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Creating and Sustaining Safe and Inclusive Spaces for LGBTQ Youth: An Exploratory Investigation of the Role of Educational Professionals

by

Andrew Luceno

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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Abstract

Recent evidence shows that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) youth regularly face hostile school environments. Those hostile environments contribute to making LGBTQ youth increasingly vulnerable to a number of emotional, behavioural, and social problems. Educators can play a critical role in buffering LGBTQ youth from potential victimization. As such, the present study explored the following questions: *1) What are the roles of educators (i.e., teachers, school administrators) with respect to promoting and creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth; 2) what unique contributions can educators make in nurturing those spaces; and, 3) what barriers do educators face in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth?* This study used a convergent parallel design mixed-methods approach. Fifty-six educators in Alberta completed an online survey; among those educators, 17 of them self-selected to participate in a semi-structured interview. Descriptive statistics were gathered from survey results; the interview data was analyzed using thematic analysis in order to generate themes relevant to the research questions. Those themes were: 1) Lack of awareness; 2) the use of inclusive language; 3) the role of inclusive curriculum in support of LGBTQ youth; 4) the role of educators as allies; 5) situational factors as barriers to supporting LGBTQ youth; and 6) supporting LGBTQ youth through GSAs. Overall, the results from the present study have future research implications and practical utility for educators and policy makers.

Keywords: LGBTQ, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, educators, teachers, administrators, support, advocacy

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, A. Luceno. The data collection reported in Chapters 2-4 were covered by the Ethics Certificate number REB17-2277, issued by the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Ethics Board for the project "School Counsellors', School Psychologists', and Educators' Perspectives on their Roles in Promoting Safe and Inclusive Spaces for LGBTQ Youth" on May 1, 2018.

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Finally, and without whom none of this research would be possible, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the 100+ participants in my study. Those educators freely gave of their time in the hope that LGBTQ youth might see a brighter and safer future. I thank them for their

tireless efforts to support LGBTQ youth – and doing so at times when it can compromise their job security and social standing in the school environment.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Definitions
GLSEN	Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network
GLBT	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer or Questioning
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans
LGB	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
LG	Lesbian, Gay

Creating and Sustaining Safe and Inclusive Spaces for LGBTQ Youth: An Exploratory Investigation of the Role of Educational Professionals

Definitions of Key Terminology

The following section contains definitions of terminology germane to research on LGBTQ issues. While it is not an exhaustive list of the terminology present in extant literature, the following is considered to be most relevant relative to this thesis/research.

The term LGBTQ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans (i.e., transgender, transsexual), queer, and/or questioning. “This collective term represents people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions” (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2016, p. 15).

The term *lesbian* refers to a woman who is attracted to other women both physically and emotionally (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2016). The term *gay* refers to someone who is attracted to people of the same sex both physically and emotionally; someone who is gay can be male or female, although the term is commonly used to describe masculine people who are attracted to other masculine people (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2016). The term *bisexual* refers to someone who is attracted to others of the same and opposite sexes – both physically and emotionally (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2016).

The term *trans* encompasses individuals who identify as *transgender* as well as those who identify as *transsexual*; these individuals do not identify with their sex assigned at birth. The term *transsexual* refers to an individual whose gender identity is not congruent with his or her sex assigned at birth (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2016). Many transgender individuals experience a discomfort and disparity between their physical body and sense of self (i.e., gender dysphoria; Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2016). As a result, transsexual individuals may begin

transitioning through the use of hormone therapy and/or sexual reassignment surgery to make their bodies more closely align with their gender identity (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016). All transsexual people are transgender, but not all transgender people embark on the process of physiologically changing their bodies (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016).

The term *homosexual* is associated historically with the medical model of sexuality. As a result, it has a negative connotation and most people from the LGBTQ community prefer other terms such as lesbian, gay, and bisexual (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016). Generally, a *homosexual* is someone who is physically and emotionally attracted to people of the same sex (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016). However, an important consideration is that not all individuals who engage in same-sex intimate relationships consider themselves to be homosexual (National LGBT Health Education Center, n.d.).

Homophobia is the fear or hatred of people who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and is often exhibited by prejudice, intimidation, discrimination, bullying, or acts of violence; homophobia is commonly used as a term to describe any anti-LGBTQ behaviour (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016).

Biphobia has been defined as negative attitudes about bisexuality and bisexual individuals (Bennett, 1992).

Transphobia refers to fear, discrimination, or hatred against transgender people specifically, or gender non-binary people more generally (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016).

Gender non-binary is a "catch-all category for gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine" – thus, they are gender identities outside of the gender binary and cisnormativity (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016, p. 16).

The term *queer* used to be a derogatory term for homosexual; more recently, however, it has been reclaimed by the sexual minority movement to refer to itself (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016) in a positive way (Taylor & Peter, 2011).

The term *questioning* refers to a person who is unsure of his or her sexual orientation, gender, or sexual identity (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016).

Some Aboriginal people identify themselves as *two-spirit* rather than as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016). In Aboriginal culture, *two-spirit* individuals have a special ability to understand both male and female perspectives, and in the Aboriginal community, these individuals are often given special status as a result (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016). Although research seldom specifically refers to *two-spirit* individuals, the term LGBTQ may subsume these identities too (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016).

The terms *straight, or heterosexual,* refers to a person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to someone of the opposite sex (Taylor & Peter, 2011).

The term *cisgender* refers to a non-transsexual person whose gender identity, gender expression, and birth sex align with the conventional expectations of male or female (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016); *Cisnormativity* refers to the assumption that only cisgender is normal (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009).

Heteronormativity refers to a system that privileges and sanctions individuals based on presumed binaries of gender and sexuality; when attitudes of heteronormativity are present, heterosexual and cisgender are believed to be the norm, thus invalidating any other sexual or gender identity (Jackson, 2006).

Coming out refers to the process by which individuals begin to associate themselves personally or publicly with other LGBTQ people, and/or discloses their sexual and/or gender identity to non-LGBTQ people (Grov, Bimbi, Nanín, & Parsons, 2006).

An *ally* is an individual – regardless of sexual orientation – who supports and honours the human, civil, and sexual rights of sexual and gender minorities, and who understands and actively explores their own biases (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016).

Chapter One: Introduction

LGBTQ Youth in Canada

In Canada, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) youth experience a high degree of vulnerability, suicidal ideation, and high-risk behavior particularly in comparison to their non-LGBTQ peers (Dyck, 2015). Canada's *First National Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia in Canadian Schools* reported that 64% of LGBTQ youth feel unsafe at school (compared to 15% of non-LGBTQ students), and 20% of LGBTQ students reported having been physically harassed or assaulted because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity; among trans students specifically, 78% feel unsafe at school, with 44% having missed school because of the victimization they face (Taylor & Peter, 2011). While much of the research on the victimization faced by LGBTQ youth has been conducted in the United States, Taylor and Peter report that Canadian youth experience the same rates of bullying and harassment as their American counterparts (2011).

This high degree of vulnerability contributes to negative mental health outcomes for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) youth: for instance, half of all LGBT youth have thought about suicide, and they are four times more likely to attempt it compared to their non-LGBT peers (Scanlon, Travers, Coleman, Bauer, & Boyce, 2010). The rejection LGBT youth experience from parents, peers, or teachers as a result of their sexual or gender diversity further perpetuates negative outcomes for these youth (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 2001). They are often at a greater risk for harassment, prejudice, and the potential development of a number of emotional, behavioural, and social problems including depression, dropping out of school, truancy, homelessness, and substance abuse (Fisher et al., 2008).

Emerging research increasingly suggests that suicidal ideation and behaviour amongst LGBTQ youth is primarily due to external-environmental factors (i.e., homophobia, biphobia, heteronormativity, transphobia, cisnormativity) which may, in turn, cause mental health concerns (e.g., depression, anxiety, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder) increasing one's risk for suicide (Dyck, 2015). Therefore, one aim of research should be to focus on optimizing environmental conditions in which LGBTQ youth live and study (Dyck, 2015).

Schools are amongst the primary environmental locations in which LGBTQ children and youth reside and should be addressed, with a specific focus on LGBTQ safety and inclusivity; however, it should be noted that schools can be a critical source of both risk and protection for LGBTQ youth (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Understanding how educators contribute to protective factors and support LGBTQ youth in potentially-hostile school climates is worthy of investigation.

Due to their victimization in schools, LGBT youth tend to have lower academic outcomes and self-esteem, and are more susceptible to negative social influences when compared to their non-LGBT counterparts (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013). In addition to the victimization faced by LGBT students in schools, many of them experience stressful home environments, conflict with their parents and families, internalized homophobia, and sexual risk-taking (Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011). These factors often perpetuate their isolation and marginalization (Liboro, Travers, & John, 2015).

LGBTQ Youth in the Alberta Context

As a result of the above concerning findings, the past two decades have seen a dramatic increase in both public attention to school-based strategies and programs to support LGBT students, as well as academic research on the effectiveness of those support strategies and

programs (Liboro et al., 2015). In Canada, however, many provincial education ministries have been reluctant to develop policies to protect marginalized groups such as LGBT youth (Rayside, 2014). Rayside maintains that impediments to change include pressures on young people to adopt dominant gender norms, the ongoing debate as to the role of schools in supporting gender and sexual minority youth, religiously conservative groups that wield power in opposing such policies, the availability of schooling for children whose parents are morally and religiously traditional, the lack of readiness of teachers to address questions of sexual and gender diversity in the classroom, and the lack of resources available to LGBT activists in Canada (2014). Rayside states that changes to school policy to protect marginalized youth have lagged behind societal change, particularly at the provincial level (2014).

In Alberta, substantial changes to promote inclusiveness for LGBT youth have been restricted largely to Calgary and Edmonton (i.e., urban centers; Franklin, 2011). Audette (2009) argued that Alberta was the only province to take a step backward in policy to protect LGBT youth when it amended the province's Human Rights Statute in 2009 explicitly requiring schools to notify parents when there was going to be teaching about sexual orientation, sexuality, or religion, and allowing parents to withdraw their children from such classes. However, in 2015, the Alberta legislature amended the *School Act* by passing Bill 10 which mandated the establishment of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in any school where students wanted one. As a result, students were permitted to name the group "Gay-Straight Alliance" or "Queer-Straight Alliance (QSA)," and meet on school property. Further, the Bill also added sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, and gender expression to the Alberta Bill of Rights (Bellefontaine, 2015).

In 2017, the Alberta government furthered its efforts to promote the safety of LGBTQ youth by passing Bill 24; the Bill would strengthen GSAs in schools by closing loopholes that

had previously allowed school administrators to deny or delay the establishment of the peer support group (Franson, 2017). More importantly, the Bill made it clear that students could not be outed to their parents by school staff for participating in a GSA except under special circumstances (Franson, 2017). Proponents of GSAs say they reduce bullying and save lives; in Alberta, GSAs are more likely to be found in urban schools – few are found in the province's rural areas, and very few are found in Catholic schools as the school board opposes them (Calabrese, 2018).

In response to legislative changes, the Calgary and Edmonton Catholic school boards confirmed that teachers needed to sign agreements promising to live by Catholic values (sometimes referred to as Catholicity clauses); those values included not being in common-law or same-sex relationships (Bennett, 2018). Recent changes to The Alberta School Act, however, affirms teachers' freedom from discrimination; nevertheless, that incongruence places Alberta's Catholic school teachers in a difficult position if they are part of the LGBTQ community and/or if they want to show their support as allies openly (Bennett, 2018). However, many Alberta schools (particularly faith-based) refuse to comply with the new legislation (i.e., refuse to provide GSAs; Ramsay, 2018), some of which risk losing their funding from the provincial government as a result (Bennett, 2018).

Despite the current presence of legislation that imposes protections for LGBTQ youth in Alberta, a recent change in provincial government threatens to change that. The United Conservative Party led by Jason Kenney was elected to power in Alberta in April 2019 (Heidenreich, 2019). Kenney's government promised to repeal the protective legislation that prohibits school staff from informing parents when a student joins a Gay-Straight Alliance (Keller & Giovannetti, 2019).

Indeed, it appears that educators face a number of social and political challenges if they are LGBTQ, wish to start a GSA, work in Catholic schools, or want to advocate for LGBTQ youth openly. These tensions notwithstanding, the roles of schools and educators in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth are important to further examine and determine.

When schools make specific and enumerated efforts to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth, those youth report feeling more respected, having a trusted adult to speak to about LGBTQ issues, and feeling safe in their school; they are also less likely to be subjected to homophobic/transphobic verbal abuse or physical attacks, and their teachers are more likely to intervene when such incidents do occur (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Given that LGBTQ youth spend a great deal of time in the school environment, efforts must be made to create and sustain safe and inclusive spaces for them (Dyck, 2015). Schools must promote and support environments that contribute positively to students physical, psychological, social, and emotional development; further, teachers have a moral, ethical, legal, and professional responsibility to ensure that schools are welcoming and inclusive (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016).

When teachers display anti-bullying attitudes, students take their cues from them and act accordingly (Novick & Isaacs, 2010); similarly, when teachers hold stronger anti-bullying attitudes, peer-reported bullying decreases (Veenstra, Lindenberg, Huitsing, Sainio, & Salmivalli, 2014). Research has consistently found that access to supportive adults in school is associated with greater academic success, effective coping skills, and fewer somatic symptoms in response to the peer victimization youth faces (Rigby, 2000). Therefore, the positive impact that educators can make on LGBTQ youth by creating and sustaining safe and inclusive spaces in school is worthy of further investigation.

Statement of the Research Problem

In light of the unique vulnerability of LGBTQ youth, the disproportionate victimization they face in schools, the contentious social and political climate around sexual and gender diversity in Alberta, and the meaningful positive impact schools and educators can make on these youth, it stands to reason that research is needed in this area and specific to the Alberta context.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The purpose of this exploratory mixed-methods study was to understand the experiences of Alberta educators who seek to create and sustain safe and inclusive environments for LGBTQ youth in schools. In doing so, Alberta educators were given the opportunity to have their voices heard and to share their experiences in a way that has not been thoroughly addressed in extant literature.

Overall, the primary objective of this study was to address the following questions: *1) What are educators' roles and responsibilities with respect to promoting and creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth; 2) what unique contributions can educators make in nurturing those spaces; and 3) what barriers do educators face in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth?* In exploring these questions, the aim was to identify helpful strategies that educators are using to support LGBTQ youth, the barriers they face in doing so, and how they might surmount those barriers. The hope is that educators in the future may refer to the results of this study to aid them in providing more effective support for LGBTQ youth.

The methodological approach used in this study was a social constructivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017) utilizing a convergent parallel design mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2015) and using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was

considered to be appropriate and the best fit for this study because it offers the means to explore the richness of educators' experiences, and then translate and interpret those results into knowledge sharing that may benefit other educators in the future, as well as the gender and sexually-diverse youth they serve.

Significance of the Study

Given the general dearth of research in this area, and more specifically within the Alberta context, there is a significant need to explore the roles of educators with regard to creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth. This study addresses that void in the literature. The anticipated significance of the study is that eliciting a better understanding of how educators create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth, what barriers they face in doing so, and how they overcome those barriers, will provide other educators who wish to support LGBTQ youth in schools with some guidance and strategies. Conducting this study in the Alberta context may raise awareness about the unique opportunities and challenges that are a product of related geographical and sociopolitical factors; thus, the helpful strategies elicited through this study may also be uniquely suited to supporting educators in Alberta who wish to support LGBTQ youth in schools.

Summary

Overall, the primary objective of this study was to explore the roles of educators in creating and sustaining safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth in schools. The findings from the present study will provide educators with strategies and insights into how educational professionals address the needs of gender and sexual minority youth – an area that has been largely ignored in the literature.

The study was conducted using an exploratory mixed-methods approach. Using purposeful and snowball sampling, educators in Alberta were recruited to complete an online survey. Self-selecting participants then volunteered to participate in semi-structured follow-up interviews over the phone in order to elaborate on some of their responses from the survey, as well as provide rich descriptions of their experiences with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth in schools.

The current document is organized into five chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter Two presents a review of pertinent literature including an overview of the struggles faced by LGBTQ youth in schools, the importance and roles of educators in supporting those youth, as well as some of the barriers those educators face in doing so.

Chapter Three provides a description and rationale for the research design, including a justification for the research paradigm used, a discussion about epistemological and ontological considerations, reflexivity/axiology, and justification for the chosen methodology. Further, the quantitative and qualitative approaches taken will be discussed and outlined, the analysis method (i.e. thematic analysis) will be delineated, and the procedures, participants, recruitment, data collection, and interview process will be described.

The findings will be presented in Chapter Four, with a particular focus on primary and secondary themes elicited through Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, Chapter Five offers an interpretation and discussion of the study's results, highlights its limitations, implications, and areas for future direction, and concludes with some final reflections.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The data varies widely as to how many individuals identify as LGBTQ in Canada. The first year in which Statistics Canada conducted a survey on how many Canadians identified as lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) was in 2003. At that time, 1% of the Canadian population answered that they were lesbian or gay; 0.7% answered that they were bisexual. However, the survey participants in this study were contacted over the phone, so the data may underrepresent the LGB population at that time (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016). The largest Canadian study on gender identity and sexual orientation to date included 30,000 randomly selected grade 7 to 12 students in British Columbia in 2007; in that study, 11% of male participants and 18% of female participants identified as not exclusively heterosexual (Saewyc, Poon, Homma, Smith, & McCreary Centre Society, 2007). More recently, Taylor and Peter's (2011) study of 3,700 Canadian students reported that 14% of respondents identified as LGBTQ. While the numbers of individuals identifying and reporting as LGBTQ have substantially increased, the reasons are uncertain.

LGBTQ Youth in Schools

Evidence from Canada's first national school climate survey by Egale shows that homophobia is common in today's schools (Taylor & Peter, 2009). Research consistently depicts middle school and high school environments as hostile and unsafe for LGBTQ youth, whereby LGBTQ youth are subjected to frequent verbal, physical, and relational microaggressions (Jackson, 2017; Reynolds & Koski, 1993; Seelman, Forge, Walls, & Bridges, 2015). A study of 37 European countries found that schools were the most problematic context for LGBTQ students (Pizmony-Levy, Kama, Shilo, & Lavee, 2008); LGBTQ students who experience victimization in school are more likely to have lower self-esteem, weaker grades,

more absenteeism, and they are at a significantly increased risk for suicide (Seelman et al., 2015). Given the findings in extant research, school personnel need to work particularly hard in implementing practices and policies that ensure the safety and well-being of LGBTQ youth (Taylor & Peter, 2011).

Research shows that schools are disproportionately unsafe for gender and sexual minority youth: Egale reported that 75% of LGB students and 95% of transgender students felt unsafe in school compared to 20% of their heterosexual peers (Taylor & Peter, 2009). Gender and sexual minority youth are two to six times more likely to report feeling unsafe than students from other minority groups (i.e., gender, race, religion, ethnicity, disability; Murphy, 2012). Transgender students are particularly vulnerable to isolation and adverse outcomes because their transition is always public; they face a greater likelihood of assault, harassment, feeling unsafe, and missing days of school compared to LGB youth (Seelman et al., 2015). The Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey of 925 trans young people showed that almost two in three transgender youth reported being taunted or ridiculed; 35% of them had been physically threatened or injured in the past year, and 12% had been threatened or injured with a weapon (Wells et al., 2017).

Youth in schools hear anti-LGBTQ comments frequently which contributes to a disaffirming environment for them. A Canadian study found that three-quarters of LGBTQ youth reported hearing expressions such as “that’s so gay” every day in school (Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015; Taylor & Peter, 2009). Similar results from The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network’s (GLSEN) nationwide survey in the United States found that two-thirds of LGBTQ students reported hearing homophobic comments like “you’re so gay,” and “that’s so gay!” often or frequently. These expressions are often used to mean that someone or something is stupid or worthless, thus they are often dismissed as harmless by school staff and other

students; however, LGBTQ students reported that those comments bothered them and created distress when they were heard (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). These comments are not only upsetting to LGBTQ youth, but also to heterosexual cisgender youth too; in part, this is because some of the heterosexual cisgender students feel empathy for the victims of the comments, have LGBTQ family members and friends, participate in the comments and then feel guilty, or are ashamed for being a silent bystander (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Regardless of the intended meaning behind anti-LGBTQ comments and discourse, when used, they communicate an unsupportive environment for LGBTQ students; such expressions "pejoratize LGBQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer/questioning) identities and, by implication, valorize heterosexual ones. Ultimately, students get the message that 'gay' is not what one wants to be in school culture" (Peter et al., 2015, p. 200).

Once an individual has been identified as or is assumed to be LGBTQ, the peer rejection, lack of school support (Murphy, 2012), isolation, harassment, and violence they experience affect their psychological development and emotional well-being (Reynolds & Koski, 1993; Martin & Hetrick, 1988) as well as academic outcomes (Bahr, Brish, & Croteau, 2000). Students who do not feel comfortable in school are more likely to be absent, thus impacting their access to education; in GLSEN's research, 17.7% of LGBTQ students reported missing at least one day of school in the last month because they felt unsafe, and 8.7% reported missing at least two days for the same reason (Greytak, Kosciw, Villenas, & Giga, 2016).

Extant research suggests that all students are educated in an environment rife with homophobia, regardless of whether they identify as LGBTQ or not (Peter et al., 2015). Even many heterosexual students report being harassed for being perceived as gay or lesbian (Reis, 1996). This underscores the pervasiveness of homophobia in schools, impacting students of all

sexualities and gender identities. However, according to Peter and colleagues (2015), 61% of gay students and 66% of lesbian students between grades 7 and 12 reported being verbally harassed, compared to 29% of heterosexual boys and 37% of heterosexual girls.

The forms of victimization LGBTQ students are subjected to extend beyond verbal harassment too. GLSEN reported that 88% of LGBTQ students felt deliberately excluded or "left out" by other students, and half of those students reported it happening often or frequently. Over 75% of LGBTQ students reported having been the subject of mean rumors or lies told at school; nearly 60% reported being sexually harassed (i.e., unwanted touching, or sexual remarks directed at them), 16.7% of which reported that such events happened often or frequently; approximately half of the participants reported being victims of cyberbullying, and nearly 40% reported having had their property stolen or deliberately damaged by other students (Kosciw et al., 2016). LGBTQ students also report significantly higher rates of physical victimization than their heterosexual peers (Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005), and are more likely to have been in a fight that necessitated medical treatment (Russell, Franz, & Driscoll, 2001).

Research shows that LGBTQ youth are three times more likely to have been assaulted or in a physical fight at school than their heterosexual peers (Human Rights Watch, 2001; as cited in McCabe & Rubinson, 2008) Finally, Shields, Whitaker, Glassman, Franks, and Howard (2012) reported that LGBTQ students were twice as likely than their heterosexual peers to be threatened or injured with a weapon in the past school year.

Identity Development and Social Competency of LGBTQ Youth

Given that LGBTQ youth face an increased likelihood for experiencing harassment and assault, it is especially important to examine how these experiences relate to their identity development and well-being (Greytak et al., 2016). Adolescence is a time of complex

developmental tasks that can be stressful for even the most balanced and well-adjusted individuals, and many of these dynamics are heightened for LGBTQ youth as they strive to develop multiple identities (i.e., their gender and sexual identities) in hostile school environments while building social competence, self-esteem, and future direction; these students grapple with the stigma and confusion associated with adopting identities that are often considered deviant and pathological (Diaz, Kosciw, & Greytak, 2010; Imich, Bayley, & Farley, 2001). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth look like any other student, so their experiences often go unnoticed as they suffer in silence, isolation, and loneliness; while their heterosexual peers welcome the feelings of sexual attraction, sexual minority youth are often frightened by them (Reynolds & Koski, 1993). The result is that sexual and gender minority youth are often left to deal internally with feelings related to their emerging identities (Vare & Norton, 2004), and suffer an inability to be authentic to themselves (Jackson, 2017). Several participants from Jackson's study reported that they had tried to change their sexual or gender identity, "which they said left them feeling powerless and pointless" (Jackson, 2017, p. 24). These students felt that the school system negatively influenced their sense of life self-direction, self-empowerment, and mental health (Jackson, 2017).

LGBTQ youth often internalize the heterosexist ideology and homophobia that is disseminated by parents, in schools, and through the media (Kielwasser & Wolf, 1992); this internalized homophobia manifests itself through anxiety and fear of being outed as a sexual minority to their parents, friends, and schools (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992), and contributes to low self-esteem, a sense of shame, and loneliness (Sears, 1992). The isolation LGBTQ youth faces deters them from them successfully negotiating independence, intimacy, and an understanding of the self (Cooley, 1998), including the development of sexual identity, societal confirmation, and

peer affirmation (Fontaine & Hammond, 1996). This isolation diminishes their sense of self-worth, and increases suicidal ideation, drug abuse, and negative risk-taking behaviors (Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). Individuals who are multiple minorities (e.g., a person of color who is gay) face unique obstacles as they attempt to integrate their racial identity with their sexual orientation, all in the face of institutional marginalization (Kumashiro, 2001).

Vare and Norton (2004) maintain that the lack of support resources available to educate and inform sexual minority adolescents about their emerging identities leaves a cognitive void for developing a sense of self. These youth experience isolation when they are subjected to derogatory comments about being gay, bisexual, or questioning from significant others, or they lack social opportunities to explore their emerging identities in a positive way; further, this lack of cognitive and social support pushes sexual minority youth into secrecy (Vare & Norton, 2004), and the fear of disclosure severs LGBTQ youth's access to emotional, appraisal, and informational support mechanisms (e.g., teachers, counsellors, trusted adults) that are readily available to heterosexual adolescents (Tharinger & Wells, 2000). In fact, extant research has found that gay and lesbian adolescents have more difficulty developing social competency skills compared to their heterosexual peers (Fontaine & Hammond, 1996).

Suicidality and Self-Harm

Estimates suggest that LGBTQ youth are two to three times more likely to have attempted suicide in the previous 12 months and up to seven times more likely to have suicidal ideation than their non-LGBTQ peers (Russell & Joyner, 2001). A longitudinal study from New Zealand showed that 21-year old sexual minority youth were six times more likely to have had one or more lifetime suicide attempts when compared to heterosexual youth; when interviewed again at age 25, those same youth reported a significantly higher rate of suicide attempts since the age of 21 than did the heterosexual respondents (Fergusson, Horwood, Ridder, & Beautrais, 2005).

The data from a Canadian study specific to transgender youth are particularly staggering with 73% reporting acts of self-harm as well as serious thoughts of suicide over the previous 12-months, and with more than two in five having attempted suicide over their lifetime. Of that group, approximately 8% had attempted suicide more than four times; this comes as little surprise as 38% of transgender youth self-report as being in poor mental health (Wells et al., 2017).

The bullying and harassment that LGBTQ youth experience in schools have been consistently linked to several negative mental health outcomes (Kosciw et al., 2013). Scholars explain the high rates of suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance abuse among gay and lesbian youth as a partial reflection of their internalized homophobia from growing up as sexual minorities in a heterosexist culture and school environment; internalized rejection in these youth contributes to a low sense of self-worth, and as a result, greater engagement in high-risk behaviors. (van Wormer & McKinney, 2003). Verbal harassment, for example, is a strong predictor of traumatic stress reactions among LGBTQ youth, including severe anxiety,

disordered eating, and sleep problems (D'augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002). Egale reports that 92.3% of LGBTQ students find homophobic comments "upsetting;" and 41% of transgender students find them to be "extremely upsetting" (Taylor & Peter, 2009). Taken together, prolonged exposure to hostile school environments for LGBTQ youth contributes to long-term experiences of trauma as well as other poor psychosocial outcomes.

Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes for LGBTQ Youth

The academic and psychosocial risks experienced by LGBT youth are most often the result of the bullying, harassment, discrimination, and negative interactions they face from peers and adults in school in response to their sexual orientation or gender expression; this hostility contributes to poor short and long-term psychosocial outcomes (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010). Given that LGBTQ students are more likely to experience victimization, harassment, and assault in school compared to their non-LGBTQ peers (Fedewa & Ahn, 2011; Saewyc, 2011), they are particularly vulnerable to psychiatric disorders (Roberts, Austin, Corliss, Vandermorris, & Koenen, 2010). Research shows that major depressive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, phobia, panic disorder, and substance use disorders are more prevalent in the LGBTQ community than among non-LGBTQ individuals (Roberts et al., 2010). Generally, LGBTQ youth experience greater health disparities when compared to their non-LGBTQ peers, including depression, substance abuse, and suicidality (Saewyc, 2011). In addition to those negative outcomes, even youth unsure of their sexual identity (i.e., questioning) are at a higher risk for prostitution, AIDS, running away from home, school absenteeism, and drop-out (Russell, 1989).

Homophobic micro assaults such as, "homo," "dyke," and "queer" are the most common forms of harassment and intimidation toward LGBTQ individuals; this anti-gay verbal abuse

perpetuates a sense of isolation, and the feeling of being a despised and devalued minority, and therefore make LGBTQ youth a socially sanctioned target for violence (Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990). Boys who are bullied because of their gender identity or sexual orientation are more likely to experience psychological distress, verbal and physical abuse from their peers, and negative perceptions toward school, than boys who are bullied for other reasons (Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008). Further, because LGBTQ identities have been stigmatized in society, these youth may feel less accepted, cared about, or supported when compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Saewyc et al., 2007). The victimization that LGBTQ youth experience in schools is associated with increased risk for internalizing (Heck et al., 2014) and externalizing symptomology (Varjas et al., 2007). According to Rivers and Cowie (2006), the physical and psychological impact of the victimization, severe violence, or sexual assault LGBTQ youth experience is similar to the symptoms and effects of post-traumatic stress disorder. Compared with non-LGBTQ individuals, these youth also experience significant adjustment difficulties and academic problems (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013) most often the result of the discrimination, negative interactions, harassment, and bullying they face from peers and adults in school (McGuire et al., 2010). Their disconnectedness from school puts them at a higher risk for school dropout, suicidal ideation and attempts, depression, self-harm, substance abuse, extreme loneliness, social dissatisfaction, risky sexual behaviors (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; D'Augelli, 2002), alienation, and hopelessness (McGuire et al., 2010). LGBTQ youth who experience victimization and harassment in schools are twice as likely to report that they do not plan to attend any post-secondary education institution (e.g., university, trade school; Kosciw et al., 2016). An early study by Remafedi (1987) found that

almost one third of the 29 homosexual youth studied would leave high school early due to homophobic abuse and harassment.

Supportive Policies and Practices for LGBTQ Youth in Schools

Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz (2009) distributed online surveys to LGBTQ youth ages 13 to 18 years old through social media in an effort to identify relations between different forms of victimization (i.e., verbal harassment, physical harassment, physical assault), locational characteristics (i.e., region, locale), community level characteristics (i.e., school district poverty, adult educational attainment), and school district characteristics (i.e., district size, ratios of students to key school personnel). They found that the environmental characteristics of rural status, lower education levels, and higher poverty levels were associated with increased homophobia as well as hostile school climates (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009). This suggests that different environmental characteristics (e.g., urban school vs. rural school) may be inherently more supportive or unsupportive toward LGBTQ youth; unfortunately, the challenge in reducing LGBTQ harassment is that rural status, lower education levels, and higher poverty levels are not impacted by educational policy (Kosciw et al., 2009). Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz (2009) maintain that further research is needed on efforts to improve school climate for LGBT students; specifically, how school personnel intervenes when LGBT victimization occurs, what resources are available that can improve the school climate for LGBT youth (i.e., Gay-Straight Alliances, comprehensive safe-school policies, and educator trainings), and how schools can create a climate in which youth are more willing to report when they have been victimized.

There is a growing body of research aimed at creating and maintaining safe and inclusive schools for LGBTQ youth through inclusive policies, affirming and supportive school personnel, and the presence of GSAs (e.g., Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013). Russell,

Horn, Kosciw and Saewyc (2010) maintain that the efforts that yield consistent results in supporting these youth involve creating policies that require protection of all students from bullying and harassment, and that those policies also specifically identify categories of students most likely to experience harassment (i.e., gender and sexual minority youth).

Kosciw et al. (2016; 2013) highlight the importance of establishing enumerated anti-bullying policies with clear provisions for sexual orientation and gender identity (a policy with this level of detail is "comprehensive"). Researchers and advocates have argued that the most effective anti-bullying and harassment policies specifically identify categories of students (e.g., sexual and gender minority youth) most likely to be victimized (Russell et al., 2010). When policies are not enumerated to include sexual and gender minority youth, they lack the grounding needed for consistent implementation and change; clear and enumerated anti-bullying policies provide the necessary foundation for schools to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (Russell et al., 2010).

Research shows that certain policies contribute to students' positive perceptions of school climate as well as measurable outcomes of achievement and self-esteem (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009). Chesir-Teran and Hughes (2009) examined relations between perceived heterosexism and available supports in high school policies and programs, and victimization rates amongst lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) students. They analyzed data from existing surveys that had been distributed over the internet to a cohort of 2,037 LGBQ students. They found that perceived programs and policies to support LGBQ youth were each significantly and negatively associated with perceived harassment; students who perceived more inclusive policies and programs also reported less frequent and less tolerated harassment against LGBQ students. One of the strengths of the study was that it used internet survey data, which has the

potential to be at least as reliable and valid as data collected through more conventional approaches (Buchanan & Smith, 1999). The anonymity of survey research collected over the internet affords respondents more leeway to reveal experiences and perceptions than other approaches may permit (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009). Indeed, when the nature of research is sensitive, or when participating in a study could potentially perpetuate the vulnerability of its participants, online surveys seem to be a good fit. Chesir-Teran and Hughes (2009) recommend that future research focuses on the perceptions of teachers and administrators with regard to how programs and policies that support LGBQ youth create a safer school climate; they state that school wide anti-bullying policies that contain LGBQ-specific protections are important, but may not bring about comprehensive and meaningful change in the overall school climate unless there are concomitant shifts in the attitudes and behaviors of school staff. In particular, classroom teachers' support was the most important factor for keeping LGBQ youth safe; the authors postulated that schoolwide policies may be too far removed from students' day-to-day experiences, and that what matters most is the way students are treated by their teachers (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009). This research underscores a need to study the attitudes and behaviors of classroom teachers and administrators with regard to how they create a safe and inclusive climate for LGBTQ youth – whether enumerated anti-bullying policies exist or not.

Kosciw, Diaz, and Greytak (2008) reported that students in states with comprehensive, enumerated safe school laws experience lower levels of harassment and assault based on their sexual orientation or gender expression compared to students who live in states with no such laws, or whose laws are non-enumerated; further, in states with comprehensive and enumerated laws, students also reported fewer instances of harassment. Kosciw et al. (2008) tracked reports of victimization from 2001 to 2007 in states with and without comprehensive and enumerated

safe school laws. They found a decline in victimization of LGBTQ youth in the states with comprehensive and enumerated safe school laws, but no change over time in the states with no laws or in those with non-enumerated ones.

Horn and Szalacha (2009) found that heterosexual students in schools without enumerated safe school policies were more likely to endorse excluding and teasing a lesbian or gay peer as acceptable than students in schools with enumerated policies; further, students in schools with enumerated policies were more likely to consider exclusion and teasing as unfair and hurtful than students in schools with non-enumerated policies.

Having comprehensive and enumerated policies or laws provides all students and staff with a clear understanding of the rights of LGBTQ youth as well as the legal responsibility that schools have to safeguard those rights (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). Swanson and Gettinger (2016) examined the association between school-level supports for LGBT students, and teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors toward LGBT youth. They used surveys with a sample of 98 teachers who worked with grades 6 to 12 students in an effort to examine the relationship among GSAs, enumerated anti-bullying policies, and the provision of LGBT-related training, and teachers' knowledge and attitudes, as well as the frequency with which teachers engaged in supportive behaviors toward LGBT youth. They found that teachers were more likely to engage in LGBT-supportive behaviors when they worked in a school that had an active GSA or an enumerated anti-bullying policy with specific provisions for LGBT youth, and received training specifically targeted to supporting those youth. In their study, teachers' reports of taking on a supportive role toward LGBT youth were significantly lower compared to their ratings of the importance in doing so. This shows that despite teachers' beliefs that there is a need to support LGBT youth, they may not consistently intervene when those youth face victimization.

Other studies also show that teachers feel more comfortable and confident intervening for LGBTQ students when anti-bullying policies and laws are well articulated (e.g., Russell et al., 2010). Swanson and Gettinger (2016) maintain that these results highlight the need to further investigate the disparity between teachers' attitudes about the importance of supporting LGBTQ youth and their behaviors in actually doing so (i.e., what are the barriers educators experience in supporting these youth?). Further, future research could explore how specialized training to support LGBTQ youth contributes to more supportive actions toward LGBTQ youth on the part of teachers.

Greytak, Kosciw and Boesen (2013) examined the availability and effectiveness of school-based resources to support LGBT youth; they considered the role GSAs, supportive teachers, LGBT-inclusive curricula, and comprehensive anti-bullying/anti-harassment policies which included specific protections for LGBT youth. They found that supportive teachers, LGBT-inclusive curricula, and the presence of GSAs were related to lower levels of victimization for LGBT youth; all four resources were also related to lower absenteeism for LGBT youth (Greytak et al., 2013). While the interaction effects of their analysis yielded favorable outcomes for LGBT youth as a whole when any of the four areas of support were in place, transgender youth benefitted the least compared to lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth; as a result, the authors maintain that future research should investigate how supportive teachers, LGBT-inclusive curricula, GSAs, and anti-bullying/anti-harassment policies support transgender youth specifically (Greytak et al., 2013).

However, policies and procedures intended to support gender and sexual minority youth are not always strictly followed. After the Alberta education minister amended the School Act to include specific references for the protection of gender and sexual minority youth in schools (i.e.,

a GSA will be approved immediately should any student request one, students participating in a GSA cannot be "outed" by school staff), many school boards failed to meet the new legal requirements (French, 2018). French (2018) writes that Alberta school boards were presented with a 26-item criteria to be included in a good policy that reflected the law and created supportive environments for LGBTQ youth; a subsequent analysis of four Alberta school boards' policies revealed that they fell substantially short of that standard. This further highlights the need to understand what educators themselves are doing in schools to support gender and sexual minority youth, independent of policies and legislation.

