

Tolerance of Gay-Straight Alliances in Public Schools:
LGBT+ Adolescents' Struggle for Support and Coexistence

By

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Abstract

Discrimination against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT+) people has been prevalent throughout U.S history. Through the endurance of much legislative and social oppression, same-sex couples now have the right to marry. However, there is still social opposition. A commonly recognized support organization for LGBT+ individuals, primarily high school-age adolescents, is the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), an extracurricular student organization in public schools that provides a supportive place for these adolescents to unite with heterosexual allies away from an atmosphere that otherwise maybe occupied by homophobia and bullying. In 2016, Franklin County High School (FCHS), in rural Tennessee, established the county's first GSA with much unanticipated resistance. This study examined 8 community members' support for and opposition to the GSA through semi-structured interviews. Participants were divided into three groups based on their positions toward the GSA: Group 1: Strong Support, Group 2: Conditional Support, and Group 3: Strong Opposition. Findings show that supportive participants felt that LGBT+ adolescents needed a place to escape bullying and find allies. Conditional Supporters thought that LGBT+ adolescents experienced much more bullying than heterosexuals, but the participants were concerned that the GSA would get special treatment as a school club. Those who strongly opposed the GSA felt that LGBT+ adolescents were not bullied any more than other students and that the GSA was unnecessary and dangerous to have in school. Each participant gave recommendations of ideas that might lower conflict between students of differing sexual orientations, which are accompanied by any available research.

Introduction

Social justice and the dignity and worth of a person are social work core values (NASW, 2017) that are most relevant to the current research topic: tolerance of GSAs in public schools. These two social work core values apply within the context of all social work practice settings and the clients, coworkers, and acquaintances who may be involved. First, social justice generally refers to the equal distribution of resources, opportunities, and rights among a population. A few of the many ways that social workers advocate for social justice for LGBT+ people are by fighting discriminatory legislation, openly supporting equality, and increasing awareness of the community's needs and challenges. Second, the value and dignity and worth of a person is reflected in the current research as the study considers the opinions and perceptions of all participants, regardless of their support or opposition to the GSA, to have the same level of importance for understanding the rationale behind people's position towards the GSA. The research also considers LGBT+ students' safety in public schools equally important to heterosexual students' safety in public schools.

As a population that experiences elevated health, social, and relational issues, LGBT+ adolescents are regarded as one of the most "marginalized and vulnerable" populations that social work professionals serve (Radzilowski & Hicks, 2014). LGBT+ minors of Franklin County High School, specifically, are the primary focus of this study. While taking into account the ideas of community members who are in opposition and support of the GSA, ideas to resolve conflict between students of differing sexual orientations are also explored.

This study begins with a history of the challenges faced by lesbians, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals in the U.S.; such individuals endured periods of legislative discrimination, such as the forbiddance for same-sex couples to adopt or marry, and social, emotional, and physical abuse, such as the Stonewall raids and conversion therapy. The focus then turns to a description of past and present efforts of LGBT+ organizations to provide support, advocacy, educational resources, and a variety of other services to those of sexual minorities and gender identities. This description of LGBT+ organizations serves to set the stage for the modern social atmosphere towards LGBT+ adolescents and the attitudes toward GSAs, the topic of the current study. The research conducted for this study involved interviews with community members about their attitudes toward their local GSA and toward the adolescent GSA members in a rural area of Middle Tennessee. Interviews were conducted and analyzed to better understand common rationales behind support and opposition to the controversial club. This study is valuable to individuals who desire information on the LGBT+ community; GSAs; the rationale behind support or opposition to GSAs; interventions that may reduce conflict between individuals of differing sexual orientations and reduce bullying towards LGBT+ adolescents.

Section I:

Discrimination towards Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals in the U.S.

In social and legislative contexts, the United States has struggled with the acceptance of homosexuality throughout the country's existence. Throughout the years, non-heterosexuals have been labeled as immoral, mentally ill, and criminal as they have strived to obtain social equality and demolish gender role barriers. These infamous labels

were encouraged with the assistance of mental health classifications, religious interpretations, and widespread homophobia in society. Many LGB individuals and identities have found that unity is key in gaining morale as a person and a community as well as combatting injustice, discrimination, and other LGB issues. An example of this is when, in result of the AIDS epidemic in the mid-to-late 1900s, gay and lesbian communities began to bond and identify more closely, and gay-support organizations began to include other sexual orientations (Elliot, 2016). Through unity and support, LGB organizations have generated public demonstrations, a sense of community, and promoted the use of literature and education. Associations and organizations that advocate and assist the LGB community have been crucial to the success and efforts of the LGB community as a whole (Burns, 2006). Despite the abundant hardships that the LGB community has endured, victories have been won; today, openly homosexual individuals can serve in the military, and same sex couples can wed in all 50 states.

However, LGB individuals, specifically adolescents, still face social abuse in direct result of perceived or claimed sexual orientations. They are constantly told that they are in error for those whom they love, and they are often prompted to change or conceal their true feelings (Haldeman, 1999). Conversion therapy is still practiced and encouraged in some religions and areas of the country, targeting homosexual minors. In their every-day lives, LGB adolescents are at a high risk of physical and verbal bullying, social isolation, truancy, drug abuse, and suicide ideation (Stonefish & Lafreniere, 2015). These risk factors can be reduced through public-school support groups such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), which are student-run organizations that unify and strengthen

LGB adolescents by promoting friendships and tolerance between LGB and heterosexual adolescents (Poteat, Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig, Russell, 2013).

Homosexuality in the United States: Colonization - 21st Century

A potential source of the U.S.'s past and current stances of homosexual intolerance stems from the ideology of King Henry VIII. Henry VIII used religious doctrine in 1533 to support the condemnation of sodomy — primarily anal penetration and bestiality — as both a sin and a felony (Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest, 2007). Previously, sodomy had been a crime punishable by the church, but the transition into legislation made the activity a capital offence with severe repercussions. England's first legislation dealing with sodomy was christened the Buggery Act of 1533, which mandated that those found guilty must forsake their land, and, in many cases, also be hanged. This Act was enforced for three hundred years until the Buggery Act was repealed in 1836, and the final transgressor was executed (Houston, 2013).

In imitation of Henry VIII's ideology, the first American colonies also considered sodomy to be a crime punishable by death. Homosexuality, considered biblically immoral, was considered as perverted as bestiality, which was also disciplined through death in the new colonies (Cox, 2003). However, there were acts of animosity towards homosexual individuals and homosexual activity before the official first American colony, Jamestown, was established in 1607; in 1566, Spanish records show the execution of a "sodomite" in St. Augustine, Florida, which was one of the earliest cases of homosexuals' persecution in the New World (Foster, 2007).

Over time, punishments became less severe as colonies became more established and additional colonies were founded. Many colonies used Massachusetts' ruling that a nonconsenting individual who participates in sodomy will receive "harsh penalties" instead of death, while another colony declared that no punishment would be given to those who verbally "cried out" as a nonconsenting victim (Robertson, 2010). The specific ramifications for practicing sodomy or being open about homosexuality varied to considerable degrees, but most of the early colonies, if not all, condemned homosexuality in some way. At one point, each colony mandated that two consenting individuals who were caught in the act of sodomy were convicted as accomplices and were dealt with severely (Robertson, 2010). While some sodomy laws had the potential to bring justice to a victim of rape and sexual violence, they frequently targeted and criminalized consenting homosexuals.

The American Revolution introduced a new phase for the gay community in the mid-to-late 1700s. While laws and punishments were slackened towards homosexual activity, there was also apprehension about young men being coerced into homosexuality through wild passion, which was thought to be the source of gay desire, prostitution, bigamy, and rape (Foster, 2007). In the late 1700s, the colonial laws against sodomy were still in place under religious influence. In relation to common ideology of this time in history, Foster writes, ". . . same-sex desire and sodomy — which they considered particularly sinful and subversive of the biological, social, and political order ordained by God, nature, and reason" (2007, p. 279). Despite the colonies' independence from England in 1776, the English's discriminatory ideology bled into the 1800s as same-sex relationships and sodomy were still legally prohibited while they were also considered

socially scandalous and immoral in the United States. Well-known reverends of the time such as John Cotton, referred to sodomy as ““abominable filthiness,”” and a judicial body working on the Davis v. Maryland sodomy case in the early 1800s referred to same-sex sodomy as, ““That most horrible and detestable crime (among Christians not to be named)”” (qtd. in Foster, 2007, p. 284). As it had been the alleged foundation of persecution during Henry VIII’s reign, religion was still a monumental factor in the social and legislative stances towards homosexuality in the United States. Many non-heterosexuals continued to be persecuted for their sexual orientation throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s. The punishment of hanging was no longer in practice, but those who were caught participating in sodomy or identified as homosexual were still punished by law. In 1903, the first known police raid on a gay bathhouse took place at New York’s Ariston Hotel Bath, resulting in 26 arrests, 12 charges of sodomy, and seven prison sentences that ranged from 4 to 20 years (Chastain, 2011).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Homophile Movement birthed the endeavor towards attaining gay rights that is still struggled for today in the U.S. The Homophile Movement was stimulated by social and legal activity that pursued equality and respect from the Mattachine Society, known as the United States’ second gay rights organization, which was later joined by lesbian organizations such as Janus Society and Daughters of Bilitis (Hall, 2010). Homosexuals’ demand for rights and respect that framed the Homophile Movement paved the way for the famous Stonewall riots in June of 1969. The Stonewall riots resulted from a routine police raid that was violently challenged at a gay bar in Greenwich Village. Witnesses of the first riot recall seeing police officers enter the bar, and exit roughly back into the streets with an angry crowd that included homosexuals,

cross dressers, and drag queens who were yelling, being assaulted, and attempting to overturn cars as they protested the police raid (Picano, 2015). This was one of the first times that physical force was used by so many to fight the police raids. The Stonewall riots lit a fire beneath the homosexual community that called for activism, protests, and unity. After the riots, participation in gay rights organizations excelled, and four years later there were roughly fifteen times as many pro-gay organizations. The response to Stonewall was significant: “Rather than a decisive break, Stonewall marked the movement’s evolution from a thinly spread reform effort into a large, grassroots movement for liberation” (Hall, 2008, p. 657). The one-year anniversary of the Stonewalls riots resulted in the United States’ first LGB Pride March that covered 51 blocks in New York City.

As the U.S. developed economically and advanced in technology, the mainstream social consensus of disapproval towards homosexuality remained stagnant; in fact, all states had anti-sodomy legislation by the 1960s. In result of legal cases, states such as Illinois, Idaho, and Connecticut paved the way for states to abolish anti-sodomy laws, while others, such as Kentucky in 1974 and Arkansas in 1977, passed legislation that prohibited only gay sodomy (GLAPN, 2007). This was a time when non-heterosexuals struggled to maintain possession of their constitutional rights, even though they were more unified than ever before. For instance, in 1986, the case *Bowers v. Hardwick* concerned two men who were prosecuted because police found them engaging in oral sex in the privacy of their residence (McBride 2003a). The men were charged for violating the Georgia Sodomy Statute, a crime warranting no less than twenty years in prison. The case arrived at the mercy of the Supreme Court, but homosexual rights did not prevail.

The Court ruled that the constitution's "right to privacy" was not applicable to non-heterosexuals or sodomy, and that same-sex sodomy was not a fundamental right of the constitution (McBride, 2003a). Consequently, this Supreme Court ruling implied that non-heterosexual individuals did not hold the same rights as heterosexuals, which added fire to the already-escalated social levels of intolerance, misunderstanding, and abhorrence towards homosexuals. Many scholars believe that the Court's decision in *Bowers v. Hardwick* encouraged a popular prejudice that still exists today in laws, education, and culture: that homosexuals are socially and morally inferior to heterosexuals (Srader, 1994).

Seventeen years later, the definition of the right to privacy changed to include homosexuals and sodomy through *Lawrence v. Texas*. In 1998, police found two males participating in intercourse in the privacy of their apartment (McBride, 2006b). Texas' Homosexual Misconduct law declared that it was illegal for two individuals of the same sex to participate in any form of sexual activity even though the same sexual activities were not illegal for partners with opposing sexes. The case made it all the way to the Supreme Court, where the Homosexual Misconduct law was repealed due to violation of privacy. Additionally, the ruling of *Lawrence v. Texas* negated and overruled the verdict of *Bowers v. Hardwick* (McBride, 2006b). The court also decided that, in result of *Lawrence v. Texas*, all sodomy laws were unconstitutional, which directly affected thirteen other states.

Marriage

After *Lawrence v. Texas*, consenting adults were given the right to participate privately in sodomy regardless of sexual orientation. However, non-heterosexuals still did

not have *equal* rights. Marriage was reserved only for heterosexual couples; same-sex couples were not permitted to reap any of the benefits of marriage. Utah was the first state to deliberately prohibit same-sex couples from matrimony. This was done in 1995 through the third section of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which clearly defined marriage as the union of a man and woman, thus thwarting any attempts of same-sex marriages (Ontario Consultants, 2009). DOMA became increasingly popular throughout the U.S. as many states jumped on the bandwagon. By 2004, 33 states regulated marriage through DOMA, and five additional states were in the voting process towards accepting the act (Ontario Consultants, 2009).

However, at the turn of the 21st century, Massachusetts became the first state to allow gay marriage, which was achieved through *Goodridge v. Mass. Department of Public Health*. Per law, the court's final decision,

Barred access to the protections, benefits, and obligations of civil marriage, a person who enters into an intimate, exclusive union with another of the same sex is arbitrarily deprived of membership in one of our community's most rewarding and cherished institutions. That exclusion is incompatible with the constitutional principles of respect for individual autonomy and equality under law. (Mass. Trial Court Law Libraries, 2016, para. 1)

With Massachusetts' example, Maryland, Maine, and Washington legalized same-sex marriage by 2012. Nearly a decade after Massachusetts' court ruling, DOMA was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in *United States v. Windsor* (Mass. Trial Court Law Libraries, 2016). The repeal of the third section of DOMA removed the federal restrictions for same-sex couples to marry and receive the same benefits that

married heterosexual couples receive. However, after this portion of DOMA was repealed, each state still had the liberty to have its own laws concerning marriage.

One of the most monumental moments for the LGB community occurred two years after DOMA was amended. On June 26, 2015, it was federally mandated that individuals of the same sex would have the right to marry in all fifty states. This ruling was achieved through *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which used the fourteenth amendment to overrule every states' legislation that outlawed gay marriage (Yoshino, 2015). This was a colossal victory for the LGB community. The legalized right of marriage, which had been forbidden for so long, was more than just the permittance for same-sex couples to receive the benefits of matrimony; it was a proclamation of past injustices, current demands for equality, and a promise for a healthier future for the LGB community. The majority rule of the Supreme Court's concluding statement concerning *Obergefell v. Hodges* was, "Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right." (Yoshino, 2015, p 147)

Adoption

Adoption is also an important issue for many homosexuals because it continues to be a controversial issue in 2017. Same sex couples were not allowed to adopt children in 1990, but it was projected that gays and lesbians parented and housed approximately 6 to 14 million children in the U.S. at that time (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 1995). Although there were a multitude of children being raised by gay and lesbian couples in 1990 through artificial insemination and concealment of their sexual orientations, there are social and legal hindrances that still exist in 2017.

Common explanations for refusing or disagreeing with the right for gay and lesbian couples to adopt have been: there will be added stress for the child, the parents will abuse the child, the child will be gay, the child will be deprived of a father or mother, and the rationale that gay and lesbian couples are exponentially unstable because gay couples are often unfaithful and lesbian couples lack the stability of heterosexual couples (O'Leary, 2004). These accusations have been poorly supported by research. In fact, studies have shown that children raised by non-heterosexual parents are no more likely than children raised by heterosexual parents to suffer in psychological or sexual development, become gay themselves, or be molested in childhood (C.W.I.G., 1995). There is deficient evidence that shows that gay and lesbian individuals are incapable and unsuitable of parenting a child due to their sexual orientation, and the children of gay and lesbian parents are as well-balanced and happy as children raised by heterosexual parents (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017).

Gay and Lesbian Couples were not permitted to adopt a child in any of the 50 states in the vast majority of the 1900s. However, the end of the 1900s brought change for gay and lesbian couples. In 1979, two Californian men became the country's first same-sex couple to jointly adopt a child, Alaska was the first state to allow a lesbian to adopt her partner's biological child in 1985, and in 1997 New Jersey was the first state to officially allow same-sex couples to adopt children (Rudolph, 2012). For nearly two decades, each state had its own legislation concerning same sex adoption. Mississippi, the last state to have a law against same-sex couples having the right to adopt, had its law overturned in March 2016, a year after same-sex couples federally gained the right to marriage. Although same-sex couples can now adopt in all 50 states, some states have

loophole laws that make it difficult for gays and lesbians to parent children. In February 2017, Tennessee legislators proposed a bill that repeals TCA § 68-3-306, which would make children who were conceived through artificial insemination illegitimate (Tennessee General Assembly, n.d.). This legislation has the potential to negatively affect parental rights and custody as well as the child's inheritance, child-support funds, and many other resources that a legitimate child receives.

