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Treatment and Perceptions of LGBTQIA+ Persons

Emily Bolshazy

TREATMENT AND PERCEPTIONS OF LGBTQIA+ PERSONS

By

Emily Bolshazy

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Emily Bolshazy

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Emily Troshynski, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Chair

Margaret Alexis Kennedy, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Tamara Herold, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Magdalena Martinez, Ph.D.
Graduate College Faculty Representative

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D.
Graduate College Dean

Abstract

In school districts across the country, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQIA+) young adults are being bullied at alarming rates. These experiences have long-term implications for quality of life, employment opportunities, and justice system interactions. Yet, very little research is dedicated to understanding their experiences. This project includes qualitative triangulation analysis to compare common themes throughout three data sources. Research questions this project seeks to answer are 1) How do people who are anti-LGBTQIA+ policy perceive LGBTQIA+ young adults? and 2) What are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals? The overall goal of this research project is to be able to show the common experiences of LGBTQIA+ students and inspire the creation of a policy or procedure that can be presented to school districts to aid in their pro-LGBTQIA+ student policies.

Keywords: *LGBTQIA+, bullying, school, gay straight alliance (GSA) club*

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Currently in America there are roughly 1,994,000 young adults in the LGBTQIA+ [1]

community and roughly 11,343,000 LGBTQIA+ adults (Conron, 2020; Conron & Goldberg,

2020). Research on LGBTQIA+ persons suggests that they experience heightened rates of abuse

and unequitable treatment at schools and within places of work (Allen, 2014). To begin, this

chapter presents the topic of the research project. Following this, an overview of the statistics of

LGBTQIA+ bullying is offered. Then, the chapter will conclude with the scope of the thesis

project and provide a roadmap to the layout of the paper.

The amount of bullying and harassment that LGBTQIA+ young adults experience is

alarming. Nationwide, almost 85% of LGBTQIA+ young adults reported that they had been

verbally harassed and about 40% had been physically assaulted in school as a result of their

LGBTQIA+ status (Allen, 2014). These young adults are attacked for their identity, sexuality

and/or sexual orientation, and gender expression (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2012).

There has been an increase in the amount of LGBTQIA+ bullying following the 2016 American

Presidential Election (Dennis, Uttamchandani, Biery, & Blauvelt, 2019).

A young adult's high school experience helps shape them for their future (Tubbs &

Garner, 2008). LGBTQIA+ youth who experience high rates of bullying/harassment are more

likely to skip school and have lower educational performance (Pizmony-Levy & Kosciw, 2016).

These students also are at a greater risk for suicide attempts and suicidal ideations (Robinson &

Espelage, 2012). Regardless of a young adult's gender/sexual identity, bullying is a severe risk

factor associated with poor mental, social, and physical health indicators (Reisner, Sava, Menino,

Perrotti, Barnes, Humphrey, Niktin, & Earnshaw, 2020). Knowing that LGBTQIA+ students

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[1] LGBTQIA+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexualities and/or sexual orientations
and gender expressions. (Rafferty, 2018)

experience higher amounts of bullying, more needs to be done to protect LGBTQIA+ students (Pizmony-Levy & Kosciw, 2016).

Earlier research dedicated to school climate studies describes a school's climate as the combination of characteristics of all the individuals in a school (Tubbs & Garner, 2008). These characteristics include the morale of teachers and staff, young adults' cultural backgrounds, and the school's values and belief systems (Tubbs & Garner, 2008). Recent research that connects school climate studies to experiences of LGBTQIA+ young adults consistently finds that they often feel isolated from their peers, friends, teachers, and administrators because their schools have created/cultivated a climate that is unaccepting of LGBTQ+ persons (Allen, 2014). Thus, these studies have also found that a school's climate can affect teachers' quality of teaching, young adults' academic performance, and the overall learning environment (Tubbs & Garner, 2008).

Overall, LGBTQIA+ young adult educational performance is lower than non-LGBTQIA+ young adults, and a hostile climate/culture does little to support their current and future successes (Horowitz & Hansen, 2008). LGBTQIA+ students often report that they do not feel that their school was supportive towards them and their similarly identified peers (Reisner et al., 2020). Current research shows that many LGBTQIA+ persons experience bullying while they are in school and also while they are participating in online learning (Crothers, Kolbert, Berbary, Chatlos, Lattanzio, Tiberi, & Meidl, 2017). In sum, members of the LGBTQIA+ community do not feel safe in school and/or educational environments; they also do not feel like they have support from their faculty and administration.

Bullying or Worse?

One of the difficulties when looking at research on victimization experiences of LGBTQIA+ young adults is the conflation of the terms bullying and harassment. This is a problem because actions labeled as bullying in schools can also be legally considered as harassment or even as hate crimes (Mikel Brown, Chesney-Lind, & Stein, 2007). For example, school districts across the country have codes of conduct and clauses that define bullying. Yet, prior research has shown that behaviors and actions that are legally defined as harassment are labeled as bullying (see Appendix A). This can mean that young LGBTQIA+ adults are being harassed, assaulted, and/or victims of hate crimes and that these experiences are not being considered as such; instead, they are considered as "bullying" and handled within the school and not within the legal system (Mikel Brown, Chesney-Lind, & Stein, 2007).

In the state of the research site location, the definitions of bullying and harassment are very similar. As defined by the state educational system, bullying is written, verbal, or cyber expressions/acts that interfere with an individual's rights, harm an individual, and cause fear of harm in an individual (see Appendix A). This definition of bullying is useful because it includes harmful behaviors based upon gender identity[2]/expression and sexual orientation. The inclusion of psychological bullying is essential because it includes actions that are not as easy to see and can do just as much damage as physical bullying. Furthermore, within this state, harassment is defined as a person threatening to cause physical injury to a person, cause damage to an object, threaten an individual, and commit an act that is intended to harm an individual physical or mental health and safety (see Appendix A).

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[2] "A person's deep internal sense of being female, male, a combination of both, somewhere in between, or neither, resulting from a multifaceted interaction of biological traits, environmental factors, self-understanding, and cultural expectations" (Rafferty, 2018, p.2)

These definitions were chosen for this thesis because they are the vernacular used at the local level; similar phrases and definitions are also brought up throughout the secondary data sets utilized for this research. Importantly, these definitions are offered to show how similar in wording both bullying and harassment are. Thus, they directly apply to this research topic's focus on understanding LGBTQIA+ experiences with bullying/harassment.

Scope of Thesis

Connected to research presented here in this Introduction, this thesis aims to look at the treatment of LGBTQIA+ young adults[3] in a public school district and how public perceptions affect them. In 2017, the school district where the research was conducted held several public town hall discussions on whether or not they should implement policies that would add protections to LGBTQIA+ individuals. These inclusion policies[4] were later implemented but, importantly, and through the use of secondary data sources that focused on LGBTQIA+ experiences, this thesis addresses whether or not anything changed. This research project is essential because it looks at how the outside community can affect LGBTQIA+ individuals and their school experiences.

Based on an analysis of several secondary data sources, this thesis seeks to answer two broad research questions: 1) How do people who are against LGBTQIA+ policy perceive LGBTQIA+ young adults? and 2) What are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals? To answer these two questions, qualitative triangulation analysis (Flick, 2004; Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011; Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006; Triangulation, 2014;) of three (3) secondary data sources was coded multiple times and then analyzed for reoccurring themes (Corbin, 2004;

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[3] For the purpose of this project, young adult references both high school students and recently graduated individuals. It is important to note that students in high school are under the age of eighteen and are considered children, not adults.

[4] Policy 5138: Addressing the Rights and Needs of Students with Diverse Gender Identities or Expressions

Khandkar, 2009). The three sets of secondary data to be examined include 1) transcripts from

several public-school district community meetings; 2) personal notes from observing local GSA

club meetings; and 3) collective notes from townhall discussion at local non-profit serving

members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Policy recommendations, educational materials, and

teacher workshops are a few things that could be developed with the information gathered from

this project. These ideas for future research and policy impacts are included in the Discussion

chapter.

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

Scholars have been researching the treatment of LGBTQIA+ young adults in schools for years (Earnshaw, Menino, Sava, Perrotti, Barnes, Humphrey, & Reisner, 2020; Reisner, Sava, Menino, Perrotti, Barnes, Humphrey, Niktin, & Earnshaw, 2020; Robinson & Espelage, 2012). This research has shown, time and time again, that schools are not safe places for members of the LGBTQIA+ community (Berry, 2018). This chapter will discuss previous research on LGBTQIA+ experiences with bullying and harassment; summarize school climate studies; detail what we know about community and school responses to bullying/harassment; and end with a subsection on research dedicated to consequences and impacts of bullying/harassment. Additionally, the chapter will end with an explanation of the strengths and limitations of previous research and how this thesis fills the gaps of previous research.

Research on Bullying and Harassment

Research suggests that LGBTQIA+ individuals are more likely to experience bullying than their non-LGBTQIA+ peers. Different types of bullying include physical, verbal, and cyber bullying (Hunt & Moodie-Mills, 2012). For example, Blumenfeld and Cooper (2010) found that 10%-15% of all LGBTQIA+ community members had experienced some type of bullying. A different study on the emotional experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in high school found that they reported the highest rates of bullying and negative emotional experiences (White, Moeller, Ivcevic, Brackett, and Stern, 2018). Transgender[5] and non-binary[6] individuals experience types of bullying that other young adults in the LGBTQIA+ community do not

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[5] "A subset of gender-diverse youth whose gender identity does not match their assigned sex and generally remains persistent, consistent, and insistent over time; the term "transgender" also encompasses many other labels individuals may use to refer to themselves" (Rafferty, 2018, p.2)
[6] A way for people to identify themselves when their gender is not male or female (transexuality.org)

(Earnshaw et al., 2020). For example, transgender young adults are often deadnamed[7] and misgendered[8] (Earnshaw et al., 2020).

Other studies have focused on the language of harassment instead of "bullying". As was stated in the introduction, the definitions of bullying and harassment are almost identical (See Appendix A). According to a study done by Hunt and Moodie-Mills (2012), 84% of gay and transgender individuals had reported being verbally harassed, 40% had reported experienced physical harassment, and 19% of these students reported physical assault. Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon, and Howell (2009) found that 90% of LGBTQIA+ young adults reported having been verbally or physically harassed because of their perceived/actual identity (vs. 62% of non-LGBTQIA+ students). In another study, Berry (2017) found that 74.1% of LGBTQIA+ individuals had been verbally harassed because of their sexuality. These statistics indicate that something is wrong and that something needs to change.

