Title:

LGB teachers' negotiations of civil partnership and schools: Ambivalent attachments to religion and secularism

Authors and Affiliations:

Dr Aoife Neary

Dr Breda Gray

Prof. Mary O'Sullivan

School of Education, University of Limerick

Department of Sociology, University of Limerick

Department of Physical Education and Health Sciences, University of Limerick

Corresponding Author Details:

Dr Aoife Neary, Department of Education and Professional Studies, University of Limerick, Castletroy, Limerick aoife.neary@ul.ie

Teachers and civil partnership: Ambivalent attachments to religion and secularism

As legal structures for same-sex relationships are introduced in many contexts, the politics of sexuality are negotiated along religious/secular lines. Religious and LGBT-Q rights are pitted against one another such that LGBT-Q lives often assumed to be secular. Schools are crucibles of intermingling religious, secular and equality discourses and this complexity is carefully negotiated by LGBT-Q teachers in their everyday lives. Drawing on a study with LGB teachers as they entered into a Civil Partnership in Ireland (a legal structure in place for five years prior to enactment of Marriage Equality in 2015), this paper captures a 'structure of feeling' — new cultural work done as sexuality norms were in a state of flux. The teachers' accounts unravel the religious/secular binary and provide insight of universal interest into the ambivalent, messy ways in which the politics of sexuality are (re)negotiated across the overlapping social fields of religion and education.

Key Words: Civil Partnership/Same-Sex Marriage; Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer; Teachers; Religion; Secularism; Structure of Feeling; Cultural Legitimacy.

Word Count: 6586

Introduction

In many ways, the politics of sexuality have been mediated along polarised religious/secular lines (Hunt, 2009). Much religious doctrine, teaching and practices continue to declare the illegitimacy of LGBT-Q[1] identification and same-sex desire and it follows that religious and LGBT-Q subjectivities are continually pitted against one another in society (Yip, 2010). For example, as legal structures for same-sex relationships have emerged in many contexts, religious and LGBT-Q rights have been polarised in the public sphere (Neary, 2016a) with fundamentalist religious organisations and devoted followers of organised religions generally comprising the strongest public opposition to same-sex marriage (Ogland and Verona 2014). And so, as the politics of sexuality are (re)negotiated across contexts, it is unsurprising that

LGBT-Q identifications are most often conflated with secularism whilst religion is associated with sexual conservatism and repression. Such reductive perspectives render LGBT-Q people who have religious affiliations as unintelligible, uneducated or unstable (Shannahan, 2010). However, in recent times, such oppositions and conflations have been contested through acknowledgement of the religious attachments of LGBT-Q people (Browne et al 2010; Hunt 2009; Yip, 2010; Taylor and Snowdon, 2014).

The place and shape of religion in schools has long been a contested topic and schools are crucibles where discourses of religion, secularism and equality coalesce in complex ways. Reflecting broader societal discourses, there have been significant tensions between religion and sexuality in schools (Shipley, 2014). Debates about sexuality education at school embody these tensions. Across the globe, moral panics about the shape of sex education have ensured that reluctances, anxieties and silence persist in relation to teaching about sexuality at school (Luker, 2006). Even in countries that claim to have secular education systems, religious discourses permeate sex education via the concept of morality. For example, in the U.S. the moral authority of Christianity is evident in 'Abstinence Only' sex education programmes (Rasmussen, 2010). Unsurprisingly then, recent 'progressive' approaches to sex education have relied largely on the logics of secularism, side-stepping tensions with religious doctrine and reiterating religion's place in the private sphere (Rasmussen, 2016). However, the commonplace suggestion that religion should reside in the private sphere doesn't account for how religion has 'never fully been a private affair' (Hemming 2011, p. 1074) and that schools exist at the nexus of public and private domains. Furthermore, such approaches to sex education foreclose discussions about sexuality from a religious faith perspective (Rasmussen, 2016).

For LGBT-Q teachers, religion has largely been perceived as a problem as they negotiate their everyday lives at school (Ferfolja, 2009). Religious ideals around sexuality operate in subtle ways to shape cultural norms and practices in many school contexts (Love, 1998) and these 'invisibly deployed' messages ensure reluctance and anxiety around disclosing a LGBT-Q identification (Neary, 2013; Ferfolja, 2005). Religious exemptions in equality law have also been a source of concern for LGBT-Q teachers, leaving them feeling 'vulnerable and exposed' in schools under religious patronage (Fahie, 2016, p. 403). The de-legitimising force of religion is such that, in many jurisdictions, LGBT-Q teachers have been dismissed on religious grounds (For example, The Guardian, 2013). Many of these cases are instigated at the very moment that a teacher enters into a legal structure for same-sex

relationships. Such cases raise questions about how discourses of religion and secularism feature as legal structures for same-sex relationships are introduced and spill over into schooling contexts. For various reasons, the Irish context provides a rich site for engagement with this topic.