Safe and Inclusive Practices to Support LGBTQ Youth in Schools

Roles of Educators in Support of LGBTQ Youth in Schools

Research has consistently shown that youth experience more positive outcomes when they feel a sense of connectedness to their teachers; the connectedness between students and teachers can improve students' sense of class membership and provide safe spaces in which students feel comfortable expressing themselves, and their concerns – including the victimization they face (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004). For example, Konishi, Hymel, Zumbo, and Li (2010) used survey data drawn from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) on a Canadian sample of 27,217 15-year old students and 1,087 school principals. Levels of bullying behavior in the school were reported by school principals, and math achievement data and sense of connectedness ratings were drawn from student surveys. The researchers found that math achievement was negatively related to school bullying and positively related to student-teacher connectedness. What is not explicit from that study is how student connectedness is facilitated by educators; therefore, future research might explore how the supportive relationships between teachers and students are built.

Goodenow, Szalacha, and Westheimer (2006) examined survey data from the 1999 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey for the purpose of comparing the safety of 202 sexual minority youth in 52 schools with and without support groups (e.g., GSAs) for LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) students to investigate the relation between perceived staff support and safety and explore other school factors associated with victimization and suicidality amongst these youth. They found that students who could identify a school staff member they could talk to about a problem were one-third as likely to report being threatened, injured with a weapon at school, or having made multiple past-year suicide attempts, when compared to youth who could not identify such an adult (Goodenow et al., 2006). As a result of these findings, the authors maintain that educators' efforts to communicate support for and availability to LGB youth in schools is important for creating a safe school climate, and that future research should examine how those efforts are made.

As indicated above, educators can have a critical impact on the well-being of LGBTQ youth; therefore, it is essential to explore their contributions in creating safe and inclusive spaces in schools. Russell, Seif, and Truong (2001) examined the data of 11,000 surveys of grades 7 to 12 students who took part in the Add Health Study in the USA. They did so in an effort to understand which domains (i.e., family, teachers, friendships, and peers) contributed to the greatest risk for negative outcomes (i.e., school troubles, negative attitudes, and poor performance) among sexual minority youth. The researchers felt the surveys offered an authentic body of data given that past studies reported a high level of self-disclosure when interviewing methods afforded greater privacy (e.g., anonymous surveys). They found that each domain contributed to the negative attitudes about school held by those sexual minority youth; however, the feelings those youth had about their teachers played the most important role in

explaining school troubles. Feelings about teachers played the largest role in predicting the troubles of both sexual minority boys and girls in school in the areas of paying attention, getting homework completed, and getting along with other students. As a result, Russell, Seif, and Truong (2001) maintain that the most important implication for schools is the finding that relationships with teachers play a leading role in explaining the school troubles experienced by sexual minority adolescents: youth with positive feelings about their teachers were significantly less likely than their peers to experience a variety of school troubles (e.g., bullying). Accordingly, supportive teachers can help prevent the school troubles for sexual minority youth when they have the awareness of, and training to do so. These results underscore the importance of understanding how educators can optimize the school climate for sexual minority youth; however, their study itself did not elucidate on any specific strategies or behaviors employed by educators in an effort to do so. Therefore, future research should examine the efforts made by educators to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth.

Craig and Smith (2014) surveyed 255 multiethnic sexual minority youth at 15 urban high schools to analyze how discrimination and sources of support (i.e., family, peer, school) impacted school performance. They found that the perception of available sources of support were positively associated with school performance. As a result, the authors state that sexual minority youth would benefit greatly from school services that recognize the links between academic performance and the degree to which the social environment is perceived to be inclusive, accepting, and safe. They maintain that subsequent research should explore how school policies are being appropriately enforced, and how that may lead to increased experiences of support, a reduction of discriminatory incidents, and as a result, improved school performance among sexual minority students. In an effort to do so, the authors suggest that including teachers

and administrators in the discussion would increase the rigor of studies that seek to identify aspects of school climate that positively and negatively impact sexual minority youth.

Rivers and Noret (2008) analyzed questionnaire and survey data from 53 LGB students in grades 7 to 9 measuring experiences of bullying and victimization, and sources of social support. Sources of social support were clustered into three groups: family members, peers, and school staff. They found that students who worried about their sexual identities were more likely to seek support from and confide in school staff than a heterosexual peer. Specifically, LGB students were most likely to confide in a school nurse. However, the authors state that few schools have full-time nurses, so if students cannot identify a supportive adult, they may not seek support at all. The authors stated that the school nurse may seem more approachable as the nurse is often not a permanent member of staff and thus someone independent of the school system. Beyond that characteristic, no indication of the specific behaviors the school nurse demonstrates to be more approachable was given. Therefore, it stands to reason that more research is needed on the characteristics and behaviors of approachable school staff, specifically, permanent school staff like classroom teachers.

Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, and Danischewski (2016) surveyed 10,528 LGBTQ youth ages 13-21 in the 2015 National School Climate Survey about the presence of supportive staff and several indicators of school climate (i.e., school safety, absenteeism, achievement, aspirations, responses to anti-LGBTQ remarks, victimization). Their findings show that having staff supportive of LGBTQ students was related to feeling safer in school and being absent fewer days; students with more supportive staff at their schools were less likely to feel unsafe due to their sexual orientation or gender expression, as well as much less likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable; students who could not identify a supportive staff member

were twice as likely to feel unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation; students with more supportive staff in their schools were more likely to say they planned to graduate from high school, as well as attend post-secondary studies; students who could identify supportive staff also reported higher GPAs when compared to those who could not identify supportive staff (i.e., 3.3 GPA compared to 2.8 GPA respectively). Indeed, LGBTQ youth having access to supportive staff makes a substantial difference in their school experiences and positive outcomes; the behaviors of educators that facilitate those connections with LGBTQ youth are worthy of investigation. This is echoed by a study by Russell and colleagues that found that having at least one supportive teacher for LGB youth is linked to higher rates of homework completion, higher school engagement, and more specific plans to attend college (2001). Students with more supportive staff members express a higher level of school belonging, which in turn, may have a positive effect on student well-being; in fact, the researchers found that students in schools with more supportive staff reported higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression when compared to those who could not identify any supportive staff (Kosciw et al., 2016). Students who reported more supportive staff in the form of intervening when anti-LGBTQ comments are heard said that they felt safer in school compared to those youth who did not have staff who intervened when such comments were heard. In light of the findings, the authors remark that the relationships LGBTQ students have with their teachers are one of the best predictors of school success and that students with positive feelings about their teachers report significantly fewer school difficulties related to their LGBTQ status (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2006; Russell; see also Russell, Seif & Truong, 2001). However, the researchers found an increase in anti-LGBT remarks made by school staff, and reports of educator intervention regarding these kinds of remarks decreased compared to the previous 2011 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw et

al., 2006). Given how troubling these findings about educators' behaviors are, further research should explore potential explanations (i.e., why educators may be resistant to supporting LGBTQ youth; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). The researchers gave a few examples of the positive behaviors that make a difference for LGBTQ youth (i.e., intervening when anti-LGBTQ remarks are heard, displaying a safe-spaces sign, displaying an equality sticker). Given how convincing the positive impact of supportive staff to LGBTQ youth is, it is reasonable for more of those kinds of behaviors embodied by staff to be further explored.

McGuire, Anderson, Toomey and Russell (2010) conducted mixed-method research using survey data of 2,260 LGB youth and conducting focus groups with 35 transgender youth to examine school strategies implemented that supported those individuals, including the protective role of supportive school personnel. They found that the presence of GSAs and LGBT-affirmative curricula in the classroom contributed to an overall sense of safety. Further, when school personnel took action to reduce harassment, students reported greater connections to those school personnel, as well as more feelings of safety. Participants responded that they were optimistic about the role teachers can play in improving school climates; youth believed that if teachers intervened more, school climates would improve. Some students who were transitioning (i.e., transgender youth) expressed how important the role of school personnel (e.g., principals, teachers) played in helping them feel safe and to navigate the school environment. Those individuals highlighted the importance of having even just a single school staff member who would advocate for them, which contributed to their sense of safety. Specific actions on the part of school staff that contributed to a sense of safety for transgender youth included, offering refuge and safe spaces in the form of private bathrooms, maintaining secrecy about students' legal names, freedom from exposing and unsafe locker room environments, and advising on

other academic matters (McGuire et al., 2010). Having supportive teachers is possibly one of the strongest positive influences for LGBTQ students' well-being as students with supportive teachers report higher self-esteem, higher GPAs, a less hostile school climate, and less absenteeism; students who report having a positive relationship with at least one teacher experience fewer school difficulties, less depression and anxiety (McGuire et al., 2010), and less drug use (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008). Importantly, McGuire and colleagues' study (2010) found that using focus groups with students elicited specific behaviors on the part of educators that contributed to a sense of safety and inclusivity for LGBTQ youth in schools.

Indeed, understanding the specific behaviors of educators that are perceived as supportive to gender and sexually-diverse youth is valuable and provides strategies that others can employ. These behaviors should be explored in further depth. However, McGuire and colleagues (2010) reported that teacher intervention to stop harassment of LGBT youth was rare. They maintain that to support teachers in challenging the victimization of LGBT youth fully, further research needs to be conducted examining their motivations for intervening or not intervening. In this regard, research should examine how leadership (e.g., administrators) in schools sets the tone for safety and inclusivity for gender and sexual minority youth as well.

The positive impact of supportive teachers benefits all students, not just those who identify as LGBTQ. For example, Russell and McGuire (2008) found that teacher intervention when LGBTQ students were harassed contributed to greater feelings of safety for all students – not just LGBTQ. They examined data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health which comprised survey responses from over 90,000 students in 80 high schools and 52 middle schools during the 1994-1995 school year. Their analysis examined the associations between school safety strategies and school safety climates. Students were asked to report on if

they had ever heard school staff intervening when negative comments or slurs based on sexual orientation were made; if they knew who to ask for information around sexual orientation, gender identity, or LGBT issues; if the school curriculum made references to LGBT people, their history, current news and events; or if they had received information about sexual orientation and gender identity. They also asked students if they could identify LGBT teachers or other LGBT students in the school. In predicting school safety for LGBT students, teacher intervention when LGBT-victimization occurred had the strongest positive association: students reported more safety for LGBT people when they experienced teacher intervention. It is important to add that there was not a significant relation between hearing anti-LGBT slurs and teacher intervention; many gender and sexual minority youth who reported feeling safe also reported high rates of anti-LGBT comments made. However, teacher intervention was the buffering factor contributing to a sense of safety, perhaps even more so than an inclusive curriculum, and diverse sex education instruction. Teachers seem to have the potential to buffer LGBT youth from negative outcomes, even when that school climate is perceived as hostile. This study highlighted the enormous impact of one type of behavior (i.e., intervening when anti-LGBT slurs are heard) and suggests that other identifiable teacher behaviors could also have a meaningful impact on safe school climates. Therefore, how teachers intervene and what specific strategies they use to stop the victimization of LGBTQ youth are areas worthy of focus; further, other supportive behaviors by teachers should also be explored.

Kosciw, Palmer, Kull and Greytak (2013) studied data drawn from a survey of a diverse sample of 5,730 LGBT youth who had attended secondary schools in the United States. They examined the effects of a negative school climate on achievement for those youth and the role that school-based supports (i.e., safe school policies, supportive school personnel, and GSAs)

had on offsetting those effects. They found that the victimization of LGBT youth contributed to lower academic outcomes as well as lower self-esteem, but that all of the school-based supports contributed to lower victimization and promoting better academic outcomes. The presence of a GSA was most highly correlated with the number of supportive educators in school and related to a decreased incidence of anti-LGBT victimization. The presence of a GSA alone, however, was not significantly related to the individuals' self-esteem or achievement. An inclusive curriculum was related to higher GPA and fewer missed days of school, but not to a decreased incidence of LGBT victimization or greater self-esteem. Only having a greater number of educators in school who are supportive of LGBT youth was related to decreased victimization, lower absenteeism, increased GPA, and higher self-esteem. The researchers deduced that having supportive educators might provide the personal connection needed to help keep LGBT students in school and buffer against victimization; these staff might make the school environment safer and more affirming for students by intervening when anti-LGBT victimization occurs, by providing individual support for students, and by initiating schoolwide efforts to increase safety and inclusivity (Kosciw et al., 2013). While a significant relation between having supportive educators and more positive school climates and outcomes for LGBT youth was identified in this study, a limitation is that the quantitative methods used did not allow for the exploration of what specific teacher behaviors contributed to the perception from students that they were supportive. Given that having supportive educators contributed to positive outcomes in the areas of GPA, victimization, self-esteem, and school attendance, the ways in which those educators demonstrate their support for LGBTQ youth presents a gap in the research. Further, given the high correlation between the presence of a GSA and supportive educators, it would be worth

investigating how educators contribute to GSAs to make them effective in supporting LGBTQ youth.

Pizmony-Levy et al. (2008) conducted a school climate survey (based on the GLSEN National School Climate Survey and translated into Hebrew) completed by 298 lesbian and gay participants between the ages of 11 and 18 to examine students' sense of school connectedness and a sense of respect from peers, and the impact those factors had on their sense of safety and victimization. Most participants submitted their responses online, although a paper version of the survey was available too. The authors opted for an online survey option given the well-documented difficulties experienced in gathering empirical data from sexually-diverse individuals using more traditional data-collection methods (e.g., Savin-Williams, 2001). Their analysis showed that when students have supportive teachers, they report a higher level of respect from their peers; further, having supportive teachers is associated with students' feeling comfortable discussing issues related to their sexually-diverse identities (Pizmony-Levy et al., 2008). According to Pizmony-Levy et al. (2008), teachers who are viewed as being supportive are attuned to the bullying and harassment sexually-diverse youth face, are highly committed to promoting social justice, and they acknowledge the importance of talking about sexual orientation. Despite the positive impact supportive teachers can have, data on victimization from this study showed that many teachers did not intervene when sexually-diverse youth were being harassed. Again, this research highlights a gap in our understanding of why many educators abstain from supporting gender and sexually-diverse youth in schools, especially given the immense positive impact those contributions can have on the lives of vulnerable youth. To elucidate this issue, research should be conducted to examine the barriers teachers face in being more supportive toward sexually-diverse youth.

School staff ignoring the victimization faced by LGBTQ youth seems to be more the norm than the exception. For example, the 2015 National School Climate Survey revealed that school staff seldom responds to concerns of harassment and violence of LGBTQ youth when those youth report incidents: 62% of students who had reported their own victimization were met with no response or action taken by school staff. Grossman and colleagues (2009) conducted a qualitative study using five focus groups of LGBT youth attending public high schools to examine their experiences with school violence. The aim of their study was to understand what LGBT youth found as oppressive and destructive social conditions in their schools. Two themes emerged from the research with high-frequency in relation to LGBT youths' experiences of interpersonal school violence and their thoughts as to the ways it could be prevented in the future: (1) the youth did not feel they were part of the school community (i.e., they felt unwelcome), and therefore, experienced no sense of empowerment or feelings of influence that come from belonging to a collective; and (2) the youth experienced a sense of learned helplessness and did not feel that much could be done to improve the school climate for themselves. LGBT youth said that heterosexual youth primarily used name-calling, hate speech, harassment, and sometimes physical violence as forms of victimization towards them. The LGBT youth felt that without the assistance from teachers and administrators, which they rarely received, they would not be able to effect any change themselves to improve their circumstances. Some participants felt that teachers focused exclusively on "doing their job" which entailed teaching the curriculum, but not intervening when LGBT youth were harassed. Their sense of learned helplessness extended into a lack of reporting incidents of victimization based on sexual orientation or gender identity because they felt that teachers and other school staff would either ignore the concerns or blame the victim. One transgender female described an incident in which

she joined the female line and was forced to move to the male line. As a result of these types of incidents, and the general lack of teacher intervention when LGBT victimization occurs, the researchers concluded that school staff become the "gatekeepers of the status quo," which includes fostering heterosexual and [what teachers deem to be] "gender 'appropriate' expression" (Grossman et al., 2009, p. 43). Grossman and colleagues (2009) state that the inherent self-worth of LGBT youth is compromised when they are victimized and invalidated as a result of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. A strength of the qualitative approach used in this study was its ability to identify specific instances that made LGBT youth feel unsafe. If unhelpful behaviors of school staff toward LGBTQ youth can be specifically identified by way of a qualitative research approach, it could be argued that this type of research method could prove useful in identifying helpful and positive strategies school staff use to support LGBTQ youth and to make the school environment safer and more inclusive for them.

Jackson (2017) conducted a qualitative study to explore how LGBTQ students felt their high school experiences could have been more self-empowering as they made decisions to transition to post-secondary life. Jackson (2017) interviewed nine college students aged 18 to 21 via individual interviews and focus groups. Students in the study reported the school climate to be rife with anti-LGBTQ sentiment, and that school staff was unhelpful in creating a safe and inclusive environment for them. For instance, some students reported that the school counselors did not seem open to supporting them with LGBTQ-related issues; rather, they only seemed interested in helping students choose their courses. Some students stated that they could never judge whether a teacher would be okay with their sexual orientation or gender identity, which resulted in their hiding it (i.e., trying to be perceived as non-LGBTQ). This lack of trust toward

school staff is consistent with another study in which only 14% of a sample size of 256 gay and lesbian youth felt safe and comfortable enough to disclose their sexual identity to a teacher, 8% to a counsellor, and less than 1% to the school principal (Harris & Bliss, 1997). Sometimes the lack of validation experienced by LGBTQ youth in schools contributes to their feeling unable to disclose their identity to even one friend, as this was the case for 36% of participants in one study (D'Augelli, 1991). Those individuals also reported that they feared disclosing their identity to other students more than any other group. LGBTQ youth often feel uncomfortable disclosing their identities to staff members in schools, in part, because they fear the adult at school will tell their parents (Schope, 2002). Jackson's (2017) participants reported a homophobic and unsupportive atmosphere within the school, and as a result, an absence of the acknowledgment of the existence of LGBTQ people and issues (i.e., invalidation). As a result, those students felt unable to be authentic to themselves in a school culture of hostility. Some students expressed a desire to have a GSA in school but did not feel confident enough in requesting one because they did not believe they had the necessary support from school staff to make them feel safe. Jackson's qualitative approach brings about helpful insights into the actions, or rather, inactions, of school staff that compromise the safety and inclusivity of the school environment for LGBTQ youth. Based on these findings, it would be worth exploring what the specific actions are on the part of educators that communicate support and openness toward LGBTQ youth, rendering them more approachable. One of Jackson's participants also highlighted a very relevant issue to the Alberta context as it relates to starting a GSA in school: while it may have been possible to launch a GSA in school, the participant did not feel safe enough to do so (but wished there was one). In Alberta, schools must provide a GSA for any student who requests it; however, much like the student in Jackson's study, requesting a GSA

may put a student at risk for victimization and harassment. Therefore, it would be important to learn how school staff support students who request a GSA while maintaining a level of discretion and privacy that may mitigate further victimization of those youth.

For many LGBTQ students, staff members seem uncaring about the victimization they face, and invalidating toward their identities. Elze (2003) reported that 41% of LGBTQ students had heard teachers make homophobic jokes, and 31% of students surveyed did not feel comfortable speaking with any staff member about their gender or sexual identity. Elze (2003) maintains that when bystanders witness staff members making homophobic jokes, it communicates that homophobic harassment is acceptable within the school community. Kosciw, and colleagues (2016) reported that almost 50% of students in their study never told staff members about the victimization they faced because they doubted an effective intervention would occur, or they feared the situation would get worse; 29.3% of students were deterred from reporting incidents of victimization because they believed the staff members to be homophobic or transphobic themselves. Therefore, LGBTQ youth experience challenges in navigating a school environment in which some teachers may be supportive, while others are not. Future research may explore how teachers who wish to support LGBTQ youth communicate those values despite having colleagues who perpetuate the victimization of those students.

Many teachers act on the assumption that all children in their classes are or will be heterosexual (i.e., heteronormativity); this assumption invalidates the identities of LGBTQ individuals (Burt, Gelnaw, & Lesser, 2010). Mudrey and Medina-Adams (2006) maintain that many teachers and school staff are ignorant to LGBTQ youth's experiences, demonstrate an outright bias, or ignore victimization when it happens. According to the 2015 National School Climate Survey, a significant proportion of LGBTQ students feel unsupported and unsafe in

school because of their sexual orientation and gender expression; one-third of those students admitted to skipping school within the last month out of fear for their own safety. Of those students, 57% decided not to report incidents of harassment during the previous year to teachers; amongst those who did report an incident, 62% remarked that teachers did nothing in response. Students reported that the lack of corrective action on the part of staff is a significant reason why they feel unsafe at school (Kosciw et al., 2016).

As mentioned previously, sometimes the perpetrators of homophobic comments are the teachers themselves: 23.4% of students surveyed in Canada reported that they had heard homophobic comments from staff on a weekly basis. In that study, only four in ten students felt comfortable talking to their teachers about LGBTQ issues (Taylor & Peter, 2009). Taylor and Peter (2009) maintain that LGBTQ youth have become weary of seeing teachers look away when anti-LGBTQ victimization occurs, and as a result, those youth do not feel comfortable discussing LGBTQ issues with their teachers. They also maintain that many staff members are unaware of who is being victimized, and why. But the youth in the study reported that they indeed wished to be able to confide in their teachers about LGBTQ-related issues. Therefore, it would be helpful to learn what educators do to build relationships with LGBTQ youth so that those youth will confide in them when they are being victimized, as well as when they wish to discuss issues related to sexual and gender diversity. Further, participants in the study felt that teachers were unwilling to integrate LGBTQ content into their classes, but that they would integrate content about other diverse groups; that communicates to these youth – either implicitly or explicitly – that other forms of diversity are respectable but not their own (Taylor & Peter, 2009). Therefore, it would be valuable to explore how teachers are integrating LGBTQ content into their courses in

meaningful ways and communicating to LGBTQ youth that their culture is just as valued as others'.

Even educators recognize that the school climate is hostile toward LGBTQ youth. The Every Teacher Project on LGBTQ-Inclusive Education in Canada's K-12 Schools surveyed 3319 teachers to explore how they perceived their school climate for LGBTQ students and the LGBTQ-inclusive efforts they made to improve the climate for those youth (Taylor et al., 2015). They found that only 18% of teachers perceived their school to be safe for transgender students, and 28% perceived their schools to be safe for LGB students. The survey asked respondents (i.e., "check all that apply") which LGBTQ-supportive strategies they used, such as using inclusive language; addressing LGBTQ topics in sexual health, family, and healthy relationships areas; including LGBTQ rights when talking about human rights; challenging homophobia in the classroom; and critiquing gender conformity. Amongst educators in Alberta specifically (n=211), 31% said they used inclusive language in the classroom; 31% said they addressed LGBTQ topics in sexual health, family, and healthy relationships areas; 23% said they included LGBTQ rights when talking about human rights; 37% said they challenged homophobia in the classroom; and 17% said they critiqued gender conformity. While this data is helpful to understand what educators are doing to support LGBTQ youth, it lacks the details as to how they implement those strategies; this highlights an area for future study. Further, only 37% of Alberta educators in the study reported participating in some form of LGBTQ-inclusive effort (i.e., actions and behaviors that specifically strive to ameliorate the safety and inclusivity of the school climate for LGBTQ youth) at their school. Therefore, future research should explore what the barriers are to teachers' LGBTQ-inclusive efforts.

This lack of support for LGBTQ youth has not gone unnoticed by administrators. GLSEN and Harris Interactive conducted an online survey in the USA completed by a nationally representative sample of 1,580 K-12 public school principals (GLSEN & Harrison Interactive, 2008). The survey examined the principals' general attitudes and perspectives on bullying, harassment, and safety in school, overall awareness of the school experiences of LGBT youth and their families, efforts to reduce bullying and harassment in schools, resources available to students, and school and district and community supports and barriers for principals in creating safer schools for all students. The study revealed that only one-third of secondary school principals felt their school would feel safe for LGBT students, and only one-quarter of them felt it would feel safe for transgender students. Among those principals, 90% reported hearing anti-LGBT slurs in their schools, but only 21% attempted to foster a safer environment for the youth affected by them. Six in ten principals reported that their professional development efforts during the past school year addressed bullying or harassment, but fewer than one in twenty said that these addressed LGBT issues specifically. Principals indicated that there was a lack of teacher training to support LGBT issues: three in ten principals rated their teachers and staff as only fair or poor in their ability to deal effectively with the victimization of LGBT youth; one third of principals gave their teachers a fair or poor rating for being able to respond effectively to a student talking to them about being LGBT. When addressing the issue of creating safe environments for LGBT youth, principals said that the most helpful systemic strategies would likely entail professional development for staff, issuing consequences for school personnel who do not intervene when witnessing anti-LGBT harassment or homophobic remarks, and having anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies that explicitly protect LGBT students. Other systemic strategies that were viewed as helpful, but not as helpful as the aforementioned,

included infusing history and events about LGBT people into the curriculum, and allowing clubs on school campus where LGBT and non-LGBT students can join together to promote tolerance (e.g., GSAs). When principals were asked what they did in response to the bullying and harassment of LGBT youth, responses included direct conversations with victims, perpetrators, or their parents; disciplinary actions (e.g., formal suspensions, incident reports); and resource referrals or delegation for follow-up (e.g., referral to the school counselor). Half of the principals reported implementing peer mediation or conflict resolution or awareness campaigns to reduce bullying or harassment (but not specific to supporting LGBT youth). The least common steps implemented to reduce bullying or harassment reported were clear consequences for school personnel who did not intervene when they witnessed bullying or harassment of LGBT youth. In summary, the data from this study shows that principals are generally aware of the victimization of LGBT youth in their schools, and have implemented anti-bullying and anti-harassment measures, but not systemic measures specific to the support of LGBT youth. Principals engage in disciplinary measures for perpetrators of victimization, but their efforts do not impact systemic change in support of gender and sexually-diverse youth. When principals in the study were asked about the barriers they faced when engaging in efforts specifically designed to create a safe environment for LGBT youth, the most common ones were lack of resources, lack of time on the part of educators, and lack of funding. Three in ten principals encountered objections from at least one of their stakeholder groups (e.g., parents, community members). Importantly, only 8% of principals reported objections by students with regard to explicit systemic protections for LGBTQ youth (GLSEN & Harrison Interactive, 2008). This research highlights a gap in the research with regard to awareness versus action: principals are aware of the need to support gender and sexual minority youth, but few take specific actions to improve

the climate for those youth. While principals expressed some barriers to engaging in specific efforts to support LGBT youth, how they might surmount those barriers remains unclear. As such, future research may examine the efforts of principals that are specific to optimizing the school environment for LGBT youth, as well as how they overcome barriers while doing so.

Without systemic support, LGBTQ youth find it difficult to improve their own circumstances; these students often feel powerless to challenge the social injustices they experience in school (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008). When school staff are complacent about the seemingly "innocent and harmless" acts of cruelty directed toward LGBTQ youth, the likelihood of more serious forms of victimization increases; this behavior also reinforces the "hegemonic heteronormativity of the whole school community" (Peter et al., 2015, p. 200).

The studies reviewed highlight a convincing need for educators to make specific efforts to improve the school climate for LGBTQ youth. Some barriers to effecting systemic change have also been discussed in the literature. However, few studies closely examine what educators are actually doing (i.e., specific strategies and unique contributions) to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth, what barriers there are in doing so, and how they overcome those barriers. As such, it would be valuable for future research to closely examine the contributions of educators in that regard.

Gay-Straight-Alliances

One way to offer support to LGBTQ youth, help them find their voice, and give them an opportunity to build relationships with like-minded individuals is through the implementation of a Gay-Straight-Alliance (GSA; Hanna, 2017). GSAs are school-based, student-centered extracurricular clubs "where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer [LGBTQ] students, along with their heterosexual and questioning allies, gather for conversation, learning activities,

and mutual support" (Mayo, 2013, p. 266). GSAs support sexual minority students and their allies in reducing prejudice, discrimination, and harassment within the school (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010), as well as help others rethink the societal norms surrounding gender and sexuality (Mayo, 2014). GSAs can have a variety of different formats and serve different agendas: they can be structured or unstructured, offer a group therapy environment, or be casual and conversational, as well as have an activism component (Poteat, Yoshikawa, et al., 2015). Through the GSA, students may be provided with information about coming out and relationships, how to communicate with school staff or find trusted teachers, and assist youth with coping strategies on how to live in a hostile world (Walls et al., 2010).

Lee (2002) conducted a qualitative study using interviews with seven LGB students to assess the impact of being part of a GSA. Lee maintains that GSAs serve the purpose of providing a safe space for youth to build positive relationships with their peers and teachers; for example, GSAs can raise awareness among teachers about which students may be vulnerable based on their marginalized group membership (i.e., gender and sexual minority). Two participants in the study said that before the establishment of a GSA in their school, they had no intention of attending university. Once the GSA was established, teachers took notice of them and gave them extra encouragement (e.g., "you can do better") and guidance (e.g., helping them revise their post-secondary goals). Participants saw their involvement in the GSA as a source of empowerment and reported that the social and emotional support they gained from being part of a GSA gave them the confidence to form more positive, open, and honest relationships with their teachers. Having a GSA also provided teachers with a way to show their support to the LGB students and to identify themselves as allies. This facilitated the students' forming connections with adult mentors. A strength in Lee's research is that it makes important links between GSAs

and teacher support: it shows how the establishment of a GSA can raise awareness among individuals in the school community about who is vulnerable (i.e., LGB youth), and connect them with those who wish to be of support (i.e., teachers). The use of qualitative methods (i.e., interviews) was effective in the way it garnered unique insights and rich reports from youth of how GSAs and teachers could be supportive. In the Alberta context, an adult supervisor must be assigned to facilitate the GSA. Given the positive impact GSAs can have on the school climate for LGBTQ youth, it would be valuable to understand how those supervisors (e.g., educators) establish GSAs in school, what strategies they may use to facilitate supportive relationships between staff and students, and what barriers they face in doing so. Further, Lee (2002) states that a limitation of the study is that it only captures a snapshot of students' experiences in the GSA; however, teachers may be able to provide insights into how the GSA impacts school climate in the long term.

Walls et al. (2010; see also Hanna, 2017) highlight the importance of finding and developing a network of supportive friends to mitigate the impact of a hostile school environment on LGBTQ youth. Walls et al. (2010) reported that LGBTQ students who attended schools with GSAs experienced less suicidality than LGBTQ students who attended schools without them; in addition, those students reported subjective improvements regarding various other psychosocial factors such as increased comfort with their sexual identity, greater self-efficacy, and an increased sense of connectedness to their schools. Lee (2002) found that LGBT students who attended schools with GSAs mentioned improvement in their motivation for school, as well as their grades; GSA members reported feeling safer at school, and less harassed. Further, Szalacha (2003) reports that students from schools with GSAs report hearing

significantly fewer homophobic remarks compared to students whose schools do not have a GSA.

Research has shown that positive outcomes as a result of GSAs impact not only LGBTQ youth, but also the school environment in general (Hanna, 2017). Walls et al. (2010) echo this finding, and maintain that GSAs improve school climate for LGBTQ students whether they are members of the GSA or not, and that having visible adult allies (e.g., teacher facilitators of the GSA) is a significant contributor to these outcomes.

Mayberry reported that LGBTQ students who attend schools with GSAs experience, "less social isolation, increased self-esteem, gains in academic achievement, feelings of relational empowerment, and a heightened political consciousness" (2013, p. 309; see also Mayberry, 2006). However, Mayberry (2013) maintains that ignoring the needs of LGBTQ youth (e.g., not advocating for the establishment of a GSA) is often the course of action taken by educators because they fear reprisal from administrators, parents, and community members; moreover, the fear of job loss is a very present threat to teachers who take a stand for controversial social justice issues (e.g., advocating for LGBTQ youth in schools). Given these tensions, future research should explore how educators maintain the balance between advocating for LGBTQ youth (e.g., supporting the establishment of a GSA), and barriers and possible reprisal they face in doing so.

Given the substantial challenges LGBTQ youth face, there is evidenced need for the support of these students at school, therefore, GSAs and the visible presence of a GSA in school are of great importance (Murphy, 2012). Students in schools with GSAs report feeling safer with regard to their sexual orientation and gender identity (GLSEN, 2007) and are better able to name safe adults in the school compared to youth whose school does not have a GSA (Walls et al.,

2010). Yet, according to GLSEN's 2015 National School Climate Survey of over 10,000 youth in the USA, only 54% of high school students and 4% of middle school students reported having a GSA at their school (Kosciw et al., 2016). It is during middle and high school that supports to help youth grapple with their identity are crucial: gay and lesbian youth first realize their same-sex attractions at the average age of ten years; first activity with same sex partners occurs at the average age of sixteen years; and adolescents disclose their sexual orientation to others at the average age of seventeen years (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000); supporting these milestones can start with the implementation of a GSA.

When school supports are lacking, many LGBTQ youth turn to internet social media to access resources, explore their identities, find likeness, and come out online (Craig & McInroy, 2014). A further exploration of how online social media supports LGBTQ youth is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to note that when support and a sense of connectedness are unavailable to LGBTQ youth in school, they may look for it elsewhere. Therefore, given that LGBTQ youth look for support in school, but that many schools do not offer them a GSA, future research may explore how educators still create and maintain safe and inclusive spaces in schools with the resources that are available.

Many students are not aware of how to start a GSA, or if it is within their legal right to do so; students will need an adult to guide them through the process and support them in overcoming potential barriers (Murphy, 2012). While there is evidence for the positive impact GSAs can have on improving school climate, King (2008) maintains that the GSA itself, without the systemic support of the greater school community, is not enough. King states that GSAs could actually compartmentalize the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer (GLBQ) youth to the confines of the GSA meetings, thus further marginalizing the youth that attend. King states

that LGBQ youth need adults in the school to advocate for activities that promote the inclusion of marginalized groups; further, future research should investigate how educators use their advocacy skills to decrease homophobia and heterosexism.

A study by Seelman et al. (2015) found that higher school engagement amongst LGBTQ students was not significantly associated with the presence of the GSA, but rather, the number and types of safe adults that a student can identify and has access to at school; the larger, more active, more visible, and more supported the GSA was perceived to be was significantly associated with school engagement. Taken together, educators must be actively involved in and supportive of the GSA for its potential positive impact to be realized. Seelman et al. (2015) argue that it is not just the *types* of safe adults available that is significantly associated with LGBTQ students' school engagement, but the total number of safe adults a student can access that is an important contributing factor to safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth. Further, Seelman et al. (2015) maintain that school staff must be trained to support LGBTQ youth and implement GSAs, and that the school culture must nurture the development of a strong and effective GSA. Merely having supportive staff and a GSA in the school can be potentially more helpful to some LGBTQ students than being personally involved in the GSA itself (Seelman et al., 2015). This relationship between the presence of the GSA and educators' involvement in it further highlights how essential it is for LGBTQ youth to have supportive staff – independent of GSAs or other related available programs in school. Therefore, future research should investigate the contributions educators make to the creation and nurturing of a GSA to support LGBTQ youth who participate in it, as well as those who do not.

It is not sufficient for schools to simply establish a GSA and believe their work is done; once the GSA is created, all school personnel have a responsibility to nurture and support it (e.g.,

consistent support of the GSA's activities in the community, consistently challenging anti-LGBTQ communication; Seelman et al., 2015). Given how research shows that educators feel underprepared to support LGBT youth (e.g., Swanson & Gettinger, 2016) and the relatively recent legislation in Alberta mandating a GSA in school for any student that requests one (i.e., Bill 10), adequate training for teachers who wish to support LGBTQ youth through GSAs, advocacy efforts, and challenging homophobic language, may be underdeveloped. Therefore, research should investigate how suited educators are to supporting GSAs, providing other supports and initiatives for LGBTQ youth, as well as how much training they have received to do so effectively.

Seelman et al. (2015) highlight the importance of all school staff contributing to a positive school climate for LGBTQ youth, including teachers, social workers, principals, and maintenance staff. Safe adults who wish to be identified as such can take part in professional development on supporting LGBTQ youth, post visual representations of LGBTQ people (e.g., poster of a gay celebrity), use safe space signage in the school (e.g., safe zone stickers), and ensure that curricula is LGBTQ-inclusive (Seelman et al., 2015). A safe and inclusive school environment allows LGBTQ youth to come out; Pizmony-Levy and colleagues (2008) found that students who felt comfortable revealing their sexual orientation in schools reported being more respected, and more helped by teachers. Therefore, future research can explore how educators build trusting relationships with LGBTQ youth and communicate to them that they are safe adults.