When in school, LGBTQIA+ individuals are being bullied/harassed by their straight peers (Aragon et al., 2014). LGBTQIA+ individuals are bullied/harassed by their peers based on the stigmas and perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ community (Earnshaw, Reisner, Juvonen, Hatzenbuehler, Perrotti, & Schuster, 2017). While not all non-LGBTQIA+ individuals bully/harass LGBTQIA+ individuals, they do not always step in when they see the bullying/harassment happening (Earnshaw et al., 2017). Therefore, the connection between perceptions of LGBTQIA+ and treatment of them (individually and as a group) is important to consider.

After looking at previous research on bullying and harassment, it is evident that a change needs to be made in the American school systems. LGBTQIA+ students should not be

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[7] Using the birth name of an individual who has changed their name (Earnshaw et al., 2020)
[8] Using improper pronouns that do not reflect their gender (Earnshaw et al., 2020)

bullied/harassed at the rates they are (Berry, 2017; Blumenfeld & Cooper, 2010; Grossman et al, 2009). The next section of this chapter will discuss the previous research done on the impact of school climates.

Research on School Climates

A hostile school environment can have detrimental effects on a student's current and future well-being (Reisner et al., 2020). In their research, Day, Fish, Grossman, and Russell (2019) found that students in the LGBTQIA+ community often face a more hostile environment than their non-LGBTQIA+ peers. Herein, a hostile environment is characterized as being unsafe and unaccepting of LGBTQIA+ individuals (Mitchum & Moodie-Mills, 2014). For example, one school climate study found that over a third of LGBTQIA+ students avoided gender specific areas of their school because they did not feel safe (Berry, 2018). This leads to young adults in the LGBTQIA+ community skipping school because they do not feel safe or comfortable in their learning environment (Berry, 2018).

Furthermore, research notes that LGBTQIA+ students do not feel safe enough to report bullying/harassment out of fear of being "outed" by school staff (Reisner et al., 2020). When asked about the connection between experiencing bullying and reporting, oppressive and non-inclusive policies in schools were often a cited barrier for LGBTQIA+ students (Lapointe & Crooks, 2018). Examples of non-inclusive policies include a failure to recognize preferred names where, as one study documents, 42% of transgender students had not been allowed to use their preferred name because of restrictive policies (Berry, 2018). Nationally, these school climate studies also found that approximately 59.2% of transgender students were required to use a bathroom/locker room that did not align with their gender (Berry, 2018). This begs the question: Are hostile school environments microcosms of attitudes within the local community?

Race also plays a role in the treatment of LGBTQIA+ persons. In their study, Hillard, Love, Franks, Laris, and Coyle (2014) found that non-white Gay Student Alliance (GSA[9]) members were more likely to experience harassment than those who were not in a GSA club. LGBTQIA+ students of color often felt like their white LGBTQIA+ peers had an easier time being accepted (Earnshaw, et al., 2020). When navigating multiple stigmatized identities (race, gender, sexuality) LGBTQIA+ individuals reported even higher rates of bullying than their peers that only had one stigmatized identity (Gower, Rider, McMorris, & Eisenberg, 2018).

Payne and Smith (2013) attribute the harassment of LGBTQIA+ students based on their gender/sexuality to a larger set of beliefs in America. It is important to note that experiences with bullying and harassment are not consistent throughout the United States (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009). Throughout rural towns in the south, LGBTQIA+ students experience higher rates of victimization (Kosciw et al., 2009). One LGBTQIA+ student explained that when they went to school in their rural town they were not able to come out as lesbian (Hulko & Hovanes, 2017). In fact, recent research has documented how several principals from rural towns recommended that LGBTQIA+ students "blend in" with other students in order to cause fewer problems (Bishop & McClellan, 2016). Once participants of this study switched schools and started attending classes in a large city, they felt fine coming out and expressing themselves without fear of retribution (Hulko & Hovanes, 2017). Other members of the LGBTQIA+ community have agreed that they are not as accepted in small towns as they are in big cities (Hulko & Hovanes, 2017).

In sum, the research on school climate is mixed and depends on multiple factors. First, LGBTQIA+ status is an important factor when looking at school climate because transgender

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[9] GSA stands for gay straight alliance, and it is a club that is often seen in middle and high schools. Some clubs define GSA as gender sexuality alliance as well.

and gender diverse individuals experience higher rates of bullying than their LGB peers (Day, Perez-Brumer, & Russell, 2018). In addition, the intersection of race and ethnicity with gender identity and expression influences how LGBTQIA+ individuals are treated (Earnshaw, et al., 2020). Finally, location is an important factor in school climates. LGBTQIA+ individuals receive different kinds of treatment depending if they are in a rural or urban area (Hulko & Hovanes, 2017). After reviewing the impact of school climates, this chapter will next discuss the school and community responses to LGBTQIA+ bullying.

Community and School Responses

To help combat the bullying/harassment and negative experiences LGBTQIA+ young adults face, schools have created GSA clubs and safe spaces. GSA clubs are a student run club that aims to create a safe and positive space for LGBTQIA+ students as well as straight students (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011). First and foremost, these clubs are created most of the time because there are no safe spaces at school (Toomey et al., 2011). One of the goals of a GSA club is to build relationships between non-LGBTQIA+ and LGBTQIA+ individuals (Lapointe & Crooks, 2018). There are currently over 4,000 GSA clubs registered in the United States and other countries are beginning to see them appear (Toomey et al., 2011).

Having a GSA club at a school encourages a more positive environment for LGBTQIA+ students to be themselves (Day et al., 2019). Schools with a GSA club have lower reports of victimization, and people are more likely to step in when they hear homophobic remarks being made (Day et al., 2019). Along with this, LGBTQIA+ community members in schools with GSA clubs felt higher amounts of support from teachers, classmates, and school administration (Day et al., 2019). Kosciw et al. (2012) also found that there were decreased amounts of anti-

LGBTQIA+ victimization in schools with a GSA club. When there are GSA clubs LGBTQIA+ young adults are much more likely to feel like they belong (Robinson & Espelage, 2011).

Research on the impacts of inclusive school policies demonstrate promising positive connections to LGBTQIA+ student success. When schools have LGBTQIA+ focused policies, there are lower rates of homophobic bullying (Day et al., 2019). When young adults are taught a positive representation of the LGBTQIA+ community and its history, there was a significant decrease of in-school victimization (Kosciw et al., 2012).

Schools with teachers and administration that are serious about reducing bullying can provide appropriate supervision, intervention, and a welcoming school climate (Blumenfeld and Cooper, 2010). Schools that also have supportive teachers have higher feelings of safety, lower rates of truancy, a stronger feeling of acceptance, higher grade point averages, and greater educational intentions (Aragon et al., 2014). The longer teachers and administration avoid having conversations and deny the treatment of LGBTQIA+ students, the longer a heteronormative culture will be upheld (Mayberry, 2006).

When it comes to creating and enforcing rules that will help to protect the LGBTQIA+ community, the school principal needs to be an ally of the LGBTQIA+ community. Research has shown that principals are the most important variable in creating a positive school climate (Bishop & McClellan, 2016). Principals set the tone for what behaviors are/are not acceptable and can control what actions are taken against discriminatory individuals (Bishop & McClellan, 2016). When principals have a positive perception of the LGBTQIA+ community, schools often are able to create a safe and welcoming environment (Bishop & McClellan, 2016).

Consequences and Impacts

There are significant consequences to members of the LGBTQIA+ community that are a result of bullying and harassment. In their study, Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, and Russell (2010) found that LGBTQIA+ experiences with school victimization had a direct correlation to long-term psychological adjustments. Experiences with bullying and harassment, or worse, can lead to higher rates of depression, anxiety, suicidality, and traumatic stress in the future (White et al., 2017). On top of that, Craig, Tucker and Wagner (2008) found that LGBTQIA+ young adults are more likely to have difficulty with substance abuse, experience psychiatric disorders, and commit suicide.

There are also educational repercussions that are a result of bullying/harassment. Horowitz and Hansen (2008) found that LGBTQIA+ youth who had reported being verbally harassed had grade point averages (GPA) that were significantly lower than their peers. In their study on educational outcomes for LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ young adults, Aragon, Poteat, Espelage, and Keonig (2014) found that LGBTQIA+ individuals earn lower grades, have lower educational aspirations (including not finishing high school or attending college), and have high rates of truancy. These consequences can be tied directly to perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ community. When the principal of a school is apathetic towards the treatment of LGBTQIA+ individuals, they are less likely to do anything to stop the bullying/harassment from occurring (Bishop & McClellan, 2016).

In their study on the inequalities in educational and psychological outcomes between LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ participants, Robinson and Espelage (2011) found that LGBTQIA+ students felt like they did not belong. Given the large number of young adults in the LGBTQIA+ community, this is a problem. The consequences of LGBTQIA+ bullying and harassment are severe. With a majority of research saying that LGBTQIA+ bullying is a problem

(Aragon et al., 2014; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; White et al., 2017), more needs to be done to protect these individuals.

Strengths and Limitations of Prior Research

One of the strengths of previous research on the treatment of LGBTQIA+ students is that it better reflects the realities of LGBTQIA+ youth in school. Research explains how school climate, teacher attitudes, peer relationships, and feelings of safety affect LGBTQIA+ students in the immediate. Additionally, research also shows connections to academic and professional successes in the future. This research is incredibly important because it documents rates of bullying, harassment, and even abuse. This, therefore, helps to validate the experiences and feelings of LGBTQIA+ students by showing them that they are not alone in their school struggles.

A majority of previous research has been collected through quantitative research methods. While there is nothing wrong with these methods, qualitative methods are preferred because they are able to get a deeper understanding of the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students and why they are being bullied/harassed. Studies highlighting the experiences of LGBTQIA+ young adults have brought large amounts of awareness to educators and policy makers, but there are still gaps in current research that should be addressed. While previous research has looked at the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals and the impact of LGBTQIA+ focused policy and the importance of GSA clubs, there is a limited amount of research that has connected the public perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ community, the experiences of current LGBTQIA+ members of a GSA club, and the experiences of older LGBTQIA+ individuals who are members of the LGBTQIA+ community. While some qualitative research in this area has been completed, there is still a need for more. More qualitative research would help to get a deeper understanding of

student experiences. This thesis project helps to fill in the gaps of previous research by examining public perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ community and how these perceptions affect young adults in this community.