The U.S. Military

The U.S. military has its own history of battling homosexuality. At first, the military focused on acts of homosexuality rather than the sexual orientation itself. During World War I, sodomy was considered perversion, and offenders faced a court-martial and were often discharged (Canaday, 2009). However, the military began to share the view of popular psychologists' and psychiatrists' that homosexuality aligned with psychopathology. During World War II, soldiers were physically examined and given psychiatric interviews during recruitment to eliminate homosexuals. By 1942, the U.S. military excluded and punished individuals who identified as homosexual, even if the person had not been caught for committing an act of sodomy (Herek, 1993). Prior to 1947, soldiers who were caught committing act of sodomy or were found to be homosexual after recruitment received a Blue Discharge, which excluded them from receiving VA benefits. However, after 1947, dishonorable discharge replaced the Blue Discharge (Sullivan, Mills III, Dy, 2016). Seven years after WWII ended, the American Psychiatric Association deemed homosexuality a mental disorder in the first Diagnostic Statistical Manual for Psychological Disorders (DSM), (ALGP, 2012). This further stigmatized minority sexual orientations and complicated the lives of non-heterosexuals

who wanted to serve their country. From 1980 to 1990, almost 17,000 male and female soldiers were discharged under the medical rationale of homosexuality (Herek, 1993).

The policy “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) was established by the U.S.’s Department of Defense in 1993. DADT stated that homosexuals could serve in the military as long as their homosexuality was undetectable and kept in secret. The policy stated that the military had to have direct evidence of a person’s homosexuality before they could make inquiries concerning the person’s sexuality (Harwood, 2015). Although DADT permitted homosexuals to be in the military, those who were found to take part in homosexual acts were still discharged (Wilder & Wilder 2012). While DADT can be viewed as a loophole for homosexual individuals to serve in the U.S. military, it was also a was a policy that promoted discrimination and demanded that homosexuals hide their true sexuality. Overall, DADT was ineffective; over 13,000 members of the military were dishonorably discharged due to sexual orientation after the policy was implemented. The military’s intolerance and the pressure from DADT also caused health issues for homosexual individuals who tried to hide their sexual orientation. Unhealthy stress levels, depression, and psychological distress were common among members of minority groups such as homosexuals, because they often experienced internalized homophobia, perceived stigma, and prejudice events (Johnson, Rosenstein, Buhrke, & Haldeman, 2015). Policies like “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” gave an unmistakably clear view of the military’s embedded intolerance of homosexuality. Homosexuality was punished through dishonorable discharge until 2011; the common consensus was that homosexuals would not make good soldiers physically or mentally.

Dr. Evelyn Hooker played a primary role in changing the DSM's diagnosis of homosexuality as a mental disorder through a comparative study of 30 homosexual and 30 heterosexual men. In this study, all participants were subjected to three tests that measured attitudes, thoughts, and patterns of emotions. Homosexual and heterosexual participants were paired by age, education, and IQ, and their unlabeled results were given to experts who were to evaluate and decipher which individual was homosexual and which was heterosexual. The results varied from each sexual orientation, and experts could not successfully identify the homosexual individuals through the test results. In the 1950s, Hooker's results determined that there was no difference between the mental stability of heterosexuals and homosexuals (APA, 2017a).

Immigration

The distaste of homosexuality in the U.S. was also made clear when the Bureau of Immigration denied access into the country for immigrants who identified as homosexual through the Immigration and Nationality Act in the early 1950s (Canaday, 2009). This act not only mandated that homosexuals were not allowed to immigrate into the country, but that homosexual immigrants and refugees could also be deported. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 specified that individuals with "psychopathic personality" would not be admitted into the country for health-based reasons; in *Quiroz v. Neelly*, the first case that challenged the meaning of psychopathic personality, the court concluded that, "Whatever the phrase 'psychopathic personality' may mean to the psychiatrist, to the Congress it was intended to include homosexuals and sex perverts" (Shoop, 1993, p 528). In 1965 the term "sexual deviant" was added to clarify the exclusion of homosexuals, and in 1987 when the fear of AIDS greatly contributed to the barring of homosexuals from

entering the country because homosexuals were (and still are) classified as a high-risk group for contracting AIDS (Shoop, 1993). In 1990, the Immigration Act removed the ban on homosexuals, but persisted in testing immigrants for AIDS.

Conversion Therapy

Early in the 20th century, a homophobic concept revolutionized into a popular form of anti-gay “therapy” that it still is practiced today. The desire to transform the sexual orientation of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals is an aspiration that existed in Europe during Sigmund Freud’s era. The practice of this attempt to transformation of sexual orientation is coined conversion therapy, also known as reparative therapy and reassignment therapy. As the name “reparative therapy” suggests, the practice and support of this therapy promotes the stigma of homosexuality and the idea that homosexuals are broken creatures whose errors need to be corrected. The administration and support of conversion therapy often comes from individuals and groups that believe that it is morally or ethically wrong to be anything but heterosexual. Therefore, they often believe that the majority, if not all, of the individuals who seek help in changing their sexual orientation are having personal struggles with morality; however, the social stigma that regularly pairs with homosexuality can be enough pressure to make an individual want to conform to the norm: heterosexuality (Haldeman, 1999). Minors are one of most popular recipients of conversion therapy. Often, minors who receive conversion therapy have been manipulated into believing that their sexual orientation is wrong or they undergo treatment against their will (National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2017a).

Some sexuality-conversion therapy methods use behavioral, medicinal, or spiritual approaches, whereas other methods focus on psychoanalysis. Conversion

therapy does not have a specific, scientifically proven formula or step-by-step method; in fact, the therapist or individual conducting the treatment regulates which methods and practices will be utilized (Cramer, Golom, LoPresto, Kirkley, 2008). Despite the diverse approaches of conversion therapy, the overwhelming negative social attitude on homosexuality is its main fuel source: “CTs are based on the conceptual rationale that sexual orientation is a conscious choice and, in rarer instances, a pathology or sin” (Cramer, Golom, LoPresto, Kirkley, 2008, p. 94). In the early-to-mid 1900s, it was a common belief that homosexuality was a mental illness, a conscious choice, and direct defiance of the Christian deity. Therefore, mental health professionals and spiritual leaders often conducted the approaches in therapy.

Over time, conversion therapy has included many diverse techniques and methods in attempt to convert sexual orientations. One of the most infamous practices of conversion therapy is a form of aversion therapy in which a homosexual individual receives an electric shock to the genitals in order to deter homosexual desires. Aversion therapy deters an individual from a behavior or thought process by associating it with a negative stimulus, such as physical pain. Aversion therapy was also administered with the use of drugs like apomorphine, which was given to homosexual individuals when they were presented with an image of a naked individual of the same sex (Feldman 1966). Apomorphine, now used to treat Parkinson’s Disease, caused the individual to become nauseous enough to induce vomiting. Other physical forms of conversion therapy that have been practiced in the U.S. include lobotomies, castration, and oophorectomies (the removal of ovaries). Psychoanalytic therapy, which stems from Sigmund Freud’s theories of psychoanalysis, was also implemented in attempts of curing individuals of

undesirable sexual orientations. Psychoanalytic therapy focuses on the influences of the unconscious mind on a person's actions and thoughts. In conversion therapy, psychoanalysis focuses on the unconscious mind through the individual's relationships and issues in childhood that they believe could have resulted in homosexuality.

Even in present day, there are still some groups who hold strong to the belief that sexual orientations can be manipulated. Religious conversion therapy groups strive to change the sexual orientation of individuals who are often unhappy with their sexual orientation. Many of these religious groups do not advertise themselves as conversion therapy groups; instead, they advertise counseling and often step-by-step programs to repent from homosexuality. A few modern ex-gay religious associations are Restoration Path (also known as Love in Action), Exodus International, and Homosexuals Anonymous. There have been several instances when religious leaders use the conversion groups to relieve their own closeted homosexuality. One example is Colin Cook, founder of the religious sexual conversion group Quest, who had sexual relations with homosexual clients as part of the religious therapy treatment (Haldeman, 1991). Cook's relations with his clients were revealed after 6 years of giving therapy sessions to males, and his job was terminated as a result.

Results of countless studies show that conversion therapy does not succeed in converting individuals to heterosexuality. Many reports of studies conducted in the 1960s, such as Irving Bieber's Psychoanalytic Study, were deceptive as they report successful conversion therapy results; in early conversion therapy studies, bisexuals commonly outnumbered homosexuals, which distorted the statistics of homosexual individuals' changes to heterosexuality, which were minimal. (Haldeman, 1991).

Moreover, studies have shown that conversion therapy can be dangerous to the client. Individuals from both European and American studies have suffered from the practice and methods of conversion therapy, and they have reported direct results of depression, decreased sexual arousal, lowered self-esteem, loss of religiosity, anxiety, phobia of men, suicide attempts, increased aggression and hostility, dissatisfactory relationships, self-hatred, denial, emotional turmoil, social isolation, and difficulty with intimacy (Cramer, Golom, LoPresto, Kirkley, 2008). The horrendous side effects of conversion therapy are one of the reasons that it has been deemed unethical.

Conversion therapy also has a negative impact on the LGB community as a whole; it promotes social stigma and the idea that repentance is necessary for homosexuals. It also supports the concept that homosexuality is unnatural, a choice, and often a disgrace against religious deities. However, in the medical and psychological fields, homosexuality has slowly become accepted as a positive and natural sexual orientation.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American School Counselor Association, the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of Social Workers together, representing more than 480,000 mental health professionals, have all taken the position that homosexuality is not a mental disorder and thus is not something that needs to or can be cured. (APA, 2017d, para 14)

Some organizations and associations have put actions behind their declaration of support towards homosexuality. As an organization that once described homosexuality as

a mental disorder in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, the American Psychological Association adopted an alternate official stance on homosexuality: “Since 1974, the American Psychological Association (APA) has opposed stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and violence on the basis of sexual orientation and has taken a leadership role in supporting the equal rights of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals” (APA, 2017e). The APA’s understanding of homosexuality slowly spread to influence legislation concerning the regulation and permissibility of conversion therapy. In 2012, California was the first state to pass legislation declaring that conversion therapy is unethical for minors, and by 2017 six states and the District of Columbia also adopted similar laws (Walker, 2015).

In respect to individuals who desire to change their sexual orientation, or those who are prompted to do so by professionals,

The APA encourages mental health professionals to provide assistance to those who seek sexual orientation change by utilizing affirmative multiculturally competent and client-centered approaches that recognize the negative impact of social stigma on sexual minorities and balance ethical principles of beneficence and no maleficence, justice, and respect for people’s rights and dignity. (APA, 2017e, para 8)

The hardships faced by the homosexual and LGB communities have been present throughout the country’s history. From the general society, field of mental health, and military, it is clear that sexual orientation-based discrimination has been dominant the United States. For many years, social and legislative discrimination did their best to

cripple the LGB community. However, now there is a ray of hope as opportunities for positive change, unity, and justice grow closer for the LGB community.

Section II: LGBT+ Organizations

The power of organizations for minority groups like the LGBT+ community has been evident throughout U.S. history. Minority-group support organizations have the potential to provide benefits to individual members and the group as a whole. Increased clarity, further understanding of the legitimacy of issues, improved availability of services, resources to knowledge, and the enhancement of each individual's quality of life are a few of the many possible benefits that minorities can receive from a successful support group (Burns, 2006). Pro-LGBT+ organizations and associations have enabled members of the LGBT+ community to unite as they battle discrimination and injustice. In the present day, there are not only more LGBT+ organizations than ever before, but there is also more diversity amongst organizations. Examples of unique and diverse LGBT+ organizations are: International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Intersex Law Association (ILGLaw), which focuses on equality through law, the Latino Pride Center, which caters specifically to supporting and empowering LGBT+ Latinos, and the Gay Christian Network, which works with LGBT+ Christians towards acceptance amongst the religious community (The Gay Christian Network, 2017; ILGLaw, 2005; Latino Pride Center, 2017). Each LGBT+ support organization works relentlessly in their own fields and unique ways to obtain social and legal justice and equality for individuals of all sexual orientations.

Pioneer Gay Rights Organizations

Non-heterosexuals endured suppression and intolerance for nearly three centuries after Henry VIII's Buggery Act in the 1500s. Society's general perception was that homosexuals were immoral beings who deserved punishment for their scandalous sexual actions and preferences. However, a few well-known voices began to sing a new tune for all non-heterosexuals in the late 19th century and early 20th century. From the Czech Republic, scientist Sigmund Freud produced literature that described homosexuality as a true sexual orientation rather than a treacherous act against a deity and the government (OMICS, 2014). Freud's literature and scientific approach was one of the first to take a new stance on homosexuality. One of the first recorded community activists was Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld of Poland. In 1897, Hirschfeld's initial establishment, the first known gay-rights organization in history, was the Wissenschaftlich-Humanitares Komitee (Scientific Humanitarian Committee) of Berlin, which was founded to pursue gay-rights and decriminalize homosexuality (OMICS, 2014). Hirschfeld used this platform to expand his work for the non-heterosexual community through additional organizations that eventually spread geographically. In 1919, Hirschfeld established the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute for Sexual Science) in Berlin, which was the home of a vast library on sexuality as well as an educational facility that also provided medical, psychological, and counseling services (Morris, 2016). Hirschfeld was also known for his work with The World League for Sexual Reform. The World League for Sexual Reform focused on collecting information and educating on the improvement of sexual functioning, and it held conferences in Copenhagen, London, Vienna, and Brno (Dose & Selwyn, 2003). The World League for Sexual Reform existed for approximately ten

years. Most of Hirschfeld's work was interrupted or destroyed by the Nazis, including the library of the Institute for Sexual Science that was burned in 1933 (Morris, 2016). Freud and Hirschfeld inspired future generations through their legacy of advocating for homosexuals by sharing their literature, education, resources, and ideology.

While individuals like Freud and Hirschfeld laid the foundation for others to collaborate and stand for gay rights early in history, there is minimal evidence of sexual advocacy groups in early America. The first recorded gay rights organization was not founded until the 20th century. However, despite the country's overwhelming condemnation of homosexuality, American activists advocated for gay rights and made attempts to collaborate with others of a similar mindset. (CGLHF, 1992) verifies that in 1924, Henry Gerber founded the U.S.'s first known gay rights organization, The Society for Human Rights, which was established through inspiration from Magnus Hirschfeld's efforts in Germany. This was America's first recorded attempt of minimizing social isolation by publicly unifying and empowering those who faced discrimination, intolerance, and inequality in result of their sexual orientation. Unfortunately, The Society for Human Rights was short-lived; merely a year later, the organization was subject to a police raid and everyone involved was prosecuted (C. G. L. H. F., 1992). This incursion brought an end to the organization known as The Society for Human Rights.

The Mattachine Society was founded in 1951 by a group of men in Los Angeles who wanted to extend gay rights. Approximately a year later, the Mattachine Society had nearly 5,000 individuals involved with the group's efforts towards unifying homosexuals, educating homosexuals on ethical practices of other cultures, encouraging homosexuals'

hand in leadership, and advocating for oppressed homosexuals (Hall, 2010). The Mattachine Society expanded into multiple chapters, each with their own gay rights activities and publications. Washington DC's chapter of Mattachine published that they were prepared to,

Act by any lawful means . . . to secure for homosexuals the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as proclaimed for all men by the Declaration of Independence; and to secure for homosexuals the basic rights and liberties established by the word and the spirit of the Constitution of the United States.

(Hall, 2010, p. 541)

The Los Angeles Mattachine's popular newspaper, *One*, published alongside the perspective that, "homosexual acts between consenting adults are neither anti-social nor sinful; legal attempts to regulate such behavior violate principles of American freedom" (Hall, 2010, p. 541). Although the Mattachine Society gained popularity quickly, the society began to dissolve after merely ten years of action.

Daughters of Bilitis was the country's first-documented lesbian organization. The Daughters of Bilitis, founded in 1955, was well known for its popular magazine, *The Ladder* (Gutterman, 2012). The Daughters of Bilitis' main goals for the organization and publication were to improve the education of the "variant" with relevant psychological and sociological literature, as well as to improve the social stigma and attitude of the public through education (Valentine, 2008). *The Ladder* quickly became the organization's tool for outreach to potential lesbians and supportive heterosexuals. One of the most well-known publications in *The Ladder* was the short story, *The House on the Borderland*. This story illustrates a 1950s woman who struggles with her awareness of

her desire for other women, but cannot neglect her duties as a wife and mother (Gutterman, 2012). The woman in the story also dealt with prospect of social alienation and the idea of being viewed as a sinful, disgusting creature, while she was stuck in her heterosexual household. Many women responded to this story, and they were encouraged to learn more about their own sexuality. Interviews with members of the Daughters of Bilitis reveal that many women alleviated their sexual desires in their own homes by having lovers over while their husbands were at work, being none the wiser; this remained true until the 1970s when women were more likely to tell their husbands about their desire for women in result of the Feminist Movement (Gutterman, 2012). The Daughters of Bilitis crumbled in the 1970s from unstable leadership that resulted in a lack of funding.

The Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis were the first organizations of their kind in the U.S.; many more organizations and groups were formed to unify non-heterosexuals and fight injustice. Groups such as the Janus Society, ONE Inc., Counsel on Religion and the Homosexual, Gay Liberation Front, and Gay Activist Alliance were formed in result of the gay and lesbian community's need for social and legal support. These groups practiced public gay-rights protests, unified and educated its members, and published literature and news for the gay community (Morris, 2016). Scientific findings were also published that decriminalized and normalized homosexuality, specifically in the fields of psychology and sociology. In a study in which gay men were observed in the 1950s, Dr. Evelyn Hooker found that gay men were "as well adjusted" as heterosexual men, and *The Homosexual in America*, written by Donald Webster Cory, proclaimed that non-heterosexuals were a true minority group (Morris, 2016). However, there was still

plenty of opposition towards homosexual individuals at the time; homosexuals were still generally seen as ill, unlawful, or perverse. As one indication, it was not until 1973 that homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic Statistical Manual for Psychological Disorders (ALGP, 2012.).

The 1960s were a turning point for American culture, as the Civil Rights Movement and Sexual Revolution ushered in a demand for equality, liberty, and social justice. Through the sexual revolution, the homosexual community grew stronger as it formed supportive organizations in the following decades. The 1980s were scarred by the AIDS epidemic, when scientists and doctors began to understand the results of HIV infections. By the end of 1981, 121 of the 270 identified gay men with severe immune deficiencies had died (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). As a result, sex education became even more important to the gay community.

Ongoing LGBT+ Organizations from the 20th Century

The Diana Foundation was founded in Houston, Texas in 1953, and is nationally known as the country's oldest gay organization that is still active in present day 2017. The Diana Foundation primarily meets the needs of the gay community through donations to other organizations that focus on helping diverse communities with various needs, such as Legacy Community Health Services, Montrose Counseling Center, Gulf Coast Archives and Museum, and The Charles Botts Memorial Archives and Library (The Diana Foundation, 2017). This unique organization began as a social group for non-heterosexuals, and is well-known not only for philanthropy, but also for the Diana Awards, which originated with the founder of the Diana Foundation, David Moncrief. The formation of the Diana Foundation and the Diana Awards occurred when David Moncrief had a small gathering of friends at his abode to watch the Academy Awards.

During the broadcast, Moncrief comedically announced that he had an award for an individual at the gathering who had given “an outstanding performance” over the past year – the award was a dildo, and the recipient graciously accepted the award with humor. The Diana Awards have continued ever since Moncrief gave his award, and given the nature of the first award, the gatherings have been “heavily tinged with overt sexual overtones and bawdy humor” ever since (Wolf, 2017).

The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table (GLBTRT) is the United States’ first professional LGBT+ organization. The GLBTR was founded in 1970 through the American Library Association. As another unique organization, the American Library Association focuses on improving libraries by making information legally available, and accessible (American Library Association, 2017a). Advocacy is part of the Association’s strategic plan, alongside professional leadership and development and information policy. In result of society’s distaste for non-heterosexual orientations and literature, the GLBTRT ensures that LGBT-related literature is available and accessible in professional libraries (American Library Association, 2017b). Through the American Library Association, the GLBTRT promotes an individual’s right to knowledge, intellectual diversity, and the accessibility of controversial literature.

The country’s largest LGBT+ family and ally organization is Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), which was founded in 1972. PFLAG’s 400 chapters and 200,000 supporters strive to reach equality through means of advocacy in communities, education about LGBT+ issues for all, and support for families, allies, and LGBT+ individuals (PFLAG, 2017). *Cultivating Respect: Safe Schools for All* is an

advocacy program of PFLAG that works to bring safety to LGBT+ youth in public schools.

By advocating for legislation and policies that promote equality and providing communities with education on LGBT+ issues, the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) works to improve the human and civil rights for the LGBT+ community. Founded in 1977, NCLR is a non-profit law firm that uses litigation, legislation, policy, and public education to meet its goal of improving life for individuals in the LGBT+ community as it serves over 5,000 LGBT+ individuals and family members each year (National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2017b).

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) was founded in 1979 and is currently known as the world's oldest professional association that has been continuously focused on the transgender community. WPATH brings together varied professionals who work to produce the best policies that will benefit the health, respect, education, and equality for transgender individuals in every culture. It is a major focus for members to accommodate individuals with Gender Dysmorphia, which is a mental disorder according to the DSM 5.

In 2017, the largest civil rights organization that strives to support and advocate for LGBT+ individuals is the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). The HRC was founded in 1980 by Steve Endean, and currently has over 1.5 million members and followers (Human Rights Campaign, 2017). The HRC's main aspiration is to end discrimination, which it works toward through challenging legislation that persecutes members of the LGBT+ community. Pieces of legislation such as The Marriage Equality Act and The Employment Nondiscrimination Act were positively affected by the work of the HRC.

The Human Rights Campaign works to end discrimination, which is described through the mission statement: “The Human Rights Campaign envisions a world where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people are ensured equality and embraced as full members of society at home, at work and in every community” (Human Rights Campaign, 2017, para 3).

Currently, the World’s oldest and largest LGBT+ organization of health care professionals is Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality, also known as Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA). This organization has been providing healthcare to LGBT+ individuals while also advocating for improved medical care and understanding of LGBT+ health issues since 1981. GLMA now has over 1,000 members that range from students of health professions to health professionals who serve all over the world (GLMA, 2017). Medical organizations are crucial for educating LGBT+ individuals about potential health issues such as AIDS, depression, and cervical cancer.

Founded in 1987, BiNet USA is known as America’s oldest advocacy organization for bisexual, pansexual, fluid, queer-identified and unlabeled people. BiNet is a non-profit organization that advocates for the bisexual community and promotes diversity (BiNet USA, 2010). BiNet works to make the bisexual community more visible and it produces literature on bisexual orientations. The New York Area Bisexual Network (NYABN) was formed in 1987 with the guidance of BiNet USA. The NYABN strives to materialize a strong sense of community for bisexuals in the area as they collaborate to become more prominent in the community, minimize and eliminate bi-phobia, and support each other throughout their daily lives (NYABN, 2008).

In 1990, Queer Nation was founded in New York as an activist group against discrimination and violence towards the LGBT+ community. Queer Nation is known for their banners and marches against violence, as well as Nights Out events, in which individuals belonging to Queer Nation would gather at non-gay bars to increase their visibility and show heterosexuals that queers will not be restricted to gay bars (Queer Nation, NY, 2016).

The Lesbian Avengers began in New York City in 1992, and there have been approximately 55 chapters since it was founded. The Lesbian Avengers seek to improve conditions for lesbians through social events as well as to increase the awareness of what lesbians have to overcome in society. Each chapter focuses on the issues relevant to the area, from homophobia and racism to religious oppression towards the LGBT+ community. One of the most well-known activist events of the Lesbian Avengers is the annual Dyke March, which began in 1993 with over 20,000 lesbians marching through Washington. Today, there are multiple Dyke Marches held each year across the U.S., and the March can even be witnessed in Mexico City (Lesbian Avengers, 2016).

Great strides have been made from the Society of Human Rights all the way to the Lesbian Avengers. The LGBT+ organizations that originated in the 1900s have survived a minimum of 17 years and have adjusted to best cater to the changing needs of the LGBT+ community. The efforts and collaborations of past and present LGBT+ organizations, many of which were not mentioned, have been the workhorses that enable change for the LGBT+ community.

Section III: Modern LGBT+ Adolescents and Gay-Straight Alliances

The LGBT+ community has progressed substantially, with having the right to marry in all 50 states as one of the greatest victories. The federal promotion of equal rights for LGBT+ individuals is essential to the community's health and welfare. However, the LGBT+ community is still at a huge social disadvantage in many areas of the country; members of the LGBT+ community are still subject to verbal and physical harassment, threats, social isolation, and family disownment solely because of their sexual orientations and gender identities. While the adult LGBT+ community is often considered to be an at-risk population, LGBT+ adolescents' at-risk status indicates an immeasurable need for advocacy and support.

Gay-Straight Alliances

One of the ways that LGBT+ adolescents have combatted homophobia and social intolerance is through clubs like Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs). GSAs are one of the most popular groups that LGBT+ adolescents have in their schools. In 1998, the first 40 GSAs were founded in the San Francisco Bay area, and now there are over 4,000 across the nation (GSA Network, 2009). Gay-Straight Alliances are inclusive support-groups for LGBT+ members and heterosexual allies. As a modern and controversial group, "GSAs are framed as youth-driven groups intended as a setting for LGBTQ and heterosexual youth to receive support, socialize, and engage in advocacy" (Poteat, et. al., 2015, p. 177). Each school's club hosts diverse activities for members such as peer education workshops, movie nights, and pride parties. Studies have shown that LGBT+ students who attend schools that have GSAs generally feel safer and more accepted, are

more motivated, earn better grades, and have better attendance than LGBT+ students in schools without GSAs (Liboro, Travers, St. John, 2015).

The Massachusetts GSA Network conducted surveys that were analyzed for a secondary study to identify the participation and involvement of students in GSAs of Massachusetts. The study consisted of 295 students in 8th-12th grade from 33 different GSAs. On average, members were active 1.56 years, 29.5% identified as heterosexual, 44.8% identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual, and 9.1% identified as transgender, gender-queer, or another label that differed from their birth sex (Poteat, Heck, Yoshikawa, Calzo, 2016). The study showed that there was a correlation between membership time and membership engagement; greater engagement was positively correlated with GSAs that had open atmospheres for discussion and support. GSAs with accepting and appealing atmospheres often had more friendships among members and more memberships. Successful Gay-Straight Alliances offer the opportunity for heterosexual and non-heterosexual students to engage in the school club by joining together to embrace diversity and advocate for change.

The 2009 Dane County Youth Assessment (DCYA) was used to collect more information on the demographics and effectiveness of GSAs. The sample size consisted of 17,366 students from high schools and middle schools in Wisconsin. In the study, 48.9% of the students attended one of the 14 schools with a GSA, and 51.1% students attended one of the 31 schools without a GSA. LGBT+ students in schools with GSAs had significantly lower levels of truancy, smoking, drinking, suicide attempts, and sex with casual partners than LGBT+ students who attended schools without GSAs (Poteat, Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig, Russell, 2013). Additionally, heterosexual students who

attended schools with GSAs also had lower levels of truancy, suicide attempts, and sex with casual partners. The DYCA showed definite correlation and potential causation for increased healthy lifestyles and choices for LGBT+ and heterosexual adolescents when a GSA exists.

Gay Straight Alliances are often contested by the communities of the host schools. It is not uncommon for challenged GSAs to belong to schools that also have clubs for specific religions, cultures, and races where students can voluntarily socialize and participate in activities with peers. Some opposing viewpoints are that GSAs promote labeling, show approval of homosexuality, undermine parental authority, encourage youth to rebel against god, and suggest that alternate sexual orientations are natural rather than a conscious choice (Scalia, 2009). With strong opinions in the community, it can be daunting for adolescents to begin and keep a GSA in their school, especially if their own parents disapprove of the club.

However, GSAs are protected by law: The Equal Access Act. The Equal Access Act helps student-run clubs exist in schools, especially when the clubs are controversial, like GSAs. The Equal Access Act is as follows:

It shall be unlawful for any public secondary school which receives Federal financial assistance and which has a limited open forum to deny equal access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against, any students who wish to conduct a meeting within that limited open forum on the basis of the religious, political, philosophical, or other content of the speech at such meetings. (DeMitchell & Fossey, 2008, p. 92)

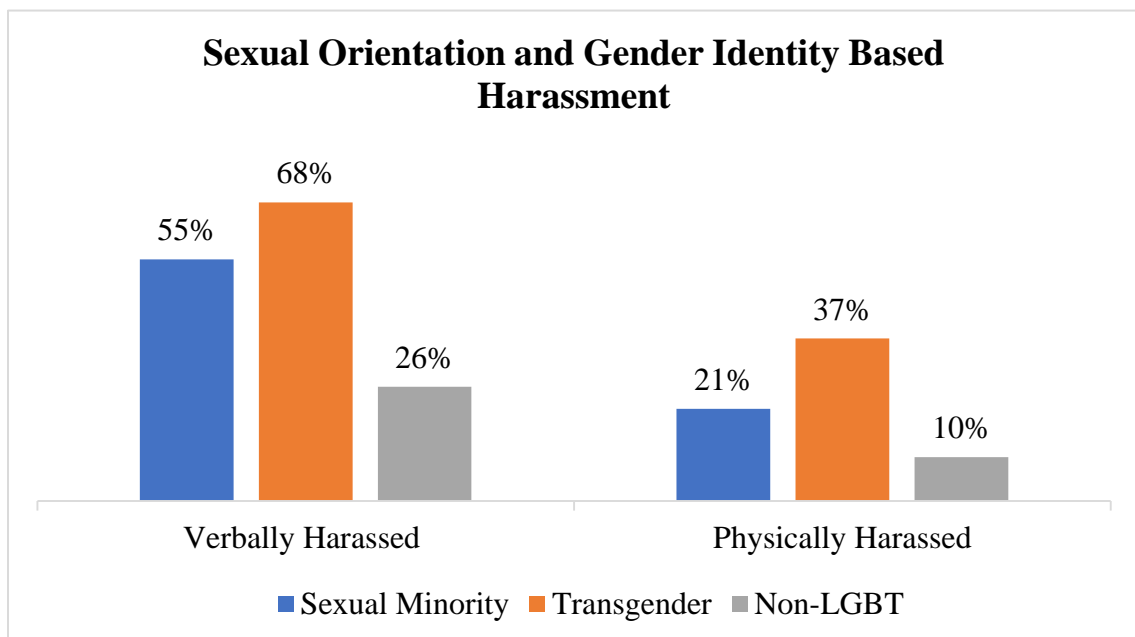
The Equal Access Act was formed to protect clubs that are disputed and discriminated against when the club meets the school's criteria for student organizations. This legislation has been beneficial to numerous genres of student organizations; it was initially implemented to protect religious clubs, and now it protects everything from political clubs to social support clubs like GSAs (DeMitchell & Fossey, 2008). GSAs can legally exist in public schools through the Equal Access Act, but adolescents still need support and acceptance from their families, peers, and communities.

The Social Atmosphere Towards LGBT+ Adolescents

Schools are among the most common places that LGBT+ adolescents face social abuse and injustice. In the U.S., studies show that sexual orientation-based bullying and harassment are evident in the lives of approximately two of every three LGBT+ high school students (GSA Network, 2009). This means that even though many schools in the U.S. have anti-bullying policies, the majority of LGBT+ adolescents are still socially ridiculed and shamed for their alternative sexual orientation and gender identity. It is essential for every student to have a safe and non-threatening learning environment, but LGBT+ adolescents' safety at school is often at risk. Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) national study found that over 60% of students felt unsafe in school because of their peers' retaliation to their sexual orientation, and over a third of LGBT+ students felt unsafe in school because of how they expressed their gender (California Safe Schools Coalition, 2003). More than half of the LGBT+ students in the GLSEN study felt unsafe in school, a place where adolescents spend a large portion of time of each week.

The harassment and bullying of LGBT+ students is not confined to the U.S. A national study conducted with 3,700 Canadian high school youth found elevated homophobic and transphobic trends. Displayed in Figure 1 are the percentages from sexual minority, transgender, and non-LGBT+ students who reported experiences of physical and verbal harassment due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Figure 1. Harassment in Canadian High School



From the sample of 3,700 youth, 55% of the sexual minority students reported being verbally harassed about their sexual orientation, and 32% of those students reported being verbally harassed on a daily or weekly basis. Additionally, 21% of sexual minority adolescents reported being physically assaulted or harassed in result of their sexual orientation (Taylor et. al, 2011).

Students' feelings of safety, or lack thereof, can potentially affect important aspects such as students' health, grades, and future. A student whose safety is compromised at school faces unique challenges in developing to his or her full academic

potential. A positive school climate and the absence of homophobic bullying were positively correlated with minimal levels of depression, alcohol and marijuana use, and truancy among 7,000 middle school students (CDC, 2014). The results of this study show that a positive school climate and absence of homophobia bullying have a positive impact on LGBT+ students and their heterosexual peers.

