Straight allies: Combating homophobia and interrogating heteronormativity 'straight' on

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the experiences of five allies and their involvement in Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in secondary schools in Southwestern Ontario, Canada. Drawing on both queer theoretical perspectives and Kumashiro's (2002) framework of anti-oppressive education, I investigate what motivates or influences allies' decisions to become members of GSAs, and I explore their roles as allies in secondary schools. This inquiry portrays how allies play a critical role in facilitating social change in their schools, and how GSAs positively contribute to school communities. By investigating the experiences of allies, I wish to emphasize the importance of authorizing students' perspectives as a powerful opportunity to engage students in transforming educational policy and practice. Moreover, this process of student engagement draws attention to how educators might nurture alliances between straight-identifying and queer pupils in schooling by listening to the voices of students themselves.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all those in 'hiding'; it is my hope that we may become 'unhidden', if we so choose. To my friends that feel they cannot be who they are: stay strong, one day we'll live our lives 'out' loud.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my thesis supervisor, Wayne Martino, for your guidance, support, and encouragement. I have appreciated the opportunity to learn from you.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Agency – The capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices (Knox, D., Mooney, L., Nelson, A., & Schacht, C., 2001)

Ally – a person "who works to end oppression in [their] personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate for, the oppressed population" (Wall & Evans, 1991, p. 195).

Gay-Straight Alliances – Student-led clubs within schools, where queer students and supportive allies advocate for a better school climate, educate the school community about queer issues and support sexual minorities and their allies (GLSEN, 2007).

Gender – "A social construct based on a group of emotional, behavioural and cultural characteristics attached to a person's assigned biological sex. The gender construct then classifies an individual as feminine, masculine, androgynous or other. Gender can be understood to have several components, including gender identity, gender expression and gender role" (GLSEN, 2009, p. 40).

Hegemonic Masculinity –Societal agreement of culturally normative male behaviour; males are encouraged to adopt these behaviours

Hegemony – The political, economic, ideological or cultural power exerted by a dominant group over other groups. It requires the consent of the majority to keep the dominant group in power (Knox et al., 2001)

Heteronormativity –an ideological system that naturalizes heterosexuality; the normalization and the taken-for-grantedness of heterosexuality

Heterosexism - A system of attitudes, bias, and discrimination in favour of opposite-sex sexuality and relationships. It can include the presumption that everyone is heterosexual or that opposite-sex attractions and relationships are the only norm and therefore superior (Knox et al., 2001)

Homophobia – Negative attitudes towards homosexuality

LGBTQ – An acronym used to refer to individuals that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning.

Marginalization – The social process of being made marginal (to relegate or confine to a lower social standing or outer limit or edge) (Knox et al., 2001)

Prejudice – An attitude or judgement, usually negative, about an entire category of people based on their group membership (Knox et al., 2001)

Queer – 1) "An umbrella term used to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to heteronormative society" (GLSEN, 2009, p.42). 2) "a positionality vis-a-vis the normative..." (Halperin, 1995, p. 62)

Straight Ally – a person who identifies as heterosexual and who advocates for LGBTQ rights

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

> "A key to social change is that privileged groups come to realize that their position is unearned, that it is a matter of social definition and established traditions of power, rather than inherent or demonstrated superiority. Once they recognize this, they see that the rights and advantages they enjoy should be granted to everyone" (Miceli, 2005, p.226).

Introduction

My research investigates the experiences of self-identifying straight allies and their involvement in Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in secondary schools in Southwestern Ontario. I am concerned to investigate what motivates or influences their decisions to become members of GSAs, and I am interested in examining their commitment to purposefully disrupting heteronormativity within their educational institutions.   By heteronormativity I mean the normalization and the taken-for-grantedness of heterosexuality. Moreover, my inquiry captures how straight students are, at times, acting with agency to both address sexual injustice and to purposefully dismantle sexual and gender binaries that sustain heteronormativity in education. Furthermore, the challenges associated with problematizing homophobia and disrupting heteronormativity in secondary schools are revealed.   My investigation purposefully set out to include the experiences and perspectives of straight male allies because most empirical literature on GSAs and indicates that allies mostly comprise female students (Goldstein & Davis, 2010). In addition, one gay-identifying ally is also included in this study to spotlight how they are negotiating their subjectivities within homophobic and heteronormative institutions.

Defining an Ally

Washington and Evans (1991) define an "ally" as an individual from a majority group who works to eliminate oppression by supporting and advocating for oppressed

groups. Furthermore, Bishop (2002) suggests that allies are distinguished from others because they possess the following characteristics:

- their sense of connection with other people, all other people;

- their grasp of the concept of social structures and collective responsibility

- their lack of an individualistic stance and ego, although they have a strong sense of self;

- their sense of process and change;

- their understanding of their own process of learning; their realistic sense of their own power;

- their grasp of "power-with" as an alternative to "power-over";

- their honesty, openness, and lack of shame about their own limitations;

- their knowledge and sense of history;

- their acceptance of struggle;

- their understanding that good intentions do not matter if there is no action against oppression;

- their knowledge of their own roots (p. 111).

Thus, core qualities consistent among allies include: compassion for others, a strong sense of responsibility, an unwavering commitment to addressing inequalities in society, and a comprehensive understanding of social power relations. In sum, allies' awareness of social issues and their capacity to understand human needs, compel them to contribute to positive social change. Bishop (2002) further writes,

> "They understand that they must act with others to contribute to change. They believe that to do nothing is to reinforce the *status quo*; not to decide is to decide; if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem…They take responsibility for helping to solve problems of historical injustice without taking on individual guilt. Most look for what they can do, with others, in a strategic way, and try to accept their limitations beyond that" (p.110).

It is undeniable that allies occupy a crucial role in facilitating positive social change in society through their adoption of attitudes and behaviours that reject the marginalization of people and challenge the construction of unjust human conditions. Kumashiro (2002), for example, argues that anti-oppressive approaches to education have the potential to create "new activist possibilities for who students can be and become" (p. 201). This being said, my research captures how heterosexual allies are pushing back against homophobic and heterocentric school culture; they are actively pursuing sexual and gender justice in secondary schools through their advocacy for equitable social and educational provisions for queer people. Wells (2006) states that a ally is "a person, regardless of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity, who supports and stands up for the human and civil rights of LGBTQ people" (p.5). The allies from whom I gathered data are vigorously working to raise awareness about LGBTQ issues and they are generating positive changes at their schools through their participation in GSAs.

With respect to sexual and gender ideologies, it is essential to ascertain how heterosexual allies are coping with competing narratives i.e. embracing LGBTQ- positive personal attitudes and beliefs in the face of social and systemic homophobia within the educational system. Stotzer (2009), for example, writes, "How can any one person develop positive attitudes in the confusing social landscape that offers both positive and negative stereotypes about LGB people" (p. 68). Despite being exposed to differing messages about LGBTQ people, straight allies are supporting queer rights and addressing sexual and gender prejudice and discrimination. My research captures the essence of such resistance to the marginalization of queer individuals. Moreover, my

inquiry provides an opportunity for the actions of heterosexual allies to be validated as contributing to the diminishment of social and political barriers that sustain gender and sexual inequities. Overall, it is important to recognize the LGBTQ activism efforts of straight allies because as Goldstein and Davis (2010) write, "heterosexual allies are...powerful advocates for the LGBT movement" (p. 479); they have the ability to generate positive social change.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of my research, therefore, is to generate further knowledge about straight allies and their involvement in GSAs. Heterosexual allies may participate in GSAs, which are student-led clubs within schools where queer students and supportive allies together advocate for a better school climate, educate the school community about social justice issues, and support sexual minorities (GLSEN, 2007). Furthermore, "GSAs are identified as a critical change agent that can help to create safe, caring and inclusive schools for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, queer (LGBTQ) students and their allies" (Wells, 2006, p. 4). My research is important because there are few empirical studies on GSAs (Stotzer, 2009). Likewise, little research has explored queer-positive attitudes held by straight-identifying individuals; most literature documenting heterosexual students' feelings towards LGBTQ people has drawn attention to the extent to their prejudicial and negative attitudes, although, evidence suggests there has been an increase in acceptance for sexual minorities (Stotzer, 2009).

My research is informed by Queer Theory, which provides a conceptual framework for both thinking about sexual identity and addressing sexual oppression in schooling in terms of deconstructing normalcy. Moreover, Queer Theory underscores

the negative ramifications of heteronormalization and acknowledges the power to dismantle its oppressive reign. Sullivan (2003) asserts, "Queer (Theory) is constructed as a sort of vague and indefinable set of practices and (political) positions that has the potential to challenge normative knowledges and identities" (p. 43-44). My research deemphasizes the naturalization of queer identities, in place of questioning the sedimentation of the heteronormative bedrock that monopolizes educational space. It is also informed by the framework elaborated by Kevin Kumashiro (2002) on anti-oppressive education, which describes four ways of conceptualizing and combating oppression: "education for the Other, education about the Other, education that is critical of privileging and Othering, and education that changes students and society" (p.31).

Britzman (1998) discusses the "unthinkability of normalcy" (p. 87), which is characterized by the inability of society to interrogate socially, circumscribed 'norms' associated with sexuality and gender. In the current homo/hetero dichotomy, heterosexuality is constructed as 'natural' and 'normal', which positions homosexuality as 'deviant' and 'abnormal'; this ubiquitous ideology conceals the historical nature of sexualities as arbitrary or contingent on cultural evolution (Jagose, 1996). Consequently, people who are or are perceived to be queer, or associate with queer individuals, routinely endure inequitable treatment, victimization, and verbal and physical assault. The silencing and overt omission of queer voices underpins heteronormative practices within Canadian schools. Morris (2005) describes heteronormativity as "the illusion that heterosexuals are the only people on the planet and are the center of all sexual practices" (p. 9). The "inability" or unwillingness of

many educational institutions to interrogate heterosexism, leaves the normative construction of heterosexuality intact. Lisa Duggan (1998) asserts that we must work to "destabilize heteronormativity rather than to naturalize gay identities" (p.570). Hence, we need to dismantle hegemonic ideologies that foster an inequitable system, rather than build on to it. This process of critically examining and deconstructing sexual and gender categories corresponds with Queer Theory's emphasis on demystifying the creation of coherent identities (Gamson, 2000).

Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) argue that as a society, "We want to shift [the] normalizing gaze away from the Other and to fix it firmly on those who have the power to classify and objectify" (p. 75). Hence, it is essential to dismantle the privileged gaze of the oppressor to denigrate queer culture, identities, and bodies. My research investigates how straight allies in secondary schools in Southwestern Ontario are disrupting heteronormativity, combating homophobia, and, at times, attempting to expunge the hetero/homo binary which pervades society and infiltrates the educational system. Furthermore, I examine the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of straight allies in an attempt to uncover their commitment and success in unlearning homophobia and disrupting heteronormativity through self-reflexive practices. This topic is indeed worthy of exploration because little is known about the motivation, beliefs, or activities of heterosexual allies (Miceli, 2005). Altogether, this inquiry explores the experiences of straight allies to discover how they are actively pursuing sexual and gender justice in secondary schools in Southwestern Ontario through their involvement with GSAs. Overarching research questions include: How have self-identified straight students come to be involved in GSAs in their secondary schools?

How do heterosexual students understand and perceive their involvement in GSAs? Are straight allies combating homophobia they encounter at school? Are they actively unlearning anti-queer attitudes? What are the challenges associated with disrupting heteronormativity in school communities?

Context and Significance of the Research

> "Heterosexuality is normative. It is hegemonic. It is institutionally sanctioned, ideologically affirmed, and socially encouraged and expected" (Khayatt, 1992, p. 205).

Schools are microcosms of society, thus it is expected that they will reflect the homophobia that exists in the general public. Unks (1995) argues that secondary schools are perhaps the most homophobic institutions in American society; thus it is imperative for researchers to investigate how some youth are leading, taking risks, and bringing about social change within heterosexist institutions. Moreover, because "adolescents spend a large portion of their time in the school context...schools are a potential setting for positive youth development and resiliency" (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011, p. 175).

Flowers and Buston (2001) assert that conformity is taught within schools through the mindless consumption of 'norms' and the adoption of seemingly 'natural' roles. Hegemonic sexual and gender models perpetuate the notion that deviation from the 'norm' is unsettling, and thus, queer people are considered problematic, rather than homophobic and transphobic attitudes and behaviours. Overall, the manifestation of dominant sexual and gender ideologies in education camouflage the need to address prejudice, in the form of heterosexism, directed towards queer people. Similarly, Morris (2005) purports that "schooling plays a large role normalizing sexuality and

gender...heteronormativity scripts roles that schooling enforces" (p. 11). More specifically, given the *heterosexual matrix* which Butler (1990) defines as the "grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized", heterosexuality is positioned as 'normal' in schools, often resulting in marginalization of queer sexualities and genders. Blaise (2005) writes,

> "Critiques of heterosexism are attacks not on heterosexual practices, but on the discourses of heterosexuality and how they have become embedded in the foundations of our thoughts and accepted as unproblematic; subsequently manifesting and maintaining power over marginalized identities. Failing to question or interrogate heterosexuality as a form of sexism leads to simplistic understandings of gender (p. 60).

Blaise (2005) brilliantly identifies the need for staff, students and parents to challenge preconceived notions of 'normalcy' and to unlearn harmful discourses that privilege heterosexuality at the expense of queerness. Schools cannot continue to embrace the limited notion of tolerance, which is evident in safe schools policies that seek to address homophobia without analyzing and addressing the oppression of queer youth through daily heteronormative schools practices. This 'remedy' for inequality generates inadequate knowledge, fails to elicit critical thinking, and it exacerbates the concept of 'normalcy' by overlooking institutionally sanctioned inequalities, such as heterosexism. Through "individualizing the harassment of queer youth, schools abdicate their responsibility for challenging power systems and culture that privilege heterosexuality over homosexuality" (Goldstein, Russell, & Dalley, 2007, p. 187). Britzman (1995) explains that Queer Theory circumvents homophobic explanations of sexual prejudice because it fails to scrutinize the naturalization and normalization of heterosexuality. Although, anti-homophobia strategies in schools are designed to build a safe and secure

school environment for LGBTQ learners, this educational philosophy neglects to disassemble the harmful heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy and question the naturalization of heterosexuality. Schools must delve deeper into the roots of injustice to rectify the marginalization of queer people; learners must be prompted to unlearn hegemonic constructions of gender and sexuality, which sustain heterosexism within schools because heteronormativity "pushe[s] people into fixed identities within gender binaries" (Connell, 2009, p. 43). Plummer (1989), for example, designates four components within education that nurture heteronormativity: the 'hidden' curriculum, a deficiency in queer role models, the construction of peer relationships based on heterosexuality, and rampant homophobia in schooling. These factors contribute to the acquisition of biased knowledge, which limits students' exposure to diversity and ultimately nourishes their "impulse to normalize" (Britzman, 1998, p. 92). All in all, without the interrogation of normative gender and sexuality constructions, systemic inequalities will continue to thrive and disenfranchise queer youth and punish straight allies.

In 2005 Canada became only the forth nation to legalize same-sex marriage (Haskell, 2008). The "legalization of same-sex marriage may have granted symbolic legitimacy to same-sex relationships, but it provides little protection for queer youth who enter into them" (p. 9). Furthermore, although non-normative sexualities are progressively being accepted within larger society (Stotzer, 2009), "educational institutions at all levels still suffer their students, faculty, and staff to a highly heterocentric culture" (Rodriguez, 1998, p. 177). While equity and inclusion policies exist in all Ontario school boards, many administrators, parents, and students are

aggressively opposing the creation of GSAs, despite the fact that these clubs are designed to address issues of equal access and accommodation, "which are firmly established and protected in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and all provincial and territorial human rights statues" (Wells, 2006, p. 26).

The Banishment of Justice

> "In the case of the GSA movement, not only was opposition inevitable, it was predictable" (Miceli, 2005, p. 140).

In Faculties of Education in Ontario, Canada, teacher candidates learn that an essential ingredient in a great educational recipe for instruction is the facilitation of critical thinking opportunities. Thus, educators are responsible for creating cultures that encourage their students to reflect on and analyze their beliefs, values and assumptions. Furthermore, pupils should be prompted to examine and challenge dominant ideologies, afforded opportunities to interrogate 'knowledge' presented in course content, and be permitted to share their thoughts and engage in dialogue about social issues. Friere (1970), for example, writes:

> Critical thinking cannot exist without dialogue. Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education (p. 128).

Hence, when students are denied opportunities to critically examine queer identities, culture, and history due to the absence or outright banning of LGBTQ content in schools, systemic injustice is preventing youth from obtaining a 'true' education; ultimately, this raises ethical issues of indoctrination.

Secondary schools are often considered spaces where private matters, such as sexuality and gender identity, should be officially avoided (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). Often, these topics are classified as taboo or too mature for youth to encounter (Ferfolja, 2007); consequently, queer topics are often avoided due to potential backlash from students, parents and school administrators. Discussions of same-sex partnerships and gender fluidity in schooling are often met with opposition because these topics are commonly and problematically linked to 'recruitment' discourses (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006). Moreover, some people believe that queer people are trying to acquire more LGBTQ members through dialogue about sexual minority issues. Miceli (2005) suggests that GSAs are strategically framed as having a "homosexual agenda" (p. 148) in order to invalidate the existence of these clubs within many schools. The public rejection of GSAs has been more prominent within school boards with religious affiliation. This comes as no surprise; LGBTQ content censoring has long been the 'norm' in schools that operate within a Catholic framework. These schools continue to disenfranchise queer people through the privileging of heterocentric curricula, and the maintenance of heteronormative school culture, which is embedded within daily practices and policies. Overall, Didi Khayatt (2006) fervently declares, "Schools teach intentionally (through the curriculum) and unintentionally, through values promoted by teachers, administration, boards, and parents, a taken for granted normative sexuality and concomitant expectations of gender behaviour" (p. 135).

The Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) in Ontario, Canada, banned the formation of GSAs during the fall season in 2010. The ban persists today and students are encouraged to form groups called SIDE (Safety, Inclusivity, Diversity, and

Equity) to discuss social justice issues within a limited Catholic framework (Houston, 2011). It is apparent that the board is actively censoring students' opportunities to engage with queer issues. The chair of the board, Alice LeMay, states, "If a gay student requests a Gay-Straight Alliance they would be denied…It's not in accordance with the teachings of the church. If they wanted to have a club outside of school, fine, just not in school" (Houston, 2011). This prejudicial ideology highlights one way queer youth and their allies are silenced within schools, which is a form of homophobia.   Within noncompliant Catholic schools, "representation also becomes homophobic when it endorses or participates in a politics of silence or erasure regarding the existence of other sexualities as a way to maintain the belief, erroneous as it is, that somehow humanity and heterosexuality are synonymous" (Rodriguez, 1998,p.183). The HDCSB's decision positions heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexual orientation and knowledge that contradicts this belief is regarded as problematic. Likewise, Frances Jacques, the principal at St. Joseph's Catholic Secondary School in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, also refused to grant students permission to create a GSA at their school. While student activists were unjustly denied a setting to challenge heterosexist assumptions, they are continuing their pursuit for social justice at school (Houston, 2011). The trials and tribulations of queer students and straight allies are powerful reminders of how youth are actively working together to address LGBTQ prejudice in schools, despite opposition from authority figures and their peers. The resilience and dedication of these individuals is prompting necessary social change in society.

On November 30th, 2011, Premier Dalton McGunity announced that students will no longer have to stand aside while the formation of GSAs in their schools are banned.

Recent anti-bullying initiatives, which include a clause on GSAs (Greenburg, 2011), have been developed by the Liberal party to "promote gender equity, anti-racism, respect for people with disabilities and people of all sexual orientations and genders with groups called gay-straight alliance 'or another name'" (Houston, 2011). Interestingly, the proposed bill does not provide protection for bullying against teacher allies and queer-identifying educators, thus, more work will be necessary to make schools safer for all queer people and their allies.

In light of this development, Charles McVety, the president of the Canada Christian College in Toronto, states:

> "to force especially Christian classrooms or schools to have homosexual clubs would of course be an affront to their family values. This is an obvious disconnect between providing supportive spaces for all students and the undeniable bullying of queer youth in schooling. And what does this have to do with bullying?" (Greenburg, 2011).

It is clear, that many individuals who hold fundamental religious values continue to suppress the development of equitable educational provisions for queer people in social institutions based on religious grounds. The most apparent reason for non-compliance with legislation is motivated by the objective of maintaining the 'immoral' nature of LGBTQ people. In fact, Miceli (2005) argues that conservative Christians' investment in trumping sexual minority rights is purposely constructed to combat that which "threaten[s] to destabilize the foundations of the nation" (p. 140).

Through my research, I met two female queer-identifying secondary students who previously attended Catholic secondary schools in Southwestern Ontario, but

recently switched institutions to attend a public high school. They both communicated that their former school tried, but could not "beat the gay out of them." This statement is concerning because the safety and welling being of queer-identifying students within schools that do not provide them with environments to unapologetically express their sexual and gender diversity can be alienating. In the future, qualitative research, which depicts the experiences of queer youth in Catholic institutions would provide powerful narratives which may highlight the how queerness gets negotiated within religious settings.

Interestingly, out of the 46 ally participants in the Goldstein and Davis (2010) study, 93% reported attending religious services rarely or never (p. 485). Thus, the majority of these allies in this study did not consider themselves to be religious. Despite this apparent incompatibility, religious youth may maintain LGBTQ-positive attitudes. The amalgamation of these two seemingly clashing beliefs is an intriguing topic that requires further investigation. Clearly ignorance within public institutions breeds misinformation, facilitates prejudice and produces the classification, stratification, and victimization of minority populations. Queer people are not mythical beings; they exist in Catholic schools, regardless of policies that attempt to erase their presence; queer individuals *are* at the front of the class, they *are* in the locker room, and they *are* picking up their child from school. To deny this reality and to silence queer issues continues to result in an infringement of the human rights of sexual minority populations in school communities.

Preordained Personhood

> "Schooling tends to produce squashed selves because many teachers and school administrators already have preconceived notions about who kids are, or who they should become when they grow up" (Morris, 2000, p. 19).

Children are often told that they can be anything they want to be when they grow up. Regrettably, this notion is a fallacy because youth have to negotiate who they are within predetermined parameters that limit self expression. Gamson (2000) argues that the problem with educational institutions resonates with how schools operate to heterosexualize and to impose gendered expectations on pupils. Thus, the idea of being a queer person in society becomes incoherent with dominant ideologies that denigrate sexual minorities. Clearly normative discursive intelligibilities of gender and sexuality limit possibilities of human expression (Foucault, 1978). What are the consequences of such systemic practices? "In what ways do sex/gender shape identities or limit who we can be or what we can do?" (Morris, 2005, p. 9). Hegemonic sexual and gender beliefs, embedded within particular religious institutions, inhibit the actualization of LGBTQ justice through the purposeful devaluation of sexual minorities. Miceli (2005) describes religious rights groups' justification for the dismissal of queer issues when she writes, "A shift toward acceptance of homosexuality in one institutional realm (schools, marriage, media, etc.), they argue, will disrupt the accepted and necessary moral order of American society, which is considered linked to normative heterosexuality" (p. 150). Thus, the status quo, heterosexuality, is institutionally sanctioned and privileged through the purposeful abdication of queer validation because same-sex partnerships are perceived as 'unnatural' and immoral.

A Call for Action

LGBTQ inequality is blatant and remains, for the most part, unaddressed in society. This injustice calls for all people, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, to take action to rectify this human rights predicament. Moreover, it is imperative that all people, not just staff and students who identify as LGBTQ, take a stand against heterosexism. More often than not, "Those who are traditionally marginalized remain outsiders, called upon as "experts" to speak with their own voices to educate the norm, only to be deemed not rational because they speak from a visible (i.e., a non-dominant) standpoint" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 39). For example, Miceli (2005) describes the potential ramifications associated with queer youth combating LGBTQ prejudice without assistance from straight allies; she contends that there are many factors that inhibit the possibility of queer people from producing necessary social change independent from the sexual and gender majority. Firstly, sexual minorities are often plagued with the negative stigma of being queer, which may hinder the general public's experiences of empathy towards LGBTQ people. Secondly, due to systemic inequalities, queer people are often denied access to institutional power. Miceli goes on to describe the crucial role straight allies have played in the GSA movement:

> The willingness of heterosexual students to rally around and stand up for the rights of their LGBT peers, of teachers to sometimes risk their jobs to advocate for the safety and education of all their students, and of the regional and national organizations to use their resources to coordinate and support all of these efforts, bolstered the political impulse of some LGBT youth and made it into a movement (p. 194).

This being said, straight allies occupy an invaluable role in the fight against LGBTQ prejudice and discrimination.

Many straight allies may be in a privileged position to ameliorate gender/sex binaries without being victimized on the basis of their self-identified sexual orientation. Alternatively, many allies, due to their queer activism efforts, may be forced to absorb some of the victimization directed towards LGBTQ people. Goldstein and Davis (2010) conducted a study with 46 heterosexual students in an American college GSA to "investigate characteristics of students who commit to acting as allies in reducing sexual prejudice" (p. 478). In this study, 55% of students believed that straight allies would be "teased and harassed"; 63% thought allies would be "physically threatened"; and 45% of the participants thought allies would be "avoided" by other heterosexuals. Meanwhile, only 24% of participants reported feeling that straight allies would be respected. This study illuminates the need for additional research to examine stigma by association in intergroup attitudes and behaviours because peer backlash may diminish or even inhibit the recruitment of straight allies in GSAs (Goldstein and Davis, 2010).

Despite potential adverse consequences, many straight allies are electing to join GSAs to advocate for a better school climate, educate their school community about queer issues, and support sexual minorities (GLSEN, 2007). Their experiences with combating LGBTQ prejudice in education and their motivations for joining GSAs are the focus of this thesis.

Theoretical Framework: The Use of Queer Theory

> "Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-a-vis the normative...[Queer] describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance (Halperin, 1995, p. 62)

My research is informed by both queer theoretical perspectives and Kumashiro's framework of anti-oppressive education, which raise important questions about the impact of heteronormativity or the naturalization and normalization of heterosexuality in social institutions. This section commences with the examination of Kumashiro's (2002) anti-oppressive framework. Thereafter, I focus on the history and significance of Queer Theory, and I examine how it serves as the theoretical underpinning of my in(queer)y.

Anti-Oppressive Education

Kumashiro (2002) suggests four ways to conceptualize and combat oppression. This section examines his framework of anti-oppressive education, which raises important questions about the impact of heteronormativity in social institutions**.** He utilizes the term, 'Other', to describe 'groups' of people who are traditionally marginalized in society, such as LGBTQ people, females, students of colour, and families with low socioeconomic status (SES). Moreover, he indicates that people are classified as 'Other' if they identify as "*other than* the idealized norm" (p. 32). The 'norm' is widely accepted as a Caucasian, heterosexual, male with a high SES. 'Othered' people are socially and/or systemically oppressed through a variety of actions and behaviours that range from prejudicial attitudes to overt forms of discrimination. Overall, oppression is defined as "a dynamic in which certain ways of being (or having certain identifications) are privileged in society while others are marginalized" (p. 31). My research attempts to draw attention away from the negative experiences of the 'Other', and to focus on the myriad of ways in which straight allies are creating positive social change in school environments.

Education for the Other represents a strategy to improve the experiences of marginalized individuals. Within this approach, schools are positioned as places where the 'Other' is harmed by erroneous expectations, and through stereotypical and prejudicial treatment from pupils and educators. To address this injustice, Kumashiro (2002) asserts that schools must welcome, inform, and fulfil the needs of marginalized students. With respect to LGBTQ inequities in schooling, GSAs can provide supportive spaces for queer youth that facilitate their integration into the school community. Kumashiro further states: "School needs to provide separate spaces where students who face different forms of oppression can go for help, support, advocacy, [and] resources..." (2002, p. 35). *Education about the Other* embodies what students already know or should know about 'Othered' people.   Ending oppression in schools requires that students learn about anti-oppressive knowledge.   Kumashiro (2002) suggests that oppressive knowledge is fostered through the silencing of and the misunderstanding about the 'Other'.   In schooling, normative notions of gender and sexuality are reinforced by the silencing of queer narratives in curricula and the maintenance of the troublesome homo/hetero dichotomy.   Often, queer identities are denigrated and homophobic remarks or actions remain unaddressed in class.   In response, the purposeful disruption of heterosexist knowledge, achieved through the consistent integration of LGBTQ matters in curricula and the problematization of 'norms' within GSAs, may help alleviate the oppression of queer people in schools. My inquiry captures how allies are addressing homophobia, individually and collectively, through their participation in GSAs in schools by educating the community about the 'Other'.

The aforementioned anti-oppressive initiatives are considered superficial methods of addressing the marginalization of people because they do not operate to dismantle systemic oppression or redefine 'normalcy'. The following approaches acknowledge a deeper need to uproot oppression in schools. Kumashiro (2002), for example, believes that schools need to direct their attention to *Education that is Critical of Privileging and Othering,* instead of merely focusing on *Education for and about the Other.* He suggests that the "dual processes of privileging and Othering are often invisible because they are masked in common sense" (p.82). Thus, heterosexuality is couched in the guise of 'normalcy.' This approach emphasizes the importance of acquiring more knowledge about oppression and comprehending and critiquing inequity in society. Unlearning prejudice and acting to combat oppression underscore this initiative. In this sense, my research explores how straight allies are unlearning heteronormative conceptions of gender and sexuality and addressing LGBTQ oppression in their schools.

