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Youth Understandings, Perceptions, Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Educational Reform
by
Lindsay Maxwell

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Education at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
2011
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Youth Understandings, Perceptions, Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Educational Reform

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

Youth are traditionally excluded from meaningful participation as decision-makers in educational reform. Over the popular social networking website Facebook, youth demonstrate sustained awareness, engagement and civic action on educational issues despite their formal exclusion. By positioning Alberta's Bill 44 as a case study, this research categorizes youth understandings of a piece of educational reform. It further draws attention to youth understandings of their own political efficacy in educational reform. Informed by critical theory, this study complexifies the exclusion of youth from positions of power in formal educational reform.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated in loving memory to Pam N. Nason, teacher, mentor, and friend.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with sincere gratitude that I begin by thanking my advisors, Dr. Christopher J. Greig and Dr. Lara Doan for their continual support, advice, and patience as they mentored me through researching and writing my first original study. I would also like to thank Dr. Gerald Cradock for agreeing to be my external reviewer. Within the Faculty of Education, I would like to thank Dr. Dragana Martinovic for lending me her advice and expertise, Dr. Pat Rogers for providing phenomenal administrative support, and Gayle Tait and Margaret Mayer-McKnight for their constant encouragement. Outside of the University of Windsor, I am grateful to Dr. Alan Sears, Dr. Pam Whitty, and Pam N. Nason, for their feedback, ongoing conversations and professional example, which helped shape this research.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Context and Statement of the Problem

Educational reform is a fluid, perpetual and ultimately political process, which is influenced by diverse individuals, organizations and communities. Although democracy, which I understand to mean shared decision-making, is widely recognized as being the political system that gives most, if not all, of its citizens' political agency, no democracy is politically classless (Noddings, 2003). Citizens wield varying degrees of power in public decision-making based on any number of individual or social circumstances, including the intersections of their racial, sexual, gendered, abled, aged, and socioeconomic identities. This variation of power can be seen in the politics of educational reform, where interested and affected individuals and groups have unequal voices in shaping curriculum, education and school policy. Only those adult citizens who are seen as legitimate 'stakeholders' may directly participate democratically in educational reform, for instance, when school board members or unionized teachers vote on a given issue. The majority of citizens, however, are unable to participate, democratically or otherwise, in formal educational decision-making.

Students are arguably participants in education, yet they are among the most disenfranchised in educational reform. Youth¹ are the only persons who are legally required to attend schools (Alderson, 2003), yet their opinions are rarely solicited to

¹ Borrowing from the contemporary legal tradition, I will be referring to people under the age of 18 as youth. Where specific ages are readily apparent, I will refer to people under the age of 12 as children, and people between the ages of 13-18 as adolescents. When citing other researchers, I will use the terms as they are given by the scholars to whom I referring (e.g. young people, youth, children, adolescents, teenagers, etc.)

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influence the reform and ostensible improvement of the very curriculum that they are expected to master, or the school environment they are obliged to inhabit (Cook-Sather, 2006; Ericson & Ellett, 2002; Levin, 2000; Zion, 2007). The exclusion of student participation in educational reform is particularly problematic given the aims of Canadian citizenship education, which often extol ‘democratic values’ for students (Bickmore, 2005; Osborne, 2000; Westheimer, 2008). While fostering appreciation for democracy is laudable, there appears to be a gap between the goal of teaching democratic citizenship and providing meaningful opportunities for students to perform democracy within their schools. This gap suggests an educational opportunity missed for authentic and meaningful democratic praxis within public schooling.

Besides the educational benefits of democratizing the schooled experiences of youth, there is legal support for student participation in educational reform. Article 12 of the legally binding² United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), to which Canada is a signatory, outlines children’s right to speak and be heard on all matters pertaining to them, and for their views to be given “due weight in accordance with [their] age and maturity”. While the precise weight of students’ views as compared to those of other adult decision-makers is beyond the scope of this research, their exclusion contradicts both the democratic values of their curricula and their legal rights as protected under an international charter.

² By ratifying the UNCRC, Canada has assumed a legal obligation to write its’ laws in accordance with the principles of the UNCRC. As described by the Canadian Children’s Rights Council, “the governments that have ratified it [the UNCRC] have legally agreed to fulfill its provisions... When a country ratifies the Convention, it assumes a legal obligation to implement the rights recognized in the treaty” (The Canadian Children’s Rights Council, n. d.).

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Although youth are traditionally excluded from educational reform, their legal obligation to attend schools, and the expectation that they learn and be evaluated on their learning of a prescribed set of subjects, combined with the goals of citizenship education in particular, and their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (1989) indicate educational, legal and moral justifications for their inclusion. When they are invited to participate in decision-making, however, youth are typically afforded only tokenistic gestures of participation by those with decision-making power (Lodge, 2005; Speak Out, 2011). More often than not, they are entirely absent from the process.

Although it was written more than twenty years ago, Fullan's (1991) comment that, "We hardly know anything about what students think of educational change, because no one ever asks them" (p. 182) is of continuing relevance.

This research aims to disrupt the norms of current educational politics by studying a piece of educational reform through the voices of the students. Rather than the traditional methods of studying educational reform, which rely on adult informants or quantitative test scores, this study focuses on students as active agents, as opposed to passive subjects/objects. Conversely, this research studies a large sample of students' understandings of Bill 44 that they were excluded from drafting by approaching the participation of youth as legitimate and valuable to public decision-making. The intent is to complexify the policies and practices of restricting educational decision-making to adults only.

Section 11.1 of Alberta's contentious Bill 44 (colloquially referred to as 'Bill 44') was selected as the piece of educational reform to be studied because it deliberately controlled public school students' learning about particular subjects without ever asking students whether they were (un)satisfied with the current teaching of these topics, or

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whether they would like an adjustment made to the curriculum or classroom time that pertained to these subjects. Rather than being an anomaly, this adult control over education is typical in Canadian public school governance. Such an approach is the essence of viewing students as the objects, rather than subjects of educational reform (Levin, 2000). Bill 44 is also topical, covered a wide range of issues, and received substantial media coverage from Canada's two national newspapers (*The Globe & Mail*, *The National Post*), two national broadcasting networks (The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Canadian Television Network) as well as numerous Alberta news sources. As a major piece of educational reform, it was unusual that Bill 44 was embedded in provincial human rights legislation, rather than enacted as a stand-alone education bill. Finally, Bill 44 was chosen because it provoked strong reactions from youth, which in turn provided rich youth-produced data sources to draw from.

Passed in June 2009 and enacted in September 2010, Bill 44 requires that parents and guardians be notified of instructional activities or materials that deal "... explicitly with religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation" (Hansard, 2009) and under human rights law, allows for parents and guardians to opt their children out of educational programming (Hansard, 2009). It should be noted that students cannot formally opt themselves in or out of such instruction without punishment, and that this provincial human right pertains only to the legal parents or guardians of youth. Teachers who fail to provide appropriate notice to parents or guardians can be brought before the Alberta Human Rights Commission for violation of section 11.1 of Bill 44 (Hansard, 2009).

A survey of Hansard transcripts indicated that students were not involved as co-authors or decision-makers in creating, revising, passing, or enacting of this bill. Excluded from formal political processes and spaces, Alberta public school students took

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to social media such as Facebook by the hundreds to voice their views on Bill 44 and to organize several on- and offline civic responses. These cyber initiatives indicate that contrary to the rhetoric of some adults about the civic apathy and disengagement of Generation X/Y (Butler, 2010; McLean & Cook, 2010; Southey, 2010), youth do take an active and participatory interest in educational reform, albeit outside of the traditional political structures that formally exclude them.

Bill 44: Background. Ironically, Bill 44 was not originally intended to be an educational bill. It was introduced by Alberta's Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, the Honourable Lindsay Blackett on 29 April 2009, to the second session of the 27th Legislature to a House comprised of 71 Progressive Conservatives (PC), 9 Liberals, 2 New Democrats (NDP), and 1 independent. The title of Bill 44 was "Human Rights, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism Amendment Act 2009."

As described in its' first reading by Mr. Blackett, the purpose of the bill was to update Alberta's Human Rights Code by adding "sexual orientation" to the protected classes of people. Alberta was the last province in Canada to update its Human Rights Code to include sexual orientation, a point that was referred to numerous times in the legislature debates. The Supreme Court case *Vriend v. Alberta* (1998) provided the legal impetus for the addition of sexual orientation as protected from discrimination in provincial human rights codes (in that the Supreme Court ordered the province of Alberta to include protection for sexual minorities in its' provincial human rights code), and thus can be seen as the motivation for Bill 44. Included in Bill 44 was also a move to strike out the word "citizenship" in the Commission's name, as, according to Mr. Blackett, citizenship is within the purview of federal and not provincial jurisdiction. The Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, and

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unnamed ‘faith leaders’ were listed as his partners and co-authors in drafting the bill over the 12 months prior to its first reading in the legislature (Hansard, 2009, p. 884). Mr. Blackett mentioned the contentious section 11.1 (which is colloquially referred to as ‘Bill 44’) just once in the first reading, saying only “the rights of parents on the education of their child would also be confirmed” (Hansard, 2009, p. 884). The government-created organization Speak Out: Alberta Youth Engagement Initiative was not cited as a partner in creating the bill, nor was it mentioned in any of the subsequent debates.

Although Bill 44 was not intended to be primarily an education bill, subsequent legislative debates focused almost exclusively on section 11.1, which applies only to publicly funded schools, and not to private, charter, or home schooling. Section 11.1 stated that school boards must provide notice to parents or guardians when subject matter that “... deals primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality, or sexual orientation” (Hansard, 2009) is taught. Parents and guardians, upon receiving said notice would have the option to withdraw their child from educational programming that covered these three subjects. Teachers accused of not providing adequate advance notice to parents could then be summoned to a provincial human rights tribunal for human rights violations. After the second reading, the government passed Amendment A1, which stated that Bill 44 would not apply to “incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes, human sexuality or sexual orientation” (Hansard, 2009, p. 967).

Throughout legislative debates, the government maintained that section 11.1 was merely a consolidation of pre-existing rights into human rights law. For instance, under the provincial School Act, parents and guardians have the right to withdraw their children from religious or patriotic instruction. School boards also have individual policies that allow parents and guardians to opt their children out of the human sexuality components

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of the health curriculum, known as Career and Life Management (CALM). The Honourable Rob Anderson (PC, Airdrie-Chestermere) described the addition of these existing policies to human rights legislation as a symbolic way of entrenching parental rights as described in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR). Section 26 (3) of UNDHR states: “parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children” (UNDHR, 1948).

The Liberal Party, led by the Honourable Dr. David Swann, and the NDP, led by the Honourable Brian Mason, initiated House Opposition to the bill. The Official Opposition and Third Party maintained that Bill 44 was not merely a consolidation of pre-existing laws. They argued that while parents and guardians did have the right to opt their children out of religious or patriotic instruction under the School Act, schools had never before been required to send notices home when religion was primarily or explicitly the subject of instruction. Opponents also argued that sexual orientation appeared in the curriculum in many places, not just the health units in grades 4-9, and that schools had never been required to notify home, nor did parents and guardians have the option to remove their children from these classes. The Opposition maintained that besides the administrative burden of the excessive paperwork needed to implement Bill 44, section 11.1 would cast a “chill” over classrooms, leading teachers to censor the curriculum. This, they claimed, would have a deleterious effect on critical thinking opportunities.

The Liberals and the NDP noted the apparent hypocrisy of including sexual orientation within the provincial Human Rights Code, while simultaneously allowing parents to opt their children out of instruction that teaches tolerance and acceptance based on sexual orientation. They stipulated that section 11.1 did not arise from grassroots networks of parents who were unhappy with the current system, but rather that it was the

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result of appeasing the right wing of the conservative caucus that opposed the addition of sexual orientation within the Human Rights Code. Opponents criticized the scheduling of the debates. Both the second and third readings of Bill 44 began after 10:00pm, and continued until 3:13am and 3:40am, respectively. This, they claimed, ensured that the gallery would be empty during the debates (Hansard, 2009).

The Alberta Liberal and NDP were not the only opponents of Bill 44. The Alberta Teachers Association (2009) released numerous statements against Bill 44, stating that it was contrary to established policy relating to the teaching of controversial issues” (Theobald, 2009) and that it “defeat[ed] the purpose of education” (Svidal, 2009). Media releases from the Alberta School Boards Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents and the Alberta School Councils’ Association indicate that these professional organizations were also against the bill.

The Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership, which had been described by MLA Blackett as a partner in creating the bill, published an open letter in the Calgary Herald titled “Alberta’s Bill 44 a Disaster” (Keeping, 2009). The Foundation also released several videos on its website and on youtube.com titled “Bill 44, free speech and the chill on the Alberta curriculum”, “Bill 44 and the child's right to an education” and “Students Against Bill 44” (Keeping, McKay-Panos, Simons, Creelman, K., Creelman, A., Creelman, A. & Creelman, S., 2009). The last video is of particular importance, as it featured the three secondary school students who founded the Facebook group “Students Against Bill 44”.

This Facebook group was mentioned just once in the House debates, and was one of the two times that student views were represented in the legislature. On 1 June 2009, the Honourable Ms. Laurie Blakeman (AL- Edmonton-Centre) alluded to this group, and

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tabled 84 letters from junior high school students opposing Bill 44. On 3 June 2009, the Honourable Fred Lindsay (PC – Stony Creek) tabled an email from one grade 10 student who supported Bill 44 (Hansard, 2009). These were the only instances of students' views being represented in the formal political process of this piece of educational reform.

Speak Out: Alberta Youth Engagement Initiative was comparatively silent about Bill 44. Created, funded and maintained by the Alberta government, the group's mandate, as described on their website read "Speak Out began as a way for youth to have a voice - a voice that can produce change. Through this initiative, we can work together to improve learning. Decision-makers need to know what it's like to be a student in Alberta today" (Speak Out, 2010). Ostensibly created as a liaison between students and the minister of education to dialogue about educational policy, this group was absent from the legislature debates regarding Bill 44. None of the daily Speak Out blogs or forums mentioned the bill, and the group did not take an official position on Bill 44. Just one discussion thread, consisting of sixteen posts by nine users discussed the bill. None of the MLA's mentioned the Speak Out website during legislature debates on Bill 44.

This silence contrasts with the Facebook group described in the legislative debates. As of 5 June 2010, there were 11, 257 members of the "Students AGAINST Bill 44" Facebook group, and 92 members of the "Students FOR Bill 44" group. Although some members of each of these groups could be adults, self-identified students founded each group, and many of the Facebook group members identify themselves by their ages and public schools. The founders of the "Students AGAINST Bill 44" group self-identified as being in grades 7, 10, and 11, and appeared in a Youtube video produced by the Sheldon Chumir Foundation to protest the bill (Keeping, et al., 2009).

The Present Study

There is an absence of youth participation in the politics of educational reform, which is both educationally and legally problematic. Their views are unsolicited and often ignored by those in positions of power. It is not thus unsurprising that students are turning to informal online spaces to engage in thoughtful discussions, and to organize both online and offline political action on educational reform. As an exploratory inquiry that could add to arguments for the full inclusion of youth in educational reform, this study will empirically describe students' understanding of a particular piece of educational reform, Alberta's Bill 44. Based on the data, the political, educational, legal and moral implications of potential youth inclusion as active participants in educational reform will be addressed.

Research Questions

The central question that will be addressed in the study is as follows;

How do self-identified youth Facebook users understand Bill 44?

Guiding Questions

There are two guiding questions that will shape the study. These are:

1. What sources, values and beliefs informed youth understandings of the development, adoption, and implementation of Bill 44?
2. What are youth perspectives of their own agency in shaping educational reform in general, and Bill 44 specifically?

Theoretical Perspective. This research will draw implications from the perspectives of a particular marginalized group, youth, which naturally lends itself to critical theory.

Critical theory has been described as 'critical' largely because it makes social inequality apparent, identifies causes for social inequality, and encourages action for the oppressed

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(Rush, 2004). Similar to interpretivism, critical theory holds that knowledge is socially constructed and contextual, but differs by evaluating it based on its' potential for emancipation (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). The purpose of critical theory is to change the social context (Lichtman, 2006). It calls for the "radical restructuring [of] society toward the ends of reclaiming historic cultural legacies, social justice, the redistribution of power and the achievement of truly democratic societies" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p. 1056, in Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 437). Critical theory was used as the basis from which the research questions were formed, and its' emancipatory nature informs much of the data collection and analysis.

Central to critical theory are the relationships between power and privilege. Harvey (1999) describes one manifestation of this relationship as social privilege, which involves power that is generally accepted (rather than questioned or condemned) combined with the 'right' kind of social status. Experiences common to those lacking social privilege include having "conversations of importance are broken off or not listened to, explanations are interrupted, valuable contributions are not registered, protests are walked away from or not responded to, pertinent information is not received, and the person is not accurately know by those who blithely claim to know..." (p. 44). In their relationships with adults, particularly in the context of educational reform, youth, by virtue of being youth, are socially underprivileged. During the debates around Bill 44, their valuable insights were not sought out, and their protests are not heard in any meaningful way. This collective social underprivilege necessarily leads to what Harvey (1999) calls a 'distorted public self' when youth are either in the company of adults, or agentic subjects in public discussion and decision-making.

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A distorted public self is both community and context specific. Some youth experience social privilege when they are with their peers in a particular social setting, but then lose this privilege when they are in the company of adults. For instance, the student who posts an informed and articulate message about Bill 44 on a Facebook page (which was created by and for youth) may be seen as an intelligent leader by her peers. This same youth may have difficulty communicating the same message to adults in positions of power in her school, as she likely lacks the necessary social privilege or political rights to communicate freely with adults. Rather than being seen as an intelligent leader, she may be cast as a troublemaker, leading to her distorted public self when in the company of adults. In applying the feminist methodological act of ‘excavation’ (DeVault, 1999) to research with youth, the goal is to uncover aspects of youth’s lives that have been silenced, ignored and misrepresented due to their social underprivilege. This use of feminist theory aims to remove the distorted public self of youth.

Although youth are collectively socially underprivileged in their interactions with adults, hierarchies of social privilege exist within communities of youth. Both Queer and Feminist Theory recognize the intersectionality and multiple subjectivities that contribute to the fluidity and dynamism of all identities (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Mayo 2007). In the case of the hypothetical youth Facebook user from the previous paragraph, the intersections of her race, gender, social class, ability to communicate in the English language and perceived sexual orientation would all influence her degree of social privilege and power, and thus how much of an impact her commentary will have. The dynamics of intersectionality influence all the understandings of Bill 44, including those of students, adults, and my own as a researcher.

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Queer and Feminist theory will further complexify the interpretation of the data. Talburt and Rasmussen (2010) remark that Queer theory extends beyond sexuality as a subject to inform inquiries of many topics. Just as the term ‘Queer’ purposefully disrupts how identity is constructed (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004), the participants’ ages will be ‘queered’ to disrupt their identities as youth. To ‘queer’ a youth identity is to question, challenge and redefine what it means to be a youth, and to confront the systems of power, privilege and oppression that assign a particular meaning to this identity. The strategy of Queer theorists to “...surface the unmarked criterion that scorns some and honors others.” (Tierney, 1997, p. 35 in Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 441) will be used in analyzing why the remarks of youth, particularly when they are expressing the same opinions as those of adults, are scorned rather than honoured.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the relevant literature relating to Bill 44. The review is divided into two sections. The first section contextualizes the content of Bill 44, which includes a description of sexuality and religious education from a Canadian³ and – where possible- an Albertan perspective. It also highlights those sections of Alberta curriculum documents that pertain to sexuality and religious education. As Bill 44 changes the way that sexuality and religious education are taught in public schools, it is necessary to first outline how these subjects were prescribed to be taught immediately prior to Bill 44. While the curriculum documents themselves do not account for individual classroom dynamics and approaches, they nonetheless provide some context for how teaching and learning about sexuality and religious education might have occurred in the province of Alberta.

The second section contextualizes youth participation in educational decision-making by reviewing citizenship education, student voice as it connects to children's rights, and conceptions of childhood as a socially constructed- and often morally inferior- ideal. This section contextualizes why youth were not invited to participate in the legislative processes that led to Bill 44.

³ Education in Canada is largely within the constitutional purview of the provinces. Despite calls from various stakeholders for the formation of a federal ministry of education, no such ministry has been established and it is unlikely, given the nature of Canadian politics and constitutional arrangements, that a federal ministry of education will be established (Levin, 2005). The notable exception to provincial authority over education is the schooling provided to Aboriginal, Inuit & Metis children, which is under federal jurisdiction. While it is thus difficult to generalize about education in Canada, some commonalities do exist. Where possible, the province that a given study was conducted in is referenced.

Content of Bill 44

This section reviews scholarship related to the content of Bill 44, and how they are addressed in Alberta curriculum documents.

Sexuality Education in Canada. While human sexuality and sexual orientation as formal subjects are explicitly taught within a sexual health framework, many curricular subjects are saturated with content pertaining to sexuality. This section first outlines how human sexuality and sexual orientation are addressed within health outcomes, and then describes how they are included across the curriculum.

Although there is no national curriculum for sexual health education (or for any other subject), non-binding federal guidelines for sexual health education were published by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) in 2003. PHAC put forward the following two goals for sexual health education:

- i. to help people achieve positive outcomes (e.g., self-esteem, respect for self and others, non-exploitive sexual relations, rewarding human relationships, informed reproductive choices); and
- ii. to avoid negative outcomes (e.g., STI/HIV, sexual coercion, unintended pregnancy) (p. 8).

It should be noted that positive sexual outcomes are listed as a goal, and that this goal is listed before avoiding negative outcomes, as it will be demonstrated that sexual health education in policy and practice focuses exclusively on avoiding negative outcomes. One of the six principles of the guidelines is that sexual health should be accessible to “all individuals, regardless of background” (p. 18) and public schools are cited as one of the key organizations able to deliver accessible sexual health education. This principle is in opposition to sexual health education practices, as sexual health education is neither

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mandatory nor consistent across Canada. All ten provinces have parental opt-out clauses meaning that state-funded sexual health education is potentially inaccessible to some individuals based on their family backgrounds (Smylie, 2008).

School-based sexual health programs in Canada are often evaluated using a deficit model. For instance, while McKay, Fisher, Maticka-Tyndale and Barrett (2001) state that there is “no direct, causal relationship between sexual health education in the schools and macro level trends in teen pregnancy and STI rates” (p. 131), these are precisely the characteristics they measured to determine the effectiveness of a given program. McKay et al. (2001) describe effective sexual health education as delaying first experiences with intercourse and reducing both teen pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STI’s). Similarly, Smylie’s (2008) evaluation of student knowledge after a sexual health education program in Ontario tested only for knowledge related to preventing pregnancy and STI’s. Homosexuality was mentioned just once, in relation to HIV, and while there were frequent questions about condoms, questions about lesbian protection methods such as dental dams were absent. Only sex acts that include a male sex organ are evaluated. Neither evaluation tested for students’ understanding of the positive sexual health outcomes described in the Public Health Agency guidelines.

Non-heterosexual sexualities are either absent or Othered in Canadian sexual health education that is delivered through public schools (Connell, 2005; Eyre, 1997; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Snyder & Broadway, 2004; Temple 2005). While there is often resistance to infusing sexual education curriculum with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) content, LGBTQ and suspected LGBTQ students often become violently visible in their schools through verbal, social, and physically homophobic bullying (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh 2004; McGregor, 2008;

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Taylor, Peter, Schachter, Paquin, Beldom, Gross, & McMinn, 2008). When included in sexual health programs, non-heterosexual sexualities are usually pathologized and presented as deviant (Eyre, 1997; Temple, 2005). Heterosexual sexuality is neither pathologized nor presented as deviant (although some heterosexual acts are, the sexuality itself is not), and is often normalized to the exclusion of other valid and legitimate sexual expressions (Fine, 1988; Khayatt, 2006).

Female desire is conspicuously absent in Canadian sexual health education, particularly when compared to ubiquitous male desire. Connell's (2005) survey of Ontario school-based sexuality education describes a binary wherein (hetero)sexual experiences are pleasurable for males but dangerous for females. Females are positioned as the gatekeepers to normalized male heterosexual desires, never the initiators of a sexual experience, either alone or with a male or female partner. This is consistent with findings of a 'missing' discourse of female desire in sexual health education programs in the United States (Fine, 1988; Fine & McClelland, 2006).

Although addressed less explicitly, sex education is also taught outside the health curriculum. Nearly all subjects taught in schools reference human sexuality and sexual orientation in some way. These topics are present in Canadian textbooks on subjects such as Personal and Social Education; Moral Education; Family Economics; Human Biology; and Catholic Moral and Religious Education (Temple, 2005), as well as most approved books for English Literature (Lewison, Leland, Flint & Moller, 2002). It is difficult to speculate on whether or not individual teachers choose to address matters of human sexuality or sexual orientation when they are present in subjects outside of sexual health. Schneider and Diminto's (2008) survey of Ontario teachers indicated that educators were relatively uncomfortable raising LGBTQ issues across the curriculum, citing potential

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parental protests, harassment by students, and a lack of resources as their top three barriers. There is a gap in the research indicating whether or not teachers raise heterosexuality as a sexual orientation within the classroom.

