

Multi-case Study with Canadian Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs)

by

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Abstract

School based gay straight alliances (GSAs) are primarily North American extra-curricular clubs that foster support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) and allied middle and secondary students. Founded and led by youth, they can also take on activist or educational roles, such as lobbying for LGBTQ-inclusive curricular materials (Micelei, 2005; GSA Network, 2011). The continuing emergence of GSAs has forced intense public discussions and much debated policymaking decisions on how schools engage and grapple with LGBTQ topics, and the spectrum of sexual and gender roles more broadly (Herriot, 2011; Short, 2013a). This is especially true in educational policy-making, where various jurisdictions have developed, debated, amended, revised, and resisted GSA affirming policies.

Despite there being nearly 300 GSAs in Canadian schools (mygsa.ca), little is currently known about how youth members and their teacher advisors perceive the diverse roles, purposes, and functions of GSAs are and can be. Beyond their immediate effects on members and their school communities, GSAs mark a new moment in contemporary theorizing about youth, as they disrupt the dominant notion of youth's sexual subjectivity as naturally and universally asexual in practice and heterosexual in orientation (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004; Robinson, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to understand the pragmatic workings and theoretical implications of GSAs primarily through working with club members themselves. Findings from the work with participants were situated within a larger policy narrative, which was conducted using an interpretive approach using policy documents relevant to the participating GSAs. Policies generally defined openly or suspected

LGBTQ students' safety as the policy problem, which GSAs would then resolve as designated safe spaces within the school. Although some participants viewed the GSAs' primary purpose as a harm-reduction strategy in congruence with the policy documents, many others eschewed its being characterized as such, and resented its reputation as a "charity case." In conjunction with recognizing its supportive functions, most participants emphasized diverse features of their GSA, such as its importance as a valued social space, or its filling an educational gap regarding LGBTQ content. Not only did participants from across sites experience the GSA differently, members of the same club had different reactions to what the club was, and why it was important.

A significant policy revision pertaining to LGBTQ youth in Lower Mainland schools occurred during data collection. Youth participants' engagement with the public consultation process in this policy revision was analyzed as both an extension of the policy narrative completed prior to data collection, and a close examination of how some GSA members engage in activism. The dissertation concludes with theory building related to how youth participants characterized the intersections of youthfulness, voice, citizenship, and diverse sexual and gender identities.

This research informs theory, practice, and policy-making around how schools approach youth in general, and LGBTQ and allied youth in particular.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Lindsay Herriot. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, “Ethnographic Inquiry with Canadian Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs)”, No. Pro00044137, 10 February, 2014.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the participants who so graciously shared their stories and lives

with me, and;

In loving memory of my grandmother, Pte. Gwendolyn Bellows (1921-2015), who
passed away peacefully shortly before this work was completed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Preface.....	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
List of Tables	xii
List of Figures.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Background of Study	1
1.2 Research Questions	4
1.3 Clarification of Terminology	5
1.3.1 Terms relating to childhood and youth.	5
1.3.2 Demystifying LGBTTT2QAI*.	11
1.4 Brief Description of the Study.....	15
1.5. Organization of Dissertation	15
CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Frameworks & Literature Review	17
2.1 Introduction and Selection of Literature.....	17
2.2 Epistemological and Theoretical Perspectives.....	18
2.2.1. Constructivism.	18
2.2.2 Feminist theory.....	20
2.2.3 Queer theory.	23
2.2.4 Childhood theory.....	27
2.2.4.1 Surveillance and control.....	28
2.2.4.2 Political illegitimacy and children's participation rights.	29
2.2.4.3 Innocence, sexuality, and schooling.	36
2.2.5 Summary of theoretical perspectives.	39
2.3 Literature Review.....	42
2.3.1 Theoretical constructions of childhood and youth in Canadian schools.	42
2.3.1.1 Compulsory schooling and the Dionysian/Apollonian child.....	42
2.3.1.2 Educating for gender conformity.....	43
2.3.1.3 Educating the 'good' youth-citizen.....	45
2.3.2 LGBTQ youth in schools.	50
2.2.3.1 Written curricula, legal precedents, and school policy.	50
2.3.2.2 School climate.....	54
2.3.3 Gay Straight Alliances: Numbers, locations, and members.	59
2.3.3.1 GSA emergence in Canada.....	59
2.3.3.2 A GSA by any other name: Labeling the club.	63
2.3.3.3 Numbers and locations of GSAs.....	64
2.3.3.4 Who attends the GSA?: Youth intersectionality in GSAs.....	65
2.3.3.4.1 The 'straight' in Gay Straight Alliances.....	65
2.3.3.4.2 LGB- hold the T: Trans exclusion and affirmation in GSAs.	67
2.3.3.4.3 Race, class, and faith.	69
2.3.3.5 Teacher advisors in GSAs.	69
2.3.4 Purposes, roles, and functions of GSAs	71
2.3.4.1 Support and 'safety' in GSAs.	72
2.3.4.2 Social spaces and belonging.	75
2.3.4.3 Education about queer history and life.....	77
2.3.4.4 Education as activism.	78
2.3.4.5 Education as enacting citizenship.	80

2.3.4.6 GSAs as both continuity and change.....	82
2.4 Blending Policy, Theory, and GSAs: Ontario's Bill 13 as Exemplar.....	83
2.5 Summary.....	86
CHAPTER 3: Methodology and Study Design	88
3.1 Introduction and Rationale for the Methodology	88
3.2 Research Contexts.....	89
3.3 Methodological Approaches	90
3.3.1 Interpretive multi-case studies.....	90
3.3.2 Interpretive policy analysis.....	94
3.3 Ethnographic Methods.....	96
3.4 Study Design: Data Collection	97
3.4.1 Selection of policy documents.....	98
3.4.2 Selection of participating schools.....	100
3.4.3 Participant profiles.....	101
3.4.3.1 Schools.....	102
3.4.3.2 GSAs.....	103
3.4.3.3 Participants.....	105
3.4.4 Observations.....	111
3.4.5 Pre interview activities (PIAs).....	115
3.4.6 Semi structured interviews and group interview.....	116
3.5 Study Design: Data Analysis.....	119
3.5.1 Hermeneutics.....	119
3.6 Researcher Positionality.....	122
3.7 Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Transferability	126
3.8 Challenges of the Research Process.....	128
3.9 Summary.....	129
CHAPTER 4: Interpretive Policy Analysis	130
4.1 Introduction	130
4.2 Policies	130
4.3 Interpretive Policy Analysis	135
4.3.1 Defining the policy problem.....	135
4.3.2 Contextual influences on policy problem identification and definition.....	138
4.3.3 GSAs as a policy solution.....	142
4.3.3.1 GSAs as promoting student safety.....	142
4.3.3.2 GSAs as structural change.....	145
4.4 Conclusion.....	146
4.5 Summary.....	147
CHAPTER 5: Roles, Purposes, and Functions of GSAs	148
5.1 Introduction	148
5.2 GSAs as Social Spaces	149
5.2.1 Popularity, social capital, and GSA membership.....	149
5.2.2 Social relationships within the GSA.....	157
5.2.3 GSAs fostering a social connection to the school.....	165
5.3 Safety and Support in the GSA.....	168
5.3.1 Peer support.....	169
5.3.1.1 Support from allies.....	169
5.3.1.2 Support from queer peers.....	178
5.3.2 Support from adults.....	182
5.3.3 Support and safety: Overlap and divergence.....	184

5.3.3.1 Safe from what?	184
5.3.3.2 Safe for whom?	190
5.3.3.2.1 Trans.	190
5.3.3.2.2 Ethnocultural diversity	194
5.3.3.2.3 Religion.	196
5.3.3.3 Safe to do what?	198
5.4 Education, Activism, and the GSA	199
5.4.1 Broad conceptions of anti-homophobia education	199
5.4.2 LGBTQ education within the GSA.	201
5.4.3 Dialogue.	207
5.4.4 LGBTQ education inside the classroom.	214
5.4.5 GSA-led education and activism throughout the school.	219
5.4.5.1 Events.	219
5.4.5.2 Posters.	223
5.4.5.3 Calling out.	234
5.5 Overlapping Social, Supportive, and Educative Functions in the GSA	238
5.6 Summary	240
CHAPTER 6: Activism in GSAs	242
6.1 Introduction	242
6.2 Policy ACB (2014): Summary and context	242
6.3 Policy ACB and washroom access	244
6.3.1 Importance of gender-neutral washrooms for trans youth.	244
6.3.2 Adult opposition to gender-neutral washrooms	248
6.4 Policy ACB and Student Voice	253
6.5 Policy ACB: Citizenship and the Right to Recognition	263
6.6 Situating Policy ACB Within the GSA Policy Landscape	267
6.5 Summary	269
CHAPTER 7: Theory-Building From Work With GSAs	271
7.1 Introduction	271
7.2 GSAs in Elementary Schools	272
7.3 Surfaced Themes	273
7.3.1 Innocence, homophobia, and the Apollonian child.	273
7.3.2 Childism, exceptionalism, and the Apollonian child.	275
7.3.3. Apollonian rebuttals to contrary evidence	278
7.3.4 Children's homophobia and the Dionysian child.	284
7.3.5 Childism, exceptionalism, and the Dionysian child	286
7.4. Smothered Themes	288
7.5 Significance of Themes	294
7.5.1 Significance of the surfaced themes.	294
7.5.2 Significance of smothered themes.	295
7.6 Summary	296
CHAPTER 8: Conclusion	297
8.1 Summary of Findings	297
8.2 Implications for Policy	301
8.3 Implications for Practice	304
8.4 Recommendations for Future Research	306
References	308
Appendix A – Participant Information Letter	343

Appendix B - Participant Consent Form	347
Appendix C - Supportive Resources	349
Appendix D - Pre Interview Activities	350
Appendix E - Interview Guide.....	351
Appendix F - University of Alberta Ethics Approval	353
Appendix G - Vancouver School Board Ethics Approval	354
Appendix I - Vancouver School Board Policy ACB (2004)	358
Appendix J - Vancouver School Board Policy ACB-R1 (2014)	367

List of Tables

<i>Table 3.1.</i> Types of case studies.....	93
<i>Table 3.2.</i> Club names by school.....	104
<i>Table 3.3.</i> Participant names and self-chosen identity labels.....	109-110
<i>Table 3.4.</i> Observational data by school.....	111
<i>Table 3.5.</i> Number of interviews by school.....	117
<i>Table 5.1.</i> Legend of colours used in figure 5.13.....	239

List of Figures

<i>Figure 2.1.</i> Where will your GSA fit on this diagram?.....	72
<i>Figure 3.1.</i> Participant drawing of their sexual orientation.....	108
<i>Figure 5.1.</i> Where will your GSA fit on this diagram?.....	148
<i>Figure 5.2.</i> Permanent display at Evergreen Secondary.....	151
<i>Figure 5.3.</i> Day of Purple cupcakes at Evergreen Secondary.....	151
<i>Figure 5.4.</i> Woven streamers for the Day of Purple at Evergreen Secondary.....	152
<i>Figure 5.5.</i> QSA advertisement at Birch Secondary.....	153
<i>Figure 5.6.</i> Ripped Pride sticker in a hallway at Birch Secondary.....	154
<i>Figure 5.7.</i> LGBTQ-themed posters in a hallway at Birch Secondary.....	154
<i>Figure 5.8.</i> Participant drawing of a good GSA meeting and a bad GSA meeting.....	161
<i>Figure 5.9.</i> School attachment (Non-LGBTQ/Sexual minority/Trans students).....	166
<i>Figure 5.10.</i> Participant drawing of a bad GSA meeting and a good GSA.....	213
<i>Figure 5.11.</i> Poster supporting LGBTQ athletes at the Sochi Winter Games.....	224
<i>Figure 5.12.</i> Poster supporting LGBTQ athletes at the Sochi Winter Games.....	225
<i>Figure 5.13.</i> Aggregated participant responses to ‘Where will your GSA fit on this diagram?’	239
<i>Figure 6.1.</i> Participant field notes.....	252
<i>Figure 6.2.</i> Participant field notes.....	256

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

As a direct response to school-based homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and heterosexism, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) and allied youth are initiating extra-curricular clubs called Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) (Taylor & Peter 2011). GSAs have been characterized as school-based support groups and safe(r) spaces that must have a teacher-sponsor, and are open to teachers and youth of any and all sexual orientations and gender identities/expressions (Diaz, Kosciw, & GLSEN, 2009; Micelei, 2005; St. John, Travers, Munro, Liboro, Schneider, & Greig, 2014). Although some clubs are called by other names such as Rainbow Alliance, Acceptance Club, or Alliance Gai-hétéro, I will be referring to all such clubs as GSAs for consistency and readability.

According to the *GSA Advisor Handbook* (Buehler, Solis, Marsocci, Ohinsky, Wadden, Littlefield, & Michael, 2011), GSAs tend to have three overlapping prototypical aims: activist, social, and support. These purposes and functions are as varied as the youth who comprise them and the schools they inhabit. For instance, while some GSAs consist of privately conducted, mainly emotional support for LGBTQ youth, many others take on more active roles advocating for LGBTQ youth by holding school-wide anti-homophobia events or lobbying for school-board anti-homophobia policies (Griffen, Lee, Waugh & Beyer, 2005; Lipkin, 2004; Macgillivray, 2006; Meyer & Stader, 2009; Micelei, 2005). With rolling membership, GSAs can serve multiple roles simultaneously or sequentially, and may have a limited lifespan due to student turnover (Fetner & Kush, 2008). Within the space of a single academic year, for instance, a highly activist club may

focus primarily on poster and social media campaigns, concurrently offer mental health support when an allied counselor is hired by the school mid-year, and then switch from poster campaigning to being more of a social space, emphasizing bowling or movie nights. Regardless of the form(s) they take, the continuing emergence of GSAs has forced intense public discussions and much debated policymaking decisions on how schools engage and grapple with LGBTQ topics, and the spectrum of sexual and gender roles more broadly (Boesvald, 2011a; Herriot, 2011; Short, 2013).

The rapid uptake of GSAs throughout Canada is a phenomenon unto itself: there are 301 clubs registered at mygsa.ca as of this writing, from coast to coast to coast, with doubtless more in existence but not registered on the Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (EGALE) sponsored website. Although their numbers have skyrocketed since the first reported Canadian GSAs emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Collins, 2004; Rayside, 2014), there is a noticeable lack of qualitative research on multiple sites within the Canadian context, with most qualitative work being restricted to a single site or two, or with only the queer youth members, rather than the GSA as a whole, across multiple sites (see Fetner, Elafros, Bortolin, & Drechsler 2012; Lapointe, 2015; St John et al., 2014). This dissertation builds upon Short's (2013) recent appeal after his ethnographic research with queer students in Toronto:

What is needed is a study (particularly in a Canadian context) that asks queer students about their awareness of and experiences with the formal and informal heteronormative practices of schools in order to expose the codes of heteronormative cultural assumptions and the ways that the formal and informal curricula play out in a site ostensibly governed by a well-written equity policy that

acknowledges and seeks to reverse the negative effects of heteronormative practices. (p. 114)

GSAs are queer students' traditional home to voice their concerns with formal and informal cultures of heteronormativity within schools, and they have a particularly long history within on the unceded and unsundered territories of the Skwxwú7mesh, Tslie-wahtuth, and the Xméthkwyiem nations, in British Columbia's Lower Mainland. Some of the earliest reported Canadian GSAs emerged in this territory (Herriot, 2011), and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation was the first such provincial body of teachers to pass a resolution supporting their formation in the year 2000 (Smith, 2004). With longstanding activism from the BC Gay and Lesbian Educators (now Pride in Education) and numerous precedent-setting court cases securing rights and affirmation for LGBTQ students, the Lower Mainland is a policy-rich setting within which to investigate and analyze GSAs. Under policy protections from multiple jurisdictions affirming their right to exist, the Lower Mainland is an ideal place to take up Short's aforementioned call for an investigation of how queer students experience heteronormative codes in sites that have well-written anti-homophobia policies.

An intensive, multi-site inquiry can produce not just a clearer picture of how GSAs function in relation to their governing policies in various contexts, but also illustrate how youth themselves are constructed by others and themselves, when they explicitly rebuke the heteronormative codes of schools. Branching out from previous studies, which have analyzed the legal, political, and philosophical dimensions of Canadian GSAs (Callaghan, 2014; Clarke & MacDougall, 2012; Donlevy, Brandon, Gereluk, & Patterson, 2014; Herriot, 2011; Herriot, 2014a; McDonough, 2014), or how

they are understood by educational professionals (Kearns, Mitton-Kukner, & Tompkins, 2014; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013), this research investigates how contemporary Canadian GSAs are experienced by their members, and socially situated within their home schools. While earlier GSAs were predominantly preoccupied with simply being allowed to exist (i.e. arguing with administrators over whether or not the school could have a GSA, see Micelei, 2005), their presence in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia is, for the most part, now actively supported and encouraged administration and teaching staff, as well as various levels of policy (see BCTF 2010/2011; Loutzenheiser, 2015; Vancouver School Board, 2014). The question now is if and how the GSAs in this study are transitioning from being primarily safe(r), anti-bullying havens struggling to exist, into something else.

Multiple GSAs are also ideal settings to investigate who the “gay child” is, as a present, rather than futuristic projection (Stockton, 2009). Rather than interviewing openly gay adults about their childhoods, for instance, a study with the member of GSAs allows space for grounded theory regarding the contemporary gay child to emerge. In so doing, this research contributes to ongoing theorizing about who youth are and can be, particularly within schools, and particularly with regard to the gendered dimensions of their identities. The intersections of voice and sexuality/gender identity are central to this theorizing, as students’ self-identification as LGBTQ, or “coming out” plays a vital role in how they are understood.

1.2 Research Questions

The research therefore aims to answer the following two research questions:

- 1) Now that GSAs are fairly securely established within the Vancouver School Board, what are their roles, purposes, and functions, both within the lives of participants, and their broader school community as perceived by their members?
- 2) What new theoretical insights about the social construction of youth can be developed from close examination of how GSA membership?

1.3 Clarification of Terminology

1.3.1 Terms relating to childhood and youth.

According to Newton (2003), “any analysis of childhood must rigorously attempt to open up the boundaries that have been placed around the experience, whether such boundaries are commonsensical, sociological, educational, psychological, medical or biological in type” (p. 10). One of the goals of this research was to create and deepen knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ and allied young people who are between the ages of eleven to nineteen. Following Newton’s admonition in the opening quote, this section acknowledges the multivariate terms typically applied to persons in this age range. I provide definitions for several terms that will be used throughout this dissertation, and by drawing on literature and examples from medicine, sociology, history, education, and law, justify why I mainly rely on the most encompassing term, “youth.”

Physiological definitions notwithstanding, the terms “child,” “teen,” “youth,” “kid,” and “adolescent” are primarily social constructions with rather fluid temporal and cultural meanings (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). In contrast to “newborn,” “baby,” “infant,” and “toddler,” which fairly consistently refer to persons under the age of three, the earlier terms can encompass any number of age groupings between birth and twenty-

five, depending on the time, place, and discipline of the speaker. The dividing lines between “child” and “adolescent” are blurrier than most, and are of particular relevance to this dissertation.

A defined period of adolescence is a relatively new Western phenomenon. An invention of the Industrial Revolution (Coontz, 1992; Cunningham, 1995), adolescence was later crystallized and popularized as a distinct life stage by psychologist G. Stanley Hall in the early twentieth century. Especially relevant for this study, whose participants include gender variant youth, Hall’s creation and popularization of “adolescence” largely characterized the period as one when boys developed the “masculinizing” traits that would distinguish them from girls (Kimmel, 1996). The term adolescence continues to evolve, with the new “pre-teen” and “tween” distinctions introduced by early 21st century marketing researchers in order to target more specific demographics of young people, and young girls in particular (Quart, 2004; Siegel, Coffey, & Livingston, 2004).

The issue then, of whether adolescence is a universal life stage, or a temporally and contextually bound creation of modernity, remains a divisive question, with scholars in medicine, psychology, law, education, and sociology redefining the phenomenon based on any number of cultural or scientific norms. In briefly considering several disciplinary definitions of adolescence, my aim is twofold: 1) to acknowledge existing disunity of the subject, and 2) to build a strong case not only for my own terminological choices, but also for the contributions I hope to make to childhood theory throughout this research.

The disciplines of psychology and the life sciences tend to cordon childhood off at either the advent of puberty or the advent of sexual maturity.¹ Making perceived or actual sexual identity formation the criterion from which teenagers can be understood as separate entities from children is particularly relevant for the study at hand. Even without addressing the temporal space between puberty and sexual maturity, these limits are problematic. With the normal age range for menarche or first menstrual period falling between ten and fifteen years of age, for instance, and puberty beginning two years before that (Chen & Tran, 2011), identifying an eight-year old female as an adolescent seems a misnomer. Similarly, sexual maturity normatively occurs between ages eleven to fourteen for males, and often even younger than that, yet contemporary culture is unlikely to recognize a 5th or 6th grade male as a teenager.

Similar fluidity exists within the contemporary Canadian legal context. Criminal culpability can begin at ages twelve, fourteen, sixteen, or eighteen, depending on the offence (Canadian Department of Justice & Canada, 2003). The consumption of alcohol, for instance, is legally permissible at either eighteen or nineteen depending on the province. Legal permission to drive an automobile is now sixteen in all provinces and territories, with some restrictions on beginning drivers, such as how many passengers may be in the vehicle, mandatory driver education, etc. (Canada & Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011). The minimum voting age has steadily decreased, from twenty-one in 1867 to eighteen in 1970 (Elections Canada, 2006). A petition for the provincial voting age in Alberta to be dropped further to sixteen was recently considered, but rejected by the Alberta Court of Appeals, and was refused to be heard by the Supreme Court of

¹ The term "puberty" refers to the emergence of secondary sexual characteristics, while "sexual maturity," barring atypical reproductive physiology, refers to the physical ability to reproduce (Chen & Tran, 2011)

Canada (CBC News, 2004). South of the border, a group of American 5th graders have recently argued for the minimum voting age to be lowered to fourteen (Sugarman, 2007), and several individual states are considering reducing the voting age to anywhere between ages twelve and seventeen (Wall & Dar, 2011).

Physiological and legal definitions of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood often converge uncomfortably on issues of the age of consent [to sexual activity] and heterosexual marriage, of which the legal minimum age is frequently changed. Mid-19th century American girls, for example, were legally able to consent to sexual activity at ages nine or ten, despite likely not having experienced menarche (Coontz, 1992), while Canadian females, depending on their “previously chaste character” and the time the laws were written, could variously consent or not between the ages of twelve and twenty-one (Pilon, 2001).

Legally consenting to anal sex remains precarious business for youth, and is a notable example of how the intersection of age and sexual orientation combine to determine who is a child, youth, or adult. With the exceptions of the Ontario and Quebec Court of Appeals, the Canadian Criminal Code maintains that all persons under the age of eighteen must be legally married to consent to anal sex. Prior to the legal recognition of same-sex/same-gender marriage in 2005 (Rayside, 2008), same-sex couples over the age of eighteen had no way to engage in lawful anal sex, while their different sex/different gender counterparts had the option of marrying. Especially where consent and decision-making are concerned, the legal definitions of child, youth, and adult are importantly shaped by perceived sexual orientation and sex acts.

The social sciences also have a tenuous metric for delineating between childhood and adolescence, or youth and adult, with one dominant norm being that, “when labour begins... the child ceases to be” (Cunningham, 1995, p. 173). Yet there are obvious absences here as well. Indigenous Canadians who practice Medicine Wheel teachings and the Circle of Courage include nearly all youth regardless of age in varying types of labour to nurture mastery, competency, and belonging (Brokenleg, 2010, Gilgun, 2002). Moreover, working class, and until the middle of the 20th century, middle class youth have always been paid, albeit poorly, for their labour (Coontz, 1992). In the West, these “children’s jobs” have included being a farmhand, babysitter, dishwasher, factory worker, sex worker, stock boy, chimney sweep, and especially for girls, indentured domestic servants without sexual autonomy (French, 2008). Indeed, children and youth continue to work for a pittance in all of these roles all over the world, including the West. More recently, since the late 1980’s, three out of four American teenagers have been receiving some form of compensations for their work for at least eighteen hours per week (Coontz, 1992). In Canada, the oil boom in Northern Alberta has more recently precipitated lowering of the legal working age to twelve (Alberta Human Services, 2005).

With working for wages a demonstrably imprecise dividing line, participation in formal education is often considered in demarking children from adults. Though historically, public schools were conceived of, among other things, as a quarantine to separate childhood from adulthood (Cunningham, 1995), the increasing demand for and accessibility of post-secondary education, coupled with the emergence of perpetual continuing education make schooling a difficult standard with which to sort out children, teens, and adults. Graduating with a high school diploma is similarly inadequate, as

Canadians who do not receive a high school diploma are not considered to be children or youth for the duration of their lifespan.

There is a fuzziness, then, to the terms *child(hood)*, *teen(ager)*, *adolescent/ce*, *kid(s)*, and *youth*. Despite a lack of formal consensus on their meanings, I will nonetheless articulate my own definitions of these terms for coherence and readability in the context of my research. In order to maximize inclusivity, I have consciously chosen to employ “youth” in reference to all persons aged eighteen and under, as well as to persons between the ages of twelve to eighteen specifically, while the term “child” is used sparingly and exclusively for persons under the age of twelve. This decision-making was informed by the precedent of the Chief Public Health Officer’s (2011) *Report on the State of Public Health in Canada*, where children are defined as persons between zero to eleven years of age, and youth are twelve to nineteen. While wanting to maintain ‘youth’ as a flexible and inclusive category, I nonetheless chose to limit the categorization of youth for this study to persons aged eighteen and under because of the legal obligation to report child abuse, as outlined in *The B. C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect: For Service Providers* (British Columbia, 2007). Having clear and specific legal and professional responsibilities to my participants necessitated an upper age limit for my categorization of youth. Finally, the decision to collapse “teen,” “pre-teen,” “tween,” and “adolescent” into the broader term “youth” was informed by conversations with youth—with whom I volunteer and/or work—who find the term “adolescent” pathologizing and “teen” demeaning, or childish.

When referencing literature in childhood theory, I will use the terminology as written by the original authors, but with the understanding of readers of this dissertation that I am applying it to all youth under the age of nineteen unless otherwise specified.

1.3.2 Demystifying LGBTT2QAI*.

With our understandings of gender and sexual diversity constantly evolving, so too does the language used to describe them. Academic literature, for instance, has historically described non-heterosexual men as sodomites, homophiles, same-sex attracted, and homosexuals, while conventions in contemporary literature allow for gay, queer, bisexual, pansexual, and men who have sex with men (MSM) (Crompton, 2003; Johnson, 2007). Trans identities continue to evolve a multiplicity of labels, with hermaphrodite, transsexual, transvestite, and cross-dresser being earlier terms that were acceptable both inside and beyond the academy, whereas now, most of these terms are considered offensive (Feinberg, 1996). Taken directly from Airtion and Meyer's (2014, p. 217-224) glossary of terms, the following are labels and concepts that are referred to throughout this research, and that may be new, or have taken on more refined, or specific meanings in recent years:

Ally: Someone who, while not necessarily identifying as a member of an oppressed group or experiencing a particular oppression, commits to lessening the effects of that oppression on group members through interpersonal or structural change.

Assigned sex or assigned gender: The designation, usually male or female, given to infants at the time of their birth and based in most cases on a cursory visual inspection of primary sex characteristics.

Cisgender: A term characterizing people who are not transgender or transsexual or whose gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Genderqueer: Refers to people whose gender identity and/or expression explicitly challenges the gender binary but is *not necessarily* fluid or indeterminate. (see gender fluidity).

Gender Creativity: A recently developed phrase describing (most often) a child “who does not abide by the binary gender norms, prescriptions, or proscriptions that might exist in the child’s culture, but transcends and transgresses those norms to independently, uniquely, and with artistry evolve into the gender that is ‘me’” (Ehrensaft, 2011). This term is often preferred for its celebratory connotation.

Gender fluidity: Wherein one weaves together many possibilities of gender in one’s identity or expression, whether at one point in time or across the life course.

Gender independent: A term with similar meaning, usage, and connotation to gender-creative. Applied in the case of children who are understood to be developing and living their gender ‘independently’ of local gender norms.

Gender variance: A term synonymous with gender-creative, gender-independent, gender-nonconforming, gender non-normative, etc., denotes someone whose gender varies from local norms of behavior, grooming, and affinity for persons of their assigned sex.

Trans*/transgender: Umbrella term for individuals who blur the lines of traditional gender expression; usually include transsexuals and sometimes also ‘cross-dressers.’ Trans- or transgender-identified individuals may or may not choose to change physical characteristics of their bodies or legally change their sex.

Transgender *children* are those who generally affirm their gender identity as the ‘opposite’ of that written on their birth certificate. Many people also use trans and/or transgender as an identity term.

Transgendered: An adjectival form of ‘transgender’ thought by some to be outdated, while others choose to use it to emphasize the way gender is always actively produced. ‘Transgender’ is the more widely accepted term.

Transman, transwoman: Terms used by some transgender or transsexual men and women to express their trans *and* male or female identities. Other people with transsexual histories choose to identify as women or men without any qualifying reference to this history.

Transsexual: A person who identifies and/or lives as a sex which is other than the sex they were assigned at birth. The difference between ‘transgender’ and ‘transsexual’ - being the most common terms in this area- is often based on the specifics of one’s transition, i.e., ‘transsexual’ is a term most commonly used by people who have sought out surgical and/or hormonal changes.

Two-spirit: An identity term used by some Native American and First Nations (in Canada) people whose gender and/or sexuality does not conform to constructions of hetero- and/or cisgender norms prescribed by white settler colonial societies. (p. 217-224)

In addition to these selections from Airton and Meyer, the following terms feature in this research, and may be unfamiliar to readers:

Asexual: A person who does not experience sexual attraction or who has little or no interest in sexual activity. (Egale Canada, 2015)

Kinsey Scale: Originally published in 1948, it is a scale from 0-6 used to describe a person's sexual experience or response at a given time, with 0 being exclusively heterosexual and 6 being exclusively homosexual. (The Kinsey Institute, n.d.). It is often described colloquially as being from 1-7, with 1 as exclusively heterosexual, and 7 as exclusively homosexual.

Pansexual: A person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to individuals of diverse gender expressions or identity or assigned sex. (Egale Canada, 2015)

These lists are unlikely to comprise the definitive glossary of queer terms for all time; as this research will demonstrate, youth are constantly creating new labels to describe their gendered and sexual subjectivities. It is, however, a comprehensive list of key terms that are relevant and in use now, and are specific to the concepts they describe.

In the interests of clarity and readability, I often collapsed all non-heterosexual, non-cisgender identities into either 'queer,' or the acronym 'LGBTQ,' which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer. Unlike other scholars who simply use LGBT, I have added the 'Q' as an umbrella letter to include the plurality of identities that do not fit neatly in to LGBT. Where particular participants self-identify as allies, I have similarly condensed heterosexual and cisgender identities into 'ally,' which is itself an unstable identity depending on context. When referring to how a trans-allied cisgender lesbian understands transphobia, for instance I characterize her as an ally, but when describing her experiences with heterosexism, I position her as a lesbian, or when considered collectively with other youth, as queer. While I respect the labeling decisions of other scholars, such as eschewing LGBTQ in favour of SGM ('sexual and gender minorities'), I have made these naming choices based on current conventions in the field,

my own uses of such terms in my personal and professional life, and for coherence and readability of the overall document. I use them consistently as such throughout this work.

1.4 Brief Description of the Study

I conducted this research on the traditional, unceded, and unsundered territories of the Coast Salish nations, in Vancouver, British Columbia. Prior to data collection with human participants, I conducted an interpretive analysis of the relevant policy documents that mentioned GSAs by name. I then observed, interviewed, and worked with the youth members and staff advisors of six Gay Straight Alliance clubs, and also had the opportunity to interview a few youth who attended the participating schools, but were not members of the GSA. Participants were approached as co-collaborators, and they contributed to knowledge building by member checking their interviews, adding their own contributions to the field notes, and talking through the initial data analysis. In so doing, this dissertation presents a clear picture of not only the participants' lives, but of the six participating GSAs in their school milieus.

1.5. Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation includes eight chapters. Chapter two begins with an overview of the three theoretical perspectives that guided this research; feminist, queer, and childhood theory. It then reviews the literature relevant to the study, first by looking at how Canadian schools have been instrumental in defining and regulating how youth can and should express their sexual orientation, gender identity, and citizenship rights, before reviewing what is known about GSAs in Canada. Chapter three is a comprehensive overview of the methodological approaches and study design, including the overarching case study approach, the interpretive policy analysis methods, and ethnographic methods.

The interpretive analysis of the three selected policies follows in chapter four which provides necessary context for the findings from human participants in chapter five. Policy and participants are woven together in chapter six, which contains a cross-case study of how some participants engaged with a relevant local policy revision. This engagement is then situated within the policy narrative of GSAs in the Lower Mainland that began in chapter four. Chapter seven broadens the focus by engaging in theory-building with regards to how the youth participants understood their own gendered and sexual subjectivities, as well as their capacities as citizens. This dissertation concludes in chapter eight, which outlines implications for practice and areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Frameworks & Literature Review

2.1 Introduction and Selection of Literature

“Schools can be considered cultural sites where dominant gender roles and heterosexist norms are continually vouched for and privileged” (Short, 2013, p. 109)

I begin this chapter by describing the epistemological and three theoretical frameworks that underpinned this research; namely, constructivism, and feminist, queer, and childhood theories. The chapter then reviews literature relevant to the research questions by dividing it into two sections. It opens with an overview of how Canadian schools have been instrumental in defining and regulating how youth can and should express their sexual orientation, gender identity, and citizenship rights and responsibilities. This literature is presented as an overview of how Canadian schools originally adopted, and continue to enact and enforce particular ideals about children and youth. In so doing, it not only addresses the second research question, which pertains to theory-building around these issues, but also provides context for the second section, which is an overview of what is currently known about GSAs.

The second section of the literature review, which hones in on GSAs specifically, is itself divided into two sections. The first describes GSAs in terms of their historical and contemporary emergence in Canada, and who attends and supervises them. The second is loosely organized around the National Organization of GSAs Network's (2011) three-pronged framework of the purposes and functions of GSAs, namely safety/support, social spaces, and education/activism. As an example of how these issues are of timely importance in education, I then analyze a recent case of how dominant theoretical

constructions of childhood and GSAs publicly collided in Ontario's Bill 13 (2012). I conclude by recognizing how GSAs are agents of continuity as well as change.

I have deliberately avoided, as much as possible, using research from other nations (such as the United States) in order to hone in on the unique legal, cultural, and educational experiences of Canadian LGBTQ youth. Issues that are at the forefront of American GSA organizing, such as the "don't say gay" law in Tennessee schools (Darby, 2013) or marriage equality (Diaz, Kosciw, & GLSEN, 2009), are considerably less of an issue in Canada. This is largely due to structural differences such as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Government of Canada, 1982) and the federal *Civil Marriage Act* (Government of Canada, 2005), but also influenced by differing cultural realities. Relying primarily on Canadian data allowed me to tailor the literature more closely to the data sources and context of my study.

2.2 Epistemological and Theoretical Perspectives

2.2.1. Constructivism.

Scholarly work has a long tradition of privileging a positivist, objectivist approach to knowledge building (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1998a). With the advent of constructivist qualitative approaches from the Chicago School in the 1920s and 1930s, however, the strictly positivist insistence on objective, quantifiable answers to all questions gave way to the more subjective, contextual, and constructed approaches to knowledge creation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

A constructivist worldview is undergirded by certain preconceptions, namely that reality is locally and actively constructed by human beings in all their contradictions and complexities, that knowledge is created, or co-created rather than found, and that not only

is an escape from subjectivity impossible, but it is also undesirable as well (Ellis, 2006, Guba & Lincoln, 2004; Merriam, 1998a; Smith, 1991). Methodologically speaking, constructivist research tends to avoid quasi-randomly control trials and double-blind experiments in favour of ethnographies, phenomenological or hermeneutical inquiries, or a mixed methods approach (Guba & Lincoln, 2004; Merriam, 1998a). This makes constructivism epistemologically compatible with a number of theoretical perspectives, including, but not limited to, post colonialism, critical theory, feminist theory, queer theory, Indigenous theory, and critical race theory. It is through such theoretical lenses that newer, or more sophisticated meanings can be created (Crotty, 2010).

Perhaps belying my moderate constructivist tendencies, I am in agreement with Flybjerg (2011) in finding positivist and post-positivist perspectives to be complementary, particularly within case study designs. Certain realities must be acknowledged to be true apart from human beings' active construction of their existence. For example, school buildings are physical structures that rely on the laws of physics and engineering in order to withstand the elements. This is true whether any thinking person has actively attached meaning to them. Determining the meanings attached to school buildings, however, such as how they physically create or challenge the panoptic gaze, or segregate and classify persons by age, relies on a constructivist, and not an objective, or positivistic epistemology. Both the objective reality of school buildings, and the subjective meanings that are attached to them, are worthy of consideration, and one's epistemological approaches should shift depending on the nature and concern of the research questions.

Given the nature of my inquiry and research questions, a constructivist mindset is a logical epistemological choice with which sophisticated meanings and knowledges about youth, GSAs, citizenship(s), and sexual and gender variance can be developed, finessed, and redefined. From this constructivist foundation, I used three complementary theoretical frameworks in designing and conducting this study; feminist theory, queer theory, and childhood theory. They are discussed in turn in the following sections.

2.2.2 Feminist theory.

This research was rooted first and foremost within a feminist theoretical orientation. While recognizing that feminisms and womanisms have multiple and often simultaneously overlapping and divergent definitions, purposes, and goals (see Prince & Silva-Wayne, 2004), I openly source my own feminist framework from hooks' (2000) clear and concise characterization of it as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (p. 1). For me, this means that feminism, while intersectional with other systems of oppression, centres on understanding and dismantling sexism specifically. The strands of feminist theory that most influenced this research include Judith Butler's (1990) gender performativity, and Nel Noddings' ethic of care (1991), and are further discussed below.

Although closely related to one another, gender and sex are distinct facets of identity. Simply put, sex refers to biological, or anatomical identity, generally based around the sex organs, while gender is the social and cultural construction of gendered identity. Commonly operationalized and enforced as a two-dimensional male/female binary, or continuum, both sex and gender are in fact dynamic and multidirectional. Sex identities, for instance, include males, females, and intersex people, who can have a

potentially infinite combination of sex chromosomes and anatomical features (Blank, 2012). Gender has similarly non-binary manifestations, as can be seen with agender, bigender, pangender, trans*gender, and other identities, in addition to cisgender masculine and cisgender feminine presentations (Blank, 2012; Johnson, 2007).

Coined by Butler (1990), gender performance is a useful cognitive framework for understanding how gender, as distinct from sex, is socially and culturally enacted. Performance refers to the repetitive self-presentation of gender that all people engage in throughout the day. Gender performances generally, though not always, follow and reinforce the “gender culture,” which is “a society’s understanding of what is possible, proper, and perverse in gender-linked behavior... [including] a set of values, mores, and assumption, [establishing] which behaviors are seen to be gender-linked” (Ramet, 1996, p. 2). A woman’s application of lipstick, or a little girl’s insistence on wearing the colour pink are examples of gender performances that conform to Western gender culture, while a man’s decision to self-present in the same ways transgress or subvert the gender culture. Neither benign nor problematic on their own, the rules governing how these choices of self-presentation are socially responded to indicates that gender cultures shape how gender can and should be enacted. Responses that shame transgressive gender performances and reward conformity are typically described as part of the gender policing that regulate and (re)enforce the dominant gender culture (Ehrensaft, 2011). Based on their research with queer youth in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Haskell and Burtch (2010) characterize gender policing in public schools as so severe that it creates and perpetuates a “hidden curriculum of bullying” (p. 11). Understanding

and explicating the mechanisms by which gender is policed in schools is central to this research, and findings pertaining to these concepts are outlined in detail in chapters 5-9.

Dominant gender culture is undeniably patriarchal, wherein male/female are positioned in a two-dimensional, oppositional, and hierarchical relationship with one another, with the masculine consistently privileged over the feminine (Blank, 2012). Patriarchal, or hyper-masculinity is utterly dependent on the subordinate feminine for their very existence; or as Stoltenberg (1994) describes it, hyper-masculinity is built on a foundation of being not-feminine, and by extension, not-gay. In their seminal work with Australian secondary schools, Connell (1987) coined this phenomenon as hegemonic masculinity. It is from this standpoint of acknowledging how gender is performed and policed within patriarchy that I, like Lather (1991), see feminism as an “... organizing principle, which profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our daily lives to correct both the invisibility and distortion of the female experience in ways relevant to ending women’s unequal social position” (p. 71). Feminism is my organizing principle through which I approach the world, and through which this research was designed and executed.

My identity as a feminist researcher is grounded in a feminist ethic of care, which is itself a relational ethic rooted in “receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness” (Noddings, 1992, p. 2). Rather than adhering to mind-body dualism, wherein the mind is rational and masculine, and privileged over the bodily domain of emotions and the feminine, a feminist ethic of care validates emotion and relationality as valuable and legitimate ways of being. It eschews the positivist presumption that relationships and

emotions can and should be controlled for, and instead sees creating and nurturing caring relationships as central to the research process.

For me, this demanded ever-present sensitivity to the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual needs and wellbeing of participants. They were approached as holistic beings, and not merely informants on lived experiences. The empirical data that was collected was secondary to their feelings of being in a trusting and caring relationship with me, and feeling secure as valued members of the research process.

2.2.3 Queer theory.

Rooted as it is in post-structural feminism, queer theory was a natural secondary theoretical framework in this research, adding a much-needed interrogation of how gender and sexuality overlap, diverge, and are significantly influenced by other positionalities, and structures of power (see Butler, 1990; 2004; Lorde, 1984; Sedgwick, 1990; 1993). The heart of queer theory lies in its unyielding commitment to unsettling norms, subverting hegemonies, and to hearing silences that are generally overlooked (Sumara & Davis, 1999). In contrast to gay and lesbian studies, queer theory claims that identities are necessarily unstable (Ward, 2008), and that a coherent, stable self cannot exist outside of social relationships of power (Corber & Valocchi, 2003). Consistent with queer theory's commitment to fluidity, "it seems most accurate to say that queer has *multiple* meanings and political and cultural modes of operation" (Ward, 2008, p. 3, original emphasis). Throughout this inquiry, I will therefore be using *queer* as "a political metaphor without a fixed referent" (Eng, Halberstam, & Muñoz, 2005, p. 1) – "a metaphor that describes various modes of challenge to the institutional and state forces

that normalize and commodify differences” (Ward, 2008, p. 3). The premise of queer theory, as explained by curriculum theorist William Pinar (1998) is

In its more subversive form, queer theory actually is one more variation on a post structural theory of the self that is *deeply suspicious* of all identity categories, viewing them as (at least in part) regulatory mechanisms of the dominant culture, involved in locating the self within binary oppositional power relations and within rigid boundaries or borders that police difference. (p. 97, emphasis added)

While I am hesitant to use the word ‘suspicious’ in my own work, I am sufficiently curious about how the boundaries around particular identities (such as queer, youth, citizen, etc.) can become fixed, dichotomized, and, conversely, how and why they can be relaxed. Butler (1991) famously questioned any identity labeling in writing, “who or what is it that is ‘out’ made manifest or fully disclosed, when and if I reveal myself as a lesbian? What is it that is now known, anything?” (p. 15). Twenty years later, Rooke (2010) illustrated this point by acknowledging how her own previously stable lesbian identity was unsettled when her long-term female partner came out as transgender and began identifying as a man. Rooke’s questioning of whether she can continue to claim a lesbian identity is a clear example of the dynamism expected and articulated by queer theory.

While fluidity of identity is a hallmark of queer theory, identities must nonetheless be “arbitrarily closed” for social and political action to occur (Procter, 2004). In other words, while LGBTQ identities are constantly in flux due to overlapping ethnocultural, political, geographic, and other realities, queer youth must nonetheless be identifiable in order to enact strategic planning and policies to increase their safety and

acceptance. Using an extended metaphor of dialogue and the sentence, Hall (1987) explicates how identities must be temporarily, and even arbitrarily “closed” in order for action to move forward:

Is it possible for there to be action or identity in the world without arbitrary closure – what one might call the necessity to meaning of the end of the sentence?

Potentially, discourse is endless: the infinite semiosis of meaning. *But to say anything in particular, you do have to stop talking.* Of course every full stop is provisional . . . It’s not forever, not totally universally true. It’s not underpinned by infinite guarantees. But just now this is what I mean; this is who I am . . . Full stop.

OK (p. 45, in Procter, 2004, p. 120, emphasis added).

Temporary closure, however arbitrary and incomplete, is essential to enact queer theory in the community as well as the academy. Conversations of who and what is a lesbian (Butler, 1991; Rooke, 2010) are important and can and should continue, but with the caveat that self-identified lesbians exist, and their identification as a collective of multi-marginalized persons is necessary in order for activists to protest injustice, create equitable legislation, and increase social and cultural representation. With the very real violence that LGBTQ youth, self-identified or not, experience in Canadian schools, temporary closure becomes urgent. Gloria Steinem (1983) illustrates this immediate need for action in recalling a conversation with Flo Kennedy: “Look” she said kindly. “If you’re lying in the ditch with a truck on your ankle, you don’t send somebody to the library to find out how much the truck weighs. You get it *off*” (p. 94). Queer theory in this research with LGBTQ youth therefore takes on a Janus-face appearance, where there is space for identities to collapse, expand, and fluidly shift, while simultaneously

remaining static enough to account for the realities of sexuality and gender-based differences, strengths, oppressions, and actions.

Queer theory itself is not bound by a static set of topics of inquiry: “After all, queer as a body of theory is not limited to thinking about gendered and sexual subjectivities. Rather it is a philosophical commitment to contesting the logics of normativity” (Rooke, 2010, p. 29). By extending queer theory beyond considerations of gender and sexuality, my research investigated the intersections of how youth construct their civic identities (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Robinson, 2013), their youthfulness (Gray, 2009; Young-Bruehl, 2013), and their queerness (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004; Stockton, 2009) amid the complexities of being a multiple subject who is simultaneously young, queer, and a citizen. Besides investigating a broad array of topics, queer theory can also inform methodological choices. Described as enabling a scavenger methodology, queer theory is amenable to mixing different, and seemingly contradictory methods to create knowledge that has been deliberately or accidentally excluded by traditional research (Halberstam, 1998).

In practice, I blended queer theoretical approaches with a feminist ethic of care. Although queer theory aims to unsettle and investigate borders and categories, my obligation to approach all participants with unconditional positive regard was unchanging. By creating stable, caring relationships, I hoped that my participants felt secure enough to participate in the messy, unsettling work so essential in queer research. It is within this ethic of care that participants could engage in the research in such a way that simultaneously revealed some previously undiscovered assets and strengths within

themselves as an LGBTQ youth, and fostered understanding and resilience that can help them change their hurtful schooling realities.

2.2.4 Childhood theory.

One of the assumptions of this inquiry, and the focus of the second research question, is the notion that the LGBTQ youth who organize GSAs unsettle many of the norms that constitute historical and popular conceptions of who and what is a youth. While it is beyond the scope of this research to give space to all of the many theoretical perspectives about young people, I will discuss each of the following widespread theories as among the most relevant to the social constructions of LGBTQ youth, particularly when these youth organize themselves into a GSA: surveillance and control, political illegitimacy, innocence, gender, and sexuality, and finally, children as rights-bearers. All of these perspectives are undergirded by Jenks' (2005) two Greek archetypes of the Dionysian and Apollonian child.

In brief, the Dionysian child, is an evil, wild, sinful, and sensual child. Schools and educational programming designed with the Dionysian child in mind are generally prescriptive and corrective, and heavily supervise, or otherwise discipline, children's thoughts and behaviours. Conversely, the Apollonian child is innocent, good, natural, and angelic. The education of the Apollonian child is epitomized in Rousseau's *Emile*, which emphasizes learning through the senses and interactions with the world. While the Apollonian child grew out of Romanticisms' attempt to emancipate children from the pejorative Dionysian construct, Apollonian children are nonetheless under continual adult surveillance, and meant to be seen and not heard (Jenks, 2005). Smith (2014) explains how these differences affect actual interactions with children, noting that, "in simple

terms if we think about children mainly as ‘little devils’ we are likely to devise quite different strategies for guiding their actions than if we think about them as ‘little angels’” (p. 3). The Apollonian and Dionysian archetypes are therefore useful metaphors with which to discern how and why decisions regulating children’s subjectivities are made, and provide cognitive scaffolding to organize the theoretical perspectives outlined in this chapter.

2.2.4.1 Surveillance and control.

Since the rapid expansion of cities during the Industrial Revolution, adults have identified children as persons in need of panoptic surveillance and temporal and spatial control (James, Jenks & Prout, 1995). Adults seem particularly anxious when children and youth occupy streets, alleyways, restaurants, airplanes, public transit, and shops or stores. Curiously enough, parks and playgrounds are out-of-bounds once youth appear to be over the age of twelve, and even more so when youth are male and not white (Gagen, 2006). Once segregated into schools, a topic returned to later, young people are further sequestered into rigid age cohorts, which makes creating and maintaining multi-age friendships difficult, if not impossible (James et al., 1995). The reasons for this ever-present gaze have varied over the past two centuries. Some have argued that concerns about children in public places are fueled by a perceived need for a productive labour force in the future (Cunningham, 1995; Iannacci & Whitty, 2009); others posit that due to dominant Dionysian understandings of youth being innately deviant—a threat to the ‘civilized’ world of adults—they must be watched and regulated (Jenks, 2005). Some scholars have traced the regimented control of children back to early childhood centers, or daycares, where “... just as soldiers are drilled persistently even beyond basic training,

so children are required to eat, sleep, wash and excrete at specific and regular times” (James, 1998, p. 55). This control persists past early childhood into secondary school, in which Alderson (2003) describes a typical day: “Regular crowded mass treks from one part of campus to another. Queing to wait, sometimes in the rain, until a teacher arrives to unlock doors. Up to a quarter of your time taken up with silent queuing and marching” (p. 22). Although adults cannot reliably coerce and maintain other adults in to a state of totalitarianism, they tend to have more or less a free reign to do so with young people from infancy through their adolescent years. As such, surveillance is a defining feature of childhood, and can be observed across multiple spaces, including schools. It is an area of particular interest when answering the second research question for this investigation, which concerns how the bodies of LGBTQ students are organized, or otherwise regulated within schools.

2.2.4.2 Political illegitimacy and children’s participation rights.

Closely tied to their need to be watched and regulated, youth are also constructed and treated as politically illegitimate. As articulated by Rudduck (2007), “the legacy of public perceptions of childhood has made it difficult, until recently, for people to take seriously the idea of school children as accomplished social actors in their own world. Pupil voice initiatives require that we review our notions of childhood” (p. 603). Youth arguably remain the largest disenfranchised group of citizens in Canada. One justification for their political disenfranchisement is the belief that “children and society need protection from one another. Children need protection from exploitative adults and from their own limited understanding of their interests. Society needs protection from children, who cannot be expected to understand the interests of the body politic” (Cohen, 2009, p.

183). In this way, the child is at once Apollonian *and* Dionysian, as a subject who should be simultaneously be protected against corruption, but who themselves have the potential to corrupt.

Kachur and Harrison (1999) take another approach, arguing instead that a “parentocracy” has subsumed children’s representation in their participation in public schooling, and indeed, all matters of public life. As Cohen (2009) explains:

Parents are expected to represent children at the ballot box and in the public square.

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

Dramatic examples of children’s interests running contrary to those of their parents’ wishes are the cases of LGBTQ youth whose parents do not affirm their sexual orientation and/or gender identities. In their role as *in loco parentis*, schools can be caught between satisfying parents, who have many formal mechanisms by which they can affect change in school policy, and ensuring the safety of children, who are typically without access to the power levers of school policy. This literal “pitting adults against children,” in schools and its implications for children’s rights, student voice, and school policy are further analyzed in chapter six.

Recognizing young persons as potentially powerful political actors who create policy, make mistakes, and most daring of all, have differing ideas than adults is

threatening to those adults who exclude youth “for their own good” (Harvey, 1999, p. 2; see also Alderson, 2003; Smith, 2014). It is perhaps because political illegitimacy is one of the main pillars of dominant social constructions of youth that GSAs are so unsettling, as GSAs demand political legitimacy and agency not only within their schools, but at the level of school board and provincial politics as well.

Scholars and activists from the emerging field of children’s rights dispute the dominant notion of children as *de facto* politically illegitimate. Recognition of children as political rights-bearers, both of universal human rights, and of children’s rights, has been of growing importance within childhood studies, particularly in the twenty-five years since the drafting of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)* (1989). The *CRC* is itself the culmination of a century-long effort to name, recognize, and enforce children’s rights on a global level. It exemplifies a dramatic shift in adult conceptions of children, namely that they constitute a special class of persons with inherent human rights. While early attempts to draft children’s rights codes date back to the 1850s (Fuchs, 2007), the first serious international commitment was made in 1924 when the League of Nations adopted the International Declaration for the Rights of Children (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997). Progress stalled until 1979, when that year was designated by the United Nations as the International Year of the Child. Among other things, this designation positioned children as a special interest group in global discourse and sparked ten years of rights drafting, culminating in the *CRC* (Fuchs, 2007). Although a total of twenty-three NGOs contributed to writing the *CRC*, including Defence for Children International, UNICEF, and Save the Children Alliance, children and youth themselves were ironically absent during this drafting process (Flekkøy & Kaufman,

1997). Nonetheless, the concerted efforts of a significant number of adults over 150 years to include youth in human rights discourses introduced a radical new theory of childhood into public parlance.

The rights accorded to children in the *CRC* fall under four broad categories: survival, protection, provision and participation, with each level of rights being dependent on the previous being fulfilled (Sunker & Swiderek, 2007). Most relevant to this inquiry is the right to participate, as outlined in Article 12, which reads as follows:

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

Research has demonstrated that Article 12 is important to children. One of Lundy's (2006) main findings was that, although children and young people did not know it was within the scope of their internationally guaranteed human rights, not having a say in decisions made about them was the most important issue to the children and young people interviewed. Children identified that being afforded only minimalist or tokenistic opportunities to participate and engage with adults was worse than not being listened to at all (Lundy, 2006). This is consistent with the literature on student voice in public

schooling, where students became cynical about participation when their suggestions were ignored (see Lodge, 2005; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Malone & Hartung, 2010).

Participation, as outlined in Article 12, conceives of children as agents who can and should make contributions to decision-making in their families, schools, clubs, communities, and religious organizations, rather than as the future citizens or adults-in-waiting that most adults imagine them to be (Jenks, 2005). As current (rather than potential) citizens, “the practice of actively involving pupils in decision-making should not be portrayed as an option which is a gift from adults, but a legal imperative which is the right of the child” (Lundy, 2006, p. 931). In the paradigm shift to think of children as current citizens who have democratic participation rights, Sunkler and Swiderek (2007) suggest renaming “politics *for* children” to “politics *with* children” (p. 306, emphasis added).

Overlapping objections to Article 12 stem from the incompatibility of children’s rights with the dominant views of youth described earlier. There is skepticism that children have the necessary capacity to have meaningful input into decision-making (Lundy, 2006), yet in the contemporary context, incompetency is rarely used as a justification for denying political participation rights to adults, and if this were ever done, many adults would likely be excluded. The onus on children to prove competence is described as discriminatory, at best, and presents childhood as a state of *infantia*, which is the generic term for not-being-able-to (Bergstrom, 2010). It harkens back to much of Western history, wherein “... a child was *infantia*, incapable of legal speech, *innocentia*, incapable of harm, *doli incapax*, incapable of wrongful intent, *alienis juris*, outside the law, and the property of the father” (McGillivray, 2011, p. 22). Yet Grover’s (2006)

findings dispute this long-standing notion of children's natural Apollonian deficiency. In her research on the right of children to be heard in educational litigation in Pennsylvania, Grover (2006) found that there was "no independent evidence presented in Court to demonstrate that adult views on the issues... were any more rational or well-informed than those of the high school students affected" (p. 157).

Another objection to youth participation rights emanates from adult anxiety about potentially weakened parental rights and, in the context of schooling, school authority (Lundy, 2006). In this case, parents are correct in assuming that children may have divergent interests and opinions than those of their parents, however, the recognition of these interests is required in order to view the child as a full, rather than subservient, legal person. McGillivray (2011) argues that children's rights are the welcome death knell of 'parental rights,' writing, "parental rights as proprietary rights, as rights over another, cannot co-exist with children's rights" (p. 21). By way of example, she analyzes how, despite children having the right to protection "... from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse," section 43 of the Canadian Criminal Code states,

every school teacher, parent, or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction toward a pupil or child, as the case may be, who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable in the circumstances (p. 38).

Although repeatedly admonished by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child to remove the aforementioned section 43, Canada has steadfastly refused to do so. The Supreme Court continues to support the welfare position in maintaining section 43, wherein overzealous prosecution of adults using force against children would cause the

break up of too many families, which is contrary to the best interests of the child.

McGillivray (2011) derides this view, writing, “by trumping children’s rights-claims with a welfare approach derived from proprietary rights, the court has gutted the meaning of children’s rights” (p. 50). As the field of children’s rights progresses, there will likely be further Supreme Court cases adjudicating the balance between parental fiduciary duties and children’s rights.

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

In summary, the child-subject is a radically different entity within the human rights framework than it is within dominant or popular strands of childhood theorizing. The adoption of the *CRC* in 1989 marks a powerful and subversive new layer of theory to the growing field of childhood studies. Despite the *CRC*, the theories undergirding many Canadian adults’ conceptions of youth are resolutely Apollonian, and similar to the following passage:

Western childhood has become a period in the life course characterized by social dependency, asexuality and the obligation to be happy, with children having the

right to protection and training, but not to social or personal autonomy. (Ennew, 1986 in James, Jenks and Prout, 1995, p. 62)

The existence of openly LGBTQ youth who, unhappy with their school climates organize and try to enact change, run contrary to much of the above passage. It is possibly because they overturn so much of the dominant conception of childhood that GSAs the source of such controversy.