It is important to review previous research before starting a new project. Previous research can help to guide future research projects that will fill in the gaps of what was not able to be done previously. Using a theoretical framework that can help to explain what is being studied is essential. For the purpose of this research, Symbolic Interactionism and Queer Theory were chosen.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

Symbolic Interaction (SI) Theory and Queer Theory were used in this project to explain the harmful effects of public perceptions and adverse treatment of LGBTQIA+ students. Symbolic Interaction Theory is a sociological theory that explains behavior on the micro, individual level (Yeager, 2016). Queer Theory is a sociological theory that provides a deeper understanding of an individual through the lens of society's patriarchal, race-blind, and heterosexist assumptions (Green, 2007). Overall, Symbolic Interaction Theory was chosen because it can help explain how perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ community paired with bullying and harassment can affect LGBTQIA+ students. Queer Theory was selected because it helps to provide a deeper explanation of the intersectionality of LGBTQIA+ students.

This chapter will discuss both Symbolic Interaction and Queer Theory. Beginning with Symbolic Interactionism, an overview of the Theory will be addressed following an explanation of Queer Theory and its relation to SI. Next, previous research using Symbolic Interactionism in queer studies will be discussed. The chapter will close with the strengths and limitations of Symbolic Interaction theory.

Symbolic Interactionism: An Overview and Connections to Research Topic

Yeager (2016), while describing Symbolic Interactionism, explains that a person's "self" is molded through social interactions. There are three core premises in Symbolic Interaction Theory: people interact with objects based on the meanings that they have for them, the meaning behind objects is a product of interaction, and meaning for everything can change at any time (Yeager, 2016). In this theory, the term "object" can be used in the place of words such as people and places. According to this theory, the creation of one's "self" is through social interactions, and this is crucial when looking at the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students. Previous literature

has shown that LGBTQIA+ students are bullied at higher rates than their non-LGBTQIA+ peers. Research has also shown that these harmful interactions can lead to negative self-views (Day et al., 2019), resulting in a range of short- and long-term consequences.

Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, and Demirbuken (2009) explained Symbolic Interaction as a process of interpretation of actions. Humans interpret everything in their unique way (Aksan et al., 2009). One object can have a different meaning for every single person (Aksan et al., 2009). Meanings are formed as a result of experience through interactions (Aksan et al., 2009). To understand human behavior, the individual's definitions, meanings, and processes must be examined so that the context of their understanding makes sense. This theory is not concerned with objectivity but subjectivity in society (Carter & Fuller, 2015). An individual's worldview is made entirely of their subjectivity (Carter & Fuller, 2015).

In their Symbolic Interaction analysis of transgender women, Makassar, Carter and Fuller (2016) found that these women believed the reason they were excluded in society was the societal perceptions of transgender people. People act based on their interpretations of others through social interactions (Aldiabat & Le Navene, 2011). These internalized negative stereotypes are the anticipation of rejection and sensitivity to this rejection (Link et al., 2015). The concept of stigma consciousness was developed regarding sexuality minority bias (Link, Wells, Phelan, & Yang, 2017).

In the Symbolic Interactionist take on social control of deviance the core principles are embarrassment and shame (Yeager, 2016). Humans will do whatever they can to avoid embarrassment (Yeager, 2016). To avoid embarrassment, people conform to social expectations (Yeager, 2016). This is known as "Symbolic Interaction Stigma" in sociological research (Link et al., 2017).

Symbolic Interaction stigma is the anticipation of what others may be thinking based on previous interactions (Link et al., 2017). This can be applied directly to this research project. If LGBTQIA+ students are made to feel embarrassed about their sexual/gender identity, they may do whatever they can to hide and avoid the attention. Along with preventing embarrassment, LGBTQIA+ students at schools without GSA clubs may not find their group where they feel understood. A combination of shame and not feeling like they belong can lead to no sense of self, and that can have damaging effects on individuals.

Queer Theory and Connections to Symbolic Interactionism

While Queer Theory is difficult to define, scholars have established that it represents a deeper understanding of an individual's intersectionality (Green, 2007). Queer Theory is not restricted to the identity of LGBTQIA+ individuals (McCann, 2019). This Theory questions the entire concept of identity (McCann, 2019). Queer Theory was introduced into the academic world in the 1990s and has been used ever since because of its flexible nature (McCann, 2019). Queer Theory can be used to explain a multitude of issues across the social sciences. Queer being the ambiguous term that it is, Queer Theory can transgress social science boundaries other theories cannot (McCann, 2019).

Previous research has included an intersectional perspective to see how different identities affect LGBTQIA+ students (Hulko & Hovanes, 2018). Intersectionality has been defined by Shields (2008) as "social identities which serve as organizing features of social relations" (p. 302). Social identities include gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, and location. The way that these identities intersect with each other shapes how individuals perceive everything.

When students experience bullying that attacks their gender and/or sexuality, it is a direct attack at the core of their identity. Individuals with an identity outside of the "norm" must-do "identity work" (Copp, 2006). Identity work is the individual's process of developing and creating boundaries for who they want to be, who they are, and how they want to be treated (Copp, 2006). While sociology and queer studies may not be similar, queer theory and Symbolic Interactionism both analyze identity and subjectivity (Green, 2007).

Symbolic Interactionism: Previous Research

Previous research has shown that when students are constantly being told negative things about themselves, they will eventually believe that those negative things are true (Toomey et al., 2010). This is Symbolic Interaction theory in practice. For example, Brown and Lohr (1987) researched peer-group affiliation and self-esteem to test Symbolic Interaction theory. They found that teenagers were expected to pick a group to join based on their interests and values, but until they knew who they were, they would move from group-to-group testing out different self-concepts (Brown & Lohr, 1987). The understanding of the self is a never-ending process of social interactions (Copp, 2006).

Research dedicated to parents of transgender and gender non-conforming young adults have documented how they were often scared/concerned for their children to openly express their gender identity (Johnson, Sikorski, Savage, & Woitaszewski, 2010; Alegria, 2018; Sansfacon, Robichaud, & Dumais-Michaud, 2015). This is due primarily to a worry that their students would face intolerance, stigma, and harassment (Tyler et al., 2020). Additionally, research also suggests that parents were also worried their child would be discriminated against because they are a member of the LGBTQIA+ community (Alegria, 2018; Sansfacon, Robichaud, Dumais-Michaud, 2015; Sansfacon, Kirichenko, Holmes, Feder, Lawson, Ghosh,

Ducharme, Newhook, & Suerich-Gulick, 2019). Overall, research notes that these fears stemmed from the reality that their child experienced social marginalization (Tyler, 2015). People develop their self-concept through their daily interactions, and it would be worrisome for parents to think that their child would have a negative self-concept because of what people say about them.

Perhaps because of experiences with intolerance, shame, stigma, and harassment, research (Tyler, 2015; Aranmolate, Bogan, Hoard, & Mawson, 2017; Schmitz & Tyler, 2018) also finds that LGBTQIA+ students must have a solid parent-child relationship. When parents support their LGBTQIA+ children, they are less likely to experience mental health issues and substance abuse (Tyler, 2015). Parents of LGBTQIA+ students expressed that the thought of their child being unhappy/depressed/suicidal brought them tremendous anxiety and they wanted to do whatever they could to help (Sansfacon et al., 2015). While it may be a journey for parents to accept and support their LGBTQIA+ children, if they educate themselves, allow time for understanding, obtain support from other parents, and obtain approval from professionals, they are much more likely to be a part of their child's life (Sansfacon et al., 2019).

Importantly, studies also find that conflict between LGBTQIA+ children and their parents can lead to drug use, depression, sexual health risk, and suicide (Tyler, 2015; Aranmolate et al., 2017). Risk factors for suicide among LGBTQIA+ youth include bullying, cultural and religious beliefs, feeling hopeless, and an unwillingness to get help because of social stigmas (Aranmolate et al., 2017). Social stigma is a direct result of Symbolic Interactionism. Even if they are not true, the internalization of stereotypes is one of the main aspects of SI (Link et al., 2015).

Strengths and Limitations of SI

Due to the heteronormative (the cultural notion that what is "normal" is based on straight cis-gender individuals) culture in America, Symbolic Interaction theory is appropriate for

looking at the treatment of LGBTQIA+ students and how public perceptions affect them. Carter and Fuller (2016) explained that this theory could be used to understand social contexts, an individual's environment, a person's social and spiritual self, and negative aspects like stigma.

While this theory can explain many social phenomena, Smith-Lovin (2007) argues that the future of Symbolic Interaction theory is headed towards control, which looks at the relationship between a person's identity and their course of action. The argument is that people behave and act the way they do because of society's social pressures to act a certain way, not because of how people see themselves (Smith-Lovin, 2007). Along this line of thinking, gender is not a way to view themself, but a systematic group of cultural meanings and social practices that puts people into different unequal categories (Carter & Fuller, 2015; Link et al., 2015; Smith & Smith, 2017).

Symbolic Interactionism is most often explained through research using interviews, surveys, and ethnographies (Carter & Montes Alvarado, 2018). There are both positives and negatives associated with these research styles. The two most common types of research are qualitative and quantitative research. Depending on which of the two is asked about their preferred research techniques the answers will differ. While Symbolic Interactionism has its limitations, it is a valuable tool to examine how bullying and harassment affect LGBTQIA+ youth.

Queer Theory is beneficial for this research project because, when paired with Symbolic Interactionism, it can help to describe an individual's entire identity and how that identity is impacted by public perceptions that, in turn, affect their experiences. Queer Theory helps to create a deeper meaning of identity by looking at the intersectionality of an individual, and when paired with Symbolic Interactionism it shows the entire process of how the identity is created

(McCann, 2019; Yeager, 2016). With these two theories paired together, deeper understandings of LGBTQIA+ individuals can be made. While Queer Theory is perfect for this research project, there are limitations to the theory that should be discussed. The title of the theory having the word queer in it has been shown to make people uncomfortable (Abes, 2008). Queer Theory also challenges the traditional ways of thinking so it is important to offer support when implementing this new way of challenging the social norms (Abes, 2008).

Chapter 4 Methodology

This research project aims to answer these research questions: 1) How do people who are against LGBTIQA+ policy perceive LGBTQIA+ young adults? and 2) What are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in school? This project's findings will answer these questions by analyzing common themes present throughout the three qualitative secondary data sources. A qualitative approach was taken because it is the best method to gain insight on how individuals/groups experience social problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Secondary data sources were chosen because the author had access to these secondary data sources (through participation in the law school research team and volunteering at a local high school) and they allow the researcher to do their analysis in a timely manner since they do not have to collect new data (Sherif, 2018). Even though the author of this paper participated in the data collection, it is still considered secondary because, at the time of writing this thesis, data is three years old and was not originally collected for this project. This methods chapter will first discuss the southwestern urban/metropolitan city in which the data was collected. Then, the three (3) secondary qualitative data sources will be described as well as methods used to analyze the data.

