

Health promotion, well-being and morality: School-based sex education in British Columbia

by

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Abstract

Considering the current demands for better sex education in British Columbia (B.C.), this thesis presents a documentary analysis of the sex education material provided to teachers, analyzing the meanings and values about sexuality presented in the material and examining the relations of power that produce these discourses. The research findings indicate that although health promotion is said to be the number one priority of sex education programs, morality guides what appears in the resources. Students learn to consider their sexuality and sexed bodies in terms of protection, danger and preparation for reproduction, and the material presents heterosexual, cisgender bodies as the norm. However, discussions of gender diversity, consent and students' sexual agency suggest that feminist views and B.C. organizations that advocate for better sexual health education have influenced the discourses and expanded definitions of what is normal and possible in regard to sexuality.

Keywords: sex education; moral regulation; documentary analysis; gender; sexuality

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List of Acronyms

SBSE	School-based sex education
PHE	Physical and Health Education
SOGI	Sexual orientation and gender identity
LGBTQ2S+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Two-Spirit and additional sexual orientations and gender identities

Chapter 1.

An introduction to school-based sex education in British Columbia: the bad, the good and the ugly?

Whether and how to provide sex-education in public schools is a long-debated issue in Western educational systems, with advocates for comprehensive and inclusive programs, and advocates for more muted programs that protect children's' supposed innocence. In the fall of 2016 to the fall of 2019, British Columbia implemented a new kindergarten (K)-12 grade curriculum that set off a new wave of debate about the nature and role of sex education. According to the British Columbia Ministry of Education (n.d.-a), the curriculum was redesigned to respond to a rapidly changing, technological world in which students can access information with more ease and communicate instantly with others. The modifications extended to every subject from Mathematics to Physical and Health Education, the latter of which houses discussions of sexuality. Before the new curriculum, sex education was delivered in the context of Health and Career Planning, which in the new curriculum is reduced to Career Planning and prepares students for the workplace. In the redesigned curriculum, sexuality is covered in Physical and Health Education (PHE) along with themes such as the importance of physical activity, emotional well-being, and fitness goals.

In an effort to deliver age-appropriate sex education, students are gradually presented with more complex concepts about sexuality. For instance, in kindergarten students learn the name of body parts, including private parts, which allows teachers to discuss inappropriate ways of being touched. Building on this knowledge, elementary school pupils learn strategies to use in potentially hazardous or abusive situations, tricks employed by potential abusers to contact their victims, changes that occur during puberty, practices that reduce the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, sexual identity and gender. Finally, secondary school students are taught about healthy sexual decision making, short and long-term consequences of sexual health decisions, and the physical, emotional and social changes that influence relationships (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.-b).

Even if the content of the new curriculum appears to be progressive, Glenn Hansman – former vice president of the B.C. Teachers' Federation – noted that the final decision on what and how to teach rests on school authorities and teachers (as cited in Lovgreen, 2015). At the time the curriculum was revamped, Hansman was still the vice president of the Federation and one of the key figures that promoted the incorporation of inclusive terms and mentions of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). And while his statement about the freedom given to teachers to implement the curriculum was aimed at reassuring the conservative public, it supports the findings of previous research, which suggest that the content and delivery of sex education classes vary from one school (and teacher) to another. In addition, according to Fields et al. (2015), "teachers resist formal sexuality education policies and agendas with which they feel uncomfortable" (p. 374), emphasizing specific topics and avoiding others, such as abortion or sexual orientation.

B.C.'s sex education curriculum is often seen as problematic compared to the Ontario curriculum released in 2019. In Ontario, sexuality is discussed in the subject Human Development and Sexual Education, and topics such as the appropriate naming of body parts, the changes that happen during puberty, STIs and sexual orientation are included, just as in the B.C. curriculum. However, in Ontario, gender identity, consent, and cyberbullying lessons are mandatory, which does not happen in B.C. Moreover, the following topics, which are not mentioned in the B.C. curriculum, are included in Ontario's sex education materials and must be covered in class: personal hygiene needs during puberty, how assumptions about gender and sexual orientation can be hurtful, the importance of having a shared understanding with your partner about consent and your decisions regarding sexual activity, gender expression, pornography, abstinence and contraception (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.).

B.C. Organizations that advocate for better sexual health education for youth and promote the sexual health of people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities believe that sex education is lagging behind the legislative changes. For example, while the law recognizes and protects sexual diversity and same-sex marriage, sex education classes continue to provide information that is only valuable for cisgender, heterosexual students who intend to engage in penile-vaginal intercourse. The campaign Sex Ed is Our Right argues that while the British Columbia Ministry of Education (n.d.-c) claims that the PHE curriculum "is designed to develop the knowledge, skills, and

understandings that students need for lifelong physical health and mental well-being” (para. 2), in practice, students who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Two-Spirit or identify with additional sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTQ2S+) are still marginalized and their sexual needs neglected. This results in 62% of LGTBQ2S+ students still feeling unsafe in schools – according to the ARC Foundation¹ (n.d.-a), creators of the SOGI² 1 2 3 program. Moreover, the lack of information directed to these groups and their sexual needs is said to expose them to greater sexual health risks.

The group YouthCO³ (2018) surveyed more than 600 youth who live in British Columbia, and found that students wanted to receive sex education that was “relevant, standardized, delivered by knowledgeable educators, and fun!” (p.6). Youth want sex education to recognize that not all bodies are cisgender or heterosexual, and they want to be informed about sexual activities that are not penis in vagina sex (such as masturbation and anal sex), the social and relational aspects of sexuality, sexual decision-making, consent, where to access condoms, contraceptives or get tested for STIs and how to respond to sexual assault. The students’ responses highlighted the need to “have the same type and amount of content in their sex ed classes wherever they are in the province” (p. 11). Significantly, the survey revealed that not all the students were receiving the same sex education information; for instance, while sex education had started in grade 5 for some, sex ed only began in grade 9 for others, and not all had been taught about LGBTQ2S+ identities and orientations.

The campaign Sex Ed is Our Right (n.d., Take Action section, para. 2) notes that the fault does not rest entirely on the curriculum, but the lack of funding, resources and sex education training for teachers. The curriculum has changed and some of the topics that students are interested in are included in the redesigned curriculum. However, there is no mandatory training for teachers who impart Physical and Health Education, and they lack the resources necessary to implement sex education that is relevant to every

¹ ARC stands for Awareness, Respect and Capacity, although the organization does not use its full name.

² SOGI refers to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

³ YouthCO is a youth-led human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and Hepatitis C organization that seeks to reduce stigma related to these infections throughout British Columbia. They are the creators of the campaign Sex Ed is Our Right, and offer workshops on sexual well-being, Hepatitis C and HIV, among other topics

student. Veteran local sexual health educator Saleema Noon notes "you can have the most amazing, comprehensive curriculum document, but what matters is what happens in the classroom" (as cited in Lovgreen, 2015). Thus, despite the mentions of sexual orientation and gender identity in the curriculum that are intended to promote LGBTQ2S+ inclusiveness, these topics can be overlooked or covered in an unsatisfactory manner due to school/teacher preferences and lack of knowledge. The same is likely to happen with discussions of sexual decision making and sexual assault if teachers do not feel comfortable and informed enough to discuss the subjects.

Sex Ed is Our Right also deems the curriculum as "vague in wording and flexible in scope" (n.d., Take Action section, para. 2). The organizers express that while the curriculum intends to raise awareness of sexual diversity, it only mentions diversity generally and broadly. Moreover, the learning outcomes stated in the curriculum are vague, which leaves inexperienced sex ed teachers – who were only entrusted with teaching physical education before the curriculum redesign – with few resources to implement their classes. It is not that teachers do not want to teach about diversity, intimacy or sexual consent but they often do not have the knowledge to do so, explains Options for Sexual Health (2021), Canada's largest non-profit provider of sexual health services.

On the other hand, conservative activists, school trustees and groups deem the new curriculum, especially mentions of sexual orientation and gender identity, as a threat to children and an attempt to indoctrinate them. School board trustee Barry Neufeld (2017), for example, believes that "the B.C. Ministry of Education has embraced the LGBTQ lobby and is forcing this biologically absurd theory on children in our schools. Children are being taught that heterosexual marriages (are) no longer the norm." (as cited in St. Denis, 2020). Other social conservative groups such as the Culture Guard (2017a, 2017 b) and Parents United Canada (n.d.) maintain that students are being radicalized, inculcated into a political program, and made to adopt the norms and ideas of a minority (LGBTQ2S+). They maintain that "different" sexual orientations and identities are delusions and students should only be taught "biological facts". They consider the mention of SOGI to be child abuse because they believe this creates confusion during the child's first years of development. From their perspective, children must be protected from these harmful ideologies and parents should have the ultimate say in what their children learn.

Although mentions of sexual orientation and gender identity in sex education tend to be the most debated topics among conservatives, they also disapprove of mentions of masturbation and explicit details of sexual acts, especially when the material is directed toward students in K to 7. They argue that the information received by the pupils is not age-appropriate and that children in this age group are neither interested in those matters nor ready to assimilate the information. Believing that kids and preteens are being robbed of their innocence and potentially even traumatized by the information they receive, some conservatives equate exposing them to details of sexual activities with sexual assault (Hernandez, 2019).

In light of the recent changes to the curriculum and the debate provoked by them among social conservatives and sex activists and organizations, I examine school-based sex education in British Columbia through an analysis of the teaching resources available to sexual health educators in 2022, three years after the implementation of the new K-12 curriculum. The thesis is organized into six chapters, described hereafter. Following this introduction, chapter 2 reviews the literature on sex education. Chapter 3 explains the methodological and theoretical considerations that directed this research. The fourth and fifth chapters recount and analyze the findings of this research: chapter 4 focuses on how sexual orientation, gender identity and diversity are discussed in the sex education material, and chapter 5 centers on the way the sexed body, its boundaries, sexuality and its dangers are portrayed in the Physical and Health Education resources. Finally, chapter 6 condenses the main findings of the study and details its implications for future research.

Chapter 2.

Youth, sexuality and schooling in the literature

Existing research on school-based sex education (SBSE) from a social science perspective questions its motivations and outcomes. Especially, it challenges the idea that the purpose of sex education is to promote sexual health, and denounces the moralistic undertone of its approach towards sexuality. According to scholars, sex education acts as a mechanism for the regulation of society (Allen, 2017; Bay-Cheng, 2003) and "has importance in socialising a new generation, not only into prevailing attitudes about sexuality but also into critically important ways of thinking about and being in society" (Measor et al., 2000, p.7).

To uncover this strategy to regulate teenage sexuality, researchers have employed different methods and approaches, that I categorise in three bodies of research. The first body of research utilises discourse analysis to identify the recurring themes of sex education in the curricula, as well as its silences. Other researchers focus on the history of sexuality and sex education, explaining the societal concerns and changes that encouraged the creation of certain discourses found in modern sex education. Finally, some scholars use interviews and participant observation to identify topics covered in sex education classes.

This thesis assesses the agreements, contradictions, and results of these bodies of research. First, I present the history of sex education and the regulation of sexuality; I continue with an explanation of sex education motives in the 21st century and end with an account of what existing studies identify as the current discourses in SBSE.

2.1. Health promotion or moral regulation? The history of sex education

Sex education made its first appearance in the early 20th century as part of the social hygiene movement, which arose from a preoccupation with moral decay and venereal diseases. At the turn of the century, a group of individuals and organizations that worried about the declining morality in Canada – especially among working-class people –, started a fight against prostitution, divorce and obscene literature (Valverde,

1991). They believed the regeneration of Canadian society could not occur if purity ideals were not inculcated in its citizens, and turned to the educational system to warn “innocent” children and youth of the dangers of promiscuity in an effort to protect them from illness and their parents' ignorance regarding sexuality and morality (Zimmerman, 2015).

According to Valverde (1991), "sexual desire is [was] perceived as the most dangerous of forces, the worst threat to civilization, and hence as that which most needs [needed] taming" (p.28). The members of the social hygiene movement believed that, to construct a powerful and “pure” country, its citizens needed to control their sexual instincts and remain STD-free (Valverde, 1991). In addition, they perceived Anglo-Saxons as more capable of exercising this sexual control, thus avoiding sexual activities that could result in venereal disease (Mawani, 2006; Valverde, 1991). Contrarily, people of colour and East Indians were perceived as "savages" and Asian men as "degenerated" individuals who had lost their manhood (Valverde, 1991). These beliefs resulted in racist sex education programs that exhorted students to avoid race mixing (Zimmerman, 2015).

A purely moral and racist discourse found its way into medicine after the First World War. Many Canadian soldiers infected with venereal diseases from their contact with foreign prostitutes were returning home, and between 15 and 20 percent of the Canadian population was infected with syphilis or gonorrhoea. This alarming percentage of infected citizens "became a metaphor linking larger societal concerns about social and racial degeneracy [...]. Venereal disease personified both state and professional anxieties about sex, vice, and immorality" (Mawani, 2006, p. 148). Health professionals could now hide the moral aspect of their recommendations to avoid interracial sex and engage in monogamous heterosexual sexual practices behind scientific data that, in their eyes, showed "the relationship between (im)morality, "illicit" sex, and disease" (Mawani, 2006, p.149). These professionals, who usually imparted sex education programs, defined “good” sex as the activity that occurred between married heterosexual couples and had as its objective reproduction. If sex was practiced mainly for pleasure, even within marriage, it was considered a perversion. According to Mawani (2006), "sexual pleasure was lustful, dangerous and, moreover, served no social purpose" (p.155).

The duty to save the race rested particularly on women, who were considered "moral guardians" of Canada (Mawani, 2006). Their offspring, which symbolized the country's future, depended on their ability to avoid 'immoral' sexual activities those who could not exercise self-control, practice sexual passivity and value motherhood, were punished. Sangster (2006) states that between 1920 and 1945, The Female Refuges Act allowed judges in Ontario to incarcerate women who were considered promiscuous. The correctional institutions housed women aged 16 to 35 who had sex out of marriage, were illegitimately pregnant or contracted venereal diseases. In addition, sex educators warned girls against seducing their male classmates through their clothes or behaviour and taught them to resist men's advances and demand the highest purity standards from the man they would marry (Mawani, 2006; Zimmerman, 2015).

In the late 1960s, the onset of the Sexual Revolution set a heightened discussion between liberals and conservatives. The first defended teenagers' right to pleasure, sex education as a human right and wanted to "reorient sex education away from its repressive roots and into the new dawn of freedom" (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 80). The latter defended parents' right to educate their children and argued that schools should not instruct children on sex and sexuality. Although sex educators started to discuss human reproduction and body parts during their classes, the "Big Four taboos" continued to haunt sex education: abortion, contraception, homosexuality and masturbation were not discussed inside schools (Zimmerman, 2015). Moreover, the question remained: should sexuality be addressed inside the school classrooms?

At the end of the 20th century, the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) pandemic answered that question; schools could no longer avoid discussions of sexuality. However, controversies around school-based sex education did not cease. While conservative people argued in favour of abstinence-only sex education to stop the spread of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), liberal people contended that comprehensive sex education (CSE), one that acknowledges that teenagers are likely to engage in sexual activity and teaches them how to do so safely, was the best approach to prevent the spread of HIV.

2.2. The schooling of sexualities in the 21st century

The social purity movement, the venereal disease crisis of the interwar period and the AIDS pandemic might seem distant historical events. However, current research suggests that sex education continues to be a mechanism of moral regulation, and the racist, classist, sexist and heteronormative motivations that emerged in those epochs are still deployed in school-based sex education. Currently, the regulatory role of sex education in the Western world is concealed by a discourse of health promotion: an apparent interest in reducing the rates of young people who contract sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or face unintended pregnancies. These discourses continue to portray youth's sexuality as a place of danger and illness.

Scholars agree that the interest in regulating young people's sexuality derives from adults' perception of youth, although they have not reached a consensus on how it is depicted. Some authors argue that teenagers are considered hypersexual, hormonally driven beings unable to control their sexual urges and making rational decisions regarding their sexuality (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fields, Gilbert & Miller, 2015; Friehe & Smith, 2018). Other researchers claim that teenagers are treated as innocent, childlike and sexually inexperienced beings who can be corrupted if they are taught about human sexuality (Allen, 2007, 2013). Finally, Pascoe (2005) explains that adolescents are simultaneously considered "too innocent to know about sex and too sexual to be trusted with information" (Pascoe, 2005, p.29). In any case, sex education appears as a means to protect adolescents, whether it is from themselves or the exterior, sexualized world.