Studies have shown that approximately 9% of high school-aged adolescents identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning (Youth Suicide Prevention Program, 2011). It is estimated that a higher percentage of adolescents consider themselves to be LGBT+, but do not openly identify for various reasons, one being apprehension towards the reaction of peers or family. LGBT+ minors also face daily challenges as a result of their non-conforming sexual and gender identities, especially at school. LGBT+ youth are considered to be an at-risk population because social isolation and alienation, school drop outs, depression, substance abuse, and suicide ideation and behaviors have become increasingly prominent within the group (Stonefish & Lafreniere, 2015). Many of these risk factors are evident throughout the LGBT+ community, but they are increasingly common with adolescents. The diversity of race, ethnicity, and gender are prevalent through the LGBT+ adolescent community as individuals often struggle against discrimination from peers and family. With such a culturally diverse population, it can be difficult for adolescents to feel safe about being open about their sexuality, especially when they are a minority in race, ethnicity, gender, etc. Geographic locations, demographics, and religious influence can also have a skyrocketing effect on the number of adolescents that openly identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, regardless of their actual sexual activity. However, irrespective of race or ethnicity, many LGBT+ adolescents feel

that their schools and communities have low levels of tolerance for sexual orientations other than heterosexuality.

Surveys administered by the Center for Disease Control show the self-reported sexual identities and behaviors of 51,617 adolescents age 13-18, categorized by race and ethnicity. The study was conducted throughout seven states in the northeast portion of the United States. The survey showed that only 4.6% of the adolescents identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Only 26,882 of the participants were sexually active. Of the sexually active participants, 50.6% of gays and lesbians had experience with only same-sex behavior, and 30% of the participants had experience of engagements with both sexes. Of the 30% who had sexual contact with both sexes, 49.5% identified as bisexual and 32% identified as heterosexual (Mustanski et al., 2014). As seen in Tables 1 and 2, the prevalence of sexually active gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth was analyzed by race.

Table 1. Racial Comparison of Gay/Lesbian Sexual Orientation

<u>Compared Races/Ethnicities</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
White to African American	1.00:1.75
White to Hispanic	1.00:1.75
White to Asian	1.00:0.54
White to Asian*	1.00:3.03

*Unsure/undecided sexual orientation
Mustanski et al., 2014

Table 1 shows that African Americans and Hispanics identified as gay or lesbian more than Whites, while Asians identified as “Unsure” three times as many than that of Whites.

Table 2. Racial Comparison of Bisexual Sexual Orientation

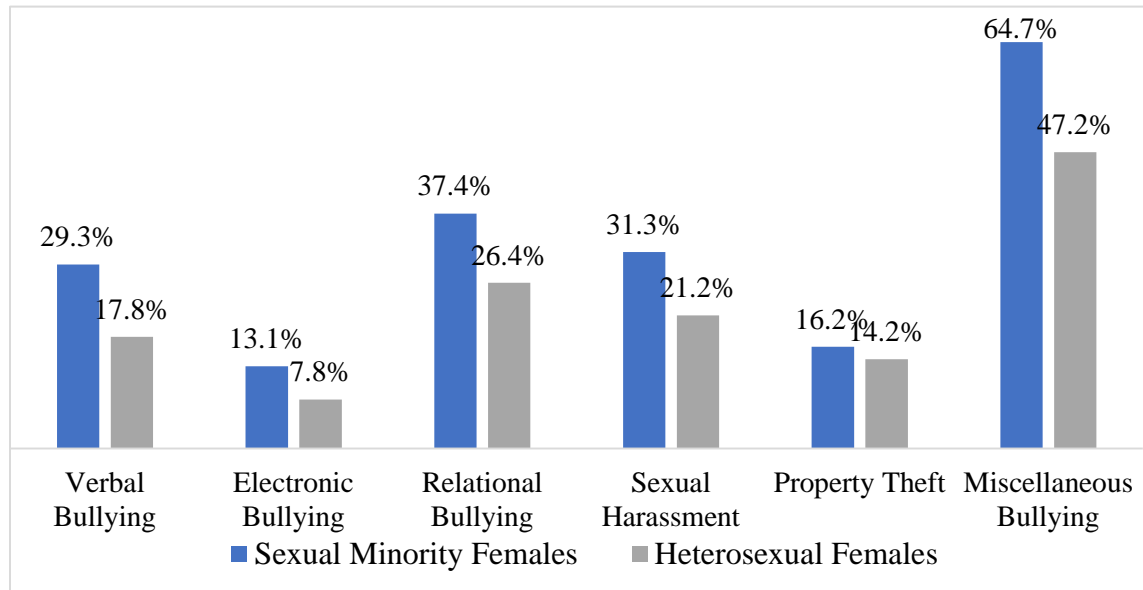
<u>Compared Races/Ethnicities</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
White to African American	1.00:0.92
White to Hispanic	1.00:1.03
White to Asian	1.00:0.62

Mustanski et al., 2014

Table 2 shows that African Americans and Asians identified as bisexual less than Whites. The CDC showed that gay, lesbian, and bisexual orientations exist in the lives of adolescents regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender. However, an individual's culture, geographical location, and social environment may have a great influence on his or her ability to be open about their sexuality.

Bullying is an issue in many schools, and children can be bullied by their peers for a myriad of reasons, such as their skin color, weight, eyeglasses, or clothing. Approximately one out of every four students is bullied on a regular basis, and an estimated one of every five students has been a bully to his or her peers (No Bullying, 2015). Bullying was measured through a study with 832 females from 22 high schools in Boston, Massachusetts. The majority of the females were heterosexual, with only 11.9% non-heterosexual (Johnson et al., 2011). The girls reported their experiences with bullying in the 30 days prior to the study's evaluation.

Figure 2. Bullying Experienced by Sexual Minority and Heterosexual females



(Johnson et al., 2011, p 193)

While both heterosexual and sexual minority females had experienced all types of bullying in the previous 30 days, Figure 2 shows that sexual minority females encountered significantly more verbal, electronic, and relational bullying, as well as more sexual harassment, property theft, and miscellaneous bullying.

LGBT+ adolescents face social abuse in unparalleled forms. Unfortunately, many of today's LGBT+ adolescents live in a world of heterosexism, which is uniquely and fittingly defined by Dr. Gregory Herek as, "...an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community. It operates principally by rendering homosexuality invisible and, when this fails, by trivializing, repressing, or stigmatizing it" (Herek, 1990, p 316). Both homosexual and heterosexual adolescents experience the effects of heterosexism, often through condemnation or affirmation of behaviors and identities.

A qualitative study in El Paso, Texas, was conducted with a mixture of 31 faculty members, undergraduate students, and graduate students of Southwest University. The participants varied in gender, sexual orientation, and race, although the majority of the study participants were female, heterosexual, and White. The study consisted of interviews and evaluations of SWU literature that provided insight to the atmosphere towards homosexuality within the university. One individual voiced her experiences of exclusion, fear, self-guarding, and discomfort as she remained a closeted lesbian for a year and a half at SWU. Another student remarked that the university's social atmosphere was a suffocating mixture of conservative religiosity and strong homophobia. A Muslim student recalled the lack of diversity on the campus, and the way that students who were atypical in sexuality and race at SWU were often easily identified and targeted. An additional student told that SWU determined that there was not a violation of the nondiscrimination policy when said student was voted out of a fraternity because another member found that the student was gay and a member of the LGBT+ organization on campus. A faculty member noted that many of the professors speak ill of homosexuals and that the undergrad students display quite a bit of hostility and homophobia. One student talked about being spontaneously and violently assaulted because of his sexual orientation while spectators encouraged the attackers and did not come to his aid. A final student wrote about how Coming Out Week is aimed at homosexuals only, which is extremely unfair to heterosexuals who deserve the chance to wave heterosexual flags, fight heterophobia, and express their views toward homosexuality without being labeled as homophobic (Wickens & Sandlin, 2010). The authors of the study also noted that the concluding student's views about Coming Out Week were retrieved from a publication of

SWU's student newspaper. This study conducted in El Paso portrays the discrimination and violence that can derive from homophobia in a climate that lacks diversity. It also shows that even in an educational setting, LGBT+ students are not always protected from social abuse by antidiscrimination laws, bullying policies, and faculty members.

A prime example of the LGBT+ community's struggles with tolerance occurred in 2007, when California passed Senate Bill 777. SB 777 was implemented to stop the discrimination of multiple groups and identities within public schools. The state bill's primary mission was summarized in the amendment of Section 220 of the Education Code, which reads,

No person shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of disability, gender, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic that is contained in the definition of hate crimes set forth in Section 422.55 of the Penal Code in any program or activity conducted by an educational institution that receives, or benefits from, state financial assistance or enrolls pupils who receive state student financial aid. (Kuehl & Jones, 2007)

This bill was met with extreme opposition because it included homosexuality and bisexuality alongside heterosexuality in the carefully worded definition of sexual orientation. Before the bill successfully passed, many individuals made their views known about the legislation. Californians expressed their fears that SB 777 would turn schools into facilities for sexual experimentation and violate Christian parents' authority in concern to teaching morality; one of the biggest fears was that the legislation would "indoctrinate" students into thinking that homosexuality was normal (Unruh, 2009).

A national survey revealed that gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents more than doubled the number of suicide attempts than that of their heterosexual peers (CDC, 2014). This may be a result of the intolerance that LGBT+ students receive with from peers and even school systems. States such as Utah, Alabama, and South Carolina have laws that strictly forbid educators to discuss alternate sexual orientations at all, and some even mandate that educators speak of homosexuality and bisexuality in a negative manner, even in sex education courses (Hoshall, 2013). This is extremely dangerous because all students in these states, regardless of sexual orientation, are taught that heterosexuality is the only normal, acceptable sexual orientation. This can produce and encourage issues such as bullying and self-harm along with teaching ignorance concerning other sexualities.

A closer evaluation of these laws show the deliberate discrimination and taboo towards non-heterosexuality. Utah currently has state restrictions for its educational standards, even for sex education courses, found in *R277-474-3 General Provisions*; these rules mandate that educators cannot talk about “the advocacy of homosexuality” and “the advocacy or encouragement of the use of contraceptives methods or devices” with students through any educational materials or methodologies (State of Utah, 2017). Regardless of the fact that same-sex marriage has been legal in all states since June 26, 2015, in January of 2017 the Alabama State Department of Education webpage states: “An emphasis, in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state” (Alabama State Department of Education, 2016). Not only is this information outdated and incorrect, it strongly suggests

that the intolerance of alternate sexual orientations is still present in the school systems of Alabama. According to South Carolina's Comprehensive Health Education Act of 2014 (Section 59-32-30), "The program of instruction provided for in this section may not include a discussion of alternate sexual lifestyles from heterosexual relationships including, but not limited to, homosexual relationships except in the context of instruction concerning sexually transmitted diseases" (South Carolina Department of Education, 2017). Through this educational decree, South Carolina's education system has given students an exceptionally negative and limited association of homosexuality: that this sexual orientation results in, or is causally linked to, sexually transmitted diseases.

These state education laws make it impossible for students to adequately learn about non-heterosexual orientations, and they hinder the ability for LGBT+ students to talk to their professors about personal problems and current events related to LGBT+ issues such as safe-sex and homophobia. This hindrance deters LGBT+ adolescents from coming out and accepting themselves because they know that there is a poor chance that they will receive understanding and acceptance from their peers and teachers.

While equality and justice are the final goal for the LGBT+ community, it cannot be denied that the United States has made great strides towards equality, even if there is a deficiency of tolerance and acceptance. From being viewed as immoral, ill, and criminal, homosexuals can now serve in the military and marry in all 50 states. However, there is an abundance of progress to be made towards the social acceptance of the LGBT+ community. Progress and success have aspired from the pioneering efforts of the Society of Human Rights all the way to the massive membership of the Human Rights Campaign.

LGBT+ adolescents and supportive heterosexual peers have begun to walk in unity through public school organizations such as Gay-Straight Alliances so that one day there may be justice and equality for all – regardless of sexual orientation.

Methodology

The methodology section includes the research design, background of Franklin County, TN and demographics, Franklin County High School GSA, availability of LGBT+ organizations in Franklin County, sampling, interview process, and analysis methods.

Research Design

Qualitative research generally uses inductive reasoning, meaning that the study begins with an open idea or generalization and becomes more narrow and specific with progress (Trochim, 2008). Through qualitative research, this study uses inductive reasoning to understand the rationale behind the public's support or opposition of Gay-Straight Alliances in public high schools, and identify alternatives that might increase LGBT+ adolescents' safety in public schools. The research was conducted in Franklin County, Tennessee where the formation of a high school GSA caused a rift in the community as many residents publicly displayed opposition and support. Adult Franklin County community members gave their opinions about the GSA through face-to-face interviews. The semi-structured interviews gave participants the opportunity to share their unique opinions and perspectives in their own natural words. A total of 8 interviews were conducted, transcribed, analyzed, and evaluated to identify patterns and common ideology.

Background: Franklin County, Tennessee & Demographics

Franklin County, an area that covers 567 square miles in middle Tennessee, is part of eight cities: Winchester, Cowan, Dechard, Estill Springs, Huntland, Monteagle, Sherwood, and Tullahoma. Demographics concerning levels of diversity, wealth, and education in Franklin County are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Demographics of Franklin County, TN from the 2010 Census

	Franklin County	Tennessee	United States
Total Population	41,052	6,346,275	308,758,105
Non-White Race and Ethnic Origin	9.2%	22.4%	27.6%
Foreign Born Persons	2.5%	4.8%	13.2%
Living in Poverty	15%	16.7%	13.5%
High School Graduate or Higher*	82.8%	85.5%	86.7%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher*	19.5%	24.9%	29.8%

*Persons ages 25+

(U.S. Census, n.d.) When compared to the demographics of Tennessee and the United States, the inhabitants of Franklin County have lower levels of racial and ethnic diversity (9.2%) as well as lower levels of post-high school education (19.5%) for adults age 25 and over. Franklin County is located in the Bible Belt, which is a region known for socially conservative Protestantism. Franklin county is estimated to have at least 78 Christian churches, which is approximately 1 church per 7 square miles (Share Faith Inc., 2017). Sewanee: The University of the South is located in Franklin County, and the

University educates approximately 1,793 students as of 2015. Sewanee University is a private liberal arts college with an Episcopal seminary (The University of the South, 2015).

As a school in Tennessee, Franklin County High School's (FCHS) sex education courses must strictly promote sexual abstinence, educate students on the benefits of avoiding sexual activity, the benefits of reserving sexual activities for marriage, and can only provide contraceptives if they are distributed while teaching students that abstinence is still the best way to avoid sexually transmitted diseases (Gotto & Johnson, 2012).

Franklin County High School's GSA

The Gay Straight Alliance at FCHS began during the spring 2016 school semester. The community's response to the GSA was immediate. Harsh bullying of LGBT+ adolescents had become so prevalent that students and parents reached out to local advocates who fought for LGBT+ rights; the methods and sources of bullying had extended far beyond the verbal and physical harassment that these students typically received on a day-to-day basis by peers (Justice, 2016b). Social media played a large role in rallying both opposition and support of the GSA and adolescent LGBT+ community. A Facebook page created to encourage protestors to show opposition to the GSA gathered enough fame and infamy that the creator was interviewed by NBC (Jones, 2016) This Facebook page rallied many people to show their opposition at the Franklin County School Board (FCSB) meetings, and it also drew the attention of LGBT+ supporters and enticed them to attend the meetings as well.

In February of 2016, the GSA was officially debated for the first time at a FCSB meeting because many individuals believed that the GSA did not belong in their public-school setting. Some community members had expressed views such as "the gay rights

movement has unfairly overshadowed Christian principles at FCHS,” and that the club would be a forum in which sexual activities are practiced (Justice, 2016a, para 17).

Conversely, other members of the community expressed that students’ safety was the main reason for starting the club, and that it was desperately needed.

Prior to the first FCSB meeting, the Franklin County school system director affirmed that if the GSA aligned with the club criteria set by the school then it could only be banned if all other extracurricular clubs were eliminated as well (Justice, 2016b). At the February FCSB meeting four community members, one being a student and member of the GSA, were given prior approval to publicly speak at the meeting; each individual gave his or her perspective concerning the GSA and its placement in the school. Some speakers expressed extreme opposition while others exhibited adamant support. The discussion of the GSA during the February meeting concluded with a proposal to revise Administrative Procedure 6.702.1 – Club/Organization Criteria (Franklin County School Board, 2017b). The initial meeting ended with a feeling of temporary victory for the supporters of the Franklin County GSA. However, the discussion of the GSA was hardly over. The GSA was then addressed at the FCSB work session meeting on March 7, 2016, and again on the March 14, 2016 regular FCSB meeting; both meetings involved proposals of revisions to the school’s club criteria that were presented and requested to be altered further (FCSB, 2017e; FCSB, 2017c). Each meeting involved lengthy discussion about the club criteria and GSA. The discussion of the change in criteria for clubs and organizations extended to the April 4, 2016 FCSB work session as well (FCSB 2017d). The revisions to the Administrative Procedure 6.702.1 – Club/Organization Criteria were finalized and put to the vote on April 11, 2016; there were 7 votes for the change in

criteria and 1 vote in opposition of the change (FCSB, 2017a). The motion passed, and new criteria was set for Franklin County school clubs and organizations.