In summary, explicit education pertaining to human sexuality and sexual orientation tends to fall under the purview of health classes in Canadian public schools. The literature reviewed does not indicate any emphasis on Public Health Canada's promotion of positive sexuality. Most sexual health programs adopt a deficit-based, stringently heteronormative approach. There is an opt-out for parents to exercise on behalf of their children, but neither an opt-out or an opt-in for children to exercise themselves. There was no literature to suggest that children and young people are including in the design or implementation of these programs.

Religious Education in Canada. Religious education in Canada is less consistent than sex education, perhaps because of its constitutional positioning. For historical reasons, publicly funded Roman Catholic school boards (sometimes called Separate schools) are constitutionally entrenched in Alberta, Ontario, some cities in Saskatchewan, and in the Northwest Territories (Hiemstra & Brink, 2006). There are also private and charter religious schools across Canada, some of which receive varying amounts of public funding (Sweet, 1997). The scope of this paper, however, does not include the teaching *of* religion, as is the mandate of religious schools, but, instead summarizes teaching *about* religion, which is commonly referred to as religious literacy. Given how Bill 44 requires parental consent to teach any subject "...that deals explicitly with religion..." (Hansard, 2009), in both publicly funded secular schools and publicly funded Roman Catholic schools, it is reasonable to assume that lessons pertaining to religious literacy are included within the scope of the Bill.

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The distinction between the teaching of and teaching about religion was summarized in the following guidelines published by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1994). The guidelines make clear that while teaching *about* religion is to be included in Ontario public schools, the teaching of religion should be excluded. The guidelines make the distinction in the following way:

- The school may sponsor the study of religion but not the practice of religion.
- The school may expose students to all religious views, but not impose a particular one.
- The school's approach to religion is one of instruction, not of indoctrination.
- The function of the school is to provide education about all religions, not convert to any one religion.
- The school's approach is academic, not devotional.
- The school should study what all people believe, but shouldn't teach what to believe.
- The school should strive for student awareness of all religions, but not press for acceptance of any one religion.
- The school should seek to inform the student about various beliefs, but not seek to conform him or her to any one belief (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1994, in Sweet, 1997, p. 219).

Although these guidelines were developed and ostensibly implemented in the province of Ontario, not Alberta, they nonetheless provide a sound description of religious literacy. Another definition describes religious literacy as “the ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in... public life” (Prothero, quoted in Gallagher, 2007, p. 13). Ideally, a

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robust religious literacy would go beyond the religious to teach about secular, or non-religious worldviews as well. Atheism, agnosticism, deism, theism, existentialism and humanism are all systems of belief that merit careful examination in public schools alongside their religious counterparts (Carr, 2007; Noddings, 1993; Noddings, 2008; Sweet, 1997; Wright, 2007). While perhaps more aptly described as ‘existential literacy’, so as to encompass faith-based and secular philosophies, for the purpose of this study, I will rely on the language used in religious literacy literature, and will thus be referring to ‘religious literacy’ as teaching and learning about both religious and non-religious worldviews and beliefs.

While there have been few studies that have evaluated Canadian students’ religious literacy, one that was recently conducted reported relative illiteracy. In a survey of 44 New Brunswick seventh graders, students could not identify pictures of hijab, turbans or yarmulke as religious head coverings, mistaking them instead for various types of hats (Peck, Sears & Donaldson, 2008). The students were largely unaware that youth wear these types of head coverings for religious purposes. Prothero’s (2007a, 2007b) surveys of American college students yielded similar results, demonstrating that students lacked basic knowledge of both their own religious traditions, as well as those of others. For example, only 10 percent of the students could name all five major world religions, while 15 percent could not name any. Prothero (2007b) further reported a Hindu student who could not name a single Hindu scripture, and groups of Catholic students who had not heard of the Golden Rule, as commonplace occurrences in his introductory religion course.

Religion as an explicit subject has also been found to be absent in Canadian textbooks. In his survey of public school textbooks in British Columbia, Van Brummelen

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(1994) found a marked absence of religious knowledge. There were no religious references in any subject of elementary school texts, and several high school history texts traced ancient, medieval, and 18th century history without a single mention of Christianity. Far from being value-neutral, the majority of word problems in math textbooks from grades 3 to 7 dealt with purchasing material goods, which seemed to promote individualistic capitalism at the expense of acknowledging other worldviews. With its' structural plurality, faith education (including confessional and religious literacy approaches) in Alberta can be taught in one of eight ways. Secular, Roman Catholic, Hutterite, Aboriginal, charter, Francophone, separate faith-based and home schooling are all systems of schooling that offer some religious education within the province of Alberta (Hiemstra & Brink, 2006).

In her cross-country study of religious literacy in Canadian schools, Lois Sweet (1997) discovered that young people were genuinely interested learning about diverse religious beliefs. Yet far from being integrated as a core curriculum course, religious literacy in Canadian public schools appeared to be a patchwork approach at best (Sweet, 1997). Consistent with the reasons for Ontario teachers not wanting to raise LGBTQ issues in the classroom (Schneider & Diminto, 2008), Sweet found that fear kept most principals and teachers from teaching religious literacy. According to Sweet, there were many barriers to infusing curriculum with appropriate references to religious literacy, including fear of indoctrinating, offending, threats of lawsuits, conflict, curriculum and administrative hassles, and fear of not knowing enough about the subject. Similar to sexuality education, religious literacy in Canadian public schools is neither compulsory nor consistent. Neither subject is wholly integrated into provincial curricula and there appears to be some measure of self-censoring on these subjects (Schneider & Diminto,

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2008; Sweet, 1997). Further research in this area is needed, as there appears to be a gap in the literature pertaining to evaluations of Canadian students' levels of religious literacy.

Review of Alberta Curriculum Documents. Bill 44 applies only to the formal curriculum of Alberta public schools, not to the unplanned 'teachable moments' that occur in schools (Hansard, 2009). Despite this explicit application of the bill, Alberta curriculum documents were not cited nor tabled in any of the legislative debates pertaining to Bill 44 (Hansard, 2009). On 1 June, 2009, the Honourable Rob Anderson (PC, Airdrie-Chestermere) described religion and sexuality as "two very narrow subjects" (Hansard, 2009, p. 1467), and implied that they were only discussed in the Career and Life Management (CALM) curriculum, which parents could already opt their children out of under the Safe Schools Act (Hansard, 2009).

A brief overview of Alberta curriculum documents has revealed otherwise. In surveying the curriculum documents for two subjects (social studies and English), Alberta's formal curriculum was found to be rife with outcomes that "primarily and explicitly deal with religion, human sexuality and sexual orientation" (Hansard, 2009). The following sample outcomes from the social studies curriculum would be distorted to the point of being inaccurate if they did not address religion and sexuality in a meaningful and explicit way:

Grade	Outcome
2	2.1.3 investigate the cultural and linguistic characteristics of an Inuit, an Acadian and a prairie community in Canada by exploring and reflecting upon the following questions for inquiry: What are the cultural characteristics of the communities (e.g., special symbols, landmarks languages spoken, shared stories or traditions, monuments, schools, churches)? (30)
3	3.1.1 appreciate similarities and differences among people and communities (37)

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	<p>3.1.2 examine the social, cultural and linguistic characteristics that affect quality of life in communities in other parts of the world by exploring and reflecting upon the following questions for inquiry: How is cultural diversity expressed within each community? (37)</p>
5	<p>5.2.1 appreciate the complexity of identity in the Canadian context (16)</p>
8	<p>8.2.2 demonstrate a willingness to consider differing beliefs, values and worldviews (16)</p> <p>8.2.1 appreciate how Renaissance Europe formed the basis for the worldview of the Western world (i.e., astronomy, mathematics, science, politics, religion, arts)</p> <p>8.3.1 appreciate how a society’s worldview influences the society’s choices, decisions and interactions with other societies</p>
9	<p>9.1.6 assess, critically, the impact of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms on the legislative process in Canada by exploring and reflecting upon the following questions and issues: In what ways has the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms affected conditions in the workplace (i.e., issues of gender, age, race, religion)? (PADM, I, C)</p>
10	<p>1.1 acknowledge and appreciate the existence of multiple perspectives in a globalizing world (20)</p> <p>1.4 identify the various ways that people in Canada express their identities (traditions, language, religion, spirituality, the arts, attire, relationship to land, role modelling)</p> <p>2.1 recognize and appreciate historical and contemporary consequences of European contact, historical globalization and imperialism on Aboriginal societies (21)</p>
12	<p>1.1 appreciate various perspectives regarding identity and ideology</p> <p>1.3 explore factors that may influence individual and collective beliefs and values (culture, language, media, relationship to land, environment, gender, religion, spirituality, ideology) (20)</p> <p>3.8 evaluate the extent to which governments should promote individual and collective rights (American Bill of Rights; Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms; First Nations, Métis and Inuit rights; language legislation; emergencies and security legislation) (23)</p>

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Table 2.1

While there were a number of subjects for discussion embedded in these outcomes, religion and sexuality were nonetheless parts of each one. In outcomes for grades 2, 8, 9, and 10, for example, religion is included within the laundry list of items to be addressed within a particular historical or political context. In “appreciat[ing] similarities and differences among people and communities”, it would be reasonable to expect that religious differences and sexual orientation would be some of the defining characteristics that third graders would compare and contrast. Finally, any education pertaining to human rights codes, as alluded to in grades 9 and 10, would have to include explicit reference to each of the protected classes of people, which include religion and - within Canada - sexual orientation. Contrary to the Honourable Fred Lindsay’s (PC – Stony Plain) insistence that the bill would not apply to the teaching of the Holocaust, it is doubtful that any historically accurate depiction of the Holocaust could avoid “primarily and explicitly” describing that it included the persecution and genocide of religious and sexual minorities.

Within the English curriculum, a brief survey of the approved reading list for grades 4-12 revealed many books that primarily and explicitly feature sexual orientation. As part of the review and selection process, books were approved based on their ability to “encourage students to develop a sensitivity to and an understanding of individual differences, such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability” (p. xiii). The teacher’s guide that accompanied the list of approved reading materials highlights the following books as dealing explicitly with sexuality:

- Kertesz, Imre. (1992). *Fateless*
- Stinson, Kathy. (1992). *Fish House Secrets*

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- MacIntyre, R. P. (1993). *Yuletide Blues*
- Huxley, Aldous. (1931). *Brave New World*
- Gantos, Jack. (2002). *Hole in My Life*
- Bock, Dennis. (2001). *The Ash Garden*
- Potok, Chaim. (1985). *Davita's Harp*
- Ostenso, Martha. (1925). *Wild Geese*
- Remarque, Erich Maria. (1929). *All Quiet on the Western Front*
- Fisher, Antwone Quenton. (2001). *Finding Fish: A Memoir*
- Montgomery, Sy. (1992). *Walking with the Great Apes: Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, Birute Galdikas*
- Findley, Timothy. (1977). *The Wars*

While not described as explicitly addressing human sexuality or sexual orientation in the teachers' guide, the following books prominently feature a heterosexual romance, and thus address human sexuality or sexual orientation, or both:

- Montgomery, Lucy M. (1908). *Anne of Green Gables*
- Austen, Jane. (1813). *Pride and Prejudice*
- Huxley, Aldous. (1931). *Brave New World*
- MacLachlan, Patricia. (1985). *Sarah, Plain and Tall*

The fact that the Teacher's guide did not acknowledge that these books have explicitly heterosexual references suggests a probability that teachers may raise heterosexuality as a sexual orientation within the classroom.

Religion was no less part of the books on the approved reading list. The following are described in the Teacher's guide as having explicitly religious themes:

- Levitin, Sonia. (1988). *The Return*

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- Vonnegut, Kurt. (1963). *Cat's Cradle*
- Davies, Robertson. (1970). *Fifth Business*
- Martel, Yann. (2001). *Life of Pi*
- Adams, Douglas. (1995). *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*
- Hillerman, Tony. (1988). *A Thief of Time*
- Potok, Chaim. (1985). *Davita's Harp*
- Greene, Graham. (1982). *Monsignor Quixote*
- Tyler, Anne. (1991). *Saint Maybe*
- Findley, Timothy. (1977). *The Wars*
- Sender, Ruth Minsky (1986). *The Cage*
- Lewis, C. S. (1950). *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

Contrary to the government's claims during the debates, subjects that deal with religion, human sexuality, and sexual orientation are present in the curriculum beyond their inclusion in the CALM health units from grades 4-9. Topics of religion and sexuality (particularly Christianity and heterosexuality) are indeed integrated in Alberta's curriculum documents, as evidenced by a review of English and social studies curriculum documents.

Context of Youth Participation

This section outlines some of the educational, legal, and moral scholarship contexts of youth participation and exclusion in educational reform. It begins by outlining how political participation, or citizenship are typically taught in Canadian schools, outlines the literature on student voice and children's political participation rights, and concludes with some of the historical and contemporary adult constructed narratives about youth that either encourage or inhibit youth political participation.

Democratic Citizenship Education in Canada. Unlike religious and sex education, fostering democratic citizenship has been publicly recognized as an important educational goal in Canada's public schools. Within the Canadian context, a rigorous citizenship education has been framed as preparation for active, responsible citizenship (Hebert & Sears, 2001) and has been linked to increasing youth participation in both formal elections and community projects (Osborne, 2000). Democratic citizenship as a subject in Canadian schools has found a traditional home in courses such as social studies, history and political science (Bickmore, 2005).

One of the evaluations of Canadian citizenship has been the National Citizenship Exam (Griffiths & Wright, 2007). Commissioned by the Dominion Institute, this 21-question test evaluated political, geographic, and historical knowledge of Canada, and is similar to the exam given to immigrants to become Canadian citizens. The authors concluded in both 1997 and 2007 that natural born Canadian citizens⁴, especially when compared to immigrants, had particularly low levels of civic literacy and recommended the establishment of a mandatory national citizenship exam as a requirement for high school graduation. The results of the National Citizenship Exam, as well as other Dominion Institute findings have created considerable public anxiety about the relative historical illiteracy of Canadian youth, which some have characterized as detrimental to democratic citizenship (Clark, 2009). Yet despite this civics 'crisis', funding at the university level in Canada for research in citizenship education has been lacking, particularly compared to other Western countries such as Great Britain (Hughes, Print & Sears, 2009). It has been noted that Canada lacks substantial evidence-based research that

⁴ The study methodology does not indicate whether Aboriginal Canadians, either on or off reserve, were included within the sample of 'natural born Canadians'. The test questions did not test for Aboriginal Traditional or contemporary civic knowledges.

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could better inform educational reform and policy (Hughes, Print & Sears, 2009). Lack of funding for Canadian citizenship education also exists at the classroom level. While curriculum documents often provide clear mission statements and outcomes, there are virtually no resources for teachers to attain these goals. In the case of social studies in Alberta, for example, teachers faced a lack of materials to help them effectively implement the new curriculum (Hughes, Print & Sears, 2009).

The term ‘democratic citizenship’ itself has carried multiple meanings in Canadian educational research. While previous generations may have been comfortable with a ‘good citizen’ meaning feeling a sense of duty to participate in voting, declining youth voter turnouts suggests that youth understand citizenship differently (Bennett, 2008). For instance, some researchers have posited that youth withdrawal from formal elections demonstrates a growing sophistication, and a deliberate choice to not engage in flawed forms of participation (Levine, 2006 in Bennett, 2008). While acknowledging that citizenship itself is a contested term, Westheimer (2008) has catalogued three distinct types of citizenship that is taught and promoted within the Canadian schooling context:

Type of Citizen	Personally Responsible Citizen	Participatory Citizen	Social-Justice Oriented Citizen
Description	<p>Acts responsibly in their community</p> <p>Works and pays taxes</p> <p>Picks up litter, recycles, and gives blood</p> <p>Helps those in need, lends a hand in times of crisis</p> <p>Obeys laws</p>	<p>Active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts</p> <p>Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or to clean up the environment</p>	<p>Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures</p> <p>Explores strategies for change that address root causes of problems</p> <p>Knows about social movements and how to affect systemic change</p>

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		<p>Knows how government agencies work</p> <p>Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks</p>	<p>Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice</p>
Sample Action	Contributes food to a food drive	Helps to organize a food drive	Explores why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes
Core Assumptions	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question and change established systems and structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice over time

Table 2.2

Which types of citizens have Canadian schools been fostering? Bickmore (2005) would argue that based on the curriculum documents of three provinces (Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia) Canada nurtures the personally responsible, and occasionally participatory citizen, but not the social-justice oriented citizen. Her survey of three provincial curricula across three subjects found that official curriculum documents emphasized conflict-avoidance at the expense of thoughtful examination of the root causes of systemic inequity. Social injustice in these documents was presented as either foreign or historical, or as residing within the unruly individuals who ‘cause’ trouble. Systemic inequity as part of contemporary Canada was implicitly denied. These curricula appear to be counter-intuitive, as debate and dissent are widely acknowledged to be at the heart of democratic citizenship (Bickmore, 2005; Ignatieff, 2000; Osborne, 2000).

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Although social studies curriculum documents are consistent within each provincial jurisdiction, the delivery of democratic citizenship education has been shown to vary according to students' socio-economic status. The finding that middle and upper class students are encouraged to ask questions and working class students are taught to answer them (Anyon, 1981) continues to hold true. Privileged students have more opportunities to be active and take charge in citizenship education whereas underprivileged students are expected to follow instructions (Osborne, 2000). According to Westheimer's (2008) categories, it would be reasonable to assume that students of a lower socio-economic status are more likely to receive citizenship education emphasizing their role as the personally responsible citizen.

Canadian citizenship curricula carry "... a mix of contradictory expectations for citizenship: everything from being good by being compliant to an exhortation that young individuals can and should change the world" (Bickmore, 2005, p. 381). The absence of students at the decision-making level in educational policies that affect them indicates that demonstrating compliance is valued over developing their abilities to meaningfully affect change in their world. A recent survey of 90,000 fourteen years olds in twenty-eight nations (one of which included Canada) found that citizenship education "... where it is offered, remains largely a textbook based experience, largely severed from the vibrant experiences of politics that might help young people engage with public life" (Bennett, 2008). As will be discussed in the following sections of the literature review, this is particularly true in the every day politics of public schooling. Although children vastly outnumber adults in schools (Alderson, 2003), they have considerably less power in decision-making, a finding that runs contrary to democratic principles of participation.

Student Voice. *Student voice* refers to soliciting and incorporating students'

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opinions into the formal decision-making processes of their schools. Canadian scholar Michael Fullan (1991) popularized this term when he asked “What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?” (p. 170). By acknowledging that students have a voice, it suggests that they have legitimate perspectives on a given topic (Holdsworth, 2000). “Voice” can be further described as having presence, power, agency and influence within a democratic context (Cook-Sather, 2006).

While student voice can be empowering and democratic in some contexts, in others it has proven to be exploitative and seen as a source of victim blaming. To demonstrate the differences in purposes and uses of student voice, Lodge (2005) divided student voice into four categories, ranging from the least democratic to the most: quality control; students as a source of information; compliance and control; and dialogue. These categories are described as follows:

1. *Quality Control*. Students’ voices are received as those of consumers providing feedback. The purpose of student voice is to allow adults to make judgments about the quality of the school. (Lodge, 2005)

2. *Students as a source of information*. Students are used as informants to improve their school, their teachers’ performance, or their own performance. However, they do not have agency to change the methods used to evaluate these improvements (ie. standardized tests). There is no dialogue between students and adults, and students receive no feedback on the suggestions they make (Lodge, 2005). This type of voice adopts a deficit model, where student voice is sought to overcome deficiencies, rather than as an ongoing commitment to democratic agency (Fielding, 2001). Within this category, the purpose of student voice is to inform strategies for improvement.

3. *Compliance and control*. Student voice is used to decorate or adorn pre-

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determined policy initiatives. This can often take the form of inserting positive quotations from students on brochures or emails (Cook-Sather, 2006), while omitting dissenting voices (Lodge, 2005). As an example, after being invited to attend a conference on school reform, one student described her experience of this type of student voice in the editorial of her school's student newspaper:

To our chagrin and disappointment, we did not feel welcome when we attended sessions, which were aimed primarily toward adults and anyone who was especially familiar with the jargon of educational processes ... In the end, we are left feeling that our participation is more about creating public relations for [the sponsoring organization] than it is about creating meaningful student voice in the process.
(Mitra & Gross, 2008, p. 228)

The purpose of this type of student voice is to imply that youth support pre-existing targets.

4. *Dialogue*. Students build a shared narrative with other educational stakeholders (Lodge, 2005). This requires adults to confront the power imbalance between themselves and the students, while actively listen to what youth have to say (Cook-Sather, 2006). Students take an active role in writing items on policy agendas, rather than merely being consulted. (Gunter & Thomson, 2007). Student voice that includes dialogue views children's perspectives as an integral part of school discourse, rather than an attempt to undermine adult authority (Lundy, 2006). The purpose of this type of student voice is to integrate students at the decision-making level of educational policy in a meaningful way.

While dialogical student voice is more democratic than the others listed, any discussion of student voice is susceptible to a reduction to tokenism. Romantic notions of childhood and the views of children can impede youth being taken seriously as legitimate

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educational stakeholders (Cook-Sather, 2006). Pollard et al. (1997) caution against listening to students as a sentimental or romantic endeavor. This romanticized use of student voice is most clearly demonstrated in Lodge's 'compliance and control' category; although it can appear in any discussion of student voice. Gunter & Thomson (2007) further disrupt the notion of cute and innocent children by arguing that youth can be, racist, sexist, classist, ableist and homophobic, and sometimes argue for policy to reflect these biases. As such, prejudiced youth are often labeled as childish, and their views are then easily dismissed. This ignores the reality that adults can be just as bigoted as youth are, and yet are still respected as legitimate stakeholders.

As a safeguard against tokenism, Lundy (2006) recommends that any use of student voice should include telling participating children and young people "... what decision was made, how their views were regarded and the reasons why action has proceeded in a certain way" (p. 939). Flekkoy & Kaufman (1997) caution against tokenistic gestures of student voice, believing that disingenuous uses of student participation leads to decreased youth engagement in formal political processes. It is plausible that "if [children and young people] are led to believe that their opinions carry more weight than they actually do, [they] will either give up trying or become rebellious" (Flekkoy & Kaufman, 1997, p. 86). Zion's (2006) research provides support for this claim in the words of one of her eighth grade participants: "There's no point in doing it [filling out student voice surveys] if they're not actually going to change. That's why nobody even does them" (p. 138). Here, the student indicates that unless their voice results in real change, the exercise is not worth the time of the participants.

The most recent example of Canadian youth rejecting tokenistic uses of their political participation was when UNICEF launched their 1999 campaign 'It's your voice:

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National election for the rights of youth'. This campaign asked primary and secondary school students to vote on ten rights on a ballot that were most important to them (Elections Canada, 1999). Malone & Hartung (2010) describe the youth response to this campaign:

What organizers weren't prepared for was the backlash it created when a highly articulate children's community demanded that the vote be abandoned because it was patronizing and demeaning. Many youth organizations banded together via a network of email lists and issued a joint release saying they wanted to participate in *real* political processes and that adults would never be asked to choose between their basic rights in the same way that UNICEF was asking them to." (p. 31, original emphasis)

Student voice can thus be seen as a complex issue, with many purposes and uses. It can be exploitative and victim blaming or empowering and democratic, asking simultaneously "can the subaltern speak" (Spivak, 1988, p. 271) and *how* can the subaltern speak? Student voice is ultimately about who controls who can speak and who can be meaningfully heard.

Student Voice as a Human Right. There is support for student voice in the legally binding United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989); which is a culmination of a century-long effort to recognize children's rights at the international level. Early attempts to draft children's rights codes date back to the 1850's (Fuchs, 2007), however the first serious international commitment was made in 1924 when the League of Nations adopted the International Declaration for the Rights of Children (Flekkoy & Kaufman, 1997). The impetus for the creation of an international children's rights code came decades later in 1979, when that year was designated by the United

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Nations as the 'International Year of the Child'. Among other things, this designation positioned children as a special interest group in global discourse and sparked ten years of rights drafting; which culminated in the CRC (Fuchs, 2007). A total of 23 NGO's contributed to the drafting of the CRC, including Defence for Children International, UNICEF, and Save the Children Alliance (Fuchs, 2007). Children and youth were curiously absent during this drafting process (Flekkoy & Kaufman, 1997), which is paradoxical given their participation rights secured in Article 12. The rights accorded to children in the CRC fall under four broad categories: survival, protection, provision and participation; with each level of rights being dependent on the previous being fulfilled (Sunker, 2007). Most relevant to this thesis is the right to participate, as outlined in Article 12, which reads as follows:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law (United Nations, 1989).