But how do the curriculum and sex education classes look like in practice? Most of the current research on sex education in the West has analyzed the state of SBSE in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. In Canada, the literature on sex education from a social science perspective is not abundant, even when there has been a burgeoning of research on sexuality and youth during the last years. The majority of contemporary Canadian studies on the topic analyze the state of SBSE in Ontario or Alberta, while sex education in British Columbia has been neglected, and – to the best of my knowledge – there is no study about school-based sex education in Vancouver from a sociological or anthropological perspective.

For those reasons, I will not only resort to Canadian research in the present portion of this thesis, but to literature from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Although not all the findings from countries other than Canada might apply to Canadian school-based sex education, as Western countries, these societies share a set of social norms, values, traditions and customs. Having been colonies of the United Kingdom, they are heavily influenced by British culture. In fact, Australia, New Zealand and Canada are still members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. As for the United States, Valverde (1985) states that "Canada is primarily influenced by the US in all cultural fields, and sexual politics is no exception" (p.25).

2.3. The construction of a preferably "non-sexual" student

Several scholars denounce that the sex education curriculum addresses the risks of engaging in sexual activity during adolescence while neglecting the positive aspects of sexuality. Discourses of danger are largely present in school-based sex education, and teenagers learn that sexual behaviour will almost inevitably lead to disease or unintended pregnancy (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Allen, 2007; Byers & Fisher 2017; Connell 2005; Fields, Gilbert & Miller 2015; Fine 1988; Froyum, 2010; Measor et al., 2000).

Researchers claim that the most common topics covered in sex education classes are the naming of body parts, a basic explanation of human reproduction, birth control and STIs. In their research conducted in the Canadian provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Ontario, Byers et al. (2017) observed that puberty, reproduction, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), abstinence and birth control methods were widely discussed. On the other hand, sexual orientation, masturbation, pornography, sexual decision-making and communicating about sex were "poorly covered" or "not covered" at all. Phillips and Martínez (2010), who conducted research in Ottawa before the Ontario sexual health education curriculum was redesigned, identified similar themes, adding that teenagers received the messages that "sex is risky", "sex [should be] reserved for committed relationships" and "sex is taboo" (p.376).

When discussing birth control and STI prevention, teachers emphasize that abstinence is the most reasonable and responsible choice for teenagers, since it guarantees no risks (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Connell, 2005; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Phillips & Martínez, 2010). Moreover, while sex education programs discuss the use of condoms

in detail, some of them offer distorted data on the effectiveness of contraceptives (Fine and McClelland, 2006). In Catholic schools, adolescents are told to use contraceptives but not taught “how to” (Phillips and Martínez, 2010), and the discourse on contraceptives and prophylactics "excludes any acknowledgment of pleasure or fun—the use of condoms is described as reducing spontaneity and sensitivity" (Connell, 2005, p.259). Besides, alternative safer sexual practices like masturbation or mutual masturbation are never discussed, even when students are interested in the topic and males constantly talk about "wanking" in school settings (Measor et al., 2000).

After analyzing the themes and discourses deployed in SBSE and realizing that teenagers are learning about sexual risk rather than sexuality and sensuality, Allen (2007, 2017) and Valaitis (2011) maintain that a non-sexual student is preferred inside the educational system. Allen (2007) explains that schools recognize adolescents as potentially sexual when they talk to them about reproduction, STIs, pregnancy and the need to wear a condom for protection during sexual encounters, but "express their preference that they are not sexual" (p.230) when they do not provide them with condoms, teach them how to use them or encourage them to choose abstinence. In Allen's words, the failure of "a curriculum that suggests that knowledge about sensuality/sexuality is not as important as knowing about sexual risk" is that it "does not address a sexual/sensual student." (Allen, 2007, p.228).

2.4. SBSE: heteronormativity, classism and racism

Previous research suggests that "sexuality education, as it is currently organized, does more than present children with objective facts about sexuality; it also socializes children into systems of inequality" (Connell & Elliot, 2009, p.84). In SBSE programs and materials, the desirable sexual being is portrayed as a white, heterosexual, middle-class, while the behaviours of non-Caucasian, non-heterosexual and working-class individuals are policed and disciplined, and their sexual needs neglected (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Froyum, 2010; García, 2009; McNeill, 2013). Through sex education, children are habituated to inequalities based on sexual orientation, gender identity, race and class.

Scholars agree that school-based sex education materials present heterosexuality as what is normal and natural (Gilbert, 2006; Grace, 2018; Fine &

McClelland, 2006; Kinsman, 1987). Vaginal coitus is described as "real sex" (Bay-Cheng, 2003) and the discussions on STI protection assume that students will only engage in penile-vaginal penetration. In fact, the curriculum ignores the pleasures and risks of oral and anal sex, leaving students without the information they need to make healthy and pleasurable sexual decisions – especially non-heterosexual students (Connell, 2005; Estes, 2017; Moore & Harris, 2014). In addition, in the few occasions in which sexual orientations other than heterosexuality are mentioned, they are considered "sites of risk and deviance" (Fields et al., 2015, p.378), which not only hinders non-heterosexual individuals' ability to live healthy and fulfilling sexual lives, but "perpetuates the invisibility of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adolescents along with reproducing heterosexism and homophobia" (p.615). According to Alldred and Fox (2015) and Kinsman (1987), the marginalization of so-called queer sexualities in SBSE promotes a compulsory or freely compelled heterosexuality.

It is important to note that, although formal policy can dictate the inclusion of topics that address the needs of sexual and gender minority groups, previous research suggests that the content and delivery of sex education classes varies from one school – and teacher – to another. Fields et al. (2015) maintain that "teachers resist formal sexuality education policies and agendas with which they feel uncomfortable" (p.374), emphasizing specific topics and avoiding others. For his part, Rayside (2014) explains that even if Canadian provinces approve educational programs to eradicate homophobia and heterosexism, schools and teachers do not always implement formal policies. Ultimately, teachers have the last word in how sex education will be implemented (Connell, 2005), and they might choose to discuss or avoid discussion on the sexual lives and needs of non-heterosexual students.

According to Bay-Cheng (2003) and Fields et al. (2015), school-based sex education also promotes racism: white bodies appear in sex education textbooks when discussing normative sexual development and black bodies when explaining sexual risk or venereal disease. In addition, black males are presented as a danger to white women, who appear as more capable of controlling their desires (Froyum, 2010; García, 2009). Similarly, Latino youth are considered "oversexed" and "over-reproductive", with Latino girls being advised that macho-Latinos will not be willing to use condoms and thus they should take the pill or, even better, remain abstinent (García, 2009).

The same perceptions apply to students from lower classes, who are “more readily perceived as latent pregnant teenage girls, unexpected teenage fathers, diseased bodies, and precarious subjects” (Friehe & Smith, 2018, p.186). Bay-Cheng (2003) claims that low-class students are sometimes provided comprehensive sex education because they are expected to be “lustful and loose” (p. 68), therefore being always at risk of contracting STDs or getting pregnant. On the other hand, middle and upper-class women are believed to “have something worth ‘saving’” (Bay-Cheng, 2003, p. 70) and, consequently, are expected to comply with sexual rules and remain abstinent until marriage.

2.5. Of feminine and masculine sexualities and the double standard

Within schools, sex education regulates and constructs feminine and masculine sexualities in different manners. Sexuality is presented as dangerous, but the nature and the extent of the risks are not said to be the same for men and women, and they are not expected to exercise (or not) their sexuality in the same way.

For her seminal work, *Sexuality, schooling and adolescent females: The missing discourse of desire*, Fine (1988) analyzed several sex education curriculums, interviewed female students and observed sex education classes. Through her work, she identified three discourses presented to women in New York City through school-based sex education: 1) sexuality as violence, 2) sexuality as victimization and 3) sexuality as individual morality. The first one, sexuality as violence, applies to feminine and masculine sexualities, while the second and third discourses are explicitly directed at women. Sexuality as violence is understood to mean that sex education is violent and detrimental for young people, and silence around sexuality will result in less sexual activity. Sexuality as victimization presents the physical, social and psychological risks to which women expose themselves when engaging in sexual activity. This discourse portrays females as sexually vulnerable and victims of predatory men who manipulate them to engage in sexual activity and then leave them with emotional wounds. For this reason, females are expected to resist men's advances and practice abstinence until marriage. The third discourse, sexuality as individual morality, teaches women to exercise self-control and self-respect. Females are taught that self-respect takes the form of remaining abstinent until marriage and their sexual decisions are valued “as long

as the decisions made are for premarital abstinence" (Fine, 1988, p.32). Fine also identifies a missing discourse of desire in SBSE. She explains that the curriculum barely acknowledges female desire, which appears only as a "whisper" that gets automatically silenced by the negative consequences of sexual activity.

Although more than twenty years have passed since the publication of Fine's (1988) study, her work triggered a proliferation of research on the missing discourse of female desire and the ways feminine sexuality is portrayed in sex education lessons. According to these studies, the discourses that Fine identified in 1988 still permeate school-based sex education. Teachers' discourses and materials present women as emotional and passive, as vulnerable objects of desire and not as desiring subjects. When engaging in relationships, the material presents girls who look for protection and love, prioritizing the emotional aspects of a relationship rather than its physical elements. Females are expected to resist male advances, reserve sexual intercourse for marriage or committed relationships and have little knowledge about sexuality and sex (Allen, 2003; 2013; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Friehe & Smith, 2018; Froyum, 2010; Measor et al., 2000). According to Connell (2005), women are labeled as "passive, uninterested in sex and only submit to it under pressure. Boys have desire and girls do not" (p.261).

While not explored in depth, male desire is portrayed as an ever-present sensation in men's lives. Males are constructed as the active subjects in a relationship and initiators of sexual activity. At times, they are even considered a danger to women, "predatory" beings who pressure and convince girls to have sex. Unlike girls, boys are expected to amass sexual experience and be sexually knowledgeable (Allen, 2003, 2013; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Connell, 2005).

In general, a sexual double standard operates in schools, and men and women are judged differently even if they exhibit the same behaviour. In the school classroom, "the double standard means that it is fine for boys to amass sexual experience, but unacceptable for girls to do the same thing" (Measor et al., 2000, p. 112). In the interviews that García (2009) conducted with young women in the United States, the interviewees declared that when they showed interest in contraceptives, teachers were suspicious of the reasons that raised their interest and refused to provide them with the information requested. For her part, Delamont (2012) suggests that even in the cases when teachers do not actively preach the sexual double standard, they do not challenge

students' perception of appropriate feminine and masculine sexualities. Whether by teaching that women must be “pure” while men can be sexually experienced or not challenging those ideas, sex educators often perpetuate the sexual double standard.

2.6. Conclusion

Previous research on sex education maintains that behind a great concern about youth's sexual health lays a strategy to constitute and regulate adolescents' sexuality. The literature on the topic reveals that the racist, classist, sexist and heteronormative morality that fueled the rise of school-based sex education is still present in the curriculum and teaching practice. SBSE informs teenagers about the physical, social and psychological dangers of sexual activity; silences the discourse of desire and pleasure; reinforces racism, classism, masculine and feminine sexual roles; and naturalizes heterosexuality.

How has the new B.C. curriculum addressed this criticism? By conducting this research, I aim to analyze the dominant discourses presented in school-based sex education in British Columbia and contribute to the Canadian scholarship on SBSE, a considerably unexplored field from an anthropological or sociological perspective. I expect that an understanding of the dominant messages deployed in sex education curriculum and material will foster more sociological and anthropological research on Canadian school-based sex education and provide a foundation for future research. I hope my research will raise additional questions about SBSE and encourage scholars to examine its complexity from distinct standpoints.

Chapter 3.

Theoretical and methodological considerations

The following chapter indicates the methodological and theoretical decisions made during the project, how they were relevant to address the questions that guided this research and interpret the data, and how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced these decisions. In order to accomplish the objectives outlined above and guide the reader through an overview of the methodological and theoretical portion of this investigation, the section is divided into subsections. The research questions are the first aspect to be mentioned, followed by a discussion of the challenges and changes in methodology that this research experienced. I continue with an explanation of documentary analysis and its appropriateness considering the goals of this research. After presenting a note on reflexivity, I close this section by examining the theoretical framework that guided the interpretation of my data.

3.1. Research questions

The research project had as its objective to examine the meanings and values about sexuality deployed in the sex education material. By analyzing the Physical and Health Education resources recommended to teachers to prepare their sex education lessons, I aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the values and meanings about sexuality deployed in the material recommended to teachers who impart school-based sex education (SBSE) in British Columbia?
2. What sort of social relations of power produce the discourse about sexuality presented to children and youth in schools today?

3.2. Initial research strategy and complications

During the first stage of my study, my research questions were slightly different from the ones stated above. From the beginning, I was intrigued by the values and meanings presented in school-based sex education programs in the province, but I wanted to analyze the way in which teachers deployed them *in practice*. I aimed to

understand whether and how educators in Metro Vancouver reproduced, refashioned, challenged and rejected the discourses presented in the curriculum and identified by other scholars. To do so, I considered it necessary to attend sex education classes and listen to the teachers' discourse. However, the COVID-19 pandemic made this impossible, which implicated a rewording of the research questions and a change in methods.

My intention to conduct an ethnography was driven by my initial research questions and a perceived gap in sex education research. Previous investigations on school-based sex education gave priority to curricula analysis and quantitative methodologies. Only a few studies focused on interviewing teachers and students, and even fewer scholars had conducted ethnographies. I was convinced that ethnographic research, which "involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews" (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007, p.3) would provide valuable insights into school-based sex education by allowing me to study teachers' speech in everyday contexts.

Since sexuality and gender are discussed more exhaustively in the grade 9 curriculum than in other grades, and mainly in Physical and Health Education, I was interested in attending all the grade 9 PHE classes that students had during a semester. Additionally, I wanted to observe the Science classes in which human reproduction was covered and the Social Studies' sessions dedicated to gender issues.

To appreciate similarities and differences in sex education programs, messages and teachers' implementation of the curriculum, I had planned to attend classes with more than one teacher in two different schools. In addition, I would have interviewed the educators to learn about their experiences teaching sex education in secondary school, their perspectives on the curriculum and the meanings and values they associated with sexuality. I had also anticipated that, as part of earning the teachers' trust, informal conversations would occur before or after classes, during lunch or at the teachers' lounge, and their casual nature could foster sincere, low-pressure interactions. Therefore, in my ethnographic research, data collection would have occurred in three ways: 1) participant observation, 2) in-depth interviews and 3) informal conversations.

Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic impeded the execution of that plan. After obtaining ethics approval from Simon Fraser University to conduct my ethnographic study, I sent my research proposal to the Vancouver, Burnaby, Coquitlam, Richmond and Surrey school boards. Lessons were delivered remotely when I submitted my proposal in the summer of 2021, but the schools planned to return to in-person classes in January 2022. The Ministry of Education and individual schools were making every effort to decrease the possibilities of transmission of the virus and, at the time, it was considered that having one extra person in the classroom would pose an unnecessary risk. For this reason, and after several months of waiting for the school boards to make a decision, my request to conduct research within secondary schools in Metro Vancouver was denied. Having invested a considerable amount of time in waiting for a school district's approval that was not granted, with the pandemic still affecting interactions among people and research plans, and with the 2-year timeframe of my master's program coming to an end, I decided to modify my research questions and research methods accordingly.

3.3. Documentary analysis

The decision to conduct a documentary analysis was driven by the revised research questions. Documentary analysis provided me with the opportunity to identify the values and meanings about sexuality deployed in the sex education materials recommended to teachers, as well as the relations of power constructing the discourse around sexuality presented in those resources. Utilizing pre-existing data and exploring the latent and explicit meanings found in that data allowed me to conduct a study I would not have been able to complete otherwise.

Although, in qualitative research, more attention is given to fieldwork than to documentary analysis, the latter can produce results as valuable as those obtained through interviews and participant observation. According to Glaser and Strauss (2017):

Every book, every magazine article, represents at least one person who is equivalent to the anthropologist's informant or the sociologist's interviewee. In those publications, people converse, announce positions, argue with a range of

eloquence, and describe events or scenes in ways entirely comparable to what is seen and heard during field work. (p. 163)

Each document reveals the voice of its authors and discloses information on the position and context from which it was written. In addition, Prior (2008) argues that documents can be regarded not only as objects containing words and images but as “active agents in episodes of interaction and schemes of social organization” (p. 824). According to the author, documents are not only produced and used by human actors but also impact and influence the actions of these actors. For the matter of this research, we can say that the lesson plans, interactive presentations and other instructional materials direct teachers toward the development of particular discourses. In this sense, documents may influence the educators and their practice.