There were subtle changes in the Administrative Procedure 6.702.1 – Club/Organization Criteria, one being a prolonged process in attaining official approval to form a new school club. However, one of the most prominent changes was the requirement for all students to have written parental consent to join a club (FCSB, 2017f). The need for parental consent has the potential to greatly undermine and discourage LGBT+ students from joining the GSA if they have not come out about their sexuality to their parents or guardians. This new criterion may also deter heterosexual allies from joining the GSA if their parents are in objection to the club or LGBT+ community. See Appendix B for full criteria for FCHS extracurricular clubs and organizations.

Availability of LGBT+ Organizations in the Area

The FCHS GSA was one of Franklin County's first LGBT+ organizations. However, the formation of the school club was the first spark to a potential wildfire of support for the LGBT+ community. The LGBT+ Rural Youth Fund is a direct result of the high school LGBT+ youth's recent struggles in Franklin County. The GSA also inspired the creation of the Cumberland Center of Justice and Peace. The LGBT+ Rural Youth Fund provides financial support for community activism and LGBT+ educational opportunities, seed money for rural GSAs and other rural LGBT+ youth groups, funding for a LGBT+ speakers and programs, and for crisis funding (Cumberland Center for Justice and Peace, 2017). Also, in January 2016, Tennessee Equality Project (TEP), an advocacy group that fights discriminatory legislation, extended their efforts to protect LGBT+ rights in Franklin County through the TEP Franklin County Committee. Many

of the closest long-standing LGBT+ support organizations, such as the Oasis Center and Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), are located in Nashville, TN, nearly 100 miles from FCHS.

Sampling

A non-probability sampling approach, criterion sampling, was used to recruit study participants. Criterion sampling involves selecting participants who meet the desired criteria (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008). For this study, eligible participants were Franklin County, TN residents, FCHS graduates, and/or other adults associated with Franklin County's GSA. Exposure to initial participants was made through observation at the FCSB meeting on February 8, 2016. The February 8 FCSB meeting was the first time that the GSA was officially addressed by the school board. A large crowd attended the meeting, composed of individuals who strongly supported and opposed the club. A community member who publically gave an opinion at the FCSB meeting was invited to participate in the study. FCHS graduates were also identified and invited to participate.

Snowball sampling, the recruitment of additional participants through referrals made by current study participants, was used to find further participants who were linked to the GSA or FCHS (Oregon State University, 2017b). Participants were contacted by email with an explanation of the study and an invitation to participate. Appointments were made with individuals who were interested in participating or learning more about the study. At this time, individuals were given the chance to read and sign a consent form (Appendix A) if they were interested in participating.

Interview Process

After giving written consent, individuals were reminded that they could end the interview or skip questions without any negative repercussions. All interviews were conducted in person and documented with an audio recorder. Each participant was given the opportunity to answer the following six questions:

1. What is your experience with or exposure to people who identify as LGBT+?
2. How does your religious affiliation (or lack thereof) relate to your views concerning the LGBT+ community? What is your religious affiliation or lack thereof? Please describe.
3. Do you think that LGBT+ adolescents in Franklin County are generally at a greater risk of being bullied for their sexual orientations than heterosexual adolescents? Please explain.
4. Many public high schools have clubs like Art Club, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Debate Team. Why do you believe that students **should** or **should not** be able to have GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliances) in public schools?
5. What do you think would help lower conflict between students of differing sexual orientations?
6. What advice, if any, would you give to an LGBT+ high school student who is struggling with social acceptance in school?

After the conclusion of each interview, individuals were given a copy of the consent form with the researcher's contact information.

Analysis Methods

Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed, and each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Audio recordings were deleted once they were completely transcribed.

Each script was printed so that open coding could be used to objectively identify patterns and themes. Open coding consists of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data, which is accomplished through data reduction, labeling phenomena, and discovering and developing categories (Oregon State University, 2017a). As each interview was analyzed text was categorized and labeled through color coding, highlighting, underlining, and marking in other various forms. After each script was individually examined and labeled, all scripts were studied simultaneously to identify correlations and patterns in language, as well as to identify shared or adverse ideas, opinions, and perceptions. Reoccurring ideas, perceptions, opinions, and patterns were categorized for each interview question.

Final topics, themes, and codes were developed by transferring coded information to tables to organize themes and patterns. The data displays consist of a table for each identified theme or pattern with the name of the participant and the direct quote from which the theme or pattern was identified. Direct quotes were used to verify identified themes, patterns, diversities, mindsets, ideas, etc. that represent a fraction of Franklin County community members' mindsets towards their GSA.

Results

The participants in this study ranged from 21 to 50 years: a professor, two religious leaders, two college students, one parent of a student at FCHS, and two community members. The participants were categorized into groups based on their perception of bullying and their views of FCHS's GSA: Strong Support of GSA, Conditional Support of GSA, and Strong Opposition of GSA. Within these three groups, the topics from the questions were: Association with LGBT+ Individuals, Religious

Influence, Perception of Bullying, Franklin County’s GSA, and Advice for Struggling LGBT+ students. Themes are common concepts in the participants’ responses, and the themes are categorized with codes, meaning that the themes are categorized by topic (University of Huddersfield, 2017). The results conclude with each participant’s ideas on what would lower conflict between students of differing sexual orientations at FCHS.

Group 1: Strong Support of GSA

Mark, Emma, Paul, and Jenny strongly supported Franklin County’s GSA. They were classified as showing strong support because they provided no reasoning or inclination to restrict the GSA from being allowed in FCHS. As a whole, this group believed that the GSA would benefit all students at FCHS. Identified codes and themes are displayed in Table 4, and each code is categorized by color.

Table 4. Codes & Themes: Strong Support of the GSA

Codes	Themes
Association with LGBT+ Individuals	Friends
Religious Influence	Atheist/ Not religious
	Christian
Perception of Bullying	Bullying is worse toward LGBT+ students
	Prevalent at FCHS
Franklin County’s GSA	Students need the social support
	Has the right to exist at FCHS just like any of the school’s clubs
	Increases exposure, visibility, and number of allies
Advice for Struggling LGBT+ Students	Connect with allies
	Persevere
	Get out of Franklin County
	It might not get easier
	Someone must stay and fight

Association with LGBT+ Individuals

Mark was the only participant in the study that openly identified as LGBT+. However, the other strong supporters recall having LGBT+ friends during and after high school. Paul talks about his first association with a member of the LGBT+ community: “. . . Certainly the first person I knew was gay was one of my best friends in high school. He didn’t come out until after high school, but it was one of those things that you said, ‘duh.’”

Religious Influence

The participants who showed strong support of the GSA were diverse in religious affiliation. While Jenny and Paul were both Christian, there were significant differences in their belief structures. Jenny explains, “I am Christian. . . I was raised that it [homosexuality] is wrong, unfortunately. But in the new time era, it’s not such a big deal. In my personal opinion, I don’t really see a problem with it.” While Jenny disagreed with her religion’s position on homosexuality, Paul embraced his: “I am an Episcopalian and one of the things I’m proudest of in our church is the strong stand the Episcopal church has taken in most places in favor of LGBT equality.”

On the other hand, Emma and Mark did not affiliate with a religion at the time that the interviews were conducted. Mark said,

I was Roman Catholic for most of my life, but I’m not really anything right now. . . I think one of the major reasons why I’m not religious right now is because of the eventual reckoning I did to kind of understand who I was and what the value of sexual liberation and LGBTQ issues were.

Mark's journey in understanding his sexuality may have led him to withdraw from religion. However, Emma explains how her atheism allows her to view the LGBT+ community as equal and good:

I am atheist as well as my fiancé, and we are raising a child to be without religion and of science and logic. And with those things, we find it way easier to be supportive of other people because I feel like I have nothing keeping me from being supportive of anybody's right to love. It's just a moral oath within me to be like 'Well sure they should have all the things that we have, why wouldn't we share all this stuff?' So yeah, religion doesn't impose on my views. I think it frees me from being held back.

Studies show that religious individuals are more likely to regard the LGBT+ community with higher levels of homophobia, negative attitudes, and prejudice. In concern to gay marriage and homosexuality, non-religious, atheist, and secular individuals are more likely to be more supportive and accepting than those who are religious (Zuckerman, 2009).

Perception of Bullying

Members of Group 1, the strong supporters, each had solid opinions about the prevalence of bullying at FCHS, and all four participants believed that bullying was worse for the LGBT+ students. When asked question 3, the participants initially replied with the phrases: "Oh, yeah," "Yes," "Absolutely," and "One-hundred percent" before further explaining their views on bullying towards LGBT+ students. Jenny elaborated by speaking of a fellow student with whom she attended FCHS:

I had a friend in high school who struggled with it. He was a huge Christian, very religious guy. He struggled with it because he was gay and he didn't know how to take it himself and he didn't know how to take others bullying him and judging him. He got a lot of wrath from that. After high school. . . he decided that he was tired of running from himself and he opened up and made a YouTube video and came out publicly.

In the past, many LGBT+ students chose to come out in college because it was a more opportune atmosphere for individuals to be open about their sexuality, regardless of how long they had personally identified that way (Personal Rights in Defense and Education, 1998). More recent studies show that students who hide their sexual identities are more prone to depression, suicidal behavior, and abuse of drugs and alcohol. Additionally, data shows a reduction in the average age that LGBT+ individuals are becoming open about their sexuality (Arizona Board of Regents, 2017).

Paul viewed the issue through a different perspective that involved gender roles, especially for males in Franklin County:

First of all, bullying is an all too prevalent way of life in this county, but I also think that this county bases an awful lot around sort of kind of classic macho stuff. . . If I was just going to go off of my gut feeling, it's probably a bigger issue for the boys. . . I think that yes, there's an awful lot of religious fundamentalism in this county, and there is that macho thing that goes on here, so yeah, I think it's worse.

Males and females both endure bullying in public schools, but typically the types of bullying vary. In terms of the adolescents who bully, research shows that males are

typically guilty of a combination of physical and relational bullying, while females generally show their aggression through only relational bullying (Smith, Rose, Schwartz-Mette, 2009). In reference to the adolescents that are the objects of bullying, females generally endure verbal harassment and indirect forms of social bullying, and males typically endure more physical and direct forms of bullying (The Center for Parenting Education, 2017).

Franklin County's GSA

In regard to Franklin County's GSA, all four showed strong support of the GSA and LGBT+ community and believed that the GSA was a positive addition to the school's variety of clubs and organizations. They mentioned the adolescent LGBT+ population's need for social support as they explained why the GSA is good for FCHS. Jenny believes that the GSA is a good place for LGBT+ students to find friends and learn to cope with being a sexual minority alongside supportive peers. Jenny said,

I think it would be nice to have one just because there's some kids out there that don't know how to deal with the emotions that deal with being gay. There's some people that don't have anybody to talk to, they don't have friends that they can go to that they feel comfortable enough cause you know you are always scared of whether you are going to lose that friend or not if they find out. I think it would be good for somebody to identify with who they are.

Emma commented on how the social support of a GSA can help students be safe and find unity as they deal with LGBT+ issues:

I think they should have a safe place. And I use the word safe because I think it is much more important. They are not getting together and just wearing rainbow

shirts. They are talking about real problems there day to day. And I think it is important that they connect on that and that they spend time with like-minded people who share their support.

Paul and Mark both looked at the issue in another way: That the GSA has the same right to exist at FCHS as Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and debate team.

When asked why the GSA should or should not be allowed at FCHS, Paul replied,

Because all of those other clubs exist. That's why they should. And I think that students who have an interest in gathering together to give each other support should be allowed to gather together and give each other support. That's the primary purpose of a GSA, and certainly if you are going to allow an FCA, which is going to come in and. . . often give a message that it's not ok to be gay, you ought to be able to have a club that can say 'Yes, it is,' particularly in a place like Franklin County where those students who are LGBT are not likely to get support at home or at their church or wherever. They've got to have a safe place.

Mark and Paul also saw that GSAs do more than provide a safe place for LGBT+ students and allies to co-exist. The GSA had the potential to increase visibility of the LGBT+ community in Franklin County, and to help heterosexual students see that LGBT+ students are normal people too. Mark commented,

Personally, I think that it's really excellent for not just students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, transgender, and intersex at the time they are in high school, but it's also really important for students who don't. Students who at the very least reckon with the fact that there are people that they know who they like,

who they grew up with, who they love and care for, who are not straight, and they do have lives.

Research confirms the comments from this group. While GSAs are designed to provide a safe place for LGBT+ students, a forum for socialization, and an opportunity for advocacy, the club also increases LGBT+ visibility (Ayers, Quinn, Stovall, 2009).

Increased visibility of a minority group like LGBT+ adolescents in Franklin County can raise awareness of the population and its issues, as well as help the group receive more support from heterosexual community members and school administrators.

Advice for Struggling LGBT+ Students

Mark, Jenny, Emma, and Paul each had unique pieces of advice for an LGBT+ student who is struggling with social acceptance in high school. In the group of strong supporters, Mark and Emma both urged the student to connect with allies, whether they be faculty members or other students.

I didn't experience the same struggle, therefore I think that I would try to connect them with someone who has been there and would be more understanding of what they are experiencing. I would hate for them to feel like if I was like 'Oh, you know, this is high school, people are mean.' That's not appropriate, this is something that lots of teenagers deal with. (Emma)

The social atmosphere of the GSA would allow LGBT+ students to connect and share understanding in concern to difficulties in life (GSA Network, 2009). Jenny's advice focused on life after high school.

Just pretty much be yourself because it will get easier once you get older.

Whether you are gay or straight, it's not going to matter in the real world, but

when you are in high school it's going to matter. People are going to judge you no matter what, but once you get older it's going to get better. (Jenny)

While they agreed that it is important for an adolescent to be true to themselves, Paul and Mark did not share Jenny's optimistic perspective about life after high school. Mark's chilling words, spoken from experience, were, "You know, I'd love to be like 'It [life] gets better,' but it doesn't sometimes." Paul and Mark also would encourage students to persevere and to get out of Franklin County if they can. However, both participants admitted that someone has to stay in Franklin County to fight for equality. Mark talked about persevering alongside allies in his words of advice:

There are other people out there who will fight with you — on the same side as you, not against you. And that's something. If you've been fighting already just to stay alive, it means that you are well trained and that means you will be strong already for a fight you will have later. And that's kind of cold advice I think, but it's the only honest advice I've got.

Paul also encouraged the LGBT+ student to preserve, but also to look beyond Franklin County if they do not want to stay and fight.

Don't give up. Franklin County is the kind of place where people have a hard time imagining life beyond the border of the county. It's the kind of place where it's really tempting to think that this is all there is. I wish I could promise that it was going to be easy any time soon, and you can't promise that. But Franklin County is not the edge of the world. Frankly we are a dimple in the armpit of the world, and there are marvelous, accepting places out there and all you've got to do is just survive. Look for the allies, cling to the ones you can find in this place, and

survive. And maybe the best advice is that you can get the hell out. Get some place safer while those of us who have enough stamina or who just aren't lucky enough to leave at the moment. . . stay and fight the battles out. Eventually the tide is going to turn, but it's going to be a long hard battle here. (Paul)

Outstanding and Memorable Quotes

Below are quotes from participants in Group 1 that were memorable and outstanding. These quotes were identified for this section because they contain valuable and unique information that helps the reader understand the Strong Supporters' perspective of the GSA in Franklin County.

- ❖ “I think that it's a civil rights issue but also a really important community issue to allow people to reckon with who is around them so that they don't live in fiction. I think that blocking something like a GSA is more than just violating a few students' rights. Its perpetrating a fiction upon every student that goes to that high school. Which I think is wrong even for the most conservative, straight kids out there, that they are being lied to by being told that this sort of thing only happens elsewhere.” (Mark)
- ❖ “When GSAs do their job well, yes they provide a safe place, but they also provide a place of conversation. They can provide a place where its ok for the person who is squeamish about LGBT stuff to come in and say ‘I'm squeamish,’ and instead of everybody jumping on them, they say ‘well, why?’ And start to talk about it and start to put a human face on it.” (Paul)
- ❖ “I'm raising a child and I don't want him to go to that high school at this point. . . I can't send him to a school full of hate. As a liberal atheist, I could never put my

child in an environment where he could not be himself. So, I feel the same for any other parent. You want your child to flourish and feel safe, and if there's a club or organization in your school that provides that for you, I don't care what you call it and who is coming. It needs to be there just as much as debate, just as much as the Christian athletic clubs. It's equally important." (Emma)

Group 2: Conditional Support of GSA

Andrea and Vanessa were conditionally supportive of FCHS's GSA. These participants were classified as being conditionally supportive because while they showed general support of the GSA and its purpose, they were apprehensive that the GSA would receive special treatment as a school club. Both participants have a unique perspective because they graduated from FCHS within the past 5 years. Identified codes and themes are displayed in Table 5, and each code is categorized by color.