Research has demonstrated that Article 12 is important to children. One of the main findings of the Northern Ireland Commission on Children and Young People was that, although children and young people did not know it was within the scope of their internationally guaranteed human rights, not having a say in decisions made about them was the most important issue to the children and young people interviewed. Children

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identified that being afforded only minimalist or tokenistic opportunities to participate and engage with adults was worse than not being listened to at all (Lundy, 2006). This is consistent with the literature on student voice in public schooling, where students became cynical about participation when their suggestions were ignored (see Flekkoy & Kaufman, 2010; Mitra, 2008; Malone & Hartung, 2010).

Participation, as outlined in Article 12, conceives of children who can and should make contributions to the decision-making in their families, schools, clubs, communities, and religious organizations, rather than as future citizens or adults-in-waiting. (Flekkoy & Kaufman, 1997). As current (rather than potential) citizens, “the practice of actively involving pupils in decision-making should not be portrayed as an option which is a gift from adults, but a legal imperative which is the right of the child” (Lundy, 2006, p. 931). In the paradigm shift to think of children as current citizens who have democratic participation rights, Sunker (2007) suggests renaming ‘politics *for* children’ to ‘politics *with* children’ (p. 306, emphasis added).

Objections from Article 12 tend to come from adults, not children, and fall under three categories. The first is skepticism that children have the necessary capacity to have meaningful input into decision-making (Lundy, 2006). Flekkoy & Kaufman (1997) note that in the contemporary context, incompetency is rarely used as a justification for denying political participation rights to adults, and if this were ever done, many adults would likely be excluded. The onus on children to prove competence is described as discriminatory, at best, and presents childhood as a state of *infantia*, which is the generic term for ‘not-being-able-to’ (Bergstrom, 2010). In her research on the right of children to be heard in educational litigation in Pennsylvania, Grover (2006) found that there was “no independent evidence presented in Court to demonstrate that adult views on the issues...

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were any more rational or well-informed than those of the high school students affected” (p. 157).

The second objection is a worry that giving children participation rights would weaken parental rights and, in the context of schooling, school authority (Lundy, 2006). Although perhaps it is inconvenient for parents and other adults to dialogue with children, and integrate their views into decisions that affect them, parents do not lose any rights when those same rights are accorded to children (Mitchell, 2010). Although not a basis to deny children’s rights, adults are correct in assuming that children may have divergent interests and opinions than those of their parents. Grover (2006) asserts that the recognition of these interests is required in order to view the child as a full, rather than subservient, legal ‘person’.

To recognize the child as being separate from the parents, with potentially competing legitimate interests, is a necessary prerequisite to an acknowledgement of children’s fundamental human rights. The child’s right to be heard on matters affecting his or her life (e.g., education) furthermore flows from a view of the child as a person in his or her own right. It is therefore striking when the courts fail to solicit children’s views on educational matters being litigated, where children’s perceptions are of relevance. The Courts’ denial of children’s participation rights with regard to the right to be heard in litigation affecting the child, thus serves to undermine the child’s personhood (Grover, 2006, p. 158).

In debating the merits of Article 12 of the CRC, Flekkoy & Kaufman (1997) reverse the typical objections, by asking lawmakers to consider the consequences of “*not* letting the child voice an opinion, make a choice, or share the decision-making” (p. 67, original emphasis). The United Nations (UN) (2003) lists the consequences of prohibiting

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participation by noting that adults can and do abuse their power over young people, and that adults do not always act in young people's best interests. The UN further cites the legality of corporal punishment of children by their parents as an example of infringement of a child's right (in this case, to not be physically harmed) that is made possible by the child's exclusion from lawmaking on corporal punishment. Cunningham (2006) cites the following British example of corporal punishment as adults not working in the child's best interests:

Some 88% of adults in Britain think that a parent should have the right to smack a child. The government goes along with this. Children are rarely asked what they think about smacking, but they tend to have a rather different view from adults and the government. As described by a 7 year old: 'It's parents trying to hit you, but instead of calling it a hit they call it a smack' (p. 232).

It is reasonable to conclude, in this instance, that if children were accorded full participation and voting rights in the legalization of corporal punishment, this practice would be more legally and politically contested than it currently is. Corporal punishment is thus a clear example of how denying children their participation rights under Article 12 of the CRC necessarily influences the law, and makes some types of physical abuse of children by their parents legal.

The denial of children's rights by adults is somewhat paradoxical, given how all adults were once children. Unlike perhaps any other system of oppression, here there is a rare example of all oppressors having the lived experience of the oppressed. It is reasonable to assume that children forty years ago (people who are now today's adults) would have felt similarly on wanting to participate in decisions that affected them, regardless of whether or not they would have framed their willingness to participate in

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children's rights discourse. Why, then, do adults deny children's participation in decision-making if they would have enjoyed participation when they themselves were children?

Freire (1970), in writing about the liberated who then immediately oppress the still unliberated, notes, "their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity" (p. 45). It is therefore possible that part of the conception of adulthood is defined as one who expresses domination by oppressing non-adults. Further conceptions of the distinction between adulthood and childhood are expanded upon below.

Adult Conceptions of Youth. In this section, I outline some of the historical and contemporary conceptions of youth⁵ in Western culture. As Cohen (2009) notes, "the very boundaries of childhood have been constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed many times throughout the course of human history in ways that reflect familiar doctrinal perspectives on children's political status" (p. 182). It is important to outline the more recent constructions of childhood and adolescence to contextualize why youth were excluded from participating in formal discussions on Bill 44, and why adults thought it necessary to pass a bill that restricts children's access to information about particular subjects. This is not an exhaustive description of the many conceptions of childhood that have existed throughout Western history, but enough to contextualize some of those conceptions that led to Bill 44, and children's exclusion from it.

In his text, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, Neil Postman (1982) argues that childhood, as it is known today, is founded on the supposed need to shelter younger

⁵ As previously noted, I will be referring to people under the age of 18 as youth. When citing other researchers, I will use the terms as they are given by the scholars to whom I am referring (e.g. young people, youth, children, adolescents, teenagers, etc.).

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citizens from adult secrets, particularly sexual secrets. Although secrets about sexuality are seen as the most dangerous for children, adults have increasingly treated other topics such as money, violence, illness, death, and social relations as secrets to be kept from children. Increasing knowledge of these secrets is seen as “one of the distinguishing characteristics of adulthood... culminating in sexual enlightenment” (49). Childhood, according to this view, is a state of controlled ignorance.

Postman contends that adults’ ability to keep secrets from children was greatly enhanced by the advent of the modern printing press, because secrets could then be passed through coded text, which was indecipherable to illiterate children. Thus, the arrival of the printing press further separated children as a distinct segment of society, because secrets could be kept more readily from them. Postman elaborates:

"Children were not separated from the rest of the population because they were believed to have a "different nature and different needs." They were believed to have a different nature and needs because they had been separated from the rest of the population. And they were separated because it became essential in their culture that they learn how to read and write, and how to be the sort of people a print culture required" (p. 37)

There is thus an inherent tension in the literate child. Although children are encouraged to increase their literacy skills from very young ages, Postman’s theory of childhood asserts, “reading is the scourge of childhood because, in a sense, it creates adulthood” (13). The literate child poses a threat to this construction of childhood, as the exclusive control of information by literate adults becomes more challenging to maintain. The combination of literate children and adolescents with technologies that make texts on topics deemed unsuitable for children widely accessible further undermines this construction of childhood. While topics such as contraception, masturbation or

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homosexuality can be officially 'hidden' by removing them from school curriculum, children can now Google, Wikipedia, or Youtube these topics themselves. Children's ability to independently access these adult secrets necessarily threatens the conception of childhood as ignorant, innocent, or uninformed.

Although there is increasing adult anxiety about their declining control over children's access to information, children in Western cultures were not always seen as needing protection from adult 'secrets'. Indeed, for much of Western civilization, children were legally and socially understood as the property of their fathers, or other adult males, little more than slaves (Cunningham, 2006). While Postman credits the advent of the printing press and mass literacy with creating childhood as a separate class in need of supervision, keeping secrets from Canadian children has until recently, taken a backseat to exploiting them as economic resources. In their examination of child labour in Canada, Peikoff & Brickey (1991) note that social reformers in the late 19th century saw child labour itself as consistent with a Protestant work ethic, and did not show any particular interest in shielding children from the adult conversations they would have been exposed to in factories, shops, farms, or as domestic labourers. Illegitimate, orphaned, or otherwise destitute Canadian children were assessed and placed in homes based on the economic advantages they would bring to a foster or adoptive family as unpaid labourers. The push for mass public education in Canada in the 1830's was similarly fuelled by the notion that an educated workforce would increase national wealth, and was tied to economic and nationalistic goals (Peikoff & Brickey, 1991). This emphasis continues to appear in discussions of public education, as evidenced by *Reversing the Real Brain Drain: Early Years Study: Final Report* (McCain & Mustard, 1999), which reinforces the notion of childhood as "... an economic resource in which adults must invest to reap future

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profits... The report calls for communities to respond to the neglected needs of children in order to remain competitive in the global economy... The actual quality of children's lives and their relationships seem to take a back seat to current investments for a future productive citizen" (Iannacci & Whitty, 2009, p. 18).

Reform of Canadian child labour laws drastically changed the conception of childhood so that by the third decade of the 20th century, the demand for children had undergone a complete reversal. "Infants were now in the greatest demand, and, deprived of their former economic value, adolescents were difficult to place" (Peikoff & Brickey, 1991, p. 45). These authors contend that the ideological shift in attitude towards children from economic slaves to "precious creatures in need of special care..." (p. 61) was largely a result of changes to labour conditions.

Just as there are inherent paradoxes in the literate child, there are similar tensions between conceptions of the child as "...angelic... or the child as barbarian" (Friquegnon, 1997 in Iannacci & Whitty, 2009, p. 16). In some dimensions of Western cultures, there exists a long tradition of viewing childhood as "... a necessary evil that required a punitive approach (Iannacci & Whitty, 2009), a conceptualization of childhood that stretches back to Roman Catholic conceptions of Original Sin. Cunningham (2006) claims that social work and the Children's Aid Societies in the first half of the 20th century rarely saw children, and in particular, working-class children, as individuals, but instead "... more of a collective problem that if not solved, would herald disaster" (p. 178). While children, and in particular, girls, are no longer publicly discussed as in need of civilizing, many who fall outside dominant conceptions are referred to as 'at-risk', and are approached from this deficit-based perspective as people in need of 'fixing' to ensure economic and civic success (Iannacci & Whitty, 2009).

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Although children born in Canada are accorded citizenship at birth, they inhabit an uncertain political space described as 'semi-citizenship' (Cohen, 2009). By virtue of being politically disenfranchised, youth form the largest group of unrepresented people in Canada, where 21% of the population consists of children under the age of 18 (Statistics Canada, 2006). Cohen (2009) cites the following paternalistic reasoning as one of the reasons that children continue to be disenfranchised in liberal democracies: "... children and society need protection from one another. Children need protection from exploitative adults and from their own limited understanding of their interests. Society needs protection from children, who cannot be expected to understand the interests of the body politic." (p. 183)

Longitudinal studies in Britain demonstrate how children have been increasingly viewed as incapable and in need of more, rather than less, adult supervision and control. In 1971, 80% of British 7 year olds could go to school on their own, and by age 9, most could cross roads, use buses, and go on non-school journeys alone. By 1990, less than 10% of 7 year olds went to school on their own, only 50% of 9 year olds could cross roads, and less than 10% can use buses (Cunningham, 2006). While these findings could be evidence that it is adults' perspectives on society, and not necessarily children that have changed, they nonetheless demonstrate a curtailment of children's independence in public spaces. Cunningham further argues that, "to think of children as potential victims in need of protection is a very modern outlook" (p. 245). It is possible that this conception of children as potential victims who need to be safeguarded from many varieties of ills and dangers, combined with Postman's (1982) assessment that children were those who needed to be shielded from adult secrets informed the drafters of Bill 44.

It is important to note that Western educational reform does not universally

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conceive of children as ‘potential victims in need of protection’, or as persons inferior to adults. In their curriculum for New Brunswick children from birth to age 5, Whitty et al. (2009) write “In this framework, we acknowledge children as curious and communicative individuals in their own right: young citizens actively constructing, co-constructing and reconstructing their understanding of the world within various communities of learning” (Section 1, p. 8). Rather than shielding children, this curriculum “... views children as confident, active learners...” (p. 1). This curriculum framework provides evidence that there are some competing conceptions of childhood within Canadian educational circles that influence education curriculum, politics, and reform. Within the discipline of philosophy, Canadian scholar Brennan (1997) posits that any acceptable theory pertaining to the status of children demands that children, by virtue of their personhood, receive the same moral consideration as adults. Although their rights and responsibilities may differ from older people, Brennan argues that they must have equal moral status and consideration.

Within the Alberta context, Taylor (2001) notes that students are increasingly discussed as the ‘products’ of the school system, and are thus ignored as actors or participants in their own education. Their parents, particularly in the discourse of publicly funded charter schooling in Alberta, are seen as the ‘clients’ of government services (Kachur, 2001). Kachur further describes the emergence of publicly funded charter schools as ‘educational parentocracy’, where “... a child’s education is increasingly dependent on the wealth and wishes of parents, rather than the ability and efforts of pupils” (Brown in Kachur, 2001). Such ‘parentocracy’ extends beyond education to children’s representation in all matters of public life:

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Parents are expected to represent children at the ballot box and in the public square. This is so even in cases where the interests of children may run contrary to the interests of their parents. School improvements could mean higher taxes for parents, pitting adults against children. Or parents may not vote at all; in fact, many do not. When they do, each of them only has one vote, regardless of how many children their vote represents. Presumably, children who do not have parents or legal guardians are not represented politically in any meaningful way (Cohen, 2009, p. 191)

Such are the adult conceptions of children as those who need to be shielded, protected, or are otherwise incapable of representing themselves (Postman 1982; Cunningham, 2006; Brennan, 1997), and it may have been these understandings of childhood that informed the adult decision-makers who created Bill 44.

Student Voice, Democratic Citizenship & Educational Reform. A paradox exists in citizenship education in Canada. Despite rhetorical goals for democratic education, students are often excluded from real participation in decision-making processes or from authentic leadership experiences within formal education (Zion, 2009). There appears to be a disconnect between democratic citizenship education and the exercise of student voice. Lodge (2005) argues that youth cannot learn to behave democratically in an institution that does not allow them to experience democracy. In making the case for students to become reform leaders at the secondary school level, Mitra & Gross (2009) noted that civics education and service learning fostered passive participants, rather than leaders, of democracy. They further argued that an effective way to teach democratic citizenship would be to meaningfully involve students in educational policy. Grover (2006) continues this argument by writing “a critical part of that training

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in self-government involves participating in decision-making to various degrees. A fundamental start in this respect is having the right and opportunity to offer one's views and perceptions, not as a token exercise, but to have them actually taken into account in decision-making in a range of relevant domains (p. 159). Although the motivation for including student voice should not be primarily to enhance their citizenship education, there would likely be considerable benefit in that regard (Levin, 2000).

In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), student voice can and should be solicited and respected in educational reform because children have the right to participate in drafting and revising the policies that affect them. Yet, this rarely happens in practice (Levin, 2000, Oerlemans & Vidovich, 2005, Zion, 2009). Educational reform in Canada typically assumes that everything depends on the teacher, or the test, thereby ignoring the causal role of students in their own learning (Ericson & Ellet, 2002). Levin (2000) has argued that

The history of education reform is a history of doing things to other people, supposedly for their own good. Each level in the hierarchy of education believes it knows best what those at lower levels need to do, and has little shyness about telling them or, just as often, forcing them. (p. 155)

Youth are clearly at the bottom of the reform hierarchy in public education. This absence of students at the decision-making level reinforces Alderson's (2003) argument that schools are organized around and reinforce the assumption that adults are knowing and wise, as compared to children who are ignorant and foolish. Students are often only vaguely aware of educational reform and contribute very little, if anything, to the ongoing debates of what is included or excluded in their curriculum (Zion, 2009) Fifteen years after Fullan (1991, p. 217) commented that "We hardly know anything about what

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students think about educational change, because no one ever asks them'', Oerlemans and Vidovich (2005) reported that students were still disenfranchised and disempowered in educational policy.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to meaningfully integrate Alberta youth into the educational reform in that province. However, by documenting student conceptions of Bill 44, and comparing and contrasting their understandings with those of adults, this research attempts to question the conceptions of youth that informed this bill, and challenge the practice of youth exclusion from educational reform.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

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Research Design. The preceding literature review indicates a lack of recognition of students as participants in discussions about educational policy and school reform. A case study approach with phenomenographic data analysis has been selected as the best research design to answer the research questions. A case study was chosen because it is exploratory rather than confirmatory, and it seeks to identify themes or categories of behaviour, rather than prove relationships or test hypotheses (Hancock, 2006). These characteristics aim to flesh out students' beliefs, ideas and conceptions of the phenomenon, rather than try to prove a hypothesis about what they might say. Case study research conducts an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its natural context, using multiple sources (Yin, 2003). The phenomenon studied in this research will be Alberta's Bill 44. The multiple sources used will include the legislative transcripts from the public debates on Bill 44, news sources including newspapers and articles from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and conversations posted to Facebook by self-identified youth and adults. Data will be analyzed using a Phenomenographic approach, to investigate how youth understand, perceive, and conceptualize of Bill 44 as a piece of educational reform, (see Koballa Jr., Bradbury, Glynn & Deaton, 2008).

Phenomenography. Phenomenography traces its roots to the discipline of education (Svensson, 1997). Being an empirical approach that does not formulate general principles, it is compatible with case study research (Barnard, McCosker, & Gerber, 1999; Yin, 2003). Phenomenography aims to "discover the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, realize and understand various aspects of phenomena in the world around them" (Ornek, 2008, p. 1). It uses richly descriptive, non-numerical language to identify patterns of similarities and differences in the way a given

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phenomena is experienced and understood (Barnard et al., 1999). Phenomenography focuses on phenomena that are relevant and closely related to the participants' world, and situates the subjective knowledge of the participants as the object of the research (Barnard et al., 1999). Youth perceptions of Bill 44 meets these criteria, because the bill is relevant to the participants' experiences in public school, and the object of the study is to describe the subjective understanding of the participants.

The ontological perspective of phenomenography is non-dualistic, meaning that the object and the subject of the inquiry are not separate or independent of one another (Barnard et al., 1999; Linder, 2002; Ornek, 2008). In phenomenography, the world is understood to be simultaneously objective and subjective, where there is a continuous interrelationship between thought, experience, and a phenomenon (Barnard et. al., 1999). In this research, the phenomenon (Bill 44) is objectively a written text, which is simultaneously subjectively conceived, drafted, amended, interpreted, and enacted by various subjective actors. The phenomenography does not separate the object (the written text) from the subject (the meaning created when the text is interacted with). It instead views them as co-dependent and interrelated. Phenomenography emphasizes the patterns of commonalities from the collective of participants, rather than focusing on the experiences of individuals (Barnard et. al., 1999; Marton, 1986). To clarify, "Phenomenographic research aims to explore the range of meanings within a sample group, as a group, not the range of meanings for each individual within the group" (Akerlind, 2005, p. 323). This methodology fits with the aim of the research, which is to categorize the collective understandings of each group of stakeholders, not the individual understandings of any one stakeholder.

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Data Collection. Data collection consists of two phases: (a) printing the conversations about Bill 44 from two Facebook groups: ‘STUDENTS FOR BILL 44’ and ‘Students AGAINST Bill 44’; and (b) ascertaining which comments came from youth, which came from adults, and which cannot be identified.

Facebook conversations between Alberta youth. Several options were explored to determine the best data collection site from which to answer the research questions. Questions of space, both physical and virtual, as well as membership, both voluntary and compulsory, informed the assessment of data collection sites. While many adult groups have created organizations that occupy both physical and virtual spaces to advocate for their interests, (such as teacher’s associations, parent councils, the provincial legislature, etc.) often youth have no such physical organizing space. Although students occupy physical spaces in schools, their primary purpose as dictated by regulations is not to attend schools to advocate for their own interests, nor do they produce texts that represent their collective stance on a given issue. They also do not attend schools voluntarily. I could not therefore approach the physical presence of students in schools, the same way as the membership of a teacher in the Alberta Teachers Association, with its concomitant online and face-to-face advocacy.

With no physical space from which to collect qualitative data from a collective of students, online spaces were investigated. In 2008, the Alberta government launched a website entitled “Speak Out: Alberta Student Engagement Initiative”. This website, which is government controlled, is described as “an opportunity for Alberta’s youth to share their experiences and ideas in order to help the people who make decisions about our schools understand the issues that are important to us” (Speak Out, 2010). This type of student solicitation is best represented by Lodge’s (2005) categorization of “students

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as a source of information”. By its’ nature, the website does not allow for free and uncensored discussion by students. Speak Out also hosts an annual conference, where the voices of youth are used to adorn decisions that have already been made and to discuss an agenda that has been set by adults. Adult decision-makers are not bound to comply with any of the suggestions that youth put forward, and youth are not afforded any means to enforce their decisions. This conference is demonstrably about the “compliance and control” (Lodge, 2005) of student voices, rather than any meaningful dialogue with young people to make educational decisions. Given the controlled nature of the Speak Out website, I did not deem it to be an appropriate venue from which to gather the uncensored understanding of Bill 44 by a collective of students. Furthermore, several searches revealed that only nine users made sixteen comments about Bill 44 on the Speak Out website, which constitutes a significantly smaller sample size than what was found on Facebook, with far fewer comments to analyze.

Facebook advocacy groups, on the other hand, were created by and for students. Launched in 2004 (Skerrett, 2010), Facebook has demonstrated itself to be a ubiquitous presence in the lives of North American youth and young adults, with as many as 85% of American college students reporting having a personal Facebook account (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). Although originally limited to only Harvard students, Facebook eventually opened up to allow for all college students, and in 2006, for use by the general, non-student, public (boyd, 2007). Unlike other social networking sites, Facebook users tend to accurately represent their offline identities in their online profiles (Maranto & Barton, 2010; Pempek, et. al, 2009; West, Lewis, & Currie, 2009). This truthful portrayal of identity differs from other social networking sites such as Second Life, MySpace, or various gaming sites, where youth report playing more with their

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identities by assuming characteristics they do not actually possess offline, such as changing their race, gender, orientation, etc. (Kelly, Pomerantz, & Currie, 2006; Maranto & Barton, 2010). A partial explanation for the relative accuracy in identity portrayal is that Facebook friends also tend to be ‘real life’ friends; meaning most Facebook users have met their Facebook friends offline, or face-to-face, at least once (West, et. al, 2009). Although there is always a margin of error, it can be reasonably assumed that the majority of the Facebook users in this research who self-identified as youth were indeed under the age of 18.

Besides its’ use as a performative and social space, Facebook has increasingly become a vehicle for political dialogue, organization and education. In terms of dialogue, Facebook is increasingly used as a means to discuss and debate public affairs. For instance, while only 10% of a teen participant pool in a 2001 study reported using cyberspace to discuss political, economic, or international issues in cyberspace; that number had jumped to more than 50% by 2010 (Lin, Cheong, Kim & Jung, 2010). Beyond dialogue, Facebook is also a tool for youth to facilitate offline political behaviour. In commenting on an Earth Hour blog, one youth wrote:

While we usually think of facebook in terms of “what parties are going on this friday?” we also use it so many more constructive ways without thinking about it. Personally, my friends and I use it a lot to plan our annual Relay For Life walk to collect donations and recruit people to walk with us. I also notice a ton of political groups which is a great way for college kids to get involved politically and to be able to connect with people of similar demographics and political perspectives. (Wilson, 2008, para. 1)

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This youth demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the reach and power of Facebook, by recognizing it as a means of enhancing the offline political and charitable engagement of young people. For youth who live in repressive political regimes, the political possibilities of Facebook are invaluable. For instance, the Facebook page for Egypt's April 6 Youth Movement attracted more than 70,000 members within its' first few days (Wolman, 2008). "Uniting 70,000 people is no easy feat in a country where collective action is so risky. Social networking has changed that. In turn, it is changing the dynamics of political dissent" (Wolman, 2008). In the case of Egypt, Facebook organizing created a mass offline protest in conjunction with the 2008 general strike and launched a youth movement that continues to be active today. There appears to be a special relationship between specifically youth political participation and digital media:

The alchemy between youth and digital media has been distinctive; it disrupts the existing set of power relations between adult authority and youth voice. While many studies of children, youth, and media have for decades stressed the status of young people as competent and full social subjects, digital media increasingly insist that we acknowledge this viewpoint. Not only must we see youth as legitimate social and political actors, but we must also recognize them as potential innovators and drivers of new media change. (Ito, Davidson, Jenkins, Lee, Eisenberg & Weiss, 2007, p. ix)

In the case of Facebook, youth and young adults are indisputably the innovators and leaders of new media change. This is largely because Facebook was created by a 19-year-old Harvard student, and was only open to college and university students for the first two years of its' existence. Children and young people are the 'digital natives' (James, Davis, Flores, Francis, Pettingill, Rundle & Gardner, 2009) of Facebook, because they have not

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only grown up with it, they are, and continue to be its' first inventors, leaders, and users.