Research Site Location

Data from the United States Census Bureau (2019) reveals that, the state in which the research was collected has a population of 3,080,156 people. 73% of the population is White, 10% black or African American, 1.7% Native American, 8.7% Asian, 0.8% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 29.2% Hispanic or Latino. The County in which the data was collected has a population of 2,266,715. 69.5% of the population of the county is White, 13% Black or African American, 1.2% Native American, 10.4% Asian, 0.9% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 31.6%

Hispanic or Latino. The population of the county makes up a majority of the population of the entire state and the percentages of race in the county are similar to the state's percentages.

Again, according to the United States Census Bureau (2019), this school district located within the county where the research data derives is the fifth-largest school district by enrollment in the United States. The school district contains a diverse group of students from all different backgrounds. With a population of 3,22,770 students, 46.5% are Hispanic, 25.2% are Caucasian, 13.8% are Black/African American, 6.4% are Multiracial, 6.4% are Asian, 1.6% are Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 0.4% are Native American (Fast Facts). In August of 2018, after several public town hall meetings and discussions, this school district passed a gender diversity policy[10]. This policy adds specific protections to transgender and gender diverse students in the school district.

The high school where the GSA club was held had a population of 2,666 students. 56.23% of the students were White, 24.68% Hispanic, 6.9% Black/African American, 6.83% two or more races, 3.83% Asian, 0.83% Pacific Islander, and 0.71% Native American (Nevada Report Card). It is important to note that the population of students at this school is not representative of the school district.

Data Sources

There are three sources of qualitative data used in this thesis project. The first source includes transcripts of four (4) public town hall meetings. These meetings have been labeled: S, C, W, and D. They are cited in the findings as the label as well as the time of the speaker. These meetings were held to determine whether the school district should adopt a policy that would

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[10] Policy 5138: Addressing the Rights and Needs of Students with Diverse Gender Identities or Expressions

provide safety for transgender and gender diverse[11] students. Each of these public meetings were approximately two hours long with approximately fifty (50) people speaking for or against the policy. Additionally, hundreds of community members were present at these meetings. These meetings were held in the evening at several high schools throughout the school district. While there were five town hall meetings throughout December of 2017, only four transcripts are available for analysis because the video recording from one of the meetings was never published/made publicly available. Videos of these four town hall meetings are publicly available on the school district's website.

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[11] "A term that is used to describe people with gender behaviors, appearances, or identities that are incongruent with those culturally assigned to their birth sex; gender-diverse individuals may refer to themselves with many different terms, such as transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer,7 gender fluid, gender creative, gender independent, or noncisgender. "Gender diverse" is used to acknowledge and include the vast diversity of gender identities that exists. It replaces the former term, "gender nonconforming," which has a negative and exclusionary connotation" (Rafferty, 2018, p.2)

Data Source	Number of Meetings	Demographics of Participants	Role of Author at Meeting
School District Townhall Meetings	Five Meetings • December 1, 2017 • December 2, 2017 • December 5, 2017 • December 6, 2017 • December 7, 2017	People who attended these meetings were members of the community. This included parents, students, policy makers, educators, and other community members.	Author not present at meetings. Author helped to create transcripts of publicly available videos
Community Townhall Discussions	Three Meetings • February 26, 2019 • March 7, 2019 • March 16, 2019	Participants of these discussions were individuals in the LGBTQIA+ community. Their ages ranged from early teens to early twenties.	Non-participant observer
GSA Club Meeting Notes	Several meetings throughout the 2019-2020 academic school year.	Members of the GSA club were all high school students ranging from ages 14 to 18.	Participant Observer

Table 1. Data Sources

Utilizing public videos from these four school district town halls, students from a local

university and law school created transcripts. Working in teams, and to increase accuracy of

transcript creation, each of the four transcripts were split between two students to create a

transcript from what was viewed/said at each of the meetings available on video. Each pair of

students transcribing one video reviewed each other's work before completing the transcript for

that video/town hall meeting. After all four full transcripts were created, they were reviewed and

double-checked by two PhD students and one university professor. At this last stage, these three

individuals edited transcripts to make sure that they were a verbatim style transcript which

included gestures, crowd agreement/disagreement, mumbling/unclear spoken words, as well as

time stamps. It is important to note that the transcripts are verbatim because it adds to the credibility and validity of the data (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006).

The second qualitive data source include anecdotal and thematic notes taken at town hall meetings at local non-profit organizations serving the LGBTQIA+ community. There are no verbatim transcripts from any of these meetings. These meetings were advertised to the LGBTQIA+ community through posters and word of mouth. There were three townhall meetings, but this thesis will only discuss one of them because the author only attended and took notes at one of the meetings. There were approximately fifteen (15) young adults present at the meeting the author attended. These meetings were held to get a deeper understanding of the school/work experiences of LGBTQIA+ young adults. Individuals at these meetings were able to share their schooling experiences as well as what they experience at work.

Notes from these meetings contain information about safe spaces in schools, how teachers and administration treated LGBTQIA+ young adults, and their overall acceptance while in school. LGBTQIA+ safe spaces are places where LGBTQIA+ individuals know they will be safe and not judged by their peers or teachers. Meetings were held at local community non-profit organizations. Notes were taken at these meetings by student researchers. These students did not participate in the discussions. They were in the back of the room observing the conversations. This is known as a non-participant observer (Ciesielksa, Bostrom, & Ohlander, 2018).

The third source of information are notes taken from several GSA club meetings at a local high school. The group was a mix of around thirty young adults who were "out" as LGBTQIA+ and others who did not feel safe to share their gender/sexual identity. At these meetings, group members would share their experiences in school, hold educational sessions where LGBTQIA+ information was taught, and have meetings just for them to socialize and

make new friends. At these meetings notes were collected through observation of the discussions. There are no verbatim transcripts from any of the GSA club meetings. Memos were also written after each meeting summarizing the discussion. Memo writing is a useful tool in qualitative research because it helps the researcher have a deeper understanding of the events they are observing (Lawrence & Tar, 2013).

Analysis of Data

Data in this project was qualitatively analyzed using methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation is the process of using two or more data sets that were collected using the same methodology (Heale & Forbes, 2013). According to Patton (2016), triangulation of qualitative data sources checks for consistency of what people say at different times across different means of research. There are three data sources included in this project and using triangulation will help contribute to the overall credibility of the research findings (Patton, 1999).

When coding for answers to the first research question a line-by-line and open coding approach was used. Line-by-line analysis is a tool that can be used to break down a large amount of data. This process allows researchers to interact with the data in a way that allows them to stay grounded in the research (Corbin, 2004). To get an answer to the research question, line-by-line analysis was completed and direct quotes were pulled and added to a separate word document. An open coding approach was then used on the line-by-line analysis to explain how the quotes answer the research question. Doing open coding on the quotes helps to build categories for the data (Khandkar, 2009). For this project, the answers were categorized by themes.

The second two data sources were used to answer the second research question. This is known as thematic network analysis. Thematic network analysis is the process of gathering themes at different levels in the research (Attride-Striling, 2001). This will be the best way to

adequately summarize what the major concerns of students are as well as other topics that were discussed. A limitation to this method is that there may be a topic discussed but may not present itself in the notes as a significant theme in the discussion.

Strengths & Limitations

One of the major advantages of using secondary data is the cost effectiveness. The data has already been collected which saves the researcher both time and money (Johnston, 2013). Secondary data analysis is the strongest when the secondary data being used was originally collected by the researcher (Sherif, 2018). In this thesis project, two of the data sources were collected by the author. It is beneficial because the author is already familiar with the research and has the context of the original situation (Sherif, 2018).

There are several limitations to this study that need to be discussed. The first is that all three sources of data are secondary sources. As explained by Heaton (2008), one of the biggest strengths of qualitative research is the presence of the researcher. When analyzing secondary data, the researcher is not present for the data collection. While the author of this thesis was present for the data collection of two of the data sources, the author was not present at the school district townhall meetings. The second limitation to this research approach is that the findings are not generalizable to a larger group. While that is not the goal in qualitative research, it is still seen as a limitation in research (Sherif, 2018). Even though there are limitations to this research method, it was the best option for this research project.

Ethical Considerations

While attending town hall discussions and GSA club meetings any notes that were taken did not include any identifying information of those participating. Names of the school were not recorded, and no identifying information of schools were included in the notes. Participants were

more than welcome and invited to look at the research notes to make sure the information being

recorded was accurate. In accordance with UNLV's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the three

sources of secondary data were approved for this thesis [1733617-1].

Chapter 5 Findings for Research Question One

This chapter will discuss the findings of the first research question: How do people who are anti-LGBTQIA+ policy perceive LGBTQIA+ young adults? To analyze the four school district transcripts, thematic coding was used. This was a four-step process which is presented in Figure 1. In Appendix B table 1 shows examples of the coding process. Based on the review of the townhall transcripts, the three most present thematic codes associated with public perceptions of LGBTQIA+ young adults, specifically transgender and gender diverse youth, were beliefs, safety of cisgender students, and protectionism of spaces.

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│   Open Code for Research Question    │
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│        Line-by-Line Analysis         │
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│          Open Coded Answer           │
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│            Thematic Code             │
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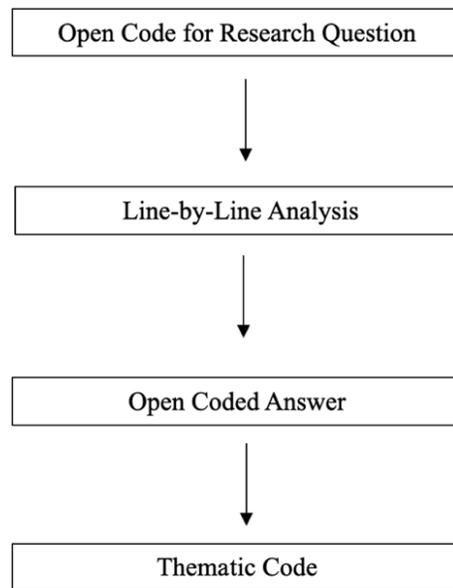
Figure 1. Thematic Coding for RQ1.

An underlying theme of all three themes was the traditional definition of spaces. Speakers discussed various spaces through the lens of heteronormativity[12]. In the heteronormative understandings of gender, there are only two genders: male and female (Dinnie & Browne, 2011). Bathrooms and locker rooms are heteronormative in nature. There is no room for gender diverse individuals in spaces that are created without them in mind.

