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**Removing Barriers and Establishing Gender and Sexuality Alliances in Schools: A
Qualitative Analysis of GSA Advisor Experiences**

By

Maxwell L. Keller

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Psychology

In

School Psychology

Minnesota State University, Mankato

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Current movements within the field of education include a focus on the ability of educators to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other sexual and gender minority (LGBTQ+) students within schools. As LGBTQ+ students are at increased risk for a variety of mental health and lifetime negative factors, it is vital to identify evidence-based supports for these students. School-based extra-curricular organizations such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) have been found among the literature to increase positive educational outcomes for all students and serve as a protective factor for LGBTQ+ students who face these increased risks by virtue of their identities. However, current studies indicate a low rate of successful implementation of these clubs and limited access to clubs for students who have had existing clubs within these schools. To date, only one study has sought to identify relevant barriers and facilitative factors related to adoption and installation of these clubs within schools.

The current study examined the reported barriers and facilitative factors to GSA implementation in middle and high schools through semi-structured interviews with ten GSA advisors. Transcriptions of interviews were analyzed through deductive thematic analysis and results indicated seven themes among advisors' experiences of factors that influenced their ability to implement. The seven themes included: Knowledge, Skills, Impact, Environmental Factors, Advisor Identity, Emotions, and Social Factors. Barriers and facilitators were not differentiated by theme but some subthemes were exclusively reported as barriers or facilitators. Notable barriers included fear of backlash, administrative and staff turnover, and conservative or religious local communities. Notable facilitators included knowledge of relevant legislation,

support of an official co-advisor for the club, and school staff support of club events. Findings of the current study have implications for implementation in leveraging supportive variables and in preparing for barriers to implementation. Future research should examine key components of implementation that produce the most beneficial effects for students.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In recent years, demand on school service providers to meet the individual and specific needs of students of diverse backgrounds and abilities has increased (Merrell et al., 2012). One major issue in this modern focus on diversity is the ability of educators to address the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning and differently identified (LGBTQ+) students. However, pressure to help serve these students has not necessarily resulted in knowledge of how to do so (Agee-Aguayo, et al., 2017).

The terminology related to LGBTQ+ community membership is as diverse and varied as the individual members of the community themselves. As part of their policy and advocacy, the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) include definitions for relevant terminology related to gender and sexual orientation diversity. Some of the defined terms include: “sexual orientation,” “gender identity,” “cisgender,” and “transgender” (American Psychological Association, 2015b; Westheimer et al., 2016). “Sexual orientation” is a piece of an individual’s identity that encompasses their feelings of sexual and/or emotional attraction to another person or persons. Sexual orientation may refer to attraction to persons of the same sex (gay men and lesbians), attraction to members of the opposite sex (heterosexuals), or attraction to multiple sexes or genders (bisexuals, pansexuals, and others). “Gender identity” refers to a person’s internal and inherent sense of being a specific gender such as a man, woman, or an alternative gender (American Psychological Association, 2015b). Gender identity is not visible to others as it is internal and may or may not align with a person’s assigned sex. “Cisgender” is an adjective used to describe an individual whose own gender identity and expression are congruent with their assigned sex at birth.

In a joint statement, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the American Psychological Association (APA) called for “education, training, and ongoing professional development about the needs and the supports for gender and sexual orientation of diverse students” for those working with school-aged youth (American Psychological Association & National Association of School Psychologists, 2015). Both organizations encourage education and training as a tool to allow practitioners to learn how cissexist and heteronormative views and societal structures may be limiting the children they serve within the school environment and create situations in which a healthy and productive learning environment may not be available to all students.

Current research and theory suggest that sexual orientation and gender identity related issues are a real concern for some school-age individuals. Fifteen percent of transgender individuals reported transitioning under the age of 18 (James et al., 2016). Additionally, harassment and discriminatory practices have been reported in schools across elementary and secondary school levels on a national scale (Kosciw et al., 2018). Because it is the goal of school psychologists to advocate for equitable and just learning environments for students, the ability of practitioners to adequately and professionally meet the needs of LGBTQ+ students is not a matter of personal view but a matter of social justice (Speight & Vera, 2009). Inequitable or even unsafe school environments or interactions can limit students, and it is the responsibility of educators to advocate for systems and individual change to create those necessary environments. As part of the dominant group, institutions and societal structures often favor heterosexual individuals in their policy, which may be referred to as being “heteronormative” (Trans Student Educational Resources, 2020). Institutions that work in ways that favor cisgender individuals, either overtly or through systems-level or policy-based discrimination, are referred to as being

“cissexist.” In this, current societal structures, such as binary divisions on locker rooms and restrooms or non-inclusion of LGBTQ+-specific protections in school harassment and bullying policies, may negatively impact the lives of gender and sexual minority youth based upon prevailing structures. Moreover, because they do not face the negative reproductions of these heteronormative or cissexist systems, members of the dominate groups may not identify these harmful impacts due to their common acceptance in the larger sociocultural context. This failure to notice systematically based harm and subsequent lack of change to address heteronormative or cissexist systems can cause undue stress and negative impacts on gender and sexual minority individuals, causing long-term negative outcomes.