2.2.4.3 Innocence, sexuality, and schooling.

A further explanation for youth's exclusion from public decision-making is adults' fetishization of the innocent, unknowing, naïve, and otherwise Apollonian, child (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004; Faulkner, 2010; 2011). Fascination with children's alleged innocence extends beyond justifications for disenfranchisement outlined in the previous section; as Stockton (2009) explains, "the ideal of 'innocence' and childhood is almost perversely white and middle class... Experience is still hard to square with innocence, making depictions of streetwise children, who are often neither white nor middle class, hard to square with 'children'" (p. 32). Leaving aside for a moment a lengthy critique of children whose social, ethno-cultural and class positionalities prevent them from being innocent in the public consciousness (see Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Egan, 2013; Epstein, O'Flynn, & Telford, 2003; Jhally, et al., 2011; MacNaughton, Davis, & Smith, 2010; Stockton, 2007, 2009), children are typically thought to lose their naïveté through exposure to public schooling, and to the varying sexual and gender identities that might be discovered therein (Egan & Hawkes, 2010; Faulkner, 2010). As earlier work on public opposition to Canadian GSAs reveals, the notion that GSAs would serve as a deviant, hyper-sexualized recruiting ground for previously hetero-asexual children was one of the

strongest adult arguments for banning the clubs (Herriot, 2011; Herriot, 2014a). This conception of the hetero-asexual childhood, which is always innocent and good, becomes marred and undone by exposure to queerness, which is always deviant, is of particular relevance to school-based Gay Straight Alliances. As Edelman (2004) explains, “the cult of the child... permits no shrines to the queerness of boys and girls, since queerness, for contemporary culture at large... is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end” (p. 19).

In his seminal text *The Disappearance of Childhood*, Postman (1982) argues that childhood, as it is known today, is founded on the adults’ need to shelter younger citizens from adult secrets, particularly sexual secrets. While explicitly sexual conversations can be taboo among adults, they are perceived to be overwhelmingly more so when young people are present. Although secrets about sexuality are seen as the most dangerous for children, adults have increasingly treated other topics such as money, violence, illness, death, and social relations as secrets to be kept from children. Increasing knowledge of these secrets is seen as “one of the distinguishing characteristics of adulthood... culminating in sexual enlightenment” (p. 49). Childhood, according to this view, is a state of controlled, ignorant, Apollonian innocence.

Postman (1982) contends that adults’ ability to keep secrets from children was greatly enhanced by the advent of the modern printing press, because secrets could then be passed through coded text, a media indecipherable to illiterate children. Thus, the arrival of the printing press further separated children as a distinct segment of society, because secrets could be kept more readily from them. There is therefore an inherent tension in the literate child. Although children are encouraged to increase their literacy

skills from very young ages, as Postman's theory of childhood asserts, "reading is the scourge of childhood because, in a sense, it creates adulthood" (p. 13). The literate child poses a threat to this construction of childhood, as the exclusive control of information by literate adults becomes more challenging to maintain.

The combination of literate youth and accessible technologies that make texts on sexuality widely accessible further undermines this social construction of childhood. While topics such as contraception, masturbation or homosexuality can be, and often are officially hidden by removing them from school curriculum, children can now Google, Wikipedia, or Youtube these topics for themselves. This ability to independently access these adult secrets necessarily threatens the conception of childhood as ignorant, innocent, or uninformed (Herriot, 2014b; Robinson, 2013). In some ways, GSAs can therefore be understood as occupying a precarious space at the nexus between mandatory youth innocence/ignorance about sexuality in public schools, and the explosion of the Information Age, where any and all real or imagined sexual practices are instantly, and always, available. With little space to follow the linear tradition of growing "up," that is growing vertically from sexual innocence to expected reproduction, the youth in Gay Straight Alliances seem to be growing "sideways" (Stockton, 2009, p. 11) in order to have room to grow at all. Stockton's metaphorical shift from growing up to growing sideways creates theoretical space within which non-reproductively based trajectories of growth can be imagined, one where adults and children can exist in a lateral, rather than vertical, relationship.

It is against this backdrop of competing and contradictory theories of children, childhood, and youth that young people's lives are constructed and regulated. In the

following section, I explain how I blended childhood theories with my other two theoretical frameworks in designing and conducting this research.

2.2.5 Summary of theoretical perspectives.

Like Malterud (2001), I think of theory as “the researcher’s reading glasses;” that is, the lens(es) through which a researcher formulates research questions, designs a study, and collects and analyzes data. Feminist, queer, and childhood theories combined to tint the metaphorical lenses through which this research was approached. In this section, I discuss some of the ways that these three theoretical perspectives jostled, competed, and combined to necessarily and profoundly shape each phase of this research.

Herself blending feminist, queer, and childhood theory, Robinson (2013) offers the following explanation on the compatibility of these three frameworks, and how they can mutually enhance each other:

Queer theory, stemming from poststructuralist feminist frameworks, is important in reinforcing understandings of childhood as fluid and unstable, and in reminding us of the socially-constructed nature of the relationship between childhood and sexuality- and equally, between adults and the child. (p. 5)

Where feminist and queer theories are concerned with the unequal power relationships manifested by sexism and heterosexism/cissexism, childhood theory can be similarly preoccupied with age-based oppression. First named *childism* by Pierce and Allen (1975), Young-Bruehl (2012) has recently popularized childism as an umbrella concept that “... highlight[s] the fact that prejudice is built into the very way children are imagined” (p. 5) wherein young people are blamed for negative or undesired traits in adults. Or, as Alderson (2003) notes when connecting this conception directly to schooling, “adulthood

is assumed to mean being strong and informed, reliable and wise, and childhood means being vulnerable and ignorant, unreliable and foolish. Schools are planned on this assumption and constantly reinforce it” (p. 8).

Childism, sexism, and heterosexism/cissexism can powerfully combine in adults’ moral panics about children’s real or imagined gender performances or sexual activities (see Egan, 2013; Egan & Hawkes, 2010; Faulkner, 2010). Commenting on the recent resurgence of panic about the over/sexualization of young girls, Egan (2013) notes that adults have “displac[ed] our impotence onto something more manageable and potent- the cultural and sexual corruption of the girl child” (p. 9). Adults’ blaming children, and girls in particular, for adult anxieties about sexuality has been further documented by Herriot and Hiseler (2015), who argue that “by focusing on the sexual shame of [girls], adults are able to talk about sexual shame without feeling shamed themselves” (p. 296).

In another recent example of theoretical metissage between feminist, queer, and childhood theories, Stockton’s (2009) stark, provocative question, “What might the notion of a gay child do to our conceptions of the child?” (p. 2) queers dominant conceptions of the naturally and universally (hetero)asexual child. Stockton further elaborates that, “[t]he phrase ‘gay child’ is a gravestone marker for where or when one’s straight life died... by the time the tombstone is raised (‘I was a gay child’), the ‘child’ by linguistic definition has expired” (p. 7). A gay child in the present tense seems anathematic to current conceptions of who the child can be; one’s coming out marks the end of a socially recognized childhood, because queerness is often understood as being exclusively within the purview of adulthood (Edelman, 2004). Queer and feminist theorists add queer and gender queer children to Stockton’s (2009) gay child, as young

persons who are currently un-readable and unrecognizable as legitimate youth, and argue for our conceptions of both queerness and childhood to be broadened so as to include these young people (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004; Ehrensaft, 2011; MacDougall, 2004; Meyer & Sansfaçon, 2014).

Moving to considerations of rights and citizenship, Lister (2007), uses feminist scholarship to argue against the influential mid-twentieth century view of T. H. Marshall (1950) that children are mere “citizens in the making,” and that citizenship is really about “a struggle for recognition” (Lister, 2007 p. 709). Moosa-Mitha (2005) extends Lister’s work by developing a feminist, anti-racist, non-classist, theorization of children’s citizenship that she calls difference-centered. According to Moosa-Mitha, citizenship should be based on “the right to participate differently in the social institutions and culture of the society... *Citizenship means, in this case, being included in one’s greatest possible difference.* (p. 375, emphasis added). This means that rather than expecting youth to perform an adult version citizenship, that they can and should instead be recognized as citizens who happen to be young, not *despite* their youth.

Moosa-Mitha’s (2005) argument builds on the theoretical foundations of first-, second- and third-wave feminism’s insistence that a feminine gender not be seen as an add-on to citizenship rights, or something to be controlled for (see de Beauvoir, 1953), but should instead be included in the fullness of their difference. Rather than demanding that women act and be more like men in order to access the public square, factions within each wave of feminism have long demanded recognition of women *as women* in politics (see Marsden, 2012; Stansell, 2010). Feminist analyses of children’s citizenship rights

follow the same logic, arguing for space for children to equitably enter public life as children, rather than pretending to be adults.

In this research, as in the work of scholars described in this section, feminist, queer, and childhood theories combined to create new theoretical spaces throughout each phase of this study.

2.3 Literature Review

2.3.1 Theoretical constructions of childhood and youth in Canadian schools.

Public education in Canada was designed for specific purposes, with several defined conceptions of childhood in mind. That is, the architects of compulsory schooling had particular notions of who the child was when they designed the school system to educate him². The legacy of these ideals of childhood continues to inform how educationalists understand children, how schools are organized, and why GSAs emerged. This section of the literature review begins with looking at the contexts from which these ideals are rooted, and then moves to examine how they are of continuing relevance for GSAs and LGBTQ youth in particular.

2.3.1.1 Compulsory schooling and the Dionysian/Apollonian child.

Compulsory public schooling emerged in mid-19th century Canada as a tool of moral regulation in a new nation (Rousmaniere, Dehli, & De, 1997). This emergence was characterized by Jenks' (2005) two competing conceptions of children, the Dionysian and Apollonian child, explicated earlier in this chapter. Depending on the issue, and often the particular children in question (and especially their racial, gendered, and class signifiers),

² I deliberately use the masculine pronoun here because adult men designed mass schooling to benefit primarily male children (Axelrod, 1997).

adult conceptions of childhood can be essentialized by these archetypes. Nineteenth-century ideals of children, like those of today, are infused with characteristics of both the Dionysian and Apollonian child, although features of the Dionysian child were predominant then, while Apollonian takes centre stage now. Conceptions of who the child was and is continue to inform decisions about how they should be educated as gendered and sexual citizens, and therefore have particular relevance to a study with GSAs. What follows is an account of how youth subjectivities relating to gender and citizenship were taken up at the emergence of public education in Canada, and how the residue of these ideals remains in schooling today.

Conceptions of the child vary depending on the location of the threat. When the concern is “radical homosexuals” promoting the “gay agenda” to schoolchildren, children are understood as Apollonian; that is, children are understood as being in possession of a (good), though fragile, heterosexuality that is in need of nurturing protection. When, however, the threat is a child herself, such as in the case of a transgendered girl using the girls’ bathroom, the child in question is conceptualized as Dionysian, while the rest of the children are Apollonian. This is to say, she is understood as a hypersexual, deviant, and possibly contagious threat, who must be either corrected or quarantined.

2.3.1.2 Educating for gender conformity.

Touting biological determinism, an Ontario school inspector in 1860 remarked that “[t]here was considerable diversity between the mind of a girl and that of a boy” (Axelrod, 1997, p. 35). Youths continue to be positioned as being only one of two sexes or genders (that is, boy or girl), and universal heterosexuality is seen as innate and foundational to each binary gender identity (see Egan & Hawkes, 2010; Ehrensaft, 2011;

Robinson, 2013). These dimensions are espoused through a set of historical and institutionalized processes within formal education— that is, schools normalized and solidified the spatial segregation of two distinct sexes in what is known as the “gender-role curriculum” (Gleason, 2001). For example, consider the establishment of single-sex schools, gender-segregated washrooms (with signs for ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ on the doors), and gender-segregated curricula, especially in health, industrial arts, domestic sciences, and physical education. These practices and policies served to maintain and reproduce broader social structures (for example, heterosexual patriarchy) through the systematic stratification of gender identities and the institutionalization of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980). Binary gender segregation further extended to the playground, with girls typically being pushed to the literal sidelines, with less physical space to play, exercise, and socialize during school breaks (Gleason, 2001, see also Gagen, 2006).

It seems paradoxical. While gender identity and sexual orientation were understood as naturally and universally cisgender and heterosexual, schools nonetheless invested considerable effort in teaching and enforcing gender conformity. Why would a student need to be taught something that is both natural and universal? Rules are typically established because someone is behaving contrary to the norm. We do not, for instance, create and enforce rules about breathing, which is a naturally occurring, universal phenomenon. The investment of time and resources indicates that rather than being a stable, fixed identity, cisgendered heterosexuality was seen as somewhat fragile, or at least in need of protection from corrupting influences. And while deviance was often seen as infiltrating children and schools from the outside (say, from a lurking paedophile, or

“homosexual”, who are often conflated as being one and the same), recent scholarship on the history of children’s sexuality suggests that children have been subverting gender norms and compulsory (hetero)asexuality for generations (Egan & Hawkes, 2010; Robinson, 2013).

Examples of enforced gender regulations in Canadian schooling abound. With regards to gender nonconformity, there are multiple reports of trans youth being suspended, or otherwise disciplined for using the school bathroom that matched the gender they identify as (CBC News, 2015a; Gulli, 2014). This is an important example of embodied moral regulation. Youth’s gendered subjectivity is understood as exclusively cisgendered, an assumption that is reflected in “boys” and “girls” bathroom policies in schools. Those with differing gendered subjectivities from the norm, such as trans youth are punished.

Another example of the disciplining of gender nonconformity is the case of Marc Hall, who was barred in 2002 from bringing his boyfriend to his Ontario school’s prom. The prom is, among other things, the school’s ritualized celebration of compulsory heterosexuality, which was threatened by Hall’s deviance (Smith, 2005). These cases, and many others like them, distil the extent to which heterosexual patriarchy is institutionalized within and by schools to promote and privilege youth’s “natural” and “universal” heterosexuality and gender conformity.

2.3.1.3 Educating the ‘good’ youth-citizen.

Although citizenship education has taken a backseat to literacy, mathematics, and science in recent years, it was nonetheless the backbone of early Canadian curricula (DiMascio, 2010). Emerging as it did after the rebellions of the 1830s, one of the central

aims of mass education was to produce and reproduce loyal, obedient patriots who would not disrupt the social order (Axelrod, 1997). This was increasingly important at a time when the enfranchisement of some white male property-owners caused white male elites to panic at the possibility of an illiterate, or civically uneducated, voter, and public schooling was conceived as a remedy for children's natural civic and moral deficiencies. Proponents of schooling believed that through state-subsidized indoctrination, children would learn the subordination necessary to become loyal, obedient citizens (DiMascio, 2010).

Within liberal democracies, citizenship education is generally seen as a primary vehicle in producing “governable subjects” (Rose, 1999; see also Smith, 2014). This typically means inculcating values conducive to a compliant citizen, who will participate in established structures, such as voting or volunteering, without fundamentally altering the institutions themselves (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Recent scholarship in citizenship and citizenship education has advanced several models envisioning more possibilities for youth citizenship than the aforementioned compliance. Shultz's (2007) conceptual framework of approaches to global citizenship, Joshee's (2009) three ideologies driving discourses of citizenship, and Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) levels of citizenship all point to more expansive imaginings of citizenship for youth. Despite greater possibilities theoretically, however, there is little evidence of students being encouraged to express civic participation beyond being governable subjects. Instead, students' active citizenship within established structures at school is generally restricted to sitting on a student council, a body which has little or no real power, and whose members are sometimes handpicked by the teaching staff (McFarland & Starmmans,

2009; Sears, Peck, & Herriot, 2014). Otherwise, students and their views on educational policy tend to be tokenized, relegated to the margins, or outright ignored.

A recent example from Atlantic Canada indicates how civic obedience is still prioritized over civic action in schools. Administrators at Leo Hayes High School in Fredericton, New Brunswick, prohibited students from holding anti-bullying rallies in the school cafeteria. The protests were designed to express student frustration with the administration's alleged inaction after a student left the school due to bullying. When the students then held demonstrations off school property during their lunch hour, they were given detentions, and threatened with having graduation privileges revoked if they continued (CTV Atlantic, 2012). As students are supposed to be learning compliant, rather than active citizenship in schools, their protest against the administration, both on and off campus, was seen to merit punishment. In an about-face indicating discomfort with public knowledge of compliant, rather than participatory citizenship, the punishments were revoked after the story ran in the press (CBC News, 2012).

Student voice is a branch of active citizenship that values, to varying degrees, youth participation in school governance and policy-making. Its enactment has the potential to differ so substantially from the Apollonian/Dionysian archetypes, that a third was recently coined, the Athenian child (Smith 2011; 2014), who is described as

... a symbolic target for the relatively novel governmental mode of regulating children via strategies of participation and 'reponsibilization.' Named for the Greek goddess of wisdom, the Athenian child is associated with child-rearing norms in which welfare is closely associated with autonomy, so that the child is in a sense a 'partner' in the socialization process (Smith, 2014, p. 190).

The Athenian child, as conceptualized by Smith, has much to offer childhood theory. In addition to moving beyond the Dionysian/Apollonian binary, its focus on children's agency is of particular relevance to student voice, citizenship education, and children's rights.

Depending on its application, student voice can be empowering or infantilizing. It can be operationalized as a means of bringing the textbook knowledge learned in civics or social studies to life. Wolk (1998) cautions that youth "... can't come to know what it means to be a responsible, decision-making member in a democracy if [they] are not in a classroom or a school that practices democracy to begin with" (p. 80). The literature suggests that children acquire democratic ways of thinking and being by both learning about governing systems in conjunction with having some power within a governing system (James 2010; Thompson 2007). The knowledges gained from texts and from actions should be understood as mutually reinforcing one another, or as Holding (in Thompson, 2007) writes, "[t]he learnings [*sic*] of civics become more relevant when they are connected to actual, 'real life' democratic participation in activities" (p. 779). The quotation marks around 'real life' suggest giving students real things to do rather than having them as token participants.

Tokenism is one of the key ways that student voice can be infantilizing. One obvious example of tokenism is when student voice initiatives only result in action when student and school board views coincide, particularly on non-controversial issues like having more healthy food options in the school cafeteria. Students in a school espousing democratic methods report that ideas contradictory to those of school authorities were ignored, and that "the teacher always had the best idea" (Rudduck 2007, p. 602).

Similarly, a high school senior made the following remarks after attending a school reform conference as a student representative:

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

The experience described by Mitra's participant epitomizes how even in spaces where a more Athenian notion of childhood could govern proceedings, the Apollonian construct continues to result in youth being seen, but not actually heard. Equally frustrating to youth are when their words end up adorning pre-determined policy initiatives that they did not actually contribute to (Cook-Sather 2006), or are received as if they are consumers providing feedback for quality control (Lodge 2005; Yonezawa & Jones 2007). Dionysian youth would never be encouraged to have a student voice, but positioning them as Apollonian can preclude participation in politics from being a positive, or empowering experience. How children are conceptualized therefore has a significant effect on how they are approached, not just with regards to their genders, but also as citizens.

In summary, the student-citizen is generally both the Dionysian *and* Apollonian child, as politics and children are understood as needing protection from one another (Cohen, 2009). Political life is thought to be better off away from children's corrupting influences, as they are thought to be incapable, immature, or just too silly for meaningful

participation, and might even wreck political institutions if they try (Rudduck, 2007).

Simultaneously, the rough and tumble realities of politics are deemed too harsh, too serious, for the naturally sweet, innocent, and apolitical child. The inclusion of student voice in meaningful ways remains fraught with both possibilities and challenges.

Children's citizenship rights and citizenship education therefore continue to be a highly regulated affair, especially within public schooling.

2.3.2 LGBTQ youth in schools.

2.2.3.1 Written curricula, legal precedents, and school policy.

The written, or formal curricula of Canadian schools are further indicators of how the Apollonian and Dionysian ideals of youth's gender, sexuality, and citizenship are typically governed. They also necessarily shape the contexts within which GSAs emerge, particularly when a stated goal of a GSA is to increase LGBTQ visibility within formal curricula. For the purposes of this review, I take the broad position that formal curricula includes all mandatory and auxiliary texts (such as textbooks, novels, library materials, picture books, and so forth), stated learning outcomes, suggested learning activities, and the written policies that support, reinforce, and govern all such teaching and learning.

Immediately prior to the founding of the first Canadian GSAs in the late 1990s, LGBTQ people and topics were not just invisible, but deliberately silenced. In Saskatchewan, for instance, "curriculum materials that depict gay lifestyles are commonly protested if not banned from classrooms" (Wotherspoon, 1998, p. 98). Commenting on the situation in the mid-1990s, Temple (2005) noted that "Family Life classes rarely discuss gay and lesbian families as viable options, history classes overlook the gay and lesbian civil rights movement, and Canadian law classes ignore the

discrimination against gays and lesbians" (p. 91). The Supreme Court Case, *Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36* (2001) marked the end to an eight-year legal struggle where kindergarten teacher James Chamberlain was finally allowed to introduce optional picture books depicting LGBTQ families at the elementary level. The *Chamberlain* case not only established precedent for queer inclusion at the elementary school level, it also originated on Coast Salish lands, in British Columbia's Lower Mainland, where my study took place. Similarly, Peter and Murray Corren's 1997 complaint to the British Columbia Human Rights Commission about the lack of curricular inclusion of LGBTQ topics led to a negotiated settlement with the ministry of education and the development of a new, optional course called *Social Justice 12* in 2006, which was then offered in 2008 (Rayside, 2014).

Despite the *Chamberlain* and *Corren* victories, LGBTQ topics are still woefully underrepresented in Canadian schools, and are included sporadically, if at all. In their cross-country survey, Taylor & Peter (2011) found that just 67% of British Columbia youth reported LGBTQ issues having ever been talked about in at least one class. Inclusion in the formal curriculum matters to LGBTQ students. Those who reported that queer content was in one or more of their courses are significantly more likely to feel "like a real part of my school," to feel "I can be myself at school," to feel "proud of belonging to my school," to feel "I am treated with as much respect as other students," and to have "at least one adult I can talk to in my school" (Taylor & Peter, 2011, p. 125). Queer-positive curricular experiences were also correlated with a more affirming school climate, with LGBTQ students who had been exposed to such curricula less likely to hear slurs like "faggot" at school (p. 125). Not all curricular experiences were positive,

however, with a quarter of all students reporting that queerness was portrayed negatively when it was mentioned in class. These curricular absences position children and young people as innocent Apollonians who merit ‘protection’ from the dangerous or corrupting knowledges of non-heterosexual families, people, and topics.

There continue to be calls for better inclusion of queer materials in formal curricula. Temple’s (2005) survey of Quebec textbooks found them “fiercely heterosexist” (p. 287), while Loutzenheiser and McIntosh (2004) lament the “add and stir” (p. 153) approach to queer content. Multiple Canadian researchers have documented how LGBTQ issues and persons are either absent, or raised only in relation to HIV/AIDS, abuse, and prostitution (Eyre, 1997; McKay, Fisher, Maticka-Tyndale & Barrett 2001; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003; Smylie, Maticka-Tyndale & Boyd, 2008), while references in history, art, literature, or sciences remains sparse. Short (2012) describes the current need for curricular inclusion as a broad transformation:

The curriculum must change to include queer content and to recognize queer families, but the curriculum will not change unless the Ministries of Education direct it to change and if queer youth are reconstructed legally as full citizens within the school. That response is a wall-to-wall transformational approach that also considers the playing fields, the stages, the artwork on display in hallways, media classes, sports, music, visual arts, friendships, libraries, music rooms, loyalties, clubs, the machine shops, the gyms and the classrooms in pursuit of a time when sexual minority youth may participate and thrive with their interests vested and valorized on and off school prosperity for the time that schools are such a crucial part of their lives. (p. 11)

There have been small, hard-won steps towards Short's vision over the past decade. Concurrent with GSA emergence, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario partnered with the Canadian Teachers' Federation to publish *Seeing the Rainbow* (2002), a curricular guide advising teachers to "add books to the classroom" discussing same-sex relationships and sexuality, to "integrate the curriculum" by addressing sexual diversity and incorporating mention of sexual minorities into subjects such as literature, history, art, law, and science, and to "provide appropriate education about sexuality," including sexual diversity (Temple, 2005, 275-276). *Seeing the Rainbow* is a significant document not only as a curricular material, but also as curricular policy. Now teachers could respond to protests by referencing the standards set forth in a professional document. While policy does not ensure protection, it can enable protection, and *Seeing the Rainbow* was an early professional document supporting teachers' inclusion of LGBTQ curriculum content. For instance, Schneider and Dimito (2008) found that written policies and professional statements support teachers in including LGBTQ texts and topics: Ontario teachers whose school district had an anti LGBTQ harassment policy reported feeling more supported, comfortable, and protected. Professional workshops have also been found to help increase Ontario teachers' understandings of how to raise LGBTQ issues in classrooms (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012).

The British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF), which is the professional teacher's association where this study took place, has resolved to facilitate the use of learning materials that convey positive and inclusive portrayals of same-sex families and to address same-sex families when relevant to the curriculum (BCTF 2013a). The BCTF also makes available, for public use, LGBTQ focused lesson plans for all grades,

including “Fairy Tales and Gender Roles,” “The Boy Who Wanted to be a Dancer,” and “First Nations’ Perspectives on Gender” (BCTF, 2006-2015). In its *Diversity Framework* (2008), The British Columbia Ministry of Education (2008) has similar, though not as specific, policies pertaining to formal curriculum, such as requiring teachers to consider the portrayal of genders and sexual orientations when evaluating learning resources. It is unknown, however, how widely these resources are used within classrooms, either within British Columbia, or elsewhere in the country.

2.3.2.2 School climate.

Intertwined with the formal curriculum is the hidden curriculum, which consists of the norms, values, and beliefs that are inculcated in schools (Pinar, 1998). The hidden curriculum is taught and learned, accepted and challenged throughout the school, in hallways, classrooms, bathrooms, cafeterias, sports events, and other extra-curricular activities. Commenting on the detrimental effects of the hidden curriculum and its inverse relationship to what is formally written, Loutzenheiser and MacIntosh (2004) argue that:

What is invisible and markedly absent from curriculums is often rendered visible and saturated with meaning outside the classroom, as queer bodies are named in high school hallways and cafeterias, or erased in popular epigrams such as, ‘Oh, that’s so gay.’ (p. 152)

The hidden and written curricula exist in a dynamic, symbiotic relationship, where each informs, and is profoundly affected by the other. As Loutzenheiser and MacIntosh have indicated, what is silenced in the written curriculum is often hostile and loud in the hidden curriculum. In light of the previous sections’ documenting the near-invisibility of

queerness in the written curriculum, it is unsurprising that school climates are deeply affected by the hidden curriculum of gender policing, homophobia, and transphobia.

Research on the hidden curriculum's effects on LGBTQ youth typically includes work on bullying, harassment, assault, and suicide (see Epstein, & Johnson, 1998; Haskell & Burtch, 2010; Rayside, 2014; Short, 2013; Taylor & Peter, 2011; Walton, 2004). One of the most dangerous manifestations of the hidden curriculum is its seeming insistence that youth are and should be hetero-asexual until they graduate from high school (Craig McInroy, Alaggia, & McCready, 2014). Having a fundamental part of identity such as gender expression and/or sexual orientation policed and suppressed can have devastating consequences. In his suicide note, an openly gay 15 year old from Ottawa wrote "I don't want to wait 3 more years, this hurts too much" (Boesveld, 2011b, p. 1). The youth's father issued a statement explaining how he'd experienced numerous verbal and physical assaults at school, including having batteries stuffed down his throat (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012). Queer youth who do graduate from high school can continue to feel the violent effects of the hidden curriculum throughout adulthood; homophobic harassment, assault and bullying are strong predictors of developmental problems and risk behaviours among LGBT youth (Saewyc, 2011).

The study with the widest scope on the LGBTQ experience in schools also happens to be one of the most recent. *The First National Climate Report on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools* (Taylor & Peter, 2011) provides the most comprehensive quantitative snapshot of bullying, and includes data from all ten provinces. Some key findings from the executive summary are worth quoting here at length:

- 70% of all participating students reported hearing expressions such as “*that’s so gay*” every day in school and almost half (48%) reported hearing remarks such as “faggot,” “lezbo,” and “dyke” every day in school.
- 74% of trans students, 55% of sexual minority students, and 26% of non-LGBTQ students reported having been *verbally harassed* about their gender expression
- 20% of LGBTQ students and almost 10% of non-LGBTQ students reported being *physically harassed or assaulted* about their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity
- 49% of trans students, 45% of students with LGBTQ parents, 43% of female bisexual students, 42% of male bisexual students, 40% of gay male students, and 33% of lesbian students report being *sexually harassed* at school in the last year
- Almost two-thirds (64%) of LGBTQ students and 61% of students with LGBTQ parents reported that they *feel unsafe at school*. (p. 15-17, emphasis added)

Qualitative work gives texture to these numbers and presents a more complete picture of what such bullying and harassment looks and feels like. The following narratives were taken from Haskell & Burtch’s research (2010) with youth in Coast Salish territories in British Columbia’s Lower Mainland, and provide additional detail to Taylor and Peter’s (2011) statistics:

Snow days were the worst though, because I’d have to walk home, and on a snow day, everyone decides to throw snow balls, and, oh, choose the one wearing a pink t-shirt!... ‘Get that freak!’ (p. 35)

In the change rooms... I'd get a lot of, like, "What the fuck are you looking at? Faggot!" that kind of stuff. And I had a couple of people try to throw me into the locker but I fought [back]. (p. 38)

There was this one kid... he was constantly coming up to me in the hallways, "are you gay?" "I know you're gay!" "Are you gay?" ... he just kept attacking me about it... (p. 42)

Having a clear picture of the symbolic, verbal, physical, and sexual violence experienced by LGBTQ youth in schools is essential to understanding not only the conditions under which GSAs continue to emerge, but also the resilience and courage of those students who create and participate in them. Within this context, GSAs can be interpreted as a direct rebuke to the hidden curriculum of patriarchy and heterosexism that maintains such violence.

Jubran v. Board of Trustees (2002) is a powerful example of how school-based homophobic bullying can affect youth. Azmi Jubran was verbally taunted with homophobic slurs such as "faggot" and "queer" during his five years as a student in the North Vancouver School District. Much of the harassment included anti-gay slurs and was combined with physical acts such as being spit on, kicked in the hallways and slammed into lockers, and continued for three years despite administrator's knowledge of the harassment (Meyer, 2006). Although the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal originally awarded damages to the youth, his self-identification as a heterosexual kept the case tangled in numerous appeals for years. The central question asked in this case was, can a heterosexual student experience homophobic discrimination? Calling the first appeal "judicial ignorance," MacDougall (2004) asks, "would a child who actually *is* gay,

self-identify as such before a tribunal or court that is blind to homosexual issues? Is not the creation of a homophobic environment, whereby any child (whether gay or lesbian) might suffer from oppression, enough to motivate a court to act?” (p. 1089, original emphasis). *Jubran* was, in many ways, a ruling on whether or how heterosexuals could be harmed by a homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic environment, and if so, what responsibilities the schools have to mitigate such harm.

After twelve years of court dates, the British Columbia Court of Appeal held up the original decision, and damages were awarded to Mr. Jubran. While *Jubran* did not end homophobic and gender-based bullying, as Taylor and Peter’s (2011) report readily addressed, it did send a clear signal that school boards could be held accountable for such bullying, harassment, and physical assault under civil law. The *Jubran* ruling exemplifies how policy, in this case a human rights ruling, can enable protection. School boards undoubtedly paid more attention to their roles and responsibilities regarding homophobic and gender based violence in the wake of *Jubran*. Investigating sexual diversity in Canadian schools therefore requires focusing on heterosexual, and uncommitted orientations, in conjunction with youth who identify as being LGBTQ.

One of the national report’s notable findings was that 58% of heterosexual students report finding homophobic comments upsetting (Taylor & Peter, 2011). This number is relevant to the current inquiry as GSAs are Gay *Straight* Alliances; they may have heterosexual members, leaders, and supporters whose various identities and perspectives are also critical in developing greater understandings of GSAs. Furthermore, many members of GSAs have not publicly committed to any particular sexual or gender identity, which is “...representative of recent attitudes toward sexuality, particularly

among young people” (MacDougall & Clarke, 2012, p. 210). Rather than dividing sexual orientation in to a gay/straight binary, youth increasingly allow for more fluidity in the identities they publicly disclose.

The British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) has passed a number of resolutions pertaining to the hidden curriculum of gender normative heteronormativity, including a mandate to condemn homophobic acts (1993), develop and implement school-board anti-homophobia policies (2008), document, report, and take action on anti-gay slurs (2006), and actively support GSA formation (2000) (BCTF, 2010/2011). The British Columbia Ministry of Education has issued similar LGBTQ supportive documents including the *Diversity Framework* (2008), *Safe, Caring, and Orderly Schools: A Guide* (2008), and *Focus on Harassment and Intimidation: Responding to Bullying in Secondary School Communities* (2001). Familiarity with these provincial documents provides essential background to observe if and how these policies are implemented, and how LGBTQ youth experience them.

2.3.3 Gay Straight Alliances: Numbers, locations, and members.

2.3.3.1 GSA emergence in Canada.

Gay Straight Alliances reportedly emerged in the late 1980s in California and Massachusetts (Griffen et al., 2005; Miceli, 2005) and in Canada in the year 2000 (Collins, 2004; Lund, 2007). Originally conceived of as small, ‘safe havens’ to help LGBTQ youth and their allies survive high school, the establishment of GSAs were a direct response to the symbolic, social, sexual, and physical violence experienced by LGBTQ youth in schools. Allegedly the primary purpose of GSAs, safety continues to be

foundational to the clubs, although some have broadened their mandates to encompass other goals (The National Association of GSA Networks, 2011).

Opposition to GSAs in Canada was sometimes virulent, and their right to exist can still be precarious. In this way, they represent a branch of the broader gay liberation movement, “[b]ecause schools play a vital role as public spaces for citizenship claims, community skirmishes over GSAs serve as transformative moments when the boundaries of queerness further sharpen and define LGBT citizenship” (Gray, 2009, p. 84). Early adult protests recorded in print media included linkages to gay liberation by arguing that they would advance a global “gay agenda.” Opponents were also concerned that GSAs amounted to little more than a “gay sex club for kids,” and that they infringed on parental rights wherein parents are the sole educators about gender and sexuality (Herriot, 2011). Recent adult opposition to club formation relays different concerns: GSAs are an infringement on the religious rights of publicly funded Catholic schools to adhere to the catechism (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012), that they should not be advertised (Lambert, 2013), and that they might “give bullies ideas” (Taylor & Peter, 2011, 129). School principals and administrators have dismissed GSAs by saying there isn’t enough interest “in that topic,” “most people will find it offensive,” “creating a problem where there wasn’t one,” and citing budgetary concerns and fear of backlash from parents (Taylor & Peter, 2011, p. 129).

Some youth also protest GSA creation, mainly by vandalizing posters that advertise GSA meetings and events (Fetner, et al., 2012; Haskell & Burtch, 2010; Lund, 2007). One of Taylor et al.’s (2011) participants described student opposition thusly:

Obstacles were mainly from the student side—many students were very unfamiliar and thus uncomfortable with the idea of a GSA. The very few other LGBT students were very disengaged in general from school (academically and in extracurriculars), which offered very little support. (p. 130)

Youth opposition to GSA formation is also expressed in letters and editorials in the school newspaper (Short, 2013). Students can be understood as implicitly hostile to their existence; were there widespread affirmation for LGBTQ youth in schools, GSAs likely would not have emerged as the social phenomenon they are today.

Ontario's *The Accepting Schools Act* (2012) and Alberta's *Bill 10: Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children* (2015) indicate how opposition to GSA formation continues to be strong enough, at least in those two provinces, that provincial legislation protecting their right to exist occupied a substantial portion of the legislative assembly's agenda for months at a time. Using the considerable clout of a provincial statute to mandate support for GSAs in all publicly funded secondary schools is indicative of how powerful the backlash against these clubs continues to be. Yet early qualitative research from these provinces complicates any straightforward narrative of acceptance and backlash. Administered shortly before the public debates on *The Accepting Schools Act*, one survey of 41 GSA advisors in Ontario found no evidence of active resistance to their GSA, from either parents or the community (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012). Similarly, when Alberta's first GSA emerged in the year 2000, and the local newspaper ran a front-page story on the club, there were no reports of negative responses. Their advisor attributed this lack of hostility at least in part to the careful groundwork laid

by the group's student leaders, who addressed the entire staff before the club began meeting (Lund, 2007).

GSAs have enjoyed considerable adult support alongside the opposition. Given how all GSAs must have a teacher supervisor (Fetner & Kush, 2008; Miceli, 2005), LGBTQ students in schools with GSA clubs know there is at least one teacher who openly supports them. Adult support in Canadian print media acknowledged the need for GSAs as safe spaces from gay bashing, and advocated for their potential roles in educating for systemic change as early as the year 2000 (Herriot, 2011). Demonstrating a professional stance on the issue, many school boards now provide professional development workshops on GSAs for teachers and administrators. Some school boards partner with outside organizations to host GSA conferences, such as the Youth Project in Nova Scotia (Youth Project, 2013); and Jer's Vision and the Rainbow Resource Centre in Manitoba (Jer's Vision, 2013). Co-hosted by EGALE and the Toronto District School Board, the OUTShine GSA National Summit in 2013 has been by far the largest GSA Conference, hosting hundreds of youth and educators for a four-day event. These conferences demonstrate that a significant number of vocal adults are open to supporting both LGBTQ youth and GSAs that aim to meet their needs in school contexts.

Concurrent with GSA emergence in British Columbia, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation passed a resolution in the year 2000 requiring members to support their formation (BCTF, 2010/2011). At the faculty of education level, teacher candidates have responded positively to learning about them (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012). The recently passed *Bill 13* in Ontario goes a step further; after considerable political pressure from all sides, all public secular and Catholic schools are now required to support the

development and operations of GSAs (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012). Recent scholarship found that not only is there no religious argument to be made against GSAs in public or denominational schools, but also that the case for supporting GSAs on educational, ethical, or legal grounds remains compelling (MacDougall & Clarke, 2012). Despite the opposition outlined earlier, Canadian GSAs also experience strong support from youth, teachers, administrators, school boards, provincial political parties, and members of the general public.

2.3.3.2 A GSA by any other name: Labeling the club.

The politics of self-identification in club names continues to be a contentious issue, with reports from multiple provinces of principals insisting that clubs not contain the word “gay” or “queer,” or that they focus on equity and human rights more broadly, and not on sexual and gender minority issues specifically (Fetner et al., 2012; Short, 2013). Despite opposition, GSAs continue to emerge with diverse names such as The Cool Club, Rainbow Brigade (British Columbia); The Other Side of The Closet, Project Rainbow (Alberta); GLOW/Gay, Lesbian Or Whomever (Manitoba); Queer Positive Space, Culture of Peace, Born Equal, Colouring Outside the Lines, Be the Movement (Ontario); and Catalyst, Pride in Humanity, Alliance Gai-hetero (New Brunswick) (EGALE, 2013).

Clubs choose to self-identify and rename based on any number of local contexts, shifting goals of the group, and personalities involved, as well as administrator or other school and community interference. It is therefore difficult to assess from the outside exactly why a GSA is named as it is, other than in the case of publicly funded Catholic schools in Alberta and Ontario. Until the very recently aforementioned Bill 10 and Bill

13 in those provinces, the publicly funded Catholic schools generally refused to allow GSAs to have ‘gay’ or queer’ in the title, and insisted on more generic sounding names such as “Respecting Differences.” One of the pillars of both Bill 10 and Bill 13, and one of the most contentious issues in the public debates on this legislation, was the mandate that youth be able to name their clubs whatever they wanted. I am in agreement with Pike (2012) that, since GSAs are primarily started by and for LGBTQ students, “it is best when they name them in a way that resonates for their own school community” (p. 29). It is possible that other jurisdictions across Canada will follow Alberta and Ontario’s lead, if not by implementing provincial legislation pertaining to GSA naming, then by an informal consensus that students be allowed to choose the names of these clubs.

2.3.3.3 Numbers and locations of GSAs.

As of this writing, there are 283 GSAs registered on mygsa.ca, spread across all ten provinces and the Yukon Territory (mygsa.ca, 2013). This number does not take into account GSAs that have chosen not to register with mygsa.ca, or who perhaps do not know about this subsidiary of Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (EGALE). There could also be defunct clubs that are still registered. GSAs are often fleeting and unstable, dissolving when leaders graduate, or teacher-advisors leave the school (Fetner & Kush, 2008). Despite these limitations, however, the mygsa.ca count is the best available measure for the number and locations of Canadian GSAs. Additionally, Taylor and Peters (2011) found that there was regional variation in youth reporting that their schools had GSAs, with 41% in British Columbia and 37% in Ontario, to just 13% on the Prairies, 4% in the North, and 5% in the Atlantic provinces indicating that their school hosted such a club (p. 127). Further, Rayside (2014) reported that British Columbia’s

Pride in Education Network (PEN, formerly Gay and Lesbian Educators, or ‘GALE’) had tallied 90 GSAs in the province as recently as 2013.

2.3.3.4 Who attends the GSA?: Youth intersectionality in GSAs.

Just as GSAs themselves are hard to tally due to their transient, counting the multiple identity signifiers of GSA members is even more difficult. As of this writing, there have been few large-scale, quantitative studies that have investigated the subjectivities of GSA members (see Diaz, Kosciw, & GLSEN, 2009; Taylor & Peter, 2011). More nuanced data on members’ multiple subjectivities typically comes instead from the backgrounds of small-scale, typically single-site case studies of GSAs, work with individual participants, rather than the whole club from multiple sites, or through surveys and interviews with a small number of youth ($n < 20$) across several GSAs (see Griffen et al., 2005; Fetner et al., 2012; Lapointe, 2015; St. John et al., 2014). Aside from the age-based commonality of being middle or secondary school students, it is difficult to generalize any other characteristics of the youth members. This section reviews existing literature on what is known about how particular signifiers, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religious affiliation have been found to affect GSA membership and composition.

2.3.3.4.1 The ‘straight’ in Gay Straight Alliances.

Kitchen and Bellini’s (2013) survey of 41 GSA advisors in Ontario provides the largest quantifiable sample of straight and cis allied club membership. Most advisors reported cis girls as being upwards of 80% of the club’s membership, with the majority of members not identifying a queer sexual orientation. Youth have speculated that without the “safety and protection” of straight friends, who are typically female, queer students

fear being labeled or Othered by attending the GSA (Short, 2013). Creating space for youth to not identify their sexual orientation(s) is essential to GSAs' commitment to inclusiveness. One of Haskell and Burtch's (2010) participants characterized his GSA as "horrible" and "stupid" after being required to sit in a circle and declare his orientation to the group on the first day (p. 80). While some youth voiced frustration that no members of their GSAs disclosed their queerness for fear of reprisal from other students, others indicated that some closeted LGBTQ youth, however, can only participate in the clubs by not identifying an orientation, or "passing" as straight (Fetner et al., 2012). Had GSAs existed in my own high school years (which was during the early 2000's in rural New Brunswick, and they most assuredly did not), I would have been too timid to disclose my own bisexuality, and instead loudly proclaimed allyship for the same reasons that some of Fetner et al.'s (2012) participants described. The decision of whether or not to be 'out' in the GSA is likely still fraught with emotion.

While recognizing the limitations outlined above, GSAs are arguably somewhat effective as inclusive youth spaces with regards to sexual identity, at least when compared to other spaces at school. Given how they are deliberately and specifically open to heterosexual and cisgender members, though questions on the roles of straight allies are numerous, including:

- How much of the spotlight should straight allies take in an anti-homophobia workshop?
- Can they be effective in the struggle against homophobia without reproducing the dynamics of straight privilege that invest their voices with more authority in the first place?

- In practice, it has sometimes proven effective to have straight youth publicly challenge homophobia, because they are not considered part of a “special interest group.” How can this system of privileging certain voices be challenged?

(Collins, 2004, p. 110)

While continuing to address these questions, all of the queer youth participants in one recent study responded positively to the involvement of straight allies within their GSAs (Fetner et al., 2012). One lesbian student described the common feeling when she wrote:

Because any queer will stand up for their own rights. But when you can get a straight person to fight and be vocal for a right that doesn't affect them and that sometimes, they don't even really understand? well / it kind of made the 'ally' part of the GSA really. (p. 201)

Other participants in the same study indicated how straight allies embodied an important “bridge” between themselves and ambivalent or hostile heterosexuals. Straight allyship in GSAs, and indeed within the LGBTQ community more broadly, is therefore a complicated and contested terrain, on which there are multiple perspectives.

2.3.3.4.2 LGB- hold the T: Trans exclusion and affirmation in GSAs.

Multiple sources indicate that trans youth can and do experience GSA membership differently than their cisgender peers; with trans youth reporting outright hostility, to frustration that GSAs do not adequately address the specific realities of trans youth (Diaz, Kosciw, & GLSEN, 2009; Taylor & Peter, et al., 2011; Travers, Bauer, Pyne, Bradley, Gale, & Papadimitriou, 2012). Members also indicate accessibility issues around transgenderism, transsexualism, and genderqueer identities:

[W]e didn't really acknowledge the T in LGBTQ . . . it was [a] GSA and that had no room for people with different gender identities . . . not that we hated trans people, but that we felt there was no one on campus that could possibly fit that letter. (Fetner et al., 2012, p. 200)

The comparative invisibility of trans GSA members is likely not only due to a lack of targeted and specific inclusive measures on behalf of the GSA, but also a combination of trans youth being an even smaller numerical minority than their LGB peers, and their comparatively higher risks of homelessness and other physical harms for being out about a queer gender identity versus a queer sexual orientation (Travers, et al., 2012). Trans youth have poorer outcomes than cisgender queer youth in almost every conceivable measure; from homelessness and mental wellbeing, to physical health and school success, etc. (see Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013; Jones & Hillier, 2013; Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006). Because of the comparatively higher rates of parental rejection for trans youth, it is possible that their remaining fully closeted throughout secondary schooling contributes to low reported numbers of trans involvement in GSAs.

Even when GSAs do not take up trans issues explicitly or directly, they nonetheless have accidental, or unintended benefits for trans or gender nonconforming youth. In a survey of 409 American transgender youth, GSAs were found to benefit transgender students because of their supportive functions, their ability to educate and raise awareness about LGBTQ people and issues more broadly, and the significant positive effect that GSAs have on the overall school environment (Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013). Similar findings have been reported in Canada, with the GSA being cited as a crucial resource for trans youth (Travers et al., 2012).

2.3.3.4.3 *Race, class, and faith.*

The whiteness and class privilege of the majority of GSA members has been identified as possibly or actually alienating to students of colour and the working class in both the United States (Diaz, Kosciw, & GLSEN, 2009; Fox & Ore, 2010) and Canada (Short, 2013). Additionally, as Ontario's Halton Catholic District School Board's 2011 decision to ban GSAs demonstrates, there exists a very real dichotomy between school spaces for religious beliefs and sexual diversity:

The conversations [about Halton] did not take into account students who may be struggling with same-sex desire while simultaneously coming from homes where homophobic spiritual or religious beliefs are practiced and salient. These students are caught between a system of faith tied to family and community and a sexual identity tied to their sense of self... The problem with GSAs is that they only create a safe space for *some* LGBT students (and mostly just lesbian and gay).

(Thompson, 2012, p. 49-50)

Helping LGBTQ youth to reconcile sexuality and spirituality in personal and social contexts so they feel they belong to communities in *both* contexts is an issue that needs to be addressed in developmental and cultural terms, especially in light of the damage done to youth via religiously promoted conversion, or reparative therapy³. GSAs will likely continue to grapple with issues of faith while working to embody inclusive principles for all LGBTQ and straight students of particular religious affiliations.

2.3.3.5 *Teacher advisors in GSAs.*

³ Conversion, or reparative therapy is a pseudoscience approach to changing non-heterosexual people to heterosexuals, or trans people to cisgender identities. These approaches have been denounced as ineffective and unethical by bodies such as the American Medical Association (2012) and the American Psychological Association (2007/2009)

Teacher advisors play a pivotal role in GSAs; without their open support, the clubs would not be allowed to exist (Miceli, 2005; Valenti & Campbell, 2009). In Kitchen and Bellini's (2013) survey of 41 GSA advisers from Ontario, a slight majority of participants identified as straight and female. While several participants reported that they co-supervised the club with straight male colleagues who were not part of the research, all of the men advisors included in the study identified as gay. Many of the gay men advisors were not out to either their peers or to their students, suggesting the pervasiveness of ongoing stigma against gay male educators (see King, 2004; Mayo, 2013). Seventy-five percent of those surveyed self-identified as activists, and many thought that they were more of an activist than their non-GSA advising teacher colleagues.

Supportive GSA advisers can have a powerful effect on youth. Speaking about their openly gay male GSA teacher-advisor, one queer, androgynous youth said, "it was his idea to found our school's GSA, I was the founding member. He was so supportive, he was always there to listen, he was always there to back me up on anything..." (Haskell & Burtch, 2010, p. 15). MacGivillary (2008) reported similar sentiments of appreciation when he interviewed young adults about their high school experiences of him as a GSA advisor. Further, one of Taylor et al.'s (2011) respondents noted that "[t]eachers are very supportive about gay straight alliance—some teachers have bought sweaters and shirts to show their support and they do the day of silence" (p. 127).

Not all teachers are supportive of GSAs, however. A lack of professional development on how to take up LGBTQ issues in the classroom, fear of reprisal from parents, and possible threats of losing employment have all been cited as barriers

impeding would-be advisors from leading a GSA (see Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Valenti & Campbell, 2009). Some teachers also report feeling that equity work, such as GSA supervision, is not part of their job responsibilities, or what they were hired to do (Short, 2013). With teachers taking on increasing responsibilities amidst shrinking budgets, there is also the practical reality of timing to consider; potential advisors may simply be too overwhelmed with other tasks to supervise a club.

Advisors must juggle several responsibilities when working with a club. They should be at least somewhat knowledgeable about LGBTQ issues, and be able to refer students to appropriate resources and supports. They are often looked to for guidance and mentorship, particularly if they're openly LGBTQ themselves (Ferfolja, 2009), yet coming out risks collapsing all other identities and simply being known as the gay teacher (Endo, Reece-Miller & Santavicca, 2010). For this reason, some teachers reported being impatient with gay students, or refused to supervise the GSA, for fear of being only known as gay, rather than a multi-positioned teacher (Neary, 2013; Nixon, 2006). Whatever their orientations, advisors must also delicately balance supporting the goals of the GSA while not incurring too much of the wrath of administrators, colleagues, or parents (Endo, Reece-Miller & Santavicca, 2010).

2.3.4 Purposes, roles, and functions of GSAs

Broadly speaking, GSAs tend to have three overlapping sets of goals: social, support, and activist (see figure 2.1). The emphasis that each group places on each sphere can vary tremendously, with significant variance even between clubs within the same city, or within the same club over a few months. The remaining literature on GSAs is reviewed by loosely relying on these categories as an organizational framework.

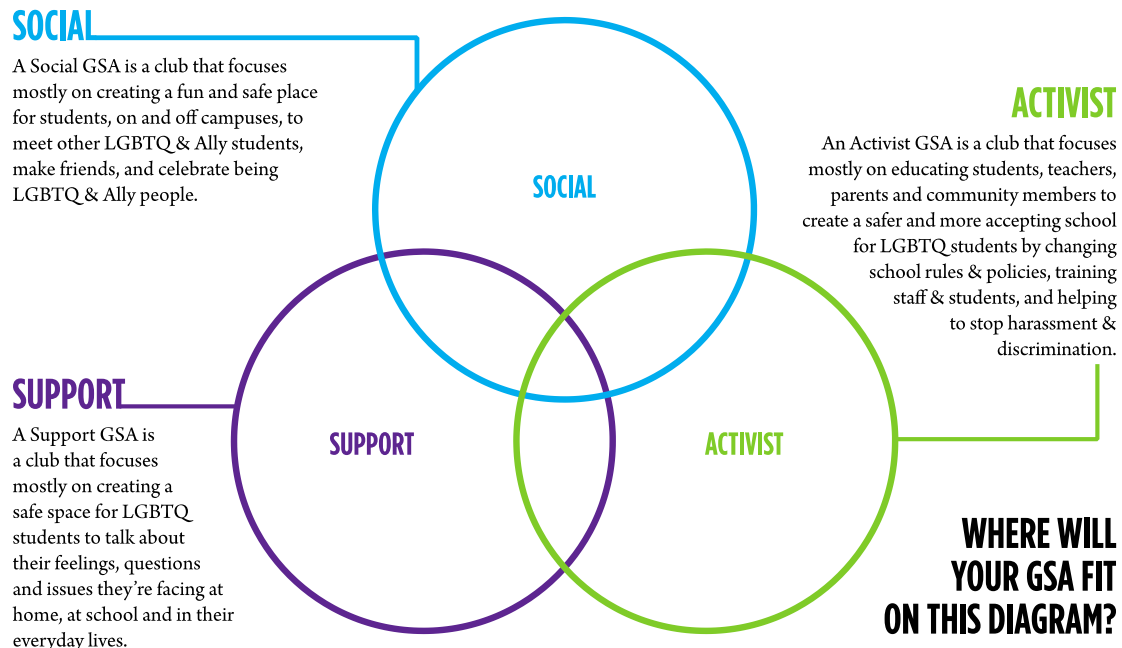


Figure 2.1. Where will your GSA fit on this diagram? (National Association of GSA Networks, 2011, p. 4).

2.3.4.1 Support and 'safety' in GSAs.

Initially beginning as small, largely hidden or invisible 'safe havens' for LGBTQ students, GSAs continue to serve a supportive function that is noticeable to students (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013). Canadian youth whose schools had GSAs, for instance, were far more likely to agree that their school communities were supportive of LGBTQ people than those without GSAs (53% versus 26%) (Taylor & Peter, 2011). GSAs are often supported by at least one member of the school's counselling staff, who can provide either through public display or in individual conversations, pamphlets and resources on topics such as coming out, family counseling, gender reassignment, and queer sexual health (Griffen et al., 2005; Miceli, 2005). When recalling how her school coped with the suicide of a GSA member, one advisor/counsellor emphasized how pre-established connections between her GSA and community pride organizations facilitated

a broader network of support, including from other GSAs, which in turn helped with processing grief (Jones & Hillier, 2013).

Central to being supportive is the notion that GSAs are safe spaces. As one asexual GSA member describes the concept: “We all need a sanctuary. I’m extremely grateful I was involved since it [the gay-straight alliance] helped me come to terms with being different” (Fetner et al., 2012, p. 200). Youth participants consistently report positive feelings of safety and security when speaking about their membership in a GSA (see Gray, 2009; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011). The importance of safety and security is reflected in youth’s positioning of GSAs just above physiological needs (e.g. food, water, shelter) on Maslow’s (1987) hierarchy of human needs (see Meyer, 2014 for how this applies to trans youth in schools). GSA’s ability to meet these fundamental needs demonstrates that they serve at least one vital function for their youth members.

Without dismissing the very real support and feelings of safety and inclusion that obviously make GSAs special for some members, some researchers argue that the “safe spaces” label is often applied uncritically. In their study on the alleged safety of American and Canadian GSAs for instance, Fetner et al. (2012) ask the following three questions: 1) safe from what? 2) safe for whom? and 3) safe to do what? Safety in their first sense is operationalized as a protection or reprieve from actions constituting real or perceived harms. In the second sense, it is a component of individual or collective wellbeing, and thirdly, as facilitating action.

Safety is further problematized by Hackford-Peer (2010), who argues that “safe spaces” discourses position all queer youth as victims, without acknowledging that safety does not mean the same thing to all queer students. Arguing that their focus on safety

does not affect real change, several researchers advocate that GSAs shift from being small, self-contained safe spaces to queer school practices by affecting pedagogical and institutional changes (Currie, Mayberry, & Chennerville, 2012; Hackford-Peer, 2010).

Others contest the criticisms of GSAs and safety, convincingly demonstrating how the presence of a GSA is correlated with positive outcomes for youth, whether or not they themselves participate in the club. For instance, one recent British Columbia study found that students who attended schools with GSAs where anti-homophobia policies had been in place for at least three years had consistently lower levels of problem drinking among all students, LGBTQ and heterosexual, and that the correlation was particularly strong for girls (Konishi, Saewyc, Homma, & Poon, 2013). An American study described how the presence of GSAs had similarly positive effects on student health, with students reporting less in-school harassment and fewer suicide attempts (Goodenow, Szalacha & Westheimer, 2006). When 245 LGBT college students were asked to reflect back on their high school experiences, the presence of a GSA, whether or not the participants were active in it, was positively related to educational attainment, and negatively related to depression and substance abuse (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, and Russell, 2011). Lower rates of truancy (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010), alcohol use, and psychological distress, including depression (Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011) have also been found in surveys of youth attending schools with GSAs.

Recent qualitative work has found that the need for safety continues to be a mobilizing factor in youth's decision to join the GSA. One of Lapointe's (2014) participants in Ontario

had attended two secondary schools where he has been the target of homophobic victimisation. He decided to become involved with the GSA at his second school after he received a death threat on his first day of school. After he reported the incident, he was introduced to the GSA advisor and became one of the group's leaders. Despite being physically abused and verbally threatened, he was a visible activist for LGBTQ rights and awareness. (p. 711)

The role of GSAs as safe(r) spaces, is therefore contested. Despite many high-profile legal victories regarding LGBTQ issues and education (Meyer, 2014; Rayside, 2014), there continue to be youth who seek out GSAs because they understand them as a desperately needed refuge from homophobic and transphobic bullying.

Identifying GSAs as *safer*, implying movement and growth, rather than *safe*, which denotes a more static state, would perhaps describe these spaces more accurately. Anderson's (1994) comment that "regardless of the root cause, if gay and lesbian students are being hurt in public schools, then change must begin there" is of continuing relevance more than twenty years later (p. 21). While there is space to contest and broaden how safety, particularly for LGBTQ youth is defined, there is nonetheless undeniable evidence that their feelings of safety in schools are disproportionately lower than those of their straight peers (Taylor et al., 2011). This is especially true for trans youth, who are disproportionately rejected by their families, and therefore rely on schools for a sense of safety (Travers et al, 2012).