To collect my data, I accessed the British Columbia Curriculum’s website, consulted the page on “Physical and Health Education” under the “Curriculum” tab and explored the “Supports” section. Through “Supports”, I gained access to instructional samples, guidelines for the delivery of health-related topics in elementary and secondary school, and websites such as the B.C. Teachers Federation and the Focused Education Resources. Some instructional samples from the Curriculum’s site recommended teachers to consult additional links for more information on sexuality and gender, which I visited as well. Since teachingsexualhealth.ca, a site created by Alberta Health Services in collaboration with Alberta teachers, was repeatedly mentioned in the resources, I explored numerous lesson plans, presentations, interactive tools and videos available on the platform. I also examined the “Diversity in B.C. schools” policy and the Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education, a document that serves as a foundation for all sex education programs in the country. Both documents provided insights on the way the materials and delivery of sex education “ought to be” structured.

Although I initially considered evaluating only the material developed for secondary school pupils, I later realized that an analysis of the material produced for K-12 students could provide a richer overview of sex education in the province. When collecting my data, I realized the resources were mostly divided into the following categories: intended for grades K to 3, 4 to 7, 8 to 9 and 10 to 12. However, several resources were recommended for both elementary students and preteens in the first

years of secondary school. Moreover, I noticed that the biological aspect of sexuality – widely mentioned in the literature – was mainly discussed from grades 3 to 7. Not many instructional materials were tailored to kindergarten and students in the first grades of elementary school, but reviewing that content could provide valuable insights into how children are introduced to their bodies, sex and gender. For these reasons, and since the amount of data was manageable, I decided to analyze the instructional resources addressed to grades K to 12.

Once I gathered the material, I classified the different types of resources as follows: government-generated material, teacher-generated material, recommended books, and resources developed by B.C. organizations and advocates for better sex education. I retrieved most of the teacher-generated materials from the B.C. Teachers Federation website, which allows educators to upload their teaching resources. Lesson plans developed by ARC Foundation, YouthCO and other sexuality and gender experts were found through the B.C. Teachers Federation and the B.C. Curriculum site. The latter was also the repository from which most governmental documents were taken, while the Focused Education Resources offered a list of books recommended to teachers and students based on their school grade. Finally, the Alberta portal contained material created by Alberta's health authority in conjunction with teachers in the province.

While selecting the material I used as data, I considered the four criteria mentioned by Scott (1990) to assess the quality of the evidence available for analysis: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. The documents were retrieved from official websites and developed by education specialists or experts in sexuality and gender issues, which assessed the authenticity factor. Regarding credibility, these are the undistorted resources recommended to the teachers and to which they have access through trustworthy sites. Although the open-access materials I analyzed are not the only resources available to teachers to prepare their sex education classes – for instance, the B.C. Digital Classroom Collection of the Focused Education Resources can only be accessed by educators from school districts and independent schools with a subscription to the collection–, they reflect the content presented in the publicly accessible sex education material at large. Aside from making sure the resources were representative, I studied their meaning. What was this source and which was its purpose? What did the document mean in relation to the other resources?

Exploring the material allowed me to identify the themes presented in the sex education material, the tone in which the major themes were discussed and how this content came into being. When analyzing the resources, I paid attention to phrases, repetition of certain words, illustrations and the way certain groups of people and relationships were portrayed. I was able to identify the “official” discourse around sexuality and gender; in other words, the way in which the B.C. Ministry of Education believes sexuality should be discussed in the classroom. By interpreting the data, I identified the meanings and values placed on sexuality, sexed bodies and groups of people such as intersex individuals and the LGBTQ2S+ community. In general, these documents uncovered the relations of power that formed the discourses presented in them and the standpoint from which government, teachers, book authors and organizations consider and evaluate youth sexuality.

3.4. A note on reflexivity

I acknowledge that I am part of the social world I study. Although no conflict of interest interfered with this research, I recognize that my position in the social world influenced my study. As Atkinson & Hammersley (2007) claim, “the orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them” (p.15). The illustrations, words and phrases that captured my attention, the written portions of the materials that I included in this document and how I interpreted the data were all inspired by my position in the social world.

I approached my data as a 25-year-old, brown, Latino woman who lived in Mexico for most of her life. Coming from a conservative country and having found the sex education I received to be insufficient, I support comprehensive sex education and have a positive view of sexuality. It is my context which directed me to conduct research on sex education in the first place and I acknowledge its effects on the way I perceive my surroundings. However, I confirm that my goal as a researcher is to produce knowledge and contribute to the existing literature, and not to impose my beliefs on how sexuality should be approached in the school setting.

3.5. Theoretical framework

To develop my analysis of school-based sex education in British Columbia, I draw upon a Bourdieusian-Foucauldian theoretical framework. I build on Bourdieu's interpretation of education as a mechanism of reproduction and utilize concepts such as pedagogic action and work, school authority, cultural arbitrary and habitus to explain resistance and reproduction. I also refer to Foucault's notion of power, biopower, discipline and punishment to interpret my data.

Having largely contributed to discussions of schooling and education, Bourdieu's work serves to frame education as a meaning-producing, structuring activity that plays an essential role in cultural reproduction. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), *pedagogic action* reproduces the existing social order and power relations by inculcating and imposing meanings through educational activities. These meanings are *cultural arbitraries* that do not derive from universal principles but are the product of culture, history and power, and are legitimized by pedagogic action. The cultural arbitrary reproduced with more assiduity is the one that "most fully [...] expresses the objective interests (material and symbolic) of the dominant groups or classes" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.18). Dominant groups grant authority to the educational institutions for them to replicate the meanings that warrant their dominant position, reproducing inequality and existing relations of power.

Through long processes of inculcation that Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) call *pedagogic work*, the educated individuals internalize the rules of the dominant cultural arbitrary, generating practices that conform to its principles. In other words, pedagogic work structures a *habitus*: "a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a disposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 214). Once a habitus is structured, the agent has a disposition to think, perceive, appreciate, act react to symbolic stimuli as the principles of the inculcated arbitrary mandate. This means that external regulation is no longer needed, as the habitus is durable, transposable and exhaustive: it is capable of reproducing itself once the pedagogic work ceases; it generates "practices conforming with the principles of the inculcated arbitrary" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.33) in other social spaces; and fully reproduces the rules of the cultural arbitrary in the practices of the person.

The fact that teachers are embedded with *school authority* facilitates this mechanism, as it legitimizes their value as educators and the knowledge they transmit. Teachers do not have to continually prove their value as educators since they are shielded by the pedagogic authority of the educational institutions where they work. Hence, school authority eases the process of acceptance and appropriation of the principles of the cultural arbitrary, which then transform into a mental formation (*habitus*).

Although educational institutions tend to reproduce the status quo, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) recognize a potential for transformation. Inside the school system and the social world at large, agents can play by the rules or resist them, participating in the reproduction or transformation of social structures. For instance, those who produce the resources available to teachers can challenge the legitimacy of the dominant cultural arbitraries, modify their apparent value and position new meanings as valuable. The same holds true for educators and students.

While Bourdieu's ideas contribute to an understanding of reproduction and resistance in education, Foucault's work on sexuality and power-knowledge helps us understand why sexuality and the sexed body are so heavily regulated; his analysis reveals why so much attention is given to the processes that may produce life. Both perspectives on power are complementary in studying discourse production and its effects.

In the Foucauldian sense, *power* is a productive force that exists everywhere, not something possessed by privileged actors or institutions. According to Foucault (1995), power should not be described as a repressive force, but as something that constitutes agents and *regimes of truth*. These regimes are discourses that are held to be true by a society and derive from accepted forms of knowledge, which may take the form of scientific discourses. In this way, power and knowledge are interconnected: as a duplet, they promote specific discursive formations that define not only what is true but what is normal and abnormal.

Foucault argues that through hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and examination, institutions such as the school, the prison and the army are able to discipline people into "a productive body and a subjected body" that can "become a useful force" (Foucault, 1995, p.26). Inside the institutions, *disciplinary power* is

exercised to subject bodies; individuals and their actions are perpetually supervised and judged according to what is considered the norm. Those who abide by the norm are rewarded, but those who deviate are faced with a “micro-penalty” of time, activity, speech, body and sexuality that punishes minor undesirable behaviours or inclinations in order to correct and reform them. In this way, definitions of normal and abnormal are inculcated in the minds of individuals and their bodies disciplined and made docile.

While disciplinary power focuses on the individual, *biopower* focuses on regulating populations. As the “power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Foucault, 1978, p.138), biopower seeks to regulate the biological processes of the population. The sexed body and the realm of sexuality occupy a high-priority position in the politics of power because of their reproductive potential. Disciplines such as statistics and the health sciences create knowledge that defines what is normal and healthy for a sexed body, allowing power to take charge of life by closely regulating and correcting sexuality, protecting it from anything that could harm the population as a whole or the reproduction of the species. A normalizing society sets the norm of sexual conduct and measures individuals against this norm, which is seen as natural and, therefore, legitimate. It guides populations toward that norm, corrects deviant behaviour and, if necessary, disallows others’ lives to protect the species.

Through a Bourdieusian- Foucauldian theoretical framework, I interpret the discourses presented in the sex education material available to Physical and Health Education teachers and the relations of power that have formed them. I examine the workings of different disciplines and agents in the formation of cultural arbitraries and knowledge that are reproduced in the material and presented as the norm.

Chapter 4.

Sexual orientation, gender identity and diversity in the curriculum

While examining the messages about sexual orientation, gender identity, and diversity deployed in the materials recommended to sex educators, the criticism presented by advocates for better sexual health education in B.C. spun in my head. I knew I could not answer the question that haunted me during the first stage of my research: "what does sex education look like in practice?" Yet, the material recommended to teachers could introduce me to what sex education classes *ought to* look like according to the education authorities. Considering the current criticism and the history of sex education, the resources were enough to raise an ever-expanding set of questions. Was heterosexuality presented as the "norm" and, if so, how? Were transgender and gender diverse people represented in the resources? Were gender roles and stereotypes still prevalent? Were there any direct or subtle forms through which students were being told what *normal* meant in regard to gender and sexual orientation? How were these students expected to live their sexuality and enact their gender? After all, as Measor et al. (2000) explain, sex education "has importance in socialising a new generation, not only into prevailing attitudes about sexuality but also into critically important ways of thinking about and being in society" (p. 7).

According to the policy "Diversity in B.C. schools", all the schools in the province are obliged to accept diversity, as well as "create and maintain conditions that foster success for all students and promote fair and equitable treatment for all [...] taking into account the different beliefs, customs, practices, languages, behaviours, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and physical differences of individuals and cultural groups" (Government of British Columbia, 2017). Moreover, the Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education declare that the goal of comprehensive sexual health education in the country is to "equip people with the information, motivation, and behavioural skills to enhance sexual health and well-being" (Sex Information and Education Council of Canada [Sieccan], 2019, p. 22). In other words, sex education should address the sexual health needs of all the students, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. To achieve this goal, sexual practices other than penile-

vaginal intercourse, how to practice them safely, and a discussion of the gender spectrum could be included.

However, those discussions are barely existent in the materials I reviewed, and when they appear they are contradicted by other discourses. Through an analysis of the instructional resources developed by B.C.'s governmental authorities and teachers, lesson plans elaborated by ARC Foundation – creators of the SOGI 1 2 3 program⁴–, and publicly accessible books recommended by the Ministry of Education, I identified three dominant discourses, which I explain in this chapter. First, I examine heteronormativity and the invisibility of sexual diversity; second, I document discussions of gender and bullying; and third, I explore the pervasiveness of the gender binary and analyze the reproduction of gender roles and stereotypes throughout the material.

4.1. The reproduction of heteronormativity and the invisibility of sexual diversity

Government authorities, teachers, book authors and organizations approach sexual orientation differently. For instance, while the material developed by ARC Foundation challenges homophobia and teaches students that families come in many forms and not all people are attracted to those from the opposite sex, most of the recommended books assume that boys will be attracted to girls and girls to boys. In the resources elaborated by teachers, more attention is given to penile-vaginal intercourse than to mutual masturbation, oral and anal sex, which could be of more interest to non-heterosexual students. Finally, the guidelines provided by the province do not give any recommendations on how to address sexual orientation, nor do they say if the topic should be covered.

Since kindergarten, the ready-to-use lesson plans developed by ARC Foundation, which are based on content previously created by The Pride Network⁵, introduce students to the concept of diversity and invite them to embrace others'

⁴ A resource that supports educators in teaching about sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) by providing ready-to-use, SOGI-inclusive lesson plans that align with the curriculum.

⁵ An U.S. based network which "offers emerging LGBTQ+ leaders opportunities for personal transformation and professional development to create change within themselves and in our communities", according to information retrieved from their website <https://www.thepridenetwork.org/>.

differences. These lesson plans acknowledge that families come in many forms, including but not limited to those composed of same-gender parents, opposite-gender parents, single parents, blended or extended families, same ethnicity, and multi-ethnic families. From grade 2 onwards, students learn the importance of avoiding name-calling regardless of how different others appear to be. Beginning in grade 6, these instructional samples recognize that it is not easy to explain to others that you are a member of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Nonetheless, through fictional characters, real-life stories and testimonies, they show students that it is possible to "come out" despite their fear and/or the initial negative responses they might receive. The resources introduce kids to concepts such as *homophobia* – "the fear or hatred of people who are gay or lesbian" –, *sexual orientation* – "an identity based on whether someone is attracted to a person of a different sex, the same sex or both sexes" –, *gay* – "[a] term to describe people of the same sex who have feelings for one another in a romantic way" –, and *lesbian* – "women who have feelings for one another in a romantic way" (ARC Foundation, n.d.-b, p. 17).

However, the instructional samples often explain sexual orientations vaguely, especially in grades K-5. For example, when discussing the different types of families, the existence of families with same-gender parents is mentioned but not expanded on. It is only at the end of the lesson plan that "possible extensions" are presented, and the material explains that if educators want to teach acceptance of same-gender families, they can make use of other books and "ask students to imagine/pretend they had two moms or two dads. If that were so, what would they get double of? (positive/fun things)" (ARC Foundation, n.d.-b, p. 2). Teaching acceptance of same-gender families is left to the consideration of teachers and they might not consider the possible extensions due to lack of time or unease with the subject. In fact, The Every Teacher Project final report affirms that only 58% of Canadian educators who impart grades K-5 are comfortable discussing LGTBQ topics (Taylor et al., 2015).

Heteronormativity is most present in the books recommended by the Ministry of Education through the Focused Education Resources website. The resources are divided into "books for girls" and "books for boys", and assume that all the readers are heterosexual. The books for boys are illustrated with pictures of boys thinking of girls, include sentences like "you may have started to crush on girls" (Dunham, 2019, p. 74) or provide examples such as "you like a girl at school, but she only seems interested in star athletes with big muscles [...] Do you pursue her anyway?" (Mar & Norwich, 2010, p.

40). Similarly, the books addressed to girls include illustrations of girls fantasizing of boys with little hearts flying around them. These books claim to act as a "guide to the care and keeping of parents, siblings, friends, teachers, *and yes, even boys* (emphasis added)" (Dunham, 2013) or include chapters titled "do boys have crushes on us or is it just a rumour?" (Metzger, 2018). Additionally, some of the resources assume that the teenagers' guardians are a woman and a man, as the following excerpt from *The Body Book for Boys* illustrates: "You're bound to have questions that [...] you don't feel like bringing up at the dinner table with Mom and Dad" (Mar & Norwich, 2010). Only some of the resources for grades K-9, such as *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson & Parnell, 2005), *It's Perfectly Normal* (Harris, 2014a) or *The Boy's Body Book* (Dunham, 2019) consider that not everyone is raised by a mother and father, but by two mothers, two fathers, grandparents, single parents or foster families. Still, even the illustrations presented in those books show more families composed by male and female than families with single or same-sex guardians.

Significantly, the books recommended for grades 4 to 7 take for granted that teenagers only want or need to know about penis-in-vagina sex between a female and a male. The resources explain penile-vaginal intercourse when discussing the biological changes that the body experiences during puberty and how they lead to the maturation of sexual organs, allowing people to procreate. Even when some resources recognize that people not only have sex for reproductive reasons, they fail to mention the different types of sex that do not result in pregnancy. After grade 7, some of the resources appear to accept the idea that heterosexuality is not the only sexual orientation. They do so by writing "partners" instead of inferring someone must have a "girlfriend" or "boyfriend" depending on their gender, or by including phrases such as "this book is written for boys [...] whether you are interested in boys, girls, both or 'not yet' or none of the above" (Smiler, 2016, p. 6). Still, only one resource, directed at grades 10 to 12, explains the ins and outs of having sex with someone of your same sex and denounces the institutionalized homophobia that prevents schools from explaining sexual intercourse between same-sex couples (Dawson, 2015, p. 166).