In Ireland, civil partnership (CP), a legal structure that provided many of the legal benefits accorded to marriage, was signed into law in 2010. This legislation was in existence until 2015 when Ireland became the first country in the world to extend civil marriage to same-sex couples via a public vote. Mirroring international contexts, religion and secularism were central features of sexuality equality debates in Ireland as CP and same-sex marriage were negotiated. A sexually progressive Left declaring marriage to be a civil, secular institution was pitted against a conservative, religious Right (Neary, 2015). Furthermore, the Irish education system with its history of interconnection between church and state and recent moves towards secularism also provides a valuable site for engaging with intermingling discourses of religion, secularism and equality.

In Ireland, 96 percent of primary schools (Coolahan et al, 2012) and 58 percent of second-level schools are under religious patronage (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). However, the legitimacy and credibility of the Catholic Church has waned considerably (Donnelly and Inglis, 2010) and discourses of secularism have become prominent in the public sphere. Several changes have been underpinned by secular discourses. The government proposed a process of divesting the patronage of Catholic primary schools (Coolahan et al., 2012) and religious and cultural diversification has resulted in a growing multi-denominational sector[2] at primary and second-level. Furthermore, in the face of significant religious opposition, governmental consensus about CP and later same-sex marriage followed decades of LGBT-Q activism in Ireland. These moves, along with the more recent amendment of religious exemption Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Act[3] and the removal of Rule 68[4], signal a shift in the balance of power. Nevertheless, religion continues to operate as a central part of the normative fabric of life in Ireland. It operates less through doctrine but rather through 'belonging to a cultural tradition and heritage, to a shared collective memory' (Inglis, 2007, p. 207). Cultural traditions around significant life moments such as birth, death and relationship commitment continue to be predominantly presided over by the Catholic Church and it is through these cultural workings of religiosity that families and communities are bound together and heterosexuality is affectively (re)produced (Gray, 2006).

This paper captures teachers' negotiations of their everyday lives at school as they entered into a CP in Ireland. Undoubtedly, in many contexts, religion poses a very real threat to the everyday lives of LGBT-Q teachers in schools. But, moving sideways from the predominant characterisation of religion as oppositional to LGBT-Q identification or a problem to be overcome by 'progressive' approaches to the politics of sexuality at school, this paper inquires into the ways that the religious and the secular coalesced as teachers negotiated their school contexts while entering into a CP. While Ireland's education system bears a unique legacy of intertwined church/state relations, this paper nevertheless offers insight of universal interest into LGB teachers' negotiations of the newness of this cultural moment and the emerging politics of sexuality following the introduction of a new legal structure for same-sex relationships. Following the idea that if new norms are not explored, 'they remain implicit and the focus is always at the level of the effects that they produce' (Gray 2006, p. 208), this paper captures a 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 2013; 2015) as new politics of sexuality are being negotiated in this time of flux.

A structure of feeling is the 'felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living' (Williams, 2013, p. 68). It is a 'difficult thing to get a hold of' (ibid.) because it is not just relations between social organisation, dominant ideas and material life at a particular time, rather, it is 'something else beyond these elements' (Gray, 2008), something residual and delicate. A structure of feeling is how the meanings and values of a particular cultural period *feel* (Williams, 2015). It exceeds 'language and discourses in their function as unconscious and often inarticulate experience, traversing and embodying contradictory causes and meanings' (Boler, 1999, p. 210). It is not formally learned nor is it experienced in the same way by all individuals or generations but 'it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization' (Williams, 2013, p. 69). The particular community may not be completely aware of this structure of feeling because 'it is a state of unfinished social relations that have not yet found the terms for their own reflexive self-comprehension' (Zembylas, 2002, p. 192); it is 'new cultural work' (Williams, 2015, p.157).

The paper is organised in the following way. First, we present the methodological details of the study. Following this, we first introduce the ambivalent ways in which the teachers' subjectivities are shaped by religion. Then, we explore the teachers' contradictory optimistic attachments to religion and secularism. The structure of feeling or 'new cultural work' captured in this paper unravels the religious/secular binary and tells a more nuanced

story of the ambivalent, messy ways in which the politics of sexuality are renegotiated across the overlapping social fields of religion and education. Furthermore, following Zembylas's (2002, p. 208) notion that analysing the structure of feeling at work in schools helps to 'deconstruct the power structures that normalize life at school and in the classroom', the teachers' ambivalent and contradictory optimistic attachments (Berlant, 2011) to religion and secularism as they entered into a CP provide a generative point of departure for (re)thinking the relationship between religion and sexuality in education contexts.

Methodology

This paper draws on an in-depth, qualitative study guided by the research question: how are teachers negotiating their personal and professional identities while entering into a CP in Ireland? Following University Ethical approval, fifteen teachers took part. Table 1 provides an overview of their profiles.