Facebook's positioning as a youth-led phenomenon, combined with its' widespread popularity and relatively reliable identity representation, made it the most effective and efficient data collection site for this study. The groups are a natural youth setting, with voluntary participation by Facebook users. While semi-structured interviews are the typical phenomenographic method of data collection, relying on texts avoids the possibility of interviews becoming a "diagnostic discourse", and allows instead for a "an exposition of the subject's own perception" (Aslop & Tomsett, 2006, p. 245) Although early analysis has demonstrated that many adult Facebook users appropriated this designated youth space, it began as a youth-initiated space for students to freely advocate for their own interests. It was also the most effective means of collecting a large volume of qualitative data from a sizeable sample. Of all the possible data collection sites, the Facebook advocacy groups devoted to Bill 44 were selected as the most appropriate methodological tool form which to answer the research questions.

Determining Facebook users' ages. There is no way to guarantee that all posts on the Facebook walls of "Students for Bill 44" and "Students Against Bill 44" were written by youth, as posters do not always indicate their ages in their postings. However, several steps will be taken to ensure that youth - and not adults - wrote the data collected and identified as authored by students. First, I will assume that all posts containing phrases such as "in my school" or "my teacher says" were written by students. Similarly, posts made by those who identify themselves as adults, such as those that say, "at my daughter's middle school," or from adult organizations such as the Sheldon Chumir Foundation, will classified as authored by adults.

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I will also check every poster's profile and make a judgment as to whether it can be reasonably assumed that the poster is a student. For instance, Facebook users often make public the name of their high school, as well as their expected graduation date. If it is indicated on the users' profile that they had not yet graduated from high school at the time of the posting, I will assume that the poster was a student and include all of their postings in the data. Postings made by users that I cannot in good faith identify as a youth or adult will be discarded.

Data Analysis. Phenomenographic data analysis identifies the qualitatively separate categories that describe the common meanings the participants ascribe to the phenomenon (Ornek, 2005). Coding or categorization is determined in phenomenographic research as the researcher-generated ways of describing the participants' conceptions of the phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997). I will be using an inductive coding strategy, where the categorizations of youth understandings will 'emerge' from my immersion in the data, rather than being pre-assigned before data collection (Akerlind, 2005). To facilitate emerging categories, early readings of the data will be approached with a high degree of openness to possible new meanings and interpretations. The sorting of transcripts and direct quotes into distinct categories is a highly reflexive process, requiring the researcher to cycle back and forth between the initial categories and the transcripts to ensure the collective understandings are reasonably reflected in the categories (Akerlind, 2005). Ireland, Tambyah, Neofa & Harding (2009) emphasize the immersion process as critical to inductive coding, recommending prolonged and repeated exposure to transcripts in order to faithfully record all possible conceptions.

The visual representation of the different categories is both hierarchical and

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horizontal, and is commonly referred to as the ‘outcome space’ (Barnard et al., 1999).

This outcome space is a comprehensive expression of the researched phenomenon (Ireland et al., 2009), and can be referred to as the ‘product’ of phenomenographic research (Marton & Pong, 2005). Marton & Booth (1997) identify three criteria in constructing an outcome space:

1. that each category in the outcome space reveals something distinctive about a way of understanding a phenomenon;
2. that the categories are logically related, typically as a hierarchy of structurally inclusive relationships; and
3. that the outcomes are parsimonious- i.e. that the critical variation in experience observed be represented by a set of as few categories as possible” (in Akerlind, 2005, p. 323)

The logical ordering of categories in the outcome space is determined by the complexity of understanding represented in each coding category.

Unlike in phenomenology, phenomenographers do not reduce or depart from the original language of the participants (Barnard et al., 1999), with the exception of the researcher-developed labels for each of the coding categories. It is understood that each individual holds multiple perceptions, and that the categories of meaning may or may not express the full range of possible conceptions of the phenomenon. When analyzed together, the categories represent the collective understanding of the phenomenon (Barnard et al., 1999).

Validity. Ortek (2005) lists the three factors of valid phenomenographic research as: the correspondence between the results and previous studies, the logically separate and exclusive categories, and the probability of the categories. To increase the validity of

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phenomenographic research, Sandbergh (1997) recommends that phenomenographers use perspectival subjectivity to become more aware of how their interpretations influence the research process. Using perspectival subjectivity differs from biased subjectivity, which is the unprofessional practice of a researcher selectively interpreting data so as to support the researchers' own pre-determined conclusions (Kvale, 1991). In contrast, researchers with perspectival subjectivity remain aware of how their own biases and interpretations continually impact the both the research process and the results. Sandbergh (1997) outlines five steps of phenomenological reduction, which will increase the validity of a phenomenography. The primary researcher will use all five steps in the collection and analysis of the data.

1. Orientation to the phenomenon and how it appears. The researcher must maintain focus on the appearance of the phenomenon throughout the research process. This is enhanced by clear research questions.

2. Describing. The researcher must describe participants' experiences of the phenomenon, without trying to add to, or explain the experience. The researcher cannot use theories and models to surpass the experience.

3. Horizontalization. The researcher must treat all aspects of the experience as equally important. The researcher cannot judge some of the participants' statements as more valid than others.

4. Search for structural features. The researcher must first use free, imaginative variation to interpret a possible variation within a participants' conception. The researcher must continue to adopt different interpretations until a basic meaning structure has been established.

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5. *Using intentionality as a correlational rule.* The researcher relates what the participants conceive as reality with how they conceive reality, without making any judgments or evaluations as to why reality is perceived.

Scope and Limitations. The participant selection process of youth (i.e. those who joined and then posted comments on a Facebook page) necessarily limits participation to those youth who are aware of and engaged with Bill 44. It is likely that these participants are more aware of and engaged with educational reform than the average Alberta public school student. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that all Alberta public school students are as aware of, and passionate about either Bill 44 specifically, or educational reform in general as the youth participants whose Facebook conversations provided data for this study.

The limitations of data collection over Facebook must also be noted. Firstly, although every effort was taken to ensure that those participants classified as youth could be reasonably identified as being under the age of 18 at the time they posted comments, there were no guarantees. Facebook users could have invented profiles that listed their graduation date as later than 2008 to give the false impression that they were youth for any number of reasons. They also could have used the present tense (i.e. ‘my teacher says’ or ‘at school today’) to deliberately or unintentionally mislead their audience into believing they were students. It is therefore possible that some of the Facebook comments from users whom I have identified as youth could have been over the age of 18 at the time that they posted their comments. This is one of the inherent limitations of using Facebook as a site for data collection.

Obtaining data from Facebook also limits the participation sample to only those youth who have access to a computer, as well as the digital literacy skills needed to create

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and maintain a Facebook profile. Mental and physical ability, as well as social class, could be possible deterrents to participation on Facebook and thus in this research.

Finally, the issues of participant consent and intent cannot be avoided. None of the youth whose comments are quoted consented to be part of this research, nor did they post their comments with the intent of their words being analyzed as part of an academic study. This lack of consent is problematic, as obtaining the informed consent of research participants is foundational in conducting ethical research. The intent of the participant is also an issue when collecting and analyzing the data. It is possible that had youth been asked to write or dialogue about their understandings of Bill 44 with the intent of their utterances being studied by a university researcher, then their responses could have been quite different in terms of style, content, and presentation.

Despite the abovementioned drawbacks, obtaining data from Facebook is not, however, an entirely unethical enterprise. This research did receive ethics approval from the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board. All of the data collected was in the public domain, meaning that anyone who activated a Facebook account could see the same postings that I did. I needed no special permission to view any of the content that is quoted in this study, nor did I incur any financial loss or gain to access it. As they are freely available in the public domain, these conversations form an important part of the textual record of Bill 44's emergence.

Locating Myself. I am obliged to draw attention to my own personal subjectivities and biases that will necessarily influence this study. It is my belief that no researcher or research is ever neutral. My individual values and beliefs can and do influence the research process in its' entirety, including but not limited to, the research

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questions asked, the methods of data collection, the analysis made and the conclusions drawn.

I initially decided to use Bill 44 as a case study for my Masters thesis because I was so opposed to it. When I heard of it in the news (CBC, 2009; Kay, 2009), I found its premise problematic, its content objectionable, and the method by which it passed in the legislature (at 3:20am) questionable. I am embarrassed to admit now that the complete exclusion of young people from the decision-making process of Bill 44 did not even occur to me as an issue until several months after I had decided to make Bill 44 the focus of my research.

During a Facebook search for web activism on Bill 44, I found the Facebook group 'Students Against Bill 44' completely by chance. The group had nearly 12,000 members then, which is likely why it was one of the first groups to appear during my Facebook search. In reading the many discussions posted to this group, I empathized with the students who were frustrated by not being included in the legislative process of educational reform. Having now spent 19 years, or 76% of my lifetime as a student, I too have been continually frustrated by not having a voice in most of the decisions that affect my schooling. The experiences informed my perspective that my Masters thesis must tell the story of Bill 44 through students' eyes.

My strong opposition to Bill 44 conflicted with the intent to read and interpret all youth comments as legitimate. This was most apparent when I read comments that supported Bill 44, and I became powerfully aware that my own anti-Bill 44 biases necessarily affected this research. As I outline in the reflexive process section of the discussion chapter, I remained conscious of these biases, and strove to give those views that I disagreed with the same sincere respect that I afforded those that I agreed with. As I

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categorized and analyzed the data, I found myself deeply respecting and finding considerable insight in the youth comments I initially disagreed with strongly.

I also remained aware of the adult bias and perspective that I brought to this research, which is an inquiry into youth understandings. As I outline in the reflexive process section of Chapter 5, I strove to remain conscious of the fact that I, as an adult, was entering a youth space uninvited. In order to consistently challenge the adult perspective through which I collected, coded, interpreted and analyzed the data, I continually asked myself how the youth participants themselves might have engaged in phenomenographic research of their own Facebook comments. In so doing, I was able to maintain some awareness of how my own adult perspectives were influencing the research.

RESULTS

Introduction. Data was collected from two different Facebook groups. The first was created on 30 May 2009 by a self-identified ninth grade male, and is called “Students FOR Bill 44”. At the time of data collection in the autumn of 2010, 94 individual Facebook users had joined this group. Comments were posted to the group’s wall, and there were no discussion threads in the discussion feature of this group. The description of the group under the info tab stated⁶:

Bill 44, a bill attempting to be passed on the Albertan legislature is one covering the rights of a parents to take their child out of a class they see is unfit for them, or conflicts with their beliefs, etc.

Though there are many groups on this site claiming "censorship", I believe it is an attempt at the renewal at parental control over a childs life, which is and of itself partially wrong when taken to the extreme but the main point is this: would you rather be controlled by the government and the public education system (biased in all matters, no matter what they wish us to believe), or your parents who are also biased?

Considering the title of this group one might assume the creator to support this bill; they also might assume the creator is actually a 45 year old parent of three with a very good Facebook account. The first is true, I believe that the indoctrination that is inevitable should come from your parents, not the government; and no I am not a 45 year old, I'm a ninth grader which (after reading the forums of groups opposed to

⁶ Consistent with a phenomenographic approach, I will be presenting participant comments exactly as they appeared when collected. Due to the high number of spelling and grammatical errors, I will not be using [sic] to denote such mistakes, as this convention cluttered their comments rendering them largely unreadable.

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bill 44) seems to be intellectual enough to discuss this matter in a calm fashion.

(Facebook, 2010)

The second group was created on 28 May 2010 by a self-identified eleventh grade female, and was called “STUDENTS AGAINST BILL 44”. At the time of data collection 11, 320 individual Facebook users were members of this group. Users posted comments to the group’s wall, as well as to 38 separate discussion threads using the discussion feature of the Facebook group. The description of the group under the Info tab stated:

The Alberta government is attempting to pass a bill that restricts our access to a fair and open education as students, and allows our parents to pull us from any class that teaches material that they don’t believe should be taught. Because many Alberta highschoolers and students aren't aware, or aren't exactly sure, the consequences of Bill 44 are below:

This bill would restrict our teachers' ability to talk about any issues that deal with religion, sexual orientation and sexuality, by requiring them to notify parents ahead of time. For example, even though gay marriages are legal and recognized in Alberta, this bill would allow parents to remove their children from classroom discussions in which they would talk about homosexuality.

Bill 44 is attempting to restrict the adults of tomorrow by cutting us off from the issues of today. We cannot just let them take away our global perspectives, and ideas about our world! We must stand up. Contact your MLA and invite your friends, so that we can oppose this together. We can all make a difference!

(Facebook, 2010)

Data from users who could not be reasonably identified as either adult (over the age of 18) or youth (under the age of 18) was discarded. After the data from unidentifiable users

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was discarded, postings from both groups were divided by age. A total of 239 individual youth made 546 postings. A total of 186 individual adults made 815 postings. There was a considerable outlier in the adult group; one adult participant posted 217 comments to the Facebook forums, or 26% of the total number of adult postings. After controlling for this outlier, the differences between the mean volume of youth and adult postings are demonstrated in figure 4.1

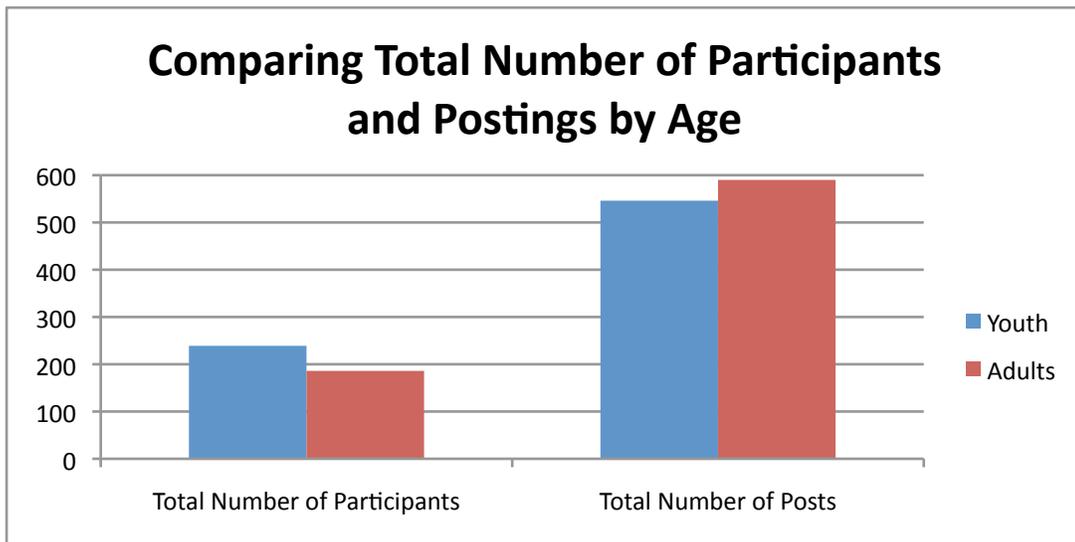


Figure 4.1

Figure 4.1 demonstrates some difference in the use of Facebook groups by youth and adults. Significantly more youth Facebook users chose to participate in the Facebook forums, however, as a group, they posted less than their adult counterparts did. The difference in average postings per user (2.28 for youth and 3.17 for adults) is considerable, as there were significantly more participating youth than there were adults. There was a significant disparity between adults and youth when comparing the range in number of postings. The range of number of postings made by youth was 1-36, while it was 1-217 for adults. The difference in range is demonstrated in Figure 4.2, where the total number of posts by the five most frequent posters are tallied and compared.

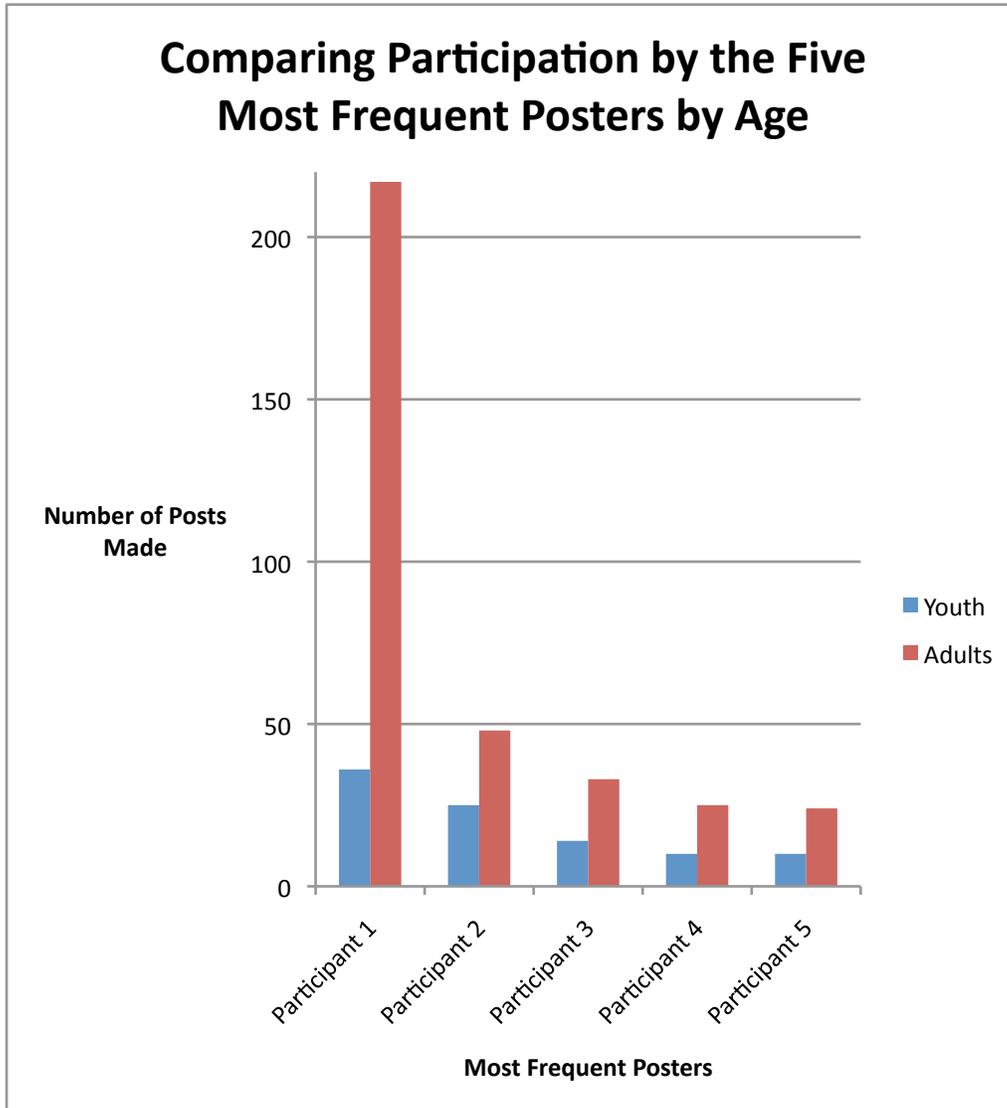


Figure 4.2

The data indicates that although more individual youth were engaged in discussions about Bill 44 through Facebook, individual self-identified adults made significantly more postings. The implications of this finding will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Adult Participation in/Appropriation of the Facebook Groups: Questions of membership and space arise from the finding that a significant number of self-identified

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adults posted in the Facebook groups, and that as collective, posted more comments than youth did. While both Facebook groups were initiated by youth, and had the word ‘students’ in the title, they were clearly not exclusively youth spaces. What does it mean for self-identified adults to participate more in designated student spaces than the students themselves do? More importantly, why would so many adults feel entitled to participate in these spaces? Some of the adult participants self-identified as post-secondary students, which gives some insight as to why they would join groups with the word ‘students’ in the title. Many more of the adult participants, however, self-identified as parents, teachers in the public school system, and middle-aged adults from the province of Alberta. The relative anonymity of Internet communication offers only a partial explanation; many of these adult users not only disclosed their ages, but first and last names, past and current workplaces, telephone numbers and addresses. The content of the adult postings described below illustrates some of the reasons why adults thought that their presence in these forums was appropriate.

Content of Adult Postings. The content of the postings made by adults is described to contextualize the environment in which youth discussed Bill 44. They are not analyzed as part of the phenomenography, i.e., I did not undertake phenomenographic analysis to empirically describe how this group of adults understood Bill 44. In this section, I am (re)presenting a sample of adult comments to demonstrate the backdrop of excessive adult communication against which youth discussed, debated, protested and supported Bill 44. Although deliberately antagonizing and obnoxious comments are commonplace in the cybersphere, the appropriation of a youth space by particularly condescending and combative adults merits close examination.

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Typical postings written by adults who joined the Facebook groups were condescending. In addition to being patronizing, many were hostile, and could be classified as bullying. They often conveyed a sense of entitlement, and demonstrated no awareness that they had, as adults joined, and largely appropriated, a youth space. None of the adults who posted in the group forums acknowledged the disparity in political power between themselves and the youth whom they often bullied and harassed; nor did they advocate increasing the power and presence of youth as decision-makers educational reform. The following was typical of many of the remarks made by adults. It was written by a Facebook user who self-identified as the mother of three children in the Alberta public school system:

Adult Participant 43: To the high school students on this forum: I love the fact that you're all speaking up expressing your views. Right or wrong, they're your views and you have the right to express them. I adore young people who aren't followers and cannot be beaten down just because of the say so of the laws of the land or home. You're our future and our next generation of voters. I don't necessary have to agree with every views you express or your beliefs but I'm thrilled to death that you're standing up and making your voices heard. Some of you adults (young and old) are more than OK too. ;) as long as you don't come across as a bully and a know it all. Let these kids express themselves.

There are many problematic assumptions and implications communicated in this posting. To begin with, why does this adult 'love' that secondary students are expressing their views? One can only speculate how much she would still 'love' the outspokenness of secondary students if their expression of views resulted in real change, i.e. if they could express their views by casting a ballot in a plebiscite, election, or motion in educational

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reform. While it could be seen as laudable that she writes ‘I don’t necessary have to agree with every views you express’, it is easy to respectfully disagree with those who cannot effect change in any meaningful way. In writing that secondary students are ‘the next generation of voters’, Adult Participant # 43 does not communicate that she sees their current disenfranchisement as problematic. In so doing, she reinforces their political powerlessness by reminding young people that they are only future, and not current voters.

Adult Participant 43 is further ‘thrilled to death’ that youth are ‘making [their] voices heard’. This begs the question, heard by whom? In a democratic environment (either within a school or a particular polity), the primary way by which one makes their voice heard largely by being a possible voter who can affect change. While certainly many youth took to Facebook to speak, it is doubtful that those in positions of power meaningfully heard them. Liberal MLA Laurie Blakeman mentioned this Facebook group just once in the Legislative Assembly, several minutes before Bill 44’s third reading, and subsequent passing, at 2:30am (Hansard, 2009). Based on the student comments in the Facebook forums, it likely that this was little more than a tokenistic gesture, as, given the timing of the mentioning of student comment, the decision to pass the bill had already been made. Due to the one mention occurring in the middle of the night, there were no witnesses or press in the gallery to hear these youth concerns. One youth posted the standard response email he received from Ms. Blakeman to the Facebook group, and commented ‘I lol’d’ (Youth Participant # 84), which is social networking slang for ‘laugh out loud’. Another youth commented ‘Sort of a ‘Thanks for playing, try again’ message?’ (Youth Participant # 53). Consistent with Lodge’s (2005) categorizations of the uses of

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student voice, this tokenistic gesture is one of the most ineffective, as it breeds frustration and hostility by youth who know that they are not being taken seriously.

Adult Participant 43's 'adoration' of young people who cannot be 'beaten down by the laws of the land or home' ignores the fact that by virtue of being youth, and thus systemically excluded from democratic decision-making, young people have little opportunity to challenge the laws and policies that they disagree with. Rather than acknowledging the powerlessness of youth, and arguing for them to have meaningful ways to push back against being 'beaten down', this adult is communicating that youth expressing irritation with Bill 44 is synonymous with not being 'beaten down'. Given how the majority of youth were adamantly against Bill 44, and it nonetheless passed, it is false to assume that they were not 'beaten down' in this instance of law making.

Finally, the irony of the last statement 'let these kids express themselves' appears to be lost on the writer. Her patronizing attitude and uninvited intrusion into a youth space is hardly conducive to 'letting youth express themselves'. Indeed, the word 'let' is problematic, as it implies that youth can only express themselves if they are given permission to do so, ostensibly by adults.