Lastly, Kumashiro describes how oppression is produced by discourse through his explanation of *Education that Changes Students and Society.* Furthermore, the repetition of discourse leads to its naturalization. This being said, the reprising of formally derogatory terms, such as queer, is utilized to take back their power to be harmful. This approach emphasizes the practices of reflecting on our personal privileges and confronting our own prejudices. Kumashiro's (2002) anti-oppressive framework underpins my research because straight allies are operating within certain heteronormative limits to elicit social and systemic changes in their secondary schools. They are working to make schools inclusive spaces through the deliberate eradication of

homophobia. Through their participation in GSAs, which offer opportunities to challenge students' preconceived and heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality, they are examining oppressive relations, and taking action to reduce gender and sexual inequalities in their schools.

Queer Theory

Heterosexuality is held in esteem because it has been culturally constructed as "natural", thus, positioning homosexuality as unnatural by default. Queer Theory offers a new way of thinking that helps to interrogate and disrupt socially constructed polarities that manipulate identify formation (Carlson, 1998). The next section offers insights into how Queer Theory informs my research.

Throughout one's life and especially during puberty, there is a press for heteronormativity (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Kimmel, 1994); boys and girls, for instance, are expected to engage in 'opposite' sex attraction because it is a 'normal' rite of passage, specifically within the school environment. Thus, sexual identities are regulated and negotiated through a heteronormative lens during this developmental phase. Kehler (2010) writes, "Schools are, by default, heterosexualized by the daily practices, routines, and curriculum largely supported by the majority of teachers and administrators" (p. 14). Furthermore, it is evident that through the intentional silencing of queer identities in the official curricula, the naturalization and normalization of heterosexuality is constructed and sanctioned (Britzman, 1995). Due to heteronormative pressure embedded within social institutions, including the family,

media, schools, and religion, many queer youth feel isolated and unsupported. The isolation of queer youth has been well documented (Martin & D'Augelli, 2003), which demonstrates the necessity of queer youth to have compassionate allies. More specifically, Wells (2006) acknowledges the invaluable necessity for visible allies to advocate for LGBTQ justice in schools. Overall, Kumashiro (2000) highlights the moral and social significance of confronting and addressing oppression when he purports, "to fail to work against the various forms of oppression is to be complicit with them" (p. 29). Thus, heteronormative pressure placed upon straight youth does not exonerate them from the responsibility of eradicating homophobia and confronting heterosexism in society.

Queer Theory "provides a conceptual resource for moving beyond the binaries of schools as either safe or unsafe places for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, and LGBTQ youth as either 'normal' or 'deviant'" (Linville, 2009, p. 153). Thus, Queer Theory seeks to dismantle the normalization of identities which construct essentialized categories of people and contribute to gender and sexuality polarities. Essentializing people is not logical; however ambiguous categories have been assembled to tame the diversity which exists in the populace. People cannot fit into neatly compartmentalized boxes (even if you stuff them in) because *individuals* have numerous intersecting identities.

A historical overview of the emergence of identity classifications as they relate to non-normative sexuality is an important basis for understanding the significance of Queer Theory for my own research on GSAs. In the 1960s, individuals with non-normative sexualities started referring to themselves as "gay" and "lesbian" in an

attempt to "[reclaim] their identity from the medical profession" (Carlson, 2009, p. 109) that pathologized same sex sex-acts. Beginning in the 1970s, focus shifted to processes of denaturalization, which emphasized that "sexuality is a set of meanings attached to bodies and desires by individuals, groups, and societies" (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Drawing upon constructionist knowledge, Foucault claimed that homosexuality was a modern invention because same-sex sex acts, which previously existed in society, yet were unidentified, now corresponded with categories of identification (Jagose, 1996). Thus, Foucault brilliantly proposed the notion of socially constructed subjectivities based on classification of specific sexual acts. Likewise, other proponents of Queer Theory suggest that stable sexuality and gender categories are a fallacy because they are "historically contingent and continually negotiated in relational interactions" (Linville, 2009, p. 165). Similarly, Britzman (1998) describes identity is a discursive social production, which is dependent on the zeitgeist of the times.

Identity politics developed in response to a prejudicial culture that meticulously policed non-normative genders and sexualities. Butler (1991) argues that identity categories function "as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (p. 13-14). Likewise, Gamson (1995) states that identity classifications are simultaneously political and the basis for oppression; he also questions the validity of coherent groupings in light of the instability and fluidity of identities. Despite, persistent critiques on essentialized identities, politics of difference have historically been bonded with political intervention (Jagose, 1996).

Queer Theory surfaced in the 1990s (Jagose, 1996; Morris, 2005), when it began to critique Gay liberation, which essentialized all gay and lesbian people by creating a

stable, "coherent community, united by a collective lesbian and gay identity" (Jagose, 1996, p.62). However, Morris (2005) fervently declares, Queer Theory is not about liberation; its academic merit resides in its "opposition and resistance to normalizing, medicalizing, reifying discourse and social practices" (p. 11). Queer theorists argue that no one possesses identities because they are a process, not a property (Jagose, 1996), thus, Queer Theory deliberately interrogates the manufacturing of identities and the existence of identity politics (Gamson, 2000). Fundamentally, Queer Theory challenges the essential bases of identity categories (Linville, 2009) because queer is eternally ambiguous and relational (Jagose, 1996); "by refusing to crystallise in any specific form, queer maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal" (Jagose, 1996, p. 99).

Martino (2009) writes, Queer Theory is an "analytic tool that enables a critical focus on deconstructing sexual categories and identities that are often circumscribed by a logic determined by defining heterosexuality in opposition to homosexuality" (p. 387). It raises questions about the ways in which the homo/hetero duality underpins contemporary life (Gamson, 2000). Morris (2005) suggests that compartmentalizing society into dualities is a primitive way to make sense of the complexities that exist in the world.

> Queer theorists view heterosexuality and homosexuality not simply as identities or social statuses but as categories of knowledge, a language that frames what we know as bodies, desires, sexualities, identities. This is a normative language as it shapes moral boundaries and political hierarchies...Queer theory is suggesting that the study of homosexuality should not be a study of a minority – the making of the lesbian/gay/bisexual subject – but a study of those knowledges and social practices that organize 'society' as a whole by sexualizing – heterosexualizing or homosexualizing – bodies, desires, acts, identities, social relations, knowledges, culture, and social institutions (Seidman, 1996, p. 12-13).

Thus, Queer Theory provides me with an analytic framework to interrogate an institutionally sanctioned heteronormative system. Questioning this system is imperative because heteronormativity manufactures a hetero/homo dualism that limits our understanding of gender, sexuality and sexual desires.

Hence, the purpose of Queer Theory is not to naturalize sexual identities, but to dismantle the system that has the power to categorize people and ultimately maintain heteronormativity. Moreover, Queer Theory is an "angry protest, resisting insidious discursive practices that do violence to the marginalized" (Morris, 2000, p. 16). Within a schooling context, some teaching practices work to naturalize or normalize homosexuality in the name of equality through the inclusion of queer identities in secondary curriculum. This practice of normalization, as Britzman (1995) points out, often relies on merely including gay subjects in the curriculum while leaving the heteronormative system intact. Such interventions operate as a superficial and ineffective attempt to address LGBTQ oppression within education.

Queer Theory informs my own conceptualization of sexuality and the regulatory function of schools in their capacity to both enforce and interrupt heteronormative systems of oppression. Moreover, Queer Theory provides both analytic and conceptual tools for making sense of the role of GSAs not just as a site for affirming fixed sexual identities but as means by which all students can work together to address homophobia and the limits of heteronormative thinking. In conjunction with Kumashiro's framework of anti-oppressive education, Queer Theory is employed to draw attention to both systems of oppression, in terms of their impact on sexual minority students, and the important role that heterosexual-identifying students might play in their role as

allies in addressing and combating the deleterious effects of institutionalized homophobia and heternormativity in school communities. Overall:

> Queer theory threatens to tear down many of the walls surrounding and protecting dominant forms of identity and the structures built into society meant to support them. It is a threat to inequality and those who benefit from it. It is a threat to ignorance (Nadjiwan, 2002, p. 19).

Thesis Overview

This thesis explores positive attitudes held by straight secondary students about queer people because much of the literature documenting heterosexual people's feelings towards LGBT individuals has tended to highlight their prejudicial and negative attitudes (Stotzer, 2009). Overall, the purpose of this investigation is to generate more knowledge about straight allies and their involvement in GSAs because there is little, if any, empirical research in Canada on these social justice clubs.

Chapter one explains the intricacies of the inquiry and the context and significance associated with exploring the attitudes and beliefs of heterosexual allies and their participation in GSAs. Queer Theory is positioned as the theoretical underpinning of my research. Moreover, an exploration of Queer Theory and Kumashiro's work on anti-oppressive education demonstrates how they inform my investigation by providing an opportunity to interrogate heteronormativity within an educational context.

In chapter two, I acknowledge the empirical work available on straight allies and I provide a historical overview of GSAs. In the literature review, I explore current research that documents the development of positive attitudes towards queer people. Firstly, a societal trend that suggests the increasing development of queer-positive

attitudes is explored. Next, straight allies' contribution to the LGBTQ movement is acknowledged. Thereafter, two major studies which examine the attitudes and beliefs of straight college-based GSA members are presented and positioned as informing my research investigation. The history of GSAs within American and Canadian contexts is also explored. The significance of GSAs is presented, followed by a critical analysis of hegemonic masculinity and its impact on the development of supportive LGBTQ attitudes among young men. The concept of agency among queer youth and their allies is the focus of the next section.

Chapter three specifically outlines the methodological aspects of the study. Moreover, I discuss the methods I utilized to gather and analyze the data for this investigation. Drawing upon traditional qualitative methodology, I utilized semi-structured, open-ended interviews to collect data. Thereafter, I thematically organized the data to foster sense making.

In chapter four and five, an analysis of the data is presented. In chapter four, I present information about the straight allies I interviewed. Moreover, demographic information is revealed, their motivations for joining GSAs are explained, and the triumphs associated with their GSA involvement are presented. In chapter five, I discus the challenges associated with generating LGBTQ-positive schools and the implications of homophobic school culture and institutionalized heteronormativity and heterosexism. In the final chapter, I provide a brief overview of the research and its objectives, and suggest implications for further in(queer)ies. In addition, policy and practice suggestions, which have the potential to create positive social change in secondary institutions and elicit a more equitable educational atmosphere, are provided.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the research problem, which is to generate more knowledge about straight allies and their involvement in GSAs. Limited research conducted on GSAs and few empirical studies involving straight allies justify this research; the significance of this research resonates with the desire to learn more about how heterosexual allies are coping with competing narratives regarding sexual and gender diversity. This research is vital given the recent banishments of GSAs in Catholic schools in Ontario, Canada, which as I have pointed out in this chapter, continue to demonstrate the prevalence of inequitable educational provisions. Lastly, in this chapter, I directed attention to the negative consequences associated with LGBTQ activism amongst straight allies as an important backdrop and motivation for conducting this research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

> "Extraordinary assumptions about the position of queer people in our society cannot be made without exploring the ordinary experiences of our everyday lives" (Haskell, 2008, p.11).

In this section I provide an overview of some of the significant literature in the field that deals with straight allies and GSAs in school communities and I examine how it informs my own research topic. In North America there have been few empirical studies on GSAs and straight allies, particularly within a Canadian context. There is a need for further research that illuminates the role of heterosexual allies and the role and purpose of GSAs in secondary schools. Previous studies with straight allies who participate in GSAs have been limited to college clubs. Additionally, these inquiries have neglected to explore multiple sites in one study. Thus, my scholarly work attempts to fill these empirical gaps by building knowledge in these areas. Moreover, I interviewed GSA members from secondary schools to produce an in-depth understanding of various roles and purposes of GSAs and to generate knowledge on the roles of heterosexual allies in GSAs.

Available research suggests that straight allies play an important role in the GSA movement and that GSAs may contribute to the development of more positive school

climates. What the review also revealed was that existing research has focussed on female participants as GSA allies; hence, learning more about the perspectives of male students helps build further knowledge and understanding about the role that heteronormative policing of masculinity might play in its capacity to influence the participation of straight male students as allies in such school clubs.

Straight Allies: Taking a Stand for Human Rights

"Expressions of allegiance from heterosexual students or adults are powerful reminders
of the significance of straight allies to the GSA movement" (Miceli, 2005, p.193).

Loftus (2001) reports the prevalence of increasingly positive attitudes towards same-sex relations and the growing support for removing restrictions on the civil liberties of LGB people. Interestingly, Stotzer (2009) asserts, "researchers have rarely studied the development of factors affecting the positive attitudes of supportive heterosexual people" (p. 68) in the USA, despite literature that demonstrates an increase in acceptance of sexual minorities within an American context. Understanding how positive attitudes arise among heterosexual-identifying people helps propel social movements forward. Furthermore, Miceli (2005) acknowledges that:

> The movement would have grown much more slowly, made less of an impact on change, and perhaps even have died out completely before it really got off the ground, if it had relied only on the courage and activism of LGBT students...a youth movement that relies solely on gay students would have little chance of making a noticeable impact on America's schools (p. 194).

Hence, straight allies' effort in advocating for LGBTQ rights and their contribution to the formation of more equitable circumstances for queer people is noteworthy. Miceli

(2005) indicates that beginning in the late 1980s, there was an effort by queer people and their allies to voice concerns about homophobic school culture because it was silencing queer students and rendering them invisible. Although, queer students and straight allies began their pursuit of equality over 20 years ago, the fight for anti-heterosexist education is currently a social and political issue. For example, Park (2011) states that recently the Senate has approved the controversial "'Don't say gay bill", which will make it illegal for teachers in elementary schools to talk about homosexuality in schools in Tennessee, United States. Perhaps, politicians believe that if teachers do not talk about queer sexualities, they will cease to exist! The outright censoring of non-normative sexualities at school is a clear example of systemic injustice. Altogether, "This process of heterosexual hegemony has a large negative impact on the experiences LGBT, and, in fact, all students have in schools" (Miceli, 2005, p.223). Today, in spite of grandiose demonstrations of LGBTQ human rights opposition, the actualization of social change is more feasible due to the gains of the gay rights movement.

The Development of Straight Allies' Queer-Positive Attitudes

Stotzer (2009) interviewed 68 self-identified heterosexual college students, who participate in their school's GSA, about their queer-positive attitudes and their attitude formation. These students were asked to explain their attitudes towards homosexuality, how their attitudes were formed, and how their attitudes are reinforced. Stotzer identified three important factors contributing to attitude formation; the first was the presence of early normalizing experiences in childhood where LGBTQ affirmation was encountered. In this feature, participants' identified that same-sex couples represented a minority; however, they were not taught this was wrong. Participants indicated that

parents were a positive influence in their attitude formation. Fascinatingly, "parents often indirectly conveyed messages to their children by how they treated the issue of sexual orientation" (Stotzer, 2009, p. 72). Thus, many parents did not always directly demonstrate their acceptance and support of LGBTQ people. Stotzer's study revealed that youth may develop supportive attitudes towards queer citizens from experiencing varying parenting styles. It is important to note that a deficit in early childhood normalization did not inhibit students from developing queer-positive attitudes. However, straight allies' exposure to early normalizing experiences did assist them in developing meaningful relationships with queer peers. Other positive influences indicated by straight allies included, contact with queer adults and exposure to LGBTQ content in popular culture. However, it is apparent that stereotypical images of queer individuals are often embedded within popular media for youth to devour and digest; thus it is essential for schools to provide other food for thought, by actively assisting youth to interrogate dominant images and to question oppressive "sedimented, rigid gender/sexuality categories" (Morris, 2005, p. 12). Clearly, GSAs can play an important role in this capacity.

The second aspect identified by Stotzer (2009) as impacting queer-positive attitude formation was meeting queer pupils in high school or college. Moreover, 25 participants in her study declared that they had a queer friend in high school: "For those participants who had early normalization in childhood, meeting LGB peers in high school and early college crystallized their developing attitudes, but for those who had not had normalizing experiences, meeting LGB peers was often a more tumultuous event" (p. 76). Therefore, although some heterosexual allies did not encounter early

normalization in childhood, they still had the capacity to challenge sexual hegemony and unlearn prejudicial attitudes towards sexual minorities. Lastly, Stotzer's study revealed that participants who experienced empathy towards LGBTQ peers or who rejected queer prejudice contributed to positive attitude formation towards sexual minorities. For example the struggles queer peers encountered with social and familial acceptance often provoked feelings of empathy, which in turn bolstered straight allies' queer-positive attitudes. Empathic responses to the mistreatment of LGBTQ people also fostered feelings of resistance. Thus, many participants in Stotzer's study indicated that their resistance to negative attitudes toward queer people helped consolidate their supportive LGBTQ attitudes.

Likewise, Miceli (2005) writes,

A sense of urgency in response to students' stories of abuse and to the reports of suicide and other risk factors ushered in energized and dedicated allies who sped up the progress of the GSA movement. These alliances further break down hegemonic forces by increasing the numbers of heterosexual people who have come to realize that the oppression of LGBT individuals is unjust and to start to understand the power behind the social construction of inequality" (p. 225).

Goldstein and Davis' (2010) research also echoes this sentiment; findings ascertained from their inquiry suggest that exposure to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender related prejudice prompted much higher levels of queer activism among straight allies. They surveyed 46 straight allies from a single college GSA. The purpose of their investigation was to delineate the attributes of heterosexual students who commit to disrupting sexual injustice. The inquiry assessed allies' intergroup contact and their prior experiences with queer prejudice, "endorsement of positive

stereotypes and immutability beliefs, perception of ally role in terms of the potential for stigma by association, and the level of intergroup communication apprehension" (p. 478). The purpose of this study was to generate a descriptive ally profile. Fruitful data gathered from this study includes heterosexual allies' motivations for participating in their school's GSA; 85% of participants identified that advocating for human rights and supporting queer friends were reasons for joining the alliance. Similar to Stotzer's (2009) study, Goldstein and Davis (2010) discovered that many participants joined their school's GSA to advocate for civil liberties and to support their queer friends. Furthermore, straight allies had previously befriended LGBTQ youth or were acquaintances with queer individuals. With respect to intergroup contact, 96% of respondents reported being acquaintances with LGBTQ individuals, 83% indicated they have close queer friends, 41% have extended LGBTQ family members, and 8% of participants have immediate family that identify as sexual minorities.

The Goldstein & Davis (2010) study focused on one single American GSA and the majority of participants were, "white, female, politically liberal, and religiously inactive, social science and humanities majors" (p. 489). Given this demographic Goldstein and Davis (2010) support the need for future studies that focus on a more diverse group of allies. For example, they indicate that securing a male perspective or interviewing religious individuals could provide fruitful data. Additionally, allies were positioned as potentially having difficulty accurately identifying factors that contribute to their own social justice attitudes and behaviours,. Goldstein & Davis (2010), therefore, conclude that "more extensive quantitative and qualitative studies are needed to fully understand ally motivation and development" (p. 480). In this regard, my study will strengthen the

limited research available on straight allies and their participation in Gay-Straight Alliances.

Straight Ally Commonalities

Miceli's (2005) research also reveals that the majority of straight ally students were motivated to become involved with GSAs for political reasons; they were aware of LGBTQ needs, often from exposure to queer issues through their personal connection with queer family members or friends. She goes on to state, "the basic underlying element influencing most people's desire to get involved with a GSA at their school was an awareness of the needs of LGBT students and a feeling that being involved was the right thing to do" (p. 200). Her research reveals that straight allies were dedicated to helping others, especially female heterosexual allies. The majority of participants in Miceli' research were female, which demonstrates the value of investigating the experiences of male straight allies and to ascertain if there are circumstances that inhibit males from joining and participating in GSAs. Miceli (2005) purports: "Although a much larger sample would be needed to definitely establish a pattern, my findings suggest that both gender and sexual orientation have an impact on a person's willingness to get actively and visibly involved with their school's GSA" (p. 200). My research includes male straight allies in order to provide insights into how gender might have an impact on their participation or willingness to engage in GSAs.

On the whole, Poteat et al. (2009) suggest that "peers and schools can promote positive youth development through the provision of social support and belonging, and that further research might focus on the role of heterosexual allies (e.g., students who actively support and affirm sexual minority students) to compliment and extend

research assessing sexual prejudice" (p. 960). Hence, Poteat et al draw attention to the significance of producing further knowledge about straight allies, which informs my own research focus on the role played by straight allies within the context of GSAs in school communities.

The Role of GSAs

Egale Canada, Canada's LGBT human rights organization, surveyed over 3700 students from across Canada from December 2007 through June 2009. Phase one of the study revealed that:

- Over half of LGBTQ students did not feel accepted at school, and almost half felt they could not be themselves, compared to one-fifth of straight students.
- Over a quarter of LGBTQ students and almost half of transgender students had skipped school because they felt unsafe, compared to less than a tenth of non-LGBTQ.
- Transgender students (over a third) were twice as likely as LGB students to strongly agree that they sometimes feel very depressed about their school that they do not belong there, and four times as likely as straight students (Egale Canada, 2009).

In light of such findings, Kumashiro (2000) advocates for the creation of supportive spaces in schools where minorities are supported and their identities are affirmed. Moreover, school based advocacy groups, such as GSAs, provide information and resources for students, assist youth to develop positive self-esteem and help them combat feelings of isolation (Knox, D., Mooney, L. A., Nelson, A., & Schacht, C., 2001). GSAs have been linked to reducing the victimization of queer youth and to improving campus climates (Goldstein & Davis, 2010). For example, within the United States,

GLSEN's National School Climate Survey reveals that LGBTQ students in schools with GSAs or similar clubs hear less homophobic remarks, are victimized less due to their sexuality or gender expression, are more likely to report incidents of harassment or assault, are less likely to feel unsafe due to their sexuality or gender expression, are less likely to miss school because they feel unsafe, and they indicate a greater sense of belonging within their school communities. On the whole, the reduction of queer marginalization in schools is undoubtedly correlated with more positive educational experiences for sexual minorities. My research reveals the motivations for straight allies' participation in GSAs, and it exemplifies how they are collaboratively working with queer students to address heteronormative oppression.

A recent US survey of 1646 randomly selected students evaluating Safe Schools Programs for LG pupils revealed that 35% of learners with access to GSAs believed that queer youth could be open about their sexuality, as opposed to 12% without GSAs; additionally, 58% of students that attended schools with GSAs encountered anti-gay slurs daily, and 75% of youth without GSAs heard anti-gay slurs everyday (Szalacha, 2001). These findings suggest that GSAs may help raise awareness about sexual diversity and queer social issues, provide a forum to address misconceptions, and reduce LGBTQ prejudice and discrimination by occupying a visible presence in schools. Overall, the purpose of GSAs is to provide spaces in which "LGBTQ students and allies can work together on making their schools more welcoming for all members of school communities, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity" (Egale Canada, 2010). My own research provides further knowledge about the role of GSAs and more specifically, the consequences associated with straight allies providing support for their LGBTQ peers.

Unfortunately, information gathered in the final report of Canada's first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools indicates that many queer youth find their learning environment at school unsafe:

- Almost two thirds (64%) of LGBTQ students and 61% of students with LGBTQ parents reported that they feel unsafe at school
- The two school spaces most commonly experienced as unsafe by LGBTQ youth and youth with LGBTQ parents are places that are almost invariably gender-segregated: Phys. Ed change rooms and washrooms. Almost half (49%) of LGBTQ youth and more than two fifths (42%) of youth with LGBTQ parents identifies their Phys. Ed change rooms as being unsafe; almost a third (30%) of non-LGBTQ youth agreed. More than two-fifths (43%) of LGBTQ students and almost two-fifths (41%) of youth with LGBTQ parents identified their school washrooms as unsafe; more than a quarter (28%) of non-LGBTQ students agreed
- Female sexual minority students were most likely to report feeling unsafe in their school change rooms (59%). High numbers (52%) of trans youth reported feeling unsafe in both change rooms and washrooms...(Taylor et al., 2011, p. 1).

Similarly, inequitable social and systemic practices have been identified in the United States, which have prompted many sexual minority students and allies to advocate for queer human rights and collectively work as agents of social change. In October 1995 an ambitious group of American students petitioned to establish a GSA at their high school. Consequently, the Salt Lake City Board and the State elected to ban all non-curricular clubs instead of permitting the existence of GSAs (Bohan & Russell, 1999). Regrettably, it is apparent that the creation of advocacy clubs may be met with opposition, not only by students and parents, but from influential administrators as well. Interestingly, before the lobby to create a GSA, the principal was unaware of ongoing harassment practices which targeted queer youth at the school; due to the students' brave efforts, the need for spaces which provide affirmation, acceptance, and promote self-efficacy and self-confidence became visible. On the whole, through the examination of the Salt

Lake City study, Bohan & Russell (1999) suggest that students are more likely to report anti-gay harassment if they believe the principal actually demonstrates care and concern for pupils.

GSAs are not limited to concentrating on LGBTQ issues; the purpose of these student-led clubs are to address various forms of discrimination, and challenge gender role stereotypes, classism, racism, heterosexism, and other inequalities (Egale Canada, 2010). Fascinatingly, the title of the club has been called into question, which has resulted in an ongoing controversy. Is the title of the club reinforcing the homo/hetero binary it seeks to expunge? Taylor, Peter, McMinn, Elliot, Beldom, Ferry, Gross, Paquin, & Schachter (2011) acknowledge that the title of "'Gay-Straight Alliances' seems problematic in that 'gay' does not necessarily refer to lesbians or bisexuals and trans identities are not explicitly encompassed by the expression" (p. 4). As a result, GSAs are increasing being called Queer-Straight Alliances (QSAs) (Goldstein & Davis, 2010). Furthermore, many GSAs have been criticized for exclusively targeting subpopulations instead of providing supportive networks for all students. McCready (2001) purports that clubs designed to support queer youth may unintentionally alienate queer youth of color and neglect to provide identity affirmation for individuals with multiple intersecting identities. Moreover, Kumashiro employs Powell's (1999) work when he argues, "identity based activist movements function just as mainstream society does in excluding its own margins" (2002, p. 56). Overall, people possess multiple subjectivities, thus offering a club which fails to acknowledge intersecting axis of identities may be alienating to many individuals and ironically exclusive in nature (Kumashiro, 2002). Therefore, attempts must be made to recognize diversity within

differentiated groups and address oppression as a whole by continuously troubling our center (Kumashiro, 2001).

The Historical Significance of Gay-Straight Alliances

GSAs are relatively new student-led clubs in the United States, with the first documented union tracing back to 1989 in Massachuetts (Wells, 2006). Although, GSAs are more common today (Mercier, 2009), learners campaigning for these organizations have historically encountered opposition from school administration, teachers, parents, and students. Within the United States, "widespread litigation of students' rights to form GSAs and gain access to school resources for meetings and organizational purposes through the Equal Access Act (EAA) and the First Amendment began to appear in the mid-1990s" (Mercier, 2009, p. 178). Overall, schools that have a limited open forum are not permitted to deny GSAs the ability to utilize school resources if they allow other non-curricular groups access; this activates the EAA. In addition, courts have also interpreted 'curriculum related' as the circumstances where school policies were implemented to prevent the formation of GSAs, which violates the First Amendment (Mercier, 2009).

From a Canadian perspective, GSAs involve issues of equal access and accommodation "which are firmly established and protected in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and all provincial and territorial human rights statues" (Wells, 2006, p. 26). Additionally, Wells (2006) writes, Canadian courts have ruled that the failure to address heterosexism and homophobia in educational institutions is professionally irresponsible and a form of educational malpractice. Wells (2006) and Griffin et al.

(2004) suggest that the purpose of GSAs falls under one of the following categories: providing counselling and support for queer youth and allies, offering safe spaces, prompting visibility and awareness, and producing social and educational change. The production of educational and social change is the focus of my inquiry. My investigation, informed by Queer Theory and drawing upon existing literature on GSAs, highlights the significance of straight allies' support of and participation in GSAs and their role in actively pursuing sexual justice in secondary schools.

Why Support the Creation of Gay-Straight Alliances?

Sexual and gender norms are "social constructs that are taught and reinforced through the socialization process" (Haskell, 2008, p. 39). Thus, schooling has the potential to operate as a critical change agent which provides students with the opportunities to deconstruct hegemonic ideologies. Unfortunately, curricula often fail to assist students move beyond a superficial and polar understanding of gender and sexuality. Birden (2005) purports,

> By the time children have reached first grade, they have already complied a significant amount of data about what it means to be gay in a heterosexist society, even though much of what they learned may well be incorrect, born of fear and prejudice rather than factual information. Schools are in a unique position to correct much of this misinformation at an early age before it ripens into anti-lesbian and gay prejudice and violence (p. 2).

Hence, preventative measures which actively permit learners to unlearn prejudice are imperative. Curricula that simply acknowledges sexual and gender diversity will not suffice; there is a myth that "'information' neutralizes ignorance and that learners and their teachers will rationally accept new thoughts without having to grapple within

unlearning the old ones…this discourse called 'information' purports to construct 'compassion' and 'tolerance' as the correct subject position but in actuality performs the originary binary opposition of 'us/them' in more elaborate and normalizing terms" (Britzman, 1998, p. 88). Thus, students must become active participants in deconstructing the notion of 'normalcy', unlearning heterosexist assumptions, and intrinsically questioning the construction of identity dualities in order for sexual and gender justice to be achieved in educational institutions. Goldstein and Davis (2010) write, "Middle and high school programming and curricula that expose students to, and help them process, such social justice issues may facilitate subsequent ally development" (p. 489). Thus curricula has the potential to provide opportunities for students to become informed about sexual inequalities, challenge dominant heteronormative assumptions, and spark their interest in becoming an ally and advocating for LGBTQ rights. Likewise, extracurricular social justice clubs, such as GSAs, can provide ample opportunities for adolescents to dismember and disrupt harmful dichotomies that uphold heteronormativity. My research uncovers how straight allies are attempting to disrupt 'straight' thinking, unlearn heterosexist attitudes and beliefs, and challenge the systemically and socially sanctioned heteronormative system.

