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Frankie Huff  
*University of Central Florida*



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A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF GENDER AND  
SEXUALLY DIVERSE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS:  
BALANCING SCHOOL ETHOS

by

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M.Ed. University of Central Florida, 2008  
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the College of Education and Human Performance  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term  
2015

Major Professor: Elsie L. Olan

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## ABSTRACT

Anti-bullying campaigns and legislation are on the rise, and school districts are fighting in favor of and against various forms of support for gay and sexually diverse (GSD) students, creating very distinct experienced ethoses in their prospective schools. At times, these ethoses stand in direct opposition of the aspirational ethoses of those same schools. The purpose of this grounded theory study is to understand how schools interact with the educational policies in place to create a balanced ethos. This study uses Charmaz's (2014) constructivist approach to grounded theory methods to answer the following questions: How, if at all, does the aspirational ethos balance with the experienced ethos in high schools for GSD students, and, how, if at all, are schools creating positive high school ethoses for GSD students? Two themes emerged from this study. The first theme, *don't ask, don't tell*, showed that GSD students are often expected to be silent about themselves and their issues. The second theme, *policy is just a beginning*, revealed that inclusive policy alone is not enough, administration must interact with these policies and GSD students. The findings of this study indicate that for schools to provide a balanced aspirational and experienced ethos for GSD students, these students must be included in the policies, actions, and interactions of the high school. Schools create a positive ethos for GSD students when the balance is achieved. This study has practical and theoretical implications for anti-oppressive educational practices and discourse regarding GSD students.

This dissertation is dedicated to my two greatest teachers. First, I dedicate this to my mama, Lois Hart, who loved me without exception. She was, and will always remain so, my greatest hero. I have never known another human with such strength and courage. She showed me what dedication and perseverance meant every single day of her life, and it is because of her that I endeavored on this academic journey. To Debbie Kleinberg, who has taught me the meaning of absolute love even when I was unworthy, I also dedicate this work. Without her I would not be the person I am today. She is half of me, the better half. If I could give her half of my doctoral letters, I would. Instead, I hope she'll be my forever girl and accept these letters—M-R-S.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Background

The seeds for this study were planted nearly thirty years ago when I searched the halls and corridors of my high school for answers and could not find them, when I sought out someone like myself and could not see anyone, and when I became afraid of being myself because of what I heard in the classroom and in the community. Growing up, I quickly learned that being attracted to the same sex was unacceptable. I distinctly remember hearing my health teacher refer to homosexuality as a ‘deviant behavior’. In the halls, I heard the words “faggot” and “dyke” used as insults in jest and in anger. I spent years creating a life that was not my own because I feared anything else. Looking back, I think about my need to deny who I was. Life in my hometown, and in my high school, was not open, nor was it accepting. There was no readily available information about sexuality available in the school system or anywhere in the community, and homophobia was strong. I felt unsafe.

But, that was years ago, and things have changed. We now live in a world where diversity is mandated in classrooms, where same sex marriage has become a reality in the United States, and where public icons are no longer afraid that they will lose their starring role or recording contract if they ‘come out’<sup>1</sup>. Gender and sexually diverse <sup>2</sup>(GSD) youth have access to

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<sup>1</sup> Coming out is defined as “the process of acknowledging one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity to other people. (University of Michigan, n.d.)

<sup>2</sup> Gender and sexually diverse (GSD) is a less exclusive term that comes from the broad ranged grouping of diverse individuals that extend beyond the usual LGBTQ acronym. The term GSD is



the Internet and a myriad of websites that provide the answers I never found as a teen, the peers with whom I never had the opportunity to meet, and a community to accept them. With these changes in the United States, one would expect the educational experiences of GSD students to be equitable to the experiences of their heterosexual, gender normative peers. My experiences as a classroom teacher, however, have caused me to question that expectation.

In 2008, while teaching at an adult high school, a young man named Gary<sup>3</sup> was enrolled in my Intensive Reading course. The purpose of this particular class was to improve the reading skills of students who tested below a 7<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. Typically, these students are not readers, and they struggle with comprehension and analysis of even the simplest of middle and high school level texts. It became clear after two class sessions that Gary was not in the correct class; he finished assignments in a fraction of the time it took the other students, and immediately, he turned to a novel and buried himself within its pages. Gary was a voracious reader, who moved quickly from one book to the next, reading the memoirs of Augusten Burroughs and David Sedaris and novels such as James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*. Unfortunately, add/drop was over, and Gary would either have to withdraw from the course or stay where he was. He stayed, and I pushed him to work at harder tasks, and continued to encourage his reading. We shared tastes in reading and often traded books. After time spent talking to Gary throughout the semester, I came to learn the circumstances that brought him to

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proposed by a number of therapy groups, namely Pink Therapy of London (Pink Therapy, n.d.) It will be used for the purpose of this study to include all individuals who do not identify as gender-normative or heterosexual. This term was adopted by the researcher because more common terms used in the U.S. created exclusion.

<sup>3</sup> All names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms created by the participants to provide anonymity.

our school and ultimately were responsible for the low entrance exam scores that had placed Gary in this lower level course.

Living in a metropolitan area of Florida, Gary had been the victim of constant verbal harassment in his school. Gary was known to be gay by many of his peers, and presumed so by those who did not actually know; because of this, he was taunted by them, as well as one of his teachers. He was often the target of the teacher's gay jokes, many made in front of a classroom of Gary's peers. It became so painful and embarrassing that Gary would disappear from class for long periods of time, resulting in more degradation by the teacher and failing grades. By the time his family moved, Gary had lost interest in school, and he 'Christmas-Treed'<sup>4</sup> his entrance exam to the new high school. He seemed dejected and afraid those first few weeks in class. Soon, however, in a different environment, he flourished. He completed the adult high school program with good grades and a sense of belonging. In an email to me several years later, Gary wrote, "I liked [the] adult high school way better than all of the other high schools I attended. I made new friends. I liked my teachers; they understood me. [The students] didn't care about my sexuality; they just wanted to get their diploma and go out to the world and try to make a change in their life" (Gary, personal communication, 2013).

Gary's situation is hardly an isolated one. The Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) reported in their 2013 *National School Climate Survey Executive Summary* that 55.5% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students felt unsafe in their schools. Over 30% of the LGBT students missed at least one day of school in a single month,

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<sup>4</sup> Christmas-Treed is a term used in educational settings to refer to someone marking random answers for a multiple-choice test.

and over 60% avoided activities because of safety concerns (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2014b, p.4). High school success and college readiness are dependent upon the interactions between students and schools; students who are not interacting within the school may not do as well as those who do (Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2007, p 524). When students feel isolated from their schools and their peers, academic consequences can be great. The harassment of GSD students may lead to declining grades and truancy (GLSEN, 2014b, p.6).

As an educator and a researcher, the questions that stem from my experiences and from research, such as that provided by the GLSEN's *National School Climate Survey*, center on the changing ethos, or climates, of high schools. While harassment and discrimination are still very much prevalent, the 2013 survey's executive summary did show some improvement in school climates since earlier versions of the survey (GLSEN, 2014b, p.10).

Much research exists showing the effects of discrimination and harassment on GSD high school students and on the methods for increasing support for these students academically, socially, and emotionally, yet there is little research that examines how high schools balance the aspirational ethoses that are espoused through policy and procedure and the actual experienced ethoses of GSD students in these schools.

### Statement of the Problem

The Department of Education, the state departments of education, local school boards, and school administrators establish the policies and procedures that create an 'aspirational ethos' in educational institutions. Donnelly (2000) defined 'aspirational ethos' as the ideals or values professed by an institution. This professed ethos, however, holds little merit if the 'experienced

ethos' of the school does not suggest that a genuine execution of the aspirational ethos has occurred. The experienced ethos is the lived experiences of those within the institution. As Kezar (2007) proclaimed, it is how we foster and tend to the aspirational ethos that outlines the experienced ethos.

Now, with the June 26, 2015 ruling for national recognition of same sex marriage, gay rights serve as a major political talking point. Anti-bullying campaigns and legislation are on the rise, and school districts are fighting in favor of and against various forms of support for gay and sexually diverse (GSD) students, creating very distinct experienced ethoses in their respective schools. At times these ethoses stand in direct opposition of the aspirational ethoses of those same schools.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explain how high schools created and employed policies and procedures, and how they interacted with these to foster balanced school ethoses for GSD students. School ethos, or the atmosphere of a school, is shaped through the social interactions that took place within the school, as well as the interaction of the students, staff, and faculty with policies and procedures in those schools (Alder, 1993; McLaughlin, 2005). Identifying how GSD students experienced the ethoses in their high schools facilitates an understanding of how high schools balanced their aspirational and experienced ethoses.

### Research Questions

The central question is how, if at all, does the aspirational ethos balance with the experienced ethos in high schools for gender and sexually diverse (GSD) students? The researcher agreed with Kezar's (2007) statement, "an ethos does not develop on its own, education must tend their institution's ethos on an ongoing basis and consistently work to align policies and practices with it" (p. 14). This led to the following sub question: how, if at all, are schools creating positive high school ethoses for GSD students?

### Significance of the Study

The Jeffrey Johnston Stand Up for All Act (2008) regulated that all Florida "school districts must create and adopt a policy that clearly states that harassment and bullying are prohibited" (Equality Florida, n.d.). Backed by the House of Representatives and the Senate in Florida, this bill obligated school districts to protect all students from bullying and harassment. Both legislative groups made it clear that all students were to be protected, including GSD students (Equality Florida, n.d.). But, in an October 2014 press release regarding the publication of their 2013 *National Climate Survey*, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) reported that "schools nationwide are hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBT students" (GLSEN, 2014a). This discrepancy that existed between the ethos that Florida aspired to create and the actual experiences of GSD students in those school ethoses drove this study.

## Delimitations

This study was geographically limited to the state of Florida. This location was selected based on the researcher's access to participants and familiarization with schools, teachers, and GSD support groups within the state.

The researcher's own experiences as a teacher, a scholar, and a member of the GSD community can influence the collection of data and the analysis. As Charmaz (2014) noted, "we are not passive receptacles into which data are poured" (p. 27). In fact, the researcher influenced the study design, from creating instruments for data collection through data analysis. Through reflexivity, however, the researcher constantly returned to preconceptions while working with data to avoid forcing data into any category into which it did not move to naturally, thus avoiding biases (Charmaz, 2014).

The educator participants in the interview portion of this study consisted of only one male, who identified as a GSD individual. The researcher acknowledged that having perspectives from non-GSD males might have provided a different perception of school ethos.

This study used only one focus group made up of college students and has just one non-college student participant. Because GSD students drop out of high school at higher rates than their heterosexual peers, it might have been beneficial to learn more about the experiences of youth who did not attain high school diplomas or who did not attend college.

## Summary of Chapters

The first chapter of this dissertation has provided background information regarding the pursuance of this study, the statement of the problem, and the purpose of the study. Within this chapter, the researcher delivered the research questions that drive the study and the significance of the study. Finally, the chapter offered the delimitations of the study.

The second chapter presented a review of related literature concerning school ethos and GSD high school students. Included in this chapter are defining literature on school ethos and the impacts of school ethos on GSD high school students.

The third chapter described the methods of data collection and analysis for this study. The researcher described the study's design, the researcher's role, participants, sample size, setting, and data collection and analysis. Also, this chapter proffered issues of trustworthiness and ethics.

The fourth chapter answered the research questions through analysis of data from focus groups, interviews, and extant documents. This chapter also provided discussion on triangulation of the study and emergent themes.

The final chapter of this dissertation provided the emergent theory. Next, the researcher discussed the implications of the study in regards to teachers, pedagogy, and schools. Then, limitations and ideas for further study are discussed. Finally, I concluded the dissertation with a brief summary.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

*“Every campus has an ethos, but not every campus intentionally builds and sustains theirs. (Kezar, 2007, p. 18).*

### Ethos and School Ethos

Since Aristotle, the definition of ethos has been the subject of debate among scholars. In Book II of *Nicomachean Ethics*, ethos was defined as habits and customs (Höffe, 2010, p. 253). Further, Aristotle suggested the idea that moral and intellectual virtues are the products of ethos, and they are important in the development of intellect (Höffe, 2010, p.253). While McLaughlin (2005) acknowledged Aristotle’s vision of the importance of ethos in the educational arena, having cited, “educational influence as involving the shaping of dispositions, virtues, character and practical judgment of persons in a milieu in which tradition, habit, and emulation play an important role;” he added, “The notion of ethos is notoriously difficult to bring into clear focus in the context of teaching and schooling, as elsewhere” (p. 306). A number of researchers agreed that defining ethos in terms of its educative importance was difficult, but necessary. Donnelly (2000) referred to school ethos as “fashionable but nebulous” and asserted that despite the importance academia places on ethos, “there have been relatively few conceptualisations and theoretical discussions of it” (p. 134). Janet Strivens agreed, stating that even though school ethos is hard to define that it was “too important to ignore” (as cited in Donnelly, 2000, p. 134). Graham (2012) added that while hard to define, a positive school ethos is central to improving schools (p. 341).



In his article, Graham (2012) noted that while many people involved in education acknowledged the value of a positive school ethos, “the term is mostly taken-for-granted with little evidence of explanation, critical reflection or supporting literature” (p. 341). Because of this ambiguity in the defining of school ethos, a number of researchers have used other words to describe the same concept.

Margaret Allder (1993) presented a working definition of school ethos in her article “The Meaning of ‘School Ethos’.” Allder (1993) cited Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, and Smith (1979) and a 1977 United Kingdom study by the Department of Education and Science (DES) as the primary origins of discourse on school ethos. In their research, *Fifteen thousand hours: Secondary schools and their effects on children*, Rutter and colleagues determined from their research that some schools provided a better overall experience for their students than what might have been expected given the socio-economic situations of the students in those schools. They argued that the climate, or the environment, had a significant effect on the school and the experiences of the students (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979). Similarly, the report *Ten good schools* by the DES signified that each of the schools presented in the study possessed two consistent qualities: “effective leadership and a ‘climate’ that is conducive to growth” (as cited in Allder, 1993, p. 59). The terms ‘climate’ and ‘environment’ are used in each study interchangeably, and in each case offer a loose definition of ethos as the milieu of an institution, including the values and attitudes of those in the environment. In further explaining ethos, Allder (1993) added, “some authors refer to the concept by other words” (p. 60). Allder (1993) noted that the work of other researchers, such as Torrington and Weightman (1989), Lynch (1987), and Everard (1986), added to the research focused on school ethos, with each of

these studies using a variety of terms to discuss school ethos. The terms *spirit*, *ambiance*, *atmosphere* and *climate* were all applied similarly by researchers who studied school ethos (Allder, 1993, p. 60; Solvason, 2005, p. 85). These terminologies served as the basis for Allder's definition of school ethos.

Allder (1993) turned to the work of Paul Van Buren to help define 'school ethos'. Van Buren (1972) wrote about religious discourse, but in order to do so he had to first discuss the meanings of words. From this discussion, the concept of the 'edges of language' is presented. In chapters IV and V of his book, Van Buren (1972) created an image of words as existing in a *home-field* where there were rules that fully explained the word and its uses with no room for ambiguity. He extended his image, to include 'frontiers'. In the frontiers, the meanings of words were pushed to the outer edges of language, where the rules were less strict and the definition or use of a word shifted (Van Buren, 1972).

Developing her definition of 'school ethos', Allder (1993) considered Van Buren's (1972) idea of words existing at the edge of language, where meanings can shift to the needs of society, while she contemplated the various terms used when school environment has been studied. From this, Allder (1993) concluded "that 'ethos' is always located somewhere in the social system of an organisation" and that the ethos is associated with behavior, specifically behaviors that had already occurred (p. 68). Thus, Allder (1993) defined school ethos as the:

unique, pervasive atmosphere or mood of an organisation which is brought about by activities or behavior, primarily in the realm of social interaction and to a lesser extent in matters to do with the environment, of members of the school, and recognized initially on a experiential rather than a cognitive level. (p. 69)

This definition, though still somewhat ambiguous, has served as the basis for much newer research on school ethos.

In a 2005 study, McLaughlin began with Allder's definition and then built upon it by including the idea of culture in the understanding of ethos (p. 310). McLaughlin also looked to the research of Glover and Coleman (2005), which defined 'school ethos' as the "less measureable features of the atmosphere of schools, such as the relationship between people and the values and principles underpinning policy and practice" (as cited in McLaughlin, 2005, p. 310). Glover and Coleman (2005) suggested that ethos refers to the 'social dynamics' of the larger enveloping culture of a place (p. 252), and viewed it as the "way in which the school works as an organisation and the atmosphere that prevails between all stakeholders, but especially between student and student, student and teacher, and teacher and teacher" (Glover & Coleman, 2005, p. 253). Based on the work of Allder (1993) and Glover and Coleman (2005), McLaughlin developed a definition of ethos that was somewhat more conclusive. McLaughlin's definition declared that ethos "can be regarded as the prevalent or characteristic tone, spirit, or sentiment informing an identifiable entity involving human life and interaction such as a nation, a community, an age, a literature, an institution, an event, and so forth" (p. 311). McLaughlin (2005) and Allder (1993) concurred that ethos was first experienced and then perceived.

Based on the collective definitions and underpinnings of 'ethos', particularly those of Allder (1993) and McLaughlin (2005), 'school ethos' is the distinctive atmosphere or tone of a school created through the social interactions of those humans in the school as well as the interaction of the humans with the polices in those schools.

## Aspirational Ethos and Experienced Ethos

School ethos is a dichotomous term. Its dichotomy exists in the aspirational, or intended, ethos of a school and in the experienced, or lived, ethos of the stakeholders in that school.

‘Aspirational ethos’ can be defined as the professed or intended ethos of a school, which is often created by mission statements, policies, and procedures set up at local, state, and federal levels.

Donnelly (2000) referred to aspirational ethos as the “declared values of a school.” ‘Experienced ethos’ included the lived experiences of all of the stakeholders in an educational environment, including students, faculty, staff, parents, and community partners.

Kezar (2007) affirmed, it was the care taken to “foster and reinforce the sentiments” (p.14) of the aspirational ethos that patterned the experienced ethos in a school. Nelson (2008) agreed that ethos was a work under construction, “which is not a ‘given’ from authority but created out of the dynamic interactions of school authorities, staff, pupils, and parents and the varying interpretations of the overall purpose of education” (p. 1731). McLaughlin (2005) stated, “The potential tension between an ‘intended’ (or ‘aspirational’) ethos and an ‘experienced’ ethos is...an inescapable part of ethos in an educational context” (p. 312). Donnelly (2000) and McLaughlin (2005) acknowledged a gap between the aspirational ethos and the experienced ethos in many schools. Donnelly (2000) added that the rhetoric of the school’s aspirational ethos, that which the school verbalized, is often far from the experiences of teachers and staff members in these schools. Similarly, Solvason (2005) suggested that the gap between the two ethoses was also evident in the relationships between teachers and students. It was here in this gap between

the aspirational and the experienced ethos that the potential problem of educational equality and academic achievement of all students existed.

### An Ethos of Safety Through Policy

Depalma and Jennett (2010) argued, “While it is vitally important that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are legally protected, it is also vital that education play a major role in transforming deep-seated prejudices, at personal and institutional levels” (p.15). One way to make these changes was through the creation of policy and procedure.

In the United States, the role of establishing educational policy is largely in the hands of state education departments (United States Department of Education [USDOE], n.d.b, para. 2). While this is the case, there are a few federal laws which serve to promote school safety and academic equity. The *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001* proposed measures to improve the academic standings of disadvantaged and at-risk youth in the U.S., with particular attention paid to minority ethnic and racial groups, economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficiency students, and students with disabilities (USDOE, n.d.a). Federal government has also mandated three laws regarding civil rights and education-Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 spoke to discrimination based on race and national origin, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 addressed discrimination in education based on sex, and Title II of the Americans With Disabilities Act of 2008 focused on discrimination against those with disabilities (USDOE, n.d.b). These laws all suggested a promise of equity in education, but lacked any depth of inclusion as they were written to specify only a small number of specific

classifications such as ethnicity, race, and people with disabilities, but were exclusive of sexual diversity and religion.

In a *Dear Colleague* letter, the Office of Civil Rights from the U.S. Department of Education offered further clarification on bullying and the federal anti-discrimination policies (Ali, 2010). This letter affirmed, “Bullying fosters a climate of fear and disrespect that can seriously impair the physical and psychological health of its victims and create conditions that negatively affect learning, thereby undermining the ability of students to achieve their full potential” (Ali, 2010, para.1). Here, the USDOE identified climate, or ethos, as an important factor in the academic success of students. The letter went on to inform school districts that some forms of bullying, specifically those that involved targeting individuals based on race, color, nationality, sex, and disability, were not only to be considered acts of bullying, but were also violations of federal anti-discrimination laws (Ali, 2010, para.2). The letter also stated that some states had taken steps to include sexual orientation and religion (Ali, 2010, para. 3). Finally, the letter addressed the necessity of all schools to make public all policies and procedures regarding harassment, and the need to take proper steps when harassment occurs (Ali, 2010, para. 5-6). This letter made it clear that harassment was a problem that needed to be prevented, and if not prevented, punished; however, there was only a mention that some schools have broadened their policies to include sexual orientation and religion. There was no enforcement by the federal government for schools to include these classifications in their policies.

It was left up to each state to create equitable educational environments for all of the students in that state, and to decide what exactly that means. Each state created a mission statement for their school systems and built policy to align with those statements. Less than one-

fourth of the states in the United States currently have anti-bullying laws that include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, and some states require staff to avoid becoming involved in situations involving issues regarding sexual preference and gender expression (Debaun, 2012, p2). The Florida Department of Education's mission statement presented a generic statement toward academic goals with no mention of the learning environment, or ethos.

It read:

The mission of Florida's K-20 education system is to increase the proficiency of all students within one seamless efficient system, by allowing them the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills through learning opportunities and research valued by students, parents and communities. (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], n.d.d)

Speaking directly to academic success and school efficiency, this mission statement provided no directives regarding either school ethos or equity. The "Safe Schools" page of the Florida Department of Education website offered discussion of school climate, stating, "Schools that implement school safety measures, drug prevention programs, and positive school climate that promote caring relationships either directly or indirectly facilitate rising student academic achievement" (FLDOE, n.d.c, para. 1).

In 2008, Florida Governor Charlie Christ signed into effect "The Jeffrey Johnson Stand Up for All Students Act" (FLDOE, n.d.c para.1). This act mandated the creation of policy regarding the acts of bullying and harassment (FLDOE, n.d.a, para. 2). The FLDOE offered the following paragraph as a template for districts to use regarding this policy:

It is the policy of the \_\_\_\_\_ School District that all of its students and school employees have an educational setting that is safe, secure, and free from harassment and bullying of any kind. The district will not tolerate bullying and harassment of any type. Conduct that constitutes bullying and harassment, as defined herein, is prohibited. (Florida Department of Education “Model”, 2013, p.1).

This law and the aforementioned federal laws were written to provide a harassment free environment for students; however, still they lack the specific language that is necessary to provide GSD students with the safety they need. Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, and Sanchez (2011) claimed that school policy can only be effective in facilitating safety when:

(1) they have and enforce clear and inclusive anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies that include LGBT identity and gender expression, (2) students know where to go for information and support about LGBT concerns, (3) school staff regularly intervene when bias motivated harassment happens, (4) students have gay straight alliances and other student sponsored diversity clubs, and (5) LGBT issues are integrated into the curriculum. (p. 229)

In the survey *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America*, conducted by Harris Interactive and GLSEN, it was reported that “students from schools with a policy that includes sexual orientation or gender report fewer problems with schools safety in general” (2005, p. 9). Still, only half of the students and teachers surveyed



indicated that their schools' policies included specific language for sexual orientation or gender expression (Harris Interactive and GLSEN, 2005, p. 8).

Two laws were proposed to the U. S. House of Representatives and to the Senate in 2010 that “would provide explicit protection for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) students in public schools” (Russell, Kosciw, Horn, Saewyc, 2010, p.1). The *Safe Schools Improvement Act* would have required that schools who received any funding from the *Safe and Drug-Free School and Communities Act* to create and enforce an inclusive policy that specified protected groups of individuals to include “a student’s actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion’ (Russell et al., 2010, p.4). The *Student Non-Discrimination Act* would have provided “protections and recourse to students targeted for discrimination based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity” (Russell et al, 2010, p.4). According to the website govtrack.us, both of these proposed bills were introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate in 2010, 2011, and 2013. In each case, the proposed bills were sent to committees and no action was taken. According to the govtrack.us website, these bills were again introduced to Congress in January of 2015 and were sent to committees; prognosis for action is 1% (“S.311: Safe Schools,” n.d.). While it appeared that school districts wanted academic success for all of their students, and many wished to create safe environments for those students, their policies left much room for interpretation by the district administration.

## Policy is Not Enough

“In a recent commentary on Safe Schools Policies in the United States, [it was] stressed that school policies are important but not enough to protect LGBTQ youths from homophobia in schools and communities” (as quoted in Darwich, Hymel, & Waterhouse, 2012, p.390). Research indicated that student perception of safety has a significant impact on academic achievement (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz & Russell, 2011; Heck, Flentje, Cochran, 2011). While school policy can begin to foster a feeling of safety and equity in the learning environment, it is evident that more needed to be done. As students begin to identify with who they are outside of the classroom, there needs to be an effort to help them do the same within the classroom. Darwich and colleagues (2012) pointed out the need for peer support and adult support during this time in adolescence, and claimed that those GSD students who had poor support or no support from their peers or central adults, were often harassed and experienced negative outcomes in the academic arena (p. 383-384).