2.3.4.2 Social spaces and belonging.

GSAs also function as social spaces. They host events such as the queer prom, movie nights with LGBTQ films such as *But I'm a Cheerleader* or *Jihad for Love*, or out

of school activities (EGALE, 2012). They can often be a place for students to just have lunch and chat. Having GSAs as social spaces is important to youth; one member commented, “It would be good if [the GSA] was more fun sometimes, you know, a place to hang out without always having to work on some project” (Collins, 2004, p. 109). Haskell & Burtch’s (2010) participants from the Lower Mainland of British Columbia agreed, with one explaining, “having more of a social setting, I think would get more students out [to the GSA], and then, of those students, only a portion of them would be activists, which is cool, but I think it’s almost too much to ask of them” (p. 81). This participant emphasized the plurality of reasons for joining a GSA, and how a balance must be struck between those who favour more activist goals, versus those who want a space to which they can simply belong. As articulated by Fetner et al. (2012), “the sheer existence of the group and access to a comfortable social space was what made high school a bearable experience” (p. 203). GSAs’ function as meeting that need for a comfortable social space should be valued as much as their other goals.

Having a space to belong to is an important human need, coming just after physiological and safety/security needs on Maslow’s (1987) hierarchy. Osterman’s (2000) work on belonging and school community is especially relevant here. She asserts that belonging in a school community is intrinsically linked to student’s sense of being accepted, and indicative of part-whole relationships, wherein students who feel accepted “feel that the group is important to them and that they are important to the group” (p. 324). There are compounding benefits of belonging. Students who believe they belong at school reported being more engaged and active, which in turn leads to a stronger sense of belonging. Osterman’s (2000) findings that cooperative learning, small group work,

teacher support, and autonomy all cultivated feelings of belonging for students have direct linkages to GSAs, which themselves practice most or all of these criterion. Similar to safety and security, the social function of GSAs can be understood as fulfilling a crucial, even foundational, human need for its members.

Of course, activist work can also be social, and the two can combine to form powerful experiences of belonging, group identity, and a sense of community for GSA members. Reporting on meeting and working with other queer youth at GSA conference in Ontario, one participant summed up the groups' feelings with,

being in the same room and being accepting, and realizing, "Hey, look, they're not different; they're not some weird freak. They're just like me," and like, I think those are the big things that we found with GSA that when we did the conference. We're like, wow, you never feel like everyone's like you; you're not by yourself. (St. John et al., 2014, p. 159-160)

Other participants in the same study spoke of how their GSA involvement helped them make more friends both in their own school, at other schools, and in the local gay rights community. Activist and social functions within GSAs are not necessarily contradictory to one another, but can in fact enjoy a symbiotic relationship. They need to be carefully balanced to meet the constantly evolving individual members' needs in order to be accessible to a wide pool of potential members.

2.3.4.3 Education about queer history and life.

GSAs are important educational sites for youth to teach and learn about the history of their own communities (Mayo, 2013; EGALÉ, 2013). This education is vital when considering that LGBTQ youth are not often born into queer families. Unlike youth

from religious minorities, for example, LGBTQ youth do not typically have the equivalent of a faith group to learn about their own positionality. Indeed, their families and faith communities can be quite hostile towards their sexual identities (Hin, 2015; Thompson, 2012; Travers et al., 2012), making information about sexual and gender minorities more difficult to obtain. The GSA may be the only place where youth learn about the persecution of the LGBTQ community in the Holocaust, the Stonewall Riots, or the potential for great joy and self-actualization in queerness (Mayo, 2013). Some of Lapointe's (2014) participants indicated that the GSAs' educational functions were what drew them to the GSA; Bobby, for instance, joined the club because his friend had recently come out, and he felt he was lacking in awareness of LGBTQ people and culture. As he explained, "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 *I Girl*, *5 Gays* and I needed definitely more than that" (p. 712). In conjunction with their roles as political, civic, and youth cultural sites, GSAs can be places for youth-led and peer-to-peer education on an array of topics relating to gender, sexuality, and politics.

2.3.4.4 Education as activism.

GSAs are increasingly taking on educational goals embedded in traditional activist methods, both within their individual schools, and in the wider polity. Within Red Deer, Alberta GSA's first few years of existence in the early 2000's, for example, education-as-activism within the school included holding a poster campaign with messages like "Closets are for Clothes," writing a GSA 'Declaration of Acceptance' which was modeled after the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and displaying it in the school library, and having facts and myths about sexual orientation included in the

student bulletin (Lund, 2007). In an instance of bringing the community in to the school, the GSA members invited a local Protestant pastor to give a Biblical view of ‘homosexuality’ that was neither hateful nor condemning. Other more recently reported activities have included handing out “slurring tickets,” to call out peers who said “that’s so gay” (Fetner et al., 2012), and going class-to-class for World AIDS Day events (Lapointe, 2015).

The members of one Toronto GSA unanimously agreed that their greatest achievement was *Unite*, an annual multi-media conference that celebrates and educates about sexuality. When pressed for more details about their activist work, one member easily listed numerous projects:

We do tons of stuff. We have a policy of sexual harassment that’s in there – this cannot be done, that cannot be done. We spent a little too long talking to the equity department at TDSB [Toronto District School Board], talking about changing the “Mother and Father” on forms, just lots of stuff like that. Reshaping on paper how families have changed now, for instance. And, of course, we do tons of stuff for AIDS all the time. (Short, 2013, p. 86)

Other GSA activities outside the school itself include raising supplies for a local women’s shelter, developing education packages for their school boards, writing a newspaper article on LGBTQ issues, holding a school-wide Pride Week, participating in their community Pride parade, and delivering workshops to staff and students (Collins, 2004; Fetner et al., 2012). One of the more creative activist projects from GSAs was the Vancouver School Board’s 2012 Pink Project, which coordinated 1,500 students dancing

in flash mobs, the video recordings of which were subsequently posted on Youtube, to raise awareness about homophobic and gender based bullying (Pike, 2012).

2.3.4.5 Education as enacting citizenship.

Like other scholars, I identify and understand the aforementioned educational and activist roles as instances of engaged citizenship:

Through their involvement with the Alliance they [GSA members] gained a sense of personal power, and they learned they could be agents of change. Most students voiced a strong belief that they had the ability to “make a difference” in the world” (Lee, in Conway & Crawford Fisher, 2007, p. 128)

Important for this study, and further explored in the next section, is the connection between belonging and citizenship. In her study of Vancouver GSAs, McIntosh (2004) found that GSA members identified belonging as central to some form of citizenship:

Citizenship could be a really positive word or almost negative. It could mean ... that you have to belong somewhere to know who you really are. Oh, I have to belong to these people because I have black hair... .. in that context, citizenship could mean that you have to belong somewhere to someone. (p. 88)

As indicated earlier in this review, however, youth can and do experience difficulty participating in GSAs based on any number of positionalities including class, gender or ethnic identity, or belonging to a faith community. Especially where faith is concerned, youth have expressed ambivalence about the acceptance of their spiritual identities within the GSA. Just as GSAs seem to provide and promote some form of safety for some students, they similarly can be spaces of belonging for some youth of faith.

GSA's citizen engagement is multi-directional and intergenerational; that is, GSA members, along with their teacher advisers, are engaging with their peers, as well as with adults, to affect meaningful change in various ways. Such engagement is not innate, rather it is taught, practiced, and learned. Networking, organizing meetings, publicizing events, speaking in public, writing policy, creating workshops, building coalitions—these are all learned skills. While the GSA teacher adviser is frequently the lynchpin for much of this mentorship, youth members can also teach and learn this activist and organizing skills from each other. These activities are also significant because many of them build mentoring relationships between LGBTQ and allied adults. Queer youth have long been isolated from adult role models, largely due to the pernicious stereotype that all adult gay men are predatory pedophiles (King, 2004). Cut off from mentors, LGBTQ youth can often find it difficult to envision a healthy, fulfilling adult life. GSAs can therefore be understood as vehicles to bridge that gap, not only within schools, but also to supportive adults in the community, such as those at the local Pride Centre, AIDS organization, and municipal politicians (St. John et al., 2014; Short, 2013).

GSAs as hubs of citizen engagement mark a radical departure from traditional queer organizing, as movements for gay liberation have a long history of being led and participated in by adults. One only has to think of the responses typically given to children who self-identify as LGBTQ (e.g., “How can you know that yet?”) to know that the conception of a queer child in contemporary times continues to be anathematic. With its membership assumed to be adults-only, the gay bar or dance club, which by definition is not open to minors, has long been a site of gay consciousness-raising and organizing (Fields, 2004). Having the leadership of LGBTQ social activism shift from being adult-

centric to including some youth leaders, and many more as participants, and physically moving from private, adult-only establishments into public, state-funded schools indicates a substantial change in the people and processes of gay liberation. As Fetner & Kush (2008) explain, “the emergence of GSAs in high schools as legitimate, official student groups recognized by school authorities marks a moment in which young people are stepping forward to claim support for lesbian and gay rights on their own terms” (p. 117). Throughout all of these endeavours, GSA members are often openly and unashamedly LGBTQ (or LGBTQ-allied) and actively engaged in creating change (Micelei, 2005; Pike, 2012). As this represents such a marked departure from the expected, promoted, and privileged youth subjectivity in schools (i.e. the hetero/asexual compliant youth), it is perhaps unsurprising that GSA emergence continues to be fraught.

2.3.4.6 GSAs as both continuity and change.

While the role of GSAs as subversive change agents in a host of areas has been emphasized throughout this literature review, they are also illustrative of several important continuities, namely around sex education and embodied resistance. In her review of Canadian autobiographical educational histories, Gleason (2001) found that sex education, when it was explicitly addressed, tended to be “... brief, presumably self-explanatory, and heterocentric” (p. 210). Sex education has never been forthcoming either at home or at school, and youth have been accurately and inaccurately educating their peers on sex and sexuality for generations. In this regard, GSAs have simply moved this peer based sex education from whispered conversations in washrooms or back alleys to classrooms that are supervised by adults. Similarly, autobiographies on the history of schooling, particularly from survivors of the residential schools, demonstrate that

children have been actively subverting the embodied regulations of gender within schooling for generations (see Gleason, 2001). GSAs have formalized this ongoing subversion, transforming what were once individual acts of resistance to youth collective consciousness raising, which is supported by adult allies, aimed at creating lasting systemic and institutional change. Acknowledging the continuity of GSAs provides necessary historical context in discerning the ways in which they are indeed indicative of substantive changes in how gender, sexuality, and citizenship are taken up in schools. I was mindful of their simultaneous roles in continuity and change when conducting this research.

2.4 Blending Policy, Theory, and GSAs: Ontario's Bill 13 as Exemplar

The case of Ontario's *Bill 13: The Accepting Schools Act* (hereafter referred to as 'Bill 13') is a recent example the powerful interaction between dominant and transgressive theories of childhood within educational policy. Bill 13 was initiated in response to significant moral concerns, and in turn provoked others, including those pertaining to youths' sexuality and citizenship. On the one hand, there was increasing public alarm about LGBTQ youth in schools. Recently intensified media coverage on gay-bashing and subsequent gay youth suicides had culminated in queer activist Dan Savage's popular *It Gets Better* YouTube campaign (see Craig et al., 2014). During this time, the public demanded that something official be done about the alarming number of LGBTQ youth suicides. In response to the crisis, Bill 13 was advanced in Ontario to ensure that all publicly-funded secondary schools support and host GSAs—provided the students wanted one—and that “boards and principals will not be able to prevent students

from using the name GSA or another name the students may choose for these groups” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 2).

Despite broad support from a number of individuals and organizations for Bill 13, there was concurrent resistance to some of the issues implicitly advanced within the bill, including the premise that providing explicit and legislative platforms supporting GSAs was tacit acceptance that young people can embody ‘non-cisgender’ and ‘non-heterosexual’ sexual and gender identities. Echoing earlier protests against GSAs (Herriot, 2011), groups opposing Bill 13 argued that GSAs were an arm of a powerful gay lobby that, through social engineering, was redefining student subjectivity so radically that it infringed on parental and religious rights (see Lees, 2012). Opposition to Bill 13 can be understood as an example of moral regulation, wherein adults targeted GSA members with moralizing discourses to inhibit the clubs they deemed intrinsically immoral (for more on moral regulation, see Hunt, 1999; Smith, 2014). Given how prescribing and regulating particular gender, sexual, and citizen identities have always been a central aim of Canadian schools, this instance of moral regulation can be seen as a continuation of earlier policies, such as 20th century prohibitions of female students from wearing pants, or restricting female enrollment in industrial arts.

While parental and political movements advanced strategies to regulate GSAs, youth themselves were being discursively reconstituted in the media and the legislature as having legitimate LGBTQ identities that should be affirmed within schools. Opponents responded to this discursive shift in student subjectivity by resurfacing a set of discourses and actions that disenfranchise (LGBTQ) youths’ collective voice. For example, Tim Hudak, the leader of the Official Opposition in Ontario, strenuously objected to the

premise in the Bill that afforded students control of the *naming* of GSAs by remarking that his “position is that principals run the schools with the parents and the school boards, not students” (Howlett, 2012). Hudak’s remarks highlighted the extent to which the power to name (especially to name queer identities) is reserved for adults exclusively, and that affording youth this power would undermine adults’ exclusive right to run schools. In a poignant example of intersectionality, Hudak’s remarks blend with his attempts to morally regulate the sexual and gender identities of youth (that is, to regulate young people back into the realm of heterosexual, cisgender patriarchy) by delegitimizing the active citizenship of young people within their schools.

The ages of protesters at public rallies both for and against Bill 13 outside of the Ontario Legislature during the spring of 2012 is notable here. While there is little doubt that at least some youth opposed Bill 13—after all, protection from peer-based bullying is still a central tenet of many GSAs—young people, either as individuals or a collective, did not constitute a presence in coverage of protests against Bill 13. This is to say that reports of protests against Bill 13 indicate that these demonstrations were organized and attended exclusively by adults. Conversely, there were several reports of public rallies in support of Bill 13 being organized and attended by youth, usually either GSA members or youth who wanted to form a GSA at their schools (Houston, 2012; Korducki, 2012). That adults as well as youth attended these demonstrations suggests intergenerational partnerships that were absent from those opposing Bill 13, and by their presence, youth demonstrate a commitment to participating in institutionalized democracy, albeit from the sidelines at a political protest (rather than, say, as elected members of the legislative assembly who could vote on Bill 13). While there are likely multiple reasons that youth

chose to participate in Bill 13 rallies (e.g. to impress peers or teachers, to be on the news, as something fun to do on a Saturday), it is plausible that they also thought there was a decent chance their participation could influence the final vote. Indeed, some of the youth protesting an anti-gay educational bill in Alberta in 2009 reported significant optimism that their civic action would yield tangible results (Herriot, 2014b). This foray into political spaces indicates how youth are rejecting and subverting the more compliant forms of educational citizenship that have been foundational to citizenship education in Canada (see Westheimer, 2008).

The youth faction of the pro-Bill 13 protesters is similar to the participation in GSAs more broadly, wherein some youth, in conjunction with adults, collectively contribute to educational policy-making and broader public conversations around gender, sexuality, and schooling. In belonging to a GSA, members are expecting adults to take them seriously as citizens, not *despite* being young or LGBTQ (or allied), but as simultaneously embodying these *legitimate* subjectivities. This work in conjunction with adults can be interpreted as embodying Smith's (2014) archetype of the Athenian child, wherein young people exercise agency, and are integrated in to, rather than segregated from, adult and political activities. By insisting on the right to self-identify as a collective, these youth are also practicing active citizenship.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of each of the three theoretical frameworks that informed this study, and detailed how they blended with one another. I then applied these theoretical frameworks to the relevant aspects of the social construction of youth in schools, namely their gendered citizenship. This chapter also

reviewed the literature pertinent to LGBTQ youth in schools, including an in-depth synthesis of what is known about GSAs in Canada. I concluded by positioning Bill 13 as an exemplar of how the theoretical perspectives outlined earlier in the chapter can be useful frameworks in analyzing contemporary GSAs.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology and Study Design

3.1 Introduction and Rationale for the Methodology

In begin this chapter by describing the epistemological and three theoretical frameworks that were underpinned this research. I then move to the methodological approaches, and study design. After providing contexts and descriptions of the sites and participants, I describe the methods of data collection and analysis procedures. The chapter concludes with a description of my own positionality, and a reflexive analysis of the challenges, scope, and the limitations of the study. Threaded throughout are my decision-making criteria and processes around issues of ethics, consent, confidentiality, and reliability.

The purpose of this study was to understand the functional, socio-political, and theoretical workings of multiple GSAs within a single school district. An interpretive, multi-case study, using a combination of an interpretive policy analysis of relevant documents and ethnographic methods with human participants was deemed the best methodological fit to address the research questions, which were:

- 1) Now that GSAs are fairly securely established, what are their roles, purposes, and functions, both within the lives of participants, and their broader school community?
- 2) What new theoretical insights about youth can be developed from close examination of how active citizenship intersects with diverse gender/sexuality presentations?

3.2 Research Contexts

Data collection occurred during a time of significant change within the international gay rights movement, LGBTQ school policies in Vancouver, and public education in the Lower Mainland. I briefly outline some of the major events in each of these areas, not as an exhaustive list, but to texturize the temporal, cultural, and geographic milieus in which participating GSAs operated.

There were several well-publicized gay rights violations that occurred globally during the first six months of 2014. Most frequently referred to by participating GSAs in this study was the state sanctioned discrimination of LGBTQ persons and public associations leading up to the Olympics in Sochi, Russia. Passed shortly before the Winter Games began in February, the new Russian federal law criminalized making “homosexual propaganda” available to children, and was followed by waves of homophobic violence wherein young gay males in particular were lured by gangs posing as gay men, only to be beaten, tortured, and/or sexually assaulted (Herszenhorn, 2013). Uganda passed similarly discriminatory legislation in February of 2014, punishing consensual same-sex relationships with up to 14 years in prison. Previously called the “Kill the Gays Bill” (Karimi & Thompspon, 2014), it was also passed amidst well-publicized violence against LGBTQ persons and activists.

There were also significant events of LGBTQ visibility and inclusion during this time. Between January and May of 2014, bans on same-sex marriage were struck down or ruled unconstitutional in ten American states.⁴ In a triumphant moment of visibility for

⁴ In chronological order, they were Virginia, Nevada, Kentucky, Texas, Illinois, Michigan, Arkansas, Idaho, Oregon, and Pennsylvania.

gender queerness, Conchita Wurst, an Austrian drag queen who sports a beard, won the popular EuroVision singing contest in June of 2014. Laverne Cox, a black transgender actress, became the first openly trans person to be featured on the cover of *TIME* magazine, and a month later, the first openly trans person to be nominated for an Emmy award in acting.

All of these events were mentioned in various GSA meetings, with the homophobic violence in Russia garnering the most attention from all the clubs. Knowledge and updates on these events were disseminated by both advisors and members, and frequently led to us/them binaries, wherein homophobic violence was positioned as being more of a concern in foreign nations than in Canada. A comprehensive analysis of GSA members' temporal and geographic understandings of homophobia is presented throughout chapters five, six, and seven. For the purposes of contextualizing the findings, it is enough to note here that GSAs were aware of these world events to varying degrees, and discussed them with varying frequency. These issues function as a sort of barometer on the status of gay rights organizing, of which GSAs are an important part.

3.3 Methodological Approaches

3.3.1 Interpretive multi-case studies.

In its simplest form, a case study is qualitative research that is intrinsically bounded or fenced in. There needs to be, in actuality or theoretically, either a finite amount of time for observations, a finite number of participants or observations to be made, or a spatial boundary such as a classroom or school (Merriam, 1998b; Stake,

1994). Studying the culture of one GSA in one school is a single case study, while studying several GSAs in a finite set of schools is a multicase study.

The overall intent of case study research is generally 1) descriptive, 2) evaluative, or 3) interpretive (Carson, 1986). Descriptive case studies have been characterized as “atheoretical” (Lijphart, 1971, p. 691), meaning they eschew theoretical guidance in design and data analysis, and generally research new or emerging fields about which little is known (Merriam, 1998b; Stake, 1994). While I question the achievability of a totally theory-free approach, descriptive case studies are nonetheless foundational in providing data for new fields of inquiry. Given how there is already a fairly substantial emerging literature on GSAs, a descriptive intentionality was deemed not appropriate in answering my research questions. Similarly, evaluative case study’s emphasis on weighing and judging the data (Merriam, 1998b) contradicted my feminist theoretical framework, which rejects hierarchy and competition. The research questions aim to understand the diversity of roles and functions of GSAs without ranking them according to any sort of criteria.

My inquiry was therefore interpretive, because it sought to understand and make sense of *how* and *why* GSAs function as a group and in relationship with their schools and broader contexts. I was looking to gain an in-depth understanding of youth’s *experience* of GSAs, and in so doing, derive meaning that could provide insight into other inquiries. It was not my aim to provide a theory-free description of GSAs, nor did I develop criteria for evaluating or judging the clubs, although my findings were somewhat informative to members evaluating the purposes and merits of their own GSA. Rather, this inquiry was interpretive in that it sought to understand and make sense of *how* and

why GSAs function as a group and in relationship with their schools and broader contexts.

Including multiple sites was essential, as most of the previous, in-person qualitative work with GSAs had been with a single site (see Griffen et al., 2005; Mayo, 2013), or with only the queer youth, and not their straight allies, or observations of the club as a whole of multiple sites (see Haskell & Burtch, 2010; Lapointe, 2015; Short, 2013). By drawing from multiple sites within the same school district, board policies, particularly those pertaining to LGBTQ youth and extra-curricular clubs, and local norms were consistent across all cases. This made differences among and between the individual sites more readily and easily observable. Importantly, I did not judge or evaluate these differences amongst sites, but rather allowed the individual “portraits” of each site to contribute to the overall picture of GSAs (Merriam, 1998b, p. 40). Multiple cases allowed for a more robust and dynamic understanding of GSAs to emerge, and enhanced the generalizability and external validity of the findings.

Flybjerg’s (2011, p. 307) table of case selection for information-orientated case studies provides further clarification on how the particular cases within this multi-case study were chosen.

Table 3.1. Types of case studies.

Type of Information-oriented selection	Purpose
Extreme/deviant cases	To obtain information on unusual cases, which can be especially problematic or especially good in a more closely defined sense. To understand the limits of existing theories and develop new concepts, variables, and theories that are able to account for deviant cases
Maximum variation cases	To obtain information about the significance of various circumstances for case process and outcome; e.g. three to four cases that are very different in one dimension: size, form of organization, location, budget, etc.
Critical cases	To achieve information that permits logical deductions of the type, “If this is (not) valid for this case, then it applies to all (no) cases.”
Paradigmatic cases	To develop a metaphor or establish a school for a domain that the case concerns.

Within this framework, I was drawn to the maximum variation case selection, wherein all of my cases shared key features, such as being governed by the same provincial and school board policies, but differed in size, geographic location, and socio-economic and cultural compositions. Similar to how other studies have established variability in if and how effectively Toronto’s public schools engage with equity and diversity despite being governed by the same school board policies (see McCaskell 2005; Goldstein, Collins, & Halder 2007), I looked for a similar range within Coast Salish territories in British Columbia’s Lower Mainland. I was not trying to find extreme or deviant cases, as there is little or no baseline of what a “typical” GSA case might look like, nor was I attempting to formulate or test hypotheses about cases. The maximum variation case selection was therefore the most appropriate methodological choice in sample selection.

3.3.2 Interpretive policy analysis.

My study was designed to emphasize youth members' experiences with GSAs, while including the perspectives of youth non-members, GSA advisors, and administrators. Understanding that GSAs are in a symbiotic relationship with their surroundings, the study was firmly situated within its local, national, and international contexts. Conducting a focused, interpretive content analysis of relevant policy documents was essential background work in contextualizing the rich, thick data that I gathered from schools. According to Ellis (2006), "without reading individual stories in the larger stories of which they are a part, researchers are not likely to critically interpret the conditions contributing to the individual stories they have uncovered" (p. 116). The content analysis of three relevant policies was conducted prior to the data collection with schools.

Interpretive policy analysis can draw from a wide variety of approaches and methods, including ethnomethodology, phenomenology, structuralism, poststructuralism, hermeneutics, and discourse analysis, to name just a few (Wagenaar, 2011). Compatible with my constructivist epistemological position as described in section 2.2.1 of chapter two, interpretive policy analysis holds that all knowledge is acquired through interpretation, a necessarily subjective act which is deeply entrenched in who the researcher is (Yanow, 2000). This focus on the researchers' ability to make meaning out of the policy documents requires an explicit accounting of the theoretical orientations guiding such interpretation, as I have described in detail throughout section 2.2.2 in chapter two. The interpretive policy analysis for this dissertation is not an exhaustive analysis of how various stakeholders interpret the policies, as that would be beyond the

scope of the research. Rather, it is a tailored content analysis, informed by queer theory, feminist theory, and particular branches of childhood studies, of the written policies that specifically mention GSAs, and have jurisdictional authority over GSAs in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

The interpretive functions of the policy analysis are congruent with the strands of queer and feminist theorizing that interrogate, disrupt, and are deeply suspicious of normative claims about who or what is a ‘problem.’ An interpretive policy analysis interprets not just the policies as a whole, but their individual parts, or categories, as well (Wagenaar, 2007). Labels like “safety,” for instance, do not have a taken for granted meaning, but are instead interpreted by the researcher, who considers multiple possible meanings as informed by theory. This interrogation and meaning making of labels is of considerable importance to the analysis in this research.

Interpretive policy analysts are centrally concerned with how a policy issue is framed, and pay close attention to the metaphoric and descriptive language used to frame the problem, as this shapes perceptions of who or what the problem is (Yanow, 2000). Determining what policy problems GSAs were designed to solve in the relevant policy documents before speaking with participants themselves allowed me to better contextualize and interpret participant data, and build a more holistic conception of GSAs within a policy network.

I chose to conduct an interpretive policy analysis of the policy documents because of its compatibility with my epistemological and theoretical orientations, and because it provided the relevant contexts for which participant data could be meaningfully analyzed. An account of which documents were selected for analysis, and how they were further

analyzed by relying on hermeneutic approaches, follows in the study design sections of this chapter.

3.3 Ethnographic Methods

While case study research can draw on any number of data collection methods, including quantitative approaches such as statistical analysis, there is nonetheless a long history of ethnographic methods within case study research (see Flybjerg, 2011; Yin, 1981). I relied on ethnographic methods for the in-person data collection for two reasons; first because it was the best methodological fit to answer the research questions, and second, it was congruent with my theoretical frameworks, drawn from feminist theory, queer theory, and childhood studies. In this section, I relate how the theories outlined in chapter one specifically shaped my methodological choices in employing ethnographic methods in schools.

As third- generation research with LGBTQ youth, this study aimed to move away from earlier studies which framed participants as being “at risk,” or in the second generation as “resilient” (Russell, 2005) and instead, took a more nuanced approach in understanding LGBTQ youth as a complex, heterogeneous group, whose lives are profoundly influenced by their social contexts (Horn, Kosciw & Russell, 2009). The importance of social context, combined with the need to account for multiple, shifting identities, made ethnographic methods more appealing than one-time interviews or focus groups alone. Combining observational data with the interviews and focus groups allowed for a clearer picture of GSAs to emerge, such that they could not be reduced to being only spaces of resilience and capacity-building for at-risk youth. Rather, each GSA

emerged as a complex microcosm of youth culture and gay rights activism in schooling, as well as a space of both resilience and risk.

I was also drawn to ethnographic methods because of the congruency of their lengthier time commitment with Noddings' (1984, 1992, 2006) and Tronto's (1993) feminist ethic of care. Given the sensitivity of the study's topics such as LGBTQ identities, I did not feel it appropriate to parachute in from the ivory tower of the academy, ask questions, and then leave. Rather, I wanted sufficient time to build caring relationships with the youth participants in particular. Engrossment, which is open, nonselective attention, and motivational displacement, which is attuning to, and often prioritizing the needs of another, is essential to caring relationships. An ethic of care is profoundly and ultimately rooted in relationship, in an organic reciprocity that often takes time to develop. Building sustained relationships grounded in care was not only the best approach for the scholarly aspects of this research; it was integral to my ethic of seeing participants holistically rather than as merely informants or receptacles of knowledge. I therefore favoured ethnographic methods, including observations, pre-interview activities, individual and small group (2-3 participants) interviews, and focus groups for in-school data collection.

3.4 Study Design: Data Collection

The policy analysis section of my study involved collecting began with collecting the policy documents from relevant bodies with jurisdictional authority over Vancouver schools, while the ethnographic component consisted of multiple methods of data collection including observations, pre-interview activities, and semi-structured focus

groups and individual interviews. Data analysis for each section was conducted by relying on hermeneutic strategies. Each of these components are outlined in this section

3.4.1 Selection of policy documents.

A myriad of international accords, legal precedents, and policy documents from multiple jurisdictions could have been used in the policy analysis to answer the research questions. For instance, the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), to which Canada is a signatory, could arguably have been analyzed with respect to my study, especially due to its provisions for children's identities and voices. In order to specifically focus on those policies that had a more direct effect on the participating GSAs, however, I chose to limit the policy analysis to just those documents that the participants themselves were more likely to relate to their GSA involvement. I therefore collected the following three policy documents that were used in the interpretive policy analysis, all of which were readily accessible online through each organizational website:

1. British Columbia Teachers Federation (2010/2011). *Motions passed by the BCTF to support LGBTQ students and staff* (see Appendix H)
2. British Columbia Ministry of Education (2008). *Social Justice 12: Challenging homophobia in schools- Second edition. Unit 6*
3. Vancouver School Board (2004). *Policy ACB: Sexual orientation and gender identity* (see Appendix I)

The first policy was selected not only because GSA teacher advisors were likely aware of it, but also because it was the first such provincial teachers' union to pass GSA-affirming policy (Herriot, 2011; Smith, 2004). As a landmark policy, I was especially interested to

see if and how it was of relevance to GSAs in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia fifteen years after its' adoption.

The second policy was selected because it is an example of how calls for policy changes resulted in changes to the curriculum. Implemented as a direct result of Peter and Murray Corren's 1997 complaint to the British Columbia Human Rights Commission about the lack of curricular inclusion of LGBTQ topics, I wanted to know if and how this curricular inclusion was being perceived by youth who are either themselves LGBTQ, or are allies. Moreover, unit six of the social justice curriculum is the only part of British Columbia's written curriculum to mention GSAs by name. Analyzing it in conjunction with the data collected from schools offered a rich opportunity to compare how GSAs were being taught about, versus how they were enacted by six of the clubs themselves.

The third policy narrows the focus to the school board within which I was collecting data. As of June, 2014, 35 of British Columbia's 60 school boards had adopted policies pertaining to sexual orientation, gender identity, and school safety and/or student wellbeing (Loutzenheiser, 2015). Given that Vancouver was one of the jurisdictions that did have a board policy specifically pertaining to the issues I was studying, it was a natural fit to include in the policy analysis. I was also curious to see if the participants would mention their school board policy as one enabling or supporting their GSA, or if they knew of its' existence.

Amidst significant public controversy, the Vancouver School Board (VSB) passed revisions to its 2004 policy on LGBTQ youth, originally named *Policy ACB: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities* (hereafter referred to as Policy ACB), during the data collection in the spring of 2014. The 2014 revisions to Policy ACB ensured that students

would have the right to have their self-identified gender(s) affirmed within their school. In what became a contentious public issue attracting significant provincial and national media attention (CBC News, 2014a; Wente, 2014), the policy further stated that “trans* students shall have access to the washroom and change room that corresponds to their gender identity” (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 6). While the amendments were eventually adopted on 16 June, 2014, the revised policy was not implemented during the school year, and as of this writing is being challenged by parents as a violation of both parental rights and the School Act at the British Columbia Supreme Court (CBC News, 2014b).

For the interpretive policy analysis, I used only the original 2004 policy, as it was this version that governed the participating GSAs, and because the policy analysis was completed immediately prior to the data collection with participants. I did, however, include participant data from the GSAs’ involvement in the policy process (such as field notes from the public meetings that I attended with participants, conversations about the policy revisions in the GSAs, etc.), as it was of recurring interest to the participants. The original policy from 2004 can be found in Appendix I, while the 2014 revised policy is located in Appendix J.

3.4.2 Selection of participating schools.

This research took place on the unceded territories of three Coast Salish nations, the Skwxwú7mesh, Tslieł-wahtuth, and the Xméthkwiyem nations, which are in British Columbia’s Lower Mainland. Shortly after I passed my candidacy exam, and received ethics approval from both the University of Alberta and the Vancouver School Board (VSB), I began the ethnographic component by approaching GSA advisors within the

VSB in January 2014. All GSAs were located in secondary schools, which in the province of British Columbia include grades 8-12. The Pride in Education Network, a British Columbia coalition of educators and advocates, publishes a contact list of all the GSA advisors throughout the province. I sent an introductory recruitment email to each of the eleven clubs that listed a supervisor's email, with the goal of eventually securing three participating sites. Unfortunately, no supervisors responded to my initial or follow up recruitment emails.

Through my personal and professional networks, I was introduced to the advisors of four clubs, all of whom readily agreed to ask their club members if they were interested in participating⁵. One of these advisors was a prevention specialist (mental health support worker), for a then-defunct GSA that no longer held meetings, but still wanted to meet with me and participate in interviews. Jean also served as the GSA advisor at two additional schools, both of which invited me to work with them. I therefore worked with a total of six GSAs, one of which was defunct.

Later, once I was immersed in Vancouver's GSA 'scene,' I learned that Pride in Education's email list was largely out-of-date, and that it included many advisors who were no longer club supervisors, or indeed, working at the same schools. Relying on personal and professional networks was therefore essential to conducting the in-person data collection portion of the study.

3.4.3 Participant profiles.

Rather than providing detailed individual descriptions of the participating schools, clubs, and people, I have chosen to instead to provide broad characterizations. This

⁵ In order to respect student voice and youth decision-making, it was essential that advisors first checked with youth and obtained their consent to my working with their club in the first place. Youth therefore provided verbal, though not written, consent to being observed.

balances the need to maintain confidentiality while still providing enough contextual information for the reader to be able to situate the study. I begin by describing the schools themselves, and then profile each GSA. Finally, I offer general descriptions of how the youth participants self-identified at the time of data collection.

3.4.3.1 Schools.

Six schools from across Vancouver participated in this study. Two were located in the western, and generally more affluent half of the city, and another two were in the more socio-economically mixed northeast. The final two were in the economically impoverished areas of the east end and downtown. Youth mentioned the significance of geographic location in these final two schools, as each was located in the heart of the city's respective gay and lesbian neighbourhoods. In talking about supports for his GSA, Neyko⁶, said, "it helps that... we're right next to [name of] street. All that stuff." Similarly, Charlie and Cory discussed how local geography influenced their feelings of safety and belonging at school, and contributed to the GSA's environment:

Charlie: There is a pretty high queer population in this area, there is a nickname for the [name of street], it used to be called Dyke Central 'cause there were so many lesbians that lived here. It's just fantastic, I love it. And um, so there's just a really, it's a safe place, it's a really safe school. We do have a pretty large, like, comparatively queer community within the school....

Cory: it just shows that our school is pretty positive, and that where we are located in the city, like Charlie said, is, is, the [name of street]. And everyone knows that the [name of street] is LGBT, you know, inclusive, and safe, and, yeah.

⁶ A pseudonym, as are all names in this study. The process of choosing pseudonyms is described in detail in section 3.4.3.3

It was by coincidence rather than design that the two schools closest to the city's historic gay and lesbian neighborhoods participated in this study.

All participating schools had ethnically diverse student populations, with students from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and South East Asia forming significant populations within the school. The majority of the teaching and administrative staff across sites were white, with the few teachers of colour being identifiably East or South East Asian. There were posters advertising several ethnicity-based culture and language clubs at several of the participating schools. For instance, one school hosted both a Filipino and Spanish club, while another had a weekly Vietnamese club. Just one of the participating schools had a significant Indigenous presence, with posters highlighted Indigenous alumni's successes, and an Aboriginal Support Office. Otherwise, First Nations people or cultures were not visibly present in participating schools.

3.4.3.2 GSAs.

As previously mentioned, and further discussed in chapter five, one GSA no longer met regularly. This section therefore profiles the five GSAs whose meetings and events I was able to observe. All of the clubs that I observed held their meetings during the lunchtime break, which was 40 minutes in length. Table 3.1 outlines the participating schools (all of which were assigned pseudonyms), and the club names, which were not given pseudonyms due to the highly political nature of naming the clubs themselves (see Pike, 2012).

Table 3.2. Club names by school.

School	Club Name
Aspen	Pride Club
Birch	QSA
Cedar	GSA
Dogwood	GSA
Evergreen	True Colours

Most clubs were fairly teacher-directed, with the QSA at Birch being the notable exception as a primarily student-led group. One advisor who worked with two of the clubs was given a snack budget and brought healthy finger foods to each meeting. Given the impoverished socioeconomic status of one of these clubs, the food served an important nutritional function for youth without a lunch. When describing multiple reasons for continued GSA membership, Elias, explained, “my mom doesn't have to worry about making my lunch every Wednesday.”

Beyond meeting dietary needs, the snacks functioned as a welcoming pull for youth to attend. As recorded in my field notes, several youth described how having food at the GSA meeting “brought the energy up,” and contributed to a “real sense of community.” They seemed to also provide an excuse, or cover, for youth who might feel hesitant about coming to GSA; that is, students could justify their attendance because there was free food.

GSA meetings were typically advertised over the PA system during morning announcements. The youth members and advisors also put up posters throughout the schools indicating the meeting dates, times, and locations. During my observations, I noticed that some schools had more GSA posters than others, and there was tremendous variance in poster location. Some were hung prominently in the main foyer in glass

display cases, whereas others were stuck in a hallway. None of the posters were defaced during my data collection, although there were reports that some had been vandalized earlier in the year, and students and staff alike reported that teachers were the primary culprits of the vandalism.

True Colours and one of the GSAs doubled as more generic social justice groups, alternating between general social justice topics one week, and focusing on LGBTQ topics the next. While most student members were actually members of both clubs, some youth only came to the more general social justice club. There was sometimes little distinction between which club was meeting on a given week.

3.4.3.3 Participants.

I worked with nine adult participants, and was able to formally interview five of them. All adults who were asked to self-identify did so as cisgender, and nearly all were white. The majority of adults self-identified as queer, gay, or bisexual. Two of the advisors were classroom teachers, while the rest were school counselors, educational assistants, mental health support workers, and child and youth care workers.

It is difficult to give a precise number of youth participants, as GSA attendance was inconsistent, and not all youth wanted to, or were able to, be interviewed. For instance, some youth's words were recorded and member checked in the field notes, but they either chose not to be interviewed, or could not be due to time constraints. In these cases, I have assigned them a pseudonym and indicate their grade when quoting them, but provide no other identifying labels, as they did not self-select any for this research. They are not listed in Table 3.3; only participants who were interviewed or in a focus group are listed there.

During our review of the letter of information and consent form at the beginning of each interview or focus group, participants were invited to choose how they would like to be represented in the research; either with a pseudonym of their choosing, or with their given name(s). Giving research participants, and youth participants in particular, the option of choosing their own pseudonym is consistent with a research orientation that values participants as co-collaborators, with the power and autonomy to control how they and their stories are represented (MacNaughton, Davis, & Smith, 2010). For those who did not select a pseudonym, or clearly indicate if they wanted their legal names used, I selected a pseudonym for them. While some LGBTQ youth opted to use their given names as a deliberate act of personal and political emancipation, others preferred to choose a unique pseudonym for any number of reasons. Roan explained the importance of participants being able to choose an identity, be it a pseudonym, or keeping their own names, in the following note they wrote me during data collection:

For ~~most~~ a lot of us, it's pride in our identity. It's also about being heard. Most of the time we have to seek out people to talk to, but this is different. Now ~~people~~ adults are actually seeking our opinions. It's an overwhelming sense of finally, finally someone is listening to us.

A significant number of youth and adults chose to retain their own legal or preferred names in this study, however; I have chosen not to reveal how many in order to better protect confidentiality. As such, I have listed their pseudonyms/names and identities in Table 3.3 alphabetically, rather than by school, so as to protect their privacy.

As I explained to interviewed youth at the end of each interview, I was hesitant to assign labels to them based on my reading their social positionalities (the process of their

self-labeling is analyzed in greater detail in chapter five). For the purposes of context, I note here that the majority of youth reported female gender identities, and at four of the six schools, members tended to be older (primarily or exclusively grades 11 and 12). Most, though not all, had told their parents about their GSA membership, and about their sexual orientations and gender identities if they identified as LGBTQ. At three of the schools, most or all GSA members were high academic achievers, while academic achievement was more mixed at the other three. Nearly all participants were members of at least one other school club or sports team.

At the end of the interview, I asked participants, adults and youth alike, if they would like to identify their gender identities, sexual orientation(s), and ethnic identities. I explained that, although most had labeled these facets of their identity in the interview, sometimes people like to have more than one label, or perhaps use a label that did not come up in the interview. I further explained that I was asking this because I did not want to assume that I knew their identities just by looking at them, and that I wanted to use the correct pronouns, as well as their self-identified labels, when writing about them. Finally, I reassured them that this was voluntary, and that they need not give any identifying labels at all.

Many participants chose more than one label to describe their sexual orientations and ethnicities, and a minority shifted or changed their labels during the course of data collection. Some of the labels relating to sexual orientation and gender identity included lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, asexual, pansexual, gender queer, gender fluid, sexuality fluid, and female to male (FtM) transgendered. Absent among self-identities were male to female (MtF) transgender, two-spirited, and intersex.

With the exception of one, all participants were enthusiastic about being asked about their identity labels, and in nearly all cases the interview was extended by 5-10 minutes while they explained in great detail why they used chose their particular labels. These additional conversations about labeling provided rich, unexpected data. For instance, two grade eight girls, upon hearing that another participant at a different school used “gender fluid” as one of his gender identities, developed in that moment a concept of “sexuality fluid” with regards to orientation. In a separate interview, a different eighth grade girl struggled with how to describe her ethnic identity. Glancing over at a sheet of LGBTQ terminology that she’d received from her Pride Club advisor earlier that day, she eventually settled on “questioning” as the most authentic description for her ethnicity. Finally, two youth from different schools told me that while they could not tell me their sexual orientations verbally, they could draw them for me. Figure 3.1 is one such drawing, wherein the participant and I agreed that I could refer to her sexual identity as ‘Kinsey 6’ (with the understanding that the Kinsey scale was from between 1-7), when it needed to be written instead of drawn:

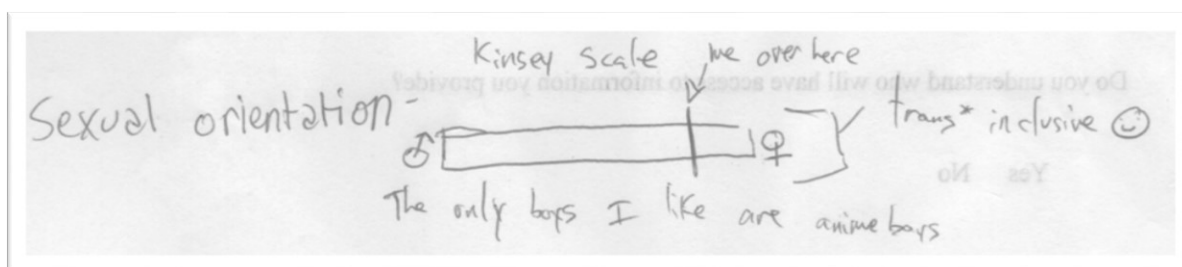


Figure 3.1. Participant drawing of their own sexual orientation

Ethnic labels were similarly diverse, with white, Caucasian, Asian, Chinese, and Canadian being among the most commonly claimed. Very few self-identified as Aboriginal, and those who did so chose not to list their nation amongst other ethnicities.

Some chose no identities at all, while others chose to label themselves with regards to race or ethnicity, but not with gender, or any combination of possibilities. These identities are represented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Participant names and self-chosen identity labels.

Name	Identities	Name	Identities
Aislinn	Female, bisexual (teacher advisor)	Krista	Grade 11, no labels
Andy	Grade 10, gender non-conforming, questioning, pansexual, Caucasian, Jamaican, Chinese	Little One	Grade 11, girl, heterosexual
Angelina	Grade 8, female, questioning (sexual orientation)	Marcus	Grade 12, male pronouns, bisexual, Chinese Canadian
Avery	Grade 10, female, heteroflexible, White	Marina	Grade 11, female, heterosexual, Caucasian
Caroline	Grade 12, female, gay, queer, French Canadian	Mark	Grade 12, male, straight, Jewish?, Canadian, Polish, Baltic-y
Charlie	Grade 12, gender non-conforming, neither, female presenting, lesbian (sort of), Dutch, Indonesian	Meghan	Grade 11, Cisgender (she), woman, non-heterosexual, Caucasian
Christopher	Grade 10, male, gay, Kurdish	Michael	Male, gay, Chinese (teacher advisor)
Colette	Grade 11, no labels	Morgan	Grade 10, female, bisexual (preference for women), Caucasian
Cory	Grade 11, trans youth FtM, gender fluid, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, all genders, pansexual, White, Chinese, Dutch	Mya	Grade 12, female, straight, Sri Lankan, Canadian
Danielle	Grade 12, female, straight/heterosexual, Chinese Canadian	Neyko	Grade 12, gender is whatever I feel like (for practicality, 'he'), mostly male, pansexual/Kinsey 4, Eastern European
Dominic	Grade 10, trans (FtM), pretty straight, pretty White	Odie	Grade 9, no labels, Vietnamese
Doug	Cis gender male, queer/gay, White (advisor)	Peter	Grade 12, male, gay, Caucasian
Elias	Grade 8, male, straight,	Petra	Grade 11, no labels

	Mediterranean		
Elinor	Grade 11, no labels	Polina	Grade 8, female, heterosexual, Soviet, American, Russian Jewish
Ethan	Grade 11, male, straight, Chinese	Rhien	Grade 8, female, straight, European, Canadian
Heidi	Female, straight, Canadian (Icelandic) (teacher advisor)	Roan	Grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer, mixed (white-passing) person of colour
Irene	Grade 12, female, straight, Asian Canadian	Roisin	Grade 11, cisgendered, heteroflexible, German, Irish, Canadian
Jacky	Grade 10, boy, straight, Asian	Sasha	Grade 12, female, straight/confused, Ukrainian
Jake	Grade 10, male, straight, European	Stella	Grade 12, straight, female, Chinese
Jean	Male, gay, French Canadian (advisor)	Taylor	Grade 10, no labels
Jiani	Grade 8, female, heterosexual, Australian, Chinese, Canadian	Ted 1	Grade 12, male pronouns, heterosexual, Chinese Canadian
Kai	Grade 8, panromantic, asexual, gender fluid, Chinese	Ted 2	Male, Straight, Asian (administrator)
Kitty	Grade 8, cis female, Kinsey 6, half-white, half-middle eastern???	Violet	Grade 11, RAINBOW (gender identity), technically bi, sexuality fluid, Native American-Australian, with a side of Persian

The variety encompassed in this table indicated the generative possibilities of simply asking about identity, and the data generated from these additional identity questions is further discussed in chapter five.

Finally, data collection with participants was marked by a series of teacher walkouts, lock-outs, and eventually a full strike. Beginning in May, these job actions disrupted the flow of data collection. While I was unwilling to cross a picket line, several teacher advisors directly asked me to supervise their clubs so that the GSAs could still

meet while they were walking out, or were locked out at lunchtime. I followed the teachers' lead as the strike unfolded, and provided supervision when requested so that some clubs could continue meeting. Due to the strike, I was unable to schedule and complete seven additional interviews, and five previously scheduled observations.

3.4.4 Observations.

I collected observational data, most frequently through lunchtime meetings, from the five active GSAs and their schools March-June, 2014. Table 3.4 provides a summary of the observational data collection from schools.

Table 3.4. Observational data by school.

School Name	Frequency of meetings	# of lunchtime meetings observed	# of GSA events attended	Mean # of members per meeting	Mean grade level of members
Aspen	Weekly	10	2	6	8.5
Birch	Weekly	7	1	5	11
Cedar	Biweekly	6	2	3	12
Dogwood	Biweekly (often combined/alternated with a social justice club)	2	0	4	11
Evergreen	Biweekly (often combined/alternated with a social justice club)	4	2	9	11.5
TOTAL		29	6	N/A	N/A

I arrived at each school about 15 minutes before the lunchtime GSA meeting, signed in as a visitor at the office as per school policy, and then went to the student washroom before waiting outside of the GSA meeting space. In the case of the defunct

GSA, I followed the same procedures before conducting interviews with participants at that school.

Arriving early allowed me to become acquainted with the school's physical surroundings. In particular, I took notes on, and often photographs of, posters advertising GSA meetings and events, as well as general LGBTQ posters (such as rainbow stickers on classroom doors). I was careful to note where in the school the posters were (such as the busy main foyer, or a dark corner in the basement), as well as their condition (were they defaced, or well cared for?). I also took notes on what other types of clubs and events were advertised throughout the school, such as student government elections, or the school musical. Finally, I recorded in my field notes overheard instances of homophobic and misogynistic language in the hallways. For instance, at two different schools, I overheard youth calling each other "faggot," and at a third, I overheard "that's so gay." At all participating schools, I overheard misogynistic comments such as "bitch," "slut," and "pussy." These comments were made by both male- and female- presenting students, and were most often uttered by, and directed to, young men.

Using the washroom allowed me to assess their function as gendered spaces within the school. Particularly once the public debates about the VSB's revised policy on gender inclusion and school washrooms began in earnest (explained in greater detail in chapter four), it was helpful for me to get the lay of the land. Was there at least one gender-inclusive washroom at each school? Where was it located? Was it easy for students to access? One school, for example, had just one gender-inclusive washroom that was located behind the office, and designated for staff use. Students could access it only by asking the secretary for the key.

Following Boostrom's (1994) lead, my early observations were mostly "observer as videocamera" (p. 53). While this type of observation yields the least significant field notes, it was important to allow time and space to become gently and incrementally acquainted with the particulars of each school site. Hastily rushing to more refined, or analytical observations risked me only seeing what I had pre-determined was there, so I was mindful to observe at more of a surface level in the beginning. In so doing, I was able create space for surprises to bubble up in unexpected places (Ellis, Janjic-Watrich, Macris, & Marynowski, 2011).

The majority of the meetings I attended consisted of students and their advisor(s) sitting around desks or tables in a circle in a classroom. I would deliberately sit somewhere away from the advisor so as not to seem like I was co-advising or co-supervising. In the one club that had meetings with desks in rows, I sat in the second-to-last row, and off to the side. I was introduced to the group by the advisor in the first meeting I attended at each school, gave a brief introduction of who I was and the aims of the research, and emphasized how consent would be obtained during individual interviews. I also explained that I would be taking field notes, and that youth were encouraged to read what I was writing about them during each visit, and they were welcome to add, delete, and edit the field notes. Integrating member checking into the observations in this way was consistent with my theoretical approach of making space for, and valuing students' contributions, and with an ethic of care, which emphasizes relationship and collaboration.

In subsequent meetings, I generally only spoke if spoken to, or when asked a question. I was often put in the role of expert on LGBTQ matters when advisors and/or

youth would turn to me with clarifying questions (such as in which year were the Stonewall Riots, or what was the difference between transgender and transsexual). However, when inaccurate information was disseminated, either by advisors or youth, I did not interrupt to correct mistakes. Other than answering questions when they were directly asked to me, I was mostly silent during the meetings.

As the observations continued over the spring of 2014, I became more of an “observer as insider” who participated more actively in the observations, and an “observer as reflective interpreter” who began to understand the significance of what I was witnessing (Boostrom, 1994). Throughout these observations, I kept detailed field notes of informal chatting, or hallway conversations (Carson, 1986; Short, 2013). As time went on and relationships strengthened, I often chatted with the youth about a host of subjects, both LGBTQ related and others, before the meetings began. I took extensive field notes in each meeting, and in two separate occasions at two different schools, asked for, and received permission to audio record a conversation as it was taking place. My audio recording these two conversations was actually suggested by the youth, who noticed how furiously I was scribbling during their discussions of issues directly relating to the research questions.

Member checking occurred throughout data collection, including during the observations. The majority of youth participants were quite interested in my invitation for them to read over and add to the field notes. They often playfully corrected me on what they thought I got wrong, and added in more details when they thought I had not captured the whole story. They also wrote jokes, and drew pictures in the field notebooks that were unrelated to the GSA. Regarding interpretation and analysis, youth sometimes asked for

clarification on why I had written things down, or why I thought certain incidents were important. This member checking was essential to my early analyses and preliminary impressions of the data. Besides facilitating rapport, the member checking of field notes was congruent with feminist literature on research methodologies for work with children, which recommend such practices as a means of partially dismantling the hierarchy between adults and youth (Kennelley et al., 2014; Pascoe, 2007; Mayall, 2013).

3.4.5 Pre interview activities (PIAs).

Pre interview activities are optional tasks which take about five minutes to complete, and are generally provided to participants a few days before their in-person interviews (Ellis, 2006). PIAs were used to facilitate recall, gently and non-intrusively build rapport, and create space for participants to introduce new questions and concepts beyond what the interviews would otherwise elicit. These data collection tools were therefore congruent with an ethic of care that anticipates and prioritizes the holistic needs of participants (Tronto, 1993).

PIAs are especially relevant to work with youth, as they are a way to “... learn a great deal about the children’s experiences and contexts without exhausting them with decontextualized questions” (Ellis, 2006, p. 121). They gave youth multiple tools to represent experiences that were meaningful to them, allowed participant choice, and flattened some of the age-based power differential between the youth and myself (Best, 2007; Mandell, 1988). Further, they recognized that youth are more familiar with visual and written techniques, particularly in schools, and accommodated for this difference and preference (Di Santo, Underwood, & Kenneally, 2014; Punch, 2002).

A list of optional pre-interview activities (PIAs) was provided to participants who agreed to an interview (see Appendix D). Some participants chose not to complete any PIAs, most chose to complete one, and a few chose to complete multiple PIAs. Among the most commonly selected PIAs were “Draw a good GSA meeting and a bad GSA meeting,” “Write a list of 20 words relating to the GSA. Now divide that list in to two groups,” and “Draw a diagram showing how GSAs are similar to and different than other school clubs.” A total of 27 PIAs were collected from 13 participants.

3.4.6 Semi structured interviews and group interview.

Semi-structured interviews, conducted in quiet, confidential settings were a primary method of data collection. They were usually conducted after I had completed around three observation sessions, although this was not always possible due to scheduling conflicts. In general, the interviews that happened later in the data collection yielded more robust data, because greater rapport had been established. I also had greater personal experience with the school and the GSA in question, and could therefore tailor my questions to specific shared experiences of the club.

Interviews with participants lasted between twenty and sixty minutes, and were audio-recorded and transcribed (see Appendix E for the interview guide). They took place in a quiet, semi-public space of the participants’ choosing, generally an empty classroom with the door open, or in the school library. A small minority of the youth preferred to meet off campus, at a local café, or in the park on a sunny, spring day. Evergreen members elected to have a group interview with all members at the same time, spread over two lunchtime meetings. A few of the interviews at other schools were conducted with two or three youth together, at the participants’ request, otherwise all

interviews were individual. Table 3.5 tallies how many interviews were conducted with youth and adults at each school.

Table 3.5. Number of interviews by school.

School Name	# of youth interviewed	# of adults interviewed
Aspen	7	0 [*]
Birch	5	1
Cedar	11 ^ψ	0 [*]
Dogwood	2	1 ^Ω
Evergreen	14	2
Fir	2	3
TOTAL	42	5

I began the interviews by reviewing the letter of information and the consent form.

Following the recommendation of the Research Ethics Board of both the University of Alberta and the VSB (see Appendices F & G), youth signed their consent forms without their parents' involvement. The multiple reasons for not requiring parental consent, particularly when working with LGBTQ youth, are articulated by Chabot, et al., (2012):

Waiving the requirement for parental consent can show respect for their autonomy and ability to make decisions according to their own interests (Geluda et al., 2005).

^ψ One of these students was recruited through the public meetings regarding revisions to Policy ACB. Although they attended a different school within the VSB, for the purposes of this study, they were considered an *ad hoc* member of Cedar's GSA and pro-Policy ACB communities. This youth participated in an individual interview with me, and spoke about their role as a GSA president at their own school, and their involvement with the policy revision process. I have therefore chosen to include their date, but not their school, as I did not conduct any observations, or speak with anyone else from their school.

^{*} I collected extensive field notes and "hallway conversations" with these five advisors, but due to the teachers' strike, could not schedule an interview without crossing picket lines.

^Ω Dogwood, Fir, and Evergreen all shared one advisor.

Moreover, allowing young people to consent on their own behalf can encourage greater participation from marginalized youth (e.g., LGBT youth, homeless youth) and allows researchers to obtain a more diverse sample. It can provide researchers with a more nuanced understanding of the experiences and needs of marginalized youth. Finally, it can also help reinforce researchers' duty to treat all potential participants in a just and equitable manner. (p. 29)

In order to ensure that consent was free, informed, and ongoing, I reassured participants before their interview, as well as during GSA meetings and events, that they could discontinue their participation in the study at any time without penalty (i.e., academic suffering, belonging to a GSA, my unconditional positive regard for them, etc.). Furthermore, I reiterated that they would not need to justify or explain their withdrawal to me.

I also explained to youth that I was morally and professionally bound by the *BC Handbook on Youth Care* (2012), meaning I was required to break confidentiality if they disclosed instances of harm or abuse to themselves or another person under the age of 18. Just one youth disclosed an incident that needed to be reported, which I did following the protocols laid out in the *BC Handbook*. The youth was involved in each step of my reporting the incident, and later expressed relief that they were taken seriously. Due to the possibility of sensitive and emotionally distressing subjects being raised in the interviews, I compiled and distributed a list of supportive community resources to each youth participant (see Appendix C). Finally, participants were made aware that they could member check their interview transcripts by email. I contend that being told of member checking before the interview facilitated better rapport, as participants knew in advance

that they could later remove any comments with which they were uncomfortable.

Member checking further enhanced the credibility of the study, as it increased the certainty that I had accurately captured what the participant had intended to convey.