Minority Stress Theory

Minority Stress Theory was first proposed by Ilan H. Meyer and was applied to lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals to explain relationships between sexual minority status, social stressors, and health outcomes (Meyer, 2003). Minority Stress Theory was built upon evidence of increased risk for mental health concerns and suicidality for gay men and lesbians compared to heterosexual individuals when accounting for genetic predisposition and comorbid mental health disorders (Friedman, 1999; Meyer, 1995). When accounting for these additional variables through studies of twins with divergent sexual orientations, evidence indicates that outside and environmental interactions are likely causes of increased levels of psychological distress (Meyer, 1995). Further, the theory is based on previous findings that gay men who suffered high levels of minority stress based upon their sexual identity were two to three times as likely to suffer from high levels of psychological stress. Since its development, the theory has been applied to individuals of other minority statuses as well as other members of the LGBTQ+ community (Saha et al., 2019).

At its most basic premise, the theory outlines the relationship differences between general social stress and stress due to navigating social systems as a member of a minority identity group (Meyer, 2003). Per the theory, all living individuals experience various stressors and pressures as a result of living within the social environment and working within the larger society. These sources of stress may be tied to mental or physical health issues for individuals, though not all individuals who experience specific types of stressors may experience the same health outcomes. These mundane social stressors exist for all people; however, individuals who do not identify as cisgender or heterosexual can experience additional pressures from their environment that theorist Meyer (2003) refers to as minority stress. This excess of stress and anxiety stems from a hostile social environment created by stigma, prejudice, and discrimination. LGBTQ+ individuals may experience added stress as a result of their minority status. This type of social environment stems from others' non-acceptance of an individual's identity or identities. Myer's theory exists with three underlying assumptions about this type of stress experienced by individuals: that it is unique, chronic, and socially-based. The first assumption highlights the idea that these stressors apply only to those members of society who do not fit within the heterosexual or cisgender expectations of living in society. Additionally, the second assumption—that this stress is chronic—reflects that this increased state of anxiety or pressure is extended beyond a few small interactions with others. These experiences continue throughout an individual's lifespan and are frequently occurring. The final assumption describes the cause of this anxiety as an unaccepting and cold social environment which members of the LGBTQ+ community may experience. This anxiety stems from harsh or negative interactions or the potential for those interactions with others, based in fear of how others in society may view or treat them based upon their gender or sexuality. Given that this anxiety stems from the potential for negative

interactions based on others' beliefs, it is not necessarily mediated by one's own confidence or security in their own identity. For example, an individual who feels secure or proud of their identity may still be afraid or anxiety related to the potential for negative interactions with members of the public based upon their gender expression or sexual orientation.

These additional stressors exist within the environment at varied distances from the individual themselves, labeled as either distal or proximal stressors by Meyer (2003). Proximal stressors include stressors or anxiety within the individual and are often related to cognitions or thoughts the person may have. Examples of proximal stressors may include concealment of identity from others, expectations of rejection, and internalized homophobia. Concealment of one's identity may be used as a coping mechanism to avoid rejection from others and may lead to rumination on actions that must be taken to "hide" one's identity, in turn increasing anxiety or negative affect (Croteau, 1996; Meyer 2003; Waldo, 1999). Distal stressors include experiences of discrimination, harassment, and physical violence. While these processes often have a direct and intensive impact on an individual, they exist outside of the individual and come directly from the environment and are therefore more removed relative to the proximal stressors.

Health and Academic Disparities

In support of Minority Stress Theory, studies have shown that non-acceptance of an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity by family, peers, friends, and other significant people in their lives is related to higher risk of mental health issues (Kosciw & Diaz, 2016). An individual may be subjected to acts of varying levels negativity toward them based upon their gender identity or sexual orientation, and these acts may have detrimental effects on students' health and academic outcomes. For example, a transgender student required by school policy to utilize the bathroom aligned with their assigned biological sex may experience fear or anxiety

related to using a bathroom that does not align with their gender identity. Students who are bullied or shunned by peers may feel unsafe or unwanted in their classrooms or extracurricular activities. Poorer peer relationships for LGBTQ+ students have been found to be related to lower levels of self-esteem, lower mean grade point averages, and higher levels of depression (Bos et al., 2008). Discriminatory acts against LGBTQ+ individuals have been found to be correlated with suicidal ideation and lower levels of life satisfaction (Sutter & Perrin, 2016). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth who experienced bullying directly related to their sexuality had more negative impacts, such as poorer mental health, for those who were bullied compared to students who were bullied for reasons other than their sexuality, such as their weight (Patrick et al., 2013). People within the LGBTQ+ community find themselves at higher risk for suicidal ideation and report self-harm at higher rates than their cisgender heterosexual peers (Almeida et al., 2009; Friedman, et al., 2006; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Additionally, sexual minority youth have been found to be more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety compared to their heterosexual peers and exhibit greater deficits in emotional regulation such as rumination and emotional awareness (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2008). These difficulties with mental health and emotional regulation put members of the LGBTQ+ community at increased risk of substance abuse compared to their heterosexual, cisgender peers. These practices carry further health concerns later in life including life-long substance abuse, early death, and induced health disparities (Green & Feinstein, 2012; Gonzales et al., 2017).

