Ms. Willow described feeling paranoid and losing trust in others. She became more self-conscious and hyperaware of how her actions may be perceived, recounting an incident on prom night where she did not assist a female student who was sick in the washroom, but instead sought a private environment to deal with the situation.

Despite her initial concerns, Ms. Orlando’s behavior continued, and he was eventually made aware of the possible homosexual orientation of Ms. Willow. Ms. Orlando approached Vice Principal Don Clarke alleging that he saw Ms. Willow looking very uncomfortable and nervous, and that she tried to sneak a student out of the bathroom.

Don Clarke spoke to Principal Dr. Young, who alleges that Mr. Orlando stated that the incident seemed sexual, and that he had heard a student once complain that Ms. Willow provided literature to students with “lesbian content.” Dr. Young called the police, who investigate the incident and find that there are no grounds for charges.

Over time, rumors spread and Ms. Willow made an official complaint. A final decision was made by the Board, which recognized that Mr. Orlando, Dr. Young, and the Halifax Regional School Board had discriminated against Ms. Willow on the basis of her perceived sexual orientation, and failed to ensure a safe and inclusive environment as per the Canada Human Rights Act, 1977.

The school board was also forced to apologize for their wrongdoing; however, whether or not this apology was genuine is difficult to decipher as they are not directly mentioned in the case.

Not long after the decision was made, they introduced a board policy that requests teachers declare their sexual orientation and relinquish their position if they are a member of the LGBTQ+ community. The school board was also forced to apologize for their wrongdoing; however, whether or not this apology was genuine is difficult to decipher as they are not directly mentioned in the case.

Although historically, Canada has come a long way in terms of laws regarding the protection from discrimination of LGBTQ+ people, these come with their own set of limitations. The Halifax Regional School Board has been criticized for their lack of inclusion and protections, and the case explores discrimination on a basis of perceived sexual orientation, with the Halifax Regional School Board denying any wrongdoing.

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Although there are anti-discriminatory laws in place, individuals continue to deal with more subtle forms of oppression and microaggression in their daily lives. Our role as social workers should be to support LGBTQ+ needs and experiences in our workplaces and in the provision of service to diverse populations, just as it was with Ms. Willow.

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References


Willow and described their relationship as inappropriate and sexual. Meanwhile, he described this same student’s close relationship with a male heterosexual teacher as not at all suspicious. Rather, he described it as consisting of a “father and daughter” dynamic. This also demonstrates Mr. Orlando’s homophobia towards LGBTQ+ individuals.

Mr. Orlando spoke immediately to another male counterpart, instead of speaking to Ms. Earle, who had been consulted. The outcome of this incident could have been much different.

Mr. Orlando also used an overheard conversation about Ms. Willow referring materials about gay lifestyles to her students as “evidence” that she took sexual advantage of a student.

Dr. Young wrote that Mr. Orlando believed that the female student was “infatuated” with Ms. Willow and described their relationship as inappropriate and sexual. Meanwhile, he described this same student’s close relationship with a male heterosexual teacher as not at all suspicious. Rather, he described it as consisting of a “father and daughter” dynamic. This also demonstrates Mr. Orlando’s homophobia towards LGBTQ+ individuals.

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It is our duty to challenge heteronormative systems and ideologies to begin realizing critical thought and awareness in our surroundings. This would allow us to ensure more inclusivity in our professional practice and personal interactions, and embrace a more positive view of those who identify as LGBTQ+.

Opportunities For Growth and Learning in Anti-Oppressive Practice

Individuals “continue to face a variety of challenges that range from being forced to remain closeted, to actual job dismissal” (Ozeren, 2014, p. 1203).

For those who do come out to their employer, it has been shown that individuals in the LGBTQ+ community have lower employment prospects than cisgendered people and are more likely to lose their job when their sexual orientation becomes known to their employers (Ozeren, 2014, p. 1204).

There was an automatic link created between Ms. Willow’s supposed behaviours and perceived sexual assault, which was fueled by her sexual orientation and her colleagues’ prejudicial beliefs (Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, 2006).

Through changes in law and policy, human rights found voice in the media and news outlets as a result of the Halifax case. Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission and the Halifax Regional School Board, principal Dr. Gordon Young, and teacher John Orlando. Ms. Willow is a 26-year-old, able-bodied, middle-class, lesbian woman who was not completely out in her workplace at the time of this incident.

Ms. Willow recruits the student to help move some sports equipment to a storage room accessed through the women’s washrooms. They stop to wash their hands on the way out of the washroom and are seen leaving the bathroom with the student by Mr. Orlando and Ms. Killey.

Mr. Orlando approaches Vp Principal Don Clarke alleging that he saw Ms. Willow looking very uncomfortable and nervous, and that she tried to sneak a student out of the bathroom.

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