Barriers to Supporting LGBTQ Youth in Schools

Extant research has elucidated a number of barriers to school staff supporting LGBTQ youth. Many teachers may agree that, in principle, it is their responsibility to create a safe and

inclusive learning environments for LGBTQ youth, but that understanding does not necessarily translate into action (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). That may occur because teachers are not adequately equipped to address LGBT issues (Meyer, 2008; Meyer, Taylor, & Peter, 2015), or because their commitment to social justice conflicts with personal beliefs about sexual orientation and gender expression (Perez, Schanding, & Dao, 2013; Sawyer, Porter, Lehman, Anderson, & Anderson, 2006). Fredman, Schultz and Hoffman (2015) conducted qualitative research via 16 semi-standardized interviews with teachers to explore the barriers they encountered in their schools when trying to incorporate inclusive pedagogical practices and cultivate a safe climate for LGBTQ students. They found that educators considered three main bodies of unofficial (i.e., not formally documented anywhere) “rules” governing the treatment of LGBTQ topics: (a) teachers should not talk about LGBTQ topics, (b) if teachers wish to talk about LGBTQ topics, they must get prior approval through the appropriate channels (i.e., administration), and (c) when teachers address LGBTQ issues, they must manage them in such a way not to induce negative reactions from parents or other community members. One educator in the study explained that teachers are already very busy, and that she has to consider the additional stress and workload that a disgruntled student or parent would add to that if she offended them by talking about LGBTQ topics. That educator commented, “why would I want to teach this if I know I am going to have to answer 10-15 emails tonight from parents complaining about that sort of thing? You know, in general teachers don’t want to make more work for themselves” (Fredman et al., 2015, p. 70). Another educator commented that other teachers have lost their job simply because a parent complained about their behavior, even though they were not doing anything wrong; that realization makes teachers err on the side of caution, and self-censor when it comes to discussing perceived taboo topics (e.g., LGBTQ

issues). Fredman, Schultz and Hoffman (2015) reported that these rules are silently reinforced, thus perpetuating heteronormativity as an accepted value. Another theme in Fredman and colleagues' study (2015) concerned a lack of training for teachers to support LGBTQ issues; teachers commented that they will often ignore issues of homophobia because they do not feel equipped with the skills to deal with them. Some commented that mandating, and thus legitimizing professional development for teachers to support LGBTQ youth, just as professional development about learning disabilities is regularly offered, would institutionalize attention toward LGBTQ issues in schools. Teachers in this study could not have described such rich details about the barriers they experience in supporting LGBTQ youth through survey methods alone; therefore, a strength of this study lies in its qualitative approach. Future research should employ similar methods (i.e., interviews, qualitative methods) to further explore the barriers faced by teachers when supporting LGBTQ youth. Further, Fredman, Schultz and Hoffman (2015) recommend conducting future research with a larger sample size, comprising male teachers, and educators from the LGBTQ community.

A study by Swanson and Gettinger (2016) of 98 educators indicated that a lack of training and skills to support LGBT youth was the primary barrier, followed by a lack of knowledge regarding the needs and issues of LGBT students, and not enough time or resources (see also MacGillivray, 2000). Of those participants, 37.9% reported being part of a staff that tolerates LGBT harassment, and 35.8% reported having an unsupportive school administration (see also MacGillivray, 2000; Sawyer, Porter, Lehman, Anderson, & Anderson, 2006). Activities and behaviors that were reported as helpful in supporting LGBT youth included providing safe spaces for them in classrooms, being aware of the LGBT biases in course textbooks and other materials, ensuring that LGBT persons are reflected in course content, and

immediately addressing anti-LGBT language (e.g., "that's so gay") when witnessed. An analysis of the results showed that teachers who reported a high level of training to support LGBT youth and who worked in schools with GSAs were more likely to engage in activities and behaviours to support LGBT students. However, as one participant in Fredman and colleagues' study mentioned, "If somebody's on fire, 'I don't have the training, so I guess I'll just watch them burn and call the fire department.' You have to do something…" (2015, p. 73). Participants in that study reported a sense of duty to protect LGBTQ youth, but a lack of confidence in their abilities to do so. Future research would benefit from exploring how educators with varying degrees of training to support LGBTQ youth are making efforts to do so, and what barriers they face as a result of their lack of experience and training in that regard.

Research has uncovered a number of other barriers to teachers supporting LGBTQ youth. Teachers do not always feel comfortable intervening for LGBTQ students unless school policy clearly articulates protections for these youth; further, teachers may not intervene because they hold non-supportive or discriminatory attitudes toward LGBTQ students, and/or are unaware of the importance of intervening (Russell et al., 2010). Some teachers lack an understanding about sexual orientation, so they are reluctant to combat persistent stereotypes and stigmas (Bahr et al., 2000; McCabe & Rubinson, 2008) or incorporate topics related to gender and sexual diversity into their curriculum (Ngo, 2003). McCabe and Rubinson (2008) postulated that their participants appeared naïve about the issues and difficulties faced by LGBT youth, lacked experience in negotiating complex social justice issues in schools, and therefore may not have been compelled to contemplate those difficulties. Their study comprised mostly educators in training of primary grades; they proposed that educators that work with older children may have different expectations, knowledge, and attitudes toward supporting LGBT youth. Therefore,

future research should include educators of secondary school grades to explore their attitudes and knowledge about supporting LGBT youth in schools.

Teachers also express fear of losing their jobs if they advocate for LGBTQ-related issues (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008; Szalacha, 2004). Consequently, while many educators appear to be attuned to the challenges faced by LGBTQ youth, most teachers avoid LGBTQ topics in their classrooms altogether (Puchner & Klein, 2011). Therefore, by deliberately or unwittingly avoiding discussions around LGBTQ-related topics, teachers are reinforcing heteronormative values (MacGillivray, 2000). Further, many teachers feel pressure to ensure student success on standardized testing scores, leaving little time and effort to dedicate to responding effectively to social injustice; as a result, they may rely on guest speakers to conduct brief and insufficient presentations on LGBTQ-related topics. While this can be enlightening to students, it does little to ensure lasting safety and inclusivity unless teachers are reinforcing the values presented on a daily basis (Lipkin, 2002). Future research should explore how educators who are attuned to the challenges faced by LGBTQ youth navigate the barriers encountered (e.g., lack of resources, lack of time, fear of losing their job) when trying to support them.

McCabe and Rubinson (2008) maintain that education training programs need to do more to train teachers to support LGBT youth. For example, pre-service training programs can help develop attitudinal beliefs congruent with an LGBT-affirmative orientation by exposing teachers to curricula focusing on sexual orientation identity development, harassment and violence statistics perpetrated toward LGBT individuals, and skills training to intervene during anti-LGBT harassment (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008). Further, McCabe and Rubinson (2008) propose that university education programs can work with schools where their graduate students are placed to develop anti-harassment policies, and to provide support and training to teachers to intervene

during incidents of harassment. Given the incongruence between reported pre-service teacher education on supporting LGBT youth in this study and the recommendations proposed by McCabe and Rubinson, future research should explore how education programs are equipping their students to support gender and sexual minority youth in schools.

Research shows that many pre-service teachers do not seem knowledgeable about issues of sexual and gender diversity (Bahr et al., 2000), that many would not consider harassment of LGBT youth as a form of social injustice, or that the LGBT population is, in fact, an oppressed group (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008). However, teachers' resistance toward addressing LGBTQ issues is not exclusively due to discomfort surrounding LGBT issues, a lack of knowledge or skills, or contradictory personal moral or religious values (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016), it also stems from a fear of being labeled homosexual (Harris & Bliss, 1997) or deviant. Studies of male teacher candidates in Australia and Canada showed that those preparing for elementary school positions worried about being perceived as pedophiles by parents if they advocated for LGBTQ issues, and felt the need for a particular kind of self-surveillance (Berrill & Martino, 2002). Future studies should include male educators to explore how they negotiate the balance between being supportive of LGBTQ youth, and possible fears about being perceived as pedophiles or gay.

Training and Professional Development for School Personnel

Just how well university training programs prepare graduates to support LGBT youth in schools remains an area of debate (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008). For adults working closely with youth, training in the areas of sexual diversity is essential, with self-awareness being an important component of it (i.e., these adults need to consider how they would react to students

who self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and how they would work with bullies who persecute LGB youth; van Wormer & McKinney, 2003).

Research assessing educators' knowledge about LGBTQ youth is quite limited (Varjas et al., 2008), but what is available suggests that areas related to sexual and gender orientation are not sufficiently present in many education programs (Meyer, 2008) or textbooks (Jennings & McGillivray, 2007). Studies show that educators and other school staff are inadequately trained to intervene on behalf of and advocate for LGBTQ youth (GLSEN & Harrison Interactive, 2008; Savage, Prout, & Chard, 2004; Whitman, Horn, & Boyd, 2007). One educator from Meyer's qualitative study mentioned that she was not attuned to the needs of LGBT youth in her school because topics around gender and sexual diversity and the victimization of these youth were not featured in her graduate studies (Meyer, 2008). Meyer (2008) maintains that creating safer and more positive learning environments for LGBT youth in schools is not possible until school leaders initiate a whole-school initiative that engages students, families, teachers, and community members in a process of transforming the formal and informal structures of the school. Within the Alberta context, future research may consider the unique contributions administrators are making to facilitate such a systemic shift.

Several graduate students from education, school psychology, and counselling disciplines in McCabe and Rubinson's (2008) study reported that LGBT topics were never discussed in their coursework, or only hastily mentioned. Ball, Tyson, Quinn, and Meiners (2011) maintain that pre-service programs for educators have marginalized LGBTQ lives by actively erasing LGBTQ content in teacher education curriculum. Research tells us that reducing LGBTQ targeted violence in schools is paramount to creating safer learning environments for all students (Meyer, 2009), that when there is a lack of attention to that violence, LGBTQ students' positive feelings

about school diminish (Grossman et al., 2009), and that listening to the experiences of LGBTQ youth in teacher pre-service programs positively informs educators' abilities to work effectively with those youth and their families (Stiegler, 2008). Despite this research, a 2009 audit of 57 teacher preparation programs in the state of Illinois documented that the majority of their programs failed to include references to LGBTQ lives (Duke, 2007). Koch (2000) reported that of the 813 pre-service teachers surveyed, less than half felt that they had received sufficient training to work effectively with LGB students; further, only 35% of the participants answered more than half of the LGB knowledge questions correctly. Given this lack of professional training to support LGBTQ youth on the part of educators, future research may explore how educators find the guidance and support they need to create safe spaces for gender and sexual minority youth.

However, not all teachers report inadequate training with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth. Athanases and Larrabee (2003) conducted a qualitative study of three education classes comprising nearly 100 students at a large California public state university to assess the effectiveness of the instruction students received around lesbian and gay (LG) issues. In their program, students' pre-service training included relevant readings, a video, guest speakers, discussions, and weekly written reflections about LG issues, including topics about LG victimization. Subsequently, the dominant stance taken by their participants was an appreciation for the challenges LG youth face, and reports of plans to advocate for them in schools. Regardless of their personal and religious values surrounding sexual diversity, teachers who received pre-service training on LG issues reported a sense of duty to protect those vulnerable youth. Several students in Athanases and Larrabee's study (2003) were concerned that, after only one presentation, several readings, and a video, they still lacked the breadth of knowledge

and skills necessary to confidently and competently handle discussions inclusive of LG concerns; some teachers also expressed concerns about the age-appropriateness of discussing LG-related topics in elementary grades. This concern was, in part, due to general questions about what young children understand regarding LG concerns. Athanases and Larrabee (2003) highlight these concerns as areas for future research, therefore, future studies can explore how prepared educators feel to address gender and sexual minority topics when they have received pre-service training in that area, and how educators of elementary grades treat LGBTQ-related topics with younger students.

Statement of Problem and Purpose of Study

As discussed previously, LGBTQ youth experience hostile school environments that affect their social, emotional, and physical well-being and safety (Kosciw et al., 2016; Taylor & Peter, 2011b; Taylor et al., 2015). Educators can have a critical role in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth; their efforts can potentially be more meaningful than the implementation of GSAs, and enumerated policies to protect gender and sexual diverse youth (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Kosciw et al., 2013). However, the majority of research to date has utilized quantitative methods to elucidate the relation between LGBTQ youth's perceived safety in schools and how supportive they feel their teachers are. While this relation has been established in extant research, few studies have closely examined the experiences of educators with regard to creating and sustaining safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (i.e., their supportive behaviors and actions, and the barriers they need to overcome). For example, Goodenow, Szalacha, and Westheimer (2006) used survey data to establish the positive relation between students being able to identify a school staff member they could talk to about a problem and their sense of safety. However, how those staff members establish relationships with

students remains a gap in the research. Kosciw and colleagues (2016) reported positive behaviors and actions on the part of educators to support LGBTQ youth; however, the survey methods they used only allowed for selecting those behaviors and actions from a checklist. What is lacking from their approach are the unique behaviors educators demonstrate that may not be included in their checklist, the barriers and adversity those educators face, as well as the strategies educators use to navigate their unique circumstances and environments (e.g., religious environments, specific school policies, government legislation). The work done by McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, and Russell (2010) utilized a mixed-methods approach (i.e., surveys and focus groups) which allowed for a broad exploration of the educator actions that positively impacted LGBTQ youth. However, their participants were the LGBTQ youth themselves, so a gap in their research is that the perspective of educators was not explored.

The work done by Fredman, Schultz, and Hoffman (2015) is an exception in that it utilized qualitative methods to interview educators about the barriers they encountered when trying to incorporate inclusive practices and create a safe climate for LGBTQ youth. A strength in their research is that educators could discuss the barriers they experienced specific and unique to their circumstances; what is missing from the findings are the actions educators take to surmount those barriers. McCabe and Rubinson's study (2008) is another exception in that it used focus groups to elucidate the supportive behaviors toward LGBTQ youth on the part of educators in training (i.e., pre-service graduate students). Their approach allowed for the collection of rich and unique responses from participants; however, the study was conducted with graduate students (from a program that promotes social justice as its cornerstone) so the results may not closely reflect the reality of educators' experiences in schools, nor do they represent typical graduate training programs for educators. Further, those graduate students were

training to become primary school educators, so insights from educators working with secondary school LGBTQ youth are lacking in their findings. This highlights a need for a similar (i.e., qualitative) approach to be taken with educators currently teaching in schools, as well as those who work with older (e.g., high school) students. Further, none of the qualitative studies reviewed explored strategies to supporting LGBTQ youth as well as barriers to doing so from the perspective of administrators (e.g., principals). The role that administrators play in establishing safe and inclusive environments for LGBTQ youth (e.g., empowering teachers, providing training, protecting teachers) has been shown to be essential, therefore, a gap in the literature is their unique behaviors and actions.

Summary

In sum, the literature reviewed on the actions and behaviors that educators employ to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth is scarce, particularly the research that elicits rich descriptions of the strategies educators employ, the barriers they face, and how they overcome those barriers. Given the dearth of information in this area, the purpose of this exploratory study was to elicit and examine the roles of educators (e.g., actions and behaviors) with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth in schools.

As indicated previously, the primary questions guiding this study were: *1) What are the roles of educators (i.e., teachers, school administrators) with respect to promoting and creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth; 2) what unique contributions can educators make in nurturing those spaces; and, 3) what barriers do educators face in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth?* This study aims to fill the void in the current literature base by exploring the first-hand experiences of educators in Alberta with regard to creating and

maintaining safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth. Thus, educators' efforts and strategies to support LGBTQ youth and the barriers they face were explored and analyzed.

Chapter Three: Methods

Chapter Three provides a description of and rationale for the use of an exploratory mixed-methods approach and its components in conducting this research. Further, the research design, ontological and epistemological considerations, research paradigm, data collection methods, data analysis and synthesis, ethical considerations, and issues of trustworthiness will be outlined.

This study was conducted as part of a larger research project surveying and interviewing school counsellors and school psychologists, in addition to educators, in collaboration with a research team composed of university professors from the Werklund School of Education and a doctoral student in counselling psychology. The demographic information and descriptive statistics presented in this thesis comprise all participants; the data analysis will focus specifically on survey responses and interview data from educators.

Research Design

The research design is the plan for conducting the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). For the proposed study, a convergent parallel design mixed-methods approach was used (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, both the quantitative data and qualitative data are collected concurrently, with the results of each dataset analyzed separately from the other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Once the data has been analyzed, the researcher merges the results of the quantitative and qualitative datasets to allow for an overall interpretation (i.e., this is known as the point of interface; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This merging of data allows for content areas of each data type to be represented and for the researcher to compare/contrast and/or synthesize the results. The researcher can then analyze for any divergence, convergence, contradictions, or relations

between the two sources of the data, ultimately developing a more complete understanding of the research topic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Figure 1 depicts a diagram briefly summarizing the convergent parallel approach.

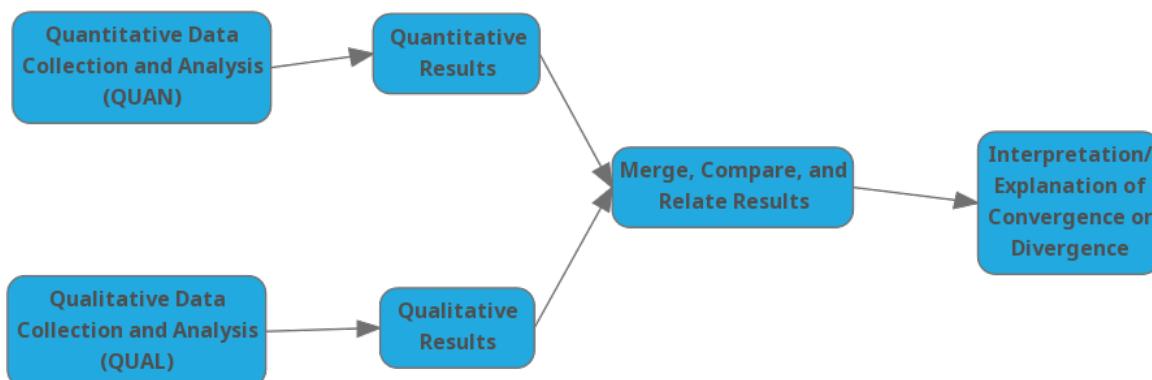


Figure 1
Research Design Plan: Steps in Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Designs

Mixed-Methods Research Approach

The use of a mixed-methods design in this study combined elements of quantitative (i.e., online surveys) and qualitative (i.e., open-ended survey questions, semi-structured follow-up interviews) research approaches to obtain a breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This research method involved analyzing data, integrating findings, and drawing inferences from both quantitative and qualitative approaches used (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). The quantitative data (i.e., surveys) in this study set the context of the participants involved and allowed for the reporting of statistical trends; the qualitative data (i.e., open-ended survey responses, interviews) in this study allowed the participants' voices to be heard. Further, a mixed-methods design was appropriate as the survey results needed to be explained and enhanced (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Fetters and

Freshwater (2015) maintain that mixed-methods approaches offer researchers new insights and allow for knowledge-growing that go beyond separate quantitative and qualitative results. The knowledge-growing they describe was a goal of this study.

Mixed methods research, while arguably the best fit for the proposed study, is not without its criticisms. First, issues of validity may arise if the main qualitative phenomena and the quantitative variables are not parallel, or if the units of analysis (i.e., group or individual) are not parallel (Creswell, 2015). To address these concerns, the proposed study collected data from individuals for each component, then analyzed the results of each component to look for patterns within each data set before combining the results. There may also be issues due to the differences in sample size between the quantitative and qualitative components (Creswell, 2015). This must be considered carefully before over-generalizing the results of the study.

Quantitative component. The survey questions were formulated by the research team and general demographic information and descriptive statistics about the participants were gathered through surveys. While the survey was not validated psychometrically, all members of the research team had to agree on each question (i.e., wording, applicability, value) for it to be included. The use of surveys in this study was intended to provide some general descriptive statistics of the participant sample, and high level ("thin") qualitative descriptions provided by participants through the use of open-ended questions and optional comment fields.

The first section of the survey collected background information about the participants' current roles and training using multiple-choice questions (e.g., Your highest level of education: Bachelor's Degree; Master's degree; Doctoral degree). Participants were asked to describe their role in the school (e.g., teacher, administrator), gender, age, level of school in which they currently work, the school's geographical setting, student population, number of other staff

employed in a similar role, highest level of education, specialized training obtained in their role, and years working in their role. The second section of the questionnaire focused on the participants' training specific to working with LGBTQ populations. Participants responded to Likert questions (e.g., How well do you feel your specialized training prepared you to support LGBTQ youth in your role: Not at all; inadequately; adequately; thoroughly?) and had the option of including open text comments to give context. The third section of the survey concerned LGBTQ programming in the participant's school. Participants responded to multiple choice questions about the presence of a GSA (or related programs) in their school and their involvement with it (e.g., If you have been involved with a GSA/QSA, for how long [approximately in years]: Less than one year; One to three years; Three to six years; Six or more years?). The fourth section of the survey focused on ways in which participants contributed to the safety and inclusivity of LGBTQ students in school. In this section, participants responded mostly through open text comments (e.g., How might individuals in your role uniquely contribute to making learning and involvement in school safe and inclusive for LGBTQ students?). The fifth and final section of the survey focused on the ways in which participants developed and contributed to GSA/QSAs in their schools. In this section, participants responded through open text comments (e.g., In your opinion, what helps the development of a successful GSA/QSA within a school?). Survey questions can be found in Appendix A.

Qualitative component. The interview questions were formulated by the research team; they were discussed, adapted, and reworded until there was consensus about their wording, applicability, and value. The interview questions were formulated using an enhanced critical incidents technique (Butterfield, Maglio, Borgen, & Amundson, 2009) in an effort to elicit descriptions and examples of specific events that illustrate the example given (e.g., specific

example(s) of when safety and inclusivity was demonstrated, specific example(s) of when a teacher faced a barrier to supporting LGBTQ youth). Semi-structured interviews of self-selecting survey participants provided a thicker description of the participants' experiences as well as more nuanced and quotable answers to the general research questions. The interviews allowed participants to give deeper perceptual information and delve further into the descriptions of their experiences. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of participants, and those recordings were transferred to a password-encrypted drive. Subsequently, all interviews were transcribed for future data analysis. Interview transcripts were stored on a password-protected drive that was accessible only to the researcher, the principal investigator, and a research assistant/colleague who assisted with data analysis and peer debriefing.

A qualitative component was added to the study to give voice to the participants as they reflected on topics about gender and sexual minority students (i.e., LGBTQ youth; Clarke, Ellis, Peel, & Riggs, 2010). Qualitative methods have been found to be particularly effective for research on LGBTQ-related topics, and useful for exploratory research studying topics about which little is known (Clarke et al., 2010). An advantage of using qualitative methods is that they can focus on understanding the meaning produced in a particular context (e.g., Alberta schools) by a particular group of people (e.g., Alberta educators; Clarke et al., 2010).

The interview questions reflected the survey questions and deepened their exploration into the topics covered. The topics explored in the semi-structured interview included: (a) the participant's beliefs about what makes for a safe school environment for LGBTQ youth; (b) their role in supporting LGBTQ youth; (c) the pre-service training they had received that equipped them in supporting LGBTQ youth; (d) the professional development they have received that has

equipped them in supporting LGBTQ youth; (e) areas of competency they would like to further develop with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth; (f) barriers they have faced in supporting LGBTQ youth; (g) factors that contribute to and thwart the success of a GSA; (h) other groups and programs that are available to support LGBTQ youth in their school; (i) the participant's experiences in feeling supported and unsupported by various members of the school community with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth in school; and (j) the visual aspects of schools that can contribute to safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth.

Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

Well-crafted research projects have an identified methodology and an associated theoretical framework that guides the research and analysis (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). Researchers must identify their understanding of the nature of reality (i.e., ontological assumptions) and their beliefs about what can be known (i.e., epistemological assumptions; Braun & Clarke, 2013), and then consider those assumptions as they inform the methodological approach and methods used in one's research (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000).

Ontology. Ontology refers to the researcher's claims about what knowledge is (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Investigating ontological distinctions is a critical component of the research process as it enables the researcher to evaluate how their perceptions of human nature impact the approach they use to reveal social truths (David & Sutton, 2004). The researcher adopted a social constructivist ontology, holding the belief that the participants' reality and experiences are a product of and interaction between socially, culturally, and historically constructed factors (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

Epistemology. Epistemology refers to how we know what we know (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016), or *what it means to know* (Carter & Little, 2007). Epistemology can be thought of

as the justification of knowledge, and it determines the method used in research – particularly in the participant-researcher relationship, as well as the data analysis, and reporting of findings (Carter & Little, 2007). A reflective researcher actively adopts a theory of knowledge (Carter & Little, 2007).

Social constructivism. The basic tenet of social constructivism is that reality is socially, culturally, and historically constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Therefore, research attempts to understand social phenomena from a context-specific perspective (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Social constructivists view research as value-bound rather than value-free, meaning that the process of inquiry is influenced by the researcher and the context under study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The social constructivist approach views social reality as being co-constructed by individuals who interact with and make meaning of their world in an active way; the researcher approaches the search for truth in people's lived experiences through rigorous interpretation (Byrne-Armstrong, Higgs, & Horsfall, 2001).

The principle assumption of this paradigm is that reality is socially constructed, and that individuals develop subjective meanings of their own personal experience; the researcher's role is to understand multiple realities from the perspectives of participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). To do so, the researcher must become involved in the reality of the participants and interact with them in meaningful ways (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Constructivist researchers recognize and acknowledge that their own background and experiences influence their interpretation, therefore, they "position" themselves in the research to acknowledge their own cultural, social, and historical experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Rather than starting with a theory, constructivist researchers pose research questions and then generate or inductively

develop meaning from the data collected (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Axiology and reflexivity. Axiology refers to the researcher's personal values and biases that contribute to the interpretation of research and knowing (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Given that the data's meaningfulness is interpreted and influenced by the researcher, qualitative research requires that the researcher actively reflect on those values and biases throughout the process (Carter & Little, 2007). To establish research rigor, the researcher must acknowledge their own preconceptions, personal beliefs, or interests, and how the interaction between researcher and participant may contribute to or influence the production and/or identification of themes and patterns (Carter & Little, 2007). This acknowledgment and self-monitoring is known as *bracketing*, and is intended to reduce the deleterious effects that the researcher's preconceptions can have on tainting the research process (Morrow, 2005; Tufford & Newman, 2012). To address the potential impact of the researcher's preconceptions in interpreting the data, a number of measures were taken as outlined below.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose various criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness, or rigor, of qualitative research, and divide them into the following domains: credibility, dependability, and transferability. The following is an overview of how trustworthiness was considered and addressed in this study. Strategies such as providing discrepant findings (e.g., negative cases), taking self-reflective field notes, maintaining involvement in the field, member checking (i.e., having participants verify the accuracy of their interview's transcription), peer debriefing (i.e., comparing my analyses with those of other researchers familiar with the TA process), and providing thick descriptions of the data were used to address trustworthiness. I

have included a self-reflection of my own reflexivity (i.e., biases and assumptions) in this overview, and the efforts the research team and I made to address those biases.

Assumptions and personal framework. Prior to undertaking this research endeavor, I was a middle and high school teacher who had worked in a culturally conservative country (e.g., Turkey) and a culturally liberal one (i.e., The Netherlands). I have also worked as a teacher in both public and separate (i.e., Catholic) schools in Ontario.

In my most recent teaching assignment, I launched a GSA in my school. As a result, I adopted an advocacy role for LGBTQ inclusivity in the school as well as an awareness-raising role to educate colleagues on the needs of gender and sexually-diverse students. I am aware that how my efforts were received and supported by colleagues, and the level of training those colleagues brought to the discussion, have influenced my expectations of educators' roles in and awareness of supporting LGBTQ youth in schools.

Based on my experiences as an educator, I approached this study with some biases and misconceptions. My assumption was that most teachers were apathetic to the victimization experienced by LGBTQ youth. Many of the teachers I have encountered feel that their role is to teach the curriculum, and that the social-emotional needs of their students are not the school's concern. One bias I hold is that the teachers who are more resistant to supporting LGBTQ youth will also be more seasoned educators. I also assumed that the educators who take on an advocacy role for LGBTQ youth would generally fulfill the role of GSA supervisor. In my experiences, there have been subject teachers who make meaningful contributions to support LGBTQ youth outside of the GSA supervisor role (e.g., the Drama teacher putting on a performance of The Laramie Project), but those examples are few and far between.

As a researcher, I needed to be aware of how those situational experiences could shape my expectations (e.g., conservative and liberal school environments), and how my previous dealings with other educators could bias the data from this study. As a result, it was important for me to be attuned to evidence from the data that contradicted my preconceptions.

Credibility. This criterion refers to whether the participants' perceptions match the researcher's portrayal of them (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Various measures were taken in an effort to account for credibility in this research. For instance, to account for my bias it was important to provide findings that may be discrepant with my assumptions or expectations (e.g., I interviewed sexually-diverse teachers in Catholic schools, and one Catholic school was described as very welcoming toward LGBTQ youth). Being aware of and identifying these negative cases is a form of credibility (Morrow, 2005). Self-reflective field notes were taken when reviewing survey responses of participants (prior to the interview) and throughout the interviews themselves highlighting thoughts, impressions, reflections, and questions for follow-up with participants (Morrow, 2005). While analyzing transcriptions, I used the memo feature in NVivo to note my impressions of the data and emerging themes.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) maintain that repeated and prolonged involvement in the field facilitates a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, thus contributing to credibility. To keep abreast of the local discussions surrounding LGBTQ youth in schools, I stayed involved in the field by volunteering with Calgary PRIDE, by following conversations and posts on related social media groups (e.g., Alberta GSA Network on Facebook), and by remaining attuned to political discussions surrounding safe spaces for LGBTQ youth in schools through reading and watching news media regularly.

Member checking is a form of credibility, and entails (but is not limited to) asking participants to verify the accuracy of their interview transcription (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Of the 17 educator interview participants, seven of them requested to review their transcript, and one participant requested some minor changes.

Peer debriefing is a form of credibility that was used to enhance the accuracy of the researcher's account; this process involves asking colleagues to review the data and field notes, and then to consider alternative ways of looking at the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Hill et al., 2005). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the researcher consulted with a colleague (i.e., a PhD student of counselling psychology) who had also reviewed the entire dataset (i.e., survey data, interview transcripts). The researcher and his colleague discussed emergent themes and patterns, and ways of looking at them from different perspectives. The researcher also had two additional graduate students from the School and Applied Child Psychology program review all the survey data and several transcripts. Then the researcher met with those students to discuss their impressions of the data, the themes and patterns that emerged for them, and quotes/excerpts that embodied those themes. Then, based on the consensus of themes and patterns between the researcher, his PhD colleague, and the two graduate students, the researcher compiled a document of themes and sub-themes, descriptions of those themes, and related excerpts. That document was subsequently submitted to the research team members (i.e., Werklund School of Education professors) for their feedback.

Dependability. Dependability in qualitative research is akin to inter-rater reliability (i.e., consistency between raters) in quantitative research, although it is not assessed through statistical procedures (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Rather is it established by comparing and contrasting

the conclusions (e.g., codes) made by others who have reviewed the same data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

In this study, dependability was addressed by having a colleague code all the same data that the researcher did, and then discussing and comparing those codes. Further, the two graduate students who participated in the peer debriefing process also coded interviews; those codes were discussed with the researcher and his colleague in the Ph.D. program.

Transferability. Transferability refers to the fit between the research context and other contexts as judged by the reader; this can be measured by the richness of the descriptions included in the study that gives readers a sense of shared or vicarious experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Denzin (2001) calls this richness "thick description," which serves as a vehicle for communicating a holistic picture of the data to the reader. The amount of detailed information that the researcher provides regarding the context of the study also addresses transferability as it contributes to an element of shared experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Given the Alberta context of this study, it is expected that Alberta educators who read it will experience a sense of shared experience. Extant research shows that the challenges LGBTQ youth face are similar across distinct geographical settings (i.e., from one country to another; Taylor & Peter, 2011), as well as the barriers educators face in supporting those youth. Therefore, it is hoped that educators outside of the Alberta context will also derive a sense of shared experience from the results of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to commencing the study and data collection, ethics approval was obtained from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to their participation in the survey, and then again prior to any interviewing. Given the

sensitive nature of the study, participants' anonymity was protected at all levels of the data collection process. All participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study prior to their involvement, their involvement was completely voluntary, and they retained the right to withdraw their contributions at any time up until their contact details were replaced with anonymizing codes which coincided with the commencement of the data analysis. It was not anticipated that participants would experience emotional distress, anxiety, or worry throughout the study as the research was strengths-oriented and focused on what makes (or could make) schools safe and inclusive for LGBTQ youth. However, given that participants could potentially share experiences and information that may be critical towards others in the school community, informed consent (i.e., anonymity, safeguarding of information) was reiterated throughout the data collection process. Further, participants were given the option to review the transcriptions of their interview and to make changes as they saw fit (i.e., member checking). Finally, all participants' names were entered into a draw for a chance to win a small honorarium.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis (TA; Braun & Clarke, 2006) was chosen as the qualitative method of analysis for this study. A strength in TA is that is allows for the in-depth exploration of topics where little is known; further, it can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches – including a social constructivist paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2013) provide guidelines for researchers to ensure that TA is conducted in a way that is theoretically and methodologically sound. Researchers using TA are encouraged to clearly describe the steps to TA, what types of questions will be explored using the analytical method (e.g., experiences of educators), and their epistemological positions and assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). These points have been addressed throughout this thesis.

TA has been extensively used in qualitative research to address a wide range of research interests (Braun & Clarke, 2013). TA is a popular choice for reflexive researchers who explore issues surrounding social justice, and who wish to give voice to under-represented groups (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019). TA is an approach that is foundational for qualitative analysis (Clarke et al., 2010), and is useful when exploring the experiences of people (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA can be used to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and to identify themes and patterns in the data that reflect those experiences in a meaningful way; it has been widely used in qualitative research to explore LGBTQ-related topics (e.g., Braun, Terry, Gavey, & Fenaughty, 2009; Clarke, Kitzinger, & Potter, 2004). Verbal interview data tends to be at the root of thematic analysis (Joffe, 2012).

Alternative qualitative inquiry frameworks were considered as well for the analysis of interview data. *Ethnography* considers the culture of a group of people, and how that culture explains their perspectives and behaviours (Patton, 2015). Ethnography would not have been appropriate for this study as the research questions were not related to LGBTQ culture, specifically, nor was the culture of educators under investigation. *Narrative inquiry* was also considered for this investigation. Narrative inquiry is intended to illuminate the life and culture of the individual being interviewed (Patton, 2015). Narrative inquiry would not have been suitable for this study as the research questions were not specifically related to the life experiences and culture of the participants. Finally, *Content Analysis* was considered to analyze the qualitative data. Content Analysis refers to counting recurring words or themes in a dataset (Patton, 2015). Content Analysis was not preferred for this study as it may have produced some thin descriptions of the data, but not the thick descriptions that would contribute to knowledge-growing.

Theoretical considerations. TA is not tied to any particular theoretical framework so it can be applied when using a range of theories and epistemological approaches (Joffe, 2012). TA can be used deductively (i.e., where themes are drawn from a theoretical idea that the researcher brings to the research), or inductively (i.e., allowing the themes to naturally emerge from the raw data itself; Joffe, 2012). For the purposes of this exploratory study, the data analysis was conducted inductively. Themes and patterns were generated based on the participants' accounts of their experiences supporting LGBTQ youth in schools, as opposed to confirming or refuting pre-established hypotheses.

Procedures

The procedural steps of the study broadly entailed: 1) recruiting school psychologists, school counsellors, and educators who worked in Alberta schools to complete the online survey; 2) conducting semi-structured interviews with self-identifying participants; 3) analyzing survey data of educators to glean "thin" descriptions of their roles in supporting LGBTQ youth; and 4) analyzing interview data to identify "thick" descriptions, themes, and patterns with regard to the roles of educators in supporting LGBTQ youth. Each of these steps is outlined in the remainder of this section.

Research Participants

This study was intended to provide insight into how school professionals created and sustained safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth within the Alberta context. As such, the inclusionary criteria entailed that all participants worked in an Alberta school as a teacher or administrator at the time of completing the survey and interview. Purposeful sampling procedures were used to select individuals who could provide the necessary information regarding the central concepts or phenomena being explored in the study (Creswell & Plano

Clark, 2018). Participants who completed the online survey were asked if they would be willing to answer follow-up questions through an individual semi-structured interview. All participants were interviewed over the telephone or by videoconferencing (e.g., Skype).

Recruitment. At the commencement of the research design process, a survey was constructed in consultation with other members of the research team. Upon successful ethics approval (Appendix C), the survey was built in Survey Gizmo and the online survey link was distributed via multiple methods: (a) the link was sent via email using snowball sampling (i.e., to individuals who share a research interest in LGBTQ youth; Frey, 2018) using networks known to the researcher and the research team; (b) the researcher posted calls for participants on social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter; see recruitment flyer in Appendix C) targeting members of LGBTQ-affirmative groups (e.g., Alberta GSA Network); (c) the researcher advertised the study on the Psychologists' Association of Alberta (PAA) online research board; and (d) the researcher attended a professional development seminar for psychologists hosted by the PAA about working with LGBT clients, announced the research project there and distributed the survey link.

Participants who followed the survey link were introduced to the study's informed consent document (Appendix D), including limits to confidentiality, the voluntary nature of participation, and the contact information of the researcher and his supervisor.

Participants who self-selected to take part in the semi-structured follow-up interview expressed their willingness by clicking a box at the end of the online survey, and by subsequently providing contact details (i.e., email address). The researcher then contacted the participant(s) by email to schedule the interview and to send the informed consent document for taking part in the interview. All participants expressed their informed consent in writing (i.e., by

returning a digital copy of the informed consent document); participants were also reminded of the informed consent and the voluntary nature of their participation prior to the interview and being recorded.

Data Collection

A selected literature review preceded data collection; the literature review informed the study (i.e., research questions, survey questions) but was not data collection in and of itself.

The rationale behind using a survey was to garner general descriptive statistics about the participants and high level ("thin") descriptions from open-ended questions they answered.

Through the online surveys, participants could self-select to take part in a follow-up semi-structured interview that was audio-recorded and later transcribed. Interview participants were contacted by email to schedule a time to interview with one of two interviewers (i.e., the researcher or his colleague), either over the phone or by videoconference. The rationale behind using interviews was to garner thicker descriptions, and more nuanced and quotable answers to the general research questions. Prior to the interview, the interviewers reviewed each participant's quantitative and qualitative survey responses to familiarize themselves with the data and highlight areas and responses needing clarification or worthy of elaboration.

Interview procedures. For the purposes of this study, the researcher and his colleague conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with each of the self-selecting participants to obtain a rich understanding of their experiences with regard to creating and sustaining safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth.