3.5 Study Design: Data Analysis

3.5.1 Hermeneutics.

The overall analysis procedures for both the interpretive policy analysis and the data collected in schools was informed by a hermeneutic approach, which analyzes and makes meaning and sense of the data within the contexts and relationships with which they occurred (Ellis, 2006; Merriam, 1998a). There is no meaning to be made divorced from the subjectivities of both the participant and their context. This focus on context and subjectivity made borrowing from hermeneutical data analysis strategies a particularly good fit both the case study design, and for my research questions specifically.

Hermeneutical analysis is characterized by forward and backward arcs, and emphasizing relationships as part-whole (Crotty, 2010; Ellis, 1998; Smith, 1991). The ‘forward arc’ is the researcher’s first impression of the data, what she is able to see, make sense of, and attribute meaning to based on her own standpoint (Ellis, 1998). This forward arc can be likened to the analysis component of Boostrom’s (1994) “observer as videocamera,” wherein initial observations are valued and analyzed. The backward arc, on the other hand, is an ongoing interpretation and (re)construction where the researcher goes back through the data and looks for what is missing, what can be seen in a new way, and what can be confirmed or contradicted from the initial, forward arc, of data analysis. The backward arc is where “alternate interpretive frameworks are purposefully searched for and “tried on” (Ellis, 1998, p. 27). When theory is thought of as “the researcher’s

reading glasses” (Malterud, 2001), the backward arc provides the reflective space to try on multiple pairs of glasses so that meanings can be seen through a variety of lenses. I contend that versatility with theory bolsters the researcher’s ability to uncover the diverse meanings and significances for which hermeneutic data analysis procedures are designed. It is also compatible with my use of multiperspective theorizing (see chapter one), and anticipated theory building.

Hermeneutics insists on seeing interplay of the micro and macro in any relationship (Smith, 1991). Metaphorically speaking, the constant back-and-forth between the part and the whole is like the need to see the forest *and* the trees simultaneously, rather than emphasizing one over the other. Individual narratives make sense only when researchers are also interpreting the larger contexts, and larger contexts are themselves informed by singular stories (Ellis, 2006). The perpetual cycle is referred to as the hermeneutic circle (Ellis, 2006). This feature of hermeneutics is especially relevant to this study, as individual narratives, such as data from the semi-structured interviews, can only be understood within temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts, and bound in relationships of power. The hermeneutic circle’s propensity to generate new meanings out of the same data is a particularly good fit for an interpretive case study design, which is primarily concerned with relationships and meaning-making.

Hermeneutics were used to analyze both the policies in the interpretive policy analysis in chapter four, and the participant data in relation to those policies. For instance, the policy documents were examined in the forward arc for their initial, or surface impressions (such as affirming the GSAs right to exist), and then, by relying on my theoretical frameworks, re-read for meaning and significance (i.e. what does it mean for

children's rights and active citizenship that schools endorse GSA clubs?). The interpretive policy analysis in chapter four provided the specific policy contexts that participating GSAs operated within, and in so doing, contributed to building a "whole" picture of the GSA landscape in the Lower Mainland, through which the data from participants could be analyzed against.

I relied on hermeneutic strategies as I analyzed the observational and interview data in a number of ways. Adapting MacQueen et al.'s (1998) structure, my codebook consisted of a code label, a brief definition, and examples. Developing codes was an iterative process combining both theory-driven and data-driven codes (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2010). Based on my theoretical frameworks and literature review the first draft of my codebook consisted of seven codes, and was entirely theory-driven. Once immersed in the data using the hermeneutic circle of meaning-making, however, a number of data-driven codes emerged.

In order to make sense of the interviews in light of the observational field notes, I went back and forth between them. This meant that I would code an interview and then re-read field notes of my observations, or review the pictures I took of GSA posters throughout the school. I also went back and forth between the interpretive policy analysis of relevant policy documents that specifically mentioned GSAs (completed in February, 2014, before the observational and interview data was collected) and the observational data. I looked for specific instances where influence could be identified, such as how meanings were made out of the revised VSB gender identity policy based on the GSAs' social position within the school.

3.6 Researcher Positionality

My own standpoint, subjectivity, and social locations necessarily influenced all stages of this study, from how the research questions were phrased and formulated, to procedures for data collection and analysis, to the conclusions drawn. As articulated by Best (2007),

Feminist scholars have repeatedly demonstrated, [that] the standpoints or perspectives we privilege shape our understandings of the worlds we study. When we fail to recognize this, we not only render particular groups invisible but also obscure and distort our understandings of the everyday worlds they occupy *and* their social organization. (p. 2)

In other words, who I am necessarily influences what, and how, I will see, because seeing itself is a profoundly social, situational, and contextual practice (Berger, 2008). The researcher's own values in qualitative research are central to the process, from determining who or what will be studied, how it is conducted, and what is seen, both the field and the analysis (Letherby, 2003; Smith, 1999).

Consistent with a reciprocal ethic of care, I also recognized that because I was busy “deconstructing the discourses and categories that produce [my] informants’ subjectivities, [I] might consider the extent to which [I] [my]self am willing to be ‘pulled apart’ or undone?” (Rooke, 2010, p. 34). In other words, it was by deconstructing my own subjectivities in tandem with analyzing those of my participants, that I consciously dismantled the ontological boundary between the ‘knower’ and the ‘known.’ While it would be easier to assume the identity of a semi-detached researcher, my theoretical perspective demanded that I interrogate myself as rigorously as I did my participants.

With regards to the ethnographic methods used in data collection, “the self-explanations offered to the ethnographer are offered on the basis of the informants’ understanding of the *kind of person* the ethnographer is” (Rooke, 2010, p. 33, original emphasis). This is to say that participants divulge or conceal aspects of their lived experiences in part based on who I am, and who they think I am. This is an inevitable reality that cannot be evaluated as good or bad, it just is.

Furthermore, my youth participants were at a crucial life stage with regards to identity formation. I was sensitive to the fact that “as teens categorize themselves, they categorize others as well. The researcher, in this setting, becomes part of their meaning-making systems and identity work” (Pascoe, 2007, p. 192). In her own research with high school boys for instance, Pascoe was “alternatively a teacher, a mother, a girl, an outsider, a note taker, an author, a student, a potential sex partner, or a confidant” (p. 192). Within my own data collection, I experienced being read as all of the roles that Pascoe lists, as well as a friend, an insider, and a role model. These chosen or assigned roles necessarily influenced the particular narratives shared through engagements with particular participants.

As this research took place on the unceded territories of three Coast Salish nations, the Sk̓wxwú7mesh, Tsliel-wahtuth, and the Xméthkwyiem nations, in the Greater Vancouver Area, in the province of British Columbia, I begin by following the First People’s convention by first situating myself in relation to the materials I have investigated by identifying my own origins. I write with acknowledgement that I am a treaty partner, the descendent of French colonizers who appropriated the Mi’kmaq and Maliseet territories of the Wabanaki Confederacy in what are now called the Maritime

provinces. The university with which I am affiliated lies on lands belonging to the Nations of Treaty 6, and is currently named Edmonton.

As a white, cisgender female, my appearance conformed to dominant norms of which bodies are safe and unthreatening in schools. My cis and white privilege, combined with being female marked me as the epitome of insider, in that my body was consistently read as that which belonged in a public school. I was not seen as racially deviant or suspect, nor was I read as a threat to the status quo of white privilege and power within schools. While an outsider on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish nations, I was nonetheless a racial insider in the public schools on this land.

Participants' reading of my age was the first obvious instance of my being marked as a simultaneous insider *and* outsider. For example, several of the adults scolded me for being late for class, only to then realize that I was not a secondary school student. Conversely, my younger participants, especially those in grade 8, made occasional references to my being a "grown-up."

I found that I alternated between insider/outsider depending on which components of identity were emphasized, either by myself, or the participants, in a particular setting. With regards to the GSA advisors, because I let it be known to my adult participants that I was a certified teacher, and had previously worked as a teacher's assistant, they often responded to me as an insider colleague and confidant. There were times, however, when being seen as an outsider elicited more thorough responses. When I felt they were reciting pre-approved responses to questions on anti-homophobia practices or policies, I would emphasize how my teaching experience was in Quebec and New Brunswick, so

that they could explain to me as an outsider, how things worked in British Columbia, and more to the point, their own schools.

I similarly alternated between being an insider and outsider with the youth participants. They approached me variously as a friend, ally, crush, teacher, authority figure, and in their words, “role model.” I was consistently attuned to how I perceived their readings of me, and adapted my behaviours accordingly. For instance, when two youth positioned me as a crush, I was mindful to not pay them extra or special attention that could be misconstrued as my inviting their crushes. I also made sure to casually reference my partner so as to gently discourage any overt attempts to express their crushes.

In very few instances, when asking youth at the end of the interview about their preferred gender pronouns, sexual orientations, and ethnicities, I described my own preferred labels as examples (i.e., I identify as a cis woman, alternately bisexual or queer, white with Acadian heritage). The aims of such disclosures were twofold; firstly, I wanted to increase comfort for those whom I either knew or guessed were newly identifying as LGBTQ by marking myself as an insider of sorts. Secondly, I felt it was part of the reciprocity between youth and myself; that if I was going to inquire about their choice of labels, I needed to be candid about my own. I deliberately did not disclose my sexual orientation before the interviews, as I wanted the opportunity to be read as an insider by both straight and queer students. Indeed, I perceived that both groups saw me as one of their own in various capacities. With straight students, this misidentification took the form of being able to express heterosexist or cissexist views, such as when Jacky’s questioning whether trans people would still be trans if there was less societal

gender policing overall. Had I been openly queer, he might not have thought through these ideas with me. Openly queer students also saw me as an insider, and as Emma put it, “one of us.” This was similar to Pascoe’s (2007) openly queer participants guessing that she was a lesbian without her disclosing so, and like Pascoe, I am inclined to believe that this facilitated better rapport with my openly queer students. Being bisexual was therefore a unique vantage point from which to conduct this research as it led to my being perceived as an insider within different groups.

I was however, an outsider in several key respects. As inescapably cisgender, I was never mistaken for being trans, and therefore not an insider to the four openly trans and gender queer participants. I was also undeniably female, although like Pascoe (2007), I tried to downplay my femininity without disparaging it. As a cisgender femme, my authentic gender presentation quite rigidly conforms to privileged femininity, which I suspected would potentially alienate youth who struggle to either conform to, or eschew dominant feminine markers (see Dahl, 2010). A butch lesbian and a trans female (MtF), for example, could both feel affronted by an openly femme researcher; the first because she’s trying to escape compulsory femininity, and the second because she’s trying hard to be legitimized by it. I therefore dressed androgynously, in jeans and a t-shirt, with no makeup or jewelry. Despite my downplaying my femininity, I was nonetheless an outsider to both cis and trans males, who I believed responded to me as they would towards other adult women.

3.7 Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Transferability

Trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability are of ongoing concern for qualitative research (Creswell, 2008). I was able to increase the trustworthiness and

credibility of this study by reflecting on my own positionalities and member checking, which I described in previous sections, and by creating an audit trail, and triangulating multiple data sources. I address transferability, or generalizability by drawing on the case study literature specifically.

An audit trail consist of a chain of evidence; that is, physical documentation of the step-by-step processes of data collection and analysis (Crotty, 2010). In this research, this meant keeping copies of letters of information (Appendix A), consent forms (Appendix B), pre interview activity suggestions (Appendix D), interview question guides (Appendix E), and ethics approval forms from both the University of Alberta (Appendix F) and the Vancouver School Board (Appendix G). All audio recordings of interviews were stored in a password protected hard drive, and field notes, notes from participants, and pre interview activities were locked in a filing cabinet. This organized chain of evidence lends credibility to the final research report.

Triangulating multiple data sources is also essential in establishing credibility. In this study, I used multiple methods of data collection, including observations, focus groups, individual interviews, and pre-interview activities, as well as a full policy analysis of relevant policy documents. Within the interviews and focus groups, as well as during the member checks of the field notes, I often asked the same question in different ways, and asked the same key questions across sites. This allowed for patterns and themes around the central questions of this study to emerge credibly and reliably.

Transferability refers to the ease of which results from one study can be applied to similar situations or contexts. A perennial misunderstanding of case study research (Flyjberg, 2011), case studies are nonetheless of general relevance and interest

(Chadderton & Torrance, 2011). As a multicase interpretive case study, this research can provide insight into the *diversity* of GSAs, identifying areas of commonality and difference across sites. This research will therefore be relevant for researchers investigating the lives of LGBTQ and allied youth, and the roles of extra-curricular clubs in schooling.

3.8 Challenges of the Research Process

While the process of observational data collection was intellectually and emotionally invigorating, and yielded rich, thick data, there were nonetheless several challenges related to even-ness, or uniformity of participation, as well as scheduling logistics. I was distressed by how, because of the ongoing snowballing recruitment, my involvement across the six schools was fairly lopsided. I began working with some schools as much as six weeks before working with others, for instance, I observed ten GSA meetings and two events at Aspen, versus just two meetings and no events at Dogwood. How, I wondered, could I possibly make useful comparisons between these two GSAs when I had such little data from one school, and so much from the other? Similarly, rather than scheduling individual interviews, one club preferred to do a two-part focus group with all 14 members participating together. I also had former members of the now-defunct GSA who wanted to participate, and was troubled by how I could meaningfully include them, as I would not be able to conduct observations like I did at other schools.

I was further frustrated by the overlap in collection, and how it defied tidy classification in neat columns. For instance, given how one event (a VSB sponsored conference in collaboration with a national NGO) was attended by multiple GSAs, how

would I accurately account for this in a table? Similarly, some participants completed one pre interview activity, where others declined, and still others created more than one.

While still troubled by the lack of uniformity, I learned to lean in to this discomfort as data collection unfolded. I reminded myself of Halberstam's (1998) claim in *Female Masculinity*, that queer theory can be operationalized as part of a scavenger methodology, in that it uses different methods to create knowledge that have been deliberately or accidentally excluded by traditional research. Embracing this 'scavenging' nature, I tried to make peace with the fact that, due to the lived realities of differences among schools, no research with GSAs would ever be entirely uniform. Instead, I had to open myself, and the study to the variance between clubs, and settle into data collection procedure that worked based for each school, and the individuals involved with each club. Whereas some clubs were quite open and enthusiastic open my being there, and were quite active within the school, others met only semi-regularly (such as bi-weekly, or monthly), and were more apathetic to my presence and my work. I therefore embraced my more scavenger approach by accepting whatever engagement each club was willing to offer, rather than insisting on uniformity across sites.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the methodological procedures and study design of this research. It has outlined the data collection and data analysis strategies, and situated the researcher within the study. It has also addressed the validity, trustworthiness, credibility, and methodological challenges of this research.

CHAPTER 4: Interpretive Policy Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by introducing and describing the three policies analyzed as part of the interpretive policy analysis, which was conducted prior to data collection with participants. I interpret whom or what was defined as the problem in each of the policies, and what contextual factors may have influenced policy-makers in defining the problem as they did. I then interpret why GSAs were proposed as a partial solution the problems I interpreted in the documents.

4.2 Policies

I found three policies relevant to Vancouver GSAs from three different educational jurisdictions:

1. British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) (2010/2011). *Motions passed by the BCTF to support LGBTQ students and staff* (see Appendix H).
2. British Columbia Ministry of Education (2008). *Social Justice 12: Challenging homophobia in schools- Second edition. Unit 6*
3. Vancouver School Board (2004). *Policy ACB: Sexual orientation and gender identity* (see Appendix I).

As the professional union for all public schoolteachers in British Columbia, the BCTF is a recognized leader in progressive education policy-making, particularly with regards to LGBTQ issues (Smith, 2004, 2005). Attracting significant public attention in the year 2000, the BCTF was the first Canadian teacher's union to pass affirmative policy

requiring members to support GSA formation in publicly funded middle and high schools (Herriot, 2011). Collated under the heading “Motions passed by the BCTF to support LGBTQ Students and Staff” on the BCTF’s website, there are ten policies listed under the subheading “Social Justice Policies,” and an additional six under “Social Justice Procedures” (BCTF, 2010/2011). All 16 of these policies were ratified between the years 2000 and 2010, and while all were analyzed for this chapter, the following were most relevant to GSAs:

- 41.C.03—(a) That the BCTF actively support the establishment of Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) support groups in middle and high schools throughout BC;
- (b) That the BCTF actively encourage local leaders to facilitate the establishment of Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) student support groups in middle and high schools in their locals. (00 AGM, p. 18) (BCTF, 2010/2011).

Other relevant policies from this list included the BCTF’s opposition to reparative therapies and that the BCTF condemns homophobic acts. The list of the sixteen BCTF policies is included in Appendix H. For the sake of readability, these policies are referred to as the BCTF policies throughout this analysis.

While the British Columbia Ministry of Education has not adopted policies relating to GSAs or LGBTQ youth specifically, it is responsible for curriculum development and implementation. In reviewing curriculum documents for grades 8-12 (which were the grade levels of my youth participants), I found just one unit that mentioned GSAs, located in the sixth and final unit of an optional grade 12 course called *Social Justice 12*. This unit was the direct result of a human rights complaint launched in 1997, and no similar units had been added at the time of data collection in 2014. Based

on GALE's (now Pride in Education's) *Challenging homophobia in schools- Second edition*, the unit includes a review of Canadian legal cases pertaining to LGBTQ rights, activities around privilege, and opportunities for discussions of homophobia within schools. The nine-page curriculum unit also includes a myths and facts sheet retrieved from the BCTF, which indicated some semblance of collaboration between the teachers union and the ministry of education on this issue. The Social Justice curriculum was launched in 2008, and continues to be offered as an optional course in many British Columbia schools.

While the unit in its entirety was analyzed for this interpretive analysis, GSAs were mentioned only once in the curriculum, under the fact sheet provided by the BCTF:

Myth 4: Gay-Straight Alliance Clubs (GSAs) in high schools are a way to recruit students and encourage them to experiment with being gay or lesbian. Fact 4:

No one suddenly chooses to become LGBT simply because they heard about the topic in school, from friends, or via their social circles. There is no known “cause” for a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity—whether that person identifies as homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, or transgender. Sexual orientation and gender identity are complex traits, and have been understood differently by different cultures and at different times in history. GSAs help all students to come together in a safe space to talk about issues that are important to them. GSAs help all students to learn from one another and make their school safe and more welcoming for students, staff, and families. Anyone can be the object of hateful slurs, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 7)

Other relevant components of the curriculum focus on “legal advances in LGBT rights in Canada and BC” (p. 8), the career possibilities for LGBT individuals, stereotyping, discrimination, and empathy. I refer to this curriculum as *Social Justice Unit 6* throughout the dissertation

Finally, the Vancouver School Board was following its 2004 *Policy ACB: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity* (hereafter referred to as Policy ACB) during the tenure of the data collection. Adopted with little fanfare nearly a decade ago, the purpose of the original policy was

to [establish] and [maintain] a safe and positive learning environment for all students and employees including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, or who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity. (Vancouver School Board, 2004, p. 2)

It includes one mention of GSAs, in the following passage under the heading “Counselling and Student Support”:

Schools are encouraged in their goal planning to advocate for students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and those who are questioning their gender identity. Where students request and where staff are willing to volunteer their time, Gay/Straight Alliance clubs (GSAs) will be encouraged at secondary schools in the district. (p. 2)

Policy ACB also stated that the Board would provide training on these issues to all staff members, without specifying the methods or timeline for implementing this professional development (Mahovlich, 2013, personal communication). While the VSB does employ a part-time Anti-homophobia and Diversity Mentor, and released a press release in 2012

that this employee had conducted “hundreds of Lunch and Learn school-based workshops...” Galina (2011) asserted that

[t]o date, the VSB has failed to come up with a way to measure the policy’s effectiveness in achieving that goal. Moreover...the majority of the 5,100 teachers and staff in the Vancouver school district haven’t even been trained on how to implement the policy.

Without sustained empirical evidence, the efficacy and influence of the original *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity* policy is therefore quite difficult to measure or otherwise evaluate.

Amidst significant public controversy, the Vancouver School Board (VSB) passed revisions to Policy ACB during the data collection in the spring of 2014. The 2014 revisions to Policy ACB ensured that students would have the right to have their self-identified gender(s) affirmed within their school. In what became a contentious public issue attracting significant provincial and national media attention (CBC News, 2014a; Wente, 2014), the policy further stated that “trans* students shall have access to the washroom and change room that corresponds to their gender identity” (Vancouver School Board, 2014, p. 6). While the amendments were eventually adopted on 16 June, 2014, the revised policy was not implemented during the school year, and as of this writing is being challenged by parents as a violation of both parental rights and the School Act at the B.C. Supreme Court (CBC News, 2014b). The interpretive policy was also conducted in the winter of 2014, before data collection with participants, and the revisions were not ratified until 16 June, 2014. While the issues of the policy revision and ensuing public debate are timely and relevant, and included when the participants spoke of their

experiences with this process, the revised policy itself was beyond the scope of the current study. For this analysis, I have therefore only used the original 2004 policy, as it was this version that governed the participating GSAs. I refer to it as Policy ACB (2004) throughout this dissertation, and label the revised policy, when it is spoken of by participants as either the revised policy, or Policy ACB (2014). The 2004 policy is listed in full in Appendix I, while the revised 2014 version is listed in Appendix J.

4.3 Interpretive Policy Analysis

4.3.1 Defining the policy problem.

Interpreting the policies outlined in the previous section first required identifying who, or what, is the “problem” that these policies aim to address? My own analysis revealed a pattern similar to Airton’s (2013) finding “... that in education the nebulous (queerness) tends to become concrete (homophobia) and therefore actionable (fight homophobia)” (p. 543). Queerness in this sense is quickly laminated to a queer subject, generally an openly or suspected LGBTQ youth, who can then be rescued through targeted anti-homophobia policies. Other possibilities of queerness, such as its being a natural feature of biological and cultural diversity, or a positive part of spirituality, are not named or considered when defining who and what is the policy problem.

Openly and suspected LGBTQ youth certainly face very real emotional, academic, mental, physical, and sexual violence at school, and this violence merits care and attention (see chapter two for a comprehensive analysis). This analysis was conducted with these realities mindfully at the forefront; as of this writing, another story of a youth suicide due to transphobic bullying at school is making international headlines (CBC News, 2015b). Rather than diminishing the unacceptably violent status quo, my

noting the linear path of queerness-> unsafe gay child -> anti-homophobia policies draws attention to the specific formation of the policy problem, which in turn shapes and limits policy solution options. By drawing explicit attention precisely what or whom is the problem, it is hoped that the policy path will become clearer.

Within the BCTF policies that refer specifically to GSAs, the wording is such that members are to “actively support the establishment of GSA support groups in middle and high schools throughout BC” (41.C.03). The second use of the word ‘support,’ as a descriptor for what GSAs are, can, or should be, provides some indication of who or what the problem was. Identified as a ‘support group,’ it can be reasonably inferred that potential GSA members are in need of support, and possibly able to provide support as well. The ‘problem’ here is students, presumably LGBTQ-identifying youth, who are experiencing a deficit of supports at school. LGBTQ youth can also be construed as part of the solution as well, as members within support groups typically give support, in addition to receiving it themselves. Furthermore, the problem is specific to middle and secondary schools; that is, not in early childhood centres or in elementary schools. What or whom they need support *from* is curiously unnamed, and is taken up later in this chapter.

Social Justice Unit 6 construes the problem a bit differently. As a unit of a course open to any grade 12 student (where it is offered), it is unlikely that the problem was limited to LGBTQ youth exclusively, as it is probable that plenty of straight students would be taking the course as well. Rather, the primary theme of *Social Justice Unit 6* pertains to some of the multiple systemic and socially created barriers and discriminations faced by LGBTQ people. With regards to public schools in particular,

LGBTQ people's lack of safety is of particular focus. The following are the prompts in a suggested assignment, wherein students are asked to consider any of the following questions in evaluating their own school climates:

- . Is there discrimination against LGBT people in our school?
- . Do LGBT people feel safe in our school?
- . Are there safe places in our school?
- . Is there an anti-harassment policy in our school or district?
- . What evidence is there that all people, including individuals who are LGBT, are welcomed in our school?
- . What activities in our school reflect inclusiveness? (p. 6)

There is no mention of how GSAs might increase safety in this list. The heavy emphasis on safety, anti-homophobia, and anti-discrimination throughout *Social Justice Unit 6* indicated that the problem was lack of safety and respect for real or suspected LGBTQ people. In this way, it is similar to the BCTF policies, wherein LGBTQ students are identified as in need of extra support.

Similar to the BCTF policies (which pertain to middle and secondary schools), and *Social Justice Unit 6* (which is only open to grade 12 students), Policy ACB (2004) also located the problem in the older years; GSAs are to be “encouraged at secondary schools” (p. 2). While they are not identified as “support groups” as they are in the BCTF policies, GSAs are only mentioned under the “Counselling and Student Support” section of Policy ACB, meaning that they are likely construed as primarily or exclusively providing psycho-social-emotional support to LGBTQ youth. Beyond support, however,

“schools are encouraged in their goal planning to advocate for students [who are LGBTQ]...” (p. 2).

In sum, where the policies from the BCTF, *Social Justice Unit 6*, and Policy ACB mention GSAs explicitly, they do so by suggesting that the problem is a lack of school-based supports for LGBTQ students at the middle or secondary level. By identifying the problem as a lack of support for these students, rather than what they need support from, or whom or what is causing their heightened need for support, the problem lends itself to positioning the GSA as a solution (this is analyzed in greater detail throughout section 5.3 in chapter five). While there are explicit calls for increasing positive representations of LGBTQ people and families throughout each of the policy documents, indicating a secondary and related problem, this is not tied directly to GSAs. The problem across all three documents is consistently a lack of support for LGBTQ students, not the individual and systemic incidents of gender-based violence that cause LGBTQ students to need greater supports within schools. Both perpetrators and institutional failures escape being named as the problem, and function as absent referents throughout the policies, which in turn replace them with vulnerable LGBTQ youth as the problem.

4.3.2 Contextual influences on policy problem identification and definition.

This section interrogates the relevant contextual influences that informed how the linear policy ‘problem’ of unsafe LGBTQ youth was defined. Essentially, how did the problem come to be named in this way? Historical norms and legal precedents are integral to this section of the analysis, wherein I examine how pervasive and entrenched patriarchal norms were the dominant social regularity constraining whom and what could be named as the problem. In what follows, I argue that that due to an invisible adherence

to male supremacy, rooted in and policed through what is often a violent combination of misogyny and homophobia (Kimmel, 1996; 2013; Stoltenberg, 1993), policymakers were unable to name hegemonic masculinity as the problem. Consistent with the victim-blaming inherent in patriarchal violence (Gavey, 2005) the ‘problem’ was shifted away from perpetrators of violence, and reconstituted in the bodies of openly or suspected LGBTQ youth as problems to be solved.

The three policies analyzed for this analysis were all developed in the early to mid-2000’s. Considering British Columbia’s educational policy landscape regarding LGBTQ issues in the early 2000s, the BCTF and VSB policies were in fact quite radical because they explicitly named homophobia, albeit not whom or what was causing said homophobia. For instance, in a much-publicized report⁷ that served as a direct response to *Chamberlain v. Surrey School Board* (2002) case, the BC Ministry of Education published a generic anti-bullying report that steadfastly avoided naming homophobia, sexism, or misogyny in their recommendations, much less as contributing factors to school-based bullying and violence (Walton, 2010). In his analysis of safe schools policies in British Columbia, Walton (2010) noted that

none of the recommendations that stem from the main report acknowledge, much less attempt to deal with, social difference in any form. Such exclusion is especially glaring given the title of the Task Force report, which is, *Facing our fears, accepting responsibility*. (p. 139)

Subsuming homophobia and gender violence under more generic anti-bullying statements is a typical governmental response to sexist violence (MacIntosh, 2007; Walton, 2004).

⁷ This report was excluded from the policy analysis because it does not mention GSAs.

The Ministry's refusal to even name, much less outline specific steps to address homophobia, sexism, and misogyny in a report specifically commissioned to investigate violence in schools indicates just how politically unpalatable even mentioning these issues by name was.

Combined with an unwillingness to name hegemonic masculinity, with its normalized and violent gender policing as the problem, it is further understandable that the BCTF and VSB positioned LGBTQ student *safety* as the policy problem. These education policies were adopted on the heels of an AIDS epidemic that devastated Vancouver's gay and bisexual men's communities, wherein many of the successes of AIDS awareness groups came from making the harms of homophobia and HIV-stigma on the bodies of actual people visible to the general public (AIDS Activist History Project, 2015). Through public protest, AIDS activists demonstrated the gruesome human toll of the disease by publicizing body counts on legislature lawns using coffins, or drawing chalk outlines of bodies to demonstrate lives lost due to inadequate government action in combating the disease (Positive Living BC, 2006). The BCTF policies, which at that time were on the very fringe of progressive acceptability, can be seen as a natural extension of these hard-won lessons gained from nearly two decades of AIDS activism in the gay community; namely, emphasizing the real physical harms of homophobic violence. Wanting to support real LGBTQ youth in secondary schools was possibly seen as a more realistically achievable goal than would be naming perpetrators, or the normalization of patriarchal violence that required such youth to need school based support.

The connections between *Social Justice Unit 6* and gay rights activism are evident in the following recommended instructional activity:

Students should be aware of several legislators and activists who have encouraged or initiated changes in laws and policies. These include activists at a local level, in their school district or community, if possible. Speakers, case studies, and research would be appropriate methods to accomplish this. Have students choose a topic for research such as

- . advances in LGBT rights in BC and Canada
- . role models in the struggle for LGBT social justice (Social Justice 12, 2008, p. 68)

Given how *Social Justice Unit 6* was developed in response to a formal complaint by two gay rights activists, it is understandable that the curriculum would take the same activist approach of focusing on how safety can be secured for real LGBTQ people, and how protections can be secured through the political process, without naming the explicit causes of homophobic violence.

The timing of the Vancouver School Board (2004) policy merits careful attention, as it was adopted just two years after the British Columbia Court of Appeal ruled in *Jubran v. Board of Trustees (2002)* that heterosexually-identified students could experience homophobic discrimination at school, and that provincial school boards had a duty to protect such students from harm. This likely contributed to the wording in the Anti-Harassment subsection, "...hatred, prejudice, discrimination, harassment towards students or employees on the basis of their real or *perceived* sexual orientation or gender identification will not be tolerated" (p. 2). Similarly, *Social Justice 12* (2008) notes, "anyone can be the object of hateful slurs, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity" (p. 70). Following the Jubran precedent, the focus is on the primarily

physical violence inflicted upon suspected LGBTQ students, rather than who was inflicting said violence, or why they chose to do so. The named problem was a lack of safety for openly or suspected LGBTQ youth, not why they are victimized in the first place.

4.3.3. GSAs as a policy solution.

4.3.3.1 GSAs as promoting student safety

Constrained from naming hegemonic masculinity as the problem, and limited to protecting the real bodies of openly or suspected LGBTQ students, it is not surprising that policy solutions centred almost exclusively on how to keep LGBTQ youth's bodies safe at school. Within the educational policies included in this study, this translated in to BCTF and VSB policies that specifically forbade physical violence and assault, and promoted strategies (including GSAs) that were thought to increase the physical safety of actual openly LGBTQ youth in schools.

It is no surprise then, that policies endorsing GSAs specifically emphasize their function as *support* groups for actual LGBTQ youth. For example; “the BCTF actively support the establishment of Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) support groups” (BCTF, 2010/2011, p. 1), and “Where students request and where staff are willing to volunteer their time, Gay/Straight Alliance clubs (GSAs) will be encouraged at secondary schools in the district” (Vancouver School Board, 2004, p. 2). Because of the political unwillingness to explicitly name homophobia and misogyny as the policy problems, and also building on the more effective strategies of AIDS activists in the 1980s and 1990s, I content that the policy solutions were narrowly defined to focus almost exclusively on protecting the physical and emotional safety of actual LGBTQ youth.

With the advent of *Social Justice Unit 6* in 2008, however, the policy landscape had shifted significantly. Marriage equality had been legalized throughout Canada, and most provincial human rights codes had explicit protection for sexual orientation, with a few including explicit protections based on gender identity (Rayside, 2008; 2014). The problem now was not just that actual LGBTQ bodies were in need of protection (although this was, and continues to be the primary named policy problem regarding LGBTQ youth in schools), but also the explicit curricular inclusion of a disenfranchised Canadian minority. Referring back to Airton (2013), the policy problem was no longer exclusively protecting queer bodies, although that was still the primary concern, but about the lack of space for queerness itself. With Chief Justice Beverly McLaughlin's comment in the *Chamberlain* (2002) case that "tolerance is always age-appropriate" (*Chamberlain v. Surrey School District N. 36*, 2002, para. 69), curricular inclusion of LGBTQ topics had been endorsed by the nation's highest court. *Social Justice Unit 6* was clearly designed to remedy the deliberate exclusion of LGBTQ topics that was at the heart of *Chamberlain*.

As evidenced by several studies investigating LGBTQ youths' sense of safety at school (Taylor & Peter, 2011), the policy problem for the curriculum developers was still greatly influenced by what was, and still is the dominant conception of the policy problem, namely the protection of openly or suspected LGBTQ students. Emphasizing safety as the primary policy solution is evident in the wording of the policies. *Social Justice Unit 6* states, "GSAs help *all* students to come together in a safe space to talk about issues that are important to them. GSAs help *all* students to learn from one another and make their school safe and more welcoming for students, staff, and families" (p. 70, emphasis added). Beyond its focus on safety, using "all students" twice in this section

acknowledges that straight students can, will, or should be part of GSAs. Earlier in *Social Justice Unit 6*, parallels are drawn between anti-racism and LGBTQ allyship, with “you do not have to be a person of colour to care about racism. Similarly, you do not have to be LGBT to fight homophobia in schools or society at large” (p. 70). These small acknowledgements of straight allies are juxtaposed with the overall narrative of protection for LGBTQ youth exclusively within the three policy documents. While the problem remains a lack of support for LGBTQ students, potentially straight students are identified as being possible solutions in that they can help fight the homophobia that experienced by their queer peers.

The straight allyship presented in *Social Justice Unit 6* is a fixed, rather than fluid category, and care was taken to not promote, encourage, or condone queerness. The “myth” dispelled about GSAs in the document, which is the only mention of GSAs in the unit reads,

“Myth 4: Gay-Straight Alliance Clubs (GSAs) in high schools are a way to recruit students and encourage them to experiment with being gay or lesbian... No one suddenly chooses to become LGBT simply because they heard about the topic in school, from friends, or via their social circles.” (p. 70)

Emphasizing a lack of fluidity in sexual orientation privileges the dominant narrative of biological determinism. This implicitly limits policy solutions such as reparative therapy, itself a destructive practice banned by the BCTF in the same year they ratified their policy to openly support GSAs (see Appendix H). It does, however, reinforce the notion that being LGBT is not only discouraged, it is impossible to encourage due to biological determinism.

Similar to Walton (2010), I too “think of policy as narratives that tell a particular story” (p. 144). The narrative that GSAs are the solution to actual harm to actual LGBTQ youth is prominent in other policy contexts, such as coverage of Ontario’s *Safe and Accepting Schools Act* (2012), and Alberta’s recent debate about Bill 10 (CBC News, 2014d). With headlines such as “Alberta introduces bill to aid gay youth in schools, reduce suicide” (Globe & Mail, 2014), the story of GSAs equalling safety for LGBTQ students is taught and re-taught through these public conversations.

4.3.3.2 GSAs as structural change

Although the structural causes of the policy *problem* (queer students’ safety at school) were unnamed in the policy documents analyzed, the policy solutions nevertheless pointed to at least some institutionalized changes. Supporting GSA formation, for instance, created at least one school-sanctioned queer positive space within the school, even if this was only for the one hour per week that GSAs typically meet. Whereas previously there may have been no openly queer affirming spaces within a given school, housing of the GSA on campus provides a physical cue to members and non-members alike that there was at least some space for queerness some of the time. This cue would likely extend to bulletin boards where GSA materials could be advertised, or to the public announcement system where GSA meetings could be included in the morning announcements. While GSA materials often focus on anti-homophobia and student safety (see chapter five for examples), their physically occupying space in the building indicates structural accommodation for queerness in schools. In light of the long history of a rigid gender binary, often enforced through physical segregation in Canadian

schools (see chapter two), I interpret creating physical space for GSAs as a significant structural change.

4.4 Conclusion

As reviewed in chapter two, analyzing the narrow framing of GSAs as a harm-reduction strategy is not a criticism of the actual harm they prevent, or their function as healing spaces for youth. I support the work of GSAs in this regard, and recognize that they will continue to serve this purpose. Rather, this section aimed to contextually and concretely analyse how the policies reviewed exist in relation to LGBTQ youth, and GSAs, so as to better understand the workings of the six clubs I worked with in the spring of 2014.

The policies reviewed in this analysis indicated some public urgency in protecting the lives and bodies of openly or suspected LGBTQ youth at school, but lack a concomitant strategy to address the root causes of the violence that they are subjected to. I understand the policies analyzed here as part of a broader policy landscape that encourages safety for identifiable victims of masculine violence without naming or addressing the social norms that encourage and perpetuate masculine violence itself. In this sense, the policies reviewed here have much in common with the anti-rape campaigns that encourage women to “stay safe” and avoid being raped, while remaining silent on how men can avoid raping, and/or how bystanders can intervene.

Without my specifically drawing attention to it, the youth themselves took up, supported, interrogated, and broadened these discourses around GSAs and safety during data collection in the spring of 2014. Their insights on the narrow policy landscape within which LGBTQ youth and GSAs are situated are further discussed in chapter five.

Completing the policy analysis prior to in-person data collection in schools allowed me to be mindful of how participants operationalized these policy narratives. Particular attention was paid to how discourses of “safety” were taken up, and I frequently probed the participants to fully explicate what exactly they meant by “safety” when they spoke of it in their interviews and in the focus groups. Asking how participants came to understand safety allowed for a more robust comparison between the participants’ narratives and those from the interpretive policy analysis.

4.5 Summary

This chapter analyzed three policies relevant to GSAs using an interpretive approach. It determined that the safety of real or suspected LGBTQ youth was the primary contributing factor to identifying both the policy problem and GSAs as the solution. These policies avoided specific reference to who or what might be causing LGBTQ students to feel unsafe at school. Queerness and straightness are construed as biologically determined, and therefore fixed, immutable categories of identity. The interpretive policy analysis conducted in this chapter provided the necessary policy landscape through which the participant data in the following chapter can be best contextualized.

CHAPTER 5: Roles, Purposes, and Functions of GSAs

5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzes findings from the fieldwork to address the research question “what are the purposes and functions of GSAs?” In order to provide some structure to these findings, I have organized the chapters in accordance with the categories listed in figure 5.1 (National Association of GSA Networks, 2011, p. 4); that is, social, support, and activism.

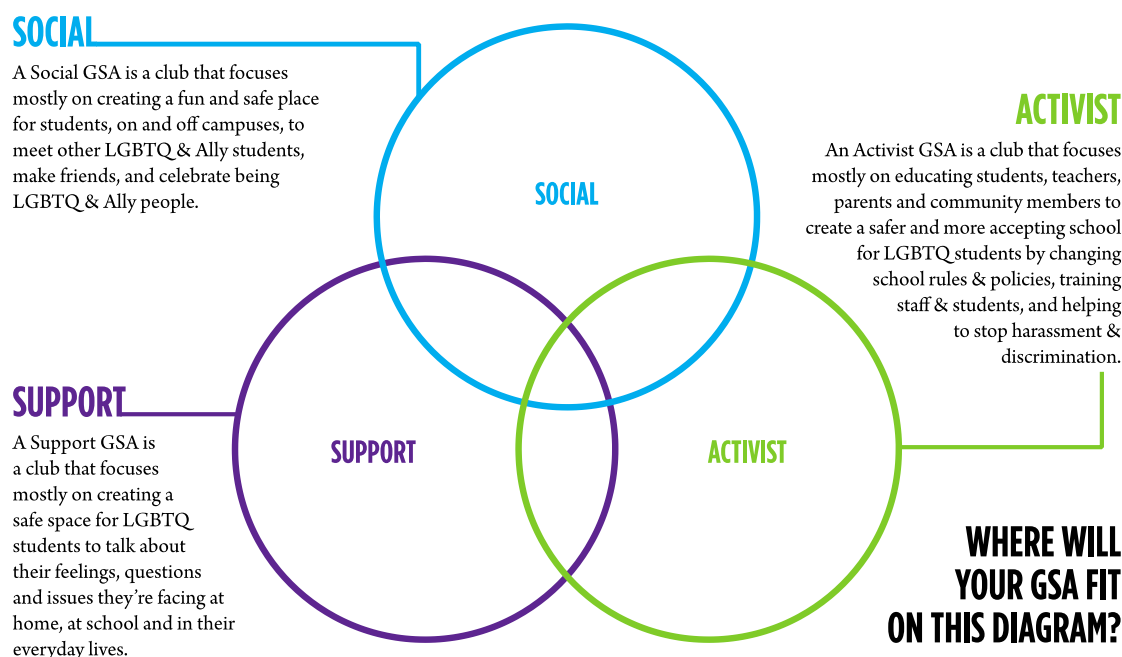


Figure 5.1. Where will your GSA fit on this diagram? (National Association of GSA Networks, 2011, p. 4).

During the interviews, I often employed figure 5.1 as visual prompt by asking youth to mark where their own GSA would fit in. I was careful to describe this diagram as a beginning; that is, there could, and likely would, be purposes of the GSA that did not fit neatly into these categories. The concluding section of this chapter presents the

collated data from where youth participants from across sites marked their GSA on this map.

5.2 GSAs as Social Spaces

As extra-curricular clubs in secondary schools, it is unsurprising that GSAs have a social function. I was first interested in how GSAs attracted or repelled potential members based on its social standing within the school, and the social capital of existing members. Once members joined, there were significant findings on why they valued or dismissed the social aspects of their GSA. In congruence with the hermeneutic focus on part-whole relationships, I also investigated how GSAs could facilitate members' feelings of connection or belonging with the wider school community.

5.2.1 Popularity, social capital, and GSA membership

The potential for a robust social circle frequently enticed youth to join the GSA in the first place; most youth reported initial involvement with the GSA because a friend had invited them to a meeting. Anecdotes such as “Cory invited me one time, when I was in grade eight, and I just started going because he was going” (Andy, grade 10, gender non-conforming, gender questioning, pansexual) were common. While youth reported making and maintaining new friendships in the club, it was seldom that a youth came to their first meeting on their own. At Aspen, there was an unwritten rule that student council members attended the first few meetings of various clubs, including the GSA. As one youth, who did not want to be identified by a pseudonym, or have their grade revealed, explained in an interview, this sometimes led to permanent membership:

It was kind of mandatory of us [as members of the student council] to support Pride club and advertise it for students to come. But as I came to more and more

meetings... I realized the very insightful discussions that were held there, and all the things that you learn. And I eventually fell in love with the club because I believe in equality, and I felt that [the GSA] kind of gave a very strong identity.

Like a strong sense of that to everybody.

This unwritten rule seemed to give youth with relatively high social capital (which was evidenced by their being an elected council member) a socially acceptable reason, or ‘cover’ for membership in comparatively lower status clubs, such as the GSA. This infusion of elected council members seemed to raise the status of the GSA as a whole. The GSAs at Aspen and Evergreen, both of which were filled with members who were simultaneously on the student council, tended to enjoy a measure of popularity within the school. Their school-wide events, such as the Pink Day fashion show at Aspen, or the Day of Purple rainbow cupcake lunch at Evergreen were well publicized, and well attended by the student body. Figure 5.2 is part of the permanent display in Evergreen’s foyer, while Figures 5.3 and 5.4 were photos taken just before Evergreen’s Day of Purple lunch:



Figure 5.2. Permanent display at Evergreen Secondary.



Figure 5.3. Day of Purple cupcakes at Evergreen Secondary.



Figure 5.4. Woven streamers for the Day of Purple at Evergreen Secondary.

I was struck by both the very public positioning of these displays, as well as the amount of student labour that created them. Each of the rainbow flags on the cupcakes in figure 5.3 was handcrafted, and spread among ten such trays, which sold out in about fifteen minutes. Similarly, a tremendous amount of student planning and labour went in to the rainbow streamers artfully hung in the front hall (figure 5.4). Both the permanent display in figure 5.2 and the Day of Purple event took place in the school foyer, which is the main entrance to the school and one of its most public and spatially important areas. There were also impeccably maintained posters and Evergreen Secondary's True Colours⁸-sponsored notices hung throughout the school. All this communicated to me, as an observer, that the True Colours club was held in relatively high esteem by staff and

⁸ True Colours was the student-selected name of the GSA at Evergreen Secondary

students alike. As suggested in chapter four, these displays represent institutional support for queerness to literally take up space in schools.

Other schools had a far less public, or well maintained GSA presence in the hallways. In contrast to True Colours at Evergreen, the signs for Birch's QSA were in less central corridors, and were often ripped or less cared for (figures 5.5, 5.6, & 5.7). The location, number of, and maintenance of GSA posters across clubs gave me some sense of where the GSA might fit within the school's social hierarchy. When asked where their QSA fit within the school's popularity scale, Birch students Charlie (grade 12, gender non-conformist, female presenting, lesbian) and Cory (grade 11, trans FtM, gender fluid, non-conforming queer, pansexual) both laughed and said "jeez, near the bottom."

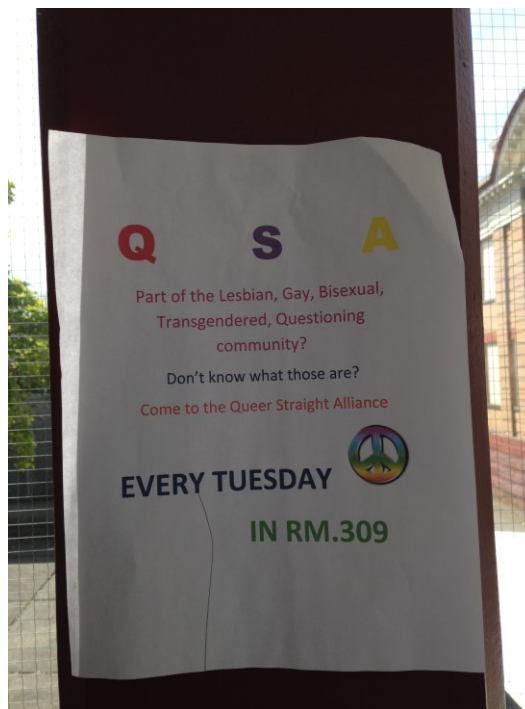


Figure 5.5. QSA advertisement at Birch Secondary. Although the club had met on Wednesdays for a number of weeks, the sign still said that meetings were on Tuesdays.



Figure 5.6. Ripped Pride sticker in a hallway at Birch Secondary.

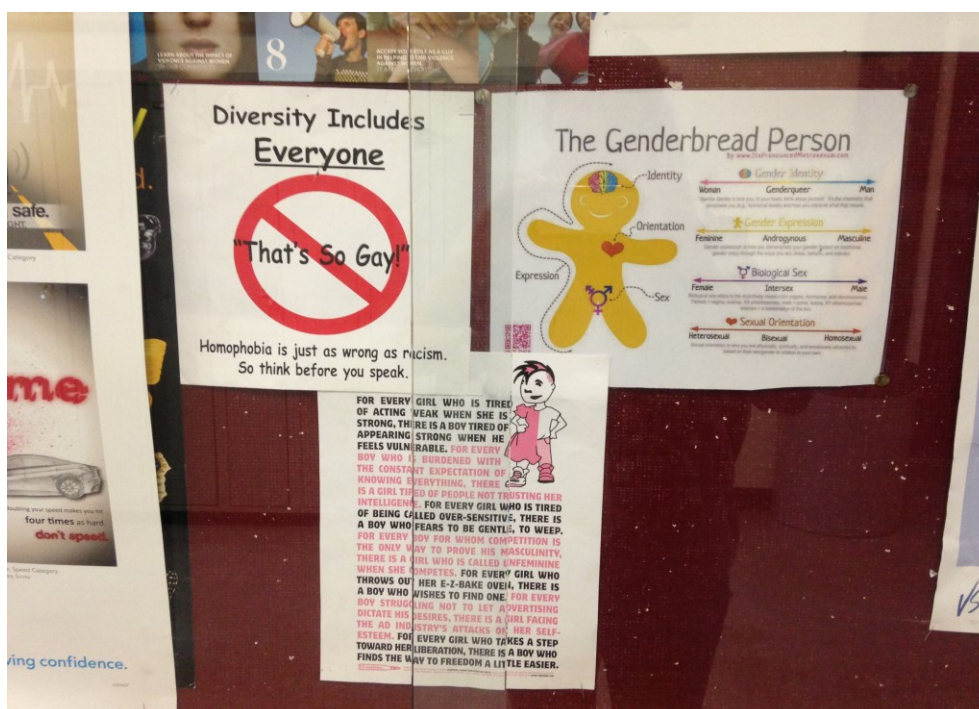


Figure 5.7. LGBTQ themed posters in a hallway at Birch Secondary.

The images of GSA materials from Birch Secondary, combined with comparatively fewer members, none of whom were elected student council members like at Aspen and Evergreen, remarks made in interviews, and my own observations supported Charlie and Cory's assessment that their GSA was less socially privileged than the club at Evergreen.

Jean, the advisor for three different schools (Dogwood, Evergreen, and Fir) commented on how the social capital of members influenced the club's social palatability. He remarked how Evergreen, filled as it was with student council members, had a thriving membership, while Dogwood, with lower socially ranked members, was more "on the fringes." Aislinn, a former advisor to the defunct club at Fir, described how membership ebbed and flowed over the years, according to the social capital and status of members.

These findings highlighted a frustrating paradox. On the one hand, GSAs are often touted, by participants in this study and in others, as being safe spaces of belonging for youth, especially LGBTQ and allied youth, who often have nowhere else to be. Yet GSAs' flourishing seems to hinge significantly on the membership, and especially the leadership, having a critical mass of already-socially successful youth. Aislinn spoke of how the now-defunct GSA flourished under more socially capable leaders, who had since graduated. She described the current dynamic at Fir Secondary:

I find Sara a little bit annoying, a little bit difficult to deal with, right? She's a- I mean, she's obviously really bright, but just a challenging kid to work with, and I know that's not super kind, but again, I'm just trying to be really honest here. So I wonder if that's why it hasn't been as successful. And then you know, you worry that if I find her irritating, like my God, am I putting out those vibes? And then well

there's obvious reasons why kids can, why they develop behaviours if they're marginalized, and all that sort of stuff, so. Umm, I think that's part of it. I think that's a big part of it, to be honest.

Aislinn is describing a double bind, wherein LGBTQ youth like Sara are socially unsuccessful, at least in part, due to their ongoing marginalization as queer youth. When there are fewer higher status youth in the GSA, a downward vicious cycle was observed by advisors Aislinn, Tamara, Heidi, and Jean (from Cedar, Dogwood, Evergreen, and Fir), wherein the lack of higher status youth repels other higher status youth from joining, until there are no members left. The club then collapses, as the lower status youth cannot maintain it on their own. Advisor Jean explained how GSA membership at Fir skyrocketed after a star basketball player joined, only to fizzle out when he graduated:

Five years ago, one of the star players of the basketball team here at Fir, a Filipino boy... he came out to the whole school in his grade 12 year. He worked a lot with the GSA [after coming out]. And by him coming out to the whole school, and being on the basketball team, like one of the star players... It was great, we had a lot of kids come that year. That was four or five years ago, and we had a lot of kids coming. And it was a lot because this, this young man would say to kids, and he was respected by his peers, 'Come. Come to the QSA.'

Multiple former advisors at Fir told the same narrative of how this fairly popular basketball star's presence animated the GSA, only to have it collapse upon their graduation. Through conversations with the teacher advisers from Fir's now-defunct GSA, as well as at Cedar's very small, fledgling GSA, this seems to have been the dynamic at both schools. It seems that GSAs, which are a potential remedy for queer

youth's poor social skills may not thrive when comprised solely of socially low-status youth; there needs to be at least a few socially more capable youth in leadership positions.

When there was a critical mass of relatively socially successful youth in the GSA, there were major social gains for less socially sophisticated members. Some youth such as Kai (grade 8, panromantic, asexual, gender fluid) talked about how crucial the GSA was in fostering social success at school: "I just - I suppose I'm just in Pride Club to, I dunno, feel like supported and like (pause) try to make more friends, cause friends are a hard thing for me." Having an official club meeting to attend, complete with a teacher sponsor and scheduled meeting times created structure for youth like Kai, who sometimes struggled in more unregulated settings. At a different school, the QSA president explained how she tried to foster this type of structured social space: "It's a meeting place for people who are different. So it's a very welcoming place to be. It's sort of what my goal was for this year, to just make it a safe space, for people to come, to ask questions, if they are interested, to talk to, have friends, you know?" (Meghan, grade 11, cisgender woman, non-heterosexual). My observations across sites corroborated what Kai and Meghan told me; namely that the GSA drew members who were socially different from their peers. It seemed that a delicate balance among those with and without social capital had to be achieved in order for those without social capital to accrue benefits, but also for the club to survive at all.

5.2.2 Social relationships within the GSA.

Creating and maintaining friendships was essential for ongoing GSA attendance, with many of the youth reporting that the social bonds they formed and reinforced there

were among the best aspects of the club. Polina's (grade 8, female, heterosexual) remark that "most of my friends are at Pride Club" was typical of many participants. One way of cultivating friendships within the club was by creating space for fun, playfulness, and warmth through banter, snacks, inside jokes, and relaxed physical seating. When asked about the best parts of his GSA, Neyko (grade 12, mostly male, pansexual/Kinsey 4) replied "All the happy people! So many happy people in the QSA. And the pizza. It's just great. People show up to the QSA with a smile. It's a really friendly place. That's what I think is the best part." From a different school, Angelina (grade 8, questioning) agreed that "Pride Club is one of the fun clubs, it's just nice being there. I can relax." Christopher (grade 10, male, gay) says that the best parts of his GSA "... were the very casual and sometimes fluffy conversations we would have. We would talk about cookies." Roan (grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer) explained how having food at meetings brought members together socially, while also fulfilling potentially unmet physical needs:

Having food is really important. Kids are happy when they eat. And so like, if someone doesn't have lunch, then QSA isn't going to be as good. So I always bring a few extra granola bars on QSA day in case someone doesn't have lunch so I can be like, 'here, eat, be happy.'

Roan's comment indicated that QSAs could be caring spaces for youth, where basic needs such as having enough to eat are anticipated and responded to.

Being able to sometimes prioritize socializing among the club's other purposes was essential for GSA president Irene (grade 12, female, straight):

Our GSA is very friendly. It's very social, like before a lot of times before we start meetings, we ask people about weekends... it shows where our priorities lie, which is in our members. We want everyone to be like, having a good time. And be like 'come over, and have lunch, and we'll talk about GSA things.' Not like, 'come over, we're going to do GSA things, bring your lunch.'

Field notes from all of the five schools that still held GSA meetings revealed that, amongst conversations about specifically LGBTQ related topics, GSA members also talked about other topics such as schooling, pop culture, their families, and their lives. There was time and space to talk, relax, and enjoy each other's company. Remembering meetings from her now-defunct GSA, Kitty (grade 8, cis female, Kinsey 6/trans inclusive) recalled, "Sometimes we'd bring up like, GSA related topics. But it would be more like, 'yo how are you doing?' And like, we'd got to discuss what was going on in our life, and that was pretty cool..."

Given the precious little time that public schooling affords for socializing, GSAs seem to be filling an important need in this regard. The majority of the school day, particularly at the secondary level, is spent sitting quietly in classrooms. While students are in close physical proximity to their peers, they are remarkably socially isolated during long stretches of silent activities (Jackson, 1968/2008). Field notes from four participating schools reveal how there was comparatively freer movement in GSAs than in the typical arrangement of academic subject, where all students are required to sit forwards on a chair and facing a particular direction. By contrast, students within the GSA got up, changed positions, sat on tables, flipped their chairs backwards, and sprawled on the floor. They chose where to sit, and could (and frequently did) change

their seating arrangements on their own accord, without asking an adult's permission to do so. Roan (grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer) and I had the following conversation about seating in the GSA:

Lindsay: So your QSA meetings aren't like, sitting in rows listening to the teacher?

Roan: No, we usually sit on the desks, or in – it depends. Depends on where you're sitting. People in the back normally sit on the desks, and often times people who have more to say sit up on a desk. But it does depend.