One form of support that provided a feeling of safety and belonging for GSD students was the gay-straight alliance (GSA). More than 900 GSAs exist throughout the United States (Gay-Straight Alliance Network [GSA Network], n.d.a); all but twelve states are part of the National GSA Network (GSA Network, n.d.b). Walls, Kane, and Wineski (2010) allowed that GSAs helped in creating a positive climate for GSD students. In addition to creating a positive climate, schools with GSAs were experiencing a drop in absenteeism and an increase in academic success. Mayberry, Chenneville, and Currie (2013) contended that LGBT students, who attended schools where GSAs existed, were less likely to experience social isolation, and

more likely to show positive gains socially and academically. Murphy (2012) reported that GSD students enrolled in schools with GSAs were less likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe and typically earned higher grade point averages than those GSD students in schools where no GSD-specific support groups existed. The presence of GSAs was also associated with educational attainment in young adulthood, including technical and academic post-high school endeavors (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011, p. 184).

“Traditionally, queer people’s existence in educational settings has been denied or made invisible, not just physically such in school hallways and classrooms, but in discourse, curricular representation, and policy design” (Reilly, 2007, p122). To address this invisibility of GSD individuals, Curwood, Schliesman, and Horning (2009) supported adding GSD literature to the schools’ curricula, stating that a failure to do so meant failing the students (p. 39). A report from the *California Safe Schools Coalition* and the *4-H Center for Youth Development* indicated that students reported feeling safer when they had learned about GSD issues in their schools and were more likely to report having adult support and teachers who treated them fairly (O’Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, and Laub, 2004, p.22). The perception of safety is not without reason; a *Safe Schools Research Brief* showed that significantly fewer cases of reported harassment and bullying appeared in schools with an inclusive GSD curriculum (Russell, Kostroski, McGuire, Laube, and Manke, 2006, para. 5).

#### GSD Teachers as Role Models

Although GSD youth have suffered in schools for far longer, this group was not described as an at-risk population until the 1980s and 1990s (Russell, 2014, p.145). The

importance of role models for at-risk minority students has long been a discussion among researchers. Villegas, Strom, and Lucas (2012) stated, “the role model argument for increasing the diversity of the teaching profession builds on the idea that, beyond transmitting academic knowledge, schools function to shape students’ values in subtle but profound ways” (p. 285). The literature specific to GSD teachers as role models is sparse, but one can turn to the research of ethnic minorities and role models in order to see the benefits afforded to those students. In an article for *The American Conservative*, Lampo (2013) suggested that in the same way the “institutional racism inspired and drove the civil rights movement,” institutional homophobia is behind the GSD movement (para. 11). Richard Riley (1998), former U.S. Secretary of Education, indicated that not only do students need role models, but also they should “see themselves in the faces of their teachers” (p. 19). In discussing teacher diversity, specifically teachers of color, Villegas and colleagues (2012) purported that teachers of color motivate their students by providing them with models of success. They continued, “that people of color are uniquely positioned to promote learning for all students of color because they tend to bring to teaching an understanding of the students’ cultural backgrounds and experiences (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012, p. 286). Similarly, GSD teachers will bring their own understandings and experiences to their classrooms, providing the necessary role models for GSD students. Morrow (1993) agreed with this necessity suggesting that just as schools have decisively hired teachers from varying cultures and ethnicities, they should follow suit in the hiring of GSD teachers to serve as role models.

## The Impact of Experienced Ethos on GSD High School Students

The ethos of a school is affected not only by policy but also by the wider views of the community and the interaction of policy with faculty, staff, and administration. As Lozier and Beckman (2012) stated, “School systems have always reflected the larger society as they complied with and continued ideological and political goals of the group in control” (p.75). Darwich and colleagues (2012) added, “LGBQ youths in schools are not spared from the cruelty of homophobia that exists in the wider society” (p.382). In order to create environments that are conducive to learning, schools must foster an ethos of safety and concern for all students. Inclusion in policy and academic and social activity impacts the treatment of diverse populations. Hilliard, Love, Franks, Laris, and Coyle (2014) argued, “LGBTQ youth who report that teacher and school staff respond to bullying and harassment are more likely to report that they feel that their school is an accepting place, feel like they are part of their school, and to report being happy at school” (p.8). Hilliard and colleagues (2014) also discussed policy, training, GSD resources, and inclusive curriculum as necessities for creating a healthier learning ethos for GSD students.

A negative ethos, one in which victimization of GSD students is tolerated or ignored, leads to academic and social issues for many GSD students. “Victimization at school and social support were found to mediate the associations between sexual orientation and psychological distress; these findings highlight how the school environment can relate to positive and negative mental health outcomes” (Heck et al., 2011, p. 162). According to The National School Climate Survey approximately 28% of GSD students drop out of high school (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer,

Boesen, 2014). A number of researchers have found that absenteeism of GSD students may be as much as five times higher than that of their heterosexual peers, curbing occasions for academic and future success (Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, and DuRant, 1998; D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Darwich et al., 2012). “Overall, at-school victimization disproportionately impacts LGBT youth and has been shown to be related to lower levels of school belonging, feeling unsafe at school, poorer academic performance, more substance abuse, and more depressive symptomology” (Heck et al., 2011, p. 163).

The 2013 National School Climate Survey from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) showed that a higher risk of being victimized led to lower academic performance (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2014b). GSD students are at the center of this risk. Pike (2012), citing an earlier version of the GLSEN survey, reported, “that nearly nine out of 10 LGBTQ students experienced harassment at school...and nearly two-thirds felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation” (p. 30). Russell and colleagues (2011) reported that more than 85% of GSD youth are verbally harassed, and an even larger percentage hear derogatory remarks in school. Nearly half of all GSD students were physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation (p.223-24).

The lack of safety in schools led GSD students to a number of academic issues affecting the attainment of educational goals and successes. “LGBTQ youth report greater victimization, distress, and poorer academic performance than heterosexual youth” (Poteat, Mereish, DiGiovanni, and Koenig, 2011, p.598). Russell and colleagues (2011) agreed, stating, “the victimization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students in middle and high school is pervasive” (p.223). The researchers continued by noting that victimization can be

verbal or physical, including those types of communication that might have been part of everyday conversation, such as youth using the phrase *that's so gay* or calling a peer a *fag* (p. 223). Victimization of GSD students, whether verbal or physical, created a negative school ethos that often caused marked decreases in academic, social, and psychological growth.

### Summary

Research showed it was necessary for the well-being of all students, particularly marginalized groups such as GSD students, that high schools not only created a set of strong policies and procedures to declare their aspirational ethoses, but also interacted with those policies and procedures and with the students, faculty, and staff to form a positive school ethos. Munn (2001) stated, “In a school, ethos touches all aspects of its operation...Ethos is so much part and parcel of the taken-for-granted about the way any school goes about its business that it can be very hard to describe” (p.30). It is this aspect of ethos that can cause the aspirational ethos to become lost in a negatively experienced ethos for GSD students. Solvason (2005) suggested, “It takes far more than a new policy to transform the underlying beliefs of a school” (p. 92). If high schools hoped to provide safe and equitable spaces for GSD students, then all of the participants in the educational system, from governing boards to the students, needed to work together to create policy with specific language, to train teachers and administrators to work with these policies, to build inclusive curricula, and to foster acceptance and inclusion for all students.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

*“If someone wanted to know whether one drug is more effective than another, then a double-blind clinical trial would be more appropriate than a grounded theory study. However, if someone wanted to know what it was like to be a participant in a drug study, then he or she might sensibly engage in a grounded theory project...” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 36-37).*

This qualitative, grounded theory study examined the high school experiences of gender and sexually diverse (GSD) individuals. The researcher used these experiences to determine how high schools balanced aspirational ethos and experienced ethos for their GSD students. Within the constructs of this chapter, the researcher described the research design and the research questions driving this study. Additionally, this chapter defined the researcher’s role, participants, sample size, setting, and data collection and analysis. Finally, issues of trustworthiness and ethics were discussed.

### Research Design

A grounded theory design was employed in this qualitative study. Glaser and Strauss (1967) viewed grounded theory as a way to generate theory through a “systematic discovery of theory from the data of social research” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 14). Their goal was “to construct abstract theoretical explanations of social processes (Charmaz, 2014, p. 7). Examining the social and academic experiences of GSD high school students assisted in understanding how aspirational ethos is balanced with intended ethos to create the best educational opportunities for



this marginalized group. Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory approach provided the framework to make these discoveries and generate a theory.

Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory approach followed Glaser-Strauss's "inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended approach" but argued against the idea of *tabula rasa*, or the blank slate, of the researcher. Whereas, Glaser and Strauss insisted that the researcher enter the study with no preconceived ideas or values, Charmaz's approach acknowledged the "subjectivity and the researcher's involvement in the construction and interpretation of the data" (Charmaz, 2014, p.12-14). The researcher's interest in GSD students from a personal standpoint and as an educator served as a starting point in the creation of the research questions and the interview questions.

Data collection was driven by the research question and the researcher's path to find the answer. The flexibility of grounded theory allowed the researcher to move between data collection and analysis phases, gathering new data as deemed necessary (Charmaz, 2014, p.26). This flexibility provides the researcher the opportunity to fill in gaps of data as they become evident. This was particularly important when studying the experiences of the participants. During focus groups, a participant could hear someone else's experience that will trigger a forgotten experience of their own. In the focus group the participants then had the opportunity to share their newly recalled experiences. In email interviews the participants do not have the benefits of having the memory jogged by another's story. However, during coding, the researcher could discover a pattern or category during coding, and ask then new questions of the participant(s).

“Grounded theory aims to make patterns visible and understandable” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 89).

By collecting a large amount of rich data, this study found the patterns and themes that emerged from the experiences of the participants and the language of extant documents. These patterns and themes presented themselves in a single emergent theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2014).

### Research Questions

This qualitative, grounded theory study examined the high school experiences of GSD students in order to understand how high schools created and maintained a positive school ethos for GSD students. Much research exists on the need for positive school ethos and academic consequences of a negative school ethos on students, but no research directly examined the ways in which high schools balance their aspirational ethos and their experienced ethos. The following questions drove this research study:

*Research Question 1:* How, if at all, does the aspirational ethos balance with the experienced ethos in high schools for gender and sexually diverse (GSD) students?

*Research Question 2:* How, if at all, are schools creating positive high school ethoses for GSD students?

### Researcher’s Role

The role of the researcher in a grounded theory study is to collect data and analyze it in an iterative manner (Charmaz, 2014, p. 15). The researcher used "inductive data to construct

abstract analytic categories” from the lived and perceived experiences of GSD high school students (Charmaz, 2014, p.15). The researcher then used these developing categories to gain understanding of how high schools balanced their aspirational ethos and their experienced ethos.

### Participants

Focus group participants made up the largest group of the study. Fifteen college students, all members of a gay-straight support group at a state college in Florida, participated in the focus group regarding their high school experiences. Additionally, one member of a GSD community support organization volunteered to participate and answered the focus group questions electronically through private email. Table 1 provides demographic information for the focus group participants and for the one participant who contributed through email.

Table 1 Focus Group Participants

Participant	Gender Identity	Age	Sexual Orientation (If disclosed)
Adelaide*	Female	18	
Alex	Male	21	Asexual
Alexoz	Male	18	Gay
Ashlie	Female	19	Lesbian
Blue*	Male	18	
David	Male	19	
Eliza*	Female	20	
Freddie**	Genderqueer	22	
Jack	Male	23	
Jasmine	Female	18	
Jazzmine	Female	19	
Lena*	Female	18	
Mandy	Female	20	Questioning
Naomi	Female	20	
Ray*	Female	20	
Senna	Female	20	Bisexual

\*These students attended focus group but offered no discourse

\*\*Freddie did not attend focus group, but answered questions via email

It should be noted that while sexual orientation was not asked as part of the study, some participants volunteered that information through their focus group narratives. Freddie did not discuss sexual preference, however, it was shared that during high school Freddie identified as a male-to-female transsexual but now identifies as genderqueer. Genderqueer is defined by University of California Berkeley’s Gender Equity Resource Center (n.d.) website as, “A person whose gender identity is neither man nor woman, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders.”

The second group of participants was made up of teachers who responded to questionnaires electronically through private email. This group answered questions regarding their school and community. Initially six female teachers participated in this study through email. Samantha taught an elective subject. Lee taught special education courses. The remaining four- Renee, Virginia, Corrine, and Joy taught core academic courses. Joy also served as the faculty advisor for a gay-straight alliance group on her campus. Table 2 describes demographic information for these participants.

Table 2 Teacher Interview Participants

Participant	Gender	Approximate Population of School	Sexual Orientation
Joy	Female	2300	Straight
Virginia	Female	1400	Straight
Renee	Female	1200	Straight
Samantha	Female	1200	Straight
Corrine	Female	1100	Lesbian
Lee	Female	1300	Lesbian

During the iterative process of coding, the researcher decided to reach out to more teachers to collect further data. Two additional respondents were added to the study. The first respondent, a female teacher and GSD community support group leader, volunteered to answer a

revised questionnaire based on what she has observed or discussed with members of a GSD community group and her school. Miss Frizzle taught core classes. The second respondent, a male teacher and gay-straight alliance sponsor, taught core classes, and participated through email by providing a short narrative regarding his school’s climate. He was given the questionnaire, but due to constraints in time felt that it would be easier for him to respond to the overall idea of the questionnaire, “Describe your school climate.” Table 3 describes the demographics of these two participants.

Table 3 Additional Teacher Interview Participants

Participant	Gender	Approximate Population of School/Organization	Sexual Orientation
Miss Frizzle	Female	1600/40(Club)	Lesbian
Tom Davis	Male	3200	Gay

The focus group and questionnaire respondents represented eight counties in the state of Florida, including both rural and suburban communities.

### Sample Size

Initial sampling in grounded theory included establishing “criteria for people, cases, situations, and/or settings” prior to starting the investigation (Charmaz, 2014, p.197). Charmaz (2014) added that grounded theory begins in the early stages of initial sampling with a “point of departure” since the researcher does not know where the study will lead or what categories will emerge. In this starting point, Charmaz (2014) noted that researchers should “start with relevant materials...that leads you to sampling texts, people, settings, or larger structures such as government agencies or organizations” (p. 197).

To begin this study, the researcher used purposeful sampling and sought individuals who would have knowledge of the experiences of gender and sexually diverse high school students. Because of this, the researcher solicited participants who were members of gay-straight organizations, GSD community support groups, and secondary school teachers. Participants consisted of two subgroups of volunteers- recent high school students and current secondary school teachers, as these participants would be able to offer insight to the study. To request voluntary participation by recent high school students, the researcher emailed gay-straight alliance groups on four college campuses, including state colleges and state universities in Florida. All groups responded to the initial email (see Appendix A) requesting permission to present the study; one college group chose to participate. A gay-straight alliance organization from a state college in Florida agreed to hear about the study and participants were recruited from this initial meeting. Sixteen participants volunteered for participation from this initial presentation of the study, and fifteen were included in the study. A single male volunteer was excluded from the sixteen volunteers because his age was outside of the desired demographics.

In addition to reaching out to gay-straight alliances on college campuses, the researcher initiated contact, via email, with two community organizations that work with GSD individuals. An administrator from one of these groups declared that clients and members of that particular organization were typically much older than the age group requested, but suggested a third community organization to contact. While the first two groups did not participate, the third group shared information regarding the study with its members, and a single participant volunteered to respond through email to a questionnaire containing the same questions that were used for the focus group. Participants for this part of the study (focus group and questionnaire) were selected

based on the following criteria: the individual was between the ages of 18-23 and was willing to participate in the study. The cut off age for participants was set at 23 in order to collect data from those who would be within five years of their expected high school graduation, allowing for better recollection of their individual high school experiences. Also, given recent gains for equality for GSD individuals, such as the 2015 ruling for same-sex marriage throughout the U.S. and legalizing adoptions by GSD individuals and families, collecting data from earlier than 2010 may have provided outdated information.

The researcher purposefully selected participants for the teacher interviews. Participants were teacher peers, with at least two years' experience in the secondary school they discussed. Ten teachers were informed of the study and given the opportunity to participate; eight completed and returned the interviews.

### Setting

Interviews for this study were conducted in a focus group setting and through questionnaires answered through private emails. The focus group was held during a regularly scheduled gay-straight alliance meeting on a state college campus. These meetings are held weekly in a classroom on the state college campus. The researcher was granted permission to make an initial presentation of the study on October 23, 2014, at a regular meeting. During this meeting, the researcher presented the research questions and the details of the study, the processes of the focus group, and requested volunteers for participation. On October 30, 2014, during the next regularly scheduled meeting, the researcher conducted the focus group within the

hour time frame of the group's normal meeting to provide a convenient and familiar space for the participants.

One participant, who was given information regarding the study by a community support group for GSD youth and young adults, participated through email. Given the preference to meet in person or to participate through email, the participant chose emailing. The participant lived more than 50 miles from the researcher and the focus group site, and stated electronic correspondence would be better. Likewise, all educator interviews were conducted through email due to distance, and in some cases, a concern for anonymity since the teachers were speaking about the school in which they were employed.

#### Data Collection

Data collection began in the fall of 2014 and continued through the summer semester of 2015. Approval (see Appendix B) was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in October 2014, prior to any data collection. Additionally, an IRB approval was granted in October 2014 from the state college where the focus group was held; this document was not included in the appendices to respect the anonymity of the college's gay-straight group members who participated. All participants who participated in the study were given a summary explanation for exempt research (see Appendix X).

This study collected data through interviews and extant documents. Interviews were conducted in a focus group and teachers participated electronically using emailed questionnaires. Extant documents were acquired through Internet searches of Florida school district websites,



news articles related to GSD issues in schools in Florida, and a request of public records from Okeechobee County School Board.

### Interviews

Interviews were conducted in focus groups and electronically by email in the fall of 2014 and the spring of 2015. A focus group was conducted to collect data regarding the high school experiences of GSD youth from members of a gay-straight alliance on a state college campus. The focus group was conducted on campus and was recorded using audio devices. Follow-up questions for focus group members were distributed to the participants by the faculty advisor for the gay-straight alliance and were returned to the researcher via email. The researcher hoped to form a second focus group using members of a community support group for GSD youth and young adults, but received only one volunteer. This individual participated through email and answered the focus group questions, follow-up questions, and a third set of questions designed to clarify and elicit more information regarding school climate.

A second set of participants answered questions regarding teachers' perceptions of GSD students and their school environments. Because participants came from different areas of the state of Florida, these participants answered questions and follow-up questions using email.

The interviews for the focus groups and the questionnaires for the teachers were semi-structured, and both sets of initial questions were similar in construction. Interviews and questionnaires were designed with open-ended questions to allow the participants to tell their stories (Charmaz, 2014). The audio recordings for the focus group were transcribed and the

transcript was presented to the participants for respondent validation of accuracy (Charmaz, 2014).

Prior to each of the interviews, the researcher created focus group questions and questionnaires following Charmaz's (2014) approach. "By creating open-ended, non-judgmental questions, you encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 65). The researcher considered Charmaz's (2014) samples of grounded theory interview questions (p. 66-67) when creating the questions used for data collection in this study. After reviewing the transcripts from the focus group and working with initial coding, the researcher made adjustments to the original questions and requested the participants of the focus group to respond via email to the follow-up questions. As analysis took place, the researcher moved back and forth between the codes and both sets of data to ensure that enough data had been collected from the focus group. The individual respondent, Freddie, from the GSD support group was given both sets of questions in the initial part of his interview to ascertain that he had the opportunity to answer the same questions presented to the focus group. Questionnaires used to interview current teachers were developed under the same guidelines as the focus group. These questions were delivered to all of the educator participants' private emails due to traveling distances and anonymity. One participant, who was brought in later in the study in order to add a male perspective, did not feel that he had the time to respond to the questionnaire due to his and the researcher's time constraints. He did, however, choose to respond to the overall question, "Tell me about your school's climate in regards to GSD individuals."

## Focus Group

The focus group was held on October 30, 2014. Prior to this date, IRB approval had been obtained from the research university and the state college on which the focus group would be held. Potential participants were informed of the study a week prior, during their gay-straight alliance meeting. The focus group allowed participants to respond to questions regarding their high school experiences.

Questions were organized in the following categories: participants' high school experiences, participants' perceptions of the climate (ethos) of their high schools, and participants' perceptions of their surrounding communities. Table 4 contains interview questions for the focus group. These questions served as a guide to elicit discourse among participants.

Table 4 Focus Group Questions

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Talk about your experiences in high school.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What kind of clubs or groups, if any, did you join?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. How were these clubs/groups supported by the school administration and faculty/staff?</li></ol></li><li>b. What kind of student were you?</li><li>c. How, if at all, has your high school experiences affected your life as a young adult?</li></ol></li><li>2. Tell me about your high school's climate.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Tell me about the interaction between peer groups.</li><li>b. Tell me about the interaction between faculty and/or administration and students.</li><li>c. How safe were students made to feel in your high school?</li></ol></li><li>3. Talk about the community in which your high school was located.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What are the main sources of income in your community?</li><li>b. What level of education did most members of your community attain?</li><li>c. What type of support did your community provide your high school?</li><li>d. What values or ideals did your community promote?</li></ol></li></ol> |
|--|

Question one and its sub-questions were designed to collect information on the participants and to identify their levels of engagement socially and academically during high school. Question two was aimed at eliciting information on the experienced ethos of the participants' high schools. These questions were concerned with human interaction and safety in the high schools. The final questions were developed to learn about the communities surrounding the participants' high schools and to identify the influence the communities may have on the schools' ethoses.

The same questions were sent to an additional participant, Freddie, who was informed of the study through a GSD support group. As Freddie was the only volunteer from that support group, and it was inconvenient for Freddie to join the college focus group, Freddie participated through email.

While working with initial coding, the researcher determined that further questioning was necessary to clarify participant statements and to collect more data regarding high school experiences; thus, a revised set of questions was created<sup>5</sup>. These questions were distributed to all of the original focus group participants and to Freddie. Three were returned from the focus group and one from Freddie. The revised follow-up questions are in the table below.

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<sup>5</sup> Ken Rigby's Bullying Questionnaire for Students and GLSEN's 2013 National School Climate Survey influenced this questionnaire.

Table 5 Focus Group Follow-Up Questions

<p>Tell me about student safety at your schools.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How well did you get along with students at your high school?</li><li>2. Did you or your peers ever feel unsafe at your high school because of personal characteristics, including sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, body size or weight, family's income or economic status, academic ability, citizenship status, and actual or perceived race or ethnicity, disability, or religion? If yes, please explain.</li><li>3. Were there particular spaces in your school that you or your peers avoided specifically because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable? If yes, please explain.</li><li>4. Were you or your peers verbally harassed at your high school based on personal characteristics?</li><li>5. Were you or your peers physically harassed at your high school based on personal characteristics?</li></ol> <p>Tell me about the support of staff and administrators at your school.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>6. If harassment occurred in your high school, did students report incidents?</li><li>7. How were students supported by staff and administration if incidents of harassment occurred and were reported?</li></ol> <p>Tell me about the local community surrounding your school.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>8. How involved, if at all, was the outside community with the school you attended?</li></ol>
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Question one was designed to learn about the participants' peer relations while in high school. Questions two and three inquired about the participant's perceptions of safety in the school. Questions four and five were created to elicit information on physical and verbal harassment experienced by the students. Questions six and seven asked about the handling of harassment issues within the structure of the school. The final question addressed the idea of community support for the school.

### Freddie

A third and final set of questions were developed and sent to Freddie. During the iterative process of coding, it was apparent that Freddie had more to say, so following Charmaz's (2014)

ideas on intensive interviewing, this final set of questions was written and Freddie agreed to answer them. The final questions used for Freddie’s interview are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Freddie Follow-Up Questions

<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Describe the overall climate in your school in regards to the support of gender and sexually diverse individuals?</li><li>2. How academically successful, if at all, were sexually diverse students in your high school?</li><li>3. How does the school climate mimic or diverge from that of the surrounding community?</li><li>4. What would you want to share about your high school experiences that you have not already had the opportunity to do on prior questionnaires?</li></ol>
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Question one was designed to address the ethos of the school in specific regard to GSD students. This question allowed Freddie to address any specific perceptions held regarding the school’s ethos for Freddie and GSD peers. Question two was designed to address the academic successes of GSD students in Freddie’s high school. Question three was created to discover the similarities between the community’s values and those of the school. And, the final question allowed Freddie to talk about any high school experiences believed to be relevant to this study.

#### Teacher Interviews

After IRB approval, initial contact with participants occurred in October of 2014. The initial eight respondents were given copies of the Summary of Exempt Research detailing the study, and six volunteered to participate by answering questionnaires via email. Emails were sent out with the questionnaires, demographic forms, and a request for pseudonyms. The questions

posed to the educator participants were designed to collect data on the perceived experiences of GSD students in high school from the viewpoint of teachers within those schools.

Table 7 Teacher Interview Questions

<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Tell me about your high school's climate.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How are students made to feel safe and welcome?</li><li>b. How are faculty and staff made to feel safe and welcome?</li><li>c. What students, if any, are at risk in this climate?</li><li>d. How do faculty and staff interact with diverse populations of students?</li></ol></li><li>2. Tell me about your sexual minority students or those students perceived to be sexual minority students.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How are these students made to feel safe and welcome in your high school?</li><li>b. What types of support are made available through the high school for these students?</li><li>c. How do these students interact with peers in your high school?</li><li>d. How do these students interact with faculty/staff/administration in your high school?</li><li>e. What types of successes or failures do you see for gender and sexually diverse (GSD) students in your high school?</li></ol></li><li>3. Tell me about your high school's educational mission under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act of 2013?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What kind of specific language is used in your high school's mission statement regarding diverse populations?</li><li>b. How would you rate (on a scale of 1-4) your high school's mission statement regarding both NCLB and Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act of 2013?</li><li>c. How would you rate (on a scale of 1-4) your high school's implementation of their mission statement for all students, including GSD students?</li></ol></li><li>4. Talk about your community.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How does the community support all students in your high school?</li><li>b. What does the community do to provide support for all students in your high school?</li><li>c. What values or ideals does the community promote?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. How do these align with the school's mission?</li><li>ii. What effect do these values, if any, have on the school's climate?</li></ol></li></ol></li></ol>
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Question one and its sub-questions were created to discover the educator's perceptions of the ethos in their high school in regards to the safety and well-being of GSD students. Question

two and sub-questions were posed to collect data on GSD students in their high schools, particularly the safety and interactions of these students. Question three and sub-questions sought data on the school's mission statements and two federal laws regarding safety and academic achievement in schools and the educator's perception the implementation of those policies. Finally, question four and sub-questions asked about the surrounding community from the educator's perspective.