Pseud.	M/F	Age	School Type[5]	Religion
Eimear	F	43	Catholic Primary	Personally, No. Professionally, Yes.
Darina	F	60	Catholic Primary	Roman Catholic
Simon	M	37	Multi-Denominational Primary	Church of Ireland
Fergal	M	38	Multi-Denominational Primary	Spiritual Belief
Ronan	M	52	Catholic Primary	Spiritual Belief
Tom	M	35	Catholic Primary	None
Steve	M	29	Multi-Denominational Primary	Catholic
Sarah	F	43	ETB Second-level	Roman Catholic
Mary	F	59	Gaeilscoil Second-level	None
Anna	F	46	Catholic Second-level	No(ish – except for school liturgical events)
Bev	F	54	Catholic Second-level	None
Elaine	F	30	ETB Second-level	Roman Catholic; attend mass irregularly
Conor	M	43	Community Second-level	No
Richard	M	51	ETB Second-level	Quaker
Eoghan	M	47	Community Second-level	Roman Catholic

Table 1: Participant Profiles

This study was shaped by a post-structural epistemological approach. The cyclical and multi-layered approach to data collection and analysis was not an attempt to arrive at a deeper, truer meaning or a more valid form of data. Rather, it was an attempt to grasp at layers of voices

in a variety of ways and to identify recurring dynamics and tensions in the data (Lather, 1993). Participants were recruited through advertisements, personal networks and a snowball sampling method. Each teacher participated in this study across a period of approximately ten months. First, the teachers participated in one-to-one in-depth interviews (approximately 90 minutes); some using visual aids to elicit rich detail. Teachers who had already registered their CP at the time of first interview completed a detailed reflection recalling life in school at the time of their CP. Prompts focused on aspects such as decisions, feelings, strategies and reactions in their relations with colleagues, students and parents in the time planning before, the days around and after their CP celebration. In addition, all teachers were invited to complete six weekly written reflections guided by prompt e-mails. Then, I wrote a summary of the first interview and written reflections (approximately 4,000 words) and shared it with each teacher. These summaries were both a member-checking exercise and encouraged another layer of interpretation on the part of teacher and researcher. Furthermore, these narratives sought to avoid coded fragmentation too quickly, ensuring that analysis of each teacher's story was sufficiently contextualised. Finally, thirteen teachers took part in a second semi-structured interview (approximately 70 minutes) that was partly shaped by my analysis and their reactions to and reinterpretation of the written summaries.

Data analysis first involved several readings of individual transcripts where, guided by research questions, the emerging ideas were coded and grouped into categories. This layer of analysis was further refined by follow-up interviews with the teachers about my written summaries, discussing emerging ideas with colleagues alongside reading into and thinking with a variety of conceptual tools such as the ones drawn upon in this paper: habitus as a 'structure of feeling' and 'cruel optimism'. Central themes were identified from across all data and four broader meta-themes were constructed. This paper focuses on one broader meta-theme: 'the ambivalences of cultural legitimacy'.

Ambivalent subjectivities

The teachers' subjectivities are ambivalently shaped by religious affiliation, religious teachings on sexuality and by their occupations as teaching professionals in an education system with a potent religious legacy. Inglis (2007, p.205) claims that the majority of people in Ireland have a 'Catholic habitus'; 'a deeply embodied, almost automatic way of being spiritual and moral that becomes second nature and creates a Catholic sense of self and a way

of behaving and interpreting the world'. As table one introduces, many teachers in this study displayed deeply affective relationships with religion and talked about attachments to religion, religious faith and spirituality. Furthermore, four of the teachers interviewed had entered Catholic religious life at a young age – a considerable percentage of the teachers in this study. We are not claiming that the participants in this study are necessarily representative of LGBT-Q teachers in Ireland but this number of randomly self-selecting participants who had been in religious life reminds of how religion has been deeply embedded in the normativity of the Irish context.

In the past, the Catholic Church has been clear in its position on same-sex attraction as a 'moral disorder'. The four teachers who had been in religious life left because they couldn't reconcile their own feelings with the church's teachings. They displayed a potent sense of hurt, anger and loss in relation to the teachings and practices of the church. For example, Sarah, who had been in religious life and has remained committed to a Catholic religious faith since she left, talked about her feelings of hurt and sadness associated with a memory of being at Mass one weekend with her nieces and nephews:

> The priest started talking about "damage to the family" and how "the media, TV and homosexuality were damaging family life". I absolutely… I couldn't believe my reaction. I actually stood up … took one child up in my arms and the other and they said "Where are we going Sarah?" and I said "That man is saying bad things about Sarah and Eve (partner)". And people around just looked…I said it loud — I didn't care…It was a spontaneous thing…and it wasn't done to be a public show, it was out of immense hurt' (Sarah, Teacher, Community Second-level).

Several teachers who hadn't been in religious life but demonstrated a deep commitment to a Catholic religious faith also described how church teachings deeply affected their sense of well-being: 'I would be very angry about their teaching and I certainly think it contributed to the guilt and shame and unease…it certainly contributed to a lot of my unease about who I am' (Darina, Teacher, Catholic Primary). Elaine (Teacher, Catholic Second-level) described how she agonised over same-sex attraction because of her religious belief: 'I wanted to be straight…the only reason I wasn't accepting myself was because of my religion…Jesus never preached hatred he only preached love and I'm not doing anything wrong to anybody'. These accounts demonstrate the deeply embodied nature of church teachings and the potency of their emotional reactions reveals the extent of their investment in religiosity. Many of these teachers, such as is illustrated by Elaine's quote above,

attempted to reconcile de-legitimising teachings with their continued attachments to religion and religious faith, indicating how they have ambivalently embodied religiosity's legitimising and de-legitimising forces.