Griffin et al. (2004) describe the importance of building resilient schools by supporting the creation of GSAs. As previously mentioned, GSAs can positively affect the educational experiences of queer youth (Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2010) and students and school personnel within schools with GSAs report a more positive and supportive school climate (Szalacha, 2001, 2003). Students with access to GSAs are less likely to hear homophobic remarks and research from GLSEN (2007) demonstrates

that GSAs may contribute to the creation of safer schools for queer pupils by sending a message that anti-gay language and harassment is unacceptable.

Sumara (2001) fervently declares that heteronormativity "represent[s] the way that 'heterosexual' has become a normative category against that all other subject positions are identified and judged" (p. 2). A substantial objective of many GSAs is to deconstruct heteronormativity through educating the school community about the harmful homo/hetero dichotomy that is circumscribed by many daily discursive practices within schools. Moreover, Morris (2005) emphasizes the importance of unsettling "sedimented, rigid gender/sexuality categories" (p. 12). GSAs are invaluable because many educational institutions systemically marginalize LGBTQ youth, displace queer issues and fail to provide positive information about sexual minority identities, which Wells (2006) coins the "oppression of silence." Furthermore, Wells (2006) contends that there are grave consequences for queer students, their families and society as a whole, if schools neglect to address homophobia and heterosexism. Thus, my research investigates whether straight allies are helping to foster a positive community atmosphere and eliciting necessary social change in schooling by speaking out against homophobic and heterosexist individual and institutional practices.

GSAs are not exclusive school clubs; they are open to all queer students and their allies. Interestingly, Miceli's (2005) survey of GSAs indicates that most students involved in these advocacy groups are actually heterosexual allies. Straight allies may elect to join GSAs to educate the school community about queer issues and support sexual minorities (GLSEN, 2007). Wells (2006) states that an ally is "a person, regardless of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity, who supports and stands

up for the human and civil rights of LGBTQ people" (p.5). Therefore, assumptions about GSA members' sexual orientation or gender identity are inappropriate.

Revealing how straight allies have come to become involved in GSAs and their motivation for participating in the sexual justice movement in general is a fruitful feature of my investigation. Research undertaken by Goldstein and Davis (2010) reveals that out of the 46 heterosexual college students in GSAs, "students indicated they joined the alliance primarily to serve as an advocate for human rights (85%) and to support LGBT friends (85%) (p. 486). This data was collected from members of one GSA, however, my research explores the motivations and beliefs of straight allies from multiple educational sites in Southwestern Ontario.

My research illuminates why straight allies are invested in combating homophobia and disrupting heteronormativity in secondary schools, despite often experiencing negative repercussions. Previous research illustrates that youth join GSAs for a variety of reasons; some students may have queer friends and/or family members or they may be exhausted by normative social pressures in educational institutions (Wells, 2006). GSAs are great opportunities for allies to "openly question understandings of sexuality, challenge gender roles and expectations, and feel safe and valued for their differences" (Wells, 2006, p. 28). Unfortunately, many students are not afforded the opportunity to connect with GSAs, which provide support for sexual minorities and their allies, and address queer social issues (GLSEN, 2007).

Intergroup Contact and Sexual Prejudice Reduction

Stotzer's (2009) research highlights the importance of encountering LGBTQ adults in communities; this contact had been linked to the possession of LGBTQ positive attitudes and non-heterosexuality in previous inquiries (see Herek and Capitanio, 1996). Furthermore, Wells' (2006) research suggests that "simply getting to know an LGBTQ person is one of the most significant ways to reduce discrimination and prejudice" (p. 28). There has been little research on intergroup contact and sexual prejudice in adolescence (Heinze & Horn, 2009). Research that does exist suggests that "intergroup contact, in itself, is not enough to reduce negative attitudes and prejudices related to LG peers among adolescents, but rather [the] type of contact (intimate vs. casual) is a critical component to prejudice reduction" (Walls et al., 2010, p. 947). Goldstein and Davis (2010) reference Bullard's (2004) work when they advise that interpersonal contact with queer people can enhance straight students' consciousness and sensitivity to the marginalization of queer people, operate as a precursor to the deconstruction of sedimented assumptions and stereotypes about LGBTQ people, and potentially influence non-queer individuals to destabilize the oppression of queer people.

Henize and Horn (2009) suggest that the type of intergroup contact has an impact on attitudes towards queer individuals; they assert, for example, that: "Casual contact, such as simply being exposed to out LG peers at school, may actually increase adolescents' negative attitudes towards LG people" (p. 938). Furthermore, Walls et al. (2010) demonstrate that judgment of homosexuality as wrong was lower among adolescents that have queer friends. They were more apt to evaluate exclusion based on sexual minority identities as wrong and were more comfortable interacting with LG peers (Walls et al., 2010). Thus, maintaining close interpersonal relationships with

queer youth potentially acts as a buffer against developing LGBTQ negative attitudes. Overall, the "relationship between intergroup contact and levels of school-based sexual prejudice among heterosexual adolescents found that intimate contact (having a gay or lesbian friend) related to lower levels of sexual prejudice among heterosexual adolescents but casual contact (simply knowing a lesbian or gay students at school) did not." (Horn, Kosciw, & Russell, 2009, p.864).

Fascinatingly, a meta-analysis of the impact of intergroup contact on prejudice, conducted by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), revealed a relationship between intergroup contact and age. Intergroup contact was more powerful among children and adolescents than adults, perhaps because youth are in the process of developing their attitudes and beliefs. Likewise, Horn (2006) advises that age and school climate relate to youth's reasoning about homosexuality and the treatment of people who identity as lesbian or gay. Poteat et al. (2009) found that students in earlier grades, compared to students in older grades, were less likely to remain friends and attend the same educational institution with LG students. Ironically, queer youth are expressing their sexual orientation and gender identity earlier, yet prejudice is more prominent with younger heterosexual youth (Poteat et al., 2009). This is a cause for concern because friends provide a supportive network for youth and many queer adolescents may be intentionally excluded from friendship groups.

Remaining Friends with Queer Youth

Poteat et al. (2009) "examined heterosexual students' willingness to remain friends with gay and lesbian peers who come out and their willingness to attend schools that include gay and lesbian students" (p. 952). The Dane County Youth Survey (DCYS)

(2005) and (2009) reveals that boys are less willing to remain friends and attend school with gay and lesbian peers than girls. Walls et al. (2010) acknowledge that boys are more likely to evaluate homosexuality as wrong, express discomfort when interacting with LG individuals, and rationalize the social exclusion of sexual minorities as acceptable. Poteat et al. (2009) propose that adolescent boys engage in gender normative performances that prove their heterosexuality and they may feel pressured within male peer groups to steer clear of queer peers. Hence, the unwillingness of some male pupils to foster relationships with queer pupils may inhibit their development of queer-positive positive attitudes. On the whole, additional research must examine the vantage point of male students and explore the correlation of gender performativity and homophobia in secondary schools. I am conscious of purposefully including male participants in my study to investigate this question further.

Kehily (2002) identifies schools as a "performative space where heterosexuality and masculinity can be fused, enacted and displayed" (p. 135). Thus, hegemonic masculinity is fostered through the enactment of homophobia, which disenfranchises queer men and women (Petersen, 2000). The most powerful aspect of my research will be ascertaining how some visible male straight allies negotiate their LGBTQ-positive attitudes and beliefs within homophobic and heterosexist schools. Moreover, I aim to produce knowledge about how they personally negotiate their commitment to sexual justice in schools, despite peer and societal pressure to conform to hegemonic masculinity ideals, which often include overt homophobic demonstrations. Given the prominence of a female straight ally perspective in recent research (see Goldstein and Davis, 2010), my inquiry attempts to access a much needed male vantage point.

Hegemonic Masculinity: Performing Prejudice to Persuade Peers

> "A manly front is maintained by actively constructing and reconstructing a façade of masculinity that publicly affirms heterosexuality through exaggerated rules and norms of masculinity. The relationship between heterosexuality and homophobia is unmistakably parasitic when young men feel the need to prove their manhood at all costs. Men's fears of being suspected as gay operate in a powerful manner to sustain and maintain narrow restrictive versions of masculinity (Kehler, 2010, p. 4-5).

Gender is a socially constructed phenomenon, not an inherited identity, contrary to popular belief. Thus, socialization processes within social institutions, such as schools, must strive to deconstruct gendered 'norms' that dictate powerful messages such as "boys will be boys." Furthermore, the concept of gender fluidity should be validated because the current masculine/feminine binary is detrimental to many people because it represents a hierarchy of masculinity within it (Connell, 2008). Moreover, hegemonic masculinity is positioned as superior, which marginalizes other masculinities. Furthermore, sexual minorities, effeminate boys, or men who are perceived to be gay are often targets for verbal and physical abuse and discrimination (Connell, 2009; Pascoe, 2007). Unfortunately, the "belief that gender distinction is 'natural' makes it scandalous when people don't follow the pattern" (Connell, 2009, p. 5). Kehily (2002) acknowledges that due to the ubiquitous assumption that heterosexuality is 'normal', widespread homophobia is routinely practiced and often condoned within male peer groups. Thus, heterosexual masculinity is constructed, preserved, and ultimately privileged through homophobic culture (Petersen, 2000). Within male peers groups, homophobia is enacted to "police the boundaries of acceptable heterosexual male behaviour and identity" (Daley-Trim, 2007, p. 205). Overall, Stotzer (2009) states, being male, being religious, originating from Southern

States in America, and not having queer friends, correlates with higher levels of homophobia.

Within male peer groups, there is presumed punishment associated with the abjection of gender 'norms'; therefore, for many male students, it may be difficult to circumnavigate the adoption of hegemonic masculinity and openly advocate for LGBTQ human rights through GSA involvement. Moreover, stigma by association may inhibit male youth from becoming visible allies for queer youth in their secondary schools. Goffman's (1963) theorization of stigma maintains that allies must share some of the victimization directed towards marginalized individuals they maintain relations with. This being said, his work may be applied to inhibitions associated with LGBTQ activism among straight males, as has been suggested in the existing literature (Stotzer, 2009). Male pupils may not want to bear some of the oppressive burden associated with publicly expressing queer-positive attitudes and advocating for queer rights. Similarly, male students may be concerned with being perceived as queer if they do not succumb to homophobic and heterosexist normative male culture. They may desire for people to know that they are heterosexual, and thus feel the need to prove their heterosexuality through homophobic language, distancing themselves from queer peers, and avoiding the discussion of LGBTQ issues. In Goldstein and Davis' (2010) study, 33% of straight allies were concerned that advocating for queer issues would make them susceptible to being labelled queer. Additionally, 56% of heterosexuals surveyed expected that allies would be perceived as queer. Overall, the majority of respondents thought they would be teased and physically threatened because of their role as allies. Only 24% thought they would be respected by other heterosexuals. Clearly, it is evident that straight allies

must be willing to confront homophobia head on in order to contribute to positive social change.

In Stotzer's (2009) investigation, 18% of female participants had a queer friend divulge their sexual orientation to them in high school, and 6% of the participants had a LGBTQ friend 'come out' to them in college. Contrarily, only one male participant identified that a friend 'came out' to them in secondary school, and three males stated that a LGBTQ friend told them in college. This finding suggests that males and females may encounter queer peers at differing ages. Moreover, "differences in exposure, may offer insight into consistent research findings that suggest men have less positive attitudes toward LGB people" (Stotzer, 2009, p. 77).

Due to the available literature which demonstrates barriers associated with male recruitment and participation in LGBTQ activism via GSAs, Liang and Alimo (2005) suggest that LGBTQ programs should be created that specifically target a straight male audience. This being said, male learners must be afforded opportunities to deconstruct notions of 'normalcy', challenge normative gender constructions, and explore the concept of multiple masculinities. Expanding limited preconceptions about masculinity will aid in ally development through the acknowledgement that there is a "range of ways in which to 'be' a masculine subject, a range of ways in which to 'do' or perform masculinity" (Dalley-Trim, 2007, p. 200). In this capacity, my research is concerned to include the perspectives of male straight allies to enable an examination of how their positive attitudes towards queer people developed and how they are disrupting hegemonic male culture through their participation in GSAs and their active pursuit of gender and sexual justice in schools.

Queer Agency

Horn et al (2009) indicate that the majority of research on queer identities focuses on the victimization of sexual minorities. Talburt (2002) specifically argues that these "dominant narratives about queer youth make youth intelligible – to others and to themselves in narrowly defined ways" (p.18); hence, ubiquitous negative accounts of queer youth and their allies displace their experiences of agency. Moreover, most of what has been written about queer youth has focused on non-normative development or risk outcomes (Russell, 2005). Talburt (2002) acknowledges the risk and stigma discourse surrounding queer identities when she writes that queer youth are positioned as "at risk through statistics on queer youth suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted [infections], homelessness, dropping out, depression, [and] verbal and physical assaults…" (p. 28). These dominant discourses have eclipsed the many ways in which queer adolescents and their allies are standing up and standing out to create positive social change within schooling (Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009). Likewise, Varjas, Mahan, Meyers, Birkbichler, and Dew's (2007) work criticizes scholars for over-emphasizing the harmful consequences associated with homophobia and transphobia in education; the preoccupation with negative outcomes masks queer youth's ability to resist victimization and act with agency to reject hegemonic ideologies that saturate the school environment. In this sense, it is important for researchers to acknowledge how people resist, or push back, against oppressive power relations (Foucault, 1990). Wright (2005), for example, claims that the belief that minority students are explicitly victims within social institutions strips them of their agency in making meaning of who they are at school. Queer youth have the ability to elicit social change and succeed in society.

Sexual minorities cannot be essentialized as one disadvantaged homogenous group; many queer youth experience sexual prejudice at school, however, not all LGBTQ youth feel disadvantaged, silenced, and oppressed in education. Contrary to robust literature that depicts a one-dimensional, marginalized image of queer youth, my in(queer)y leaves room for straight allies to discuss queer-positive attitudes. Moreover, many straight allies are refusing to participate in homophobic discursive practices and are attempting to expose the toxicity of heteronormativity in schools. Altogether, my research highlights the trials and tribulations of individuals that stand up against anti-gay attitudes and behaviours, stand out for human rights, and refuse to remain passive, while social and systemic gender and sexual injustices continue to perpetuated at their schools.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the relevant literature in the field on GSAs. It directs attention to the fact that a focus on GSAs is indeed an under researched topic and it highlights a review of the empirical research that provides some insight into the development of queer-positive attitudes by heterosexual-identifying individuals. Important literature dealing with how early childhood normalizing experiences (parental influence, contact with queer adults and exposure to LGBTQ content in popular culture), meeting queer peers, experiences of empathy towards LGBTQ people and rejection of sexual prejudice contribute to LGBTQ positive attitude formation is examined. Such research revealed that many straight allies are involved with GSAs for political reasons because they are aware of LGBTQ needs. On the whole, a review of the literature illuminates the need for further research on GSAs, which focuses on the

important role of straight allies and particularly how the gender of the ally might further impact on such political involvement.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

"The primary goal of social sciences is to obtain organized knowledge of social reality" (Schutz, 1967, p. 228).

My investigation draws upon qualitative research methods because "their focus on meaning creation and the experiences of the everyday life fit well with the movement goals of visibility, cultural challenge, and self-determination" (Gamson, 2000, p.348). Such a focus on employing a qualitative research methodology is consistent with the purpose of my inquiry, which is to investigate the political involvement for straight allies in GSAs in school communities in Southwestern Ontario with the objective of illuminating the roles and purposes of GSAs and the role of straight-identifying allies in GSAs. Gamson (2000) argues that qualitative research, unlike quantitative exploration, is "more concerned with cultural and political meaning creation, and...mak[ing] room for voices and experiences that have been suppressed" (p.347). Certainly, non-normative sexualities and genders have been pushed into the margins of heterosexist school culture; the time for allies to speak about their commitment to addressing homophobia and heterosexism in schools is well overdue.

Patton (2002) maintains that qualitative research involves producing in-depth understandings and detailed accounts of a small number of people or cases. Traditional qualitative inquiry involves interviewing, which encompasses purposefully gathering valuable data from their stories. Patton (2002) contends that "the purpose of qualitative interviewing is to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn *their* terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences" (p. 348). In my study, I used a purposeful sampling technique to limit my investigation to gathering data from GSA members in secondary schools through one hour semi-structured interviews that were scheduled by formal appointments. Thus, the inclusion criteria for this study included secondary school students who were members of their public school's GSA. Although, securing the perspectives of straight allies was the original objective of this research, I revised my study to include the experiences of one gay-identifying male for two reasons: 1) it was challenging to find straight-identifying allies that were interested in participating in my study, thus, I expanded the sample size to include students with queer sexualities and genders; 2) I wanted to include the experiences of queer students to spotlight how they are negotiating their subjectivities within homophobic and heteronormative school settings. Only one queer GSA member participated in this study because no other LGBTQ students came forward to be interviewed. I theorize that some queer students, under the age of 18, may have been inhibited from participating in this study because they were required to have their guardian(s) sign a document to assent to their participation. Perhaps some sexual minority and gender variant students are not 'out' in their family setting and/or their guardian(s) are unaware of their involvement in GSAs.

Semi-structured interviews with consenting allies were implemented to compliment and extend research on individuals that hold queer-positive attitudes. Just as Stotzer (2009) conducted semi-structured interviews with 68 straight allies, I utilized this method to allow participants to discuss content and events that they felt were meaningful, to provide an opportunity for participants to make meaning out of their lives and subjectivities, and to offer allies a platform to tell their stories without being constrained by generic fixed responses (Patton, 2002). This data collection technique allowed participants to "express *their own* understandings in their own terms" (p. 348).

Employing a qualitative research methodology, therefore, is suited to the purpose of my study, which is to provide an opportunity to examine the voices of allies in greater depth. Hence, this research provides an outlet for five allies to share their individual experiences as advocates for sexual justice in secondary schools, without resorting to making generalizations about all allies across a particular population. The focus was to build more in-depth knowledge and understanding about individual allies, their experiences of and critical response to institutionalized heteronormativity and homophobia in schools. Patton's (2002) writings on qualitative inquiry provide a justification for my methodological selection; the focus is on depth and understanding of individual life experiences as a basis for building knowledge about the factors and influences affecting the willingness of allies to become involved in GSAs. Four people-oriented directives are central to the collection of qualitative data: proximity, facts, thick description, and direct quotations. Moreover, Patton (2002) writes, methodologists operating within a qualitative framework must become "close enough to the people and situation being studied to personally understand in-depth detail of what

goes on" (Patton, 2002, p.28). They should assemble the perceived facts and ensure that they are including an abundance of description about the participants, human interactions, activities, and the atmospheres they are observing. Qualitative methodologists need to gather the direct quotations of people, obtained through speech and writing, as a source of raw data to describe social reality (Patton, 2002). Through conducting qualitative research that follows these mandates, the collection of data illuminates how these students are, at times, acting as agents of social change by "refus[ing] to think straight" (Britzman, 1998) and working to circumnavigate social and institutional heterosexist assumptions. This inquiry, therefore, provides some further insights into how straight allies are unlearning what is 'normal'? (Britzman, 1998).

Effort was made to penetrate respondent's viewpoints to "offer an inside perspective [that] powers qualitative reporting" (Patton, 2002, p. 8). Through audio recorded sessions, direct quotations were assembled for analysis because they serve as "a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry, revealing respondents' depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions" (p. 21). Influenced by Patton's (2002) questioning recommendations, my qualitative inquiry was strengthened through the creation of carefully constructed, focused, thoughtful and distinct questions. Through the posing of clear and singular questions, the quality of elicited responses was increased.

Research Design and Method

Good research involves using appropriate techniques depending on the purpose of the inquiry. Historically, a positivist research tradition monopolized sexuality

studies, however, "Over time the positivist tradition of sexuality studies has been very much overshadowed by a strategy that rejects the notion that tools and assumptions of natural sciences are appropriate for the study of sexuality" (Gamson, 2000, p. 352). Therefore, the majority of prevailing sexuality inquiry is married with qualitative research (Gamson, 2000). I utilized qualitative methods in my study because they facilitate detailed and in-depth accounts of phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, Creswell (2007) declares that "we use qualitative research to develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist for certain populations and samples or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem we are explaining" (p. 40). My research is built upon the foundation of traditional qualitative investigation because there is an absence of academic literature that thoroughly explores the role and purpose of GSAs and the experiences of straight allies in Canadian secondary schools.

To secure participants for the inquiry, an email invitation was sent to principals of secondary schools with GSAs in Southwestern Ontario, and they were asked to forward the message to the teacher supervisor of the GSA at their institution. Upon administration and teacher approval, I visited GSAs to notify them of my research and offer allies an opportunity to speak about their experiences as advocates for sexual justice through their participation in Gay-Straight Alliances.

Patton (2002) identifies the significance of securing informed consent from research participants. Hence, I provided a detailed letter of information that outlined the purpose, aims, and objectives of my research, which afforded allies an opportunity to make an educated decision to partake in the investigation. In addition, participants were asked to sign consent forms to symbolize their voluntary participation to tell their

story. If individuals were under the age of 18, they were instructed to have their guardians consent to their participation in the study by signing an assent document. On interview days, I collected the consent/assent form before the interview began and an effort was made to develop a positive rapport with each participant to facilitate a comfortable atmosphere that was conducive to sharing personal experiences.

I commenced one hour semi-structured interviews with an opening statement because Patton (2002) indicates that opening statements should be presented twice; once in advance of an interview and again, prior to each session. The message read:

> The information you are providing through this interview is valuable because the experiences of allies' involvement in Gay-Straight Alliances is under researched, specifically in Canada. The purpose of this interview is to gather your experiences as a member of your school's Gay-Straight Alliance.

Thus, the data collected was positioned as important and the reason for its importance was indicated. Lastly, the purpose of the interview was outlined out of respect for the participant (Patton, 2002). Above all, the privacy of the participants was protected by providing confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and through withholding any information that could potentially identity them within the subsequent thesis because "researchers have a special ethical obligation to protect the privacy of research participants" (Palys and Lowman, 2000, p. 41). Upon participant approval, I audio recorded the interviews, which allowed conversations to be transcribed and reviewed, thus making data analysis easier. Patton (2002) acknowledges that "recorders do not 'tune out' conversations, change what has been said because of interpretation (either conscious or unconscious), or record words more slowly than they

are spoken" (p. 380). Thus, I used an audio recorder to capture valuable quotes, which strategically permitted me to witness non-verbal communication. Furthermore, Patton (2002) contends that each interview is an observation, thus, researchers must be attuned to careful surveillance because "interviewing and observation are mutually reinforcing qualitative techniques" (p. 27). Only tactical notes were made to compliment the audio recordings. Additionally, to strengthen data analysis, a post interview was completed after each interview to provide a scheduled opportunity for me to reflect on the process, make observations, and learn from the experience (Patton, 2002).

I conducted qualitative research, which, as Gamson (2000) notes, attempts to dismantle oppressive heterosexist science that has previously monopolized sexuality studies. I utilized individual semi-structured, open-ended interviews with five allies from three secondary schools in Southwestern Ontario because Patton (2002) argues that a smaller sample size "adds depth, detail, and meaning at a very personal level of experience" (p. 17). Hence, my decision to interview a small respondent population is justified because it allowed me to explore the experiences of a few allies in greater depth.

My semi structured interview technique included open-ended questions because, without them, participants would be led down a restrictive path that could potentially eradicate opportunities to gather insightful, powerful, and uncensored data that highlights the authentic social circumstances of human beings. Furthermore, with open ended questions, the "respondent supplies [their] own words, thoughts and insights in answering the questions" (Patton, 2002, p. 346), which adds to the authenticity of the data collected. This data collection technique positions the participants as experts in

their own lives and it validates their experiences, attitudes and beliefs as important information to be collected. Clear, impartial, singular, and unrestricted questions were posed during interview sessions to alleviate confusion and elicit the collection of desired information. Additionally, the semi-structured interviews allowed "flexibility in probing and in determining when it's appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth, or even pose questions about new areas of inquiry that were not originally anticipated" (p. 347). Thus, question probes were utilized as a tool to deepen insights and enrich responses to questions, and to provide cues for participants about the level of desired response (Patton, 2002). Questions posed to participants were designed to gather insight into the operation and functioning of their specific GSA, to ascertain the culture and climate of their school, and to identify their perceived role(s) as GSA members. Questions prompted allies to indicate their reasoning for electing to participate in GSAs, to specify the role or purpose of a GSA, to identify their role as a GSA member, to communicate what issues have an impact on LGBTQ students at their school, and to express their views on administration's, teachers', and peers' commitment to and effectiveness in addressing LGBTQ issues.

Data Analysis

Patton (2002) asserts that "quality qualitative research depends on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher" (p. 5). Thus, the researcher must be well versed in qualitative tradition, and respect the proper procedural elements of interviewing and analysing data. As previously stated, Queer Theory operates as the theoretical underpinning for my research on straight allies and their involvement in GSAs. "Queer Theory proposes to examine differential responses to the conditions of identities on terms that place as a problem the production of

normalcy and on terms that confound the intelligibility that produces the normal as the proper subject" (Britzman, 1995, p.157). Moreover, Queer Theory informs my analysis of heteronormativity and pupils' willingness and ability to disrupt it within educational contexts; it provides both analytic and conceptual tools for making sense of the role of GSAs, not just as a site for affirming fixed sexual identities, but as means by which all students can work together to address homophobia and the limits of heteronormative thinking. Data obtained through interviews were thematically organized and analysed to foster sense making. Moreover, Patton (2002) articulates that content analysis is commonly used in qualitative research and it involves any "data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings" (p. 453). Fruitful qualitative research reveals the materialization of themes, patterns, understandings, and insights (Patton, 2002).

I maintained the integrity of the data by purposely working to eliminate the potential for erroneous interpretations of the work, which could consequently manipulate the findings and damage the merit of the inquiry. Unfortunately, an unbiased study is an oxymoron; picking a topic for inquiry is, in itself, a subjective act and utilizing a particular methodology infers that one is operating within its limits. If a researcher identifies their biases, they may be more apt to avoid biased interpretation of their research data. I do acknowledge that my own values, beliefs and commitment to sexual and gender justice may have inadvertently influenced my analysis of the data. As a sexual minority, I was motivated to perform this research to ascertain how allies are attempting to diminish LGBTQ directed prejudice and discrimination, which I am highly attuned to. Moreover, the institutionalization of heteronormativity and

heterosexism has been, and continues to be, an alienating and suffocating struggle for me. I find it remarkable that some straight-identifying youth are advocating on behalf of LGBTQ people to disrupt and dismantle the privileging of heterosexuality and gendered 'norms' in society, which many LGBTQ people are unable or unwilling to do.

Obstacles to Gathering Students' Experiences: Access Denied!

As previously mentioned, the information collected through this study is important because research on GSAs within a Canadian context is very limited. Within the United States, research has explored the contributions of straight allies with a college based sample; often overlooked are the experiences of straight allies within secondary institutions and from multiple sites (Toomey et al., 2011). Limited data collected from high school GSA members from various schools has confined understanding of the complexities associated with straight allies and queer-identifying students' problematizing homophobia and interrogating heteronormativity.

For this study, I contacted fourteen schools and visited nine with the boundaries of Southwestern, Ontario. I received negative responses declining participation in the study, from two schools, and no response at all from an additional two schools. Below I reflect on why some educators may have elected to prevent the students at their institutions from learning about my study, without directly consulting with GSA members themselves. Additionally, I examine alternative barriers to collecting data, such as: few allies to speak with, student inhibitions, and parental assent concerns.

As a researcher gathering data from high school students, I experienced both apprehensive and apathetic responses from some administrators and teacher

supervisors of GSAs, which created impediments to accessing participants. Palpable barriers to gathering the experiences of GSA members include: access to schools denied by principals and teachers, straight allies' reluctance to participate, and parental or guardian non compliance of potential participants. Firstly, many principals were concerned about a researcher coming into their school to speak with GSA members. Principals are responsible for overseeing the well being of the students within the school they supervise, however, some administrators seemed to be excessively apprehensive about the research I was conducting and I was denied the opportunity to meet with the teacher supervisor of a GSA and the collective group. Perhaps, as Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, (2004) have identified, sexuality and gender remain topics that are pushed to the margins of schooling because they are perceived as controversial topics. Perhaps school staff are unwilling to recognize or admit that homophobia and heterosexism continue to exist in schools, despite efforts to combat it or a failure to do so. Perhaps they do not want to admit that there is heterosexist undertone as their schools, which fosters inequitable educational provisions for some LGBTQ-identifying youth. Blaise (2005) compels school communities to acknowledge heterosexual privilege though the interrogation of normative ideas of sexuality and gender. It is evident that many schools are supersaturated with LGBTQ-negative attitudes and behaviours (Taylor et al., 2011), thus there is a call for action to confront and address this injustice. Since reformative initiatives are required in many instances to prevent the 'Othering' of sexual minorities and gender variant students in schooling, Cook-Sather (2002) argues, "there is something fundamentally amiss about building and rebuilding an entire system without consulting at any point those it is ostensibly designed to serve" (p. 3). Therefore, Cook-

Sather brilliantly identifies the need to consult students and to listen to their viewpoints in order to improve the conditions for LGBTQ people in schooling.