Only Aspen's club had a required seating arrangement in rows. A participant represented this as part of a pre interview activity (PIA), where he chose to draw a good meeting and a bad meeting:

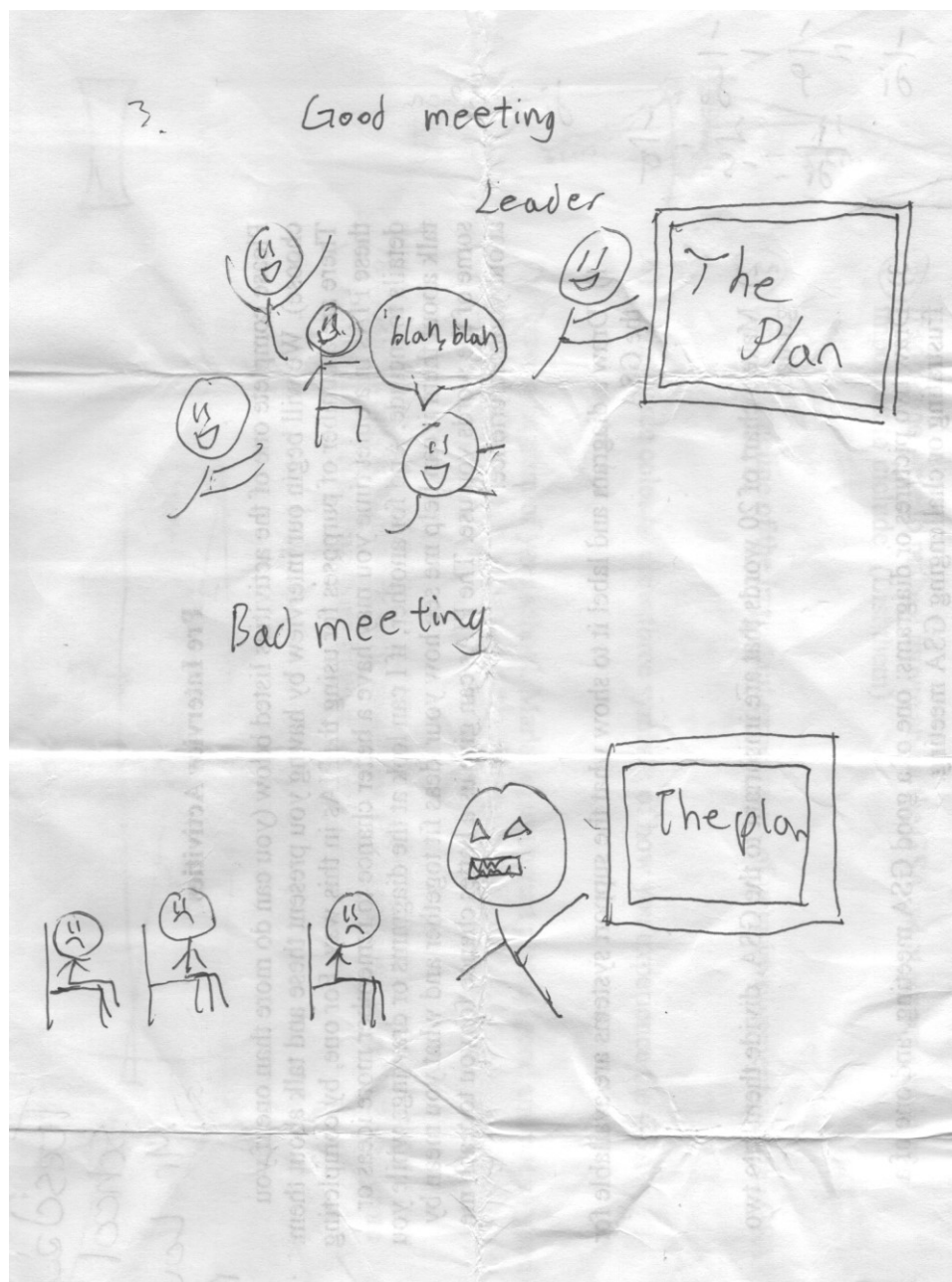


Figure 5.8 Participant drawing of a good GSA meeting and a bad GSA meeting.

The stiffness of the seating arrangements is evident in the drawing of a ‘bad meeting,’ where students appear static, passive, and constrained. Conversely, the ‘good meeting’ shows more movement, and diversity in positioning of students’ bodies. Jacky and I had the following conversation about his drawing:

Jacky: Here's the thing. I believe that in a good meeting, people should socialize. I think in a bad meeting, there's probably going to be one dictator, he's going to be like here's the plan, you guys must follow that plan. No exceptions. Right?

Lindsay: Yeah

Jacky: And everybody just stays quiet because of fear. In a good meeting, there's more socializing. There's conversations. There's different ideas being presented. So lots of different minds come together in a single plan. It might take a bit longer than the other one, but I feel in the end it's more fun, it's more meaningful, and it's more (pause) it's more relaxed. It's more human hearted, if you understand what I mean.

Jacky had joined Aspen's Pride Club on my first day of data collection. That first meeting and the one following it were facilitated by one teacher, after which another teacher took over the club. The differences in Jacky's drawings mirrored my observations of the how different the facilitation styles were between advisors. From a different school, Roan (grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer) echoed the importance of having diffused leadership by commenting on their PIA of a good meeting and a bad meeting:

I put a leader dominates discussion, or tries to help direct things as part of my bad meeting. So if you have a leader who's like, 'we're going to do this now. This, this, this. Here's what we're doing. That's not great and that's a lot of the reasons why QSAs that have too strong of a leadership don't always work.

Just as the personalities of the individual members had tremendous impact on a GSAs sustainability, so too did the leadership style. Jacky and Roan's comments pointed to a preference for more egalitarian than authoritarian leadership.

While the youth universally reported positive feelings about the GSAs' social aspects, many felt simultaneously guilty about it, and perceived the purposes of the club as a zero-sum equation. Advisors and students alike worried that social aspects of the GSA necessarily meant that they weren't doing "enough", by which they meant more events, more educational outreach, and producing a measurable decline in school-based homophobia. Social time, and all other GSA purposes and functions were understood as being in a binary, and often antagonistic relationship with one another. With some frustration, QSA president Meghan (grade 11, cisgender woman, non-heterosexual) explained, "they're content to just be there... really content to you know, sit around, and talk," as if sitting around and talking weren't legitimate functions in and of themselves. Cory (grade 11, trans FtM, gender fluid, nonconforming queer, pansexual) agreed, noting several times that, "I think that's why our GSA kind of sucks in a sense because we don't do anything."

The notion that being a space for socializing could be one of the club's important, legitimate, and valid purposes, was raised by just two participants, Kitty and Roan:

Kitty (grade 8, cis female, Kinsey 6/trans inclusive): I also wanted to mention, I think that there is maybe a bit of a need for social. For a social aspect of the LGBTQ community. Because I think that it would be pretty important for other people in this community to know that 'hey there are more people like me out there and I can go talk to them, and it's safe to talk to them,' and stuff.

Roan (grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer): It's really, really important to have fun at QSA meetings. If you don't do that then they just suck. Um, and you generally don't have fun when they're over-structured.

With the exception of Kitty and Roan, participants generally reported feeling guilty about their enjoyment of the social aspects of the GSA. One advisor seemed to be ashamed as she recalled “I was almost shy to meet with you about this, because compared to [another school in the study], they’re really political...” while another advisor, Tamara (female, straight), remarked in the hallway “we don’t really do anything...” Like their youth counterparts, adult participants readily discounted or diminished the social aspects of the club, often understanding them as hindering ‘real work.’ Feeling a sense of belonging, or enjoying a fun space at school were generally conceptualized as guilty pleasures; and while typically first among aspects of the GSA enjoyed by members it was an almost shameful characteristic when they talked about it specifically

I understand these conflicting and contradictory feelings about the social aspects of the club in light of the enduring trend of accountability-based educational reform, where exemplary performance on high stakes testing crowds out time for socializing, and increasingly, other subject areas such as the arts. With the dominance of neoliberalism in education, among other fields, there is mounting pressure to limit or eliminate any activity that is deemed inessential to ‘producing’ employable graduates (see Pashby, Ingram & Joshee, 2014; Schultz, 2007). While negotiating these normative influences, each club struggled with valuing the social aspect of the GSA, and ultimately had to decide for themselves where the balance should be. As Andy (grade 10, gender non-conforming, gender questioning, pansexual) explained, “because there's times where you need to be structured and there's times where you can be silly. Right?” Despite struggling to value it as legitimate, all participants indicated that there needed to be at least some time in the GSA for friendships, play, and fun.

5.2.3 GSAs fostering a social connection to the school.

Beyond friendships between individuals, GSAs were foundational to a collective identity that connected the individual to both the group and the school. This could most clearly be seen in my conversations with Charlie (grade 12, gender non-conforming, female presenting, lesbian) and Cory (grade 11, trans FtM, gender fluid, nonconforming queer, pansexual):

Lindsay: So what's the best part of your GSA?

Charlie: Sense of community

Cory: Yeah. It's a family. You know, we really are... I'm proud to be part of the QSA, at our school, and I'm proud to be from Birch. I've been going to Birch since grade 3, I am a Birch kid. This is my second home. And GSA has always been a huge part of that, I've been going every single year.

This sense of belonging, particularly for a trans-identified youth like Cory, and a gender non-conforming youth like Charlie, is fairly unusual. Not only are trans youth much more likely than their LGB or straight peers to find school, and particularly washrooms and change rooms unsafe (Taylor & Peter, 2011, p. 80-88), they unsurprisingly have far lower levels of school attachment (see figure 5.9).

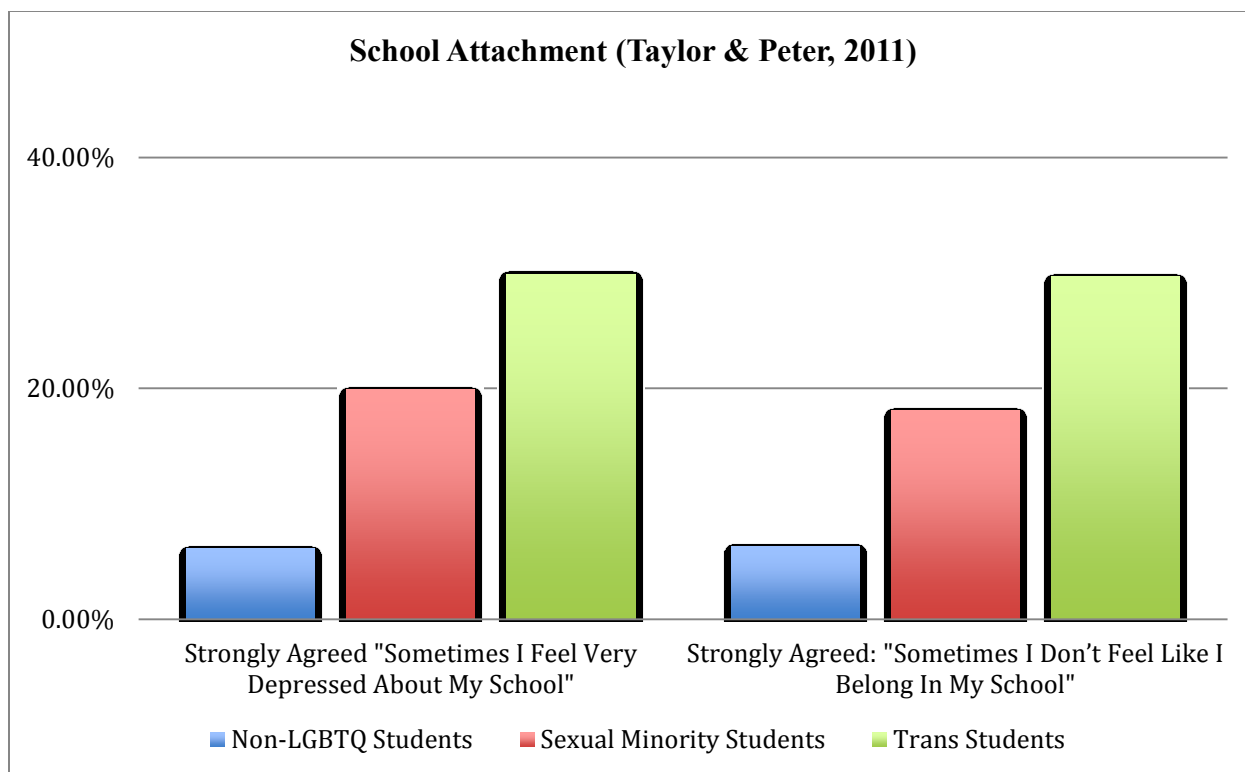


Figure 5.9 School attachment (Non-LGBTQ/Sexual minority/Trans students)

(Taylor & Peter, 2011, p. 86.)

More than half (55.5%) of Taylor and Peter's trans participants disagreed with the statement "I feel like a real part of my school", as compared to 24.5% of straight respondents in the same survey (p. 94). School attachment is therefore a particular area of marginalization for trans youth. Within my small sample of self-identifying trans and gender queer youth across six schools, their GSA membership was consistently linked with feelings of belonging. While this does not diminish the findings of other scholars, whose trans participants reported GSAs as not being trans-inclusive, or indeed overtly hostile to trans members (see Fetner et al., 2012; Travers et al., 2012), my four openly trans participants indicated otherwise. As mentioned above, Cory was a self-described "Birch kid," in large part because of his GSA membership, while Andy told me in a

hallway conversation that his membership was “life saving.” At a different school, Roan (grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer) described the how their QSA visibly supported trans youth throughout the school through deliberate clothing choices:

And we do focus on queer issues but (pause) we have discussions about queer and trans issues, but most of our activism is about trans things because trans kids need the most support. And we need it NOW... That’s why we have like, transgender wear grey Wednesday.

This difference in findings from my study and others that looked at trans youth’s involvement with GSAs could be partially methodological, however, as most of my participants were already involved in their GSA when I began working with them. Had I recruited trans participants who were not part of their schools’ GSA, such as through an online trans youth forum, my findings might be more mixed regarding trans membership in GSAs and school attachment.

Over at Evergreen, Little One (grade 11, female, straight) reported how True Colours facilitated similar feelings of attachment to the school as a whole; “[t]he sense of community is pretty important at school, I think. So, like, coming to clubs like these, it kind of strengthens that sense of community.” Like other interviewed youth, Little One’s connection to community was twofold; there was a sense of belonging to the GSA community, through membership of the club itself, and there was belonging to the larger school community. Little One, Cory, and others were articulating their experience of Osterman’s (2000) conception of part-whole belonging, wherein belonging to a part can facilitate belonging to the whole.

This sense of belonging was underscored by a generally positive sense of duty, or obligation, which in many ways echoes the civic republican conception of citizenship as a balance of rights and responsibilities (see Knight & Harnish, 2006; Sears & Hughes, 2006). Reflecting on the role of responsibility, Polina (grade 8, female, heterosexual) explained,

Another thing is that even if I don't really feel like going, then- now that I've been going so much, it just feels like I have to go now, like it's a duty. Like, I'm committed. Committed, to this, and like for before I go, I won't feel like going, but then I get there and I don't regret going.

Similar to Ingram's (2013) doctoral work on teen girls' conceptions of citizenship, Polina identified how she understood civic responsibility as at least partially located within herself as an individual. By fulfilling her responsibility, in this case enacted by her maintaining GSA membership, she was then able to create and maintain benefits, such as a positive sense of belonging and attachment to the school as a whole. Additional analysis on how GSAs affect citizenship for youth are further analyzed in sections 5.3.1.1, 5.3.3.2.2., 5.4.2, and 5.4.5.1.

5.3 Safety and Support in the GSA

As described in the GSA Network's (2011) diagram, a primarily supportive GSA is "a club that focuses mostly on creating a safe space for LGBTQ students to talk about their feelings, questions, and issues they're facing at school, at home, and in their everyday lives" (p. 4). Support in the participating GSAs was conceptualized in a variety of ways. Sometimes it was a dimension of friendship, particularly between allied and queer members. Interestingly, support between queer youth was described less often in

interviews, although it was observed during meetings. At other times, support consisted of mentorship and caring from school staff. Finally, support was also described as an aspect of safety, with important linkages to policy as discussed in chapter four.

5.3.1 Peer support.

5.3.1.1 Support from allies.

Self-identifying allies had robust understandings of ‘support,’ often connected to feelings of empathy, compassion, human rights, and good citizenship. For example, Jacky (grade 10, straight, boy) at Aspen Secondary understood support as a responsible way of acknowledging privilege:

We’re human. We have the privilege to support those people that are gay and lesbians. Look, if I was born gay and lesbian, and discriminated against, I would hate it. I don’t care if it’s unnatural, I don’t care if I don’t have a baby or anything, but I would hate the world for discriminating upon me, right? So I feel like we have the privilege to actually support these people. We can do this. We can support them. And they’re humans so we should support them. That’s my ideology.

Ally and GSA president Irene (grade 12, female, straight) from Cedar Secondary agreed. “A lot of [GSA] is like, compassion and empathy, and that all goes in to being a good citizen, being a good person. And I think GSA is a place where people can learn not only how to be those things, but also exercise those qualities that are really important.” GSA membership for Jacky, Irene, and other allies was conceived as a way of enacting deeply held feelings of empathy, and solidarity, which have been theorized as essential components of active citizenship (Banks, 1990; Baron-Cohen, 2011). For Sasha (grade 12, female, straight/confused), this sense of empathy was rooted in believing in equal

access to positive schooling experiences. When I asked her why she, as an ally, cared about supporting her LGBTQ peers, she replied, “Why do I care? Because I want to feel safe at school. I feel like everyone should have that right. So, doesn't matter who you are, who you love, like, it should be your choice and that shouldn't depend on (pause) that shouldn't change the way you feel at school.” Here, Sasha indicated a belief that through her GSA membership, she could personally contribute to greater equality within her school. Not only are Sasha’s remarks another instance of part-whole belonging, whereby the actions of the individual contribute to the well-being of the group, they are another iteration of allies acknowledging and trying to eschew their privilege. In their candid assessments of their roles as allies with straight privilege, Jacky, Irene, and Sasha articulated components of a liberal social justice citizen (Joshee, 2004; 2009).

Many allies traced the values that led them to GSA membership back to their parents. Jake’s (grade 10, male, straight) comment “well, my parents always brought me up to be open minded” was a common response to queries as to why they supported the LGBTQ community while not identifying as queer themselves. At a different school, Rhien (grade 8, female, straight) reported feeling anchored enough in her own family that she was able to, and enjoyed, supporting her LGBTQ peers within the GSA: “I like to just support other people. Like, I don’t’ really find that I need support in like those ways, I have my family's support of who I am. So I don't really think I need to get support. But I just like to help other people and stuff.”

Rhien’s emphasis on helping, as well as Irene and Sasha’s highlighting empathy and compassion are compatible with privileged femininity, wherein females are socially rewarded for helping or caring for others, particularly when the Other is in a more

marginalized position than themselves (see Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1993). Noting this congruency between helping and gender performance does not, in my view, negate the authenticity of care that these (mostly) straight, female allies had for their queer peers. Having observed their interactions with others, and having come into relationship with them, I evaluated their care as genuine, rather than merely performative.

Curiously, none of the allies commented on how homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, rooted as they are in misogyny and patriarchy, affected their own lives, or how the homophobia affects everyone, not just its' explicit targets. For instance, cisgendered-identifying allies, whether male or female, have, like all students, likely been gender policed at school. Being shamed or discouraged from an activity, toy, or behaviour because it conflicts with an assigned gender is an experience common to all people (see Stafford, 2013 for a comprehensive account of normalized gender policing in a Vancouver elementary school). One of the most frequent forms of gender policing is labeling gender deviance as gay or lesbian, such as calling female athletes dykes, or male cheerleaders fags, regardless of their sexual identity. Tying sexual orientation to gender performance in this way is what Rich (1980) terms compulsory heterosexuality. So while the allies emphasized their shared humanity with LGBTQ peers, they did identify their shared discrimination under patriarchy. Perhaps they did not want to equate their own discrimination with the greater burdens placed on LGBTQ youth, or perhaps they had just not considered it from this perspective. Within their conceptions of commonality, there was still an us/them binary. While on one hand, this demarcation could be seen as an example of negative othering of LGBTQ peers by allies, it can also be recognized as acknowledgement of social difference within a universalist perspective of human rights.

One gay, male youth, however, spoke at length of allies' need for support, linking it to the fallacy that queerness is contagious, and the normalized gender policing typical of patriarchy:

Christopher: The goals for my QSA was to support and make feel safe those around me. Where it's not just for those who are queer but for those who are allied with queer people. That's what it was for

Lindsay: So do you think that allies need support?

Christopher: Yes! They really do! Allies need support

Lindsay: Okay. Can you talk to me about that?

Christopher: Typically when someone is an ally, a common homophobe may say that they're queer themselves. Just for being aligned with the queer community. And they end up being bullied and harassed just for being someone that they're not. And... most people who are also allies may be too afraid. The QSA is not just mostly based around the queer community, and to support the queer community, but to support those who are allied with the queer community...

In this conversation, Christopher identified an important piece of the LGBTQ community, namely the straight allies who also need support. The partner of a gender queer person, a bisexual's straight spouse, and the heterosexual and cisgender children of LGBTQ parents are just some of the straight allies who are nonetheless directly affected by normative homo- and transphobia. These groups need support as well, but are often overlooked in both queer research and queer activism. While Parents and Friends of Gays and Lesbians (PFLAG) has facilitated tremendous community outreach to cisgender heterosexuals, Christopher's comment draws attention to how ongoing support is crucial

for allies, especially those who are explicitly ‘out’ as allies to the LGBTQ community and GSAs.

Youth with queer parents have been found to face similarly heightened levels of harassment in schools as their LGBTQ peers (Taylor & Peter, 2011), and it is likely that they find some level of support should they choose to join a GSA. Just one of the participants in this study, who himself was queer, self-identified as being the child of a queer parent. Another was the mostly straight sibling of a trans brother, who reported joining her school’s GSA immediately after formal data collection had ended. A third participant, who was cis gender and non-heterosexual, felt that her GSA membership was normalized by the fact that her queer relative had founded the club a number of years ago. She also had several openly queer relatives, and therefore felt that her GSA membership was “just natural.”

Far from being a strictly hierarchical dichotomy, with straight allies providing support to queer youth who receive it, support proved to be multidirectional. Anyone in the GSA, at least according to Christopher, can give or accept support regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. While some straight allies such as Sasha, Rhien, Angelina, and Irene nonetheless characterized themselves either primarily or exclusively as occupying a helper role, Christopher’s comment indicated a plurality of experiences. There is therefore no one role for the straight ally in the GSA, especially where support is concerned.

Peer support from straight allies was important to LGBTQ youth. In response to questions about the best parts of Pride Club, Kai (grade 8, panromantic, asexual, gender fluid) remarked, “well, just knowing that there are allies there that can support people.”

This response echoes Fetner et al.'s (2012) recent finding that straight student participation in GSAs was “for the most part lauded as a particularly useful, helpful, or encouraging aspect of the gay-straight alliance” (p. 200) by LGBTQ members. School support can be crucial for those youth who don't have affirming families, faiths, or peer groups. Empirical data has long documented how a lack of affirming support systems for LGBTQ youth, particularly from their families, is correlated with serious and sometimes deadly mental and physical health outcomes such as homelessness, addictions, depression, anxiety, and suicide (Russell, 2005; Ryan et al., 2009; Travers et al., 2012). LGBTQ youth in this study were cognisant of the devastating effects of family rejection, with Cory, (grade 11, trans FtM, gender fluid, nonconforming queer, pansexual) explaining, “there's those who completely don't have support at home, that do find support within the school, and the GSA's a big part of that.” At a different school, Christopher (grade 10, male, gay) agreed, saying that, “of course the LGBT community totally needs allies. In fact, our allies are practically our outlets... to survive being in society.”

Similar to their LGBTQ co-members, allies recognized some of the importance of their support for queer LGBTQ members. Empirical evidence of family rejection's effects on LGBTQ youth, disseminated in class by the GSA advisor at Aspen Secondary, spurred Angelina (grade 8, questioning) to action: “it's like how [name of advisor] explained it to us, there's a lower mortality rate for people suiciding, even just having this club here. And I was like, 'I'd like to be a part of this.'” Like Sasha, Rhien, and Irene, whose motivations for membership were discussed earlier in this section, Angelina is a cis female ally who was motivated to join the GSA by wanting to help, or care, for others.

Here is an instance of the overlap between GSAs' educative and supportive functions, wherein allies learned more about homophobic discrimination, and were then spurred to provide support and affirmation to their queer peers. This dynamic relationship between education and support is a manifestation of praxis.

Support from allies, however, did not necessarily mean GSA membership. For instance, one advisor talked about how a former GSA president's basketball teammates' *not* attending the QSA was in fact a form of support: "I don't think any of the other basketball players came to the QSA, in support. But their support was 'we don't care. Just play basketball with us' ... [which was a] total form of support" (Jean, gay, male). In this sense, 'support' took the form of normalizing the president's openly gay identity; 'not caring,' rather than apathy or indifference, meant 'not pathologizing.'

One non-member who wanted to be interviewed about her school's GSA regardless, worried that open support for LGBTQ youth could itself be pathologizing, demeaning, or Othering:

Jiani (grade 8, female, heterosexual): I really don't tell them it's like a support thingy in case like they're offended, because like, if like, I was LGBTQ and someone told me it's a support club, then I would feel like kind of offended because I'd feel like they were saying that we don't have enough support. Like so then they're making us feel like we're outsiders already or something, so I don't really call it a support club

Here, Jiani is articulating a post-queer politics, wherein LGBTQ persons are understood as having made such strides towards equality that they are no longer in need of special attention, or targeted programming as the policies in the policy analysis from chapter four

would suggest. It is a direct rebuke to the dominant justifications identified in chapter four, namely that GSAs must exist as life-saving support groups for vulnerable LGBTQ youth. Unlike earlier-quoted allies such as Rhien or Angelina, Jiani was reluctant to automatically position queer people as having deficits, or necessarily in need of support. This could explain why Jiani was not a member of the Pride Club, whereas Rhien and Angelina cited the need for their allied support as among their reasons for joining. While Jiani acknowledged difference- she believes that queer and straight youth are distinct- she also believed they should be perceived as needing equal, rather than equitable, support mechanisms. Within this worldview, it would be impolite or insulting to demean the queer community by not treating them as equal, or interchangeable, with their straight counterparts.

Jiani's interpretation represents a double-edged sword for the Canadian gay rights movement. There have indeed been impressive and highly visible gains within the last ten years, including securing marriage equality, legislative protection for GSAs in two of the most populous provinces, and the precedent-setting *Chamberlain v. Surrey School Board* Supreme Court case. It is culturally more acceptable to come out than ever before in post-contact Canadian history, and queerness has openly and explicitly infiltrated pop culture, and youth culture in particular (e.g. the pop star Lady Gaga, the television series *Glee*, etc.). Jiani, like many straight Canadians, is of the opinion that queerness, or gay liberation, are "no big deal anymore" (Bell, 2008). Yet these moments of visibility and legal recognition, while important, do not indicate that we live in a post-queer era where gay rights organizing is irrelevant, unnecessary, or obsolete. As the literature review for this study indicated, there are still significant inequalities between queer and straight

youth, especially pertaining to supportive, caring schools. Now that some progress has been secured, the gay rights movement may encounter this approach of being treated equally rather than equitably in years to come.

Christopher (grade 10, male, gay) was alone in extending his conception of how GSAs can and should support straight youth by explicitly naming ‘homophobes’ as those in need of support.

Christopher: I think in a way, all three of us, homophobes, queers, and allies all struggle with the topic of the queer community. Homophobes struggle with not being able to reach out to those around them. Allies struggle with being judged for someone who they’re not. Someone who they support. And queers, of course, just are judged for who they are. So, in a way, all three of us suffer... Like, I’m not the type of person that would say, like, ‘homophobes are the bad guys, they just swear and beat you up, and rape you, and blah blah blah.’ No. They suffer too. They too are suffering... I mean, can you just imagine... how they were taught hatred?

Christopher’s identification of bigotry and hostility as stemming from suffering enables him to feel compassion for those he describes as ‘homophobes,’ for he spoke of his own suffering at length. This commonality of suffering is, I think, how Christopher was able to cognitively make space for the suffering of ‘homophobes’ within the GSA.

Christopher, however, does not speak for all queer youth, and based on my relationships with them, I strongly suspected that several of the participants would likely not have been amenable to including openly homophobic students within the GSA. Queer-identifying students like Neyko, Andy, and Charlie talked about how one of the best features of the GSA was that it was explicitly free of homophobic language:

Neyko (grade 12, mostly male, pansexual/Kinsey 4): ‘Cause even though (pause) our school doesn't have necessarily bullying towards LGBT issues, but it is still the butt of the joke sometimes. So, [at the GSA], to not be the butt of a joke when you say something is quite nice. [It's] a safe space is a place where I can be - I can go and I can say, 'oh, I really like that person.' And I don't have a specific group of people from my school come down and laugh about it.

Support for, from, and with straight-identifying youth in a GSA is therefore a multi-dimensional phenomenon, and far more complex than a simple hierarchical binary wherein straight youth provide support to their LGBTQ peers.

5.3.1.2 Support from queer peers.

Curiously, support amongst exclusively queer youth (i.e. by queer youth to queer youth) was scarcely mentioned by the interviewees. While Neyko (grade 12, mostly male, pansexual/Kinsey 4) remarked, “we have our [queer] peers there, and they've gone through similar experiences. They know what's happening, they relate with us,” he was one of the very few queer youth to mention this aspect of the GSA. I observed openly queer youth support each other in various ways in GSA meetings, such as by commiserating about academics, or school events, but they seldom offered support on LGBTQ issues specifically. The one exception was one club with multiple trans and gender queer youth members, in which case, members who had transitioned offered their expertise on issues such gendered locker room use to those who were considering transitioning. Commenting on meeting other gender questioning and gender queer youth in their GSA, Andy (grade 10, gender non-conforming, gender questioning, pansexual) saying, “it saved Cory and I a bit. Helped us through a lot. It's really just helped with

friendship bonds. And understanding of certain topics and subjects and stuff.” Otherwise, there were few if any instances of support based on common experiences of marginalization (i.e. coming out to parents, dating relationships, etc.).

I was initially puzzled by this relative omission, as the literature indicates how vital queer youth-to-youth support is to GSAs’ purposes and functions (see Griffen et al., 2005; Miceli, 2005). Wasn’t this queer-to-queer peer mentorship essential for GSAs? Why wasn’t it being talked about at length the way support from allies was? I interpret the relative lack of queer peer support rooted in shared discrimination in a number of ways. Firstly, I may simply have not been privy to these moments due to scheduling, lack of rapport, etc. While I eventually enjoyed strong, caring relationships with youth participants, in some schools, I was simply unable to observe enough meetings for them to feel comfortable being so vulnerable in front of me.

Further to this, ‘support’ for the youth seemed to be synonymous with ‘affirmation,’ by which differences and experiences were validated without necessarily being shared. What mattered was not the peer listener or mentor having the same lived experience, but their ability to respond positively, without shame or judgement, to the stories being told. This conflation of support with affirmation across identities rather than within ‘closed’ identity groups is understandable given how many youth emphasized that the GSA was most emphatically *not* a queer-only space. Across different schools, queer-identifying youth spoke with great conviction on this point:

Charlie (grade 12, gender non-conforming, female presenting, lesbian): You know, one of the main things that people forget about the QSA is like, the S part. Queer-

Straight-Alliance. You don't have to be, like, you don't have to identify as queer, or like, be queer to go to the QSA.

Christopher (grade 10, male, gay): I remember, how before when we used to make posters, for the QSA, we would always put a bridge between "queer" and "straight," to be very specific as to there's a bridge between us. The QSA is not a club where you just go and like, surround yourself with, queer people. Not just queer people go there, straight people can go there too.

Not only were GSAs not queer-only spaces, none of the youth in this study expressed a desire for them to be so. Youth consistently responded to the question "what would you improve about your GSA" with wishes that it be "bigger," or have "more members," regardless of how those members self-identified. Reflecting on how things would be different if their GSA didn't exist, Charlie said that, "[q]ueer kids have a way of finding each other, we'd still know each other." Given that the queer youth in this study reported using other venues in the community for queer-only peer support, as well as various Internet forums, it seems that their need for queer-to-queer peer support was at least partially fulfilled elsewhere.

A final explanation for the relative absence of queer-to-queer peer support is the comparatively more fluid identity expressions amongst participants. Youth did not report entirely stable sexual orientations or gender identities to myself or to the club. Identifying as an ally was itself a broad field, encompassing self-chosen labels such "straight passing", "straightish/mostly straight," "open- it depends who I'm dating," "heteroflexible," and "I'm not sure yet." This marks a considerable departure from traditional and even contemporary gay rights strategies which tend to rely on "Born this

Way” biological determinism and more fixed identities (Arseneau et al., 2013). Just as there are a multiplicity of ways to be queer, so too was there considerable variation amongst allyship. This fluid flexibility meant that demarcating between ally-support and queer-support was a nebulous distinction at best. Identifying as an ally in one moment, youth could and easily did later identify as queer(ish) in some way the next. Queerness itself was not perceived as a homogenous entity, Roan (grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer) explained:

Roan: It’s going to be so flowing, and it’s always changing that if you have too much structure it just doesn’t work. I think part of the reason is that LGBT – it used to be LGBT but now it’s LGTTBQAAIT plus. Sometimes there’s extra letters in there that I want to be included, so LGBTTBQA plus

Lindsay: Sure

Roan: And it just keeps going and going and going, and it’s flowing. And nothing is ever the same. And there’s a new identity, and someone comes up with every new identity every day. Not because they’re making it up, but because it works for them. And that’s important that they have that.

Roan’s acknowledging the considerable fluidity within queerness makes it difficult to assume sameness amongst a collection of queer youth simply because they share different characteristics that are lumped together under the LGBTQ acronym.

In sum, both queerness and queer people were supported and affirmed amongst youth participants of multiple shifting and stable identities. What mattered was a positive reception to queerness, rather than a fixed queer or ally identity in those offering support.

5.3.2 Support from adults.

Similar to support from peers, support from adults seemed to be interchangeable with affirmation. Youth from across sites stressed the importance of school staff openly and visibly supporting the GSA. Commenting on how multiple teachers and administrators, some of who are openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual, attended the first GSA meeting of the year, Neyko (grade 12, mostly male, pansexual/Kinsey 4) reported, “it was really useful to have that there. Even if they no longer come to the meetings. Still I know these people will be there to support me.” Youth described similarly positive feelings about staff, and administrators in particular attending GSA sponsored events. In a hallway conversation with two vice principals during a GSA event in the school’s foyer, both administrators emphasized how they understood their being visible at GSA events as integral to promoting a safer school climate, and broadly decreasing instances of homophobia. These findings are important for practice, as they demonstrate how staff, especially those with limited time and multiple other commitments, can nonetheless contribute to the supportive functions of the GSA. Staff need not take on the role of GSA advisor to support the club. Spending a few minutes publically buying a rainbow cupcake, or popping in to say hello at a meeting were efficient and low-commitment indications of support that youth appreciated.

Guidance from advisors was also important, as youth across all schools stressed that they did not want the GSA to be a youth-only space. Describing the characteristics of a supportive GSA, Meghan (grade 11, cisgender woman, non-heterosexual) explained the vitally supportive role of her own advisor:

Where there is also someone who is able to- an adult. Especially because I mean, teenagers can't deal with every- all of the problems, cause sometimes the problems can be really, they have like self harm, and depression and stuff like that, so we have a person there...

While I only observed conversations about the serious issues that Meghan describes in passing, youth reported that their advisors were informative and non-judgemental on mental health. They were comfortable talking about mental health, both their own and that of their peers, with their GSA advisers. This openness to mental health is significant, as the literature indicates that youth in particular have difficulty accessing mental health care not only because of their stigma against mental health, but also because of many adults' perceptions that to be depressed or otherwise mentally ill is a developmentally normal part of adolescence that does not require intervention (see Metcalfe, Tough, Salegio, & Reynolds, 2013). Having the GSA adviser double as a conduit in accessing mental health care services, or even just as a non-judgmental adult to validate mental health concerns in non-stigmatizing ways is likely especially important for LGBTQ youth, who themselves have a higher risk of mental health problems (Canadian Public Health Report, 2011).

Sasha (grade 12, female, straight/confused) saw adults' supportive roles as a blend of affirmation and guidance: "... having parents and teachers... is very important because then they can support you. They know what you want, and they know what you need, and they know what you're missing, and they get to help with that if they want to." Similar to support from peers, adult support could come from adults of any orientation. It could also be sporadic and still appreciated. These findings indicate that a staff member

need not take on the responsibility of serving as a GSA advisor to nonetheless have a meaningful and positive impact on its members.

5.3.3 Support and safety: Overlap and divergence.

‘Safety’ was a recurring theme, often mentioned in conjunction with support. Nearly all participants, youth and adult alike, referred to the GSA as a ‘safe space,’ and attached multiple meanings to this term. Following Fetner et al.’s (2012) lead, I have organized the findings pertaining GSAS as safe spaces in the following three categories; safe from what; safe for whom; and safe to do what?

5.3.3.1 Safe from what?

Perceived levels of hostility or insecurity are central to GSA members’ conceptions of safe spaces. Examples of hostility include institutional barriers to GSA formation, opposition to the GSA from students, staff, and administrators, and having GSA posters and materials vandalized, particularly with homophobic slurs (Fetner, et al., 2012). When youth in this study spoke of ‘safe spaces,’ I often wondered, “safe from what?”

Homophobic violence was often seen as the historical reason for GSA formation, if not it’s contemporary purpose. Irene (grade 12, female, straight) explained:

It’s kind of petered out because it’s like ‘oh, what’s wrong, I don’t see people pushing people in lockers.’ But a lot of times it’s more something that you can’t often see in the halls and recognizably that’s bullying. Like sometimes it’s even smaller, like ‘uhh, you don’t want to like work together with a certain person on a project.’

While no youth reported current or ongoing instances of homophobic or transphobic physical violence at school (they referred to such violence as being the school's past, or else hearing that it happened at other schools), they did comment on linguistic instances of homophobic exclusion and bullying. Slurs such as "faggot," "dyke," and "that's so gay" are obvious examples of hostile, or unsafe language. While many of the school staff interviewed for this research reported seldom or never hearing homophobic language in the hallways, nearly all of the youth did hear slurs at school, ranging from every day to several times per week. As Jean (gay, male), an advisor at Dogwood, Evergreen, and Fir explained, "I never hear it, right, because I'm an authority figure. And also they know I'm queer, so they wouldn't say it [around me]." According to Jean, those youth who do use homophobic language are able to refrain from doing so in the presence of an openly gay staff member, indicating at least a partially linguistically safer school climate than those where homophobic remarks go unchallenged by staff (see Taylor & Peter, 2011). In reviewing field notes, however, I overheard "fag" and "that's so gay" amongst non-GSA members in three different schools, including a school where Jean worked. While youth seemed to self-police their homophobic language around recognizably and openly queer adults, they expressed it openly around myself, and around participating youth.

All youth participants reported hearing homophobic language at school at least sometimes. When asked about frequency, answers ranged between several times every day to once a week. Although slurs were a common enough part of school life for all the participating students, most youth went to great lengths to diminish their importance or intensity. They relied on several strategies to weaken the effects of homophobic language, such as labeling it exclusively within the purview of younger students, and

noting how quickly it's corrected by other students, and most frequently, how slurring did not actually refer to LGBTQ persons, or even queerness more broadly.

Homophobic language was often described by grade 12 students as especially endemic among the younger grades, the age-based implications of which are analyzed in greater detail in chapter seven. In so doing, homophobic language was Othered by attaching it exclusively to a less desirable group, namely younger students. There were also conflicting reports on homophobic language use. For instance, many grade 12 students first responded that they never heard homophobic language at school, and when I commented on how wonderful that was; they quickly corrected themselves to explain that while they heard it, it was called out immediately. Sasha (grade 12, female, straight/confused) said, "Like you could hear it, but you hear it and then everyone turns, and it's like 'what did you just say?' Like, 'you can't say that.'" Reports of homophobic language was often backtracked in this way from 'never' to 'sometimes, but we're doing something about it.'

By far the most common method of youth participants' deactivating homophobic slurs was explaining to me how, in context, they weren't intended to be derogatory, or even to refer to LGBTQ persons.

Jake (grade 10, male, straight): I don't really think it's like, they're saying it intentionally to put down. It's just something that they've said for years and it's just a habit now... But like something (pause) unfortunate will happen and they'll say 'that's so gay.' Like, in woodshop if we get a day, kind of free block and play videogames in the back. And like, if one of them dies for no reason, they'll say that.

At a different school, Kitty agreed:

Kitty (grade 8, cis female, Kinsey 6/trans inclusive): The majority of the time, they don't mean it in an insulting way. I think they mean it in a more offensive kind of way. Like, not offending the - like, not offending the party that is being oppressed by this. But like, in more of a (pause) in more of an 'yo, I'm insulting you because you suck' kind of thing

Here, Jake and Kitty are referencing the common belief that the gay in 'that's so gay' is discursively divorced from gayness as a sexual orientation, while simultaneously referring to something that's offensive, ridiculous, undesirable, or otherwise bad. This type of doublespeak arguably entrenches and reinforces the normalized homophobia that pervades our culture, especially linguistically.

Sexualized gender policing, generally through misogynistic language, was far more common than explicitly homophobic slurs. Slang such as "pussy" and "bitch," generally between males, was frequently observed in the hallways, and occasionally commented on during interviews. Chatting with me during a meeting, Polina (grade 8, female, heterosexual) commented on the gendered dimensions of slurring. She remarked that it was definitely all boys who said 'fag,' never girls, and that this was because "... boys just fool around, like to make each other laugh. Girls are more mature. Even if they don't like homosexuality, they'll still respect it." Here Polina described the disparity in slurring within an essentialized gender framework, naturalizing the common patriarchal assumption that boys are less capable of, or shouldn't be required to be "respectful" around sexuality (Gavey, 2005; Kimmel, 1996). She is either acknowledging or endorsing the common-sense 'boys will be boys' refrain that typically dominates discussions of boys' aggression, taunting, or bullying. At a different school, Meghan

added to this observation by illustrating how boys used homophobic language to gender police each other in misogynistic ways:

Meghan (grade 11, cisgender woman, non-heterosexual): Um, there's a group of guys, and I know that they're not homophobic. I know that they honestly don't care. But, they say things like "that's so gay, Oh you're so gay" like, like it's a joke? If someone does something that is slightly feminine, then it's like, "you're so gay." It's that kind of thing.

Like so many other accounts of men employing homophobic language as a means of expressing misogyny and restricting the masculinity of other males to a very narrow, hegemonic masculine gender expression (see Connell, 1987; Kimmell, 2013; Pascoe, 2007; Stoltenberg, 1993), Meghan interpreted the boys in her story to be laminating queerness to the feminine. When used in this way, their homophobic language can be understood as largely an expression of misogyny, albeit expressed through homophobia. The boys were proving their own heterosexual maleness to the group by pathologizing the perceived or real gender infractions of their male peers, thus reinforcing their own status as straight boys. It is not so much queerness itself on trial, but rather the strict borders around heterosexual masculinity.

Roan (grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer) extended this analysis to include the particular victimization of transwomen. They explained:

Roan: It's much harder for trans girls. If you just transitioning male to female, or male to female presenting, or somebody who's viewed as being more feminine, you have so much of a harder time. You have a one in twelve chance of being murdered.

Lindsay: Why do you think it is so much harder?

Roan: Because being a woman is degrading. And being viewed as a male who is trying to be a woman is incorrect. But if you're viewed that way it is so much more degrading because people view you as being unnatural. But it all kind of filters down to feminism. It's important because being a woman is degrading.

Here, Roan understands their lived experience, and that of their friends, as continually policed by codes of hegemonic masculinity wherein the masculine is consistently privileged over the feminine. The rigidity of this norm is enforced by the violence inflicted on those who transgress gender binaries, especially transewomen, who are seen as rejecting male privilege.

Meghan and Roan were the only participants who expressly connected homophobic language to sexism. Most participants did not allude to the inherent misogyny of this type of slur (i.e., when used to gender police males), and one adult rejected the linkages. Vice principal Ted2 (straight, male), explained how gender and sexual orientation were not part of the bullying he sees on a regular basis, yet gave examples of bullying that hinged on males' use of misogyny (such as calling each other's mother's 'fat'). Commenting on this example, Ted2 reflected, "you know, it upsets the kids, but in there I don't see a whole lot of gender, or orientation type of thing". When homophobic harassment was explicitly discussed, sexual orientation and gender identity were understood as largely isolated, or unrelated to each other.

Despite the youths' reports of diminishing homophobic slurring in schools, and their not identifying misogynistic gender policing as part of homophobia, linguistic insults are nonetheless a barometer of what LGBTQ and allied youth are looking to be

safe from. I did not hear homophobic or misogynistic gender policing in any of the twenty-nine GSA meetings I attended, although it could have occurred out of earshot. Further, while youth tended to downplay school based homophobia in their interviews, it was a frequent topic of discussion within the GSA. They told stories of homophobia and gender policing that occurred not just at school but elsewhere in their lives, such as online, at home, or in the community. In this sense, I understand their description of the GSA as a ‘safe space’ in part as a refuge from homophobic and misogynistic utterances.

5.3.3.2 Safe for whom?

Although officially open to all staff and students, GSAs are not immune to the social structures of privilege and power that govern group behaviours. Fetner et al (2012) claim that “[t]he second dimension of safe spaces is membership—who is welcome and who is left out... membership in gay-straight alliances is an important site of boundary maintenance” (p. 200). Rather than existing in a utopian vacuum of universal, egalitarian acceptance, the GSAs in this study, similar to those in the literature, negotiated the same systems of power and privilege that affect us all, including white supremacy, misogyny, colonialism, and neoliberalism to name a few. This section therefore examines how GSAs both were and were not ‘safe,’ or affirming and inclusive, of multiple identities.

5.3.3.2.1 Trans.

There has been some concern over how well trans identities are integrated within GSAs (see Diaz, Kosciw, & GLSEN, 2009; Fetner et al., 2012; Thompson, 2012; Travers et al., 2012). While a number of lesbian, bisexual, and gay staff were involved with the GSAs across schools, there were no openly trans staff in the GSAs I observed, nor, to my knowledge, were there openly trans teachers on staff. I attribute this absence of trans

advisors to lack of support for trans teachers more broadly, rather than an inhospitable climate within the GSAs themselves.

Field notes and interview transcripts reveal that trans persons and current events were talked about within all of the clubs at least once. Conchita Wurst's EuroVision win, Laverne Cox's breakout role in *Orange is the New Black*, and the trans-specific components of the VSB policy revisions, were among the most frequent topics. Trans GSA members also spoke about their own lived experiences of being trans, including chest binding, gendered washroom access, and negotiating romantic relationships. Kai (grade 8, gender fluid, panromantic, asexual) explained, "I'm out at school because well, even though I still don't really trust a lot of people, I feel safe enough here. I feel safer here than at home. So that I can freely express my gender and such." Kai's Pride Club peers demonstrated support for their gender identity by corrected themselves when they would accidentally misgender Kai, even when Kai was not present for the misgendering. This attentiveness to pronoun preferences regardless of whether or not a trans student was present indicated their attunement to being specifically trans-inclusive.

Roan (grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer) described how the GSA at their school actively promoted ongoing trans-awareness specifically throughout the school:

You remember the transgender day of remembrance? Where we wear grey? We happened to have a school theme, we'd always fall on that day of the week. So we'd always have a grey Wednesday. Or grey Tuesday. And I have heard like, the most mock-progressive seeming people at the school yell at each other. One of the – a bunch of his friends were like, 'hey man where's your grey? Do you not support trans people or something?' And that was really cool to happen. And our student

council helped organize that, and they helped get the word out about it. So people know we exist.

These ‘grey days’ operationalized trans-visibility as normative; rather than asking others to wear grey, the speaker in Roan’s story assumes that wearing grey would be the default position, and questioned those who did not follow this norm. In Kai and Roan’s cases, the GSA was supportive, and actively aware of trans issues.

While all participants agreed that GSAs can and should be safe spaces for trans members, not all youth were convinced that the ‘T’ belonged within the LGBTQ acronym. Although not speaking about GSA membership specifically, Caroline (grade 12, female, gay/queer) explained her thinking:

I don't understand why LGBT is the acronym. I don't think the T should be in that... Cause it's like you can have somebody who's (pause) transgendered, and then they're straight. So, now they're not part of the LGB. They're part of the T. And so it's like, it's a different thing. So I don't think it should be in the same - for now it's fine cause it's a minority that needs to be (pause) brought to the foreground, but in the future I don't think it should be the same thing

Caroline’s tone was not hostile when she made this comment, nor was her body language aggressive or defensive. She was more matter-of-fact about the distinctions between the LGB and T communities, and how they often do not have the same priorities, goals, or concerns. As an activist and community member, I have personally noticed significant differences between the agendas of more broadly focused LGBTQ groups- generally run by cisgender gay men and sometimes cisgender lesbians- and the meetings of trans-specific bodies.

Caroline's lack of hostility in this observation however, does not mean that her sentiments were, or would be, perceived as welcoming, inclusive, or affirming to trans youth. As discussed in the literature review, trans youth have identified a lack of trans-inclusivity as a problem with GSAs (see Diaz, Kosciw, & GLSEN, 2009; Fetner et al., 2012; Thompson, 2012; Travers et al., 2012). Moreover, a trans youth who left formal schooling before graduation spoke on this issue during the public consultation meetings at the VSB during the revisions to Policy ACB. In my field notes from that meeting, the youth said that she was told in her GSA meeting that "the GSA isn't really for trans issues," and subsequently stopped attending the club. This indicates that at the time of data collection, there was at least one trans youth who felt explicitly rejected from their Vancouver School Board GSA.

I asked Roan (grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer) why they thought that some trans youth might not join the GSA, and they explained:

Uh, because they don't want to be perceived as being queer or trans. And, I have some queer friends who don't join the QSA because they don't like the people who run it, quite frankly. The people who run QSA argue almost constantly, and I'm in the same friend group with them and some other people, and our queer friends in the friend group don't come to QSA because they hate listening to people argue. I have listening to [names of other youth] argue. I do everything possible to shut them up. Because they're so annoying.

Roan's comments echo Aislinn's earlier assessment of how interpersonal dynamics have tremendous influence on how popular or well-attended a GSA will be. Trans youth, like their cisgender peers, were reportedly similarly affected by personality conflicts.

While numerous straight and queer non-members of the GSA participated in this study, I did not speak to or interview any trans youth who were not active members. The findings regarding GSAs as safe, welcoming, inclusive, and affirming spaces for trans youth would be more robust if I had been able to recruit a larger sample of trans youth overall, and trans non-members in particular.

5.3.3.2.2 Ethnocultural diversity.

Consistent with my queer theoretical approach, which emphasizes the right to self-identity, and acknowledges multiplicities of identities that can be in/visible, I made a deliberate methodological choice to not attach specific gender, sexuality, or racial/ethnic identities to the students observed. Instead, interviewed participants were invited to name their (multiple) ethnic identities if they so chose. Upon completing data collection, I am convinced this was an appropriate methodological approach because a significant minority of participants self-identified in ways that I could not “read” by looking at them (such as Jewish, Kurdish, and Aboriginal [no nation specified]). This diversity would have been obscured if I made sweeping generalizations of GSAs’ racial/ethnic compositions based solely on observations.

While I prioritized participants’ ethnic self-identifications, I nonetheless observed racialized tensions in the boundary maintenance of GSA membership. Significantly, ethnic identities were implicitly and occasionally explicitly organized in homonational terms, with White, Euro Canadians consistently presented as more accepting of the LGBTQ community than foreigners, or Canadians of colour. This was most evident in Aspen’s major project during data collection, which was the continuation of a four-year

tradition of the GSA giving a workshop on LGBTQ issues to the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

The majority of the student body at Aspen was identifiably Asian, with White students comprising the largest minority of non-Asians. There was not a significant Aboriginal presence amongst either the staff or student body. Although visibly Asian students were the majority within the school, they were underrepresented in the GSA, making up less than half of the regular membership. Michael (male, gay, Chinese), the ESL teacher who was also a GSA advisor, explained to the GSA whilst preparing for the workshop that 95% of the ESL class was comprised of new Canadians from Mainland China. Although a significant minority of the GSA membership was born in Mainland China, and spoke Mandarin or Cantonese as a first language, none were in the ESL class.

Beginning several years ago as a student-driven initiative, the ESL workshops were positioned as an assimilating device with distinctly homonational overtones. Defined as the "... understanding and enactment of homosexual acts, identities, and relationships that incorporates them as not only compatible with, but even exemplary of neoliberal democratic ethics and citizenships," homonationalism is the favourable association of gay and lesbian people and/or gay rights with a nationalist, or imperialistic ideology (Kulick, 2009, p. 28). The notion that the ESL students, all of whom were visibly Asian, might have prior knowledge on LGBTQ terminology and issues was not considered, nor was the near-certainty that some of the ESL youth were likely queer themselves. While the comment that "we need ESL kids in our club" was frequently heard during these planning meetings, and undeniably a genuine expression of outreach and inclusion, ESL youth were nonetheless positioned as being 'naturally' more bigoted

towards the LGBTQ community due the cultural norms of Mainland China. It is reasonable to claim that the GSA may not have been as safe, or inclusive, for new Canadians, and especially new Canadians of colour.

Conversely, the True Colours club at Evergreen was comprised entirely of visibly Asian students, some of whom were born overseas. There was not the same us/them binary of needing to educate newer Canadians about LGBTQ issues at Evergreen as there was at Aspen. I did however, spend significantly less time with the Evergreen True Colours due to scheduling conflicts and the teacher's strike, so it is entirely possible that a similar dynamic was at play that I simply did not observe. Finally, there was not a strong presence of Aboriginality in any of the clubs observed, and very few participants self-identified as Indigenous Canadians (n=2). Although two-spiritedness was included when youth were discussing the 'alphabet soup' of the LGBTQ acronym, there was little mention of Aboriginality otherwise.

5.3.3.2.3 Religion.

A few youth spoke of the compatibility between GSA membership and openly being a person of faith. Discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, faith was rarely spoken about in bigoted terms within the GSA. Indeed, when religion was referenced, it was often done so in ways emphasizing how not all religious people are homophobic, and how faith and queerness could be reconciled. While few youth spoke of their participation in their faith communities, those that did were responded to with interest and acceptance. Offhand remarks, such as referencing church attendance, were normalized by the group, and responded to in the same way that news of other weekend activities were received. Cory (grade 11, trans FtM, gender fluid, nonconforming queer,

pansexual) and Charlie (grade 12, gender non-conforming, female presenting, lesbian) thought it was “so cool” when I mentioned how a youth I’d worked with previously was president of both the GSA and his Christian club.

This openness to religion was not universal, however. The population of the now-defunct GSA had particularly strong ties to the local Roman Catholic parish. One of the advisors there hypothesized that this connection was one of the reasons that GSA membership had dwindled:

Jean (gay, male): And so, they feel- from what we’ve spoken to some students- they feel as though if they head to [the GSA], someone is going to see them and tell their parents, and their parents are going to see their parents at church. And then that dialogue has to happen, right?

Similar to Thompson’s (2012) reflection that fear of being outed to parents at church could discourage membership, Jean’s hypothesis demonstrates how even though the GSAs were not overtly hostile towards faith or people of faith, that they may nonetheless be less safe for religious students. This lack of safety stemmed not from anti-religious hostilities from within the GSA, but rather homophobia from faith communities both within and beyond the school. While this section summarized how persons of faith were able to be part of the GSAs, section 5.4.3 analyzes how GSAs held political dialogues about the role of faith in the gay rights movement.

In sum, there were significant contextual factors influencing how safe the GSA was for a multitude of identities. While explicitly open and accepting of all, there were nonetheless some identities that were ‘safer’ than others, based on a variety of cultural

norms. Transgender identities, minority ethnocultural locations, and religious faith were just some of the many identities that jostled for space in the GSAs of this study.

5.3.3.3 Safe to do what?

Finally, GSAs were conceived of as safe places to talk about the lived experiences of being a queer youth without fear of ridicule or harassment. Referring to a romantic partner as ‘partner’ or in same-sex terms (such as a girl talking about her girlfriend) was normalized; no one in the group asked what that meant, or commented on its unusualness. Neyko (grade 12, mostly male, pansexual/Kinsey 4) explained:

It’s a safe space is a place where I can be - I can go and I can say, 'oh, I really like that person.' And I don't have a specific group of people from my school come down and laugh about it. Cause even though (pause) our school doesn't have necessarily bullying towards LGBT issues, but it is still the butt of the joke sometimes. So, to not be the butt of a joke when you say something is quite nice.

It didn’t seem to matter whether or not all members of the club identified as LGBTQ during these types of disclosures, what mattered was their ‘insider’ status as knowledgeable about LGBTQ norms. The LGBTQ youth didn’t have to explain or educate members about each and every aspect of their identity. Although questions were encouraged, and frequently came up (e.g., “what’s the difference between ‘transgender’ and ‘transsexual’”), all members had some basic knowledge of LGBTQ vocabulary, norms, and current events. Queer youth who spoke about their lives were not starting at ground zero when talking about their lives with other members, be they allies or elsewhere on the LGBTQ spectrum. At a different school, Andy (grade 10, gender non-conforming, gender questioning, pansexual) further explained:

Well it's a place where you can be yourself. And talk... You can just (pause) throw it all out there. No one's going to judge you. No one's going to be all upset about it... And (pause) I just think it's a good place to really just (pause) relax.

Andy's comments indicate that they are able to let their guard down in the GSA. Being 'out' is generally a state of flux, especially for youth, who must continually negotiate how out to be, about what and to whom. This hyper-attentiveness to surroundings can cause anxiety and exhaustion for queer people. Andy, like other queer youth in this study, reported that not having to self-police, or otherwise monitor their 'outness' as much contributed to their feelings of safety in the GSA.

Aside from being out, the GSA was a safe enough space for youth to undertake their many activist and educational activities, which are the subject of the next sections.

5.4 Education, Activism, and the GSA

I begin this section by outlining how participants understood the efficacy of anti-homophobia education more broadly, before turning attention to the specific educational functions of the GSAs. I first analyze how LGBTQ-affirming education was taken up within GSAs, with a focus on dialogue, and contrast this with the LGBTQ education, or lack thereof, that is provided in formal curricula. This section concludes with data on GSA-initiated education projects such as holding events, putting up posters, and calling out homophobic language in the hallways.

5.4.1 Broad conceptions of anti-homophobia education

Education within the GSA meant different things to different participants, and was enacted in a variety of ways. Aside from the educational posters and events discussed in the following section, there was peer-led and advisor-led education within

the GSA, and ‘calling out’ in the hallways or other classes. All of these educational activities occurred within an almost unshakeable belief that educating others was the best, and possibly only way, to improve the lives of LGBTQ youth. Kitty (grade 8, cis female, Kinsey 6/trans inclusive), for example, said that it was important that the GSA do educational outreach in classes “... because it's important that students learn about this stuff so that - a) so they don't make beginner or homophobic comments and all that. And b) so that they're more aware and stuff.” The participants appeared to believe in a straight line between the GSAs’ interventions and a reduction of homophobic comments. At a different school, Kai (grade 8, panromantic, asexual, gender fluid) had a similar understanding. When I asked them if they thought have LGBTQ topics included in the formal curricula, they said “I think so... Because more people would be educated. And then they would learn that like, some words they've said may actually hurt people.”

The possibility that those espousing homophobic views could resist such educational outreach was often met with confusion. Andy, Meghan, and I had the following exchange when discussing local parents who were picketing the Vancouver School Board over a revision to the sexual orientation and gender identity policy:

Lindsay: [You’re saying that] The people who are against the policy should just understand [the evidence for LGBTQ-affirming policy]. Do you think that would change their mind though? What if they understood it [the evidence] but didn’t make them change their minds?