The teachers' subjectivities have also been shaped by their occupation as teachers in an education system with a strong religious legacy. For several teachers in this study, memories of negative experiences in their teaching careers also loomed large in their minds. In the early years of Bev's (Teacher, Catholic Second-level) teaching career, her mother received several anonymous letters informing her of her daughter's relationship with a woman and saying that she was unsuitable to teach in the local school. She acknowledged that these experiences continue to linger: 'I think *that* issue (with the letters) in the 80s can come back to me and I don't want *that* repeating or being any risk'. Darina's (Teacher, Catholic Primary) experiences of primary schools under Catholic patronage have also been turbulent. When it became 'common knowledge' that Darina was in a relationship with a woman, a teacher in another school approached the manager of her school saying: 'it was a disgrace that the likes of me should be teaching in the school'.

All the teachers in this study continued to perceive religious 'ethos' as a significant threat and many avoided teaching in schools under religious patronage. While most described positive and affirmative reactions of colleagues to their CP, for those employed in schools under religious patronage, their CP risked interpretation as acting contrary to religious 'ethos' and therefore legitimate grounds for dismissal. These assumptions induced certain silences in the negotiations around their CP: 'I didn't want it [to mark CP at school] because I really was conscious that it's a Catholic school...with the Catholic ethos' (Darina, Teacher, Catholic Primary). Given official religious teachings on sexuality, past experiences in teaching careers, the presence of Section 37 (1) and international reports of teachers dismissed on 'ethos' grounds, it is unsurprising that there was a potent sense of fear and wariness about religious 'ethos' in schools. However, one teacher interrogated her assumptions around religion:

> I would have been very nervous around the chaplain. And…that's assumed prejudice
> …You can't always blame others for not accepting you when you don't even know
> whether they do or not (Bev, Teacher, Catholic Second-level).

Bev worked in a Catholic school and the power of religious 'ethos' in her context was such that she incorrectly assumed that she wouldn't be entitled to marital/CP leave because it would be against school 'ethos'.

The accounts of these teachers illustrate how their subjectivities have been shaped in ambivalent ways by attachments to religion and the workings of religiosity at school. Catholicity continues to be deeply embedded and operates largely as an unquestioned norm through cultural traditions (Inglis, 2007) that permeate school life in Ireland. De-legitimising religious teachings and regulatory devices such as religious 'ethos' in schools continued to cause uncertainty and fear amongst the teachers, reproducing heteronormativity and silence. Many of the teachers sustained affiliations with and participation in religious practices despite their delegitimising effects. Such decisions point to how religiosity operates as a felt mode of belonging that is lived through ambivalent feelings such as nostalgia and anger. But accounts such as Bev's simultaneously exemplify the kinds of transformative moments made possible as the norms of fields become 'increasingly open to questioning, subject to uncertainty and change [and] one is unable to simply keep on going as before' (Sweetman, 2003, p. 540 cited in Adams, 2006, p. 520). These moments allow reflexivity in; they force an 'uncovering of unthought categories of habit' (Adkins, 2003, p. 25). In this way, the teachers' accounts both point to an impasse in getting beyond hegemonic categories of sexuality and schooling even as these categories and their meanings are in the process of change and transformation.

Having introduced how these teachers' subjectivities are ambivalently shaped in relation to religion and pointed to how moments of flux promise transformative potential, the following two sections capture a structure of feeling that reveals contradictory optimistic attachments to religion and secularism.

Attachments to religion and the promise of cultural legitimacy

Like many countries, the ritual of marriage has considerable significance in Ireland. The vast majority of heterosexual weddings are performed in Catholic churches and priests perform the civil registration work of the state. In this context, it is unsurprising that marriage is often assumed to be a religious institution. As CP was a new institution at the time of this study, there was 'no blueprint' (Tom, Teacher, Catholic Primary), nor had enough time elapsed for social norms around CP to become established. So, in this time of 'unfinished social relations' (Zembylas, 2002, p.192) the feelings and decisions of the teachers as they constructed their CP ceremonies provide unique insight into the conditions through which new sexuality norms are negotiated. In this section, we reveal how, in the search for personal

meaning and cultural legitimacy, many teachers displayed attachments to religion in the celebration of their CP. The structure of feeling captured underscores the ways in which religion and normativity entwine to produce optimistic attachments to religion (and the cultural legitimacy it promises) with ambivalent effects.

