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BOOK REVIEW

Homophobia in the Hallways: Heterosexism and Transphobia in Canadian Catholic Schools

Tonya D. Callaghan

Toronto: University of Toronto Press (2018)

264 pages; \$27.95 USD (paperback)

ISBN 978-1487622674

<https://utorontopress.com/us/homophobia-in-the-hallways-2>

Reviewed by Roy Quinto

Tonya Callaghan builds a case to resist homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools in the book *Homophobia in the Hallways: Heterosexism and Transphobia in Canadian Catholic Schools*. The introduction builds the case that homophobia has been institutionalized and maintained in Catholic schools through doctrinal disciplining in what is eventually described as the tools of “holy homophobia.” The first part focuses on the experiences of 20 participants in the study, “uncovering how power operates in Canadian Catholic schools” by weaving their “life narrative” vignettes. The second part identifies how the media and the law have become allies in combating these oppressive power structures. The third part focuses on various Catholic documents that perpetuate homophobia in Canadian Catholic schools. The fourth part attempts to explain how these structures were put in place and maintained through the lens of three critical theorists.

Chapter 1 effectively introduces the reader to the state of the educational world of the LGBTQ community. From civil rights to educational research, society seems to be more and more accepting of this community. The chapter moves quickly through the history of the LGBTQ civil rights movement and connects the growing body of education research on LGBTQ students with the general growing acceptance of LGBTQ people in Canada. The chapter notes that as LGBTQ people gain acceptance in secular society, the education research shows a divergence in acceptance within schools that depends largely on whether the school is secular or religious. In secular schools (public schools in the US) improvement in school culture for LGBTQ individuals is

evident, while in religious schools, the opposite is observed. The author specifies that while most of the education studies regarding Catholic schools were conducted in three countries—the United States, Australia, and Canada—the trends all appear to be similar. The chapter then moves through the evolution of various necessary theories to critically analyze these policies and documents and effectively lands on critical pedagogy, striking a hopeful tone as critical pedagogy “aims to emancipate the oppressed and mobilizes people through common and accessible understanding of critique to end various forms of human suffering” (p. 29). The chapter ends with an acknowledgment of validity concerns given the perception that the author is already biased and given the author’s previous works. It remains up to the reader to decide if they agree with the assertion that validity will not be an issue because the author intends to actively seek evidence to challenge previous findings. The author asserts that “in this way, this study does not succumb to researcher bias” (p. 34).

Chapter 2 is divided into two parts: methodology and interviews. The author’s meticulous effort in formulating the methodology is especially noteworthy. Even though only 20 participants were engaged in the study, the study was remarkably successful in capturing diversity by sexual orientation, gender, and age. In terms of sexual orientation, all but one participant identified as LGBTQ. Participants were divided relatively evenly between gay and lesbian individuals and three identified as transgendered. Among the participants, 13 were recently graduated participants between the ages of 18 and 24. Despite explicit effort to have an ethnically and geographically diverse study group, the vast majority of participants were white and were from the provinces of Alberta and Ontario. With that said, the group’s representativeness is remarkable. The second part of the chapter describes the narrative inquiry method of analysis and the qualities that make it an appropriate method for the emancipatory goals of the study. After going through the interviews, the chapter concludes by summarizing the experiences of the participants since the interview. The importance of the media is included in this account. A more detailed analysis of these interviews is eventually presented in Chapter 5.

On its surface, the title of chapter 3, “Media and Law,” does not comment on education or Catholicism. Yet, the chapter explains the unique Canadian education system, where two different school systems can exist—one secular and the other Catholic—although both receive public funds. In a number of ways, this chapter takes the momentum from the first half of the book and shifts to discuss Canadian law and media. In fact, the information might have been better placed at the beginning of the book to create context for readers,

especially non-Canadians unfamiliar with Canadian law or society. That said, the chapter is roughly divided between law and media, first exploring the law and how different provinces use the legal system to address homophobia. This ultimately culminates in 1982, with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, simply known as the Charter. Since the Charter, not many homophobic actions in any province have withstood legal challenges, except in Catholic schools, where such actions are protected under Section 2 under religious freedom. This, along with denominational rights in Section 93, composes the two legal protections afforded to Catholic school protection for homophobia. The author provides various examples where Catholic schools employ these legal protections and counterexamples where LGBTQ activists have still managed, with limited success, to create and promote LGBTQ rights in Catholic schools. The chapter ends with how the media has effectively been used to both change public opinion with LGBTQ-positive portrayals and shed light on homophobic practices in Catholic schools—“without question, media accounts have played an instrumental role in getting this much needed discussion started” (p. 115).

Chapter 4 acts as the final piece of evidence in the author’s case for the presence of homophobia in Catholic schools. The chapter discusses two documents from two provinces. In 2004, the Catholic bishops in Ontario published the “Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation” (PGASO), and in 2007, Catholic educators in Alberta published “Towards an Inclusive Community” (TIC). The author asserts that both TIC and PGASO are similar in their instruction to Catholic communities. In fact, the author goes so far as to assert that PGASO

constitutes a form of religiously inspired maltreatment of a vulnerable minority group. PGASO does not offer the assistance to LGBTQ people in Catholic schools that its title promises. On the contrary, it singles out sexual minorities and subjects them to a thinly disguised guide to the ill treatment of and hostility towards students of same-sex attraction. (p. 133)

This is the first time the author clearly and unequivocally states their opinion in such strong terms without using the words of the study participants, academic studies, and others. This is one of the most powerful parts of the book because the author thoroughly and effectively reviews both documents, section by section, revealing the underlying homophobic context. The author rightly concludes that the documents are neither welcoming nor benevolent, as intended by the authors, and only cause further confusion and homophobia in Catholic schools and harm to LGBTQ students.

Chapter 5 is largely a theoretical review, applying the work of three critical theorists to “[construct] an account of homophobia in Alberta and Ontario schools that goes beyond participant experience and textual evidence” (p. 165). The author reviews Althusser’s concept of the ideological state apparatus, Foucault’s theory of disciplinary surveillance, and Gramsci’s notion of hegemony. The author details each theorist, their respective theory, and the definition of their terms, effectively comparing and contrasting these theories and how they will be applied. At times this analysis felt overly complicated. Ultimately, the author concludes that the application of these theories only partially explains the institutionalization and maintenance of homophobia in Catholic schools; the main purpose of these theories is to explain potential ways to resist the oppression experienced by the participants. The author then concludes the chapter by presenting evidence from media accounts shared in Chapter 3 to show the already-existent prevalence of resistance.

The book then concludes with a summary of the key points of each chapter and discusses areas of future research. The author wishes to learn about the situation in other provinces, particularly in light of new legislation. While this book was well written, with fantastic insights and fascinating glimpses into the lives of LGBTQ people in Canadian Catholic schools experiencing homophobia, from the introduction to the last page, the author’s only intended audience seems to be Catholic educators from these two provinces in Canada, with other readers left to excavate relevance for themselves. Still, readers will learn a great deal from reading this book.

Dr. Roy Quinto worked as both a teacher and administrator in Catholic Schools for nearly 15 years. He now works to create affirming educational spaces for LGBTQ youth in Los Angeles.