All of these factors may contribute to a student's school experience, though they do not offer a full picture of the experiences of LGBTQ+ students. Students have complex backgrounds and identities and, while increasing physical and mental health risks are a concern, a deficit-based approach to examining a person's sexuality or gender identity can be limiting. For

example, a student who is transgender but has strong community and school supports may not experience the additional risks described here while a lesbian student whose family is unsupportive and who is bullied at school for her sexual orientation may be further at risk. Students may experience discrimination or harassment based on other aspects of their identity such as immigration status, ethnicity, race, or religion (Kosciw et al., 2018).

Additionally important in discussing the experiences of gender and sexual minority youth is the understanding of how various other aspects of identity come together to influence the interaction between identities and the environment. This approach and framework to understanding the ways in which various part of a person's identity may impact an individual in different ways was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, who used the term "intersectionality" to describe the multidimensional lives of Black women based upon their experiences as both Black individuals and women (1989). An intersectional approach to understanding experience and identity does not limit experiences, risk factors, societal impact, and other factors to only one piece of identity. For example, a non-intersectional approach to examining the lives of queer youth may discuss only the additional risks, advantages, and experiences of individuals that are directly traced to their LGBTQ+ identity, either intentionally or inadvertently ignoring the role of race, disability status, age, sex, and socioeconomic status in influencing experience and risk. An intersectional approach to examining experiences of LGBTQ+ youth may instead identify ways in which Black LGBTQ+ youth have differing life experiences from their white peers and may face additional risks and may even experience additional microaggressions and discrimination based on their race or ethnicity when seeking LGBTQ+-affirming supports (Sadika et al., 2020; Witfield et al., 2014). Particularly when framing discussions of how to best support students, it is necessary to recognize differences in experience within and access to these supports. Despite

potential limitations of a deficits-based viewpoint, it is important to understand the additional risks that may affect students through an intersectional lens.

Queer Cultural Capital Theory

In response to frequent conversations of deficits related to LGBTQ+ identity, recent trends have led to increased study and thought given to potential positive factors of membership within the queer community. Proposed by Pennel (2016), Queer Cultural Capital Theory builds upon the existing structure of Bourdieu's (1986) Cultural Capital Theory and outlines various knowledge, abilities, and advantages a person may have due to membership within the LGBTQ+ community. The theory outlines six forms of cultural capital to explain abilities that may be acquired through existing in the world as a queer individual: aspirational, linguistic, familial, navigational, resistant, and transgressive. The first five of these forms are derived from previous work on applying Cultural Capital Theory to experiences and strengths of people of color (Yosso, 2005).

The first type of cultural capital, aspirational, refers to the ability of an individual to look forward and plan for growth despite the structural or societal barriers they may face due to potential minority statuses they hold (Pennell, 2016). Particularly for queer youth, aspirational cultural capital may involve planning or rallying for laws, bills, or other policies that increase rights given to members of the LGBTQ+ community. Linguistic cultural capital refers to the verbal and nonverbal identifiers within a culture that allows member of the community to recognize one another. Within the LGBTQ+ community, this may refer to specific pride flags and their colors or even basic slang and terminology related to identities and activities within the community that may not be commonly known by cisgender and heterosexual others. Familial cultural capital refers to the ability of queer individuals to make connections with others through

networks, as is often referred to within the queer communities. These connections can be seen through the formation of Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) or the idea of “chosen families” that resonates throughout queer community in the form of close friendships and relationships.

The ability of queer individuals to maneuver and utilize heteronormative cissexist institutions in necessary ways is described by the fifth type of cultural capital: navigational. This form of cultural capital may be described as a transgender student utilizing lesser-used restrooms or locker rooms within the schools to avoid interactions with peers who may express negativity about which gendered facility they use. The sixth form of queer cultural capital is resistant cultural capital in which queer individuals live in ways that challenge societal norms or regulations despite the potential social consequences. The final type of cultural capital, as added by Pennell, is transgressive. Having this type of cultural capital allows for an individual to move beyond heteronormative cissexist expectations and norms for living within society.

Transgressive cultural capital may be seen in students who are LGBTQ+ taking a partner to prom or even wearing clothes that are congruent with their gender identity. All of these abilities and skills contribute to unique patterns of strengths a member of the LGBTQ+ might possess and the forms of cultural capital highlighted by the theory work to shift focus from a deficit-based view of LGBTQ+ identities to a strengths-based approach. When discussing issues related to serving LGBTQ+ youth, a comprehensive approach is necessary and must include protective factors and positive aspects related to LGBTQ+ identity.

Protective Factors

As highlighted by Pennell (2017), membership within the LGBTQ+ community is not alone a negative experience and framing student identities in this way detracts from overall understanding of these students and their lives. In fact, despite hardships one may experience by

virtue of their minority status, protective factors can serve to lessen the risk of hardships and negative experiences. Much research has been done on the relationship between others' acceptance of a person's sexual identity and gender identity and mental health outcomes (Higa, et al., 2015; Kosciw et al., 2016; Shilo & Savaya, 2011; Shilo & Savaya, 2012). Higher levels of acceptance from family and peers has been found to be related to lower levels of emotional distress and anxiety. Acceptance may come in the form of welcoming same-sex significant others into the home or family, using preferred names and pronouns, or responding positively to moments of coming out. Particularly within the school environment, acceptance from teachers and other school professionals may utilize strategies of offering positive responses to students coming out and using preferred names and pronouns of students. These protective factors and positive aspects related to LGBTQ+ identity can be utilized to better understand the lives and needs of students for school service providers.