After analyzing the collected data from the first set of questionnaires, the researcher decided that two new questions were needed to address gaps in the construction of themes. The questions are included in Table 8.

Table 8 Teacher Interview Follow-Up Questions

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How would you describe the overall climate (ethos) of your school?</li><li>2. How do the Gender and Sexually Diverse (GSD) students experience this same overall climate in your school?</li></ol> |
|---|

Question one was designed to gain an understanding of how the participants viewed the overall school ethos. The second question asked whether or not GSD students experienced high school in the same manner as the general population. These questions allowed for communication about general populations and specific populations to determine if ethoses are offering comparable experiences for GSD students and non-GSD students.

#### Extant Documents

Extant documents provided rich data for this study (Charmaz, 2014, p.45). Extant documents are those in which the researcher played no role in their creation, including organizational documents, mass media texts, and public records (Charmaz, 2014, p. 48).



Organizational documents were used to gain knowledge of policies and procedures that relate to all high school students, particularly those who are GSD. These documents included mission and vision statements, strategic plans, nondiscrimination policies, and anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies and protocols for several school districts in Florida. The documents were publically accessed on the Internet through official school district websites. From these documents, the researcher located data that provided an understanding of the aspirational, or intended, ethos that schools hoped to create for their high school's students, and analyzed data for specific language regarding GSD students.

Mass media texts were used to collect data on lawsuits or civil rights interventions in Florida that involved GSD students. The lawsuits and interventions, filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), were made against counties that discriminated GSD individuals, including harassment, freedom of speech violations, and denial of GSAs on campus. The ACLU began taking legal action against school districts in the United States who refused to allow gay-straight alliances to form in public schools in 1999 (ACLU, n.d.). These news articles regarding the various lawsuits and interventions provided the researcher with data regarding GSD issues, which may have affected school ethos.

Florida's first school district to be sued by the ACLU was Okeechobee County School District, in 2006. In this case, a gay-straight alliance was denied access based on the grounds that "the club would interfere with the order and discipline of the school and that the club was incompatible with the school's abstinence-only policy" (ACLU, n.d., para. 10). As this was the first lawsuit filed by the ACLU against a Florida school district regarding GSD discrimination, the researcher hoped to collect rich data regarding the intentions of the district administration in

denying access to a support group. Archived public records were accessed through the superintendent's office of Okeechobee County School District. The researcher requested transcripts from school board meetings regarding the lawsuit, between 2006-2008. The school district provided copies and mailed the transcripts from three closed-session meetings of the school district's executive board. These transcripts were originally sealed, but were made open and available to the public once the court case was closed in 2008.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative studies involved an iterative process of coding data while collecting new data, writing memos, and organizing data (Creswell, 2014). For grounded theory, coding involved constructing codes at several levels (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) suggested using initial coding, focused coding, thematic coding, and, if possible, theoretical coding. These processes were not strictly linear in their construction of codes or emergent theory; in fact, the processes were iterative in nature and the researcher constantly moved back and forth between raw data and new codes, comparing data to data, data to codes, codes to codes, and emergent theories back to data and codes (Charmaz, 2014). Figure 1 details the iterative process of grounded theory coding, indicating the back and forth method of comparing data and codes.

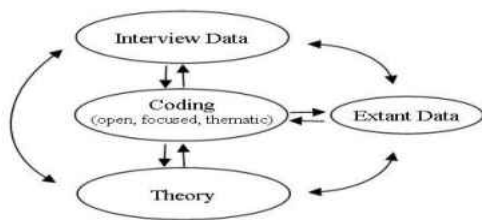


Figure 1 The Iterative Process of Grounded Theory Coding (©Frankie Huff)

## Teacher Interviews and Focus Groups

Prior to coding data, audio recordings from the focus group were transcribed using *normal*<sup>6</sup> style transcription. The transcripts were checked for accuracy by the transcriber and the researcher. Data collected from the teacher interviews were in already script form, as the interviews occurred electronically through private email. Data collected from the focus group and from teacher interviews were sorted by participants into individual narratives. This allowed the researcher to see each participant's story without the interruption of questions and separation of space between comments.

### Initial Coding

First the researcher engaged in initial coding (open coding), the line-by-line naming of data (Glaser, 1978). Charmaz (2014) discussed initial coding as a process in which the researcher searched raw data for action and subsequently labeled the action (p. 116). Codes were assigned using gerunds or gerund phrases to indicate what action occurred, when possible (Charmaz, 2014, p. 116). Upon completion of open coding, the researcher started the iterative process of comparing codes to data for accuracy of the assigned codes.

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<sup>6</sup> RightTranscript.com describes *normal* transcription as a “style that omits *ums* and *uhs*, false sentence starts, and nervous stuttering. Idiomatic noise words like *you know*, *well*, *so*, and *such*, as well as poor grammar and word usage are transcribed.”

## Focused Coding

Focused codes are those codes that appeared more frequently in data and reveal patterns (Charmaz, 2014). Focused codes offered centrality and focus to the research. In this stage of the coding process, the researcher looked “for what these codes [implied] as well as what they [revealed]” (Charmaz, 2014, p.140). The researcher gathered the open codes from focus group narratives and began looking for emerging patterns. These patterns allowed open codes to be categorized by comparing codes against one another in order to begin to form a more focused set of codes (Charmaz, 2014).

The researcher then used Charmaz’s (2014) inductive process of comparing data and Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) constant comparative method of coding to compare the new focused codes back to raw data to verify that the actions expressed in the original data were carried through to the new focused codes. This process ensured that the codes had emerged from data and were not result of bias or experience on the part of the researcher. Focused codes were then examined for patterns regarding school ethos and the elements that affected it for GSD students. This led to emerging themes and the next level of coding.

## Thematic Coding

While earlier approaches to grounded theory used axial coding (See Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which began to define and identify the properties of codes, Charmaz (2014) moved away from this approach by continuing to use emergent strategies. Reflecting on and comparing the focused codes, the researcher was able to recognize emerging themes. These themes, which

appeared as focused categories of codes, offered new broader categories. Thematic codes allowed the researcher to make sense of data in relation to the research questions and to begin to theorize.

### Extant Documents

The analyses of mass media documents, of documents obtained through public education websites at the federal, state, and district level, and of those archived documents obtained from the school district of Okeechobee, Florida were used to gain an understanding of the language used to form aspirational ethos of public schools. Analysis of these documents involved thinking about how the documents are positioned in their context (Charmaz, 2014, p. 53). To do this, the researcher considered the documents' purposes, creators, intended audiences, and the structures (Charmaz, 2014, p.53). Situating documents established that data is relevant to the study and not used out of its appropriate context.

### Organizational Documents

Documents that created policy and procedure are organizational documents. The information found in these documents served as related literature (see chapter two) to inform the study as well as provide language for comparing the policies and procedures from educational organizations. For the purpose of this study, organizational documents were analyzed for the language used. The organizational documents analyzed included: USDOE and FLDOE educational policies regarding academic success and protection of marginalized groups; and, mission and vision statements, strategic plans, and anti-bullying/harassment policies from

Florida school districts. Analysis of documents involved reading the documents and making note of the language used to describe marginalized students and the protections afforded these individuals. The researcher coded language as specific and non-specific, making note of references (either directly or indirectly) to GSD populations in each section where protections were discussed.

### Mass Media Documents

Press releases and news articles were used in this study to fill in gaps in collected data and to provide additional background information. These types of documents provided insight into public dialogues about the topic at hand (Charmaz, 2014, p. 53). Focus group interviews and questionnaires made several references to lawsuits and litigation that took place within the state of Florida. To maintain anonymity of the participants, those comments regarding specific cases involving legal action were not included in the coding for this study. The researcher instead searched for articles on legal proceedings in Florida regarding GSD students and public schools.

Mass media documents regarding these cases were analyzed for insight into the values and concerns of the policymakers in these districts and the interpretations made of their policies. Relevant articles were examined for language that informed this study's research questions. This language was then compared against the thematic and focused codes constructed during analysis of interview data.

## Archived Public Documents

As the coding process continued, and the researcher engaged in constant comparative methods, a gap emerged. Through interviews, the researcher gathered the views of GSD individuals and current faculty concerning the ways in which GSD students were experiencing school ethos. Analysis of extant documents provided the policies and procedures, thus the voice of the policymakers. Missing from this data were the voices of county administrators, those people who at times may create the policy, but more often regulate how the policies and procedures are carried out.

In order to understand how and why administrators created certain policies and how they worked to create positive school ethos, the researcher contacted the superintendent's office of Okeechobee County Schools, and requested the minutes from school board meetings where the legal proceedings of *Gonzalez v. School Board of Okeechobee County*, from 2006 through 2008, were discussed. As a precedent-setting, groundbreaking case (ACLU, 2009b), the transcripts from the related school board meetings provided the opportunity to analyze the language used in creation of policy and how the values of the administration and the community shaped the interpretation of those policies.

These archived documents were examined for themes and specific language to speak to the research questions for this study.

### Issues of Trustworthiness and Ethics

Standards of credibility were upheld through trustworthiness, specifically validity and reliability, and through ethics. Validity was maintained by triangulation of data, in testing data collection instruments, and in reflexivity of the researcher. Triangulation occurred because data informing this study came from several different sources (Creswell, 2014). This study used focus groups, questionnaires, and extant data to generate themes. Data collection instruments were created following Charmaz's (2014) techniques for developing interview guides and interview questions for grounded theory (p. 65-68). Questions were open-ended and non-judgmental, allowing for emerging narratives from the participant (Charmaz, 2014, p. 65). The instruments designed to collect data from the focus group were used during the session and were re-visited and re-tailored to elicit further data to fill gaps. These new questions were then sent out as follow-up questions. This process allowed the researcher to be certain that the questions were appropriate for data to be collected. Questionnaires were created and used in the same manner. The researcher acknowledged that a few possible biases existed in relation to this study. These biases included: identifying as a member of the GSD community, personally knowing seven of the eight teacher participants, and familiarity with the lawsuit in Okeechobee, Florida as it is the researcher's hometown. The researcher maintained awareness of each of these biases and considered how they may influence data collection and analysis. Reflexivity, during all phases of the study, helped to keep biases in check. For example, the researcher made no assumptions regarding the treatment of GSD students when creating interview questions. All questions allowed for positive and negative responses. Similarly, during analysis of codes, the researcher



assigned themes and categories that were informed by data, and constantly worked iteratively with data to assure accuracy and eliminate possible biases.

In order to build a reliable study, the researcher utilized several tactics. First, the transcriber and the researcher checked for accuracy by comparing the transcribed material to the audio recordings. The process of grounded theory coding also added to reliability of the study, as the researcher constantly checked and crosschecked the codes against data (Creswell, 2014, p. 203; Charmaz, 2014, p. 115). This iterative process assured that the codes, categories, and themes were true to the collected data.

Ethical practices and procedures were critical to this research. The researcher maintained a sense of ethics during all phases of research in order to create an accurate and honest study. For this study the researcher maintained anonymity of participants through the use of pseudonyms. Only the researcher and each study participant knew the assignment of pseudonyms. A list of pseudonyms and actual names were stored in digital files, which were password protected. The names of each participant's school and county district have been omitted to extend further anonymity. Only the names of schools collected from public data such as the district websites, mass media news articles, and the archived public records have been used. This information was already readily available to the public. Finally, all collected data that were printed from digital files were shredded. Digital copies of this data will be stored and password protected for no less than three years, and then will be destroyed. The researcher will store public documents, which only exist in printed form, for the same three-year period.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

*“Privilege is not knowing that you're hurting others and not listening when they tell you”  
(Stokes, 2014)*

The focus of this study was to understand how high schools balanced the aspirational ethos with the experienced ethos for gender and sexually diverse (GSD) students. The study specifically examined the experiences of recent high school students and the perceptions of current teachers regarding the ways in which GSD students interacted and functioned within their schools' ethoses. Additionally, extant documents regarding policy, procedure, and archived public record pertaining to GSD students were examined to provide a complete picture of the aspirational ethoses blueprinted by policymakers and administrators and to address gaps in collected data.

Understanding how GSD students experienced the ethoses within their schools and how aspirational ethoses are formed will afford policymakers and school districts the tools necessary to ensure balanced ethoses, where what is intended is what is experienced. Rutter, et al. (1979) described positive ethos as one of the main characteristics of a good school. With today's ever-changing ideas about accountability and objectives within the educational systems in the United States, a stable and healthy school ethos is imperative.

In chapter four, data collection findings will be discussed. First, the coding process and coded data will be described; this will include open coding, focused coding, and thematic coding. Next, the research questions will be addressed through the findings from each data collection

instrument. Finally, this chapter will discuss overarching themes that emerged from the coded data.

### Coding for Findings and Emergent Themes

Grounded theory methods of data analysis involved collecting data and analyzing it in an iterative process (Charmaz, 2014). Data collection began with the distribution of questionnaires for the teacher interviews in mid-October, 2014, shortly followed by the focus group interviews with recent high school students on October 30, 2014. As teacher interviews were returned, the researcher began coding using grounded theory methods. During the analysis process, the researcher examined data for “actions and processes rather than themes and structure” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 15). These actions were assigned open codes, and the codes were constantly compared against one another and against raw data to check for truth in meaning (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As comparison of the codes continued, the researcher was able to organize the open codes into “conceptual categories” of focused codes (Charmaz, 2014, p. 15). Finally, the codes were refocused and reorganized into more “inductive abstract analytic categories,” or thematic codes (Charmaz, 2014, p.15). The final emergent and overarching themes were then used to theorize emergent theories.

## Teacher Interviews and Focus Group

### Initial Coding

Initial coding of interview data allowed the researcher to begin to see patterns forming from data (Charmaz, 2014). Here, the researcher began checking new open codes against raw data to ascertain that the codes were accurate, and to determine if there were gaps in data. The researcher decided that further inquiry of the focus group and the teacher participants was necessary to collect more data for the participants' narratives. The open coding of the collected data indicated that the questions did not provide enough information to gain full understanding of GSD high school experiences. The researcher requested that study participants answer follow-up questions while the coding process continued, understanding that the new responses may change or add to the current codes. The researcher added the new data to the original narratives and assigned codes. Once again, the researcher compared codes to data and codes to codes.

All open coding charts for study participants are provided in Appendices C-U. Charts are labeled by pseudonyms and identified as either a teacher participant or a focus group participant. The charts consist of three columns of information (See Figure 2).

Open Code Identifier Number	Open Code	Participant Language
A05	Lacking support for GSA – not being allowed to hold any functions or plans.	But the GSA, we couldn't really hold any functions or plans and we didn't really have support there.

Figure 2 Explanation of Open Coding Charts

On the far right are participants' excerpts from the narratives; these are raw data collected from the interviews. The middle column provides the open code assigned to data by the researcher. Finally, the left column provides open code identifiers. These identifiers are used in the coding charts for the remainder of the study.

Figure 2 provides an example of the open coding process. Focus group participant, Alexos (AO), provided the language "But the GSA, we couldn't hold any functions or plans and we didn't really have any support there," when responding to a question regarding administrative support given to clubs and organizations on campus. The researcher coded this statement according to the action occurring; thus, assigning the code *lacking support for GSA-not being allowed to hold any functions or plans*. This code was identified as code AO5 for use in discussing focused and thematic codes.

Open coding for the focus group generated 371 codes from the eleven contributing participants of the focus group. Teacher interviews produced another 250 codes from eight teacher participants.

### Focused Coding

The process of focused coding occurred as the researcher took note of the frequency of each open code. In this study, the researcher began focused coding by creating clusters of new codes, categorizing the 371 open codes from focus group and the 250 from the teacher interviews. Clustering is a prewriting technique used by Charmaz (2014) and other grounded theory researchers as a means of informal memo-writing (p. 184).

Using this method, the researcher worked to categorize the codes for both groups of participants. Thirty-seven focused codes were created from the open codes of the focus group narratives (See Appendix V), and another sixteen focused codes came from the open codes assigned to teacher interview data (See Appendix W). Table 9 shows the first focused code generated from open codes for focus group interviews.

Table 9 Example of Focused Coding Chart

Focused Codes	Open Codes
Feeling safe at school	(S10) (A19) (N31) (N25)

The open code identifiers on the right in Table 9 represent the open codes assigned during the initial coding process. For example, open code S10 is *feeling safe* and correlates with Senna’s statement, “So I kind of feel safe around them...” Alex’s code A19 is also identified as *feeling safe* and it is assigned to, “Well, I felt safe, personally for me.” Naomi made two references to feeling safe in one of the two high schools she attended. Code N31 is *being unsafe in the larger school and feeling safer in the smaller school* and code N25 is *being safe in one school*. All four of these codes represent the same idea of safety within the school, and are, therefore, categorized under a singular focused code. It is important to note that some open codes are used in more than one focused code, such as N31, which included being safe and being unsafe in the same code.

The researcher continued using the clustering method of memo-writing to group together open codes that were the same or similar in idea. Focused codes were then compared to raw data not only to re-check the accuracy of the codes but to also try to gain, what Charmaz (2014) refers to as, “[the] sense of the direction [the] analysis is going” (p.140).

Not all open codes were carried over to focused codes. Some of the open codes were unrelated to this study. For example, David made the statement, “Some people like think that how they talk about money, fame, power, wealth—some people like to talk about it,” and the code assigned was *describing others*. This code was unique, and did not inform the study; therefore, the researcher did not carry the open code to focused codes.

Throughout the analysis process of this study, the researcher continued to collect and analyze new data. Follow-up questions were presented to the focus group and to teacher participants. New data were given open codes and were merged with existing focused codes, or when necessary, more focused codes were created.

### Thematic Coding

Through constant comparative analysis and memo-writing, the researcher surveyed the focused codes assigned to each group of interviews and identified emergent patterns in the codes. Emergent patterns, or themes, are viewed by Charmaz (2014) as highly focused codes, or thematic codes. Thematic coding, therefore, allowed the researcher to construct overarching themes when comparable or similar codes presented themselves.

The researcher merged the focused codes from the teacher interviews and from the focus group after recognizing similarities among the focused codes of each. For example, the focused code *feeling unsafe* from the focus group data was similar to the code *lacking safety for GSD kids* assigned to codes from teacher interviews. After coding for themes this way, however, the researcher discovered that the perspectives varied more than the two themes. The researcher then recoded each group separately and labeled the emergent themes.

From the focused codes of the teacher interviews, five themes emerged. These themes offered insight as to how the experiences of GSD students are perceived by teachers within the school settings. Table 10 shows each of the five themes constructed from data and the focused codes. The corresponding open codes are presented in the chart represented by the assigned identifier (for explanation of each identifier, see the *Teacher Interview Open Codes* Appendices C-J).

The researcher created thematic codes by categorizing focused codes into groups to look for emergent patterns. In the initial categorization of focused codes for teacher interviews, there were two additional thematic codes: *Feeling unsafe* and *Focusing on policy and procedure*. After going back to raw data for teacher interviews and re-categorizing data, these two themes were merged with other themes.



Table 10 Thematic Codes Teacher Interviews

Thematic Codes	Focused Codes	Open Codes
Creating a positive school ethos for GSD individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Making efforts to make all students feel welcome</li> <li>b) Believing that GSD specific language is included in policy</li> <li>c) Believing that mission/vision statements acknowledging diverse populations</li> <li>d) Believing mission/vision statements with specific language for GSD</li> <li>e) Believing there was community support for school in general</li> <li>f) Having visible GSD faculty/staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (CO1) (SH2) (JS1) (JS2) (RC1) (RC2) (LR1)</li> <li>b) (MF15) (MF16) (MF17)</li> <li>c) (JS21) (LR19)</li> <li>d) NONE</li> <li>e) (CO14) (JS22) (JS23) (LR23) (LR24)</li> <li>f) (MF4) (TD9)</li> </ul>
Creating a negative, or unsafe, school ethos for GSD individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Lacking safety for GSD students</li> <li>b) Believing that school is not meeting mission/vision statements</li> <li>c) GSD students not receiving support from administration</li> <li>d) Experiencing negative outcomes based on community (religious beliefs, no value for education, low level education)</li> <li>e) Hearing or seeing verbal harassment toward GSD individuals in the school or use of slurs *toward non-GSD students</li> <li>f) Hearing negative comments made about GSD students or faculty by faculty/staff</li> <li>g) Believing GSD students are treated differently than general population</li> <li>h) Feeling that some GSD fit in better than others (girls, bisexuals, popular LGB individuals)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (CO6) (LR3) (LR7) (LR10) (LR11) (VH7) (VH8) (TD6) (RC74) (RC10)</li> <li>b) (LR21) (LR22) (VH24)</li> <li>c) (MF10) (RC25) (RC67) (RC68)</li> <li>d) (CO15) (CO16) (LR15) (RC72) (LR28) (LR29) (SH15) (SH19) (SH27) (RC58) (RC61)</li> <li>e) (LR33) (VH38) (TD14) (TD8) (RC63) (RC33*) (RC34*) (RC39*)</li> <li>f) (LR33) (VH19) (SH 29) (SH30) (TD8)</li> <li>g) (RC61) (LR34) (LR35) (VH35)</li> <li>h) (TD23) (VH41) (VH42) (MF5) (MF6) (MF7) (MF9) (MF17) (RC10)</li> </ul>
“Don’t ask, don’t tell!” (Wanting GSD students to be invisible and silent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) GSD students remaining silent about who they are or when hearing/experiencing verbal harassment</li> <li>b) Believing that community/school prefers to ignore the existence of GSD issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (VH 16) (VH17) (RC27) (RC36)</li> <li>b) (SH8**) (SH16**) (SH9**) (SH17**) (SH33**) (SH34**) (RC69***)</li> </ul> <p><i>**In vivo code: “Don’t ask, Don’t tell”</i>  <i>***In vivo code: “...a taboo issue in this community.”</i></p>
Providing limited support for GSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Believing that there is policy for anti-bullying/harassment</li> <li>b) Believing that mission/vision statements included safety and the learning environment as a concern</li> <li>c) GSD students relying on circle of friends or group of other GSD students for support</li> <li>d) GSD students finding support from one or two trusted teachers</li> <li>e) Experiencing difficulty when requesting support for GSD students (GSAs and policy changes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (CO5) (CO7) (SH3) (MF1) (TD1) (RC 42) (RC43)</li> <li>b) (VH23) (JS21) (LR19)</li> <li>c) (CO9) (SH20) (MF12) (TD13) (TD 20) (JS11) (JS12) (JS14) (JS18) (LR12) (SH13)</li> <li>d) (MF4) (MF8) (MF13) (CO10) (JS3) (JS14) (LR14) (SH21) (RC28) (RC29) (RC11)</li> <li>e) (RC19) (RC20) (TD3) (TD4) (TD5) (TD6) (LR8) (LR9) (SH11) (SH12) (SH29) (SH30) (RC23) (RC24)</li> </ul>
Believing all students including GSD are experiencing an overall positive ethos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Believing overall school climate is good for all</li> <li>b) Students interacting well with peers</li> <li>c) Students interacting well with faculty/staff</li> <li>d) GSD students thriving in school and community</li> <li>e) Believing GSD students are treated equally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (JS1) (JS4)</li> <li>b) (JS10) (JS15) (VH14) (VH34) (RC31) (RC32)</li> <li>c) (JS10)</li> <li>d) (JS13) (JS18)</li> <li>e) (JS16) (JS17) (RC15)</li> </ul>

The researcher believed that the idea of feeling unsafe was characteristic of a negative ethos; therefore, these two themes were merged. Similarly, the policies and procedures of a school were presented in raw data as having positive and negative effects on school ethos; this category was divided between the two existing themes based on whether the policy or procedure offered characteristics of a negative or positive school ethos.

Construction of the thematic codes for focus group data followed the same steps as described in the paragraph above. The researcher began with the focused codes for this set of data, and arranged them into a number of categories. Initially, there was a desire to place these codes in the same categories supplied by the thematic coding for teachers, but the researcher became aware of this behavior and began rearranging the codes again, allowing themes to emerge naturally (Charmaz, 2014). Ultimately, five thematic codes emerged. These codes provided a look at the positive and negative experiences of GSD students in the high school environment in the following thematic codes: *feeling unsafe*, *feeling isolated*, *finding support*, *experiencing negative situations in school*, and *experiencing positive situations in school*. The researcher believed the first three thematic codes (*feeling unsafe*, *feeling isolated*, *finding support*) to be easily included in the final two themes of positive and negative experiences; therefore, two thematic codes for the focus group were labeled *describing the qualities of a negative school ethos* and *describing the qualities of a positive school ethos*.

The table below provides the thematic codes for focus group data and includes the focused codes and open codes' assigned identifiers.