Table 5. Codes & Themes: Conditionally Supportive Participants

Codes	Themes
Association with LGBT+ Individuals	Has LGBT+ friends
Religious Influence	Is religious
	Religion condemns homosexuality
	Does not agree with religion's stance on homosexuality
Perception of Bullying	Bullying is worse toward LGBT+ students
	Witnessed bullying towards gay students
	Gay males are bullied more than lesbians
Franklin County's GSA	FCH should have the GSA if the club helps students
	GSA must abide by the same rules as other clubs to stay at FCH
Advice for Struggling LGBT+ Students	It gets better after high school

Association with LGBT+ Individuals

Andrea and Vanessa both reported having LGBT+ friends. Enlightened through her friendship, Andrea commented on the complications that come with being a lesbian in Franklin County:

One of my best friends is actually an in-the-closet lesbian, so I've seen a lot of the stuff she's had to struggle with. . . I think they go through a lot of heartache going through school trying to find themselves.

It is not uncommon for sexual minority youth to struggle as they find themselves during high school. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that many LGBT+ youth experience some type of social rejection, family disownment, and violence, and that 60% of LGBT+ youth stop participating in their customary activities due to periodic feelings of sadness and hopelessness (CDC, 2015).

Both participants also made a point to say that they did not judge non-heterosexuals for their lifestyles. Vanessa stated,

I have no judgement towards anyone. If you want to be with a guy, you can be with a guy, if you want to be with a girl. . . that doesn't affect me, so none of that bothers me by any means.

Religious Influence

Andrea and Vanessa both identified as Christian: Church of God and Southern Baptist, respectively. Both participants noted that their churches condemned homosexuality and considered it a personal choice rather than a natural occurrence or condition. Vanessa stated, "I grew up in a Baptist church . . . Obviously, my church does not believe in it [homosexuality] by any means. . . Most of them think that it's a choice,

and that God wouldn't place that on you." A common rationale behind this ideology is that Adam and Eve's involvement in The Fall of Mankind introduced undesired things into the world such as sickness, pain, and same sex desire even though these things were not part of God's perfect vision for the world (Bible Gateway, n.d.; Focus on the Family, 2017).

Although Andrea and Vanessa both aligned with their respective faiths on most issues, they both disagreed with their churches' positions on homosexuality, as Andrea explained, "I think that they can't help it. They feel how they feel. They love who they love." Vanessa looks at the issue from a different perspective and talked about what caused her to disagree with her church's position:

My own personal belief, you know, is what someone else does is really none of my business. It's not affecting me in any way. . . In some circumstances, I can see where it wouldn't be a choice. I've heard of a lot of stories where some people are just so certain that they don't want to be this way [LGBT+], or they hate themselves for being this way. You can't really control your mind. Your mind is going to race and do what it wants to do, and I think it's the same way with that.

Both Andrea and Vanessa believed that non-heterosexuality is not a choice, contrary to their religions' positions on the subject.

Perception of Bullying

Andrea and Vanessa reported that LGBT+ students were at a greater risk of being bullied than heterosexual students when they attended FCHS. They felt strongly about the question and immediately answered with "absolutely" and "definitely" before explaining further. Their observations mirror statistics from prior studies; the CDC states that 34%

of LGBT+ students reported getting bullied in comparison to 19% of heterosexual students (CDC, 2015). Both Andrea and Vanessa also noted that gay males seemed to be bullied more than lesbians.

I don't think there was a lot of bullying if they were lesbian. I think it was more if you were a guy, and you were bullied by guys. I don't know really that many lesbians, but I think it may not have been as bad on them. (Vanessa)

While this comment proposes that gay males seemed to be a target for bullying, it also suggests that lesbians at FCHS may have lower visibility in comparison to gay males.

The conditional supporters also reported witnessing bullying towards LGBT+ students. "When I was there, there was this kid that wore a bow in his hair, and he got a cheeseburger thrown at him at lunch. It was awful, but it happened all the time at school." (Andrea). School cafeterias, bathrooms, and playgrounds are some of the most common places that students get bullied because there is less adult supervision (U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources, n.d.).

Franklin County's GSA

In regard to FCHS's GSA, Group 2 believed that the club was designed to help students with their struggles at school and therefore should be allowed in the school.

If someone is willing to have a sponsor for something like that, and they think that it's enough of an epidemic that people are actually suffering because of it, and it's going to save someone's life by meeting in a support group regardless of what it may be for, go for it. (Vanessa)

However, both participants made sure to explain that they believe the club should be treated like any other club at FCHS. "They should have the GSA as long as it doesn't get

special treatment. If that club can go through the same steps as the other clubs, then I feel like it should be allowed.” (Andrea). She also pointed out that other extracurricular clubs should be allowed as well, such as the highly-desired fishing club that had been previously turned down. Additionally, both participants referenced Christian Clubs at FCHS: F.I.S.H. and Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Similarly, Vanessa thought that the club should not get special treatment in regard to when the club holds its meetings:

I believe that it would be just like how FCHS has F.I.S.H., which is like a Christian-based club. They typically meet in the mornings, and I think that if they were going to have meetings it should be in the mornings you know, not during school hours, just like with the FISH club. . . . When it takes place is really what affected people. I think that if it’s going to happen, it needs to happen before school hours, and I think that goes with any religious based club, anything swaying.

According to the GSA Advisor Handbook, GSA meetings should only be held after school hours or during lunchtime, contingent on each school’s rules (GSA Network, 2011). To start a new club at FCHS, a proposition for a school club must go through an application process and meet general criteria set by the FCSB such as having a teacher-sponsor and a way to give back to the community. Through the Equal Access Act, GSAs receive the same protection that religious, political, and philosophical clubs receive (DeMitchell & Fossey, 2008). Theoretically, a GSA would not receive superior treatment to any school clubs, including those also protected by the Equal Access Act.

Advice to Struggling LGBT+ Students

When thinking about advice to give to an LGBT+ student who is struggling with social acceptance, Vanessa put herself in that adolescent's shoes as she said,

I'd probably feel like no one understands. I wouldn't want to talk to a counselor because they're not going to understand because they are older, which means they are probably going to have the same outlook that everyone else has in the county. But I would never want to give up. I wouldn't stop going to school because of my sexual preference, and they shouldn't either. In high school, you kind of get into cliques so I think that it's important to just find your clique, and just make it through. I know that's terrible to say, but once you get out of high school, things are a lot more broad. And if you can just make it through those few years, you know, hopefully, in most situations, it would be a lot better.

Vanessa would encourage an LGBT+ student to persevere even though they may not receive help from all teachers and administrators. Coincidentally, her advice to find a clique, or group, of supportive peers could be followed through membership to a GSA.

Similarly, Andrea would advise a student to seek help in authority figures and trusted peers at school:

Go find a teacher, an administrator, somebody at the school that you can trust to talk to. Don't let the people bring you down. It's easier said than done, but it's just a few years. You can get through it, and there's more out there than just what's going on currently. Just find somebody to talk to, get through your day, and everything will work out in the end.

Andrea encouraged LGBT+ students to persevere by reaching out for support. Both Andrea and Vanessa also mentioned that high school does not last forever, and that life could improve beyond the high school walls.

Outstanding and Memorable Quotes

Below is a quote from a participant in Group 2 that was memorable and outstanding. There is only one quote in this section because both Conditional Support participants had brief interviews at approximately 7 minutes each. This quote was identified for this section because it contains valuable and unique information that helps the reader understand the Conditional Supporters' perspective of the GSA in Franklin County.

- ❖ “It’s a small town that has strong views about that [homosexuality], and I’ve always heard that Franklin County is like 20 years behind the rest of society. I think that most people are raised like I was (I mean I can’t really say I wasn’t) where that is wrong. . . or you know, these people are bad, like bad people. I’m sure that most of the youth are still raised that way today in Franklin County.” - Vanessa

Group 3: Strong Opposition of the GSA

Rick and Jeremy were in strong opposition to the GSA because they believed that there was no need or place for a GSA at FCHS. Both individuals recognized a bullying problem, but said that it was not directed solely toward LGBT+ students. Identified codes and themes are displayed in Table 6, and each code is categorized by color.

Table 6. Codes & Themes: Strong Opposition of the GSA

Codes	Themes
Association with LGBT+ Individuals	Family members and acquaintances
Religious Influence	Christian
	Aligns with religious teachings on homosexuality
Perception of Bullying	Bullying is not worse towards LGBT+ students at FCHS
	Should have a bullying club instead of GSA
	Bullying goes both ways
Franklin County's GSA	No parental authority
	GSA is unnecessary and does not belong in schools
Advice to Struggling LGBT+ Students	It's part of being human
	Read the bible

Association with LGBT+ Individuals

Both of those strongly opposed to the GSA had family members who identified as LGBT+. Rick explained his relationships with his LGBT+ friends and family:

I also have a gay aunt that is . . .bisexual. . . I also have a gay cousin. I've got a gay uncle-in-law. I have gay people in my family and it's not that I don't love them, I just don't want them teaching my children or any other children that that lifestyle is O.K. . . I have friends. I have customers, I have many customers who are gay. It's never a problem. Even after the GSA debacle that I was a part of, I've not lost any of my bisexual or gay or lesbian couples. They still come to the shop just as regularly.

Religious Influence

The Group 3 participants both identified as Christian: Rick as Baptist and Jeremy as Church of Christ. Both individuals also mentioned that they stood by the bible and their religion's position when it comes to homosexuality. Jeremy explained how his religion shaped his world view,

Every view that I have in my life is colored by the New Testament, so it supremely affects how I relate to this topic and every other topic I come across in my life, but at the same time, I am also able to look at this topic in ways other than religiously colored, if you will. . . It does consider homosexuality a sin. If you are speaking of marriage, then it also says that marriage is between a man and a woman.

Rick also commented about the sinfulness of alternate sexualities and transgender individuals:

The bible is plain as day: it's a sin, no matter what. There's no other way around it, you can't get around it, it's a sin. I sin every day of my life, and I'm going to continue to sin every day of my life until the day I die. Where the fine line is drawn, is it's the abomination of this sin because you are living in it. My sin, I might cuss or I used to smoke. I was a smoker for 21 years. I sinned every day that I smoked, but every night I asked for forgiveness. But this is a lifestyle that they live in. Knowing that if you live in this lifestyle till the day that you die, when you meet your maker, the bible says you are not getting in. . . Especially when you get into the T word, because then you are saying that God is a liar. God is no liar. God's never lied, and he never will lie. If you say you are transgender then you are calling God a liar, because god made you who you are. If you wanna know who you are, look between your legs, it's that simple. It's that simple.

There's no other explanation.

A study involving lesbian and gay Christians found that some of the participants coped with the two identities by taking the bible "seriously but not literally," researching

language, historical, and cultural backgrounds, using alternate interpretations and reframing scripture, having close relationships with pastors and allies, and believing that God loves everyone, regardless of sexual orientation (Bowland, Foster, & Vosler, 2013). There are some denominations, such as Episcopal and Lutheran, that use the bible as their holy book and, depending on the church, also accept LGBT+ individuals.

Perception of Bullying

Perception of bullying was one of the main divisions between support and opposition of a GSA, primarily because those who did not see an issue with bullying towards LGBT+ students did not consider a GSA to be necessary. Jeremy commented on bullying towards LGBT+ students:

Is it because you're gay you get bullied? No, that's not just the reason. Nobody goes around and just picks out only homosexual people for bullying. Yes, homosexual people do get bullied, but so do overweight people and people with cross eyes and people who wear glasses, and people will do all sorts of things regardless of their sexuality. . . In fact, if you don't tell anybody what your sexual preference is, then that would simply not even be a topic of bullying.

Rick had similar views on bullying, but he surpassed Jeremy's frame of thought and said that LGBT+ students have protection that heterosexual students lack in public schools, and the students who feel bullied are actually the heterosexual adolescents. Rick also said that LGBT+ students seem to evade punishment for offenses like public displays of affection (PDA) and peer-on-peer fights.

No reports have come back to me that there's ever been a physical threat against an LGBT student. In my opinion, other children are getting bullied because they

have a different view or they support something differently than the LGBT community. . . The LGBT community is more protected in a whole. If a boy and a boy get in a fight over a girl, a couple of buddies, they get in a fight over a girl, they are expelled, blah blah blah, this and that. If you take it that this boy and girl is a gay thing or a transgender thing, well they are protected. You can't punish those children as you punish normal children. I've got a bus driver that is a customer of mine. . . He said that he sees more and more of girls holding hands, boys holding hands. . . and two boys lock lips every day and it makes him want to jump off the bus and just make them stop, but they get in no trouble, no reprimandation whatsoever. A boy and a girl get caught kissing, they are in trouble, they are going to the office. Now that's happened. (Rick)

Both Jeremy and Rick stated that they would be content with an anti-bullying club at the school as long as it was not based on sexuality. Overall, they both agreed that the GSA was not the correct solution for bullying issues at FCHS. Jeremy mentioned his support of a bullying club: "Do you need a place that talks about bullying? Yes. I am all for that. Does it have to be sexually orientated? The answer is: No."

Jeremy and Rick shared the limelight as they openly opposed the FCHS GSA through public speech and social media. As a result of their expressed opposition to the GSA, both received negative and violent forms of retaliation from supporters of the LGBT+ community. Rick recalled some of the backlash he experienced:

The LGBT community really needs to practice what they preach as far as hate, bigotry, racism. They are the exact opposite. They threatened to ruin me, close

down my business. They've threatened me in so many ways. I was even threatened physically. I was even called a child molester.

Jeremy received similar forms of harassment that expanded to his job and the safety of his family:

Meanwhile I am getting calls at my house threatening the life of myself and my family. I get calls and emails at work explaining to my employer why I should never be allowed to work for him again because I simply say it should not be in school. As late as November or October (2016), I had a gentleman calling where I worked telling people that I was under investigation by the FBI, and that I was threatening children. This is not a one-way street.

Jeremy explained that he was aware of extremists on both liberal and conservative sides, and that he does not agree with either. However, he did say that he had not heard of any LGBT+ individuals who had received similar threats and forms of harassment in result of their involvement in the GSA debate.

Franklin County's GSA

Jeremy and Rick found the GSA overwhelmingly unnecessary and wrongfully allowed at FCHS. They each had very strong opinions about the GSA. Jeremy's perception centered around the fact that students of mixed sexualities were doing fine in other clubs.

Have they been unsafe playing their music? Has anybody made them unsafe enough to stop playing music and start forming a Gay-Straight Band? The answer is: No. So, the band hasn't been stopped from being, it hasn't made it a . . . unsafe atmosphere, so really, it's not about safety, because we already have homosexual,

young people, as they think they are, in every atmosphere, in every club, in every section of the school. (Jeremy)

Jeremy believed that GSAs were more than unnecessary. He thought that they were part of a social agenda that was exclusive rather than inclusive, as GSAs are promoted.

It is a social engineering agenda that up until recently, has been promoted by our federal government, and that's really what it's about. It's not about bullying, because, if this was all about bullying we wouldn't need a club to stop it. The club doesn't stop anything. We've got to get away from lumping clubs into a divisive category. Like when I use the band, there is no gay-straight band, it's a band. It's a group of kids that are there simply because they love music. Not because they are gay and love music, or because they are straight and love music. That's the whole deviation of GSA from other groups is they are in the name divisive. I don't care if it says alliance after that. How about just a student alliance? Because that's what they are, they are students. Most of the kids we are talking about don't even know anything about sex. Why are we trying to impress upon certain ways of life on kids who don't even know how to accurately and how to mindfully and thoughtfully think through situations? That club, GSA, is promoting a lifestyle above others. They are separating students and saying 'This guy is gay and this guy is straight, so let's just have a club about it.' That's ridiculous.

Jeremy believed that GSAs promote a lifestyle to adolescents who are uneducated about or oblivious of sex. However, the CDC's 2015 survey of high school students showed that 41% of students reported having sexual intercourse prior to the study, and 30% of students had participated in sexual intercourse in the prior 3 months, 43% of

which did not use a condom (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). Studies also show that individuals aged 13-24 make up 22% of recent HIV diagnoses in the U.S., and 81% of the diagnosed were gay and bisexual males (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). These statistics suggest that many adolescents are, in fact, aware of sex, and that the students, regardless of sexuality, are not receiving proper preventative education when it comes to health risks of sexual intercourse.

Rick's perception of the GSA's misplacement varied slightly. Rick thought that the club should not legally be allowed in the school for health reasons and because it contradicted school rules:

The CDC has come out with a study, you can research this. . . They came out with a study that if you become a homosexual male at the age of 18, you are gonna cut 20 years off your life. 20 years. If you start smoking at the age of 18, you will cut 10 years off your life. Why do we not have a smoking club? Now here's my reasoning behind that: If you have a smoking club, which is the same as this GSA club in a certain extent. . . What age is the legal consent to smoke a cigarette? What is the legal age for sexual intercourse? How old do you have to be to buy a Playboy? You've got to be 18. If an 18 year old sleeps with a 14 year old what happens? They get arrested. So, we are going to say the legal age to have sex is 18, which it is. That's legal. So, you've got to be 18 to have sex, but you are going to have a sexually oriented class or club. Now here's another reason behind it. In 2010 the state of Tennessee passed a law that the only thing that could be taught in sexual education in the state of Tennessee is abstinence. They can't

teach a guy how to put a condom on, they can't teach a girl about intercourse, none of that. Abstinence is it, that's state law.