GSA as a Protective Factor

Gay-Straight Alliance or Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) clubs are extra-curricular student organizations that exist with the intention to provide safe, equitable, and affirming environments for LGBTQ+ youth within schools (GSA Network, 2020). GSAs were first documented in schools in California and Massachusetts in the 1980's and a network of California regional members and collaborators was established in 1988. The system later became the student-driven Gay-Straight Alliance Network, focusing on community organizing, student leadership development, and peer support. Over time, the Gay-Straight Alliance Network developed into a national-level collaborative to support GSAs throughout the country and formally changed its name to the Genders and Sexualities Alliance Network (GSA Network). GSAs exist predominately in middle and high schools and serve various functions dependent on

student goals, size of membership, political and legislative climate, and other factors (Center for Disease Control, 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020).

At their most basic function, middle school and high school GSAs serve as a welcoming and accepting space for students in the community and their allies to make peer connections (Jordan, 2000; Kosciw et al., 2020). The connections can build and grow into a form of familial cultural capital as mentioned previously as a strength of the LGBTQ+ community (Pennell, 2016). These social connections and relationships provide not only social supports but may additionally provide a setting in which students do not need to conceal their identities and help students to combat internalized homophobia or negative self-perceptions about their gender identity or sexual minority status, potentially reducing the impact of the previously described proximal stressors (Meyer, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2020).

The organizations are typically student-run with the oversight of a school staff member (Kosciw et al., 2020; Marx & Hensmen Kettrey, 2016). The GSA Network, along with numerous other national organizations, provide free guidance on GSA organization, events, and activities through online handbooks, webinars, and conferences, creating cost-effective programming for clubs and eliminating the need for extensive funding from schools (Gay, Lesbian, Straight, Education Network, 2021; GSA Network, 2020; Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2021). They may also host school-wide events to promote a positive school climate or educate school and community members and work to address experiences of school-based discrimination by offering emotional support as well as avenues for reporting within the district. These efforts may include working with school-based administrators and individuals with positions of power such as legislators or other community organizers to advocate for inclusive policies, educational training, and the provision of other protections and supports for LGBTQ+ students. Given the

focus on middle school and high school GSAs in the literature, little is known about the implementation of these student organizations in elementary settings and even less information is available regarding their activities and impact. Given the data to support that LGBTQ+ student identity is salient and developed in the elementary years and recent evidence indicating that anti-LGBTQ+ bullying and harassment occurs in elementary settings, this gap in the literature is unfortunate as elementary students could additionally benefit from the positive outcomes associated with school GSAs (Kosciw et al., 2018).

The literature regarding the benefits of GSAs within schools overwhelmingly highlights their utility and importance as a school-wide support for both students within the LGBTQ+ community and those who are not. Indeed, GSAs act as a protective factor for students in the face of bullying and anti-LGBTQ+ harassment in schools where they are both able to receive emotional support from peers within the organization and are more likely to receive support from school faculty and staff compared to students who attended schools without GSAs (Fetner & Elafros, 2015; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020). These interactions and relationships build upon the familial cultural capital that LGBTQ+ youth can possess as part of their identity and may protect against increased risks for physical victimization or bullying (Pennel, 2016). In addition, the presence of GSAs in middle and high schools has also been found to be a significant factor in reducing the risk of physical victimization, harassment, and bullying for gender and sexual minority youth, therefore addressing distal stressors as identified by Minority Stress Theory (Marx et al., 2016; Meyer, 2003; Toomey et al., 2011). Because GSAs are student-run and require minimal funding to operate, they serve as a cost-effective way to address physical victimization and other issues of harassment in schools compared to intensive programming and interventions, many of which produce only modest effect sizes in reducing

actual bullying behavior (Merrell et al., 2008). GSA presence in schools has been found to interact with related reduced rates of physical victimization to be associated with fewer days absent from school (Kosciw et al., 2013).

When reflecting on their high school experiences, students whose schools incorporated GSAs into their student organizations endorse feelings of belonging within their school, feeling safer in their schools, and overall more positive high school experiences compared to those who did not attend schools with GSAs (Fetner et al., 2015; Kosciw et al., 2020). Students with access to GSAs as a support also reported more diverse and more extensive friend groups compared to those without the organizations who reported high school as a difficult time in their lives. These students additionally report higher rates of identifying supportive adults within their school and higher overall rates of peer acceptance (Kosciw et al., 2020). School-based clubs and organizations for gender and sexual minority youth have been found to decrease the risk of substance abuse problems in adolescence including use of alcohol, marijuana and cocaine use, and sharing of needles used for drug injections (Heck et al., 2011; Jordan, 2000). LGBTQ+ high school students whose schools have GSAs report lower overall rates of depressive symptoms and general mental health concerns compared peers who do not have GSAs within their schools (Heck et al., 2011). These outcomes have been found to be sustained in the long term, with students who attended high schools with GSAs reporting more positive self-esteem in early adulthood and involvement in GSAs being related to lower rates of suicide attempts across the lifetime (Toomey et al., 2011).