Given that the vast majority of heterosexual weddings take place in churches in Ireland, it is perhaps unsurprising that many teachers sought out explicit religious involvement in their CP. In the UK, Harding's (2008) work highlights the complexities of the separation of CP from religion. Some participants in her research argued that this separation suggests that freedom of religion does not apply to LGBT-Q people while others took comfort in CP as a secular institution. In Ireland, legislation outlines that a CP must be non-religious. Because of their personal religious faith, some teachers expressed disappointment with CP because 'everything I know about weddings and marriage, it's always bound by God' (Elaine, Teacher, Catholic Second-level). Elaine's quote here is a potent illustration of how religion and marriage operate in tandem and, as such, CP falls short of the promise of normativity.

Despite official religious teachings, several teachers succeeded in having someone with a religious affiliation give a blessing at some part of their CP celebration. For example, Ronan asked a priest to perform a blessing for him and his partner in a separate reception after their CP ceremony: 'I thought it gave it…a legitimacy' (Ronan, Teacher, Catholic Primary). Ronan's motivations draw attention to how some teachers pointedly claimed a cultural legitimacy via religious involvement in the ceremony with an acute awareness of how it functions as part of a normative framework of sexual citizenship and legitimacy in this context. Other teachers articulated their inclusion of a religious blessing less as a claim to cultural legitimacy and more as acknowledging and celebrating their personal religious faith: 'It (religion) is part of my definition…as a person… I see myself as a liberal Christian…as being in conflict to that very conservative dogmatic Catholic attitude that exists' (Tom, Teacher, Catholic Primary). Sarah wanted to have her religious affiliations present in her celebration and decided to ask the chaplain in her school to perform this blessing:

> He said "Oh come back to me when you have a date…" So when I had the date, I went back to him and I still felt I was being fobbed off and I regretted in the pit of my stomach then that I had ever said anything to him…(Sarah, Teacher, ETB, Second-level).

11

The accounts of Sarah and Tom highlight the ever-present tensions in religious attachments. Tom's reflection on the importance of acknowledging his personal faith in his CP reveals the necessity to justify his religious attachment and how it is difficult for his faith to be expressed without considerable qualification. Sarah sought the acceptance of the Catholic Church and was drawn towards the official systems to claim belonging and legitimacy but the affective intensity 'in the pit of her stomach' reveals the exclusionary, de-legitimising extent of religion. Such intensities are residual, hard-to-reach aspects of a structure of feeling that underline religion's continuous promise of belonging and the wounding effects of religious attachments.

It is clear that there were a variety of motivations for the inclusion of religious involvement and religious elements in the celebration of their CPs. Some teachers made these decisions with cognisance of how this would give a cultural gravitas and legitimacy to their CP (and relationship) amongst family and friends. Some sought acknowledgement of their personal religious faith in their CP celebration because of how religion is embodied and shapes self-acceptance. But personal faith is not easily separable from how religion works in and through the culturally normative and 'conventional forms of the social direct us to recognise only some of our attachments as the core of who we are and what we belong to' (Berlant 2011, p. 125). The teachers' accounts demonstrate how religion is intertwined with a sense of belonging and the shape of their ceremonies is as much about claiming normativity and cultural legitimacy as recognising personal faith or belief. The cultural workings of religiosity in Ireland (Inglis, 2007) as well as these teachers' professional trajectories through an education system with such intertwined church/state relations suggests that they may have internalized how religion promises a cultural legitimacy that exceeds state recognition (and the heteronormative motifs associated with heterosexual weddings).

The teachers' decisions around celebrating their CP illustrate the ambivalent effects of religious attachments. Many delighted in the involvement of those in religious life, the inclusion of New Age or religious references and symbols in their CP celebrations and these decisions brought a certain kind of comfort, ordinariness and meaningfulness which exceeded state, secular recognition. However, from Catholic to Quaker religious ceremonies, these ceremonies simultaneously marked the teachers as outside of or contrary to official religious systems. Berlant's (2011) work on attachment provides insight into these ambivalent effects. Attachments are always optimistic and to orientate towards an object (such as religion) is to turn towards the 'cluster of promises' that it offers (Berlant, 2011, p. 23). Berlant's (2011)

concept of 'cruel optimism' denotes 'a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic' (p. 24). The fantasy of the object blocks the satisfaction of the object and instead binds to the cluster of promises that it represents (Berlant, 2011). These teachers' attachments to religion and cultural legitimacy can be understood as a cruel optimism. Religion promised personal meaning and belonging and their claim to religious/cultural legitimacy produced a temporary comfort and ordinariness. However, their attachments to religious recognition and cultural legitimacy are simultaneously costly. Their attachments obfuscated how certain heteronormative, religiously-inflected performances and practices were required in return for cultural legitimacy and how teachings on sexuality continue to overtly mark LGBT-Q people as illegitimate.