Beliefs in Biology and Spirituality

The theme of beliefs was the most discussed theme throughout the four town hall transcripts. Discussion surrounding personal beliefs included two different types: traditional understandings of sex[13] and gender identity[14] and spiritual/religious beliefs. Thirty-two (32) out of eighty-three (83) speakers mentioned their beliefs/morals/values and how the policy would go against them. Speakers cited their personal beliefs as a reason to not support the pro-LGBTQIA+ school policy.

When stating how the LGBTQIA+ lifestyle goes against their beliefs, most stated that it went against their understandings of sex and gender. For example, one community member stated, "I believe a man is born a man and a woman is a woman" (W1:08:30). This belief was also articulated by community members as a worry that thinking anything other than "man and woman" would impact their children's beliefs. For example, one said, "As I strongly believe that there are only two genders male and female, don't try to confuse my children" (S45:30) while another shared a similar viewpoint: "Who has given kids the authority to decide whether they are

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[12] "…a set of gendered and sexualized norms that create particular versions of normative heterosexuality and gender identifications. This set of norms works to invisiblise the continual imperative to reproduce specific forms of heterosexuality and normative male/female identities" (Dinnie & Browne, 2011, p.9)

[13] "An assignment that is made at birth, usually male or female, typically on the basis of external genital anatomy but sometimes on the basis of internal gonads, chromosomes, or hormone levels" (Rafferty, 2018, p.2)

[14] "A person's deep internal sense of being female, male, a combination of both, somewhere in between, or neither, resulting from a multifaceted interaction of biological traits, environmental factors, self-understanding, and cultural expectations" (Rafferty, 2018, p.2)

a boy or a girl, regardless of their biological gender" (D43:39). This connection between an adult/parent's understanding of biological sex and/or gender identity as only being two and the possible impacts for their children's understanding of biological sex and/or gender identity was commonplace amongst all public community meetings.

Several other speakers shared this same line of thinking and connected their understandings of sex and/or gender to official documents. One said, "…talk to my kids and treat them the way that were raised, on their birth certificate, boy or girl" (W1:13:58) and "…they know that men is men and women is women" (W1:32:06). Additionally, one speaker mentioned, "I know what I am because I know what my mother gave birth to" (W1:15:56). One community member, who was a student in the school district at the time, spoke against the school district policy and responded to these sorts of claims about believing in just man and just woman: "…taxpayer money should not be spent on funding the acceptance of gender dysphoria[15]" (W1:35:54). These traditional understandings of sex and beliefs in gender identity are rooted in outdated science. Other speakers used this outdated science to support their decision to not support the policy.

Some speakers argued that this policy would go against their belief in science. For example, "Me and my family shouldn't have to accept a medically false idea that can be taken advantage of by someone with a corrupt moral compass" (W1:35:54). This association between nonconforming gender identity and corruption, confusion, and "feelings" was also a widely shared sentiment. For example, other community members noted, "There has been studies that

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[15] "A clinical symptom that is characterized by a sense of alienation to some or all of the physical characteristics or social roles of one's assigned gender; also, gender dysphoria is the psychiatric diagnosis in the DSM-5, which has focus on the distress that stems from the incongruence between one's expressed or experienced (affirmed) gender and the gender assigned at birth" (Rafferty, 2018, p.2)

prove that children go through different stages in the way they feel but after puberty, they go back feeling normal, the way they should be" (W1:03:05), and,

> "How would your definitions or terminologies provide a safe and respectful environment to those who believe gender identity does not pertain to feelings, but instead biology, in the basis of the structure of DNA?" (D29:29).

Another speaker said,

> "…all this policy have no scientific base. They have no, uh, record of being actually effective. We don't have any data on it. So instead of just trying to impose something, first let's do some research and then come up with solutions" (W1:33:07).

These speakers believed that they could not support LGBTQIA+, transgender or gender diverse individuals specifically, because their understandings of science did not support it. Similar to beliefs in science, speakers cited their religious/spiritual beliefs as a reason to not support this policy.

In this sense, community members who did not support this policy articulated arguments based on their own understandings of biology, science, and how these understandings are also part of their spiritual and/or religious belief structure. Some community members were concerned that their children/students were going to be forced to believe something different than what they were taught at home. For example, one mentioned, "You are forcing students to discard their beliefs, their religions, their rights as citizens to accommodate to the feelings and decisions of only one group" (S57:46). When talking about their children's beliefs associated with religion, another speaker said,

"…they may be compelled to accept and celebrate values and beliefs related to gender theory which clearly goes against the values they hold and the values that their parents have carefully instilled in them…" (W1:10:25).

Similarly, one speaker argued that the morals they teach their children have been established since the beginning with God, and that the LGBTQIA+ lifestyle is a new culture trying to be imposed. "I believe in the morals that we teach our kids that God has established since the beginning, not in a new culture that is being imposed" (D55:10). Another speaker said,

"I am against this proposition because as a father, I teach my kids that in the beginning my in the beginning God created Adam and Eve and he is only one that assigns pronouns before birth [*hands waiving in support in the audience.*] and he makes no mistakes in doing so" (W1:26:24).

Similarly, another community member said, "We as a community speak with one voice; we stand on the rock of truth and this gender-diverse policy is a symptom of the real problem, (inaudible) of a Godless generation" (D43:39). These speakers argued that implementing a policy to protect LGBTQIA+ and gender diverse individuals would go against their religious/spiritual beliefs.

Previous research has shown that religion is a predictor of whether or not a person supports transgender individuals (Campbell, Hinton, & Anderson, 2019). Religious people are more likely to have negative attitudes towards the transgender community than non-religious people (Campbell, Hinton, & Anderson, 2019). Previous research suggests that the reason religious individuals are prejudice towards the LGBTQIA+ community is because the community violates the values of the religious system (Campbell, Hinton, & Anderson, 2019). The perception of people in the LGBTQIA+ community in the eyes of religion are that they are

immoral. Their existence goes against the morals and values of what is taught throughout Christian and Catholic religions. In addition to these personal beliefs, speakers stated that they could not support this policy because it would decrease the safety of cisgender students.

Safety of Cisgender Students

The theme of safety was the most second most mentioned throughout the town hall transcripts with twenty-seven (27) out of eighty-three (83) speakers discussing the topic. When mentioning safety, speakers most often talked about the safety of straight cisgender[16] students. Specifically, worries about the safety of young straight cisgender girls was used as examples. Even though previous research has shown that LGBTQIA+ individuals are the ones that need protection and safe spaces (see Wernick, Kulick, & Chin, 2017), these speakers were still concerned about the safety of cisgender students.

This concern about safety came up several times and, when articulated, the concern was riddled with threats of potential abuses. For example, one community member said, "You're going to have high percentage of rapes, molestation," (C45:55) while another echoed, "This can lead to sexual assault" (C27:07). Some community members contextualized this worry as a threat that, if the policy passes, rates of violence will increase. For example, one speaker claimed, "But let me give you a heads up, to you parents that agree with this when your son comes home raped or your daughter [*inaudible*] from sexual abuse, it's on you" (W1:04:55) while another speaker said, "If we were to allow this regulation, there would be a high risk of boys and girls being sexually abused" (W1:19:08). These speakers believed that, if the policy were to pass, the safety of cisgender students would decrease mainly because of a belief that gender diverse and transgender students would commit these violent crimes against them.

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[16] "A term that is used to describe a person who identifies and expresses a gender that is consistent with the culturally defined norms of the sex they were assigned at birth" (Rafferty, 2018, p.2)

Again, there was a majority of speakers on the "against" side that vocalized concerns about safety. These concerns were also associated with specific places; restrooms, locker rooms and the like. One speaker said, "What's going to happen to my children when my son goes into a locker room and there is a transgender child who is a boy or a girl – whatever – what's gonna happen to my son?" (D33:52). Other community members asked, "What will be done when a student feels uncomfortable being in the same restroom as someone who is transgender?" (S48:04) and, "Who is going to protect me when I get bullied for my beliefs or for being extremely uncomfortable if a gender diverse kid is in the same bathroom or locker room as me?" (S56:37). These individuals were worried that cisgender students would be made to feel uncomfortable in these spaces and that there would be no protections for them if a) they did not want to share these spaces with gender non-conforming students and/or b) something were to happen to them because they shared these spaces with gender non-conforming students.

Important to note, several of these speakers weighed the safety concerns of LGBTQIA+ and trans-identified students to those of cisgender students. One speaker exemplified these weighted concerns: "You keep mentioning safety for transgender, but what about the other students?" (C25:15). Clear throughout all of these public meetings was a worry that adding safety protections for the LGBTQIA+ students would take away rights of cisgender and/or non-LGBTQIA+ students.

In sum, the overall worry that straight cisgender students will no longer be safe or, worse, be victimized was very apparent throughout the school district town hall meetings. Thinking through these themes is important because this rhetoric has been articulated throughout much of the anti-trans legislation of late. Just in the year 2021, a record-breaking eighty-two (82) anti-transgender bills have been brought to legislation (Human Rights Campaign). But, what does the

research suggest? Do we have research to show that these fears are something to be factually concerned with? The answer to that is no, research has actually shown the opposite: LGBTQIA+ individuals are much more likely to be victimized by their straight cisgender peers (Grossman et al, 2009; Berry, 2017; Blumenfeld & Cooper, 2010).

The stigma associated with the rhetoric that LGBTQIA+ individuals will harm others can be very damaging. LGBTQIA+ individuals constantly hearing that they are confused, full of incorrect feelings, that they are harmful, dangerous, and a threat to the safety of others, can affect their view of themselves. This connects to Symbolic Interactionism because this overall concern for the safety of straight cisgender individuals is actually causing harm to the LGBTQIA+ community by telling them that they are predators (Day et al., 2019). Along with concerns of safety, the topic of protectionism was also discussed when explaining why those "against" could not support the school district policy.

Protectionism

Protectionism was a heavily discussed theme throughout the four school district town hall meetings. Speakers throughout this theme believed that straight cisgender individuals would need to be protected if the pro-LGBTQIA+ policy was passed. They thought that adding protections for the LGBTQIA+ community would somehow take protections away from non-LGBTQIA+ individuals. Within these conversations, concerns about where LGBTQIA+ individuals can and cannot be/spaces that they can and cannot frequent were raised as concerns. These included conversations about restrooms, locker rooms, and other spaces.

While talking about protections for straight cisgender students, the topic of restrooms was brought up several times. There was a consensus among several speakers that having LGBTQIA+ individuals in restrooms would make them unsafe for straight cisgender individuals.