Academically, the presence of GSAs in high school has been associated with lower rates of student dropout and higher numbers of students with higher ACT scores (Baams et al., 2020). These findings extend beyond LGTBQ+ students to include positive impacts on cisgender and

heterosexual students in schools with GSAs. Friendships and relationships formed within GSAs have been associated with accountability to assignment completion and course attendance for LGBTQ+ youth, with students holding each other accountable for academic growth during meetings (Fetner et al., 2015). The presence of GSAs has also been associated with greater college education attainment for LGBTQ+ students later on in life (Toomey et al., 2011). This evidence, in addition to the evidence of social-emotional benefits, highlights the importance of GSAs as a preventative intervention to address school-age and life-long risk factors.

Issues of GSA Implementation and Ecological Factors

Despite the evidence to support GSAs and other extra-curricular student organizations to support LGBTQ+ students, recent data indicates that only 61.6% of LGBTQ+ students attend schools with GSAs (Kosciw et al., 2020). However, despite the reported existence of these organizations, of the students who had a GSA or similar organization within their school, 38.2% reported that they had never attended a meeting or participated in activities. An additional 13.1% reported that they attended rarely, while only 29.6% reported attending frequently. lack these organizations and do not adopt or being the process of implementing GSAs within their schools (Center for Disease Control, 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020). However, despite these recent reports, the simple prevalence of GSAs does not adequately explain the availability of these supports or greater contextual issues related implementation of GSAs within schools. Overall, data indicate that GSAs and similar organizations are not being provided to a significant portion of students and, additionally, that students who have access to these clubs are not necessarily attending meetings or activities that would provide the expected benefit. In this, the issue of ensuring LGBTQ+ students receive the available support of a GSA is two-fold in that many schools

simply do not provide the opportunity and those that do are not providing it in an adequate enough way for students to receive the benefit.

Generally, research indicates that the overall level of successful implementation of evidence-based practices in schools is low (Ennett, et al., 2003; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002). Despite increasing attention to the need for evidence-based interventions within the field, simple implementation of intervention is not necessarily associated with positive outcomes and stronger effects of intervention (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Webster-Stratton et al., 2011). One potential explanation of this may be the often atheoretical nature of intervention selection despite a broad array of existing theories related to behavior change that could be used to inform intervention selection (Davis et al., 2015; Michie et al., 2005). Given the goal of implementing these interventions to improve student outcomes, it is imperative to examine why expected outcomes are not always achieved. School-based practices are not simply enacted without the actions of school professionals, and it cannot be expected that implementation within schools exists separate from the influence of other factors (Fixsen et al., 2005). Indeed, many school-based factors such as administrative support, teacher support, access to intervention materials, financial resources, training of front-line implementers, staff turnover, and other factors have all been identified as factors influencing establishment and sustainment of school-based practices across tiers of support (Durlak et al., 2008; Forman et al., 2009; Forman et al., 2013). However, identification of relevant influences for specific interventions has been limited, with identification of intervention-specific or practice-specific barriers and facilitative influences on implementation receiving limited focus (Arnold et al., 2021; Forman et al., 2009; Kincaid et al., 2007; Langley et al., 2010). In order to effectively implement distinct school-based practices, it is vital to identify their relevant barriers and supports. To better support gender and sexuality

minority youth through implementation of GSAs, relevant and practice-specific alterable factors surrounding school environments to ensure successful implementation of this school-wide support for students.

The Theoretical Domain Framework

As stated previously, many psychological theories related to behavior change exist and may overlap widely in their constructs, making selection of theories to support intervention and behavior change related to implementation complex (Davis et al., 2015). The Theoretical Domain Framework (TDF) was developed as a potential framework to consolidate these approaches and theoretical constructs into more easily-applied constructs (Michie et al., 2005). The TDF was developed in six phases through expert consensus approach between 2003 and 2004 through work with health psychology theorists, health services researchers, and health psychologists who did not have expertise in theory, for a total of 62 experts involved across groups to complete the work of validation. For more in-depth description of methodology for development of the original TDF domains, see Michie et al., 2005. These methods identified twelve key domains related to behavior change and were selected for their representativeness of the broad range of behavior change theories, giving common name to similar constructs that exist across the various theories.

Cane and colleagues (2012) completed further content validation of the Theoretical Domain framework to confirm the number of domains, the constructs in each domain, and the given names of each domain that best conveyed meaning. Refinement was completed via card sort methodology. Participants were nineteen theory and behavior change experts who were asked to sort original constructs from TDF into groups both as open sort (without any labels or pre-taught groupings) and closed sort (organizing constructs within the original TDF domains)

task to identify relevant domains and their constructs. A more detailed review of this methodology can be found in Cane et al. (2012).