Adults' condescending dismissal of youth and their views on Bill 44 was occasionally hostile. The following was written by a Facebook user who self-identified as a 32 year old mother of a daughter in the Alberta Catholic school system, and was in response to the postings of 3 self-identified youth Facebook users:

Adult Participant 176: All three of you have no idea what you are talking about.

You are all still children with no clue how the world works. I don't have time right now to respond point for point but I will be doing so later.

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Here, childhood is presented as *infantia*, the generic ‘not being able to’, or ‘not knowing’ (Bergstron, 2010). There appears to be frustration directed toward the youth for what Adult Participant 176 perceives as their unknowingness, yet this adult supports Bill 44 as a means to maintain youth ignorance. This is consistent with Postman’s (1982) description of childhood being a state of controlled ignorance. This same user further dismissed the postings of both youth and adult Facebook users by writing:

Adult Participant 176: I think its hilarious that a group of people with no children think they can tell me what parenting means and doesn't mean. You are all arrogant and judgmental, the very things I keep being told I am.

Another adult, in response to youth who disagreed with his support of Bill 44, wrote:

Adult Participant 113: you people are so fricken stupid its not even funny....

Everyone in this group needs to quit crying.

The comments of Adult Participants 176 and 113 indicate hostile ageist prejudice, without any awareness on the author’s parts that they are in a youth space. This lack of awareness can be described as a sense of entitlement, as they, as adults in support of Bill 44, have entered a youth space uninvited, to disagree with youth opposition to Bill 44. This sense of entitlement, and the imbalance of power between youth and adults would be comparable to that of a male in the early 20th century entering a suffragette space uninvited to speak about why women should be denied the vote. Adult Participants 176 and 113 echo the patronizing and arrogant tone of Adult Participant 43, but add aggressive intimidation.

Intimidation was a recurring theme in the adult postings that were directed at youth. While many of the youth decried the explicit heterosexism embedded in Bill 44 (a point that will be elaborated on later), only one youth self-identified as LGBTQ.

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Immediately after this tenth grade female disclosed her bisexuality, she faced a barrage of insults, harassment, and aggression from self-identified adults, including:

Adult Participant 113: This is by far the dumbest thing I've ever heard in my life... I strongly believe against it [homosexuality] and if I had kids I would definitely tell them it was wrong.

Adult Participant 154: I do not believe that homosexuality is right... I believe it is unclean and a sin, just like so many others out there. But I would never single them out or treat them bad.

While it cannot be definitively stated that more youth did not self-identify as LGBTQ as a direct result of these comments, this was the adult response to the only youth who came out. The irony that Adult Participant 154 would not 'treat them bad' appears to be lost on the writer, as his calling her sexual orientation 'unclean' and 'a sin' is indeed singling her out and treating her badly.

It is against this backdrop of condescension, hostility, intimidation and homophobia that youth discussed and debated what they saw as an important piece of educational reform, and in some cases, mobilized to do something about it.

Phenomenography of Youth Understandings.

Introduction. As described in Chapter 3, I did not design categories of understanding prior to data collection. This was a deliberate action; as an adult, I did not want to presume to know how youth might understand Bill 44. Neither did I want to manipulate or contort their understandings into a framework that would not allow for authentic representations of how they conceive of the phenomenon. Rather, I allowed the categories of understanding to emerge organically from the data. Careful and thorough reading and rereading of the data resulted in 9 distinct categories of understanding, with

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31 subcategories, organized in ascending order from least to most complex. These 9 distinct categories were formed when there was sufficient evidence that an “overall meaning” (Marton & Booth, 2005) of Bill 44 had been expressed. The subcategories were formed when participants focused on different elements of the same overall meaning that was ascribed to Bill 44.

After the table illustrating the relationships between the hierarchical or horizontal categories of understanding, commonly referred to as the phenomenographic outcome space, I illustrate and interpret each category and subcategory, beginning with the least complex understanding (Bill 44 is outrageous) and ending with the most complex (Bill 44 is a political construction). The category names were chosen to finish the sentence ‘Bill 44 is...’, and were often taken directly from the utterances of youth. It should be noted that many individual students had multiple understandings of what Bill 44 was, the motivation for its’ being drafted, who and what it affected, how it would be implemented, and what, if anything, they could do about it. With reference to the first guiding research question, youth conceptions of Bill 44 were informed by what they saw as the purpose and function of educational reform, public schooling and human rights, as well as the rights, roles and responsibilities of parents, youth, teachers and the government.

Each category of understanding is illustrated by several quotations from youth, which were copied and pasted directly from the Facebook groups. The names of quoted youth are replaced with numbers to protect their anonymity. After the data collection was completed and youth comments were separated from those of adults, each individual youth Facebook user was assigned a random number between 2 and 240. Where a youth’s gender identity could be reasonably ascertained (i.e., users with names such as Jessica, Erin and Stephanie were assumed to be female, David, Adam and Michael were assumed

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to be male), I use the gendered pronoun that correlates with their projected gender identity. In cases where a youth's name is androgynous (i.e. Lindsay, Taylor, Andy), I alternate between using male and female pronouns.

The language of youth is not altered in any way, as phenomenography does not reduce or depart from the original language of the participants (Barnard et. al., 1999). Without making judgments or evaluations, I relate *what* the participants conceive as reality with *how* they conceive reality (Sandbergh, 1997). The *what* often answers the question 'what is Bill 44?' while the *how* elaborates what ways of knowing informed the answer to this question. In so doing, some connections will be made to my theoretical framework, as well as research summarized in Chapter 2; however, I am mindful that phenomenographers cannot use theories or models to surpass the experience as described by participants (Sandbergh, 1997). The experiences themselves, as described by the participants, are the focus of this chapter. Rather than only using one quotation to illustrate each category and subcategory, I deliberately chose to include many direct quotations from youth, so that their words can provide rich, substantial and nuanced descriptions of their understandings of Bill 44. The use of many quotations could be seen as overwhelming, but was a conscious choice made after I read multiple adult-produced texts pertaining to Bill 44 (i.e. transcripts of the legislature debates, newsletters from professional organizations such as the Alberta Teachers Association, newspaper articles, etc.). In each adult text, the voices of youth were either entirely absent or tokenized. This thesis is thus an opportunity to present substantial evidence of youth understandings of Bill 44 in all of their richness and complexity. A total of 91 individual youth Facebook users (or 38% of the sample) are quoted in this chapter.

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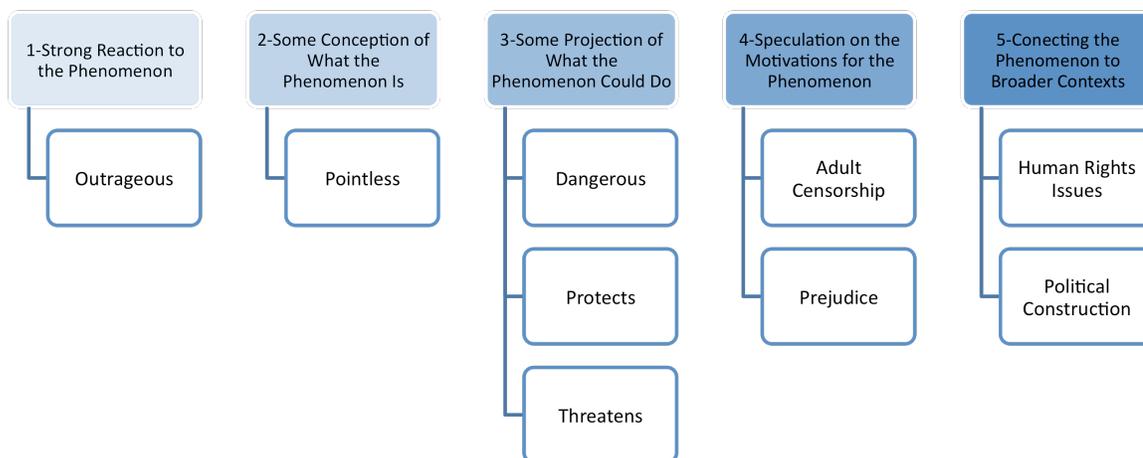


Figure 4.3 Phenomenographic Outcome Space

These 9 categories represent the qualitatively different understandings that youth had of Bill 44. The vertical arrangement clusters together categories that are of the same level of complexity. Hierarchically, ‘Bill 44 is Outrageous’ represents the least complex understanding, while ‘Bill 44 is a Political Construction’ represents the most complex understanding. The column names indicate the necessary and sufficient conditions through which each category was evaluated to determine its’ level of complexity. I will illustrate and interpret each category and subcategory beginning with the least complex.

Category One: Strong Reaction to the Phenomenon

Bill 44 is Outrageous. Many youth vented their frustrations about Bill 44 in the student Facebook groups. The recurring theme in these emotional postings was outrage, with Bill 44 itself being understood as an outrageous piece of legislation. The following were typical remarks:

Youth Participant 201: I hate it. I hate it so much

Youth Participant 89: Can’t believe this piece of shit on a paper got passed

Youth Participant 32: This is stupid. I can’t believe it actually passed. I’m in shock

Youth Participant 98: Fuck Bill 44

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Youth Participant 146: WORST. IDEA. EVER.

These utterances are indicative of the considerable passion with which youth understand Bill 44. They also directly challenge the adult-constructed narrative that youth are apathetic and disengaged from politics and educational reform (Griffiths & Wright, 2007; Clark 2009; Butler, 2010). Far from being apathetic, these youth appear to care deeply about Bill 44, and have strong feelings about its' passing. They are outraged, and through this outrage, communicate that they understand the bill itself to be outrageous. Subsequent postings about Bill 44 being outrageous were intentionally and unintentionally ironic using homophobic language:

Youth Participant 24: this is so gay! The little fun left in school will be gone if this bill passes

Youth Participant 153: Wow... this bill is gay...

Youth Participant 184: That is super gay oh wait do i have to notify your parents first

It is slang for many youth, and increasingly some adults, to use the word 'gay' as synonymous as 'stupid', 'bad', or 'ridiculous'. Youth Participant 184's comment is doubly ironic. On the surface, it appears that he is attempting to be clever by asking if Facebook users' parents should be notified by his use of a homophobic slur, because he understands Bill 44 as restricting education pertaining to (homo)sexual orientations. His use of this common homophobic slur further draws attention to the fact that (homo)sexual orientations are commonly and pejoratively referred to in the hidden curriculum of schooling through every day conversation, which is a part of schooling that parents cannot opt their children out of. His asking if the parents of Facebook users should be notified before he uses a homophobic slur is a facetious way of reminding those in the

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Facebook groups that parents cannot control or censure all parts of schooling, or what their children are exposed to, which is what Bill 44 is understood to legislate. By making the suggestion, though in jest, that perhaps parents of Facebook users be notified before using homophobic language, he is communicating that being legally required to notify parents before teaching about (homo)sexual orientation is an outrageous, or preposterous policy.

Category Two: Some Specific Focus on an Aspect of the Phenomenon

Bill 44 is Pointless. There are 3 subcategories under ‘Bill 44 is Pointless’, each representing qualitatively different understandings that are informed by different focuses on why the bill was drafted, who and what it affects, and how it will be implemented. The common thread within these subcategories is that youth either do not understand the point of Bill 44, or else they dismiss what they understand as the point as being irrelevant, wasteful, or ineffective.

Bill 44 is Irrelevant. Youth who understood Bill 44 to be irrelevant did so because they saw schooling as irrelevant. This subcategory focuses on what Bill 44 is perceived to affect, and is demonstrated in the following postings:

Youth Participant 62: I understand that censorship is wrong and everything, but why are you complaining if you have to leave school? Either way the system turns the information into false bullshit so just go the fuck home

Youth Participant 111: like who really cares..... its school !!!

These postings seem to demonstrate considerable youth apathy. The comments communicate not only indifference, but in the case of Youth Participant 62, hostility towards formal schooling. Given the context of these postings, however, it would be misleading to interpret them as merely apathetic. These youth chose to look up a group

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devoted to opposing Bill 44 (both postings came from the ‘against’ group), ostensibly read at least some of the information and postings on the group, and then drafted and submitted their own responses. None of these gestures indicate serious apathy; rather, they all demonstrate active engagement in public debate on educational reform. Similar to the postings in the ‘Bill 44 is Outrageous’ category, these are emotionally charged postings; however, these youth do not understand Bill 44 as being primarily outrageous. They instead see it as pointless, irrelevant or perhaps a welcome recess from scheduled classes. School is not understood to be something that youth should care about, so legislation that changes or affects schooling is largely understood to be irrelevant to their lives.

Bill 44 is a Waste of Public Funds. The youth in this category understand Bill 44 as pointless not because they understand schooling as also being pointless, but because they understand it as consuming an unreasonable amount of public funds.

Youth Participant 80: this bill is totally unnecessary! Another class waste of our tax dollars.....

Youth Participant 206: why does the stelmach government care... They are running one of the strongest provinces in Canada into deficit while trying to cut spending to health care and other essential services.... AND THEY’RE WORRIED ABOUT WHAT WE TALK ABOUT???? Seems like some mixed up priorities....

These utterances convey some understanding of the rationing of public funds within the Alberta provincial polity, and that different portfolios compete to receive public funds (such as health care and education). Similar to the postings in previous categories, they are emotionally charged, with the strongest identifiable emotion being frustration. While these youth also appear to be outraged by Bill 44, their outrage is specifically directed at

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it being a pointless waste of public funds. These youth make a direct connection between public funds and educational reform, and conclude that Bill 44 is wasting said public funds.

By his use of the pronoun ‘our’, Youth Participant 80 does not necessarily see himself as disqualified as either a taxpayer or citizen with legitimate claims over how public funds are spent. Indeed, using ‘taxpayer’ and ‘citizen’ interchangeably is commonplace in popular discourse. Although most youth do not pay income taxes, they do pay federal taxes on every item they purchase in the province of Alberta. Youth are also financially dependent on their parents or caregivers who do pay both federal and provincial taxes, and are thus directly affected by the taxes paid by families. By using the pronoun ‘our’ to describe taxes, Youth Participant 80 has positioned himself as a member of a community of taxpayers. Within a democracy, being a taxpayer generally grants citizens legitimacy in speaking about how public funds should be spent. By using the pronoun ‘our’ to position himself as a taxpayer, Youth Participant 80 could be suggesting that he could or should have some input into how public funds are spent.

Bill 44 is Redundant. Bill 44 is understood as pointless because it is a redundancy of pre-existing school board policy within the province of Alberta. Youth emphasize all of the ways that parents and caregivers could already remove their children from instructional lessons without Bill 44, making it a redundant piece of legislation.

Youth Participant 46: Uhm, some schools already have been handing out permission slips to parents about sex ed before bill 44, its nothing new

Youth Participant 22: Honestly we don’t need this damned bill to be excused from class. If it came to the point where we needed to be excused from class all we have to do is bring a parents note

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Youth Participant 156: But they do that already. We already have to get a fair amount of slips signed. I had to get one signed to watch a cheesily animated movie involving farm animals that slightly related to Russia during Stalin's rule.

These understandings of Bill 44 relate to parents already having the authority to remove their children from particular classes. The bill is seen as pointless, because its' implementation would hardly change already established procedures. Youth Participant # 46 connects her understanding to two of the three topics listed in Bill 44 (human sexuality and sexual orientation), which are explicitly taught in sex education curricula. Youth Participants 22 and 156 widen the scope of parental authority to include history and political science, and in the case of Youth Participant 22, any and/or all subjects of instruction. It appears that 'parent' is understood to be an evolving and shifting concept, particularly with regards to surveillance responsibilities. Bill 44 being understood as unnecessary in this case implies that youth conceive of educational reform as resulting in changing policy, procedure, or both. Given how they do not foresee school policy or procedure undergoing considerable change due to Bill 44, they dismiss the bill as pointless, or unnecessary.

Category Three: Some Projection of What the Phenomenon Could Do

Bill 44 is Dangerous. Many youth were concerned that the implementation of Bill 44 would be dangerous to both children and young people, and society at large. The common theme in this category was the belief that ignorance on particular subjects would be dangerous to the physical health and safety of both individuals and communities. This category is divided into two subcategories; the first pertains to the sexual health and well being of Alberta youth, and the second covers fears of future physical violence. In the first subcategory, youth linked knowledge of human sexuality to the successful

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prevention of unplanned pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The parental opt out clause of Bill 44 was understood as preventing some youth from sexual knowledge, and thus jeopardizing to the sexual health and well being of some adolescents. In the second subcategory, youth understood formal education on the topics of sexual orientation and religion as a deterrent against homophobic and religious bigotry, hate, violence and wars. Again, because Bill 44 allows for education to be restricted for some students on these topics, they concluded that it is a dangerous piece of legislation that would cause physical harm to themselves and their communities.

Bill 44 is Dangerous to the Sexual Health and Well Being of Youth. Bill 44 is understood as allowing, at the behest of parents, for some students to receive abstinence-only sex education. Youth in this category conclude that this is dangerous to the sexual health and well being of adolescents, because they believe this causes an increase in unplanned pregnancies, and the spread of STIs.

Youth Participant 227: If you want to protect your kids, you need to teach them about protection. Today my mom told me about a teenage girl, who got pregnant, because her parents pulled her out of sex ed class, and never talked to her about it, so she didn't know how one gets pregnant. This bill will make more cases like this occur.

Similar to the youth in the 'Bill 44 Protects' category, Youth Participant 227 is linking the bill to a particular type of protection. Here, she understands Bill 44 as inhibiting teachers from protecting students from risks associated with sexual activity, and supports her claim with anecdotal evidence provided by her mother. Other youth relied on outside sources to support their claims that restricting sex education is dangerous to young people.

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Youth Participant 49: The Canadian Press, TORONTO — A new survey says Toronto teens need more sexual health education. It says teens are engaging in risky sexual behaviour but aren't getting the information they need to protect themselves from sexually-transmitted infections. The survey of 1,216 teens ages 13 to 18 is a joint project of Planned Parenthood Toronto, York University, the University of Toronto, Wilfrid Laurier University, and Toronto Public Health. It found 83 per cent of respondents had never accessed sexual health-care from a doctor or a clinic, many because of concerns over confidentiality. Overall, they found 24 per cent of the teens who took part in the survey had never engaged in any sexual experiences, while 27 per cent reported vaginal intercourse, 25 per cent reported giving or receiving oral sex and seven per cent reported anal sex.

That means 3/4 of surveyed teens have had sexual experiences (At least in kinky Toronto, haha). I would not call 76% non-existent. The teen pregnancy rate has been falling consistently over the past decades. Proof:

http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/images/pub_graphics/coststudy.gif

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The American Academy of Pediatrics states that “Abstinence-only programs have not demonstrated successful outcomes with regard to delayed initiation of sexual activity or use of safer sex practices.” On August 4, 2007, the British Medical Journal published an editorial concluding that there is “no evidence” that abstinence-only sex education programs “reduce risky sexual behaviours, incidence

⁷ The full citation for this article can be found in the reference list under ‘Advocates for Youth’. The full citations for the subsequent three articles in this posting can be found in the reference list under CTV Toronto, American Academy of Pediatrics, and Hawes, S. E., Sow, P. S., & Kiviat, N. B.

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of sexually transmitted infections, or pregnancy” in “high income countries.”

Sources:

http://toronto.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20090602/sex_health_090602/20090602?hub=Toronto

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/108/2/498>

<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/extract/335/7613/217>

This lengthy posting features many expert opinions, including three from Canadian universities, one NGO, one government agency, a medical association and a peer-reviewed journal. Many youth cited the work of professional organizations or academic researchers when discussing Bill 44, with this posting reflecting the highest number of sources cited in a single post. Consistent with deficit based sexual education programs (McKay et. al., 2001; Smylie, 2008), these quotations from youth demonstrate their understanding that the purpose of sex education is largely preventative. Its’ goal is seen as helping youth avoid specific negative outcomes, such as unplanned pregnancy and STI’s. Sex education as a means of preventing sexual assault or sexual violence is not referred to. Furthermore, none of the youth who mentioned sex education in their understanding of Bill 44 made reference to sex education helping students achieve positive outcomes, such as those listed in the Public Health Agency of Canada (2003) guidelines. In light of this understanding of the purpose and goals of sex education, it is obvious why they would understand Bill 44 to be a dangerous piece of educational reform, as it prevents sex education from fulfilling its’ preventative function for all Alberta public school students.

Bill 44 Will Incite Violence. Besides being dangerous to their sexual health, youth projected an increase in both local and global violence as a result of Bill 44. The distinction between this and the previous subcategory lies in both intent and in actual

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harm. In the previous subcategory, the dangers that are seen to follow the consensual sexual activities of uneducated youth are seen as accidental and largely not life threatening. They frame potential youth sexual activities as happening in consenting relationships, with no mention of violence or coercion. This understanding of danger contrasts sharply with danger they describe as coming from the premeditated violent attacks from those who, because of Bill 44, will be uneducated, particularly on topics such as religion and sexual orientation.

Youth Participant 126: for example if someone were to believe in buddism but the child of an extreme christian found out he or she would think its wrong and depending on the person this could end violently.

Youth Participant 126 is making a direct link between a lack of knowledge about religious diversity and increased inter-faith violence. Other youth illustrated similar understandings by offering interpretations of historical and contemporary acts of violence:

Youth Participant 58: Ignorance was what toppled the two towers, ignorance kept people like hitler in power, and we must not allow it to pass! DOWN WITH BILL 44!

Youth Participant 176: If we on't teach them about evolution, or homosexuals we are creating fear and fear leads to hate. We are begging of another holocaust if we breed this kind of society and cutting our knowledge is the first step. Hitler was taught to fear homosexuals as well as jews .

At its most extreme, this understanding projected the beginnings of armed conflict:

Youth Participant 23: But isn't that how wars start—Ignorance?

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A straight line between Bill 44 and physical violence and/or war is drawn in these understandings. Bill 44 is understood as the first step in inciting armed conflict by allowing for some youth to not receive formal education pertaining to contentious topics in public schools.

Bill 44 Protects. The majority of understandings in this category were written by youth who supported Bill 44. They posted in both of the Facebook groups (students for and students against Bill 44) and demonstrated thoughtful understandings of the role schooling and the purpose of both human rights and educational reform. Although the majority of youth participants strongly opposed Bill 44, the presence of youth who supported it complexifies the understandings of youth as a collective. The participation of youth who have supported Bill 44 makes it impossible to classify youth as wholly anti-establishment and contrary to the ideas of adults. That being said, those who opposed the bill vastly outnumbered the youth who conceived of Bill 44 as a protection against various types of harm. Youth understood Bill 44 as protecting two distinct phenomena that were important to them, Canadian culture, and freedom from teacher bias.

Bill 44 Protects Canadian Identity. Favourable references to multiculturalism are central to this understanding. The ability to accommodate is seen as a particularly Canadian policy, and fundamental to Canadian identity. Bill 44 is understood as protecting the multiculturalism and Canadian identity that are important the following Facebook author.

Youth Participant 119: This bill upholds one of the great things in Canada. That we are a multicultural society. We are not a melting pot. We do not send children to school to all become the same. We MUST let parents raise their children according to their own beliefs, to uphold our freedom and the great country that is Canada...

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Oh, so you're a big fan of the American melting pot then? You're very un-Canadian, attacking on of the base precepts of our country like that. The reason our country is great is because of the multiculturalism, and you want to take away freedom for people to do that.

This youth is clearly proud to be a Canadian citizen, which is conceived of as being part of a country that is distinctly multicultural and allows for particular educational accommodations. Youth Participant 119 defines multiculturalism by situating it as the opposite of the American melting pot, and appears to have conflated the meaning of multicultural with the broader terms of diversity, or pluralism. Bill 44 is thus understood as a vehicle through which multiculturalism and the right to accommodate are protected in public education. It is also seen as protection against a Canadian identity that veers too closely towards an American one. This is reflection of a strongly held stereotype that Canada is considerably friendlier to diverse cultural expression than the United States is.

Bill 44 Protects Students From Teacher's Biases. Youth in this category understand teachers as having excessive power to teach the curriculum from their own biased perspectives. Similar to the postings in other categories, these youth are frustrated. They understand Bill 44 as protecting not only themselves as students, but also the Alberta curriculum from the bias of their teachers.

Youth Participant 194: Why is it exactly that schools must teach young minds of the "controversial topics" anyhow? You go to school to get an education to allow you to make your own choices, learning such topics as how to read and write, how to do various forms of math, physics, chemistry, biology. You learn how to do sports, about history, economics. None of these except biology even come close to reaching a controversial topic, so why would Edmonton have to pass such a bill to

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keep education to be informational, parental upbringing to be values, in the first place? Because teachers find it within themselves to promote controversial topics. For instance, just last week, I was “taught” that a lack of social Darwinism in our society of leading to all our social problems.