The interviewers adhered to the interview protocol but remained flexible enough to give participants the opportunity to deviate from the questions asked to recount experiences they felt were important. As the interviewers identified trends in the themes emerging from the

interview(s), they recorded them in the margin of the interview protocol. Each interview was completed in one session and ended when the participant felt they had expressed enough about any given topic (i.e., saturated the discussion). The interviewers engaged in the process of active listening and paraphrasing to build rapport with the participant, and to seek clarification and confirmation of what was being said. The interviewers used probing questions to deepen the discussion when appropriate. The interview recordings were then transcribed and anonymized by a professional transcriptionist. The interviews ranged from 32:32 to 92:00 minutes in duration (median = 58:41).

Interview transcription. As each interview was completed, the recordings were sent to a professional transcriptionist to be transcribed. The transcriptionist removed as much identifying information (e.g., city, school, and people's names, community organizations' names) from the transcriptions as possible before returning them to the researcher. Once the transcription was received by the researcher, it was read while listening to the interview audio recording to ensure for accuracy. It was then sent to the participant to be verified for accuracy (where the participant expressed a desire to do so). The researcher then complied with any change requests made by the participant. Then, the transcription's filename was replaced with a code (i.e., three-digit number); a separate password-protected document that matched the files' codes to the participants' names and professional roles was maintained.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Quantitative survey responses were exported from Survey Gizmo and imported into IBM SPSS. A frequency analysis in SPSS elicited descriptive statistics for the dataset. Microsoft Excel was then used to generate tables of the data presented in this report.

Once all interview transcripts were transcribed and read for accuracy, qualitative

responses from the surveys and interview transcripts were analyzed using TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

TA is a theory-building approach characterized by the need to move beyond general descriptions of the data through writing to the generation of themes, concepts, and categories; Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), including NVivo 12, support these processes involved in TA (Silver & Lewins, 2014). Therefore, NVivo 12 was selected by the researcher as a computer-based analysis tool as it was supported in the literature (for use with TA) and offered by the university. NVivo 12 was used to analyze the qualitative data and generate thin and thick themes. All of the data was also analyzed by the researcher's colleague so that patterns and themes could be triangulated and discussed. Additional efforts were made to triangulate the emerging patterns and themes through discussion with other graduate students: two students volunteered to read all anonymized survey data and three survey transcripts each, identify themes and patterns, and highlight quotes/excerpts that embodied those themes and patterns. The instructions given to those students can be found in Appendix E. Based on the discussions between the researcher and colleague, and subsequently the researcher, colleague, and volunteer graduate students involved in the peer debriefing meeting, themes, sub-themes, and their definitions were created, as well as salient quotes. Those themes, sub-themes, definitions, and quotes were then presented to the research team for feedback and ongoing discussion.

Data analysis using TA was conducted in six phases, as delineated by Braun and Clarke (2006). A visual representation of the phases of TA is provided in Figure 2. While the phases of TA are sequential, they can also be recursive (Braun et al., 2015). Therefore, throughout the analysis process, the researcher returned to previous phases as needed.

The thematic analysis for this study focused on organizing the data into recurrent themes/sub-themes and patterns; occurrences of data (e.g., the frequency of a particular word mentioned) were not quantified.

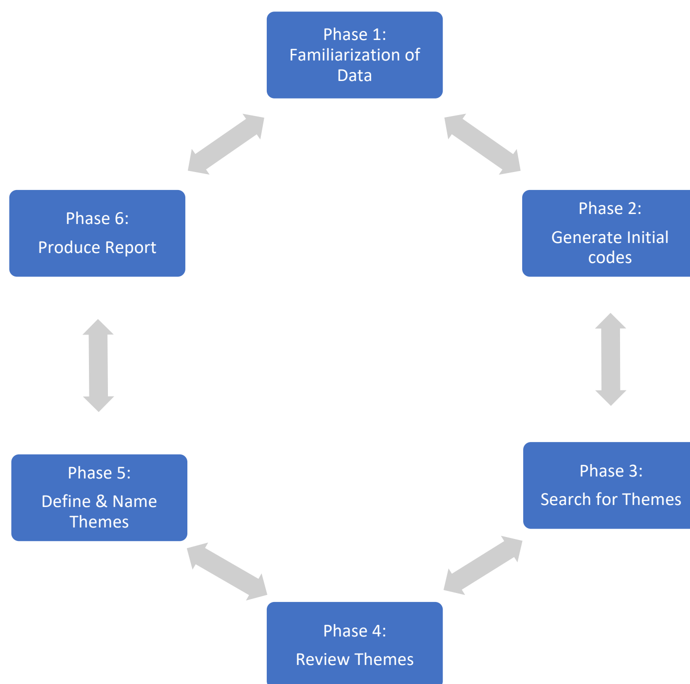


Figure 2
Steps in Thematic Analysis. Adapted from "Using thematic analysis in psychology" by Braun, V., & Clarke, V., 2006.

Phase one: Familiarization with the data. In phase one of the data analysis, the researcher familiarized himself with the breadth and depth of the data. First, all interviews were transcribed. As mentioned above, the researcher read the transcripts while listening to the audio recordings to (a) ensure the accuracy of the transcription, (b) to remind himself of the tone of the conversation, intonation and inflexion used, and (c) to better understand the context of the discussion and the points made. During this step, it was helpful for the researcher to consult his notes made in the margins of the interview protocol, and to further reflect on the emerging themes and patterns. The researcher exported all the survey data from Survey Gizmo and thoroughly reviewed the open text responses as well.

Once the above steps were completed, the open text survey responses and the transcripts were imported into NVivo 12. Then, a classification sheet containing the demographic information of participants (e.g., role in school, school size) was created and imported into NVivo 12; this allowed the researcher to glean some context of the participant in question while coding their respective transcript, and when eventually analyzing the related excerpts.

Phase two: Generating initial codes. Next, each interview transcript was carefully read, and codes were generated with regard to the experiences of educators in supporting LGBTQ youth. "A good code is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon" and it should be intuitive enough so that other coders might define it similarly (Boyatzis, 1998, p. x). The purpose of coding is to find the evidence for themes – coding is not theme generation itself (Braun, Clarke, Terry, & Hayfield, 2017). The coding was done inductively based on the researcher's familiarization of the data: "inductive coding and theme development involves working 'bottom up' from the data, and developing codes (and ultimately themes) using what is in the data as the starting point" (Braun et al., 2017, p. 22).

At first, codes were generated liberally and specifically as they related to the research questions of the study; as more codes were generated, and using the functionality of NVivo 12, some were merged with others and/or renamed.

Phase three: Searching for themes. The next phase involved beginning the process of organizing codes and their relevant excerpts from the transcripts into meaningful groups, themes, sub-themes, and patterns. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 10) define a theme as "something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set." The process began with exporting the collation of individual codes from NVivo 12 to a file; each file was then printed. Then, those

excerpts were read, themes/sub-themes and patterns were tentatively generated (by making notes in the margins), and links were noted between the themes/sub-themes and patterns. A goal of this phase was to go beyond the semantic content of the data (i.e., a surface level description of what the participants said) and into latent levels of analysis (i.e., examining underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, for latent thematic analysis, the development of the themes and sub-themes themselves involves interpretive work (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase four: Reviewing themes. In the previous phase, the researcher analyzed the data (i.e., codes, excerpts) looking for recurring regularities; that process is known as *convergence* (Patton, 2015). The researcher then judged the categories based on two criteria: 1) internal homogeneity (i.e., how well the data within a certain category – or theme/sub-theme – holds together in a meaningful way), and 2) external heterogeneity (i.e., the extent to which the differences between categories are bold and clear; Patton, 2015). This process was continued in phase five.

Peer debriefing was an essential component in this phase as the researcher collaborated with his colleagues to make decisions about the internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity of themes. In order to do so, an analysis meeting was held in which the researcher, his colleague from the PhD program, and the two graduate students wrote all the themes and sub-themes they had generated on cue cards. Each member of the group shared their insights and rationale for the themes/sub-themes they had generated, as well as excerpts that embodied those themes. The group collaboratively organized the cue cards on a large table and reordered them until a consensus was achieved about the internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity of themes and their subthemes. An example of this process can be found in Appendix F.

Phase five: Defining and naming themes. Phase five involved refining the themes, analyzing their related excerpts, and generating clear definitions for them. An effort was made to clearly state what was unique and specific about each theme and summarize its essence in just a few sentences.

The peer debriefing process continued in this phase. A password-protected collaborative document was created by the researcher and shared with the peer debriefing members. Within the document, themes/sub-themes, their definitions, and relevant excerpts were detailed. All group members were encouraged to continue to rework the themes/sub-themes and further refine their definitions, and then add to the body of related excerpts. Once that process was completed, the document was presented for feedback to the research team composed of the researcher, a Ph.D. student in counselling psychology, and three university professors. The research team recommended a reworking of the theme titles so that they better encapsulated the many, and sometimes excessive number of sub-themes. In response to the appropriate and helpful feedback, theme titles were reconsidered and reworked to be more inclusive of the sub-themes within.

Phase six: Producing the report. In this phase, the final analysis of the data was completed and the report was written based on that analysis.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide a detailed account of the methodological approach used by the researcher in this study and how the data was analyzed. By using an inductive TA approach, the researcher strived to identify themes and patterns with regard to the ways in which educators support LGBTQ youth in schools, and the barriers they face in doing so. In this way, the translated results from this study could be made useful to educators who wish to implement

strategies to support LGBTQ youth, or who wish to anticipate barriers to doing so and/or surmount existing ones.

Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the roles of educators in supporting LGBTQ youth in schools, the contributions they make in that regard, as well as the barriers they face. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from 56 online surveys and 17 semi-structured in-depth interviews with educators. All participants were assigned a numeric code/pseudonym. This is followed by an overview and presentation of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews.

The six themes and their subthemes developed from our analysis of the interview data are presented below in Table 1:

Table 1:
Overview of Themes and Sub-themes Developed Through Thematic Analysis of Interview Transcripts

Themes	Sub-themes
1: Lack of Awareness	1.1: Lack of training. 1.2: Lack of representation. 1.3: Lack of confidence in supporting LGBTQ youth. 1.4: Training aspirations.
2: The Role of Inclusive Language	2.1: Lack of awareness toward LGBTQ-affirmative language. 2.2: Difficulty with appropriate terminology. 2.3: Creating inclusive spaces through language use. 2.4: Educating others on appropriate language.
3: The Role of Inclusive Curriculum in Support of LGBTQ Youth	3.1: Lack of representation. 3.2: Creating safe spaces through curriculum.

	3.3: Barriers to infusing LGBTQ-affirmative content. 3.4: Efforts to surmount barriers.
4: The Role of Educators as Allies	4.1: Role-models. 4.2: Teachers' ally work. 4.3: The Safe Contact. 4.4: Administrators' ally work.
5: Situational Factors as Barriers to Supporting LGBTQ Youth	5.1: Religious barriers. 5.2: Parental opposition. 5.3: Anti-LGBTQ student behaviours. 5.4: Educators addressing situational factors.
6: Supporting LGBTQ Youth Though GSAs	6.1: Facilitating connectedness through GSAs. 6.2: Empowering LGBTQ youth through GSAs. 6.3: Raising awareness about the GSA. 6.4: Barriers to successful GSAs.

As this study is concerned with the roles educators assume in support of LGBTQ youth, the unique contributions those educators make, as well as the barriers they face, the themes and sub-themes presented reflect educators' experiences with respect to those areas.

Quantitative Results

The demographic background of survey participants is presented in Table 2. Amongst all respondents, 64.9% reported their primary role as *teacher*, 15.6% as *school counsellor*, 6.5% as *other school personnel*, 5.2% as *school psychologist*, 5.2% as *administrator*, and 2.6% as *teaching assistants*.

Regarding the gender reported by survey respondents, 87% identified as *female*, 7.8% identified as *male,* and 5.2% selected *neither of those options apply to me.*

Regarding the age reported of survey respondents, 45.5% were between the ages of 30-39 years, 29.9% between the ages of 40-49 years, 14.3% between the ages of 20-29 years, and 10.4% between the ages of 50-59 years.

Regarding the level of school in which the survey respondents worked in their role, 46.8% reported working in *Senior High School*, 28.6% in *Junior High School*, and 24.7% in *Elementary School*.

Regarding the geographical setting of the school in which the survey respondents worked, 54.5% reported working in an *urban* setting school, 31.2% in a *rural* setting, and 14.3% in a *suburban* setting.

Regarding the student population of the school in which the survey respondents worked, 28.6% reported a student population of *251-500*, 28.6% reported a student population of *500-750,* 18.2% reported a student population of *250 or less*, 10.4% reported a student population of *750-1000*, 10.4% reported a student population of *1001-1500*, 2.6% reported a student population of *1501-2000*, and 1.3% reported a student population of *2000 or above*.

Regarding the highest level of education obtained by survey respondents, 57.1% reported having a *bachelor's degree*, 40.3% reported having a *master's degree*, and 2.6% reported having a *doctoral degree*.

Regarding the specialized training survey respondents had obtained in their roles, 39% reported having *certification,* 37.7% reported having a *master's degree,* 20.8% reported having a *diploma,* and 2.6% reported having a *Ph.D.*

Regarding the number of years that survey respondents had been working in the primary role they identified (e.g., teacher, administrator), 61% reported *six or more years,* 18.2% reported *three to six years,* 15.6% reported *one to three years,* and 5.2% reported *less than one year.*

Table 2
Demographic Background of Survey Participants

Characteristic	*n*	Percentage
Role		
Administrator	4	5.2
Other School Personnel	5	6.5
School Counsellor	12	15.6
School Psychologist	4	5.2
Teacher	50	64.9
Teaching Assistant	2	2.6
Gender		
Female	67	87
Male	6	7.8
Neither of those options apply to me.	4	5.2
Age		
20 – 29;	11	14.3
30 – 39;	35	45.5
40 – 49;	23	29.9
50 – 59:	8	10.4
Level of school in which you currently work in your role:		
Elementary School	19	24.7
Junior High School	22	28.6
Senior High School	36	46.8
School’s geographical setting:		
Rural	24	31.2
Suburban	11	14.3
Urban	42	54.5
Student population in the school where you are currently employed:		
250 or less	14	18.2
251 – 500	22	28.6
500 – 750	22	28.6
750 – 1000	8	10.4
1001 – 1500	8	10.4
1501 – 2000	2	2.6
2000 or above	1	1.3
Your highest level of education:		
Bachelor’s degree	44	57.1
Master’s degree	31	40.3

Doctoral degree	2	2.6
Specialized training obtained in your role:		
Certification	30	39
Diploma	16	20.8
Master's Degree	29	37.7
PhD	2	2.6
Years working in the current primary role selected:		
Less than one year	4	5.2
One to three years	12	15.6
Three to six years	14	18.2
Six or more years	47	61

Survey respondents were asked to report on their feelings about the training they had received with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth (See Figure 3). When asked about how well they felt their specialized training prepared them to support LGBTQ youth in regard to the development and maintenance of an inclusive and safe learning culture, 9.1% of survey respondents reported *thoroughly*, 24.7% reported *adequately*, 42.9% reported *inadequately*, and 23.4% reported *not at all*.

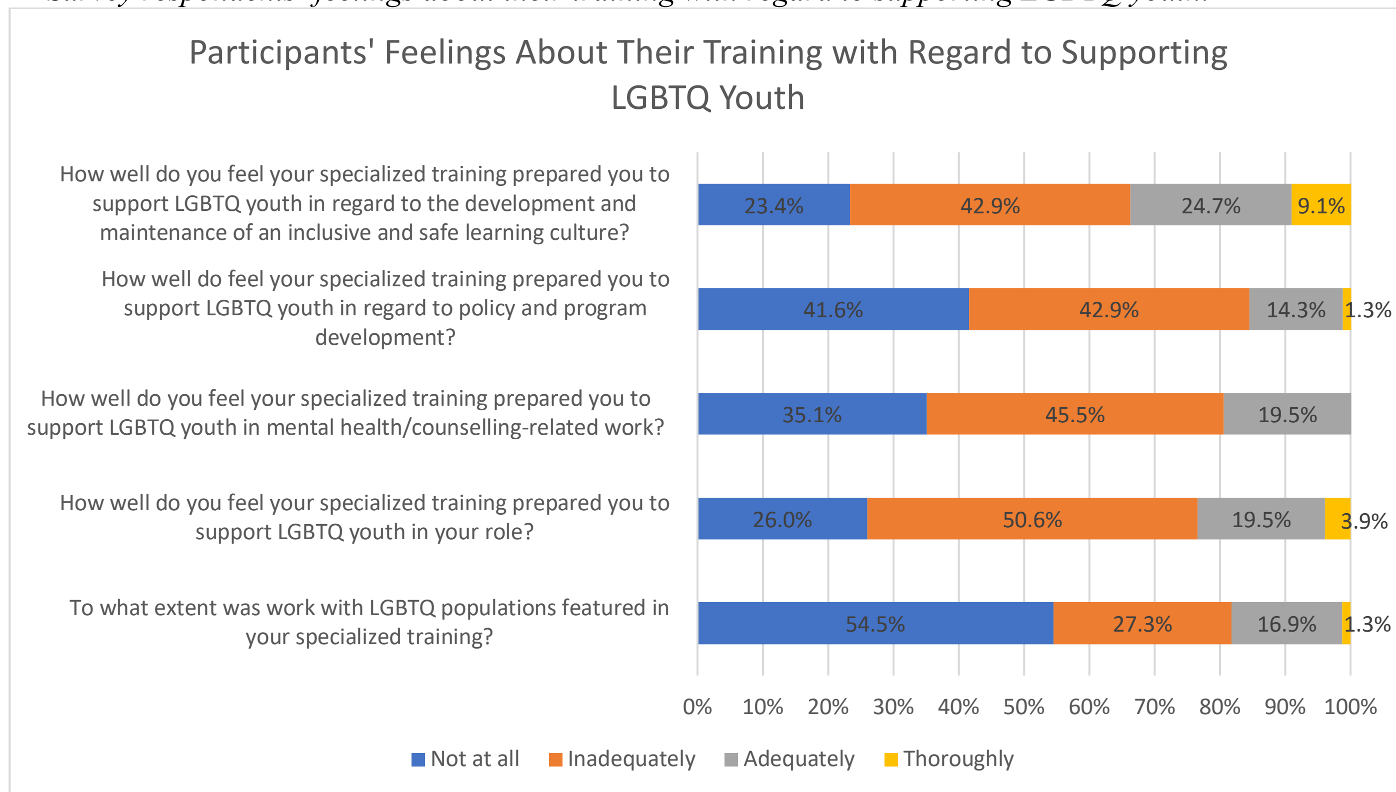
When survey respondents were asked about how well they felt their specialized training prepared them to support LGBTQ youth in regard to policy and program development, 1.3% reported *thoroughly*, 14.3% reported *adequately*, 42.9% reported *inadequately*, and 41.6% reported *not at all* (Figure 3).

When survey respondents were asked about how well they felt their specialized training prepared them to support LGBTQ youth in mental health/counseling-related work, no respondents reported *thoroughly*, 19.5% reported *adequately*, 45.5% reported *inadequately*, and 35.1% reported *not at all* (Figure 3).

When survey respondents were asked about how well they felt their specialized training prepared them to support LGBTQ youth in their role, 3.9% reported *thoroughly*, 19.5% reported *adequately*, 50.6% reported *inadequately*, and 26% reported *not at all* (Figure 3).

When survey respondents were asked to what extent working with LGBTQ populations was featured in their specialized training, 1.3% reported *thoroughly*, 16.9% reported *adequately*, 27.3% reported *inadequately*, and 54.5% reported *not at all* (Figure 3).

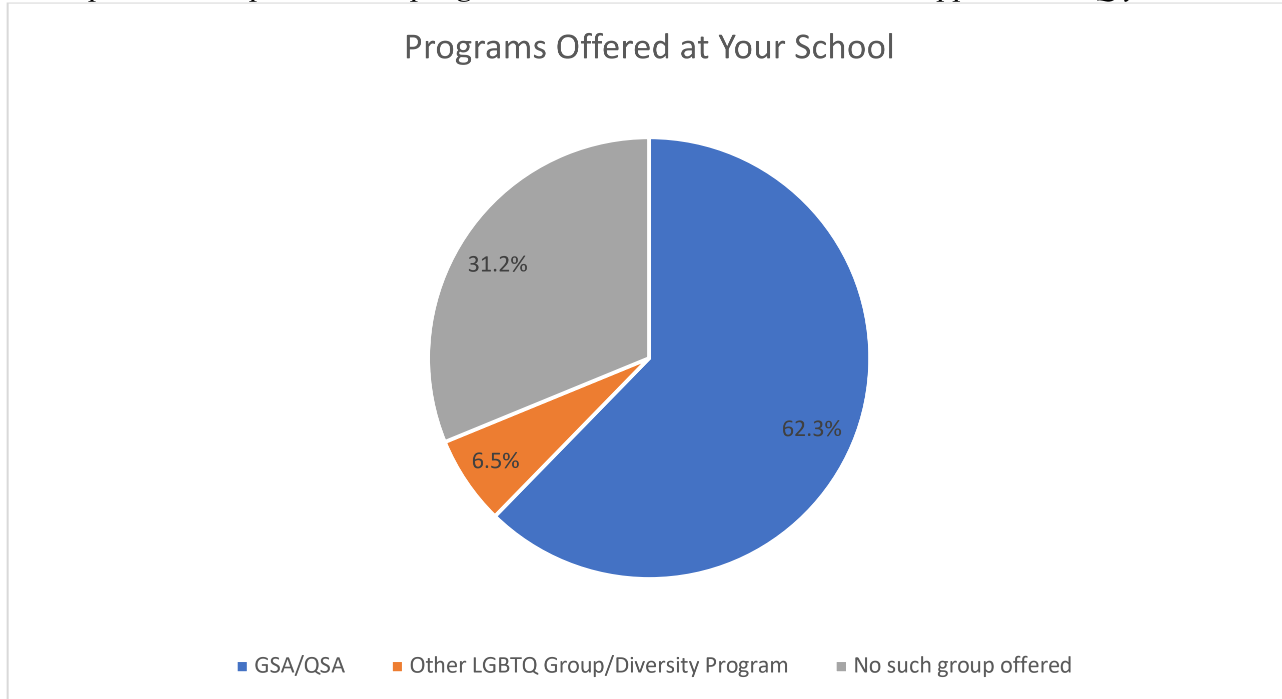
Figure 3
Survey respondents' feelings about their training with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth.



Survey respondents were asked to report on the programs to support LGBTQ youth available in their school (Figure 4). Among survey respondents, 62.3% reported having a *Gay-Straight Alliance* or *Queer-Straight Alliance* in their school, 6.5% reported *other LGBTQ Group/Diversity Program,* and 31.2% reported *no such group offered.*

Figure 4

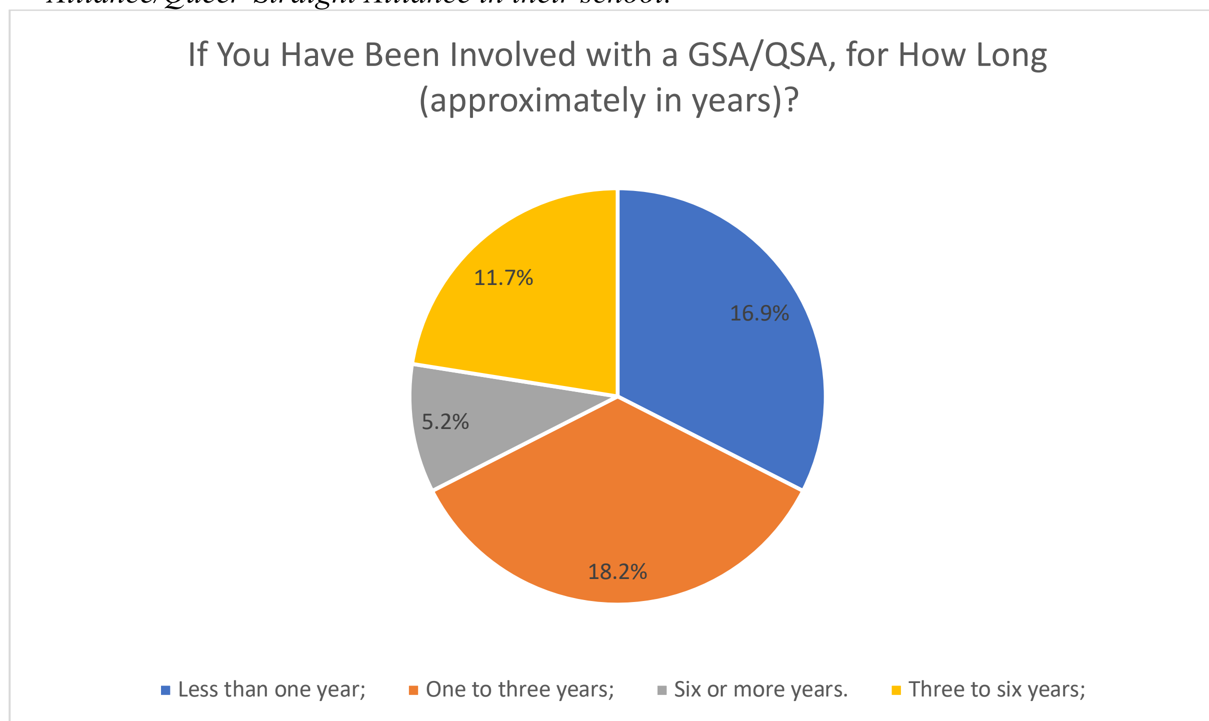
Respondents' reports on the programs available in their schools to support LGBTQ youth.



Survey respondents were asked to report the amount of time (in years) they were involved in a school group to support LGBTQ youth (Figure 5). Amongst survey respondents, 18.2% reported being involved with such a group for one to three years, 16.9% reported an involvement of less than one year, 11.7% reported an involvement of three to six years, and 5.2% reported an involvement of six or more years.

Figure 5

Amount of time (in years) survey respondents were involved with the Gay-Straight Alliance/Queer-Straight Alliance in their school.

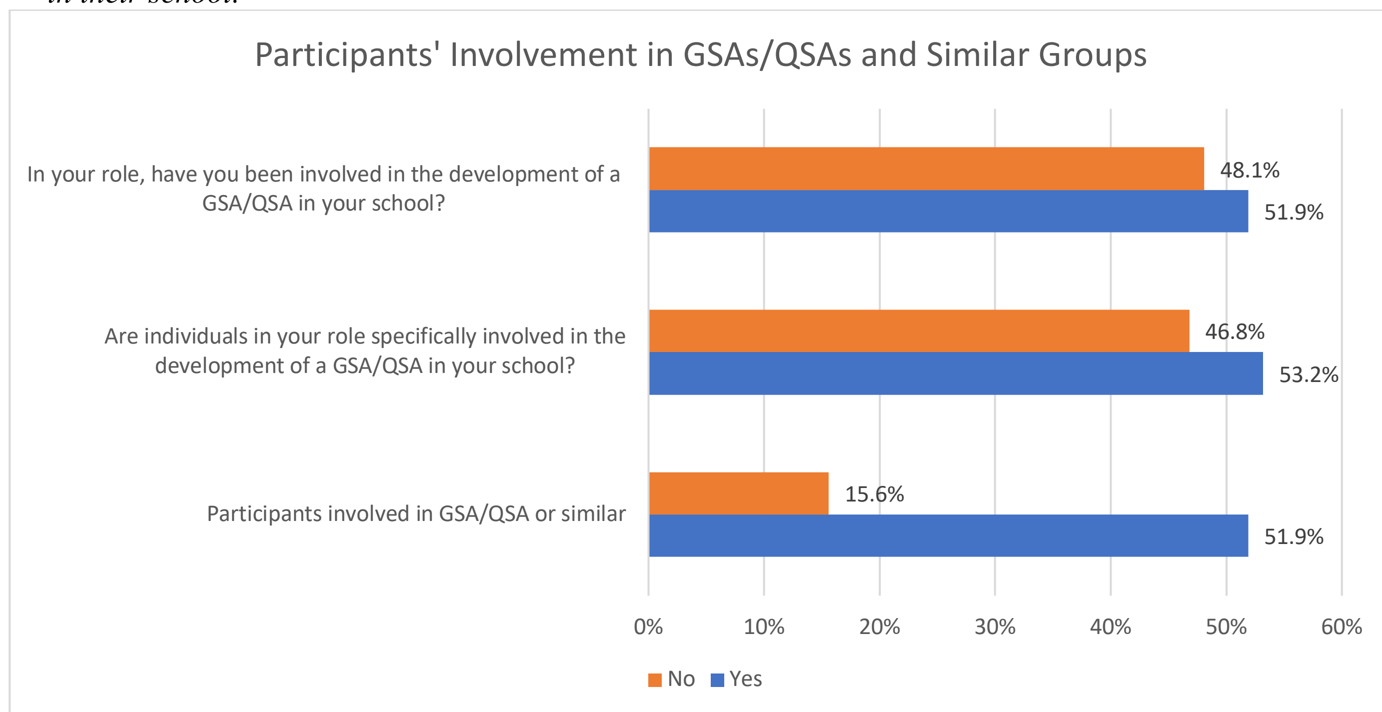


Survey respondents were asked to report the nature of their involvement with a group to support LGBTQ youth in their school (Figure 6). Survey respondents were asked if they were involved in a GSA/QSA or similar group in their school. Among survey respondents, 51.9% reported that they were involved in a GSA/QSA or similar group, 15.6% reported that they had no such involvement (Figure 6).

Amongst survey respondents, 51.9% reported that they had been involved with their school's GSA/QSA, 48.1% had not (Figure 6).

Survey respondents were asked if individuals in their role were specifically involved in the development of a GSA/QSA in their school. Among survey respondents, 53.2% reported that they had been involved in the development of a GSA/QSA, 46.8% had not been involved (Figure 6).

Figure 6
Nature of the participants' involvement with the Gay-Straight Alliance/Queer-Straight Alliance in their school.

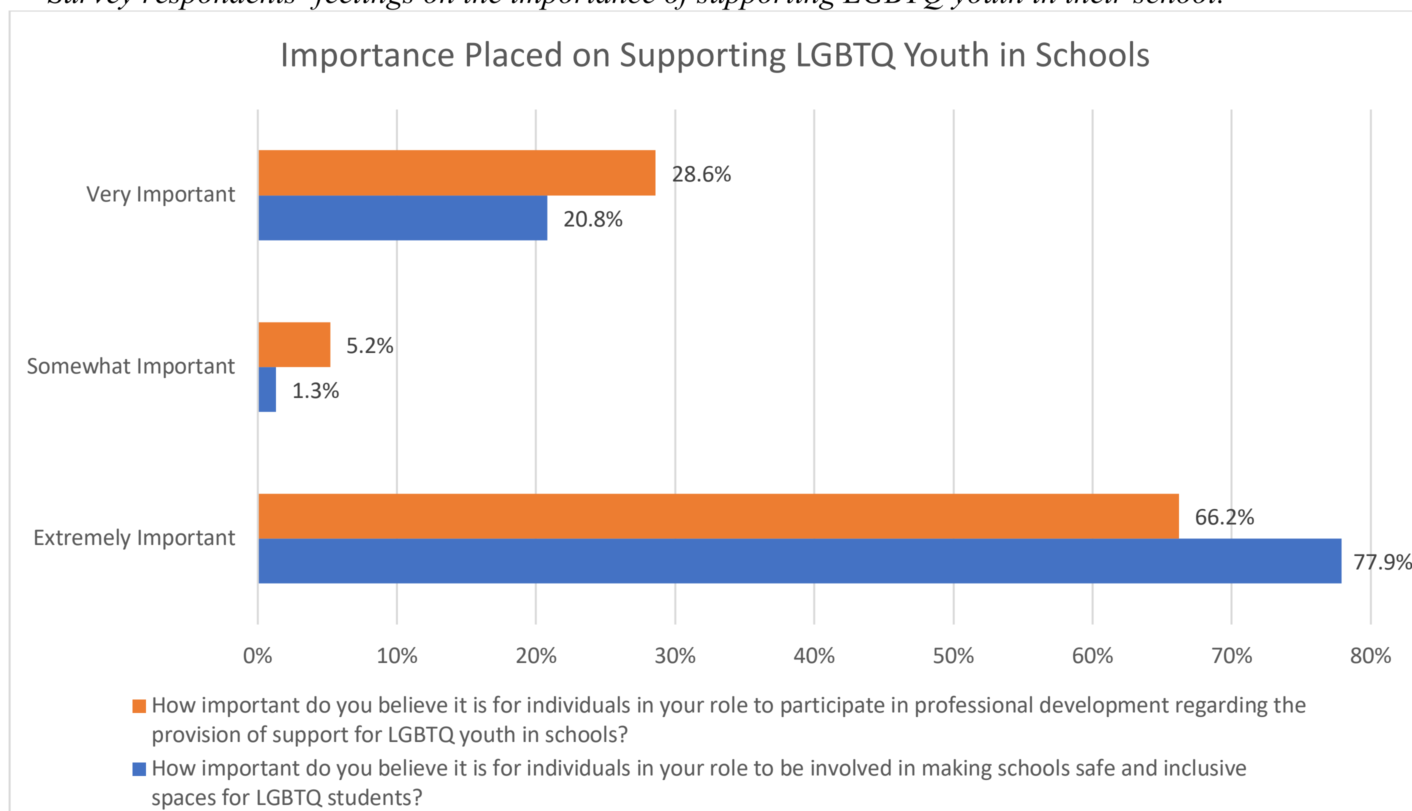


Survey respondents were asked to report on how important they felt it was to support LGBTQ youth in their school (Figure 7). When survey respondents were asked how important they felt it was for individuals and their role to be involved in making schools safe and inclusive for LGBTQ students, 77.9% reported that it was *extremely important*, 20.8% reported that it was *very important*, and 1.3% reported that it was *somewhat important*. No participants selected the *not important at all* option (Figure 7).

When survey respondents were asked how important they felt it was for individuals in their role to participate in professional development regarding the provision of support for LGBTQ youth in schools, 66.2% reported it as *extremely important*, 28.6% reported it as *very important*, and 5.2% reported it *somewhat important*. No respondents selected the option not *important at all* (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Survey respondents' feelings on the importance of supporting LGBTQ youth in their school.



Survey respondents were asked to report on the level of support they experienced from other members of the school community with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth (Figure 8).

Regarding the level of support survey respondents experienced by school psychologists, 31.2% reported feeling *extremely supported,* 22.1% reported feeling *very supported*, 24.7% reported feeling *somewhat supported*, 22.1% reported feeling *not supported all* (Figure 8).

Regarding the level of support survey respondents experienced by school counsellors, 37.7% reported feeling *extremely supported*, 35.1% reported feeling *very supported*, 23.4% reported feeling *somewhat supported*, and 3.9% reported feeling *not supported at all* (Figure 8).

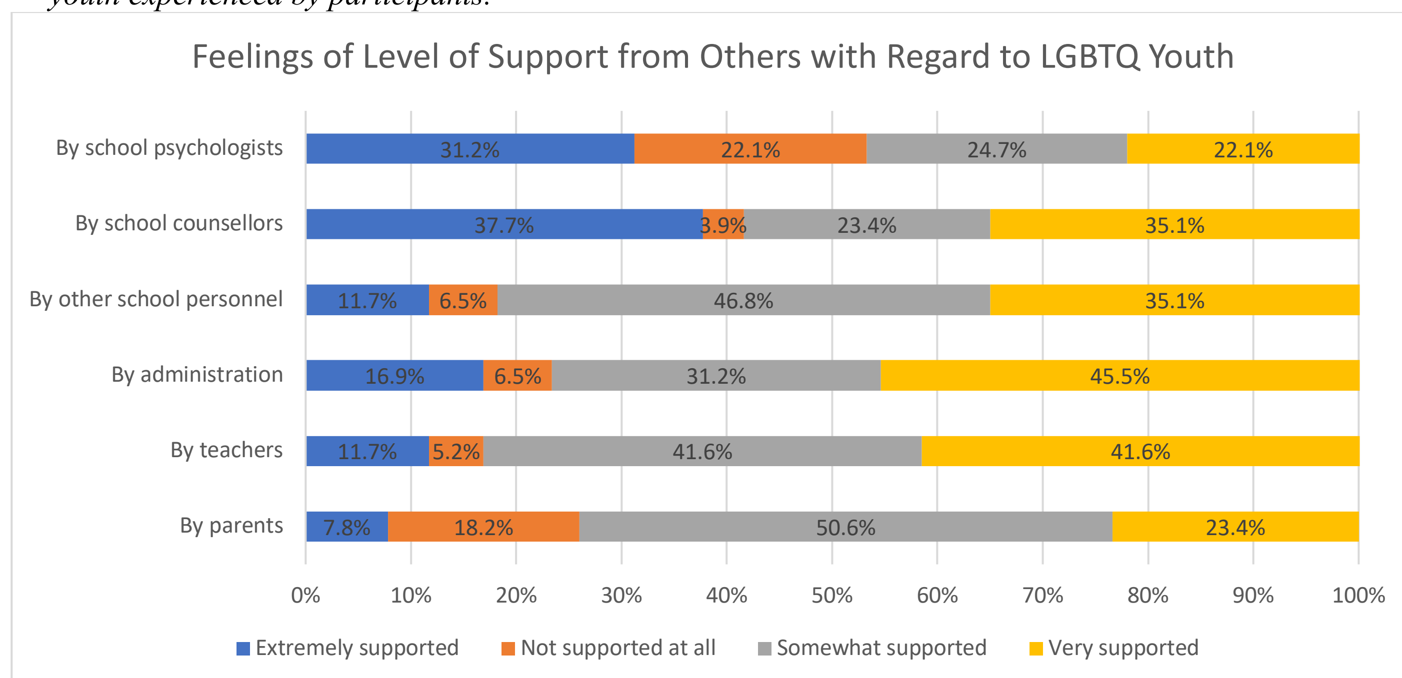
Regarding the level of support survey respondents experienced by other school personnel, 11.7% reported feeling *extremely supported*, 35.1% reported feeling *very supported*, 46.8% reported feeling *somewhat supported*, and 6.5% reported feeling *not supported at all* (Figure 8).