Attachments to secularism and the promise of freedom from religious 'ethos'

Having outlined the optimistic turn towards the promise of religion and cultural legitimacy, we now explore how the teachers' attachment to the fantasy of an education system free from religious 'ethos' sits in contradiction with this. Given the teachers' descriptions of negative feelings and experiences related to religious teachings and the workings of religious 'ethos' in the Irish schooling system, it is unsurprising that most teachers were adamant that a turning away from religion and a move towards a secular education system would be a progressive step: 'I think my feeling would be that all education should be state run…It should all be in the secular arena' (Richard, Teacher, ETB Second-level). Evident across the accounts was a desire to be free from religious 'ethos'. It was assumed by most of the teachers in this study that multi-denominational schools were much more progressive entities. Many teachers deemed themselves lucky to work in these contexts:

> I mean Educate Together [multi-denominational patron]… they would be very supportive as a patron…Whereas, I don't know what it would be like in a Catholic school having to tell the reverend chairperson (Simon, Principal, Multi-denominational Primary).

In contrast, religious 'ethos' and the iconography that so often appears in schools under religious patronage was interpreted as threatening: 'The big statues in the hall and the pictures… just the whole kind of…Catholic 'ethos' dripping off the walls — it is oppressive' (Richard, Teacher, ETB Second-level).

In these accounts we can see how 'secular' and 'multi-denominational' are presented as symbols of a more 'progressive' education system. But they are presented as thus *in opposition to* a Catholic religious 'ethos' as 'oppressive'. But Steve's account disrupts this narrative and the assumption that secular or multi-denominational schools are somehow implicitly more inclusive of LGBT-Q people:

> Even though it was an Educate Together [multi-denominational] school, it was a bit old-school. She [Principal] came from a Catholic school for thirty years…I was kind of told, 'listen if I were you I would keep things quiet' (Steve, Teacher, Multi-denominational Primary).

Here, Steve draws attention to how this is not a simple story of patronage divestment and such fantasies are not a guarantor of sexuality equality. Darina highlighted how a secular education system with a minority of private schools under Catholic patronage might actually result in a tightening of Catholic mores that would potentially exclude LGBT-Q teachers:

> I feel I am as entitled as a normal Catholic person to be within the tradition I believe in…I just don't feel that if one is gay or lesbian therefore one should leave the Catholic Church or one should leave the Catholic school (Darina, Teacher, Catholic Primary).

Her labelling of herself as 'a normal Catholic person' underlines the extent to which Catholicity and normativity are so thoroughly intertwined in this context. And so, while the majority of these teachers described the ideal education system as 'secular', the accounts presented in this paper thus far provide a more nuanced picture.

Similar to their attachment to religion in celebrating their CP, the attachment to a secular education system and the struggle to be free from religious 'ethos' might be understood as a fantasy of 'the good life'. This fantasy might be understood as a temporary break with their cruel attachments to religion. The past/present fantasy posits religion as a repressive force while secularism is the progressive, forward-looking future (Asad, 2003). However, Love (2007, p. 8) suggests that turning away from injurious feelings towards celebratory progressive futures obscures how the past is 'something living — as something dissonant beyond our control, and capable of touching us in the present' (Love, 2007, pp. 9/10). Furthermore, secularism has its own regime of subjugating forces (Cinar, 2008) and, as illustrated by the teachers in this study, religion and secularism often join together in complex ways with embodied and social effects (Hemming, 2011).

This rush towards secularism as the progressive solution to teaching about sexuality at school has been interrupted by some. Rasmussen (2010, p. 700) is wary of the idea that if someone critiques secularism, one is 'immediately cast as a conservative' and asserts that an orientation towards secularism invokes blindness to its cultural and religious underpinnings. Rasmussen (2016, p. 182/183) asserts that the compulsion to attack religion — or in the case of these teachers, incise religion from schools — is somewhat of a 'reflexive response' and there is a need to 'refuse the temptation to be immediately defensive about religion' or presume more secularism is emancipatory or progressive. Rasmussen (2012) warns against the assumption that secularism will ensure 'sexularism'— a progressive future of pleasure and freedom of expression for gender and sexuality. Furthermore, a glorification of secularism also overlooks 'the very places where politics comes to matter most: at the deepest levels of the unconscious, in our bodies, through faith, and in relation to the emotions' (Pellegrini, 2007, p. 933). Given the entangled relationship between religion and (hetero)normativity evident across the structure of feeling captured in these teachers' accounts, the fantasy of progressive secularism can be seen as a turn towards 'a cluster of promises' saturated with incoherences (Berlant, 2011, p. 23). The suggestion that secularism is a neutral, progressive answer to the tensions between religion and LGBT-Q sexualities in schools flattens the complexities of lived realities — such as those of the teachers in this study.