We could argue that what Dawson (2015) describes as institutionalized homophobia is present in sex education material and is indicative of a heteronormative culture that gets reproduced through the inculcation of cultural arbitrariness. The guidelines and teacher generated material present heterosexuality as the only valid sexual

orientation by deliberately ignoring diverse sexual orientations and practices, reproducing the structures that facilitate the domination and marginalization of LGBTQ2S+ groups. Although the material thoroughly explains how female and male may engage in sexual intercourse, it overlooks how two females or two males may have sex. In fact, anal sex is only mentioned to state that it is a high-risk sexual activity. The resources do not specify why anal sex is riskier than other sexual activities and how to practice safer anal sex aside from the general recommendation to use condoms during any sexual activity. In comparison, the risks of contracting an STI or getting pregnant from penile-vaginal intercourse are widely discussed and options available to reduce those risks are covered in depth. This lack of discussion of anal and other forms of non-procreative sex suggests that a moral judgment is made on sexual activities that are not associated with heterosexuality; a form of homophobia that scholars have repeatedly described (Estes, 2017; Grace, 2017; Rayside, 2014).

Another poorly covered topic is the one pertaining to intersex individuals "someone who's sexual and reproductive characteristics do not fit perfectly into our standard definitions of male or female" (Reves & Penney, n.d., p. 3). The previous definition is provided in the only resource that mentions intersex people, which is part of the Science and Biology lesson plans for grades 10 to 12. Although the material elaborated and recommended for PHE explores the anatomy of sexual organs, none of the lesson plans, presentations or books address intersex "conditions". Only people whose sexual and reproductive characteristics allow for a clear categorization into the groups "female" and "male" are represented in the PHE material. Neither do intersex people have a significant space in Science class and Biology. Even when the lesson plan critiques medical attempts to "normalize" people born intersex, the sole term "intersex condition" transmits the idea that there is something wrong or abnormal about being intersex. The video testimonies of intersex people recommended for the lesson intend to end the stigma related to their "condition", but the fact that only one resource mentions intersex bodies perpetuates their invisibility and stigma.

The sexual health needs of *every* student are not met, but only of those who are deemed as having the right bodies or desirable sexual orientation. As previous research maintains, moral regulation seems to be disguised under an apparent concern for sexual health and well-being. While "straight sex", its risks and how to avoid them are thoroughly covered since grade 4, it is only in the senior years that pupils learn about

sexual activities more commonly associated with non-heterosexual subjects. Moreover, the possibility of having a sexual orientation other than heterosexuality is not explored until grade 7, after years of teaching students that attraction to and cohabitation with the opposite sex are the norm. Similarly, while dozens of lessons refer to female and male bodies, only one is devoted to intersex bodies.

In this way, education plays a role not only in the reproduction of knowledge but relations of power (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Through long processes of inculcation – pedagogic work – that start in kindergarten, the positions of the dominant and dominated groups are reinforced; the dominant heteronormative culture is arbitrarily legitimated and other cultures excluded. The legitimacy of heterosexuality is reinforced and naturalized, while members of the LGBTQ2S+ community remain in the shadows, in discourses of risk and are denied the information necessary to preserve their sexual health and well-being. In addition, the idea that biologically speaking you can only be female or male, is likely to affect the well-being, self-esteem and mental health of those who do not easily fit in those two categories.

We can analyze the (re)production of heteronormativity using the Foucauldian concepts of disciplinary power and biopower, which unite to take charge of the life processes and regulate them. Since sexuality gives access not only to the individual's body but to its reproductive function, it occupies a privileged position as an object of regulation. Determining what the "norm" is in regard to sexual orientation functions as a mechanism of control. The sexed body is only considered "adequate" when it can be utilized to produce offspring and only the reproductive sexual practices deserve to be protected from infections and disease. Heteronormativity aims to control this sexed body, establishing its possibilities of action through normalizing judgment. Through discourses like those studied in this section, students are taught to become docile, heterosexual bodies. By the same token, the students' bodies and desires are likely surveilled and examined not only through the sex education discourses presented in the material, but the sex education classes implemented by the teachers. Educators may constantly evaluate pupils' sexuality, paying attention to their reactions and comments on sex and correcting their sexual behaviour if needed. Thus, we could argue that the heterosexual individual is "a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called 'discipline' [...] power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth." (Foucault, 1978, p. 194). Power, through these discourses,

produces the same type of individual that it deems normal and reinforces their behaviour. Through the material, students are rewarded by representation and validation if they adhere to the "norm" and punished through invisibility and consideration of their bodies as "diseased" if they deviate from it.

4.2. An effort to be inclusive: discussions of gender and bullying

Whilst the material recommended to PHE teachers does not seem to be inclusive in terms of sexual orientation and sexual diversity, discussions of gender tend to better align with the school's system goal to "create and maintain conditions that [...] promote fair and equitable treatment for all" (Government of British Columbia, 2017). Several resources distinguish between biological sex and gender, which shows the impact of second wave feminism on culture. Additionally, all forms of bullying, name-calling, and their sometimes-life-threatening consequences are covered in depth in an effort to prevent them from happening, and the usage of gender-neutral pronouns is widely recommended.

The material created by ARC Foundation and The Pride Network encourages teachers to use gender-neutral pronouns, refer to students using the pronouns they prefer and avoid referring to the group as "ladies and gentlemen" or "girls and boys". The material produced by teachers and B.C. government repeats these instructions and reminds educators to "use inclusive language, such as gender-neutral terminology" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.-e, p. 6). However, the same guidelines that recommend using gender-neutral terminology refer to "boys and girls" instead of using neutral terms such as children or folks.

In terms of gender, students learn since kindergarten that they can be whatever they want. The material admits that even when other kids might not accept them immediately, they will eventually come to appreciate their differences and recognize their worth. Short stories and their fictional characters reinforce this message of acceptance through statements like "it isn't always easy to be different from everyone else, but you can only be who you are" (Kai Cheng, 2017) or "it was true that no one else in class wore a bunny costume. But it was also true that a girl who was crying asked if she could touch one of the ears" (Arnold, 2019). Through the usage of simple images like the one

of a kid who can change into the shape of anything they can imagine or a gender-variant child who decides what to wear depending on how they feel that day, children are socialized into the idea that it is acceptable to feel they do not belong to any gender or the same gender every day. In these stories, some of the characters ask the gender-creative kids whether they are boys or girls and try to teach them what boys and girls are supposed to do, but eventually learn to see the beauty of diversity.

The teaching material teaches appreciation of diversity and raises awareness on how hurtful and damaging it can be to be ostracized and called names. From kindergarten through grade 9, pupils are invited to consider the consequences of name-calling, develop strategies to self-monitor the use of labels and gradually presented to the complexity of gender. In kindergarten and grades 1-2, the topic on how girls and boys do not always look like we would expect them to is covered along with mentions of how language differences, foreign names and being an immigrant are not reasons to feel less valuable or be bullied. In grades 4 and 5, the students are introduced to "The Gender Unicorn" (Figure 1) and "The Genderbread Person" (Figure 2): two graphics that explain the differences between gender identity, gender expression and sex assigned at birth, as well as the distinct genders one might be physically and emotionally attracted to. It is also for these grades that the material provided by ARC Foundation recommends "I am Jazz", a book written by Jazz Jennings, a transgender girl who narrates her story. However, the book is not officially included in the lesson plan until grades 6 and 7. The



Figure 1 The Gender Unicorn
Trans Student Educational Resources, 2015.

material introduces the concepts *transgender* and *transphobia* in grade 6 and instructs students to not judge themselves or others based on physical appearance. After learning about transphobia and transgender identities, the material contemplates showing the students documentaries and stories about people who have struggled with bullying or committed suicide after being consistently bullied due to their differences. They are also invited to evaluate how safe their school and its spaces are for trans, two-spirit and gender expansive students.

The Genderbread Person v4 by its pronounced METROsexual.com

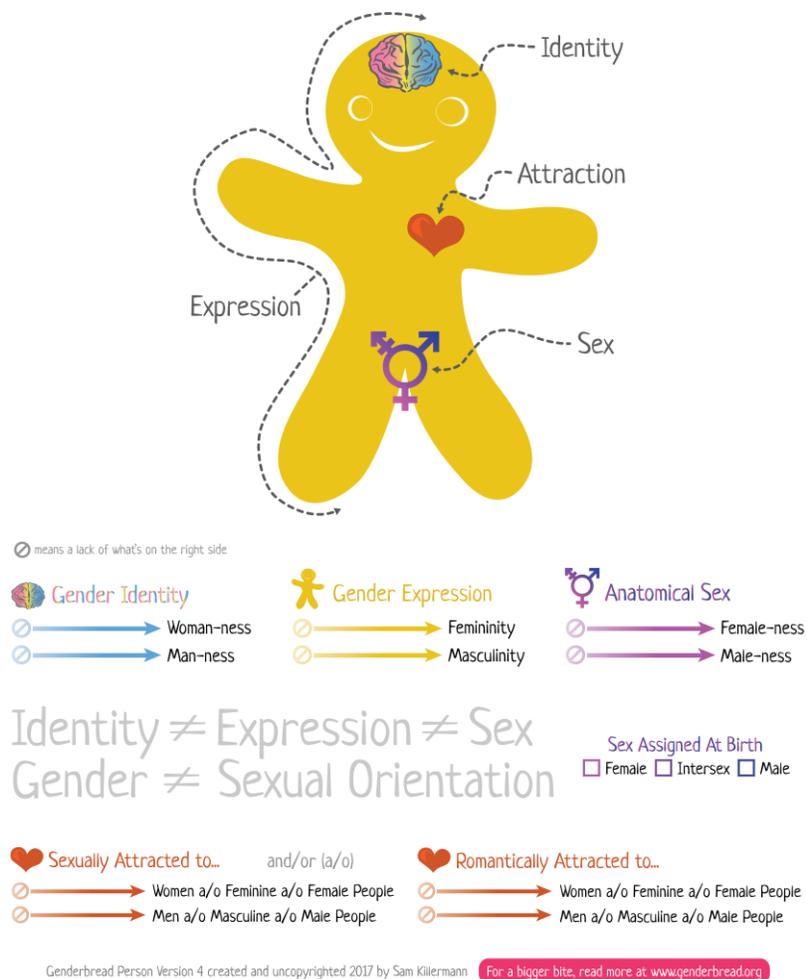


Figure 2 The Genderbread Person
 It's Pronounced Metrosexual, 2017.

Although two-spirit and gender-expansive students are mentioned in the material developed by the creators of SOGI 1 2 3, these concepts are not explained in the

lessons elaborated by them. If the educators wish to acquire more knowledge on what it means to be gender-expansive or two-spirit, they need to consult a guideline for educators that is constantly mentioned in the material provided by ARC Foundation: *The Gender Spectrum, what educators need to know*. In it, educators are explained that a two-spirit person is "a First Nations, Métis, or Inuit person who has a dual-gender identity, gender expression or gender role" (The Pride Network, 2018, p. 4) and that someone who is gender expansive "does not conform to society's expectations of their gender role or gender expression. [...] includes boys who behave, dress and interact in feminine ways and girls who behave, dress and interact in masculine ways" (The Pride Network, 2018, p. 4). Aside from the definitions, half a page of the book explains who can be included in the term gender-expansive, and one page explains the two-spirit tradition, the importance it once had in their Indigenous communities and the way in which colonization and the gender binary system affected this tradition. The concepts two-spirit and gender-expansive are mentioned throughout *The Gender Spectrum*, but they are never explained in depth. Educators who are not familiar with the concepts prior to reading *The Gender Spectrum* may not obtain from it the information needed to fully understand the meaning of two-spirit and gender expansive. In the rest of the material, those two terms are absent, exhibiting how some gender identities and expressions are silenced.

Among the concepts and possibilities that refer to gender diversity, transgender identity is the most mentioned, although this is only true for the material created by ARC Foundation, and the books recommended through the Focused Education Resource website. These resources define *transgender* as "a person whose gender identity and/or expression are not aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth" (ARC Foundation, n.d.-b, p. 17) or "people who transition from their assigned sex at birth to their identified gender" (Nealy, 2017, p. 29). The lesson plans and books acknowledge that transgender people are often discriminated against, victims of transphobic bullying and harassment, excluded from social groups, or considered wrong or sick. Nonetheless, these resources try to stop transphobia by explaining that "these people's views are based on fears or misinformation, not on facts" (Harris, 2014a, p. 11) or asking the students to think of ways in which they could help a transgender student at their school to "feel included and happy to be here" (ARC Foundation, n.d.-b, p. 19).

Although the teaching material from grades 6 to 12 includes the concepts transgender and transphobia, mentions of transgender people appear in less than a fifth of all the resources on sexual orientation and gender identity. Of the resources that take transgender identities into account, most mention it briefly, and only one is a whole book on transgender children and youth. Recommended for grades 8 to 12, this book is written for health professionals, schools and families who need to understand the challenges that transgender people experience and support them during their transition; but it is also recommended for secondary students. *Transgender children and youth: cultivating pride with families in transition* is the only resource in which gender dysphoria and the differences between social transition – "the process where a transgender young person begins to live in their affirmed gender without any medical interventions" (Nealy, 2017, p. 81) – and medical transitions – "typically includes hormone therapy or surgeries" (Nealy, 2017, p. 82) – are explained.

Following Bourdieu's analysis of reproduction in education, we could argue that the dominant cultural arbitrary valorizes cisgender individuals over transgender identities. However, B.C. organizations that advocate for more inclusive sex education have started to challenge the validity of this arbitrary by introducing mentions of transgender and gender diverse individuals in the material, and inviting students to think of ways in which they can make these individuals feel accepted. This resistance to arbitrary portrayals of transgender people as not worthy of representation is gradually causing a change in culture that can be observed through the material.

Nonetheless, it is possible that due to the scarcity of materials that cover transgender issues, and the fact that teachers have the ultimate say on what to teach and when, youth finish high school without a clear idea of what it means to be transgender. In fact, in my experience teaching Introduction to Sociology to first-year university students, I have noticed that students do not fully understand what being transgender means. When we discuss the module on Gender and Sexuality and I ask them what they understand by transgender, their answers are something like: "Someone who feels a different sex," "someone who dresses and acts like the other sex," or "someone who has taken hormones or gone through surgeries to look a different gender". Many decide to remain silent, some look away to avoid being addressed directly and, after a brief silence, some start to browse the internet or try to look for the definition of transgender in their textbooks. Usually, one person explains that being

transgender has to do with the feeling that your sex and body do not match your experience of yourself. Although my students' initial definitions are not entirely wrong, they make some mistakes. First, they seem to think of gender and sex as interchangeable concepts and they fail to recognize what is most important about being transgender: gender identity. Their answers suggest they believe being transgender is only about how someone presents themselves to others or about medical transitions, but the experience of being transgender begins before all that.

In the beginning, I was surprised by the students' lack of familiarity with the vocabulary. While preparing the module's lesson, I thought the students would be familiar with all the terms. After all, I had never been as aware of the difference between sex and gender than now that I was living in Canada. Born and raised in Mexico, I had never been asked which pronouns I used before starting my graduate studies at a Canadian university, but I had been asked that question so many times in the past months that it now seemed "natural" to me. Not only that, but the feminist and LGBTQ2S+ movements in Canada have made significant advancements in terms of inclusivity, human rights and public awareness. How was it possible that university students did not know all about gender and LGBTQ2S+ vocabulary?

Even when the media might be giving more coverage to LGBTQ2S+ movements and their struggle, the messages that students receive from those and other sources might not be clear and contribute to misinformation. Schools are "the only formal educational institution to have meaningful contact with nearly every young person" (Sieccan, 2019, p.73), as well as trustworthy sources of information. If transgender, two-spirit and gender expansive people are not represented in the and their identities are not explained, it is possible that the brief mentions of these concepts leave students with more questions than answers. Although my observations as a graduate teaching assistant are by no means representative of the university student population and their understanding of transgender people and gender, they provide material for thought and future research.