Regarding the level of support survey respondents experienced by administration, 16.9% reported feeling *extremely supported*, 45.5% reported feeling *very supported*, 31.2% reported feeling *somewhat supported*, and 6.5% reported feeling *not supported at all* (Figure 8).

Regarding the level of support survey respondents experienced by teachers, 11.7% reported feeling *extremely supported*, 41.6% reported feeling *very supported*, 41.6% reported feeling *somewhat supported*, and 5.2% reported feeling *not supported at all* (Figure 8).

Regarding the level of support survey respondents experienced by parents, 7.8% reported feeling *extremely supported*, 23.4% reported feeling *very supported*, 56% reported feeling *somewhat supported*, and 18.2% reported feeling *not supported at all* (Figure 8).

Figure 8
Level of Support from other members of the school community with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth experienced by participants.



Qualitative Analysis

The following section begins with an analysis and synthesis of some of the open text comments provided by survey respondents. Then, a description is provided about each of the six themes and their sub-themes that reflect the educators' experiences in supporting LGBTQ youth in schools, and the barriers they face in doing so. I have presented a broad range of educators' experiences to promote the reader's understanding of the situational diversity and complexity in which educators find themselves with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth, including the barriers those educators encounter in their efforts. Further, I have identified verbatim examples (i.e., excerpts) from the educators' stories to provide textual expressions/exemplars of the identified theme.

Qualitative Analysis of Open Text Comments on Surveys

Many of the online survey questions allowed respondents to select from a set of responses (e.g., Likert scale) and then offer further optional comments using text. Some additional questions from the online survey solicited optional responses only in the form of open text. The following section reports on the open text comments made by educators through the online survey; a summary of those comments is found in Table 3.

In the data analysis process, the open text comments mostly served to inform the themes generated through thematic analysis of the interview data. However, some of the quotable excerpts are reported below.

Table 3
Qualitative Analysis of Open Text Comments Made by Educators on Surveys

Survey Question	Number of Open Text Responses	General Summary of Responses
To what extent was work with LGBTQ populations	8	Respondents generally stated that they had received very little training to support LGBTQ

featured in your specialized training?		youth; some respondents commented that they had pursued professional development in that area, or learned through experience supporting LGBTQ youth.
How well do you feel your specialized training prepared you to support LGBTQ youth in your role?	7	Respondents generally commented that they had received no training to support LGBTQ youth.
How well do you feel your specialized training prepared you to support LGBTQ youth in mental health/counselling-related work?	6	Respondents generally commented that they were not suited to supported LGBTQ youth in mental health/counselling-related work. One respondent commented that the need for this type of training is increasing for teachers – not just for counsellors.
How well do you feel your specialized training prepared you to support LGBTQ youth in regard to policy and program development?	6	Respondents generally commented that they were not prepared to support LGBTQ youth in regard to policy and program development.
How well do you feel your specialized training prepared you to support LGBTQ youth in regard to the development and maintenance of an inclusive and safe learning culture?	6	Most respondents deferred to their previous comments (i.e., that their training had been inadequate/they were not prepared to support LGBTQ youth).
In what areas (e.g., mental health/counselling, policy/program development, inclusive curriculum, etc.) with regard to LGBTQ youth do you feel most prepared?	54	Respondents generally commented that they felt unprepared to support LGBTQ youth. Some respondents commented that they had sought professional development opportunities, and as a result, feel they can create a safe classroom environment for LGBTQ youth. Some respondents commented that their professional experiences prior to teaching (e.g., social worker) helped prepare them to support LGBTQ youth. Some respondents commented that they were supporting LGBTQ youth through the GSA they lead.
What other professional development or related opportunities have prepared	54	Respondents generally listed helpful professional development opportunities they have sought: (e.g., Egale Canada Conference, Alberta Teachers' Association Equity and Human Rights

you in supporting LGBTQ youth, if any?		Conference, Alberta Teachers' Association PRISM Workshop).
In supporting LGBTQ youth, what areas do you feel you could develop further?	54	Respondents commented on wanting to develop skills to support and teach their colleagues about gender and sexually-diverse youth. Many respondents also wished to better understand the terminology about gender and sexually-diverse identities.
Check any of the following that are offered at your school (*Gay Straight Alliance/Queer Straight Alliance/Other LGBTQ/Diversity Program/Group)*	34	Respondents commented with the following: Gay-Straight Alliance, DEHR to Care, Diversity Club.
If any of the above is offered at your school, are you involved with it in some capacity?	7	Most respondents who commented said they led the GSA or supported it in some way.
If you answered "Yes" above, describe the nature of your involvement:	28	Respondents mostly commented that they led or co-led the GSA or similar (e.g., GLOW Club).
If you have been involved with a GSA/QSA, for how long (approximately in years)?	2	Respondents clarified that their GSA club had only recently started.
What do you believe makes for a safe and inclusive learning environment in school?	54	Respondents generally eluded to an environment in which all students and staff feel respected and part of the community. Respondents also commented on the need to have staff consistently support students and address homophobia.
How important do you believe it is for individuals in your role to be involved in making schools safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ students?	4	Respondents commented on the need for positive adult role-models (e.g., LGBTQ-affirmative staff) in school.
How might individuals in your role uniquely contribute to making learning and	54	Respondents commented on the importance of educators being advocates for LGBTQ youth, and demonstrating openness toward those individuals. Some respondents commented that

involvement in school safe and inclusive for LGBTQ students?		having an environment in which students and teachers feel safe to come out is important. Respondents commented that more staff should seek professional development to support LGBTQ youth. Respondents commented that staff must be consistent in supporting LGBTQ youth (e.g., consistently addressing homophobic comments from students, posting Safe Space stickers).
In what ways do you currently support LGBTQ youth at your school?	54	Respondents commented that they try to create a safe classroom space for all students, call out homophobic language, use inclusive language, lead GSAs, and serve as the school's Safe Contact.
In your role, how do you uniquely contribute to the development of a safe and inclusive learning culture and spaces for LGBTQ students in your school?	54	Respondents generally commented on their advocacy role for inclusive practices (e.g., using inclusive language, posting displays depicting diverse individuals), serving as a trusted contact for LGBTQ youth, serving as a GSA advisor, and maintaining a safe classroom for all students.
In your opinion, what helps the development of a successful GSA/QSA within a school?	54	Respondents commented that education and training is helpful to students and staff who take part in the GSA. Respondents commented that active and consistent student leadership is needed, as well as a staff advisor who can support that consistency. Respondents commented that having supportive teachers of the club is important, as well as supportive administration.
In your opinion, what hinders the development of a successful GSA/QSA within a school?	54	Respondents commented that a lack of support from administration, inconsistent attendance, reluctance from non-minority staff to participate/be supportive, lack of feelings of safety amongst teachers (e.g., fear of being outed, fear of being labeled "gay," fear of community backlash), and students' fear of being outed are factors that can hinder the development of a successful GSA.
In your opinion, what contributes to the ongoing maintenance of a GSA/QSA within a school?	54	Respondents commented that supportive staff, GSA members who take on a leadership role and who are committed, supportive administration, a supportive school community, and having meaningful and relevant activities contribute to successful GSAs.

How might individuals in your role specifically contribute to the development of GSAs/QSAs or equivalent in schools?	54	Respondents commented that they could support the development of GSAs by advocating for LGBTQ youth to administration, remaining informed about laws and legislation that support GSAs, seek professional development on the maintenance of a GSA, and communicating openness to students.
Are individuals in your role specifically involved in the development of a GSA/QSA in your school?	10	Respondents generally expressed concerns about a lack of support for a GSA (e.g., a student has not requested one, administration is unsupportive, it is not accepted in the primary school).
If "Yes", how are they involved?	32	Most respondents commented that they were a leader or co-leader of the GSA.
If "No", why are they not involved?	22	Respondents commented that administration has not sanctioned the GSA, and that there is resistance from the community.
In your role, have you been involved in the development of a GSA/QSA in your school? If "No" to Question 34, what has stopped you from becoming involved?	27	Respondents commented that the need for a GSA is not clear, that time does not permit, and that they do not feel sufficiently prepared to develop a GSA.
If "Yes" to Question 34, what have you contributed?	27	Most respondents commented on their contribution to the GSA as staff supervisor.
If "Yes" to Question 34, what has been helpful to you?	27	Respondents commented that community resources (e.g., Woods Homes, Alberta GSA Network, the Alberta Teachers' Association resources), and support from colleagues and administration have been helpful.
If "Yes" to Question 34, what challenges have you faced?	27	Respondents generally commented that unsupportive administration and teacher colleagues, an anti-LGBTQ/conservative/religious environment/culture, and parent backlash have posed challenges.
If "Yes" to Question 34, what would have been helpful were it available?	27	Respondents commented that connections with LGBTQ-affirmative organizations in the community, supportive and educated (i.e., about LGBTQ issues) administration, evidence of successful LGBTQ-affirmative actions in other schools, and more district in-service training would be helpful.

How important do you believe it is for individuals in your role to participate in professional development regarding the provision of support for LGBTQ youth in schools?	3	Respondents commented that professional development on supporting LGBTQ youth is necessary for all teachers.
How supported do you feel you are in your efforts to support LGBTQ youth?	14	Respondents commented that in some circumstances they feel supported by parents, teachers, administrators, school psychologists, school counsellors, other school personnel, and in others they do not. Also, some respondents commented that their school did not have access to school psychologists with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth.
Further comments:	8	Respondents expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this research.

When educators surveyed were asked about how their training prepared them to support LGBTQ youth, their comments generally indicated that they had received very little training in that regard. As an anonymous survey respondent stated, “There was no training specific to LGBTQ youth in any of my teacher education courses, or during my master’s degree, or Ph.D. I have sought out research and PD (professional development) on my own since then.”

When educators surveyed were asked how they made unique contributions in their role to support LGBTQ youth, many commented on the efforts they made to create safe and inclusive classrooms. One survey respondent expressed how she created a safe and inclusive space for her LGBTQ students through the curriculum she teaches:

> [I talk] about diversity within families and relationships, integrating LGBTQ+ topics or examples in curriculum, being a role model with Inclusive language and actions. Normalizing the words Lesbian, Gay, discussing heteronormativity and privilege, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

Some educators surveyed shared specific strategies they employ to support LGBTQ youth. One survey respondent shared a strategy for building self-advocacy and communication skills through mentorship of younger LGBTQ youth by older LGBTQ youth. Their comment was in reference to supporting LGBTQ youth when they have experienced invalidating treatment from a teacher:

> The best way around it so far is to buddy up younger students with older students who are strong communicators to coach the kids in conflict resolution or self-advocacy. I am still there to support or step in, but the older student will usually spare me the gritty details so there are no professionalism issues.

When educators surveyed were asked about the barriers they experienced in supporting LGBTQ youth, they often commented on the lack of support they received from other members of the school community, or hindrances they experienced with regard to the culturally or religiously conservative communities they worked in. As one anonymous survey respondent stated with respect to the barriers they experience:

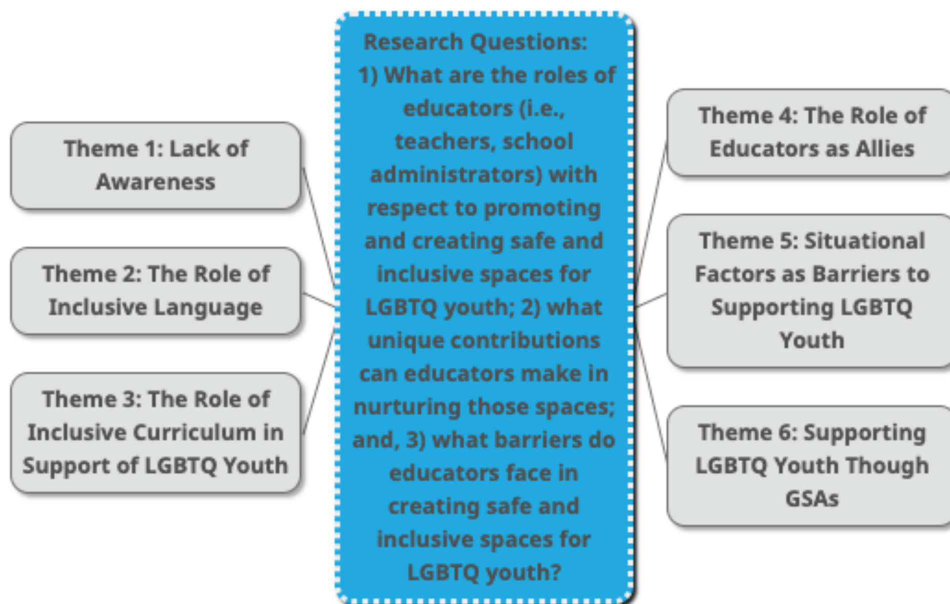
> Lack of respect of decor and not being able to put our [rainbow] flag in a central gathering area. I've also been asked to take a large majority of the safe spaces and LGBTQ boards/flags/posters down when the archbishop is coming to visit our school so as not to make him mad.

When asked about what hinders the ongoing maintenance of a GSA within a school, one survey respondent stated: "Staff turnover and graduation of particularly activist students."

Qualitative Analysis of Interview Transcript Data

Figure 9

Themes generated through Thematic Analysis based on survey responses and educator interviewee responses.



The following section presents the themes generated through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as they related to the research questions of this study. Each theme generated provides insight and context to at least one of the research questions in this study.

Theme 1 (Lack of Awareness) relates to *what barriers do educators face in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth?*

Theme 2 (The Role of Inclusive Language) relates to *what unique contributions can educators make in nurturing those spaces,* and, *what barriers do educators face in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth?*

Theme 3 (The Role of Inclusive Curriculum in Supporting LGBTQ Youth) relates to *what unique contributions can educators make in nurturing those spaces,* and, *what barriers do educators face in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth?*

Theme 4 (The Role of Educators as Allies) relates to all three research questions in this study.

Theme 5 (Situational Factors as Barriers to Supporting LGBTQ Youth) relates to *what unique contributions can educators make in nurturing those spaces,* and, *what barriers do educators face in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth?*

Theme 6 (Supporting LGBTQ Youth Through GSAs) relates to all three research questions in this study.

Theme 1: Lack of Awareness

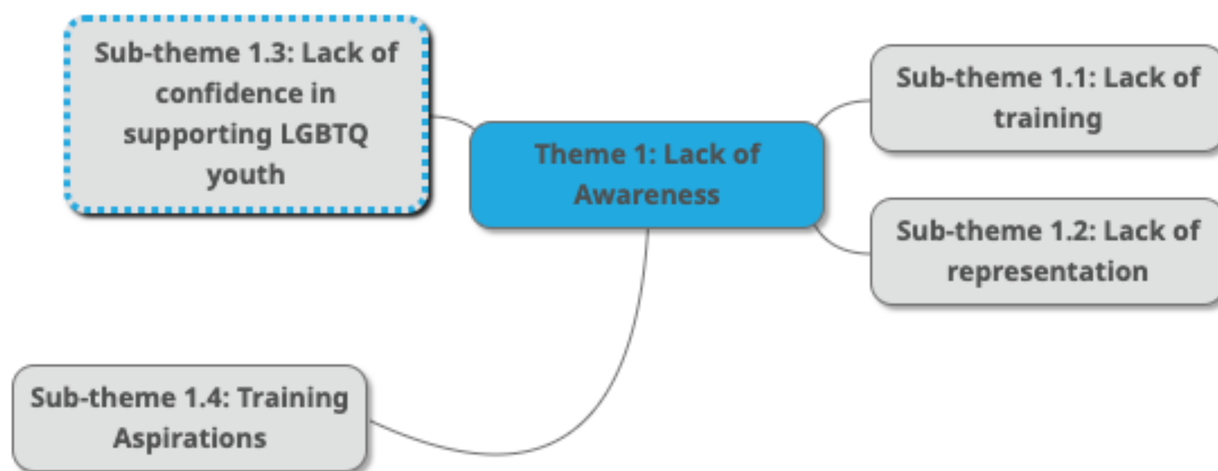


Figure 10
Theme 1 and its sub-themes relate to educators' lack of awareness about LGBTQ issues, some aspirations they have for training, and efforts they have made to support LGBTQ youth.

The first theme and its sub-themes address the level of awareness and preparedness educators feel they have to support LGBTQ youth, and their perception of others' awareness and preparedness to address those same needs (Figure 10). The implications of that awareness were discussed/presented further by interviewees. In this theme, an awareness of LGBTQ issues not

only reflects the knowledge educators have and training completed in this area, but also their awareness of the training available within the school and community.

Sub-theme 1.1 addresses the training educators have received in the areas of sexual and gender diversity; a particular focus is placed on how well their pre-service teacher training covered issues surrounding sexual and gender diversity. Sub-theme 1.2 addresses the lack of representation of LGBTQ topics and individuals in teacher training and professional development, and as a result, in the school curriculum. Sub-theme 1.3 addresses the lack of confidence some educators experience in working with LGBTQ youth because of inadequate training, as well as a lack of awareness about the protections toward LGBTQ youth afforded by the school and the law. Sub-theme 1.4 addresses the training aspirations of LGBTQ educator allies (i.e., what kind of training they feel should be offered).

This theme has been included as it directly relates to a research question of this study. This study is concerned with the barriers educators face in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (i.e., Research Question 3). Among responses to surveys and in the interviews with educators, a lack of education and training regarding LGBTQ issues and how to address those issues emerged as a consistent barrier.

The survey asked specific questions with regard to the effectiveness of specialized teacher training in preparing educators to support LGBTQ youth as noted in the previous section; the interview questions probed deeper into this topic, with a focus on educators' pre-service training experiences, and eliciting comments surrounding the role of training and awareness in general for educators (i.e., teachers, administrators). Educators also commented on parents' awareness of the needs of LGBTQ youth, and the impact that awareness has on facilitating safe spaces.

Generally, educators reported a lack of preparedness through their training experiences to support LGBTQ youth. In response to an interview question regarding how much LGBTQ-related training an interviewee had received in her university education program, 005 summarizes the general perspective across other interviewees by stating, “No. Nothing. Zero. No.” Even educators who had pursued university studies beyond an undergraduate degree reported insufficient exposure to LGBTQ topics.

Interviewed educators expressed experiencing difficulties in finding the information they needed within the school itself to support LGBTQ youth or to further their own understanding. As a result, these educators indicated that they pursued their own related training. Further, as indicated in the interviews, when only few educators possess training in supporting LGBTQ youth, they could become the only source of support for those youth; as one survey respondent explains:

> [This] is why I’m doing my Masters in Counseling Psychology. Even our guidance counsellors do not have training or Masters degrees in Counseling. As the QSA teacher sponsor and only openly Queer teacher I am the main support for all staff and students...I am the main support for all LGBTQIA+ students in my school, guidance calls me with questions. Honestly, we need more teachers to be allies so that students don’t have to seek out just one teacher.

Interviewed educators also reported on their difficulty in finding professional development opportunities about supporting LGBTQ youth available within the community, as those opportunities were not advertised through their school or school board. 005 explains this by stating:

> There was nothing. I mean, there's starting to be some things in our district and stuff, but I really had to go search stuff out to get knowledge...I had to go and ask around and find out who was doing this and who was talking and where can I find this information.

Some of the interviewed educators commented on how they rely on their LGBTQ friends as sources of information: "I just do lots of reading and ask about readings and quite frankly I ask my LGBTQ+ adult acquaintances, 'Can I ask you?', 'Can I talk?' 'Where do I find this' kind of stuff?" (005).

Sub-theme 1.1: Lack of training. If LGBTQ topics were covered in pre-service training, educators generally responded that it was done superficially. As interviewee 010 mentioned, "...it seemed a little bit tokenish I guess, where it was mentioned maybe in one instructional period in one semester."

Interviewed participants often highlighted the importance of having school administrators who were trained to address the needs of LGBTQ youth in their school. Many interviewed participants commented that their administrators (e.g., school principal) lacked an awareness of the needs of LGBTQ youth. Of the three administrators interviewed, none could identify a training opportunity related to supporting LGBTQ youth specific to their role. When asked about training specific to the role of principals, 011, who is a principal in a large public high school, stated:

> No, not that I'm aware of. Other than the ability to phone our…office and ask what can I do about this situation. But as far as, like workshops, so that you just instinctively feel confident in it, not so much. I guess it's not too often that one

> would handle it completely alone. We bounce things off each other, but yeah, that's a gap too, I would say.

A number of interviewees indicated that a lack of awareness about the needs of LGBTQ youth on the part of parents can also perpetuate the victimization those youth face. Educators consistently commented on how the religious and conservative views of parents in the home influence their child's attitudes toward LGBTQ youth; parents may also be unaware of the negative influence and impact their language and behaviours may have. That can be evidenced in the intolerant and insensitive language some students use. Interviewee 011, who is a school administrator, commented:

> So just trying to educate parents on the words you say, the slang words, all that sort of stuff, kids are listening to that, little kids are listening to that. Like, I listened to my little pre-school neighbours the other day, and the little guy was…teasing the other kid that he autism, and that he was gay. And I thought, "You're four, where is he getting this stuff from?" It's not a school thing. So, parents need to be more cautious with their words.

Educators commented on situational factors (e.g., teaching in a Catholic school) that impacted the availability of training opportunities to them as well as how accessible those trainings are if they did exist. In the Alberta Catholic system, the sexual health curriculum falls under the purview of Religious Studies. Interviewee 022, an administrator in a Catholic elementary school, commented that LGBTQ-related training is "something that would never be on the PD agenda of workshops offered by the religious education department." Interviewee 008, a teacher in a Catholic school mentions how even the most basic training is not available to her:

> …we've had nothing, ever, no training. So, if we could have a school PD day where we just got basic tips on, you know, like, "You have LGBTQ students in your school, this is how you can make them feel welcome." I think that would be amazing.

Some interviewees noted that working as an educator in a rural community poses limitations to accessing training on supporting LGBTQ youth as there may be few local opportunities. As one rural educator put it in her interview, "Even if you, like on the Learning Network or like that, you know your PD money that's allocated to you every year, there isn't a lot that you can choose to go to" (003).

Some educators highlighted effective professional development opportunities that are available to all staff in their school board, and further noted that those trainings are not well-attended. For instance, interviewee 016, who teaches in an urban public school board of 650 teachers, said she was disappointed by the fact that only eight teachers attended a workshop about supporting LGBTQ youth. Interviewee 003, however, said that she is often given a five-minute slot in staff meetings to educate school staff on the needs of LGBTQ youth. She commented,

> …just giving me that five-minute blurb to kind of talk about what's changing, different books or different things you can incorporate into your classroom that show different types of families, different types of people. You know, having that five-minute spotlight to kind of expose people to how they could be drawing different worldviews into their class and just teaching them about all the new lingo and stuff like that.

Sub-theme 1.2: Lack of representation. Educators often indicated in their interviews that their teacher training was not completely devoid of diversity-related topics, but that those topics did not include issues surrounding LGBTQ-youth (i.e., lack of LGBTQ representation). As 003 commented in her interview:

> I remembered [there was] lot of focus in [my] teacher training about students with a variety of special needs but never once did we learn about, talk about, or discuss anything where it has to come with, you know, gender, sex, religion, anything like that.

As a result of this lack of training, educators highlighted a need to pursue self-directed opportunities to learn about how to support LGBTQ youth. As interviewee 016 mentioned:

> But diversity of students is not mandatory or was not a mandatory course when I was taking my education degree. And so, since then the only training I have received in LGBTQ students has been professional development that I have chosen to go to.

Ignorance regarding LGBTQ can also contribute to a misperception of the victimization and/or a minimization of the needs of those youth as noted by interviewee 017 who recounted an incident in her rural school in which the rainbow flag was vandalized during a GSA event. She commented on the minimization of the incident on the part of some staff:

> Because the rhetoric of, "Oh, those of you who are interpreting this as a hate crime, you're being overly sensitive." As opposed to, "No no, this flag represents pieces of these people's identities, and someone tried to light it on fire." That's...yeah, they feel unsafe, because it's quite possible that they *are* unsafe.

Some educators also commented on how there is a general misconception that only students in senior grades face issues related to gender and sexual diversity, and thus, those issues should not be addressed or are inappropriate to discuss with younger children. As interviewee 016 commented, "I would like elementary teachers especially to know [more information], because they tend to, in my personal opinion, view issues about LGBTQ students as being for junior high or senior high teachers. Which is completely untrue." Interviewee 005 commented that much of the resistance to addressing LGBTQ issues comes from elementary school educators when she states, "…especially in the younger grades, I find there's resistance. Like, 'I teach Kindergarten, I don't need to worry about this.' 'Yes you do.' Or, you know, 'They're not teenagers yet, they don't even know.' 'Yes, they do.'

As a result of misconceptions, some educators find themselves at odds with their colleagues in an effort to support their gender diverse students:

> …so it was difficult to get some staff to support us or to respect gender identities of the kids, and having such young kids, like in Grade 5, some pushback was that they're so young they don't know their gender identity at that age, which is obviously total bullshit.

Sub-theme 1.3: Lack of confidence in supporting LGBTQ youth. Some educators commented on how there is a surprising lack of knowledge on the part of educators with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth. Interviewee 014, a teacher, and educational consultant to schools on LGBTQ issues, commented, "I've worked in the area for a long time, I keep thinking nowadays everybody should know this, and I'm always astounded – but never show it – that we have to go back to basic education all the time." 014 stated that it is within her role to listen to the needs of teachers, including those teaching elementary grades because there are young

children who identify as LGBTQ, and to provide them with the basic skills they need to support those students.

Interviewees generally expressed a belief that their colleagues (e.g., teachers) wanted what was best for the children in their care, but that their ignorance toward LGBTQ-related issues posed obstacles to creating safe and inclusive spaces. Interviewee 016 encapsulates this well by stating:

> Absolutely, there are teachers who have expressed interest or have asked me questions or demonstrated they were trying, and it was just from a lack of knowledge. They didn't know what non-binary was, or didn't understand what it was so they were asking questions so they could help the student that they knew was non-binary.

By and large, interview responses indicated that educators' inadequate training about LGBTQ issues contributes to a perceived lack of confidence on the part of educators in addressing needs surrounding gender and sexual minority youth. This lack of perceived confidence can lead to educators readily making referrals to other staff members who are perceived to be more suited to the task. As one administrator commented in an interview, teachers may be quick to,

> …[move] [LGBTQ students] on to the counsellor, to somebody else, because they're afraid of handling it incorrectly. Again, not because they have a particular belief or not – maybe they do, they don't make that evident – but just wanting to make sure they don't cause damage and problems. A lack of confidence, for sure (011).

As indicated in the interviews, educators' may also lack an awareness of the legally-mandated supports for LGBTQ youth, and thus not completely understand or have confidence with respect to what extent they may offer those youth support. As mentioned previously, Bill 24 further supported the implementation of GSAs in schools for any student that wanted one, and prohibited school staff from outing the students who took part in it. 006, a Catholic school teacher, commented on how teachers were not made explicitly aware of the protections afforded to LGBTQ youth through Bill 24:

> So, like the fact that Bill 24 exists, nobody is trickling that information down to teachers to say, "This is against the law now, to do this." Even though it's out there in the news and our union, our local, put on a presentation, there's no requirement, I guess, for principals to hold a meeting and say, "This is what this means. Make sure you follow it." I only know one school that saw that. One example.

As interviewee 016 summarizes, "That the biggest issue that holds people back from supporting LGBTQ youth is a lack of education and lack of knowing what to say – even in the public system."

Sub-theme 1.4: Training aspirations. In light of the tensions and barriers to supporting LGBTQ youth highlighted by interviewees as they relate to training and professional development, some educators expressed aspirational strategies. Interviewee 003 commented on how progress in this area needs to start with teacher training programs:

> And the highest expectation would be all of our new teachers who are coming out of all of our universities are having classes, are having exposure so that…know how to deal with kids who are LGBTQ and trying to find their way. So, it needs to

> be something that is embedded into teachers and they know they can approach any kid, no matter their situation.

Some educators interviewed expressed frustration with the lack of initiative taken by administrators to access training opportunities and provide them for others, and that when teachers are the instigators of LGBTQ-affirmative practices, those practices are less effective than when administrators take the lead. Interviewee 003 encapsulates this well by stating that,

> … new teachers are probably the most knowledgeable and supportive teachers already. So, really, what should've been done is all the principals should have a specific LGBTQ inclusive language/actions training. That should then filter down. I think it actually should even start with trustees, but either way, it should go to the principals and trickle down to the schools and then trickle down from there. But what's happening, it's more of a bottom up.

Many of those aspirations related to hiring practices in that administrators should seek to employ educators who demonstrate LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes and who come prepared with related knowledge and skills. Interviewee 014 highlights the importance of this by stating that administrators should hire,

> …people who are qualified in those areas, with higher knowledge like Master's, and some are working on their doctorates now in the areas of LGBTQ resource persons, to go out and actually help teachers who have youths in their schools who are identifying as transitional and they don't know how to deal with it in their classroom and their parents community.

Theme 2: The Role of Inclusive Language

Figure 11
Theme 2 and its sub-themes are related to how language can create safe and inclusive spaces or hostile ones for LGBTQ youth.

The second theme and its sub-themes address how language is used in the school by educators, students, and parents as a strategy that supports LGBTQ youth, or when used inappropriately, can be a destructive force (Figure 11). None of the survey or interview questions specifically addressed the use of language, but language use emerged as an important and recurring theme to educators during the interviews. Interviewees gave some examples of the positive and negative ways language can be being used in the school, and the impact that language has on LGBTQ youth.

Sub-theme 2.1 addresses the lack of awareness educators demonstrate with regard to LGBTQ-affirmative language and the impact that language has on LGBTQ youth. Sub-theme 2.2 addresses the difficulty educators report in using LGBTQ-affirmative language. Sub-theme 2.3 addresses how educators use inclusive LGBTQ language in their classrooms. Sub-theme 2.4 addresses the efforts educators make to educate their students on the use of LGBTQ-affirmative language.

This theme has been included as it directly relates to the research questions of this study. This study is concerned with the unique contributions of educators in promoting safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (i.e., Research Question 2). Through the use of LGBTQ-affirmative language, educators interviewed expressed how they attempt to create a safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ youth. This study is also concerned with the barriers experienced by educators to creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (i.e., Research Question 3); the educators interviewed explained how the use of language that is invalidating toward LGBTQ youth can create hostile and unwelcoming environments for those youth. For example, interviewee 011 commented that, while the landscape around LGBTQ-appropriate terminology is ever-changing, using invalidating language "can be enough to shut a student down, if you use antiquated terminology" (011). Educators interviewed also gave some practical examples of how they use more inclusive language in their classrooms. For example, interviewee 015 referred to using the terms "leader and follower," as opposed to "boys and girls" during the dance unit in Physical Education. And some educators interviewed commented on how important language use is for building relationships with LGBTQ youth. As interviewee 018 said, "How you treat someone every day in your communication with them and your support of them is crucially important."

Sub-theme 2.1: Lack of awareness toward LGBTQ-affirmative language.

Congruent with theme one, a lack of awareness is present in theme two as it relates to the use of LGBTQ-inclusive language. Educators interviewed commented on how some of their colleagues (e.g., teachers, administrators) lacked an awareness of LGBTQ-inclusive language, and at times, marginalized LGBTQ youth as a result (i.e., by using

invalidating language). Interviewees commented that invalidating and even hurtful language toward LGBTQ youth is tolerated amongst staff and students for lack of guidance and direction on more inclusive and supportive language. For instance, interviewee 010 said, “I feel that it was just ignorance in a lot of cases...I suppose [teachers] were just kind of comfortable using certain phrases because they had never been challenged before.” Interviewees commented that the tolerance for invalidating and offensive language is often specific to certain groups (e.g., LGBTQ), but would be considered inappropriate if it impacted other marginalized youth:

> …if you were to say something that was kind of a little bit racist, somebody would call you on that, for sure, in the classroom. But if you accidentally said something that was against a gender-minority group, that you didn’t even realize you were saying, nobody is ever going to say anything to you (Interviewee 019).

Sub-theme 2.2: Difficulty with appropriate terminology. Some educators interviewed admitted that they and their colleagues were aware that the language they used could be invalidating toward LGBTQ youth, and that as a result, they were fearful of making mistakes when addressing LGBTQ youth or issues surrounding those youth. As a result of that discomfort, some educators reported avoiding those youth and their issues altogether. As interviewee 014 commented,

> …seeing the confusion and guilt and remorse teachers would have if they said the wrong name, just because of historical knowledge, because our brain works that way, and not knowing how to address those students. So sometimes they wouldn’t address the student [at all].

Some interviewees who are LGBTQ allies admit struggling with the use of LGBTQ-inclusive language. As a result, they may avoid asking students about the issues they are experiencing. As interviewee 021 admitted,

> I kind of struggle with the terminology. It changes a lot. And just from my own reading, and again I don't understand it all, depending on the individual that you're talking to, how they identify themselves.

Sub-theme 2.3: Creating inclusive spaces through language use. Some educators interviewed gave specific examples of how small changes to the way they address students and the language they use can make a substantial difference in creating a safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ youth. For example, interviewee 010 stated, "…we don't say 'boys will be boys' at the school anymore, at least our principal doesn't. I don't." Some educators interviewed highlighted that students use "That's so gay!" regularly, they think it is harmless, and saying it often goes unchallenged by teachers. When that happened, interviewees said it communicates that boys' hurtful behaviour (e.g., saying "That's so gay!") toward LGBTQ youth is normal and acceptable. Interviewee 015 commented on some recent practices in her middle school that she feels are inclusive of all genders:

> I know a whole bunch of other teachers…who actually don't say "boys and girls" anymore. They say something like, "Hey gang!" or "Hey team!," or they just say "Hey Grade 7s!" or stuff like that. We also talked about using "guys." …we had a conversation with our classes about how when we say "guys," we don't mean males in the class. We talk about how that term became gender neutral, where it just refers to people in general.

Some educators interviewed commented on the importance of using LGBTQ-inclusive language in the way that it can attract LGBTQ students (i.e., communicate openness and acceptance), or push them away. Interviewee 018 is an administrator in an urban school who comments:

> In my own career here, I've had more [conversations] than I can actually count, where a student has asked me to support them coming out to their families. That's happened, I probably do that three or four times a year…We are quite fluent around the use of [gender] pronouns, name changes, those sorts of things that students…how you treat someone every day in your communication with them and your support of them is crucially important. However, the subtleties around [gender] pronoun use and around what's written on their documentation or around the name that you use is, from what we've heard from students, especially in this case – trans students – members of the LGBTQ community, is vitally important, right? That's sort of where some of that respect comes in for them as well.

Interviewee 015 commented on how LGBTQ-affirmative language can also be communicated through visuals around the school (e.g., posters). For instance, she gave an example of a poster that read, "I choose to celebrate diversity by challenging heterosexism and sexism" (015).

Sub-theme 2.4: Educating others on appropriate language. Some educators interviewed expressed the importance of calling their students out on the use of inappropriate language toward LGBTQ youth and related issues, as well as the need to teach those students appropriate language: "Or even like, when students just don't know how to react [to LGBTQ content], give them strategies versus letting them just blurt out whatever" (Interviewee 010).

However, some educators interviewed said that they feel uncomfortable addressing those issues and often lack the strategies and language to do so with sensitivity:

> Yes. Definitely. Teachers don't always know what to do with comments made by other students. Particularly, I've had my kids talk to me about how "that's gay" is used in hallways or in classrooms, and teachers, in their opinion, definitely heard the comment and did nothing to respond to it. That always makes the kids feel a little less safe. I've had my transgender student – and as I said, I had a non-binary student this past year – definitely had their pronouns not used correctly, which always, in their words, 'triggers' them (Interviewee 016).

Educators reported that when anti-LGBTQ language is allowed to be used in the classroom, it can create a hostile environment for gender and sexual minority youth that is seemingly sanctioned by the adults in the room. Interviewee 010 expressed the importance of addressing inappropriate language used by students in such a way as to not further perpetuate hostility: "I still tell the student that this [homophobic] language is unacceptable, but it's even the way I phrase it, just being calm about it. 'This is a discussion rather than me telling you what to do.'"

Theme 3: The Role of Inclusive Curriculum in Support of LGBTQ Youth

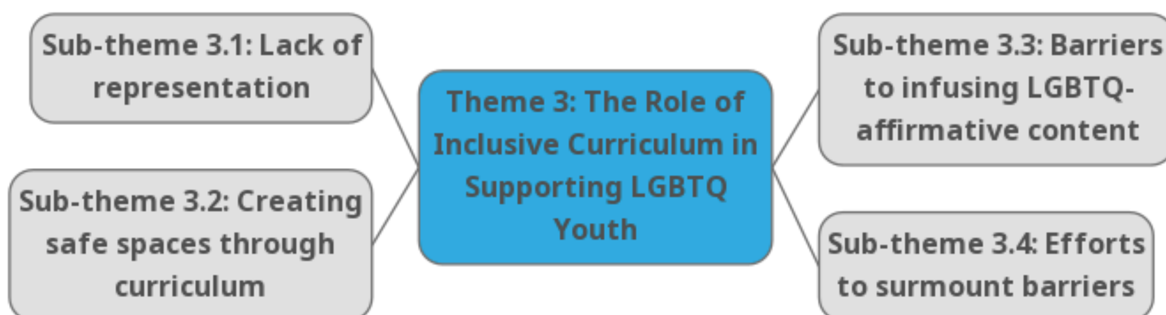


Figure 12
Theme 3 and its sub-themes are related to how educators create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth through infusing LGBTQ-affirmative content into their classes.

The third theme and its sub-themes address the efforts educators are making to create safe spaces for LGBTQ youth through inclusive curriculum strategies, and the barriers they experience in doing so (Figure 12).