Religion and secularism: Blurred boundaries and ambivalent effects

The structure of feeling captured in this paper reveals how sexuality norms are ambivalently negotiated between a socially embedded and individually embodied (hetero)normative Catholicity and the promise of liberal, secular arrangements of progress. The hurt, loss and anger described by the teachers in response to religious teachings and the presence of religious 'ethos' in schools is a potent indication of how religion is embodied as a felt sense of belonging. But Berlant (2011, p.51) has helped us to see how there are 'conditions of possibility' within their costly bargains with religion. For example, the religious blessings in CP celebrations can be read as a new fashioning of Catholicity as detached from official church doctrine. Furthermore, the negotiations of the 'unfinished social relations' (Zembylas, 2002, p. 192) around CP produced reflexivity about the cultural workings of Catholicism enabling a destabilization of sexuality norms. However, this new potentiality sits alongside how societies and schools can act as a 'straightening device' (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 560) with

15

homonormative consequences (Hermann-Wilmarth and Ryan, 2014) where certain lives come to belong while new 'others' are created. It also distracts from the ways in which religiously and spiritually-inflected heteronormative subjectivities are (re)produced through religious frames that continue to mark LGBT-Q bodies as illegitimate. Religious inscriptions of illegitimacy in past teaching careers and current religious teachings simultaneously conditioned optimistic attachments to secularism as the progressive future of schooling. The teachers' orientation towards multidenominational or secular schools as guarantors of sexuality 'progress' sits in sharp contrast with their own religious attachments and claim to religious and cultural legitimacy in the celebration of their CPs.

Britzman (1998) argues for close attention to feelings and where they 'break down, take a detour, reverse their content, betray understanding…where affective meanings become anxious, ambivalent' because of what they reveal about power relations in schools and society. This paper's attention to an emergent structure of feeling — the hard-to-reach, delicate and residual experiences of negotiating new sexuality norms — has provided a generative point of departure for (re)thinking the relationship between religion and sexuality in education. The teachers' attachments to religion refute assumptions that LGBT-Q lives are secular and help us move sideways from the predominant characterisation of religion as in opposition to or a problem for LGBT-Q people in schools, providing a more nuanced picture of the place of religion in LGBT-Q teachers' lives. Moreover, the teachers' contradictory attachments to religion and secularism blur the boundaries between religion and secularism. Such attachments warn against a simplistic framing of the politics of sexuality as secular and 'progressive' versus religious and conservative in education contexts. Furthermore, while the Irish context undoubtedly has a unique legacy of church/state relations, this paper has nonetheless provided universal insight into how religion operates through cultural (hetero)normativity and congeals in particular ways around wedding rituals and that these discourses inevitably permeate schooling contexts. Such findings caution against the rush towards secularism as a 'progressive' solution and also point to the potential that the quasi-public/private spaces of schools hold for meaningful engagement with and learning about the tension-filled terrain of religion and sexuality.

References

Adams, M. (2006). Hybridizing Habitus and Reflexivity: Towards an Understanding of Contemporary Identity. *Sociology,* 40, 511-28. doi: 10.1177/003803850663672

Adkins, L. (2003). Reflexivity: Freedom or Habit of Gender. *Theory, Culture and Society,* 20 (6), 21-42. doi:10.1177/0263276403206002

Ahmed, S. (2006). Orientations: Towards a Queer Phenomenology. *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies,* 12, 543-574. doi: 10.1215/10642684-2006-002

Asad, T. (2003). *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press.

Boler, M. (1999). *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education.* Routledge: New York.

Britzman, D. (1998). *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Browne, K., Munt, S. R. and Yip, A. K. T. (2010). *Queer Spiritual Spaces: Sexuality and Sacred Places.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Cinar A (2008) Subversion and Subjugation in the Public Sphere: Secularism and the Islamic Headscarf. *Signs,* 33, 891-913. doi: 10.1086/528850

Coolahan, J., Hussey, C. and Kilfeather, F. (2012). *The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector.* Dublin: The Department of Education.

Darmody, M. & Smyth, E. (2013). *Governance and Funding of Voluntary Secondary Schools in Ireland: Research Series Number 34*. Dublin: The Economic Social and Research Institute.

Donnelly, S., & Inglis, T. (2010). The Media and the Catholic Church in Ireland: Reporting Clerical Child sex Abuse. *Journal of Contemporary Religion,* 25, 1-19. doi: 10.1080/13537900903416788

Duggan, L. (2004). *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Fahie, D. (2016). Spectacularly exposed and vulnerable' - how Irish equality legislation subverted the personal and professional security of lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers. *Sexualities,* 19, 393-411. doi: 10.1177/1363460715604331

Ferfolja, T. (2005). Institutional Silence: Experiences of Australian Lesbian Teachers Working in Catholic High Schools. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education,* 2, 51-66. doi: 10.1300/J367v02n03_05

Ferfolja, T. (2009). State of the Field Review: Stories So Far: An Overview of the Research on Lesbian Teachers. *Sexualities*, 12, 378-396. doi: 10.1177/1363460708099116

Gray, B. (2006). Curious Hybridities. *Irish Studies Review*, 14, 207-223. doi: 10.1080/09670880600603638

Gray, B. (2008). Putting Emotion and Reflexivity to Work in Researching Migration. *Sociology,* 42, 935-952. doi: 10.1177/0038038508094571

Harding, R. (2008). Recognizing (and resisting) Regulation: Attitudes to the Introduction of Civil Partnership. *Sexualities,* 11, 740-760. doi: 10.1177/1363460708096916

Hemming, P.J. (2011). The Place of Religion in Public Life: School Ethos as a Lens on Society. *Sociology,* 45, 1061-1077. doi: 10.1177/0038038511416148