Table 11 Thematic Codes Focus Group

Thematic Codes	Focused Codes	Open Codes
Describing the qualities of a negative school ethos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Feeling unsafe at school</li> <li>b) Experiencing or seeing bullying/harassment</li> <li>c) Feeling that only popular GSD kids are safe</li> <li>d) GSD girls finding more acceptance than GSD boys</li> <li>e) Receiving negative reactions from peers</li> <li>f) Feeling isolated/keeping to oneself</li> <li>g) Losing friends after coming out</li> <li>h) Experiencing closed-mindedness</li> <li>i) Not coming out until after high school</li> <li>j) Dropping grades/performing poorly</li> <li>k) Feeling guilty</li> <li>l) Dropping out of school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (S10) (N31) (N25)</li> <li>b) (A24) (AS32) (JK14) (JL16) (AS 37) (AO27) (FP7) (FP14) (FP27) (FP30) (FP31) (FP32) (FP34)</li> <li>c) (AO27) (N27) (JL14) (A28) (AS25) (AS26) (AS29) (AS 30) (M101) (M104) (M105)</li> <li>d) (AS26) (AS34) (AS35)</li> <li>e) (M86)</li> <li>f) (S7) (JL5) (A2) (A4) (A6) (AS5) (AS8) (AO14)(AO18) (AO19) (AO15) (AO16) (JK5) (M24) (M29) (M47) (A1) (FP1)</li> <li>g) (AS14)</li> <li>h) (S2) (S3) (JL18) (FP28) (FB29)</li> <li>i) (A16) (M60)</li> <li>j) (JL7) (AS11) (M22) (FP4) (FP41) (FP42)</li> <li>k) (M68) (M79)</li> <li>l) (FP20) (FP43) (FP47)</li> </ul>
Describing the qualities of a positive school ethos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Relying on the support of one/few close friends</li> <li>b) Receiving support from one/few faculty and staff</li> <li>c) Receiving support from one/few administration</li> <li>d) Receiving support from other GSD peers</li> <li>e) Receiving equal treatment and access</li> <li>f) GSD students standing up for other GSD students</li> <li>g) Belonging to clubs/teams/groups</li> <li>h) Belonging to GSAs</li> <li>i) Fitting in/trying to fit in</li> <li>j) Getting along well with most peers</li> <li>k) Maintaining good grades</li> <li>l) Feeling safe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (S4) (S5) (S8) (A7) (AS6) (AS15) (AS37) (AO24) (M36) (M39) (M40) (D2) (M101) (FP9) (FP25) (FP32)</li> <li>b) (A5) (A13) (A21) (A22) (A23) (A25) (M103) (N34) (N35) (N36) (N37) (AS21) (AS22) (N33)</li> <li>c) (N40) (N38) (FP11)</li> <li>d) (S9) (JL13) (AS24) (M98) (N18) (N19) (N30) (S9) (S11)</li> <li>e) (AO6) (AO7) (AO9) (N14)</li> <li>f) (AS33) (AS 36) (JK13) (A25) (D4)</li> <li>g) (N1) (D1) (AO1) (AO2) (AO20) (AO21) (AS1) (AS2) (AS3) (AS4) (JB1) (JK1) (M1) (M2) (M3) (M12) (N2) (N3) (JK1) (FP2)</li> <li>h) (JB2) (AO2)</li> <li>i) (M30) (M31) (M32)</li> <li>j) (JL8) (JL9) (JL10) (JL11) (N5) (N19)</li> <li>k) (JL2) (JL8) (AS7) (AO12) (AO13) (N4) (M20) (M21) (A3)</li> <li>l) (A19)</li> </ul>

## Extant Documents

### Organizational Documents

Organizational documents analyzed for this study included: mission and vision statements from all Florida school districts, strategic plans from several high schools in the state of Florida, and documents that indicated a presence of GSD support clubs and non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies. These documents provided a look into the language of policymakers in the creation of aspirational ethos in high schools. The researcher collected this data from official school and district websites.

### Mass Media Documents

An Internet search of press releases and news articles on legal proceedings in Florida regarding discrimination against GSD students provided a number of articles for this study. These articles provided data on the stance taken by some schools regarding GSD individuals and what they deemed as being best for the overall student body. The researcher reflected on gaps in literature using extant documents and compared this data against the thematic codes from teacher interviews and focus group data.

Most of the documents detailed lawsuits and interventions filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on behalf of students in middle schools and high schools throughout Florida. School districts in the following counties had discrimination cases filed against them for denying a gay-straight alliance (GSA) to form or meet on campus: Escambia County, Lake

County, Marion County, Nassau County, Okeechobee County, and Polk County. Two other school districts had discrimination cases filed against them as well. A Flagler County case involved continued harassment of a GSD student by peers and a teacher (ACLU, 2011). The ACLU also filed suit against a Holmes County high school on the on basis of denial of freedom of speech to students who wanted to express support for GSD individuals through clothing and stickers (ACLU, 2009a).

### Archived Public Documents

In examining the mass media documents several references were made to a groundbreaking Florida case, Gonzalez v. School Board of Okeechobee County. In 2008, a judge issued the ruling “that school officials must let the GSA meet on campus and holds that schools must provide for the well-being of gay students” (ACLU, 2009b, para. 4).

Many articles on this case were either short on facts or the articles were written by the ACLU, who filed the lawsuit on behalf of the students at Okeechobee High School. In order to gain understanding of the motivation of the school board and superintendent to deny the GSA the opportunity to meet on campus, the researcher contacted the superintendent’s office in the county and requested any board meeting minutes available regarding the lawsuit, years 2006-2008. Minutes from open board meetings and closed executive board meetings were made available to the researcher as archived public documents.

These archived documents were examined for themes and language that informed the study. During examination, the researcher made notes throughout the minutes to discover emerging themes in data.

## Research Questions and Findings

Data collection methods and tools used for interviews and extant documents in this study highlighted the research questions. The questions in this study were designed to inquire about the ways in which high schools created and maintained a positive school ethos for GSD students. Understanding that aspirational ethos is the intended climate of a school, often created on paper through policies and procedures, the researcher hoped to gain insight about the ways in which schools extended the written policies and procedures into the everyday functions and occurrences that GSD students were engaged in.

### Research Questions

1. How, if at all, does the aspirational ethos balance with the experienced ethos in high schools for gender and sexually diverse (GSD) students?
2. How, if at all, are schools creating positive high school ethoses for GSD students?

A causal relationship exists “when a study is designed to determine whether one or more variable...causes or effects one or more outcome variables” (Trochim, 2006, para. 3). Given the general assumption that educational policymakers and administrators intend to create positive ethoses, environments where all students benefit, within their respective schools, one must know how to balance the experienced ethos with the aspirational ethos in order to create a positive school ethos. All data collection tools inform this causal relationship; therefore, each method will be addressed before the findings of this study are presented in relationship to the research questions.

## Teacher Interviews

Teacher interviews were conducted to gather data regarding teachers' perceptions of how GSD students experienced schools' ethoses. Interviews were designed to collect data in four categories of questions for teacher perceptions of the following: school ethos, interactions of GSD students, balancing of policy with action, and community.

After the first session of coding, two follow-up questions were presented to the teachers to collect more data regarding the overall school ethos and how GSD students experienced that ethos.

The researcher analyzed the focused codes, reorganizing and re-categorizing them into broader codes. Initially, *positive school ethos* and *negative school ethos* were considered as themes, but important codes and themes were lost in the broader codes. Finally, the researcher labeled the focused coding from teacher interviews into five thematic codes: *creating a positive school ethos for GSD students*, *creating a negative or unsafe school ethos for GSD students*, *providing limited support for GSD students*, *believing all students including GSD students are experiencing an overall positive ethos*, and *don't ask, don't tell*.

The eight teacher participants in this study offered narrative discourse regarding their perceptions of their schools' ethoses and how GSD students experienced and interacted within each particular ethos. Of the eight teacher participants in this study, only two made the claim that GSD students in their schools experienced the climate in the same way that the general population did. Joy related examples of an overall positive climate in which GSD students were active and engaged participants. In a follow up email, Joy stated, "Kids are positive, supportive

of each other, of the school, and generally happy to be there” (J. Spier, personal communication, May 29, 2015). Virginia also indicated that GSD students were treated much the same as the non-GSD students, but indicated through her discussion that the entire school was experiencing a negative ethos. The remaining six participants believed that their respective schools were experiencing an overall good ethos, but believed that GSD students experienced it differently.

The thematic code *creating a positive school ethos for GSD students* encapsulated narrative discourse regarding the activities and practices that teachers, administrators, and the community are engaged in with their high schools, which created a positive ethos for GSD students. This theme showed the behaviors and actions that are catalysts for creating a positive school ethos including: welcoming students, providing policy with language that is specific to the protections of GSD individuals, having visible GSD faculty and staff, and community support for the school itself. Each of these excerpts from teacher interviews described attributes of a positive ethos as characterized in terms of inclusion, visibility, and support.

Joy discussed how the faculty helped make all students feel welcomed in her narrative (JS1, JS2). “Students are made to feel as part of a family. For the most part, students know that they are welcome into teachers’ classrooms, and are able to seek help, support and advice from them when needed.” Corrine, Renee, Samantha, and Lee also commented on making students feel welcomed based on the visibility of staff greeting students at the beginning of the school year and daily. Corrine wrote (CO1), “Staff presence is very visible and staff greet students in courtyard and at classroom doors.” Similarly, Renee said (RC1), “Overall, our school tries very hard at the beginning of the year to make students feel welcome to the campus.”



Only three of the teacher participants felt that the language used in their policies and mission statements were inclusive of all students. Renee, Miss Frizzle, and Samantha all indicated specific language in policy regarding GSD individuals. Miss Frizzle indicated (MF15) that her school has a “discrimination protocol for students based on sexual preference.” Joy and Lee do not mention specific language for GSD students, but indicated that they felt their school policies were intended to be inclusive based on the use of the word *diversity*. For example, Lee’s county mission statement (LR18) includes the words “every student” and the vision statement (LR19) includes “diversity”.

Participants offered discourse on community support, particularly support for scholarships and sports (see codes LR23, LR24, SH22, SH23, SH24, SH25). Joy and Renee, however, indicated that the communities are completely supportive of the school as a whole. Renee described her school (RC48) as the “hub of activity for the community.” Joy described her community (JS22), describing it as having a “super support system throughout the community.” She also portrayed the parents as being extremely involved in the school (JS23).

Miss Frizzle indicated that in her high school (MF4), “[S]ome of the [gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender] faculty members are out to students.”

From the thematic code *creating a negative or unsafe school ethos for GSD students* the researcher was able to identify some of the activities and practices that shaped a negative school ethos. Among the attributes that fostered a negative ethos were lack of safety and hearing verbal harassment and negative comments.

The focused code *hearing negative comments made about GSD students or faculty by faculty/staff* provided a clear example of attributes of a negative ethos. Lee made the following

comment (LR33) in her interview: “Staff are prone to making fun of students who are gender and sexually diverse.” Additionally, four participants addressed verbal harassment, including homophobic language directed at GSD and non-GSD students. Virginia, in describing a situation one of her openly gay students revealed to her, stated (VH38), a “group of students started following him and yelling the words faggot.” Renee spoke to the situation of homophobic comments being used for name-calling directed at peers (RC33 and RC34): “pockets of students who still throw around slurs—but it’s generally not in the direction of actual students who identify as gay...name calling with peers.”

The theme *providing limited support for GSD students* was assigned to focused codes that acknowledged support for GSD students in high school either in limited or lacking quantity. This theme included data on absent or nonspecific language in policy for protecting GSD students, GSD finding the support from small groups or individuals, and finding difficulty in getting support for GSD individuals.

One participant (Joy) felt that the policies of her schools were specific enough to protect their GSD individuals. Many policies contained language such as *all students*, *diversity*, and *each/every student*, but few actually included the words *sexual orientation/preference* or *gender identity/expression*. Tom stated (TD1) that he had “been prodding for years to have sexual orientation and gender identity added to [his county’s]<sup>7</sup> nondiscrimination policy.” Miss Frizzle noted (MF1) that there is a “discrimination clause in the Code of Conduct,” but later indicated that there are no protections for faculty or staff (MF17).

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<sup>7</sup> County name removed from quote for anonymity of participant.

In some instances, one or two teachers provided safety and support to one or all of GSD kids within a school. Renee, for example, shared the following language regarding teacher support for GSD students (RC28): “this particular sub-group of students felt extremely comfortable with me and I counseled them.” Corrine said (CO10) that GSD students “find staff that are nonjudgmental and supporting.” And, Samantha added to the language (SH21) that GSD students find a “special teacher who cares and loves them for who they are, human beings and not their sexuality.”

Seven of the participants commented on the fact that GSD students, rather than interacting with the larger population, often stuck together in small groups, or cliques, or they had one or two close and trusted friends. Tom provided two comments regarding this. In code TD13, he stated, “[S]tudents find their own circles and groups to socialize in.” In code TD20 he added, “They find support in social circles...”

Finding and gaining support for GSD individuals in high schools is difficult. Lee, Samantha, and Renee (LR8, LR9, SH11, SH12, RC23, RC24) all noted difficulties GSD students and their allies had in the forming of gay-straight alliances on their campuses, and each participant further indicated that legal action was either threatened or taken against the school boards in an effort to force the schools to allow these clubs to form and meet. Samantha added that during the time that he school was in disagreement over the GSA, she overheard negative comments from faculty and staff (SH29). In all three cases, as indicated through interviews and school websites, none of these schools currently have a GSA. All three participants felt that GSD students at their schools were not supported as well as the non-GSD students (see RC25, LR10, SH32).

The fourth thematic code, *believing all students including GSD students are experiencing an overall positive ethos*, included codes from teachers' interviews where comments were made regarding the perception that GSD students are experiencing a positive ethos in their schools. This theme included a positive ethos for everyone in the school, positive interactions with others in the school, and equal treatment.

Joy, while discussing how GSD students interacted with others in the school, offered this (JS13): “[T]hey are a very active and outgoing part of the school community, and are supported throughout the school community.” She added (JS18), “...they have had great success in the school community.” Renee also felt the students in her school interacted well with each other (RC31 and 32): “These students belong to peer groups made up of a diverse group of students... [they] aren’t ostracized by their peers.” On the other hand, Renee acknowledged that these students are not supported at her school (RC72).

Each of the first four thematic codes discussed above informed this study by providing the ways in which schools and districts created the aspirational and experienced ethoses of their schools. The creation of policies that are specific was important, but the engagement with those policies dictated how GSD students and everyone else in the school system interacted. The policies existed as a foundation for the interactions of the faculty, staff, students, and community, but were not the only factors in achieving a balanced ethos. Data showed that teachers held a better perception of their schools’ ethoses and of the interactions of GSD students in that ethos when policy was inclusive and executed as written, where all students were treated equally, and all students were provided with the support they needed, whether it was social or academic. Of the eight participants, only Joy expressed full acceptance and support of GSD students in her

school. Her school, however, did not include specific language in policy, rather the language expressed *diversity*. Because everything else was in place in her school- the support, the interactions, and the equality- the term *diversity* was intended and experienced in an inclusive manner. In chapter two, the researcher provided literature under the heading *Policy Isn't Enough*. The intended policies are without weight if not carried out to their full intent. Likewise, a general policy could be strengthened by the actions taken by administration and teachers.

The researcher decided to address the final thematic code from the teacher interviews separately. This code used *in vivo*, or natural, language (Charmaz, 2014, p. 343) from the original narrative shared by Samantha, to label the codes in this category. Code SH8 *don't ask, don't tell* was maintained for two reasons. First, the specific language used by Samantha was repeated twice, once in her original interview, and again in her follow-up interview; therefore, the significance of the statement was identified not only by the researcher, but also by the participant herself. Second, during the coding process, the researcher discovered a number of related open codes from other participants' narratives. In Samantha's narrative she replied to a question about GSD safety, stating (SH7, SH8), "I'm not sure they are. I feel our campus is a very don't ask don't tell campus. I think our faculty, staff and administrators would like to ignore our sexual minority students." And, in response to a question about how well GSD students interacted with faculty, staff, and administration, Samantha replied (SH16, SH17): "Again, I feel we have a very, don't ask don't tell mentality on campus. That isn't all faculty and staff but the majority." Renee stated (RC64), "people just don't talk about it," while referring to legal action filed against her school for discrimination. Renee said (RC73) the discussion of GSD concerns and individuals is "such a taboo issue in [the] community." She later added (RC77), "I think,

overall, without intending to, our community and schools perpetuate intolerance by not addressing it.”

Like the *in vivo* code indicated, there is an implication of the school not, or not wanting to, engage in talking or hearing about GSD issues. In some cases, this meant bringing silence to the needs and concerns of GSD students. Lee discussed (LR11) the idea that GSD students sometimes felt like they must keep their identities quiet. “They count on the good graces and understanding of few or choose to remain secretive.” Virginia also expressed (VH16, VH17) that GSD students were remaining silent in her school, “I do not believe the majority of our sexual minority students make light of their situation... The issues for sexual minorities are, for the most part, not discussed in our high school.” Miss Frizzle shared (MF11), “There are anti bullying protocols, but many of these students do not report the harassment out of fear and lack of support.” Similarly, Renee (RC27) said, “These students do not reach out for help to school personnel.”

The findings from teacher interviews showed that GSD students are being silenced and ignored by certain schools and districts, making them feel unsupported and fearful. These students did not feel safe being who they were and often felt as though they must keep quiet about not only who they were, but also about the harassment they experienced.

### Focus Group

The focus group’s purpose was to gain an understanding of the ways in which GSD students experienced the ethos of their high schools. The focus group interviews were designed

to collect data in three categories of questioning: high school experiences, perceptions of the high school climate, and finally, the perceptions of the surrounding community.

Follow-up questions collected from the focus group participants were added to the existing narratives. These questions focused on peer interaction, safety and support from faculty and administration, and community support.

Data from the focus group indicated that high school experiences were varied among the participants. The researcher first organized the focused codes into the following five themes: *feeling unsafe, feeling isolated, finding support, experiencing positive situations, and experiencing negative situations*. After labeling the new themes, the researcher compared these five themes to the open codes and raw data. In doing so, two broader themes emerged. In talking about their experiences in school, participants were able to describe positive and negative experiences. No one provided discourse on the routines of the day, unless those routines affected them, either positively or negatively. Therefore, two themes were assigned to data: *describing the qualities of a negative school ethos* and *describing the qualities of a positive school ethos*. These themes appeared simple, but Charmaz (2014) argued, “Grounded theory coding need not be complex” (p. 115).

During the focus group, participants provided discourse regarding experiences that were characterized as the positive and negative ethoses that exist in high schools. Students who experienced a high number of negative characteristics found high school difficult, if not impossible to navigate. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention makes the claim that negative school experiences put GSD “youth at increase risk for experiences with violence, compared with other students” (2014, para. 2).

Freddie, a genderqueer 22-year-old, identified as transsexual male to female in high school. Freddie experienced an overall negative ethos during high school. Freddie's experiences were unsafe, unsupported, and riddled with bullying and harassment, leading to Freddie's dropping out of high school.

Freddie shared a story about a friend's experience during high school. The experience exhibited examples of harassment of GSD students in high school.

Once my friend was called a faggot in the same way by one student when he entered a classroom to ask his teacher about a trip they were going on; he yelled at the guy and said not to judge him without knowing him and to not say such things to people. As a result the teacher didn't allow my friend to go on the school trip, saying he was causing unnecessary conflict and the person who called him a "faggot" received no punishment. From this piece of Freddie's narrative, the researcher added the open code FP30, *hearing a multitude of slurs*, because the action that is occurring is the hearing of slurs. In the focused coding process, the open code was categorized under the label *experiencing or seeing bullying/harassment*.

Freddie also detailed incidents of harassment and unsafe situations of their<sup>8</sup> own while in school.

The place where many people congregated who liked to yell obscenities to gay people was by the bus loop. Every day when I got off the bus and when I went to the bus after class was over a group of rednecks shouted "faggot" and "queer" at me. I tried to stay

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<sup>8</sup> Because Freddie identifies as genderqueer, gender specific pronouns are not used.



with friends and walk fast but the name-calling continued. I always felt scared and unsafe in this circumstance and wanted to stick up for myself but was too scared to say anything cause I felt they would do worse than yell if I did.

This was assigned the open codes FP 31 *yelling obscenities at bus loop, "rednecks" shouting slurs, being yelled at, trying to avoid, staying with friends* and FP32 *feeling afraid, feeling unsafe, wanting to defend oneself, fearing worse treatment if standing up*. Focused codes assigned to this part of Freddie's narrative were *feeling unsafe at school* and *experiencing or seeing bullying/harassment*.

Regarding administrative support, Freddie acknowledged that there were a few supportive administrators, but they were ineffective, and the others were unsupportive.

There were a couple of administrators who were kind and seemed to really care about the students including me and were very supportive and nice, however most of the administrators did not maintain professionalism when it came to handling students or dealing with the bullying problem I had... There was a lot of bullying to LGBT students, and nothing was done about it. The staff did not seem to do anything about bullying so students who were being bullied would definitely feel unsafe... There was no real support. The couple of nice administrators I mentioned showed their support by being nice but they must have been unaware of the severity of the situation or didn't know how to change it... [M]any of the school's administrators supported anti-gay and anti-trans policies and actions.

These pieces of the narrative were assigned the following open codes: FP11 *acknowledging a few supportive administrators*, FP12 *administrators failing to handle bullying effectively*, FP14

*GSD bullying occurred frequently, FP15 administration not dealing with GSD bullying, FP 16 not doing anything about bullying, FP17 students feeling unsafe, FP37 lacking support/being nice/being unaware/not knowing how to fix it, and FP38 administration supporting anti-gay and anti-trans policy and action. Focused codes assigned were feeling unsafe at school, experiencing or seeing bullying/harassment, and lacking support.*

Freddie's full narrative expressed attributes of a negative school ethos. Within their story, Freddie shared incidents of bullying, harassment, fear, and lacking or failing support systems. There was no mention in their narrative of a GSA or other supportive group for GSD students. Freddie, not unlike many GSD high school students, experienced low grades (see FP3 and FP4) and eventually dropped out of high school (see FP13). The effects of Freddie's high school experience "left emotional scars" (see FP5).

Naomi, a 20-year-old female, spoke to dual experiences in her narrative. She attended two different high schools, one a smaller alternative school, and the other a larger mainstream school. She described her experiences at the smaller school as positive. She included discourse on acceptance, support, and interactions with peers and her own academic success in her conversation on the smaller school.

Naomi expressed the belief that uniforms created a sense of equality in her school, but also acknowledged that people, students and faculty, were accepting and supportive.

In that school, that one with uniforms, most percentage of the school was, gay, bisexual, or lesbian. Well, there were straight people too. But it was pretty cool because everybody was very accepting... So, one high school, it was cool. Everyone was safe... In the school that everyone was very accepting, the teachers, the faculty, everyone was so

amazing, so great. If you wanted to make your own group, they would let you. You just talked to them and they'd support you in what you wanted to do. They even had-- if there was-- there was this kid in a foster-- he was a foster, and he wanted to get a phone. The teacher got him a phone and paid for him. And kids, there was this one guy, he was like my brother, and supposedly his ex-boyfriend had something and they had sex. The teacher took him after school to go get tested. And they're very supporting, they always there for you and we had a safe zone there too... They were cool. I think small schools, they're very-- you get to know more other people so they're very helpful towards you.

The open codes assigned to this narrative are N32 *being accepted by school adults*, N33 *being allowed to make own group*, N34 *getting support from teachers*, N35 *supporting a foster kid*, and N36 and N37 *getting support from teachers (smaller school)*, N18 *being diverse*. These were assigned to focused codes *receiving support from some faculty and staff*, *receiving support from some administration*, *receiving support from other GSD peers*, *getting along well with most peers*, and *fitting in*.

Naomi's positive experiences in this school were punctuated by a high grade point average (N4) and her social success (N5).

The focus group participants were able to identify, through their narratives, positive and negative school ethos. By examining the narratives of Freddie and Naomi, there are clear distinctions between each participant's experiences. Freddie, detailing his negative experiences, identified the absence of strong administrative support and the presence of bullying and harassment as characteristics of an unsafe and negative school ethos. Naomi, on the other hand, identified the support and acceptance of administration, teachers, and peers for creating a safe

and positive school ethos. These findings provided a platform upon which the research questions can be considered; understanding the characteristics of a positive and negative school ethos is imperative to finding a balanced ethos.

### Extant Data

In looking at organizational data, the researcher conducted an Internet search of all sixty-seven Florida county school district websites to examine the language of mission statements and vision statements. This search revealed that sixty-six of the sixty-seven counties in Florida have district wide mission and/or vision statements visible on their official district websites; none of which used specific language regarding the safety of any marginalized students. Two districts used the word *equitable*, twenty-nine said that *all students* are to be provided an education, and twenty-one discuss *safe climates* or *environments*. These statistics are reflective of the statewide mission statement in Florida, which states:

The mission of Florida's K-20 education system is to increase the proficiency of all students within one seamless, efficient system, by allowing them the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills through learning opportunities and research valued by students, parents, and communities (Florida's State Board of Education, 2012, p.6).

Florida's vision statement provides the means statement to this mission:

Florida will have an efficient world-class education system that engages and prepares all students to be globally competitive for college and careers (Florida's State Board of Education, 2012, p.6).

Like most of the mission statements and vision statements in the state, the focus is on academics and college and career readiness.

The following county school boards were involved in discrimination lawsuits and interventions within the past decade for denying the formation of a gay-straight alliance (GSA): Escambia County, Lake County, Marion County, Nassau County, Okeechobee County, and Polk County. The researcher examined each county's student codes of conduct or student handbooks for the language used in anti-harassment and anti-bullying statements. The researcher also searched the sites for school club policies and the presence of GSAs in their high schools for additional organizational data.