Sub-theme 3.1 addresses educators' perspectives regarding the lack of LGBTQ representation in the current curriculum. Sub-theme 3.2 addresses the efforts educators are making to infuse LGBTQ-affirmative content into their curriculum in order to create a safe and inclusive classroom environment. Educators interviewed also reported on some of the subject areas (e.g., Physical Education, English) that lend themselves well to infusing LGBTQ-affirmative content, and some of the strategies they use. Sub-theme 3.3 addresses the barriers educators are experiencing when trying to infuse LGBTQ-affirmative content into their subject areas. Sub-theme 3.4 addresses some of the strategies educators report using to surmount the barriers they experience to infusing LGBTQ-affirmative content into their curriculum.

This theme has been included as it directly relates to the research questions of this study. This study is concerned with the unique contributions of educators in promoting safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (i.e., Research Question 2). Educators can create safe spaces for LGBTQ youth in the way they acknowledge issues surrounding sexual and gender diversity in the classroom. This study is also concerned with the barriers faced by educators in fostering safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (i.e., Research Question 3); barriers (e.g., resistance) may emerge when educators seek to infuse LGBTQ-affirmative content into the curriculum.

By infusing LGBTQ content into her lessons, and normalizing those topics, interviewee 008 explained how those actions facilitate a safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ youth:

> …but I just try to portray, like anytime an issue comes up that it's not a big deal to me and it's just 100% okay. And I find that a lot of kids will come out to me, lots of times in their writing, because you know they're writing a personal reflection and they'll come out in their writing, just in a no big deal way, like, 'Me and my girlfriend went to the movies this weekend.' So, I think they do get a sense from me that, at least in my classroom, it's a safe space.

However, educators interviewed expressed their worries about upsetting community members (e.g., parents, church officials) if they discussed LGBTQ issues and content in their classes. For instance, interviewee 022, who is a principal said, "So, any issue of non-mainstream sexuality that the community feels is worth attention is going to come to the principal."

Sub-theme 3.1: Lack of representation. Many educators expressed concern for the general lack of representation of LGBTQ identities in the curriculum. While there has been a thrust over recent years to represent more ethnic minorities into the curriculum, according to the educators interviewed, diverse families remain under-represented. Interviewee 021 mentions, for instance, "We display diverse children so maybe we should start displaying diverse families (e.g., same-sex parents)." Further, interviewees say that school curriculum remains heteronormative. As interviewee 017 states, "the [Biology] 30 curriculum talks about things in a really binary way (i.e., that only males and females exist)." Some educators also highlight the lack of inclusiveness in the Sexual Education curriculum. They mentioned that the lack of representation includes censorship of sexual and gender diversity (e.g., in the Catholic school curriculum), or completely omitting diverse perspectives on sexuality:

> …one of the big areas my kids talk to me about specifically is Sex Ed. They have asked me in the GSA, "Can we please have some Sex Ed classes in the GSA that are for us, because our Sex Ed in our health class has absolutely nothing to do with us. It is all very straight, directed towards straight kids" (Interviewee 016).

Interviewee 014 stated that while there is available content representing the contributions of LGBTQ people, the curriculum continues to omit that content and lack representation of sexual and gender diverse individuals:

> …we should be honouring people within the gay or sexual minority communities who also have made sacrifices and contributions to ensure that change was happening. I hope that we will see some of that start to come into our Social Studies history…There's some great literature that's been written by people from

> [the LGBTQ] community that hopefully will start to become recommended resources in time.

Interviewee 002 maintained that change is possible, as evidenced by the inclusion of other diverse groups into the Alberta curriculum that have become an accepted and unchallenged component over time:

> First Nations [and] Francophone perspectives are kind of more infused into our curriculum, put in there with political powers that be, but I think we need to get that happening more to really get to a place where it is just normal, or it's not a shock if you were to pick up "My Two Dads."

Interviewee 002's reference to the political powers that are essential to influence the infusion of LGBTQ perspectives into the curriculum reflects a sentiment that is consistent across the educators interviewed. Educators consistently maintain that the government must mandate more inclusive curricula (i.e., representing LGBTQ identities) for any meaningful change to happen.

Sub-theme 3.2: Creating safe spaces through curriculum. Despite the lack of inherent representation of LGBTQ identities in the curriculum, educators reported that they can still make meaningful efforts to infuse it into their lessons. As interviewee 014 suggested, there are many areas of the curriculum where educators can infuse LGBTQ content: "So, English class, Social Studies class for sure, human rights in Canada. I mean there's so many opportunities [for] trans-curriculum or [to] trans-weave in through different curriculums" (Interviewee 014). Some educators interviewed reported on the substantial, time-consuming, and independent efforts they made to include more diverse perspectives into their courses:

> I've been…re-writing some of our English modules to include more inclusive literature… so that we're including more [Indigenous content], more LGBTQ, more people of colour, that kind of stuff, more gender equity in our reading materials and stuff (Interviewee 005).

Some educators interviewed expressed how certain academic subjects more readily lend themselves to addressing LGBTQ topics than others. Through some subject areas, educators reported having the opportunity to normalize LGBTQ identities, and that in doing so, they create an accepting and inclusive space. Interviewee 008, who teaches in a Catholic school, states that many students will come out to her through their journal writing in English class:

> If they're coming out to me in writing, if they're doing it very casually, like "My girlfriend and I did this on the weekend;" I usually respond to people's journals…so I might say something to show that I read it. Maybe I would write, like, "Oh I thought that movie too was awesome."

Elementary school educators can subtly teach children about gender diversity through books that reflect nature. Interviewee 015, who teaches grade 5 said:

> There's books like 'Worm Loves Worm' that we read in Science – it is Science connected because worms are actually non-binary, they're like male and female in one worm…So this worm wants to marry another worm, and all these other insects in the forest are like, 'Okay, but one of you needs to be the bride' (015).

Interviewee 015 goes on to explain that lessons about gender and sexual diversity are more understandable to young children when they make connections to the natural world (e.g., in animals).

Interviewee 002 explained how LGBTQ topics can be explored through improvisation in Drama class, and that she will teach the students to be respectful through those activities:

> When we play out scenes or we talk about improv…I'll use an LGBTQ scenario, and in a way that's positive and respectful and supportive…I'm trying to build up just a general idea of positive support, whether you're pink, blue, red, whatever you feel, dress like, doesn't matter, like that whole idea.

Sub-theme 3.3: Barriers to infusing LGBTQ-affirmative content. Some educators expressed their concern and frustration with the lack of explicit guidance on how to infuse LGBTQ-inclusive content into their lessons. These challenges were more likely to be expressed by Catholic school educators than public school educators. Interviewee 003, who teaches in a rural Catholic school, states:

> There just needs to be more ready-to-use resources, more availability through PD, availability through Webinar, just for people to feel comfortable knowing you're giving justice to whatever you're speaking about, or ensuring you're incorporating all ways of life into your teaching so that every kid can see themselves reflected in what they're learning, and their thoughts, their family, their love, their everything is acceptable…

Some teachers expressed a general frustration with the lack of resources available that use inclusive language and depict diverse families.

Many educators interviewed worried about threatening complaints from parents if they approached LGBTQ-related topics in their classes. These educators expressed the need to maintain a careful balance between discussing diverse perspectives in the

classroom while not drawing negative attention to themselves. Interviewee 002 shared an example:

> Like if you start using novels that are written by LGBTQ authors, right? Or content like...there was a story another teacher friend of mine was talking about…it was "My Two Dads" – it was elementary school – and she got backlash from the community and from some parents who had concerns and this kind of thing, and even some administration had concern that because it's seen as pushing an agenda…I think teachers need to feel empowered and have the skills to be able to say that there's curricular-researched reasons for including these types of examples in our curriculum.

Even in the absence of parent backlash, some educators interviewed feel there is an unspoken rule about what kind of content is acceptable or not:

> And it's a struggle because I've taught health and I really wanted to bring in a lot of that diversity stuff in there but didn't feel like the school policies or the curriculum really supported that. So, I didn't go into it, unfortunately, because of not having the support (Interviewee 007).

Sub-theme 3.4: Efforts to surmount barriers. Some educators interviewed explained that they cannot explicitly infuse LGBTQ-inclusive content into their courses, so they look for other ways to legitimize related discussions with their students:

> There are several bins with…novels that cover LGBTQ issues in them, and that's how some of the teachers will talk about these [topics] in their classes…it's been good for in-class discussion, and I know this one Grade 8 teacher said her kids got really passionate talking about sexual orientation because of – I forgot which novel

they read but the main character was bullied for being gay. This is the most passion they've had the entire school year (Interviewee 015).

Interviewee 008 explained that in English class she has the freedom to choose articles and documentaries that cover LGBTQ-related issues. She states, "So I'm not breaking any Catholic rules by saying anything wrong, I'm just saying, 'Here are some historical facts.'"

Interviewee 008, who is a teacher in a Catholic school, explained how she is free to choose the books her students will study, thus, she is able to infuse diverse content into her English class:

> I made sure that I was ordering diverse literature that represented the LGBTQ community. I'm quite sure my principal did not very closely look into the titles of the books that I was bringing in, and I may have gotten in trouble for that, but I brought the books in, I did a book talk on them, and some of the students were shocked. They were like, 'What? This book is about a girl who likes another girl?' I was just like, 'Yeah, no big deal to me, so I don't know why you guys think it's a big deal.'

Theme 4: The Role of Educators as Allies

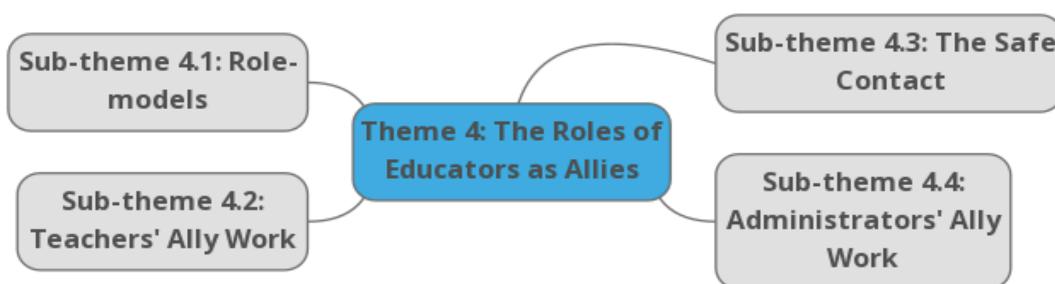


Figure 13
Theme 4 and its sub-themes are related to the role educators take as LGBTQ allies.

The fourth theme and its sub-themes address the roles that educators (i.e., teachers, administrators) take as allies in support of LGBTQ youth (Figure 13). The educators interviewed discussed their advocacy efforts for LGBTQ youth which seem to set them apart from their colleagues (i.e., they become focal points in the school for LGBTQ-affirmative initiatives and sources of related information).

Sub-theme 4.1 addresses the importance interviewees placed on educator role-models for LGBTQ-affirmative behaviour. Sub-theme 4.2 addresses the unique approaches and initiatives taken by educator allies to support LGBTQ youth. Sub-theme 4.3 addresses the role of the "Safe Contact" in schools; the Safe Contact title may be official or unofficial, and represents a contact person in the school or school board responsible for facilitating safe and inclusive spaces for sexual and gender diverse youth. Sub-theme 4.4 addresses the importance of administrators taking on an ally role in the school in support of LGBTQ youth, as well as to legitimize the efforts made by teachers to support those youth. Consistent across interviewees' perspectives on the ally role was the importance of building relationships with LGBTQ youth, normalizing LGBTQ identities, and demonstrating openness. Additionally, educators interviewed expressed the tensions experienced in their roles between advocating for LGBTQ youth, and resistance to those efforts (e.g., religious pressures).

This theme has been included as it directly relates to the research questions of this study. As this study is concerned with the roles of educators with respect to promoting and creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (i.e., Research Question 1), this theme covers some of the unique roles that educators assume in support of LGBTQ youth, in addition to their typical teaching or leadership responsibilities. The study is also concerned

with the unique contributions made by educators to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (i.e., Research Question 2); interviewees commented on some unique strategies they use to create those spaces (e.g., building relationships with LGBTQ youth). Further, this study is concerned with the barriers educators experience in their efforts to support LGBTQ youth (i.e., Research Question 3); the educators interviewed shared some of their experiences about forces of resistance to their efforts.

Educators interviewed commented on the importance of having adult LGBTQ-affirmative role-models in the school, but that male role-models can be especially influential:

> So again…especially for these students, gender roles are so rigid, the fact that we have male staff, all of our male staff buying in, has already changed a lot of behaviours at the school. I'm hoping that it's not temporary, but the change is tangible. It's really noticeable (Interviewee 010).

Further, educators interviewed commented on the value of having staff members (e.g., teachers) who are openly LGBTQ as they can be very influential toward students. As one administrator interviewed said:

> Two of our staff members are actually married to each other – two women – and they have their wedding picture of each other on their desk. So, then all the students who are in contact with those teachers are very aware of it, and they're very well-liked and respected teachers, and I think it's made a big impact. They're able to put a face and a personality to it all, instead of it being an unknown entity (Interviewee 011).

Educators interviewed also highlighted the tensions experienced in their roles (e.g., religious pressures vs. keeping LGBTQ youth safe), and the risks they feel they must take to support LGBTQ youth. As one Catholic school teacher said:

> But then you'll have some teachers who are not necessarily identifying as LGBTQ, but they're just wonderful allies and have educated themselves, they've learned, maybe they have family members or friends who identify, and they will take it upon themselves to do what I do too, which is normalize [LGBTQ identities], use the [LGBTQ-affirmative] language, not worry about repercussions. Like, at some point I just had to say, "If they're going to fire me, they're going to fire me, and I know what's right" (Interviewee 006).

One educator interviewed highlighted that even her colleagues whose personal values are not necessarily LGBTQ-affirmative can act as allies to LGBTQ youth:

> So, I find that a really interesting dichotomy. It's in their personal life that is something they would not partake in, but they'll correct people when you use the wrong name or wrong [gender] pronoun in front of the child. I think it's really interesting to note that they don't have to necessarily agree with [LGBTQ identities]…I don't know how they're wrapping their head around it but they know they're there to support these [LGBTQ] children, that at the end of the day our job is to support them and their growth. So, you don't have to agree with the fact that this child transitioned to a male to be able to support that child or make that child feel supported in their school (Interviewee 002).

Sub-theme 4.1: Role-models. Educators interviewed commented on the importance of having adult role-models in the school who portray LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes. Some of those

educators interviewed identified as LGBTQ themselves, and that being open about their lives normalized LGBTQ identities for students. Interviewee 006, who teaches in a Catholic school said:

> I also identify as a gay teacher...I actually started saying, “my wife,” “my children,” things that would connect me to being in a relationship with another woman and that would out me. ... So the conversations even just about my own identity, where I would’ve normally not talked about it or changed the subject or whatnot, I now will hit it head-on and use that as a moment to normalize it and to just have [students] know that somebody around them identifies as LGBTQ, and it’s a teacher.

Many educators interviewed highlighted the importance of consistently demonstrating openness and acceptance in order to teach their students those values. In demonstrating that openness, educators interviewed said they communicated to LGBTQ youth that they were allies:

> Probably a little bit about this value that I have, that I have to instil in everything that I do and then try to pass on. I encourage my youth to demonstrate the value, which is that idea of just openness and that relationships have to be the foundation of everything that we do, that you have to be open and empathetic and understand where someone is coming from and what their experiences might be, and who they are. And to recognize that everything that goes on has got nothing to do with you. And build relationships so you can be supportive in whatever it is they want to do. And they’ll come back to you. That idea of reciprocity. You’ll get, as well, that support when you build that relationship (Interviewee 002).

Many educators interviewed commented on the importance of having adult LGBTQ-affirmative male role-models for students as those youth generally only see female allies:

> I think it's especially important for male staff to buy in. So, I think students are a little bit used to female staff or just...like male staff may touch upon [issues of sexual and gender diversity] but then don't necessarily make it a practice to include it into their practices. I think that our elementary teacher that's here has really made it a point, and having that male figure demonstrate that [LGBTQ-affirmative] behaviour has been really beneficial for our male students (Interviewee 010).

Sub-theme 4.2: Teachers' ally work. Educators interviewed expressed the belief that it is their duty to protect all students, including LGBTQ youth. In doing so, many educators highlighted the risks they take as their LGBTQ advocacy efforts may conflict with school rules and laws:

> And that comes from my duty to protect my students from any foreseeable harm, in the teaching act. And so that would supersede any regulation on that, and kids being outed, to not out kids would certainly fall under protecting them from foreseeable harm. So that's how my principal was on my side with that, because he said the same thing, that they could fire him before he would out our kids (Interviewee 016).

Some educators interviewed explained that their LGBTQ-affirmative efforts set positive examples for colleagues; in addition, those actions created a safe and inclusive classroom environment that promotes academic success:

> I'm modeling how to be a good advocate, I think other staff members are going to follow along with that idea, right? Because they'll see the gains that I get out of doing those kinds of things with the students that I have. Students are coming to my classroom and actually attending and completing courses, which is all big things in an outreach school (Interviewee 002).

Some educators interviewed commented on the extra efforts they felt they needed to make to create a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQ youth; those efforts may entail working with other staff members and students to launch a GSA, or strongly advocating for a GSA to the school principal. However, many educators interviewed said that those efforts created associated risks and tensions for them. Interviewee 003, who teaches in a rural school commented:

> [You feel] that constant pressure to justify what you're talking about, what's happening, and knowing that the chess club isn't being interrogated that way. And so very much you try to protect the kids from that outside influence, so they don't know that there are certain people in the school building who are making it difficult for this [GSA] group to happen.

Some educators interviewed – particularly those who work in religious schools – commented on the conflict they experience between their LGBTQ ally role, and the values of the school and community. Some Catholic school educators interviewed explained that, according to their contractual obligations, they cannot be a Catholic school educator and identify as LGBTQ. That conflict contributes to the confusing messages students receive, and also poses risks for some educators with regard to job security. Interviewee 022, an administrator in a Catholic school, commented:

> Something cannot contradict itself and be true. So, you know, "We love you, but...' is kind of totally different from saying "We love you," right? I mean, in effect, what a teacher is telling a student is, "We love you and we unconditionally accept you for what you are, but if this is what you are (i.e., LGBTQ), doors are going to be closed to you." And one of those doors is going to be being a teacher in a Catholic school, right?

Sub-theme 4.3: The Safe Contact. Many educators interviewed explained that they had assumed the official or unofficial role of "safe contact" in their school or school board. This usually occurs when an educator ally advocates for safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth; they may possibly complete professional development to learn how to support those youth, and as a result, are regarded by their colleagues as the de facto human resource on many matters related to supporting LGBTQ youth. Amongst the educators interviewed who had assumed the safe contact role, they said that it was generally an unpaid responsibility whose tasks were in addition to their regular teaching load. Interviewee 006 described her safe contact role:

> I think I'm looked to in our district as a go-to person, which I feel very proud of. I also feel it's a lot on me because just the fact that...I've taken this on because nobody else was taking it on and it needs to be done. So, I'm almost resentful, like, "Why do I have to do this?" But at the same time, I really enjoy it and I'm really proud of it. So, it's a bittersweet feeling. But my staff is super supportive. They're totally on the same page with me.

Some educators interviewed said that, while their safe contact title is not official, their administrators provide them with some release time to complete related tasks. Some safe contacts are also known across the school board as contact people for mental health matters relating to LGBTQ youth:

> So, I mean, most times if a school calls me to come there and speak with their QSA or just a group or just a student, there's going to be a couple who identify as LGBTQ. I was called in one time specifically – it was one student at a school that they had tried everything with…who was severely depressed. They knew she was identifying as LGBTQ. They called me to come talk to her even though I'm not

> trained in psychology or anything like that. I can talk to her about identity, sure (Interviewee 006).

Some educators interviewed explained that, as a result of their personal interest in supporting LGBTQ youth and the associated professional development they have completed, they have undertaken an unofficial training role for matters related to LGBTQ safety and inclusivity. Some educators interviewed stated this may be especially the case when there is a lack of resources in the community to train teachers about LGBTQ identities and support those youth. Interviewee 003, who teaches in a rural school said:

> I'm now usually the person they go to when it comes to certain [LGBTQ] training or such instances where [LGBTQ youth] need an adult to talk to them and educate other teachers in the building around those ideas. But then they also recognize that, you know, with my name being attached to [LGBTQ-affirmative messages], I'm also the person that they can funnel their anger towards, because a lot of parents don't believe in it and I know other teachers have been publicly called out for supporting it.

Educators interviewed stated that in some school boards there are safe contacts who are officially appointed to advocate for issues of diversity – including ones related to supporting LGBTQ youth – as well as provide training to teachers on how to support those youth. Some educators interviewed commented that having an official safe contact, or a team of individuals responsible for promoting diversity in the school board, legitimizes their efforts in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth. Additionally, educators interviewed said they experienced a sense of security in having individuals knowledgeable about LGBTQ issues they could contact for guidance and support. Interviewee 006, who teaches in a Catholic school said:

> They call them "Inclusive Communities Champions." But again, that person is trained in a broad variety of diversity things...those kind of out-of-scope people. I think there's kind of a good thing with out-of-scope people as well, and that's that they do not sign Catholicity clauses and they're not tied to [those constraints] at all. So, there's kind of a loophole there for them.

Sub-theme 4.4: Administrators' ally work. The educators interviewed consistently commented on the importance of having supportive administration (e.g., principals) in their efforts to creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth. Educators interviewed consistently highlighted the value in having administrators who show public support for LGBTQ-inclusive efforts in the way those efforts set a positive tone for staff and students, reduce the feeling of isolation experienced by ally educators, and legitimize the efforts of those ally educators. Interviewee 021 explained how her administrator held a meeting at the beginning of the school year that facilitated open dialogue about LGBTQ issues in the school:

> We were allowed to really speak freely at the beginning of this journey, without judgement, have these conversations with each other and with our administration and as a staff. I felt like that was really a safe place, because lots of us had questions. It didn't matter whether you were anti-gay, pro-gay, none of that mattered. It was just, "What are your concerns and how can we support you?" That was a really good way to start a great conversation.

The administrators interviewed (i.e., principals) all commented on how important it is for them to facilitate safe and inclusive spaces within their roles; they can do this, in part, by building relationships with sexual and gender diverse youth and their families, and

educating themselves on the issues those youth and families experience. Interviewee 018, who is an administrator commented:

> So, it's pretty important that we say any violence, regardless of the reason, is not okay. And in the case of LGBTQ, it's not okay to be persecuted because of that. You need to be supportive of a unique and important part of the community. So, I think that's really what leadership needs to start doing – their own awareness, their own education, their own role modeling.

The administrators interviewed consistently highlighted the importance they place on building relationships with students in an effort to communicate their openness toward and support for LGBTQ individuals, as well as to make themselves more approachable. The administrators interviewed said that being approachable to sexual and gender minority youth is really important because those youth are highly victimized, and need to know they can talk to their school principal. One school principal interviewed explained how he tries to build relationships with students as soon as they enrol in the school:

> So, part of it is time spent on the initial registration for the young person. Again, the more complexity there is in their lives, the more time you need to spend understanding that complexity, but it's worthwhile because you tend to know the young person better, and therefore, their program's reflective of what you know about them, and you've established some of the relationship and communication that, should you encounter difficulty or something like that, you're more accessible to each other (Interviewee 018).

Educators interviewed expressed how important it was for their administrators to make support for LGBTQ youth public and visible, and that in doing so, students and staff learn that LGBTQ support is part of the school culture:

> When we had our rainbow day at the beginning of June, [our principal] was dressed in rainbow colours too to demonstrate his support and that he was an ally. So, yeah, I've always felt that admin for sure supports our [GSA] (Interviewee 016).

Educators interviewed generally appreciated the complexity of being an administrator who must advocate for LGBTQ youth while also dealing with dissenting values from the school community. Some Catholic school administrators interviewed commented on how they needed to maintain a balance between creating a safe and inclusive school environment for LGBTQ youth, and not upsetting the school board superintendent, the archdiocese, and religious parents. Dealing with discipline was highlighted as a source of tension amongst the administrators interviewed as they needed to encourage students to report the victimization of LGBTQ youth, while being careful to not out those LGBTQ youth publicly, or even at times, privately to their own parents who are unaware of their child's identity. Interviewee 022, a school principal stated:

> I mean, it's kind of exhausting as an administrator. You have to be really really careful and really thorough at the same time. Like you said, it's a balance between over-reacting and under-reacting [to issues of LGBTQ victimization].

Theme 5: Situational Factors as Barriers to Supporting LGBTQ Youth

Figure 14
Theme 5 and its sub-themes are related to the barriers educators face in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth because of situational factors.

The fifth theme and its sub-themes address some of the situational factors highlighted by educators that pose barriers to supporting LGBTQ youth (Figure 14).

Sub-theme 5.1 addresses the barriers experienced by educators to supporting LGBTQ youth due to religious influences within the school and broader community. Sub-theme 5.2 addresses the experiences educators have with parents who are opposed to supports for LGBTQ youth in schools. Sub-theme 5.3 addresses the inappropriate anti-LGBTQ behaviors of students that some teachers need to deal with; educators interviewed explained how those inappropriate behaviors are often a product of conservative values passed on from parents or religious values. Sub-theme 5.4 addresses the strategies educators employ in the face of oppositional situational factors to supporting LGBTQ youth.

This theme has been included as it strongly relates to the research question of this study that focuses on the barriers experienced by educators in promoting and creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (i.e., Research Question 3). This theme also relates to the

research question that focuses on the unique contributions of educators in supporting LGBTQ youth as educators interviewed shared some strategies they use despite situational barriers (i.e., Research Question 2).

Religious barriers and tensions were consistently highlighted among educators interviewed who worked in Catholic schools. One administrator interviewed commented on how LGBTQ students find themselves in a difficult position if they attend a Catholic school:

> The idea that [students] have to come forward and ask for a GSA is a little bit ridiculous, especially when the message in their religion class, which they have every day, is that "We don't hate you but we hate everything that you might want to do because [you are LGBTQ] (Interviewee 022).

Educators interviewed expressed the tensions they experience when working in a Catholic school and having to balance their LGBTQ-affirmative values with expectations from parents that the curriculum will closely follow religious teachings. Interviewee 019, who teaches in a Catholic school commented:

> Because we're expected to teach from a faith-based perspective, I need to make it work so that I'm not alienating any of the students in my class and everybody still feels like my class is a safe space, regardless of what some parents might be thinking.

Some educators interviewed who teach in Catholic schools spoke of the LGBTQ invalidating messages students receive on a regular basis, and the crisis they experience in having to deliver those messages even though they are not aligned with their true values:

> And, so, one of the lessons that I had to teach was that if a person is gay, then that's okay because God made them that way, but then God also calls those individuals to

> live a life of chastity. And that was...it was heartbreaking, that I had to teach that to kids (Interviewee 008).

Sub-theme 5.1: Religious barriers. Educators interviewed explained how the Catholic school board regulates sexual health education to ensure it is being delivered according to Catholic teachings. A Catholic school administrator interviewed expressed how those regulations posed barriers to delivering LGBTQ-affirmative sexual education:

> Well, any teacher who is teaching religion, which is where the human sexuality part of ...the human sexuality part of the health curriculum is not taught in health; it's taught in religion under the heading of "Family Life Education." Every teacher who teaches that [course] has to attend a district in-service [training], where the message very clearly is you teach the church's point of view on this, not your own (Interviewee 022).

The same administrator interviewed explained that students may often receive contradictory messages from sources external to the Catholic school, or even between one subject to another, and that those contradictory messages have harmful effects on LGBTQ youth:

> The health curriculum is telling them that it is not unnatural or innately bad to be same-sex attracted, that the gender you identify with might not match your biology, things like that. But then, in Catholic schools at least, they get a contradictory message in religion, right? And I think that's probably very confusing for them. I think it erodes the confidence they have in what they're being told in health. Or in what they're being told in religion. And that's a pretty uncomfortable place to be. Thirteen-and fourteen-year-olds don't tolerate that kind of ambiguity especially well (Interviewee 022).

Catholic school teachers interviewed consistently expressed their concerns about the invalidating and hurtful misinformation that Catholic school teachers are obliged to espouse in their classes. Interviewee 012, who used to teach in a Catholic school explained:

> My experiences when I was in [a Catholic school] were that a teacher got fired for explaining anything [about LGBTQ identities], that it's wrong, that you can be cured, that maybe a student is like that because of a past trauma, and once you get to that trauma, cure that trauma, then they won't be gay or bisexual or transitioning.

Some educators interviewed explained that while they have a seemingly supportive environment toward LGBTQ youth within the school, they are still accountable to the Catholic church whose tenets do not support an LGBTQ-affirmative environment.

Sub-theme 5.2: Parental opposition. Educators interviewed commented on the conflict they experienced between supporting LGBTQ youth in school and dealing with opposing parental values. Interviewee 008, who teaches in a Catholic school, recounted a situation in which she was supporting a transitioning (i.e., transgender) youth by addressing him by his preferred pronoun (i.e., he):

> However, his parents had called the office and said that they didn't support [the use of his preferred pronoun] and they didn't like it and they wanted him to go by his female name, and they wanted us staff to refer to him as she. And so, we were directed by administration that we were not to use male pronouns with this student.

One educator interviewed gave an example of how she reprimanded a student in class for using homophobic language; she later contacted that student's parent to explain the situation.

> So, I sent an email to mom and said, "Hey, this is a thing that happened. Here is why your student was asked to leave the class. Here is the school code that says it needs to be safe and caring for all students, and [behaviour is] not," and also, "He's let back in tomorrow and we'll start over fresh because there's two days left in the semester." And so, the response back from the parent was, "Thank you, but also, I don't think you should be talking about those [LGBTQ topics], even mentioning that stuff opens yourself up for debate and I think it's unprofessional" (Interviewee 017).

Sub-theme 5.3: Anti-LGBTQ student behaviours. Some educators interviewed gave examples of the anti-LGBTQ behaviour on the part of students that they deal with. They explained how those anti-LGBTQ behaviours originate in the home, or are influenced by religious values:

> Some of the things the kids say to me, I'm just like, "I can't believe you think that:" "That any man who lays down with a man should be stoned to death." They're willing to say that out loud, but they would never go up to our student who is transitioned and say, "You should be stoned to death. It's so passive aggressive" (Interviewee 019).

Interviewee 019 continued in explaining that much of the anti-LGBTQ sentiment expressed in her school is done "low-key," but that the undercurrent of opposition to creating safe spaces for sexual and gender diverse youth is very present. In response to having to comply with Bill 10 that mandates a GSA for any student that wants one, Interviewee 019's school administrator said to her, "They're trying to push our Christianity away."

Interviewee 019 gave an example of the insidious anti-LGBTQ behaviour she sees in her school; when asked about whether they will establish a GSA, she said, "It's pretty far off, yeah. That's not any time in the near future. We drew a rainbow on the sidewalk for Pride Week and somebody washed it off."

Sub-theme 5.4: Educators addressing situational factors. Some educators interviewed share the strategies they use to support LGBTQ youth in spite of the situational barriers they experience. The efforts they make to support LGBTQ youth may create role-conflict between personal and school values; as Interviewee 019 explained:

> So, it's really a balancing act from the side of the school, where people think that I'm 100% on board with their religious beliefs, and then the side of school that actually knows who I am as a person.

Some educators interviewed who teach in religious schools expressed the importance of upholding their LGBTQ-affirmative values even though the school culture does not support them; some do this appreciating the vulnerability of LGBTQ youth both at school and home:

> I think I have an interesting perspective on this because I run a faith-based program within a system where I don't necessarily agree with everything that's happening around that. And so, I think my role is to make sure that our students who don't feel safe at home can feel safe at school (Interviewee 019).

Many educators interviewed stated the importance of "framing" their LGBTQ-affirmative efforts in such a way as to not rouse controversy from conservative parents or a religious community. For example, many educators interviewed and surveyed said that they referred to their GSA by another name (e.g., Rainbow Club, Diversity Club) because the alternative club names were less controversial, even though their scope was the same as a GSA. One educator

interviewed explained how she balances supporting LGBTQ youth with not raising concerns from a community that opposes LGBTQ-affirmative efforts:

> The way to get the community members to be more comfortable with [LGBTQ-affirmative efforts], I suppose, is to frame it as "diversity." It is a religious community and, unfortunately, to state certain things overtly would be to push people away, or at least certain people, and then it would probably make things more difficult for [LGBTQ] students (Interviewee 010).

One educator interviewed explained that having a good knowledge of The Bible is important when addressing issues related to LGBTQ identities in a religious classroom. Further, she makes a habit of anticipating the questions students will have around LGBTQ topics and considers the answers to those questions in advance:

> So, we obviously have to study The Bible, but it's up to me what parts we study. And so you need to be well versed in what kind of literature you're using with your students and what kind of opportunities for conversation come up, to anticipate what kind of questions are going to come up when different types of families show up in stories or things come up in the news, current events, things like that. And so, I come from the perspective where "It's not our place to judge, that the only person who judges is Jesus." And so, "It's unfortunate that those judgement words are coming out of your mouth," that kind of thing, right? (Interviewee 019).

Theme 6: Supporting LGBTQ Youth Though GSAs

Figure 15
Theme 6 and its sub-themes are related to the efforts made by educators to support LGBTQ youth through GSAs.

Theme 6 and its sub-themes relate to the roles educators take in facilitating GSAs, the opportunities that lie within to empower and support LGBTQ youth, and the barriers to successful GSAs (Figure 15).

Sub-theme 6.1 addresses the strategies educators use through GSAs to facilitate a sense of connectedness to the school and LGBTQ community for their LGBTQ youth. Sub-theme 6.2 addresses the opportunities educators facilitate for LGBTQ youth to take leadership through their involvement with the GSA. Sub-theme 6.3 addresses the ways educators support students in raising awareness about the GSA and its activities. Sub-theme 6.4 addresses the barriers educators encounter to the successful maintenance of the GSA.

This theme has been included as it directly relates to the research questions of this study. This study is concerned with the roles educators take with respect to promoting and creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (i.e., Research Question 1). In Alberta, an adult is required to supervise a school GSA. Many of the educators surveyed and interviewed in this

study have assumed the role of GSA supervisor and highlighted some of their experiences in facilitating that group. This study is also concerned with the contributions educators can make in nurturing safe spaces (i.e., Research Question 2). The educators surveyed and interviewed in this study shared some of the strategies they use to facilitate a successful GSA. Further, this study is concerned with the barriers educators experience in creating safe inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (i.e., Research Question 3); educators interviewed and surveyed highlighted some of the barriers they experience to the successful maintenance of a GSA.

Educators interviewed spoke to the importance of having a GSA in order to give LGBTQ students a safe space to gather and discuss issues related to their sexual and gender identity, and the experiences they face as a result. Educators interviewed often spoke of how the presence of a GSA created a sense of inclusiveness for not only the LGBTQ youth who participated, but also for LGBTQ allies and the school community as a whole.

> It's again trying to emphasize the need for inclusiveness in our school, not necessarily just for students who may or may not be queer, but also just all our students in general. Even though they are a small community, there's not a lot of chances for these students to be individuals, there's not a lot of opportunity for these students to vocalize their individuality (Interviewee 010).

Educators interviewed often highlighted the importance and value of allowing GSA members to plan and determine GSA activities and initiatives. In doing so, those members have a chance to express their needs and have their voices heard:

> We allow the students to structure it more. Like, what do you want to do, what do you need, what do you see happening? What needs aren't being met? That kind of stuff (Interviewee 005).

Some educators interviewed explained how GSAs provide them with the opportunity to facilitate discussions and impart skills and strategies that are pertinent to LGBTQ youth, and that may be absent in other areas of their education. Many LGBTQ students do not know who to speak to when they feel they have been victimized because of their sexual or gender identity, or when they want to come out to their families or friends, so the GSA provides them with a safe forum to discuss those issues.

> In the past also, it's been a little bit of conflict resolution conversation of like, "Okay, here's maybe a way to approach a teacher or a principal or a community member or a person or like, here's stuff you could try out when you're having those difficult conversations." So primarily, so far, it's just been providing a safe space and allowing the conversation to go where it goes. And also trying to amass resources and provide them as necessary (Interviewee 017).

Educators interviewed also commented on the awareness raising opportunities (i.e., of the GSA, of LGBTQ issues) they facilitate through the GSA. For instance, GSA-led initiatives can seek to inform school staff and students about the issues faced by LGBTQ youth:

> Our GSA presented at a school board meeting for our school kind of spotlight this year, and you know what, people were in tears. Like, I really feel that the kids felt it down at that level that they were supported (Interviewee 005).

Sub-theme 6.1: Facilitating connectedness through GSAs. Educators interviewed often spoke about how GSAs gave them an opportunity to facilitate a sense of connectedness to the school and LGBTQ community for LGBTQ youth. Most educators who facilitated a GSA

described it primarily as a social environment in which LGBTQ youth and their allies could meet and chat:

> Right now the club is really a social-style club, just giving some place for kids to feel connected which, especially for my students, some of them feeling like they're pushed out of other places, so to have a place that makes them feel connected, just not at school but also because of the uniqueness, since they belong to this [LGBTQ] community. I think that's been really powerful for our students (Interviewee 002).

Educators interviewed reported that the GSA strategies and approaches that assisted in building that sense of connectedness also involved normalizing, and community building strategies. Interviewee 015 gave an example of how she accompanied her students to a forum for LGBTQ youth at a local university that put those youth in contact with others from the LGBTQ community: **"**So, my Grade 5s were invited to attend this youth forum in May and were officially the youngest people to ever have attended."

Many educators interviewed spoke about the LGBTQ guests they invited to their GSA meetings to expose their students to gender and sexually-diverse members of the community. Doing so provided students with information about LGBTQ identities, as well as role-models. Interviewee 016, who teaches in a rural public school said:

> So, as I said, my transgender girlfriend came in several times to talk to the kids...there's a group of drag queens (here) called ** and I brought them to talk and share their stories with the kids. And that, I had way more people show up to that meeting than I normally had…so that was hugely successful. In that group, there was a gay man, a two-spirited person and a woman who identifies as queer. So, they all shared their stories of being students with the kids, and that was up for

> discussion for several weeks. So, I think bringing people in who are members of the LGBTQ community, giving them those role models this year was one of the things that helped make this year more successful in that way.