Hermann-Wilmarth, J.M. and Ryan, C.L. (2014). Queering Chapter Books for LGBT Characters with Young Readers: Recognising and Complicating Representations of Homonormativity. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 1-23 doi:10.1080/01596306.2014.940234

Hunt, S. (2009). *Contemporary Christianity and LGBT Sexualities*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Inglis, T. (2007). Catholic Identity in Contemporary Ireland: Belief and Belonging to Tradition. *Journal of Contemporary Religion,* 22, 205-220. doi: 10.1080/13537900701331064

Lather, P. (1993). Fertile obsession: Validity after Poststructuralism. *The Sociological Quarterly,* 34, 673-693. doi: 10.1111/j.1533-8525.1993.tb00112.x

Love, H. (2007). *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Harvard: University Press.

Love, P.G. (1998). Cultural Barriers Facing Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students at a Catholic College. *The Journal of Higher Education,* 69, 298–323. doi: 10.2307/2649190

Luker, K. (2006). *When Sex Goes to School: Warring Views on Sex Education Since the Sixties.* New York: Norton.

Neary, A. (2013). Lesbian and Gay Teachers' Experiences of 'Coming Out' in Irish Schools. *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 34, 583-602. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2012.722281

Neary, A. (2016). Civil Partnership and Same-sex Marriage: LGBT-Q Political Pragmatism and the Normalization Imperative. *Sexualities,* 19, 757-779. doi: 10.1177/136346071561694

Ogland, C. P. and Verona, A. P. (2014). Religion and the Rainbow Struggle: Does Religion Factor Into Attitudes Toward Homosexuality and Same-Sex Civil Unions in Brazil? *Journal of Homosexuality,* 61, 1334-1349. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2014.926767

Pellegrini, A. (2007). Signalling Through the Flames: Hell House Performance and Structures of Religious Feeling. *American Quarterly,* 59, 911-935. doi: 10.1353/aq.2007.0067

Rasmussen, M. L. (2016). *Progressive Sexuality Education: The Conceits of Secularism.* New York: London.

Rasmussen, M. L. (2012). Pleasure/Desire, Sexularism and Sexuality Education. *Sex Education,* 12, 469-481. doi: 10.1080/14681811.2012.677204

Rasmussen, M. L. (2010). Secularism, Religion and 'Progressive' Sex Education. *Sexualities,* 13, 699-712. doi:10.1177/1363460710384558

Shannahan, D. S. (2010). Some Queer Questions From a Muslim Faith Perspective. *Sexualities,* 13, 671-684. doi:10.1177/1363460710384556

Shipley, H. (2014). Religious and sexual orientation intersections in education and media: A Canadian perspective. *Sexualities,* 17, 516-528. doi: 10.1177/1363460714526115

Taylor, Y. and Snowdon, R. (2014). Making Space for Young Lesbians in Church? Intersectional Sites, Scripts, and Sticking Points. *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 18, 393-414. doi:10.1080/10894160.2014.899831

The Guardian (2013 December 8) US Catholic school fires gay teacher who applied for marriage licence'. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from: http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/dec/08/us-catholic-school-fires-gay-teacher-marriage

Williams, R. (2015). *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*. London: Verso.

Williams, R. (2013). *The Long Revolution.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Yip, AK-T. (2010). Sexuality and Religion/Spirituality. *Sexualities,*13, 667-670. doi: 10.1177/1363460710384555

Zembylas, M. (2002). 'Structures of Feeling' in Curriculum and Teaching: Theorizing the Emotional Rules. *Educational Theory,* 52, 187-208. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2002.00187.x/abstract;jsessionid=5B0125868A0DD9B3D71C3822BB91C445.f03t02?userIsAuthenticated=false&deniedAccessCustomisedMessage=

[1] The participants in this study identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Throughout this paper, we use the term LGBT-Q to grapple with the politics of gender and sexuality and the dash is a continuous reminder of the silences and tensions that abound in the politics of identity and representation.

[2] Multi-denominational primary schools are predominantly run by a non-profit company called 'Educate Together'. Unlike Catholic primary schools who operate a faith formation approach within the school day, the

multi-denominational schools have an ethics curriculum called 'Learn Together' which educates about a variety of religions.

[3] Section 37 (1) of the Employment Equality Act stated that an organisation was not deemed as discriminatory if it gave more favourable treatment or took action against an employee or prospective employee on the religion ground in order to maintain the ethos of the institution. This was amended by the Irish government in July 2015 to ensure that no religious organisation can give less favourable treatment on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, traveller community, disability grounds or the ground of race.

[4] Rule 68 had afforded religion a privileged place over other subjects in the primary school curriculum.

[5] The vast majority of primary schools are governed by the Catholic religious patron (91.1%) via a board of management. The largest proportion of second-level schools are privately owned and managed by religious orders (51.2%) — the vast majority of which are entirely funded by the state. All other schools are funded by the state and have a inter-denominational (Christian) or multi-denominational ethos.