For example, data collected from the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook on the Escambia County School District's website provided language used to address bullying and harassment on campus. The following specific language regarding GSD individuals was included as a student responsibility:

Students have the responsibility not to discriminate against or harass other students on any basis including but not limited to racial/ethnic origins, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability. (School District of Escambia County, n.d., p.2)

Also, in the handbook was a definition of bullying and harassment that included GSD specific language:

Bullying and harassment also encompasses... perpetuation of conduct listed in the definition of bullying or harassment by an individual or group on the basis of the victim's real or perceived racial/ethnic origins, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability with an intent to demean, dehumanize, or cause emotional or physical harm to a student or school employee. (School District of Escambia County, n.d., p.26)

Further examination of Escambia's district website provided very general information on the forming of clubs:

Clubs, organizations, and activities must be open to all students. If a student qualifies, he/she has a right to join. Secondary students must consent to random drug screening in order to participate in any extracurricular activity. Members shall not be selected by secret ballot. Membership in a club or organization should not interfere with a student's instructional program. (School District of Escambia County, n.d., p.24)

And, finally, examination of the clubs/organizations listed by each of the seven high schools in Escambia revealed that only one high school, Booker T. Washington High School, the school involved in the lawsuit, has a GSA listed as a current club.

This data was used to determine the effects of each discrimination lawsuit. For example, Escambia County now has very specific language to protect GSD students in their districts, but only one school is listed on their district website as having a gay-straight alliance (GSA).

The following counties had one GSA according to the district and school websites: Nassau County (Yulee High School), Polk County (George Jenkins High-listed as interest only), and Flagler (Flagler Palm Coast High School). Each of the schools with a GSA present were

involved in legal action involving the ACLU, with the exception of George Jenkins High School in Polk County. At the time of publication, Lake County was still in litigation concerning the GSA in their county (Cherney, 2015). According to official school websites, Marion County and Okeechobee counties did not have GSAs listed as existing clubs in their high schools.

A review of each district's anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies and student codes of conduct from official district websites revealed that Polk and Nassau counties had language in their policies to protect sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Okeechobee and Flagler school districts had specific language to protect sexual orientation. Lake and Marion counties had no specific language geared toward the protection of GSD individuals.

An Internet search on Google for mass media documents regarding GSD students and high schools in Florida revealed a number of news articles and press releases concerning litigation against Florida high schools for acts of discrimination, as well as news that related to counties adopting protective measures for their GSD faculty and staff.

Mass media documents on ACLU.org provided data on the following lawsuits: Gillman v. Holmes County School District, Vanguard High School Gay-Straight Alliance v. Jim Yancey and the School Board of Marion County, Gonzalez v. School Board of Okeechobee County, Gay-Straight Alliance of Yulee High School v. School Board of Nassau County, and Carver Middle School Gay-Straight Alliance v. Lake County School Board. Interventions made by the ACLU and settled outside of court included the following Florida school districts: Escambia County, Polk County, and Flagler County. Finally, the search provided articles reflecting changes in policy either with or without the urging of ACLU or similar groups, including

Volusia County's decision to add gender identity and expression to its anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies.

The researcher used these documents to gain perspective on the needs of GSD students in comparison to the values and beliefs of the schools and communities. In the cases in which lawsuits had to be filed, it is important to understand why both sides believed their position is the most correct and most beneficial for the students in the school.

An example of one of these searches included a number of articles and press releases regarding the harassment of a Flagler County high school student and the ensuing arguments and agreements made regarding the case. The first document analyzed was a press release on the ACLUFL.org website. This release stated in its opening lines,

The ACLU of Florida today announced an agreement in negotiations with the Flagler County School District in the case of Luke Herbert, a Flagler Palm Coast High School student who was harassed for being gay by students and one of his teachers (American Civil Liberties Union of Florida, 2011).

The press release described the harassment of Luke Herbert, a gay male student who had been verbally and physically attacked by students. Luke also was the target of a teacher's anti-gay jokes during class. The press release explained that the student had reported several of the incidents to the school, but that seemed to exacerbate the issue and nothing appeared to happen to the offenders. The student stopped attending classes because of this. Intervention by the ACLU led to the following settlements: a public apology from the teacher, a plan for the student to catch up on academic work, an alternative educational setting for the following year, inclusive



language in district policies, and a public service announcement (American Civil Liberties Union of Florida, 2011).

Additional mass media documents on this case included statements about the way the case was settled. For example, an article on Queerty.com asks the question, “Did The ACLU Really Rescue Bullied Florida Teen Luke Herbert?” In the article, Tedders (2011) questioned why the teacher was allowed to keep his job, but the student had to switch to a virtual school. This article also provided specifics from Herbert regarding the incident, including descriptions of the behavior of students on his school bus and of a particular student who stalked and harassed him in person and through social media. All of these incidents were reported, but nothing was done, so Herbert went to local media outlets, which is how the ACLU became involved. Tedders (2011) acknowledged that without the ACLU, this situation may have continued and Herbert may have suffered worse, but believed that the agreements between the school and the ACLU were not in the best interest of the student or others like him (Tedders, 2011).

Melloy (2011), in an article on the Edge Media Network, wrote:

A March 24 article at Politicus USA says reports that the local political climate in Flagler County, where the student Luke Herbert attended high school in the Flagler County School District, is intensely anti-gay. "The U.S. Congressman for this district, John L. Mica, has voted against every single gay rights measure ever presented to him for a vote," the article noted. "The KKK has distributed hate literature in the county, telling persons 'qualified' to apply for KKK membership that they will help 'stop the moral destruction of our culture by homosexuals'" (Melloy, 2011).

The article referenced from Politicus USA is also referenced by the article on Queerty.com, but the researcher was unable to locate the article or its author, Scott Rose, on the Politicus USA website. The researcher did, however, find where Scott Rose posted a comment on an article on FlaglerLive.com, where he addressed the ethical concerns of this case, including indicating that the teacher who verbally harassed Herbert was the husband to the superintendent's secretary and speculated that was the reason for a 'slap on the wrist' instead of a more worthy punishment (Rose, 2011). A Google Internet search identified Scott Rose as a gay-rights activist and a writer for The New Civil Rights Movement website. His contributions to data, however informal, provided a voice to GSD advocates in this study.

All of the articles regarding Luke Herbert's harassment and settlements with the Flagler County Schools were reviewed and themes were compared by the researcher in preparation for comparison to the organizational data, which represented the voice of the school district, which was also collected regarding this situation.

The final source of extant data used to inform this study were archived public documents. These documents were acquired through the superintendent's office at Okeechobee County School Board as public record. The case was precedent setting and was a landmark case in discrimination of GSD students, as it ruled that schools had a responsibility to GSD students. The documents acquired included the transcribed minutes from four school board meetings, three of which were closed executive board sessions, which were made public after the 2008 ruling in the case of Gonzalez v. Okeechobee County School Board. The meetings were held on November 28, 2006; December 12, 2006; July 24, 2007; and August 20, 2008.

The researcher coded these documents for themes using Charmaz's (2014) methods for grounded theory coding. Much data in these documents were related to lawyer's fees and insurance coverage; therefore, coding line-by-line would provide data that would not inform the study. The researcher coded for themes that were related to the county's GSD students and their interactions with the administration and the surrounding community. The themes that emerged from this data were: *considering the well-being of all students* and *lack of understanding and support for GSD individuals*. Each of these themes was supported by specific language from the archived public documents.

The concept *considering the well-being of all students* was exhibited a number of times in three of the school board meetings. Each of these statements presented the belief of the school board that they were acting in the best interests of the student population. In the closed session on July 24, 2007, the attorney discussed a conversation with the plaintiff regarding a refusal to accept an offer from the principal for group therapy sessions in place of a GSA; he stated, "It would seem like your goals would kind of line up with what the principal offered" (Okeechobee County School Board, 2007, p. 11, lines 6-8). In the same session, the board chairperson stated:

I ran for office to do the right things for kids. When we look at health issues and safety issues and mental health issues as well, I think that we need to stay on course here and I just feel like that is the right thing to do. (Okeechobee County School Board, 2007, p. 27, lines 18-23)

Later, in the same meeting the attorney described the plaintiff:

She seemed very unhappy. You see this very troubled young girl and you can certainly see where any principal would say, Let's get you a guidance counselor. Let's get you

some help. It's sad but I don't believe this litigation has been healthy for her.

(Okeechobee County School Board 2007, p. 31, lines

22-25 & p. 32, lines 1-2).

Again, the attorney expressed a belief that the well-being of the students was at risk with the formation of a GSA. “[L]etting these young people focus on sexual orientation identity is actually very harmful” (Okeechobee County School Board, 2007, p. 36, lines 11-12). And, in a statement during a meeting on August 20, 2008, the superintendent stated, “We have sent the message to this community, we have sent a message nationally and internationally that we stand for the best interest of our children” (Okeechobee County School Board 2008, p. 48, lines 9-12).

The lawyer, if presumed to share the voice of the district, the board chairperson and the superintendent believed that the decision of the board to fight the formation of a GSA was in the best interests of the students. Yet, in descriptions of GSD plaintiff, it was clear that the lawyer felt the plaintiff was in need of support (see Okeechobee County School Board 2007, p. 31, lines 22-25 & p. 32, lines 1-2).

The theme *lacking understanding and support for GSD individuals* was illustrated with examples of language from the attorney who represented the school board as well as language used by various school board members. In the closed executive board meeting on July 24, 2007, the attorney, while discussing the plaintiff Gonzalez and her complaints against the school, said:

She does indicate that because of her dress—for those of you that have not met this young lady, she does portray herself as a man or tries to, even though she was born as a woman. And just to illustrate that, the court reporter asked privately when she left the room whether she was a man or a woman. It's confusing. So with that, her dress would

allow kids to make comments to her. Again, nothing that I would perceive to be out of the ordinary but she felt that kids would comment on her manliness and do it in a pejorative way. (Okeechobee County School Board 2007, p. 7, lines 9-20)

In another example from the same date, the attorney stated:

Now, I will tell you what they will say to that and they will say, we don't want to talk about sex; we want to talk about sexual orientation and non-discrimination. When I asked the Plaintiff, how do you know what your sexual orientation is if you're supposed to abstain until marriage? Her argument was, attraction. So, basically if you feel attracted towards the same sex that you should be able to sit and talk with your friends—I guess—about these attractions. (Okeechobee County School Board, 2007, p, 21, lines 14-25)

The researcher identified the language from extant data as an indicator of lack of understanding of GSD students, particularly non-normative gendered students. The heterosexist<sup>9</sup> language of the attorney illustrated the perpetuation of bullying people who are perceived differently, which indicated a lack of support for GSD individuals.

The findings from the extant data demonstrated the lack of understanding of the needs of GSD individuals that existed in many communities and schools. This lack of understanding led to beliefs that what is good for the majority is good for everyone, including GSD. This is exhibited in policies that are intended to protect all students, but still turn a blind eye to GSD

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<sup>9</sup>Heterosexist is an attitude that “[assumes] every person to be heterosexual therefore marginalizing persons who do not identify as heterosexual” (University of California, n.d.).

students as was shown by mass media and archived documents. It is explicated through the repetition of the idea that the Okeechobee County School Board and their lawyer believed that they were acting in the best interests of GSD students, even protecting them, by denying a GSA the right to meet on the high school campus.

### Overarching Themes

#### Don't Ask, Don't Tell

The *in vivo* code *don't ask, don't tell* serves as one overarching theme for this study. Teacher interviews presented data that revealed some administrators and teachers would prefer that the GSD students and the issues that surround them not exist. Samantha's interview provided the *in vivo* code when she stated (SH7, SH8) her belief that administrators would choose to ignore GSD students. This concept was also supported by statements from Lee, Virginia, and Miss Frizzle (LR11, VH16, VH17, MF11), as they discussed the silent stance many of their students took, and by Renee who called GSD issues *taboo* (RC73).

The focus group expressed attributes of positive and negative ethoses, and part of what created the negative ethos for high school students was the over-looking or ignoring of the needs of GSD students. When homophobic slurs were used without repercussions (FP30-FP34), when incidents of bullying of GSD students went unpunished or were not treated with the same severity as other forms of discrimination (FP36, FP37), or when students were not allowed to form gay-straight alliances (AO5, JB2) then *don't ask, don't tell* policy was in full effect--GSD students were not to be seen nor heard.

Much of the extant data fell within the theme *don't ask, don't tell*. The lack of specific language to protect GSD individuals in schools, the fight to keep gay-straight alliances out of schools, and the language used in the archived documents all provided examples of the desire of administration to keep GSD students invisible. As Renee said (RC75), “kids are so much more accepting than the adults are.”

Like the military epithet, this theme was administratively constructed in certain schools and served only to effect negative outcomes. Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT), as Clinton's 1993 directive was known, attempted to silence and hide the lesbian, gay, and bisexual men and women in the armed forces and “served as nothing short of a public pronouncement by the federal government that discrimination against LGB people is acceptable, that LGB people are inferior to heterosexual people, and that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a shameful trait that ought to be concealed” (Davidson, 2011, para. 4). This was the message that some schools and school districts were sending their students.

### Policy is Only the Beginning

The other overarching theme that emerged from data in this study was concerned with policies, and the ways in which schools enforced them. Policy was presented as only the beginning for providing protection for GSD students. As focus group participants described the qualities of positive and negative school ethoses, they were not providing discourse on policy as much as they were on the interactions with administrators, teachers, and peers. The majority of this discourse was focused upon interaction with the adults in the school systems; twenty-three

comments were made regarding positive support from teachers and administration (See Appendices C-U).

As Darwich (2012) pointed out, a lack of support can lead to harassment and academic failure. Even if policies included specific language to protect GSD students, administrative support of the policy and of the students must be visible.



## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

*“An anti-oppressive teacher is not something that someone is. Rather, it is something that someone is always becoming” (Kevin Kumashiro, 2005, p. 15).*

### Emergent Theory: Anti-Oppressive Education Theory

Anti-Oppressive Education provides the theoretical lens through which to consider the findings of this study. Simply stated, anti-oppressive education is “education that works against various forms of oppression” (Kumashiro, 2000, p.25). The Center for Anti-Oppressive Education offers the following explanation:

Contradictions abound in education. Teaching involves both intended and unintended lessons, and it is often in the unintended, hidden lessons that racism, sexism, and other “isms” find life. Learning involves both a desire for and a resistance to knowledge, and it is often our resistance to uncomfortable ideas that keeps our eyes closed to the “isms.

(Kumashiro, n.d.)

Kumashiro (2000) points out four ways to theorize about oppression and to work against it in the educational arena (p.25).

First, is *education for others*--others being defined as marginalized groups. Researchers look at the harmful ways in which others are treated and at the expectations held by teachers, consciously or unconsciously, that dictate how the others are treated (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 27). The *don't ask, don't tell* theme is result of this type of conscious and unconscious thinking. In thinking that they are doing what is best for the entire student body, policymakers and

administrators make decisions that create negative consequences for GSD students. For example, an administrator, who may hold strict Christian values in his judgment of policy and protocol, may exclude GSD students from protective policies and unconsciously place those students in a harmful environment. Kumashiro (2000) presented several ideas for the education for others. Schools that affirm GSD students will be successful in the fight against oppression. Another method is to provide places where oppressed students can go that is apart from the rest of the school (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 28). The creation of gay-straight alliances or other GSD support groups are examples of this kind of supportive and separate space. Kumashiro (2000) adds that embracing diversity is necessary to fight against oppression.

Kumashiro's (2000) second method for thinking about oppression is *education about the other*. This method focuses on curriculum and instruction. Teachers should create, find, and use a curriculum that provides real and honest knowledge of the other (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 31). Two types of knowledge that are often imparted in class are negative to the experiences of GSD students. The first is a type of historical knowledge that perpetuates stereotypes, and the other is knowledge that is incomplete. To correct this type of thinking, curriculum must be changed to include the other (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 32). GSD students should see themselves in the lessons teachers present, and as Kumashiro (2000) notes, not just once or twice a year, but they should be visible throughout the curriculum. The visibility of GSD students in curriculum will work against forms of oppression like *don't ask, don't tell*, which extends the invisibility of GSD individuals.

Kumashiro's (2000) third method is *education that is critical of privileging and othering*. This involves studying those individuals that are favored as well as those that are oppressed

(Kumashiro, 2000, p. 35). In other words, in order to understand why one group is being treated poorly, or is oppressed, there must also exist an understanding of why the other group is favored. This is heavily rooted in normative ideals; in the case of GSD oppression, you must also understand heterosexism. Kumashiro (2000) notes that this means not only must the student learn about oppression and favoritism, but also about himself (p. 37).

The fourth method for considering oppression is *education that changes students and society*. This concept of oppression positions it within the “discourses and histories” that when repeated perpetuate the beliefs of the oppressors (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 38). “Anti-oppressive education, then, needs to involve overcoming this resistance to change and learning, instead, to desire change, to desire difference” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 43). Administrators and teachers can work against educational oppression by not only stopping harmful behaviors, but also by overcoming a resistance to change. For example, based on the extant archived public documents, Okeechobee School Board members did not view the formation of a GSA as advantageous support. The school board held tight to community values, which were not accepting of GSD individuals, and remained resistant to change (Okeechobee County School Board, 2008).

### Discussion of Findings

#### Implication for Teachers

Teachers will benefit from the findings of this study because they will gain an understanding of the attributes that can add to the creation of a positive and balanced school ethos, as well as, learn how to work against oppression in their classrooms. Participants have

indicated throughout their narratives the importance of teacher connection and support.

Classroom teachers can extend their support to GSD students by exhibiting visible kindness and acceptance, and by extinguishing discriminatory remarks or behavior when they see it. By including GSD students in curriculum and classroom conversations, teachers can create safe environments in which GSD students are given the opportunity to succeed.

### Pedagogical Implications

Teacher educators will find this study beneficial for discourse on the needs of GSD students within their schools and classrooms. As multicultural education gives way to diversity education, understanding that the rainbow is much broader than what many teachers know is an important concept to be taught in teacher education courses. Today, more students are coming out during their school years, and educators have the responsibility to prepare their pre-service teachers for those who are out, those who do not come out, and for their non-GSD peers. Language Arts teacher educators should build and teach courses for pre-service teachers that are inclusive of GSD curriculum and discourse.

### Implication for School Contexts

Educational policymakers and administrators will find this study helpful as it provides support for the need of specific language that creates inclusiveness for GSD students in their policies and protocols. The intentions of inclusion are often iterated with words like *all* or *each*, but this study shows that more often than not, when a general attempt at inclusion is made, it leaves room for exclusion. Policymakers who provide specific language for some marginalized groups such as

race, religion, ethnicity, or disability, but fail to include sexual orientation gender identity or expression are perpetuating the cycle of invisibility and intolerance. Policymakers may make the changes, but the understanding that administrators must enforce these protections each time, with the same speed and severity with which they would respond to an infraction against any other marginalized groups, is imperative to creating a positive educational experience for GSD students.

### Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

Limitation 1. Two areas of possible researcher bias exist. First, the researcher is a member of the Gender and Sexually Diverse (GSD) community. Second, the researcher's hometown, Okeechobee, is the county about which much of the extant data is related. One concern this could have presented was a bias in attitude in collecting and analyzing data. By using Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method and Charmaz's (2014) systematic inductive process of checking data with codes and codes with codes, the possibility of bias is reduced. Also, participants were asked to read the language excerpted from their narrative for accuracy and context, which also reduced bias.

Limitation 2. The focus group participants included only one participant who was not a college student at the time of the interviews. The perspective of college student participants may vary from those of students who may have dropped out of school or went directly into the workforce after high school.

Limitation 3. Teacher participants included seven females and one male. The singular male participant identified as gay. Having more male participants, GSD and non-GSD, would add a broader perspective to the study.

Limitation 4. This study is geographically located within the state of Florida. Expanding this study to a larger region of the country would provide additional data to inform the questions and theory.

Future Study 1. The researcher wishes to extend this research to a larger participant group in rural communities for a longitudinal study to provide data on rural schools and the effects of community values on these schools, even as the larger society becomes more inclusive and accepting of GSD rights.

Future Study 2. The researcher wishes to further evaluate the causal relationship between the balanced ethos of schools and the positive experiences of GSD students in the educational arena in order to determine whether Joy's depiction of her school's positive ethos for all students, including GSD students, was an isolated situation or if that ethos can be replicated in other high schools.

Future Study 3. The researcher wants to examine the connection of the theory of anti-oppressive education to the theory of cognitive dissonance relating to the enforcement of GSD specific policy by administration to work as a catalyst of change.

Future Study 4. The researcher intends to explore a theory or model of visibility of GSD students by collecting more data from Joy's school, or a school with a similar ethos, to examine the impact of full inclusion of GSD students from educational policy and procedure to class

curriculum and discourse. This model became visible through some of the collected data, but could not be fully theorized in this study.

### Conclusion

This qualitative, grounded theory study examined how high schools create and employ policies and procedures and how the schools interact with students to foster balanced school ethos for GSD students. Through interviews and extant data, the researcher was able to understand how aspirational and experienced ethos are balanced, and how schools create positive school ethos for GSD high school students.

One school, Joy's school, experienced an ethos in which all students, including GSD students shared positive experiences. A second school, Virginia's school, exhibited a negative ethos, but all students, including GSD students, equally experienced it. Participants described the remaining six schools as presenting an overall positive ethos, but believed GSD students experienced it differently. This is indicative of the line of thinking associated with *separate but equal* during the segregation of blacks and white in the American public school system in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In order for schools to provide a balanced aspirational and experienced ethos for GSD students, these students must be included in the policies, actions, and interactions of the high school. They must be visible and vocal in all aspects of their education. Finally, schools can create a positive ethos for GSD students only when balance of the aspirational ethos and the experienced ethos of the school is achieved.

Administrators hold the power to fully include GSD students in their schools, offering them positive ethos in which to progress and reach their potential. Policy is a start, but once it is in place, administrators must provide the support and inclusion that GSD students need. Students should not be asked to remain silent and hidden.



**APPENDIX A: EMAIL FOR FOCUS GROUP**

Hello,

My name is Frankie Huff, and I am currently completing research for my dissertation at University of Central Florida. My dissertation is titled: School Ethos and Rural Communities: Balancing the intended ethos and the experienced ethos for sexual minority students in rural secondary schools.<sup>10</sup>

I believe that by learning about the secondary school experiences of young adults, we can learn more about balancing the intended ethos of schools with the lived experiences of sexual minority students, thus working toward a truly safe and equal school environment.

I am conducting research through focus groups with sexual minority adults, ages 18-23. The purpose of these focus groups is to learn of the specific secondary school experiences of sexual minority students regarding their school and community ethoses (climates).

I would like the opportunity to further discuss this research with you, with the hopes that I can conduct a small focus group on your site.

Please email me or call at ###-###-####

Sincerely,  
Frankie Huff, M.Ed.  
Graduate Student,  
College of Education and Human Performance,  
University of Central Florida

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<sup>10</sup> Please note, title changed before completion of the interview process

## **APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

## Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board  
#1 FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Frankie W. Huff**

Date: **October 08, 2014**

Dear Researcher:

On 10/08/2014, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: School Ethos and Rural Communities: Balancing the intended ethos and the experienced ethos for sexual minority students in rural secondary schools.  
Investigator: Frankie W Huff  
IRB Number: SBE-14-10607  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Muratori".