Sub-theme 6.2: Empowering LGBTQ youth through GSAs. Educators interviewed generally felt that the GSAs should be student-led with structure and guidance from an adult educator. Interviewee 003 explained how she encouraged the GSA members to decide on what the group meant to them and what it sought to accomplish:

> I kind of told the kids, "You know what? You need to sit down and you need to create a mission statement, and you need to have a vision statement of this group, so that you no longer have to justify why you want this group and why this group is allowed to happen. And in no way, shape or form is it your job to go around teaching homophobics to love and accept everyone."

Many educators interviewed gave examples of how, through the GSA, students were empowered to run events, and raise awareness about LGBTQ issues and the GSA itself:

> So, the kid started creating different presentations and animations. They're kind of like the creative type, telling people about the terminology and all these different [LGBTQ] words and definitions. And then that actually seems to help them, because it's like they were talking about it. We started with our GSA and then we...had the kid present to two different classes, and then the teacher in a different class did the same thing, with the two of her classes. And that kid came in and presented to both of our Grade 5 classes. And they felt like that really helped them, because they were not really sharing it with the entire school, but they were sharing it with groups of classes (Interviewee 015).

In line with the above strategy, one administrator interviewed expressed his aspiration to see more awareness raising and decision-making regarding the needs of LGBTQ youth, by the LGBTQ youth themselves:

> ...we gotta get away from the press conference where you have the education minister, an adult member of the LGBTQ community, a university professor and one fairly confident youth...and somehow we say that's "The panel of experts." The panel of experts are those young people that are currently in our schools. So how are they reflected in the decisions that are being made for them? (Interviewee 018).

Some educators interviewed stated that the GSA provided an opportunity for them to teach LGBTQ youth skills to help them communicate their needs to others. Interviewee 014 expressed the importance of "[teaching] those communication skills and self-advocacy in gentle ways, depending on where your GSA is at."

Similarly, educators interviewed who teach in outreach schools (i.e., alternative schools) highlighted the value of mentorship strategies (i.e., pairing younger LGBTQ students with older individuals); however, given that outreach schools can comprise a wide range of ages, those mentors may be adults.

Many educators interviewed gave examples of the student-led GSA initiatives, and the importance of letting the GSA members themselves decide on what level of exposure they were comfortable with. When asked about what has contributed to the success of the GSA in her school, Interviewee 011 said:

> I think it's that [the GSA students] planned it, they came up with what they were comfortable with. They made the rainbow cupcakes, they put them together, so a lot

> of pride, and that it wasn't something like standing up in front of the whole school at assembly...and again, that's all students – students organizing…I would say is the biggest advice I would give.

Sub-theme 6.3: Raising awareness about the GSA. Some educators interviewed spoke of the strategies they used to promote the GSA and raise awareness about its scope to other staff members. This could be done by inviting guest speakers to the school to teach staff of the importance of a GSA for LGBTQ youth. Doing so can contribute to the maintenance and acceptance of the GSA over time:

> So, I think that was good. And then, in order to champion the GSA and to bring the knowledge, it wasn't just a school club, we really worked on a campaign to bring speakers in to talk about all kinds of issues and for the staff. So, things have really progressed over the last five years in our school board (Interviewee 014)

Some educators interviewed explained that GSA events provided opportunities to legitimize and normalize the GSA, and to show the school community that it was supported by staff members:

> …in announcements, we have our GSA club, and then sometimes in announcements, like when the GSA club was selling candies around Valentine's Day, we set up a booth right in the main hallway, and it was announced in announcements, not a big deal, along with the rest of the announcements. So, it shows it has support from the staff, and that kind of thing (Interviewee 002).

Interviewee 002 shared a unique strategy that entailed using LGBTQ youth from the GSA as sources of information [about LGBTQ youth] for teachers.

> So, then I asked my staff, "The GSA kids are curious if there's anything you have questions about." I don't know where it came from. I have no idea what started this but I put it to the staff, "If you have questions, I'm going to take them back to the GSA club and they will answer them and then I'll bring it back to you guys."

Sub-theme 6.4: Barriers to successful GSAs. Many educators interviewed shared some of the barriers they experienced in maintaining a successful GSA. A substantial barrier highlighted by many interviewees involved the turnover, often due to graduation, of the more active GSA members from year-to-year.

Many educators interviewed commented on the Alberta legislation that requires a student to request a GSA – it cannot be requested by a teacher. Interviewee 008 commented:

> I think it's really difficult that we're asking kids who don't feel safe in the first place to go and put themselves out there and ask for something to make them feel safe. That's a hard position to put a kid in.

Another substantial challenge to the ongoing maintenance of the GSA highlighted by some educator interviewees involves students not wanting to be outed because of their involvement with the GSA, or not wanting to be perceived as LGBTQ by their peers. To address this, Interviewee 015 proposed making the GSA meetings enticing to all students by hosting a speaker series (i.e., inviting guest speakers to present on various topics):

> That way, we're not just talking to the kids who attend the GSA, because actually a couple of kids approached me and my teaching partner, and they approached other kids and they said they really wanted to come to the GSA but they're like, "The moment I come, my friends will think I'm this (e.g., gay) or they will know that I'm

> this and I don't want them to know it yet, type of thing." So, there's a handful of kids that never came and I know they wanted to.

One educator interviewed explained that the GSA can attract many students who are marginalized for a variety of reasons but are not necessary LGBTQ. As a result, the needs of LGBTQ GSA members may be neglected:

> …where you have the Gay-Straight Alliance and the "straight" part of that seems to have the most significant voice in that group. The other thing is that it tends to sometimes be a safe zone for many many students that are feeling marginalized and persecuted, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. So, what I would want to do if I was talking about this in a larger school would be, "How do we support community with all members that attend the school?" (Interviewee 018).

Chapter Five: Discussion

The current study sought to explore the roles of educators in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth.

Quantitative methods through online surveys examined the following areas: 1) the demographic information of participants; 2) the training and professional development of survey participants with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth; 3) LGBTQ-related programming within their schools (i.e., presence of a GSA or similar); 4) participants' beliefs about their roles with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth; 5) participants' beliefs with respect to the factors that contribute to or hinder the development of GSAs or similar programs; and 6) participants' perceived support from other school staff with regard to creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth.

Through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of interview transcripts, six unique themes were identified: 1) lack of awareness; 2) the role of inclusive language; 3) the role of inclusive curriculum in support of LGBTQ youth; 4) the role of educators as allies; 5) situational factors as barriers to supporting LGBTQ youth; and 6) supporting LGBTQ youth though GSAs.

The importance of these themes and the information that was brought to light through both survey information and interviews captured how educators in this study sought to support LGBTQ youth in schools, and the barriers they faced in doing so. Their experiences are in the Alberta context, which should be considered in light of recent changes that have brought about protective legislation for LGBTQ youth. In addition to these experiences, situational factors (e.g., rural vs. urban location of school, religious schools) are discussed as they relate to educators' roles with regard to creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth.

As the present study utilized a convergent parallel design (Creswell, 2015; see Figure 1), the following section will present a discussion merging results from the quantitative analysis of survey data with qualitative thematic analysis of interview transcripts and open text responses from surveys. Those findings will be discussed relative to major topics and areas reviewed in the extant empirical literature that provided the overall context and rationale for the present study (see Chapter 2 for a literature review). Those major topics and areas reviewed are the following: 1) Findings related to the role of educators; 2) findings related to GSAs in schools; 3) findings related to barriers to supporting LGBTQ youth; and 4) findings related to training/professional development.

The discussion section will be followed by empirical implications of the study, practical implications of the study, strengths and limitations of the study, and future directions. Finally, closing thoughts and conclusions will be presented.

Overview of Significant Results from the Study

The first section discusses the findings related to the roles of educators in support of LGBTQ youth in schools (see pg. 156). The discussion in the first section includes the importance educators place on supporting LGBTQ youth, examples of how educators seek to create safe spaces for LGBTQ youth, the importance educators place on building relationships with students, and the influential role of administrators in supporting gender and sexually-diverse youth.

The second section discusses the findings related to Gay-Straight Alliances in schools (see pg. 163). The discussion in the second section includes quantitative findings about the presence of GSAs in schools (i.e., among survey participants), how educators sustain the ongoing success of GSAs, and some of the barriers they encounter in doing so.

The third section discusses the findings related to the barriers educators experience in supporting LGBTQ youth (see pg. 169). The discussion in the third section includes some barriers to supporting LGBTQ youth with regard to situational factors (e.g., rural schools, Catholic schools), lack of resources (e.g., instructional) to support LGBTQ youth through curriculum, and the opposition/resistance experienced by educators which thwart efforts to supporting those youth as well as pose threats to their job security.

The fourth section discusses the findings related to training and professional development with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth (see pg. 174). The discussion in the fourth section includes quantitative survey data and findings from interviews with educators with regard to the adequacy of the training they have received to support LGBTQ youth in schools. The importance of training and professional development for administrators is also discussed in this section.

Finally, some educators interviewed expressed aspirations for training and professional development with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth, which are also discussed in this section.

Discussion Related to the Roles of Educators in Support of LGBTQ Youth in Schools

When survey participants in the current study were asked about how important they felt it was for individuals in their roles as educators to be involved in making schools safe and inclusive for LGBTQ youth, 77.9% reported on the survey that it was *extremely important*. These results are unsurprising given the method of sampling used (i.e., probability sampling through advertisements on LGBTQ-affirmative social media), and that educators who show supportive attitudes and behaviors toward gender and sexually-diverse youth are generally attuned to the victimization those youth face (Pizmony-Levy et al., 2008). However, according to research, these supportive attitudes and behaviors are inconsistent with how students may

perceive educators to be with regard to the LGBTQ-affirmative behaviors (i.e., educators seem unresponsive to LGBTQ victimization; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). Therein lies a gap in our understanding of the alignment between educators' attitudes about and efforts to support LGBTQ youth, and the perceptions of students with regard to those same attitudes and behaviors.

The teachers interviewed in this study gave some specific examples of how they sought to create a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQ youth, and the benefits of doing so. For example, they shared the importance of building a sense of connectedness with the LGBTQ youth in their schools. Research has consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between LGBTQ youth's sense of connectedness to school and educators, and positive outcomes in psychosocial, academic, and attendance domains (Craig & Smith, 2014; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Konishi, Hymel, Zumbo, & Li, 2010; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). Educators interviewed fostered this sense of connectedness by demonstrating LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes toward students, being out to students (i.e., for those teachers who identified as LGBTQ themselves), using correct gender pronouns, and communicating openness and acceptance in the way they interact with students and discuss issues about gender and sexual diversity. For instance, one educator interviewed works in an outreach school where student attendance can be inconsistent; this educator commented that her LGBTQ-affirmative attitude had a positive effect on student success as those students are attending her classes regularly and graduating. These findings are consistent with research that shows that LGBTQ youth who can identify a supportive adult in school are less likely to report having been victimized (Goodenow et al., 2006), have better attendance, and higher GPAs and graduation rates than those who cannot identify a supportive adult (Kosciw et al., 2016). The

current study contributes to the body of research in this area in the way that educators gave specific strategies to facilitating an environment in which LGBTQ youth felt connected to their school and teachers.

The administrators interviewed in this study also commented on how important it was for them to build relationships with LGBTQ youth and to openly demonstrate their support for those students. These findings are unique as extant research has largely neglected the roles of administrators in supporting and building relationships with LGBTQ youth. Administrators interviewed commented that building relationships with LGBTQ youth was essential in rendering them approachable should those youth wish to request a GSA, or report incidents of victimization. Administrators interviewed highlighted the importance of being attuned to and addressing the victimization faced by LGBTQ students; they also expressed the importance of building relationships with as many students and their families as possible. That relationship-building process can begin when students initially register in the school and principals have the opportunity to interview them and their families, learn about their needs, and seek to meet those needs (e.g., providing all gender washrooms). Administrators interviewed also discussed the importance of dealing with LGBTQ victimization (i.e., discipline issues) in a discreet and thorough way. While extant research has addressed administrators' general lack of training (e.g., Wright & Smith, 2015) as it relates to supporting LGBTQ youth in schools, none of the literature reviewed by the researcher of this present study gave examples of specific administrator behaviors that intended to create safer and more inclusive climates for those youth. Therefore, the present study advances our understanding in that area as the administrators interviewed provided specific strategies they use in their roles to support LGBTQ youth (e.g., meeting with

all new students, using discretion and maintaining anonymity of students when dealing with discipline issues).

Amongst survey participants who were asked about the level of support they experienced from administrators (in their efforts to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth), 62.2% reported feeling *very supported* or *extremely supported*. These findings seem to be unique in that extant research has largely neglected to quantify the level of support from administrators experienced by educators with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth.

The teachers interviewed commented on how the support shown by administrators is most effective when it is public (i.e., when others can see administrators showing LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes and behaviors). That public demonstration of support can communicate a culture of safety and inclusivity toward LGBTQ students as well as legitimize the LGBTQ-affirmative efforts made by teachers (e.g., communicate to teachers that discussing LGBTQ topics is acceptable). Administrators can publicly demonstrate their support for LGBTQ youth by allowing school staff to openly ask questions and express concerns about issues surrounding gender and sexually-diverse students (e.g., in staff meetings). Educators interviewed felt that when students witness administrators demonstrating LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes, a message of safety and inclusivity is communicated. Research supports these public efforts on the part of all educators as being crucial in the way they contribute to greater feelings of safety for all students – not just LGBTQ youth (Russell & McGuire, 2008).

Educators interviewed commented on the importance of intervening when anti-LGBTQ comments were made in the classroom. They gave examples of the assertive but respectful ways in which they addressed those comments so as not to alienate any student in particular. Those efforts are particularly meaningful given that some research has identified teacher intervention

(i.e., when LGBTQ victimization occurs) as the most important factor in creating a climate of safety for LGBTQ youth (Russell & McGuire, 2008). The present study furthers our understanding in this area as educators interviewed gave specific examples of how they intervened (e.g., responding consistently, explaining impact of language used); these kinds of specific examples have been largely absent from extant literature.

Educators interviewed in this study expressed the importance of infusing LGBTQ topics and identities into the curriculum and gave specific examples of the strategies they used to do so. The value they place on those efforts is consistent with extant research that suggests that the presence of LGBTQ-affirmative content in the curriculum contributes to an overall sense of safety for LGBTQ youth (McGuire et al., 2010). Results from McGuire and colleagues' (2010) study suggest that even one educator advocating for LGBTQ youth through their curriculum can have a substantially positive impact on how safe those youth feel. However, educators interviewed also expressed concerns about the existing curriculum in that it does not inherently contain LGBTQ representation; as such, those educators make extra efforts to include LGBTQ identities and LGBTQ-affirmative content in the topics covered in class and to normalize those identities by using inclusive language. For example, one educator maintained that the Sexual Education curriculum is heteronormative (i.e., lacks any representation of non-heterosexual relationships), and that her LGBTQ students have asked to explore topics of sexuality during GSA meetings. These reports from teachers interviewed are consistent with the literature that maintains that many educators assume their students are heterosexual (i.e., heteronormativity); those assumptions translate into a lack of LGBTQ representation in the curriculum, thus invalidating the identities of LGBTQ students in class (Burt et al., 2010). Some educators reported that when they communicate their LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes to students through the

delivery of curriculum, those students may feel comfortable enough to confide in those educators about private matters, and sometimes come out to them. This is consistent with Goodenow and colleagues' (2006) research which found that gender and sexually-diverse youth were more likely to disclose issues of victimization to teachers they felt comfortable with (i.e., teachers who communicated LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes); further, LGBTQ youth are more likely to come out if they have trusted teachers around them (Pizmony-Levy et al., 2008). The findings from the current study further our understanding of the specific behaviours educators employ in order to build a relationship of trust and safety with their students.

Educators interviewed highlighted some specific subject areas that lend themselves well to infusing LGBTQ representation and affirmative content. Drama teachers, for instance, can use role-play strategies of diverse families (e.g., same-sex couples); Physical Education teachers can make reference to students in gender non-specific ways (e.g., "leader and follower" instead of "male and female;" "hey class" instead of "boys and girls"), English teachers can select books that have LGBTQ characters and themes in them, and Science teachers can teach about the diversity of various species and how not all of them are exclusively male or female. While extant literature has called for more research on the specific strategies used by educators to communicate their support for and availability to LGBTQ youth (e.g., Craig & Smith, 2014; Goodenow et al., 2006; Rivers & Noret, 2008; Russell et al., 2001), there is a general dearth of understanding in this area. Therefore, the present study is unique in the way that it extends our understanding in this area as educators provided subject-specific strategies to communicate LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes to their students.

Several educators interviewed commented that past initiatives to represent diverse cultural identities into the curriculum have been successful in Alberta (e.g., inclusion of topics

related to Indigenous peoples, French-Canadian culture); currently, themes of diversity are present in the curriculum but do not include LGBTQ people. The youth in Taylor and Peter's (2009) study echoed these findings in the way that they felt other cultural identities were represented in the curriculum, but not their own (i.e., LGBTQ). That lack of representation communicates to students that other forms of diversity are respectable, but not their own.

The present study sheds light on a unique role some educators assume in support of LGBTQ youth – the "Safe Contact." The researcher of the present study has not encountered this role in extant literature; thus, the safe contact's contributions are worthy of elaboration and future exploration. Educators interviewed reported that the safe contact in schools is an individual who provides information on how to support LGBTQ youth. The safe contact may consult with teachers and other staff, present LGBTQ-related topics in staff meetings, or serve as a reference point for LGBTQ families or LGBTQ youth in the school. Most often amongst the educators interviewed, the safe contact also served as the GSA advisor to students. At times, the safe contact may be called upon to intervene when there is a crisis involving youth from the LGBTQ community, but they can also provide general information to staff on how to support LGBTQ youth through the curriculum, or explain the use of LGBTQ-affirmative language and gender-neutral pronouns. Safe contacts may have specific training in the area of supporting LGBTQ youth, they may belong to the LGBTQ community themselves, or may simply be allies and advocates for gender and sexually-diverse youth with no specialized training at all. The safe contact title may be official or unofficial; some educators reported that they received time-release and recognition from administrators for their safe contact efforts, while others fulfilled the responsibilities of the role in addition to their regular teaching load. The presence of a safe

contact in schools highlights the need for LGBTQ advocates as well as educators who can provide guidance and training to others in support of gender and sexually-diverse youth.

Discussion Related to Gay-Straight-Alliances

When survey respondents were asked about the programs offered at their schools in support of gender and sexually-diverse youth, 62.3% reported that their school had a GSA, 6.5% reported that another LGBTQ group or diversity program was available, and 31.2% of respondents reported no such group was offered. Taken together, nearly 70% of survey respondents had some kind of support group for LGBTQ youth in their schools. Compared to recent findings from Egale that reported only 13.8% of schools surveyed in the Canadian prairies region having GSAs (Taylor & Peter, 2011), the findings from the present study should be interpreted with caution. It is possible that probability sampling in the present study has contributed to an inflated representation of GSAs in the data; conversely, regional differences between prairie provinces (e.g., recent LGBTQ-affirmative legislation) may also contribute to results about GSA presence that are difficult to interpret.

When survey respondents were asked for how long they had been involved in the GSA (if at all), 5.2% reported having been involved for 6 or more years, 11.7% reported having been involved for 3-6 years, 18.2% reported having been involved for 1-3 years, and 16.9% reported having been involved for less than one year. These additional data may suggest that since Taylor and Peter's (2011) findings, many schools in Alberta have launched GSAs. Still, the lack of clarity on this matter highlights the need for future research on GSA presence in Alberta schools.

Educators interviewed in the present study viewed the GSA as a vehicle for LGBTQ youth to experience a sense of connectedness with their school and teachers. GSA meetings gave LGBTQ youth and their allies a safe space to discuss issues of importance to them (e.g.,

difficulty coming out, victimization in school, unsupportive teachers); educators interviewed felt that the presence of a GSA positively impacted not only LGBTQ youth who participated in the club, but the whole school community in general. These findings are consistent with extant research that has identified various formats to GSAs including ones that offer a group therapy environment, are casual and conversational, or GSAs that take on an activist agenda (Poteat, Scheer, Marx, Calzo, & Yoshikawa, 2015). Also consistent with the present study's findings, research has regularly found that the presence of a GSA improves the school climate for all students (e.g., schools with GSAs report fewer incidents of harassment) – whether they are LGBTQ or not, and independent of GSA membership (Seelman et al., 2015; Walls et al., 2010).

Educators interviewed stated that GSA members could explore their identities through GSA meetings' discussions as they learn about sexual and gender diversity, and share that knowledge with others (e.g., in school assemblies, classroom presentations). Consistent with these findings, Walls et al. (2010) reported that LGBTQ youth in schools with GSAs experienced increased comfort with their sexual identities, greater self-efficacy, and an increased sense of connectedness to their schools. The educators interviewed said that GSAs also provide youth with an opportunity to learn self-advocacy skills that can aid them when they have been victimized and wish to report those incidents to school staff. These findings are consistent with Walls and colleagues' (2010) research that found GSAs to be helpful in building coping and communication skills amongst the GSA members. Many educators from the present study expressed the importance of normalizing LGBTQ identities through the discussions held in the GSA meetings; inviting LGBTQ members from the community to the GSA meetings to speak about their experiences can also have a normalizing effect on gender and sexually-diverse identities and provide those youth with role-models. The specific role of the GSA in normalizing

LGBTQ identities did not emerge in the literature review conducted by the researcher of the present study; thus, the current findings in this area may further our understanding of how a GSA can offer support to LGBTQ youth. Further, specific GSA strategies to aid in its success (e.g., inviting guest speakers) have been largely absent from extant literature.

However, some research postulates that GSAs may actually compartmentalize the needs of sexual and gender minority youth to the confines of the GSA meetings themselves, further marginalizing those youth (King, 2008). Indeed, compartmentalizing the needs of LGBTQ youth through GSAs would have the opposite effect of normalizing the identities of those youth; educators responsible for supervising GSAs should be cognizant of that possibility and sensitive to its presence. One educator interviewed in the present study said that the GSA can often attract marginalized youth who are not LGBTQ or necessarily allies; as a result, the GSA can become a support group for a wider array of victimized youth in addition to gender and sexually-diverse individuals. The educators interviewed said that the breadth of diversity of needs can make supporting the GSA youth difficult and change the focus of the GSA's mission. This threat to the successful maintenance of a GSA has been neglected in extant research and is worthy of consideration for those who seek to create and nurture safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth. However, an obvious irony and tension is that the GSA – intended, in part, to foster inclusivity – may become exclusive should it revoke the participation of non-LGBTQ marginalized groups.

Another finding from the present study which seems to be absent from extant research is the role of the GSA as a forum for providing LGBTQ-related sex education as some students may only receive heteronormative instruction in their health classes.

Educators interviewed in the present study viewed the GSA as a vehicle for empowering youth to take on leadership opportunities in the school. Those educators generally felt that the GSA should be student-led, with some guidance from a staff supervisor. Educators interviewed said that GSA members can be empowered by having a say in the activities and initiatives taken on by the GSA; they can begin by creating a mission statement for the club and decide what they wish to accomplish and gain from participation in the club. One educator interviewed shared how an LGBTQ student was empowered to create a presentation to raise awareness about LGBTQ-related terminology and issues. These types of initiatives can help LGBTQ youth feel connected to their schools and support them in exploring their own identities. As specific GSA-related activities and strategies have been largely absent from extant research, these findings may be unique and valuable to educators who wish to supervise GSAs. Some educators interviewed expressed the importance of consulting LGBTQ youth on the decisions regarding their own safety and inclusivity in the school (i.e., in contrast to non-LGBTQ adults making those decisions); the GSA can serve as a forum for discussing such matters. These too are unique findings as much of the extant research on GSAs seems to have focused on LGBTQ youth receiving guidance as opposed to providing it. The literature does suggest, however, that adult GSA supervisors often do not have adequate training to effectively run GSA clubs (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016), so perhaps LGBTQ youth themselves can offer more guidance on strategies to support their own needs.

Educators interviewed spoke about how the GSA can provide mentoring opportunities between older and younger LGBTQ youth in the school; through those opportunities, younger LGBTQ youth may learn communication and self-advocacy skills. The importance of adult mentors for LGBTQ youth and how that mentorship may be facilitated through GSAs has been

highlighted in extant literature (e.g., Lee, 2002); further, research has shown that the number of safe adults available to gender and sexually-diverse youth positively impacts the outcomes of those youth even more so than the presence of the GSA (Seelman et al., 2015). Educators interviewed suggested that having students mentor students may also relieve some them of the threat they experience when they advocate for LGBTQ youth (i.e., community members in opposition of LGBTQ-affirmative support may be less likely to raise concerns about students helping students). These findings are consistent with extant research that has found that educators fear reprisal from administration and community members when they support LGBTQ youth (e.g., Mayberry, 2013). The specific strategy highlighted in the present study of having youth lead initiatives as well as mentor one another to avoid such reprisal is unique; though controversial, such initiatives may be worthy of further consideration.

Outreach schools (e.g., alternative schools, adult learning schools) may provide a reprieve for LGBTQ youth from some hostile school environments, and a unique setting for mentoring initiatives given that some students there may be adults and have been out for substantially longer than the younger students. The role of outreach schools in providing a safe and inclusive alternative environment for LGBTQ youth has been absent from extant literature.

Educators interviewed in the present study expressed the importance of raising awareness of the GSA and its activities in order to promote, sustain, and maintain the GSA over time. Some educators said that when teachers and students have the opportunity to show their support for and acceptance of the GSA by participating in its activities, the presence and role of the GSA becomes legitimized and normalized in the school. Consistent with these sentiments expressed by educators interviewed, Lee (2002) maintained that GSAs allow teachers in the school to identify themselves as allies to LGBTQ youth. Educators interviewed in the present study also

highlighted the importance of having a regular and consistent GSA presence through announcements, and when whole community events take place (e.g., having a GSA table at the school fair). One educator interviewed shared a valuable strategy which entailed asking teachers to generate questions for the GSA members, which would then be discussed in GSA meetings, and whose responses and insights will be communicated back to school staff. As extant literature has largely neglected to explore specific GSA promotion and maintenance strategies, as well as those that harness the guidance of LGBTQ youth themselves, these unique findings may prove useful to GSA supervisors (i.e., educators) in the future.

Educators interviewed in the present study shared their experiences with regard to the barriers in establishing and maintaining a GSA. Amongst the educators interviewed, given that the role of the GSA supervisor was often done on a voluntary basis and in addition to other teaching responsibilities, turnover in that position was highlighted as a threat to the ongoing maintenance of the GSA. Further, some students who adopt leadership roles in the GSA graduate and may not be replaced by equally impactful GSA members. Through these insights, the current study extends our understanding of the threats to the ongoing maintenance of a GSA.

Educators interviewed commonly expressed concerns about the Alberta legislation that required students to request a GSA should they want one (i.e., teachers cannot start a GSA without such a request in addition to the principal's permission); in requesting a GSA, many students fear the consequences of outing themselves. Murphy (2012) highlighted the importance of adult support in establishing a GSA as many youth are not aware of their rights in doing so, or how to proceed. This conflict poses understandable tensions as educators are unable to establish a GSA without a student requesting it, and students may lack the courage, guidance, and knowledge to do so themselves. An additional challenge may be that some schools are reluctant

to inform youth of their rights in establishing a GSA for fear of backlash from the community. This may be an understandable concern given that many Alberta school boards have failed to comply with new legal requirements (i.e., allowing GSAs when requested; French, 2018). The end result may be a systemic silencing in which the needs of LGBTQ youth are ignored, and heteronormativity is perpetuated. These findings are unique to the Alberta context, and in and of themselves, and may prompt LGBTQ-affirmative educators to find strategies to disseminate information regarding the rights of LGBTQ youth in schools (e.g., the right to a GSA, the right to discretion about participation in a GSA).

Commonly, educators interviewed stated that while many students – LGBTQ and their allies – would like to participate in the GSA, those students are wary of being perceived as LGBTQ by their peers. One educator interviewed shared a strategy to address that concern which entailed making the GSA more enticing to all students by inviting guest speakers to the meetings; as previously mentioned, strategies such as these to support GSAs further the body of knowledge in this area.

Discussion Related to Barriers in Supporting LGBTQ Youth

Educators interviewed in the present study highlighted a number of barriers they experience to supporting LGBTQ youth. Sometimes those barriers differed based on the situational factors of the school (e.g., rural, Catholic). For instance, educators interviewed expressed concerns and frustration with the lack of guidance on infusing LGBTQ content into the curriculum; those concerns seemed more pronounced among educators in Catholic schools. Extant research has also shown that educators lack the training and guidance to incorporate LGBTQ-related topics into their curricula (Bahr et al., 2000; McCabe & Rubinson, 2008). While challenges to infusing LGBTQ-affirmative content are well-documented in the literature, the

current study extends our understanding of how those challenges uniquely impact LGBTQ youth in Catholic schools as detailed below.

Helpful and subject-specific resources on infusing LGBTQ content into the curriculum may be scarce in general, however, educators in Catholic schools may need to seek approval to use [what are perceived to be] controversial resources, and they may experience the added challenge in finding ones that do not directly conflict with Catholic doctrine. Educators interviewed and surveyed often stated that it was challenging to find available resources that used inclusive language and depicted diverse families (e.g., same-sex couples). Only few studies to date (e.g., Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2015; Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017) have examined how LGBTQ-affirmative content can be infused into specific areas of the curriculum; two of the aforementioned studies focus on the language arts classroom, and none of them discuss challenges and strategies from the Catholic school perspective. Therefore, the present study highlights a gap in the literature with regard to how educators can infuse LGBTQ-affirmative content into a variety of school subjects, and with the added constrictions of Catholic school doctrine.

Educators interviewed highlighted a constant concern that their efforts to infuse LGBTQ-affirmative content into their curriculum may provoke strong negative reactions from parents or other members of the school community. Some educators interviewed feel that they would not be protected from job loss should a parent raise a complaint about the LGBTQ content in their classes. The fear of complaints from parents have been documented in the literature as a major concern from educators who wish to support LGBTQ youth; further, complaints from parents create extra burdensome administrative tasks for educators as well (e.g., meetings, responding to emails; Fredman et al., 2015). Educators risking job loss as a result of their LGBTQ-affirmative

attitudes and practices has been commonly documented in extant literature (e.g., Fredman et al., 2015; McCabe & Rubinson, 2008; Szalacha, 2004). Some of those educators interviewed in the present study had never been explicitly told not to use LGBTQ content in their classes but felt that there were unspoken rules in the school forbidding it. Educators interviewed in other qualitative studies experience similar uncertainties with regard to what they are allowed to teach in support of LGBTQ youth (e.g., Fredman et al., 2015). Some male educators in other qualitative studies reported concerns about being perceived as homosexual themselves, or if they were elementary school teachers, being perceived as pedophiles by other members of the school community should they advocate for LGBTQ youth (Bliss & Harris, 1999). Concerns from educators about being perceived as homosexual or a pedophile did not emerge in the present study; however, only two male educators were interviewed in the present study and both were administrators. Strategies to address these threats specific to male teachers, as well as those who work with younger students, presents a gap in the current literature with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth.

Some Catholic school educators interviewed in the present study identify as LGBTQ and fear job loss if they are outed; in some Catholic school boards in Alberta, teachers can be fired for being gay (Hamilton, 2018). While concerns about offending parents and related threats of job loss were very present among Catholic school educators interviewed, some educators interviewed also experienced similar threats from conservative communities in rural areas too (i.e., not all threatening conservative values stem from faith-based institutions).

Catholic school educators interviewed experience a number of barriers that are unique to working in Catholic schools. Those educators expressed concerns about the contradictory messages students receive with regard to their sexual and gender diversity (e.g., that all youth are

loved, but that LGBTQ identities are unnatural). Some educators interviewed experience an internal crisis in having to deliver the anti-LGBTQ messages they do not abide by. Educators interviewed expressed concerns that those messages – which they are encouraged to communicate with regard to discussions around LGBTQ identities – further perpetuate anti-LGBTQ sentiments amongst students. Catholic school educators interviewed expressed challenges in maintaining the balance between their own values and those of the Catholic church; further, some felt the need to be perceived as conforming to those Catholic school values around some colleagues who hold anti-LGBTQ values of their own. This can lead to some Catholic school educators being secretive about their anti-Catholic LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes and practices. These value conflicts experienced by LGBTQ-affirmative educators have been represented in extant literature, as well as how the tension between personal and religious values can contribute to non-action on the part of those educators in the face of LGBTQ victimization (Perez, Schanding, & Dao, 2013; Russell, Horn, Kosciw, & Saewyc, 2010).

Educators interviewed raised concerns about the structure of the Catholic school curriculum which regulates the delivery of sex education by making those lessons part of the religious education program. The concern here is that themes of sexuality are expressed through a Catholic lens, thus lacking representation of and invalidating LGBTQ identities; as a result, students receive messages that create a sense of shame and internalized homophobia. While a general lack of LGBTQ representation in the curriculum has been extensively documented in the literature, research has neglected to explore the added complexity experienced by educators who work in Catholic schools. The present study sheds some light on that added complexity; while some strategies for supporting LGBTQ youth in Catholic schools have emerged through the

present study, a need for a deeper understanding of how to support LGBTQ youth in the Catholic school context persists.

In spite of the perceived and actual barriers educators in the present study experience with regard to supporting gender and sexually-diverse youth in their classrooms, efforts are still made by those educators to expose students to LGBTQ-affirmative content. Some educators interviewed reported having to use strategies that provoke discussion about LGBTQ issues without raising those topics explicitly (e.g., discussing an article about bullying that has LGBTQ-related issues). Educators in Catholic schools may present information to students on the victimization of LGBTQ youth without taking an explicitly LGBTQ-affirmative stance (i.e., allowing the students to draw conclusions for themselves); this is done in an effort to expose students to LGBTQ issues without clearly contravening any tenets of the Catholic curriculum. These strategies revealed in the current study extend our understanding of how educators are infusing LGBTQ-affirmative content when working in environments that are generally disapproving of it.

According to some educators interviewed, the Catholic school environment also limits the ways in which safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth can be fostered on visual levels as they may not be permitted to display safe space stickers, the rainbow flag, or LGBTQ-affirmative posters. This comes as a disappointment given that safe zone stickers, for instance, have been shown to raise awareness about LGBTQ-related issues and contribute to an increased sense of safety for LGBTQ youth (Black, Fedewa, & Gonzalez, 2012).

Some Catholic school educators interviewed spoke about the anti-LGBTQ attitudes very openly expressed by their students (e.g., “That any man who lays down with a man should be stoned to death”), and the challenges those educators experience in addressing them. Indeed,

Catholic school educators who are allies find themselves in a challenging position between their own LGBTQ-affirmative values and the anti-LGBTQ values of the church.

Educators interviewed were most likely to experience opposition to supporting LGBTQ youth from parents (e.g., in the present study, 68.8% of educators reported feeling *somewhat supported* to *not supported at all* by parents on the survey). According to educators interviewed, parents may refuse to acknowledge their own child's preferred gender pronoun, express criticism about LGBTQ-affirmative content in the classroom, protest the establishment of a GSA, or disagree with a teacher who reprimands a child for using homophobic language. Those educators interviewed often felt that rousing complaints from parents could lead to job loss; some referenced examples of colleagues who had lost their teaching positions for delivering what was deemed inappropriate LGBTQ-related content.

Discussion Related to Training and Professional Development

When survey respondents in the present study were asked about the extent to which LGBTQ-related issues were featured in their specialized training, 81.8% responded with "not at all" or "inadequately." Extant research has consistently revealed that education programs neglect to include sufficient LGBTQ-related content in order to prepare educators to support LGBTQ youth (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008; Meyer, 2008; Stiegler, 2008). However, compared to a study by Koch (2000) in which approximately half of pre-service teachers surveyed reported that they had received training to work effectively with LGB youth, the results from the present study seem remarkably worrisome (i.e., 18-years later even fewer educators report feeling prepared to work with LGBTQ youth as a result of their training). However, when survey respondents in the present study were asked how important they felt it was for individuals in their roles to be involved in making schools safe and inclusive for LGBTQ youth, 77.9%

responded that it was *extremely important.* When those respondents were asked how important they believed it was for individuals in their role to participate in professional development regarding the provision of support for LGBTQ youth in schools, 66.2% responded that it was *extremely important.* When Athanases and Larrabee (2003) interviewed 100 pre-service education students who had received training on supporting LG youth, their participants reported that the training contributed substantially to an increased appreciation for the challenges faced by LG youth and a need to advocate for them. Taken together, what remains unclear from the present study is just how much LGBTQ-related training is sufficient for educators to feel competent to support gender and sexually-diverse youth, what effective content some education programs deliver compared to others, and where educators' motivation to support LGBTQ youth is derived if those educators are not being exposed to related topics in their training.

Educators interviewed in the present study generally reported *inadequate* training to *none at all* in their teacher education programs with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth. According to the educators interviewed, some education programs may mention the needs of LGBTQ youth but those lessons were often described as superficial and brief at best. Even educators interviewed with advanced degrees (e.g., Master's, Ph.D.) expressed a lack of LGBTQ-related training in their university programs. Educators interviewed and surveyed often commented that diversity-related content (e.g., supporting Indigenous peoples, infusing French-Canadian content into the curriculum, supporting children with learning disabilities) was sufficiently present in their training, but that those topics did not extend to supporting gender and sexually-diverse youth. Consistent with the findings of the present study, the disparity between education programs addressing some marginalized groups while neglecting others has been documented (e.g., Carroll, 2010; Cole, Denny, Eyler, & Samons, 2000; DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009).