Andy (grade 10, gender non-conforming, gender questioning, pansexual): Well, there’s a point of understanding, and there’s a point of (pause) really making sense of it, right? Even if understanding the policy would be understanding word for

word what they're saying, but making sense of it would be like, someone educating you and having you comprehend what's actually going on. And what's happening and actually have ears turning and be like, 'oh!' Kind of light bulb it, right? Kinda be like, that makes more sense. Sometimes, if you talk them through it, and educate them, it could be... But a big group of people? No one's just going to walk out by themselves. Only if they're a brave soul, right?

Meghan (grade 11, cisgender woman, non-heterosexual): I see what you're saying but I don't think that is the case with them. It's something so like – it's a fundamental systemic belief. And it's hard to (pause) change.

While Meghan and Andy both acknowledged that it would be difficult for those espousing homophobic beliefs to alter them in light of evidence, it was nonetheless inconceivable that they wouldn't eventually change their thinking. Field notes revealed that when the homophobia of their peers was mentioned in GSA meetings, the only solution proposed by the members was to 'educate them.' This finding was congruent with Ingram's (2013) assertion that her citizen-girls' "... comments reflect their seemingly unshakeable trust that schooling leads to personal development and transformation" (p. 210). It was simply unfathomable that anti-homophobia education could be challenged, much less rejected. The implications for this unwavering belief are further analyzed in chapter seven.

5.4.2 LGBTQ education within the GSA.

There were several instances of peer-to-peer and teacher-led education within the participating GSAs. Two GSA presidents at different schools, Irene, and Meghan, made a

point of sharing at least one LGBTQ related news item at each meeting. I asked Meghan how she managed to find these stories:

Meghan: Oh I just, I Google.

Lindsay: Google

Meghan: Like when I Google, I'm Googling LGBTQ Canada. And then Google News. And just like, go in to the different things. And then, my mom's a teacher.

Lindsay: Okay

Meghan: And so she sends me things. And my dad, he's disabled, so he stays home all day. Ummm, and he just like, he sends me stuff.

Meghan's explanation demonstrated not just digital literacy, but active parental support and engagement with the GSA. Considering how some of the participating youth deliberately kept their GSA membership private for fear of parental retaliation, Meghan's experience indicates how parents can have a different reaction. These efforts were appreciated by the membership. When talking about what they learned in GSA, Sasha (grade 12, female, straight/confused) said, "Irene does a really good job, actually. She keeps us very informed," while Jake (grade 10, male, straight) noted that because of Meghan's efforts, "[QSA] where I get most of my news about the happenings about LGTBQ people." The presidents' initiatives to keep the membership informed were both efficacious and appreciated.

Field notes revealed that youth also asked questions and shared what they knew about LGBTQ history (i.e., "homophobia contributes to the spreading of AIDS, which used to be called GRID;" "some ancient civilizations [ex: Greece] didn't have a problem with LGBTQ"), as well as research on queerness throughout the animal kingdom (i.e., "I

read a study on the Internet about how humans are the only species that ‘outs’ and then ostracizes it’s LGBTQ members, other animals don’t do that”). While their information was not always accurate, youth were generally enthusiastic to disseminate what they knew, as well as how they came to know what they knew. They listed sources for their information, and sometimes mentioned family conversations on these issues. Youth also quite enthusiastically added further comments and additional information about these topics in the margins of my field notes, and were pleased to teach me what they knew.

Not all education within the GSA was peer-led. Christopher (grade 10, male, gay) notes the importance of his advisor, Jean (male, gay), in his learning about queerness:

Christopher: At first, I didn’t know. I, I was so lost and confused. I did not know anything, I thought there was no help for me. I didn’t even know there was such thing as a queer community, okay?... I found pretty much all my information from Jean. The basic information that I needed. What LGBTQ stands for, what LGBTQ is for. Where you stand in the LGBTQ umbrella.

In preparing the Pride Club to teach the school’s ESL class about LGBTQ issues, their advisor, Michael, provided numerous terminology handouts to the club, which had been secured from BC’s Pride Education Network. He also introduced them to several videos that could be used in the ESL workshop, of which *Peking Turkey* was eventually selected. Advisors were therefore essential conduits of information for some youth, particularly on the basics of the LGBTQ acronym. Besides factual information about LGBTQ terminology, advisors were an important source of institutional memory of how the GSA had emerged in that particular school. They were able to help the club build on successful projects from the past, such as the Pink Day Fashion Show at Aspen, or the Day of

Silence at Cedar, and had facilitated close working relationships with both administrators and the VSB's Anti Homophobia and Diversity Mentor. In some cases, a precedent was set, ensuring a seamless delivery of materials for awareness and yearly events.

As described in a later section on GSA events, youth members learned a number of important skills in how to effect change from their advisors. Networking, organizing meetings, publicizing events, speaking in public, writing policy, creating workshops, building coalitions are all *learned* skills; they are not innate. While the GSA adviser was frequently the lynchpin for much of this mentorship, youth members also taught and learned these activist and organizing skills from each other, such as by editing the scripts for morning announcements publicizing events. Further, they taught their advisers new ways of making LGBTQ-related materials relevant to youth, such as by introducing new video resources, or offering different ways of explaining concepts. In this way, the empirical evidence confirmed earlier theorizing that educational activities of the GSA can be multi-directional and intergenerational (Herriot, 2014a). Rather than simply being linear exchanges of information about LGBTQ history and terminology, the participating GSAs also had considerable multi-generational teaching and learning on a host of subjects including soft skills such as organizing, networking, and event coordination.

Historically, opposition to GSAs was based, at least in part on, on the presumption that clubs existed to provide how-to demonstrations of gay sex acts (Herriot, 2011). While the advisors all self-identified as sex-positive, and reported not shying away from direct questions about sex, I observed very few conversations that were explicitly about either sex acts or sexual health. Charlie (grade 12, gender non-conforming, female presenting, lesbian) remembered that when the GSA had lost their advisor the previous

year but continued to meet informally, “we did talk about sex a little bit more, but that’s also because we had a couple other older members,” so it is possible that advisor’s presence actually curtailed conversations about sex. Rather than being stifled, however, explicit discussions about sex acts or sexual health were simply not an obvious priority for the GSAs I observed. Of more interest were conversations about healthy relationships and intimate partnerships. As one youth explained during a meeting, “being LGBT isn’t all about sex, it’s also about relationships.”

I observed just one conversation explicitly pertaining to sex acts, and it centred on how ‘losing your virginity’ should be defined. Of particular interest was whether or not lesbians who don’t practice penetration could be considered virgins, and if consent mattered when self-identifying as a virgin. There was eventually consensus among the youth that “you’re not a virgin after your first *mutual* sexual experience, how it happens on your terms.” Far from being spaces for gay adults to lure impressionable youth into the perils of gay sex acts then, the conversations in the GSAs were surprisingly divorced from sex acts, and instead focused on other aspects of LGBTQ life, such as terminology, history, positive visibility, and civil rights.

Youth participants valued GSAs as learning spaces about a myriad of social and political issues relating to queerness. The following responses were typical from youth across sites when asked what the best part of their GSA was, why they kept coming back, or how they themselves would be different if there were no GSA:

Marcus (grade 12, male, bisexual): I also feel that like, being in clubs like this, it really does educate you. And so one of the things I look forward to - similar to

(name) is like, just like learning more and being less ignorant about the whole situation.

Rhien (grade 8, female, straight): Um, I like - I really like learning. So I like to learn about different things that are happening.

Ted1 (grade 12, male, heterosexual): Uh, personally for me, I wouldn't have learned acceptance and I think I would have (pause) viewed the community in a (pause) terrible way. In which my present self now would not like.

The learning valued by youth seemed to be less about specific facts, or pieces of information, but about difference and diversity more broadly. Irene (grade 12, female, straight) linked this wide exposure to diversity in sexual orientation and gender identities to global citizenship, and her impending move to university in a different province:

So [pause] when you go to university, you meet a whole bunch of different people. And aside from different ethnicities, you would have a lot of different people who identify differently. And it would be close-minded to think that you wouldn't. So GSAs, I think, help with that? Because not only does it show that there are other groups of people, or people that identify differently, you have to understand that this world has like tonnes of different people in it. And to be a citizen of the world, you can't just ignore an entire, like, group of people.

In the above quote, Irene is making tentative links between the learning in GSA and being or becoming a pluralistic global citizen when she moves away to university. Her conception of being a "citizen of the world" is inherently cosmopolitan, in that it eschews a homogenous national identity by instead embracing otherness and plurality (see

Delanty, 2006). It recognizes ethnic difference as just one of many differences that can and should be acknowledged within a polity.

5.4.3 Dialogue.

The participating GSAs engaged, to varying degrees, in dialogue about issues and current events that were important to them. Different from a debate, which splits participants into antagonistic and opposing teams, the youth in the GSAs were observed dialoguing, or learning together. Although teacher advisors contributed to the dialogue, conversations were mostly student-led. One of the most frequent topics was the state-sanctioned discrimination of queer athletes during the Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia, which was mentioned in all five of the clubs observed. Youth commented on the differences between Russia and Canada regarding LGBTQ rights, remarking that Canada was more progressive in this regard. There was nuance, however, and not all conversations on Sochi positioned Canada and Russia as being in a hierarchical, ‘us vs. them’ relationship. Dialogue was opened on homophobia in sports culture here in North America, and the sports culture in their own schools. Similar to findings on homophobic language, these conversations did not include direct reference to misogyny; the comparative lack of prestige and funding for women’s sports, for instance, was not mentioned. Sexuality and gender identity continued to be understood largely in isolation from one another, even as youth across all schools grappled with the blatant, state-sanctioned homophobia of the Sochi Games.

Dialogue about current events sometimes led to some form of action, such as creating Sochi Olympics displays, or a speech in support of Policy ACB (both of which are discussed in subsequent sections), and was sometimes a means unto itself. Voluntarily

having thoughtful and informed conversations about current events, particularly those that pertain to marginalized groups can be understood as fulfilling pillars one, two, and four of the ‘good citizenship’ espoused by *The Civic Mission in Schools*, wherein good citizens:

1. Are informed and thoughtful... have an understanding and awareness of public and community issues; and have the ability to obtain information, think critically, and enter dialogue among others with different perspectives.
2. Participate in their communities through membership in or contributions to organizations working to address an array of cultural, social, political, and religious interests or beliefs.
4. Have moral and civic virtues such as concern for the rights and welfare of others, social responsibility, tolerance and respect, and belief in the capacity to make a difference. (in Levinson, 2012, p. 43-44)

There were varying levels of structure to this dialogue. One GSA president, for instance, brought one or several LGBTQ-related news stories to each meeting for the club to discuss. Most schools, however, had less structure; with youth simply bringing up things they’d heard of, generally online through Facebook, Tumblr, or Twitter. Some of the many LGBTQ current events discussions initiated by youth included the ongoing anti-gay activism of the Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas, the Ugandan “Kill the Gays” bill, ex-gay reparative therapy programmes in North America, the Trinity Western law school accreditation debate, reports of transphobic violence in North America, and the strict gender roles assigned to children’s toys such as Kinder Surprises, or Happy Meals, to name just a few.

All of the clubs observed had conversations on how religion, and the Abrahamic faiths in particular, continues to shape attitudes towards both queerness and queer people. Youth were enthusiastic about these discussions; as Jacky (grade 10, straight, boy) said, “[w]e cannot avoid religion. We have to deal with it. We have to talk about it. We have to get stuff straight about religion. And gays.” Given how religion has been relatively expunged from formal curricula in Canada (see Sweet, 1997), and the uneasiness teachers report feel when teaching about faith (Hillier, 2014), the GSA, ironically enough, was likely one of the few spaces in school where youth could engage in meaningful and critical conversations about faith.

As discussed in section 5.3.3.2.3, religion was generally, though not always, understood as hostile to LGBTQ people and the gay rights movement. Odie’s (grade 9, no labels) remark that “some people have very conservative views. Where they believe that it's necessary to continue the heritage that it's not natural. That this is - in terms of religion that god does not believe - that this is going against god's will” synthesized the general consensus on religion’s effect on the LGBTQ community. Some of the openly queer youth shared painful and shaming experiences of rejection from their own faith communities, or from peers and adults of faith, such as religious relatives calling their orientation(s) or identity “disgusting.”

While religion was often seen negatively, bashing people of faith or faith itself occurred either infrequently or not at all. Charlie’s (grade 12, gender non-conforming, female presenting, lesbian) comment that “If you go by Old Testament rules, God is kind of a jerk,” and Taylor’s (grade 10, no labels) “I hope Fred Phelps [recently deceased leader of the Westboro Baptist Church] is burning in the deepest parts of hell” were some

of the few examples of unfettered frustration with faith. These comments aside, the overwhelmingly most common dynamic in conversations about religion was a nuanced attempt to understand religion as potentially affirming of queerness. Rather than wanting the LGBTQ community to break away from faith, youth seemed to want faith to expand to include LGBTQ people. Jacky (grade 10, straight, boy) explained that, “the Bible never stated directly that gays are possessed by homo demons. So the Bible did not discriminate against gays... I feel like the Bible has been altered in other people’s heads.” At a different school, Kitty (grade 8, cis female, Kinsey 6/trans inclusive) talked about being a member of her schools’ Christian club, as well as the GSA:

Kitty: Well, I've attended a J unit, and honestly from what I've gathered, they're pretty chill about it. About LGBTQ

Lindsay: What's a J unit, Kitty?

Kitty: It's the Jesus unit. Christian club.

Lindsay: Oh, ok.

Kitty: I think they're actually pretty cool people. But you know, I'm not really Christian but I still think that it's interesting. Like, if I wanna go listen in and understand about what's going on they're fine with it.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Kitty: Also, they're really nice people. So, I think they are (pause) I'm just gonna draw one later - but cool Christian personal award! Thank you for not being bigoted with your religion.

I understand Kitty’s final remarks less as demeaning or belittling sarcasm towards Christians, and more as a relieved acknowledgement of their tolerance. This interview

took place during the local news coverage of nearby Trinity Western University's controversial bid to host an accredited law school, even though their students must sign a covenant saying they'll refrain from homosexual activities whilst a student at TWU (see Meyer, 2010). More immediately, Kitty's school is in a neighbourhood where particular Christian groups canvass pedestrians with religious pamphlets making claims that the 'homosexual lifestyle', among other activities, is a sin. Aggressive, or loudly Christianity-backed homophobia and proselytizing are concepts she was likely intimately familiar with, whereas there are no news reports of Christian law schools openly welcoming queer students, or of Christians handing out LGBTQ-affirming pamphlets to people on the street. Finding a Christian group that wasn't overtly homophobic is, unfortunately still a rarity, even in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The school Christian clubs' acceptance of Kitty, who was openly pansexual and gender queer, and not a practicing Christian, indicates great potential for a rapprochement between Christian organizations and queer people.

I was surprised by the overall refusal to bash religion, or simply dismiss it out of hand, as I have frequently observed LGBTQ adults doing so in both personal and professional settings. Youth across settings genuinely wanted to reconcile religious thought, whether they were of faith or not, with LGBTQ-affirming views and practices. This marks a departure from the understandably more exclusionary and overtly anti-religious politics of earlier waves of gay rights organizing.

Beyond LGBTQ-specific news, youth also initiated conversations about other political news, such as the Russian invasion of Ukrainian Crimea, and local concerns, such as their unhappiness with standardized testing and mandatory curricula. In May and

June, the ongoing job action/lockout between the British Columbia Teachers Federation and the provincial government was a topic of constant concern. Having a designated time and space to dialogue about important issues were seen as the best part of the GSA for some participants. Elias (grade 8, male, straight) explained:

Lindsay: Why are you happy that you did [join GSA]?

Elias: Because, like (pause) I can express my ideas.

Lindsay: Can you tell me more about that?

Elias: I don't know. I guess I have a big imagination. I just (pause) throw things out there, and (pause) I guess they just work out...

Lindsay: How do you think it would be different if there was no QSA to meet every Wednesday?

Elias: (pause) I don't know. There's nobody to express their ideas to. And then they keep it to themselves, and they'd probably get depressed or something like that.

At a different school, Irene's (grade 12, female, straight) drawing of the differences between a good meeting and a bad meeting hinged on the potential for peer dialogue about things that mattered to them:



Figure 5.10 Participant drawing of a bad GSA meeting and a good GSA meeting.

Irene described her drawing in an interview.

Irene: So the bottom one is a good GSA meeting, where like, everyone's involved and everyone shows up and everyone's talking, and the top one is when sometimes people don't show up and there's not much talking. Even if they do, 'cause, um, I

don't know. I think, a bigger picture is just like a little bit of apathy, but then, um, smaller in the GSA, a lot of times, it seems like, it seems like there's not a lot of discussion. It's kind of like 'oh, well, we'll do this, and then we'll do this.'

Irene pointed out the need for balance between having space for dialogue, and more task-oriented planning meetings. She felt "pretty frustrated" when there were not enough members to have the kind of dialogue-based meeting that she drew as a good one.

In sum, youth GSA members enjoyed dialogues with their peers about current events, both LGBTQ-related, and political issues. When asked if they spoke about the LGBTQ-related issues they talked about in the GSA in their academic classes, they almost universally responded no, an absence that is further explored in section 5.4.4. This indicates that the GSA, along with being a social space for fun and banter, also occupied an important space as an offline 'public square' of sorts for youth-led political dialogues.

5.4.4 LGBTQ education inside the classroom.

Participants identified education on LGBTQ topics provided within the GSA, and the educational activities they conducted as a club for other students, such as teaching the ESL class, or putting up Sochi Olympics displays as filling an important educational gap. Youth participants overwhelmingly stated that the GSA was one of the only spaces in school where they learned about anything LGBTQ-related. When asked how her school would be different with no GSA, Stella (grade 12, female, straight) responded, "there would be less opportunity to talk about LGBTQ issues. Cause like, these things don't really come up in real life, unless like, it's facilitated in True Colours." When I followed up by asking if there were any other spaces in the school where education on LGBTQ topics was provided, the focus group laughed, as though this was a preposterous

proposition, and said no. At a different school, my conversation with Kitty (grade 8, cis female, Kinsey 6/trans inclusive) was representative of the majority of responses to this question:

Lindsay: So, do you get a lot of education about LGBTQ stuff in your classes already?

Kitty: Not a lot in our classes. In fact, pretty much none in our classes.

Given how Kitty's GSA no longer holds meetings, I wondered if she now has any access to affirming and factually accurate materials about LGBTQ topics in school. At a different school, Meghan (grade 11, cisgender woman, non-heterosexual) provided a broad, intersectional analysis of the limited viewpoints available in the formal curriculum materials:

Lindsay: Do you see any connections, or not, between what you learn in QSA, and what you learn in school?

Meghan: No [laughs]. Umm, no. The curriculum for, I think, public schools is very heterosexual, gender-binary, and definitely very from the man's point of view. It's a very I don't know, if you read the textbooks? Men. Straight, white men.

Lindsay: So what you're learning in the QSA, you're not getting elsewhere...

Meghan: No.

Meghan's remarks implied an intersectional evaluation of the teaching and learning that occurred in her QSA. By positioning the curriculum as dominated by "straight white men's" perspectives, and how different that is from the QSA, she implied that a diversity of viewpoints were part of the club's teaching and learning. In reviewing the field notes from Meghan's QSA, multiple issues relating to equity and diversity were discussed,

such as the academic achievement gap between white and Aboriginal students and the racial politics of the VSB's Policy ACB revisions. Similar to Irene's earlier comments, Meghan's experience of teaching and learning within the QSA was one of broader diversity, and not limited to just issues of sexual orientation.

The few participants who had encountered LGBTQ topics in the formal curriculum had two distinct experiences. Some spoke of learning about anti-gay persecution in history, like Rhien (grade 8, female, straight), who remarked that "sometimes, we talk about in Social Studies, like how it used to be like, if you were homosexual, you could be put to death, kind of thing." While a few had heard of the murderous anti-gay component of the Holocaust in English or social studies, the majority linked their LGBTQ education only to sex education, which was generally part of a course called Planning 10. While most youth interviewed commented on how sexual diversity was explicitly included in Planning 10, Charlie (grade 12, gender non-conforming, female presenting, lesbian), still found it heteronormative:

Charlie: When they're talking about sex, like they don't talk about homosexuality much. At all. And it makes me really angry. But, cause, if you are a queer student, and you're taking a Planning 10 class, if you're not, you know, a girl having sex with a boy, or a boy having sex with a girl, you're not going to know what's going on. You know? Cause if- if they're not talking about something relatable, you're not going to listen to them. You know, I, when I was in Planning 10, they started talking about sex, and I was like 'Ha! Ha, this is stupid. This is really dumb, why are we doing this, like where's the- "inclusive..."'

Even though she was just months away from high school graduation, Charlie reported that she had not experienced sex education that was inclusive of her sexual identity, or the sexual experiences she had either already had, or was anticipating having. From a different school, Christopher (grade 10, male, gay) described a similarly heteronormative experience:

Christopher: So when the nurse um, teaches you about anal sex? They're very unspecific. I mean, just because you're gay doesn't mean you like having anal sex, or, and because you like anal sex doesn't mean you're gay... It's wonderful how they teach us all this knowledge because of course we have to know, since we're growing into adults- But why don't we have the option to learn about our own sexual orientation, how sex works for other sexual orientations... And, well, I don't want to say queer sex, cause that's kind of like- It should be sex. Just normal sex.

Christopher's experience is indicative of how heterosexual sex continues to be positioned as 'normal,' or 'just sex,' whereas queer sex is linguistically othered by adding 'queer' as a signifier. Owing its theoretical underpinnings to Simone de Beauvoir's (1952) seminal work, queer sex, if it is mentioned at all, is still very much 'the second sex.' Yet Christopher also points out that sex acts typically associated with queerness, such as anal sex, can and are also practiced by heterosexuals. Christopher therefore understood the demarcation between 'just sex and queer sex' as more complicated than merely the specific genders or sex acts involved.

Jake (grade 10, male, straight) ascribed discrepancies relating to how LGBTQ-inclusive Planning 10 was to the individual teacher. He remarked "it depends on the teacher, if we talk about non-straight relationships. Most of the people who've taught it

have brought it up, but it's not really in the curriculum. It's more or less just the teacher.”

This is a typical positioning of the teacher as the gatekeeper to important knowledge, particularly on politically controversial topics (Peck & Herriot, 2015; Thornton, 1991).

Christopher agreed, noting that in his experience, it was “really up to the teacher” if LGBTQ topics were covered at all.

Despite reporting disappointment with how sex education was approached within the schools, youth participants did not recommend filling this gap via the Internet. I had the following conversation with Cory (grade 11, trans FtM, gender fluid, nonconforming queer, pansexual) and Charlie (grade 12, gender non-conforming, female presenting, lesbian):

Lindsay: So if you're not getting your information around sexuality from Planning 10, for instance, right, or sexuality that's going to be useful for you, or interesting, where do you get it?

Charlie: You- you either don't. You get it online, which is not very [pause, sigh]

Cory: Don't suggest going online-

Charlie: Yeah, don't go online-

Cory: Just asking someone who knows more-

Charlie: But it's, but it's embarrassing. Like, you know, if you're shy-

Cory: It is embarrassing.

Charlie: You, you don't want to just be like, it's hard to ask someone about that, because especially in the society we live in, like we are very, I don't want to say prudish, but we're a prudish society.

Even though Charlie and Cory noted that frank conversations about sex were embarrassing, they ultimately preferred in-person learning to unfettered digital resources. This is an important point for ongoing policy discussions about how sex education can be taught in public schools. The advent of the information age and its increasingly individualized access to an array of subjects does not diminish the real need for in-person pedagogical approaches, regardless of the discomfort they can bring.

Education on LGBTQ topics outside of the GSA was reported to be lacking in a number of ways. Queerness was barely mentioned, and it was othered and vague when it did come up. In contrast, youth participants experienced a robust education on LGBTQ issues within the GSA, ranging from terminology and queer history to current events and equitable relationships. Eighteen years after Peter and Murray Corren's BC Human Rights complaint demanding more a more inclusive curriculum across levels, queerness was still pigeon-holed to sex education, and the occasional mention in history class. Although, British Columbia now offers an optional *Social Justice 12* course with a unit on LGBTQ issues, as Charlie in this study pointed out, "but nobody takes that." The data from this study indicates that there is still tremendous work to be done on mandating ore robust curricular inclusion of LGBTQ people and topics.

5.4.5 GSA-led education and activism throughout the school.

5.4.5.1 Events.

Planning and executing events occupied a significant portion of the GSAs' time and focus. The week prior to my beginning data collection, for instance, Aspen Secondary's club had thrown a 'Day of Pink' fashion show, which was attended by the entire school, and was reportedly well received. Dogwood Secondary created a "Tree of

Positivity” for the Day of Pink, wherein students wrote affirming, LGBTQ-positive, and anti-bullying messages on pink post-its, which were stuck on a paper tree in the main foyer.

The Day of Pink is an international day against bullying, discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia, and originated when two straight Nova Scotian students intervened when a male student was bullied for wearing a pink shirt in April, 2009. The students galvanized their school to wear pink in solidarity, and an annual tradition was born. The Day of Pink website (dayofpink.org) is maintained by Jer’s Vision, which is a Canadian gay rights NGO.

Cedar Secondary’s GSA planned and executed their Day of Silence event during data collection. Day of Silence is an annual day of action wherein students take a public vow of silence to call attention to the silencing effects of LGBT-based bullying in schools. Beginning in 1996, and maintained by the American gay rights NGO Gay-Lesbian-Straight Education Network (GLSEN), participating students wear ribbons to draw visible attention to their vow, and hand out cards explaining their vow of silence to their teachers and peers.

Evergreen Secondary’s True Colours planned and executed a Day of Purple lunch hour, which was also intended to draw attention to the damaging effects of homophobic bullying. The Day of Purple took a more strength-based approach than the Day of Silence, and instead literally celebrated sexual and gender diversity while simultaneously providing facts (via posters and the morning announcements) about homophobic bullying. At another school, the school board granted permission for the GSA to fly the

rainbow flag outside of their school in solidarity with queer athletes and the Russian LGBTQ community during the Sochi Winter Games.

There were numerous logistical and organizational tasks associated with planning an event. For a comparatively smaller event such as the Day of Silence, for instance, youth needed to secure permission from the principal to hold the event, email all staff, advertise on the morning announcements, photocopy handouts and posters, procure the sign up sheet from the Day of Silence website, receive the buttons and other materials from the VSB's Anti-Homophobia and Diversity coordinator, and purchase the pink tree ribbons that were to be given to all participants. The Day of Purple required all the same tasks in addition to purchasing decorations, securing permission from teachers to leave class early to decorate, organize food for sale, and set up a photo booth.

Events served symbolic purposes. They physically took up space, often the most public and prominent spaces in the school. In granting permission to the GSA to take up that space, administrators were implicitly communicating affirmation of queerness and queer people within the school. That the events were largely well-attended is indicative of broader affirmation from staff and the student body. This type of visibility is something that first generation GSAs of the early 2000's, and even newly-emerging Canadian GSAs in hostile environments could only dream of (see Herriot, 2011; Lund, 2007). Such visibility is a poignant disruption of the overwhelmingly hetero-centricity of physical spaces in secondary schools. The comparative ease with which differently-sexed couples can walk hand in hand, or even kiss in the hallways, has been noted in ethnographies of gender performances in high schools (Pascoe, 2007). Additionally, photos of gender-segregated (and highly homophobic) sports teams, advertisements for school dances, and

the senior prom, are all rigidly normalized, and condoned by administrators and staff alike. Allowing space for queerness, first within the closed doors of the GSA itself, and then within the public spaces of the school is a marked shift in the generally strict gender policing of schooling.

Visibility extended beyond their own individual schools, as two participating GSAs attended a board-sponsored event. Collaborating with Jer's Vision, the VSB facilitated the day-long 'Dare the Stand Out' conference, featuring keynotes and breakout sessions on topics of interest to GSAs, such as "Trans* representation in the media," and "GSA organizing." The Evergreen True Colours hosted this event within their own school, and collaborated with their advisor on organizing details such as room assignments and catering.

While there were many positive aspects to events, such as learning organizational skills and increasing visibility, Fir Secondary teacher advisor Heidi (female, straight) worried that they facilitated a type of cynical citizenship:

My moral dilemma with clubs right now is that (pause) I wish for the clubs (pause) to be in existence for sincere reasons. And for a purpose. And this is only a thought I've had recently. I think that sometimes clubs are developed or created in an effort to bump up somebody's resume. Or a university application... And I'm struggling with that idea right now because I feel like that is the antithesis of citizenship (laughs)

At Cedar Secondary, GSA president Irene (grade 12, female, straight) expressed similar thoughts when I asked her what she would change about her GSA:

But- but I want- I would like if there was like a magic club where this would turn in to like people would be more actively interested and interested in more so than, like, ‘oh, this would look great on a resume...’

The conceptions of citizenship articulated by Heidi and Irene are a manifestation of what scholars have called the neoliberal citizen (Shultz, 2007; Joshee, 2009), who is motivated to create civic change primarily by integrating in to existing economic and political neoliberalism. Club membership for the neoliberal citizen is primarily to boost their credentials to access wider global markets, and therefore increase capacity to accumulate wealth. This type of citizen is often at odds with others in Shultz’s and Joshee’s respective typologies, particularly Schultz’s (2007) radical citizen, and Joshee’s (2009) liberal social justice citizen.

5.4.5.2 Posters.

GSA-sponsored posters were also visible cues of acceptance and affirmation. Posters were sometimes the event themselves (e.g., Cedar’s creation of Sochi posters with their own student athletes, Dogwood’s creation of the Day of Pink tree in the foyer), advertising an event (e.g., Cedar’s posters for the Day of Silence, Evergreen’s advertising the GSA conference they hosted), or bringing awareness to the club (e.g. Birch and Aspen’s posters about the time and location of the meeting). Creating and distributing posters was also a frequent topic of conversation within the GSAs. How the posters would be made, from whom they would be procured, where they could be displayed, and how they could secure permission to mount them were all considerations that had to be discussed by the group.

In recognition of the anti-gay backlash during the Sochi Winter Games, all six schools displayed posters depicting athletes of the same gender identity kissing (see figures 7.2 & 7.3). Posters were distributed to the GSA advisors via the school board's Anti-Homophobia and Diversity mentor, and were originally designed and produced by the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia. Advisors, either in conjunction with the GSA youth, or acting of their own accord, then put them up around the school.



Figure 5.11 Poster supporting LGBTQ athletes at the Sochi Winter Games.

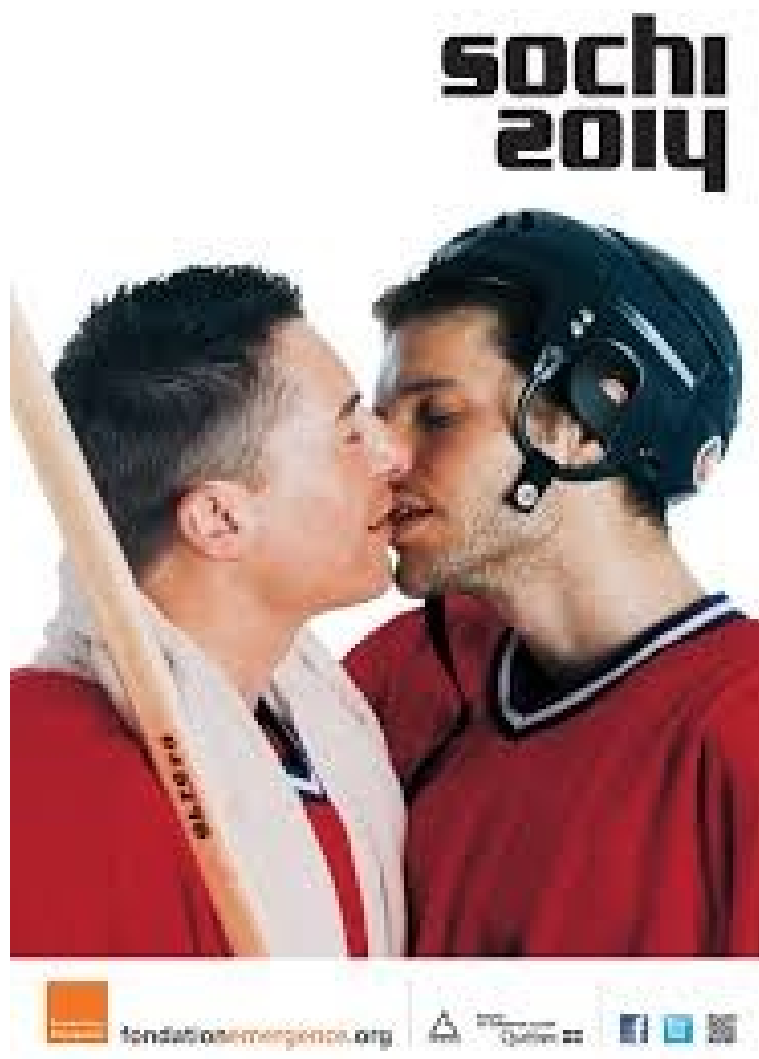


Figure 5.12 Poster supporting LGBTQ athletes at the Sochi Winter Games.

The Cedar GSA personalized this campaign by creating their own versions of these posters, featuring the student athletes from their school. The Sochi poster campaign was a significant undertaking for this GSA, which generally had low membership numbers (mean = 3). In contrast, the poster campaign involved non-GSA members, including photographers from the yearbook, student athletes, and student councillors. In a blend of advocacy and social time, this homemade poster campaign concluded with a well-attended thank-you lunch hosted by the GSA. Because Cedar's poster campaign featured

the faces of students, many of whom were not part of this study, I have chosen not to include photos of them in the dissertation, however, they featured students in similar poses as the athletes in figures 5.11 and 5.12.

Posters served different functions for those who displayed them and those who saw them. An administrator described them as a sign of safety and tolerance:

Lindsay: So what does that mean, do you think, that those are up in the school?

Folks walking by, what do you think that means - what's that communicating?

Anything?

Ted2 (straight, male): Um, tolerance to (pause) any and every one. Acceptance.

Um, you have the - I think it - underlying it all, you have a right to feel safe here...

Every student in every respect has every right to feel safe here.

The GSA advisor at that school reiterated the posters' function as a visual reminder of safety, as well as a symbol of recognition:

Lindsay: What do you think the effect of the [rainbow] stickers and posters are?

Jean (gay, male): I think it's good. All of a sudden, all the kids who were identifying as LGBTQ, 'oh, I am represented here.' I mean, as a queer person, I know that anytime I'm somewhere and I see a rainbow flag, or a rainbow sticker, it touches me, it makes me feel safe, right? So I think it's important to have that. I think we do it so much now at all the schools, the kids are like 'oh, rainbow stickers, who cares' right?

Lindsay: Right

Jean: But at least it's there if not in their conscious then in their subconscious mind that 'okay, yeah, my school doesn't tolerate that.' And maybe they'll change their

behaviours. Right? I mean, even at [Dogwood], the kids, like we have posters up all over the place, and these... boys who were born in Russia, and, and girls as well, but it seems it's more the boys I hear that were homophobic. They're not tearing it down

Jean made some important points about posters. He expanded Ted's characterization of their role in school safety by explaining how they are subconscious reminders of accepted behaviour. Regardless of how saturated the school is with rainbow stickers and posters, or whether or not youth see them as a "big deal," the adults interviewed nonetheless felt they contributed to school safety. Jean's noting that they were not torn down by a group of boys who were presumed to be homophobic indicates at least a tacit tolerance on their part, to having queerness represented in the school.

Students agreed that posters and stickers affected the school environment. Sasha (grade 12, female, straight/confused) thought that posters were reflective of the school climate in remarking that, "[w]ith posters people can go like 'oh, other people care about this cause too. Like, that's great I can't believe our school is so, like, open-minded about this.'" At a different school, Neyko (grade 12, mostly male, pansexual/Kinsey 4) compared his experience with them in Vancouver to what he imagined it would be like in his native Bulgaria:

Lindsay: So help me understand the meaning or the significance of the posters

Neyko: It's um (pause) it's kind of symbolic, I feel. Because (pause) I come from Bulgaria and Bulgaria is not so much of a tolerant place. If I were to go to my school - my old school and put up an LGBT poster it won't be there by then end of the day. It would be gone. Probably torn to shreds

Lindsay: Okay

Neyko: And, you know, seeing these posters stay up, not get defaced and stuff, for me it's sort of symbol that yeah, people in this school are okay with LGBT issues

Although there were no reports of posters being defaced at Neyko's school, this was reported as being a problem at several of the other participating schools. Irene (grade 12, female, straight) described two of the posters featuring the school's athletes in support of LGBTQ Winter Olympians as being "attacked" by having student names written above them. Eventually, the defaced posters were taken down. At Fir Secondary, the president of the now-defunct GSA reported that the poster advertising the GSA in the main foyer was continually ripped down. In response, he explained that "the more they ripped it, the bigger, and more colourful, and (pause) queerer it would be." Several of the advisors at Christopher's (grade 10, male, gay) school indicated that it was a teacher ripping down the GSA posters. The administration dealt with the problem by "... writing an email explaining what was taking place in reminding them that we are a school of diversity and acceptance. And that created a firestorm with 99% of the staff because they were outraged that this was taking place" (Jean, advisor, male, gay). This administrative and staff response indicates a shift from previous GSAs, where principals or faculty have been found unwilling to address defaced posters or homophobic graffiti (DeJean, 2004, 2007; Donahue, 2007; Endo, Reece-Miller & Santavicca, 2010; Ferfolja, 2005). The issue of a lone unsupportive faculty member was mentioned at another school, where Polina (grade 8, female, heterosexual) mentioned that one teacher was known to be against the GSA, but that as it was just one teacher, this did not seem to affect the GSA.

The True Colours club was surprised and horrified when I mentioned that some of the participating schools had their posters defaced, and inquired if they had similar experiences.

Little One (grade 11, girl, heterosexual): I don't think our posters ever get ripped down.

Several youth in unison: No, no.

Danielle (grade 12, female, straight/heterosexual): Never do. Like, the only posters that have been like, ripped down that I know of are like, election posters.

Several voices: Yeah.

Little One: But like, that's for campaigning for student council. But I don't think like, actual event posters or like, club posters have ever been ripped down?

Danielle: The most that's been done is like drawing a moustache or something (laughter). No one ever writes mean words on them.

Overall, having their posters defaced was not a significant problem for the participating schools in this study. When it did occur, it was swiftly dealt with and the youth seemed unfazed by it. Advisors, however, were frustrated and disappointed that their colleagues demonstrated their lack of support by removing posters, and took solace in knowing that the majority of their colleagues condemned those actions.

Continuously displayed, unmolested posters communicated a variety of messages beyond mere visibility. Caroline (grade 12, female, gay/queer) felt that someone who was questioning their sexuality might take comfort in seeing them, but that they were not “a big deal” for her personally because she was secure in her identity as a gay woman. Cory (grade 11, trans FtM, gender fluid, nonconforming queer, pansexual) felt like the posters

for the Day of Silence and the Transgender Day of Remembrance “have just slight information, which I feel like is the slight education, that everyone’s getting,” remarking that these posters were likely the only time the student body encountered an acknowledgement of anti-trans violence. Similar to Cory, Irene (grade 12, female, straight) felt that the Sochi Winter Games posters featuring student athletes at her school contributed to dialogue around important issues:

Irene: Those were actually pretty controversial, a lot of people were like “oh man, what’s going on.” But [pause] which is kind of good, because those posters are intended to be controversial. Like they’re intended to make people like start talking and wondering what is happening at the Sochi Olympics... They fulfilled their [pause] that was what they were aiming for, and that’s what they achieved.

Reporting from different schools, Cory and Irene both indicated that posters have some efficacy in fulfilling one of the GSAs’ goals, which is to raise awareness of LGBTQ people and issues amongst the student body. Their views, however, are necessarily affected by their membership in the GSA, and their desire for the posters to have some demonstrable impact in the school. To get a better sense of how posters were received, I asked a non-member about them:

Lindsay: What was it like for you, to see the displays up?

Jiani (grade 8, female, heterosexual): I never realized that there’s so many different terms, cause they put a whole bunch of different terms up too [pause] I didn’t know there were so many classifications to fall under, I didn’t know there were so many people who were open about being LGBTQ in the Olympics and stuff.

Lindsay: Oh wow. So it was like, educational, for you?

Jiani: Yeah.

Lindsay: Do you think it was for the rest of your school?

Jiani: I'm not sure if, um, if everybody else looked at it, but I think the ones who did look at it probably found it educational.

Jiani is just one bystander, and was likely already amenable to LGBTQ issues and people because she volunteered to be interviewed for this study despite not being a member of the Pride Club. So while not representative of all students at all schools, her perspective indicated that some of the informational posters put out by the GSA are broadening the horizons of at least some of the passers-by. At a different school, Sasha (grade 12, female, straight/confused) described how LGBTQ posters in school had a direct impact on her behaviour in elementary school, when there was no school-based GSA:

Sasha: Well, the first time we ever saw, like, 'don't say that's so gay' was always on the posters. I remember the first time I saw that poster, I was in the fifth grade, maybe sixth. And I remember looking at that and being like, 'Oh! Ok! They don't want me to do this.' This is like, what the establishment wants me to do. I should probably do this.

Lindsay: Right.

Sasha: And then, I grew up with that so now I'm like, 'this is wrong. I can't do this.'

Sasha raises an important point about legitimacy and public space. Having LGBTQ-positive messages endorsed by those in positions of authority (i.e., the administrators who would have needed to grant approval for them to be displayed) strongly communicates the behavioural, and potentially attitudinal expectations of a place. The tone of the publicly displayed posters was of significant concern however. While Sasha's experience

was a reminder to use respectful, non-derogatory language, Irene felt that some posters communicated entrenched victimhood:

Irene: The posters [at a different GSA] were a huge success, and a lot of people were coming [to GSA meetings]. Their posters were fairly, like [pause] not negative, but like fairly based on tragedy... and the posters we saw online, were really [pause] aggressive, as in like ‘everyone [pause] everything sucks, life sucks, and school sucks, and everyone’s mean.’ [They had] all these statistics about how many people commit suicide, and like how often people cry alone... it seems like that’s the main motivation for people, to like join the club. It’s like ‘oh look at all these terrible things.’

None of the statistics in the posters that Irene mentioned were inaccurate, nor did she want to shy away from the fact that school-based homophobia and transphobia were real, and serious problems. She was more concerned that a single narrative about queerness and queer people was allowed to dominate outsider perceptions of LGBTQ life. Irene repeatedly talked about the need for nuance in the GSA’s self-presentation, that there needed to be space to acknowledge the great joy and happiness that come with being queer. More than once she said “I don’t want the GSA to become, like, a charity case,” and she at one point broke down in tears, frustrated that other schools who focused on “tragedy” had a higher membership turnout than her own club, which often struggled to retain even three members. She was visibly distressed as she articulated a paradox that has long plagued activist communities, namely that publicizing a serious problem increases activism while simultaneously flattening an entire community into a victim role.

Roan (grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer) articulated similar concerns, especially with regards to trans youth, in the following conversation:

Roan: I think a lot of people have the idea or view the LGBTQ community as always wading through a massive pile of terrible things. But there's a lot of us who kind of just want to be flippant and whatever a lot of the time. And be like, normal teenagers and talk about clothes and go shopping...

Lindsay: I've had this come up a few times with different QSAs. One youth was saying you know, I don't want the QSA to be seen as a charity case

Roan: That we don't just take in everyone's rejects

Lindsay: Right. That there can actually be something fun about being a queer youth, and maybe we could focus on that some of the time.

Roan: Sometimes it's nice to just not be like, hey let's not talk about being dying for once. Because people are dying, but we should take a moment to be happy as well... Or you can just hang out and walk around the gaybourhood, or just go to movies, and just have fun with your crew of friends and not like, the world is falling apart and we need to do something about it! Cause a lot of the time it's just nice to chill out, and hang out and be calm. Cause we get so little time to do that.

Cause our lives just are shitstorms most of the time.

Irene, Roan, and others were adamant that the GSA not be an exclusively activist space by emphasizing the need for socializing. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, other youth members reported feeling guilty and ineffective because they placed such little value on GSAs' social function. These seemingly contradictory findings indicate that youth members experience GSAs differently even when they attend the same club at

the same school. They also point to how delicately the various functions of GSAs must be balanced.

Irene and Roan also eschewed the GSAs supportive functions as articulated in the policies reviewed in chapter four. They rejected the notion that the *primary* purpose of GSAs were to protect, rescue, or support vulnerable LGBTQ youth and instead see its supportive function as one of many components of the GSA. They seemed to resent the notion that its supportive functions are seen to take priority over other aspects of the club.

5.4.5.3 Calling out.

Responding to, and correcting homophobic remarks was one of the ways that GSA members thought that they educated the student body. This type of intervention, or “calling out,” was enacted in different ways across sites. At Dogwood Secondary, Elias (grade 8, male, straight) explained two different strategies he used to call out his peers:

Elias: Like (pause) if I hear someone being called a faggot, or ‘that’s so gay’ or something, I’ll either step in, or I’ll go to the counsellor or principal right away.

Lindsay: Wow. So how are you able to do that? Cause not everyone can do that?

Elias: Well, I’m not afraid.

Elias reported confidence in being able to call out peers, or report their behaviours to staff and administration. He did not fear physical reprisal from those making homophobic remarks, and he trusted the adults in his school to believe him and take his concerns seriously. This is a considerable improvement from Taylor et al.’s (2011, p. 110-111) finding that 33% of LGBTQ students report that their teachers never intervene in school-based homophobic comments, and 67% describing teachers as ineffective in addressing homophobic harassment. While Elias did not comment further on how his counsellors

and principals responded to his concerns, it is nonetheless important that he felt comfortable enough bringing them to their attention.

Not all instances of calling out involved a direct confrontation of a peer. Kitty (grade 8, cis female, Kinsey 6/trans inclusive) told the following story of her calling out through writing, and of reporting to a staff member:

Kitty: A few weeks ago I was going to the women's washroom, and someone wrote on the door 'trannies only' on the door. And I was all like 'hold up, that is not a nice thing.' So I just went and told Jean [the GSA advisor] and then I was all like - so I pretty much took out a Sharpie and I Sharpied over it. And I'm like, 'nope,' and then I put a little sticky note up beside that said 'please don't use slurs' and then I left.

Lindsay: So you felt safe enough to go tell Jean?

Kitty: Yeah, like I'm gonna go tell Jean because like, that's not nice.

Similar to Elias, Kitty was comfortable enough to tell the adults at school when she saw instances of symbolic violence. She also had the confidence to take action on her own, by colouring over the transphobic message, and, through her sticky note, provided education on acceptable language use to future occupants of the women's washroom. Although Elias and Kitty went to different schools, they shared Jean as a school mental health worker and GSA advisor. His dual role as a counsellor and GSA advisor, as well as his being an openly gay man, may have contributed to their immediate willingness to report homophobia to him.

Not all youth immediately confronted school-based homophobia. Meghan (grade 11, cisgender woman, non-heterosexual), who told me multiple stories of her calling out

her peers, described once feeling burnt out by this never-ending task after an LGBTQ-affirming workshop was offered at school:

Meghan: [She] came in to our grade nine social studies class, and was talking about why saying ‘you’re so gay’ and ‘that’s so gay’ and ‘faggot’ are such like- they’re so like, there’s no point in saying that because it’s kind of stupid.

Lindsay: Yeah

Meghan: And then, I’m walking home, and I hear those guys in my class saying ‘that’s so gay’ and I’m like [pause]

Lindsay: So what did you do?

Meghan: I just walked passed them, because it was the end of the day, I just want to go home.

Lindsay: You’re off the clock

Meghan: I’m off the clock, I just want to go home.

Meghan resented feeling like she was always thrust in to the role of having to educate her peers on the harms of homophobic language. Being out at school meant it was possible that the boys in her class were deliberately taunting her by using homophobic language within earshot right after the presentation. It is not surprising that Meghan felt a sense of burn out, and wanted to retreat after this encounter. The boys’ calculated rejection of anti-homophobia education also disrupted earlier notions that students would easily adopt and integrate all such education. This conception of anti-homophobia education as always being successful is further analyzed in chapter six.

Cory (grade 11, trans FtM, gender fluid, nonconforming queer, pansexual) explained how he relied on both verbal and non-verbal strategies when went calling out his peers:

Usually what I'll do, is I'll approach them and say 'well, that wasn't cool, maybe you should think of this next time, or maybe think of these people, or this situation, or just know who you're offending, and what not.' Um, or just, even giving them a look, after they say something. The amount of times that I've just looked at someone after they've said something rude. They just cower, and like, I didn't, I didn't say anything, I was just, looked at them and went 'really? That's not okay,' and they're- they usually apologize, and never really say it again in front of me.

Cory went on to explain how he tried to keep a sense of humour when calling out his peers, which happened fairly frequently within the sports culture of his schools' hockey academy, of which he was a part:

Cory: But yeah, it's definitely weird being in school, in hockey, and being queer at the same time. But, it's definitely fun.

Lindsay: What's fun about it?

Cory: I don't know, I guess it's my sense of humour, I always have fun messing with people's gender, and messing with people's ideas of what gender is, and, and, just the sexual orientation along with gender, people get that confused and mixed up, and what not, and just, and... I don't know. Just educating them, whether they like it or not, is kind of how I roll.

Here, Cory is characterizing calling out as ongoing education, in which he playfully keeps a sense of humour. The perpetual nature of calling out, however, particularly when

it is in response to more targeted harassment, can be exhausting, as Meghan's earlier story demonstrated. This is doubly burdensome for openly queer youth, who engage in the difficult emotional work of educating their peers, while simultaneously feeling the effects of harassment. As Andy (grade 10, gender non-conforming, gender questioning, pansexual) explained, "That really grinds my gears. And when someone says that, I automatically want to hit them." In this sense, the GSA's explicit inclusion of allies is instrumental in redistributing the burden of calling out. Allies like Polina (grade 8, female, heterosexual) and Rhien (grade 8, female, straight) commented on how hearing homophobic language caused a visceral reaction, and described their potential approaches to calling out a peer:

Polina: If somebody said faggot to me or towards me, then I would like, yell at them... I'll have an explosion at you.

Rhien: Yeah. I'd probably get pretty upset too. It's not really - like, it's really disrespectful towards other people. And like, people that - especially for people that like, are a part of that - like the community and that kind of thing. And like, are LGBTQ and all that kind of stuff. Like, that could really like, hurt someone.

While it is unknown how often allies actually do call out their peers, when they have a strong response to it, as well as a specific plan for action, they are sharing the burden of calling out, at least some of the time. This also indicates that they are unlikely to use homophobic slurs themselves.

5.5 Overlapping Social, Supportive, and Educative Functions in the GSA

Returning to the GSA Network's (2011) Venn diagram of types of GSAs introduced at the beginning of this chapter, I used the diagram itself as an interviewing

tool with some of the youth participants. When it was felt to flow naturally with where the conversation was going, I would pull out the chart and ask participants to draw an 'x' on the spot they thought their GSA belonged. Figure 5.13 is a collated version of all the responses, with different colours indicating participants from the same school.

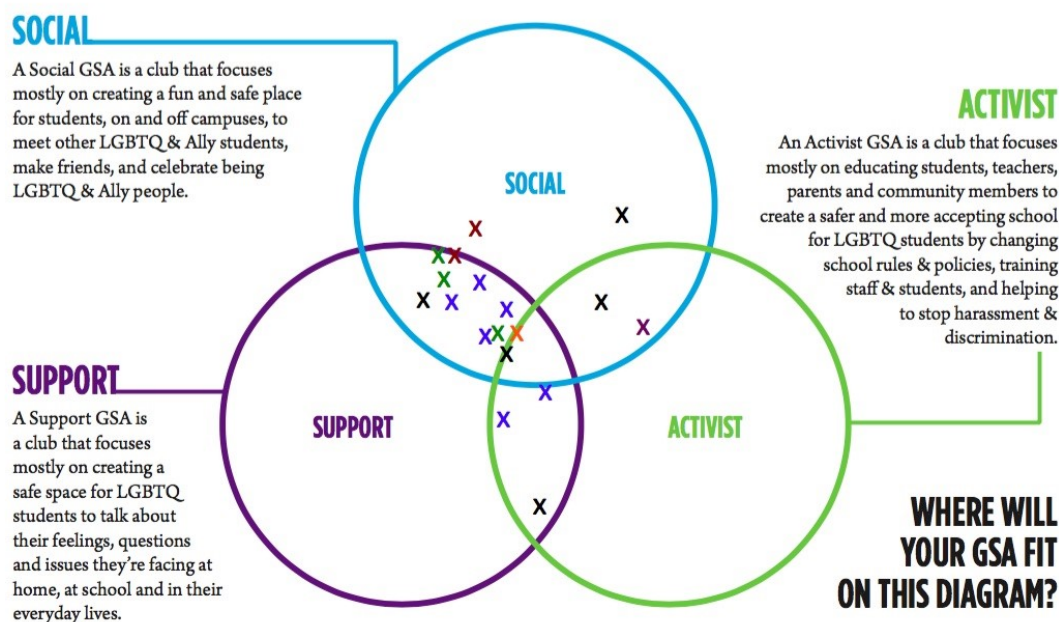


Figure 5.13 Aggregated participant responses to 'Where will your GSA fit on this diagram?' (National Association of GSA Networks, 2011, p. 4).

Table 5.1. Legend of colours used in figure 5.13.

School	Colour
Aspen	Black
Birch	Green
Cedar	Purple
Dogwood	Red
Evergreen	Blue
Fir	Orange

There were two important types of diversity within the responses; variation between and within GSAs. Looking first at variation between clubs, the four respondents from Birch (represented in green) were clustered in the same third of the Venn diagram, in the overlap between social and support. This contrasted with Evergreen (represented in blue), which had four markings in that same third, but two additional markings in a different third, that is the overlap between support and activism. This variation between clubs indicated that different GSAs take on distinct functions and goals; there is no ‘one-size-fits-all.’ Future work needs to include this multiplicity of experience, and avoid making broad or sweeping claims about the particulars of GSAs.

Similarly, different members of the same club experienced its’ various facets differently. None of the five respondents from Aspen (represented in black), for example, put their X in the same region of the diagram. This multiplicity of experiences with GSA indicates how the experience of belonging to such a club is a deeply personal one. Depending on who the member is, and what types of experiences they value, they will emphasize different features of the club. Future work could further investigate why members of the same club experience it so differently.

5.6 Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive analysis of three overlapping purposes and functions of GSAs, namely how worked as social, supportive, and educational or activist spaces. It also provided more nuance to the findings from the policy analysis in chapter four, namely that while youth members value the GSAs supportive functions, they reject positioning the club as exclusively or primarily a support group for queer-identified youth. GSAs were instead found to be dynamic spaces, whose purposes and

functions shift with the membership, and that members understand and value the same GSA experiences in very different ways.

CHAPTER 6: Activism in GSAs

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter relating to the purposes and functions of GSAs is an examination of how two of the participating clubs (Birch and Cedar) took up activist roles during the Vancouver School Board's revisions to *Policy ACB: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities* (hereafter referred to as Policy ACB)⁹. I begin by providing a summary and context for Policy ACB, and then discuss the contentious gender-neutral washroom provision and youth's attempts to exercise student voice throughout the process in turn. The data relating to the both the gender-neutral washrooms and student voice is then analyzed with regards to citizenship and the politics of recognition, as well as children's participation rights. Finally, this data is situated as being the most recent chapter of the "policy narratives" pertaining to LGBTQ youth in the Lower Mainland, thereby extending the policy analysis of chapter four.

6.2 Policy ACB (2014): Summary and context

Six weeks following the commencement of data collection for this study, the VSB held five extremely well attended consultation meetings about the revisions to Policy ACB for the public and interested parties. Attendees who had previously signed up to speak were welcome to give a five-minute speech on the issues. There were a total of 107 registered speakers, one of whom was already a participant in this study, with additional participants recruited throughout the meetings. Each meeting lasted between three and four hours; I attended and took field notes at all of these meetings. The proposed revisions most relevant to the GSAs in this study were

⁹ The adopted revision to Policy ACB (2014) can be found in full in Appendix J.

- 1) the students' right to have their self-identified gender(s) affirmed within their school;
- 2) the confidentiality clause prohibiting teachers, counsellors, or any school staff from outing a student to their parents without the student's explicit permission; and
- 3) trans students' right to use the school washroom and change room that corresponds with their gender identity

The youth participants' awareness of these policy revisions and concurrent public meetings was uneven. Four schools, (Aspen, Dogwood, Evergreen, and Fir) first found out through discussions with me that the policy was being revised, and that there would be public consultation meetings. The GSA at Birch found out from their advisor during a QSA meeting. The Cedar GSA and student body were the most informed, likely because the chair of their Parent Advisory Council (PAC) wrote an inflammatory public letter¹⁰ against the policy revisions and was frequently quoted speaking against it in the press. Most clubs were not aware that these changes were taking place until it became a well-publicized issue in the media; however, once they became aware that the public consultation meetings were happening all participating GSAs dialogued about it at least once.

One of the youth from the defunct GSA attended some of the public consultation meetings on his own, separate from his school's GSA, which by that time was no longer holding meetings. Two participating GSAs, Birch and Cedar, each took up the policy

¹⁰ I have chosen not to provide citations for the letter, or her many subsequent interviews, so as to better protect the pseudonym of the school, and the participants from that site.

revisions in two substantive ways, which I will address throughout the following sections on washroom access and student voice.

6.3 Policy ACB and washroom access

Public washrooms have dual roles. They are normatively understood as merely spaces for bodily needs to be privately attended to. It is only when a body is categorized as being in the “wrong” washroom that their role as a regulating structure of ability, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and class become apparent. I agree with Rasmussen (2009), who writes that,

toilets don’t just tell us where to go; they also tell us who we are, where we belong, and where we don’t belong. I therefore consider the space of the toilet using a poststructuralist theoretical perspective that sees space, architecture, sex and gender as things that are relational, and thus constantly renegotiated. Such a framework enables a consideration of some of the ubiquitous assumptions that underpin school toilets and the implications these have for all members of the community on a daily basis. (p. 440)

The following two sections consider both of school washrooms’ roles in schools without emphasizing one over the other. I begin by analyzing how trans youth themselves characterized their current access to school washrooms, and how they thought that the revisions to Policy ACB might change that access. I then review how the community, and adults at the VSB public meetings in particular, opposed the gender-neutral washroom provision of the revised Policy ACB.