Further investigation uncovered the study that Rick likely referenced in his interview. The 2007 study, "Federal Distortion of Homosexual Footprint (Ignoring Early Gay Death?)," was conducted by Paul Cameron, a psychologist and sociologist who wrote many pieces about homosexuality, and his son Kirk Cameron. This study was published by the Family Research Institute, of which Paul Cameron co-founded. In concern to Rick's reference, Cameron writes,

Smoking is condemned because it is associated with a reduction in longevity of 1 to 7 years. It is inconsistent to condemn smoking yet celebrate homosexuality when the decrement in life span of those practicing homosexuality approximates 20 or more years. (Cameron & Cameron, 2007, para 68)

There have been many criticisms of Cameron's work, most concerning the methodology and ethics such as: having too large of a margin of error, low response rates, questionable validity due to complexity of survey questions, and the potential presence of influential and biased interviewers (Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian and Gay Issues, 1998). Cameron was criticized over 20 years prior to his 2007 study for his ethics and research and was later criticized by professional organizations. Sex researcher and psychiatrist Richard Green testified against Cameron in the 1980s by stating that Cameron's research findings were "at odds with other researchers in the area of homosexuality," used vague terminology, were published in journals that do not require peer review for scientific accuracy, and were unlikely generalizations based off of very small samples (Keen & Goldberg, 2000, p. 60). By 1996, the American

Sociological Association, Nebraska Psychological Association, American Psychological Association (APA), and Canadian Psychological Association had each given a statement that their organization no longer supported or associated with Cameron or his research due to his fallible research methods, incessant misrepresentations of data, and violation of ethics (Herek, 2012).

Another reason that Rick opposed the GSA was because it had curriculum even though it was presented as a non-curriculum club. He saw this as a direct violation.

They are actually in violation of state law because they have a syllabus. To have a syllabus in the state of Tennessee, you must have a teacher. And to have a syllabus, you must have a curriculum. This is a non-curriculum club. They are controlled by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN). Did you know that the GLSEN sends out a monthly curriculum to every GSA club in America? Go to the website and you'll see the monthly curriculum. Now with that being said, they have curriculum in a non-curriculum club. You can't do that. If you have a curriculum, you have a syllabus, you have a subject. And to have a subject you must have a teacher that's state certified. How did they get by with that? (Rick)

Further research into Rick's claim that the GSA was illegal because it has curriculum yielded information about the Supreme Court's definition of a curricular club. While Rick stated that the GSA violates state law because of its curriculum from GLSEN, The Supreme Court's definition suggested otherwise because as of 2017, LGBT+ issues are not taught in any courses at FCHS. The U.S. Department of Education explains the Supreme Court's position on curricular clubs:

The Supreme Court defines a curriculum-related student group as one that ‘directly relates’ to the body of courses offered at a school. A student group directly relates to a school’s curriculum ‘if the subject matter of the group is actually taught, or will soon be taught, in a regularly offered course; if the subject matter of the group concerns the body of courses as a whole; if participation in the group is required for a particular course; or if participation in the group results in academic credit’ (n.d.).

Additionally, Rick believed that the GSA could be dangerous to other children as he says, “I would be willing to get rid of all clubs to save, even if it’s one student, from that lifestyle.” Through two stories, Rick illustrated that repetitive exposure to LGBT+ people and their lifestyle could cause a heterosexual person to become LGBT+ themselves. One of his stories involved a teenager who hung out with LGBT+ friends and eventually became one himself. The other story was an allegory that illustrated the message of exposure and experimentation:

I’ve got a great friend who had a bunch of friends back when he was 18-19 years old. Every time he showed up to their house, they was doing coke. He said, ‘I aint doing that!’ He said five or six times over there he said ‘man they was having time of their life.’ He said ‘If it’s that good, if it makes y’all feel that good,’ he said ‘I gotta try this shit.’ So, he tried it. He said it was great. Now he doesn’t do anything anymore but he was subject to that matter over and over and over and finally he said, “Well, I’m going to try it.”

While it would be difficult to prove that homosexuality is contagious, sexuality can be viewed as a spectrum, rather than 100% heterosexual or 100% homosexual. Just a few

identities on the spectrum are heterosexuality, pansexuality, bisexuality, asexuality, and homosexuality (APA, 2017c). Many of the different sexual orientations have their own culture and unique issues. For example, studies show that bisexuals generally experience more violence and sexual assault, more suicidal thought and attempts, and workplace discrimination than lesbians, gay men, and heterosexuals (Movement Advancement Placement, 2016).

Advice to Struggling LGBT+ Students

Jeremy and Rick's pieces of advice were unique from the strong and conditional support groups. Where others had messages of empathy and hopeful relief, the strong opposition group urged LGBT+ students to embrace reality because getting bullied is part of being human. Additionally, both participants in Group 3 would have advised an LGBT+ student to read their bible.

Toughen up. Toughen up. Read the bible and toughen up. We've got. . . this 'I hurt my feelings', 'it's a participation', 'everybody wins'. They don't. Not everybody wins in life. Everybody is given the same opportunity. Everybody is given the opportunity that is not handicapped. But everybody who is of sound mind and ability has the same opportunity. (Rick)

Jeremy's advice had a similar tone and also insisted that everyone gets bullied and that it is nothing new.

Congratulations, you're a human being. Every one of us struggled with social acceptance in high school. There's not one person that has not struggled with social acceptance in school. For some people, it's easier. For others, it's harder. That is life. Life seems to be simpler for some people and harder for other people,

and sometimes it will be simple for you and it will be hard for you. It does not have anything to do with your sexuality. Putting names on people singles you out anyway. Labels are ridiculous, we've got to get away from this. We don't have to label everything in life. It's called life. We have to learn to deal with situations in every phase of our life. From a religious perspective, I'd tell you to get a bible and start reading it, and see all the people in the bible who were struggling with society. It's full of them. There's a man named Jesus who, if you read the new testament, did nothing wrong. He struggled. He struggled so much that he was put on the cross and killed for nothing. So, if he can be killed for nothing, or mocked, or put upon for nothing, then all the rest of us will face trials in our life too. This is not new. (Jeremy)

Outstanding and Memorable Quotes

Below are quotes from participants in Group 3 that were memorable and outstanding. There are many quotes from this group because both participants had lengthy interviews at approximately 45 minutes each. These quotes were identified for this section because they contain valuable and unique information that helps the reader understand the Strong Opposition Group's perspective of the GSA in Franklin County.

- ❖ “Every student that goes to. . . Franklin County High School, or any school, deserves the right to be safe at that school. They deserve the right to go to a classroom and not have to worry about what's going to happen when they walk into that hall.” -Jeremy

- ❖ “If you allow this club to come in overnight with no parents in this county being aware of it, what’s next? Isis? Future Isis Members of America? Is that the next club? Or is it going to be like a Black Lives Matter club?” -Rick
- ❖ “Do I think that it’s possible that LGBT people are struggling? Yes. Red-headed people are struggling. Overweight people are struggling. People that are considered goths are struggling. It’s not just a LGBTQ question. So, let’s quit making it simply an LGBTQ question.” -Jeremy
- ❖ “Why would you ever let your child take a chance of ruining their entire life and ruining their salvation and possibly going to heaven over a lifestyle that people have been killed for by God, and he’s destroyed entire cities over this one simple thing?” -Rick
- ❖ “It is not one sided. It’s all sided. There is bullying not because you are of a certain sexual proclivity, there is bullying because, number one we are not teaching our children correctly, but number two we are humans. There's always been bullying. There's never been a time in history when someone did not get bullied. That doesn't make it right and we need to take whatever stretch we can to change that, but just doing it because of sexual proclivity is wrong. And forcing agendas down the throats of parents because they are a small minority is wrong too. You want to talk about bullying then let’s get into that. But not because of your sexuality. That should have no part in a school.” -Jeremy
- ❖ “The LGBT lifestyle is more harmful than Marlboro Reds.” -Rick

How to Lower Conflict between Students of Differing Sexual Orientations at FCHS

Each participant was asked what he or she thought would help lower conflict between students of differing sexual orientations at FCHS. Below are each participant's ideas with research conducted on the idea's effectiveness, if available. The participants are organized by the complexity of their ideas.

Jenny

Jenny was stumped by this question. "Honestly I have no clue. You are always going to have judgmental people." Jenny's answer was completely understandable. Bullying is a problem in many schools and, so far, there are no interventions that are 100% successful in eliminating bullying. The APA defines bullying as: "A form of aggressive behavior in which someone intentionally and repeatedly causes another person injury or discomfort. The bullied individual typically has trouble defending him or herself and does nothing to cause the bullying" (APA 2017b). Bullying is a serious issue in many schools. In 2015, a national study showed that 20% of students reported being bullied on their school campus in the prior year, while 16% of the students reported being cyberbullied (CDC 2016). Therefore, bullying is a prevalent issue in schools across the country, and there is desperate need for change.

Andrea

Andrea believed that the school administration should have more participation in deterring adolescents from bullying each other through negative consequences.

There's a lot of bullies everywhere, especially in a small town. Just the slightest little thing that is done gets spread around fast, and it's hard to let rumors die. I guess more serious punishments for the ones that are doing the bullying. (Andrea)

More serious punishments for bullying may be the answer in some scenarios. However, it is possible that punishment is just a portion of the perfect answer. Some bullying can be stopped before it has started through preventative measures. Preventative measures include: raising awareness of bullying, creating anti-bullying policies, having a way for students to safely report bullying, promoting tolerance and acceptance through student activities, and educating students and teachers about the prevalence and negative effects of bullying (U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources, n.d.).

Rick

Rick believed that conflict could be lowered if LGBT+ adolescents stopped pushing their lifestyle on the rest of the school. He thought that if students kept their sexuality to themselves and to their own cliques, there would not be as much bullying between different cliques.

Life is simple. You like something, somebody else like the same thing, talk about it. You disagree? Shut up about it. Like it was back in the day, back when I was in school. We might have had one or two that we thought were [homosexual] and come out later on. I never walked up to them and said, 'Hey, man, this girl and me we did this that or the other.' And I never would. So, I don't want them pushing their lifestyle on me. If you want all this to go away, take your stickers off. Stop it. Stop. Stop promoting it. Live your life and let be. It's simple. Stay to yourself. People, they won't leave well enough alone. They have to be flashy with it. And we don't need that. You keep to yourself, we keep to ourselves. There's been cliques and clubs in schools for years. You was a part of a little clique, I was a part of a little clique. I hung out with this group, you hung out with this group.

Did y'all ever come over to the next group and just damn them for being in that group? I didn't, cause that's their thing. Who am I to judge them? (Rick)

Adolescents typically get bullied through physical, verbal, and social means.

Some of the more common things for which students are bullied are: physical appearance that differs from the norm, few friends, poor social status, low self-esteem, poor social skills, and identification with a minority sexual orientation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). Rick mentioned that people from different cliques did not bully one another when he was in high school. A clique is a group of adolescents that exclude outside members and are very selective about who gets to be part of their group (U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources, n.d.). Bullying can happen within a group or clique, but it can also happen with individuals who are not accepted into the clique. Unfortunately, research shows that people who belong to cliques often participate in bullying those who do not belong to their group (The Nemours Foundation, 2017).

Vanessa

Vanessa believed that it was a parent's responsibility to raise children to accept diversity and respect other people even if they did not necessarily agree with an individual's actions and way of life.

What would lower conflict? Well, I think it kind of goes back to how individuals are raised. . . I feel like it all goes back to the parents. I think that if people would raise their kids to know that everyone is going to be different, but you can't disrespect someone or anything like that just because of their sexual preference or their religion or their race. I mean it all goes back to that. I think that that would

lower conflict a lot just simply just raising your kids with a different value.

(Vanessa)

Parents often teach their children about diversity, sometimes without realizing it. As children learn from their parents, they tend to embrace the same positive or negative biases, prejudices, and attitudes that their parents have towards others (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017). Positive perspectives on diversity can be encouraged and molded by parents who intentionally expose their children to diversity and show them that it can be appreciated. Suggested methods of teaching children to embrace tolerance include exposure to other cultures, leading by example, welcoming questions about human differences, challenging intolerance, talking about being respectful to everyone, and encouraging empathy (Nickell, 2016).

Jeremy

Jeremy felt that schools should have rules about PDA and the rules should be enforced with more authority. He believed that conflict could be lessened if administrators and teachers acted more like adults and enforced school rules. He also said that PDA between same-sex students is one of the only indicators that a person is non-heterosexual. Without PDA, no one would know a student's sexuality.

I understand that we all date people in high school, but you are not even supposed to be holding hands in a school, much less be able to pick and choose "well this guy's gay, this guy's straight" so we've got to get back to an atmosphere where we can make it unisex. That's the big problem. We are allowing it to become prominent in schools and we are not doing a thing about it. You are not supposed to hold hands in school, you're not supposed to be kissing, you're not supposed to

be doing things like that. So, if you are not holding hands with someone, or kissing someone, or hugging someone, or doing any sort of sexual activity with someone, how in the world is somebody going to know that you are gay? They're not. Are they going to know by your shoes? Do they have gay Nikes? They don't have gay blue jeans, they don't have straight blue jeans or straight Nikes. It's because we are allowing certain things to happen in schools that even is a visual thing to allow people to be attacked for. So, you want to stop conflict? First of all, adults be adults. Stop the conflict. Have zero-tolerance, and then if you have a zero-tolerance policy, actually follow the policy. (Jeremy)

While adopting and enforcing school rules undoubtedly helps bring order to an institution, research shows that severe systems of punishment are not beneficial to schools. In regard to zero-tolerance policies, studies show that the behavior of offending students does not typically improve. Similarly, the school's environment and safety do not benefit in result of the removal of the offending students. Proposed alternatives to zero-tolerance policies are a conglomerate of preventative programs, more beneficial alternatives for disruptive students, the ability for an offending student to reconnect with the school, and an increase in collaboration with community services and resources (American Psychological Association Zero-Tolerance Task Force, 2008). In the instance of a student who participates in PDA, a non-violent offense, the student could receive less severe forms punishment, such as detention or the removal of free time. Therefore, using a zero-tolerance policy for issues like PDA may not be the most effective solution for the student or the school.

Paul

Paul believed that conflict between differing sexual orientations would lessen if heterosexuals had more exposure to members of the LGBT+ community and got to know them as friends, neighbors, coworkers, and family. He thought that exposure and the formation of personal relationships would help demolish stereotypes and ill perceptions of the LGBT+ community.

When GSAs do their job well, yes they provide a safe place, but they also provide a place of conversation they can provide a place where its ok for the person who is squeamish about LGBT stuff to come in and say I'm squeamish and instead of everybody jumping on them, they say well, why? And start to talk about it and start to put a human face on it. I think one of the worst things about the current climate in our country is the fact that we don't put a human face on what is a wholly human issue. These are people. I can't remember the exact statistic but it's like when people come to awareness that somebody they love is LGBT, I mean yes, we've all heard stories about parents that throw their kids out or whatever, but for every one of those, there are so many more stories of a heart that turned and acceptance was found when it became about a human being rather than about an idea. (Paul)

Building relationships with members of the LGBT+ community is one of the best ways to try to overcome prejudice. Studies show that "Antigay attitudes are far less common among members of the population who have a close friend or family member who is lesbian or gay, especially if the gay person has directly come out to the heterosexual person" (APA, 2008, para 35). Exposure can be used to lower prejudice in

schools as well. GLSEN provides teaching resources about LGBT+ people and their culture in literature and history lessons so that students can have more exposure to the LGBT+ community (GLSEN, 2017).

Emma

Emma believed that increased parental guidance and more effective education on sexual issues in schools would decrease conflict between students of differing sexual orientations. She thought that schools should take a more progressive stance on sex education so that students could be better prepared for when they eventually decide to become sexually active, as most humans do. Emma says,

Education, I think. It always starts with education. We fight, and I say we fight because that's what it feels like, you have a religious family who is very, very conservative in their beliefs on those things and they just- poor child, they raise that child to not allow them to see people as people, and equal. . . So, it starts with education and it starts with the parent. I wish that there was more education on gender norms, on sex, on any type of orientation in school. Because unfortunately for me, I went to an elementary school in Alabama, where they teach abstinence and that is not an effective program. We have all the data in the world to show you that teaching abstinence is not an effective program. If you look at countries like Finland or Norway or Sweden, these countries have the lowest STD rates, the lowest pregnancy rates, the lowest teen pregnancies, and all of that comes from them starting sex education in first grade with simple things, like just talking about what is love and how we show love. Its age appropriate and it comes all the way full circle, so they don't deal with these same problems because they start them so young. So, education I think would be the biggest thing that we could do,

and I don't know how we'd do that. Because I don't know any school in the south that is going to allow you to openly talk about these things, but I hated growing up where talking about sex and everything that comes with it was such a taboo hush-hush subject, and that makes no sense to me. We are human, we are of animal, and this is part of being alive, so why do we shush it under the rug like we don't do it? Why are you acting like you don't do it? It's very weird. It can have consequences that affect their whole lives, and when I say models like Finland and other countries that are excelling, they saw many years ago that the education on these particular topics would benefit. And their whole healthcare system benefits, their economy benefits, and it's unreal because it started with exposure and education on people.