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 10/08/2014 03:03:25 PM EDT

IRB Coordinator

**APPENDIX C: TEACHER PARTICIPANT CORRINE OPEN CODES**

Corrine		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
CO1	Staff greeting students at doors and in courtyard	Staff presence is very visible and staff greet students in courtyard and at classroom doors
CO2	Describing safety mechanisms in place: SRO, Fencing	SRO on campus, recent installation of office doors that are locked into building, school is fenced off and gates are locked
CO3	Saying nothing about feeling welcome	I cannot say anything for feeling welcome
CO4	Describing kids at risk: non-Hispanic, "good kids"	Non Hispanic, "good" kids
CO5	Teaching and promoting anti-bullying	Some staff promote anti-bullying, stand up for students who get picked on, teach and re-teach expectations
CO6	Stating uncertainty about the safety of GSD students	I don't know if they do
CO7	Describing anti-bullying program in county as not addressing GSD issues	have an anti-bullying program on campus, and in the county, but nothing that addresses sexual orientation at the middle school level
CO8	No known GSD support	None that I am aware of
CO9	Gravitating toward like peers	They tend to gravitate to each other
CO10	GSD connecting with non-judgmental or supportive staff	Find staff that are non-judgmental or accepting
CO11	No specific language for GSD in mission statements	none
CO12	Describing mission statement as focusing on academics	Our mission statement focuses on academics/learning
CO13	Lacking community support for secondary schools in district	We do not get much community support And there are several elementary schools in the area, they tend to get more business partners
CO14	Community supporting some incentive programs for grades and behavior	offer rewards for academic successes and for [positive behavior]
CO15	Community not placing value in education	values are not really directed towards education and respect for schools or teachers
CO16	Community not offering respect for educators or schools	and respect for schools or teachers
CO17	Indicating that without support, academic gains are difficult	Makes it difficult to make academic or social gains

## **APPENDIX D: TEACHER PARTICIPANT JOY OPEN CODES**

Joy Spier		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
JS1	Making students feel like family	Students are made to feel as part of a family
JS2	Welcoming students into teachers' classrooms	students know that they are welcome into teacher's classrooms
JS3	Providing opportunity to seek help, support, advice	able to seek help, support and advice from them when needed
JS4	Making teachers feel like family	Same as the students
JS5	Administration maintaining an open door policy	open door policy within the administrative team
JS6	Keeping small, close-knit group of friends among teachers	Teachers also have small, close-knit groups of friends that they can lean on if needed
JS7	Describing set up of school into two divisions	This is a large campus, with an upper and lower [division]
JS8	Lacking a close supportive atmosphere because of division of upper and lower house	division will not lend to a close, supportive atmosphere
JS9	Lacking diversity on campus	not a very diverse population of students on campus
JS10	Students interacting well with students and faculty	students that are here, for the most part, interact well with both other students as well as the faculty and staff
JS11	GSD students forming tight groups of friends	the sexual minority students are a close group of kids
JS12	GSD supporting each other	help each other and support each other
JS13	GSD are outgoing and active parts of the community	they are a very active and outgoing part of the school community, and are supported throughout the school community
JS14	Supporting GSD students with teacher/staff, GSA, guidance, and peer support	Teacher/staff support, GSA support, guidance support, support of fellow students
JS15	Seeing GSD interact with peers without issue	the sexual minority students have no problem interacting with their peers
JS16	Describing classroom and equal treatment of all students	no students treat each other any differently, whatever their sexual orientation
JS17	All students are treated equally by faculty, staff, and administration	students are not treated any differently by faculty, staff or administration



JS18	Forming tight groups of GSD friends, and finding success in school and community	such a close-knit group of LGBT kids, that they have had great success in the school community
JS19	Describing school as open-minded	school is pretty open minded,
JS20	Acknowledging that GSD students may face intolerance and prejudice in "the real world"	may be hard for kids when they go out in to the "real world" and see that people may not have such an open mind, and they may face prejudice
JS21	Describing language of school's mission statement, language includes: Nurturing ,responsibilities to each other, diverse society	Excerpt omitted to protect confidentiality
JS22	Describing community as very supportive	super support system throughout the community
JS23	Participating parents	parents are wonderful, and always willing to step in when there is a time of need
JS24	Exhibiting school spirit	events are always well attended, and the school spirit is amazing
JS25	Describing the community support: school activities, volunteering, mentoring	Fundraising, event support, participation in school activities, volunteer hours, mentoring
JS26	Describing community as affluent	community that is made up of a majority of well to do families
JS27	Community imparting importance of education as a means to success	community instills in their kids a want to further their education, and to become successful in their future
JS28	Reciprocating mission statement with community values	Our school's mission fully supports the values and ideals that the parents and community
JS29	Community expecting a top-rate education and mission statement supports this	community expects that the children will get a first rate education at our school, and the school's mission supports this
JS30	Expecting kids to attend college Holding kids to a higher standard	Kids are held to a higher standard, educationally, because we expect that they will all be going to college

**APPENDIX E: TEACHER PARTICIPANT LEE OPEN CODES**

Lee Reister		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
LR1	Faculty greeting students daily	Students are welcomed daily
LR2	Implementing security: Locking doors Checking ID Acknowledging reports of bullying Extinguishing violent behavior	Security measures such as campus doors are locked during the school day; visitor identifications are checked thoroughly; faculty members are open to reports of bullying; acts of violence are extinguished immediately
LR3	Lacking safety for LGBTQ and Middle Eastern students	at risk in this climate are LGBTQ and students who are of Middle Eastern decent
LR4	Staff members mirror community values	Staff members are a reflection of our society
LR5	Some interacting empathetically; some not open to parents or children that are GSD	Some interact empathetically and quite well However, others are not open to these children or parents of children who fit into the LGBTQ population
LR6	Some staff making judgment and being rude	They can be judgmental and rude
LR7	GSD students not made to feel safe	students are not made to feel safe
LR8	Holding numerous school board meetings to discuss GSD safety	Our county [XXX] has had many School Board meetings about the subject
LR9	School board voting down protective measures	protocols that would protect LGBTQ students have been voted down
LR10	Lacking support for GSD	No support is available
LR11	GSD interacting cautiously because they are not safe	These students interact with caution because they know they are not protected
LR12	GSD students relying on a few friends Remaining secretive	count on the good graces and understanding of few or choose to remain secretive
LR13	Interacting cautiously with teachers	Students interact with staff in the same manner
LR14	Relying on one safe faculty when finding one	When they discover a trustworthy faculty member they flock to that person because they have the need to share
LR15	Lacking understanding = lacking success	Often, when students are not understood their successes are few
LR16	Fearing for students who aren't understood	fear for these students
LR17	Hoping supportive family will foster success	have supportive families will have success, hopefully

LR18	Quoting mission statement	The mission... is to provide every student with individual opportunities to excel
LR19	Quoting vision statement	embracing...diversity
LR20	Indicating that the intent of the statements are good	The words of our statement are rated as a "4" in my opinion
LR21	Not acting on mission/vision statements	However our county does not act on these words
LR22	Needing to set up protocol to implement mission/vision of schools	Additional protocols to carry out the meaning of the words are not set in place
LR23	Community supporting academics and sports activities	community supports the students academically and regarding sporting activities
LR24	Fundraising and sporting events are valued	Fund raising activities and attendance for various sporting events is a high priority for the local community
LR25	Community isn't supporting of GSD	not very supportive of LGBTQ
LR26	Describing community as rural	area is reflective of most our rural communities across the nation
LR27	Community failing to understand concepts of "diversity" and "every child"	Most people in the community do not understand the meaning of "diversity" or "every child "
LR28	Blaming perpetuating of unsupportive GSD environments on ignorance of community	school climate continues to be unsupportive of the LGBTQ students
LR29	Educating community can lead to changing schools	educate the community and they become supportive our schools will change
LR30	Reflecting society through school climate	The climate is very reflective of society
LR31	Appearing accepting on the surface	Appears accepting of all things because it's politically correct to do so
LR32	Identifying undertones of intolerance	underlying tide of non-acceptance
LR33	Staff making fun of GSD students	Staff are prone to making fun of students who are gender and sexually diverse
LR34	Treating GSD students differently, but not necessarily badly	transfers to how students are treated Not badly But different than other students
LR35	Being treated differently leads to behavior issues	played out by the students through behavior issues They become angry and act out

**APPENDIX F: TEACHER PARTICIPANT MISS FRIZZLE OPEN CODES**

Miss Frizzle		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
MF1	Indicating that there is a policy in place for harassment and bullying	discrimination clause in the Code of Conduct Harassment and bullying are not permitted
MF2	Describing youth alliance club as safe space	the club is a safe space, kids are able to share anything and it is confidential
MF3	Describing youth alliance club (out of school program)	club: the club is a safe space, kids are able to share anything and it is confidential 95% of the facilitators are GLBT
MF4	Students knowing teachers who are out	some of the GLBT faculty members are out to students
MF5	Addressing that while many GSD students are accepted as normal, transgender kids face difficulty	Even though GLBT is almost a normal high school experience in this day and age, Trans kids still have the hardest time
MF6	Transgender facing more discrimination than gay, lesbian, bisexual	They face more discrimination over their GLB counterparts
MF7	Noting that this discrimination of transgender extends to youth alliance club at some levels	even in club, some of the G&L kids still have some issue with those not using standard pronouns ie Them their zzzz)
MF8	Teachers and staff connecting with students who are like them	[faculty and staff] tend to identify and focus on our own populations
MF9	Reiterating harassment of transgendered individuals	Trans individual still are harassed, even from within the GLBT community
MF10	Lacking support from administration	lack of support
MF11	Not reporting harassment out of fear or lack of support	of these students do not report the harassment out of fear and lack of support
MF12	GSD socializing with GSD or like-minded	They [students] tend to hang with like-minded students, or drama/performing arts types
MF13	GSD students trusting one or two teachers	they [students] have one or two trusted faculty members
MF14	Growing GSA/Pride clubs on campuses	schools are allowing and supporting GSA's or Pride Clubs
MF15	Providing specific language for sexual preference in discrimination protocol	[The school] has discrimination protocol for students based on sexual preference
MF16	Lacking specific language regarding gender expression (gender diversity)	lacking is gender expression
MF17	Lacking protections for GSD faculty and staff	no such protections for faculty members and staff
MF18	Indicating that action will be taken if harassment occurs and is reported	Only if the student reports the harassment or bashing is anything done
MF19	Not treating GSD discrimination with same severity as racial discrimination	It is not treated as severe as racial discrimination
MF20	Acknowledging inconsistency in dealing with reports of harassment and discrimination by administrators. Different administrators deal differently	Depends which admin, it is not consistent

**APPENDIX G: TEACHER PARTICIPANT RENEE OPEN CODES**

Renee Cooper		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
RC1	School welcoming students back at beginning of year	Overall, our school tries very hard at the beginning of the year to make students feel welcome to the campus. An attempt is made by all teachers to be out ...on the first day of school, in the morning, to welcome students
RC2	Students earning recognition for positive behavior.	students are recognized for positive behaviors on the morning announcements and through positive referrals
RC3	Students feeling safe in general	I think overall our students feel safe.
RC4	Stating that there are areas of campus that need more supervision.	more attempts need to be made to ensure student safety in the area supervision. There are too many instances where students are out of sight during lunch, class switches, and before and after school
RC5	Acknowledging that things occur in these spaces that are not reported.	I know that things occur during these times that rarely gets reported
RC6	Encouraging teachers through incentives and team building	We do just as much to encourage teachers as we do for students This is accomplished through incentives and team building activities.
RC7	Acknowledging that some teachers were safer than others.	safety would vary from staff member to staff
RC8	Establishing rapport and gaining safety	safe enough because of the rapport I built with my students
RC9	Lacking rapport may lead to unsafe situation	for teachers and staff who do not establish relationships with the students and each other, then they may feel less safe
RC10	In Vivo "I think any of our students who are considered 'different' from the mainstream population are at risk."	I think any of our students who are considered "different" from the mainstream population are at risk.
RC11	Varying interactions with students depending on staff member.	[interaction] varies depending on the staff member
RC12	Teachers interacting with some cliques more than others.	some teachers have certain cliques of students they interact with more
RC13	Teacher interacting more with athletes, popular/pretty kids, honors/gifted kids	athletes, popular/pretty kids, honors/gifted



RC14	Making the effort to know the kids vs earning a paycheck only.	Other teachers really make a concerted effort to get to know all of their students And, then there are those who just come to work for a paycheck and spend the entire year not even learning their students' names
RC15	Claiming GSD students are treated same as others	These students are treated like any other student on the campus.
RC16	Legal steps taken	Omitted for confidentiality
RC17	Discriminating against a GSD student	This student was discriminated against for being [GSD]
RC18	student being denied a privilege given to heterosexual students	Omitted for confidentiality
RC19	Students wanting a GSA	A group of students wanted to start a GSA (Gay/Straight Alliance)
RC20	Admin and District denying GSA	were denied by administration and ultimately by the district.
RC21	GSA granted rights	Omitted for confidentiality
RC22	gaining rights was long process	Omitted for confidentiality
RC23	Students not wanting to start one now that others are gone.	weren't any students left who wanted to carry the torch
RC24	No GSA currently	do not have an active organization on campus
RC25	Lacking support for GSD students	students are not given the support they may need
RC26	Referring to guidance if students seek help	would be referred to guidance
RC27	Not reaching out for help from school personnel	these students do not reach out for help to school personnel
RC28	Students relying on one or two teachers for support	When I was still in the classroom, this particular sub-group of students felt extremely comfortable with me and I counseled them or helped them get in touch with someone who could help
RC29	Trusted teachers directing students to resources when necessary	helped them get in touch with someone who could help
RC30	Improving situations for GSD in last decade	things are a little bit better for our LGBTQ community than it was a decade ago
RC31	Maintaining diverse peer groups	These students belong to peer groups made of a diverse group of students,
RC32	GSD aren't being ostracized by peers	aren't ostracized by their peers

RC33	Using slurs, but not usually directed at GSD students	pockets of students who still throw around slurs – but it's generally not in the direction of actual students who identify as gay
RC34	Name-calling peers with GSD slurs	name calling with their peers
RC35	Interacting with teachers like other students	students interact like any other student
RC36	GSD not advertising they are out to teachers	Those that are "out" don't necessarily advertise it
RC37	Some outing themselves to teachers	some of them do [referring to coming out]
RC38	Some teachers not treating students differently	they weren't treated differently by me
RC39	Witnessing GSD slurs ignored by other teachers	witnessed teachers look the other way when slurs have been thrown out by other students
RC40	Wanting to do more for emotional safety of GSD students	need to do more to ensure emotional safety for all students, but particularly LGBT students
RC41	No programs for GSD youth	There isn't an outreach program
RC42	Stating that there is some kind of policy against bullying and harassment	the student code of conduct and the district webpage regarding the Bullying and Harassment Policy
RC43	Providing policy	Omitted for confidentiality
RC44	Stating policy is not specific to Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act of 2013	The school does not have their own mission statement regarding this. They simply state that they follow district policy. As a matter of fact, when researching this, I could not find any reference to the Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act of 2013. So, I'd rate this at a 2 because I don't feel like we have anything that specifically addresses this in our own mission statement.
RC45	Lacking specific language to protect GSD	do not have any language in any of our policies that specifically addresses the needs and/or issues concerning the LGBT community.
RC46	Feeling "all encompassing" language doesn't meet needs of GSD	The language is supposed to be all encompassing, but I feel that without addressing it specifically we aren't really meeting the safety and emotional needs of ALL students.
RC47	Describing community as involved	Our community is very involved with the high school.

RC48	Describing school as community hub	we are the hub of activity for the community
RC49	Community providing scholarship dollars	community provides close to \$1 million in scholarship monies to graduating seniors each year
RC50	Community attending sporting and academic events	They attend sporting and academic events.
RC51	Community chaperones	chaperone events
RC52	Community exhibiting traditional ideas/values	Our community is still very rooted in the "good ole' boy" philosophy
RC53	Community exhibiting a "who you know" value, valuing money	it's all about who you know and who has the most money
RC54	Community members using church as a social status	Attending church is a social status symbol
RC55	Describing some community individuals as hypocrites.	there are some who walk the walk and talk the talk – there are just as many who are hypocrites
RC56	Hearing homophobic undertones in church	There are definite homophobic undertones preached from the pulpits (I've attended both Baptist and Catholic churches in our community).
RC57	Community still racially segregated	In addition, our community is still largely racially segregated
RC58	Hearing racial slurs directed at her child	we deal with my son being called the "n-word" on a weekly basis
RC59	Reading homophobic articles on FaceBook	As a teacher, I have tons of adult former students with whom I am Facebook friends. It's amazing to me the amount of homophobic articles and comments that are posted
RC60	Being upset by what she sees/hears	It upsets me
RC61	Community and school sytem taking pride in religion	"We" pride ourselves on the fact that we pray before school board meetings and faculty meals
RC62	Community taking part in religious prayer at school board meetings and faculty meals	Honestly, I'd say that they pretty much align with the school's mission. "We" pride ourselves on the fact that we pray before school board meetings and faculty meals
RC63	District allowing itself to alienate GSB community by not allowing GSA	but in the same breath we allowed our district to present itself as extremely alienating to our LGBT community by not allowing a Gay/Straight Alliance a few years ago
RC64	People keeping quiet about the GSD and their issues	people just don't talk about it [discrimination lawsuit]

RC65	Sharing of views on homosexuality by some students during Socratic Seminars.	Omitted for confidentiality
RC66	One student suggesting that all gay people should die	student made a comment that all gay people should die
RC67	Participant expressing being appalled at behavior	I was appalled and reacted as such.
RC68	Omitted for confidentiality	Omitted for confidentiality
RC69	Fear of isolation and threats from parents lead to outburst	was only acting out because of parental isolation and threats
RC70	Stating that damage is already done to GSD students who heard the comment.	the damage had been done to the already "out" students in the classroom.
RC71	Assistant Principal believed that current policy was enough to meet needs of GSD	Omitted for confidentiality
RC72	No support for GSD	no obvious support being offered
RC73	In Vivo "It's such a taboo issue in this community."	It's such a taboo issue in this community
RC74	Blaming adults for creating taboo situation	it's really an adult-issue
RC75	Kids are more accepting in many cases	kids are so much more accepting of each other (with exceptions) than adults are
RC76	GSD being an issue among certain groups of students	an issue in what the kids would call the "redneck" crowd The "country" kids are not as accepting as the other cliques
RC77	Community and schools perpetuating intolerance, not addressing intolerance	community and schools perpetuate intolerance by not addressing it
RC78	Fragile student not feeling supported	our fragile subgroups of students probably do not feel supported.
RC79	Leading to isolation and anger	This can lead to isolation and anger
RC80	Feeling that things are improving, but still much to do to ensure safety and acceptance for all students.	feel like it's better than it's ever been But, there is still so much work to do to ensure that all students feel safe and accepted at school

**APPENDIX H: TEACHER PARTICIPANT SAMANTHA OPEN CODES**

Samantha Hall		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
SH1	Adults being visible	Faculty and staff are visible before school, between classes and afterschool.
SH2	Making students feel welcome	greet our students are (sic) they enter each period.
SH3	Taking a strong stance against bullying	strong anti-bullying stance.
SH4	Administration being attentive, proactive, and conscientious about bullying	Our administrators are very attentive, proactive and conscientious about following up on bullying reports
SH5	School showing solidarity against bullying in an event	participated in Unity Day, as a campus, showing solidarity against bullying.
SH6	Staff interacting with students within the students' academic groupings	Some do, but the way the classes are set up; AP, intensive reading, academy classes, etc.; not all teachers interact with all groups of students.
SH7	Feeling that GSD students aren't made to feel safe	I'm not sure they are.
SH8	In vivo code: "I feel our campus is a very don't ask, don't tell campus."	I feel our campus is a very don't ask don't tell campus.
SH9	Ignoring the presence of GSD students	faculty, staff and administrators would like to ignore our sexual minority students.
SH10	Receiving support from guidance counselors only	Guidance counselors only
SH11	Stating there is no GSA	do not have a GLBT club on our campus.
SH12	Denying GSA and legal steps taken	denied this group and were sued for it.
SH13	GSD interacting okay with some peers	They (GSD) interact fine with some peers
SH14	Describing community as rural.	our school is in a very rural community
SH15	Acknowledging homophobia within the community	homophobia is alive and well
SH16	Restating <i>in vivo</i> code "Don't ask don't tell."	I feel we have a very, don't ask don't tell mentality on campus.
SH17	Acknowledging that many of the faculty and staff adopt <i>in vivo</i> code	This isn't all faculty and staff but the majority
SH18	Describing community as Christian based	Christian based community
SH19	Stating that Christian values dictate the acceptance of GSD	Christian believes [sic] and ideologies dictate their acceptance of these students.

SH20	GSD students finding a few close friends	students finding a small group of friends who are their support group
SH21	GSD students finding support from one or two teachers	special teacher who cares and loves them for who they are, human beings and not their sexuality.
SH22	Community supporting sports	sports are well supported
SH23	Community supporting sports	supporters of sporting events,
SH24	Community providing scholarship money	scholarship night in giving loads of money
SH25	Community providing money for graduation party	financially supporting the all night graduation party.
SH26	Community promoting Christian Values	Christian values
SH27	Christian Values are limiting for some students	values are very limiting for certain students
SH28	Assuming no faculty or staff to be GSD	don't think we have any perceived sexual minority staff or faculty.
SH29	Hearing things about GSD group when students were trying to form a GSA	Things I have overheard and/or had said to me when the GLBT group tried to get started at our school.
SH30	Faculty/Staff expressing a negative attitude about GSA	expressing negative attitude about the club/group
SH31	Welcoming everyone to drama club	we always had Drama Club, that everyone was welcome in our club.
SH32	Speculating that lack of support for GSA is reason it doesn't exist	My thought is it [GSA] was not encouraged. No real support for it.
SH33	Community supporting kids from well-known families, sports participants, and teacher's kids.	well-known families, the sports students, for the most part the teacher's kids are supported by the community
SH34	Average kid getting overlooked	the average kid that doesn't have anyone in the system and isn't involved in extracurricular activities gets over looked.

**APPENDIX I: TEACHER PARTICIPANT TOM OPEN CODES**



Tom Davis		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
TD1	Trying to get specific language added to county nondiscrimination policy	been prodding for years to have sexual orientation and gender identity added to this
TD2	Attempting various routes to add specific language, without result	spoken to the school board, spoken with the Superintendent and others at the {county} such as the director of high schools and a resident lawyer, all to no avail.
TD3	Describing county's political views as republican	all registered Republicans in a Republican county
TD4	District stating that discrimination won't be allowed, but not willing to put it in writing	say they do not allow any discrimination but will not put it in writing
TD5	Feeling that the lack of specific language in the policies across the state is appalling	an appalling, backwards attitude not shared by other major school districts in this State.
TD6	Believing that leaving out specific language is dangerous	a dangerous stance as well regarding bullying and teen suicide.
TD7	Describing teachers as ignorant	teachers at my school are also backwards, ignorant simpletons
TD8	Hearing other teachers allow verbal discrimination	allow verbal discrimination among students.
TD9	Suffering harassment as a teacher from other teachers	Omitted for confidentiality
TD10	Describing overall climate as good.	a good experience in general.
TD11	Not hearing students complain of major incidents.	never been told by a student of a major harassment incident.
TD12	Describing school as large	This school is large (3200 students, 200 teachers)
TD13	Students finding groups of peers for support	students find their own circles and groups to socialize in
TD14	Hearing name-calling	heard of minor but common instances of name-calling
TD15	Participant sponsoring clubs	sponsor GSA and [other club]
TD16	Describing clubs as a safe haven for 'misfits'	groups are a safe haven for 'misfits' to socialize
TD17	Addressing concerns that students need outlets or they may turn violent	If students don't have a social outlet, they can sometimes turn violent as we have seen with school shootings
TD18	Feeling unappreciated by administration	My efforts and dedication to the students go unrecognized by administrators year after year.

TD19	Most GSD students are not attending GSA meetings	Most LGBT students at the school do not attend GSA meetings
TD20	Students finding support from social circle, online, and family	They find support in other social circles, online, or have better family support.
TD21	Describing demographics of GSA club	15-20 students do attend. Attendees are typically young (freshmen, sophomores), female, and low SES. About 2/3 of attendees are White, the others Black and Hispanic. Most males are non-White. Most attendees are not only LGBT, but are in other categories of perceived lower status such as lower GPA, lower income, less physically fit, female, minority, etc.
TD22	Explaining that for 2 hour club meeting 1.5 hours tends to be socializing	Only about 30 minutes of each 2 hour meeting has to do with LGBT issues. It is more about socialization and sharing/caring.
TD23	Needing GSA because of intersectionality, not strictly because GSD	It seems that LGBT students who do not suffer from multiple angles of discrimination do not 'need' the group.
TD24	Students in GSA identifying as bi or straight	Those that do attend primarily identify as straight or bi--few are out as gay or otherwise
TD25	Most students come out after high school	Most students--even today--do not come out until after high school

**APPENDIX J: TEACHER PARTICIPANT VIRGINIA OPEN CODES**

Virginia Hemingway		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
VH1	Having security issues	issues with security
VH2	Not feeling safe	I would not, quite frankly, make the claim that students are made to feel safe and welcome
VH3	Fighting amongst students	frequently have incidents of student to student violence
VH4	Staff not feeling safe	staff members are not made to feel safe
VH5	Assaulting staff	student to faculty violence
VH6	Lacking Police Presence	one deputy on campus
VH7	Confronting others is risky	students who engage in confrontation are most greatly put at risk
VH8	Responding to taunting leads to violence	students who respond to taunting or aggression usually end up in violent confrontations.
VH9	Describing School population	Omitted for confidentiality
VH10	Describing School population	We have a number of students suffer due to their housing circumstances (living in vehicles, moving constantly
VH11	School has issues with truancy	issues with truancy
VH12	Supporting groups for GSD do not exist.	no official sexual minority or LGBT organization for our school.
VH13	Over-extending counselors	guidance department consists of four counselors, so with over 2,000 students they are not exactly readily available
VH14	GSD fitting in	sexual minority students seems to be fairly well accepted among their peers.
VH15	Describing culture as not being traditional or conservative	culture/atmosphere of our school is neither "traditional" nor "conservative".
VH16	GSD not discussing their situations	I do not believe the majority of our sexual minority students make light of their situation.
VH17	Not discussing GSD issues in school	The issues for sexual minorities are, for the most part, not discussed in our high school
VH18	Attempting activism= 1 student	I have only had one sexual minority student (in my four years at this facility) attempt to complete any activism for the rights of sexual minority students.