This refined framework produced fourteen domains comprised of 84 constructs related to behavior change (Cane et al., 2012). The first domain, Knowledge, describes an understanding or awareness of something including understanding of procedures, task environments, and knowledge of conditions or rationale. This may include an overall understanding of scientific support for an action or intervention, knowledge regarding related issues, or understanding of the larger context in which a behavior may occur. The Skills domain describes abilities, competencies, or capabilities gained by individuals through previous experiences or attempts to build skills. Skills may be developed through specific training to build skills, individual practice, or a combination of previous experiences. The Social/Professional Role and Identity domain describes features or attributes of an individual across settings of work or less professional settings. The fourth identified TDF domain is Beliefs about Capabilities, which describes the confidence in or acceptance of ability or skill that can be used to change outcomes. This domain includes various constructs such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and perceived behavioral control as factors of influence on behavior change. The Optimism domain includes constructs related to beliefs of an individual that the desired outcomes will be achieved. These constructs most often refer to aspects of outlook such as optimism, pessimism, and belief that things will turn out positively or with the best possible way.

The sixth TDF domain, Beliefs about Consequences, includes the confidence in or acceptance of outcomes of behaviors within a certain context (Cane et al., 2012). This may include understanding of the consequences of actions, understandings of potential outcomes and how they may vary among contexts for the same behavior, and anticipated regrets.

Reinforcement as a domain describes the relationship or contingency between a behavior and a stimuli that increases the probability of a response, harkening back to general behaviorism with constructs such as punishment, reinforcement, and contingencies. The eighth domain, Intentions, describes the resolve or desire to behave in a particular manner. Constructs within this domain describe stages of change and the potential variability of intentions across situations, contexts, and stages of behavior. The Goals domain describes a person's desired outcomes they would seek to achieve through behavior change and may include goal setting, action planning, and both long- and short-term goals. The tenth TDF domain of Memory, Attention, and Decision Processes describes a person's ability to take in and store relevant information on the environment and behavior alternatives and to make selections between choices. These constructs may include memory and attention as well as issues of cognitive strain or tiredness that may impact a person's ability to make choices or engage in behaviors that influence outcomes.

Domain eleven of the Theoretical Domain Framework, Environmental Context and Resources, describes factors relevant to an individual's situation or surrounding environment that influence their ability to make behavior change, develop skills, and facilitate independence (Cane et al., 2012). These factors may include various pressures or stressors, critical events, access to resources such as time or money, and various facilitative factors or barriers. The twelfth identified domain, Social Influences, describes interactions between people that may bring about changes in thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and may include social norms, support, within-group conflict, power dynamics between people or groups of people, and social pressures ranging in scope from individual conversations between people to broader social norms of a community, region, or other area. The Emotions domain describes affective or feelings-based reactions an individual may have related to an event or situation. Based on the description in the

Theoretical Domain Framework, these emotions are most commonly negative and include constructs of fear, anxiety, stress, depression, and burn-out along with general affect that may be positive or negative. Finally, the Behavioral Regulation domain includes constructs that describe action taken to objectively manage or influence behavior such as self-monitoring or action planning. This may include steps taken by an individual independently such as self-monitoring or actions taken in conjunction with others.

Overall, TDF provides a comprehensive overview of mechanisms that influence behavior change and implementation of specific practices (Cane et al., 2012; Michie et al., 2005). The framework has been validated by a multi-disciplinary team of experts and was created and refined with the intention of supporting overall use of implementation science and behavior change theory across fields of study. To date, the overall use of the TDF in academic literature has been used to inform healthcare related behaviors and in informing intervention selection (Francis et al., 2012). If the TDF were applied to the study of barriers and facilitators to GSAs, the information derived could be interpreted and aligned with other knowledge of implementation behaviors.

Purpose of the Proposed Study

As it is the goal of school psychologists to support LGBTQ+ students in school-related concerns and to provide safe and welcoming school environments for all students, recent literature has identified supports and interventions to address concerns unique to these students (Agee-Aguayo, et al., 2017; American Psychological Association, 2015a; National Association of School Psychologists, 2017). One such support is the creation of GSAs or similar student organizations in which LGBTQ+ students and those who support them are able to gather, form positive social relationships, and discuss their experiences in an affirming and welcoming

environment (Center for Disease Control, 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020). Given the discrepancy in GSA implementation by region and community size, students across the country are receiving varied levels of support (Kosciw et al., 2020). Current literature indicates that, despite evidence to support the use of these organizations in schools, schools are not implementing this support in the desired ways for their students.

The purpose of the proposed study is to examine commonalities in factors affecting school-wide GSA adoption and implementation of these clubs as reported by GSA advisors through the interpretive lens of TDF. Given the lack of literature surrounding implementation of GSAs, the study was considered to be exploratory in nature and no formal hypotheses were made. The following questions were used to guide the proposed study:

1. What barriers exist to the adoption and installation of GSAs within schools?
2. What facilitating factors exist for the adoption and installation of GSAs within schools?