Youth Participant 194 begins his posting by outlining a clear conception of the purpose of public schooling. In his view, teaching and learning should not be political or controversial acts. He communicates feeling frustrated by his teachers’ subverting this purpose of schooling by ‘finding it within themselves to promote controversial topics’. Youth Participant 194 thus understands Bill 44 as an attempt by lawmakers in Edmonton to rein in those teachers who refuse to adhere to this conception of the purpose of schooling. In this case, Bill 44 protects the students, the curriculum, and the purpose of public education from the promotion by teachers of that which is or may be perceived as controversial.

Bill 44 is Threatening. Youth understand the implementation of Bill 44 as threatening in many different ways. This is qualitatively different from the ‘Bill 44 is Dangerous’ category, as Bill 44 is not understood here as being responsible for causing physical harm. Within schooling, youth see it as threatening education in general, the public system specifically, particular courses or curricula, the standards maintained in standardized testing, and the ability of teachers to do their jobs. Beyond schooling and in the wider community, Bill 44 is seen as threatening Canadian culture, democracy and societal cohesiveness. Finally, Bill 44 is understood to threaten children as future independent adults. The common thread in this category is that Bill 44 is understood to threaten some facet of life that is important to youth; by changing a phenomenon they believe existed prior to Bill 44. The large number of qualitatively different subcategories

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illustrates the breadth of collective understanding that youth had of Bill 44 as a threatening piece of legislation.

Bill 44 Threatens the Purpose of Education. Youth understand Bill 44 as threatening to what they conceive of as the purpose of education. This understanding is informed by what youth understand to be the aims, or purpose of education:

Youth Participant 191: At its very core, this bill supports, and essentially aims to create, closed-mindedness in the students of our schools. It goes against the essential principles of a balanced and well-rounded education, allowing students and their parents to pick and choose what information they should be exposed to.

Youth Participant 35: I recently participated in a forum in Ottawa where we toured the parliament. You know what nearly all the brilliant students felt towards education? Standardization! You cannot teach one child that a color is called red and the other child blue and expect them to maintain an understanding of one another.

Youth Participant 35's conception of schooling echoes that espoused by Adler (1982), who recommended "we should have a one-track system of schooling, not a system with two or more tracks, only one of which goes straight ahead..." (p. 177). By virtue of being conceived of as a homogenizing process, the accommodation of parents being able to 'pick and choose' courses for their children undermines the entire enterprise. What Youth Participant 191 describes as 'the essential principles of a balanced and well-rounded education' can be interpreted as identical mandatory curricula for all students. Youth Participant 35 makes this claim more explicitly. Other youth presented more nuanced understandings of schooling:

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Youth Participant 69: The school's purpose is to teach these perspectives, to provide a complete view of the world to children. Allowing parents to remove their children from classes because they don't agree with another's viewpoint is absolutely and fundamentally wrong. "The greatest ignorance is to reject something you know nothing about".

Youth Participant 69 builds on the previous conceptions of the purpose of schooling by offering a reason for why parents may want to remove their children from a particular class. He describes these parents as not agreeing with the viewpoint(s) presented in said classes, and dismisses their disagreement as ignorance through his quotation. This quotation can also be understood as hypothesizing that those children who are exempt from particular subjects will, through their ignorance, subsequently reject the teachings of said subject. Youth Participant 70 extends this understanding of parents opting their children out of particular classes by connecting individual and collective rights to the purpose of education:

Youth Participant 70: The point of school is to teach facts, opposing viewpoints, to show every perspective on certain issues. If a parents who disagreed with one of these viewpoints or facts pulled their child out of class, how with this child learn? If many parents do the same thing, how will our society learn? The answer is simple: it won't.

This conception of schooling reiterates Youth Participant 69's conception, which is to provide the same 'complete' curriculum to all students. Youth Participant 70's reasoning that parents who opt their children out of classes do so because they don't agree with the viewpoint presented in said class. She adds to these a rudimentary application of the tragedy of the commons, whereby a choice made at the individual level might be low risk,

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but if all individual made the same low risk choice, the risk for the collective is considerably elevated. Bill 44 is thus conceived of as allowing a tragedy of the commons to occur, which is understood to be threatening to the purpose of education. Unlike those in the 'Bill 44 is Dangerous' category, she does not connect this lack of learning to physical danger, or jeopardized health, but rather as a threat to education.

Schooling is also conceived of as a place of learning. The threat of ignorance, should Bill 44 pass is a recurring fear in youth understandings of the bill:

Youth Participant 58: It officially legalizes ignorance in the classrooms, is fascistic and will lead to nothing but our own demise within our ignorance.

Youth Participant 240: I think the thing many people are missing that are for this bill is that it is not restricting the rights of the parents so much as it is saying it is okay for parents to support ignorance on certain subjects.

Youth Participant 233: From what I can tell, wouldn't this lovely bill breed an ignorant, close-minded generation?

The threat of individual and collective ignorance is understood to be a direct result of Bill 44. Schooling is presented as the antithesis of ignorance, which youth understand as being legalized by Bill 44.

Bill 44 Threatens the Public System. This subcategory is closely related to the previous, but with a specific focus on threats the bill poses to a *publicly funded* system of mandatory education. The participants elaborate on the particulars of the public system, separating it from the general purposes of education, in the following passages:

Youth Participant 206: I agree that parents should have some choice (Some) but is there really a need for this bill in public schools? There re close a hundred religious based schools in Alberta (not counting the Catholic system) and many of them are

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publicly funded. So if the parents feel strongly enough about their beliefs they completely free to enroll their children in one of these such schools, home schooling is also a possible choice. So the options are already out there and thus there is need to hamper the public system with these restrictions. In trying to cater to minorities (whose rights should be respected) the government completely forgets about the majority of the population and end up making very few people happy.

The tension of individual versus collective rights is central to this passage, with the student understanding that the purpose of the public system is to cater to the majority, while several publicly funded religiously based schools are seen as options for minorities. Home schooling is also suggested as a means to accommodate minorities. The student understands Bill 44 as allowing so much accommodation for ‘very few people’ that it threatens what he sees as the purpose of the public system. This is a qualitatively different understanding than the previous subcategory, which saw the purpose of education itself as under attack. Here, Bill 44 is understood in light of how education is delivered in a pluralistic province, and how accommodation is balanced between the majority and minorities. Several youth offered similar understandings, albeit with far less explanation than Youth Participant 206 gave:

Youth Participant 205: In my opinion if you need to shelter your child, homeschool them or send them to a religious school of your choice.

Youth Participant 234: I agree. Leave public schools for students and parents with open minds to what is being taught.

Youth Participant 121: take your kid out of the public school system if you can’t handle the fact that children need to know about the world.

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Not only do these youth understand the accommodation requirement of Bill 44 as threatening to the public system, they dismiss those who would use accommodation (either through the provisions in Bill 44, home schooling or religious schooling) as ‘need[ing] to shelter’, not having an ‘open mind’, and not being able to ‘handle the fact that children need to know about the world’.

Bill 44 Threatens Particular Courses and/or Curricula. Youth used their personal experiences as students in Alberta public schools to speculate how the implementation of Bill 44 would impact particular courses and/or curricula. In this section, they understand that the restrictions that Bill 44 would place on teaching and learning will ultimately threaten the integrity of specific courses or materials, which are seen to be of importance. Some youth understood the effects of Bill 44 on course material to be wide-ranging:

Youth Participant 225: What if the parents are creationists with kids in a Catholic school? There goes Science. Against a particular government policy? There goes Social Studies. Sex ed? No more Health/Phys Ed. Of a religion other than the one the school is based on? No more religion. Attendance to nearly every class except math can now be circumvented.

Youth Participant 225 gives examples of several courses to demonstrate how he understands Bill 44 threatening the attendance and integrity of many of the core subjects in Alberta. Other youth illustrate this understanding by referencing their experiences within specific courses, namely social studies, science, language arts and religion. In describing their experiences as social studies students, youth grounded their understanding of Bill 44 in the evolving nature of the course, coupled with its’ focus on current events.

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Youth Participant 109: my social teacher dose recent events in the morning where we discuss social and political events and issues that are happening right now and frequently things involving religion and such come up. For some of my class mates this is how thay learn about recent events and if this was no longer allowed because a parent did not want it discussed it would cause many of the students in my class to lose out on the experience.

Youth Participant 125: It's an inconvenience for the teachers by making them create extra forms and waiting extra time to get the forms back. It's especially hard for social teachers when it comes to current events for students.

Youth Participant 196: let's do a scenario... In current events class Rahim brings in an article about the fact that Iowa legalized gay marriage. He wants to present it to the class. The teacher says ok well I will take the article, spend 15 minutes writing up a permission slip, give it to all the students, wait two weeks for all the little ones to actually get it back to him, have 3 kids out of the discussion because naturally they lost their form etc etc.... and then half the parents pull their kid out because they seem to think that somehow learning about Iowa passing gay marriage will turn their kid gay. So after 2 weeks, the teacher can talk about a not-so-current-anymore event to half the class, while having to find something educational for the other half.

The impractical implementation of Bill 44 is understood to be threatening to the teaching and learning of social studies. These examples describe how the teachers, learners, and the course content of social studies will be threatened. History as a discipline was often singled out as being particularly threatened by Bill 44:

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Youth Participant 147: Alright, i have a list of stuff on't gunna happen in my school because of the bill. 1. Well, i remember in Gr. 8 we hade to learn bout the renaissance, and learning a little bit about the catholic church and what kind of influence religion had on ppls lives was a pretty big part of the curriculum, so now wut ??

Youth Participant 144: how are we supposed to learn about WWII?

Unlike youth in the 'Bill 44 Protects' category, these students understand history to be rife with controversy, and understand that Bill 44 will erase, or flatten some its' content. Youth descriptions of how science courses are threatened are similarly focused more on the academic integrity of the course than on the students or teachers:

Youth Participant 215: The purpose of biology is to come to understand the human body. I don't see why parents should have the right to pull us out some biology classes because we're discovering what our reproductive organs are. We're learning in a controlled academic environment so i would assume that parents would be more at ease.

Youth Participant 96: we need to know about sex. we need to know how our bodies work.

The hassles of permission slips described in the understandings related to social studies are absent from these, which pertain to science. Unlike those in the 'Bill 44 is Dangerous to the Sexual Health and Well Being of Youth' category, these understandings do not see Bill 44 as dangerous to their health, but as threatening to their academic study of the biological sciences. The students who referred to language arts similarly referred to the curriculum and choice of books being significantly limited by the restrictions of Bill 44.

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Youth Participant 205: In my Lit 35 AP class next year we will be studying biblical allusions. I know my teacher is not religious but she believes that biblical allusions are critical as they underly many important pieces of literature. So should she just exempt students who are pulled from the class from 2+ weeks of school and the accompanying projects?

Youth Participant 189: It's so stupid because we are reading a book in LA called I am David and there is lots of stuff bout religion and its a great book! But next year the other kids cant read it. I on't get why we cant talk about religion !

Similar to the understandings that referenced science courses, Bill 44 is understood as threatening the content of language arts, particularly those books or projects that increase religious literacy. Youth Participant 205s comments demonstrate how he understands that Bill 44 will threaten the study of the dominant religion in Alberta, which is Christianity. Bill 44 was further understood as threatening the study of religion as a subject in its' own right. Youth emphasized the inter-faith and religiously inspired dialogue that they believe would cease to exist, as well as ignorance of multiple faith traditions, if Bill 44 were to pass.

Youth Participant 90: And with the religion topic, i say with great sadness, that i will not be able to hear from friends of debates like i used to, because I recall within the past year asking many religious and evolution related questions, and many amazing debates came from them.

Youth Participant 87: This bill could mean that parents pull their kids out of different part of religion classes at my high school....meaning students will not even be given the chance to learn about the different main religions other than our own... which is just stupid...

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Youth demonstrate their understandings of Bill 44 as threatening to particular courses and/or curricula by providing a wide range of examples drawn from their lived experiences as students in the province of Alberta. They understand the bill as threatening to the teaching and learning of these courses, as well as to the content of the curriculum itself.

Bill 44 Threatens the Standards of Standardized Testing. Youth in this category also draw heavily on their own lived experiences as students who must regularly write standardized tests. Bill 44 was seen as a threat to the standards maintained through standardized testing, as well as a threat to the grades of students who are removed from courses which teach content that appears on standardized tests.

Youth Participant 205: This Bill just really bothers me because of the issues it presents. In my AP Psych class (which in May requires that one writes a standardized AP exam) covered evolution. I would have felt sorry for kids that were pulled out of class and thus would have had unfair chances on the test.

Youth Participant 90: I don't think it's an option to not get marked on those chapters relating to the reproductive organs of both males and females. I've looked at it a bit during my bio 20 class and it's pretty interesting... Since it's part of the bio 30 curriculum, I highly doubt that they would excuse those chapters from exams, midterms, or diploma's .

Youth Participant 125: From my understanding, even if a student gets pulled out of some topics, those topics will still turn up on diplomas and exams. So that would that student would have a disadvantage.

Bill 44 is understood to pose serious risk to the grades of students withdrawn from instruction pertaining to human sexuality, sexual orientation, and religion. There appears

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to be some confusion as to how standards can remain universal if they do not apply to all students.

Bill 44 Threatens Teachers. Particular understandings of what it means to be a teacher inform this category. Onerous administrative requirement, loss of freedom of speech, and a chilling effect on class dialogue are all seen as the inevitable result of Bill 44, which in turn threaten a teacher's ability to do his or her job. One youth offers a succinct job description of what it means to be a teacher:

Youth Participant 87: I want to become a teacher. I want to help children discover who they are... but how can I do that if parents limit what their children exposed to in an already fairly protected environment.

This understanding is reminiscent of Saban, Kocbeker & Saban's (2007) metaphor of the teacher as a nurturer/cultivator, with the student as a developing organism. As a teacher who 'helps[s] children discover who they are... in a fairly protected environment', Youth Participant 87's conception of a teacher is one of a caring individual, who "... nourishes and fosters the potential capabilities of each student in a loving and nurturing learning environment" (Sunker et. al., 2007, p. 131). Bill 44 is thus conceived as placing undue restrictions on a teacher's ability to do their job, which threatens the role of teacher, as understood by Youth Participant 87. Although not tied to such a specific understanding of the role teachers, Youth Participant 9 also understands Bill 44 as placing undue restrictions on teachers, which threatens their ability to talk about current events:

Youth Participant 9: It is unfair to cripple us and the teachers by making a bunch of hurdles they have to get through to talk about today's issues.

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Rather than focusing on the extra paperwork that Bill 44 this would mean for teachers, Youth Participant 9 sees Bill 44 as threatening the ability of teachers to speak freely on given issues:

Youth Participant 206: All it will take is one loony parent to take a school to court over a teacher saying Jesus or Gay or something like that and all of a sudden no teacher will ever want to discuss anything again, it goes from students developing their own ideas to teachers simply downloading information to students for them to regurgitate upon command.

These understandings present qualitatively different conceptions of teachers than did those in the ‘Bill 44 Protects Against Teacher Biases’ category. Rather than parents needing protection from teachers, here it is the teachers who need protection from parents. This lends support to Schneider and Diminto’s (2008) and Sweet’s (1997) findings that teachers are hesitant to include explicit reference to LGBTQ or religious content within the curriculum for fear of parental reprisal or harassment.

Youth Participant 206’s description of the effect that Bill 44 will have on teachers closely resembles what Freire (1970) termed ‘banking’ education, which is where “education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (72). Bill 44 is understood to result in banking education, which threatens the teacher’s ability to use a dialogical pedagogy in class. The type of banking education that Alberta students would receive would be further limited by the teachers’ inability to freely ‘deposit’ information on sexuality, sexual orientation and religion.

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Bill 44 Threatens Canadian Values. Bill 44 is understood to be contrary to not only Canadian law, but also threatening what is perceived to be the nation's core values.

Youth Participant 49: this bill goes against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Youth Participant 35: This bill is contradictory to Canada's Human Rights and the UN's Human Rights! As usual Canada [although the bill is provincial] faces its most difficult problem: the extent of accommodation.

These postings question the legality of Bill 44 by reference to federal pieces of legislation; one is part of the Canadian constitution, the other is a federally ratified and legally binding international charter. Youth Participant 35 demonstrates some knowledge of the separation of powers within Canada's federal system, and understands Bill 44 as one example of what he describes as Canada's 'most difficult problem', which is the accommodation of minorities in a pluralist state. Beyond accommodation, other core Canadian values are described as being threatened by Bill 44:

Youth Participant 39: And most importantly, it means lack of tolerance and free speech, everything our country prides itself on.

Youth Participant 100: We the students are the future of not only this province, but the entire country. Bill 44 wrongly restricts the learning of global perspectives which as Canadians, we demonstrate among the international community. I'm quite sure that Canadians will want to keep up our reputation as being global citizens who can respond intelligently to the issues of the world, while taking into account all perspectives on a given matter. To achieve this, we cannot let Bill 44 attempt to restrain us from becoming successful leaders of tomorrow. Fight for our right to education.

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Several values are identified as both Canadian, and under siege from Bill 44. Tolerance, leadership, free speech and open-mindedness are described positively as important threads in the national fabric, which could be undermined by Bill 44.

Bill 44 Threatens Democracy. This distinct category understands democracy in general as threatened by Bill 44, not Canadian democracy specifically.

Youth Participant 56: Once we begin censoring something because a group of very loud people are offended by it, where do we stop? If you're offended by the color blue, and you can scream it really loud, that doesn't mean that nobody should be allowed to wear the color blue/ We live in a democracy, not a fascist dictatorship. The accommodation of small, vocal minorities is understood to be undemocratic.

Youth Participant 61: If Canadian are not taught about these subjects who know what will come of our society, knowledge is power. If the Canadian government takes this away from kids who know what will come of future generations they will become uneducated and this will lead to poor government, And possibly the passing of more ridiculous bills like this one.

Youth Participant 61 makes no reference to the accommodation of small groups of vocal supporters of Bill 44 posing a threat to democracy. She is instead concerned about an uneducated electorate, which in a democracy can elect poor leaders who can then pass 'ridiculous' bills. This understanding overlaps somewhat with those in the 'Bill 44 Threatens the Purpose of Education', however, Youth Participant 61 is not as focused on education in and of itself as she is about the effects it will have on a collective of future voters.

Bill 44 Threatens Social Cohesiveness. While there is overlap between this category and 'Bill 44 Will Incite Violence', the youth in this category do not make a

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direct link between Bill 44 and physical harm. Rather, Bill 44 is understood as deepening divisions and decreasing tolerance and understanding in what is believed to be an increasingly pluralistic nation and world.

Youth Participant 90: the thing i have to say about this bill is just that, the world has like 6 billion some people in it. Of course we aren't going to accept eachothers beliefs but we should at least tolerate them and learn about them, as the saying "you can't say you don't like it until you try it" somewhat applies here. You on't have to be homosexual to say you agree with them and their beliefs but you can at least tolerate it or learn they aren't bad people.

Youth Participant 191: In our globally integrated society, we must aim to learn through as many different perspectives as possible in order to better understand each other and our world. Our international connectedness demands that we do not allow ourselves to be sheltered and naïve, but rather than we aim to create unity through mutual understanding. This will never happen if we avoid everything we may in whatever way not agree with. For the betterment of our world we must aim to examine the points of view of others for the sake of tolerance and understanding. This bill takes great strides in the wrong direction.

The cohesiveness and collaboration of global society is presented as threatened by Bill 44. Students who are presumably part of the dominant culture (i.e. Christian, heterosexual, Canadian-born, etc.) are thought to become more tolerant in learning about non-dominant individuals and groups. Bill 44 is understood to impede this inevitable tolerance by not allowing free and open discussion about minorities.

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Bill 44 Threatens Children's Futures. Bill 44 is understood to threaten the future economic and moral success of youth by allowing for the censorship of vital topics in public schools.

Youth Participant 113: By avoiding topics that play a large part in today's active society, the government is attempting preventing the adults of tomorrow to be fully prepared for the real world.

Youth Participant 90: I think there are so many restrictions on learning these days, and then we're expected to live in 'the real world' and face many things in life and won't have the skills or knowledge to understand or deal with the, real world.

These understandings further reveal what youth understand as the purpose of schooling.

The youth oppose Bill 44 because it contradicts schooling's purpose, which they conceive of as preparing them for this 'real world', or for some future life. This use of language indicates that these youth do not conceive of school being part of the 'real world', but rather, as some sort of contrived, or artificial environment. Another youth elaborates on this understanding:

Youth Participant 136: it will restrict students from learning things that are important for their future and their future careers. i believe the bill should not have been passed.

Youth Participant 136 clarifies the preparatory element of schooling by connecting it to students' future careers. Bill 44 is understood to threaten the preparatory nature of schooling, and in turn, the future careers of students. Schools are therefore seen as training grounds for the 'real world', not part of it.

Category Four: Speculation on the Motivation for the Phenomenon

Bill 44 is Adult Censorship. This category is informed by what youth understand as the motive for drafting and passing Bill 44. Here, youth understand lawmakers as being motivated by wanting to censor particular topics from youth, which is consistent with Postman's (1982) analysis that childhood is the state of controlled ignorance. Parents, the government, religious groups, and adults in general are understood to be responsible for what youth see as censorship in public schools. The first subcategory dismisses the censorship of Bill 44 as ineffective, while the second, third, and fourth subcategories understand Bill 44 as an effective means for parents, the government, and religious groups to censor public education, and by extension, the children's learning and access to information.

Bill 44 is Ineffective Adult Censorship. Like all the subcategories within this category, the overall meaning of the phenomenon is understood to be adult censorship of curriculum content. While youth in subsequent subcategories decry censorship as a negative act, the youth comments in this subcategory understand the censorship to be ineffective. Based on this understanding, some youth dismiss Bill 44 as ineffective, because they do not understand how it achieves its' overall goal of censorship.

Youth Participant 113: By preventing students from hearing about it [sex] in class does not prevent them from learning it outside of the classroom.

Youth Participant 129: It is sheltering kids from the real world. There going to hear it any way so why pass a bill.....

Youth Participant 66: Don't whine about it if your parents didn't let you learn something. Most of us lean about sex, sexuality, religion, and all those other sensitive topics from someone other than our teacher. If you're that sheltered

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already, then get some friends and read a book. There is nothing you can learn in class that you can't learn elsewhere.

The censorship of Bill 44 is understood to be largely ineffective because it will fail to prohibit youth access to particular topics. Youth Participant 66's illustrates Postman's (1982) claim that 'reading is the scourge of childhood' by commenting on how children can easily learn about sexuality by 'read[ing] a book'. Bill 44 is understood as an ineffective way for adults to control, limit, or censor children's learning about sexuality. Bill 44 is understood to be ineffective because it does not allow adults, and in particular, teachers, to appropriately manage, control and teach the topics to which youth will access regardless. This byproduct of the bill is understood to be counter-intuitive to its' original purpose, which was to have adults manage, control, or otherwise censor children's learning about human sexuality, sexual orientation and religion. By having some students removed from classes that teach these topics, Bill 44 is understood as an ineffective means for adults to be involved in youth learning:

Youth Participant 130: This comes down to when you as a parent decide educationally what's the best. Learning it in the classroom, or have them find it out by some other means. The classroom sounds like a smart idea.

Youth Participant 240: Do you realize though that if you don't explain it to them, sooner or later they will find out, whether it be through friends, movies, random discussion on the internet. And it might not be in the way you would like them to either.

This understanding reflects a preference for adults to be involved in youth learning about the subjects listed in Bill 44. The bill is seen as ineffective in achieving this goal, because it allows for some youth to never have adult and, in particular, teacher guidance when

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they inevitable encounter materials pertaining to human sexuality, sexual orientation and religion. These youth who oppose Bill 44 want the support and advice of trusted adults when learning about human sexuality, sexual orientation and religion.

Bill 44 is Censorship by Parents. Bill 44 is understood to be a legislative example of government appeasement for overprotective parents who want to censor, control, or to otherwise be the sole educator of their children. Bill 44 is described as offering legal legitimacy to overprotective Alberta parents, who are described as incompetent and controlling.

Youth Participant 135: Bill 44 is for overprotective parents. Parents' overprotection is continually linked to what is understood to be their censoring of public school curricula. Youth understand children's learning about sexuality as inevitable, and are concerned that Bill 44 allows for parents to be the only adults who educate children about sex. Several youth dismiss parents' ability to be the sole educator of their children by virtue of parents' perceived incompetence.

Youth Participant 227: Parents, and I don't just mean you, cannot be trusted to educate their kids properly about sex.

Youth Participant 87: Yes a parent should be a key educator to their child however as a child I like to learn the views of others, and quite frankly I believe that the health worker of my childhood was more qualified to teach me the facts of my body than my mother with her arts degree ever could hope to be. The schools are not trying to take away your options as a parent, the fact is some parents do not or cannot teach their children about how their body works.

Other youth used hypothetical examples to illustrate their understanding of parents as incompetent educators:

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Youth Participant 180: If my parents decide tomorrow not to believe in gravity, or the concept of a gaseous air, and evolution then I can no longer study the natural sciences, period. I should then live the rest of my life completely uneducated, just because my parents had crazy views?