For example, "I don't want my girl to be in the bathroom with a boy because sometimes, uh, this will lead to different things" (W1:31:03). There was also an underlying theme of space and how it is defined by traditional ideas of gender and sex. An example of this traditional definition of space is: "A biological boy has no place in a girl's restroom, just as a biological girl has no place in a boy's restroom" (S48:04). There was this notion that LGBTQIA+ individuals could not be in certain spaces because it would go against the traditional norm of the space. Another one of the subthemes under protectionism that was discussed was the protection of girls.

When discussing their worries of bathrooms, speakers often discussed the safety of girls. One speaker said, "Which policy is going to protect my little sister" (S56:37). Throughout the United States, girls are taught how to protect themselves from boys (Tolman, Davis, & Bowman, 2015). An example of this line of thinking is: "But, I'm more worried about my Christian brothers and sisters whose daughters go to school and may have to go to the bathroom with a male student or take a shower with a male student" (S54:21). This same speaker also said, "Okay, if safety is really your concern, then a twelve-year-old boy [Baby cries] going to the bathroom or the shower with a ten-year-old or nine-year-old girl is probably not the best way to get safety" (S54:21). There was a fear that while in bathrooms or locker rooms, LGBTQIA+ individuals would harm cisgender girls.

Instead of focusing on teaching boys not to hurt girls, there is a focus on protecting and sheltering girls from boys. Several speakers shared their thoughts on this idea. Two speakers said, "I extremely am opposed that at that age, her having to be exposed to naked boys in the bathrooms and in the locker rooms" (D39:21) and, "I don't want my daughter to feel uncomfortable knowing that there is a concerning boy inside the bathroom while she is there" (S49:30). These speakers were only concerned with the comfortability of straight cisgender

students. One speaker articulated this: "I understand these students feel out of place in their gender assigned bathrooms and locker rooms, but my younger sister will not feel safe dressing out in a locker room or sleeping in the same bed on a school trip with a biological boy" (S50:20). The overall notion among these speakers was boys were predatory in nature and girls needed to be protected.

In sum, the main themes when answering the question, how do people who are anti-LGBTQIA+ policy perceive LGBTQIA+ young adults, were that personal beliefs rooted in religiosity impacted positive equitable perceptions. Additionally, perceptions of LGBTQIA+ persons were articulated as being akin to dangerous and unsafe, specifically for cisgender students. Lastly, perceptions of LGBTQIA+ folks, by those were opposed to a LGBTQIA+ inclusive policy, were also associated with as persons/a group to protect against. These speakers mostly discussed the need for protection of cisgender individuals and worry about their safety. Even though these speakers were very worried about this, research shows that it is actually LGBTQIA+ individuals who need the extra safety and protections (Grossman et al, 2009; Berry, 2017; Blumenfeld & Cooper, 2010). The next chapter will discuss the main themes of the findings for the second research question.

Chapter 6 Findings For Research Question Two

This chapter will discuss the findings of the second research question: What are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in school? To analyze both the community town hall notes and GSA club meeting notes, thematic coding was used (Attride-Striling, 2001). This was a four-step process which is presented in Figure 2. Table 2 in Appendix C shows examples of this coding process. Based on the review of both of these pieces of data, the three most present thematic codes were safe spaces, supportive teachers, and education.