One principal discussed the potential for students to participate in the study with the teacher supervisor, and opted for students not to partake in the study prior to consulting with them. In short, students were not permitted to make their own decision as to whether or not they would like to participate in the study. It seems that an unjust adult/adolescence dichotomy has been erected, in which adult perspectives are viewed as more valuable than that of learners, resulting in a hierarchy of authority. Alcoff (1995) asserts, "the effect of the practice of speaking for others is often, though not always...a reinscription...of hierarchies (p. 250). Cook-Sather discusses how student voices are missing in educational research and how educators "must seriously question the assumption that we know more than the young people of today about how they learn or what they need to learn in preparation for the decades ahead. It is time that we count students among those with the authority to participate both in the critique and the reform of education" (p.3). With respect to my research, authorizing student perspectives, provides a gateway for school staff to listen to their perspectives, and include their insights in the development of educational policy and practice that address queer issues in education.

In a similar vein, although one principal passed along the research information to the teacher supervisor of the GSA at their school, the teacher expressed concerns about the study and eventually ignored my request to visit the student group. These occurrences prompt me to question the justification for passively prohibiting students from learning about and potentially participating in something they may be personally

interested in. Older authority figures vetoing students from speaking for themselves and making their own decisions within schooling is a cause for concern.

Many secondary school GSAs were composed with mainly queer-identifying students along with a couple of self-identifying straight allies, which consequently restricted the potential for heterosexual allies to speak up about their participation in these clubs. This finding conflicts with previous research by Miceli (2005), in which GSAs were mostly composed of straight allies. Interestingly, within some schools with a higher straight-queer ratio, many students were still reluctant to be interviewed. From my experiences talking with the students, I think some members thought their GSA was not 'doing enough' within their respective schools and that they personally were not as active in addressing LGBTQ issues at their school as they 'should be'. When I visited schools, many GSA groups were just beginning the process of gathering ideas and putting together initiatives for the school year; this may have inhibited participants from participating as well. Finally, if students were under the age of eighteen, they were required to have their parent or guardian assent to their participation in the study. A few students voiced their concern about this requirement because their guardian was unaware of their involvement in the GSA and some students expressed that their guardian was still uncomfortable with their GSA participation. Overall, administrative opposition, GSA teacher supervisor apprehension, a limited number of straight-identifying allies, and complications with assent to participation in the study contributed to a difficulty in securing participants for my research.

Conclusion

My investigation draws upon qualitative research methods because it involves producing in-depth understandings and detailed accounts of a small number of people or cases. I purposely selected secondary school students who are members of their school's GSA to "compliment and extend research assessing sexual prejudice" (Poteat et al., 2009, p. 960). Justification for using semi-structured interviews within an overall approach to embracing qualitative inquiry and research design is elaborated on. The particular significance of Queer Theory and its implications for analysing data is also outlined.

CHAPTER FOUR - DATA ANALYSIS: THE EXPERIENCES OF ALLIES

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the experiences of five students, aged from 15 to 18, who are members of the GSA at their particular school. One of the male participants identifies as 'mostly straight', one identifies as 'straight', and the other refers to himself as an openly 'gay' male. Both of the two female students identify as 'straight'. The focus is on an in-depth examination of how these students are addressing anti-LGBTQ attitudes and behaviours at their respective schools. As allies, these students are speaking out and standing up for people that are victimized at their school and within the larger community. As previously mentioned, "An ally works to end oppression by supporting, and advocating for people who are stigmatized, discriminated against or treated unfairly" (GLSEN, 2009, p.5).

This study spotlights the attitudes and behaviours of students that embrace queer-positive views and as such, I include a large amount of their commentary to showcase how their voices are operating as powerful tools to address anti-queer prejudice in society, and to capture the authenticity of their stories. By queer-positive, I mean attitudes and beliefs that are supportive of LGBTQ people and culture. Drawing upon the work of Cook-Sather (2002), I emphasize the importance of authorizing students' perspectives as a means of "ensuring that there are legitimate and valued spaces within which students can speak, re-tuning our ears so that we can hear what they say, and redirecting our actions in response to what we hear" (p.4). Thus, I provide a space for allies to communicate their experiences with combating homophobia and interrogating heterosexism in their own words, which symbolically represents the need

for adults to listen attentively and respond accordingly to students' unique perspectives on school and classroom happenings (Cook-Sather, 2002), and interactions involving schools and communities (Nespor, 1997). This approach disrupts the adult-centric foundation of schooling in hopes of transforming educational policy and practice to include the insights of students. Overall, this study highlights how listening to students' insights illuminates how we may nurture alliances between straight-identifying and queer students in secondary schools.

Participant Profiles

In this section I provide a detailed summary of the personal lives and characteristics of each participant:

Chad Wickerd is in his last year in high school, grade twelve. He describes his sexuality as "mostly straight" and his gender as a "man". He is seventeen years old and attends a school which he describes as, "good": "It's a lot of fairly rich, white people hanging around and doing school things." He was previously a member of his high school's football team for 3 years, but has elected to participate in theatre this year, which he describes as an "amazing experience." Chad communicates that it would have been "too Glee" to participate in both activities, which he explains are, in many ways, socially incompatible. He describes himself as a supportive member of the GSA at his school.

Erin McAllister is sixteen years old and is currently in grade eleven. With respect to her sexuality, she states, "I like men" and asserts that she is "very female." She sees herself as an individual that is committed to ensuring that human rights are upheld for

all in society. Erin is a readily identifiable ally at her school, and is a co-leader of the GSA at her school. She attends a school, which she describes as her "family", "open", and "welcoming". Erin believes that for students to have a good high school experience they should become "involved with people and get to know people because that's how you become, like, more open minded…"

Bobby Ali is an eighteen year old grade eleven student who identifies as a "straight", "male". He has attended two different high schools in the Southwestern, Ontario region. Bobby moved last year, and thus he transitioned into a new school community, so he claims not to know too much about his school. He declares:

> But, of what I do know, it's a very nice school. The dances are not that great because nobody goes, but other than that, it's a very nice school. Yes. Very accepting of gender and people, and comedic timing, and all that. It's a very nice school.

He expresses that he is the only straight male ally who regularly participates in the GSA at his school. He is a visible supporter of LGBTQ rights and he routinely addresses anti-LGBTQ comments in his school community by directly confronting his peers.

Collette Trinket is a fifteen year old "straight", "female" student in grade ten at a large urban school. She states that respect in interactions between members of the school community play an important role at her school. She describes attending secondary school as a positive experience, which permits her to experience more freedom compared to her elementary school. She conveys that, "the hallways can get pretty crowded sometimes…But, high school has been really great and like it's open to new things…" She attended a few GSA meetings last year because her friends were

involved in the club, but this year she is a consistent participant and sees herself as making an active contribution.

Martin Hooper self identifies as an "openly gay", "male" and is currently in grade thirteen. He has attended two secondary schools in Southwestern, Ontario where he has been the target of anti-LGBTQ victimization by his male peers. Despite living through physical altercations and being verbally threatened by fellow students on school grounds, he remains a visible advocate for the LGBTQ movement. He was not involved in the GSA at his first secondary school, but he decided to become involved with the GSA at his new school after he received death threats from a peer on his first day of school. He is one of the student leaders of his school's GSA and he appreciates the support of straight allies.

Participant Motivations for GSA Involvement : Advocating For Human Rights and Supporting the LGBTQ Community

The participants gave various reasons for choosing to be involved with the GSA at their school, but many of them expressed a commitment to advocate for human rights and support LGBTQ people. This is consistent with research conducted by Miceli (2005), which reveals that for many straight allies the decision to participate in GSAs is indeed politically motivated along these lines. In addition, more recent research by Goldstein & Davis (2010) found that 85% of participants in their study indicated that advocating for human rights and supporting queer friends influenced their decisions to become involved in GSAs. This section describes the participants' personal journeys that motivated them to participate in the GSA at their school, and their reasons for electing to become involved.

Collette communicates that her friends at school, who hold queer-positive attitudes, had an impact on her decision to become involved in the GSA. She states, "But, then, like I saw my friends were in it, so I went to a few meetings 'cause part of it was 'cause I didn't want to be alone on lunch 'cause I had nowhere else to go." Thus, her friends' dedication to advocating for human rights, such as 'gay marriage', inspired Collette to become invested in being a straight ally. She explains that being queer is not a choice and that people should not be judged based on their sexual identity:

> Umm, I guess the only thing is like, I really don't believe that people should be judged based on their sexual orientation 'cause when you're born you don't choose to be a boy or girl, you don't choose to be like blonde, brunette, and you don't choose to be gay or straight. So, like people can't control that and people say it's a choice, but it's not really. It's really not. And I just don't believe that people should be judged based on something they just can't control whatsoever.

Collette seems to grasp the notion that privileging heterosexuality, while "Othering' queer sexualities is inherently unjust insomuch that she alludes to the fact that only certain students, with particular identities, are treated in harmful ways within schools (Kumashiro, 2002).

Similar to Collette's reasoning for joining the GSA at her school, Chad was motivated to join the club because many of his theatre friends were involved with the GSA. He describes his role as a GSA member as supporting queer people:

> Umm, I think my role is if, my role to provide support to anyone who needs it. Anyone who's feeling like they are being pressed by these issues. My role is if I see homophobic stuff happening around the school is to try stop it as best I can. Being an advocate for the group or ambassador or whatever...

Chad illuminates his desire to advocate on behalf of those who are impacted by LGBTQ victimization, which represents a way in which he is committed to upholding human rights for queer people. He has developed intimate contact, friendship relationships, with people who identify as queer, which Horn et al. (2009) assert relates to lower levels of sexual prejudice among heterosexual-identifying youth. Due to his established friendships with LGBTQ people, he may know what it is like for some queer people to experience homophobia.

Similarly, Erin describes her involvement with the GSA as driven by her passion to support LGBTQ human rights. She communicates that, due to her interpersonal relationships with queer friends, she has an understanding of the impacts of LGBTQ victimization.

> Umm, because equality, again, like I said before, it's my thing. Umm, I think, well I'm, like I'm really involved in theatre so I have a lot of friends umm who I've seen go through issues with being like gay, or lesbian, or bisexual, transgender...Umm, but, yeah, yeah. I don't know. I just love it. I think that everyone deserves human rights 'cause we're all people. Like it doesn't matter who you like, what your gender is, like your race, sexual orientation, like is all connects and everyone's just equal as people and I think it's just dumb to create like these walls of like hate where...it's just unnecessary and people fight over it and people die. And there are more important things to worry about.

Thus, Erin views supporting and advocating for LGBTQ people as an important aspect of her identity. She believes that all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, are human and thus should be treated with respect and dignity.

Bobby, saw the GSA as an opportunity to learn more about LGBTQ issues in order to support his queer-identifying friend. When asked about why he joined the GSA at his school, he purports:

> My friend Sammy went through a tough time. With uh, umm, his, uh, he came out and it was the worst thing possible 'cause his parents kicked him out of his house, he had to go and live with his partner instead. He got into drugs a little bit and it was just definitely problematic and I had no idea how to help, and I thought the GSA would be the best way to learn more so I can help someday. 'Cause before the GSA my only source of knowledge for gay culture was *1 Girl, 5 Gays* and I needed definitely more than that.

This comment confirms Wells' (2006) research, which suggests that "simply getting to know an LGBTQ person is one of the most significant ways to reduce discrimination and prejudice" (p. 28). Furthermore, Bullard (2004) suggests that interpersonal contact with queer people can enhance straight students' consciousness and sensitivity to the marginalization of queer people, and assist allies to unlearn assumptions and stereotypes about LGBTQ people. For example, Bobby sees Sammy as a person and not just in terms of his sexual identity, and thus, he perceives the treatment of his friend by his parents to be unjust. He joined the GSA because he wanted to learn more by about queer culture so he could support his friend. Bobby's desire to become involved in his school's GSA, due to his awareness of LGBTQ needs through his interpersonal connection with his friend, is supported by Miceli's (2005) work on ally motivations.

Unlike some of his peers, Bobby is aware of existing social and systemic injustices that impact on queer people. He acknowledges that some LGBTQ people are thrust into abusive situations, which they are forced to navigate within. Bobby communicates that he needed more information on LGBTQ matters to supplement the lack-lustre

knowledge he amassed through exposure to media; this represents a call for LGBTQ issues to be propelled into the forefront of formal educational instruction in the form of anti-homophobic education. As Britzman (1995) contends, through the silencing of LGBTQ concerns in the official curricula, heterosexism is constructed and maintained. Similarly, Kumashiro (2002) insists that educators should regularly integrate the 'Other' into their lessons and topics of discussion to help dismantle oppression. He goes on to argue that anti-oppressive education is "reading against common sense" (p.63); thus, creating curricula that allows students to critically examine privileged and marginalized identities, may prompt students to trouble sedimented prejudice. Overall, infusing LGBTQ content into the official and hidden curricula affords students opportunities to learn about sexual and gender diversity, and it may assist pupils unlearn homophobic and heterosexist assumptions that currently monopolize many educational spaces.

After being verbally threatened at his new school, Martin, the openly gay-identifying participant, was introduced to the GSA advisor by a educator and he joined the GSA thereafter. By doing this, he received support from some of his fellow peers, but he also demonstrated resiliency by committing to visibly combat homophobia at his secondary school. Martin's unwillingness to be perceived as a mere victim at his school, demonstrates how he is acting with agency to live on his own terms (Wright, 2005). Walls and colleagues (2010) illustrate that the presence of GSAs are correlated with safer schools, and an enhanced awareness that there is at least one safe adult at school.

Toomey et al. (2011) acknowledge, there is a "disparity in positive school experiences for LGBT young people and the lack of information about positive development for LGBT adolescents necessitates the need for research on specific

experiences of LGBT adolescents in positive school-based contexts, such as extracurricular activities" (p.176). Martin expresses both positive and negative feelings towards the two GSAs he has encountered within his secondary school experience. For example, he did not participate in the GSA at his former school because:

> "I didn't really believe in it...every time I got harassed, all my friends that were around me, they would never do anything. They just walk by, and talk like nothing happened. Obviously they heard it."

He participates in the GSA at his second high school because he believes students are helping to combat homophobia, and he believes that their actions are making more of a difference: "Yea, there are more straight allies at Waterdown High. Ridley [his former school] there is only like gay people in the GSA. The teacher wasn't really supportive of the GSA at Ridley". Firstly, he describes the important inclusion of straight allies in the fight against LGBTQ prejudice at his school. Miceli (2005), for example, writes: "Expressions of allegiance from heterosexual students or adults are powerful reminders of the significance of straight allies to the GSA movement" (p.193). In this sense, Kumashiro's point about the need to avoid just a focus on education for and about the 'Other' is important. The role that privileged heterosexual subjects might play in interrupting heteronormativity and addressing homophobia is highlighted here by Martin. Secondly, he asserts that the GSA supervisor was not supportive at his first school, which had a negative impact on his impressions of the GSA. Ally resources developed by GLSEN (2009) indicate that educators help foster a safe space through being a supportive ally to LGBTQ learners. That being said, the GSA advisor at Martin's first school appears not to have been very successful at facilitating a safe space because Martin does not feel she was attentive or helpful.

Understanding of Being the 'Other'

Stotzer (2009) illuminates how most literature examining the LGBTQ attitudes of straight-identifying people are monopolized by queer-negative attitudes. Thus, she identifies the necessity to expand literature on the development of queer-positive attitudes by straight-identifying individuals. Analysis of the interview data does reveal that straight allies develop queer-positive attitudes through their personal experiences with either being incorrectly labelled the 'Other' by association with queer identifying students or their ability to empathize with minority populations. An emerging theme that has surfaced through speaking with participants is their experiences of being 'Othered' themselves, and/or their comprehension of victimization based on lived subjectivities, such as sexual orientation or gender. Collette, for example, describes how a situation that occurred in elementary school may have had an impact on her understanding of what it means to be 'Othered'. Some of her female classmates thought they heard her declare that she liked another young woman at school; they responded by fabricating a rumour that she was a lesbian. She declared that the situation infuriated her a bit, not because she was labelled a lesbian, but because she was mislabelled. She depicts how this situation may have helped her develop queer-positive attitudes:

> ...I think like that once I felt that kind of discrimination, I think I kind of more realised like what people are going through and how like they are being targeted for something, for who they are instead of who they aren't. 'Cause it's one thing to be targeted for something that you aren't, but it'd be a huge different thing to be targeted for someone that you are, you know? I think that once I kind of realised like how other people must feel and worse, that I should kind of do something about it, you know?

Collette emphasizes how her own experience of being perceived as the 'Other' on the basis of sexual orientation may have prompted her to internalize how people are potentially treated differently, and are unfairly targeted and victimized based on their actual identity. This finding is supported by data collected by Stotzer (2009), which indicate that straight allies likened their equity and social justice attitudes to experiences of personal oppression or witnessing the oppression of others.

Similarly, Erin, describes how she has become more attuned to the reality and implications of LGBTQ-related harassment. She ponders:

> Well 'cause, say I'm sitting there, and like, like I'm gay and someone else is saying umm like talking to their friend being like, oh yeah, like oh that guy at the party is such a faggot, like oh what a loser like, he fell on the floor, I don't know. Umm, and I'm sitting here being like, ok so, like, I don't know, it would just be like, oh so I'm a loser because I'm gay, and like umm I'm a faggot. Like it, it just, it has that impact and to see like that other friend just kind of stand there and listen to him and be like oh yeah, ha ha ha.

Erin brilliantly connects the concepts of exposure to anti-gay attitudes and behaviours and its potential negative implications for queer-identifying people. She recognizes that queer people may be oppressed in schools due to their sexuality, which places heterosexual students in a position of privilege because of their unearned ability to evade harassment. Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, and Sanchez (2011) emphasize, "the simple, daily routine of going to school is fraught with harassment and victimization. Population-based studies have consistently shown that students who identify or are perceived to be LGB are at a dramatically higher risk for a wide range of health and mental health concerns, including sexual health risk, substance abuse, and suicide compared with their heterosexual peers" (p. 228).

When speaking to what has an impact on LGBTQ students at his school, Bobby communicates that many queer students may not be comfortable with expressing their sexuality in schools because they may be fearful of the consequences. He acknowledges how 'coming out' is difficult in the high school setting:

> Bobby: Those students are fearing right now to come out of the closet, they are fearing to be themselves around other people, they are fearing, they are hoping that these four years continuously just pass over and nobody notices a thing. And the ones that do come out are constantly living in fear. Jean himself actually did get attacked once and it was, it was scary. So, it's definitely, it's a scary subject to come out at school.
>
> **Alicia: Was this attack at school?**
>
> Bobby: No, no, it was just somewhere else. Well, like even if you hear of one, all the sudden if you are a gay person you decide to go even further into the closet than coming out.

Bobby contends that many queer youth are fearful of disclosing their sexuality at school because they are unsure as to how people will respond to this information. He describes how his queer-identifying friend was physically attacked, and positions LGBTQ youth, at times, as masking their sexuality in order to escape potential abusive treatment. Results from Canada's first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools reveals that 64% of LGBTQ students, and 61% of students with LGBTQ guardians feel unsafe at their schools (Taylor et al., 2011). Thus, the majority of queer youth are potentially living in fear in school communities.

Connell (2009) and Pascoe (2007) stress that effeminate boys frequently encounter verbal and physical abuse and discrimination because they are perceived to

deviate from gendered 'norms'. These 'norms' emphasize social expectations for men and women. If, for example, a man expresses feminine characteristics, he may be viewed as less masculine and, thus, his gender and/or sexuality may be put under scrutiny by his observers. Chad, for example, describes his gender as, a "fairly effeminate man" because people say he has "a few gender stereotypically female tendencies", which he explains in terms of being emotional and slightly flustered at times. He relates that he goes along with it "as long as you know, it's, it's not hurting me, it's not hurting anyone else." As the conversation progresses, Chad explains that people's perceptions of him definitely impacts him because he does not enjoy it when people dislike him; he is a people pleaser who attempts to avoid confrontation and acquiring enemies. Chad's in-depth understanding of gendered 'norms' - more specifically, his recognition of the social expectations of him as a man - may have contributed to his understanding of the societal implications associated with being positioned as the 'Other'.

Martin explains, "I know there are a lot of people helping with the GSA that aren't gay. They do get the harassment." After a peer from his school, a straight-identifying female student, facilitated a presentation on the gay community, someone or some people wrote, "gays are bad. They should never come back." on her locker because the person(s) perceived her to be a lesbian. Martin communicates that he felt "really bad for her" because she is young (grade ten), and, "She is not even part of the LGBT community. She is just trying to help out." This hate crime demonstrates how homosexuality is often connected with negativity in schooling. Moreover, if students advocate on behalf of LGBTQ people they may subsequently be viewed as queer, and

thus, experience harassment due to their perceived identities. On the whole, Connell (2009) proposes that allies may become targets of LGBTQ victimization due to their perceived sexuality or gender.

Family Relations and the Development of Queer-Positive Attitudes

The majority of participants I interviewed inevitably spoke about how their queer-positive attitudes contrasted with familial values and beliefs. In fact, Stotzer (2009) acknowledges that youth can develop queer-positive attitudes in spite of being exposed to queer-negative attitudes and homophobia within their family setting. Collette describes how she addresses the use of anti-gay language, not only within her school, but with her cousins as well: "Umm, if I hear like a comment or something that I don't think is very appropriate, like I'll let the person know. I'll like, sometimes even, my cousins will say stuff like that, and I'll tell them, like you shouldn't say that, it's offensive to some people and stuff like that." Collette insinuates that many people use homophobic language without the intent of being malicious; thus, they may unknowingly offend people. It is evident, however, that through the repetitive production of queer pejoratives, the naturalization of heterosexuality is reinstituted, which positions homosexuality as its undesirable, and deviant opposite (Kumashiro, 2002). Moreover, Kumashiro writes, "oppression is produced by discourse, and in particular, is produced when certain discourses (especially ways of thinking that privilege certain identities and marginalize others) are cited over and over. Such citational processes serve to reproduce these hierarchies and their harmful effects in society" (p.50).

Collette continues her discussion on the use of anti-gay language by commenting that her brother uses oppressive language at times, without the intention of causing harm:

> Yeah. Like, my brother will say it sometimes. He doesn't say it as much now. But, he wasn't trying to offend anyone, obviously. I think it's just kind of something that you end up picking up. But, I think he's out of it now.

Colette addresses her brother's use of homophobic language and indicates that he respects her interjections due to her involvement with the GSA: "He knows [my] reasons behind that, to say that he shouldn't say that kind of stuff." Collette, however, indicates that he is not involved with the GSA at their school, although she has talked to him about participating. Likewise, Erin addresses the use of homophobic language by her brother, which highlights how she acts as an agent of change within her family setting, in addition to her advocacy based work within her school community. This finding is supported by Garcia-Alonso's (2004) work, which spotlights how GSA membership helps students make an impact beyond the walls of their schools. With respect to the work of straight allies, future research may explore why GSA members are motivated to extend their LGBTQ advocacy-based work to include other areas of their lives, such as the family.

Collette also mentions her mother within the interview. When asked about if there are any challenges associated with her involvement in the GSA at her school, Collette divulges:

> Umm, my mom actually kind of sometimes worries like how involved I'm getting. Like, she's happy that I'm doing this kind of thing and like 'cause she knows I am doing like a good thing. But she's tells me

> to be like careful that I don't get too involved that people label me
> wrongly. Like she doesn't want people to like assume that I'm a
> lesbian or something just 'cause I'm involved with the GSA. So like,
> she just worries that I don't get mislabelled.

Collette has a good understanding of what it may feel like to be 'Othered' (Kumashiro, 2002) due to her classmates' differential treatment of her in elementary school based on her perceived sexual orientation. Her mother seems to be well aware of the potential negative consequences associated with being labelled the 'Other' because of Collette's association with sexual minority students at school, and is concerned that her daughter will be marginalized if, once again, she is perceived to be queer. It is clear that being identified or identifying as heterosexual in high school does not make straight students vulnerable targets for harassment, like their sexual minority and gender variant classmates. This highlights the invisible privilege that many straight-identifying students possess, in which it is advantageous to be heterosexual and consequently, it is alienating to be queer. Kumashiro (2002) writes, "the dual processes of privileging and Othering are often masked in common sense" (p.82). Thus, heterosexuality is viewed as 'natural', and consequently, homosexuality is positioned as abnormal, which contributes to the systemic marginalization of LGBTQ people in schooling. Thus, Morris (2005) suggests, educators should work to queer schooling by shattering rigid gender and sexuality categories.

Bobby also holds queer-positive attitudes, despite knowing that his father is homophobic. He declares:

> My dad is homophobic. He does not hate gay people, but he does fear
> gay people. I cannot, I would not be able to bring over a gay person
> to my house, but if I was ever gay, my dad would accept me and
> would kind of move on from this homophobia because he has no

> hatred towards anyone but he, he's Jamaican, so they have a deep
> fear of kind of homophobia. They don't understand it really.

Interestingly, Bobby draws attention to possible corollaries of cultural differences, in which some people may be less accepting or supportive of LGBTQ people based on their cultural affiliations. In Kevin Kumashiro's (2002) book, *Troubling Education: Queer Activism and Anti-oppressive Pedagogy*, he discusses the concept of identity intersectionality. He describes how racialized heterosexism exists in the Asian America community by which "queer sexuality is often racialized as White" (p.83). In a similar vein, for Bobby's father, homosexuality may be thought of as a 'White disease' (Wat, 1996). Stotzer's (2009) work suggests that people may develop queer-positive attitudes, without being exposed to early child normalization experiences from guardians. Thus, despite encountered homophobia through his father, Bobby explains that he is supportive of his queer-identifying uncle:

> My uncle is gay, so, and his grandma's a Jehovah Witness so they are
> very much against that entire deal; they all believe it's a phase. So,
> me being a gay ally, being the one person in the family that helping
> out, that's being nice, that's seeing it for what it is, you know just a
> sexual preference.

With this statement, Bobby illuminates how intersecting identities, such as religion and race or ethnicity, can impact on attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals. Chad also describes how his father previously exhibited queer-negative attitudes in his home. He believes, to a large extent, that homophobia is a by-product of media and much of it can be attributed to environmental influences, such as where people have grown up. He explains: "Like I know my dad, before he really got to know about it, used to be a bit homophobic even around me in the house until he kind of learned a bit more about it, I

guess..." He notes that he has observed a change within his father's homophobic behaviours:

> Chad: Well, just before he just used to a lot of the times just call things, just like anyone else at this school I guess, he just used to call things gay or you know, you know, what, why did you do that, are you a faggot or something? So. And you know. But he, I think really, I think he just learned a bit more about it. He has, he has definitely changed.
>
> **Alicia: And how do you suppose he learned more about it?**
>
> Chad: Well, I, I think, 'cause my, like my mom hated it like when he would do that so she talked to him 'cause and then I kind of said hey dad, listen I'm not really comfortable with this. I mean, like I know, this is how you were maybe raised or what you learned, but I'm not comfortable with this...
>
> **Alicia: And when you said that, what was, like what happened after that?**
>
> Chad: Umm, I think he was kind of surprised to be honest. Umm, I don't think he'd realised that, I think he just I think he kind of just assumed it was what, just kind of the norm I guess, for today's youth. I think he was kind of surprised that I wasn't ok with it.

Chad expresses that it was difficult to approach his father about this subject, but it was a necessary to take action because, "after a while, it just got, he was doing, it seemed like he was doing it more and more. I'm just like...I can't." He contends that he was worried about confronting his father, but he felt relieved afterwards and now "it's all good." This scenario illuminates how Chad's queer-positive attitudes are voiced not only in schools, but within the confines of his home as well. He relates that he was unable to tolerate his father's homophobic comments. In the future, research might attend to understanding the motivation for young men, like Chad, to confront institutionalized forms of homophobia, particularly within their own family contexts.

Martin was born into a Muslim family, where he is a first generation Canadian. His mother relates to him: "We are Muslim, and it is against our religion to be gay, and it is a sin and everything." His extended family also believes he is living in "sin." His mother has communicated to him:

> "Why don't you change yourself to being straight...?" [He responded by stating]: ."How should I do that?" I asked her, and she was like, "just like girls." I told her, "Do you like women"?, and she said, "If I really wanted to, I could..."

It is apparent that Martin's mother believes that being queer is a choice and that one can easily change their sexual preference if they so choose. This represents how heterosexuality is held in esteem and how people are expected to be straight. Didi Khayatt (1992) brilliantly describes the systemic pressure to fit into society's heteronormative framework when she writes, "Heterosexuality is normative. It is hegemonic. It is institutionally sanctioned, ideologically affirmed, and socially encouraged and expected" (p. 205). Despite his mother's beliefs that contrast with his own, Martin constantly refutes her comments and he attempts to prove to her that he cannot change his sexual orientation. He indicates that she responds by stating: "I am gross, and I should, like die..."; she compares her other son to Martin and despite his brother's engagement in drinking and illicit drug use, and dropping out of school, she believes: "He is better because he is not gay. He is with a woman". Martin explains that she continuously asks him if he is straight now. His mother's expectation that he should be straight demonstrates how compulsory heterosexuality operates to marginalize his identity as a gay male. She views heterosexuality as 'natural' and 'normal', and thus, she perceives Martin's homosexual identity as deviant and something that must be altered. Britzman (1998) expresses that the social demands for 'normalcy' operate to construct

the marginalization of queer people. Warner (1999) writes, "Almost all children grow up in families that think of themselves as heterosexual, and for some children this problem [creates a]...profound and nameless estrangement, a sense of inner secrets and hidden shame (p.8).

