexual norm, inclusiveness training for teachers, inclusive events such as school dances, and a "clear strategic approach" to addressing heterosexism and homophobia (pp. 12-14).

Challenging heterosexist schooling is important for many reasons. Sears (2003) argues that

[t]he sexual repression of official school culture has particularly strong implications for same-sex sexuality, which is obliterated while heterosexuality is magnified through the pressure cooker of its desexed official form and sexually charged outlaw culture. This combination produces a toxic environment for young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered and others who are non-conformists or outcasts. (p. 186)

This heterosexist environment, then, can set the stage for homophobic

bullying and harassment, and as Macgillivray (2004) explains, "[t]he deprecation and resulting marginalization of students based on their real or perceived sexual orientation, as well as their identity expression, robs them of the opportunity to participate fully in school and can retard their developmental growth into adults with positive self-identities" (p. 348). However, the issue of heterosexism is directly relevant for all students, regardless of how they identify. Challenging heterosexism not only helps to break down the norms that "confine everybody to rigid gender role stereotypes" (Macgillivray, 2004, p. 366), but also encourages students to develop critical thinking skills to question presumptions and biases they encounter throughout their lives.

I believe that we can challenge and move beyond heterosexism because despite the education system's abilities to silence and shame, it is also a place of great potential for critical thinking and change (hooks, 1994). By describing and analyzing heterosexism in high-school texts, I hope that this study has achieved an important step towards that goal.

NOTE

¹ All translations are my own.

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APPENDIX 1: TEXTBOOK LIST

Biologie Humaine

Caron, R., Faublas-Roy, M. J. & Fugère-Godin, M. (1997). *De la tête aux pieds Biologie*. Laval: Éditions HRW . Groupe Éducalivres inc.

Économie Familiale

Boisvert-Bellemare, G. (1995). *Aujourd'hui . . . pour demain !* Montréal: Lidec inc.

Gagné, C. (1995). *Économie familiale. Pour une meilleure gestion de mes ressources* (2^e édition). Saint-Laurent: Éditions de renouveau pédagogique.

Janson, J. (1997). *Comme un souffle de vie* (2^e édition). Montréal: Lidec inc.

Enseignement Moral

Bourdages, R.-A. (1989) *Au-delà du miroir...* Montréal: Éditions la pensée inc.

Bourdages, R.-A. (1990). *Singulier Pluriel*. Montréal: Éditions la pensée inc.

Bourdages, R.-A. (1991). *Vers le large*. Montréal: Éditions la pensée inc.

Debunne, J.-M., & Saint-Pierre, L. (1993). *Un aller simple*. Montréal: Éditions la pensée inc.

Debunne, J.-M., Saint-Pierre, L., & Bailly, M.-F. (1996). *Trajectoires* (2^e édition, revue et corrigée). Montréal: Éditions la pensée inc.

Enseignement Moral et Religieux Catholique

Bouchard, J.-F. & Lachance, L. (1992). *Tant qu'il fait jour . . .* Ville Saint-Laurent: Éditions d'enseignement religieux FPR inc.

Dubuc, M. (1991). *Inventer sa vie*. Ville Saint-Laurent: Éditions d'enseignement religieux FPR inc.

Durand-Lutzky, N. (1993). *Les enjeux du présent*. Anjou: Les éditions CEC inc.

Guénette, P., & Toupin, B. (1992). *Faire son chemin*, 1992. Ville Saint-Laurent: Éditions d'enseignement religieux FPR inc.

Formation personnelle et sociale

Beauchamp, L., & Pelletier, D. (1988). *À mon tour*, 5e secondaire (1re éd.). Sainte-Foy: Les éditions Septembre.

Beauchamp, L., & Pelletier, D. (1988). *Moi et Compagnie*, 4e secondaire. Sainte-Foy: Les éditions Septembre.

Beauchamp, L., & Pelletier, D. (1988). *Pleins feux*, 3e secondaire. Sainte-Foy: Les éditions Septembre.

Beaulac, G., & Dionne, L. (1988). *Formation personnelle et sociale, 1er cycle* (2^e édition). Montréal: McGraw-Hill.

Beaulac, G., & Côté, C. (1989). *Formation personnelle et sociale, 4e secondaire*. Montréal: McGraw-Hill.

Beaulac, G., & Beaugard, H. (1990). *Formation personnelle et sociale, 5e secondaire*. Montréal: McGraw-Hill.

Beaulac, G., Côté, C., Côté, J. & Desaulniers, M. P. (1991) *Formation personnelle et sociale, 1er cycle* (2e édition). Montréal: McGraw-Hill.