Chapter 2

Methods

Participants

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained prior to the start of recruitment and data collection procedures. Potential participants were recruited through Facebook postings created in groups of LGBTQ+ educators, school GSA advisors, and educators seeking to support sexual minority and gender diverse youth (Appendix A). Posts were made directly by the graduate student researcher into groups and included a link to a brief demographic survey to determine eligibility for the interview portion of the study (Appendix B). Potential participants were able to self-select for participation in the study through completing the demographic survey. Demographic information, informed consent, and contact information were collected via Qualtrics, a secure online survey platform, only accessible to the graduate student researcher and the primary faculty investigator to preserve confidentiality. As part of the demographic survey, potential participants were given the opportunity to provide an email address to be used to schedule the interview and were encouraged to avoid using emails with identifying information to further preserve anonymity. Potential participants who met these criteria were contacted via email by the graduate student researcher to schedule an interview via Zoom. Participants were compensated for participation via a \$40 electronic VISA gift card emailed to their provided email by the graduate student researcher within 48 hours of interview completion. Funding for the proposed study was provided by South Central Minnesota Pride through a scholarship awarded to the graduate student researcher. Ten participants completed participation in the study. Participant demographics can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

| ID | Gender | Sexual Orientation | Race / Ethnicity | Highest Degree | Region | School Type | Role |
|----|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Cisgender female | Straight | White | Bachelor Degree | S | MS | General Education Teacher |
| 2 | Female | Bisexual | White | Masters Degree | NE | MS | General Education Teacher |
| 3 | Cis Female | Asexual | Caucasian | Masters Degree | NE | MS | General Education Teacher |
| 4 | Female | Bisexual | Caucasian | Masters Degree | MW | MS | General Education Teacher |
| 5 | Cis Female | Straight | White | Education Specialist Degree | NE | HS | School Psychologist |
| 6 | Cis female | Bisexual or lesbian | White | Masters Degree | MW | MS | General Education Teacher |

| | | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------|------------------------------|-------|-------------------|----|----|---|
| 7 | Androgynous | Bisexual or pansexual | White | Masters Degree | S | HS | Special Education Teacher (Autism Support Teacher) |
| 8 | Nonbinary | Bisexual but more lesbian | White | Masters Degree | S | HS | General Education Teacher |
| 9 | Cisgender Female | Heterosexual | White | Masters Degree | MW | MS | General Education Teacher, Equity Leader |
| 10 | Cisgender male | Gay | White | Masters Degree | S | HS | General Education Teacher |

Note. Demographics for gender, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity were self-defined by participants. For Region: MW = Midwest, NE = Northeast, S = South. For School Type: MS = Middle School, HS = High School

Interview Procedures

Only potential participants who provided an email address and indicated that they had either implemented or attempted to implement a GSA or similar organization within the last five

years were invited to schedule an interview. Scheduled interviews were assigned participant ID numbers to interview transcriptions and data files to further protect anonymity during the scheduling and data analysis process. Interviews were conducted via the online video conferencing platform Zoom by the graduate student researcher and were recorded and stored in MediaSpace as supported by the University. Each interview was scheduled using a unique Zoom room which utilized both a waiting room feature and a passcode to attempt to restrict access to only the graduate student researcher and the participant. Access to the Zoom link was provided via email to the participant using through the graduate student researcher's university email account.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format and relevant follow-up questions were asked in addition to pre-written questions listed on the interview protocol. A semi-structured format allows for descriptive and in-depth data to be collected around the pre-written interview questions while also allowing for flexibility to clarify and expand on answers that provide new or unexpected information (Pummer, 2011). Particularly in research regarding the experiences of gender and sexual minorities, qualitative methodologies such as semi-structured interviews allow for data collection on relatively individual and personal experiences that require specific and careful study. As part of the semi-structured interview, participants responded to questions in four sections. In the first interview section, participants were asked about their role in their school or district, experience and motivation in becoming involved with the GSA, and typical activities of their GSA. The second set of questions included questions regarding barriers or factors that negatively influenced the establishment and/or sustainment of their GSA. In the third set of questions, participants were asked to describe facilitating factors related to the establishment or sustainment of their GSA. In both the second and third sets of interview

questions, participants were invited to name examples related to these barriers or facilitating factors. In the final set of questions, participants were asked if they had any additional information they would like to disclose about their experiences. A list of interview questions and session introduction information can be found in Appendix C.

Prior to the start of interview questions, participants were reminded that they may withdraw from the study at any time, that they could choose not to answer specific questions, and that participation in the study was completely voluntary. Additionally, interviewees were reminded of the purpose of the study. Finally, they were reminded that the session will be recorded and transcribed prior to beginning the formal interview questions. Interviews were recorded and transcribed via Zoom's transcription capabilities. Recordings were used to review transcriptions for accuracy after interviews are completed. Once transcription accuracy was verified via the graduate student researcher, recordings were permanently deleted. Transcriptions were numbered according to assigned participant numbers and the interview date with no identifying information being used in naming audio files. Additionally, Zoom settings were configured to record audio-only files for transcription accuracy checking.