Further, while some education programs address issues of sexual and gender diversity, they often lack enough breadth to extend into the needs of transgender and gender non-conforming youth (Case & Meier, 2014). These data on the lack of preparation of education students to support LGBTQ youth are consistent with studies that call for more training on LGBTQ issues in teacher training programs (e.g., McCabe & Rubinson, 2008).

When survey respondents were asked how supported they felt by teacher colleagues in their efforts to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth, 46.8% responded with *somewhat supported* to *not supported at all.* Some educators interviewed expressed concerns about their colleagues' lack of training about the needs of LGBTQ youth (e.g., the victimization they face) and how that lack of training contributes to a minimization of those needs or a complete lack of recognition when victimization occurs (e.g., teachers attuned to the needs of LGBTQ youth may perceive an incident as a hate crime, while other teachers who are not attuned to those needs do not). These reports are consistent with extant research that has found many pre-service teachers to be ignorant about issues of sexual and gender diversity (Bahr et al., 2000) and they do not consider the harassment of LGBT youth to be a form of social injustice (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008).

Further, many educators interviewed in the present study expressed concerns that teachers and principals may have the misconception that younger students do not experience issues related to sexual and gender diversity. Consistent with extant research, previous studies have highlighted the concerns educators have about the appropriateness of discussing topics surrounding sexual and gender diversity with primary school children (Athanases & Larrabee, 2003). However, educators interviewed in the present study argued that primary school aged children already grapple with their developing sexual and gender identities, calling for a need to

provide them with related education. Research supports this contention and maintains that gender identity develops between ages two and five, and sexual orientation as early as age nine (Zucker, 2005). However, there is a general gap in the literature with regard to the experiences of younger LGBTQ youth; coupled with ethical limitations (e.g., informed consent from parents), and possible resistance from parents, understanding the needs of gender and sexually-diverse children and youth through empirical research presents a challenge for scholars.

Still, according to educators interviewed, many primary school teachers may completely omit topics related to LGBTQ identities in their curriculum, present all curriculum content through a heteronormative lens, and believe that all of their students are cisgender and heterosexual. Some educators interviewed said that the disagreement on the appropriateness of exposing younger students to LGBTQ-related topics can create tensions between educators. The specific content related to sexual and gender diversity with regard to its age appropriateness has been largely neglected in extant research; the present study highlights gap in the literature in that regard.

Many educators interviewed recognize that supporting LGBTQ youth requires specialized professional development, so they seek out related training in the community, online, or through further university studies. However, many educators interviewed experienced challenges in finding professional development opportunities to support LGBTQ youth in the community; as a result, they may ask their LGBTQ friends and colleagues for information, or consult LGBTQ-affirmative social media (e.g., Alberta GSA Network). Some educators interviewed reported that their school or school district offered little training to support LGBTQ youth; in some cases, the lack of those opportunities was due to a dearth of resources in the local community (e.g., rural or remote communities), or due to the school's faith-based program (e.g.,

Catholic schools). What this means for educator allies in similar environments is that they may need to invest considerable time and funds to access LGBTQ-related professional development opportunities. The roles of educators who work in faith-based schools or whose geographical surroundings pose limitations to the LGBTQ-related training and professional development they can access has been largely absent from existing research. Therefore, the current study's findings may further our understanding of training-related limitations to supporting LGBTQ youth in that regard.

According to educators interviewed, a lack of professional development and training to support LGBTQ youth can contribute to their lack of confidence in addressing the needs of those youth. Some teachers interviewed reported feeling insecure about using the changing terminology around LGBTQ identities and issues (e.g., whether it is the newest and most accepted terminology), or that their lack of understanding around LGBTQ issues may exacerbate the needs of students they seek to support. Research has found that even when educators receive training to support LGBTQ youth, they often still feel unprepared (Athanases & Larrabee, 2003; Puchner & Klein, 2011). As a result, many educators interviewed in the present study said that school staff may just avoid issues about or the needs of LGBTQ youth altogether. These findings are supported by extant research that has found educators may not act when they witness LGBTQ victimization because they feel ill-equipped to do so (Fredman et al., 2015; Meyer, 2008; Puchner & Klein, 2011; Swanson & Gettinger, 2016; Taylor et al., 2015).

These findings may shed light on the imbalance between educators' feelings that they should intervene when LGBTQ victimization occurs, and their actual intervention behaviors. For instance, Swanson and Gettinger (2016) found that teachers' ratings on adopting supportive roles for LGBT youth were significantly lower compared to their ratings on the importance of

doing so. Therefore, there may be far more well-intentioned educators (i.e., those who wish to support LGBTQ youth) than those who actually express those intentions through supportive roles. Therein lies a gap in our understanding (i.e., why educators with LGBTQ-affirmative values may not support LGBTQ youth) and an area for further research. In better understanding the barriers educators experience to supporting LGBTQ youth, possible strategies to surmounting those barriers can be generated.

While educators interviewed expressed their insecurities about supporting LGBTQ youth because they felt they lacked sufficient training, some expressed shock at how their colleagues in the school knew even less than they did about LGBTQ identities and issues. Educators interviewed generally believed that school staff wanted what was best for LGBTQ youth, but that they were not attuned to the needs of those youth or how to support them. As a result, some teachers may further marginalize or even victimize LGBTQ youth without being aware of it (e.g., by using non-inclusive pronouns, failing to use the preferred gender pronoun with a transgender student, ignoring homophobic remarks). Similarly, extant research has consistently found that educators lack the training to intervene on behalf of and advocate for LGBTQ youth (e.g., GLSEN & Harrison Interactive, 2008; Savage, Prout, & Chard, 2004).

When survey respondents were asked how supported they felt by administration in their efforts to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth, 37.7% responded with *somewhat supported* to *not supported at all*. Educators interviewed (i.e., teachers and administrators) expressed their concerns with the lack of professional development and training opportunities related to LGBTQ issues specifically tailored to the roles of administrators. Some teachers interviewed expressed concerns that their administrators (e.g., principals) lacked an understanding of the needs of LGBTQ youth and how to support them in school, and therefore

seemed unsupportive of or complacent about the efforts made by teachers to support those same needs. Administrators interviewed generally thought that their roles entailed unique responsibilities (e.g., discipline issues) compared to the roles of teachers, and that they would benefit from guidance and training on how to address those issues as they relate to the victimization of LGBTQ youth. However, none of the administrators interviewed could identify training opportunities to support LGBTQ youth specific to their roles and responsibilities. While one study in extant research investigated the barriers to supporting LGBTQ youth experienced by administrators (i.e., GLSEN & Harrison Interactive, 2008), the role of specific professional development and training tailored to the needs of those administrators was not examined. Therefore, the findings of the present study may provide some important new insights on the barriers to supporting LGBTQ youth experienced by administrators and direction for future practice.

Educators interviewed stated that their administrators often neglected to communicate important information about supporting LGBTQ youth (e.g., legislation supporting GSAs). Hence, some educators in the school may not know that they have license to support LGBTQ youth or that supports are available (e.g., that any student can request and be granted a GSA, that school staff cannot out a student participating in a GSA). Past research has found that teachers may not demonstrate supportive behaviors toward LGBTQ youth if they have not received explicit guidance from administrators sanctioning LGBTQ-affirmative behaviors (e.g., Fredman, Schultz, & Hoffman, 2015). Therefore, some educators may have LGBTQ supportive attitudes but not act upon them until they have been given explicit permission.

When survey respondents were asked how supported they felt by parents in their efforts to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth, 68.8% responded with *somewhat*

supported or *not supported at all.* Educators interviewed also expressed concerns with the lack of understanding on the part of parents with regard to the needs of LGBTQ youth. That lack of understanding translated into the use of anti-LGBTQ attitudes and language that parents may pass on to their children, and then those children may demonstrate anti-LGBTQ attitudes and language in school from a young age. These findings are consistent with some extant research that parents often disseminate heterosexist ideology and homophobia to their children (Kielwasser & Wolf, 1992). Educators interviewed expressed a need to educate parents on how they can support the school in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth. To the present researcher's knowledge, extant research has largely neglected any efforts made to educate parents on LGBTQ-related and affirmative topics; the present study's findings present a gap in the literature and an area of need in that regard.

Some educators interviewed said that they had access to professional development and training about LGBTQ issues; those opportunities were generally more available in larger urban centers (e.g., Calgary, Edmonton). However, given the voluntary nature of participation in those sessions on the part of teachers, some educators interviewed said that attendance can be disappointingly low. One educator interviewed shared that she requested a five-minute timeslot in staff meetings during which she could share information about supporting LGBTQ youth. These kinds of strategies are effective in that they reach a large portion of the school staff, and the content of the discussion or presentation can be tailored to the unique needs of the school community.

Educators interviewed in the present study expressed their aspirations for more training to support LGBTQ youth. Many educators felt that LGBTQ-related training should be thoroughly covered in university education programs. Extant research supports this sentiment as most

studies have found that graduate programs in education fail to provide sufficient diversity training to their students (e.g., Bluestone, Stokes, & Kuba, 1996; McCabe & Rubinson, 2008). Educators interviewed also felt that professional development about supporting LGBTQ youth should be mandatory for any educator working in schools. Recent studies have also called for mandatory LGBTQ training for all educators, and that mandatory training will have the effect of legitimizing the support schools should offer to gender and sexually-diverse youth (Fredman et al., 2015). Some educators interviewed felt that LGBTQ-affirmative practices and initiatives, including training, should begin with administrators (e.g., principals, school trustees); those administrators should subsequently lead their staff in the best practices to support LGBTQ youth. Indeed, extant research has encouraged the provision of LGBTQ-related training to all members of the school community; these initiatives should be initiated by school administrators and offered to teachers, parents, and students (Meyer, 2008).

Some educators interviewed believed that newer graduates from education programs had received more training to support LGBTQ youth, rendering those newer educators more aware of the needs of gender and sexually-diverse individuals. While the data collected on participants from the present study included "years working in your primary role," there is insufficient information to support the claims that recent graduates from education programs are better suited to supporting LGBTQ youth than those who graduated a long time ago. A gap in the research is our understanding of how newer graduates differ from older graduates in their LGBTQ-affirmative training and attitudes. Some educators interviewed expressed a wish that administrators prioritize LGBTQ-affirmative candidates in their future hiring practices.

Empirical Implications of the Study

The findings from the present study have empirical utility for researchers, educators, and policy makers. The following is a presentation of some of those empirical implications.

Within the Alberta context, educators report inadequate training and professional development to support LGBTQ youth; as a result, those educators feel ill-equipped to infuse LGBTQ-affirmative content into their curriculum as well as to support LGBTQ youth with some of the issues those youth face. These findings are consistent with extant research (e.g., McCabe & Rubinson, 2008) and extend our knowledge in these areas with regard to how educators access information to support LGBTQ youth (e.g., asking their LGBTQ friends, looking for information online). This lack of training and professional development may contribute to, in part, the disparity between educators' LGBTQ attitudes and supportive behaviors (i.e., educators report being more supportive than they demonstrate with their actions); this disparity is highlighted in the present study and some potential reasons for it (e.g., educators feel ill-equipped to deal with anti-LGBTQ comments) are discussed.

Extant research supports the protective role that educators can have in buffering LGBTQ youth from negative outcomes (e.g., McGuire et al., 2010); findings from the current study support that research (i.e., educators report that it is especially important to provide adult support to LGBTQ youth) and extend our knowledge by providing specific ways in which educators can build meaningful relationships with LGBTQ youth.

The role of the "Safe Contact" seems to have developed in response to a lack of understanding amongst educators with regard to supporting LGBTQ youth and the need for school staff to advocate for those youth. The safe contact often becomes the de facto go-to

person in the school for many LGBTQ-related issues. The role of such a safe contact has been absent from research and presents an opportunity for further exploration.

Educators in the present study consistently reported the influential role school administrators have in legitimizing the efforts of LGBTQ-affirmative initiatives (e.g., GSAs, LGBTQ-affirmative curriculum). With the exception of few studies (e.g., Wright & Smith, 2015), the role of administrators has been largely absent from the literature. The current study extends our knowledge of how administrators can use their influence to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth and teachers alike, as well as their allies. Moreover, this study indicates that more focused research with respect to administrators' perceptions, roles, and training needs relative to LGBTQ students and GSAs within schools is needed.

GSAs can foster social support for LGBTQ youth and contribute to an overall sense of safety and inclusivity for all students (Russell & McGuire, 2008); GSAs in the present study were seen to provide and contribute to similar positive outcomes. The current study extends our knowledge of how GSAs can provide unique opportunities to support LGBTQ youth (e.g., sex and health-related education) as well as specific strategies that aid in the ongoing maintenance of GSAs (e.g., inviting guest speakers). More research related to specific strategies for maintaining and enriching GSAs in schools as well as more research relative to the benefits of GSAs in schools would seem to be important to undertake as society and educational policies evolve in the future.

Research has found that educators experience real and perceived barriers to supporting LGBTQ youth (e.g., fear of job loss; Mayberry, 2013); however, extant research has neglected to explore the unique ways in which Catholic school educators experience constraints in that regard due to the religious focus of their school's culture. The current study extends our knowledge of

some of the unique barriers Catholic school educators face (e.g., Catholicity clauses, conflicting messages communicated to students). It also highlights the need to conduct research that focuses on particular school environments such as religious schools, private schools, and charter schools.

Practical Implications of the Study

The findings from the present study have practical utility for researchers, educators, and policy makers. The following is a presentation of some of those practical implications.

Educators in the present study consistently reported that they had received insufficient training and professional development in their university programs. These concerning findings have been consistently present in the literature (e.g., McCabe & Rubinson, 2008) and call for an assessment of how current university education programs seek to prepare graduates to support gender and sexually-diverse youth.

Administrators can support LGBTQ-affirmative efforts by visibly demonstrating their support for gender and sexually-diverse youth (e.g., supporting GSAs and their initiatives) and by legitimizing LGBTQ-affirmative initiatives in the school (e.g., mandating LGBTQ-affirmative training, ensuring that LGBTQ identities are present in the curriculum). Administrators can also support LGBTQ youth by hiring LGBTQ-affirmative educators. The need for administrator-specific professional development has been identified in the present study. Those trainings need to be developed specific to the unique roles and responsibilities of administrators, and administrators have a responsibility to pursue those trainings and then disseminate LGBTQ-affirmative guidance and information to other staff in the school.

LGBTQ-affirmative policies and legislation have been identified as substantial protective factors for sexual and gender minority youth in extant research (e.g., Russell et al., 2010) as well as in the present study. The present study extends our knowledge in this area with regard to how

those policies can support GSAs (e.g., Bill 10) in the Alberta context. However, there remains a need for educators (e.g., administrators) to clearly communicate those policies and legislation to all members of the school community and the implications they have for LGBTQ youth.

Educators in the present study highlighted a number of barriers to infusing LGBTQ-affirmative content into their curriculum (e.g., lack of resources, lack of direction), and these barriers are consistent with extant research (e.g., Ngo, 2003). The present study extends our knowledge in this area as educators interviewed provided specific examples of how LGBTQ-affirmative behaviors and practices could be easily implemented across various subject matter (e.g., exposing students to newspaper articles about diversity issues in English class).

Parents have been seen to play a critical role in shaping the attitudes of young people with regard to their LGBTQ-related attitudes. If educators consistently report a lack of training and professional development to understand and support LGBTQ youth, it stands to reason that parents are also quite unaware of the victimization LGBTQ youth experience. Therefore, efforts can be made to raise awareness among parents regarding the needs of LGBTQ youth and how the school community as a whole can support them.

Catholic school educators who are also allies may struggle to balance their ethical obligations to protect and care for all young people with the conflicting (Catholic) messages communicated to LGBTQ youth. Catholic school boards are encouraged to re-evaluate the dissemination of anti-LGBTQ messages in their curriculum.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

A strength of this study lies in its methodology (i.e., convergent parallel design). This approach allowed participants to provide valuable and measurable data through quantitative methods (e.g., how well their training prepared them to support LGBTQ youth), and then give

voice to that data through qualitative interviews (e.g., barriers to accessing training). The substantial amount of interview data also allowed for a deep exploration of the experiences of LGBTQ-affirmative educators.

As few studies have investigated the roles of administrators (i.e. school principals) as supporters of LGBTQ youth; a strength of this study is that those administrators' perspectives could be included through survey data as well as interviews.

Educators who participated in the interviews identify as male and female – some of whom are part of the LGBTQ community. The diversity of identities present allowed for the exploration of unique perspectives.

Limitations of a study are the characteristics of design or methodology that impact the interpretation of the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016); they expose the conditions that may weaken the study (Rallis & Rossman, 2012). A substantial limitation to the study concerns the sampling methods used (i.e., purposeful and snowball sampling). While the sampling methods provided opportunities to explore the experiences of educators who are attuned to the needs of LGBTQ youth, all participants considered themselves allies and are thus not representative of all teachers in Alberta.

A substantial limitation of the study concerns the representativeness of the participants who completed the online survey (i.e., 87% female) and the interview (i.e., 87% female). Another limitation is that, while 5% of the overall online survey participants identified their gender as "other," all interview participants identified as cisgender (i.e., male or female).

Another limitation concerns the wording of some survey questions that contributed to misunderstanding on the part of respondents. For example, the survey question "To what extent was work with LGBTQ populations featured in your specialized training?" was ambiguous in

that not all respondents interpreted "specialized training" in the same way. Clarification and further probing of this question during the interviews suggested that some participants viewed "specialized training" as professional development opportunities (once they had already been employed as educators in schools), while others thought it referred to their pre-service teacher training. This misunderstanding of the question may have contributed to more favorable responses from participants (i.e., that more LGBTQ content was present than there actually was).

Future iterations of the survey instrument may allow educators to specify when they graduated from a teacher training program; that level of detail in the data would allow for cross tabulation of educators' feelings with regard to how well they had been prepared by their programs, and how recently they had taken that program.

A further limitation concerns the geographical exclusionary criteria for the study (i.e., limited to Alberta educators). This limitation may impact the transferability of the findings given that not all provinces and states face the same sociopolitical climates surrounding LGBTQ youth in schools.

Finally, a substantial consideration and possible limitation to this study concerns the sociopolitical changes that occurred in Alberta between data collection and the writing of the report: As of April 2019, a new provincial government has taken power in Alberta whose values regarding the protection of gender and sexually-diverse youth are different from those of the previous government. The new government pledged to remove legislation that (a) provided GSAs for any student who wanted one, and (b) prevented school personnel from informing parents when their child is participating in a GSA (French, 2019). These changes suggest that teachers may have to resort to new measures to protect LGBTQ youth in Alberta schools in the future.

Future Directions

As previously mentioned, survey respondents reported a much higher presence of GSAs in Alberta than represented on a national survey (e.g., Taylor & Peter, 2011). This disparity may be due to, in part, the passing of LGBTQ-affirmative legislation in Alberta subsequent to the nationwide data collection. Therefore, an updated nationwide survey to explore the experiences of LGBTQ youth in Canada, and the presence and impact of GSAs may be warranted.

The impact of Catholic school culture and curriculum on LGBTQ youth is limited in extant research (e.g., Callaghan, 2018). Future studies can explore the experiences of LGBTQ youth in Catholic schools compared to non-religious environments.

Teachers in the present study reported that more guidance and resources were needed to infuse LGBTQ-affirmative content into their curriculums. Future studies may explore what strategies educators are using to infuse LGBTQ-affirmative content specific to various subject matter (e.g., in the English Language Arts classroom; Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017).

Finally, many educators commented that LGBTQ youth should be consulted more about their needs and how schools can be safer and inclusive for them. Future research may employ qualitative methods to capture the voices of those youth.

Conclusion

Overall, the primary interest and focus of this study was to explore the roles of educators in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth, the unique contributions those educators make, and the barriers they encounter. LGBTQ youth continue to experience hostile school environments (Kosciw et al., 2016; Taylor & Peter, 2011) but educators can make an important impact in reducing the victimization those youth experience and fostering more positive outcomes (Goodenow et al., 2006; Russell et al., 2001). The educators interviewed in the present

study take supportive roles toward LGBTQ youth by building relationships with those youth, leading GSAs, infusing LGBTQ-affirmative content into the curriculum, supporting their colleagues with information and strategies to support LGBTQ individuals, and by advocating for sexual and gender minority students. Educators may experience barriers to supporting LGBTQ youth due to a lack of training and professional development in related areas, fear of job loss, backlash from religious and conservative community members, lack of resources, and lack of guidance and leadership from administration. Despite these barriers, most educators surveyed felt it was extremely important to support LGBTQ youth in their schools. To reiterate what one educator in Fredman's study said, "If somebody's on fire, 'I don't have the training, so I guess I'll just watch them burn and call the fire department.' You have to do something…" (2015, p. 73).

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Appendix A

Survey of School Counsellors, School Psychologists, and Educators with Regard to GSAs (Gay Straight Alliances)/QSAs(Queer Straight Alliances), and Safe and Inclusive Spaces

Information on Participants and Their School Context

Please provide your name or email address*:*

____

Questions 1 - 10 pertain to background information regarding your training and current role

Please select your primary role in which you support LGBTQ students from the list below. In the subsequent survey items, please consider how the questions relate specifically to the primary role you selected.

1. Please select the following that best describes your role:
    - *a. School Counsellor*
    - *b. School Psychologist*
    - *c. Teacher*
    - *d. Administrator*
    - *e. Teaching Assistant*
    - *f. Other School Personnel*

2. Gender
    - *a. Female*
    - *b. Male*
    - *c. Neither of those options apply to me, I prefer to identify as:* __________________

3. Age:
    - *a. 20 – 29;*
    - *b. 30 – 39;*
    - *c. 40 – 49;*
    - *d. 50 – 59:*
    - *e. 60 and above.*

4. Level of school in which you currently work in your role (please choose all that apply):

(a) Elementary School
(b) Junior High School
(c) Senior High School

5. School's geographical setting:
   (a) Urban
   (b) Rural
   (c) Suburban

6. Student population in the school where you are currently employed:
   a. 250 or less
   b. 251 – 500
   c. 500 – 750
   d. 750- 1000
   e. 1001 – 1500
   f. 1501 – 2000
   g. 2000 or above

7. Number of other staff in the school currently employed in your role:
   Response Type: Free Numeral

8. Your highest level of education:
   a. Bachelor's degree;
   b. Master's degree;
   c. Doctoral degree

9. Specialized training obtained in your role:
   a. Diploma;
   b. Certification
   c. Master's degree;
   d. PhD

10. Years working in the current primary role you selected:
    a. Less than one year;
    b. One to three years;
    c. Three to six years;
    d. Six or more years.

Comment:

Questions 11 - 18 concern your training and professional development specific to working with LGBTQ populations. ***Please select the response most appropriate for you and elaborate on your choice in the space provided below each question where applicable.***

11. To what extent was work with LGBTQ populations featured in your specialized training?
    Response Type: Not at all/Inadequately/Adequately/Thoroughly.
    Comment:

12. How well do you feel your specialized training prepared you to support LGBTQ youth in your role?
    Response Type: Not at all/Inadequately/Adequately/Thoroughly.

Comment:

13. How well do you feel your specialized training prepared you to support LGBTQ youth in mental health/counselling-related work?
Response Type: Not at all/Inadequately/Adequately/Thoroughly.
Comment:

14. How well do feel your specialized training prepared you to support LGBTQ youth in regard to policy and program development?
Response Type: Not at all/Inadequately/Adequately/Thoroughly.
Comment:

15. How well do you feel your specialized training prepared you to support LGBTQ youth in regard to the development and maintenance of an inclusive and safe learning culture?
Response Type: Not at all/Inadequately/Adequately/Thoroughly.
Comment:

16. In what areas (e.g., mental health/counselling, policy/program development, inclusive curriculum, etc.) with regard to LGBTQ youth do you feel most prepared?
Response Type: Free Text
Comment:

17. What other professional development or related opportunities have prepared you in supporting LGBTQ youth, if any?
Response Type: Free Text
Comment:

18. In supporting LGBTQ youth, what areas do you feel you could develop further?
Response Type: Free Text
Comment:

Questions 19 - 22 concern LGBTQ programming at the school in which you are employed.

19. Check any of the following that are offered at your school:
    a. *Gay Straight Alliance/Queer Straight Alliance*
    b. *Other LGBTQ/Diversity Program/Group —*
    c. *If "other" please specify*
    Response Type: Free Text
Comment:

20. If any of the above is offered at your school, are you involved with it in some capacity?
    a. *Yes*
    b. *No*

21. If you answered "Yes" above, describe the nature of your involvement:
Response Type: Free Text

22. If you have been involved with a GSA/QSA, for how long (approximately in years)?
    a. Less than one year;

b. One to three years;
c. Three to six years;
d. Six or more years.

Comment:

Safe and Inclusive Schools Questions

Questions 23 - 27 pertain to the safety and inclusivity of LGBTQ students.

23. What do you believe makes for a safe and inclusive learning environment in school?
Response Type: Free Text

24. How important do you believe it is for individuals in your role to be involved in making schools safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ students?
Response Type: Not important at all/Somewhat important/Very important/Extremely important
Comment:

25. How might individuals in your role uniquely contribute to making learning and involvement in school safe and inclusive for LGBTQ students?
Response Type: Free Text

26. In what ways do you currently support LGBTQ youth at your school?
Response Type: Free Text

27. In your role, how do you uniquely contribute to the development of a safe and inclusive learning culture and spaces for LGBTQ students in your school?
Response Type: Free Text

Questions 28 - 41 pertain specifically to the development of GSA/QSA Programs.

28. In your opinion, what helps the development of a successful GSA/QSA within a school?
Response Type: Free Text

29. In your opinion, what hinders the development of a successful GSA/QSA within a school? *Response Type: Free Text*

30. In your opinion, what contributes to the ongoing maintenance of a GSA/QSA within a school?
Response Type: Free Text
In your opinion, what hinders the ongoing maintenance of a GSA/QSA within a school?
Response Type: Free Text

31. How might individuals in your role specifically contribute to the development of GSAs/QSAs or equivalent in schools?
Response Type: Free Text

32. Are individuals in your role specifically involved in the development of a GSA/QSA in your school?
    a. *Yes*
    b. *No*

    Comment:

33. If "Yes", how are they involved?
    Response Type: Free Text
    If "No", why are they not involved?
    Response Type: Free Text

34. In your role, have you been involved in the development of a GSA/QSA in your school?
    a. *Yes*
    b. *No*

35. If "No" to Question 34, what has stopped you from becoming involved?
    Response Type: Free Text

36. If "Yes" to Question 34, what have you contributed?
    Response Type: Free Text

37. If "Yes" to Question 34, what has been helpful to you?
    Response Type: Free Text

38. If "Yes" to Question 34, what challenges have you faced?
    Response Type: Free Text

39. If "Yes" to Question 34, what would have been helpful were it available?
    Response Type: Free Text

40. How important do you believe it is for individuals in your role to participate in professional development regarding the provision of support for LGBTQ youth in schools?
    Response Type: Not important at all/Somewhat important/Very important/Extremely important
    Comment:

41. How supported do you feel you are in your efforts to support LGBTQ youth:
    a. By parents

    Response Type: Not supported at all/somewhat supported/very supported/extremely supported

    b. By teachers

    Response Type: Not supported at all/somewhat supported/very supported/extremely supported

    c. By administration

    Response Type: Not supported at all/somewhat supported/very supported/extremely supported

    d. By other school personnel

    Response Type: Not supported at all/somewhat supported/very supported/extremely supported

    e. By school counsellors

    Response Type: Not supported at all/somewhat supported/very supported/extremely supported

f. By school psychologists

Response Type: Not supported at all/somewhat supported/very supported/extremely supported
Comment:

Further comments:
Response Type: Free Text

Please tick the following box if you would be willing to participate in brief follow-up telephone or Skype interview of 20-30 minutes. Please provide your email address so that we may contact you: ________________________.

Thank you for participating in this important survey!

By pressing the Submission Button below, you are giving your informed consent that your answers to the survey above can be used in this study.

Appendix B

Follow-up Interview Questions (Survey of School Counsellors, School Psychologists, and Educators):

This interview is being conducted with:
__ School Counsellor
__ School Psychologist
__ Educator *Specify:* ____________________

1. Our study is concerned with safe and inclusive environments in schools – in our survey we asked, "What do you believe makes for a safe and inclusive learning environment in school?"
   a. What more would you like to add here?
   b. Describe an instance where safety and inclusivity (for LGBTQ students) were demonstrated at your school?
   c. Have there been any instances when you thought safety and inclusivity (for LGBTQ students) were compromised in some way?

2. What do you believe is your role in supporting LGBTQ and gender minority youth in schools?
   a. How does the school and administration recognize this role?
   b. What aspects of your role bring you into contact with LGBTQ students?
   c. Describe a specific instance when your role brought you into contact with LGBTQ student(s).
   d. How did this happen?
   e. Describe the nature of the support you offered and the strategies you used.
   f. Describe the impact your support had on the student(s).

3. How is your role in supporting LGBTQ students distinct from other education professionals?
   a. Are other staff/educators in the school suited to support LGBTQ and gender minority youth?

4. What specific aspects of your pre-service training have equipped you to support LGBTQ students?

5. What kind of professional development have you completed that has equipped you to support LGBTQ students?

6. What is an area of competency that you wish to further develop in regard to supporting LGBTQ students?

    a. What would help you to develop this competency?

7. What challenges have you have faced in supporting or working with LGBTQ students?
    a. Describe a specific instance(s) you can recall.
    b. What made that situation challenging?

8. Does your school currently have a GSA/QSA?
    a. YES:
        i. What are specific factors that have contributed to its success?
        ii. What are some specific factors that have thwarted its success?
        iii. How have these factors influenced or been influenced by your role in developing or sustaining a QSA?
    b. NO:
        i. Describe what you feel has prevented this development?

9. What other policies/practices/groups/programs in schools can provide support and facilitate safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth?

10. Describe an instance where you felt supported in your efforts (to support LGBTQ youth), if any:
    a. By parents
    b. By teachers
    c. By administration
    d. By other education professionals

11. Describe an instance where you felt these efforts were resisted, if any:
    a. By parents
    b. By teachers
    c. By administration
    d. By other education professionals

12. What would make school spaces more inclusive and safe – visually, and in any other ways you could suggest (e.g., displays, material design, announcements, lighting)?

13. In what ways can safe and inclusive spaces be "visible," i.e., communicating safety, acceptance, and tolerance in a visual way?

14. What do you believe will promote the continued development of safe and inclusive spaces in Alberta schools?

Appendix C
Recruitment Flyer

Participants wanted for a University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board approved study on *Safe and Inclusive Spaces for LGBTQ Youth in Schools*

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
WERKLUND SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Survey of School Counsellors, School Psychologists, and Educators with Regard to Gay Straight Alliances, and Safe and Inclusive Spaces

This research involves conducting surveys with school counsellors, school psychologists, and other educators in Alberta schools. The survey will take approximately 15-minutes to complete.

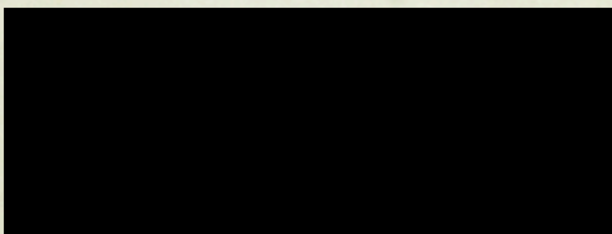
This mixed-methods study is intended to contribute to a greater understanding of how to create safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth, as well as determine the barriers faced in creating those spaces.

The expectation is that this study will contribute to approaches to support educators in the development of safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth, identify institutional barriers as well as areas for professional development, and improve school policies to support diverse youth.

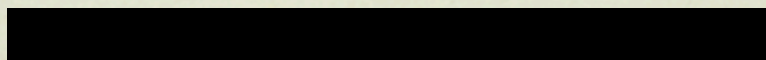
This study is being done in conjunction with a team of researchers from the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary that includes

dent in Counselling Psychology).

To learn more about the study, please contact:



To participate in this study, go to:



Appendix D
Informed Consent Document

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

[redacted]; Werklund School of Education, School and Applied Child Psychology,

[redacted]

[redacted] M.Sc. student in School and Applied Child Psychology; Werklund School of Education, c/o [redacted]

Supervisor:

[redacted], PhD; Werklund School of Education, School and Applied Child Psychology, [redacted]

Title of Project: School Counsellors', School Psychologists', and Educators' Perspectives on their Roles in Promoting GSAs (Gay Straight Alliances)/QSAs (Queer Straight Alliances), and Safe and Inclusive Spaces for LGBTQ Youth

Sponsor: Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned or information not included here, you should feel free to ask (jandrews@ucalgary.ca). Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study.

Purpose of the Study

With recent changes in Alberta legislation, school districts are now expected to enable Gay-Straight-Alliances (GSAs) within schools as part of making schools safer and more welcoming of sexual minority (queer) students. Learning from influential stakeholders, like school psychologists, school counsellors, and other educators, on how GSAs and other such safe and inclusive spaces in schools are and could further be enabled is both timely and useful to students and educators. We want to learn from your experiences and ideas on what makes secondary schools safe and inclusive places for LGBTQ students.

What Will I Be Asked to Do?

Below you are invited to give your informed consent to participate in an online survey.

□ **Survey Participants:** (Alberta Secondary School Counsellors, School Psychologists, and Educators)**.** We seek your experiences, views, and recommendations for making Alberta secondary schools safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth. The electronic (online) questionnaire contains specific (e.g., yes/no or pick the best answer from the provided list of potential answers) questions, along with more open-ended questions (e.g., How do you support Gay Straight Alliances, or their equivalent in your school?) to which you can provide more detailed responses. The survey should take no more than 20 minutes to complete and if you select the gift card option at the end, you will be asked to supply your name and email address in the event that you are a winner of a first prize ($50) or second prize ($25) electronic gift card for use at Chapters Indigo. Your survey responses will be included with those of other respondents and studied for common themes, understandings and recommendations by the research team.

Participation in any of these study activities is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation and consent to use your responses in electronic surveys, without penalty, requesting we not use your already-contributed responses to the study. Should you wish to withdraw your data from the study, you will have 30-days to do so after taking the survey. After 30-days, withdrawing your data will no longer be possible.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Your name or email address will be required to participate in the **online survey** of this study; that information will be used in the event that you wish to withdraw your responses within the allotted time period. Once the research team has deactivated the online survey and data analysis has begun, all names and email addresses will be deleted. Some general descriptive detail (e.g., self-identified gender, professional role, school size) will be requested to guide us in the analysis phase of the research, but in no way will this information personally identify you as the respondent. Should you, upon completing the survey, wish to have your name entered into a draw for a $50 or $25 electronic gift card to Chapters Indigo, you may supply your name and email address again so that we can follow-up with you if your name is drawn.

All information derived from online survey data will be analyzed by the Werklund School research team who will report on the study outcomes in ways that safeguard your privacy.

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

While GSAs and discussion of safe and inclusive spaces for sexual minority students is supported by provincial legislation, schools and communities continue to be places where such safety and inclusivity are not guaranteed. This study was developed in part to optimize the safety and inclusivity of schools. The ways school psychologists, school counsellors, and other educators can participate in the study are through online surveys and interviews.

Online Survey Participants: In consenting to complete the online survey, the risks envisioned are minimal given the focus the questions have on inviting views and recommendations for making Alberta secondary schools safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ students. The benefits of your participation would be to inform presentations to school counsellors, school

psychologists, and educators interested in what you do, and to advocate for making your schools safe and inclusive spaces.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

The information you provide in this study will be transcribed by the researcher and/or a professional who has signed a confidentiality agreement, and then it will be stored securely on the computers of the University of Calgary research team conducting this study. Any self-identifying information will be eliminated as we do our later analysis for understandings and common meanings, and prepare reports from this analysis. The data collected in this study will be stored on a secure hard drive for five years; this amount of time allows for further analyses to be conducted if needed in the event of presentations and publications. After five years, all data from the study will be destroyed using 7-pass secure deletion software. Any paper records from the study will be shredded after five years, and securely disposed of.

"Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results? Yes: ___ No: ___

If yes, please provide your contact information (e-mail address, or phone number)"
____

Signatures

While no signature is required to participate in the survey, your decision to submit the survey involves pressing "Submit" when it is complete. By pressing "Submit" you are giving your informed consent for your survey responses to be used in this study.

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

[redacted] PhD; Werklund School of Education, School and Applied Child Psychology,

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at [redacted] A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix E
Peer Debrief Recruitment Information

Research Analysis Opportunity (Volunteer)

You are invited to participate in an important component of a study about creating and sustaining safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth in Alberta schools.

The study's research questions are:
What are the roles of school counsellors, school psychologists, and educators with respect to promoting and creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth; what unique contributions can school counsellors, school psychologists, and educators make in nurturing those spaces; and, what barriers do school counsellors, school psychologists, and educators face in creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth?

We will use Thematic Analysis (TA) to analyze semi-structured interview transcripts and brief open-text responses from surveys collected. The purpose of TA is to identify patterns of meaning across a dataset that provide an answer to the research question(s) being addressed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

What is Being Asked of Research Analysis Participants?:

- You would be involved in the *theme development* stage of the data analysis;
- You would come prepared to the theme development meeting having read three transcripts from the study;
- You would come prepared to the meeting having read the open-text responses from surveys;
- You would have generated themes and patterns, and identified some quotes they feel most exemplify those themes and patterns;
- Themes and patterns will be discussed in the meeting.

Benefits to Participants:

- Engage in very timely research in the Alberta context;
- Learn about an integral component of TA for qualitative research (i.e., triangulation and theme generation);
- Be exposed to important topics concerning helping professionals (i.e., supporting LGBTQ youth, barriers, strategies)

The theme development meeting will be held on **March 21, 2019, from 4pm-6pm** in the University of Calgary Education Tower (room number to be confirmed). Food and refreshments will be provided.

If you are interested in being involved in this unique and exciting opportunity, please reply to Andrew Luceno (andrew.luceno1@ucalgary.ca).

Appendix F
Peer Debriefing Organization of Themes and Sub-Themes