4.3. Of the pervasiveness of the gender binary, gender roles and stereotypes

Even when the material analyzed accepts that biological sex and gender are not necessarily linked, the resources do not seem to have reached a consensus on whether gender is a spectrum or a binary, or if gender roles should be challenged or reproduced. Some resources acknowledge that gender is a spectrum, not a binary; others are divided in material for boys and for girls. The same is true of gender roles and stereotypes: while the lesson plans developed by ARC Foundation invite children to challenge the gender roles presented to them, several books reinforce these pre-conceived ideas on how females and males ought to feel, act and live. The material constantly contradicts itself, but there are more resources that reinforce gender stereotypes and roles than ones that challenge them.

The resources developed by ARC Foundation are the ones that more readily challenge the gender binary. Through the usage of elements like "The Gender Unicorn" or "The Genderbread Person", they explain that gender is a spectrum, "gender isn't binary. It's not either/or. In many cases it's both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that" (Killerman, 2017, p. 4). The arrows on these two graphics represent that someone can fall anywhere from identifying as a female/male/other gender to not identifying as such at all. According to them, someone can experience woman-ness and man-ness fully, partially (to any extent), or a complete lack of these. Likewise, one can display femininity or masculinity to its full expression, not display them at all or anything between the lack and the abundance of the characteristics associated with femininity and masculinity. The plans for grades 6 and 7 contribute to an understanding of the gender spectrum by comparing it to a rainbow and all its colours, as diverse as gender can be.

The rest of the material, which was developed by teachers, the province and a variety of book authors, seems to take for granted that gender is a binary. These resources only mention "girls" and "boys", use the pronouns he and she when referring to an individual, and are divided into books for boys and books for girls. They also mention that "*gender* is another word for whether a person is a male or a female (emphasis in the original)" (Harris, 2014a, p. 10), as if those were the only two genders.

The books written for girls and for boys do not only give the impression that gender is as simple as a binary, but also function as guides on *how to be* a boy or a girl. Firstly, the book covers and internal design reinforce the idea that certain colours are feminine and others are masculine. The covers of the books “for girls” are mostly pink, purple and light tones of yellow and blue, and the interior pages are white with pink details or pages in pastel colours. The covers of the books for boys have designs in blue, black and vibrant tones of yellow, and the interior pages display these same colours and details in red. Secondly, the illustrations reflect what females and males are expected to do and how they are supposed to look. Books such as *Will Puberty Last My Whole Life for Girls*, *The Girl's Body Book* and *What's Happening to Me? For Girls* show illustrations of flowers and hearts, girls looking at themselves in the mirror, mainly wearing pink clothes, doing their hair, shaving their legs, gossiping, cooking or doing other activities commonly considered as feminine. The books' illustrations portray girls as concerned about their appearance, interested in baking, painting, gardening, drama or knitting. In contrast, the pictures found in books for males display images of boys with short hair, wearing pants or shorts, standing with their arms crossed or exhibiting their newly-acquired muscles. The boys are shown playing soccer, football, basketball, practicing board skating, doing carpentry work or surfing. When discussing healthy eating for teenagers, *The Boy's Body Book* shows an image of a boy chopping carrots under the instruction of an older, feminine figure who is stirring what appears to be a soup in a saucepan. The same section of *The Girl's Body Book* is accompanied by a drawing of two young girls, each stirring something in a saucepan. These two images, when compared, send the stereotypical message that females are to be in charge of cooking, as they are more knowledgeable or appropriate for the role; if boys are to be in the kitchen, they should occupy the role of the helper, not the cook.

Interestingly, the illustrations send the message that women are allowed more displays of masculinity than men of femininity. The books for girls do include details in blue and illustrations of female characters dressed in blue, orange, yellow or any other colour included in the boys' books. Although many of the girls have long hair, many others have short hair, and several graphics show girls with pants, loose shirts and "unisex" active clothes. There are also images of girls playing soccer or field hockey – even when, in the latter case, girls are wearing "feminine" skirts instead of the shorts normally used when playing this sport. On the other hand, boys in books such as *Dating*

and Sex: A Guide for the 21st Century Teen Boy, The Boy's Body Book and *What's Happening to Me? For Boys* are not allowed to act or dress in so-called feminine ways. None of the illustrations show boys with long hair or wearing pink clothes. The only image of a boy practicing a "feminine" activity is shown in the section about playing sports of the book *What's happening to me? For Boys*: the image of a boy dancing accompanied by illustrations of males cycling, practicing martial arts or football. Even when dancing is an activity usually reserved for women, the author seems to justify this display of femininity by inserting a caption that reads "*energetic* dancing (emphasis added)" (Frith, 2007, p. 33), as males are supposed to be energetic, strong and agentic. The fact that girls are allowed certain displays of masculinity and young men are taught to repress any feminine traits expresses the idea that men and masculinity are superior to women and femininity. Apart from devaluating femininity and reproducing sexism, the illustrations suggests that any display of gender fluidity coming from boys is considered a threat to their masculinity.

Just as the images and design of the books function as a guide on how to become an acceptable gendered person, some instructions are given through the written word. For example, boys are told that their hair does not require as much time and effort as girls' since "unless you decide to become a rock star or pro wrestler, chances are you'll keep your 'do pretty short" (Mar & Norwich, 2010, p. 16). This recommendation to keep their short hair is earlier justified through a wellness discourse by explaining that oily hair can cause acne, so it is better to trim bangs and hair. Boys are also told that knowing how to tie a necktie is one of the 15 things they must learn to do in their lives (Mar & Norwich, 2010, p. 120). For girls, the books respond to questions like "Do girls in puberty gossip?" (Metzger, 2018), assuming that young women will be interested in the answer or are already familiar with the stereotype of women as fond of gossip. Female teenagers are instructed on how to dress, told that although they might see images of young women wearing "really tight and really skimpy clothes [...] those kinds of styles attract attention that's really more appropriate for adults"; they are then told that if they wear "clothes that are a little looser and cover a little bit more, people will tend to think of you as someone who has a lot of self respect" (Dunham, 2013, p. 93). Finally, the books recommend them to wear skirts or dresses for events that require them to dress up.

These discourses intend to produce habitus, "schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, p. 40). If the pedagogic action

exerted by the discourses is productive, girls will grow up to judge other females based on how they are dressed and will perceive girls with tight clothes as lacking self-respect, therefore avoiding the use of these clothes. The same holds true for boys, who will perceive males that do not know how to tie a necktie or have long hair as less masculine, and will probably adhere to the stereotypes. Ironically, *The Girl's Body Book* and *The Boy's Body Book* claim to explain "everything you [girls and boys going through puberty] need to know for growing up you"; in reality, they discuss how to grow up like every other female or male who has internalized the norms of what it means to be a girl or boy. Students are constantly repeated the rules that normal females and males should follow: they are taught how to dress, feel, who and what to like and do.

Gender roles and stereotypes can be considered *regimes of truth*, "types of discourse [society] harbours and causes to function as true" (Foucault, 1977, p.164), since they are naturalized and presented as truths embedded in the nature of females and males. Since schools are endorsed with pedagogic authority, the messages presented by them are likely to be perceived as legitimate. Thus, pedagogic action "manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 5). The discourses presented at schools get to define what it means to be a boy or a girl.

However, the messages that the students receive are inconsistent: whilst the recommended books reinforce gender stereotypes, gender roles and present ideas that valorize masculinity over femininity, the instructional samples created by ARC Foundation challenge the naturalness of these beliefs. In grade 2, the students are invited to analyze fairy tales, search for historical portrayals of gender, and compare them to the women and men in their lives. After choosing and reading a traditional fairy tale from a list – that includes Cinderella, Capable, Snow White, Rapunzel, The Ugly Duckling and The Princess and the Pea – teachers are invited to ask the kids how princesses and princes are represented in the stories, what makes the princess happy and if she is waiting to be rescued. Once they answer the questions, the children should listen to a non-traditional fairy tale such as Prince Cinders, Snow White in New York, King and King, The Sissy Duckling, Princess Smarty Pants or The Paper Bag Princess, and ask themselves which characters are more realistic. Students are expected to realize that people can live happily and freely even if they do not comply with gendered classed expectations. A similar instructional sample is proposed for grades 4 and 5: the

pupils are asked to reflect on what their culture allows and disallows for girls and boys, and read stories that depict stereotypical and non-stereotypical female and male characters. They are told that "just like the characters in media and stories, we are happiest when we celebrate what makes us unique, not when we try to be a two-dimensional version of what someone might say is a 'boy,' or a 'girl'" (ARC Foundation, n.d.-b, p. 11).

Only the two instructional samples described above challenge gender stereotypes and roles, while a dozen of books perpetuate them. Moreover, the material only considers Western middle-class gendered expectations, ignoring the diversity of the student population. Not only does society place expectations on the pupils based on their gender, but on their class, race, citizenship and ability. For instance, the literature shows that lower-class individuals have historically been perceived as "loose" and "degenerated", reason why lower-class women might not be expected to cover their bodies in the same way that middle and upper-class females, who are perceived as more valuable and worthy of protection (Bay-Cheng, 2003). The same reasoning might apply to black, Indigenous and people of colour, who are considered moral failures when compared to normative white bodies (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fields et al., 2015; Froyum, 2010; García, 2009). Overall, not all the students are in the same position and therefore they might not experience gendered expectations equally. Ultimately, the teachers can decide whether to include resources that question or preserve gender roles and stereotypes, and how to portray diversity. As one B.C. teacher explains in an instructional video on representation in the classroom, "we have full license to customize and deliver the curriculum how we deem it will be most efficient and productive" (Gregoire, 2021, 4:49-4:54).

4.4. Conclusion

Through an analysis of the material on sexual orientation and gender identity recommended to Physical and Health Education teachers, it can be concluded that the desirable student is a heterosexual, cisgender person that adheres to gender roles and stereotypes. Although the school system acknowledges diversity in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity in an effort to prevent bullying and name-calling, the majority of the resources reproduce heteronormativity and favour students who identify

and express their gender in accordance with the biological sex they were assigned at birth.

In general, gender identity is discussed more broadly and in depth than sexual orientation. As previous research has demonstrated, schools are constructed as "largely heteronormative spaces" (Allen, 2013, p. 305) and the schools in British Columbia do not appear to be the exception. Homosexuality continues to be one of the "Big Four Taboos" (Zimmerman, 2015) of sex education, a silent discourse that reflects dominant cultural ideas on what it means to exercise sexuality in "normal" or "abnormal" ways. We could argue that a heteronormative discourse is reproduced by biopower to ensure the procreation of the human race and control the population. Disciplines such as statistics and medicine are used to justify the categorization of non-heterosexual individuals, and especially gay men, as more prone to disease. Moreover, "the right to make live and to let die" (Foucault, 1976, p. 241) is exercised through not discussing anal sex in detail, failing to thoroughly explain the factors that make it a higher risk sexual activity, and not placing enough emphasis on how to make it a safer activity. The lack of information exposes non-heterosexual students to a greater risk of contracting STIs, affecting their well-being and potentially threatening their lives. Equally important, predicating heteronormativity through an assumption of everyone's heterosexuality implies that other sexual orientations are abnormal, which exposes the LGBTQ2S+ community to discrimination and rejection, to social death.

As previously stated, the possibilities presented to students to embody their gender are not abundant either. A culture that values traditional understandings of what it means to be masculine and feminine structures the boundaries of gendered action, the definitions of femininity and masculinity and the practices expected from the students based on their sex assigned at birth. In many resources, assumptions that girls are fond of pink and pastel colours, care about their appearance and enjoy gossiping, or that boys like "strong" vibrant colours and enjoy sports like football and soccer go unquestioned. "Female" and "male" are constructed as two completely different categories, not only in their anatomy but in their interests, behaviours, opportunities and constraints. These cultural arbitraries are considered natural and, embedded in the schemes of thought, perception and behaviour of those who develop the material on gender and sexuality, they are replicated in the educational resources and have the potential of producing an internalization of gender normative beliefs in the students.

In any case, the educational material that is publicly available and could be analyzed for this thesis is not necessarily representative of the discourses deployed by teachers during PHE classes. The teachers might use all the resources, a mix of the material that best aligns with their beliefs and teaching interests or might decide to create their own material to present the content on sexuality and gender. It is the hope of the author that future research on sex education in British Columbia can shed light on the practice of teachers who deliver Physical and Health Education.

Chapter 5.

Sex, risk, bodies and their boundaries

What are the messages deployed in sex education about teenagers' sexuality? Are youth today receiving a sex-positive education? Are students in British Columbia instructed about desire and pleasure, or is sex education based on fear? The Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education explain that sex education should "incorporate a balanced approach to sexual health promotion that includes the positive aspects of sexuality and relationships as well as the prevention of outcomes that can have a negative impact on sexual health and well-being" (Sieccan, 2019, p. 27). Since the previous statement is considered a core principle by the Sieccan, all the sex education programs in the country are expected to follow this criterion and modify any aspect of the curriculum that is not consistent with it.

Nonetheless, previous research suggests that sex education emphasizes and exaggerates the dangers of sexuality while ignoring the pleasure that sexual activity can provide (Allen, 2007; Connell, 2005; Estes, 2017; Moore & Harris, 2014). Scholars have pointed to the fact that a non-sexual student is preferred within the education system (Allen 2007, 2017; Valaitis, 2011), that masturbation (Measor et al., 2000; Phillips & Martínez, 2010; Zimmerman, 2015) and abortion are absent from official curriculums (Zimmerman, 2015) and that abstinence is the focus of many sex education programs (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Byers et al., 2017; Connell, 2005; Fine, 1988; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Phillips & Martínez, 2010). On the other hand, B.C. organizations and activists advocating for more comprehensive sex education bring attention to the stigma surrounding sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and the need to address it in the classroom. They support a sex-positive approach to sexual health education and express that students need to know about the social, relational and emotional changes that occur during adolescence just as much as they need to understand their physical changes – the latter being the focus of sex education classes (YouthCO, 2018).

What, then, is presented in the sex education material? Through a documentary analysis of the teaching lessons provided by the B.C.'s curriculum and B.C. Teachers' Federation websites, the books recommended by the province's Ministry of Education

through the Focused Education Resources, the provincial guidelines for the instruction of health education and the teaching material from teachingsexualhealth.ca⁶, I identified three major discourses that explain how adolescent bodies and sexuality are portrayed. Firstly, I provide an account of discussions of body boundaries, consent, sexual assault and trauma; secondly, I document the content and tone in which sexuality and the sexed bodies are described; and lastly, I explore the risks of sexual activity as presented in the material.

5.1. Of consent, boundaries and sexual assault

Teaching children and teenagers that their body belongs only to them and they can decide whether it is touched, by whom and when seems to be a priority for the Ministry of Education, the teachers and the authors of the various books recommended in the Focused Education Resources website. The authors of these resources, for the most part, have also reached a consensus on how to address the topic of sexual assault: by recognizing that the abuser is the only responsible for the assault and instructing students to listen and believe in the words of the survivor. Students are given authority over their bodies and taught to respect others' body boundaries.

Pupils are introduced to body ownership and boundaries since kindergarten, although not in the context of sexual assault prevention. The books for K-3 grade students recognize that no one's body boundaries should be crossed unless the person agrees to it and explain that kids have the right to say no to unwanted touch even if the person who wants to touch them is a family friend or a relative. Through sentences such as "you should try saying it too, loud and clear 'Don't touch me! I don't want you to'" (Profamilia, 2014, p. 21) or "you can say 'stop, you're inside my body boundary'" (Sanders, 2018, p. 35), children learn to seek consent before initiating any physical contact and to stop situations in which their body boundaries might be compromised. They are reminded they can refuse to touch someone if that makes them feel uncomfortable and should not be afraid of hurting someone's feelings when they decline a person's petition to be kissed or hugged (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.-

⁶ An online portal authorized by Alberta Education that houses numerous educational resources (from lesson plans to Kahoots and videos) on human sexuality developed by Alberta educators and Alberta Health Services. The website and its resources are recommended to sex education teachers in B.C. in several lesson plans provided by the province.

d). From a very young age, kids learn to disclose unwanted touch and ask for help from a trusted adult if the person making them uncomfortable refuses to stop when they ask them to. However, these resources do not discuss inappropriate touching of the children's genitals or private parts, to which kindergarten and elementary students in grades 1 to 4 are not exempt. The decision not to mention inappropriate touching or the concept of sexual assault might be driven by a moral effort to preserve the innocence of the kids and protect them from the "perverse" world of sexuality, desire and assault. Nonetheless, as certified sexual health educator Kerri Isham (2022) claims, "teaching early does not strip our children of their innocence [...] But sexual abuse will." (in Grossman, 2022).