This section highlights how allies are not only pushing back against anti-gay attitudes at school through their involvement in GSAs, but they are troubling homophobic interactions with their families. Allies can potentially experience negative consequences from their LGBTQ advocacy-based work within schools and within other institutions, such as the family. What is unknown, and thus, should receive further research, is what motivates GSA members to engage in ally work outside their school communities. Moreover, how does their human rights work within schooling translate into the larger community?

Coming 'Out' As An Ally

Griffin & Ouellett (2002) and Macgillivray (2005) discuss the imperative role of visible allegiance in the support of LGBTQ people. They argue that an instrumental way in which allies can advocate for change is to be visible and to draw attention to their presence within educational contexts. The following section details how allies are standing up and standing 'out' in their school communities to confront LGBTQ related prejudice. Their actions draw attention to the pride they experience from conducting advocacy-based work for the LGBTQ community, and their resiliency, as evidenced through their reluctance to accept the encroachment of homophobia in their schools.

The GSA members at Erin's school, for example, were visiting classrooms as a part of a club initiative to address the topic of HIV/AIDS. Erin shares an anecdote about an ally who wanted to be seen and heard as a member of the group:

> Actually one of the girls yesterday, umm or not yesterday, but our last meeting on Thursday, umm mentioned because Mrs K said "oh are there, is there anyone who would feel uncomfortable going around to classes and talking?" And one of the girls said, "No, like I'm actually, like umm I'm proud to say I'm part of this group. Like it's something that really matters to me and I want people to know that I'm proud of it and want them to join too and stay informed and all this other stuff too", which was pretty cool.

Similarly, Bobby addresses queer prejudice at his school by visibly demonstrating to others that he is an ally. He openly states that he participates in the GSA at his school when he interacts with his peers. He purports:

> Bobby: In fact we're having a giant assembly where I'm going to come out and say I'm part of it as well to pretty much the entire school...
>
> **Alicia: ...do you think that will make an impact on others by saying that?**
>
> Bobby: Well, most people know me from school a lot. I'm actually a fairly popular student at Crossroads High so, me coming out and saying that you know that gay, gay is ok and don't be so homophobic and that people can be whoever they wish to be is kind of, would kind of be a little bit enlightening to people who would kind of think that I'm homophobic...

Wells (2006) acknowledges the invaluable necessity for visible allies to advocate for LGBTQ justice in schools. By being an 'out' ally, Bobby demonstrates his commitment to supporting LGBTQ people.

Expanding on Bobby's notion of fostering observable connections between queer and non-queer subjects, Chad also affirms that demonstrating to queer people that they

have support is an essential role for straight allies to occupy. He declares: "And also you know with the straight allies, just to show them [queer students] that they have the support, and they do." He emphasizes that this allows LGBTQ students to know that people care about them. Research by GLSEN (2009) demonstrates that "simply knowing that allies exist can be a source of support" (p.2). Martin, however, describes his role as a GSA member as someone who "educate[s] others who aren't part of the LGBT community", which helps foster mutual understanding. He believes that the role of a straight ally is to be "a good Samaritan, just to help out if someone is in need of help. Like if you see the bullying. You don't just walk by."

Through direct intervention, allies can take a stand against queer related prejudice and help construct safer educational environments for LGBTQ people. Erin speaks about her role as an educator at her high school and how, as Martin mentions, she, as an ally, has the potential to positively impact her peers:

> And just as long as people take like umm like the small things in just calling people out on like certain types of derogatory comments that they make. Umm, if other people see me doing that, they might have the courage to go and stop like another person that might say it, who might like go and like expand to other people and just kind of spreads this huge like ocean of love...

Thus, allies such as Erin, Bobby, and Martin position themselves as role models, as actively taking a leadership role in addressing homophobia in the school community. This section highlights how visible manifestations of queer-positivity can foster positive interpersonal connections between peers as a basis for reducing anti-gay attitudes and behaviours, in general.

GSA Member Attributes

It is possible to compile a typology of GSA member characteristics on the basis of how the participants in this study explain and understand their role as allies. Similar to the motivations for GSA involvement for participants documented in the broader literature (Miceli, 2005; Goldstein & Davis, 2010), interviewees in my research indentified advocating for human rights and supporting LGBTQ people as motives for becoming GSA members. Chad depicts his school's GSA as a very open, like-minded, and talkative group. He indicates that all members are comfortable talking to each other because everyone is "very supportive of the group." He continues his description of the supportive nature of the group by stating:

> ...I think 'cause the issue that we're are all drawn for, which is the support is very, is something, it's a very emotional issue. We all feel really strongly about it and umm, we're all, we know we're all on the same page there. I guess 'cause it's a lot of times, it does brings up a lot of emotion in people I guess. We all know that, we're all going. ...it's a very emotional issue. We all know we're all on the same page and that kind of opens us all up I guess 'cause we're a lot of like minded people.

The knowingness of collectively holding queer-positive attitudes provides a stable environment, a safe space, to openly talk about issues that may be very emotional and personal in nature. GLSEN's (2009) information package on being an ally, describes a safe space as a "welcoming, supportive, and safe environment" (p.2). Collette describes the members of her school's GSA as open to new ideas, welcoming and supportive. She explains that the group is "welcoming of new people [and] very accepting. And always willing to like be there for people when you need to be." She further elaborates on her experience as a new GSA member:

It was very welcoming…And they're very welcoming of new people, like someone new walks in, and you get like get a big hello and everything. Like, everyone's very open to new ideas. Like, you never feel like you're discriminated. Like, it's, it's a very like warm kind of place to be. Like, I always look forward to the meetings because usually it's laughs and stuff like that. And, it's a very nice place to be, like everyone's just so nice; and just welcoming of new people: like gay, straight, bi, trans, whatever, you know. So, a very accepting environment.

Thus, in her opinion, essential characteristics of GSA members, which she connects to cultivating a positive environment, include: being accepting of others, creating a welcoming environment for students to feel safe, and being open to new ideas.

GSA Teacher Supervisors: Facilitating an Open Environment?

Interestingly, some GSAs I visited seemed to be more able to craft spaces in which students were afforded opportunities to talk openly about their intersecting identities. In fact, there was a strong sense that the teacher played a crucial role in cultivating such a culture of acceptance and openness in creating safe spaces for sexual minority and gender variant students to talk about their subjectivities. Many teacher supervisors, for example, were cognisant of providing an environment which afforded students the space to share what they felt comfortable sharing. However, some supervisors had policies in which students were not encouraged to publicly disclose their sexuality or gender identity or they were actually barred from self-identifying in front of the group. One teacher supervisor, in particular, was adamant about this and explicitly made me commit to adhering to this policy as a condition of my visitation. Is this sanction a manifestation of personal discomfort in discussing identities, or perhaps influenced by how they self-identify? Of course, students should never be expected to openly declare their identities in a public setting, however, providing a space in which

they are able to talk about their identities can be very empowering because in other spaces in schools, such as the hallways, cafeteria, or classrooms, they may be unable or unwilling to talk about their lived experiences. In another light, with respect to queer politics, this teacher may have been coaching students to reject formalized sexuality and gender categories and labels; since labels are loaded with meaning, there are consequences that coincide with embracing and taking them up. Or perhaps, this educator did not want youth to feel pressured or obligated to self-identify. Russell, Clarke & Clary's (2009) work suggest that there is little empirical evidence that teenagers are 'post gay'; that is to say, "typical sexual identity labels -'gay', 'lesbian' and 'bisexual' - have not lost meaning and relevance for contemporary adolescents" (p. 884). Their findings suggest that traditional labels still "matter and have meaning" (p.889) for the youth of today. This being said, hindering student's self-directed disclosure of who they are, may inhibit the development of their individual identities.

In addition to the supervisor's ability to promote an open and safe environment, the effectiveness of the teacher to guide students and to facilitate the strengthening of their knowledge and understanding in the area of social concerns in general, can enhance students' understandings of LGBTQ matters. Obviously, this is not a groundbreaking revelation, however, it is important to note that teachers well versed in LGBTQ matters may have a solid foundation and repertoire of experience to engage students in higher level thinking; for example, I have noticed that knowledgeable teachers can assist students understand complex concepts, such as heteronormativity. This emphasis on the key role of teachers in cultivating conditions for interrupting heteronormativity and addressing homophobia in schools, I would argue, should be

examined in future research on GSAs and GSA members because many of the participants I interviewed were unable to describe systemic queer issues, such as the normalization and naturalization of heterosexuality in schooling. Britzman (1998) asserts that in order to comprehend the oppression of queer students, one must move beyond the superficial examination of homophobia and invest efforts into interrogating how heterosexism contributes to the oppression of LGBTQ people. For the most part, participants were only able to grasp the negative ramifications associated with the proliferation of anti-gay language in schools, and thus, focused their advocacy based work on combating homophobia, without problematizing the impact of heterosexist assumptions and heteronormativity in society.

Where Are All the Straight Allies?

Straight allies greatly contribute to the cultivation of a queer-positive atmosphere in schooling. Moreover, research from GLSEN (2009) suggests that, "allies can make a significant contribution to the LGBT rights movement. It is important for allies to demonstrate that LGBT people are not alone as they work to improve school climate, and to take a stand in places where it might not be safe for LGBT people to be out or visible" (p. 5). Unfortunately, many of the twelve GSAs that I visited were mostly composed of queer students, whereas previous research indicates that straight allies make up the majority of the GSA populace (Miceli, 2005). Chad indicates that his GSA is mostly comprised of straight allies. He participates in a larger GSA where he estimates that approximately twenty straight allies are involved with the club in some capacity. Thus, the ratio of straight allies to queer-identifying students was much more prominent in this school when compared with the majority of schools I visited. When

asked about how many straight allies are involved in the GSA at her school, Erin states that four or five straight allies participate in the GSA at her school consistently. Likewise, Collette states there are straight allies, but that "the majority of them [members] are homosexual." She ponders why the majority of GSA members at her school identify as LGBTQ:

> Umm, well it's a GSA and I think that having one in the school is important to more homosexuals than straight allies 'cause it gives them more protection...kind of just a place to feel safe and comfortable. So, and like some go there to tell their stories and get out, some go there so they can just have a place to be, you know, 'cause it's a place where you definitely do feel accepted.

Interestingly, Collette feels as though GSAs are more essential for queer youth to participate in because of their supportive nature. However, are GSAs not just as essential for students with queer guardians and people who are perceived to be LGBTQ? Moreover, as Kumashiro's (2002) work highlights, equal focus needs to be placed on those who are members of the hegemonic group and on building alliances with those who feel compelled to support LGBTQ people, and who are actively committed to pushing back against homophobia in advocating for human rights.

GSA Roles and Purposes

The roles and purposes of a GSA depend on the needs of the students in distinctive school communities. Griffin et al. (2004) state that GSAs involve the following four roles in schools: counselling and support; providing safe spaces for students; educating the school community by raising awareness of issues and actively labouring to create educational opportunities for community members; and working to extend possibilities to raise awareness of human rights issues to produce positive change in secondary schools.

Allies in this study identified varying roles and purposes of the GSAs at their respective schools. Bobby suggests that the GSA is a "safe haven" where people are not to be judged. Collette describes her GSA as a place where people can go to express themselves without the worry of being judged or discriminated against. She explains:

> ...it's a good place to go and be open about who you really are, instead of lying to the world about who you are because here you're worried that people are just going to judge you, you know. Like, it's a place you can just go and say whatever, as long as it's not offensive towards anyone else, and like, no one will judge you. It's a very like open place.

With respect to the work of Griffin et al. (2004), Collette's GSA offers both counselling and support, and a safe space for students. She also mentions that the open atmosphere provides a space in which students can talk about issues, for example bullying, that they are experiencing at school. Collette emphasizes the supportive nature of her GSA meetings when she relates:

> They usually say, like, is anyone having any issues, or have there been any incidents. So, it's a really good place to kind of just, like, safely tell people, like what has happened to you before. So, like you feel more accepted, kind of thing.

Although Chad describes his GSA as supportive, his club seems to engage in more queer advocacy-based work; for example, the group is actively addressing LGBTQ matters that occur in the school and within the larger community as well. He affirms, "if people hear about something happening or are directly involved if something happened, they'll usually, like at the end when we're just talking about things, they'll usually bring it up. It doesn't happen often, I guess though." Collette, Chad, and Bobby view the GSA as a space where students can find support and participate without being fearful of judgement. Thus, for both Bobby and Collette, the GSA at their respective schools

functioned, for the most part, as a safe space for providing support and counselling, whereas Chad's GSA, although support-based as well, is depicted as more LGBTQ advocacy based.

Erin, however, indicates that the GSA provides a setting for the acquisition of knowledge about LGBTQ issues. She claims: "Not only is it a place, umm, for people who aren't comfortable, umm, or who are questioning or who are LGBT, umm, but I think it's for people to kind of come and learn." Thus, she communicates that the GSA provides significant opportunities to foster understanding and awareness about queer identities and issues. Moreover, there is a sense for Erin that participating in GSAs will inevitably help students learn about approaches to anti-oppressive education. For example, she sees students participating in the GSA at her school as not just learning about the 'Other' or as a means of providing education for the 'Other'; instead being a member means that they may well have the opportunity to learn about the damaging effects of privileging and 'Othering' (Kumashiro, 2002). This activist focus on anti-oppressive education is evident when Erin mentions that ignorance is one of the biggest issues in high school, and then she goes on to explain how her GSA is attempting to create awareness of LGBTQ concerns. In regards to the issues it seeks it address, she states: "We're trying to, right now we're trying to get our group out there so people know that we exist in the school. And that there is like a safe haven you can come to or you'll have people that are supportive and to help out and stuff." Erin communicates that her GSA is a "safe haven" and thus, supportive, but she also contends that the GSA is much more than just a safe haven – there is an element of educating the student body

about the damaging effects of homophobia that is central to its purpose and function within the school community.

Similarly, Bobby extends his idea on the purpose of the GSA at his school by acknowledging that is also exists to generate awareness about homophobia "because there are some people in our school that have no idea what that means...So, it's definitely unawareness to what homophobia is and why it hurts the way people have invented it as and what it really does mean for people..." Fascinatingly, Bobby presents the idea that homophobia is a social concoction, in which prejudice is learned, and thus it may be eliminated through exposure to educational experiences and purposeful unlearning. This finding is supported by Lipkin's (1999) work.

GSA Initiatives: Breaking the Silence

The primary socializing agent for adolescents is school, thus, schooling provides a powerful setting for intervention. Toomey et al. (2011) write, "Adolescents spend a large portion of their time in the school context. Thus, schools are a potential setting for positive youth development and resiliency" (p. 175). The inability or unwillingness of particular school communities to acknowledge and/or address queer equity issues becomes problematic, specifically when silencing perpetuates a state of heteronormatvity. GSAs provide an outlet to disseminate queer-positive attitudes within schooling, which may contribute to a more respectful educational environment. Moreover, GSAs occupy a visible presence in schools that been shown to create a more positive and safer school climate for queer youth (Taylor et al., 2011; GLSEN, 2009). "Research suggests that the presence of a GSA can serve as a protective factor for LGBT adolescents, such that LGBT adolescents who report that their school has a GSA tend to

report more school safety and greater well-being" (Goodenow Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Lee, 2002; Kosciw, Grcytak, & Bartkicwicz, 2010; O'Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub, 2004; Walls, Freedenthal, & Wisneski, 2008; Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010).

The space in which GSA meetings are conducted provides a place where students can talk about issues that may be silenced within the greater school community. GSAs offer students an opportunity to learn and converse about social and systemic injustices and collectively work towards diminishing inequities in their communities. In order to alleviate the silencing of sexual and gender diversity in schools, it is essential for community members to be exposed to queer issues and be allotted opportunities to further their understanding. This is powerful because as Britzman (1995) argues, heterosexuality is naturalized through the purposeful silencing of queer identities in official schooling. Due to the purposeful omission of LGBTQ content or the suppression of queer culture and people in official curricula, Erin feels the need to take on the responsibility of prompting people to speak about LGBTQ issues:

> I just wish people talked about it more 'cause then they would understand more...I've had so many conversations with people who are like, honestly I don't, I don't know because there's not many people that I can talk about this with and I'm glad that like you can talk about it with me. And I'm like, yes, I feel so triumphant in those moments, I'm like yes! and I tell them, I'm like you can talk to me, like about it at any time, I'm always here. Like, tell other people to talk about it with me, 'cause I want to be able, I want people to feel open about the topic with like me and such.

Through her investment in the topic and her willingness to communicate with others about sexuality and gender matters, Erin positions herself as a visible ally that actively works to foster understanding and connectedness among students at her school.

Research from GLSEN (2009) emphasizes the powerful role that allies play within schooling: "Allies help LGBT students feel safer and more included in school, resulting in a more positive and successful school experience. In addition to supporting individual LGBT students, allies challenge anti-LGBT behaviour and work proactively to ensure safer, more inclusive schools for all students" (p. 6). It is astounding that students, in many ways, are leading the way in combating homophobia and heterosexism in schools, while many adults are failing to question and overturn the heteronormative foundation of schooling.

Like Erin, Collette speaks about addressing the silencing the of queer issues at her school. She talks about an opportunity for the GSA to speak 'out' about homophobia at her secondary school through the collective organization of an assembly for the school. The assembly emphasizes general issues related to the LGBTQ community. She explains:

> Umm, right now, I think the format that Brian [executive council member] has like set up, is like just general issues of like bullying and like just general issues of like LGBT stuff. And then like, so that's going to become the beginning of it, then the middle of it is kinda be like how to deal with like bullies and such and I think like that, I think it's how it goes, I'm not entirely sure. And then the last, and then the last part, is going to be like you are worth it so like that, more of an encouraging kind of, part of it.

Expanding on the idea of drawing attention to queer issues, allies describe their dedication to educating their peers about LGBTQ concerns. Erin considers her role as a GSA participant in terms of educating people inside and outside the boundaries of the GSA; she explains:

> Umm, I'm hoping to like teach the other members of the GSA the stuff that I know. 'Cause I feel like umm there's still so much that I have to learn. Like That's kind of, like I learn stuff everyday by like reading articles and such...I think I just want to umm show other people my passion for it and I don't like expect them to be like, oh yeah gay rights like, all the way. Just as long as they are more informed or become a little bit informed everyday or learn about a case of like someone getting hurt because of it umm like that's just all that matters to me. Like, I want them to not, like just slowly diminish the amount the hate that exists within high schools.

Erin acknowledges that she still has much to learn, but what she does know, she can share with her peers. Her desire to share her knowledge and to further acquire additional information for her personal growth represents how she is working to create a voice for queer issues in her school community.

Overall, the literature does reveal that the presence of GSAs have a positive impact on school communities. Kosciw and colleagues (2010), for example, gathered information from over 7000 queer students and the results revealed that schools with "a GSA [are] associated with fewer homophobic comments from peers, less victimization related to sexual orientation and gender expression, greater school safety and school connectedness, and more instances of teacher intervention in homophobic harassment" (Toomey et al., 2011, p.176). My own research is consistent with such findings, with participants positioning GSAs as positively contributing to their school communities.

GSA Activities Initiatives

In this section, I report on the many activities and initiatives that students identified in secondary schools in order to combat homophobia and heterosexism. These activities fall into the categories of roles and purposes of GSAs described by Griffin et al. (2004). Such information provided may be utilized for GSA advancement

through the sharing and implementation of strategies, which will assist students and school staff in fulfilling their club specific objectives. As Toomey et al. (2011) suggest, "it is likely that some GSAs are more effective than others in promoting safe school climates and challenging the heteronormative culture within a school" (p. 184). Thus, the pooling of club knowledge has the potential to serve as a springboard for the introduction of innovative and useful techniques and activities, which may aid in the development of safer schools for LGBTQ people.

The research did reveal that before students can engage in anti-oppressive education and activities it is necessary to provide them with education in order to build a solid understanding of social problems as basis for both reflecting on their own biases, and challenging the stereotypes they have socially learned. At the first GSA meeting for the year, the GSA members at Chad's secondary school participated in an activity, which prompted students to critically examine stereotypes related to how they perceive people. The activity required students to discuss the impact of holding assumptions about people:

> ...we were kind of divided into 3 or 4 groups, and each of us were kind of given out a cut out of a person's body. And we were like, one group was like, one group was like straight males, one group, and not like the group, but like we were assigned names: straight males, gay males, straight females, gay, and we were like, fill in the body with like stereotypes.

Kumashiro (2002) writes,

> Lessons that critique, for example, the harmfulness of stereotypes and the invisible histories of institutionalized oppression can involve revealing our own privileges, confronting our own prejudices, and acknowledging the harmfulness of practices that unintentionally

perpetuate stereotypes or are complicit with institutionalized oppression" (p. 64).

Thus, activities that prompt students to question their learning and their reading practices may help students to examine how notions of 'normalcy' operate to privilege heterosexuality and gendered 'norms' at the expense of queer sexualities and genders.

Chad describes how GSA meetings provide opportunities for students to examine human rights issues; they have discussed equity issues that have an impact on people in Canada, such as the lifetime blood donation ban on men who have sex with men (MSM) and a homophobic comic that was printed in a local newspaper. Chad was inspired to respond to the comic and with a letter that was eventually published. The club also spoke about writing a letter to their local MP to address the discriminatory ban on blood donation for MSM. When Chad wrote a letter to the editor because of its homophobic content, he demonstrated a dedication to combating LGBTQ related prejudice outside his role as a GSA member at his school. He describes what prompted him to write a rebuttal to the paper:

> Umm, well 'cause in the uh comic, there, the story line was that the main character who is an elementary school child had called something gay in his class and then he got like suspended I think. And then umm, then the comic decided, took this stance that, umm, the school, the school was being too umm, was being too harsh on the premise that it was freedom of speech. And I was like, no. I kind of said that, well I understand your views, saying that homophobic comments in any situation are ok, is just not right.

Overall, his club discusses queer issues pertaining to the larger city, and they attempt to critically engage and intervene regularly in systemic issues regarding the impact of homophobia, which exemplifies members' commitment to positioning themselves as allies both inside and outside the school setting. This represents how students are acting with agency to dismantle various forms of oppression (Kumashiro, 2002).

Collette also elaborates on some GSA events by describing activities run by club members that encourage participants to openly discuss topics, such as 'coming out' to parents and siblings. In addition, movie night events provide a space to meet and find support, which helps diminish unspoken issues. A few schools created educational programming directed at debunking myths about what it means to be queer. Bobby retells how the GSA at his school is attempting to disseminate queer-positive information to the school population: "Well, on research day we saw that some of the myths...are way false. And definitely under, under, unnoticed about some teenagers now....". On the whole, educating the school population is a consistent theme that the allies have communicated. For World AIDS Day, Erin's GSA visited classrooms to inform students about the facts and myths of HIV/AIDS, how people can support those afflicted by the virus, and what individuals can do to prevent transmission. Thus, the group was committed to raising awareness of alternative social issues beyond LGBTQ matters.

Stop Right Now: Allies Push Back Against Anti-Gay Attitudes and Behaviours

"Straight ally students sought to be their own role models" (Miceli, 2005, p.206).

Students are Leading the Way

Many of the GSAs I visited had a executive council in place to aid in the functioning of the group. Some presidents led the meetings, while in other GSAs, the teacher supervisor seemed to be more instrumental in facilitating the meetings. This section is dedicated to demonstrating how many students are leading the way within the LGBTQ movement in secondary schools.

At Chad's secondary school, there was a GSA, but then it merged into an all-encompassing equity club. The creation of a GSA separate from the Social Justice and Equity Club was a student initiative led by the current GSA president, Taylor. Chad states, "He, well, he talked like with one, a few of the teachers who were very for it and...But yeah, it was definitely the student who led the charge to set it up." Erin is one of the co-leaders of her school's GSA; she consults the GSA supervisor, but the teacher advisor strongly encourages students to take initiative and guide the GSA. Likewise, Martin and Bobby state that the GSA is run by a few students, with the helpful support of their teacher supervisor. Collette expresses that there is a council set up in her GSA and that students usually develop and facilitate the group activities: "Umm, well there's a few people and usually they just come like bring in a topic and we just talk about it, yeah basically. It's just a big discussion, like almost kind of between friends, like just friends having a conversation almost." Overall, the research highlights how straight allies are actively contributing to the functioning of the GSA at their schools, by occupying leadership roles within the club. Teacher supervisors, for these students, are perceived to be helpful and supportive advisors.

Allies Directly Confronting Their Peers

Goldstein and Davis (2010) write, "heterosexual allies are...powerful advocates for the LGBT movement" (p. 479) because they are actively working to diminish prejudice and generate positive social change. This section focuses on the potential impact allies have within their secondary schools. Direct confrontation of anti-queer language and behaviours can prove to be challenging for some allies. The following section outlines how allies are resisting and pushing back against prejudice directed towards queer people and LGBTQ culture.

Despite encountering verbal and physical harassment within school, Martin refuses to succumb to mistreatment by his peers based on his sexuality. He often confronts his peers about the use of homophobic language, even though they may have unpleasant reactions. He also describes how this method of interjection may not be effective, unfortunately: "Some of them just tell me to shut up and go on, and I say, no, but you know you shouldn't use these words. If you keep using them, I will report you to the Principal...and then they stop using it until they go away from me, and they will use it again." Bobby proudly describes how he responds to peers that utilize homo-negative language: "You shouldn't say that. Don't ever say that again. I'm leaving now and I will not be back until you say sorry." Bobby also explains that the reactions from his classmates differ, sometimes in aggressive ways, when he attempts to stop the contagious use of homophobic language: "Like some people just walk away and don't say anything and the other person feels a little guilty for saying the word in the first place. But some of them just get violent...not like kicking and screaming wise, but definitely yelling wise." Bobby highlights the apparent risk allies are taking in order to

propel the LGBTQ movement forward by individually addressing homophobic behaviours. For some allies, the inability of schools to cultivate a safe and inclusive environment in which all community members respect sexual and gender diversity may compel GSA members to address homophobia on a individual level. Therefore, there is a call for schooling to provide opportunities to challenge anti-gay attitudes and beliefs – challenging homophobia should not be allowed to fall upon the shoulders of individual students, but needs to be understood collectively in terms of a whole school commitment, both in terms of policy and curriculum implementation.

Similar to Bobby's self identified role as ally, Erin describes her role as a GSA member as someone who intervenes when people make inappropriate comments. However, Erin finds it difficult to intervene sometimes because:

> Like, I'll get like nervous if I hear it and I wanna stop it and there have been a few times when I haven't said anything and I actually like walk away and I end up feeling really bad after and I'm like I should have said something; that was stupid. But, umm, yeah definitely just telling people and informing them that like it's offensive and it hurts people and it's disrespectful...Umm, when kids hear umm so many derogatory comments that they feel bad about themselves and it just ends up in like depression, suicide, whatever. It all connects. Ahhhh.

In contrast to Bobby's interjection, Erin attempts to stop homophobia and she appears to inform her peers about how anti-gay language can injure others. She understands that homophobic language can have negative impact on LGBTQ youth and she strives to convey this understanding to her schoolmates. Russell et al.'s (2011) findings indicate that there are remarkably elevated levels of suicide attempts, risk for HIV infection, STI diagnoses, and depression for queer youth, thus formal preventive initiatives in schooling must be implemented to address this disparity. On the whole, in spite of assuming the risk of encountering negative reactions from their peers, these allies are

mostly refusing to stand by while their peers are utilizing queer-negative language. It is astonishing that these youth are willing to put the welfare of others, at times, above their own, in order to address LGBTQ inequities in schooling.

Breaking Down the Bystander: 'Upstanding' Pupils

High school is a time where interconnections between peers can greatly influence a student's educational experiences. Collette describes how she perceives peer relationships within this age range:

> I think it is, 'cause a lot of the issues do happen within the teen years. So, when, if someone is going through something and their peers are really doing something to try and help them, it's really effective. 'Cause, being a teenager, like your friends and your peers are the most important things in your lives at the moment. So, I think it's really effective when people try to do something about it.

Through this statement, Collette describes the power peers may enact through behaving as 'upstanders', instead of bystanders.

Erin thinks that her peers are progressively getting better at confronting LGBTQ prejudice in her school. A lot of her schoolmates, especially the students in her leadership class, where they have been learning about intervening, "are starting to be like no, that's really disrespectful, you shouldn't be saying that", which she views as positive. Erin says when some of her peers try to intervene, at times they retract because they "get scared or whatever" or "nervous", but, she insists whatever someone says or does, makes a difference and is effective, despite the outcome, because "even if you say hey, don't say that, like at least not around me, like it will still, it's preventing like the like 5 or 6 times that they might say it around in front of you like or in a week or whatever, right?." Interestingly, if allies interject when peers use derogatory language

does it serve as a superficial response to a substantial issue? For example, such an approach to interrupting homophobic language does not necessarily change people's homophobic attitudes and is ineffective in assisting with the disruption of the heteronormative foundation of homophobic language use (Britzman, 1995). It may simply influence individuals to self-monitor and correct homophobic comments only in the presence of an ally who they know disapproves of such use of language. In this way, allies may just be insulating themselves from the impact of anti-gay language. Erin relates:

> It's interesting because like I always think umm, even if, because people tend to correct themselves when they're in front of me because I've said stuff before but umm I don't know, I don't just want them to correct themselves because I'm around like I want them not to say it at all. So, and I tell them that. Like, but, it depends on the person. Others have actually like stopped saying it [homophobic slurs], which is nice, well when they're around me at least...