6.3.1 Importance of gender-neutral washrooms for trans youth.

The Birch QSA had a significant stake in the gender-neutral washroom provisions because two of their members identified as trans, both of whom had difficulty accessing school washrooms safely and comfortably. As a result, the Birch QSA held multiple dialogues on both the policy's content and process. Andy (grade 10, gender non-conforming, gender questioning, pansexual) explained the importance of the revision mandating at least one gender-neutral washroom by describing the current obstacles they face in trying to access the washroom:

Lindsay: Is there a gender-neutral washroom right now at [Birch]?

Andy: Yes, but you have to go ask a counsellor for a key

Lindsay: What?

Andy: Yeah, um it's really not safe if you don't want to talk to a counsellor about your gender. Because that's kind of the whole reason to have a gender-neutral - well, it's not the whole reason, but it's a good reason to bring up. If you want a gender-neutral bathroom. Because if you don't wanna express who you are, and you're questioning. Or if you know who you are and you don't want to talk about it

Lindsay: Right

Andy: But technically, as someone who hates using the bathroom, I look in, and if I see people, I freak out. It's (pause) I don't want to talk to one of my counsellors to get a key for going to the bathroom.

Lindsay: No.

Andy: That's really weird!

Lindsay: (at same time) Who would want that?

Andy: No one. It's just weird.

In Andy's experience, not having an accessible gender-neutral washroom at school negatively affected both physical and mental/emotional wellbeing. They described having to balance their physical need to use the facilities with their profound anxiety and distress about being "caught" in the "wrong" one, or by having to inadvertently out themselves to the school secretarial or counselling staff. Birch's refusal to allow unfettered access to the only gender-neutral washroom is consistent with the schooling's long history of enforcing a gender binary through the building's physical structures (see Comacchio, 2006; Dussel, 2015; Gleason, 2001). Andy's self-identification as gender non-conforming and gender questioning meant that, in an essentialized gender binary, there was no "right" washroom for them to use. As Rasmussen (2009) argues, "symbols on toilet doors take for granted that bodies fit into two neat categories, and then proceed to sort them based on this presumption – a presumption rarely questioned in the production of toilet signage" (p. 440). The proposed revisions to Policy ACB were a radical instance of questioning and then altering washroom signage.

Roan (grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer) had much to say about how they were affected by a lack of gender-neutral washrooms at school. They explained,

Roan: Actually, I was in there once and someone went 'oh, the tranny' and then left. I don't know who it was, 'cause I was in the washroom, but that's a thing that happens.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Roan: And it would be great if that didn't happen, so if have single unit washrooms, then I can't get harassed while I'm trying to pee.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Roan: And I would love to just pee without being harassed, or being scared. Or standing in the washroom and hearing a voice that I know is a dangerous voice, and having to stay in the washroom until that voice leaves.

Although ostensibly a private place, Andy and Roan's experiences demonstrate how school washrooms are in fact very public sites of gendered regulation, where staff and students alike are free to police bodies and identities. Roan's experiences also draw attention to youth's investment in school washrooms' enforcement of the gender binary, as Roan was harassed in the washroom by other youths, not adults. With the exception of two small children at the final meeting, those opposing the revisions to Policy ACB at the VSB meetings were exclusively adults. Roan's narrative is a reminder that although they were not physically present to protest the gender-neutral washroom provision, young people as well as adults enforced gender segregation in school washrooms. This panoptic regulation caused considerable anxiety for participants with non-binary gender identities like Roan, all of whom reported feeling unsafe in those spaces.

Cory (grade 11, trans FtM, gender fluid, nonconforming queer, pansexual) reported many of the same experiences of harassment that Andy and Roan did, and considered having an accessible gender-neutral washroom as basic human right. He recounted the following lived experience as a trans youth.

Cory: Um, the biggest concern when I transitioned was washrooms. I just think they didn't understand how important it was. Or how unsafe I felt in the washroom

Lindsay: When I go to write about this for readers who (pause) may not think like you and I do. Can you explain, why is it important for you?

Cory: Um, just the simple fact that I can go to the bathroom whenever I want to when I'm at school. I'm at school more than I am at home... And I mean (pause) I feel like we should go into schools and say like, 'ok. No bathroom for you today.' Like, seriously, what would students do? That is a human right. Students should be able to go to the bathroom whenever they please. Students who are LGBT, or who simply just don't feel comfortable going to the washroom with other people around, can't go to the washroom. And you know, I think that - I know for me personally, it's hard not to go to the bathroom and do those things without freaking out at the thought of it. It's totally like, you know, hurting myself in a sense. That I feel unsafe...

Although he did not use the phrase 'children's rights,' Cory's comments are grounded in his understanding of youth having human rights. Rather than speaking about the LGBTQ adults who may need access to a gender-neutral washroom at school (e.g. teachers, parents, visitors, etc.) Cory emphasized how *students* need this right. This is possibly because adults at Cory's school had access to a number of adults-only, gender-neutral washrooms, while youth, as Andy pointed out, could only access a gender-neutral washroom with adult permission. In this context, Cory can be seen as advocating for youth to have the same rights to privacy, security, and self-determination that the adults at Birch already enjoyed. The implications of Cory's demands regarding children's rights and citizenship are more fully analysed in section 6.5.

6.3.2 Adult opposition to gender-neutral washrooms.

In a Cedar GSA discussion about the open letter against the policy written by their PAC chair, Irene (grade 12, female, straight) and Caroline (grade 12, female, gay, queer)

noted that one of the chair's arguments concerned the safety of straight students, rather than their queer peers, in gender-neutral washrooms:

Caroline: Because she was concerned for the safety of other children, and it's like, that's not really the safety that's been affected right now.

Irene: And she mentioned a lot about like children who aren't transgendered. Or LGBTQ. She was like, 'oh man, even students who are transgendered, you shouldn't press them to use the bathrooms' and stuff like that.

In their understanding of the chair's letter, Caroline and Irene explained how the chair worried not only for the safety of straight students, but also that trans youth would somehow be pressured or coerced into using a gender-neutral washroom. This anxiety, particularly around the potential for straight students to be in a gender-neutral space, is another iteration of how a moral panic can erupt when schools loosen the physical structures that enforce a gender binary (see CBC News, 2015a; Gulli, 2014).

Characterizing straight students as “unsafe” in gender-neutral spaces indicates the fragility of mandatory sex-segregation, and how much policing is required in order to maintain it.

Concerns about straight students' safety in gender-neutral spaces also stemmed from the belief that transgender women are not *real* women, but are rather dangerous men who want to access female-only washrooms in order to sexually harass or assault cisgender VSB schoolgirls. Such refusal to legitimize the gender identities of trans women is part of “transmisogyny,” “[a] term coined by Juliana Serano (2007), to denote the unique oppression experienced by people on the trans female/feminine spectrum (such as transsexual women) due to both transphobia and the societal devaluation of

women and femininity” (Airton & Meyer, 2014, p. 224). Many of the arguments against Policy ACB were less pertinent to educational policy-making as it is typically conceived, and had far more to do with maintaining hegemonic masculinity and the rape myths that support it. Blending transmisogyny with rape myths, one parent summarized this line of thinking, which was commonly expressed amongst opponents of the policy revisions:

What if students pretend to be transgendered for other purposes? In Toronto, a man pretended to be a transwoman to get access to a women’s shelter and sexually assaulted two women, one who was blind and homeless... Are we going to wait until these things happen to our daughters? Don’t use my kids for social experiments that aren’t working in other jurisdictions. (22 May, 2014)

There is much to be troubled by in this statement. At the heart of the speaker’s argument is the faulty assumption that trans women are in fact males who would masquerade as women for any purpose, nefarious or otherwise. Dubbed the “deceptive transsexual” trope (Serano, 2007, p. 36), this deliberate misgendering sees all trans women as “deceivers in an appearance-reality contrast between gender presentation and sexed body” (Bettcher, 2007, p. 48). In this view, gender identity and presentation are construed as a hostile trick being played on unwitting cisgender people, with biological sex or genital configuration privileged as a person’s ‘real’ identity. This misgendering has violent, and often fatal consequences for trans women (Perry & Dyck, 2014). At a later VSB meeting, a different parent reiterated this diminishment of (trans) gender identity in favour of anatomical determinism, noting, “I am concerned for my little daughter - what’s going to prevent a physical male from going into girl’s washrooms?” (29 May, 2014). According to this parent, their presumed or imagined knowledge of a bathroom

occupant's genitals is a more reliable predictor of both identity and behaviour than are visual gender cues or self-identification.

I asked Roan (grade 11, genderqueer, no gender, queer) later on about why they thought the adults opposing Policy ACB revisions were so focused on the gender-neutral washroom provision. Roan responded:

Roan: Bathrooms are a very easy thing to yell about. Because, um, a lot of the time, a lot of adults are just like, 'oh you don't use the opposite bathroom because you're going to get attacked or raped, or it's a hassle, or it's really unsafe to do.' And that can be true, but that's not really the case in schools. It's the case in the middle of the night when you're walking alone in a really conservative area of town. If you're in the wrong bathroom you can get like – people can get very, very upset at you.

Here, Roan demonstrated awareness of the transmisogynistic trope wherein transwomen are viewed as potential and/or probable rapists. Intriguingly, they also gave credence to a different dangerous rape myth, namely that sexual violence is more likely to happen “case in the middle of the night when you're walking alone in a really conservative area of town,” a claim that is refuted by available empirical evidence (see Gavey, 2005).

Roan's simultaneous rejection of one rape myth and belief in another indicated the complexity of youth's views; just because a youth dismissed one rape myth does not mean they refute all of them. The implications for how this affects research on and with student voice are taken up in section 7.5 in the following chapter.

Not all of the adults who spoke at the VSB meetings opposed the gender-neutral washroom provision. Multiple health professionals and educational scholars lauded the gender-neutral washroom provision as a positive social determinant of health. When

concerns about straight student's physical and sexual safety were raised at the VSB public consultation meeting on 22 May, 2014, for instance, Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc refuted them by citing her own research on how GSAs are correlated with positive outcomes for straight youth, including lower instances of binge drinking and decreased suicidal ideation for cisgender boys (Saewyc, Konishi, Rose & Homma, 2014). Morgan (grade 10, female, bisexual, preference for women), who was field noting her thoughts, feelings, and reactions during this public consultation had a strong response to this speaker:

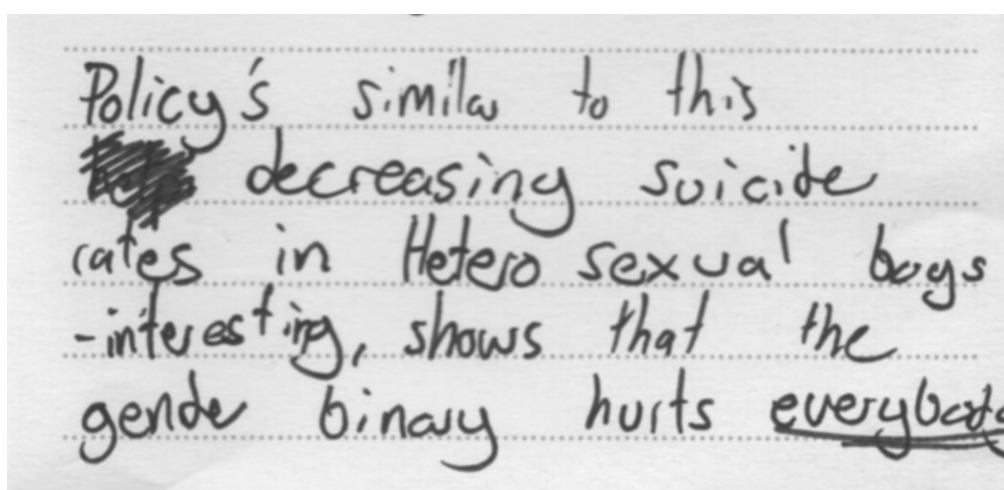


Figure 6.1. Participant field notes.

Morgan agreed with Saewyc's findings, and took the opposite view of her PAC chair and the opposing parents by believing that straight students' safety would be increased, rather than decreased, if schools took measurable steps to relax the gender binary, such as by having accessible gender-neutral washrooms.

Washroom access was among the most talked-about revisions amongst GSA members. It was not only positioned as being potentially life saving for current and future trans students, its' existence was thought to increase all students' health and wellbeing at school. Far from being a private space, the controversy around Policy ACB's gender-

neutral washroom provision is another iteration of previous theorizing, which emphasizes how very public this aspect of schooling can be (Dussel, 2015; Rasmussen, 2009).

6.4 Policy ACB and Student Voice

Of the six participating sites, Cedar Secondary's GSA, student body, and parent community were the most heavily involved with the policy process. This was largely because their PAC chair took a very public stance against the policy by writing an inflammatory letter, holding several press conferences, and hosting a special PAC meeting in response to the debates. Although none of the three Cedar GSA members were able to attend the public consultation meetings at the VSB, many other Cedar students did, and subsequently joined the club as a result of the activism supporting the policy. Indeed, the Cedar GSA grew from just three regular members at the beginning of data collection to more than thirty members after the policy was passed in June, and maintained a remarkably high membership rate through the following school year.

The Cedar GSA engaged with the Policy ACB revisions in other ways, for example, by engaging with their classmates online through the graduating class's Facebook group. GSA members showed me screenshots of this group, wherein they tried to educate their peers on what the policy would do if enacted, and why it was important. The physical space that the GSA occupied within the school also provided an important forum for dialogue about the policy revisions. For instance, Caroline, an openly gay grade 12 student had heard about this research from her guidance counsellor, and wanted to be part of it despite not being a GSA member. I had interviewed her several weeks before the policy became a public concern, and she stated unequivocally that she "didn't need the GSA." Once news of her PAC chair's opposition to the policy broke, Caroline

attended the very next GSA meeting as a place to vent her frustration, and to have her feelings validated. She remarked to me afterwards in the hallway that she appreciated having physical space within the school to engage with peers who were already on “the same side,” meaning other students who also supported the policy.

The Cedar parent community had an overwhelmingly negative response to the oppositional public letter from their PAC chair, and called a special PAC meeting (which I attended, along with the GSA president) to address their concerns. While students are typically allowed to attend and speak at PAC meetings, the chair initially refused their entry to the meeting, demanding that all those in attendance present a valid, government-issue ID, and proof that they were the parent or guardian of a Cedar student. The GSA president, in cooperation with the GSA and other allies had prepared a statement to read at this PAC meeting, and was visibly distressed about potentially not being able to read it aloud. Students were eventually permitted entry to the meeting, and Irene, the GSA president was allowed to read the GSA’s statement towards the very end of what ended up being a four-hour meeting. Visibly distressed and teary-eyed while reading it, Irene provided me with a copy of her speech afterwards, part of which read:

When PAC published their open letter I saw that what I want to protect is exactly what my peers do as well. There were social networking campaigns to spread word and raise awareness, students came to me as the Gay Straight Alliance President to express they stand by an equal and accepting Cedar... When they come to me, I want to reassure them, and I guess in part myself, that’s there’s nothing to worry about, but I’m not sure I can... I hope in your discussions tonight, you will keep in

mind the repercussions many Cedar students are experiencing even now, and the effect PAC is having on potential students.

Irene delivered her address towards the end of the PAC meeting, after many of the parents opposing the policy had left in protest of an openly trans former Cedar graduate speaking in its support. She was therefore speaking to mainly supportive parents, who affirmed the GSA and the policy revisions. Her physically occupying space in delivering this address and her commitment to maintaining “an equal and accepting Cedar,” are further analyzed as dimensions of citizenship, belonging, and recognition in section 6.5.

Irene’s experience speaking at the PAC meeting was a dramatically different experience of student voice than Violet’s (grade 11, rainbow gender, bi/sexuality fluid), who was sent to the overflow room at the VSB public consultation meeting. Violet and I arrived at the VSB at the same time, about 75 minutes before the consultation on May 22, and joined the growing lineup together. Despite presenting three different VSB student cards and her Vancouver Public Library card, she was told by the superintendent that because none of these pieces of ID were government-issued with her address on them, she could not enter. When Violet explained that, due to her age, these were the only pieces of identification she had (she was too young for a drivers’ license), the superintendent recommended that her parents come and show proof of address through a rental agreement or hydro bill. Violet dissolved into tears, and by the time her father arrived twenty minutes later, there were no places left in the main room and she was sent to the overflow room. In our many subsequent conversations about this series of events, Violet was adamant in identifying her experience as physically symbolic of how uninterested the adults were in listening student voices. From the overflow room, she

wrote me a note, which in part read, “I am outraged that I was not allowed to attend a meeting about a policy that directly affects me. I wish I was with my friends right now.” Her friend Morgan (grade 10, female, bisexual/preference for women), who was recording her thoughts and feelings of the VSB meetings, also wrote me a note about Violet’s experience:

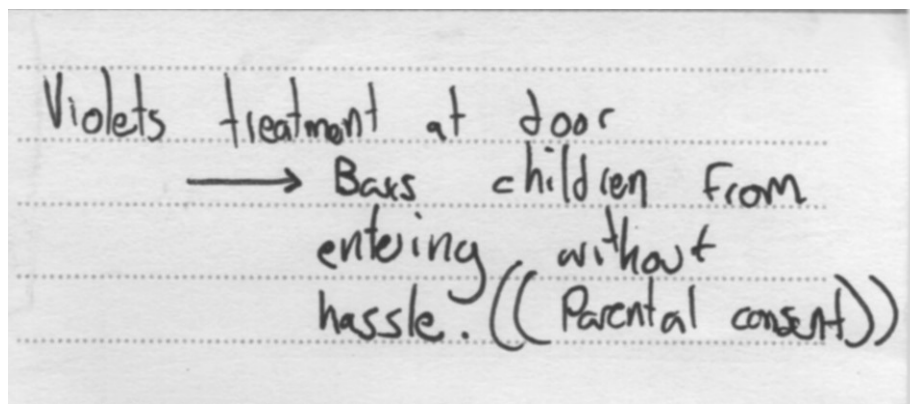


Figure 6.2. Participant field notes.

Morgan’s reference to parental consent added an additional consideration in determining how accessible these public consultation meetings were for students. Because youth’s parents typically carry their children’s government-issued identification (such as health cards and passports), youth *de facto* needed their parent’s permission to attend one of these meetings. This effectively banned youth who were not out to their parents from the meetings, the same youth who Cory will later describe as being the very students the revised Policy ACB was designed for. It is also an example of demanding that youth integrate into adult-only infrastructure in order to exercise their participation rights, rather than ensuring that they can participate fully as children (Moose-Mirtha, 2005).

Birch QSA members Meghan, Andy, and Cory each attended at least one of the public consultation meetings at the VSB. Due to the high volume of people in the gallery,

Meghan and Andy were sent to the overflow room (although not as dramatically as Violet was) where they watched the proceedings via live video feed. Andy reported transphobic harassment by a member of the public in the overflow room. Similar to Violet, both Andy and Meghan were frustrated that they had been sent to the overflow room despite being current VSB students who were directly affected by the policy. This physical exclusion from the main policy room is analyzed with relation to citizenship and children's participation rights later in this chapter.

Cory's experience of student voice differed from his Birch QSA peers, as the VSB Anti-Homophobia and Diversity mentor contacted him to become a registered speaker at the second public consultation meeting. He instead chose to have his mom do most of the speaking, while sitting beside her at the podium. When Cory and I debriefed a few weeks afterwards, I asked him why he felt he needed to be a visible presence at the public consultation.

Cory (grade 11, trans youth FtM, gender fluid, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, all genders, pansexual): Well, I (pause) I wanted the board people to have an opportunity to ask a trans youth questions. This is - it's about me, right. Like, it actually is about like, trans youth. And how we can make schools more inclusive and safe for trans youth. So, just even though I feel like - just even my presence had a bit of an impact on how people view things.

Cory and I also talked about the hostile atmosphere in the meeting room. On the evening that Cory and his mom spoke, well over half of the approximately one hundred person gallery were parents protesting the policy revisions. They held anti-Policy ACB placards,

heckled speakers, and were twice reprimanded by the VSB chair for uttering what she classified as hate speech. I asked Cory if it helped that his mom was there next to him:

Cory: Yeah, definitely. I mean, it was just her speaking and I was there to answer any questions anyone had. Someone asked me like, one question. Um, but you know, I was there supporting my mom and representing myself. And you know, just showing- you know, there weren't a lot of [trans youth] there

Lindsay: Why do you think that is?

Cory: The fear factor of the whole- I mean my mom said it perfectly. She would never purposely put me in a room with people who would like, beat me. Or like, have really bad energy towards me. And she's never wanted to do that. And so I feel like if you were smart, you wouldn't go. Like, if you don't have a rough shell, you're going to come out of this feeling, like half dead. Because these comments, these points of views really tear you up inside. And like, you really have to like, put a hard shell on.

Lindsay: So you'd have to be really brave.

Cory: Exactly. Yeah. Well, yeah. And also I had the support of my mom. So I knew if anything went wrong, I would be fine.

While Cory deeply appreciated his mom's support, he acknowledged that not all trans youth have a supportive parent in their lives who will publicly advocate for them. His experiences are consistent with earlier findings, demonstrating the crucial role that accepting parents play in bolstering trans youth's resilience to negative outcomes such as suicidal ideation, skipping school, and self-harm (Taylor et al., 2011; Travers et al., 2014).

All of the youth who engaged with the policy were so keen to speak and be heard that I held three extra focus groups with the Cedar students. Most of these students had not previously been members of the GSA, but joined as a direct result of their PAC's opposition to Policy ACB. These focus groups were eagerly requested by the youth themselves, as a way of expressing their strong feelings about what was happening in their school.

Although many of these Cedar students went on to join their school's fledgling GSA, they categorically rejected the notion that GSAs as organizing body could "do something" about parental opposition to Policy ACB. They instead saw the GSA as a place where they could dialogue amongst their peers about political issues relating to LGBTQ youth, but not as an organizational structure within which they could affect change. Nor did they see student council, or the student representative on the VSB board of trustees as places from which they could influence political issues like policy revisions. Student council was, according to Mark (grade 12, male, straight), more about event planning, while the student trustee was deemed ineffective by Irene and Violet because he did not have a vote on the board.

Because the participants had dismissed their GSA, student council, and student trustee as ineffective, I asked these Cedar students how they thought they could effect change on policies like ACB. Roisin (grade 11, cisgendered, heteroflexible) felt that the petition that she and her friends had circulated and submitted to the VSB trustees was "like we did this big scale vote and just got everyone who said yes to write their name down," and was therefore a fair method of executing representative student voice on the issue. Roisin described those who did sign the petition as being adequately informed on

the issue, noting “very few people signed it without asking for more information. And I did have a lot of people say they didn’t want to sign it because they didn’t have enough information.” They did not offer an evaluation, however, of how effective they thought the petition was, simply that it was a better mechanism through which to influence change than either the GSA or elected student representatives.

Morgan (grade 10, female, bisexual/preference for women) was also adamant that effective student voice had to be representative, inclusive, and informed when she offered the following suggestion:

The only way I can think of the students taking a position is if we got everybody into the gym, and somebody did a huge speech and got everyone as informed as they possibly could, and then you took a big vote. And then yeah, that would be the only way.

At separate schools, Roisin and Cory also brainstormed mechanisms by which Policy ACB, and other VSB policies, could have been brought to students’ attention:

Roisin (grade 11, cisgendered, heteroflexible): I think the best way to do that would be kind of to, I guess like an English class cause everyone has to take English from grade eight to twelve. To I guess just bring it up, and talk about something that comes up. But again it’s really hard to decide what needs to be brought up and what doesn’t. And if they brought up everything, then English would never happen.

Cory (grade 11, trans FtM, gender fluid, nonconforming queer, pansexual): I think if you brought a person or two people, or like the head people of the GSA at each school to come and have like a meeting. And go, you know what - this is what's

gonna - this is the policy that's being presented, how do you guys feel about this?

And then have a really big discussion about what needs to happen in schools.

All of these views indicate that the youth participants saw themselves as Smith's archetype of the Athenian child. Unlike the innocent Apollonian child, who needs protection from politics, or the Dionysian child, who would corrupt politics, the participants are arguing that they should be recognized as equal partners with adults. Roisin's suggestion that policy be part of mandatory English classes and Cory's idea to integrate policy feedback into existing GSA structures is congruent with Moose-Mirtha's (2005) conception of children's rights, wherein youth are included as *youth*, not as miniature adults. Rather than expecting youth to integrate into structures that are designed exclusively for adults, Roisin and Cory wanted to participate within a youth-friendly infrastructure, such as those already set up within the school.

While Morgan, Roisin, and Cory all eagerly offered suggestions of how student voice could be better facilitated in educational policy, they conceded that none of their ideas would be very efficacious in affecting real change. Throughout our conversations, I emphasized that they had come up with wonderful ideas for student inclusion, and wondered why they were so easily dismissing them even at the brainstorming stage. It became clear through our dialogue that although they characterized existing student voice mechanisms as abysmal, they identified a deeper problem of prejudice against young people. When I asked why they thought their ideas were likely to be rejected, they explained:

Violet (grade 11, rainbow gender identity, technically bi, sexuality fluid): I mean I think that – adults more in general, feel like they are so much more better and

educated than youth. And it's just a general consensus between adults. There's always going to be that level where they're like, 'yeah right. Well I've been alive longer.'

Roisin: And that that experience, they feel, applies to everything. Even if they don't actually have any experience in that particular thing.

Morgan wrote me the following note after one of the public consultation meetings at the VSB where there had been just one openly LGBTQ youth among the 63 registered speakers to date:

Morgan (grade 10, female, bisexual/preference for women): Throughout this entire process I've found that adults have had a sense of entitlement over the younger demographic. There was a sense, in my opinion, that the adults felt children involved in this policy were being granted a privilege not a right, by having input in the policy.

I understand the Cedar youth's dismissal of their GSAs political potency as less about the GSA itself, and more as eschewing formal means of student voice altogether. The political organizing capacities of the GSA are limited by the same social dynamics that affect all youth organizations; namely the normative illegitimacy of youth as political actors whose ideas differ from those of adults (Cohen, 2009; Lundy, 2006). This rejection does not mean that youth are disinterested in affecting the political process, especially where LGBTQ issues are concerned. Their commitment to attending VSB meetings, circulating a petition, and speaking with the media demonstrates a deep engagement with the political process. Rather, they seem to find the political potential of traditional organizing such as through a GSA, student council, or other school clubs as ineffective,

which is consistent with previous literature on student voice (Herriot, 2014b; Mcfarland, & Starmanns, 2009; Sears, Peck, & Herriot, 2014). While GSAs were appreciated as spaces for dialogue on political issues, they were not generally used as a mechanism to enact student voice where revisions to Policy ACB were concerned.

Congruent with previous research, Cory believed that policy functioned not just protection for activism, but marked a beginning, rather than the end, of change.

Cory: I mean it's (pause) we keep saying 'the policy's going to help, the policy's going to help,' but it only going to help if you do it, you know? So yeah, we kind of have to work back in with our GSA and implement some of these bathroom changes and changing the changing rooms. Because otherwise, in my school it's really not going to happen.

While Cory supported the revisions to Policy ACB, he was sceptical that the “words on paper” would produce meaningful change without continued pressure from youth, and from those in his GSA in particular. The real work was anticipated once the policy itself was passed, when the GSA would lobby the administration to actually implement its provisions. His characterizing this struggle as work for the GSA indicated at least some belief in the GSAs’ political efficacy, which contrasted with earlier participants’ dismissal of the GSA as an organizing body capable of effecting policy change.

6.5 Policy ACB: Citizenship and the Right to Recognition

Through both their targeted concerns about gender-neutral washroom access and their experiences and analysis of student voice, I identify participating youth’s engagement with Policy ACB as part of a broader (youth) citizenship struggle for recognition, rights, belonging, and legitimacy. Much of citizenship is about who is

recognized as legitimate, and belonging to a group, generally, though not always, within national, geographic, ethnic, religious, or other boundaries (see Renault, 2007; Taylor, 1992). Policy ACB surfaced deep feelings of exclusion from trans youth. Unable to access either of the gendered washrooms safely, the gender-neutral washroom provision validated not just their physical needs to use the facilities during the school day, but also recognized and literally made space for their gender non-conforming bodies and identities within the school community. Similarly, youth's wanting to physically occupy space during the PAC and VSB meetings struck a similar claim to recognition of belonging as citizens of their schools and of the Vancouver School Board more broadly. In this way, all participating youth were embodying Smith's (2011) archetype of the Athenian child, as one who is recognized as a legitimate participant in governmentality *with* adults.

The of type of citizenship that participating youth were demanding in their engagement with Policy ACB aligned neatly with Joshee's (2009) liberal social justice discourse of citizenship, which emphasizes the role of the state as nurturing a just and caring society, as well as the right to an identity and recognition of that identity. Irene's concerns at the PAC meeting, for instance, centred around upholding Cedar's reputation as an "equal and accepting" school, a reputation that she earlier characterized as well deserved due to years of commitment to affirming student diversity. Cory similarly advocated a liberal social justice conception of citizenship when he characterized having gender-neutral washrooms for LGBTQ as a "human right," wherein marginalized groups, in this case, LGBTQ youth can access rights despite difference.

Rather than locating differences or diversity as an individual issue to be dealt with, the youth pointed to the various ways in which adult, cisgender and gender conforming privileges permeated the social structures governing schooling. Although they had all individually experienced exclusion throughout their involvement, the youth nonetheless suggested several structural changes for age-based accommodations. This is consistent with Gale's (2000) recognitive paradigm of social justice in education, which emphasizes who is included in the processes and procedures of decision-making, in which difference is not an immediate barrier to participation.

The ability to make a difference was a defining feature of citizenship for GSA members in earlier studies (Conway & Crawford Fisher, 2007; MacIntosh, 2004). While participating youth attempted to affect change individually, such as by speaking out at meetings or circulating petitions, they were skeptical that any structural changes would be taken seriously due to age-based prejudice or childism. Congruent with previous studies on student voice and youth's political illegitimacy (see Herriot, 2014b; Malone & Hartung, 2010; Mitra, 2008), this suggests that student voice will likely continue to be seen as ineffective until radical changes in the social construction of youth permeate our political consciousness. A further analysis of the relationship between social constructivism and children's political rights in chapter seven.

Similar to the scholarship outlined in chapter two, the citizenship that youth participants demanded was at odds with the wishes of their parents. Cory (grade 11, trans youth FtM, gender fluid, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, all genders, pansexual) recognized the irony that those trans youth without a supportive parent were the ones most in need of the policy revisions because they explicitly protected students'

confidentiality in being openly LGBTQ at school without being outed to their parents by school staff:

Cory: There was a parent who was there to talk against this policy. What if their kid is trans? These are the kids that this policy is made for.

Lindsay: Which kids?

Cory: The kids who, you know, they don't have parent support. The policy is to help students in schools. And it will hopefully help them out of schools. But this policy is I feel is though honestly targeted towards kids whose parents are like, opposing this bill. Or this policy.

Confidentiality can be literally life-saving for trans youth, who have been found to face significantly higher numbers of homelessness, substance abuse, and self-harm when rejected by their families (Abramovich, 2012; Travers et al., 2012). Where trans youth in particular are concerned, validating children's rights in affirming their identity differences despite parental objections can be a case of life or death. Their right to recognition regardless of parental approval is a stark example of how radically children's interests can diverge from their parents', and how important schools can be in mediating these differences so as to serve the best interests of the child.

In summary, participating youth who engaged with the Policy ACB revisions demanded recognition as youth citizens who were partners in decision-making processes that affected their own lives. If "citizenship encourages a broader consideration of the degree to which individuals are able to participate in social life without valued elements of their self-definition being compromised" (Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011, p. 215), then the participants stretched the boundaries of school citizenship to include young, LGBTQ

citizens who need not diminish their youthfulness or queerness in order to participate. Further, while the citizenship that they claimed eschewed parental sovereignty or privilege, especially when it conflicted with youth's self-identities, they did not advocate the total exclusion of adults from the school polity. This allowance for youth and adults to collaborate politically offers another empirical example of Smith's (2014) theoretical Athenian child, with rich implications for scholars in citizenship, student voice, and children's rights.

6.6 Situating Policy ACB Within the GSA Policy Landscape

The revisions to Policy ACB in the spring of 2014 are the latest chapter of a GSA policy narrative in the Lower Mainland that began in the year 2000 and was interpretively analyzed in chapter four. The document eventually adopted by the VSB (see Appendix J) indicated both continuity and change in this evolving policy landscape. Similar to the three policies analyzed in chapter four, the physical safety of openly or suspected queer students in schools was the surface level problem the policy aimed to solve. The safety-first narrative is a continuation of the approach to problem definition dating back to the early 2000's.

Policy ACB (2014) also continued the trend of not naming patriarchal violence and hegemonic masculinity as the cause of the policy problem. The revised policy did not specifically name why openly or suspected queer students continue to feel unsafe at school, and in so doing, continues the normalization of patriarchy as an invisible governing force. Furthermore, Policy ACB (2014), like its earlier version from 2004 mentioned GSAs only once, and under the "Counselling and Support" heading. Similar to

previous documents, the revised Policy ACB supports their formation in secondary schools specifically, with no mention of GSAs in elementary levels.

Policy ACB (2014) also continued some of the structural solutions that the earlier policies began. By mandating gender-neutral washrooms, for instance, it tackled one of the structural barriers to trans inclusion. Rather than locating transphobia as isolated, individual acts, its rectifying a structural problem indicated a new approach to naming a problem solution. Although the primary problem was still queer students' safety (which is of course a legitimate problem that merits serious and immediate attention) the solutions were expanded to include broader, institutional changes. Whereas policies supporting GSAs by the BCTF (2010/2011) and the VSB (2004) created physical space for queerness in schools, and *Social Justice 12 Unit 6* marked the beginning of queerness being including in the written curriculum, Policy ACB (2014) extends this inclusion to schools washrooms and to trans students specifically.

Policy ACB (2014) was the first of the policies to name GSAs as "Gay or Queer/Straight Alliance clubs" (p. 2) This recognition of a broader range of queerness, as well as students' right to label the clubs themselves signified respect for both a broad range of student self-identities, and for students to choose and label those identities themselves. Further, Policy ACB's particular attention to trans youth marks the first meaningful distinction amongst queer identities. While the three policies analyzed in chapter four listed the terms of the acronym 'LGBT,' they did not meaningfully address the unique capabilities and challenges that each group faced in school. Policy ACB (2014) marked the first nuanced approach in articulating tailored solutions to the specific

challenges faced by trans students. It is therefore indicative of a change in policy solutions for GSAs and LGBTQ youth in Lower Mainland schools.

6.5 Summary

Youth who participated in the Policy ACB (2014) revisions were adamant that they needed gender-neutral washrooms in order to increase mental, emotional, and physical well-being at school. Although they were reticent to prioritize the GSA's purpose or function as a "safe space," there was nonetheless considerable evidence that trans youth in particular still find school washrooms as hostile, largely inaccessible places.

Youth were universally frustrated by what they felt was a lack of opportunity for student voice. They consistently described not being listened to, or not being afforded opportunities to speak at all, as their biggest problem with how the public consultations unfolded. Irene, as GSA president, was hurt that she initially wasn't allowed to voice the students' concerns at the PAC meeting, while Andy, Meghan, Morgan, and Violet were all frustrated that they were sent to the overflow room at the public meetings. Despite wanting the policy process to be more accessible for youth, only one of the participants saw the GSA as a useful organizing body through which they could affect change.

Policy ACB (2014) represented both continuity and change in the policy narrative of GSAs in the Lower Mainland. While it continued to emphasize student safety and make some structural recommendations for change, it was also the first to make meaningful distinctions between types of queerness in its policy solutions.

These findings indicate that the possibilities for students to meaningfully engage in policy-making and the policy process about a policy they care about are severely

hampered by a lack of supportive infrastructure to facilitate their inclusion, and pejorative views about youth's political capacities more broadly.

CHAPTER 7: Theory-Building From Work With GSAs

7.1 Introduction

This chapter re-evaluates the data in light of what it can contribute to theory-building on childhood, gender, and queerness. Borrowing from Ingram's (2013) analytical approach to her doctoral data, and consistent with the 'backwards arc' in hermeneutics, I read and re-read all research materials several times, looking for two layers of voices: those on the surface and those that were smothered. Seemingly tangential topics in my field notes and interview transcripts were re-assessed in search of multiple layers, or webs of discourses, from which insight could be gained to address the second research question. For reference, this was: what new theoretical insights about the social constructions of youth, gender, and queerness can be drawn from close work with multiple GSAs?

I looked at the data for multiple layers of voice in order to allow myself to uphold my responsibility as a feminist researcher. I could not simply take my participants' experiences at face value, but instead unearthed the complex dynamics within which they unfolded (McClelland & Fine, 2008). As Ingram (2013) writes,

In order to peer beneath the external layer and uncover those issues that are smothered by powerful forces and reinforced by families, schools, society, James Scott (1990) argues that we must pay attention to inconsistencies, omissions, disjunctions and contradictions in order to uncover how power, context and the authority of the researcher might privilege certain concepts while disguising others. (p. 218)

It was within this mindset that I contrasted the smothered themes- those that were contradicted, sidestepped, and avoided by the participants -with those that were easily surfaced. This chapter is therefore a discussion of the various layers of findings used to create a more complex understanding of youth, gender, queerness, and the intersection of all three.

7.2 GSAs in Elementary Schools

One of the primary ways I approached the second research question was by asking youth participants what they thought about the introduction of GSAs to elementary schools. To date, there are no reports of GSAs in elementary schools, so this was posed as a fictional scenario to consider. I found that this was a participant-friendly means of accessing how they thought about children, gender, and queerness, and it provoked some of the liveliest and most passionate conversations of the interviews. I was less interested in whether or not participants thought that GSAs should exist in elementary schools, although they gave varied and insightful answers in that regard, but more in how they reasoned with the question, and with which discourses they reasoned. This question was a way of gaining insight into how youth thought about the intersections of gender, queerness, and childhood.

I was also interested in how the youth participants understood student voice. The political activism both for and against the VSB's revisions to Policy ACB (2014) provided a context-specific scenario for ascertaining their views on this more theoretical issue. Rather than asking them abstract questions about children's rights, I inquired about what roles they thought young people were playing or should have played, in the policy revisions. Instead of presenting them with a hypothetical scenario, such when I asked

about GSAs in elementary schools, I observed them actually engaging in student voice at the VSB meetings and in their schools, and was able to debrief with them afterwards.

Relying on Jenks' (2005) Apollonian and Dionysian archetypes, as well as Smith's (2014) addition of the Athenian child, I first analyzed the surfaced themes, meaning those responses that were readily or immediately given to a line of questioning. Different strands of both Apollonian and Dionysian archetypes surfaced in these discussions, which are described below.

7.3 Surfaced Themes

7.3.1 Innocence, homophobia, and the Apollonian child.

Many of the youth participants relied on the Apollonian archetype of children's innocent ignorance to dismiss the possibility that children knew anything about gender or queerness, and were therefore "too young" for a GSA. The following conversation with Jake (grade 10, male, straight) from Birch is representative of how initial enthusiasm for the idea was quickly contradicted by suggesting to me that elementary school children were not mature enough for the subject matter.

Lindsay: Do you think it would be a good thing for there to be QSAs in elementary schools?

Jake: I (pause) yeah. Of course. I think most - like, in the younger grades in elementary schools, I don't think kids have really thought about things like that yet. So I don't think you'd really know if you were gay or straight until you matured a little bit.

Lindsay: Ok. And what about in the later grades in elementary school?

Jake: Later grades? Um, I'm not sure. When I think about it, um (pause) QSAs might be a bit too mature for - they might be a bit immature, and they're not really understanding the issues

Jake undercut his initially positive reaction to GSAs in elementary schools with a reiteration of the dominant belief that young children are not only unaware of their own sexual orientations, but are also too immature to understand sexual diversity in general, and the inequities surrounding it. I interpret this as an Apollonian construction of innocence because Jake seemed to want to protect their ignorance. The children's alleged lack of knowledge about sexual diversity is not positioned as evil or bad, but rather a harmless difference that should not be disrupted.

This Apollonian view was also articulated by Marcus (grade 12, male, bisexual), who explained that, "usually in elementary schools, people are like, 'oh let's just be friends!' Like, there's no discrimination when you're in elementary school. Or at a younger age." At Aspen Secondary, Jacky (grade 10, boy, straight) agreed, explaining how children younger than grade 2 are by their nature, too oblivious of difference to be able to discriminate:

Jacky: So I believe we should have the education – the LGBT education brought to lower grades. And like, grade two even. Grade two is when they should start noticing the many problems this world has. So if we could bring the education to grade two, and then have the Pride Club again, right?

Lindsay: Yeah. In grade two?

Jacky: Yeah. So if they are aware of the problem and they have a Pride Club, I feel like lots of people would join.

Lindsay: Would you? In grade two?

Jacky: Yeah. I feel – cause it's probably my bias towards younger children, but I feel like they're born liberal.

Lindsay: What does that mean?

Jacky: (pause) Oh God (laughs) hmmm. They are born without the influence of discrimination. They have no forced ideology upon them yet. So I feel like if they don't have any forced ideology.

Marcus and Jacky perceived that not only are young children unaware of sexual diversity, they are by their very nature, incapable of homophobia. This heavy, and almost immediate reliance on Apollonian notions of innocence smothered the actuality that children's school lives are, and have always been, rigidly constructed around a normalized gender binary. Decades of empirical data consistently shows that, not only are young children not ignorant of queerness, they are quick to police any perceived transgressions in schooling environments (see Duke & McCarthy, 2009). It is unlikely that any of my participants, regardless of how they self-identify, did not have any experiences of gender policing and shaming throughout their elementary school years. Indeed, the next section analyzes their lengthy accounts of homophobia during their early school years. These conversations with Jake, Matthew, and Jacky, which were representative of the majority of participants' first reactions to this line of questioning, indicate how quickly and powerfully the Apollonian archetype surfaced.

7.3.2 Childism, exceptionalism, and the Apollonian child.

Apollonian conceptions of innocence surfaced across age groups, meaning that regardless of their own ages, participants tended to view all youth who were a few years

younger than themselves as too immature for conversations about sexuality. These conversations were infused with *childism*, explained by Young-Bruhel (2011) as an umbrella concept that "... highlight[s] the fact that prejudice is built into the very way children are imagined," (p. 5) wherein young people are blamed for traits that are negative or undesired in adults. Originally coined by Pierce and Allen (1975), childism is commonly operationalized by pathologizing younger people, or childhood itself, for phenomena that originate with adults and are of a more global, rather than youth-specific concern (Herriot & Hiseler, 2015).

Participants' failure to apply to themselves the Apollonian beliefs that young children could not cope with sexual diversity because of their age-based immaturity and innocence surfaced across sites and across age groups. At Birch for instance, Charlie (grade 12, gender non-conforming, female presenting, lesbian) described what she perceived as a substantial difference in maturity amongst 13-16 year olds when she taught different groups of cadets as part of an extra-curricular programme:

It's all very young people, like 13, 14, year old kids. So... you have to be, I don't want to say careful, but, if you do start talking about sexuality too young, you are going to get a bunch of kids that are just going to start giggling... Because they're not actually listening, they're just sort of like, oh "ha, ha, ha, sexuality, you said sex, ha, ha, ha." And so, that's why I think, like Planning 10 classes are like slightly more mature because you've got, you know, 15 year olds, 16 year olds, and it would just be easier to talk to them, because they are more at an age where sexuality is becoming very apparent to them, gender identity is becoming very apparent to them.

Although Charlie has dismissed the maturity of students in grade 8 and 9, she later told me in the interview how she herself came out at age 11. Despite her lived experience of being openly lesbian during elementary school, she nonetheless felt that contemporary 13 and 14 years olds were too immature for frank conversations about sexuality. Within Charlie's construction of childhood innocence, Kitty, who was 13 years old and in grade 8 at the time of the interviews and attended a different school, was likely not ready for educational exposure to sexuality.

Kitty herself (grade 8, cis female, Kinsey 6/trans inclusive) also dismissed the notion that younger students had the emotional maturity to handle queer-affirming topics:

Kitty: Because first of all, most elementary school children are like, - you wouldn't have a lot of them because like, you'd have like - from grade one to four you don't really have the emotional maturity and like, (pause) not intelligence, but like, ability to comprehend that stuff as well.

Yet earlier in the interview, Kitty spoke of how she had "come to terms" with her own queer sexual orientation and gender identity when she herself was in elementary school. This is a curious inconsistency, essentially communicating that while all other younger children are too emotionally immature for sexual diversity, she herself was not. In this way, she has exempted herself from the childist notion that elementary school students are, because of their age, unable to comprehend conversations about sexual diversity. Within an Apollonian conception of the child, this childism obscures the reality that people of all ages can struggle with the emotional maturity to address sexual diversity by positioning children as immune from the subject.

Both Kitty and Charlie applied an Apollonian conception of childhood to people younger than themselves, while simultaneously exempting their own lived experiences as young people from this archetype. By claiming that young children have limited or no understanding of sexual diversity, Charlie, and Kitty erased not just the possibility of children's having affirming views towards queerness, but also the possibility that they might hold homophobic, transphobic, or misogynistic views just as Jake, Marcus, and Jacky had in section 7.3.1. Homophobic views are only possible when one has at least some conception of the deviance associated with sexual or gender diversity, otherwise there is no taboo to recognize and then correct. Removing the possibility that young children have any knowledge of sexual or gender diversity at all, the participants simultaneously erased their capacity for homophobic views or actions. How childism and exceptionalism intersected with Dionysian conceptions of childhood is analyzed in section 7.3.5.

7.3.3. Apollonian rebuttals to contrary evidence.

The Apollonian view of children was remarkably resistant to evidence that not all children are as innocent and ignorant as the participants liked to imagine them. The refusal to admit that children are capable of homophobia was apparent in the following conversation at Evergreen, when a participant mentioned that homophobic slurs were common in younger grades, but not amongst the junior and senior classes.

Lindsay: Oh, ok. Ok. So, why do you think it is that younger kids maybe say 'faggot' or 'that's so gay,' but older students don't as much?

Marcus (grade 12, male, bisexual): I think it's because they don't understand the meaning behind the word. And they like, hear their older siblings and friends say it. And they're like, 'oh, I'm just following them.'

Little One (grade 11, girl, heterosexual): Yeah, and it's like, also maturity level too. Like, as you get older you start like, knowing like, what's appropriate and what's not. And like, um (pause) yeah I think it's maturity level and just like their environment. How they're influenced as they were growing up at home and like, elementary school and stuff.

Although several justifications for children's uses of homophobic language were offered, none allowed for the possibility that they could genuinely espouse homophobic beliefs. According to Matthew, they are simply parroting what older youth say, while for Little One, their environments negatively influenced them. Although the Evergreen participants acknowledged that homophobic name-calling was a problem in younger grades, they simply could not shake the belief that children, positioned as Apollonain, were naturally incapable of discrimination.

Christopher (grade 10, male, gay) explained how "homophobes," as he called them, have been explicitly trained to become bigoted:

Christopher: Like, I'm not the type of person that would say, like, 'homophobes are the bad guys, they just swear and beat you up, and rape you, and blah, blah, blah.'

No. They suffer too. They too are suffering.

Lindsay: I like that.

Christopher: I mean, can you just imagine that mind-set that they're forced to stay in, by how they've been raised ever since they were a kid? How they were taught

hatred? You're never born with hatred. You're taught hatred. It's sad to know that there are people out there who- who are raised to feel such hatred toward other people.

In Christopher's view, homophobia is the result of the targeted corruption of childhood innocence and acceptance. Children are presented as *tabula rasa* with a natural inclination towards goodness. It is only when irresponsible adults specifically teach them to feel hatred that they are able to think and express homophobic views. The Apollonian notion of children as inherently good was so forceful that it could not adapt to allow for moments when children were not entirely innocent, or good.

Similar to Marcus's earlier assessment of children being incapable of discrimination, Cory (grade 11, trans FtM, gender fluid, nonconforming queer, pansexual) provided an example of how, in his perception, his younger sister's peers were incapable of hostile responses to his transition due to their young age:

Cory: In elementary school, it's like yeah whatever. Let's play. There are bigger priorities for people - for children in elementary school

Lindsay: Like what?

Cory: You know, recess.

Lindsay: (laughs)

Cory: Seriously!

Lindsay: [Bigger priorities] Than gender?

Cory: Yes. It was funny, when I did my transition my sister was in grade five. And they went into her class, because you know, we were in elementary school together. I was always you know, Molly's older sister. And so, they went in and started

talking about it, and honestly it took ten minutes to just explain what happened, and they're like, 'ok let's go.' Like, they literally said, 'can we go out for recess now?'

Like, they just - they got it.

Cory articulated his experiences with his sister's peers through an Apollonian lens that positioned children as innately good, and therefore naturally progressive or accepting of difference. According to Cory, Molly's peers were so wrapped up in frivolous or unimportant concerns, such as playing at recess, that they were unconcerned by, and therefore certainly not hostile to his gender transition. They were uninterested in a lengthy conversation or educational activity relating to the social construction of gender, or its difference from biological sex, and according to Cory, did not need longer than ten minutes to understand these concepts.

At Cedar Secondary, Irene (grade 12, female, straight) also saw children as entirely uncorrupted by homophobia. Their being intrinsically good logically extended to the belief that they would openly embrace anti-homophobia education once it was presented to them:

Irene: And I'm sure they would go for it.

Lindsay: Okay

Irene: Cause I know that kids are super open minded, and they're like super gung-ho about anything and everything that adults that they respect say is cool.... And I feel that if they are exposed to LGBTQ relationships, as well, they would also accept it. Or at least that's what I hope, and that's what I think, that they would accept, because kids are super nice. Or at least all the kids I know are super nice.

Oh, everyone's like, 'that's crazy, kids suck.' But I think that they're so small and so nice. And they're so lovely.

While Irene acknowledged that not everyone viewed children the way she did (“everyone's like, 'that's crazy, kids suck'”), she nonetheless sees them as ‘super nice,’ and therefore likely accepting of LGBTQ relationships. She and Cory both relied on the Apollonian archetype of innate goodness to explain why younger children would automatically accept and affirm difference. Cory and Irene, like many of their peers who favoured Apollonian views of childhood, simply could not conceptualize a child holding homophobic views, especially after having received anti-homophobia education.

The Apollonian archetype espoused by youth participants throughout this section has compelling implications for how theorizing affects educational planning. Youth participants positioned children as so innately good that they would naturally internalize anti-homophobia education and therefore cease to express homophobia. In this way, anti-homophobia education is posited as a problem-solving device that cannot fail because it is built upon children's supposedly universal and instinctual goodness. This finding is the theoretical explanation for why the youth participants repeatedly suggested anti-homophobia education as a panacea in chapter five.

This Apollonian view of childhood being compatible with a more structured form of education helped contextualize why Andy (grade 10, gender non-conforming, gender questioning, pansexual) had the following views:

Andy: I think it's really important to educate everybody on sexual orientation, gender identity, LGBTQ issues, while they still have the time to. Right?

Lindsay: So while they're still in school?

Andy: Yeah, because there's not - there's gender studies in university and college, but that's by choice

Lindsay: Yeah

Andy: Not everyone's going to choose that.

Andy's comments indicate that gender studies needed to become a compulsory part of K-12 schooling in part because when youth become adults and possibly choose to attend post-secondary institutions, they often don't choose to learn more about gender. I understood Andy's comment "while they still have the time" as having a double meaning. Besides the mandatory implications of the K-12 curriculum, there was also the idea that children needed anti-homophobia education while they were still young, and therefore uncorrupted by homophobia. At different schools, Sasha from Cedar and Kitty from Fir reiterated the need for anti-homophobia education at young ages for this reason:

Sasha (grade 12, female, straight/confused): I feel like younger kids don't (pause) either don't have a voice about it, or don't have an opinion on it, or (pause) are too young to have developed like, a strong opinion on GSAs. So even just starting with the posters at a young age is a good way to move forward.

Kitty (grade 8, cis female, Kinsey 6/trans inclusive): Also I think that elementary schools - last thing - I think that it would be more (pause) informed if they did teach us something in a class and people asked questions. We'd be learning about homophobia and why it's like, bad. Like, start in like grade one or two, and just teach what discrimination is. Like, I honestly think that if children learn about this stuff like, when they're younger, I think that we'd have a lot less...

Sasha and Kitty, like so many of their peers, advocated at least some anti-discrimination education for young children. These hypothetical younger children are not thought to have particularly strong prejudices, if any at all, and inklings of discrimination could be educationally corrected. Not only is education positioned as an inoculation against later, though not current, bigotry, growing up without such education is understood as the contributing factor to later homophobic beliefs. The notion that one becomes more bigoted simply by growing older reinforces the participants' conception of children starting out as Apollonian innocents.

7.3.4 Children's homophobia and the Dionysian child.

In addition to the Apollonian archetype, Dionysian conceptions of children being inherently deficient also surfaced when the youth commented on what GSAs in elementary schools would be like. In these accounts, my participants explained that children's inherent flaws were demonstrated by their frequent use of homophobic language, or general gender policing. Kai's (grade 8, panromantic, asexual, gender fluid) response was typical of the Dionysian arguments that emerged:

Lindsay: What do you think it would have been like to have a Pride Club when you were in elementary school?

Kai: Um, I think it would have been nice. Cause back then, the phrase 'faggot,' 'dyke,' 'that's so gay' were really, really common. I was bisexual at the time and I was really closed off about it. But it was - I liked a friend of mine who was the same gender as me at that time... And so I just kept quiet about it.

Kai's account is quite different than Cory's earlier recounted experience with his younger sister's peers, who "didn't care" about gender. In Kai's experience, elementary school

students used homophobic slurs regularly, and were not perceived as being accepting of real or assumed gender transgressions or sexual orientation diversity. GSAs, just as the interpretive policy analysis in chapter four found, were thought to be needed to support necessarily bullied LGBTQ youth. Unlike the policy analysis, however, some of the youth in this study advocated for GSAs in elementary school, rather than just at the secondary level. This distinction indicated that the policy problem (e.g. ‘vulnerable LGBTQ youth’) was identified by some of the youth themselves as existing at younger levels than the policies allowed for.

While the interpretive policy analysis did not mention solutions to address those perpetuating homophobia, a participant suggested queer-affirming education as a corrective action to younger children’s homophobia posited the schools. Caroline (grade 12, female, gay/queer) explained:

Caroline: One thing that I will say is that they need them [GSAs] in elementary schools

Lindsay: Ahh! Tell me more

Caroline: I remember when I was in like, grade six or something - I was nearly out. Like, I knew, but I wasn't out, and I got called a lesbian behind my back. And it completely fucked me up in the head. For so long. Like it was a (pause), it was kind of a problem. So, like I don't know if having some kind of education at least in elementary school would have changed that. But I do think it's important.

While Caroline acknowledged that having “some kind of education” in elementary school may not be a panacea, she nonetheless makes the point that in her experience, elementary school students were capable of using homophobic language and bullying in ways that

cause real harm. While her prescription is the same as those youth who had more Apollonian views of children; namely educational intervention, she arrived at this conclusion using very different thinking. Kitty and Sasha from the previous sections advocated for anti-homophobia education at young ages *before* they became capable of espousing homophobic views, whereas in Caroline's lived experience, younger children have ample capacity to cause present and immediate harm through homophobic language. Rather than being innocent, or unaware of sexual diversity, Caroline's painful memories indicate that at least some of younger children are not only aware of sexual diversity, but are capable of targeting those they perceive as different because of this diversity. Both Caroline's and Kai's memories of homophobic bullying in elementary school disrupt the homogeneity of their peers' insistence that young children are simply not capable of understanding sexual and gender diversity.

7.3.5 Childism, exceptionalism, and the Dionysian child.

Some of the youth participants normalized younger students' homophobia as developmentally typical, and something they would naturally grow out of as part of maturing. I understood these perspectives to align with the Dionysian archetype because they communicated a natural deficiency or flaw in children that would be corrected through the aging process. Having this flaw corrected simply by growing older located the deficiency exclusively within the purview of childhood, namely it was an affliction of younger children that ceased to exist upon aging. This trajectory directly contrasts with the one described in section 7.3.3, wherein children *begin* as innocent, and *become* homophobic simply by growing older. Neyko (grade 12, mostly male, pansexual/Kinsey 4) reflected on this early in our conversation:

I volunteer for the pre-teen program [at the community centre], which means I get to deal with the grade sevens. And I've heard a few F-bombs ['faggot'] dropped that I did not appreciate. So, I think it's also part of the, you know, going through high school. You kind of lose that tendency.

According to Neyko, grade sevens would cease to use homophobic slurs by simply growing older. In her senior year of high school, Sasha remarked that she “[didn’t] see bullying of LGBTQ students as much as I once did.” In sharp contrast to their peers espousing Apollonian beliefs of children who were too innocent and good to be homophobic, the Dionysian view instead sees homophobia as a problem of childhood that children may evolve out of.

I understood this particular dimension of the Dionysian child as communicating a degree of childism, wherein homophobia amongst youth is acknowledged, but then pathologized as an affliction of children who are younger than the participant who is currently speaking. The reasoning was similar to that of the childist Apollonians discussed previously, who explained that while they themselves had been mature enough for sexual and gender diversity at young ages, contemporary young people most certainly were not. Here, however, youth recognize homophobia amongst youth as a problem, but then blame it on younger children due to their ‘immature’ ages. Caroline (grade 12, female, gay/queer) exemplified this thinking when I asked her if she heard homophobic slurs in the hallways at her school.

Caroline: Yeah. But not (pause) and I notice that more in like, the grade eights, more than anything. So they're coming at it, like, from elementary school. And then

once they get here, when people start giving them like, weird looks and calling them out on it, they stop.

Homophobia is described here as being more socially normative or acceptable in elementary school, where the children are younger, than in high school which has older students. While homophobic language is unsavoury at any age, the youth participants seemed to distance themselves and their peers from it by blaming its occurrence on those younger than they were.