The ability for parents to legally withdraw their children from classes is repeatedly described as censorship. Bill 44 is thus conceived of as a piece of legislation that protects the right of parents to censor education. Parents' ability to be competent, primary educators lies at the heart of this understanding. Youth understand Bill 44 as censoring sex education in schools, which would allow parents to become their children's sole teachers of sex education. They reject the notion that parents have the knowledge and/or skills to be the primary sex educators for children, and appear frustrated that a piece of legislation would allow these unqualified adults to censor sex education that could otherwise be taught in the schools. Some youth relied on recent Canadian news stories to illustrate the potential inadequacies of parents as educators:

Youth Participant 52: Unfortunately, recently we saw one case of a parent in Winnipeg teaching her children racist beliefs (White Supremacy). This obviously proves that parents should not always teach their children ideas, for the parents may not know right from wrong themselves. Why should parents have a right to censor their child's learning, especially if they teach their children toxic ideas at home?

Youth Participant 196: I respect that parents have the right to teach their kids their values... but to what extent? The woman that drilled white supremacist ideas into her daughters head and sent her to school with swastika's drawn on her arm was simply teaching her kids her values...

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Parents are collectively understood to be unqualified to censor education because some parents have demonstrated poor judgment in teaching their children. The case of the mother in Winnipeg is used to illustrate the potential risks of deferring to parental judgment on important educational matters and demonstrates youth awareness of educational issues in other jurisdictions.

Bill 44 is Government Censorship. Bill 44 is understood to be a calculated government maneuver to reinforce consumerist values in young people. Governmental censorship, brainwashing and abuse of power are recurring themes in this category. One youth accuses the government of using Bill 44 to keep young people uneducated in order to advance a materialistic agenda:

Youth Participant 35: but of course, they don't want us to think. They just want us to live our lives by their own rules and have no opinion about anything... That is how they drown us with materialistic beliefs like the latest Iphone or the latest style. They won't keep brainwashing us like this.

Materialistic beliefs are understood to be the direct result of governmental action that encourages unthinking young people. Other youth debated whether or not enacting Bill 44 meant that their premier, Ed Stelmach is a dictator:

Youth Participant 212: a dictator is exactly what Stelmach is..forcing censorship because the majority of people in their 30s-50s are racist assholes that would love to pull their kids out of class during a discussion on religions of the world

Youth Participant 49: While I do not agree that Stelmach is a dictator, his caucus is abusing their power.

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Youth Participant 207: maybe not a dictator... yet. he does not have the power to do this and i think he's crossed the line way too many times but now people besides me give a shit.

References to Stalin and Hitler were frequently used to illustrate whether or not Premier Stelmach is indeed a dictator. Whether a dictatorial power grab or an attempt to push a capitalist agenda on children, a sinister government is understood to be censoring public school curricula.

Bill 44 is Censorship by Religious Groups. This understanding hinges on the notion that religious groups should not participate in public decision-making. Religious groups, and by extension, religious people, are understood to be inhibitors of progress and are portrayed as naïve.

Youth Participant 42: Goddamn. Since when should bible/torah/qu'ran thumping parents stick their noses in what public-school kids are learning.

Youth Participant 42 appears to be advocating for parents of all Abrahamic faiths to refrain from using faith based views to influence public school curricula. Her use of the phrase 'stick their noses' implies uninvited or unwelcome intrusions by parents who practice Abrahamic faiths. Other youth understood Christian organizations as primarily responsible for what they see as the censorship and religious supremacy:

Youth Participant 214: If they approve Bill 44 they may as well just duct tape our mouth's shut, plug our ears, and make everyone believe that the Christian Religion is the only choice and that everything and everyone else be damned.

Youth Participant 52: We can't let fundamentalist Christian parents prevent their children from learning about science just because of their religious complexes.

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While there is some overlap with ‘Bill 44 is Parental Censorship’, these understandings are distinct because the motivation for censorship is not understood to be stemming purely from a parents’ wish to control their children, but rather, from religious convictions that are positioned as contradictory to scientific evidence. Youth Participant 52’s dismissal of religious convictions as ‘complexes’, suggests they are not to be taken seriously, and indeed, should be circumvented by secularists or non-fundamentalist religious people. It is possible that Youth Participant 214’s projection of forced Christian teaching is based on the fact that Christianity is the normative, dominant religion in Alberta. Although she does not make the claim explicitly, Christian themes and holidays are ubiquitous in Alberta, so it is possible that she understands that Christian topics will not be recognized as specifically religious, and thus will not fall under the purview of Bill 44.

Bill 44 is Prejudiced. This category is split into two subcategories. In the first, Bill 44 is understood as being informed by ageist prejudices towards young people; in the second, by heterosexism and thinly veiled homophobia. Throughout this category, Bill 44 is understood as a legislative means for prejudiced adults to perpetuate stereotypes, inequality, and powerlessness among marginalized groups and individuals.

Bill 44 is Paradoxical. Bill 44 is understood to employ circular logic so to ensure a no-win situation for children. Adults are understood to hold ageist prejudices against youth, while simultaneously passing a law that will maintain all of the same negative qualities adults associate with youth. Bill 44 is understood to be a law that will perpetuate pejorative stereotypes about young people.

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Youth Participant 102: I don't understand why adults always bitch about our generations incompetence, idiocy, and lack of knowledge and perspective on such things.

And then this fucking bill passes.

The fuck?

I hate you government.

Youth Participant 188: They say they'll treat us like adults when we act like them, but how can we act like adults when the government is taking enrichment like this away from classrooms and we can't show our insightfulness or opinions on important topics in class rooms.

These youth understand Bill 44 as a calculated move by adults to keep youth powerless and uninformed. Adding to this injustice is the understanding that adults frequently refer to the perceived ignorance of youth as a justification for keeping them powerless. Without making reference to the original source, Bill 44 is seen as a Catch-22 for young people. Ageist prejudices of youth being ignorant and incapable, coupled with the desire to have these ageist prejudices maintained and reproduced are seen as the impetus

Bill 44 is Heterosexist. Bill 44, or more specifically, amendment 11.1 (which is the section that applies to schools, and what youth commonly refer to as 'Bill 44') is understood as heterosexist both in the motivation for its' being written, and in the effects it will have in the classroom. In the first case, the province of Alberta was ordered by the Supreme Court of Canada in *Vriend vs. Alberta* (1998) to amend its' provincial human rights legislation to include sexual orientation as a protected ground against discrimination. Eleven years later (and seven years after the next to last territory amended its' provincial human rights charter to include sexual orientation), Alberta passed Bill 44.

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Youth thus understand Bill 44 as contradictory and heterosexist, as it was supposed to be LGBTQ positive legislation. Some youth were simply confused:

Youth Participant 199: i just read Bill 44 and i think i'm missing something... the entire thing is about no one shall discriminate based on sexuality, marital status, race, gender, etc..... theres a whole 4 short paragraphs on the school thing..... and the rest is human rights and amendments... did i miss something!?

Youth Participant 199's confusion is informed by his understanding that Bill 44 is intended to be an anti-discrimination bill. Other youth were more blatant in describing what they understood as government heterosexism in human rights legislation.

Youth Participant 88: If Ed Stelmach feels the need to compensate for the homosexual people of Alberta having the rights they deserve he is not only ignorant but a complete fool as well.

Youth Participant 92: why is it though that canada is allowing gay marriage but yet they're trying to suppress it with this bill thats like stabbing people in the back like what the heck

Youth Participant 190: Bottom line is ...that this Bill is (from a Law Makers perspective) Very poorly written, Hastily made and quit frankly unsafe for general legal use. All on a simple revision to sexuality that should have been done nearly a full decade ago!

Bill 44 is thus conceived of as sending a mixed, and ultimately heterosexist message to Alberta's LGBTQ population. The youth in this category demonstrate some awareness of the legislative history that led to Bill 44. The future implementation of Bill 44 at the classroom level is also understood to be heterosexist, in that youth do not believe that heterosexual content would be subject to Bill 44's parental opt-out clause.

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Youth Participant 196: I 'love' this part: This bill would restrict our teachers' ability to talk about any issues that deal with religion, sexual orientation and sexuality...

Sexual orientation, eh? So we can't talk about heterosexuals, like Romeo and Juliette. Lol. This bill is so stupid and honestly, do teachers really want to make permission slips for every single class?

Youth Participant 112: Teachers dont haveta send home forms if we're talking bout guy and girl relationships but they do for same sex?

The bill said sexuality not sexual minorities. i see their attempt to make a point, but it is discriminatory and ultra-conservative. ... while we're at it, lets got back to hanging and burning watches at the stake, at the rate the Alberta government is going.

Here, it is the perceived implementation, not the motivation, of Bill 44 that is understood to be heterosexist. Youth pay close attention to the wording of the amendment 11.1, which requires schools to notify parents when teaching 'sexual orientation', not (homo)sexual orientations. Youth Participant 112 could mean that she understands sexual orientation as being present in all classes when she notes that teachers would have to make permission slips for 'every single class'.

Category Five: Connecting the Phenomenon to Broader Contexts

Bill 44 is a Human Rights Issue. This category reveals as much of an understanding about Bill 44 as it does about the balancing of competing human rights. Two subcategories understood Bill 44 as upholding religious and parental rights. Youth in these subcategories saw Bill 44 not as changing the status quo; so much as they understood it as strengthening and upholding religious and parental rights. The next two

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subcategories understood Bill 44 as infringing on children's rights to an education and to make autonomous choices. The final subcategory understands Bill 44 as pitting the human rights of parents and adults against those of young people.

Bill 44 Upholds Religious Rights. While this category initially appears indistinguishable from the protection of Canadian culture, there is a fundamental difference. In this category, the accommodation of religious minorities, and the freedom of religious belief and practice are not linked to any conception of Canadian or even Albertan identity. They are instead viewed as fundamental, inalienable rights that deserve protection within the public school system regardless of national citizenship or identification. Bill 44 is understood as protecting religious rights, independently of citizenship.

Youth Participant 119: The reason I support bill 44 is BECAUSE I respect ALL PEOPLES opinions... If you take away this right, you remove freedom of religion, you remove the right to raise your children, and you have the government all authority to tell you how to live. Forcing children to take human sexuality classes not only restricts personal freedom, it restricts religious freedom.

Freedom of religion is linked to the human right to raise children according to familial beliefs. Although he does not cite the document, this is a right in Canada, secured under the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948), where in article 26, subsection 3, "parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children". Bill 44 is understood as protecting this right because it allows for parents to remove children from instruction that could potentially conflict with a family's religious beliefs. In contrast to those in the 'Bill 44 is Misplaced' category, this posting

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demonstrates support for the educational clause of Bill 44 to be embedded in provincial human rights legislation.

Bill 44 Upholds Parental Rights. The presumed roles, rights, and privileges of adults in general and parents in particular inform much of these understandings. Parental authority and autonomy is described as being increasingly attacked by government, and Bill 44 is understood as way for parents (and their children) to push back against intrusive state interference. Similar to Bill 44 protecting religious freedom, the parental right to choose the type of education their child receives is

Youth Participant 66: Parent control your lives and decide how you live it up until 18. They have every right to decide where you go to school, what you can eat, what you can watch on TV, what sites you visit on the computer- and yes, what you learn in school. This bill supports that right, a right that has been around from the beginning of society itself. You're complaining about giving them more control, when all they're trying to do is do what's best for you.

This passage describes parents as essentially benevolent dictators, who can and should control all aspects of their children's lives. Moreover, this dictatorship is seen as a fundamental, age-old right. Bill 44 is understood as protecting the inalienable rights of parents.

Youth Participant 119: In fact I would have you know that I am not religious, and will firmly believe in educating MY children in human sexuality and evolution via the school system. I am merely upholding, as bill 44 does, each persons right to raise their children to their own moral standards.

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It is telling that the word 'my' is capitalized here. The transitory nature of youth could inform this understanding; instead of focusing on the emancipation of young people, this youth focuses on protecting the privileges he will receive once he is no longer a youth.

Bill 44 is Misplaced in Human Rights. Youth were confused as to how a piece of educational reform came to be embedded in provincial human rights law. They could not understand the point of an amendment to schools as a piece of human rights legislation, and recommended that it be redrafted under school board or educational legislation:

Youth Participant 142: Why in the world would parents want a special right to pull their child out of class? don't they have that anyways; why legalize it? Put this idiotic bill under the school act, not the human rights, good grief!

Youth Participant 49: Never before was this a human right. Parents have has the option of pulling their children out of classes already under the Alberta Schools Act. This is covered under the Alberta Schools Act, and should not be involved in Bill 44.

Youth Participant 236: The ability to NOT educate your children is NOT a right, and should never be protected by law.

These understandings are informed by some knowledge of different types of legislation, as well as strong feelings about where school legislation should be placed. Rather than seeing Bill 44 as not changing anything, they see it as granting a new human right to parents. Youth fail to see the point of the educational clause of Bill 44 as a legitimate part of human rights legislation, and reject that a parental opt out should be considered a human right. This understanding is complexified and expanded upon in the category 'Bill 44 is Censorship'.

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Bill 44 Infringes on Children's Rights to Make Choices. Youth in this category take issue with Bill 44 allowing for parents to opt their children out of a particular class or activity, rather than children being allowed to make this decision for themselves.

Although there was no policy allowing children to remove themselves from class before Bill 44, youth understand this ability being given to parents as further threatening to their ability to make autonomous decisions for themselves as students. Parents, the government and adults in general are accused of prohibiting children's choices of whether or not they themselves want to attend classes.

Youth Participant 60: What sucks here is that the kids being pulled out of classes probably don't have a say in what their "concerned parent" is doing.

Youth Participant 210: As students we should all have the right to speak and learn about whatever we want.. Our government should not be allowed to dictate our education and our futures.

Youth Participant 215: we're the one's learning not our parents. We should be able to decide for ourselves. I'm sure the majority of students are mature enough to handle such topics and there is a reason why we learn about these topics later in our education.

Youth Participant 37: this is bs our parents decide what we learn and we don't have a say how is this a free country???????

Youth Participant 214: We should have the right to choose what we want to learn... Let us decide, we are smarter than most adults think.

Outrage, frustration and indignation were common themes in these postings. Unlike those comments in the 'Bill 44 is Outrageous' category, these understandings link the bill's outrageousness to their conception of children as capable decision-makers, and of Canada

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as a (politically) ‘free’ country. They also reiterate their ‘right’ to make educational choices. These postings echo the comments made by youth who were interviewed by Northern Ireland Commission on Children and Young People, where it reported that having a say about matters that affected them was the single most important issue facing children and young people (Lundy, 2006). Being ‘smarter than most adults think’ and ‘mature enough to handle such topics’ indicates that youth understand that having some degree of competency is/should be a pre-requisite to being an educational decision-maker. Several youth described specific examples of future conflict that would arise between parents (who have decision-making power) and youth (who do not have decision-making power):

Youth Participant 125: But what if the child wants to learn something? What if a child had Catholic parents but wanted to learn more about evolution, but was denied that opportunity because of their parents?

Youth Participant 44: If my mom or dad try to take me out a class just because of the content- not gonna fly!

Conflict between children and their parents is understood to be one of the inevitable consequences of Bill 44. Youth Participant # 44 indicates that she will openly defy her parents’ choices in order to assert her own.

Bill 44 Infringes Children’s Right to Education. Some of the youth in this category understood pre-existing children’s rights to education as being threatened by Bill 44.

Participants illustrate their understanding by cited numerous human rights documents:

Youth Participant 101: seriously. Don’t we have a right to learning? it is taking the rights away from a child. Alberta was the last province to sign the rights of a child act. now we are just reversing it.

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Youth Participant 219: Everyone has 30 human rights... well now Bill 44 has been passed they're taking away freedom of speech and right to education.

Youth Participant 72: Quite simply, students have the right to be educated and informed, and this bill takes that right away.

These youth demonstrate some awareness of international human rights accords. Youth Participant 101 was the only Facebook user in either group, youth or adult, to mention the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989). He also correctly identified Alberta as being the last province to endorse the CRC⁸. Other youth understood Bill 44 as threatening potential children's rights, or rights that children do not yet enjoy:

Youth Participant 87: But I want the right to be exposed to as many opinions and views as possible. I want the right as a student to discover my own values and beliefs.

Youth Participant 87's use of the word 'want' indicates that she does not necessarily understand these rights as already ratified and enforceable by international treaty. It is possible that she would like to have these rights in the future, and Bill 44 is understood as impeding this from happening.

Bill 44 is a Clash of Human Rights. Youth struggle to balance what they interpret as competing human rights. Particular attention is drawn to parental and children's rights.

Youth Participant 193: I understand how when it comes to children parents can get very protective. But where is the line?

⁸ Canada ratified the CRC in 1991, and because of its' federated structure, asked the provinces to endorse it as well. Alberta endorsed the CRC in 1999, and was the last province to do so (Office of Child and Youth Advocate, 2010).

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Youth Participant 49: Children have the right to learn. Parents do NOT HAVE THE “HUMAN RIGHT” under Bill 44 to discriminate what their children will or won’t learn.

Youth Participant 190: Now if a parents pulls a student from a required class for an Alberta Diploma (Science 30, Bio 30), and the parent sues the schoolboard for, say withholding fair and equal education, its now in Human Rights court. Who’s rights are violated, the Parents because the control (censor) the child’s education? [again not the real issue] What about the child’s human rights, the constitution guarantee’s him/her fair and equal education. What about the Teachers Human rights? Fellow students Human Rights? What about Principles Human rights? Have they been violated? Who’s Human rights matter most?

In wondering ‘where is the line’ and ‘who’s human rights matter most’, youth are struggling to balance what they understand as a new parental human right. Most youth in these discussion threads were particularly concerned with how this new parental right would affect the rights of children:

Youth Participant 204: A child has more of a “human right” to get an education than a parent has to deny them it.

Youth Participant 214: So because I am under the age of 18 I do not have the same rights as a man at 26? I thought everyone is supposed to have the same rights. so are children and teenagers not included in the charter of rights or am I just crazy to believe that I can make a informed decision of my own?

Youth Participant 49: If my parents wished me harm, and I wished otherwise, would that be unethical?

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While there is some overlap with the category ‘Bill 44 Threatens Children’s Ability to Make Choices’, youth understand Bill 44 as limiting their human rights, not their choices. The understanding the Bill 44 grants a new human right to parents is contextualized by the belief that human rights are a zero sum game. In other words, if parents are poised to gain a human right, children are understood to lose one. Some youth understood Bill 44 as pitting all adults against students:

Youth Participant 142: The argument should not be parents vs. teachers vs. Government. Its all three against the students.

Bill 44 is understood as pitting children and adults, either as collective, or as different groups, against each other in terms of their ability to exercise human rights.

Bill 44 is a Political Construction. This category is split into to three subcategories. The first understands Bill 44 to be a political construction that children should have been included in creating. Youth comment on the injustice of being excluded from formal politics by virtue of being youth. The second category understands Bill 44 as a political construction that children can still change. Youth in this category are the organizers of the protests, pickets, rallies, petitions, and letter writing campaigns through which youth voiced opposition to Bill 44. The third subcategory also contends that Bill 44 is a political construction, but one that youth are powerless to influence or change in any way. Youth in this subcategory are keenly aware of their social and political disenfranchisement, and skeptical that youth action will affect adult decision. Consistent in all subcategories are complex and detailed (though not always factually correct) understandings of the political landscape from which Bill 44 emerged.

Bill 44 is a Political Construction that Children Should Have Been Included in Creating. Youth understand Bill 44 as primarily affecting youth, and therefore cannot

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understand why they were not included in the creation or amending of the bill. Frustration and indignation with the provincial government permeates their comments:

Youth Participant 60: Did the idiots who passed this bill even ask the students it is affecting what they thought? No, because I'm a student and I didn't get to say jack shit.

Youth Participant 121: has anyone considered stepping back and saying why don't we ask the children in stead of talking as if the children are property

One youth offered several specific examples of how youth should have been involved in the legislative process:

Youth Participant 214: They aren't taking into account the students side of this.

Sure the parents want more control, but at what cost? They should be having the STUDENTS vote on this bill and not the government because it has NO effect on them, WE will have to live with the effect of it being passed or not, WE will be the ones who will have our lives changed by it, all this bill does is set back our progression as a species and shows that it is being used as a way to get more votes in the election. If I could talk to the politicians right now I'd tell them what I posted before, have a vote across Alberta in all the public schools, not just in a group of adults who think they know what we want/what will appease the adults. Give us a choice in OUR future, I would gladly even go and confront the PM about this if it would give the people who want a voice in this a chance to say what needs to be said, and not just what the politicians want and say.

Youth Participant 214 is suggesting several remedies to what she understands as an unjust bill. Youth should either meet with provincial politicians, or else vote on educational reform within their schools. The second suggestion should not seem revolutionary, as

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most Canadian schools claim in their mission statement to teach democracy (Westheimer, year?). Youth Participant 214 is claiming that people, ostensibly students ‘want a voice in this’, and has offered a democratic means of their doing so.

Bill 44 is a Political Construction that Children can Change. Youth describe having a moral and civic obligation to oppose Bill 44, combined with optimism that their action will result in measurable change. Some youth commented on youth political participation in general:

Youth Participant 63: the power to change society lies in the youth of the nation

Youth Participant 90: We need to stand up for our rights as students!!

Youth Participant 133: If we don't protect our "limited freedom" and stay apathetic to our society, It will be soon taken from us by this conservative government and we won't have our fundamental rights anymore. We are not the puppets of this conservative government.

These youth understand political participation their avenue to ensure both ‘freedom’ and ‘fundamental rights’. Bill 44 is thus conceived of as one piece of legislation that youth can publicly protest to demonstrate political engagement. This understanding is expanded upon in the many ways that youth developed to demonstrate engagement with Bill 44.

Rather than paraphrasing them, I have selected one quote from each method of engagement so that readers can hear the multitude of ways youth organized their own civic engagement in their own words. Some were particularly creative, as well as facetious:

Youth Participant 65: let's have a day talking about everything controversial
POSSIBLE.

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if it's a big enough movement, what are they going to do..

it's true that the students can change this around. let's do it!

Youth Participant 84: I'm sorry it's our education so it's our choice

I'm totally going to dance on my desk and sign the I'm not gay song

And start a cult

Just to spite this bill

Other plans for youth political engagement with Bill 44 follow more traditional forms of activism, and take into account the existing political structure within which the bill was created. Youth explored many different avenues for protest:

Youth Participant 101: we could always take it to our mla's. are the leutenenat governor of alberta. did this bill get her majestys concent? if it did, lets let her read it over again

Youth Participant 3: Whoever is strongly against this, invite as many people as u can to this group and maybe take this to supreme court.

Youth Participant 2: Here is a link, which leads you to find your correct MLA for your constituency. Feel free to email them about your personal thoughts and views. Let's all do our part to support this cause.

Youth Participant 29: Everyone write to the newspapers and get ready for a protest at city hall

Youth also organized public rallies and demonstrations across the province of Alberta. The following represents a small sample of the many protests that were advertised on Facebook:

Youth Participant 97: Everyone!!! Please attend the silent protest on June 11th at the City Hall in Edmonton Alberta!

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We CAN'T let the government get away with this!

Let's fight for our rights, and fight for what we believe in!

4:00 PM, wear shirts, bring signs, do what you can!

Rush hour traffic, and we're going to make a scene!

Make sure we're well known and well seen!

Any Questions? Email - Silencebill44@gmail.com

Tell everyone you know about this!

Spread the word!

Youth Participant 39: Our Protest: The protest will consist of a vow of silence taken on June 7, 2009. Take a piece of tape, place it over your mouth and write Bill 44 on the tape. You can also print off the explanation below about what the bill is about...

Even if you don't place the tape over your mouth (although that is preferred so you can publicize this protest), you can also just take a vow of silence or educate people about this. This bill cannot be passed. We will not give up until it is stopped!!!

Youth Participant 114: Picket Protest:

What to wear/ bring: Duct Tape over you mouth, and picket signs, as well as the petition, and I will bring any leftover pamphlets I may have from earlier in the day

Where: Red Deer Public Library, City Hall side

When: Thursday June 11th from 4:30-5:30

Youth Participant 2: On Tuesday, September 1st a Back to School Protest Against Bill 44 organized by the Queer Allied Network (QAN) will be held on the steps of the Legislature at 4:30pm. Please attend to remind the Alberta government that we have not forgotten about the anti-education and discriminatory legislation that was pushed through... in June.

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Culture Minister Lindsay Blackett who put the bill forward has said "This will come to pass, you guys will forget about this in another month." Let's let him know that we have not forgotten and we are still vehemently opposed to this disastrous amendment!

This action is held the day before the new school year starts to remind Albertans that because of Bill 44, we will be entering a new era of fear and silence in education. Please attend to show your visible and unchanged opposition to Bill 44 and encourage our MLAs to repeal this legislation. Your voice could make all the difference.