Research shows that abstinence-only education policies in the U.S. have been unsuccessful in deterring adolescents from engaging in sexual activity. In fact, abstinence-only education may have resulted in adolescents having sex while being unaware of possible health and life-related consequences.

Using the most recent national data (2005) from all U.S. states with information on sex education laws or policies (N=48), we show that increasing emphasis on abstinence education is positively correlated with teenage pregnancy and birth rates. These data show clearly that abstinence-only education as a state policy is ineffective in preventing teenage pregnancy and may actually be contributing to the high teenage pregnancy rates in the U.S. (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2011, para 1)

Currently, there are low standards for public school sex education requirements in the U.S. Only 24 states require that sex education be taught, while HIV-related information is required to be taught in 33 states. Of the states that offer sex education curriculum, 35 have ways for parents to withdraw their children from receiving the information, and only 20 states require that the sex education curriculum be medically and factually correct (National Conference of State Legislature, 2017).

Further research into Finland's, Norway's, and Sweden's sex education policies yielded that these countries have progressive sex education in their public schools. Since 2000, Finland has optional sex education for 1st -6th grade, where "basic biological and emotional issues" are discussed, and mandatory sex education for grades 7th-9th grades, which begins with subjects such as menstruation, contraception, and intercourse, and ends with topics such as sexual ethics, abortion, and masturbation (Beaumont, Maguire, 2013). Sweden is known as the first country to offer sex education, which began in the 1940s. Sweden has low HIV rates, which can be attributed to the country's 240 youth centers that help schools teach sex education and pregnancy prevention, as well as the ability for teachers to openly answer sex related questions that children may ask as early as preschool (Beaumont, Maguire, 2013). Norway uses "honest, straightforward, age-appropriate, and wide-ranging" tactics when teaching about sexuality. Norway's sex education policies are similar to Norway's in that it begins early with age-appropriate topics, but instead of having a class solely for sex education, the subject is integrated into other classes like religion and science (Bartz, 2007).

Mark

Mark believed that conflict can be lessened by providing heterosexual students with more exposure to LGBT+ culture through literature, plays, and other art forms. He also believed that sex education should be taught from a more moralistic standpoint where students are taught about the ethics of healthy relationships, and how sexual activity eventually plays a role in healthy relationships.

I think that it's easy to hate somebody when you don't know them. You don't know anything about them and so a lot of the things that I would think would be useful kind of like school theatre productions that have gay characters in them or books that have gay themes are just as difficult to get into the schools as a GSA. Exposure I think and I think the other thing is and this might sound counter intuitive, but I think that we need a sex education that deals more with the ethics of sexuality. My sex-ED, when I went to public school in western Massachusetts, where nobody was out, and the only thing we learned – we had six years of sexual education- but all of our sexual education was about what disease you are going to get, the 37 different forms of contraception, and also what disease you are definitely going to get if you have sex. Nobody ever talked to us about what makes a sexual relationship good. So for me growing up and college I was just a nerdy kid who had never been in any sort of relationship one of the hardest things I had to reckon with was like, how do you have a relationship? And I think that honestly there is a way to speak to the kind of concerned Christian parent, the one that is worried about sex ed. where you can say, look, we are going to lay down these ethical rules. These are way you can think about what a good relationship is,

because I think that also could allow students who might come from a really conservative background in terms of sexual practices to at least say ‘Ok, those people are different and have different customs than myself. There’s an ethics to it, like these are also two people who care about each other. You know that they respect one another. That’s something that’s important to my own ethics even though I’m going to wait till marriage and only have sex with an opposite sex partner.’ I think those sorts of things could at least help students get over that idea of ‘This is something that’s just so out there that it’s a sign that this person is evil,’ and I think that the sort of pitching of homosexuality- male homosexuality especially- as a kind of unbridled sexuality, which was certainly hell.

By integrating LGBT+ topics into curriculum, GLSEN states that classrooms will be more accepting of diversity, school climates will improve, and students and teachers will be encouraged to be allies (GLSEN, 2017). However, there is not enough research to determine the effectiveness of this intervention.

Comprehensive sex education gives students information that goes beyond the teachings of abstinence. According to Planned Parenthood, “It [comprehensive sex education] is grounded in evidence-based, peer reviewed science. Its goal is to promote health and wellbeing in a way that is developmentally appropriate” (Planned Parenthood Federation of America, 2017, para 5). Comprehensive sex education goes through topics such as anatomy, physiology, communication skills, body image, contraception, relationships, and values. In opposition to abstinence programs, comprehensive sex education gives students age-appropriate knowledge so that they can understand their bodies and recognize healthy lifestyles with positive relationships. Examples of countries

who have had lower STD rates, pregnancy rates, and abortion rates in result of comprehensive sex education are Sweden and Finland (Beaumont, Maguire, 2013).

Discussion

Two of social work's core values are social justice and the dignity and worth of a person. These two values are demonstrated through efforts to empower at-risk groups such as LGBT+ adolescents by advocating for and upholding diversity, equality, and knowledge in every aspect of social work practice (NASW, 2017). Social justice can be pursued through advocacy efforts to increase awareness of the needs and challenges faced by LGBT+ adolescents.

This study detailed the promotion of social justice through describing organizations ranging from The Society of Human Rights, created in 1924, all the way to present GSAs. LGBT+ adolescents' reflection on their dignity and worth may improve through efforts to promote tolerance and understanding of LGBT+ individuals and cultures as well as awareness of LGBT+ issues. It is equally important for heterosexuals to learn to acknowledge the dignity and worth of non-heterosexuals. Aligning with some of the participants' suggestions for decreasing conflict between students of differing sexual orientations, research shows that levels of racial, ethnic, and sexual orientation-based bullying and prejudice are known to decrease through more exposure and better education on topics such as diversity, stereotypes, and cultures (Rudman, Ashmore, & Gary, 2001). Through improved education and exposure on these topics, heterosexual students may also learn to value the dignity and worth of LGBT+ students.

Regardless of the participants' positions towards the LGBT+ community, each knew at least one friend or family member who identified as LGBT+. Of the

participants, half witnessed LGBT+ students struggle with their sexuality when they were in high school, and three of these participants attended FCHS, where the new GSA was located. Religious views differed across groups. Some GSA supporters did not agree with their religion's condemning position on homosexuality, but both participants who opposed the GSA expressed that their religion's condemnation of homosexuality was a driving factor for their opposition of the GSA. Those who opposed the GSA were the only participants who thought that LGBT+ students were not bullied more than heterosexual students, that the GSA was unnecessary, and that the GSA could be a hazard for heterosexual students. Research participants who were supportive of GSAs expressed that the GSA would give students a much-needed safe place to find allies. These supportive participants advised LGBT+ students to persevere, find allies, and escape Franklin County if possible. Conversely, the research participants who opposed the GSA advised LGBT+ students to read a bible and learn to deal with bullying because it is part of life. Research participants had numerous suggestions to eliminate conflict between adolescents with differing sexualities. Only some of these suggestions have been found to be effective as indicated by previous research:

- Eliminate the abstinence-only policy for sex education courses and improve the quality of sex education
- Implement age-appropriate sex education in elementary school
- Increased awareness of LGBT people and issues to promote more interaction between heterosexual and non-heterosexual students so that they can form relationships

- A bigger role by parents in teaching acceptance and tolerance of non-heterosexual people

This research had limitations as well as strengths. One limitation of the study is that results are not generalizable, and findings may not apply to other communities and schools. Additionally, the research lacks triangulation; data only came from one method of data collection, through interviews, instead of multiple sources such as surveys and observations. Still, there were numerous strengths in this study. Research participants varied greatly in their views and attitudes toward GSAs in Franklin County, TN, which allowed for a more balanced perspective with extreme views on either end of the spectrum as well as more moderate views. Another strength of the study was the participants' willingness to participate and offer qualitative data through their illustrative stories, honest opinions, and unique perspectives concerning such a controversial subject.

Study implications for social work include a need for more research on the struggles of LGBT+ adolescents in rural areas, further research concerning the effectiveness of GSAs in rural schools over time, and further research concerning potential alternatives to replace the abstinence-only policy for public high schools. Such additional research can inform the development of interventions in communities to work towards reducing conflict, suicide rates, substance abuse, truancy, and bullying experienced by LGBT+ adolescents. Future research concerning GSAs and community perspectives should include more in-depth interviews paired with surveys and observations. Additionally, interviews should be conducted with current high school GSA members. Future research should also seek to understand the effectiveness of integrating LGBT+ curriculum in schools to lower conflict.

This research was conducted to understand the rationale behind community members' support or opposition to a local GSA and to hear their suggestions on how to reduce conflict between adolescents of differing sexualities in public schools. This study also raises awareness of the prevalence of bullying in public high schools for all students, but especially for LGBT+ adolescents. Through awareness of the U.S.'s history of LGBT discrimination and oppression, the reader can better understand the LGBT population's current social and legal positions in the country. Through interviews in Franklin County, it is understood that a major reason for the participants' opposition to the GSA comes from their understanding of their religion's stance on homosexuality. Other reasons of opposing the GSA were that the club is exclusive, violates school rules, and promotes an unhealthy and undesirable lifestyle. However, positive change is possible, and GSAs are just one method of bringing social justice to students who feel oppression, discrimination, and hatred at school because of who they are.

Conclusion

Research shows that LGBT+ adolescents do, in fact, struggle for support and coexistence in public schools (Johnson et al., 2011; Wickens & Sandlin, 2010). The major reason for opposition to the GSA in the current study was religious beliefs, followed by perceptions of danger to health and that the club was unnecessary. Those who supported the GSA expressed perceptions that the LGBT+ students endured severe bullying, needed a safe space, and should have the GSA because it met the FCHS's club and organization standards. Half of the research participants' ideas to reduce conflict between adolescents of differing sexual orientations were supported by previous research. Franklin County community members' perceptions and rationales toward FCHS's GSA

were varied and colorful. Each interview provided valuable material that may contribute to bringing social justice, dignity and worth, and much needed safety to all public high school students – regardless of their sexual orientation.

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Appendix A: Consent Form**Principal Investigator: Robin Stone****Study Title: Sexuality in Society****Institution: Middle Tennessee State University**

Name of participant: _____ Age: _____

The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation in it. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about this study and the information given below. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions, and your questions will be answered. Also, you will be given a copy of this consent form.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time. In the event new information becomes available that may affect the risks or benefits associated with this research study or your willingness to participate in it, you will be notified so that you can make an informed decision whether or not to continue your participation in this study.

For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact the MTSU Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918.

1. Purpose of the study:

You are being asked to participate in a research study because your interview responses are valuable to the effort of understanding the rationale behind community members' support or opposition to modern LGBT+ support groups, such as GSAs, in public high schools.

2. Description of procedures to be followed and approximate duration of the study:

The interview consists of approximately six questions regarding your opinions concerning bullying of LGBT+ adolescents, possible alternative interventions, and reasons behind their personal support or opposition of GSAs in public schools. The interviewer will use a digital recording device and writing utensils during the interview. Please let the interviewer know prior to the beginning of the interview if there is a personal issue with the use of these recording devices. You may skip questions if necessary, and you may withdraw from the interview at any time with no repercussions. The full interview will take an estimated 20-25 minutes. Your identity and any information you provide will be anonymous in the results of this study. The principal investigator will be the only person to know your identity throughout the study.

3. Expected costs:

n/a. There are no costs for participating in this study.

4. Description of the discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this study:

This interview is conducted in an objective manner in order to focus on your opinions and comments. Therefore, there are no foreseen negative or harmful repercussions that you might receive in result of participation. If you become emotional or passionate about an interview topic, you are welcome to stop the interview or skip the question without any negative repercussions.

5. Compensation in case of study-related injury:

n/a. MTSU will not provide compensation in the case of study related injury. In this study, you will only take part in an interview, therefore there is little-to-no risk of bodily harm.

6. Anticipated benefits from this study:

- a) The potential benefits to science and humankind that may result from this study are:
An increase in understanding of LGBT adolescents' struggles in public high schools, the reasons for support and opposition of GSAs in public high schools, and possible interventions and methods to

increase tolerance, coexistence, and acceptance of individuals with different sexual orientations and gender identities.

- b) The potential benefits to you from this study are:
There are no direct rewards in result participating in this interview other than the chance for you to contribute to research that caters to the betterment of all students in public schools.

7. Alternative treatments available:

n/a. There is no need for alternate treatments as this study consists of only an interview.

8. Compensation for participation:

There is no compensation for participating.

9. Circumstances under which the Principal Investigator may withdraw you from study participation:

There are no foreseen circumstances in which a participant should be chosen to withdraw from participation.

10. What happens if you choose to withdraw from study participation:

You are welcome to skip questions or withdraw from the interview at any time. There are no negative repercussions for skipping questions or withdrawing participation.

- 11. **Contact Information.** If you should have any questions about this research study or possible injury, please feel free to contact Robin Stone at (931) 581-4571 or my Faculty Advisor, Ariana Postlethwait at (615) 494-8633.

- 12. **Confidentiality.** All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with MTSU or the government, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. You will not be personally identifiable in the final report of the study, and a pseudonym will be used if/when you are referenced.

13. STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I have read this informed consent document and the material contained in it has been explained to me verbally. I understand each part of the document, all my questions have been answered, and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study.

Date

Signature of patient/volunteer

Consent obtained by:

Date

Signature

Robin Stone, Student, Department of Social Work

Appendix B:

Franklin County Club/Organization Criteria

Franklin County Schools clubs and organizations are to provide a positive academic and social experience for the members, school, and community.

ALL CLUBS/ORGANIZATIONS:

1. Must have a faculty advisor that is an employee of the school system
2. Must have at least five (5) student members who are enrolled in the school that are listed as members to establish the club/organization
3. Prior to club approval, the faculty advisor and principal must meet to discuss the purpose of the club/organization
4. Aims, objectives, and the constitution must be submitted in writing and signed by the advisor and club members
5. The application must be completed and reviewed by the principal and leadership team. If the club is approved at the school level, the application is forwarded to the director of schools for final approval and designation as either an academic or non-academic club/ organization. If the application is denied by the principal, the faculty advisor may appeal in writing to the director of schools within fifteen (15) school days
6. The faculty advisor must have written communication from the student's parent or legal guardian approving the student's membership or participation in the club/organization
7. Individuals not affiliated with the school, either as an employee or student, may not direct, control, conduct or regularly attend meetings or an activity. Regular attendance is defined as attending a meeting or activity more than two times per school year. However, the faculty advisor may request a waiver from the school administration if a visitor needs to attend more than twice a year due to guest speaking engagements or providing training to students
8. A list of visitors planning to attend the club meeting must be submitted and approved by school administration prior to the meeting. Approval will not be denied based on the viewpoint of the proposed visitor unless it is deemed necessary to protect the well-being of students and faculty; 1 6.702.1 Administrative Procedure
9. Once a quarter, a school administrator will attend a meeting of each established club/ organization to ensure the meeting agenda is followed

(Franklin County High School, 2017)

IRB

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129



IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Wednesday, January 18, 2017

Investigator(s): Robin Stone (Student PI) and Ariana Postlethwait
Investigator(s)' Email(s): rns3m@mtmail.mtsu.edu; ariana.postlethwait@mtsu.edu
Department: Social Work

Study Title: Sexuality in Society
Protocol ID: 17-2117

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category (7) *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	APPROVED for one year from the date of this notification	
Date of expiration	1/31/2018	
Participant Size	10 (TEN)	
Participant Pool	Adult (18+)	
Exceptions	Audio recording is permitted	
Restrictions	Mandatory informed consent; research materials including audio must be deidentified; audio must be destroyed/deleted once transcribed.	
Comments	NONE	
Amendments	Date	Post-approval Amendments
	NONE	

This protocol can be continued for up to THREE years (1/31/2020) by obtaining a continuation approval prior to 1/31/2018. Refer to the following schedule to plan your annual project reports and be aware that you may not receive a separate reminder to complete your continuing reviews. Failure in obtaining an approval for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of this protocol. Moreover, the completion of this study MUST be notified to the Office of Compliance by filing a final report in order to close-out the protocol.

Continuing Review Schedule:

Reporting Period	Requisition Deadline	IRB Comments
First year report	12/31/2017	INCOMPLETE
Second year report	12/31/2018	INCOMPLETE
Final report	12/31/2019	INCOMPLETE

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all of the post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. [Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website](#). Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident. Amendments to this protocol must be approved by the IRB. Inclusion of new researchers must also be approved by the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.

All of the research-related records, which include signed consent forms, investigator information and other documents related to the study, must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data storage must be maintained for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:

[Click here](#) for a detailed list of the post-approval responsibilities.
More information on expedited procedures can be found [here](#).