Through listening to participant commentary, it is apparent that they are individually addressing queer issues at their schools through confronting peers' homophobic language, and they are collectively addressing LGBTQ concerns through their involvement with GSAs. Due to the inability and/or unwillingness of many educators to cultivate learning environments that address LGBTQ concerns, participants may feel the burden of continuously taking up these issues, which is more than likely compounded, if school staff is unsupportive of their efforts.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an in-depth analysis of what motivated participants to become involved in their particular school-based GSA. The insights of these students draw attention to how important it is authorize student perspectives on addressing social justice issues, such as homophobia in schools, and its impact on the

whole school community. Specific knowledge derived from interviews with allies also enabled a deeper understanding of the particular role that GSAs can play in terms of addressing homophobia and heteronormativity in school communities. While, the students especially highlighted their commitment to activism, an analysis of the data also reveals that there are both potential limits and possibilities for individual members in terms of their capacity to effect change in the broader school community. In fact, questions are raised as to whether anti-homophobic education and intervention ultimately should fall on the individual shoulders of GSA members and their allies. Finally, the chapter also discussed and provided knowledge about school specific GSA initiatives as a further basis for reflecting on the specific role and function of GSAs in various school communities.

CHAPTER FIVE - DATA ANALYIS: CHALLENGES WITH CULTIVATING LGBTQ-POSITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Introduction

The previous chapter focuses on how participants in this study are actively addressing queer issues at their respective schools through their involvement in GSAs and through their individual LGBTQ advocacy-based work. This chapter spotlights the challenges associated with cultivating safer environments for LGBTQ people in secondary schooling. Moreover, I explore the significance of unlearning prejudice and, the role of administrators, teachers, and peers in addressing anti-homophobic and anti-queer attitudes, behaviours and practices in schools. Finally, I draw attention to the influence of social networking in order to highlight what work still needs to be done in secondary schools to build safer spaces for LGBTQ people and their allies.

Audre Lorde declares, "the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations, which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us." To effectively contribute to positive social change, we must trouble our attitudes and beliefs in order to unearth learned prejudice. In effect, we must unlearn that which we have often learned unknowingly (Britzman, 1995). Thus, work as an ally includes challenging personal anti-LGBTQ bias. Many allies see themselves as advocates for LGBTQ people, however are they actively working to address anti-gay language and actions at all times, in all spaces? This chapter is dedicated to revealing the experiences of students with the intention of examining and evaluating the challenges associated with addressing queer-negativity within secondary schools.

How Are Students Unlearning Anti-Queer Attitudes?

It is undeniable that anti-queer attitudes run rampant in schools (Taylor et al, 2011; GLSEN, 2009), despite the existence of supportive allies, and queer people who actively work to contest homophobia and challenge heteronormativity. Unfortunately, many people are unaware of queer issues, or perhaps are apathetic to its impact because they do not see themselves as directly affected by anti-gay prejudice (Lipkin, 1999). Bobby poetically communicates that, for some people, the acknowledgment of LGBTQ issues is problematic because of their inability to empathize with minority populations. However, if the 'norm' was homosexuality, perceptions may be altered. He explains that queer issues are a "hard subject for some people":

> **Alicia: Why do you think that that's a hard subject for some people?**
>
> Bobby: 'Cause not everyone's gay...If the majority of the world were gay, there'd be no problem. There would be a problem though if the minority was all straight, then they would all freak out.

This quote depicts how heterosexuality is equated with 'normalcy' (Britzman, 1995), and thus, represents the default sexual orientation. Due to this association, Morris (2005) notes that "being queer against the backdrop of heteronormativity is difficult and dangerous" (p.11). Bobby acknowledges that homosexuality could easily be seen as normative and thus privileged, if the majority of people identified as gay. Thus, the common practice of marginalizing queer sexualities is depicted by Bobby.

Collette divulges that she once held indifferent views regarding queer issues. She speaks to how her interest in participating in the club increased over time from her exposure to matters she was previously unacquainted with:

> Umm, well before like I was in the GSA, I didn't really, like, I wasn't as aware of more LGBT problems, so I didn't really care at first. But, then, like I saw my friends were into it, so I went to a few meetings 'cause part of it was 'cause I didn't want to be alone on lunch 'cause I had nowhere else to go. But then I was kind of interested to see like what kind of things they talked about, for sure. And then once I kind of got into it and I realised, oh this is really fun, I like it, so; I got more involved the next year.

Chad, describes prejudice directed towards queer people as learned when he uses the term, "ingrained notions", to explain how one comes to harbour anti-gay attitudes. He states, "I think it just in general it's just that you know anyone who is not straight is less of a man or a person than someone who is, and they can't, aren't as capable I guess." Chad describes how there is a heterosexist assumption that boys must perform hegemonic masculinity, which includes the expression of heterosexuality, to be considered "real" men (Askew & Ross, 1988). Moreover, Petersen (2000) writes, "heterosexual masculinity is seen as a privileged masculinity that is part created and maintained through homophobia at the expense of homosexual men..."(p.35). Chad goes on to mention that his role as an ally is to disrupt ideas like this, which manifest in anti-gay expressions. He relates: "It's just letting people know that, hey, they're no different than the rest of us, you know. 'Cause once again, like I said, they have the ingrained notions from way back when." To uproot LGBTQ prejudice, people must critique what they learned to be "normal" and normative (Britzman, 1998) and examine how normative notions conceal the privileging and 'Othering' of particular identities (Kumashiro, 2002).

Chad talks about how the musical at his school may have had helped contribute to diminishing anti-gay attitudes. He states:

> I mean, it was just kind of I guess it was kind of interesting 'cause we just did the play...which has you know two gay relationships in it and you know that actually, went over really well with the students I think. I think it was great. I saw that people were ignoring a lot of that and focusing just on the fact that it was a great show. I thought that was really good. I thought it really showed a lot, which was good. It showed a lot of just positive things going on in the school, even the people you know who in the past I had seen as homophobic people were you know they didn't focus on that at all.

Perhaps, this demonstrates that homo-negativity can potentially be reduced through the provision of opportunities for youth to digest queer material. Sumara & Davis (1999) argue that "curriculum has an obligation to interrupt heteronormative thinking—not only to promote social justice, but to broaden possibilities for perceiving, interpreting, and representing experience...this obligation might be accomplished through the development of heterotopic forms—ones that interrupt familiar patterns of thinking (p. 191; see also Blackburn, 2003; Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Martino, 2009). Ultimately, exposing learners to queer material may serve to help youth disentangle their values and beliefs from the heteronormative ones that are projected on them within various social institutions.

Collette describes her experience participating in the *Day of Silence*, a GSA initiative, at her school, in which people make a powerful statement about the silencing of queer issues by refusing to speak on this day. Although, there is a school-wide event to spotlight concerns such as homophobia at Collette's school as she previously indicates, LGBTQ material is not regularly integrated into curriculum. She describes people's reactions to the event as multifaceted:

Collette: Some people were confused, some people were like really happy about it, some people kind of saw it more as a joke. There was a lot of different reactions.

Alicia: And was this something that was talked about in class later?

Collette: Umm, not many people, none of my classes talked about it. I know that one student in basketball...asked like why, why do they have the day of silence, like why don't they just give gay people money? And that makes no sense to me, well, they're not poor, they're not necessarily poor. They don't want money, they want more freedom.

The Day of Silence brings attention to the necessity to speak queer issues into existence, but it has to be accompanied by a whole school commitment to integrating equity and social justice issues and topics about the 'Other' into the curriculum on a regular basis (Kumashiro, 2002). Thus, there is a call for a more systematic educative and instructional focus because it is impossible to unsettle queer-negative attitudes and interrogate heterosexism with the facilitation of one day events. Thus incorporating LGBTQ matters on a consistent basis "can work against the notion that teaching and learning about the Other can be achieved with a day's lesson..." (p.41). The fact that some students perceived the demonstration as a joke is concerning, and it draws attention to the inability of schooling to provide formal educational instruction that challenges homophobia and institutionalized heterosexism. The aforementioned scenario describes a student's attempt to deconstruct LGBTQ issues; although, they seem to understand that something must be done to accommodate queer-identifying people, they view the disenfranchisement of some queer people in economic terms. By contrast, Collette realizes the deep rooted inequities that exist, and acknowledges that equitable rights for LGBTQ people should be at the forefront of societal concerns.

GSAs: Informative Clubs for Allies

Lee (2002) suggests that GSAs are clubs that can provide education for straight students. He writes that these clubs can benefit heterosexual-identifying youth because they provide opportunities youth to be exposed to queer issues. Heck, Flentje, and Bryan (2011) identify the necessity for future research to explore the impact attending a secondary school with a GSA may have on straight-identifying students. With this idea in mind, my research examines the involvement of straight allies in GSAs and the perceived roles and purposes of these clubs. In this section I focus on the impact that participation in GSAs has on the participants I interviewed.

Participants in this study have undoubtedly had to unlearn anti-LGBTQ prejudice. Their personal experiences have influenced them to be more critical of anti-queer behaviours and to seize opportunities to educate their peers on behalf of marginalized people. Erin explains that a catch phrase, "no homo" is often used by her peers. She discloses a time when she used that expression, and then quickly eliminated it from her vocabulary. She recounts:

> I think, I, I just remember like umm hearing other people saying it and I think I said it once in grade 5, realised how like ridiculous it sounded and never said it again. 'Cause it was like, it just sounds bad. Like, it's just rude and I've see like that looks on some people's faces when they hear it and they are gay, and it's just like you can see like their heart like, it just, like it hurts, like. Just the look in their eyes, like uncomfortable, and they just want to get out of the situation, right?

This quote demonstrates her ability to problematize her use of language and to understand its impact on others. To do so at such a young age is also noteworthy because, as Poteat et al. (2009) note, prejudice is more prominent with younger

heterosexual youth. As previously mentioned, Martin perceives his role in the GSA as providing information to those who do not identify as queer, and thus he seeks to assist fellow students to discover how catch phrases, such as "no homo", are oppressive to LGBTQ people. He explains that this phrase is more bothersome to him than people uttering, "That's so gay". He speaks about how he wants to problematize the expression with his peers: "I see all these guys, and they always say 'no homo', and then when I am around the girls, should I say, 'no hetero'. I always want to...ask it." Martin brilliantly identifies the contradictory and offensive nature of the mindless use of this anti-queer expression. He desires to prompt his peers to question how heterosexuality has been taken for granted as normative, which pushes queer sexualities to the margins of society (Kumashiro, 2002). The expression, "no homo" constitutes a way in which youth can reaffirm their status as heterosexual and simultaneously denigrate homosexuality. This exemplifies how "oppression consists not only of the marginalization of the Other; it also consists of the privileging of the 'normal'" (Kumashiro, 2002, p.37). Overall, Martin identifies the need to question people about the concepts embedded within anti-gay language in order to prompt them to unlearn prejudice.

Bobby, joined the GSA at his school to learn more about LGBTQ issues because he felt that his knowledge base, as shaped by media that often portrays negative stereotypes, was not enough to support his friend who recently came 'out'. Thus, in order to support his queer-identifying friend, he found it necessary to learn more about queer people and LGBTQ culture. Bobby explains what he has learned from participating in the GSA group:

> I have learned that not all gay people are into this whole you know promiscuous culture that everyone seems to perceive them as. Umm, I've learned also that there is no such thing as a decrease in AIDS if you are, have a different sexual preferences than other people. I have learned that homophobia hurts.

Macgillivray, (2005) & Valenti & Campbell (2009) identify GSAs as spaces where relationships can be fostered and strengthened between queer and straight-identifying pupils and educators, thus fostering understanding and the exchange of knowledge. Developing a positive rapport amongst GSA members can build connections among GSA members so they may collectively work together to develop and plan activities and initiatives for the club and larger school community.

Bobby explains a GSA initiative the group is working on to gather information on students' beliefs and values:

> Bobby: We're actually going to do a survey and see what how people think about gay people soon, not now 'cause it's going to be kind of hard hitting.
>
> **Alicia: So, is that going to be distributed to the entire school population?**
>
> Bobby: It's going to be distributed to as much as the school population as possible 'cause we can't just force you to do it, you have to choose.
>
> **Alicia: And what do you think you're going to do with the results?**
>
> Bobby: We're going to use it and kind of put it onto the mural to see, like, see like, what kind of results of what happened because in my opinion, I have no idea who in this school is homophobic or not. But, you never know.

Hopefully the results of the questionnaire will guide GSA members in the providing activities and events that are supportive of the school specific needs. Through planning

and organizing GSA initiatives such as this one, it is evident that the potential for GSA members to actively help their peers dismantle anti-queer attitudes is powerful.

Collette describes how she is helping her friend trouble many misguided beliefs about queer people:

> One of my friends is more nervous about the topic 'cause she just doesn't quite understand it as much 'cause she was raised in a very like strict Christian family, so of course, like. Nothing, like her parents, like if I came out as gay for example and her parents found out, I wouldn't be allowed at the house anymore. Even though her parents like love me, like, it doesn't matter like. I'm a person, but if I'm gay then I wouldn't be allowed there. So, I usually kind of try to help her, like get it away from the awkwardness 'cause like, 'cause she is missing out on a lot. Like, she's missing out on some friends and she told one of my friends that now that I kind of opened her up to that kind of thing, that she has a lot more friends now. And like, she finds it easier to like accept people like that more now. So, that's nice.

As opposed to organized group initiatives, this scenario demonstrates allies' potential to address queer-negativity on a more personal level, outside the perimeters of planned activities, through one-on-one interactions with friends.

Gay Ok?

Famous American poet Dorothy Parker declared "heterosexuality is not normal, it's just common." This quote combats the ubiquitous assumption that heterosexuality is 'normal' by problematizing the notion that homosexuality is 'unnatural' because the majority of the population is straight. Britzman (1998) argues that people must collectively deconstruct notions of 'normalcy' in order to help reduce anti-LGBTQ attitudes and behaviours in social institutions. Research findings gathered from GLSEN (2009), emphasize that this process is essential because "students constantly receive the

message that everyone is supposed to be straight" (p. 12) or conform to gender normative patterns of behaviour. This section addresses how schools, educators, and students are, at times, failing to foster safer spaces for queer youth and their allies through positioning heterosexuality as 'normal'.

Research from the LGBTQ rights organization, GLSEN (2009), indicates that most queer students are harassed due to their sexual orientation or gender expression and are exposed to anti-LGBT language. Robinson and Espelage (2011) state, "The pervasiveness of anti-gay language in schools suggests that most school environments are hostile for LGBT students and that anti-gay language may contribute to negative environments for their heterosexual peers as well" (p. 317). Altercations with peers and staff members inhibit many queer students from attending classes because they feel unsafe in schools. It is irrefutable that homo-negativity and prejudice directed towards gender variant students exists in high schools; we are aware that this unjust phenomenon has negative impacts on many students because prejudice and discrimination cultivates a poisonous environment; thus, we must proactively work to address this inequity. GLSEN (2009) supports establishing initiatives that combat heterocentric and homophobic school culture because it fosters a hostile, uncomfortable and unsafe atmosphere for all community members. Ferfolja (2007) contends that professional learning opportunities for school staff, incorporating and affirming queer sexualities in curricula, including queer materials in libraries without restricting their borrowing, positioning anti-gay language as problematic, and actively deconstructing the hetero/homo binary are constructive methods by which to combat homophobia and to confront heteronormativity and heterosexism in schooling.

In the following sections I present testimony from high school students who maintain queer-positive attitudes, despite being exposed to anti-gay learning environments and cultures. I provide further knowledge and insight into the ways in which LGBTQ people and cultures are marginalized within secondary schooling. Identifiable challenges vary from the inability or unwillingness of educators and students to address anti-gay attitudes and behaviours within the schooling context, to the manifestation of homophobia within male peer culture, which has been firmly established in previous empirical studies (Pascoe, 2007; Kehily, 2002; Connell, 1995). Moreover, some males may experience difficulties with expressing queer-positive attitudes due to demands for compliance with gender norms, which include the performance of homophobia (Pascoe, 2007).

GSA Disruptions

What Club is For Lunch?

Firstly, it is essential to highlight some factors that may negatively influence the functioning of GSAs within secondary institutions. Every GSA that I visited conducted their meetings during lunch hour. For some people, this posed conflicts with other clubs, which held their meetings at the same time, such as the Social Justice and Equity Club at various schools. For example, Martin states, "Because they are both on the same day, and you have to kind of choose, GSA or Social Justice." This scenario was also evident at Collette's school. In a similar vein, sometimes, due to conflicting obligations, students, such as Chad, had to miss meetings, which ultimately impacted people's perception of his dedication to the club. He states:

> I can't, I mean I'm involved in a lot of stuff I guess. I can't always show up to meetings and Taylor is pretty adamant about people showing up to every meeting. People get ex communicated. I got kicked out of the Facebook group because I missed two meetings...

Size May Matter

When GSAs do not have many members there may be less people in secondary schools with queer-positive attitudes who are willing or able to effectively disrupt homophobia and question heterosexist assumptions embedded within teaching and social practices. This is potentially problematic because my research data suggests that students are spearheading the generation of equitable conditions for gender variant students and sexual minority pupils, allies, and people who are perceived to be queer in schooling.

Student participation in GSAs, like many other clubs or sports teams in schools, vary from year to year. Macgillivray (2007) proposes that some obstacles that GSAs must circumvent include inconsistent membership and varying participation levels throughout the years of its operation. Moreover, student graduation and student transfers or student drop outs may disrupt the social and political aspects of a GSA. This finding is supported by Dawson (2011) who writes, "GSAs are...subjected to annual changes in membership and efficacy..." (p. 37). These factors may contribute to smaller GSAs, resulting in fewer students in schools that are advocating for equitable LGBTQ educational and societal provisions. Erin explains her desire to acquire a steady group of members to make a positive impact at school:

> Umm, and this year, umm, we had like 4 or 5 people at the beginning and then we had club day and we got 21 sign ups. So now people have been kind of fluctuating like there have been like 6 people one

> day and like 15 other days. And it's just, there's not really a steady
> group so far so I'm hoping that will kind of get together... it's difficult
> 'cause I don't know, it's pretty much me and Ricky who are the ones
> who kind of get down to business and try to keep things in order.
> But, we need a strong steady group to kind of move forward I think.
> Yeah.

Erin seems to understand the concept of power in numbers in which having more members may help promote positive social change at her school.

The Availability of Teacher Supervisors

The participants also draw attention to the club complications that may arise when teacher supervisors are unable to either monitor the group or to help maintain the club's status within secondary schools. In this sense, the teacher supervisor plays a very important role in the profile and maintenance of the GSA within the overall school. For example, Erin states:

> ...but last year, Mrs. Koz's daughter broke her neck, so she was away.
> So we didn't really hold anything either and everything was kind of, I
> don't know, nothing really happened last year, which was
> disappointing, but I did a lot like with theatre and stuff.

All GSAs require a teacher supervisor to support the group and act as a liaison between administration and the students. It is essential for teachers to offer their assistance to stabilize the club's presence and assist with its functioning in schools. At times, the availability of a suitable supervisor who is well versed in LGBTQ issues may be limited. From own my observations, it is apparent that being a passionate and knowledgeable supervisor is directly related to the effective functioning of the group. Informed and committed teacher supervisors are more likely to facilitate a positive communicative environment that is conducive to the development of student leadership and the acquisition of higher level concepts, such as understanding heteronormativity.

Martin, for example, talks very highly of his GSA supervisor, who has been very supportive of him. He feels she is an effective advisor because she knows a great deal about the LGBTQ community, she has queer friends, and she attempts to make modifications to the curriculum to include queer content and themes. Similar to the work of Dawson (2011) and Valenti & Campbell (2009), which describes educators' motivations for becoming GSA advisors, Martin's supervisor harbours protective attitudes towards queer adolescents and has many interpersonal connections with LGBTQ people. Moreover, Martin indicates that this particular teacher is the only educator he knows that incorporates LGBTQ issues into every class that she teaches and he wishes more teachers would do the same. He states that most teachers do not address homophobic language although they hear it, but his GSA advisor does: "I hear it all the time [homophobic language]. My teacher doesn't [sarcastic tone]. It is different with Mrs. Dearnesss [GSA Advisor]."

Erin also attests to the exceptional leadership ability of her GSA supervisor. She credits Ms. Koz for setting up the GSA at her school:

> Umm, well, I know Ms. Koz had, she ran a GSA at the old school that she worked with. Umm and I think when she came to Rivertown she realised that there wasn't one. I'm actually, oh, I don't think there was one before she came. I'm not sure there was, it wasn't running like a couple years before she came here. But, yeah, so she started it up 'cause I guess it was successful at Bayside and umm yeah she wanted... it's something she's passionate about too, right? So, we've similar interests. It's funny talking to her. We just agree on things. And I'm like, Yeah it makes sense, She's like oh my goodness, this, this, this. Yeah

Erin also alludes to the positive rapport she shares with her GSA advisor. Moreover, being personable and having similar interests have helped foster a respectful and positive teacher-student relationship. Future research should examine the role of GSA

advisors and explore what personal and professional attributes are conducive to supervising GSAs.

Administrators, Teachers and Peers: Problematic Attitudes and Behaviours

Participants, however, also spoke about how some teachers, administrators, and students are contributing to sexual and gender injustice through displaying questionable attitudes to LGBTQ subjects, refusing or refraining from addressing queer-negative behaviours at school, or overtly discriminating against queer people. For example, while most of the students indicate that school administrators are committed to ensuring that the learning environment is free from prejudice and discrimination, Bobby openly voices concerns about the administration at his school. On the whole, participants were simultaneously unsure of principals' and vice principals' commitment to specifically addressing queer issues at their schools and of their effectiveness in implementing consequences for sexual and gender injustices.

When rumours spread about Collette's perceived lesbianism in elementary school, she indicated that she was content with the administrative intervention because: "He [the principal] told the students that they could not talk to me unless if I allowed it. That I would have to approach them; they can't approach me. So that made things easier for me...". However she was less satisfied with how administration at her high school handled another situation involving a student posting a homophobic image on Facebook:

> With the Facebook post, like it probably wasn't too effective even
> though like the police got involved, but, like, 'cause the student was

actually joking about it later. But he still wasn't posting offensive stuff, but, like he was still joking about it.

It is clear that developing and enforcing rules that address anti-homophobic behaviours does not unsettle LGBTQ inequities because the systemic heteronormative foundation remains unchallenged and intact. Ferfolja (2007) contends:

> Until educational institutions and their communities acknowledge, deconstruct, and address the unequal power relationships reinforced by the 'heterosexual us homosexual' them binary, and until non-heterosexual identities and relationships are included as part of the everyday schooling dialogues in relation to policy, pedagogy and practice, the 'Other' will continue to be othered (p.160).

In addition to creating and enforcing safe schools policies in which there are consequences for anti-gay behaviours, an effective approach to combating homophobia in schooling is to routinely integrate queer content into the curriculum and to assist learners critically examine the privileging and 'Othering' of particular identities because this constitutes the foundation of prejudicial thought (Kumashiro, 2002).

Erin also talks about the role of the administration in addressing queer prejudice and assisting with the creation and maintenance of a queer-positive school climate. She identifies the problematic nature of being impartial, while simultaneously ensuring that all students are represented and feel safe within school boundaries:

> Erin: Well, Ms. Portijjo [principal] and Mr. Cranbrook [vice principal] are both gay so, which is good, umm, 'cause people like look up to that and well these are administration and umm, they're like good people right, they take care of our school and stuff. Umm, so from what I've seen like, they, they address it immediately. Like, I think I heard someone say something in front of Mr. Cranbrook once and he was like hey and just kind of like just gave them a look and they knew, they're like, oh ok and like left. Other than that, I don't

think I'm around them enough to see the impact they're actually making. Umm, I don't know, with Ms. Portijjo, when we, well I know Ms. Koz said when she went to umm ask for permission to do a mural, umm I, I found it strange that she said, oh well if we allow you guys to do a mural, then what if all the other clubs wanna do a mural too? And Ms. Koz was kind of like, well like we're a GSA, like it's to spread like umm like awareness about how homophobia hurts and stuff and umm I guess Ms. Portijjo said, oh well what if like the Multiculturalism Club and like Social Justice and stuff want to do a mural? And Ms. Koz said, well, it's, why is that a problem, right? Like shouldn't we be enforcing that? So I just, I thought that that was interesting; it was just weird.

Alicia: Yeah, why do you think there was that reaction?

Erin: Well, I, I think she. Umm, being a principal I think she has to think neutrally towards most subjects so she has to think about like the entire school population. But in a way, I almost think because of like where we are in our generation, they should be making priorities like for like cancelling out hate, racism and homophobia and everything. Umm that might just be me because like I'm pro everything. But, I don't it's, it was professional of her to say that, but at the same time a high school needs those sort of things to kind of progress and umm put people out there in the community that will be more open minded and respectful and yeah, I don't know; it's just, it was weird. So.

Erin suggests that having queer educators at her school is "good", specifically when they occupy administrative leadership positions. This is important because, in her opinion, they are good role models that "people can look up to...[they] are good people...[that] take care of the school". She implies that having 'out' queer educators is beneficial to the school community. However, Erin's testimony prompts an important discussion about the potential vulnerability of queer educators and particular inhibitions that they may have with openly confronting queer issues within the schools they manage. Due to the amalgamation of personal and professional identities, queer administrators may be inhibited from spearheading or openly supporting anti-gay

initiatives because they do not want to participate in activities that may 'out' them. Being an 'out' queer professional who advocates for queer rights, much like a queer student who does the same thing, may compromise their personal or professional safety within schools. Didi Khyatt's (1992) study on queer female teachers highlights the collision of 'private' and 'personal' spheres of existence, and how many people must learn how to exist inside each realm, and within their overlap (see also Stebbins, 2008). Unfortunately, queer educators may be perceived to have a 'gay agenda', in which recruitment is seen as the objective of their support. Drawing on the work of Olson (1987), Griffin (1991), Khayatt (1992), and Hinson (1996), Ferfolja (2007) states that heterosexuality is perceived as "the 'natural' and 'normal' sexuality, by which all 'Other' sexualities are measured and subordinated...Non-heterosexual identities are constructed as hypersexual, paedophilic, deviant, abnormal, sick, and sexually predatory and much of the international research in the field reports lesbian and gay individuals' fears in relation to the impact and repercussions of being 'read' and positioned within these negative discourses" (p.148). Furthermore, Kumashiro (2002) discusses how mainstream society privileges straight-identifying people by associating it with naturalness and morality, which in turn, positions sexual minorities as ill, perverse, and engaging in criminal activity in some places. Therefore, in order to dismantle the pathologization and demonization of queer educators, schooling needs to address systemic issues pertaining to homophobia and heteronormativity. This way, queer educators may be more willing or able to be 'out' at school and openly support LGBTQ initiatives.

Miceli (2005) highlights the concept of heterosexual privilege and how it acts as a protective mechanism for educators to push for queer-positive school communities. The well-known heterosexuality of school staff (the Heterosexual Teflon), operates as an enabler for educators to assist with GSAs. Furthermore, if educators are married and have children, and thus project a heterosexual identity, they are not suspected of participating in GSAs to push a "larger 'gay agenda' or of starting the group out of their own interests rather than the students' interest" (p. 201). Students involved in GSAs may not understand why their efforts are not being supported to the extent they expect from queer-identifying staff due to the institutionalized heteronormativity.

Going Public: Administrative Restrictions on Assemblies that Discuss Queer Issues

While Collette indicates that her principal has encouraged the GSA to facilitate an assembly regarding LGBTQ issues for the entire school, she also adds that the principal has attempted to censor the information that the GSA may present. For instance, she indicates that they are not permitted to address the topic of teen suicide "'cause we don't want to put anything too dark to kind of like put thoughts in people's heads". Likewise, Bobby describes the ground work for an assembly the GSA is organizing at his school, which will attempt to demystify queer issues in society. He describes the plan for the assembly and the restrictions imposed on the GSA by administration:

> Bobby: We decided we are going to show a few of those *It Gets Better* videos. Umm, we're going to show, we're going to tell children about a few coming out stories, uh, we're going to say that homophobia hurts, you know.
>
> **Alicia: And are you going to be addressing any issues, any gender issues?**

Bobby: No, we decided, no we're not going to, we can't go that far.

Alicia: So, you're just primarily talking about diverse sexualities?

Bobby: Yeah.

Alicia: Why do you think that you cannot go "that far"?

Bobby: The administration.

Alicia: Did they outline exactly what you can and cannot talk about?

Bobby: They gave us a line and we cannot cross it.

Bobby further displays his displeasure with administration's effectiveness in dealing with LGBTQ issues when he purports that they simply do not effectively address such matters. I inquired about ways in which they could improve and he answered: "Well, they could show up to one of these GSAs, or put it on announcements, or be more advisable to us and say yes to more of these assemblies instead of shutting it down all the time." Similarly, Erin articulates her frustration with school staff and positions them as contributing to queer invisibility at her school when she states:

> ...I just want like teachers, administration, staff to kind of umm be more informative in a way 'cause I feel it's a subject that isn't talked about enough. Umm, because we have like anti-racism stuff going on, we have umm like information about like how to spend money properly, like why don't we have an actual assembly like run by the school itself? Umm not just a GSA like that says like this isn't right, you cannot, like you should not be using umm these terms, you should not like umm like be hating on people that like cannot control how they feel. Umm, I don't know, I feel like it's just a topic that is avoided because there, because of controversy of it, umm which is frustrating again.