The Dionysian view of childhood surfaced less frequently than the Apollonian, but it was still readily espoused, especially amongst the older youth participants. It is possible that, so close to legal adulthood themselves, the grade 11 and 12 students were more drawn to the Dionysian archetype as a means of distancing themselves from childhood, thereby legitimizing their claim to adulthood. Further research is needed to understand how ages, or any other characteristics, affect youth's use of archetype when thinking about children and childhood.

7.4. Smothered Themes

As evidenced in the previous section, various dimensions of the Apollonian and Dionysian archetypes of childhood surfaced through my conversations with youth participants about what a hypothetical GSA in elementary school would be like. These themes were easily relied on by the participants, and emerged quickly and seamlessly in response to the questions. Smothered themes, however, were those instances where youth contradicted or corrected themselves. In layering often-opposing viewpoints on top of one another, they provided the data with depth and texture. This section analytically

parses those instances of contradiction in order to make sense of the richer meanings youth participants attached to childhood.

Neyko (grade 12, mostly male, pansexual/Kinsey 4) demonstrated considerable awareness of how intimately Dionysian and Apollonian archetypes are linked not just to other children, but also to the person speaking about childhood. In the following conversation, he recognized how his own views about GSAs for younger children were influenced by how he experienced age and aging:

Neyko: You talked about having a QSA in elementary school. Well some parents are like, 'well my kid is ten. Why are we talking about sex when they're ten?' Well, unfortunately I know a few grade sevens and I know deep down and they really, really, really they should have that support there

Lindsay: Why do you think parents say things like that?

Neyko: Because (pause) oh god I'm getting old because I know the feeling now (laughter),

Lindsay: Okay.

Neyko: 'Back when I was your age, I didn't do those things!' And then I stopped myself to think for five minutes and then I was like, 'actually, I did!' Cause we forget when we get older when we started to do things. And also we - things have moved up. Kids are growing up faster, I feel.

Lindsay: Okay, so that's why parents –

Neyko: Parents are - I don't feel like every parent is ready to accept that. Cause they're like, 'what are you teaching my child? What is happening?'

Neyko made important points about how one's own aged location influenced contemporary outlooks on who children are and can be. His first instinct was to dismiss their potential capacities to learn about sexual and gender diversity by nostalgically characterizing them as Apollonian innocents. But he corrected himself by recognizing how his nostalgia for childhood innocence was not in fact grounded lived experience; he "actually did those things" at a young age.

Neyko was the only participant interviewed who demonstrated self-awareness of his own contradictory ideas about children and childhood. Other participants voiced similar contradictions without this self-awareness, meaning that their conflicting ideas of childhood were evident when re-reading the interview transcripts, without them commenting on the contradictions specifically. For instance, Caroline (grade 12, female, gay/queer) earlier suggested that children should have elementary school in section 7.3.4, and the opposite view when talking about youth involvement in the Policy ACB revisions. In the following conversation, she explained how younger children were incapable of leading a GSA:

Lindsay: What would it have been like for you to just know there was a GSA in elementary school?

Caroline: It probably would have been slightly more comforting. But at the same time, like, I probably wouldn't - the thing with elementary school kids is that they - there's very few that would have like a leadership skills yet. So it would be hard to have a GSA that would be led by a student. You'd have to have a teacher that would be willing to educate students and all that kind of stuff.

The notion that younger children may in fact already possess the necessary leadership skills, or that they could learn them are not considered. Their presumed lack of leadership skills are not questioned or interrogated, and are presented as a reason for not having a club. This view contrasted with her later frustration about not having youth voice in the Policy ACB revisions:

Caroline: I think they [youth] should be listened to. Like, in a perfect world, they're talking about you. They should talk to you.

Lindsay: One would think

Caroline: Like, yeah. But they won't. Or they most likely will not

Lindsay: Because they think that kids are stupid?

Caroline: Yeah. Well not that kids are stupid, just that they don't have - they don't know how things work. And it's like well if you don't think we know how things work, teach us how things work, so that we can tell you you're wrong

Here, Caroline is advocating a radically different approach to young people, particularly where voice and leadership are concerned. She acknowledged that many youth are unaware of how politics are operationalized, but does not accept this ignorance as reason for continued lack of involvement. It is not positioned as a Dionysian deficiency that young people will naturally evolve out of. Instead, she called for increased education in “how things work,” so that youth are able not only to participate in politics, but also voice viewpoints that differ from those of adults. This is an entirely different response to children’s age-based holes in knowledge than her earlier remarks on children and GSAs.

While Caroline talked about what she thought could or should happen in hypothetical scenarios, Cory’s contradictory accounts of childhood smothered his own

lived experiences. As articulated in previous sections, Cory was often quick to tell me that children “didn’t care” about gender, and would rather focus on things like recess. Being uninterested meant that they tacitly accepted gender diversity with little fanfare. He explained:

Cory (grade 11, trans FtM, gender fluid, nonconforming queer, pansexual) : Kids are weird. Like, they're amazing but their politics are weird. Just think about it!

Lindsay: Like how?

Cory: (pause) For example, going outside at recess. You know, if you want to play soccer, your biggest priority is to be the person with the ball. Right?

Lindsay: Yeah.

Cory: That is politics for children right there... they just don’t care about gender.

Yet as our conversation continued, Cory revealed that in his own childhood, he experienced painful bullying from peers. At various points during the three months of data collection, he recalled having serious mental and physical health problems, such as clinical depression and urinary tract infections in elementary school. These health consequences were a direct result of transphobic bullying from peers about washroom use during elementary school. Speaking at the public consultation meeting regarding the revisions to Policy ACB, his mother noted that Cory had suffered serious mental illness, including suicidal ideation throughout elementary school, and that without intervention from supportive school officials, she was sure her child would be dead. Cory later told me that LGBT education, while needed in elementary years, was more vital at the secondary level. The following exchange details why he thought that was:

Lindsay: Why do you think people associate LGBT with high school?

Cory: Cause everyone comes out in high school

Lindsay: Mm-hmm...

Cory: Um, I told, I mean there's a couple of trans kids that I met in grade five and six, and as I said, they were having a really rough time. Like, I - just as rough as when I was in grade five and six. I totally know where they're coming from... in all honesty, the only advice I had for these kids was it gets better in high school. I feel like people are more open-minded in high school... Um, and just people grow up in high school

These remarks directly contradicted his earlier claims that children were more Apollonian in their innocence of gender diversity. Far from only being concerned with frivolous things such as recess and playing ball, Cory's lived experience as a gender non-conforming child indicated that his peers had strong reactions to his gender identity. Indeed, Cory continues to suffer from mental and physical pain due to their vicious reactions to his gender identity. It remains a puzzle that Cory's views on children and childhood rely on revisionist nostalgia for an innocent childhood that he did not personally experience. Indeed, Cory's actual memories of his own childhood are filled with vicious Dionysian peers, not the Apollonian innocents that he imagined currently exist. When speaking of current grade 5 and 6 students, he is able to acknowledge that younger trans youth have similarly "rough" experiences, but cannot translate that in to a more cohesive view of childhood overall. It is possible that Cory found it too painful to acknowledge that contemporary grade 5 and 6 students are experiencing the same trauma that he did. Perhaps he was able to cope with his own trauma by ascribing to a modernist view wherein desirable progressive change is inevitable with the passage of time.

7.5 Significance of Themes

7.5.1 Significance of the surfaced themes.

The majority of the surfaced themes presented an Apollonian view of childhood, indicating that this is the dominant archetype of childhood not just among adults, but also among youth themselves. As the data from section 7.3.3 revealed, youth participants maintained children's innocent Apollonian nature even when presented with evidence to the contrary. This finding demonstrated how conceptions of childhood are deeply ingrained beliefs that are resistant to change, and should be considered in future research in childhood theory.

Intriguingly, youth held themselves apart from how they saw other children, as demonstrated in section 7.3.2 with regards to Apollonian archetypes, and section 7.3.5 with Dionysian ones. Regardless of which archetype they favoured, they steadfastly refused to apply it to their own lived experiences. This type of exceptionalism seemed informed at least in part by Young-Bruhel's (2011) childism, wherein because youth as a group were seen as undesirable, the individual youth participants needed to find some way of excepting themselves from this category. Particularly where younger children were concerned, youth like Charlie and Kitty were adamant that they themselves were exceptions to the rule. More research is needed to determine how much of this prejudice against children informed the exceptionalism demonstrated by participants, and what other core beliefs influenced their perspectives on their own childhoods in relation to other children's.

7.5.2 Significance of smothered themes.

Investigating Neyko, Caroline, and Cory's smothered themes of childhood had three important implications for ongoing research. Firstly, youth do not have a unified vision of age-based capabilities. Depending on their own ages, the ages of the children being talked about, and the topic at hand, their views span a spectrum of possibilities. When researching with and about student voice then, there needs to be greater plurality in acknowledging student *voices*. Children are not a homogenous group, and research needs to hold theoretical space for youth themselves to have Apollonian, Dionysian, and contradictory views of a given topic of inquiry, and of childhood itself.

The second implication provides empirical evidence supporting David Lancy's (2007) caution against using research on student voice to 'liberate' children. While research can have an emancipatory function, its primary goal must be to enhance knowledge and understanding of their worlds. This does not mean undervaluing or dismissing children's own accounts of the lived experience of childhood. From my feminist theoretical perspective, these narratives are valued and valuable as both a process of speaking and being heard, and as building a robust data set from which to increase knowledge or understanding. Child voice, when included, has to instead be approached as multi-layered and with plenty of space for nuance and contradiction (Lodge, 2005; Gleason, forthcoming).

Scholars who research student voice likely have sympathetic views of children and childhood (Lancy, 2012; Mayall, 2014). There is almost certainly an impulse to emphasize those data, which prioritize children's agency, while downplaying passages of compliance or contradiction (Gleason, forthcoming). The data from this study, complete

with surfaced and smothered themes, indicate that youth's views on childhood, both that of others and their own, are complicated. There is simply no straightforward, or unified "children's perspective" on childhood.

Finally, the smothered themes of children's capacity to be homophobic indicate how powerfully dominant the Apollonian archetype continues to be. Particularly in Cory's case, his reliance on the Apollonian child erased his own experiences of serious and painful transphobia during his own childhood. Scholars must therefore be especially cautious when interviewing youth on the subject of childhood, and allow plenty of space within the questions for multiple themes to surface. Without careful attention to Cory's own lived experiences, his interviews on childhood specifically would erroneously convince a reader that this trans teen's experience with gender in childhood was overwhelmingly positive. The question of *why* youth like Cory smothered their own lived experience of childhood is of continuing relevance, and a topic worthy of future research.

7.6 Summary

This chapter analyzed the data pertaining to how youth participants understood childhood, their own lived experiences as a young person, and what they thought of youth who were several years younger than themselves. Apollonian themes of children's innocence surfaced the most readily in these conversations, although many espoused Dionysian views of children's corruption as well. Youth tended to except themselves from whatever archetype they favoured, often by smothering or subsuming their own lived experiences.

CHAPTER 8: Conclusion

8.1 Summary of Findings

This dissertation investigated the workings of six school-based Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) within a western Canadian school district. It was guided by the following questions:

- 1) Now that GSAs are fairly securely established within the Vancouver School Board, what are their roles, purposes, and functions, both within the lives of participants, and their broader school community as perceived by their members?
- 2) What new theoretical insights about the social construction of youth can be developed from close examination of how GSA membership?

Braided throughout these questions was an analysis of how relevant policies from overlapping jurisdictions shaped members' experiences of GSAs. Conducted using an interpretive approach, the policy analysis contextualized participants' understandings of why GSAs exist, and what their purposes are. The policy analysis determined that the safety of real or suspected LGBTQ youth was the primary contributing factor to identifying both the policy problem and GSAs as the solution. These policies avoided specific reference to who or what might be causing LGBTQ students to feel unsafe at school, and emphasized biological determinism as both the 'cause' of LGBT identities, and a regulating tool to split gay and straight into rigid binaries.

Just as they were outlined in the policy analysis in chapter four, LGBTQ student safety from homophobia in schools was of considerable concern for all participants, adults and youth alike. Though they deactivated or diminished their experiences of homophobia in school by normalizing them or divorcing them from gay-specific insults,

all youth participants reported hearing homophobic remarks at school at least one per week, and generally more frequently. The openly trans-identified students further reported hearing transphobic remarks by their peers. Curiously, none of the youth mentioned sexist or misogynistic comments in their accounts of verbal assaults.

Although youth participants valued student safety, they were also wary of the rhetoric around safe schools. Irene's comment that, "I don't want the GSA to become, like, a charity case" epitomized this sentiment. Youth did not want extra attention drawn to the likelihood that they were more vulnerable than their peers, and generally eschewed the notion that the GSA was a support group. While they valued the support they received there, they preferred to represent it as a space for fun, socializing, education, dialogue, and activism. All of these components existed in a delicate yet dynamic balance; members from the same club were found to have radically different ideas about how their club balanced its many features, and they all assigned different meanings to where they thought their club was (see figure 5.13 in chapter five).

Just as the GSA was a dynamic entity, so too were its members' conceptions of their own identities. When asked if they would like to label their own genders, sexual orientations, and racial/ethnic identities, youth chose multiple labels, made up their own, chose no labels, and changed identities midway through. They attached great significance to their chosen labels, and were generally animated in explaining why they had chosen a particular label, or avoided another. This fluidity marks a considerable departure from the biological determinism that has underpinned many of the successes of the gay rights movement over the past several decades (Blank, 2012; Johnson, 2007).

When public controversy erupted over the VSB's revisions to Policy ACB (2014), only two of the six participating GSAs took a substantial interest in the policy process. This indicates that scholars and activists alike should not overstate GSAs' purposes as activist hubs; while some do have activist aims, many others do not. The very public controversy revitalized Cedar Secondary's GSA; where there were only three active members prior to Policy ACB (2014), youth reported 25+ regular members the following year, who had joined as a direct result of their school's parent council president being so opposed to the revisions. In addition to internal dynamics, this dramatic shift shows how exterior forces, such as the parent advisory group, or a revision to policy, can profoundly affect the sustainability and membership of GSAs.

Three major findings came out of close work with the two GSAs that did actively participate in the policy process. The first centred on how important the policy provision for gender-neutral washrooms was for trans-identified youth. Although reticent to give credence to the dominant narrative of vulnerable LGBTQ youth needing safer spaces (as it emerged in both the policy analysis and through interviews with participants) the lack of safe, accessible washrooms at schools nonetheless continued to be a major barrier for trans youth. It affected their physical, emotional, mental, and social well being, and was a continual reminder of difference throughout the day. While youth may not want the focus of the GSA to be on their safety needs, it was evident that trans bodies in particular continue to be unsafe in school washrooms.

The second substantive finding from youth who participated in the Policy ACB revisions was how little a role the GSA played as a mechanism for effecting change, or amplifying youth voice. Although the Cedar's GSA president gave a speech in that role at

her school's parent council, the GSAs were not used as formal organizational or activist bodies during the seven weeks of public debate. They were spaces for students to dialogue about the issues, but were not recognized by either the adults or youth involved as intervening bodies that might hold status at the VSB public consultation meetings. This lends additional support to the argument that bystanders must take care to not overreach in claiming that GSAs are necessarily, or always, activist hubs.

Finally, all of the youth who participated in the policy process in some way were frustrated with the lack of infrastructure to make the proceedings accessible for youth. Several of these youth understood this lack of infrastructure as a direct result of dominant conceptions of children and youth being incapable of meaningful participation in politics. This finding is consistent with the considerable body of student voice literature, wherein youth characterize their own age-based disenfranchisement as a result of pejorative views of youth in general (see Czerniawski & Kidd, 2011; Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007).

While the interviewed youth participants wanted their similarly-aged peers to have a voice in policy-making, some viewed younger children as politically illegitimate in the same way they felt adults diminished their own capabilities. This finding introduced new tensions in student voice scholarship, wherein there was evidence that some older youth hold prejudicial views of younger children. This highlighted the importance of age-based contexts when working with youth in student voice.

Interviewed participants also held contradictory and competing views of how youth younger than themselves embodied gendered and sexual subjectivities. Although the youth described themselves in terms that aligned with Athenian archetype, they did not apply to Smith's (2011; 2014) construct to other youth, and especially not to children

who were younger than themselves. Instead, youth participants characterized younger youths as either innocent Apollonians or corrupt Dionysians, while excepting themselves personally from these classifications. It is speculated that childism, the general prejudice against children informed my participants' self-exceptionalism, although future research is needed in this regard. The findings nonetheless contribute to childhood theory in general, and student voice in particular, by indicating that, similar to adults, young people themselves hold multiple, often contradictory views of childhood.

In sum, just as participants viewed the GSAs as having dynamic purposes and goals, their schematic for understanding children and childhood was similarly unstable. This dissertation filled important gaps regarding how participants in several GSAs perceived their membership in these school-based clubs, and contextualized these findings within an analysis of the policies that held jurisdiction over their GSAs. It documented how participant perceptions either matched or diverged from how official policies characterized GSAs. Finally, this research contributed to ongoing childhood theorizing especially in regards to gender, sexuality, and voice and citizenship.

8.2 Implications for Policy

This dissertation produced evidence that homophobic, transphobic, and misogynistic language is still frequent in Vancouver School Board secondary schools. Although youth participants often deactivated the homophobic slurs they overheard by claiming the slurs were not *really* about sexual orientation, the finding that all of the youth participants heard 'that's so gay,' or 'faggot' at least once a week (with most reporting overhearing it several times per week) should be of great interest to policy-makers. These findings, combined with the policy analysis wherein openly or suspected

LGBTQ youth are to be supported generally after experiencing homophobic violence, offer a compelling impetus for policy-makers to re-imagine safe schools and anti-homophobia policy from the problem naming stage. Although certainly LGBTQ youth are most deserving of supportive policies that care for them after experiencing homophobia (including policy protection for GSAs), there is also a tremendous need to re-examine the root causes of such homophobia. Broadening the scope of the policy problem to investigate *why* LGBTQ youth are unsafe in schools has the potential to yield proactive and preventative policies. While simultaneously supporting victims, there is a rich opportunity to develop policies that target how homophobia is perpetuated in schools, both by individuals and at a systemic level.

Relatedly, the evidence of pervasive misogyny in schools indicates a serious problem with how the feminine is conceived in schools, by youth and adults alike. Sexist language was so normalized that very few of the participants drew direct attention to it. In addition to developing policies that address the causes of homophobia in schools, policy-makers would be well advised to similarly prioritize policy-making around misogyny.

As the findings from chapter six indicate, any such policy development would have to include multiple groups of youth stakeholders who would have meaningful decision-making responsibilities throughout the process. With chapter seven finding that youth can and do hold pejorative views of children younger than themselves, care should be taken to include a spectrum of ages in such policy-making, as well as including other forms of diversity including a broad array of abilities, ethnicity and race, sexual orientation, gender identities, class positions, etc. Creating accessible infrastructure for youth would need to precede their involvement in gender or sexual orientation policy, as

the youth participants from the Policy ACB (2014) revisions reported feeling continually excluded from the process. While the GSA could be part of such infrastructure, as suggested by one youth in chapter six, it was not generally seen as an organizing body for policy change. Given how youth members valued GSAs for an array of reasons, not least of which was its being a relaxing space for socializing and fun, GSAs should not be immediately approached as the best or only ways to enhance student voice. Although they could be one component of filling that gap, they have other functions outside of activism that should be respected.

I understand the relatively little existing infrastructure for meaningful youth involvement in policy-making as opening up a wide space for better infrastructure to be imagined, piloted, and revised. The enthusiasm with which youth offered suggestions to create or improve such infrastructure during our conversations about Policy ACB (2014) indicated no shortage of ideas from which to draw upon. The largest impediment to their meaningful inclusion stems not from a dearth of logistical possibilities but rather their social positioning as young persons. Although the youth reported considerable frustration with adults' diminishment of their own capabilities due to ages, many held similarly prejudicial views of children only a few years younger than themselves. In order for young people's inclusion in policy-making to become a pressing agenda item, people of all ages would need to recognize their political legitimacy, and right to participate meaningfully in such conversations.

Finally, the findings from chapter five indicate a dire need for affirmative LGBTQ curricular inclusion and infusion across all grades and subjects. It is shameful that students' only encounters with LGBTQ content within schools is restricted to

occasional conversations in a weekly club. While GSAs should be applauded for providing queer-infused education to members, especially in history, biology, sexual health, and political science, this education is *ad hoc*, and sometimes factually inaccurate. This education needs to be delivered to students of all orientations and gender identities, straight and queer alike. It also needs to be developed in collaboration with experts across fields to ensure accuracy and reliable sources. Rather than a solution in and of itself, *Social Justice Unit 6* should be understood as a springboard for broader, and more substantive queer inclusion in written curricula.

8.3 Implications for Practice

The diversity of members' experiences indicated a need for greater flexibility and fluidity in how the GSA presents its purpose and goals. Members and advisors alike reported feeling pressure and guilt about various aspects of their GSA, including those they enjoyed, and negatively compared their club to GSAs at other schools. In direct contrast to the findings of the policy analysis, wherein GSAs were supported primarily as a means of increasing LGBTQ student safety, youth members tended to be repelled by this characterization of the GSA. Jiani reported this purpose as potentially offensive or pathologizing to LGBTQ students, while Caroline stated unequivocally that she did not need a school based support group. Although school safety was found to still be an issue for queer students, and trans youth in particular, the dominant narrative of GSAs as safe spaces for victimized LGBTQ youth could be emphasized less to allow space for multiple justifications for the GSA.

Rather than privileging any particular aspect of the club, members, teacher advisors, and policy makers alike might consider allowing the GSA to be a more

nebulous, undefined space. Much as the term ‘queer’ itself can be “a political metaphor without a fixed referent” (Eng, Halberstam, & Muñoz, 2005, p. 1), so too could the GSA operate with less defined specificity in order to allow space for shifting and ever-changing realities. Its functions as a space that fosters youth-led dialogue on a host of political issues, including the role of religion in public life, or its existence as a relaxing place for fun and socializing over snacks, for instance, could be emphasized more.

Beyond implications for broadening and diversifying the gay rights movement by largely rejecting fixed biological determinism, youth’s attachment to, and simultaneous fluidity with regards to their own identities has important implications for scholars and practitioners who work with young people. For scholars, it points to the methodological importance of asking a youth about their identities, rather than assuming that they can be determined by looking at them. Where youth cannot be asked about their identities in person, it is imperative to give them many open-ended choices, as they were found to create their own labels. I understand giving greater space for youth to self-identify as not only respecting their rights in this regard, but also recognizing them as Smith’s (2011; 2014) archetype of the Athenian child, whom adults respect as having their own voice and capabilities.

Youths’ creativity in self-identifying various aspects of their identity could also inform scholarly work on youth identity. Angelina’s labeling her ethnic identity as “questioning” after reading an LGBTQ terminology sheet opens up wider possibilities in considering how labels may be chosen across identity markers. Scholars investigating different domains of youth identity, such as ethnicity or ability for example, may now

consider encouraging youth to draw from a broader variety of labels when self-identifying.

8.4 Recommendations for Future Research

In addressing the research questions, this dissertation in turn opened space for more questions to be asked. This research investigated GSAs that already had policy protections secured from multiple jurisdictions (e.g. the school board, the teacher's federation, etc.). Comparing these findings with a similar study on GSAs without such policy protections would yield important findings on the roles of policy in GSA formation and sustainability, as well as what their purposes and goals may be.

Aspen Secondary's GSA-developed and delivered workshop for ESL students raised important questions about the role of homonationalism in young Canadians' understandings of newcomers, citizenship, ethnic diversity, and Canadian identity. Despite many of Aspen's GSA members being newcomers within the past ten years themselves, they did not recognize the possibility that recent newcomers could be queer identified, have openly queer friends or family members, or have any affirming knowledge or experiences with LGBTQ related issues. The evidence that youth in particular positioned gay rights as an important component of Canadian citizenship to be taught to newcomers should be investigated further, not only as an aspect of youth's roles in gay liberation, but also for how homonationalism can be used in colonial countries as marker of national identity.

Future research could also illustrate the pervasive influence of misogyny in schools, not just as it relates to homo- and trans-phobia, but as part of a broader devaluing of the feminine. With Pascoe's (2007) groundbreaking ethnography on the fragility of

masculinity in schools titled *Don't be a fag* nearly ten years old, similar in-depth studies on how femininity is policed, regulated, and negotiated are warranted, particularly in the Canadian context. That the youth in this study generally did not identify misogynistic slurs such as “bitch” or “pussy” as homophobic, especially when they were used by males to police other males indicates that youth perceptions of what ‘counts’ as sexism is an important area for future research.

Finally, more research is needed within childhood studies on how youth themselves understand not only their own childhoods, but also childhood more broadly. The many contradictory themes about who children are and can be that surfaced in chapter seven, combined with some youth’s smothering and sanitizing memories of their own childhoods with Apollonian notions of innocence indicates that childhood studies would greatly benefit from the inclusion of student voice. Care would have to be taken to ensure that multiple ages were included in this type of study, as the youth in this study tended to either romanticize or demonize children who were even a few years younger than themselves. With attention paid to the methodological strategies used, this intersection of childhood studies and student voice offers rich possibilities by offering a new directions and possibilities to both fields.

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Appendix A – Participant Information Letter

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA - Department of Educational Policy Studies Participant Information Letter

Title of Project: Ethnographic Inquiry with Canadian Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs)

Principle Researcher: Lindsay Herriot, PhD, (candidate)

Research Supervisor: Dr. André P. Grace¹¹, PhD, Professor at the University of Alberta

What is this study about?

- The aim of this study is to explore the how students and staff understand the purposes and functions of Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs).
- This study could help those members of a school community with a GSA better understand the GSA within its educational, legal, social, and cultural contexts.
- I am doing this research as part of my Ph.D. degree in educational policy studies at the University of Alberta.

Who Can Take Part?

You can take part in this study if you are:

- *A student, teacher, administrator, or staff member* who attends or works at a school with a GSA, or equivalent club,
- Speak English or French
- You do NOT need to be a member or advisor of the GSA to participate.

What Will I Have To Do?

All participants

- Are invited to take part in at least one audio-recorded, semi-structured interview, lasting between 20 to 30 minutes. You are invited, but not required to complete a pre-interview activity to help me get to know you better. If you choose to do a pre-interview activity, the researcher will do one as well. Pre-interview activities can take place several days prior to the audio-recorded interview
- The interviews will all be held at your school in a quiet room space. You are welcome to invite another adult to be present during your interview(s)

¹¹ Dr. Grace was my primary supervisor at the time that the letter of information and consent form were approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta.

- You will be given opportunities during and after data collection to review the transcripts, notes, and analysis to check for accuracy. You can always add, edit, or delete comments you've made to the researcher.

Participants involved in a GSA

- Have some of your GSA meetings, events, activities, etc. observed by the researcher. You are encouraged to specifically request that the researcher be or not be present for a particular meeting.

Possible Risks

- There is a possible risk that thinking about experiences with the GSA may cause you to become upset if it is related to a difficult time in your life. If this occurs, the researcher will offer you support and assist you to get additional help from your school, an outside organization (such as Kids Help Phone), or a healthcare practitioner. See Appendix C for a list of resources in your area should you feel distressed during the research.

Possible Benefits

- Talking and being taken seriously about your experiences as a youth or with a GSA in a safe and supportive environment can be a positive experience.
- Some youth also feel good about being part of a study that is trying to improve their school experiences.

What About Privacy?

- All information you provide will be kept confidential, meaning that it stays between you and the researchers, unless the law requires us to report it:
- - If you tell the researcher that a youth (a person under the age of 18) is being mentally, sexually, or physically harmed, or at risk of being mentally, sexually, or physically harmed.
 - Should you report harm to a youth (a person under the age of 18), the researcher is legally and ethically required to follow the reporting procedures outlined in *The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect*.
 - The researcher will have a copy of *The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect* with her at all times.

- All information that is collected will be labeled with a 'fake name' (that you can choose) so that your name is not connected with the documents.
- Computer files and audio recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer and any other documents from the study will be secured in a locked filing cabinet for five years following the end of the research project. After this time, they will be destroyed.
- None of the study information will be shared with students, staff, faculty, or administration at your school.
- The information gathered from all who take part may be presented at academic events and published in journals. None of your identifying information will be used.
- You are encouraged to participate in presenting the findings at forums that are meaningful to you, such as youth conferences, school board meetings, etc.

Voluntary Participation

- Taking part, or not taking part, will not in any way impact your education, or your involvement with the GSA. You are not required to participate.
- You can stop being part of the study at any time or not answer any questions without consequences (you won't be punished, or "in trouble"). The last point you can change or withdraw your participation is August, 2014.
- If you choose to end your participation in this study, any data gathered up to that point will be removed.
- You will be provided with your own copy of a summary of the report once the study is done, and asked for feedback throughout the process. You are invited to add, delete, and edit any information to ensure that you are being represented authentically.
- Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at (780) - 492 - 2615.

If you choose to take part in this study, please let Lindsay know you are interested. Also, if you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me or my research supervisor.

Thank you for your interest in this study.

Principle Researcher:

Lindsay Herriot PhD (c)
Department of Educational Policy Studies
University of Alberta
lherriot@ualberta.ca

Supervising Researcher:

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Appendix B - Participant Consent Form

Study Title: Ethnographic Inquiry with Canadian Gay Straight Alliances

Have you received and read a copy of the attached *Participant Information Letter*?

Yes No

Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this study?

Yes No

Have you had a chance to ask questions and discuss this study?

Yes No

Do you understand that you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time? You do not have to give a reason and it will not affect your education.

Yes No

Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you?

Yes No

Do you understand who will have access to information you provide?

Yes No

I agree to take part in this study:

_____	_____	_____
Participant Signature	Printed Name	Date

Two copies of this consent form will be provided. One is to be kept by you for your records, and the other is to be returned to the researcher.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Principle Researcher:

Lindsay Herriot PhD (candidate)
Department of Educational Policy Studies
University of Alberta
lherriot@ualberta.ca

Supervising Researcher:

Dr. André P. Grace, PhD,
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Appendix C - Supportive Resources

Covenant House

877 685 7474

575 Drake Street

<http://www.covenanthousebc.org/services/crisis-shelter>

A crisis shelter for youth ages 16-22. Youth are provided with medical attention, nutritious food, and a safe place to sleep.

Crisis Centre

604 872 3311

800 SUICIDE

<http://www.crisiscentre.bc.ca/>

Offers free, confidential counseling provided 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year by telephone and by chat.

Kids Help Phone

1 800 668 6868

<http://org.kidshelpphone.ca/en>

Offers free, confidential counseling provided 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year

QMUNITY

604 684 5307

1170 Bute Street

<http://www.qmunity.ca/>

Offers a variety of supports, services, and referrals for queer youth and their allies including a drop-in group, housing information, support in coming out, sexual health education, and individual counseling and support

Youth in BC

1 866 661 3311

<http://youthinbc.com/>

Offers free, confidential counseling 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year, both over the phone, and through chat. Provides information and referrals for any number of issues affecting BC youth

Appendix D - Pre Interview Activities

Please complete one of the activities listed below (you can do more than one if you choose). We will begin our interview by having you present these and talk about them. There are a number of purposes for using the PIAs in this way. For one, by completing these PIAs in a quiet time you may have a better chance to remember more ideas or details to include. And for another, if I can look at the diagrams or drawings while you talk about them it can help me see how your ideas fit together and what you mean by some of the words you use. The PIAs can give us a better chance for you to teach me about your experience.

- 1) Draw a diagram and label it to show what the support systems are available for the GSA
- 2) Make a chart of 20 words that are important to the GSA, divide them into two groups.
- 3) Draw two pictures or diagrams: one of a good GSA meeting, and one of a frustrating or challenging GSA meeting.
- 4) If someone were to make a movie about the GSA, what scenes would be important to include? (List them)
- 5) Draw a timeline of the important experiences of your involvement with the GSA
- 6) Using three colours, draw three symbols of how you experience the GSA
- 7) Draw a diagram of your school. Mark the important places (good and not so good) for the GSA.
- 8) Using a diagram, draw or write about how GSAs are similar and different from other clubs or organizations in your school

Appendix E - Interview Guide

Individual Experience with the GSA

1. Can you tell me the story of how you came to be involved in the GSA?
2. Why do you think your school has a GSA?
3. What does it mean to be a safe, or safer space?
4. What are the best parts of your GSA?
5. If you could change one thing about your GSA, what would that be?
6. How has being involved with the GSA affected your other relationships?

GSA Meetings

7. What do you look forward to when you go to a GSA meeting?
8. What does it mean to “get a lot done” in a GSA?
9. Can you describe something frustrating or challenging that happens at the GSA?
10. What would happen in a perfect GSA meeting or event?

Meaning or significance of GSA

11. What has surprised you about the GSA?
12. How would your school be different if there was no GSA? How would you be different?
13. What comes to mind when you think of external supports for the GSA? Things like policies from the school, or board, or province...
14. What sorts of connections do you see between the GSA and the curriculum? Are there similarities, differences, both?
15. What sorts of connections do you see between the GSA and other extra curricular activities, or student clubs? Are there similarities, differences, both?
16. What sort of reputation does your GSA have?
17. How have things changed since the GSA (either formed or disbanded)?
18. What do you think people need to know about GSAs?
19. What advice would you have to for folks who want to start a GSA?

20. What sorts of connections do you see between the GSA and citizenship?
21. Does the GSA have power to change things at school?
22. How many times per day do you hear 'that's so gay,' 'faggot,' etc.
23. What would it have been like to have a GSA in elementary school?

Appendix F - University of Alberta Ethics Approval

Notification of Approval

Date: February 10, 2014
 Study ID: Pro00044137
 Principal Investigator: [Lindsay Herriot](#)
 Study Supervisor: [Andre Grace](#)
 Study Title: Ethnographic Inquiry with Canadian Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs)
 Approval Expiry Date: February 9, 2015

Approved	Approval Date	Approved Document
Consent Forms:	10/02/2014	Letter of Information.docx
	10/02/2014	Participant Consent Form.docx

Sponsor/Funding Agency: SSHRC - Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1. Your application has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee.

A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

William Dunn, PhD

Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Appendix G - Vancouver School Board Ethics Approval



VANCOUVER BOARD OF EDUCATION
School District No. 39
ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT
 1580 West Broadway
 Vancouver, B.C. V6J 5K8

Feb. 18, 2014

Lindsay Herriot Dept. of Educational Policy Studies Faculty of Education 7-104
 Education North University of Alberta Edmonton, AB T6G 2G5

Dear Lindsay Herriot,

Thank you for your research proposal entitled, "Ethnographic Inquiry with Canadian Gay Straight Alliances."

You are granted approval to complete your research in our district and you have permission to contact parents, students and teachers in our district. Please contact the Principal of the school first and note that teachers are very busy with other obligations and have the right of refusal. The Vancouver School District does not find subjects for researchers.

The District would be very interested in learning of your results and its implications for students. When your research is completed please send us an abstract of the results.

Thank you for focusing your work within the Vancouver School District. I wish you the best of luck as you proceed with your inquiry.

Sincerely,

Maureen Ciarniello Associate Superintendent, Learning Services Vancouver School Board

Appendix H

British Columbia Teachers Federation Policies

Motions passed by the BCTF to support LGBTQ Students and Staff

(All of these appear on pages 84, 145 and 152 in the 2010/11 BCTF Member's Guide)

C. Social Justice POLICIES

12.25—That the BCTF is opposed to:

- (a) using and/or promoting reparative therapies aimed at changing lesbian, gay or bisexual students' sexual orientation; a
- (b) referring students to therapists who promote and practice reparative therapies. (Nov. 00 RA, p. 5)

34.157—That the BCTF support Bill C-389 and urge the Federal Government to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code to protect trans-identified people by explicitly adding gender identity and gender expression to the prohibited grounds for discrimination within the act. (June 10 RA, p. 17)

41.C.03—(a) That the BCTF actively support the establishment of Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) support groups in middle and high schools throughout BC;

(b) That the BCTF actively encourage local leaders to facilitate the establishment of Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) student support groups in middle and high schools in their locals. (00 AGM, p. 18)

41.C.05—That locals of the BCTF be encouraged to work with school boards to develop and implement policies that will facilitate the use of learning materials that convey inclusive and positive portrayals of same-sex families. (Jan./Feb. RA 03 p. 19)

41.C.07—That members of the BCTF be encouraged to address same-sex family

issues in their classrooms in the context of relevant curriculum. (Jan./Feb. RA 03 p. 19)

41.C.09—That in consideration of the implications of the Supreme Court decision, the Ministry of Education undertake a progressive leadership role in addressing the issues of same-sex families and sexual minority students. (Jan./Feb. RA 03 p. 19)

41.C.11—That the local social justice contacts and committees are the driving force in developing the Federation's priorities and actions in social justice, and that the social justice work of the Federation be premised on this tenet. (Feb. 04 Ex, p. 8)

41.C.15—That the BCTF encourage locals to include a social justice budget line when building their annual budgets. (June 05 Ex, p. 20)

41.D.10—That the BCTF encourage sponsor teachers to support pre-service teachers to integrate social justice issues into their practicum teaching. (08 AGM, p. 25)

41.D.12—That the BCTF encourage locals to work with school districts to develop and implement discrete policies on LGBTQ harassment and discrimination. (08 AGM, p. 25)

Social Justice PROCEDURES

34.20—That the BCTF condemn homophobic acts. (93 AGM, p. 13)

41.C.02—That locals have autonomy to create a local social justice structure that meets the needs of the local. (Feb. 04 Ex., p. 8)

41.C.06—That the BCTF and its locals actively lobby school boards to develop and implement policies designed to protect teachers from harassment based upon their real or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity. (Jan. 07 Ex., p. 2)

41.C.08—That the BCTF publicize with the membership that antigay slurs and homophobic incidents directed towards teachers by their colleagues are a form of

harassment. (07 AGM, p. 22)

41.C.17—That local unions work with school districts to develop or review anti-homophobia policy to ensure that these policies include a requirement that all homophobic incidents at schools and other worksites be reported to the district and that action be taken on these incidents. (June 06 RA, p. 14)

41.C.19—That locals work with school districts to develop or revise anti-discrimination and equity policies and education practices to ensure they are consistent with the BC Human Rights Act and School Act. (June 06 RA, p. 15)

These policies should inform the work you do within your zone or local. You may also use them as reference points for lobbying your local to effect change in a given area.

Appendix I - Vancouver School Board Policy ACB (2004)

Retrieved from <http://pacis.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2004-Policy.pdf>

ACB: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Two-spirit, Questioning

Classification: A: Foundations and Basic Commitments

Code: ACB

Intent

The Board of School Trustees (the “Board”) is committed to establishing and maintaining a safe and positive learning environment for all students and employees including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, or who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity. These students and employees, as all students and employees, have the right to learn and work in an environment free of discrimination and harassment. The letter and spirit of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *B. C. Human Rights Acts* and the *Collective Agreements* shall be carefully observed, enforced, and supported, so that all members of the school community may work together in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance for individual differences. Specifically, the Board will not tolerate hate crimes, harassment or discrimination, and will vigorously enforce policy and regulations dealing with such matters.

The Board will provide a safe environment, free from harassment and discrimination, while also promoting pro-active strategies and guidelines to ensure that lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, bisexual and questioning students, employees and families are welcomed and included in all aspects of education and school life and treated with respect and dignity. The purpose of this policy is to define

appropriate behaviours and actions in order to prevent discrimination and harassment through greater awareness of and responsiveness to their deleterious effects. This policy is also drafted to ensure that homophobic complaints are taken seriously and dealt with expeditiously and effectively through consistently applied policy and procedures. The policy will also raise awareness and improve understanding of the lives of people who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. By valuing diversity and respecting differences, students and staff act in accordance with the Vancouver district's social responsibility initiative.

Leadership

The Vancouver School Board shall ensure that all staff will be able to identify individual discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, as well as work to eliminate the systemic inequities and barriers to learning for students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and demonstrate accountability for their removal so that all students are treated with fairness and respect.

All administrators, teachers, counselors, and staff and student leaders will communicate the board's position to their employees, staff and students. In the course of their leadership roles, they will commit to listen to lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, bisexual and questioning youth and their designated support groups and take concrete actions to make schools more welcoming and safer places for these students. The Board shall consult with the LBTTQ Advisory Committee to ensure that policy directions, priorities and implementation of programs and services are consistent with this LBTTBQ policy.

Counselling and Student Support

The Vancouver School Board is committed to maintaining a safe learning and working environment which actively provides counselling and support to students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. All counsellors provided by the board shall be educated in the knowledge and skills required to deal with LGBTTQ issues with students. Counsellors will be informed and familiar with all policies with respect to human rights, anti-homophobia, hate literature, discrimination and harassment, and will alert their school community to these policies. Counsellors will be sensitive to lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, bisexual and questioning students as well as students from LGBTT headed families.

Elementary and secondary schools are encouraged to appoint a staff person to be a safe contact for students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. School administrators should inform students and other staff about the location and availability of this contact person. Schools are encouraged in their goal planning to advocate for students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and those who are questioning their gender identity. Where students request and where staff are willing to volunteer their time, Gay/Straight Alliance clubs (GSAs) will be encouraged at secondary schools in the district.

Anti-Harassment

Homophobic harassment is demeaning treatment to all students, students' parents or guardians, and employees regardless of their sexual orientation. Harassment based on gender identities is also demeaning to all students and employees. These forms of harassment and discrimination are prohibited under the B.C. Human Rights Code.

Any language or behaviour that deliberately degrades, denigrates, labels, stereotypes, incites hatred, prejudice, discrimination, harassment towards students or employees on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identification will not be tolerated. Schools will be encouraged to specifically include the prohibition of such language and behaviour in their student codes of conduct. Please refer to the “General Anti-Harassment VSB Policy”.

Curriculum Learning Resources

Anti-Homophobia Education strives to identify and change educational practices, policies, and procedures that promote homophobia, as well as the homophobic attitudes and behaviours that underlie and reinforce such policies and practices. Anti-homophobia education provides knowledge, skills, and strategies for educators to examine such discrimination critically in order to understand its origin and to recognize and challenge it.

The Board is committed to enabling all lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, bisexual and questioning students to see themselves and their lives positively reflected in the curriculum. Resources should be chosen or updated in order to promote critical thinking and include materials that accurately reflect the range of Canada’s LGBTTQ communities. Keeping in mind the multi-cultural aspect of the district, as many of the above resources as possible should be available in different languages and in formats easily accessible to ESL students.

Staff Development, In Service and Professional Development

The Vancouver School Board is committed to ongoing staff development in anti-homophobia education and sexual orientation equity for trustees and Board staff, and will

assist them to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to identify and eliminate homophobic practices. The Board will provide in-service training for teaching and support staff in anti-homophobia methodologies to enable them to deliver an inclusive curriculum. The Board will also provide in-service training for employees to deal effectively and confidently with issues of homophobia, heterosexism and gender identity and support initiatives that foster dialogue to create understanding and respect for diversity.

School-Community Involvement

The Vancouver School Board is committed to ongoing, constructive and open dialogue with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities and other communities who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity to increase co-operation and collaboration among home, school and the community.

The Board will work to create partnerships that ensure effective participation in the education process by representative and inclusive organizations and LGBTTTQ communities that are committed to the mission of the VSB. (To enable students to reach their intellectual, social, aesthetic and physical potential in challenging and stimulating settings which reflect the worth of each individual and promote mutual respect, co-operation, and social responsibility.)

The Board will encourage parent advisory councils to reflect the diversity of the District.

The Vancouver School Board will acknowledge through its communication to students, staff, and the community that some children live in LGBTTT-headed families and need to be positively recognized and included as such. Any information to students and

parents on anti-homophobia, anti-discrimination and sexual orientation equity needs to be translated into the languages spoken in the home. Parent Advisory Councils and students will be encouraged to engage in dialogue with openly identified LGBTTTQ youth and their organizations.

Employment Equity

The Board of School Trustees (the “Board”) believes in equitable treatment for all individuals regardless of race, colour, ancestry, ethnic origin, religion, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental ability, or political beliefs. The letter and spirit of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *B. C. Human Rights Acts* and the *VSB/VTF Collective Agreement* shall be carefully observed, enforced, and supported, so that all members of the school community may work together in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance for individual differences.

The Board will ensure that the confidentiality of the sexual orientation and gender identity of staff will be protected. Employees who are out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or transitioning to another gender will be given the support they require to do their work in a safe and respectful environment.

Glossary

Gay: a man who is romantically and sexually attracted to other men. It is sometimes used to refer to the general GLBTQ community, but most often refers to just gay men.

Lesbian: a woman who is romantically and sexually attracted to other women. This term originates with the female poet Sappho who lived in a community comprised predominantly of women on the Isle of Lesbos in ancient Greece.

Bisexual: generally used to describe people who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of more than one sex or gender.

Sex & Gender: it is easy to confuse these two concepts and terms; however, they are different. Sex refers to the biological sex of a person. Gender refers to their societal appearance, mannerisms, and roles.

Transgender: an umbrella term used to refer to people who transcend the traditional concept of gender. Many feel as though they are neither a man nor a woman specifically, and many feel as though their biological sex (male, female, etc.) and their socialized gender (man, woman, etc.) don't match up. Some opt to change/reassign their sex through hormones and/or surgery and some change their outward appearance, or gender expression, through clothing, hairstyles, mannerisms, etc.

Transvestite: more appropriately referred to as "cross-dressing," the term transvestite most often refers to males who dress in the clothing of women. The term drag usually refers to dressing in the clothing and styles of another gender for entertainment purposes.

Transsexual: used to describe those individuals who use hormone therapy and/or surgery to alter their sex.

Two-Spirit: used by some First Nations to describe people in their culture who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Questioning: people who are in the process of questioning their sexual orientation are often in need of support and understanding during this stage of their identity. They are seeking information and guidance in their self-discovery.

Ally: an individual who is supportive of the GLBTQ community. They believe in the dignity and respect of all people, and are willing to stand up in that role.

Homosexual: a scientific term invented in the 1800's to refer to individuals who are sexually attracted to their own sex/gender.

Heterosexual: created around the same time as 'homosexual' to describe individuals who are sexually attracted to the opposite sex/gender.

Straight: a slang word used to refer to the heterosexual members of our community.

Heterosexism and Homophobia: the term heterosexism refers to the assumption that all people are heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior and more desirable than homosexuality. "Homophobia" is defined as "the irrational fear and hatred of homosexuals." Both of these are perpetuated by negative stereotypes and are dangerous to individuals and communities.

Genderism: refers to the assumption that one's gender identity or gender expression will conform to traditionally held stereotypes associated with one's biological sex.

Sexual Orientation: is a personal characteristic that covers the range of human sexuality from gay and lesbian, to bisexual, transgender and heterosexual orientations.

Gender Identity: a person's gender identity is the way in which they define and act on their gender. Gender Expression is how they express their gender.

Queer: the term queer has a history of being used as a derogatory name for members of the GLBTQ (and Ally) community and those whose sexual orientation is perceived as such. Many people use this word in a positive way to refer to the community; they have reclaimed the term as their own. Not everyone believes this and sensitivity should be used when using or hearing it as there are still many negative connotations with its use.

(These definitions were assembled by Sarah E. Holmes (GLBTQA Resources Coordinator from 2000-2002) in August 2000, revised by Andrew J. Shepard in November 2000,

*updated again by Sarah August 2002. <http://www.usm.maine.edu/glbqtqa/definitions.htm>
University of Southern Maine Safe Zone Project.)*

DMT Responsibility: AS-LS

Cross References: ACA: Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism; FB: Facilities Planning;
GBAB: Employment Equity; GBCBA: Sexual Harassment; IGBA: Programs for
Disabled Students; IIA: Instructional Materials; IIAE: Hate Crimes and Propaganda; JB:
Equal Educational Opportunities; KLB: Public Complaints about the
Curriculum/Instructional Materials

Adopted Date: Monday February 16, 2004

Appendix J - Vancouver School Board Policy ACB-R1 (2014)

Retrieved from <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/district-policy/acb-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identities>

ACB - R - 1: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities

Classification: A; Foundations and Basic Commitments

Code: ACB-R-1

A. Anti-Harassment

The Board will strive to prevent and to provide effective procedures to respond to any language or behaviour that degrades, denigrates, labels, or stereotypes students on the basis of their real or perceived sexual and/or gender identities and/or gender expression, or that incites hatred, prejudice, discrimination or harassment on such bases.

B. Leadership

The Board will consult with the Pride Advisory Committee to ensure that policy directions, priorities and implementation of programs and services are consistent with the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities policy.

There will be ongoing, constructive and open dialogue with LGBTTTQ+ communities to increase co-operation and collaboration among home, school and the community.

Administrators, teachers, counsellors, and other staff and student leaders should consult with LGBTTTQ+ students and their designated support groups and take concrete actions to make schools more welcoming, inclusive and safer places.

Staff will not refer students to programs or services that attempt to change a student's sexual orientation or gender identity.

C. Professional Development and Training

The Board will strive to ensure that professional development and training is provided for staff to develop the awareness, knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to:

- deliver an LGBTTTQ+ inclusive curriculum (including anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia education);
- identify and address homophobic and transphobic discriminatory attitudes and behaviours; and
- support and advocate for the needs of students whose real or perceived identity is LGBTTTQ+

D. Counselling and Student Support

The Board will ensure that:

- counsellors are trained to respond competently to the needs of LGBTTTQ+ students as well as to the needs of students with LGBTTTQ+ family members;
- counsellors and staff are provided with information, from the district, on support programs or services for students and families;
- elementary and secondary schools appoint at least one staff person to be a Safe Contact who is able to act as a resource person for LGBTTTQ+ students, staff and families. (Note: School administrators will act as the Safe Contact if no one voluntarily steps forward.) School administrators will inform students and other staff about the location and availability of this contact person; and
- all secondary schools are supported in establishing and maintaining Gay or Queer/Straight Alliance clubs.

E. Curriculum Learning Resources

The Board is committed to:

- ensuring that staff utilizes language and educational resources and approaches that are inclusive, developmentally appropriate, and respectful of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions;
- enabling all LGBTTTQ+ students and families to see themselves and their lives positively reflected in the curriculum, through the provision of library and other curricular resources;
- creating or acquiring developmentally appropriate, current and relevant learning resources for sexual health education that are LGBTTTQ+ inclusive; and
- providing learning resources in languages and in formats easily accessible to ELL students and their families, where possible.

F. Communications

The Board will:

- acknowledge through its communication to students, staff, and the community that some students live in LGBTTTQ+ families and need to be positively recognized and included as such; and
- ensure that school forms and communications reflect the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities of students, staff and parents/guardians.

G. Gender Identity and Gender Expression

To support the safety, health, and educational needs of students whose real or perceived identity is trans*, staff shall adhere to the following practices:

1. Consultation

School staff are encouraged to consult with district staff, to review best practices for supporting trans* students.

2. Confidentiality and Privacy

- a. A student's trans* status, legal name, or gender assigned at birth may constitute confidential personal information that will be kept confidential unless its disclosure is legally required or unless the student or the student's parent(s)/guardian have given authorization.
- b. In situations where school staff or administrators are required by law to use or to report a trans* student's legal name or sex, such as for purposes of data collection, school staff and administrators will adopt practices to avoid the inadvertent disclosure of such information.
- c. Students' rights to discuss and express their gender identity and/or gender expression openly and to decide when, with whom, and how much private information to share will be respected.

3. Names and Pronouns

Trans* students will be addressed by the names and pronouns prefer to use.

4. Official Records and Student Information

- a. Whenever possible and permitted by law, requests made by a student, or the parent/guardian, to change the student's official record to reflect their preferred name and/or gender identity will be accommodated.
- b. Whenever possible, at the request of a student or of a students' parent(s)/guardian, the student's preferred name and/or gender identity will be included on class lists, timetables, student files, identification cards, etc.

- c. Unless the student or the student's parent/guardian has specified otherwise, communications between school and home shall use a student's legal name and the pronoun corresponding to the student's gender assigned at birth.

5. Dress

Students have the right to dress in a manner consistent with their gender identity or gender expression. This includes students who may dress in a manner that is not consistent with societal expectations of masculinity/femininity.

6. Sex-segregated Activities

Schools will reduce or eliminate the practice of segregating students by sex. In situations where students are segregated by sex, trans* students will have the option to be included in the group that corresponds to their gender identity.

7. Access to Physical Education and Sports

- a. Where possible, students will be permitted to participate in any sex-segregated recreational and competitive athletic activities, in accordance with their gender identity. Due to issues of disclosure and safety, some students may wish to participate in a sex-segregated activity that is not aligned with their gender identity.
- b. Trans* students shall be provided the same opportunities to participate in physical education as all other students, shall not be asked or required to have physical education outside of the assigned class time, and shall be permitted to participate in any sex-segregated activities in accordance with their gender identity if they so choose.

8. Washroom and Change Room Accessibility

- a. The use of washrooms and change rooms by trans* students shall be assessed on a case-by-case basis with the goals of maximizing the student's social integration, ensuring the student's safety and comfort, minimizing stigmatization and providing equal opportunity to participate in physical education classes and sports.
- b. Trans* students shall have access to the washroom and change room that corresponds to their gender identity. Students who desire increased privacy will be provided with a reasonable alternative washroom and/or changing area. Any alternative arrangement will be provided in a way that protects the student's ability to keep their trans* status confidential.
- c. The decision with regard to washroom and change room use shall be made in consultation with the trans* student.
- d. The Board will strive to make available single stall gender-neutral washrooms at all school locations and worksites.

9. Student Transfers

Schools will aim to keep trans* students at their original school site, unless it is a student's wish to transfer. Should the student wish to transfer, it is not necessary to disclose the student's gender identity and/or gender expression as the reason for transfer.

10. Resolving Conflict

Disputes will be resolved in a manner that involves the trans* student and an adult ally (teacher, service provider, parent/guardian) in the decision-making process to maximize inclusiveness.

DMT Responsibility: AS-LS

Glossary

Asexual: A person who is not sexually attracted to any gender or sex. Asexual people may still be romantically attracted to people of a variety of genders and sexualities and have romantic, non- sexual relationships.

Bisexual: A person who is attracted to both women and men.

Gay: A person who is attracted to someone of the same sex and/or gender as themselves. This word can be applied to all genders of relationships, but has primarily been used in reference to men.

Gender: A socially constructed concept of identity based on roles, behaviours, activities, and appearance such as masculine, feminine, androgynous, etc.

Gender expression: The ways a person presents their sense of gender to others (for example, through clothes, hairstyle, mannerisms, etc.).

Gender identity: A person's internal sense of being a man, a woman, genderqueer etc. This is not the same thing as a person's biological sex, and may not be consistent with how they are perceived by others.

Gender nonconforming: A term that often refers to children who express gender in ways that differs from societal expectations of the sex and gender assigned to them at birth. For the purposes of this policy and accompanying regulations gender nonconforming children are included under the term trans*.

Homophobia: The fear, ignorance and mistreatment of people who are, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay or bisexual. This often leads to bias, discrimination, hatred, harassment

and violation of the human rights of lesbian, gay or bisexual people. Homophobic bullying can also be targeted against any individual, regardless of perceived sexual orientation.

Intersex: Refers to people whose reproductive or sexual anatomy is not easily defined as male or female. There are a variety of ways someone can be intersex, ranging from having ambiguous genitalia to having mixture of XX and XY chromosomes. Intersex individuals have historically been mistreated in North American society (i.e. being forced to have “corrective” genital surgeries as infants). The term Disorders of Sexual Development is being used increasingly amongst medical professionals in reference to intersex conditions, however, this term has not been fully adopted by intersex communities at the time this policy is being written. The word hermaphrodite was historically used to describe intersex individuals, however, this term is considered highly offensive.

Lesbian: A woman who is attracted to other women.

LGBTQT+: An acronym that in this case stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, Two-Spirit, and queer/questioning. There is a wide range of other terms often included in this acronym (often referred to by queer communities as “the alphabet soup”) such as asexual, and this acronym tends to vary depending on the source. The plus sign (+) indicates the inclusion of all sexual and gender identities.

Perceived as LGBTQ+: Refers to someone who is treated as if they are LGBTQ+ even if they do not identify as such.

Pronouns: The words one uses to refer to themselves (e.g. he/him/his; she/her/hers; they/them/theirs; xe, xem, xyr, etc.)

Queer: An umbrella term (often used in place of the LGBTTTQ+ acronym) used to describe individuals who identify as being part of sexual and gender diverse communities (e.g. lesbian, gay, transgender).

Sex: A biological classification based on physical attributes such as sex chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive structures, and external genitalia. At birth, it is used to identify individuals as male or female. For those whose sex is not easily categorized as male or female see Intersex.

Sexual Orientation: Refers to a person's attraction towards a particular gender or sex. Someone may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual, etc. It is important to remember that sexual identity and gender identity are separate.

Trans*: (also Trans, Transgender, Transsexual) An umbrella term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what they were assigned at birth. Some trans* people may choose to medically transition by taking hormones, having surgery. Some trans* people may choose to socially transition by changing their name, clothing, hair, etc.

Transphobia: Fear, ignorance and mistreatment of people who are, or are perceived to be, trans* or gender nonconforming. This often leads to bias, discrimination, hatred, harassment and violation of the human rights of transgender or gender nonconforming people. Transphobic bullying can also be targeted against any individual, regardless of perceived gender expression.

Transition: A term most commonly used to refer to someone transitioning from one gender to another. Transition often consists of a change in style of dress, selection of a new name, and a request that people use the correct pronoun when describing them.

Transition may, but does not always, include medical care like hormone therapy, counseling, and/or surgery.

Two-Spirit: An Aboriginal term describing the embodiment of both masculine and feminine spirits. This identity is not limited to gender expression or sexuality, but encompasses them both while incorporating a spiritual element. It is a standalone identity, not an Aboriginal term for gay or lesbian.

(These definitions are adapted from Questions & Answers for Parents and Family Members of Gender Variant and Transgendered Youth {Vancouver School Board, 2011}.)

Legal References: The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act; BC Human Rights Code; BC School Act; and the BC Vital Statistic Act (pending)

Cross References: ALA: Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism; FB: Facilities Planning; GBAB: Employment Equity; GBCBA: Sexual Harassment; IGBA: Programs for Disabled Students; IIA: Instructional Materials; IIAE: Hate Crimes and Propaganda; JB: Equal Educational Opportunities; KLB: Public Complaints about the Curriculum/Instructional Materials

Adopted Date: Monday February 16, 2004

Revision Date: June 2014