These protests did take place in real, as opposed to just virtual space, and were reported by the media (Edmonton Journal, 2009; Red Deer Gazette, 2009). Youth Participant 2's quoting MLA Lindsay Blackett's condescending remark that "you guys will forget about this in another month" is worth noting. Many youth responded to similar patronizing and defeatist comments made by adults on the Facebook wall:

Youth Participant 227: [quoting an adult] >>protests to bills such as this one, will not lead to them being removed. It will lead to them being amended and thus make them even more confusing. [end quote]

So we should not try to change our world because it 'probably' won't work?

Youth Participant 101: k, [name of Facebook user who self-identified as 26 years old], we both have different beliefs. im in high school and thats what think. im assuming ur an adult so thats ur opinion. but who is this bill effecting? us. if u are an adult, it dosent make a differencet to you. but it does to us. u have to understand that. and plus, if we don't take action, it will get out of hand

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These youth refuse to accept notions that young people cannot change or influence adult controlled political constructions.

Bill 44 is a Political Construction that Children Can't Change: Youth understand that by virtue of being youth, they are powerless to affect any political change. Their cynicism is a significant contrast to the optimism of the previous subcategory.

Youth Participant 175: We do have to do more than start an internet group if we want results start a petition getting people over 18 so they are seen as adults, youth have little power unfortunately

Youth Participant 82: The government doesn't really care about what students want or think or need or feel because we don't do anything for the government. But why should we do anything for a government that doesn't even try to do anything for us?

Youth Participant 176: its too bad that no matter what we say the govt wont listen to us. Canada needs a fricken revolution. unfortunately children are largely ignored by the people who represent thier wants.

Youth understand Bill 44 as a political construction that 'no matter what we say' will not be influenced by the voices of young people. They do not foresee a time when youth will have the right to represent their own interests, but instead will have to rely on adults whose opinions largely conflict with the youth they represent.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Reflexive Process. Consistent with a feminist theoretical framework, it is necessary that I outline the reflexive process that informed the categorization and analysis of the data (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Keeping a research journal as well as many drafts of the results and discussion chapters facilitated reflexivity. When reading and coding the data, I remained aware of my own adult (which is to say, non-youth) status. In so doing, I was conscious of the many adult constructed narratives of childhood that diminish and disempower the views of youth. When categorizing and interpreting each Facebook posting, I was careful to ask; am I taking the youth seriously? Am I belittling, or romanticizing their lived experience? In rereading my research journal from the data collection and categorization phases of this study, I was struck by how often I was surprised by the complexity and sophistication of youth responses. If I was surprised, it must have been because I didn't expect such thoughtful responses. If I, a researcher who champions youth competency, capacity and legitimacy, held such low expectations of youth understandings of a government bill, what might other adults expect from youth in terms of their civic understanding and engagement? The fact that I was surprised made me aware of my own ageist assumptions. After discovering this in my research journal, I recategorized and reinterpreted many of the youth comments that appear in the results section.

I also remained aware of how adults take it upon themselves to speak on behalf of youth, claiming to represent their interests. In so doing, the rich and varied experiences of youth can be flattened, particularly when the views of youth contrast with those of the adults who claim to represent them. As a safeguard against favouring those youth views

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that I agreed with, I began the data categorization by highlighting all youth views that I disagreed with. When it came time to categorize the data into an outcome space, and to select quotations to illustrate each category, I was careful to include many of the highlighted quotes in the results section, so as not to privilege those views that I happened to agree with. When interpreting the views that I did not agree with, I consciously reminded myself to approach these views as legitimate and valuable.

I was particularly cautious when condensing the categories of the outcome space, as I did not want to flatten the myriad of youth understandings that were present in the data. My first draft of the results section contained 15 categories and 33 subcategories, which were eventually condensed to 9 categories and 31 subcategories. I approached each instance of combining two or more categories with caution, asking if the diversity of opinion would be lost in my categorization. In illustrating each category of the outcome space, I used many quotations from youth, 37% of the sample size, so that their words, rather than my interpretations of their words, would be the essence of the results section.

The categories of understanding largely ‘emerged’ from the data itself; I did not pre-assign any categories before data collection. Although no researcher is free from bias, I tried not to hypothesize about what sorts of understandings might be found in the data. I repeated the phrase ‘Bill 44 is...’ before reading each quotation, and then categorized the data based on my interpretation of what the youth’s comments revealed about their understanding of what the bill was. When condensing two or more categories into one, I often consulted a thesaurus to see how similar the understandings were.

I was particularly cautious when deciding which quotations would be used to illustrate each category. In order to authentically represent the data, many of the quotations used are replete with spelling, grammatical, and factual errors. Here I encountered an ethical

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conundrum. On one hand, youth did not post their views on Facebook with the intent that they would be analyzed in an academic study. It is possible that had youth posted their views on Bill 44 knowing that they would be used in research, their spelling and grammar would look differently than they appeared on Facebook. The errors in the youth postings could lead some adult readers to dismiss them entirely. On the other hand, I did not want to privilege those comments that were grammatically and factually correct by quoting them exclusively in the results section. Had I excluded the grammatically and factually incorrect comments, my results would not be representative of the sample size, or an authentic representation of the conversations as they actually occurred. Although I was conflicted about the choice, I nonetheless included comments that did not demonstrate a strong command of the conventional English language that is recognized as legitimate within the academic institution.

I am also conflicted about the nature of the study itself. After hearing self described “multiracial Indigenous hip-hop feminist reproductive justice freedom fighter” (Native Sexual Health Network, 2011) Jessica Yee speak about youth political participation, I was moved by her comment that “we don’t need any more studies on youth empowerment. What we need is to actually empower youth” (Yee, 2010). In hearing her speak, I largely agreed with her, which made me question why I am conducting research without a defined mechanism by which to implement the findings so as to affect the real lives of youth. Yet, as a novice researcher, I must begin somewhere. Although the application of this research may not be readily apparent and is outside the scope of this study, my hope is that the results may eventually produce real change that would include students as full participants in school governance, or being afforded equal political participation rights within municipal, provincial and federal politics.

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I am further conflicted by my placement of the adult participation in the results section. I approached this research with the theoretical perspective that youth perspectives be central focus, yet I began the results section by presenting the adult encroachment of an identified youth space. My research journal and many earlier drafts indicate that I attempted numerous positionings of the adult participation, including adding it as an appendix, a subsection of the discussion chapter, and the final subsection of the results chapter. This was a process that I had not anticipated when designing my methodology, which perhaps demonstrates my own naiveté as a researcher. I did not foresee the Facebook forums being appropriated by adults, and thus had not planned for how to (re)present this aspect of the research. Their presence in the Facebook forums also made me painfully aware that I too was an adult who had entered a youth space uninvited, albeit to collect data for this research and not to appropriate the space. Although I remain conflicted by its' final positioning, I left the adult participation section in its' original place as the second subsection of the results chapter because I am convinced that it provides the necessary context from which to understand the youth participation in the Facebook forums.

Youth Understandings of Human Sexuality and Sexual Orientation Education.

Youth understood the purpose of sexuality education as primarily preventative. This is most clearly demonstrated within the 'Bill 44 is Dangerous' category, where youth Facebook users continually stress the need for explicit sex education to prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STI's) and pregnancy. This understanding mirrors that of Canadian sexual education researchers, who evaluate school based sex education programming by using only preventative criteria (McKay et. al., 2001; Smylie, 2008). Outside of health class, youth further identified education pertaining to non-heterosexual sexual identities

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as a preventative measure against gay-bashing and homophobic violence. Their acknowledgement of pervasive homophobic violence correlates positively with the findings of *The First National Climate Survey on Homophobia in Canadian Schools* (Taylor, et. al., 2009).

With reference to the first guiding research question, youth drew upon a wide variety of sources to inform their understandings of sexuality education, including Canadian and American universities, NGOs, medical associations, and government agencies. They also cited anecdotal evidence as informing their understandings of sexuality education, and how Bill 44 would change, or not change it. Youth relied exclusively on their own lived experiences as witnesses or victims of homophobia to inform their understanding of Bill 44's effects on the treatment of LGBTQ people.

Perhaps because of the historical context of Bill 44, youth drew particular attention to their preference that non-heterosexual sexual identities to be featured explicitly as part of sexuality education classes. Beyond sexual health classes, youth indicated a strong desire for non-heterosexual identities to be integrated across the curriculum, particularly in history and social studies classes. This finding correlates positively with Anderson & Fetner's (2008) empirical study demonstrating that Canadians within the 1989 to 2000 birth cohort having a higher baseline of tolerance and acceptance of sexual diversity than did previous generations. Research on the integration of LGBTQ content across the curriculum (Connell, 2005; Eyre, 1997; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Snyder & Broadway, 2004; Temple 2005) as well as the documentation of the lived experiences of youth in this study indicate that such infusion is not currently the norm. Indeed, several youth hypothesized that only non-heterosexual sexual identities would be identified as sexual orientations, and therefore included within the scope of Bill

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44. These findings present a clear example of how the educational preference of young people can be at odds with the preference of those adults who claim to represent them.

Although youth comments in the ‘Bill 44 is Ineffective Adult Censorship’ category indicate that young people can and do access information pertaining to sexual health outside of school or adult supervision, the comments in the ‘Bill 44 is Ineffective’ subcategory suggest that many youth prefer to have adults, and teachers in particular, involved in their sexuality education.

Outside of sexual health classes, youth understood that Bill 44 would have a largely deleterious effect on sexuality and sexual orientation education across the curriculum. They cited examples from their own lived experiences of how topics of sexuality and sexual orientation are taught in English, science, history, religious, and social studies classes, and how they understood that Bill 44 would adversely alter these experiences. Youth also indicated that they understood heterosexuality to be a sexual orientation, and that their schooling was rife with heterosexual education and curriculum content. These results confirm my findings in the survey of Alberta curriculum documents, where I posited that sexuality and sexual orientation education are not relegated merely to health classes in the province of Alberta.

Youth Understandings of Religious Education. The results suggest that youth Facebook users have a strong interest in learning about faiths other than their own while attending public school. This finding is similar to Sweet’s (1997) report that Canadian youth are keenly interested in studying multiple faith traditions as part of their high school experience. The results also demonstrate how religious themes are widely integrated within pre-Bill 44 curricula, particularly within English language arts classes. Youth use anecdotal evidence based on their own lived experiences to describe how what

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I defined earlier as religious literacy is part of the curriculum in a number of subject areas. Similar to the results of youth understandings of sexuality education, this confirms my earlier finding in a survey of Alberta curriculum documents, that topics of religion are visibly present across the Alberta curriculum. This was particularly true for the approved reading list for English literature.

Youth also understand religious education as partially responsible for deterring religiously based acts of violence. This was similar to their understanding of sexual education as a means of increasing tolerance and/or acceptance among people of different religious and sexual identities. They stress the word ‘tolerance’ as well as some conception of both Canada and the global community as religiously plural places. Many youth understandings of religious literacy education are informed by the assumption that knowledge of different faith traditions simultaneously increases tolerance and decreases violence. Beyond anecdotal evidence, knowledge of the Nazi persecution of Jewish peoples, and the Islamic terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre were the only instances of faith-based violence that were cited to support this claim.

Although youth demonstrate positive feelings towards religious literacy education, they understand the involvement of religious people, and religious parents in particular, with Bill 44 as largely negative. They dismiss religious adults as being anti-science, and state that religious adults should not participate in educational reform. They do not use evidence, anecdotal or otherwise, to support this claim. This position is paradoxical, as several of the individual youth who advocated for robust religious literacy education in public schooling were also the loudest critics of religious adults’ participation in Bill 44. It appears that youth are interested in learning about religion, but do not want religious people to occupy positions of power in the politics of educational reform.

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Youth Understandings of Their Own Political Efficacy. With reference to the second guiding research question, those youth who understood themselves as having some agency in influencing Bill 44 positioned themselves outside of institutional practices, such as voting or being part of a political party. Where youth organized to influence Bill 44, they did so by trying to influence those who were already in positions of power, namely MLA's, rather than trying to occupy positions of power themselves. Some youth were pessimistic about their ability to successfully influence decision-makers. Youth Participant 82's comment "The government doesn't really care about what students want or think or need or feel because we don't do anything for government" is a succinct analysis of his understanding that youth are politically powerless due to their disenfranchisement. Other youth conceived of a sinister adult government that conspired to keep youth 'ignorant', so as to continue their disenfranchisement. Several youth combined the pessimistic outlook that their protests would likely yield no tangible results with a sense of duty to act nonetheless. This was especially apparent when youth replied to adults who diminished their organizing capabilities. Comments such as "so we should not try to change our world because it 'probably' won't work?" (Youth Participant 227) and "let's all do our part to support this cause" (Youth Participant 2) convey a sense of obligation to 'change the world', which is a common social studies curriculum goal (Bickmore, 2005).

The majority of youth participants were optimistic that their actions would have some effect on the adoption of Bill 44. They proposed several channels through which they could voice their concerns, including the legislature, the judiciary, the monarchy, and the Supreme Court. They communicated a sincere belief that their actions would produce measurable change, with comments such as 'it's true that the students can change this

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around. let's do it! (Youth Participant 65) and “We will not give up until it is stopped!!!” (Youth Participant 39). The distinction between the optimists and the pessimists is worth noting, as it demonstrates that youth are not a homogenous demographic. The results indicate that youth are simultaneously cynical, apathetic, dutiful, leading, following, and sincere. There are no commonalities in their understandings of their own political efficacy, other than the sample size's universal awareness of the issue. Given how all participants had voluntarily joined a Facebook group to discuss the issue, it would be problematic to assume that all youth have a similar awareness of educational reform.

(Re)defining the Crisis of Youth Civic Engagement. There was considerable public anxiety about youth civic engagement after the results of the National Citizenship Exam (Griffiths & Wright, 2007) were released. I concur that there is a crisis in Canadian youth citizenship, but not because Canadians are voting in low numbers between the ages of 18-24 (Ellis & Balinov, 2006; Butler, 2010; MacLean & Cook, 2010). The results of this research beg a different question, which is why are youth disenfranchised now? Much of the literature on active, democratic citizenship education (Osborne, 2000; Griffiths & Wright, 2007; Westheimer, 2008; Hughes, Print & Sears, 2010) does not make a strong recommendation for youth to exercise full political participation rights both within the classroom and at the legislature. Rather than focusing the conversation on the ‘crisis’ of young Canadians not voting upon turning 18, this research presents compelling evidence to instead centre the discussion on the current disenfranchisement of the 20% of North Americans (Cohen, 2009) who are under the age of 18. In particular, the results demand a serious examination of school governance as it is currently practiced whereby youth remain largely powerless in decision-making. The comment “students have something in common with the members of two other of our social institutions that have involuntary

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attendance: prisons and mental hospitals” (Jackson, 2009, p. 118) is of particular relevance when considering the governing procedures of schools. Like prisoners and psychiatric patients, children and young people are denied any opportunity to meaningfully share in the governance of an institution they are legally required to attend.

Although youth demonstrated considerable background knowledge and organizing capabilities in their on- and offline responses to Bill 44, I am cautious of positioning their thoughtful and complex understandings of the bill as prerequisites for their participation in educational reform. I do not advocate for youth to occupy positions of power because they have proven competency, as proof of intellectual capabilities is not required for adult political participation in educational reform (Flekkoy & Kaufman, 1997). While I am leery of requiring a competency test before affording youth basic participation rights, I recognize that the results of this research could nonetheless help facilitate full political participation rights for youth. This is consistent with the requirement of feminist research that a political commitment be made to producing knowledge that can affect change in participants’ lives (Letherby, 2003).

As of this writing, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt has been forced to resign after three weeks of largely youth-led public protests. Given the subject matter of this thesis, I would be remiss to not draw some attention to a current example of youth-led political action that was in part facilitated by Facebook and other social networking websites. A particularly high proportion of Egyptian citizens are young people; 33% of the Egyptian population is under the age of 14 (CIA World Factbook, 2011), with an additional 21% aged 15-24 (Assad, Roudi-Fahimi, & Population Reference Bureau, 2007). Although there were other influential factors in the Egyptian revolution such as corruption, high unemployment, police brutality, etc., coverage of the uprising indicates

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that the complete political disenfranchisement of Egyptian youth has indeed turned into a crisis. While citizens under the age of 24 will likely not form 54% of the Canadian population in the foreseeable future, their comparatively smaller numbers should not be justification for keeping them politically disenfranchised.

The transitory nature of youth makes it difficult to draw comparisons between their struggle for political participation rights social movements such as the Suffragettes and the Civil Rights Movement. While women and non-White persons are typically female and non-White for the duration of their lives, youth have less than two decades to be directly affected by ageist political oppression in both their schools and in the wider community. Although all adults were by definition once youth, most do not continue to advocate for youth political rights upon reaching the age of majority, if they advocated for them all when they were underage. As of this writing, the last activity seen in the ‘Students Against Bill 44’ group was on 5, December 2010. The last comment made on the ‘Students For Bill 44’ was on 15, December 2009. One reason for the cessation of youth Facebook activism around Bill 44 could be because many of the leaders of these groups have since graduated from high school. They are no longer secondary school students experiencing the daily effects of Bill 44 in the classroom.

Another plausible explanation for the decline in youth participation on the Facebook groups could reflect a deeper crisis in youth civic engagement:

withdrawal from major institutions (such as elections and the press) [is seen] as a decline, when these trends may actually reflect growing sophistication. Perhaps youth are deliberately and wisely choosing not to endorse forms of participation that are flawed. (Levine in Bennett, 2008, p. 4)

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Could this argument also encompass youth withdrawal from actions such as protesting, as a deliberate retreat from ineffective participation? There is evidence in the results that some youth were cynical about the responses they received from those in power. In one discussion thread, a self-identified grade 12 student posted MLA Laurie Blakeman's reply to his protest email. He commented 'I lol'ed' (Youth Participant 86), which is slang for 'laughed out loud'. Other youth, upon reading the MLA's response wrote "Sort of a "Thanks for playing, try again" message?" (Youth Participant 202) and "I received the same message...figured it was a "copy and paste, throw in the next email address" sorta deal. Really sad they passed Bill 44 though" (Youth Participant 134). These comments communicate a sense of cynical apathy towards participation in protests. Is this civic apathy misplaced? Having spent their formative years routinely and repeatedly excluded from meaningful participation in educational reform, it seems logical, rather than lazy, for youth to eventually disengage completely from civic action. The results demonstrate that the real crisis of youth civic engagement is that youth's first participation in politics are ignored and yield little or no tangible results.

Adult Participation and Questions of Space. In the context of conducting research, Kathleen Gallagher (2011) recently asked "What do we find when we're looking for something else?" It is with this question in mind that I turn to the findings of adult appropriation of an explicitly youth space, and adult decorum within this space. Perhaps this is showing my own naiveté as a novice researcher, but I did not expect to find such high levels of adult participation in the Facebook groups. Nor did I expect to find so many condescending and bullying comments made by adults to youth in these spaces.

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The adult appropriation of a designated youth space demonstrates a considerable sense of adult entitlement. It also represents a significant barrier to youth claiming of public spaces. Similar to studies of offline public space sharing between youth and adults (Friedrich & Muri, 2005), the results indicate little effective or appropriate inter-generational space sharing on the online space provided by Facebook. The demonstrated adult colonization of youth Facebook spaces continues the trend of adult panopticism and surveillance of online youth activity (Hope, 2005).

Implications for Practice. The results of this study indicate that a large sample of self-identified youth care deeply about the content and delivery of their curriculum, as well as the policies and procedures of school governance. Beyond caring, youth as a collective hold sophisticated and complex understandings of how and why Bill 44 was drafted, passed and implemented and voluntarily dialogue about the issues it presents. A substantial number of youth have further demonstrated political organizing capabilities to influence school decision-making. Citizenship educators would do well to follow the students' lead, and introduce opportunities for meaningful shared decision-making at the classroom level. Levin's (2000) example of a grade 4 class who, when asked if they would like to plan a health unit, demanded copies of the curriculum and were co-creators of the unit lesson plans, could serve as a model for democratic curriculum delivery at the classroom level. Having students meaningfully participate in curriculum delivery could be a significant lesson in practicing effective democratic behaviours, which is itself a curriculum outcome (Alberta Social Studies, 2005).

Beyond the classroom, the results indicate a need to reexamine the existing mechanism of student participation with educational reform in the province of Alberta. There is a dramatic disparity in youth utilization of the Speak Out: Alberta Student

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Engagement Initiative website and of Facebook to discuss and try to influence Bill 44. Just 9 youth posted 16 comments about Bill 44 to the Speak Out Discussion Forum, as compared to 239 youth posting 546 comments to Facebook. This implies that the formal mechanism for involving students in educational reform is significantly underused. To hypothesize why youth favoured Facebook over Speak Out is beyond the scope of this research; however, the results indicate that the current practice of relying on Speak Out is not meeting the students' needs.

The data illustrates the need for youth participation at the provincial level of educational reform to move significantly beyond the Speak Out model, which is demonstrably more about compliance and control (Lodge, 2005) than it is about dialectical engagement, to a substantially more meaningful and democratic inclusion of youth participation in educational decision-making. The particulars of how this inclusion could be realized are beyond the scope of this research; for instance, I could not endorse a first-past-the-post voting schema of youth representatives to decision-making roles over proportional voting or alternative voting, or vice versa. What the data does make apparent is the need for considerable overhaul of the mechanisms for student participation in educational reform in the province of Alberta.

Future Research. In addition to considering implications for practice, there are also opportunities for future research in related areas. In making the case for youth to move from political 'semi-citizens' (Cohen, 2009) to full citizens, future research could explore a possible causal relationship between the legal disenfranchisement of young people during their formative years in state schools, and their voluntary disenfranchisement upon reaching the age of majority. Using Lodge's (2005) assertion that young people cannot learn to behave democratically in an institution that does not

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allow them to experience democracy, assessments could be made between 18 year olds who attended free, democratic schools, such as Windsor House in North Vancouver, and those who attended traditional, un-democratic public schools elsewhere in the city of Vancouver.

Other research could determine a causal relationship between the ubiquity of online social networks in the lives of youth and their political awareness or participation. Does having access to a Facebook account cause political engagement, or merely facilitate pre-existing political awareness and organizing? Does having a Facebook account influence youth political engagement at all? As of this writing, theories of the role that Facebook played in Egypt's youth uprising in 2011 abound in reputable online journalism (citation), but more research is needed to determine how much of an influence Facebook had. Future studies could further discern cultural similarities and differences in youth utilization of Facebook to participate in civic affairs.

Further research could also investigate feelings of political cynicism and apathy among youth who have participated in various forms of civic engagement, such as writing an MLA, attending a protest or signing a petition. Gathering perspectives on efficacy after youth have participated could determine a causal relationship between early disappointments and future decisions to abstain from civic actions. Another future research project could interview youth to understand why they use Facebook, rather than the Speak Out: Alberta Student Engagement Initiative to try to influence educational issues. In so doing, research could inform future policy decisions on how youth can meaningfully participate in the decision-making processes of educational reform.

Conclusions: By using Facebook activity pertaining to Bill 44 as a case study, this research has investigated the important area of youth participation in educational

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reform. The results add new dimensions to the growing discussion of youth political participation rights in general (Bailey & Hunter, 2010; CBC, 2008; Urback, 2010) and in schools in particular (Levin, 2000; Lodge, 2005; Cook-Sather, 2006; Zion 2007).

Although there is a growing body of literature pertaining to democratic student engagement at the classroom level (Levin, 2000; Lodge, 2005; Cook-Sather, 2006; Sears & Perry, 2000; Zion 2007), there is a gap in the literature pertaining to the larger contexts of student participation, namely at the school-wide, school board or provincial level, which this study has attempted to redress. The data complexifies some of the traditional arguments against youth inclusion in decision-making, particularly accusations of youth apathy and incompetence. It further complexifies the socially acceptable conception of youth as a state of *infantia* (Bergstrom, 2010), thus begging a redefinition of youth as a social, political, legal and moral status. Given how youth have demonstrated a myriad of capabilities in political dialogue and action, the definition of youth must shift to more accurately reflect their reality.

The findings of this research can also be read as an invitation to further explore whether or not there are defensible legal, civic, moral or educational justifications for continued youth disenfranchisement at the macro-level of education governance. The results of this research also provide the impetus for serious action to begin meaningfully including youth in educational governance and policy-making. One natural extension of this work would be an exploration of the multiple methods by which youth could be integrated into existing educational governance, including the number of youth representatives at the educational reform decision-making table, how these youth would be elected, what their term lengths would be, and how much legislative power they would have. That education is within provincial, and not federal jurisdiction is a considerable

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advantage in this regard, as it allows for ten different experiments in the particulars of youth integration. Hopefully, this research will contribute to dialogue that promotes increased youth participation in educational reform both within the academy and at the educational policy level.

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