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│      Topic Discussed        │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│      Analysis of Topic      │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│      Open Coded Answer      │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│       Thematic Code         │
└─────────────────────────────┘
```
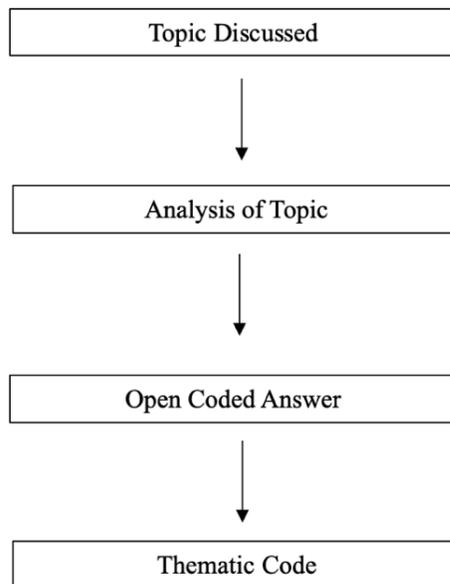
Figure 2. Thematic Coding for RQ2

Safe Spaces

One of the topics most mentioned at the townhall discussions was the importance of safe spaces. The individuals present at these meetings mentioned several times that there were only a

few places at school where they felt safe. For some of these young adults, there were no safe spaces in their school. One individual shared their experiences at a Catholic high school. There were no safe spaces and they never felt safe while at school. Examples of safe spaces were art and film class, history club, culinary class, feminist club, and GSA club.

One former student mentioned that a single stall bathroom was the safest place at their school. They did not have to worry about anyone judging them about the bathroom they chose to use. The ability to go into a single stall bathroom was a moment of peace for this individual because they could be alone and rest without having to be on guard. For this individual, having this space created one less thing to worry about in their day.

The most important aspect of the GSA club was that it was a safe space for students. It did not matter whether or not you were a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, everyone was welcome at these meetings. Ground rules of the club were established at the first meeting of the club and the number one rule was that it was a judgement free zone. Everyone wanted to be able to share their thoughts and feelings without worrying about being judged. Club participants wanted to have a space where they could be themselves without having to hide. Group members shared their experiences at school and how they often felt like they had very few spaces where they felt safe.

Unfortunately, the lack of safe spaces in school is not uncommon in schools across North America (Myers, Turanovic, Lloyd, & Pratt, 2020; White, Moeller, Ivcevic, Brackett, & Stern, 2017). These examples of safe spaces from the townhall discussion are consistent with the examples found in previous literature (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2017; Myers et al., 2020; Steck & Perry, 2018). It is important to note that these current and former students made it clear that it

was the people that made a safe space truly safe. For the individuals still in school, this meant teachers.

Supportive Teachers

Along with the discussion of safe spaces, the importance of caring teachers was a major theme present at the community townhall meetings. Having helpful and supportive teachers was one of the only positive aspects of school for these individuals. "Good" teachers would treat students, all students, like normal people. Connected to the above theme, for the LGBTQIA+ community, good teachers also provided safety. Their classrooms/offices were articulated as the only safe spaces available. LGBTQIA+ young adults also felt like they could go to the "good" teacher when they were experiencing bullying/harassment. This is important because research does suggest that LGBTQIA+ individuals are less likely to report any bullying and harassment, but if/when they did report, it was usually to these "good" and supportive teachers (Dessel, Kulick, Wernick, & Sullivan, 2017).

The topic of supportive teachers was often discussed at GSA club meetings as well. Club members would share their experiences with teachers, both good and bad. When individuals had negative experiences with a teacher they would warn other club members to stay away from them. While there were some teachers that would not hold space[17] for students, there were others that would allow these individuals to vent about their problems and offer support. These supportive teachers were praised by club members and their classroom location was shared among group members. That way others knew who the supportive teachers were and where they were located in the school. Additionally, GSA group members who were in higher grade levels than others recommended elective classes to take to younger members simply because the

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[17] Teachers that "hold space" for students not only create a welcoming environment but make time to listen and give time to students.

teacher was supportive. Supportive teachers were one of the key features of support for these individuals in the GSA club.

Overall, supportive teachers are an essential part of support for the LGBTQIA+ community. Previous research has confirmed that the emotional and educational outcomes of LGBTQIA+ students are directly connected to positive support from teachers. (Dessel, Kulick, Wernick, & Sullivan, 2017; Lilienthal, Matyo-Cepero, Messinger, & Mims, 2018). Without the support of teachers, these individuals lack connection to the school community. Having teachers' support is strongly tied to better educational outcomes (Payne & Smith, 2016).

Education

One of the goals of the GSA club was to provide education to LGBTQIA+ students since the school would not teach students about LGBTQIA+ lifestyle, culture, history, etc. Club members would volunteer to teach topics they were familiar with to the group. The club's solution to the schools not teaching LGBTQIA+ topics was to hold their own educational meetings. One meeting a month was dedicated to the education of an LGBTQIA+ topic. An example of an educational meeting topic was gender and sexual identities. At this meeting, three members worked together to create a PowerPoint and present the topic to the group. During the presentation, if someone had a question, club members not presenting would speak up and answer it based on their own personal experiences. This created a group dynamic where they could share and teach each other.

Previous research has shown that there is a lack of LGBTQIA+ specific education in school. (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2017). LGBTQIA+ individuals are having to learn about LGBTQIA+ topics informally through GSA clubs, which was observed in several GSA meetings. Due to the heteronormative nature in schools, LGBTQIA+ individuals have to learn

how to educate themselves in ways that makes sense for their identity (Schreuder, 2019). When looking at this navigation through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism, these individuals are shaping themselves according to these meanings placed on them (Aldiabat & Le Navene, 2011). In order to break through these molds shaped by heteronormative meanings, members of the LGBTQIA+ community need to be educated, from a young age, that to be a member of the community is also "normal."

In sum, the main themes when answering the question, what are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, were that safe spaces are essential in schools as well as workplaces. In addition, supportive teachers were one of the only positives associated with school memories for members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Lastly, a need for LGBTQIA+ focused education was heavily discussed. These findings show that the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals who were still in school were consistent with the experiences of the young adults who have since graduated. In this next and final chapter, the findings of this project in relation to the research questions will be discussed as well as theoretical and policy implications.

Chapter 7 Discussion & Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to answer two research questions: (1) How do people who are anti-LGBTQIA+ policy perceive LGBTQIA+ young adults? and (2) What are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals? This thesis project was successful in that it did answer both research questions. It shows that LGBTQIA+ individuals are not treated fairly in school settings and that public perceptions of LGBTQIA+ young adults are not always positive. These negative perceptions stem from outdated beliefs in biology, worries about safety, and protectionism of spaces. The perceptions of LGBTQIA+ individuals directly affect how the LGBTQIA+ community is treated which, then, directly impacts their experiences in schools, employment, and other institutions.

The purpose of this final chapter is to discuss the findings of this thesis project as they connect to prior research and to perspectives/frameworks associated with SI and queer theory. This chapter will begin with the general findings of the research questions before moving into theoretical and policy implications. Then, the chapter will close with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of this thesis project.

General Findings of the Research Questions

Research Question 1

Regarding the first research question, how do people who are anti-LGBTQIA+ policy perceive LGBTQIA+ young adults, the data shows that the main themes of public perceptions are beliefs, safety, and protectionism. The theme of beliefs surrounded the traditional ideas of biology and spirituality. Among the speakers who spoke about traditional ideas of biology (only man and woman), there was a consensus that LGBTQIA+ individuals should not be supported because they went against their understanding of science. The perception of these speakers was

that transgender and gender diverse individuals go against the traditional understandings of biology and gender where gender is assigned at birth based on the baby's sex (Manning, Fink, & Trivers, 2019). What seems to not be understood by this group is that there is a difference between biological sex and gender identity. Just because a person is born with the genitalia associated with the sex of male or female does not mean that their gender identity will be the same (Rafferty, 2018).

For the religious/spiritual beliefs, speakers did not want to support or advocate for the LGBTQIA+ community, or for the school policy, because doing so would not be in line with their core religious beliefs. The perception that LGBTQIA+ individuals violate a religion's value system causes religious people to be prejudice towards the LGBTQIA+ community (Campbell, Hinton, & Anderson, 2019). And, of late, several religious leaders have made public statements that are anti-LGBTQIA+. For example, in 2019, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormonism) announced that acting on same-sex attractions is considered to be a sin (Human Rights Campaign, 2019). In 2021, Pope Francis of the Catholic religion said that priests cannot bless same-sex marriages (Harlan & Pulliam Bailey, 2021). These two powerful religions have instilled in their multi-million member followings that it is sinful to be a part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

The theme of safety was focused on the safety of straight cisgender individuals, specifically. There was a public perception that if LGBTQIA+ individuals were allowed into certain spaces that non-LGBTQIA+ individuals would no longer be safe. These traditional understandings of space are rooted in outdated biological traditions that don't allow the existence of LGBTQIA+ and gender diverse individuals. When discussing spaces with traditional understandings of gender and sex, bathrooms/restrooms and locker rooms were discussed quite

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often. These speakers mentioned several times that biological boys belong in the boy's bathroom/locker-room and biological girls belong in the girl's bathroom/locker-room.

When it came to the protectionism of cisgender girls specifically, speakers became very protective. These speakers felt that these cisgender girls would become a target for horrific crimes if transgender and gender diverse students were permitted to use the restroom that matches their identity. There was very much the belief that girls needed to be protected, but there was no discussion on teaching boys not to hurt girls. These understandings of space are rooted in rape culture. Discussions surrounding this notion have started to make their way to popular media. In a blog post on Child Trends, Maryjo Oster wrote about rape culture in the United States and how girls are taught how to protect themselves from becoming a victim of a violent crime (2017). Rape culture in America has become so prevalent that it has become the norm (Rentschler, 2014). The thought that boys could pretend to be transgender to go into the girl's bathroom was a major source of fear throughout the four transcripts. The need to protect girls from boys meant that transgender and gender diverse individuals could not use their preferred bathroom.
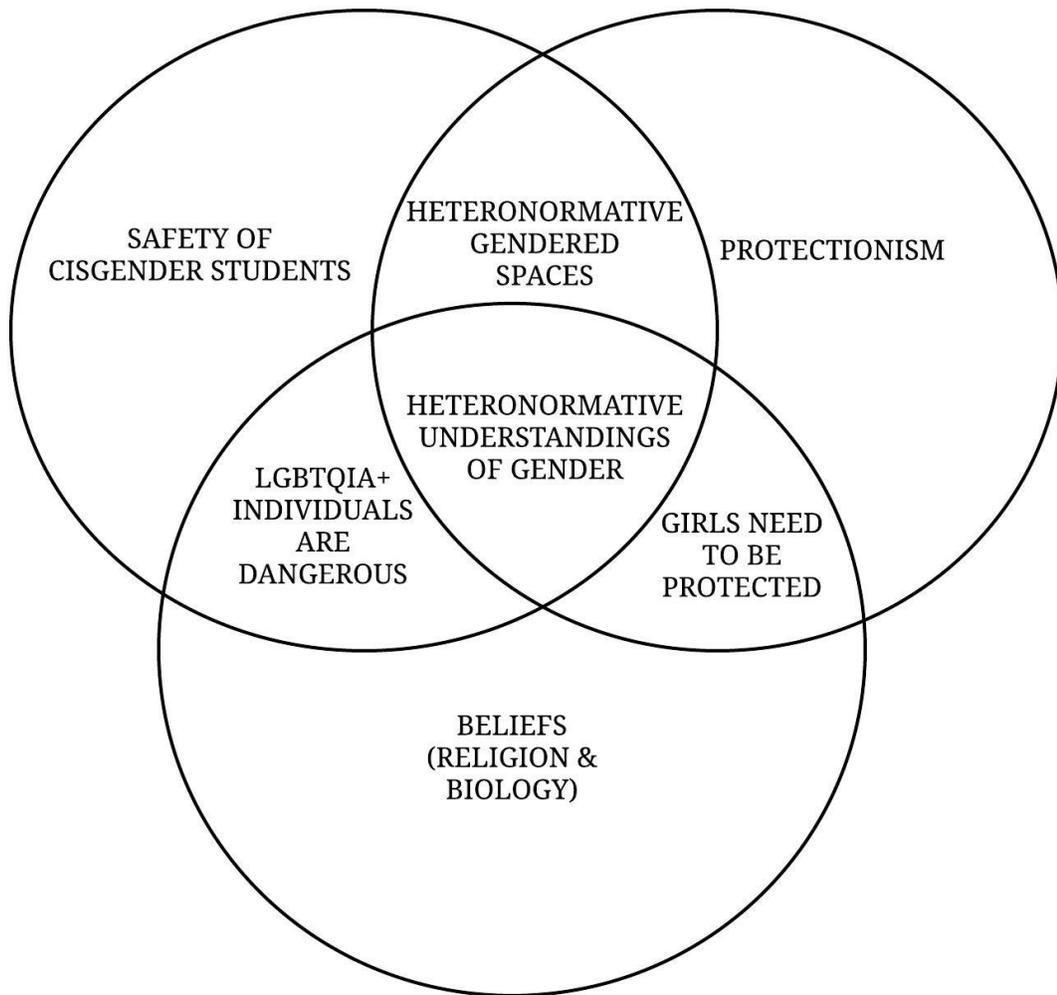
Figure 3. Connections between themes for RQ1

As seen in figure 3, all three themes are connected in many ways. Common among all three themes is the heteronormative understandings of gender. This is the traditional thought that there are only two genders: male and female. Starting with the safety of cisgender students, the idea that LGBTQIA+ individuals are dangerous is shared with the theme of beliefs tied to religion and biology. The other idea among this theme is the heteronormative definition of

gendered spaces. This is connected to the theme of protectionism. Along with this heteronormative definition of space, the belief that girls need to be protected is present in protectionism and is connected to the theme of beliefs. While all of these themes are interconnected, there are gaps where each theme does not completely match up with another.

Research Question 2

For the second research question, what are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in school, the main themes of these experiences were safe spaces, supportive teachers, and education. The importance of safe spaces was something that was heavily present in both the community town hall discussions and GSA club meetings. Individuals present at both of these meetings were very clear that safe spaces are essential for the LGBTQIA+ community. When in a safe space, these individuals did not have to worry about their safety. LGBTQIA+ individuals often would report bullying/harassment to the adult in the safe space (Steck & Perry, 2017). They knew they would be treated equally and fairly in these specific spaces.

The conversation surrounding supportive teachers was similar to safe spaces. Both of these two different groups of people agreed that having supportive teachers is the only thing that kept them in school. These supportive teachers were often the ones who provided safe spaces at school. Not only did they create safe spaces, they also provided emotional support to the LGBTQIA+ community (Steck & Perry, 2017). Supportive teachers would treat LGBTQIA+ individuals just like any other person. This provided comfort to these students because they did not have to try and act a certain way to gain acceptance, they were able to be their true selves. In order to take classes with these supportive teachers, LGBTQIA+ individuals would select certain elective classes just so they could be in a supportive classroom, not because they were interested in the class topic.

In terms of education, members of the GSA club took their education into their own hands and taught members of the club LGBTQIA+ education. The schools were not providing an education, so these individuals stepped up and provided their own. In America, schools do not currently teach anything about LGBTQIA+ community (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017). If members of the LGBTQIA+ community wanted to learn about the history of the community, they have to either do the research themselves or find other LGBTQIA+ individuals who were willing to educate them. These experiences have major impacts on members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Both theory and previous research has shown this (Aranmolate et al., 2017; Day et al., 2019; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Tyler, 2015). More needs to be done to create positive experiences for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Based on the discussions present in the community town hall discussions and the GSA club meetings, the policy that was passed by the school district has not changed anything. Again, this finding is based on conversations amongst LGBTQIA+ individuals. Conversations did not occur before the proposed school policy. Additionally, no pre- post- studies were included in this thesis to see whether or not a change(s) did occur. Even though this policy is one of the most progressive policies in the country, based on these conversations, changes have not been made/experienced in the schools. More needs to be done to make sure that everyone in the school district is aware of this policy.