VH19	Hearing staff talk about students who were gender non-normative in appearance or dress	heard staff members make commentary about students who dressed or behaved outside of traditional gender norms.
VH20	No discussion about how to protect GSD students	biggest failure is the lack of discussion of how to provide protection for our LGBT students
VH21	Not blaming Administration	not in part to administration being apathetic,
VH22	Blaming overall bad school behavior for ignoring GSD issues	an immense problem with behavioral control of the student population overall that LGBT issues are often overlooked or not given priority.
VH23	Stating that all will have safe environment.	Omitted for confidentiality
VH24	Not meeting mission statements	In implementation I'd rate it a 1.
VH25	Lacking support from community	do not believe this community offers support
VH26	Describing community	The community here suffers from financial, domestic, linguistic, and stability issues.
VH27	Describing school climate as negative	climate of my school I would describe as being very negative
VH28	Poorly running in terms of behavior management	poorly run in terms of behavioral management
VH29	Indicating that school is poorly staffed	poorly staffed
VH30	Describing one behavior issue: cutting class	I often have large groups of students cutting class outside my window.
VH31	Identifying another behavioral issue: Violence	frequent violence and fighting at the school
VH32	Relating incidents of violence (non GSD)	Omitted for confidentiality
VH33	Stating that most kids are good.	90% of my kids are great kids, and I love them
VH34	Believing that school may be more accepting of GSD students than many schools	I do believe that gender and sexually diverse students at the school are more openly accepted than in many schools
VH35	Not receiving equal treatment	I do not believe they receive equal treatment
VH36	Describing a GSD student	One of my students is a gay male. He is very effeminate and very open and theatrical in terms of his personality.
VH37	Student feeling confident	I am glad that he feels confident enough in the setting to be himself
VH38	Reporting verbal harassment	group of students started following him and yelling the words faggot

VH39	Not doing anything because there were no names given	but there was not much the Dean could do, as he did not have the names of the students who did this.
VH40	Offering student safe space	if these students continue to pursue him, he could always come to my classroom anytime.
VH41	Displaying affection, traditionally feminine lesbians are not harassed	and they often display physical affection with their significant other in the hallway (kissing, hugging, and holding hands, etcetera. I have never seen a conventionally "feminine" lesbian harassed on campus or report any harassment.
VH42	Dressing and styling with masculinity brought shunning by peers for some female students	I have had female students who identified as transgendered report harassment. These students often dressed and style themselves in a masculine manner, and this led to a bit of shunning by some students, particularly male students.
VH43	Describing school's population	Omitted for confidentiality

## **APPENDIX K: FOCUS GROUP ALEX OPEN CODES**

Alex		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
A1	Not participating in clubs or groups	I didn't really join any clubs or groups, so--
A2	Keeping to oneself	I was just sort of by myself.
A3	Being a straight A student	in high school I was pretty much the straight A student that everyone loved to hate because I'd be the one who you couldn't curve the test because I had gotten a hundred on it
A4	Not having friends	I can't really say if I had friends
A5	Knowing how to connect Having connections	knew how to be connected to people and I knew how to nurture that to a point where I had connections
A6	Being distant and cold	I was very kind of distant and cold.
A7	Growing close to some people towards the end	did grow close to some people towards the end
A8	Being on a confusing roller coaster Not getting involved	but I never really got involved with anything because it was just a really confusing roller coaster
A9	Being an introvert	I'm like a hard core introvert
A10	Being split Having honors students separate from everyone else	So, it was sort of split. You had your I.B. slash A.P. students over here, and you had the Health Academy, and then you had everybody else.
A11	Getting along with people like him Not getting along with everybody else	I noticed that the people who, like me, were in the A.P. and Honors and all that, I got along with them really well, but I didn't gel so well with everybody else.
A12	Getting along with intellectual people	I just got along better with the people who were more intellectual in nature.
A13	Being more connected to teachers than students	I had better connections with my teachers than any students.
A14	Not relating to peers	I just couldn't relate to them
A15	Not being out in high school Not knowing what he was	I wasn't out in high school because, honestly, I didn't know what I was.
A16	Learning about asexuality in college	I didn't know about asexuality until I came to college.
A17	Saying he was straight	I used to go oh I'm straight, I'm just not very good at it.
A18	Asking a girl out Being thankful when she declined	I remember, I asked this girl out, when she said no I was like oh thank god.
A19	Feeling safe	I felt safe, personally for me



A20	Being introverted	even though I was an introvert
A21	Connecting with teachers	that's because I had better connections with my teachers than with anyone else
A22	Being safe due to connecting with teachers	what kind of saved me from being picked on was people were afraid of me
A23	Being safe due to connecting with teachers	I think for me that was what kind of saved me from being bullied
A24	Others being bullied	I know there were people who were bullied
A25	Trying to help others by connecting them to teachers	I would always try to get them to talk to these teachers that I was connected with
A26	Thinking no one should have to be bullied	I was like, no one should have to put up with that.
A27	Being out and popular	there were other people who were out and they were popular as everyone's been saying
A28	Being safe if popular	they were really popular and accepted and they seemed fine with how they were treated

## **APPENDIX L: FOCUS GROUP ALEXOZ OPEN CODES**

Alexoz		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
AO1	Participating in ROTC, drill team, honor guard, and color guard	I was in ROTC as well, doing drill team, honor guard, color guard
AO2	Participating in every extracurricular, robotics, and GSA	Pretty much every extracurricular they offered as well as robotics and, GSA.
AO3	Getting support for ROTC going to competitions	ROTC, both the extracurriculars we went to state competitions and such so we got a lot of support
AO4	Getting support for ROTC due to ROTC students having a higher GPA than the rest of the school	the GPA of the ROTC was higher than the classes of the entire school so we got support there.
AO5	Lacking support for GSA – not being allowed to hold any functions or plans	But the GSA, we couldn't really hold any functions or plans and we didn't really have support there.
AO6	Being affected and going through hoops	I found it definitely affected me, and I had to go through a lot of hoops to get there.
AO7	Wanting to go to prom with boyfriend	I wanted to go to prom with my boyfriend
AO8	Not being allowed to go to prom with boyfriend	it wasn't allowed
AO9	Omitted for confidentiality	omitted for confidentiality
AO10	Omitted for confidentiality	omitted for confidentiality
AO11	Feeling like he shouldn't have had to go through hoops to take boyfriend to prom	it was a trial that I don't think should-- it shouldn't have had to be done.
AO12	Having a 3.8 GPA and being relatively good academically	I had a 3.8 so I was relatively good academically. I was an honors and AP student
AO13	Being an honors and AP student	I was an honors and AP student
AO14	Not being social	I wasn't very social.
AO15	Moving to go to a better school	freshman year I moved to go to high school, to go to a better high school than would be available where I lived before
AO16	Not knowing anyone	I knew absolutely nobody
AO17	Not speaking more than a few words except to teachers	so freshman year, to get me to speak more than a few words to you, unless it was a teacher, it just wouldn't happen
AO18	Being antisocial all the way through April of Senior year	almost all the way through my senior year, until almost April, it was pretty much the same
AO19	Being antisocial	I was antisocial

AO20	Focusing on extracurriculars	I was focusing and trying to spend all my time doing extracurriculars and everything
AO21	Keeping self busy	keeping myself busy
AO22	Realizing had been antisocial and unknown	then I realized that I had been antisocial all 4 years and that no one really knew me.
AO23	Turning self around, running for prom king	I kind of turned myself around. I ran for prom king, and I held this massive campaign
AO24	Being known by senior class	by the end of the year, in only two months, I went from a handful of AP kids knowing who I am to pretty much all of the senior class
AO25	Coming out of shell	pretty good change around and a testament to what you might be able to do if you come out of your shell.
AO26	Knowing a guy who was openly gay, but was buffered because he was popular	We had one student in my school who was open about it and he wasn't treated bad but he actually was kind of buffered I think. I think he was popular before he came out and that's why.
AO27	Being bullied if unpopular Not feeling safe	also we had a lot of other students that were out that were berated and it really didn't make me feel safe especially since I saw, who is now my ex-boyfriend, getting berated.
AO28	Seeing Administration do nothing to help the bullied kids	although the school resource officer, tried [unintelligible] behavioral specialist or, I'm not sure what his title is, but he really-- he was an administrator at the school and he really didn't do anything about it.
AO29	Feeling unsafe	-- it really didn't make me feel safe.
AO30	Getting good support	Well the support in the high school was pretty good
AO31	Having a good rating	We had-- we had a good rating
AO32	Supporting sports teams	The sports teams weren't fantastic but a lot of them were good as well, so we got community support.
AO33	Receiving support in general	Just in general
AO34	Being a Christian community	But the community around the school and around my home, obviously, as most of America seems to be, is heavily Christian.
AO35	Lacking support of GSAs and GSD due to being a Christian community	So obviously the GSA and the LGTB community wasn't supported as widely

**APPENDIX M: FOCUS GROUP ASHLIE OPEN CODES**

Ashlie		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
AS1	Participating in a leadership group	Omitted for confidentiality
AS2	Volunteering in the community	It was kind of like we volunteered in our community
AS3	Welcoming new students and showing them what to do	whenever we had new students come to our school we'd welcome them and show them what to do
AS4	Managing the marching band	I was also self-proclaimed band manager for our marching band.
AS5	Keeping to self	when I started out, I kept to myself more
AS6	Having one best friend Being friends since 7th grade	I had one best friend and we had been best friends since 7th grade, so we were always cool.
AS7	Having good grades	my grades were pretty good
AS8	Getting along ok with people, but keeping to self	got along okay with people but I just kept to myself
AS9	Being sarcastic Being rude to everyone	I was really sarcastic, and I was basically just like a dick to everybody
AS10	Having good grades	And so throughout my high school, my grades were pretty good
AS11	Having grades go down in junior year	my Junior year, my grades just went all the way down
AS12	Losing motivation	I lost all my motivation
AS13	Becoming more social than needing to be	I became way more social then needed to be
AS14	Losing a friend	But I did lose my best friend in that situation
AS15	Making new friends	I just gained a whole lot more people
AS16	Struggling with coming out	I was kind of struggling with coming out.
AS17	Coming out to new friends	I told my friends
AS18	Not coming out to family until college	not my family, that didn't happen until I started college.
AS19	Being a pretty good student	I was a pretty good student
AS20	Focusing more on security than teachers	I didn't focus as much on my teachers, as I did security
AS21	Getting away with everything by getting close to security	I learned that, if you get close with security you get away with everything.
AS22	Skipping class Being let in when door is locked	You get to skip class and they let you in when the door's locked, stuff like that

AS23	Having senior year go by fast Learning to get away with stuff by becoming close with security	that's what I learned my Senior year, and, it really just helped it go by fast.
AS24	Having a group of GSD students in school	So, in my high school we had a collection of LGBT students.
AS25	Knowing girls who were popular and lesbian	There were about 8 girls who were openly gay and they were the coolest kids. Everybody knew them and, they kind of inter-dated each other so they-- it was so weird, but they were so, just amazing and everyone wanted to be them.
AS26	Having it easier as a lesbian than gay	But, that was how it was for the girls. For the guys, it was a different story.
AS27	A guy coming out, and thinking coming out is huge deal, but everyone already knew	There was this one guy who I knew from my freshman year and he thought it was this huge deal him coming out, but the thing is that, all his friends already knew and he didn't know that we knew.
AS28	Guy was freaking out, participant was comforting friend	And he was so freaked out and we're like, dude, we already know. Relax, chill out.
AS29	Being comfortable with self	And, eventually, he became more comfortable with himself.
AS30	Popular guy auditioning for roles, being awarded, being on school TV	He auditioned for our [unintelligible] TV, which was like our morning news. So he was on TV, he was in the plays and everything, and, at the end of the year, during prom he became prom king.
AS31	Knowing another guy who was bisexual	So that was him and it was really good for him, but on the other hand there was another student, and he came out as bisexual.
AS32	Seeing this guy being picked on	Of course, all the guys were like, no, there's no such thing as a bisexual guy. Either you're gay or you're straight, so, you're gay, and they just used to give him all this crap and they used to just really pick on him or whatever, take his stuff, hide his stuff, and I would be the one who would give it back to him. And, this one time in class this guy was just going off on this other kid.

AS33	Standing up for gay student	So, I stood up for him and I was like whoa, when did you decide to be straight? And he flipped his shit and he was like, wait, I don't like that. So I don't know who you're talking to. And I was like, sweetie, we all know, but, you know, whatever. It's fine.
AS34	Having it easier as a lesbian than gay	It was just, so different from how the girls were treated, because it was kind of, okay for them I guess.
AS35	Having it easier as a lesbian or bisexual female than gay male	The guys felt them being gay is hot or if they're bi that means I still have a chance with them.
AS36	Feeling mad about bullied student, but feeling happy for friend who was popular and okay.	It was so stupid and it just made me really mad, but at the same time I was so happy for the friend that I had in ninth grade.
AS37	Thriving due to support of friends/being bullied if unpopular/feeling sad about other students	And I saw he progressed and he became prom king. He was just so comfortable with himself and it just made me angry that every student didn't have that same opportunity.



**APPENDIX N: FOCUS GROUP DAVID OPEN CODES**

David		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
D1	Participating in leadership class	This is like really a class but it is considered an organization or a group. Leadership.
D2	Trusting friends	I do have a strong trust in one of my friends. Usually I trust friends for who they are.
D3	Caring about friends	That's where I care the most.
D4	Helping friends	Usually, I do help them out whenever they have problem
D5	Minding own business but still helping	Sometimes I stay away from other people's business, but it doesn't mean I don't help them.
D6	Helping if needed	I don't unhelp. I help people who need help.
D7	Describing others	Some people like think that how they talk about money, fame, power, wealth-- Some people like to talk about it.
D8	Having different interests	as for me, I'm not interested in that type of thing. There's three things I have that's more important in life. One is sacrificing, the other one is my studies, and the other one is trust.

**APPENDIX O: FOCUS GROUP FREDDIE OPEN CODES**

Freddie Paris		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
FP1	Not participating in clubs	did not join any clubs
FP2	Participating in drama and theater	involved in drama and theater
FP3	Expressing hope for academic success	Academically I had high hope at first
FP4	Performing poorly	performed poorly in class and often didn't bother to do my work.
FP5	Suffering from experiences	left emotional scars
FP6	Feeling jaded about certain kinds of people	jaded towards certain kinds of people
FP7	Being bullied	bullying,
FP8	Trying to remain positive	try not to let these bad experiences affect my view of life or my positive thoughts.
FP9	Finding support in groups	groups I found most belonging with were the stoners and metal-heads
FP10	Describing the group associated with	Although many of these people had bad habits or seemed tough many of them didn't give a shit about sexual orientation or if someone lived an alternate lifestyle.
FP11	Acknowledging a few supportive administrators	were a couple of administrators who were kind and seemed to really care about the students including me and were very supportive and nice
FP12	Administrators failing to handle bullying effectively	most of the administrators did not maintain professionalism when it came to handling students or dealing with the bullying problem I had
FP13	Describing an experience where participant was denied the right to use female restroom; friend who tried to help was punished	Omitted for confidentiality
FP14	GSD Bullying occurred frequently	was a lot of bullying to LGBT students
FP15	Administration not dealing with GSD bullying	nothing was done about it
FP16	Administration not doing anything about bullying	staff did not seem to do anything about bullying
FP17	Students feeling unsafe	students who were being bullied would definitely feel unsafe.
FP18	Describing community income sources	There are of course franchise and corporate chains [in the community]: a grocery store, dollar stores, and a couple of fast food chains. As well there was hard labor as a source of income for many people in the town

FP19	Describing community's education level	As far as I know most people [in community] either got their high school diploma or GED
FP20	Many dropping out	Many people I knew dropped out and never furthered their education
FP21	Some attending college	A few I knew went on to college.
FP22	Community offering some support to school	My high school was the only high school in my town (there were a few in the nearest town, not far away though.) so I am guessing it received some support
FP23	Believing most people are good	believe most people are good and have a healthy view of right and wrong
FP24	Blaming ignorance, radical religion, lack of education for negative views of GSD and other minorities	but ignorance, a lack of good education and some radical religious leaders also worsened and promoted many unhealthy viewpoints when it comes to minorities and LGBT people.
FP25	Failing to get along, having a few supportive friends	With most people I did not get along well, but I had several friends who showed me support and I know cared.
FP26	Feeling unsafe	Yes, definitely
FP27	Being bullied	Bullying was a problem
FP28	Encountering racist people	I don't know as much about specific cases of racism but I encountered people with very racist beliefs and who made rude racist statements.
FP29	Encountering homophobes	As well anti-LGBT mentality was common.
FP30	Hearing a multitude of slurs	There was much name calling and me and my best friend both heard the words "faggot", "queer" shouted at us constantly on a daily basis. I could expect to hear it three dozen or more times just going to class and in between classes without even acknowledging anyone.

FP31	Reacting to slurs, being punished for reacting, being treated unfairly as slur yeller remained unpunished	Once my friend was called a faggot in the same way by one student when he entered a classroom to ask his teacher about a trip they were going on; he yelled at the guy and said not to judge him without knowing him and to not say such things to people. As a result the teacher didn't allow my friend to go on the school trip, saying he was causing unnecessary conflict and the person who called him a "faggot" received no punishment
FP32	Yelling obscenities at bus loop, "rednecks" shouting slurs, being yelled at, trying to avoid, staying with friends	The place where many people congregated who liked to yell obscenities to gay people was by the bus loop. Every day when I got off the bus and when I went to the bus after class was over a group of rednecks shouted "faggot" and "queer" at me. I tried to stay with friends and walk fast but the name calling continued.
FP33	Feeling afraid, feeling unsafe, wanting to defend oneself, fearing worse treatment if standing up	I always felt scared and unsafe in this circumstance and wanted to stick up for myself but was too scared to say anything cause I felt they would do worse than yell if I did.
FP34	Hearing verbal harassment	Yes very [bullied or harassed] much so as I mentioned previously.
FP35	Not being a victim of physical harassment	There was some fights at school, but the ones I am aware of were over personal issues. I fortunately never experienced actual physical violence in high school.
FP36	Reporting harassment, being ignored, giving up on reporting harassment	I reported [harassment] before and I heard others had too but no changes were made as a result so I didn't report it more since it happened so often and nothing was done when it was reported.

FP37	Lacking support, being nice, being unaware, not knowing how to fix it	There was no real support. The couple of nice administrators I mentioned showed their support by being nice but they must have been unaware of the severity of the situation or didn't know how to change it.
FP38	Supporting school events and sports	There were possibly companies who sponsored sports teams and such but other than that other than members of the community attending the school and their family and friends being involved there in events and such I know of no community involvement.
FP39	Lacking support	limited support
FP40	Providing surface support, not helping	few administrators and teachers showed support but didnt actually do anything to help.
FP41	Students not finding Success	not successful
FP42	Caring about school but not doing well	didnt do well in school even while caring about their education
FP43	Dropping out of high school	finishing high school.
FP44	School climate resembling community climate	school climate is pretty similar to the surroundind area only maybe worse.
FP45	Townspople more accepting overall than school people	the authorities and regular people were overall more accepting and un-prejudiced than at the school.
FP46	Repeating story about unfair punishment.	Omitted for confidentiality
FP47	Choosing to drop out, school still suspending student.	planning to drop out and thay his stepdad was there to sign him out the assistant principal said he would mark him as suspended for the past week.
FP48	Administration supporting anti-gay and anti-trans policy and action	school's administrators supported anti-gay and anti-trans policies and actions.

**APPENDIX P: FOCUS GROUP JACK OPEN CODES**



Jack		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
JK1	Participating in student orchestra	I was in the student orchestra.
JK2	Getting full funding and having multiple advisors for orchestra	Well we were also an actual class as well, so we got full funding. And we had multiple advisors for the orchestra as well.
JK3	Being responsible academically	I was very responsible academically
JK4	Being snarky and sarcastic to everybody	I was very snarky and sarcastic to everybody
JK5	Not doing well socially	I didn't do so well on the social aspect
JK6	Being fine arts oriented	My school is very fine arts oriented
JK7	Having little groups	So whatever group [unintelligible] orchestra, band, dance, they all had their own little groups together but,
JK8	Flowing in an out of groups Not being clique oriented	outside of that people flowed in and out of groups all the time so it wasn't too clique oriented
JK9	Not liking anyone Not going out of way	I didn't really like anyone there anyway so I didn't go out of my way.
JK10	Being cordial with each other	But everybody was pretty cordial with each other.
JK11	Lacking administrative support	Well the administration never directly intervened or came into the picture a lot when it came to LGBT issues.
JK12	Students taking care of issues themselves	A lot of the times it was just kind of taken care of with a lot of the students.
JK13	Sticking up for each other	People would stick up for each other as students where I went to high school
JK14	Suffering if introverted; having to be outspoken	system in and of itself, the students had to be a little bit more outspoken, so if they were introverted, and they were an LGBT student, they were, unfortunately, just usually, they suffered,

**APPENDIX Q: FOCUS GROUP JASMINE L OPEN CODES**

Jasmine L		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
JL1	Being okay	pretty okay in high school
JL2	Getting As, Bs, and some Cs	I definitely was pretty much, As and Bs, and occasional Cs, and social wise, up until my junior year,
JL3	Being loud, being childish, having energy, talking to anybody	I was very loud. Very, kind of childish. A lot of energy, I talked to anybody I could.
JL4	Being told off by a best friend	Then my junior year me and my best friend, who I had met my freshman year, she pretty much told me off
JL5	Losing trust Becoming quiet Making fewer friends	it hurt, so I started trusting people a lot less. I got quiet. I started making less friends
JL6	Being around other band members	unless they were in band with me because we were around each other all the time.
JL7	Dealing with home issues Dropping grades	junior year my grades also dropped because of a personal issue at home.
JL8	Becoming less shy Getting along with everyone Having trust issues still Improving grades	I think my senior year I got, a little bit less shy? My grades definitely went back up, but I still have trust issues.
JL9	Thinking school had cliques but not being sure Getting along with everybody	I think my school had cliques but I could never tell because everybody seemed to get along with everybody else
JL10	Having friends in football, soccer, and everything else	I had friends in football, soccer, pretty much anything.
JL11	Being a happy school Getting along Not fighting	I always had pretty happy school. Like everybody seemed to get along, nobody really fought, much.
JL12	Knowing a possible GSD student	There was actually, one boy in high school that I knew since he was in middle school. I, think, he was gay.
JL13	Not knowing if he came out, but knowing he had support	I don't know if he ever came out or if he was straight, but he-- if he was or not-- he had a lot of support.
JL14	Thinking he was safe due to popularity	I think he was one of the popular guys in our school. So, it seemed pretty safe for him.

JL15	Describing community sources of income	The main source of income in my community was fast food restaurants, hustling such as selling drugs, selling their items, robbing people, and doing favors for the neighbors, for people they know from school, from the community.
JL16	Describing the community	The level of education will be high school, job corps, mostly transfer schools because a lot of people did bad and-- or because of the bullying or problems at home, homeless, foster homes.
JL17	Being mistreated	And then people getting mistreated also.
JL18	Being abused Being chaotic Being closed minded	They get abused, because New York is very chaotic, and so for anything-- there's a little-- there's a problem, people are very close minded.
JL19	Being selfish	They're about them, they're selfish, and so the values are-
JL20	Not caring what people are	in New York, people don't care what you are
JL21	Letting people be who they are Feeling like there are more gay than straight people	I feel like there's more gays over [unintelligible] straight people, because it's-- anybody could be who they want to be.
JL22	Judging based on confidence and appearance	It's really based on your style and your fashion, and how you portray yourself. Because that's how people are going to treat you. It's by the way you carry yourself, yeah.

**APPENDIX R: FOCUS GROUP JAZZMIN B OPEN CODES**

Jazzmine B		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
JB1	Participating in marching band every year	I was in marching band for all of high school
JB2	Trying to be involved in GSA but it was cancelled	joined the GSA at my, Junior year? But it got cancelled.
JB3	Not knowing why GSA was cancelled	No one told us.
JB4	Getting money to participate in a Thanksgiving Parade	we got money for Chicago for a Thanksgiving Parade
JB5	Getting more support for Thanksgiving Parade than for anything else	I think we got more support for that than anything else.
JB6	Getting more support for marching band than for anything else	Marching band

**APPENDIX S: FOCUS GROUP MANDY OPEN CODES**

Mandy		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
M1	Participating in JROTC	was in JROTC, both army and air force branches
M2	Participating briefly in poetry club	I briefly tried the poetry club
M3	Keeping score for basketball	I kept score for JV and Freshman basketball
M4	Getting parental support for ROTC	for both the air force branch and army branch of JROTC we got parents involved
M5	Volunteering and community service with police officers, Moose Lodge, and veterans	we did a lot of volunteer work, so things like Toys for Tots, with the police officers, I would assume, like the Moose Lodge, and things to do with veterans
M6	Supporting volunteer work and ROTC	faculty, like the guidance counselors and whatnot, recommended it and they were supportive
M7	Not knowing where funds came from	But as to where we got funds, I'm not entirely sure
M8	Moving out	Well I moved out at 16 for about 6 months
M9	Attending multiple schools	I've gone to a few different schools
M10	Attending internet school and dealing with family issues	I did an internet school because I was not going to graduate on time due to issues that were happening at home
M11	3rd High School  d high school	[high school] which had just opened
M12	Being Chaplain in ROTC	I was the Chaplain in ROTC
M13	Being well behaved	I would say that I was very well behaved
M14	Missing out on experiences	I missed out on some of the experiences
M15	Being a prude	because I was, sort of a prude
M16	Gaining maturity	I've gained maturity
M17	Having ambition	I have ambition now
M18	Having a new direction	a new direction
M19	Being committed	and I'm committed,
M20	Having a 3.25 GPA	in high school, I had started off, and I had a 3.25
M21	Being on honor roll	I was honor roll
M22	Having plummeting grades due to various things	my grades plummeted due to various things and so
M23	Having a different mindset	I just, I have a different mindset



M24	Wishing she had more connections and more friends	wish I had made more connections, had more friends, looking back on the high school years
M25	Attending a private school	I had been at a private school
M26	Skipping 8th grade which was a bad idea	I skipped 8th grade, which was a bad idea
M27	Having culture shock starting public high school	Complete culture shock when I started at public high school
M28	Being shy and naïve	was very, very shy, very naïve
M29	Barely talking	barely talked that year
M30	Being dressed up by cousin	My cousin would dress me up, she would do my hair
M31	Having a different personality	I would say that I sort of had a different personality then?
M32	Coming out of shell, trying to making friends, being observant, soaking everything in	And just kind of coming out of my shell trying to make friends, really just being observant, soaking everything in,
M33	Changing high schools	I went over to another high school
M34	Having confidence	by then I had a bit more confidence
M35	Having new surroundings	new surroundings
M36	Finding friends	just kind of finding friends
M37	Getting involved in clubs	It was good to get involved in some clubs
M38	Sticking with ROTC students	ROTC though, they prefer that you just stick with them
M39	Knowing other girls	I had known a girl who was over there and then one of my other classmates moved over so that was interesting
M40	Talking more	But I talked a bit more
M41	Being mature	I would say I was pretty mature
M42	Avoiding drugs and bad things	I definitely avoided doing drugs, or getting involved in anything that I thought was bad
M43	Being goody two shoes and not knowing how perceived	I don't know if people perceived me as stuck-up, but I was goody two shoes
M44	Missing out on experiences	I missed out on so many experiences though
M45	Having other things going on	I had a lot of other things going on,
M46	Being a different person in school than at home	I would say I was a different person at school than I was at home
M47	Wishing she was included	just wish I was included in more things
M48	Wishing she had better social skills	wish I had better social skills
M49	Thinking school was good overall	overall, it was good