DePalma & Atkinson (2006) depict the controversy surrounding sexuality knowledge in schooling by arguing that unlike other identities, such as race, sexuality is silenced within schools because students are perceived to be sexually 'innocent' and thus, should be shielded from knowledge regarding diverse sexualities. Interestingly, Chasnoff (1996) and Pallotta-Chiarolli (1998) indicate that children in elementary school are able and willing to critically converse about rights pertaining to gay and lesbian people. Unfortunately, the construction of childhood innocence perpetuates the idea that they are "potential victims, and opens the possibility for children to be recruited to homosexuality, the so-called 'gay agenda'" (p.340). Moreover, the discourse of recruitment often inhibits students from being exposed to gender and sexual diversity. Due to the silencing of queer sexualities, "heteronormativity 'is maintained not only in terms of what is said and done, but also in terms of what is left out of the official discourse" (p. 334).

Teachers

Through visible demonstrations of allegiance, pedagogical practices that include individual lessons or group activities that address LGBTQ issues, and the use of LGBTQ-positive and appropriate language, teachers indirectly convey their attitudes and beliefs to students (GLSEN, 2009). It is quite evident when a teacher is committed to teaching for social justice and thus, students learn quickly what is expected or ignored within the confines of their classrooms. This being said, if a teacher fails to interrogate queer-negative attitudes and actions, the class indirectly learns that prejudice directed towards queer folk is acceptable. Kumashiro (2002) illustrates how oppressive knowledge is produced in schooling through the silencing of the 'Other' (see DePalma & Atkinson, 2006). Furthermore, heteronormative practices, exemplified through the reinforcement

of normative gender and sexuality constructs, and the silencing of transgressive sexualities, perpetuates the disenfranchisement of queer identity and identification in schools (Epstein et al., 2003). Consequently, the privileging of heterosexuality, through silencing of queer content, maintains inequities that impact on LGBTQ people in schooling (DePalma & Atkinson, 2007). Obviously, this is concerning because teachers have a professional responsibility to ensure that equitable measures are provided for all students, and that no student is made to feel unsafe or disconnected from the larger school community.

Bobby also expresses his concern with teachers tackling LGBTQ issues at school. He emphasizes that students are the individuals fronting the opposition to queer-negativity at his school:

> **Alicia: Ok, so what about teachers? So, how would you describe their effectiveness in addressing LGBTQ issues at your school?**
>
> Bobby: Well, I don't think there's nothing for the teachers that much either. It's usually just the peers that are addressing these kind of, that are causing the most effectiveness for this.
>
> **Alicia: Ok, so you really feel like it's students that are...**
>
> Bobby: It's students that are making this thing continue [that are addressing LGBTQ issues] .
>
> **Alicia: So, have you ever seen a teacher intervene or do anything to address LGBTQ issues?**
>
> Bobby: I have yet to see it.

Throughout the interview, Bobby expresses his concern about many educators' apathetic responses to anti-LGBTQ language. He consistently restates that students, not teachers,

are actively helping to propel the LGBTQ movement forward at his school. In the following quote, he describes seeing some of his peers address inappropriate language in his secondary school:

> Bobby: Like if someone says faggot out of line, someone else will, a peer will come up and say, you know that's not right, that's, that's kind of wrong.
>
> **Alicia: Like, in what kind of situations does that happen?**
>
> Bobby: It happens all the time with kids in high school.

Many educators may be ignorant of queer issues, uncomfortable with addressing LGBT concerns, or unable to effectively combat LGBTQ-prejudice and anti-gay behaviours. Through inexperience or avoidance, teachers implicitly convey messages about what they deem valuable. Ritenburg (2011), for example, states that "through the hidden curriculum, teachers implicitly, and often unknowingly, reinforce socially normalized ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality" (p. 29). With this in mind, although information about LGBTQ people and culture is not always directly mandated within the formal curricula, teachers do have opportunities to provoke students to examine their beliefs, which may prompt learners to unlearn heterocentric and homophobic attitudes.

Martin alludes to teacher ineffectiveness when addressing the harassment he faced at his first high school: "I talked to a lot of teachers about it, and they said that you know they are insecure and stuff like that, and they would go away eventually." This response is problematic because it represents a refusal to confront and intervene with anti-gay behaviour - it does nothing to prevent harassment from occurring in the future

– and constitutes an abnegation of responsibility on behalf of the teacher and the school to address homophobic harassment. Although these teachers were attempting to support Martin, they failed in their ethical responsibility to ensure the safety and inclusion of LGBTQ people in school communities. As has been indicated in the literature, addressing such harassment is central to promoting more positive experiences for queer students in schools (Taylor et al., 2011; GLSEN, 2009). Merely listening to students talk about their experiences of homophobia, does not address the root of the problem; Martin, for example, continued to encounter harassment "everyday in some form" for three years because nothing was effectively done about it. He articulates, "I hate to say that I did get used to it after a while by the time I got to grade ten I got used to it. I just walk by the hallway, and hear it all the time." This demonstrates how educators must be more attentive and act sensitively and appropriately if they discover that students are being subjected to homophobic harassment. In effect, all teachers must be allies for LGBTQ youth. Moreover, educators are effective allies when: "In addition to supporting individual LGBT students, [they] challenge anti-LGBT behaviour and work proactively to ensure safer, more inclusive schools for all students" (GLSEN, 2009, p. 6).

Collette speaks to the diversity that exists with teachers' willingness to address queer issues at her school:

> Umm, some teachers are very like open about talking about those kind of issues and if they hear a comment, then they're going to say something, tell the student not to say that kind of stuff. Sometimes they might even get kicked out of the classroom. And some teachers really just don't care at all and some teachers are really anti-LGBT, so like if they hear that kind of stuff, they're just kind of whatever you know, or ripping down posters.

She indentifies apathy and overt demonstrations of anti-gay beliefs as problematic responses from teachers at her school. She explains that students and at least one teacher ripped down posters created by the club. The group became aware of the anti-LGBTQ acts and was faced with the dilemma of knowing that members of the community are defiantly opposing GSA initiatives. Collette describes her feelings about these acts:

> I was like kind of upset. Like, they don't really have much business doing that, whether if they support or are against that kind of thing 'cause it was put up there for a reason, you don't just tear it down, you know?...Like if you don't agree with that kind of thing that's fine, just it keep it to yourself, but don't go trying to sabotage like something else that people are trying to do, you know?

When I asked her if there are consequences for "sabotaging" GSA posters, she indicates that she "hasn't heard of anything". She goes on to say that, the teacher who tore down the posters is known by the GSA advisor, but remains unnamed to the group. It is interesting to note that the teacher's identity is protected, which serves as a buffer to eclipse the consequences associated with their anti- gay actions. Should teachers not be held accountable for their actions and be confronted about their problematic behaviours? Expanding on the idea of educators as oppressors, research by Taylor et al. (2011) reveal that nearly 10% of LGBTQ students reported hearing teachers use homophobic comments daily or weekly. In addition, compared to language used to marginalize other minorities, GLSEN (2009) reports that teachers intervene to a lesser extent when homophobic language is employed compared with racist or sexist remarks. Research conducted by Espelage & Swearer (2008) draws attention to the failure of educators to combat homophobic commentary, and demonstrates the extent to which

they are actually creating unsupportive spaces for sexual minority and gender variant youth in schools.

The vast majority GSA members in the schools I visited conveyed that many of their posters were torn down. However, the consequences associated with the disturbance or defacing of posters is more unclear. Not once did students explain if there were sanctioned repercussions for this behaviour, or if this issue was addressed by administration, staff, or students. What should the consequences be for those who choose to disrupt the posters? Are school staff taking these types of disparaging behaviours seriously? The effectiveness of hanging queer-positive posters is questionable because, as Ferfolja (2007) asserts, "their lack of visibility and short-term display...posters alone may increase visibility, but they do not adequately examine discrimination and prejudice, nor do they impact on the marginalization of non-heterosexual identities in the overt and hidden curriculum..." (p.156). In addition to poster vandalism, Bobby states that the mural his GSA hopes to place in the school hall may potentially be at jeopardy of being damaged. Instead, he believes that an assembly would have more impact and be appealing to the school population in terms of providing education about LGBTQ issues. He states: "But, I think a mural will just be on the wall, it will say we're here, and we're not going anywhere and I think it might get spray painted or sabotaged 'cause you never know with schools...". It is disheartening that many GSA members habitually expect that their visible LGBTQ advocacy efforts may be desecrated by community members. Such expectations and realities of potential violence, as well as the failure of schools to adequately address such homophobic

expressions, speak to the extent to which homophobia and heternormativity are institutionalized in schools (Ferfolja, 2007).

Bobby fervently declares teachers' commitment to addressing queer issues as being "very wish washy." Likewise, Erin explains that there is room for teachers to improve their responses to addressing anti-gay language:

> Umm, I think it depends on the teacher because the majority of them I've seen like just kind of ignore it, like they don't really pay attention if people say it. Umm like in the hallways I've heard like people say it like right in front of teachers and teachers just kind of walk by and act like nothing happened.

Chad also describes teachers' commitment to addressing LGBTQ issues at his school in these terms:

> I think, I think there's kind of, it's, there's kind of two groups of teachers. Kind of a group of teachers that are kind of, I mean they know about it, but they're not like as strict about it and they're not, they're just, then there's a few teachers in school who really strongly support it and umm. There's a few teachers, and you know, I mean even while they're teaching their class, you can tell they're very, their views are very pro homo...and there are a few other teachers who are also, like very, strongly feel about that. Then there are the others who you know, they're, they're I mean, they're not against it, but they're not I guess as strong.

Recognizing that allies exist provides a supportive foundation for queer youth (GLSEN, 2009). Being a supportive ally fosters a climate of respect for diversity and it helps generate safer spaces for all students. Being an ally is the most effective way in which school staff can cultivate a community that rejects LGBTQ prejudice and discrimination. Overall, GLSEN's (2009) guide to being an ally for LGBTQ students suggests that teachers need to be well versed in queer issues, support queer youth that 'come out' to

them, educate community members about LGBTQ matters, advocate for equitable educational conditions, visibly advocate for LGBTQ people, respond to anti-queer language and actions, and support the creation and maintenance of GSAs.

Teachers Addressing Anti-Queer Language and Behaviour

Participants suggest that there are a few teachers in their schools who attempt to address homophobia. For example, Chad believes that many teachers at his school are "on board" with addressing LGBTQ issues in the classroom, which is embodied through a "no tolerance policy" on the use of anti-queer language. It must be acknowledged, however, that zero tolerance policies only serve to superficially react to anti-gay language; they contribute to the silencing of opportunities to confront heterosexist and heteronormative culture, which denigrates queer sexualities and ultimately contributes to the normalization of anti-gay expressions and slurs, thus, permitting LGBTQ-based prejudice and discrimination to continue to thrive in schooling. Instead proactive responses to LGBTQ-directed prejudice embodied through the examination of how queer sexualities and genders are 'Othered' permits the institutionalization of heterosexism and heteronormativity to be deconstructed and dismantled (Britzman, 1995). In contrast to Chad's teacher, who enforces a "no tolerance" policy, Collette's teacher exercises a more educative approach to addressing anti-LGBTQ language use. Collette recounts a situation involving a teacher at her school who overtly positions herself as a ally in addressing homophobic practices in her classroom. She comments on this teacher's efforts, as well as the school's overall effectiveness in addressing queer issues:

Collette: …Like, I know a teacher who is very like strict on not saying that kind of stuff, like offensive stuff in class. And like she'll talk about it very openly with her classes and stuff like that. So I think that's really effective and nice, you know? And like, sometimes it does make a huge difference, and depending on the teacher and how they more express it, it doesn't. So, it really kind of depends on the teacher.

Alicia: So, you talked about a teacher being open to talking about issues. So, do you think that's an effective way to address issues, to openly talk about things like, in the class?

Collette: Yeah, I think it's good as long as like it's not open where people are allowed to say offensive stuff. But, like, the teacher, like, she would ask, oh, are you homophobic? And like, if they said yes, then she'll get mad at them. It's kind of funny. Like, she'll be, you better not be homophobic and like. My friend was in her class and she was telling me about it. But, the teacher's like kind of strict on it, but in like more of a kind of fun kind of way I guess.

She talks about how this teacher utilizes humour to facilitate the recognition of queer issues. Perhaps, employing humour in some situations to incite thought about sexual and gender inequities may help some students relate to the subject matter better than if they are merely presented LGBTQ statistics or reprimanded for the use of anti-gay language.

In contrast to the strategic use of humour to combat LGBTQ prejudice, Chad describes how his French teacher utilized a more direct approach to deconstructing homophobia in class:

Like, there was the one day, where like, it was actually in grade nine I had the same teacher for French, and there was one person who like said that [homophobic remark], and she just stopped the class and we just spent like the rest of the class talking about like homophobia and why it's wrong and all that sort of stuff. It was pretty crazy…

He conveys that they spent the first fifteen minutes of the class learning French and then they spent the rest of the period, approximately an hour, discussing LGBTQ issues. Chad describes this experience as:

> Definitely eye opening to a lot of people, like 'cause…they had been used to it not really being a big deal. But, all of the sudden it's you know, worth stopping a class over. That kind of says something, you know especially to a grade nine student, who's in like their first year.

He explains that the situation helped educate students about the impact and effects of homophobia:

> …it was very drastic, but I think it got the job done, I think it was very effective. And I think if she had just kind of, I think if she had just either ignored it completely or just brushed, like kind of just in passing just kind of said that's wrong, I don't think it wouldn't have had the same effect.

Recent literature from GLSEN (2009) supports such pedagogical interventions, which are not so much about zero-tolerance, repression and prohibition, but about capitalizing on the teachable moment to educate about the impact and effect of homophobia. As has already been indicated, some teachers' unwillingness to acknowledge and/or address prejudice directed towards queer people represents a powerful message, in which "no action is an action – if an incident is overlooked or not addressed it can imply acceptance and approval" (p.16).

Expanding on the idea of action, Erin indicates that there are a few teachers that purposefully combat anti-queer behaviours at her high school. She explains that Mr. Dimson is renowned for directly confronting LGBTQ-based negativity. She describes how he possesses social capital, in the form of popularity, which may function as a catalyst to enlist students in the fight against homophobia at her school:

>...I heard like Mr. Dimson apparently, like if kids say it, say any like umm rude comments or whatever he'll say like no, stop it, it's disrespectful, I don't want to hear that ever. Umm, and...which is good because Mr. Dimson is one of the teachers that a lot of people think oh he's one of the hip teachers, like he's cool. Umm so to see him putting like an end to that sort of stuff is really great. Umm, but yeah, he's the only one that I've really seen really do it, do too much.

Some school staff at Bobby's school have visited the GSA, he explains, "you'll see teachers pop in every once in a while" to see what the club is about. He explains that they behave as passive participants during the meetings because they may be afraid of saying something wrong. Interestingly, he provides a subtle rationale for educators that do not address queer issues in the educational atmosphere. Although, some teachers attend a few meetings, they may be inhibited from contributing ideas and conversing about LGBTQ issues due to their potential discomfort with related topics Perhaps this apprehension spills over into the their teaching as well; thus, educators may benefit from informal, professional learning opportunities. In fact, Kosciw et al. (2010) and O'Shaughnessy et al. (2004) suggest that LGBTQ focused teacher professional learning is associated with safer school climates for LGBT students. Extending on this idea, Conway & Crawford-Fisher (2007) argue that teachers should incorporate newly acquired LGBTQ professional development information into their classrooms and curriculum, a stipulation that is also supported very strongly by the allies who participated in my research.

Allies Persuading Peers to Unpack Prejudice

Peers play an astronomical role in providing support for their friends and fellow students inside and outside the confines of the school grounds. Participants in this study attest to the variety of LGBTQ attitudes their schoolmates' possess. The following

sections outline how some peers harbour and voice anti-gay attitudes at school, and at times, enact their beliefs, which encroach on the queer-positive spaces allies are working to expand. These queer-negative attitudes will be juxtaposed with the pro-gay views held by participants in this study.

Erin expresses how a situation that occurred in her English class served as a catalyst for the group to discuss LGBTQ attitudes:

> Umm, and even like my English class, I remember we were having a debate about something. Umm, I can't remember what it was , but one girl said, umm well, umm, well, why, why should we be worrying about it when they're the ones who are choosing umm to like the same gender, like they're just asking to be bullied. And I was like, are you serious? Like, like today? Like, like, people still think that way. It's just, it's just crazy. And I think because like I'm so open about it and because I'm like more informed than a lot of people that I automatically assume that other people should be too. But, it just kind of shocks me to see like really how closed off people are and how unaware and it's because of like past generations and stuff and like how parents have like brought up their kids. But, I don't know. I just want kind of switch it around and be like hey, information, change.

This spontaneous debate pushed LGBTQ issues to the forefront of student consciousness. Through experiencing this altercation, students were able to deconstruct learned beliefs that homosexuality is a choice, and analyze their personal bias and attitudes about queerness, which are often built upon a heteronormative foundation of inter-gender relations (Loutzenheiser, 2004). Moreover, the adoption of such beliefs implies that heterosexual culture is 'normal' and that queer relations are, consequently, deviant. Thus Erin's recognition that some of her peers are unaware of LGBTQ matters is central to her commitment to helping students learn more about queer issues because

she perceives her role as a straight ally as someone who can help to break down prejudicial barriers. She further explains:

> And I think it's always, homophobia's always gonna be an issue but, even if we can, if we can just make it a smaller issue, I'll be happy, like if I can just have an impact umm in some form to change that and like save one person's life or whatever, umm it will make a difference like in our entire world. So, yeah, it's important.

Such comments highlight how important teachable moments are in the classroom in terms of their transformative potential for enacting anti-oppressive education in a way that is integrated into the pedagogical repertoire of the teacher's overall approach to dealing with the curriculum. By contrast, Erin advises that LGBTQ topics are not emphasized in curricula and are ultimately avoided within the learning environment:

> I feel like it, umm, I mean like people just don't talk about it I guess. Like, it's just not umm a subject that's put like high on people's priority list to cover. Umm, because I mean like even like health class like they make sure to inform you about like STIs and stuff and say like be careful otherwise like this can happen, but they don't say, like oh by the way, umm here's like information about sexuality. Like, umm because there's so many like myths and stuff and people are just, they're just unaware. I think like teachers, administration are unaware of the amount of like impact, and like negative impact umm the small things like that can make and they don't think enough about it. And yeah, I don't know. It's just, it drives me nuts.

Erin sees teachers and administrators as failing to contribute, at times, to the dismantling of queer myths and as unknowingly contributing to the perpetuation of sexual and gender injustice in schooling. A documentary entitled, *It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School*, illuminates how addressing anti-queer prejudice in classrooms is correlated with the prevention of violence and it supports the promotion of social equality. In order to dispel misinformation about LGBTQ people, Britzman

(1998) argues that we must 'unlearn' what we learned to be 'normal' or normative; this way students can combat mis-education through the analysis of how particular identities are privileged whereas others are 'Othered' (Kumashiro, 2002). In order for pupils to actively unlearn prejudice within a schooling context, schools must be spaces where queer issues are spoken into existence. DePalma and Atkinson (2006) contend that the avoidance of sex, gender and sexuality topics are evident in schooling, which Erin suggests acts as a precursor to the development of prejudicial attitudes.

The Role of Peer Support in Addressing Anti-LGBTQ Language

Peer and friendship groups occupy a pivotal role in the lives of young people. Thus, friends' willingness to support their peers is instrumental in the development of safer school communities. Collette discusses the extent of her peers' commitment to addressing LBGTQ when she explains:

> Umm, overall, it really depends on the person. Some people are really into it, some people don't care, some people don't even know about it, and some people are just against it. Like, the people who are, they're a lot of people who are usually pretty committed, so that's, that's always nice. So.

Chad echoes Collette's sentiments:

> ...even though the GSA has been around for about a year and a half. You still hear the same people kind of being the same; homophobic things in the hallways and stuff. But, I think people are starting, slowly starting and really getting better, I guess at really actually stepping up and saying, that's wrong and stuff like that.

Chad theorizes why peers sometimes may be reluctant to address LGBTQ issues when he states: "...I think on average it's, it's there but it's not horribly like pressing for most people. I think it's, they're just, I think most people just kind of leave it alone and just

oh, whatever, it's not my problem." He explains that if peers are not directly affected by LGBTQ prejudice, many of them are apathetic towards addressing homophobic comments in school. This quote highlights how heterosexual-identifying people may evade unjust living conditions, but which LGBTQ people have no other choice but to experience. He goes on to explain his thoughts as to why anti-queer situations are left alone when he states that people sometimes people do not want to confront their peers because "they don't want to be the one in the group who you know says, you know, if everyone else is just going [along with it]." Likewise, Martin proposes that peers "don't want to worry so much about other people's lives sometimes…I guess when you are not really directly involved with it; you don't feel that you should be involved with it." Martin's quote underscores the need for school communities to provide formal educational provisions to address the direct impact of homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality on all members in secondary schools. Moreover, attention must be drawn to how heterosexuality is privileged and queer sexualities are 'Othered' in schooling (Kumashiro, 2002) and how this constructs a power hierarchy in which LGBTQ people are routinely socially and systemically marginalized.

Anti-gay language, whereby students frequently exchange communicative expressions like, "that's so gay", is often used without the intent of being malicious; however, Erin postulates that peers sometimes willingly use derogatory words because they are associated with power. Bobby views the use of the word, 'faggot', as such too when he relates: "It's kind of like the word, it's kind of like the 'f' word, the other 'f' word. Like someone saying 'fuck', like when you randomly just say it nobody cares, when you scream it nobody cares, when you say it to someone, everyone looks.

Just a word for attention." Erin illustrates how youth know these are words are offensive when she declares:

> Like kids obviously like try to avoid saying things in front of teachers. Like they'll wait til they walk away 'cause they're careful. It's like swearing in front of a teacher right too, which is interesting because then like subconsciously they know like they shouldn't be saying that because it's like oh, we'll get, like they'll, they'll say something right so. I think kids know, they just don't realise the impact that it can have on other people…

Erin discusses how anti-gay language practices are normalized in her school and how students have become desensitized to the impact their words have on other people. Education that provokes thought about the consequences of normalization and sensitizes learners to power imbalances is essential to confront LGBTQ inequities in schooling (Kumashiro, 2002). Erin further explains the problematic and proliferate use of anti-gay language at her school, "…Like, I hear every day. Like, I'm walking through the halls and I hear oh, 'you're a fag', or oh, 'that's so gay' or, umm, or like, 'don't be a homo'…" Bobby describes how anti-gay language monopolizes the lunchroom space. He describes the setting as an arena for the hyper-use of the word, 'faggot'. Overall, it is evident that many spaces within schools are not safe for queer youth and staff, and their allies due to the prevalence of derogatory LGBTQ language.

Through conversing with various GSA members, it is apparent that social networking also serves as a space to enact LGBTQ prejudice and discrimination. Similar to Erin and Bobby's accounts of anti-queer language, Collette describes hearing students use oppressive words like "fag", "faggot", "that's so gay", and "homo" "in the hallways, in classrooms, sometimes after school, on like social network websites" and

she acknowledges how this may make queer-identifying people feel bad about themselves. When asked about how those words make her feel, she comments:

> Kind of mad actually. Like, it's, I just don't think it's a right thing to do, like. It can be really offensive to some people depending on the way that you use it, you know? So. And I just don't think it's very appropriate.

Collette, describes how the use of queer pejoratives frustrates her, although she self-identifies as heterosexual, because it is offensive to people. Research conducted within Canada by Egale Canada (2011) and in the United States by GLSEN (2009) indicates that: "Anti-LGBT behaviour creates a hostile environment and an uncomfortable and unsafe space for everyone", including non-minority students (p.5). All allies identified homophobic language use as the most disparaging issue faced by queer people in secondary schools. Thus, my study demonstrates how systemic and social occurrences of heterosexism may be overlooked and perhaps remain unexamined by allies to a certain extent. Furthermore, the naturalization and normalization of heterosexuality in schooling remains intact when people are preoccupied with addressing homophobia, which "individualizes heterosexual fear of and loathing toward gay and lesbian subjects…" (Britzman, 1995, p.153). Goldstein, Russell, & Daley (2007), argue that "through individualizing harassment of queer youth, schools abdicate their responsibility for challenging power systems and culture that privilege heterosexuality over homosexuality (p. 187). Although anti-homophobia strategies may assist schools to construct safer school environments for LGBTQ learners (Heck et al., 2011), this educational philosophy fails to deconstruct the binary of hetero/homo and question the naturalization of heterosexuality (Britzman, 1995), which must be uprooted in order to produce positive and lasting social change. If students can unlearn this socially

constructed binary, perhaps, schools may become safer spaces for all students to express their identities (Kumashiro, 2002).

Social Media Infiltrates the School Community

It is undeniable that social media affords many students access to conveniently communicate with each other, or about one another or staff via the internet, outside the confines of their schools. Social media can be used as a tool to propagate hate, access LGBTQ resources and information, and serve as an opportunity to actively combat anti-gay attitudes and behaviours. Due to the proliferation of media use among youth, it is essential to investigate how social media can be used as a resource to address or disseminate LGBTQ prejudice and discrimination. The participants spoke specifically about the role of social media in terms of it functioning as both a site for the expression of homophobia and for addressing or enabling anti-homophobic education and activism.

Erin explains that she uses social networking to follow particular groups on Twitter, which send her links about LGBTQ events. She elaborates on how she uses media in an attempt to break down walls built upon LGBTQ prejudice:

> …So umm, and then I'll post, like I'll take those links 'cause it says oh share with your friends like on Twitter, Facebook and stuff and I always do that…I had a person comment once, oh well what's this gonna do? It's not going to make a difference. And I said, you, you'd be surprised. He's like, oh writing my name on a thing is not going to change the world. And I said, well, when masses of people come together like it makes an impact, like you have an impact…So just like making people think and giving them, like throwing information out there so that they see it, even if they just like skim through it and are like oh whatever and they clink away. Like it's still again, like it's

subconscious, right. Just getting like little bits of information like subconsciously into their heads to think about it, right?

Erin see media as a tool to produce social change and she uses it to raise awareness of queer issues with her friends on social networks. Social media can also be used to collaborate with other GSA members about important events and initiatives they are collectively organizing. Many schools maintained their own GSA Facebook group and used this resource to assist with the planning of group activities or events for the general school population. Collette, for example, describes her experiences using her GSA's Facebook group to assist with the development of the resources for her school assembly on LGBTQ bullying and anti-gay language:

> ...Usually, we'll post like videos that we think might be a good idea to show or songs that might be good to show [to the school]. So that's how we end up choosing like what kind of stuff we're going to be putting in the assembly sometimes...Usually we make like shear decisions in the classroom, but like it gives us a first look at things from at home, like on our own time, when it's on Facebook. So.

Contrary to the use of social media to combat queer negativity, Erin comments that anti-gay language is omnipresent on many of her peers' social networking spaces:

> ...I see it on Facebook all the time. Like, like hacked by whatever, like he's a faggot. And I'm like (sigh) so I've actually like, I'll like take pictures like of the screen, umm which I'm hoping to use for the assembly to like actually show people and be like, so this is the stuff that's all over your Facebooks. Imagine how, like this would have an impact on whatever.

Erin opts to see the positive side of encountering anti-LGBTQ language on Facebook, by innovatively concocting a plan to use it as a learning experience for her peers. Similar to Erin's declaration, Collette indicates that homophobic images and language monopolize her peers' Facebook pages:

Umm, sometimes you see anti-gay pictures. Like people saying, like people posting pictures saying, no gay zone and something like that. There's one incident earlier this year where a student posted a mock of like a pro-gay status. Where they had like kind of stick figures that all looked the same, it's like, can you find the gay person? No, because we're all the same. And then that person made more of like a spoof kind of thing, like parody of that. And had like the person like saying along it, it was pointing and was like if they can't find the person, you must be stupid because gay isn't right. I don't know. So, you do see a lot of that on there. And, I think that police actually got involved in that.

She goes on to explain that the principal at her school became involved in the situation and that there were school sanctioned consequences for this action.   From this anecdote, it is apparent that anti-queer attitudes and behaviours that occur outside school grounds, may infiltrate school communities through the use of the internet, specifically, social networking.   Altogether, these cyber communicative methods have the potential to disrupt homophobia and challenge heteronormativity, however, they also may act as a catalyst to propagate homo-negativity.

Male Peer Culture: Marginalizing Queerness to Mimic 'Manhood'

In the following section, I provide descriptive accounts of LGBTQ prejudice and discrimination by secondary school male students and I analyze anti-gay attitudes and behaviours within pockets of male peer culture at three different high schools.

The absence of male-presenting GSA members was ubiquitous within all the schools I visited for my study; thus, the vast majority of GSA members were female-presenting secondary students. Research from Goldstein & Davis (2010) highlights how GSAs are mostly composed of female participants. Martin describes his second GSA as "really open" "because I think because there are more girls than guys...". He thinks that

this makes a difference in the GSA because "girls are usually more open than men are." This finding is supported by Perrotti and Westheimer (2001) who explain that women are the majority of pupils within these student clubs. Consistent research findings suggest that, in general, men exhibit less queer-positive attitudes than females (Stotzer, 2009). Martin communicates that most of his school's GSA is composed of females: "I think there is only me and one other guy and the rest of them are all girls." This is consistent with Miceli's (2005) research on GSAs. Martin indicates that there was previously a straight male in the alliance but that he quit due to harassment based on his perceived sexuality:

> One boy quit because they started harassing him for being in the GSA. They were assuming that he was part of the LGB community, because he got harassed a lot.