From grades 4 to 12, discussions of body ownership are gradually linked to sexual activity and the concept of consent makes its appearance more frequently. Students are informed that "there is nothing wrong with having boundaries or limits when it comes to anything, including sex" (YouthCO, n.d.-a, p. 2) and taught to identify their boundaries and those of others through listening and reading body language. In addition, pupils are reminded of the importance of verbally asking for consent if they are unsure whether someone is comfortable with a specific activity or physical contact. As preteens approach the age in which they can consent to sexual activity, resources addressing consent increase. According to this material, consent "means people agree to participate in a sexual activity and understand what they are agreeing to" (Alberta Health Services & teachingsexualhealth.ca, 2019, p. 2) and is described as being "about freedom, choices and agreement [...] more complicated than just a 'yes' or a 'no'" (Hancock, 2021, p. 6). It is also constructed as something that, if not obtained, can have legal, social, personal and physical consequences ranging from serving time in jail to being unable to find a job due to a criminal record or feelings of guilt and embarrassment.

The sex education material explains that legitimate consent is freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic and specific. A video used to explain the concept affirms that consent is as simple as offering tea "if they say 'no, thank you', then don't make them tea [...] don't make them drink tea, don't get annoyed at them for not wanting tea" (May & Blue Seat Studios, 2015, 0:39-0:42, 0:46-0:49). Students are instructed to ask for consent before starting any sexual contact or changing from one activity to the other: if they obtained consent to kiss a person, they must receive it again before caressing any part of the person's body. They are also informed that consent cannot be

given if a person has drunk or consumed drugs, and that failure to consider those elements of consent could result in an accusation of sexual assault.

However, this discourse constructs sexual activity as entirely rational, as a process not dominated by desire and impulsivity, and does not consider that alcohol and drugs are some of the constitutive elements of a teenager's sexual assemblage (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Cowley, 2014; Fox & Bale, 2018). This rational discourse about consent ignores the reality of traditional sexual scripts in today's culture, which dictate that men must initiate and pursue sexual activity regardless of what the woman says, and women must resist it, at least initially, to avoid being considered promiscuous (Muehlenhard et al., 2014; Measor et al., 2000). Thus, the process of obtaining and giving consent is more complex than how is explained in the material. Although this discourse might be presented simplistically to help students understand consent, it might not prepare youth to ask and receive consent when both parties are under the effects of alcohol, gendered sexual scripts or desire. As Brady and Lowe (2020) maintain, "simplifying and extrapolating serious issues from broader understandings of sexual culture limits our understanding of the issues" (p. 78).

In the teaching resources, discussions of consent are followed by explanations of sexual assault, which is defined as "sex without consent" (Louie, 2016, p. 16), regardless of whether or not force was used to perpetrate the assault. The resources emphasize that the only person responsible for the assault is the perpetrator and insist that survivors should never be blamed for the abuse. However, while Alberta resources discourage the use of messages on how to avoid sexual assault as they "did not reduce instances of sexual assault [...] increased shame in the person who was assaulted, reduced the likelihood of the survivor accessing services, and provided excuses to perpetrators who commit this crime" (Alberta Health Services & teachingsexualhealth.ca, 2019, p. 3), a resource developed by a B.C. teacher maintains that "while it is never the victim's fault, there are some precautions that everyone can take to keep themselves and others safe" (Lafortune, 2016, slide 43), such as not sharing sexually explicit photos or videos or setting an encounter with people met online in public places. The latter is the only resource that deems certain individuals as somehow responsible for their assault. The rest of the materials present a discourse that is influenced by third-wave feminism and its criticism of rape culture, victim-blaming and slut-shaming. These resources intend to remove the survivor's sense of culpability by explaining that it is not

the person's fault if someone tries to touch them, even when they might say it is (Dunham, 2013), that perpetrators of sexual assault tend to "project the fault on the victim by saying the victim's behaviour, presentation, or promiscuous reputation led to or invited the rape/assault" (Louie, 2016 p. 16) although there is no justification for such acts or that "sole responsibility for sexual assault lies with the person who did not obtain consent (the perpetrator)" (Alberta Health Services & teachingsexualhealth.ca, 2019, p. 2).

In addition, the material prepares students and teachers to deal with disclosures of assault. For example, the Ministry of Education guidelines on how to deliver health-related topics explain that if teachers identify what might be a disclosure of assault, they should gently stop the lesson, gather basic information about the abuse and assure the student they will get them help. Similarly, students learn to listen and trust the survivor without blaming them and allowing them to decide the path they want to take to recovery. In addition, the resources provide websites, emergency numbers and organizations' contact information that students can reach out to if they feel unsafe or find themselves in an abusive relationship.

Notably, the resources developed by Alberta health professionals and educators place more emphasis on sexual assault than the other books, lesson plans and government-generated resources. In every lesson about relationships, dating and consent, a section reminds the teacher to be prepared for disclosures of assault and attentive to any signs of distress that might indicate a student has experienced or witnessed abuse. Their lesson plans include several links and advice on how to treat students who shows signs of abuse, and while instructions such as "before starting these lessons, talk to the school counsellors so they are aware there may be disclosures of abuse", "ensure your students understand that disclosures of abuse cannot be kept confidential" and "share with students what they can expect if they disclose abuse, e.g., acknowledgement, honouring their disclosure, redirection to discuss further outside of class and assurance of connecting them with support" (Alberta Health Services & teachingsexualhealth.ca, 2022, 2) might be helpful to B.C. teachers, others steps and links are specific to the neighbouring province. Although B.C.'s guidelines also include sections on disclosure, these portions are short and contain few recommendations, which might be an obstacle for teachers who want to address sexual assault or are faced with disclosures of abuse.

Another difference in the way assault is discussed lies in who are portrayed as potential perpetrators and victims of abuse. For instance, while Beddall (2016) presents health professionals as people who are allowed to touch the students' private parts since they are only doing it for health reasons, Natterson (2013) adds that doctors can only touch children's private parts if their parents are in the room. Similarly, the guidelines *Supporting Student Health Elementary* explain that if the students "have the uncomfortable 'no' feeling, they have the right to say no to anyone, even a medical professional or family member" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.-d, p. 28). In terms of gender, books like *My body belongs to me from my head to my toes* (pro familia, 2014) or *Let's talk about body boundaries, consent and respect* (Sanders, 2018) contain illustrations in which the person who "says" stop to being touched or approached is a kid with feminine traits. Likewise, Louie (2016) acknowledges that anyone can experience sexual assault but "the fear that men have of prison rape is what femmes, women, and non-binary folks have to live with every day" (p. 16), and presents masculine identities as the perpetrators of abuse. Although the topics of consent and body boundaries are covered in books labeled as "for girls", "for boys" and gender-neutral, in general, more books "for girls" explain that their bodies are their own and no one has the right to touch them without their permission. On the other hand, Alberta resources indicate that no gender or age group is exempt from sexual assault and individuals of any gender and age group can be perpetrators.

The inclination towards presenting females as potential victims of sexual assault does not provide all genders with equal opportunities to define their sexual experiences in terms of assault. Being more readily portrayed as victims of sexual assault than other genders, females might more likely develop schemes of appreciation and perception that facilitate the recognition of sexual assault. Still, since men and non-binary individuals are now recognized as not exempt from abuse, it is possible for them to occupy the identity of the survivor, disclose their abuse and fight against the invisibility of their assault experiences. As Hacking (1986) explains, "a kind of person came into being at the same time as the kind itself was being invented" (p.228): categories create possibilities for people, new ways in which they can understand themselves, live and behave. In a similar way, Foucault would explain how power-knowledge constitutes agents, shapes what is considered valid and influences people's behaviour. Since the discourses recognize that not only females can experience sexual assault, the reports of sexual

assault of males and non-binary individuals can be considered true and they can rethink their experiences and define them as sexual assault.

5.2. Talking of sex and bodies...in a positive way?

The body is the centre of the Physical and Health Education curriculum, but what is said about it? Generally, the body is only analyzed in regard to its anatomy and biological processes. Discussions of puberty, body parts and reproduction account for more than half of the material available to teachers. Per contra, discourses of desire, bodily pleasure and the non-reproductive aspect of sexuality are almost inexistent.

Children are introduced to their body parts in kindergarten, but they have to wait at least until grade 3 to understand the function of their bodies' private parts and the organs "hidden" behind them. Only one of the resources for K-2 grades focuses on the sexed body. This instructional sample, *Learning about our bodies* (Beddall, 2016), recommends teaching children the names of their non-private parts alongside the "grown-up" terms for their private parts in an effort to "integrate the sexual parts of their bodies with the rest of their bodies" (p. 1). The lesson plan presents students with simple outlines of two bodies: one with a vulva and one with a penis and testicles, and mentions that touching the private parts might feel good but may only be done in private.

From grades 3 to 7, pupils learn about puberty and the changes that come with it. The *Supporting Student Health Elementary* guidelines for teaching health topics recommend teachers to impart these lessons to girls and boys in the same room since "students need to know what their peers of other genders are going through" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d-d, p. 25). In these co-ed lessons, students are informed that puberty is the passage from childhood to adulthood and their bodies will start to change under the influence of hormones. They are told that both girls and boys will grow taller and gain weight, their skin may become oily, they will begin producing body odour and grow hair in their armpits and around their genitals. Girls will also grow breasts, get wider hips and start menstruating, while boys will grow hair on their face, their voices will become deeper and their penis and testicles will grow larger. The explanations of male body changes are more detailed than for females. They are told they might experience temporal swelling of the breast area, develop bigger muscles, experience more frequent erections, and begin to have ejaculations and wet dreams.

The resources indicate that all these changes prepare the body for reproduction and are perfectly normal, but warn that “kids are much too young to have sexual intercourse” (Harris, 2014b, p. 29).

The focus is on anatomy and portraying the body as acceptable when its reproductive capacities are embraced, but not its sensuality. The material favours a rational and distant description of puberty, purposely omitting discussions of the sexual thoughts, feelings of excitement and arousal that students are likely to experience during their passage from childhood to adulthood. Thus, we could argue that teenagers are expected to think of their bodies as “perfectly normal” only to the extent that they can produce life, but as abnormal and even shameful when they yield to sensuality. By not allowing the students to explore their changing feelings and emerging desires, and stating that sexual activity should only be practiced by people who are old enough to have offspring, sexuality and its life-producing capacities are regulated.

The idea that the sexed body should be a source of shame is further represented in some of the books recommended by the Focused Education Resource. In general, illustrations of the female and male body, the reproductive organs and the genitalia are shown without shame. However, *The body book for boys* (Mar & Norwich, 2010), presents an illustration of a boy covering his mouth in shame at the end of the chapter “time to get private” (p. 79). Moreover, expressions such as “jackets”, “down there” or “bush” are used throughout the books to refer to elements like the foreskin, genitals or pubic hair. “Protecting yourself ‘down there’” (Mar & Norwich, 2010, p. 66), “beating around the bush or the hair down there” (Bloom, 2017, p. 61) and “jackets not required” (Frith, 2007, p. 22) are only some of the phrases used in the books when referring to the body’s private parts. In addition, *The boy’s body book* on puberty and reproduction introduces sexual intercourse as “the messy truth” (Frith, 2007, p. 16), which promotes a negative view of sex by reinforcing the idea that sex is dirty and objectionable.

In general, topics on reproduction and puberty tend to go hand in hand and only the reproductive capacities of sexual activity are discussed. The resources explain that an egg and a sperm are needed to create another human being and elaborate on the functions of the female and male sex organs. From grades 3 – or grade 5 for Alberta resources – to 12, diagrams of the internal sexual organs are included in every book, PowerPoint presentation or lesson plan that focuses on puberty changes, reproduction,

pregnancy or contraception. These resources utilize scientific language to explain how eggs are produced in the ovaries and are meant to unite with the sperm. If the ovary and the sperm do not meet in the fallopian tubes, the ovary travels to the uterus alone and abandons the woman's body when she menstruates. However, if the egg joins the sperm, a pregnancy begins. To be able to join the egg, the sperm, which is made in the male's testicles, travels to the vas deferens, combines with semen and leaves the penis when the latter is inside the vagina. The organs that allow the production of a new human being and their purpose are explained in detail: for females, the function of the ovaries, fallopian tubes, uterus, cervix and vagina – as a birth channel and a depository of potentially-fertilizing semen – and, for men, the function of the testicles, the epididymis, vas deferens and urethra.

However, what occurs between a male and a female before the penis enters the vagina or the process that leads to ejaculation remains a secret. The material does not recognize that desire can cause sexual activity to commence, does not mention foreplay and the stimulation of erogenous areas, or explain that sexual tension keeps building on during sexual intercourse until, sometimes, this intensification of desire and pleasure leads to an orgasm. The concept sexual arousal is mentioned in a couple of the resources but not elaborated on; it is only said that “when a woman and a man want to make a baby, they hug and cuddle and kiss and feel very loving, and get very close to each other — so close that the man's penis goes inside the woman's vagina” (Harris, 2014b, p.28). Again, the resources normalize sexual intercourse for reproductive reasons and do not mention sexual activity for pleasure as a possibility. This fact, read in conjunction with the discourse presented in other resources, confirms that the education system prefers a non-sexual/sensual student (Allen, 2007, 2017; Valaitis, 2011). The material reproduces a morality that deems sexual desire and pleasure as indecent and intends to expel it from the public sphere, relegating it to the privacy of “the bedroom”, if anything.

Mentions of non-reproductive but potentially pleasurable sexual acts are scarce in the PHE material. In fact, the material barely mentions masturbation, mutual masturbation or digital sex, even when they are much safer than other types of sexual activities. The topic of masturbation is inexistent in the guidelines developed by the government, mentioned briefly only in one resource created by B.C. teachers and acknowledged only in a few of the recommended books. Masturbation is defined as

“touching or rubbing the private parts of your own body because it feels good” (Harris, 2014b, p. 69) and is described by these resources as a normal activity that is practised regularly by some, rarely by others and never by another group of people. Students are taught that they can decide if they want to masturbate or not but, in case they choose to do it, it will not cause them any health problems (Alberta Health Services & teachingsexualhealth.ca, 2020; Harris, 2014, 2014b). They are also informed that each family has its own ideas about whether masturbating is acceptable or unacceptable. The existence of hand/digital, anal and oral sex – the other non-reproductive sexual activities mentioned in the PHE material – is acknowledged but not explored. Neither the pleasures nor the risks of digital, anal and oral sex are mentioned in detail, which not only exposes students who decide to engage in those activities to a greater risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection, but constructs reproductive sex as the norm and anything else as deviant.

Sexual intercourse is not only primarily considered in terms of its reproductive potential but regarded as acceptable only if motivated by affection and practiced in the context of a relationship. Harris (2014b) mentions that “what really matters in any relationship involving sex is that people treat one another in respectful, caring and loving ways” (p. 82) and Frith (2007) explains that “couples don’t have sex only to make babies. It can be a way of showing deep affection for each other” (p. 17). Other recommended books continuously refer to sexual intercourse as “love-making” or “making love” and show illustrations of eggs and sperm that appear to be in love, surrounded by floating hearts. The image of the egg and sperm in love is also present in one of the teaching activities developed by Alberta educators, and another lesson plan declares that “having sexual thoughts and feelings is a normal part of going through puberty, but not everyone decides to act on those feelings. People are ready for romantic relationships at different times” (Alberta Health Services & teachingsexualhealth.ca, 2018a, p. 2). These phrases and illustrations convey that it is only acceptable to act on sexual thoughts and feelings in a romantic way, driven by affection and love. Thus, the material reproduces a cultural arbitrary that presents the connection between sexual activity and love as natural and legitimate, even when it is only the product of a conservative discourse and some students, inserted into a hook-up culture, might consider sex and affection as separate experiences.

The resources also assume that the students' first sexual experience will be in the context of a relationship. In one presentation available through the B.C. Teachers Federation website, in which students are asked to consider whether they are ready for sex based on a series of questions, one of them reads, "Will I be glad I had sex with this person if our relationship ends?" (Taylor et al., 2019, slide 3). Another presentation questions the students: "When and under what circumstances do I want to have sex? (dating, long-term relationship, engaged, married, living at home, living on my own, etc.)" (Lafortune, 2016, slide 11). Although the word "etcetera" indicates that there may be other circumstances under which someone might want to have sex, none of the options provided refers to having sexual intercourse outside of a relationship (for example, in a party with someone you consider attractive or with a friend with benefits). The only resource that acknowledges that teenagers might be interested in casual "hook ups" is a book recommended for grades 10 to 12, *Sex and Girls* (Orenstein, 2016).