M50	Learning from it and gaining skills	it was an experience You learn from it And you gain different skills
M51	Preferring one experience over the other	I would say I preferred my experience at Deltona High, my freshman year
M52	Having cliques and having attorney's children	Deland's a pretty good school, there's some cliques, there's a lot of attorney's children there
M53	Having wealthy students	People that come from some money
M54	Not saying much	, high school is what it is, so, I can't really say much
M55	Being a poorer area	At Deltona High I would say it was a poorer area There was gang activity
M56	Having gang activity	There was gang activity
M57	Not being involved in gangs	I was never involved in that
M58	Not seeing the gang activity	I didn't really see it
M59	Being innocent	I was very innocent
M60	Being hit on by girls but not catching on	I remember girls that had hit on me, and I just didn't catch on
M61	Walking by two girls making out	I remember walking by and there was two people outside making out I believe two girls
M62	Being raised in a Christian home Not accepting of homosexuality Being taught homosexuals are going to hell Not being okay with homosexuality	I was raised in a Christian home so that was not accepted Basically we're taught you go to hell Homosexuality is just-- it's not okay when you're raised as a Christian
M63	Changing schools	When I went over to Deland
M64	Having a few friends	I had a few friends,
M65	Being told about things they had done sexually Having friends be open Hearing things that they do Being fine with it Being glad they trust her	I remember them talking about various things they had done sexually Everyone's been very open with me They just tell me things that they do, which I'm fine with I'm glad they trust me
M66	Finding it strange	But I think at the time I found it strange
M67	Having issues with cousin Thinking she was bisexual Having feelings toward cousin	I had some issues with my cousin; I do believe she was bisexual I remember having some feelings towards her
M68	Feeling guilty Having head played with	And I felt very guilty but I think she played with my head
M69	Setting things in motion	That was probably what set things in motion

M70	Having issues with other cousin	And I had issues with her sister, as well, who lived with me, both of them did
M71	Having a boy crazy best friend who came out as bisexual and then married a woman	Looking back I had a best friend in 9th grade, and she was boy crazy, she then came out as bisexual, she then married a woman
M72	Being surprised about not catching on due to group of friends	And just looking at my group of friends, it surprises me now that I didn't catch on to those things
M73	Attending internet school	My senior year, I left to go and do internet school
M74	Did online school so volunteered at public library	I started volunteering at the library
M75	Volunteering at the library	I started volunteering at the library
M76	Being seduced at work by a girl	I had a girl-- she kind of seduced me but nothing really came of it outside of work
M77	Being in denial about being LGBT Being against being lesbian or bisexual	And I remember saying, oh, I would never be bisexual, I would never be lesbian, any of that I was very much against it
M78	Looking up things on internet Feeling strange	And so I started looking things up on the internet, I started feeling strange, just like, no this is not good
M79	Trying to find someone to blame Asking mom about noticing anything Not understanding	Trying to find someone to blame Like, hey mom, did you happen to notice anything when I was little? Did anyone pick up on it? It was not okay and I didn't understand
M80	Getting hands on anything she could	just getting my hands on anything I could, books, articles on the internet, anything
M81	Remembering talking to home-schooled kids Not having right to label anyone Believing a girl is a lesbian although she claimed to be bisexual	I then remember talking to a group of kids, it was a family, they were home-schooled, and I have no right to label anyone but, I do believe the girl Tina is a lesbian, although she claims she was bisexual
M82	Going out Being secretive	We sort of started going out but she's younger than I was and her family didn't know, so everything was very secretive
M83	Being on a tight leash	And I was on a very tight leash

M84	Having an abusive home life Not being able to date	My home life was abusive so I couldn't really date
M85	Not being able to do things Being very proper Being well behaved	I couldn't really do things and I was very proper, very well behaved
M86	Hearing peer group have derogatory reaction about being GSD	So as far as people being accepting, I heard others around me, my peer group being derogatory
M87	Thinking homosexuality not ok	But at the time I was not okay with the idea of homosexuality, because I was just taught it was not okay
M88	Accepting that being GSD is not okay Having an aversion to being LGBT Becoming or doing what you have the strongest aversion to	So I accepted that but it's interesting, the things you have the strongest aversion to, you often do or become
M89	Not saying born this way	And, as far as, are you born this way? I can't say that I was
M90	Thinking LGBT develops over time	I think it just, sort of, happened over time
M91	Not labeling self Being open minded Not seeing anything wrong with homosexuality now	I don't want to label myself, I'm still trying to figure things out, but, I'm very open minded and I don't see anything wrong with it now
M92	Being who you are Respecting and accepting self	So, you are who you are and you should respect yourself and accept yourself because, when all is said and done, you have, yourself
M93	Setting things in motion	which I would say was another thing that sort of set things in motion
M94	Being attracted to a guy Arguing whether or not guy is gay	I was attracted to this guy and my friend was like, he's gay and I'm like no, he's not, no he's not
M95	Seeing guy make out with boyfriend	Well one day I walked into my psychology class and-- the popular kids were allowed to come over and skip-- and they got privileges, and he was making out with his boyfriend
M96	Being naïve	I was like, oh! huh! I just figured he was bi and, like I said, I was naive
M97	Wondering about attraction to gay male	So I was like, why was I so attracted to him and this and that?
M98	Knowing other gay guys Laughing with friends Belonging to a crowd	And, I knew other gay guys and I would see them laughing with their friends, so I really think it just depended on what crowd they were in

M99	Feeling that bisexuality was easier	I would say it was probably easier to be bi because then people could go oh, it's a phase or well, you know, at least you're not lesbian or gay
M100	Feeling that bisexuality was more acceptable due to perception of not committing	It just-- it was almost like-- if people could persuade you because you hadn't really committed, or you just didn't know
M101	Being safe depending on friends/groups	I really honestly believe it depended on what group you were in
M102	Having teachers with varying levels of acceptance	And you know you had professors or teachers that were very traditional and then you had other ones that were more open minded
M103	Feeling most comfortable with English teachers	I would say I felt most comfortable in my English classes, because they let you express yourself and I did well, and I just-- the teachers-- they were nice
M104	Being safe depending on friends/groups	So, yeah, it just depends on who you're friends with and the things they had been taught
M105	Being safe depending on friends/groups	How open they are to seeing a different point of view, or if they can separate themselves from their upbringing
M106	Feeling pressure to identify	I feel like a lot of time there's pressure, even by people in the community to pick a side, make a choice, are you femme or butch? Are you experimenting? Are you bi, lesbian, gay
M107	Needing time for the process	And I really think it's a process
M108	Allowing time to figure it out	And you have to allow the person time to figure it out
M109	Not needing to label self	I don't believe in having to label, however some people need that
M110	Making up own mind	And I think just, realizing that you can make up your own mind, regardless of your community, your upbringing, your friends, and whatnot
M111	Wishing there were more supporters for LGBT people	I would say I wish there was more supporters, more people that you could confide in
M112	Lacking allies in high school	I don't recall there being allies at my school

M113	Recognizing allies stickers	there's stickers
M114	Having allies in college	I know there's stickers here, so that's kind of neat

## **APPENDIX T: FOCUS GROUP NAOMI OPEN CODES**

Naomi		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
N1	Participating in student government.	I was in the student government
N2	Putting on events for school.	we just did events for the school
N3	Being social.	In one school I was the social person
N4	Doing well academically and having a 4.0 GPA	I was doing really good. I had a 4.0 I think
N5	Being social and knowing everybody	but I was really social, I knew everybody
N6	Going to a different school	then when I went to another high school
N7	Being a loner	I was a loner.
N8	Knowing most people and staying alone with self	I knew people, I knew most of the people, but I just stayed alone to myself
N9	Being a loner	I was a loner
N10	Performing so-so academically Not having good grades but passing	and I did, eh [so-so]. I wasn't that good with my grades but I was passing
N11	Going to a different school	And then in my other high school
N12	Knowing everybody	again I just knew everybody
N13	Passing school	but I was passing everything good.
N14	Being in uniform and not being able to tell how someone dresses	it was like everybody used a uniform, so, I guess when you're in uniform you can't really tell how someone dresses or how they look or things
N15	Being different types of people	since everyone was in uniform, everybody would just be different type of people.
N16	Being cool with each other and having your own groups	So everybody would be cool with each other, but everybody had their own groups though at the same time.
N17	Not being judged because all wearing the same thing, Not being able to tell who's who	you wouldn't really be judged because you were all wearing the same thing so you wouldn't be able to tell who was who.
N18	Being gay, bisexual, or lesbian and being straight	In that school, that one with uniforms, most percentage of the school was, gay, bisexual, or lesbian. Well, there were straight people too.
N19	Being accepting	But it was pretty cool because everybody was very accepting.
N20	Changing schools	when I switched to other two schools



N21	Not having a uniform	we didn't have a uniform, it was like a normal high school public school type thing
N22	Having groups of Spanish people, jocks, cool people, nerds, and geeks by themselves; Everyone else being united in the cafeteria	So, there was the Spanish people, and then the jocks, and just the cool people, and then, nerds and geeks on the other side of the school by themselves, and everybody else in the cafeteria was united
N23	Being separated Seeing who everybody was	
N24	Not knowing each other because of only having 10 minutes of lunch Remaining in the same classroom for 4 hours	the other school, we only had 10 minutes of lunch, so nobody really got to know each other because we all remained in the same classroom for 4 hours,
N25	Being safe in one school	So, one high school, it was cool. Everyone was safe.
N26	Not being safe on one school	Another high school, you weren't really safe.
N27	Being safe if popular	If you were popular, if you were really popular, people were cool because you were popular.
N28	Being unsafe if not popular Being bullied and made fun of	But if you weren't popular and you were gay, people would bully you and make fun of you,
N29	Having a high rate of suicide among unpopular GSD bullied kids	and there was a lot of deaths, suicides in my school because of that.
N30	Wearing purple in remembrance of the kids that committed suicide	each year we'd have day that we'd always wear, I think purple. I don't know what color for those kids that committed suicides, and I knew some of them.
N31	Being unsafe in the larger school and feeling safer in the smaller school	The one about the suicides was a big school, the other one was small so it wasn't bad.
N32	Being accepted by school adults	In the school that everyone was very accepting, the teachers, the faculty, everyone was so amazing, so great.
N33	Being allowed to make own group	If you wanted to make your own group, they would let you
N34	Getting support from teachers	You just talked to them and they'd support you in what you wanted to do

N35	Supporting a foster kid	They even had-- if there was-- there was this kid in a foster-- he was a foster, and he wanted to get a phone. The teacher got him a phone and paid for him.
N36	Getting support from teachers (smaller school)	And kids, there was this one guy, he was like my brother, and supposedly his ex-boyfriend had something and they had sex. The teacher took him after school to go get tested.
N37	Getting support from teachers (smaller school)	And they're very supporting, they always there for you
N38	Having a safe zone (smaller school) Punching a punching bag Avoiding fights	we had a safe zone there too. Where after a fight you could go there and had a punching bag and push you out of the fight and make you punch there and it had bats in there so you could hit that instead of there.
N39	Having a place to rest (smaller school)	If you didn't rest the night before you could go into that place and they let you sleep there the first 30 minutes of class, so you could get your rest.
N40	Supplying hair products, snacks, supplies for kids in need	they had an area where-- some people didn't have much so they had shampoos and conditioners, and some snacks and things there, comb, brushes, and, they would supply to you if you really needed it
N41	Supplying money for prom dresses	And people who didn't have money for their dresses for prom or homecoming, they would give that to you.
N42	Getting support from smaller school	And it was just really great supportive.
N43	Lacking support from larger schools	And then against the other ones, they weren't that--. They were cool
N44	Getting support from smaller schools Knowing more people	I think small schools, they're very-- you get to know more other people so they're very helpful towards you,
N45	Lacking support from larger schools Not helping everybody and minding own business	you're a bigger school you can't really help everybody in there as much as you can, so they're-- they don't-- they mind their own business.
N46	Lacking support from larger schools	They'll try but they're not really going to try that much as toward smaller schools.

## **APPENDIX U: FOCUS GROUP SENNA OPEN CODES**

Senna		
Code Number	Open Coding	Example of Participant's Words
S1	Attending two different high schools; attending private school and public school	I was in two different schools during high school. I was in a private school and a public school.
S2	Having closed minded people in school	In my private school there was some, there was some people who were very closed minded.
S3	Not understanding being gay	They don't understand being gay.
S4	Trusting only best friend	So, the only one I trust about my sexuality is my best friend.
S5	Having an understanding friend Changing to public school	She grows up as a hippie. So she understands how I felt and she knows I wasn't ready to stand, until I moved to a different school which is Lyman.
S6	Changing schools being new and unsure	I went there-- I was still not sure about-- I'm still not sure about it because I was the new kid.
S7	Being a loner	And I was more of a loner then when I was in-- until I entered at this new-- at this new one.
S8	Being helped by a friend at new school Hanging out with a friend's group Hanging out with her own group	She's gone help me, she helps me out with it-- with what's going on? (unintelligible) And she actually-- and I started hanging out with her group, and I started to hang out with groups of my own.
S9	Learning some new friends are GSD	And then I learned that some of them are actually bi, gay, straight, or lesbian.
S10	Feeling safe	So I kind of feel safe around them and I started to tell them that I'm straight but I'm kind of have a feeling-- I'm having unusual feelings toward girls.
S11	Realizing she may be bi because of GSD friends	And that's what they help me realize that I might be bi.
S12	Being encouraged to tell mom and feel free	So they encourage me to tell my mom about it, and encourage me to feel free about myself.
S13	Feeling caged in private school Needing to get out	I'm actually glad I changed schools because, when I was in private school, I just feel like a cage in there. I just feel like I just needed to get out of there.

**APPENDIX V: FOCUSED/THEMATIC CODES FOCUS GROUP**

<b>Thematic Codes</b>	<b>Focused Codes</b>	<b>Open Codes</b>
Describing the qualities of a negative school ethos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Feeling unsafe at school</li> <li>b) Experiencing or seeing bullying/harassment</li> <li>c) Feeling that only popular GSD kids are safe</li> <li>d) GSD girls finding more acceptance than GSD boys</li> <li>e) Receiving negative reactions from peers</li> <li>f) Feeling isolated/ Keeping to oneself</li> <li>g) Losing friends after coming out</li> <li>h) Experiencing closed-mindedness</li> <li>i) Not coming out until after high school</li> <li>j) Dropping grades/performing poorly</li> <li>k) Feeling guilty</li> <li>l) Dropping out of school</li> <li>m) Lack of administrative support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (S10) (N31) (N25)</li> <li>b) (A24) (AS32) (JK14) (JL16) (AS 37) (AO27) (FP7) (FP14) (FP27) (FP30) (FP31) (FP32) (FP34)</li> <li>c) (AO27) (N27) (JL14) (A28) (AS25) (AS26) (M101) (M104) (M105)</li> <li>d) (AS26) (AS34) (AS35)</li> <li>e) (M86)</li> <li>f) (S7) (JL5) (A2) (A4) (A6) (AS5) (AS8) (AO14)(AO18) (AO19) (AO16) (JK5) (M24) (M29) (M47) (A1) (FP1)</li> <li>g) (AS14)</li> <li>h) (S2) (S3) (JL18) (FP28) (FB29)</li> <li>i) (A16) (M60)</li> <li>j) (JL7) (AS11) (M22) (FP4) (FP41) (FP42)</li> <li>k) (M68) (M79)</li> <li>l) (FP20) (FP43) (FP47)</li> <li>m) (AO6) (AO7) (AO8) (FP40) (FP39) (JB2)</li> </ul>
Describe the qualities of the positive school ethos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Relying on the support of one/few close friends</li> <li>b) Receiving support from some faculty and staff</li> <li>c) Receiving support from some administration</li> <li>d) Receiving support from other GSD peers</li> <li>e) Receiving equal treatment and access</li> <li>f) GSD students standing up for other GSD students</li> <li>g) Belonging to clubs/teams/groups</li> <li>h) Belonging to GSAs</li> <li>i) Fitting in/Trying to fit in</li> <li>j) Getting along well with most peers</li> <li>k) Maintaining good grades</li> <li>l) Feeling safe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (S4) (S5) (S8) (A7) (AS6) (AS15) (AS37) (AO24) (M36) (M39) (M40) (D2) (M101) (FP9) (FP25) (FP32)</li> <li>b) (A5) (A13) (A21) (A22) (A23) (A25) (M103) (N34) (N35) (N36) (N37) (AS21) (AS22) (N33)</li> <li>c) (N40) (N38) (FP11)</li> <li>d) (S9) (JL13) (AS24) (M98) (N18) (N19) (N30) (S9) (S11)</li> <li>e) (N14)</li> <li>f) (AS33) (AS 36) (JK13) (A25) (D4)</li> <li>g) (N1) (D1) (AO1) (AO2) (AO20) (AO21) (AS1) (AS2) (AS3) (AS4) (JB1) (JK1) (M1) (M2) (M3) (M12) (N2) (N3) (JK1) (FP2)</li> <li>h) (JB2) (AO2)</li> <li>i) (M30) (M31) (M32)</li> <li>j) (JL8) (JL9) (JL10) (JL11) (N5) (N19)</li> <li>k) (JL2) (JL8) (AS7) (AO12) (AO13) (N4) (M20) (M21) (A3)</li> <li>l) (A19) (AS29) (AS30)</li> </ul>

**APPENDIX W: FOCUSED/THEMATIC CODES TEACHER INTERVIEWS**

Thematic Codes	Focused Codes	Open Codes
Creating a positive school ethos for GSD individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Making Efforts to make all students feel welcome</li> <li>b) Believing that GSD specific language is included in policy</li> <li>c) Believing that Mission/Vision statements acknowledging diverse populations</li> <li>d) Community support for school in general</li> <li>e) Visible GSD faculty/staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (CO1) (SH2) (JS1) (JS2) (RC1) (RC2) (LR1)</li> <li>b) (MF15)</li> <li>c) (JS21) (LR19)</li> <li>d) (CO14) (JS22) (JS23) (LR23) (LR24)</li> <li>e) (MF4) (TD9)</li> </ul>
Creating a negative, or unsafe, school ethos for GSD individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Lacking safety for GSD students</li> <li>b) Believing that school is not meeting mission/vision statements</li> <li>c) GSD students not receiving support from administration</li> <li>d) Negative outcomes based on community (religious beliefs, no value for education, low level education)</li> <li>e) Hearing or seeing verbal harassment toward GSD individuals in the school or use of slurs *towards non-GSD students</li> <li>f) Hearing negative comments made about GSD students or faculty by faculty/staff</li> <li>g) Believing GSD students are treated differently than general population</li> <li>h) Feeling that some GSD fit in better than others (girls, bisexuals, popular LGB individuals)</li> <li>i) Lacking specific language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (CO6) (LR3) (LR7) (RC10) (LR11) (VH7) (VH8) (TD6) (RC10)</li> <li>b) (LR21) (LR22) (VH24)</li> <li>c) (MF10) (RC25) (RC74) (LR10) (RC63)</li> <li>d) (CO15) (CO16) (LR15) (RC72) (LR28) (LR29) (SH15) (SH19) (SH27) (RC58) (RC61) (TD3)</li> <li>e) (VH38) (TD14) (TD8) (RC72) (RC33*) (RC67) (RC34*) (RC39*)</li> <li>f) (LR33) (VH19) (SH 29) (SH30) (TD8)</li> <li>g) (LR34) (LR35) (VH35)</li> <li>h) (TD23) (VH41) (VH42) (MF5) (MF6) (MF7) (MF9) (MF17) (RC10)</li> <li>i) (M16) (M17)</li> </ul>
"Don't ask, don't tell!" Wanting the GSD students to be invisible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) GSD students remaining silent about who they are or when hearing/experiencing verbal harassment</li> <li>b) Believing that community/school prefers to ignore the existence of GSD issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (VH 16) (VH17) (RC27) (RC36)</li> <li>b) (SH8**) (SH16**) (SH9**) (SH17**) (SH33**) (SH34**) (RC75***)</li> </ul>



		<p><b>**In vivo code: "Don't ask, Don't tell"</b></p> <p><b>***In vivo code: "... a taboo issue in this community."</b></p>
Providing limited support for GSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Believing that there is policy for Anti-Bullying/Harassment</li> <li>b) Believing that Mission/Vision statements including safety and the learning environment as a concern</li> <li>c) GSD students relying on circle of friends or group of other GSD for support</li> <li>d) GSD students finding support from one or two trusted teachers</li> <li>e) Experiencing difficulty when requesting support for GSD students (GSAs and policy changes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (CO5) (CO7) (SH3) (MF1) (TD1) (RC 42) (RC43)</li> <li>b) (VH23) (JS21) (LR19)</li> <li>c) (CO9) (SH20) (MF12) (TD13) (TD 20) (JS11) (JS12) (JS14) (JS18) (LR12) (SH13)</li> <li>d) (MF8) (MF13) (CO10) (JS3) (JS14) (LR14) (SH21) (RC28) (RC29) (RC11)</li> <li>e) (RC19) (RC20) (TD3) (TD4) (TD5) (TD6) (LR8) (LR9) (SH11) (SH12) (SH29) (SH30) (RC23) (RC24)</li> </ul>
Believing all students including GSD are experiencing an overall positive ethos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Believing overall school climate is good for all</li> <li>b) Students interacting well with peers</li> <li>c) Students interacting well with faculty/staff</li> <li>d) GSD students thriving in school and community</li> <li>e) Believing GSD students are treated equally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) (JS1) (JS4)</li> <li>b) (JS10) (JS15) (VH14) (VH34) (RC31) (RC32)</li> <li>c) (JS10)</li> <li>d) (JS13) (JS18)</li> <li>e) (JS16) (JS17) (RC15)</li> </ul>

**APPENDIX X: THE SUMMARIES OF EXEMPTION**



**EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH (Individual Interviews)**

**Title of Project:**

School Ethos and Rural Communities: Balancing the intended ethos and the experienced ethos for sexual minority students in rural secondary schools

**Principal Investigator:**

Frankie Huff, M.Ed., Graduate Student- UCF

**Faculty Supervisors:**

Dr. Elsie Olan, Ph.D.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you. You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

**The purpose of this study** is to explore the balance of intended and experienced ethoses in rural secondary schools in the state of Florida for sexual minority students (students who identify as gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, pansexual, omniseual, transsexual, queer, or questioning).

IRB Protocol No.  
Date:

**As a participant in this study**, you will be interviewed by the researcher. During the interview, you will be asked questions regarding the climate of the school in which you are employed, the sexual minority or perceived sexual minority students in your school, the intended ethos (climate) dictated by mission statements and educational acts, and the community which surrounds your school.

**The session will be recorded** both with audio and video devices if conducted face-to-face. Phone interviews will be recorded for audio. Skype sessions will be recorded both for video and audio. Participation in the study requires consent to be recorded. All recordings will be transcribed by the researcher, and then will be destroyed by the researcher. Email sessions will be printed and transferred to field notes with pseudonyms, then original emails will be deleted and hard copies destroyed. To maintain your confidentiality, you will be assigned a pseudonym, as will your school. All written and transcribed data will be stored, under your assigned pseudonym, on the researcher's personal password-protected file storage devices (external hard drive and computer drives).

**This interview will last approximately one hour.** If the researcher feels further clarification of a comment is needed, you may be contacted via telephone or email for clarification within two weeks of the interview.

**You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time.** Data collected prior to withdrawal, may still be used by the researcher.

IRB Protocol No.  
Date:

**Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem:** If you have questions, concerns, or complaints Frankie Huff, M.Ed., Graduate Student, Educational Doctorate Program, College of Education and Human Performance, (###) ###-#### or by email at frankiehuff@knights.ucf.edu. You may also contact Dr. Elsie Olan, Ph.D., Faculty Supervisor, College of Education and Human Performance by email at Elsie.Olan@ucf.edu.

**IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint:** Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (###) ###-####.



**EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH (Focus Groups)**

**Title of Project:**

School Ethos and Rural Communities: Balancing the intended ethos and the experienced ethos for sexual minority students in rural secondary schools

**Principal Investigator:**

Frankie Huff, M.Ed., Graduate Student- UCF

**Faculty Supervisors:**

Dr. Elsie Olan, Ph.D.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

**The purpose of this study** is to explore the balance of intended and experienced ethoses in rural secondary schools in the state of Florida for sexual minority students (students who identify as gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, pansexual, omnisequal, transsexual, queer, or questioning).

IRB Protocol No.

Date:

**As a participant in this study**, you will be in a focus group consisting of 4-20 individuals.

During the focus group, you will be asked questions about your secondary school experiences and the climate in your secondary school and surrounding community with regard to sexual minority students.

**The session will be recorded** both with audio and video devices. Participation in the group requires consent to be recorded. All recordings will be transcribed by the researcher, and then will be destroyed by the researcher. To maintain your confidentiality, you will be assigned a pseudonym, as will your school. All written and transcribed data will be stored, under your assigned pseudonym, on the researcher's personal password-protected file storage devices (external hard drive and computer drives).

**This focus group will last approximately one and one-half (1.5) to two (2) hours.** If the researcher feels further clarification of a comment is needed, you may be contacted via telephone for clarification within two weeks of the initial focus group.

**You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time.** Data collected prior to withdrawal, may still be used by the researcher.

**Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem:** If you have questions, concerns, or complaints Frankie Huff, M.Ed., Graduate Student, Educational Doctorate Program, College of Education and Human Performance, (###) ###-#### or by email at frankiehuff@knights.ucf.edu. You may also contact Dr. Elsie Olan, Ph.D., Faculty Supervisor, College of Education and Human Performance by email at Elsie.Olan@ucf.edu.

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IRB Protocol No.  
Date:

**IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint:** Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (###) ###-####.



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