Martin explains that this boy quit the GSA to ascertain whether the harassment would be reduced. Unfortunately, some young men may be inhibited from participating in GSAs due to the peer homophobic exchanges. Martino's (2001) study illuminates how homophobia is enacted within male peer culture to police young men's masculinities. Due to apparent gender specific restrictions in which young men do not want to be associated with homosexuality, GSAs may be constructed as inaccessible spaces for many males struggling to perform hegemonic masculinity for their peers. Kehler (2007) writes, "Counter hegemonic practices that effectively disrupt normative behaviours taken for granted among men thus become highly suspect...men who resist heteronormativity and various social conventions of masculinity, such as friendship practices, are bound to find themselves on the proverbial normative fringes of masculinity" (See Connell, 1989; Kehler 2004, Martino, 2001; Martino & Pallota-

Chiarolli, 2003; Mills, 2001; Renold, 2004; Robinson, 2005). Furthermore, "if certain actions and behaviours are deemed 'gay', students may avoid these for fear of being targeted for anti-LGBT behaviour" (GLSEN, 2009, p. 5).

Prior studies are grounded in the link between homophobia and masculinity in the lives of adolescent boys (O'Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub, 2004), which is rooted in male peer culture that demands conformity to' masculine' gendered 'norms'. Ultimately, for males, participating in GSAs is not traditionally associated with the expression of masculinity. In fact, other studies show that adolescent gender non-conformity is a source of significant risk in the lives of young people, particularly for boys and for LGB youth (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006). Straight males' deviant gender expressions, such as pro-gay views, are "routinely positioned along with gay males in the world that is 'other' and thus vulnerable to homophobic oppression" (Heasley, 2005, p. 311; Kehler, 2007; Martino, 2001). For example, Martin describes a time, in which he thought it was necessary to sever ties with one of his male friends:

> "I had one of my friends, Edgar, ex-friend really, he used to get harassed a lot, because he hung out with me...and I told him, you don't have to hang around me anymore, because I know you are going to be harassed. He said, thank you, and we don't hang out at all ever since."

Martin, understands the impact of being the target of LGBTQ victimization, and thus, did not want his friend to continue to be harassed based on his perceived sexuality.

My research purposely includes the perspectives of some of the few straight male allies to expand literature on students that maintain queer-positive attitudes within the schooling context. The two young men I interviewed – one "straight" and one "mostly straight" - are purposefully challenging 'normative' male peer culture in the hopes of

cultivating new forms of masculinity that do not marginalize queer people. I devote a space here to further investigate the relationships between male peer culture and anti-gay attitudes and behaviours by featuring the voices of these two young men who continuously push back against homophobic school culture in hopes of contributing to positive social change.

As previously mentioned, Chad was a member of his high school's football team. He explains that queer-negatives attitudes and behaviours have infiltrated his male sporting experience, and that, interestingly, no other members of the male football are involved with the GSA at his school. Ironically, he acknowledges the homoerotic nature embedded in particular male sporting routines:

> I mean playing football, it was very rampant [homophobia] in the dress room. That notion, you know, was kind of ironic because we're taking team showers after every game and you're calling, you know everyone else gay.

This statement incites thought about how the proliferation of homophobic language may be used as a protective barrier to prevent people from being perceived as queer within male peer culture. Chad points out that it's a way to distract from the homoerotic aspects of male specific spaces, such as the change rooms and showers.

Chad describes another situation that involves the privileging of heterosexuality and its connection to masculinity, which operates to marginalize queer sexualities in schooling. An altercation transpired at a school dance in which a male student was harassed due to his perceived queerness. He states:

> Umm, I mean, the only thing, I mean the only real confrontation I think that happened was at a dance. There was a gay student who

was getting heckled by another student; they actually got into a fight...

He presumes that both students were suspended for fighting at school, but he was unsure if the student that was heckling his peer was punished accordingly. Chad states, "I think he did get a longer suspension but that might have also been because he'd been in fights before." This scenario highlights how a male student publicly victimized a gay male pupil at a school function due to his sexual identity. Drawing on the work of Kehily (2002), this altercation represents how schools can be performative "space[s] where heterosexuality and masculinity can be fused, enacted, and displayed (p. 135).

Chad also describes the how he has heard students at his school talking in disparaging and pejorative terms about students who identify as queer:

> ...I've heard people talk about, you know like the gay students in like in negative ways I guess. Like, one of them who was running for student parliament last year and I was talking to a guy and he was like, oh, he's you know, 'cause he was running for the minister of student affairs which kind of runs all the student groups, he's like oh he's just gonna you know, make sure like that GSA does really well and he's not gonna to give anything to the sports stuff. I'm like ah. Yeah. I mean like, like it's not like it's, I don't know, I guess there's just people who are not as supportive, or something.

Chad feels like the student running for parliament was targeted because he was "kind of the most 'out' person in the school." He explains that 'out' means being open and willing to talk about being gay. When asked about how it felt to hear this, Chad responds, "I was mostly uncomfortable to be honest just that he was being that outright fully hateful about it..."

Chad also describes how homophobia happens within younger male peer groups, which is consistent with previous literature (Poteat et al., 2009). Similarly, Collette speaks to the omission of queer exposure in her elementary school when she states:

> Our school never really talked about like LGBT stuff. Like at all. Like, some, some students would have been. Like, you did have some suspicions if someone was like gay or straight and stuff like that. Like, but, like classrooms, teachers didn't say like anything. Like, there was no clubs or anything like that or like any kind of education at all. Mostly, just friends talking among themselves a little bit, but not a lot.

When queer issues are silenced in elementary schools, this may lead to the build up of stereotypes and prejudice directed towards sexual minorities and gender variant people. Thus, students may encounter queer material and concepts for the first time in high schools, where they may be expected to unlearn a decade and a half of heteronormative attitudes. Thus, along with LGBTQ content exposure and the provision of opportunities to examine the privileging and 'Othering' of particular identities (Kumashiro, 2002), providing students with access to GSAs in elementary schools may assist students understand and respect differences. Moreover, this may act as a prejudicial buffer when they enter the high school setting. (Kilman, 2007).

Chad describes how he attempts to combat LGBTQ prejudice with both younger students and his friends at school:

> Chad: Umm, let's see, a lot of times if it's with the grade nines, I'm a pretty big guy. But if it's like, I mean it happens with my friends all the time. Just be like, hey, guys, I try, you know, I try to talk to them sometimes. Sometimes they get and sometimes they don't. But, you always have to, it's a process 'cause you know a lot of them have in ingrained in their minds from, even from elementary school.
>
> **Alicia: And what are some examples of some homophobic things that happen?**

> Chad: It's a lot of, I mean it's a lot of, I guess it's a lot of indirect, it's
> not like directly hatred towards, you know homosexuals. But it's a lot
> of just indirect, just calling things gay, you know faggots.

Chad describes how his larger body size can be utilized to emphasize the personification of masculinity, insomuch as he uses his body to establish power over the grade nine boys. This research finding is supported by the work of Epstein, Kehily, Mac an Ghaill, & Redman (2001). Besides using his body in an attempt to regulate male peer behaviour, Chad verbally responds to homophobic expressions and slurs:

> I mean, if it's just like in a casual conversation with one of my friends.
> I'll just kind of just go, hey man, come on. And usually they're just,
> oh sorry...Like, most of my friends, I mean they don't mean it to be in
> that, it's just once again, ingrained in their minds. If it, umm...

Chad talks about reminding his friends that their language choice is offensive to him when he interjects with, "Hey man". He goes on to explain that his response to homophobic language depends on the company he keeps. Chad explains the reactions from his friends when he interjects:

> A lot of times in the conversation if they do say that [anti-gay
> language], they'll just apologize to me right away. I'm known as the, I
> guess, I kind of developed a reputation as the one, that one in the
> group I guess, the one who is... homosexual friendly, if that's a term?
> It is now.

Chad describes how his responses to homophobic language differ depending on who he is interacting with. His queer-positive attitudes are well known within his circle of friends, and thus he feels comfortable simply reminding them to check their language. His friends seem to understand his vantage point, and respect his wishes when he reminds them, however their homophobic language use seems to persist. Due to Chad's larger physical size, and/or his previous affiliation with ultra-masculine football culture,

his own heterosexuality remains unquestioned in the eyes of his schoolmates, and thus, perhaps he is more willing or simply more able to use his social capital to address homophobia with male peers. In short, Chad may not run the risk of compromising his masculinity when he confronts his male peers for use of anti-gay because he has ties with valorized hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995).

Erin talks about her experiences with addressing queer issues with some of her male friends. She notes that some of her male schoolmates express double standards when they describe their comfort with men who identity as sexual minorities:

> Also, umm. I know like, a lot of my guy friends. Like I've had a conversation with them and like and they say oh I don't have a problem with people being gay but it's like if they're flirting with me that's when, it's like , I have an issue with it. And, I think it would be like the same thing if like a girl was flirting with you that you didn't have feelings for, right? Like, it's just, yeah, it's just unawareness and people don't realise that it's, it's the same; it's just a different gender and it doesn't really matter, like. That sort of view.

Fascinatingly, this finding resonates with Kehily's (2002) work in which she proposes, "the inner fear of 'being gay' and the outer fear of being called gay involved young men in performance displays of homophobia and exaggerate forms of masculinity" (p. 145). In a similar vein, Martin describes how many of his male classmates avoided being his partner in group work. His understanding of their reasoning for this was because "they thought I would have sex with them, or touch them or make them gay themselves. All those stereotypes." Due to unchallenged misunderstandings and myths regarding queer sexualities, gay men in particular, are constructed as hyper sexual and prone to abusing other men because of their perceived sexual deviance (Kumashiro, 2002). Thus, educative "lessons that critique, for example the harmfulness of stereotypes and the

invisible histories of institutionalized oppression can involve addressing our own privileges, confronting our own prejudices, and acknowledging the harmfulness of practices that unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes or are complicit with institutionalized oppression" (p. 64).

When talking about the GSA at his school, Bobby describes a small group where very few straight allies are involved. He states, "It's not big, it's actually really small. I am the only straight male in it that actually continuously comes back..." When asked what his thoughts on that were, he responds, "Guys get busy. Actually Brad, one of the other guys that was there, he did go, but because his girlfriend is the one making him go, he does not need to go." Bobby explains that he is the only straight male ally that regularly attends GSA meetings, and his proposed reasoning for the absence of other straight males in the club is likened to their perceived busy nature. Perhaps, time constraint is a legitimate barrier that affects some straight-identifying males' involvement in GSAs, however, it seems more likely that they may be putting themselves at risk for becoming targets of LGBTQ victimization, due to their association with queerness, which conflicts with normative expressions of masculinity (Connell, 2009). For Brad, being in a heterosexual relationship may act as a barrier to protect him from being marginalized for his participation in the GSA. Bobby also mentions that there is another straight male who participates in the alliance less frequently:

> There is a boy, but I forget his name, I think his name, I think his name is Zac or something like that, and he's another straight guy. And he only shows up once in a while but, when he does show up everyone kind of gets excited. He himself is a very excited and non, non judging kind of person.

Chad speaks about his first experience with dropping in on a GSA meeting:

Alicia: So, what about your friends at the school, do they know you're involved in the GSA?

Chad: Oh, yeah. Yeah. A few of them are on it with me and... A few of them aren't but they respect it I guess.

Due to the incessant pressure in male peer culture to perform homophobia to demonstrate masculinity, males may be inhibited from participating in GSAs because it may compromise their male status in secondary schools. In short, the heteronormative surveillance and policing of boy's masculinities by other boys may contribute to the perpetuation of homophobic exchanges between young men and limit the ability of adolescent males to transgress gendered 'norms' that unite homophobia with the embodiment of masculinity.

As previously mentioned, Martin has been the victim of LGBTQ hate crimes at the two secondary institutions he has attended. The following section is dedicated to voicing his experiences as a self-identified sexual minority student that is consistently ostracized and belittled by his peers in school. He describes how male peers verbally and physically harass him due to his sexuality. Homophobic male peer culture is explored as a means of policing Martin's masculinity at school. His courage to push back against his oppressive male peers is to be commended

Martin's Experience in Schooling

When I asked Martin who he was victimized by at school, he instantaneously responded, "men". Like many LGBTQ youth, he was victimized based on his sexual orientation by some of his schoolmates (Taylor et.al., 2011). When he went to his first secondary school he experienced both verbal and physical harassment at the hands of his male peers, and his life was even threatened as well. He explains:

> I went to the washroom one time, and a guy pushed me back into the wall, and he said that, "gays should die", and another person said that every time I walked down the hall they looked at me and call me faggot and things like that. It was in that hallway that they talked about it, and the hallways...are really big.

Likewise, on his first day at his new high school, Martin was in the cafeteria for his spare, when a boy approached him and stated, "gays aren't allowed at [his school] and they should be killed and go away." This is a prominent example of how Martin's masculinity was being policed by another boy through the use of homophobia. He comments that he is the only 'out' gay male at his school, so he stands out: "So because I stand out too much, they have the opportunity to harass me more." Through his work with the GSA he has become a visible advocate for LGBTQ people. During a GSA initiative, in which members went around to classrooms to speak with students, Martin encountered more anti-queer comments from a group of grade nine boys. He recounts:

> Martin: They would say, nice hair, or really nice hair accessories...
>
> **Alicia: So they were kind of mocking...?**
>
> Martin: Yea, it was little tiny jabs. It didn't seem serious but they are.

This situation highlights how the grade nine boys were attempting to police Martin's masculinity though overtly ridiculing what they considered to be gender deviant behaviours. Pascoe (2007) identifies that within male peer culture, homophobia is used to monitor and police other boys' masculinity. Interestingly, Martin just ignored the comments by the boys. When I asked Martin why he supposed they did that, he states: "A lot of them aren't taught about the LGBT community and you know media doesn't help, because they will go like this [bends his wrist] every five seconds." He empathizes with them because he thinks "they are just learning". These problematic reoccurrences

of anti-gay attitudes and actions, specifically within male peer interactions, demonstrate that GSAs alone will not expunge LGBTQ-prejudice. Toomey et al. (2011) write, "relying on a GSA to be the sole vehicle for promoting safe schools for LGBT students may not be sufficient to alter the system-level heterosexism and homophobia that combines to exist in schools" (p. 183). Thus, students need opportunities to deconstruct the learned prejudice they have built up over the years. This is especially important for some young men who continuously victimize LGBTQ people in order to produce a masculine appearance for themselves and others (Kehily, 2002). Moreover, Kehler (2007) asserts, "...young men try to display a coherent heterosexual masculinity through ritualized practices that centre on 'othering' femininity and homophobia. They perform publicly, for example, through homophobic acts that are as much about their own sexualized identities as they are about that of others" (p.262).

Heteronormativity?

The allies, who identified as "straight" and "mostly straight" in my study, state that they did not witness the harassment of LGBTQ youth at their schools; this being said, it was difficult for some allies to comprehend LGBTQ victimization beyond physical or verbal altercations. Moreover, they consistently describe challenges imposed on queer students in terms of the prolific use of anti-gay language in schooling. Thus, the heteronormative structure of school culture was not really questioned as contributing to unjust educational provisions for queer youth. When asked about issues that impact queer youth, Bobby explains: "Ah, simple. Umm, the homophobia. The homophobia is the biggest problem...Yeah, there's just, it's only mainly homophobia." Chad describes school as a place in which many hate-based physical altercations do not

exist. He relates: "There hasn't been a lot of incidents within, that I, that anyone's heard about anyway. I mean it is obviously an issue in this school." He goes on to state: "I mean being in an upper middle class white neighbourhood I guess, it's very non-violent, non very hateful neighbourhood. Well, I mean obviously there are people who, but usually it's not, no confrontations happen." Similar to Martino's (2008) work, Chad's statement is classist and thus, problematic because it perpetuates the stereotype that working class citizens are more violent than individuals within higher socioeconomic echelons. Collette also perceives LGBTQ victimization to be minimal at her school:

> Umm, there is some bullying. None that I've really heard of much. Like, I know some people who've gotten bullied in the past before they came to high school. But, I'm not really sure if there's really been much incidents that really they were targeted in specific during high school.

For Chad and other allies, the acknowledgement of victimization tended to be correlated with the observable accounts of bullying. However, we know from empirical work that, "Most queer students that are harassed or assaulted in schools did not report the incident to a teacher or administrator because they thought they wouldn't do anything (GLSEN, 2009). Thus, much abuse of queer learners may be hidden from the entire student population in general.

Interestingly, Bobby positions all the queer people at his school as being comfortable with who they are:

> All the gay people in our school are very much aware and they're ok with who they are. They're kind of gay and proud to be that way. So, I don't have to help there. But, if I ever did, I would.

Moreover, similar to the inability of some allies to recognize LGBTQ issues that are 'hidden', such as the heterosexism embedded within daily school practices, Bobby may

be overlooking the internal struggles that many queer youth go through as they develop their personal identities in a heterocentric society.

A Word of Caution: The Straight in GSA

Kumashiro (2002) writes that we must always re-evaluate our vantage point to ensure that we are not silencing individuals or alienating particular people. With respect to the functioning of GSAs, Valenti and Campbell (2009) caution that "if there is a tendency to focus on the gay part of the Gay-Straight Alliance while ignoring the straight element...it is important to consider what message that sends to the straight students as well as the gay students" (p. 243-244). Thus, it is important to acknowledge and embrace the spectrum of sexuality and gender, and not to privilege any identity over another (Kumashiro, 2002). Interestingly, a young woman in one of the GSAs I visited openly declared that she was there to "raise awareness about the straight part of the alliance". This quote demonstrates how it is vital not to create divisions in GSAs in which some people are pushed to the margins of the group. Chad describes how his alliance revolves around queer leadership:

> ...I mean, a lot of times it seems as if gay people are almost kind of in charge of it, which makes sense I think, 'cause it's obviously, it's their thing. We're there to support and help a lot. I mean, it's not like there's not like a division in the GSA. It's just kind of, you know who is there to support, you know who is there because there are.

I asked him if people openly talk about their sexual orientation and gender identity in the club and he answered yes. However, when I questioned whether straight allies openly speak about their sexuality, he states: "Umm, I mean, I guess, not a lot. You know, we, we're, we say we're straight and stuff...straight but we care."

Perhaps, GSAs are one of the only spaces in schools where queer-identifying youth can openly speak about their identities and it may not be as necessary for heterosexual youth to converse about their sexuality because they can do so anywhere without being victimized. Drawing on the work of Kumashiro (2002), straight-identifying youth should still be afforded opportunities to communicate about their sexuality, if they so choose, within GSAs and thus, the space should not be monopolized by the queer-identifying students.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified many challenges associated with cultivating LGBTQ-positive learning environments. Secondary schools are positioned as homophobic and heteronormative settings that require social and systemic interventions to address LGBTQ-based inequities. Social media is portrayed as a tool to both reproduce LGBTQ prejudice and respond to anti-gay attitudes and behaviours. Male peer culture was also examined to spotlight how boys are observing and policing other boys' masculinities through the performance of homophobia. Overall the student voices were instrumental in enabling me to provide some insight onto addressing anti-oppressive education as it pertains to queer interventions in school communities and what this might look like on the ground.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis has examined the experiences of five GSA members from three different schools in Southwestern, Ontario. The purpose of this research was to investigate what motivates or influences their decisions to become members of GSAs, and to examine their commitment to purposefully disrupting homophobia within their educational institutions. Throughout this thesis I have emphasized how the work of allies, through their involvement in GSAs, constitutes powerful ways in which students are acting with agency to confront homophobia, and at times, heterosexist and heteronormative learning environments. The aim of this study was to provide a space for allies to vocalize their experiences as advocates for LGBTQ human rights and to focus attention on how educators might nurture alliances between straight-identifying and queer students in secondary schools by listening to the voices of students themselves. Moreover, drawing upon the work of Cook-Sather (2002), I emphasized the importance of authorizing students' perspectives as a means of ensuring their perspectives are heard and listened to in hopes of transforming educational policy and practice to include the insights of students.

In the literature review I acknowledged the empirical work available on straight allies and provided a historical overview of GSAs. This literature, which depicts GSAs as safe spaces, acknowledges their capacity to combat homophobia and to interrogate institutionalized heterosexism and heteronormativity. Straight allies were identified as integral members helping to push the GSA and LGBTQ movements forward. The literature highlighted the need to further investigate the significance of straight allies in

their capacity to address the institutionalization of heteronormativity and homophobia in schools.

The Significance of Theory and the Use of Student Voice

Throughout this thesis, both queer theoretical perspectives and Kumashiro's framework of anti-oppressive education, which raise important questions about the impact of heteronormativity or the naturalization and normalization of heterosexuality in social institutions, served as the underpinning for this study. Such theoretical perspectives generated important analytic and conceptual categories which also enabled me to engage with student voices and to employ them to provide further insights into how privileging and 'Othering' are understood within the context of schooling as site for examining the impact of institutionalized heternormativity and homophobia. Such theories also afforded me the analytic insight into understanding GSAs as specific activist and educational spaces that support critical in(queer)ies and interventions in school communities.

My research draws attention to the importance of the political role of straight allies in combating homophobia and interrogating heteronormativity in schooling. Moreover, this study portrayed how allies play a critical role in facilitating positive social change in their schools. It was found that participant motivations for GSA involvement involve advocating for human rights and supporting people in the LGBTQ community. Data revealed that straight allies may develop queer-positive attitudes through their personal experiences with either being incorrectly labelled the 'Other', by associating with queer-identifying students, and through their ability to empathize with minority populations. My findings are consistent with those of Toomey et al. (2011), which

indicate that GSAs positively contribute to their school communities. Visible manifestations of queer-positivity have been shown to foster positive interpersonal connections between peers as a basis for reducing anti-gay attitudes and behaviours. This research also highlighted how straight allies are actively contributing to the functioning of the GSA at their schools, by occupying leadership roles within these clubs. Finally, due to apparent gender specific restrictions in which young men do not want to be associated with homosexuality, GSAs may be constructed as inaccessible spaces for many males struggling to perform hegemonic masculinity for peers.

This research draws attention to the importance of curriculum developers to incorporate queer people and material into the official curriculum and for educators to integrate this information into their daily educational practices. GSAs were positioned as positively contributing to school communities, thus it is imperative that educators be supportive of these student-led clubs. To address the oppression of LGBTQ youth in schooling, it is vital for policy makers to create anti-homophobic policies and for educators to enforce these policies; however, this must also be paired with prompting school community members to interrogate heteronormativity to critically examine the privileging and 'Othering' of particular identities (Kumashiro, 2002).

Implications for Further Research

Within a North American context, specifically within Canada, there has been little empirical work in the field that deals with straight allies and Gay-Straight Alliances in school communities. Thus, there is a need for further research which illuminates the roles of heterosexual allies, and reveals the purpose of GSAs in educational institutions. Additionally, the experience of students who participate in GSAs has been limited, for

the most part, to college clubs, so further research should explore the insights of secondary school students in involved in GSAs. Likewise, available literature fails to consult straight allies from multiple sampling sites. Goldstein & Davis (2010) acknowledge that most scholarly work on GSAs and straight allies is comprised of female-identifying participants, hence, securing the experiences and perspectives of male students is important to compliment and extend research on sexual prejudice in schools. Moreover, exploring how male students are rejecting homophobic male peer culture and visibly demonstrating queer-positive attitudes by performing LGBTQ advocacy-based work in schools is important to understand how some men are able to transgress gendered 'norms'.

Extending on this study, research should examine the role of GSA advisors and what characterizes an effective supervisor. Moreover, the leadership ability of advisors and the interrelationships between students and the GSA supervisor should be explored. The motivations of GSA members to enact their LGBTQ work in prejudice reduction outside the contexts of schools in another topic that should be explored to illuminate how positive change is being produced in various institutions and the interconnections among them. As previously mentioned, the willingness and ability of young (mostly) straight-identifying men, like Chad and Bobby, to address LGBTQ prejudice at the expense of being perceived as queer by their male peers is indeed another important research topic to explore. Overall, more studies must be conducted on the impact of allies and their ability to dismantle social and systemic LGBTQ inequities.

My research has highlighted the importance of including the perspectives of students as a means by which to provide insights into addressing heteronormativity and

homophobia in schools. While many changes have occurred with regards to queer rights, and visibility and acceptance, there is still a long way to go. Listening to students can draw attention to both the activist capacities of the student body in terms of interrogating and addressing heteronormativity in schools, and to build further knowledge about the need to integrate queer perspectives and content into the curriculum.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Straight allies: Combating homophobia and interrogating heteronormativity 'straight' on

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Introduction
My name is Alicia Lapointe and I am a Masters student at the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into allies and their involvement in Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study
My purpose is to generate more knowledge about straight allies and their involvement in Gay-Straight Alliances. I will be interviewing 5-10 allies from a variety of secondary schools in Southwestern Ontario.

If you agree to participate
If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to complete a one hour interview in a private location at your school that will explore your experiences as an ally. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed into written form.

Confidentiality
The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Moreover, your privacy will be protected through the use of pseudonyms within the subsequent thesis. In addition, data will be securely stored by the researcher kept for 5 years and then destroyed confidentially.

Risks & Benefits
There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your academic status.
Questions
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at 519-661-3036 or ethics@uwo.ca. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Alicia Lapointe or Wayne Martino.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

[Signature]

Straight allies: Combating homophobia and interrogating heteronormativity 'straight' on

Alicia Lapointe, Masters Student, the University of Western Ontario

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature: Date:

APPENDIX C

Straight allies: Combating homophobia and interrogating heteronormativity 'straight' on

Alicia Lapointe, Masters Student, the University of Western Ontario

CONSENT FORM

I have read the letter of information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree that my child may participate in the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

_____

Name of Student

_____

Student's Signature   Date

_____

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

_____

Parent/Guardian's Signature   Date

APPENDIX D

Straight allies: Combating homophobia and interrogating heteronormativity 'straight' on

Alicia Lapointe, 2011

1. Background information: Name, age, grade.
2. How would you describe your sexuality?
3. How would you describe your gender?
4. Can you talk about your school and what it is like?
5. Can you talk about the GSA at your school? What is it like?
6. What do you consider to be the role or purpose of the GSA at your school? What role does it play at your school? Why was it set up? Who was responsible for setting it up?
7. Why did you choose to become involved in the GSA at your school? What do you consider your role to be as a member of a GSA?
8. Can you describe or talk about the other students who are members of the GSA at your school?
9. How many straight allies are involved in the GSA at your school?
10. What do you consider to be issues at your school that impact on LGBTQ students?
11. In what ways do you see yourself addressing LGBTQ issues at your school?
12. Are there any challenges associated with your involvement in your school's GSA?
13. How would you describe the following people's **commitment** to addressing LBGTQ issues at your school?
a) Administration
b) Teachers
c) Peers

14. How would you describe the following people's **effectiveness** in addressing LGBTQ issues at your school?
a) Administration
b) Teachers
c) Peers

APPENDIX E

FORM A

Western
Education

Faculty of Education
Graduate Programs & Research Office

Print Form

Reset Form

APPROVAL OF M.Ed. THESIS PROPOSAL

If the proposed research does not involve human subjects or the direct use of their written records, video-tapes, recordings, tests, etc., this signature form, along with ONE copy of the research proposal should be delivered directly to the Graduate Programs & Research Office for final approval.	If the proposed research involves human subjects, this signature form, along with ONE copy of the research proposal and Ethical Review Form signature pages (Section 1.1 to 1.7) must be submitted to the Graduate Programs & Research Office for final approval.

IT IS THE STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE A COPY OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (INCLUDING REVISIONS) TO THE THESIS SUPERVISOR AND ALL MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

Student's Name: Alicia Lapointe

Student #: 250091168

Field of Study: Curriculum Studies

Title of Thesis: "Straight" allies: Combating homophobia and interrogating heteronormativity 'straight' on

Name of Thesis Supervisor: Wayne Martino

Name of Thesis Advisory Committee Member: Goli Rezai-Rashti

DOES THIS RESEARCH INVOLVE THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS: ⊙ Yes ○ No

APPROVAL SIGNATURES:

Graduate Student :   Date: 06 / 14 / 11

Thesis Supervisor: Date: _____

Advisory Committee: Date: _____

Ethical Review Clearance   Date: Aug 16 / 11

Ethical Review Number: 106-1

Associate Dean
Graduate Programs & Research   Date: _____

A STUDENT MAY PROCEED WITH RESEARCH WHEN A COPY OF THIS FORM CONTAINING ALL APPROVAL SIGNATURES HAS BEEN RECEIVED.

A copy of this proposal may be made public and kept on a two-hour reserve in the Faculty of Education Library.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Alicia Lapointe

Professional Qualifications: Ontario Teacher's Certificate
- Intermediate/Senior: Health and Physical Education and General Social Studies, 2009

  Special Education Part 1, Additional Qualification Course
- The University of Western Ontario, 2010

  Bachelor of Education, with Distinction
- The University of Western Ontario, 2009

  Bachelor of Arts, Honors Kinesiology
- The University of Western Ontario, 2006

Related Work Experience: Project Leader
- Katimavik, Ingersoll, London, Strathroy, and Smiths Falls, Ontario, 2005, 2010