In addition, the material makes evident that female and male bodies are not appreciated in the same way. For instance, the naked female body is shown with less frequency and detail than the nude male body, and the penis and testicles are given more visibility than the vulva. Books like *Boys, girls and body science* (Hickling, 2002) and *What's happening to me? For boys* (Frith, 2007), for example, include illustrations of different sizes and shapes of penises and testicles and only a very rough illustration of the vulva. While concern about penis size is addressed in all the books directed to boys, concern about breast size is only mentioned in the book *HelloFlo the guide, period.* (Bloom, 2017) and worry about vulva shape or size is never mentioned. Moreover, the female body and its processes are deemed chaotic: when discussing vaginal discharge and menstruation, Bloom (2017) explains that "being a girl is a messy business" (p. 9). The adjective "messy" is never utilized to refer to male biological processes like wet dreams or ejaculation.

In line with previous research findings, female pleasure and desire seem to be absent from the discussion. As stated before, masturbation is not covered widely in the resources, but the books that mention it are gender-neutral or directed to men. In one of the materials, male masturbation is depicted as a positive activity, as it is a way for men to practice the right way to put a condom on "before trying them for the first time with intercourse" (Taylor et al., 2019, slide 3) but masturbation is never described as positive for girls. Neither is female orgasm considered, while male ejaculation is described as the

release of semen and sperm from the penis, usually due to an orgasm (Alberta Health Services & teachingsexualhealth.ca, 2018b). Girls are neither invited nor expected to familiarize themselves with their bodies and touch them to experience pleasure. In fact, only the *Girls and Sex* book (Orenstein, 2017) recognizes that the clitoris' only function is to provide sexual pleasure and Frith (2007) mentions that the clitoris is as sensitive to touch as the penis. Other than that, the majority of the resources name the clitoris without mentioning its function and *The care and keeping of you 2* (Natterson, 2013) goes as far as to show an illustration of the vulva and signaling to all its parts except the clitoris.

By rejecting the female body parts that produce pleasure, these materials deny women's right to pleasure and reinforce the double standard identified by other researchers. (Delamont, 2012; Measor et al., 2000). Moreover, the book *Hair in funny places* (Cole, 2001) constructs women as objects of consumption. The book, recommended for kids in grades 3 to 6, tells the story of a girl who is curious about who she will become when she grows up. Her teddy bear responds to her inquiry by explaining that, one day, her hormones will trigger many changes in her body, just as they did with her mom. At one point, while Teddy is describing the puberty experience of the girl's mother, it mentions that although puberty was not always an easy stage, "she had a grown-up body which she liked. So did the boys!" (p. 14). In this way, the female body is simultaneously constructed as an object of desire and source of male pleasure and as something that should be protected, hidden and unknown to others, females included.

Women are allowed to be objects of desire but not desiring subjects who wish to understand their anatomy and pursue more fulfilling and pleasurable sexual relationships. Through the discourses presented in the curriculum, biopower intends to regulate the reproductive capacity of females bodies: they are taught they should only think of their sexual organs and sex in terms of its reproductive capacities, that females should not be familiar with their genitalia or seek physical pleasure, as their ultimate purpose is to produce healthy offspring. By not encouraging females to amass sexual experience to preserve their sexual health, the politics of power protect the fertile body and ensure the continuation of the species. According to previous research, this discourse has permeated sexual health advice since the First World War. Men soldiers who had contracted sexually transmitted infections abroad were infecting Canadian

women, and the infections had a devastating effect on their reproductive capacity. In response, educational initiatives urged women to exercise “self-control and passivity in matters of sex. They warned women that failures of discipline not only would result in disease, but would jeopardize their prospects for marriage and motherhood” (Mawani, 2006, p.158). This regulatory project constructed and still constructs the respectable female as someone who should resist sexual approaches and express no interest in sex outside its reproductive potential.

5.3. Too risky? STIs, pregnancy and online activity

While the material recommended to teachers that impart Physical and Health Education fails to incorporate “the positive and relationship enhancing aspects of human sexuality” (Sieccan, 2019, p. 33), discussions about “the prevention of outcomes that can have a negative impact on sexual health and well-being” (Sieccan, 2019, p. 27) abound. Sexuality is portrayed as a source of sickness, danger and, to a certain extent, an impediment to fulfilling one’s dreams. This results in depicting abstinence and postponement as the best, healthiest options for teenagers.

5.3.1. Talking to kids and youth about STIs

All the types of teaching resources recognize that it is possible to contract a sexually transmitted infection with every sexual contact, but not all of them approach STIs in the same way. For example, while the teaching guidelines developed by federal and provincial government authorities argue in favour of destigmatizing STIs and promoting regular, shame-free testing, the material designed by B.C. teachers and nurses tends to perpetuate the fear associated with these infections by showing explicit images of the symptoms produced by them. In the few resources developed by YouthCO, STIs are equalled to any other infections, which can be cured or controlled, and the stigma of getting tested is addressed. The Alberta resources stress the importance of using dental dams and condoms to prevent the spread of STIs and emphasize that abstinence is the only sure way to avoid an infection. Finally, only one of the books from the Focused Education Resource mentions STIs and it does so very briefly and as a reminder of the importance of waiting to have sex.

The guidelines developed by the B.C. Ministry of Education prepare teachers to eradicate the stigma and fear that prevents students from getting tested and, hence, treated for STIs. This goal aligns with the Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health, which disapprove of fear and shame-based approaches to STI prevention given that they “result in shame and avoidance of testing, treatment, and communicating with partners about barrier use during sexual interactions” (Sieccan, 2019, p.84). Through the provincial guidelines, teachers are instructed to tell the students that “for the most part, treating an STI is as simple as treating an infection like strep throat. You would go to a doctor to get treatment for strep throat, and STIs are the same” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.-d, p. 33). The document affirms that most STIs are curable and, since the word disease carries a negative connotation and suggests that the condition is permanent, they recommend using the concept sexually transmitted infection (STI) instead of sexually transmitted disease (STD). The guidelines specify that explicit images should never be used when discussing STIs as they might be traumatic for some, and ask instructors to explain that STI testing is free and confidential in the province. Finally, the guidelines state that getting checked regularly is essential as many STIs cause symptoms that disappear with time or do not cause symptoms at all.

The instructional samples provided by YouthCO reinforce the previous messages and intend to normalize STI prevention and testing. Students are invited to get tested not out of fear but responsibility, as they are told that “getting tested doesn’t mean anything about us or who we are having sex with [...] we are choosing to be super responsible and take care of ourselves and partners” (YouthCO, n.d.-b, p.2). These resources maintain that STIs are similar to other types of infections, that most of them are curable and the rest can be treated. In addition, the lesson plans present a list of STIs, information on how they can be passed, their symptoms – or lack of –, the window period for each infection, how to get tested, and treatment and prevention options. Overall, YouthCO resources remove the stigma from STIs by portraying them as no different from other infections and presenting testing as an essential activity for all who are sexually active and not just for some groups that might be considered at high risk of becoming infected.

Even though the provincial guidelines and YouthCO resources favour a stigma and fear-free approach to STI prevention, scare tactics are used in some of the teaching resources. In fact, the only two PowerPoint presentations on sexual health available

through the B.C. Teachers Federation website, show graphic images of STIs. The one developed by Lafortune (2016) presents a picture of genital warts on the slide on human papillomavirus (HPV) (slide 17) and an amplified figure of a pubic louse on another slide (slide 20). Explicit images are not included in that presentation when referring to gonorrhoea, syphilis, chlamydia, trichomoniasis, herpes, hepatitis A, B and C, and HIV/AIDS, but the word “disease” is used twice throughout the presentation (slides 15 and 24). Moreover, when explaining HIV and AIDS, the author affirms that “there are many side effects to the different drugs and getting the right combination and dosage is difficult” (slide 25). This statement might scare the students and prevent them from getting tested and beginning their treatment. On the other hand, the presentation created by Taylor et al. (2019) shows a graphic image of herpes (slide 6) and refers to STIs as diseases three times on the slides’ notes and once on the slide itself (slides 19, 20, 30, 37). Both presentations express their preference that students do not have many sexual partners and use a condom every time they have sex to reduce the possibility of infection, but only Taylor et al. (2019) mention dental dams. As such, the fear-based approach to STIs is more prominent in Lafortune’s (2016) presentation: much more emphasis is put on the symptoms of STIs than on explaining to students how to avoid infections or providing them with resources to help them expand their knowledge of sexual health. Discourses that do not explain where to get tested and fail to educate youth about dental dams might put certain groups of students at greater risk of contracting an STI or not getting treated on time.

Finally, the teaching resources from Alberta stress the importance of using dental dams and condoms to prevent the spread of STIs, and both the resources from teachingsexualhealth.ca and the recommended books emphasize that abstinence is the only method that ensures no risk of infection. In the Alberta resources, students are introduced to blood-borne infections such as Hepatitis B and C, and HIV in grade 6, but sexually transmitted infections are mentioned from grade 8 onwards. These resources explain the symptoms, methods of transmission and treatment options for chlamydia, genital herpes, HPV, trichomoniasis, gonorrhoea, hepatitis B, syphilis and HIV. From grades 8 to 12, students are also shown videos on how to use condoms and dental dams. However, abstinence seems to be the preferred method to avoid STIs, as it is presented since grade 7 as “[t]he only sure way to avoid STBBIs (sexually transmitted and blood borne infections)” (Alberta Health Services & teachingsexualhealth.ca, 2018c,

p.2). This means that students learn about abstinence even before they are formally introduced to sexually transmitted infections. Discussions on the importance of abstaining from and delaying any sexual activity to remain healthy are especially emphasized from grades 7 to 9 but are included until grade 12. A similar discourse of abstinence is manifested in the book *It's perfectly normal* (Harris, 2014), which reminds students from grades 6 to 9 that abstinence is “the surest way to protect oneself from getting infected by a sexually transmitted disease” (p. 85) and the “only fully safe way people can protect themselves from getting HIV through sexual contact” (p.89).

Although the material has increasingly portrayed sexually transmitted infections as similar to other infections to remove the stigma and increase testing among teenagers, fear-based approaches are still present in the PHE resources and some methods to prevent the contraction of STIs are left unsaid. Even when the Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health indicates that students should know about the protection offered by the HPV vaccine and promote its application, the vaccine is only mentioned in a few resources recommended to PHE teachers. Similarly, while the Sieccan recommends increasing awareness of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) medication for HIV prevention, PrEP and PEP are never mentioned in the material. Instead of addressing these topics, an emphasis is put on the signs and symptoms of STIs, condom usage and abstinence.

The fact that the dental dam is often missing from discussions of STI prevention or that PrEP and PEP are absent from the resources might be considered as a preference to protect certain groups of people over others. The health and well-being of those who practice oral sex and groups that are at greater risk for contracting HIV – such as men who have sex with men or Indigenous people, according to a report published by the Public Health Agency of Canada (2020) – are considered less important than the sexual health of others. What is said and left unsaid in terms of STI prevention defines whose life must be defended and whose life is expendable (Foucault, 1997).

5.3.2. Of pregnancy and (more about) choosing abstinence

Abstinence and the importance of practicing protected sex are also stressed in the resources that mention the second most significant “risk” associated with sexual activity: pregnancy. The material presents pregnancy as a life event that would

permanently affect the students' lives. Students are informed that teenage parents usually withdraw from school, experience financial strain, and may cancel, alter or postpone their plans and goals, "renounc[ing] to a life of your [their] own" (Alberta Health Services and teachingsexualhealth.ca, n.d., slide 15). Moreover, the images accompanying mentions of teenage pregnancy never show calm or sleeping infants but crying babies. To avoid pregnancy, students are presented with a series of contraceptives, their effectiveness rate, way of use, where to get them and, in the Alberta resources, the side effects of each method. External and internal condoms, abstinence, the pill, patch, ring, injection, intrauterine device (IUD) and withdrawal are the most mentioned contraceptive methods, alongside the emergency contraceptive pill. Pupils are told to consider abstinence, use contraceptives every time they engage in sexual activity and consider emergency contraception as soon as possible whenever they have unprotected sex.

If faced with an unintended pregnancy, students are not given other choices than having and taking care of the baby. Two resources talk about placing a child on adoption and, even when abortion is legal in Canada and the Sieccan (2016) states that sex education should "equip individuals to navigate and overcome systemic barriers to accessing [...] reproductive health care (including abortion)" (p.14), only five of the analyzed resources mention abortion. The first resource that refers to abortion is one teaching lesson developed by Alberta teachers for grades 10 to 12, which only alludes to the fact that abortion – or deodorants, breast implants and breast supports – does not cause breast cancer. Also designed by Alberta educators, a lesson plan explains very briefly that abortion is safe if performed by a doctor, states there are two types of abortion (medical and surgical) that a person may qualify for based on how far along the pregnancy they are, and provides a website to obtain more information. The third mention of abortion is found in the book *It's perfectly normal* (Harris, 2014), which explains that abortion is a debated topic, provides an outline of abortion legislation in The United States of America and mentions that women who decide to have an abortion can usually have healthy babies in the future. The book *It's so amazing* (Harris, 2014b) affirms that abortion does not usually affect a woman's ability to conceive in the future and explains that "there are times when a woman becomes pregnant and then chooses not to stay pregnant" (p.42). Finally, the *Supporting Student Health Secondary* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.-e) handbook recommends covering the topic of

abortion but does not provide guidance on how to talk about abortion. None of the resources provide detailed information on abortion, demonstrating a preference that students do not undergo this procedure. While students are bombarded with information on how to prevent a pregnancy, they are left on their own if they conceive. The students are denied the possibility of making informed decisions regarding their pregnancy and having an abortion by not being told what happens during the procedure, where to go if they are considering having an abortion, and where to find reliable information on the topic and its possible side effects.

Through fear-based discourses, the students' bodies are disciplined. The material intends to prevent sexual behaviour that is considered deviant, and portrays those who fail to remain abstinent or use contraceptives as in permanent risk and disgrace. Pupils are told that the punishment for engaging in unprotected sexual activities is the loss of their "freedom" and their opportunities for success. Discourses that defend that choosing abstinence, postponement and contraceptives is in their best interest also contribute to the regulation of teenage sexuality; students are told they will be able to accomplish their goals if they abide by the norm and do not procreate during their teenage years. These discourses might transform into a mental formation and guide students' sexual choices, conditioning them to act according to the principles of the inculcated cultural arbitrary.

The material, and especially the Alberta material, invites elementary and secondary students to think of abstinence as their best option. For instance, in various Alberta resources, abstinence is the first method mentioned on a graphic on the effectiveness of different ways to prevent pregnancy, even when the list is not ordered from most to less effective. Their lesson plans include asking students which contraceptive methods they know and remind teachers to ensure abstinence is included in that list if students fail to mention it. Given that contraceptives are not discussed until grade 8 but reproduction and abstinence are discussed in previous years, abstinence is presented as the only real option for grade 7 students although 12 years old can legally consent to sexual activity with someone close in age. Although the Alberta material contemplates discussions of contraceptives since grade 8, and these discussions increase in frequency as the students age, the virtues of abstinence continue to be mentioned until grade 12. Through the lesson plans, students are invited to develop promotional materials outlining the importance and benefits of abstinence, made to

practice refusal skills and urged to think of the beliefs and values that their family, community and religion hold about teenage sexuality. Furthermore, pupils are continually reminded they can choose to abstain even if they have had sex in the past, almost as if they were given a “second chance” to follow the right path.

Even though this inclination towards presenting pregnancy as a situation one must fear and abstinence as the most reasonable sexual choice is more notorious in the resources from Alberta, it is also displayed in other course materials. Students are made to believe that teenage pregnancy almost inevitably results in abandoning school to find a job and provide for the child. They are told that having a baby is an impediment to fulfill one’s dreams, attain financial stability and that infants born to teenage mothers are more likely to experience a preterm birth and health problems. Aside from constantly reminding students that safe sex means no sex, abstinence is presented as favorable to the students’ relationships. Since grade 6, early adolescents learn that abstinence and postponement allow time for partners to establish non-sexual intimacy and that “it makes sense to wait to have sexual intercourse [...] a relationship that includes sexual contact often comes with complicated feelings” (Harris, 2014, p.7). Therefore, schoolchildren and teenagers are made to consider sex as an activity that might hinder the quality of their relationships, their health and well-being.