Theoretical and Policy Implications

The theoretical implications of these findings surround the effects of bullying on an individual. Symbolic Interactionism explains that students will eventually believe things that are told to them if it is constant enough (Toomey et al., 2010). This research project shows that LGBTQIA+ individuals do not have positive experiences in schools. Through repeated negative

experiences, based heavily on the perceptions of them as individuals and as a group, LGBTQIA+ individuals do not have positive feelings about school, they do not have positive experiences either. These realities can then lead to increased negative self-perceptions (Link et al., 2017). Having this information, more needs to be done to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals in school knowing that they are being bullied/harassed at higher rates than other students.

The theoretical implications of queer theory surround the intersectionalism of the individual. This includes their gender, race, location, and socio-economic status (McMann, 2019). Previous research has shown that LGBTQIA+ individuals that identify as non-white (i.e., people of color) living in conservative locations do not receive the same amount of support that other white LGBTQIA+ individuals do in large cities (Kosciw et al., 2009). Since the research location of this research project is in a large metropolitan area, gender identity, race and, socio-economic status were significant factors in LGBTQIA+ individual's experiences.

The policy implications of these findings surround educational rules and materials. Even with the negative feedback from the community on implementing a pro-LGBTQIA+ policy it was still able to be done. Knowing this, school districts across the country should be doing more to protect their LGBTQIA+ community. Notes from the GSA club meetings also show that these individuals need to be taught about the LGBTQIA+ community. Along with creating and implementing pro-LGBTQIA+ policies, school districts should include curriculum on the history of the LGBTQIA+ community and health classes should include LGBTQIA+ material.

One research project that is desperately needed is a collection of how each state and school district within the United States defines bullying. Throughout the different states and school districts across the country, there are no two definitions of bullying that are the same. This lack of consistency makes it extremely difficult to understand what is happening to LGBTQIA+

individuals throughout the country. There needs to be a clear and consistent definition of bullying in America. Additionally, future research should focus on whether or not experiences of bullying are more than that and include offenses legally deemed as harassment, hate crime, assault, or worse.

It would be beneficial for future research projects to replicate this study in their location to see how public perceptions of LGBTQIA+ folks are similar and/or divergent as well as to see how LGBTQIA+ young adults are treated in their area. Along with this, future researchers should create qualitative research projects to see how race and ethnicity affect LGBTQIA+ individuals. Additional qualitative research on the treatment and perceptions of young LGBTQIA+ individuals is very much needed. If future research projects were able to combine both Symbolic Interactionism and Queer Theory in a project, it would further explain how an individual's intersectionality combined with interactions impacts their day-to-day experiences.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

One of the strengths of this thesis project is that it fills the gap of previous research on public perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ community. This research project was able to gather a large amount of information on public perceptions of LGBTQIA+ young adults. This research project, through triangulation, was also able to show that the experiences of LGBTQIA+ young adults are not isolated instances. They are happening to many different people in different situations. The use of qualitative triangulation was the best method for this project because it allowed the author to do an analysis of three data sources to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

There are a few limitations of this study that should be discussed. While this is a qualitative research project and generalizability was not a goal, it should be mentioned that the

findings of this study are not generalizable. A second limitation to this study is that is used

secondary data, so the researcher is not able to contact the participants of the original data to see

if their experiences have changed. Another limitation to this study is that there were no clear

differences between behaviors that were bullying or harassment. This limitation is also present in

previous research pertaining to the treatment of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Even though there are

limitations, this research project has shown that the perceptions of LGBTQIA+ young adults are

not always positive and that the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals are not equal to their

straight cisgender peers.

Appendix A

DEFINITIONS

The definition of bullying as stated by the state's Revised Statute 388.122 is

"bullying" means written, verbal or electronic expressions or physical acts or gestures, or any combination thereof, that are directed at a person or group of persons, or a single severe and willful act or expression that is directed at a person or group of persons, or a single severe and willful act or expression that is directed at a person or group of persons, and

    a. Have the effect of:

        i. Physically harming a person or damaging the property of a person; or

        ii. Placing a person in reasonable fear of physical harm to the person or damage to the property of the person; or

    b. Interfere with the rights of a person by:

        i. Creating an intimidating or hostile educational environment for the person; or

        ii. Substantially interfering with the academic performance of a student or the ability of the person to participate in or benefit from services, activities or privileges provided by a school; or

    c. Are acts or conduct described in paragraph (a) or (b) and are based upon the:

        i. Actual or perceived age, race, color, national origin, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, physical attributes, physical or mental disability of a person, sex, or any other distinguishing characteristic or background or a person; or

      ii.   Association of a person with another person having one or more of those actual or perceived characteristics. (p. 1)

As stated by the state's Revised Statute 200.571, the definition of harassment is,

"without lawful authority, the person knowingly threatens:

(1) To cause bodily injury in the future to the person threatened or to any other person;

(2) To cause physical damage to the property of another person;

(3) To subject the person threatened or any other person to physical confinement or restraint; or

(4) To do any act which is intended to substantially harm the person threatened or any other person with respect to his or her physical or mental health or safety; and

The person by words or conduct places the person receiving the threat in reasonable fear that the threat will be carried out."

CODING FOR RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

Table 2. Table of Coded Qualitative Data, Transcripts with Public Townhalls

Research Question	Open Coded Quote	Line-by-Line Analysis	Open Coded Answer	Thematic Code
What are public perceptions of LGBTQIA+ young adults?	Again, she's too young. I think any child is too young to be exposed to this and I'm greatly opposed to this whole thing (39:21)	Conversations of safety associated with "girl", sense of protectionism around girl body.	→ LGBTQIA+ students make cisgender and gender conforming students feel unsafe → LGBTQIA+ students do not belong in restrooms → LGBTQIA+ students do not belong in locker rooms	SAFETY, connected to traditional understandings of gender/sex WORRY about harm; specific to "girl" here PROTECTIONISM, connected to sister or "girl" here
What are public perceptions of LGBTQIA+ young adults?	Who has given kids the authority to decide whether they are a boy or a girl, regardless of their biological gender (D43:39)	Biological boy and biological girl, assumptions about gender being connected to biological sex. Having LGBTQIA+ students in bathrooms is unsafe.	→ LGBTQIA+ students go against MY assumptions about sex and gender → LGBTQIA+ students do not belong in restrooms → Transgender and gender-neutral students go against biology	BELIEFS, traditional surrounding biology
What are public perceptions of	I don't want any of my 14 year olds, 12	Biological boy and biological girl, assumptions	→ LGBTQIA+ students go against MY	RESTROOM ARGUMENT

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LGBTQIA+ young adults?	year olds, I have a lot of daughters, I don't want any boys in their restrooms. [many hands being waved in the audience in agreement, 26:04] I don't care how their dressing. It is not safe, and it is not ok (W24:29	about gender being connected to biological sex. Having LGBTQIA+ students in bathrooms is unsafe.	assumptions about sex and gender → LGBTQIA+ students do not belong in restrooms	SPACE, restrictions connected to traditional understandings of sex/gender PROTECTIONISM, specifically surroundings girls SAFETY, specifically of straight cisgender students
What are public perceptions of LGBTQIA+ young adults?	But let me give you a heads up, to you parents that agree with this when your son comes home raped or your daughter [*inaudible*] from sexual abuse, it's on you (1:04:55)	Having pro-LGBTQIA+ policy will increase the number of rapes and molestations	→ LGBTQIA+ students will rape/molest straight & cisgender students	SAFETY, specifically of straight cisgender students
What are public perceptions of LGBTQIA+ young adults?	There has been studies that prove that children go through different stages in the way they feel but after puberty, they go back feeling normal, the way they should be (W1:03:05)	LGBTQIA+ people are going through a phase. These feelings are temporary.	→ LGBTQIA+ feelings are temporary	BELIEFS, specifically about the LGBTQIA+ community

CODING FOR RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

Table 3. Table of Coded Qualitative Data, Notes from GSA Club Meetings and Community Town Hall

Research Question	Topic Discussed	Analysis of Topic	Open Coded Answer	Thematic Code
What are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals?	Safe Spaces (CTH)	There were only a few places where LGBTQIA+ individuals felt safe in school.	→ LGBTQIA+ individuals need safe spaces in school and at work → Supportive people/allies are what make spaces safe	SAFE SPACES
What are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals?	Supportive Teachers (CTH)	Having supportive teachers is the difference between having a good and a bad school experience.	→ There is a NEED for teachers that support LGBTQIA+ individuals	SUPPORTIVE TEACHERS
What are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals?	Safe Space (GSA)	Club members were committed to making the GSA club a safe space for all LGBTQIA+ students as well as allies.	→ LGBTQIA+ individuals need a safe space in school → LGBTQIA+ individuals created their own safe space because there were none at their school	SAFE SPACES
What are the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals?	Education (GSA)	School curriculum did not include any information on LGBTQIA+	→ Because schools would not provide LGBTQIA+ education, group	EDUCATION

		individuals or their experiences.	members held their own educational meetings	

MEMOS FROM TOWN HALL CODING

Memo #1

Initial Thoughts

I began my understanding of this transcript by writing out my initial thoughts and feelings after having read through it. This transcript began with people speaking out against new policies that would help to bring equality to LGBTQ+ students and grant them protections. The people who spoke out against this policy did not seem to be educated at all when speaking about gender diverse individuals or members of the LGBTQ+ community. They mostly spoke out in fear that their children would somehow lose rights if these policies were to be put in place and that they would no longer be safe in school. One thing that was mentioned by almost every person in opposition of this policy was religion. These people said that because of their religion and the religion that they are raising their children in that they could not support anything that would protect LGBTQ+ students. I do not understand this logic at all considering there is a separation of church and state, but these parents felt very passionately about this.

There was a big difference between how the pro-policy speakers spoke and the anti-policy speakers discussed LGBTQ+ individuals. People that were anti-policy did not speak about these kids as actual human beings; they only spoke about the community as a whole. Pro-policy speakers used their own experiences to bring "humanness" to LGBTQ+ students. When speaking in favor of this policy, pro-policy individuals discussed the support that these students need and how much it will help them to be successful in school. Several speakers discussed how they needed support as a LGBTQ+ student when they were in school and another speaker discussed

how, as a teacher, it is so important to make sure every single student is supported in the classroom.

Both groups were very passionate about their own beliefs, but what I am having difficulty with is the selfishness of the anti-policy individuals and how they think that their beliefs are more important than the safety of students. The parents speaking against the policy talked about how they were worried that this new policy would not help to protect their children/students but did not care at all about the LGBTQ+ students and their protections. They only cared about their own rights and the rights of their children.

MEMOS FROM GSA CLUB MEETINGS

Memo #1: After the first meeting

Thoughts

I am writing out my thoughts of today's GSA club meeting to help me remember and understand everything that happened at the club. Today's meeting was the first GSA club meeting at the school in years. It is inspiring to see this group of individuals get together wanting to form a community. I don't think anyone was expecting that so many students would show up and want to be a part of the club. The classroom was stuffed with students to the point the door to the hallway needed to be open because it was getting too hot in the room. When introducing themselves, you could just tell how excited they were to have a space where they felt safe and welcome. These students desperately need safe spaces at this school. Some discussed feeling alone and that there was no one at school that would be willing to help them. I really hope that this amount of people continues to come to meetings and continue to form these relationships.

Memo #2: After an educational meeting

Thoughts

I am writing out my thoughts of today's GSA club meeting to help me remember and understand everything that happened at today's meeting. Seeing these students come together and put together educational meetings is amazing. While I don't think they should have to be doing this, I am glad that they are taking the extra steps to make sure that they as well as the rest

of the club is educated on these topics. Today they gave a presentation on the different types of gender and sexual identities.

These young adults have to teach themselves so much, it is mind blowing that more isn't being done to help educate them and prepare them for the rest of their lives. On top of everything that they deal with on a day-to-day basis they have to teach themselves basic things that are taught to straight cisgender students without hesitations.

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Wiley.

Curriculum Vitae

Emily Bolshazy, B.A.

Department of Criminal Justice
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV 89154
702-895-0010
emilybolshazy@gmail.com

Education

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
M.A., Criminal Justice, expected 2021

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
B.A., Criminal Justice, 2019

Experience

Graduate Teaching Assistant | 2020 – Present
Department of Criminal Justice
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Graduate Research Assistant | 2019 – 2020
School of Public Policy and Leadership
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Undergraduate Research Assistant | 2018 – 2019
Department of Criminal Justice
University of Nevada, Las Vegas