With respect to the recognition of the students’ sexual agency, the messages are contradictory. While the majority of teaching resources says that only the pupils can decide if they are ready to have sex (and guide them through their decision by posing some questions but letting teens make their own conclusions), others openly tell the students they are not ready to have sex unless they meet certain criteria. Thus, Lafortune (2016) affirms “if you are not comfortable discussing sex with a doctor or with your partner, you are not ready to have sex” (slide 12), “if you are not comfortable acquiring condoms, you are not ready for sex” (slide 14) and “if you are not ready to be a parent, think seriously about whether you are ready to have sex” (slide 28).

The materials manifest a preference for a non-sexual student, which has been identified in previous research (Allen, 2007, 2017; Valaitis, 2011). The desirable student must acknowledge the risks of sexual activity, listen to the prohibitions placed on their sexuality by the community’s values and beliefs and choose to remain abstinent until they are prepared to deal with pregnancy. Disguised under a need to rescue teenagers

from the dangers of sexuality, the resources available to Physical and Health Education teachers reproduce a cultural arbitrary that favours abstinence among the youth.

5.3.3. “You can’t un-see it”: Pornography, sexting and online dangers

The third danger of sexuality that the PHE material mentions is related to the consumption and distribution of visual media through the internet, as well as contacting people online. Since the first years of elementary school, kids are told that nothing they share through the internet is truly private and what is once on the web will always be there. As the students age, the dangers of online activity are gradually linked to sexuality, and pupils are introduced to the risks and traps of sexting and pornography.

The material makes clear that even when the internet can be a great source of information, “dangerous” people navigate the web looking to extortionate kids and youth, and that scary and upsetting images can be found online. The guidelines for teaching health topics in elementary and secondary school remind students that “the dangerous people online are smart and tricky” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.-d, p.19; British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.-e, p.21) and can deceive them into believing they are kids like them as part of their grooming techniques. A few resources also recognize that students might end up in sites they did not wish to visit, or thought they wanted to but end up scaring them, while browsing the internet. They explain that “if what you see is upsetting, scary, confusing, gross, and/or weird, or more than you ever want to see about bodies or sex, and makes you feel uncomfortable, leave that site right away” (Harris, 2014, p. 76). For these reasons, the guidelines and recommended books advise students to ask an adult whether a webpage is safe before accessing it and never share personal information or photos online.

Starting in grade 5, the resources warn students against sharing and consuming sexualized visual content. Pupils are discouraged from taking and sending pictures of private body parts through explanations of how images might not only be seen by the person they were meant for and how content uploaded to the web is there forever, regardless of whether you try to delete it (Dunham, 2013; Lafortune, 2016; British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.-e). They are also taught that if they are under the age of 18, “taking, sending, and sharing nude pictures of yourself or others can get you into trouble with the law and can also have serious lifelong personal, social and mental

health consequences” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.-d, p.23). Likewise, when referring to pornography, the material reminds educators to “discuss the underlying mess that can be found in pornography, including violence, inequality between men and women, and lack of consent” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.-e, p.18). Adolescents are told that “pornography portrays an unrealistic or unhealthy version of sexuality” (Alberta Health Services and teachingsexualhealth.ca, 2018d, p.4) and that the characters are professional actors who “are not having caring, loving, real relationships [...] in which they treat each other with respect” (Harris, 2014, p.76). They are reminded that images can be altered and advised to be very careful with the websites they access as “once you see something, you can’t un-see it” (Ministry of Education, p.18, sec). Moreover, a legal discourse is used one more time to discourage them from sharing pornography, as “passing on some kinds of porn to others can be risky and might be considered illegal” (Harris, 2014, p.76).

Although mentions of pornography and sexting are scarce in the resources, all the comments made with respect to these topics portray them as activities that have nothing to offer to the students but dangers and distress. These discourses ignore the fact that some people find sexual pleasure in watching these images and that some students might have already come into contact with pornography, finding it invigorating and exciting. None of the resources present pornography and sexting as activities that might help students explore their sexuality without risking pregnancy and contracting STIs. A moral discourse that intends to construct innocent, child-like students and prevent their sexual awakening unites with an anti-pornography feminist discourse that presents pornography as violent to justify the recommendation made to students to stay away from sexualized images. Discourses of safety, well-being and legality are also utilized in an effort to prevent children and youth from creating and accessing sexualized content, setting the norm for sexual conduct.

5.4. Conclusion

Having analyzed the discourses that permeate sex education materials, it can be argued that students are taught to consider their sexuality and sexed bodies in terms of protection, danger and preparation for reproduction. Although the body and the changes it experiences during puberty are presented as natural and necessary to the reproduction of the species, not all the aspects of the sexed body are deemed

acceptable. While messages of body ownership, abuse disclosure, body changes, bodies' reproductive capacities and the dangers of sexual activity and exploration are ubiquitous in the material, mentions of desire, pleasure and the relationship enhancing aspects of sexuality that the Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education refers to are infrequent.

Although mentions of consent and body ownership presented in the material might empower the students, these discourses are also motivated by the perceived need to protect students from their own and others' sexuality. However, recognizing students' ability to agree and refuse to engage in sexual activity means that the students' agency is acknowledged, and they are perceived as capable of making rational decisions, which differs from perceptions of teenagers as hypersexual and impulse-driven identified in previous research (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fields, Gilbert and Miller, 2015; Friehe & Smith, 2018). Moreover, the fact that discussions of consent are abundant in the material contrasts with the literature that denounces that students are not learning how to communicate about sex (Byers et al. 2017). It is evident that, although education tends to reproduce and perpetuate the status quo, feminist discourses have impacted sex education, which shows that agents can and do "transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.99).

Nonetheless, students still undergo long processes of inculcation through which they receive the message that it is only acceptable to engage in sexual activity in the context of a relationship, motivated by love and, preferably, for reproductive reasons. If the last element is absent, the sexual activity might still be acceptable, but only if it is meant to strengthen the bond between two people who have deep love and respect for one another. Sexual activity as a search for pleasure is not a possibility presented to the students and especially not to female pupils. Through these discourses, teenage sexuality is regulated, and the "acceptable" and "deviant" categories are created, divisions intended to help students police their sexual behaviour and that of others. Due to the school's pedagogic authority, their educational activities and the discourses promoted in the teaching material are likely to be perceived as legitimate (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). These messages result in "the production of 'ethical citizens' through discursive, non-coercive projects of 'making normal'" (Glasbeek, 2006, p.143). What is considered normal and abnormal sexual behaviour, what females and males should think of and do with their bodies, and the context in which youth may consider engaging

in sexual activity are defined by the discourses presented at schools – which are thought to be neutral and whose foremost concern is said to be the students' health and well-being.

The discourses also reproduce the idea that the main purpose of sexed bodies is to ensure the continuation of the species. Biopower, “the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power” (Foucault, 2007, p.16) makes its appearance through these discourses. Bodies that do not intend to bring a new being into existence or might produce unhealthy, premature citizens and might be unable to provide a stable environment for the child, are dissuaded from engaging in sexual activity. The students' reproductive capacities and sexual health are regulated in an effort to control life and create a “productive body and a subjected body” (Foucault, 1978, p. 26) that recognizes itself as a vehicle of life whose health and well-being need to be protected.

The possibilities and restrictions that students are presented with in terms of sexuality are also justified through disciplines such as health sciences, statistics and law in order to legitimize and normalize a purely moral, cultural discourse. In this manner, the preference that students remain abstinent or reserve sex for committed and loving relationships is justified by stating that having less sexual partners decreases the risk of contracting an STI or that teenage pregnancy increases the probability of abandoning school. Similarly, discourses of what is legal and safe are utilized to promote a morality that condemns the production and distribution of sexualized images. Since the pedagogic authority of the transmitter “conditions the reception of the information and, even more, the accomplishment of the transformative action capable of transforming that information into a mental formation (training)” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.19), these cultural arbitraries are likely to shape students' perceptions, appreciations and behaviour.

Which, then, are the messages deployed in sex education about teenagers' sexuality? Even though the teaching material available to PHE instructors presents sexuality as a site of danger and the sexed body as purely reproductive, further research is needed to understand what sex education looks like in practice. Future research could examine if these discourses are deployed or refashioned by the sex education teachers, and whether the teachers instruct on the positive aspects of sexuality that are missing in

the resources. While the material allows us to understand which discourses are presented as appropriate by the educational authorities, in the end, what matters is what happens in the classroom.

Chapter 6.

Conclusions

This study aimed to identify the values and meanings deployed in the teaching material recommended to school-based sex educators in British Columbia considering the recent changes to the curriculum, the criticism towards its content and the insights on sex education provided by previous research. Moreover, I wanted to examine the social relations of power producing the discourse about sexuality presented in that material. Through a detailed examination of the documents, I was able to identify major themes in the teaching resources and how they were covered. In general, the results from this study align with the findings from previous research but some topics that were not explored in depth in the literature reviewed were found to be the focus of several educational resources. More research is needed to understand the production of discourses around sexuality in SBSE, the way in which they are deployed by teachers in their everyday practice and their effects on school-aged children and youth.

After analyzing the material – and as claimed by previous research –, I can argue that sex education acts as a mechanism of moral regulation, a "project of normalizing, rendering natural, taken for granted, in a word 'obvious' what are in fact ontological and epistemological premises of a particular and historical form of social order" (Corrigan & Sayer, 1985, p.4). In the Physical and Health Education material, heterosexuality, gender stereotypes and roles, and abstinence are portrayed as what is expected from a teenager, what is normal and natural. On the other hand, masturbation, abortion and homosexuality continue to be taboos in school-based sex education. These topics, together with gender non-conformity and sexual activity for pleasure, without reproductive reasons, love or commitment, are presented as abnormal, so "rare" they do not deserve extensive coverage.

Although health promotion is said to be the number one priority of sex education programs, morality guides what appears in the resources and how the topics are approached. Teenagers who become pregnant are almost obliged to take care of a new human being since abortion is not presented as an option in most of the resources and is poorly covered by those that mention it. In addition, discussions of safer sex focus on

protection during penile-vaginal intercourse and not on safer oral or anal sex, although the latter is presented as the sexual activity that carries a greater risk of STI contraction. Overall, sexuality and sexual activity continue to be portrayed as full of hazards for adolescents, but students do not always learn how to avoid these dangers. For example, instead of encouraging the use of dental dams, promoting human papillomavirus vaccines and PrEP and PEP treatments for individuals who are at high risk of contracting HIV, discussions of sexually transmitted infections focus on their symptoms, possible long-term consequences, condom usage – but not comfortable and pleasurable use achieved by using lube or finding the right size – and abstinence. Similarly, pregnancy is introduced as a life event that threatens one's future, and although contraceptives are discussed exhaustively, students are not always told where to get them. Discourses of sexual danger are normalized and justified through the health sciences, and only a portion of the medical knowledge on sexual health is transmitted to students: the information that may scare and not empower them.

The pedagogic action expected to occur inside B.C. schools reproduces a cultural arbitrary that favours heterosexual, cisgender and abstinent teenagers. After long processes of inculcation and due to the schools' pedagogic authority, the students are likely to internalize these definitions of normality and abnormality, producing a habitus that conforms to these meanings and conditions their perceptions, thoughts and actions. In this way, students are not only able to regulate their behaviour but also equipped to supervise others' conduct. As a reward, pupils that adhere to the norm are represented in the material, while not docile bodies are punished through invisibility and lack of information to maintain their sexual health. Children's and teenagers' bodies and reproductive capabilities are disciplined, and the heterosexual, cisgender, abstinent student is constructed.

In addition, this research confirms that female sexuality is more closely regulated than male sexuality. For instance, women are not informed that their clitoris is as sensitive to touch as the penis and some resources do not even acknowledge the existence of the clitoris. Students are not presented with as many and as specific illustrations of vulvas compared to those of scrotums and penises, and masturbation is presented as an activity for men. Moreover, teenage girls are instructed to cover their bodies and stay away from tight, "skimpy" clothes to avoid unwanted attention. Young

women are expected to be non-desiring subjects that recognize themselves as objects of desire, as Fine (1988) and Fine and McClelland (2006) have previously affirmed.

While the results of this investigation largely support the critiques made by organizations that advocate for better sexual health in B.C. and the findings from previous research, they also contribute to the production of new knowledge around SBSE and raise further questions. The study identified topics that were not mentioned or explored in depth in the literature reviewed: discussions of consent, sexual assault and bullying on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation are the focus of some educational resources. Besides, part of the material intends to normalize STIs and present them as similar to other infections, moving away from the fear-based approach to sexually transmitted infections. These discourses are influenced by feminist views, the LGBTQ2S+ community and supporters, and the B.C. organizations that advocate for better, sex-positive and more inclusive sex education. In fact, lesson plans and graphics developed by organizations such as YouthCO, the ARC Foundation and the Trans Student Educational Resources have made their way to the recommended resources. Even when there is a considerable distance to go in terms of addressing gender identity and sexual orientation and displaying a positive view of sexuality, these instructional materials create new possibilities of being for the students and expand definitions of what is normal in regard to sexuality.

Moreover, while discussions of consent are still generated by a protective discourse that views teenage sexuality as risky, a number of resources appear to recognize students as sexual and agentic. This conceptualization of children and teenagers departs from the assumptions that adolescents are hypersexual or too innocent to be instructed about sex, as scholars have previously observed (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fields et. al, 2015; Friehe & Smith, 2018; Pascoe, 2005). Although consent is not explained in all its complexity, students are empowered to make sexual decisions when they are informed of their right to accept or refuse sexual activity and allowed to decide how, when and by whom they want to be touched.

Having summarized the main findings of the study and how they align and diverge from previous research, it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of this research. Although my first intention was to conduct ethnographic research in secondary schools in the Lower Mainland, the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to gain

access to the classrooms, observe the lessons, speak to the teachers and study the students' reactions to the educational materials. When I expressed my interest in conducting research at secondary schools, these were gradually transitioning to in-person classes again and one more person in the classroom was considered to pose an unnecessary risk. In a period in which human contact was limited, I decided to modify my methods and conduct a documentary analysis of the sex education portion of the Physical and Health Education material. This change in methods meant I could analyze what sex education "ought to be" according to the recommended material, document the different themes covered and the contrasting ways in which each topic was explored; but I could not examine sex education in practice, confirm which themes were presented during class, how much time was dedicated to each of them and what was communicated both verbally and non-verbally by the teachers. Thus, the findings from this study are not necessarily representative of what sex education looks like in practice. Moreover, teachers may have access to more educational material than what is accessible to the public. Different school districts and schools may grant their instructors access to databases with evaluated resources, teachers might look for information to prepare their classes on websites not recommended by the province or develop their own lesson plans and share them with the rest of the teachers at their school.

Hence, further research is needed to understand whether each of the discourses identified through this research permeates teachers' practices and to what extent. Do educators embrace feminist, inclusive, sex-positive discourses? Do they prefer fear-based approaches to the instruction of sex education, binary understandings of gender and heteronormative discourses? Since instructors in British Columbia are authorized to deliver the curriculum in whatever manner they see fit, the discourses presented by the teachers will most likely not be homogenous, but an analysis of the different discourses could provide valuable insights on the way sex education is delivered. In the future, researchers in British Columbia could conduct ethnographic research at the schools to observe sex education classes and answer these questions. Interviews with teachers, students who are currently taking PHE classes or students who have recently graduated from secondary school may also provide an answer to those queries.

It would not only be interesting to understand the messages deployed by teachers during the sex education lessons but also the way in which the pupils respond to them. Even when previous research has shown that students' "sexual habitus" are

influenced by a group of human (i.e., peers, girls, teachers) and non-human (i.e., condoms, alcohol, media) relationships that comprise their sexuality assemblage, education is one of the elements that constitute this assemblage (Aldred & Fox, 2015; Fox & Bale, 2018). Therefore, we could ask ourselves: how do the students integrate, reject and refashion these discourses in the construction of their habitus? Do they feel empowered by discussions of consent and body boundaries? Do mentions of transgender identities contribute to normalizing gender diversity in the perceptions of students or does the scarcity of these mentions help construct them as abnormal? It is worth exploring whether "pupils [are] actively us[ing] aspects of school and the school curriculum to construct elements of their identity" (Measor et al., 2000, p.64).

School-based sex education in Canada – and especially in British Columbia – has been underexplored from anthropological and sociological perspectives, and abundant research is necessary to understand its complexity. This project contributes to the Canadian scholarship on school-based sex education by bringing to light the discourses presented in the sex education material and the power relations that help produce these discourses. As well, the study raises additional questions and suggests new courses of research. I expect that an understanding of the dominant messages deployed in the sex education material provides a foundation for future research and encourages scholars in the Social Sciences to examine SBSE from distinct standpoints and methodologies.

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