Data Coding and Analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research that allows researchers to utilize both previously existing literature to develop hypothesized codes and to develop new codes based on themes that emerge within the data set (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the current study, thematic analysis occurred in six phases as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and can be seen in Table 2. All coding was completed independently by the graduate student researcher, a fifth-year doctoral candidate. After coding occurs and themes are created, thematic analysis additionally allows researchers to apply theory

and literature within the field to interpretation of codes and themes to further explain findings. When compared to other qualitative methods such as Grounded Theory, thematic analysis allows for the application of theory to already identified codes and does not apply the limits of theory to the initial coding process. In this, initial coding was completed without direct reference to or reading of relevant theories. Application of the Theoretical Domain Framework (Cane et al., 2012) was completed within the generation of initial themes as broader, practical themes of barriers and facilitative factors were not easily distilled down for understanding based on the broader context of codes. Thus, application of TDF began in phase three of analysis (Table 3). However, it is important to acknowledge that qualitative work cannot be completed without some influence of the theoretical orientation of the coder, and that this limitation of the methodology allows the potential for bias to influence which codes were identified among the data and which were not (Braun et al., 2006).

In phase one, the interview transcriptions created by Zoom recording were read while reviewing the audio recordings to ensure the accuracy of transcription services. The second round of transcription reading incorporated a rereading process in which the graduate student researcher familiarized himself with the existing data. Notes were taken throughout rereading to pick out initial features in the data in the process of open coding. As part of open-coding, the graduate student researcher engaged in line-by-line reading of the transcribed data and labeling phenomena in the data with keywords or phrases that provided enough information to summarize the data of interest. At the end of the first reading of transcripts, 56 initial codes were identified.

Table 2*Phases of Thematic Analysis*

| Phase | Description |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Familiarization with data | Proofing transcription services through listening to audio recordings and reading; initial ideas and codes were noted |
| 2. Generation of initial codes | Reading and coding of entire data set; all codes were compiled into an initial list of codes; redundant codes are combined; data extracts compiled to provide examples of codes and meanings |
| 3. Initial theme creation | Initial list of codes compiled into potential themes; relevant data extracts used to identify similar concepts |
| 4. Review of initial themes | Themes reviewed in relation to data extracts and the entire data set to ensure relevancy of groupings; a thematic map or table created |
| 5. Defining and naming themes | Themes defined and summarized in a few sentences; subthemes identified and added to thematic table; theme names finalized |
| 6. Reporting and final analysis | Final write-up and manuscript reporting of themes; data extracts to support themes and theme names used to provide support |

In phase 2, initial codes were generated based upon notes and labels identified in rereading in phase 1. Identical or repetitive codes in the list were consolidated for efficient use in

the next coding procedure (Braun et al., 2006; Corbin et al., 2008). For example, the codes “teacher turnover” and “administrative turnover” were combined into the overarching code “staff turnover.” Coding was conducted for as many concepts as possible and various extracts or pieces of data (ex: sentences, phrases) were assigned multiple codes based on relevancy. Data extracts with multiple relevant codes were assigned codes in order according to saliency at the discretion of the coder. Additional codes that were not identified during initial coding were added throughout the analysis process. A master list of codes was saved in table form electronically for reference and backed up through OneDrive along with extracted data pieces to provide context and rationale for the code. At the end of phase 2, a total of 42 initial codes were identified.

In phase 3, the list of master codes was sorted and analyzed for potential overarching themes. Final codes can be found in table format in Appendix D, including codes, example data extracts, their corresponding themes and subthemes. These lists of potential themes were considered initial themes for analysis, allowing for changes in later phases on further review of the data. Initial themes consisted of broad categories or abstract concepts supported by the data. To inform answers to the initial research questions, codes were first attempted to align to two initial themes: barriers and facilitative factors. However, broader review of the context surrounding codes within transcripts indicated that simple categorization of these codes into “barriers” or “facilitators” was restrictive and did not fully capture the experiences and reports of advisors, who often described similar experiences with differing perspectives regarding their value as a barrier or facilitator. Seven themes were derived from participant responses across interview items, as many participants would describe their experiences with both facilitative factors and barriers within responses to the same questions. Notably, this way of describing experiences across participant experiences did not provide consistency in the naming of certain

factors as barriers or facilitators across codes, themes or subthemes, sometimes varying within participant interview. For example, national-level organization resources such as those produced by the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network and the Human Rights Campaign, were described across some participants as being valuable tools and facilitators to their work while others described the resources as limiting and their widely accepted guidelines as being barriers to providing to the needs of their specific students or communities. As an additional example, in questions regarding barriers, participants would often begin to describe specific barriers and then describe instances in which that particular barrier (ex: lack of strong student leadership) would have been facilitative (ex: strong student leaders). Therefore, during phase three, seven initial themes were identified as they aligned to the Theoretical Domain Framework (Cane et al., 2012).

In phase four, initial themes were refined over two levels of review (Braun et al., 2006). First, data extracts marked for each code were reviewed to determine if the context surrounding coded data was consistent with the initial themes. A table of initial themes was created to identify main themes and codes were organized to the greatest extent possible (Table 3). Thematic maps, visual representations of themes, and analysis of initial themes allow researchers to organize the code and to aid in analyses of data in a way that is more accessible to the presentation of findings (Braun et al., 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). At the second level of review, candidate themes were analyzed through a re-reading of the entirety of transcribed data to ensure accurate representation of the data set (Braun et al., 2006).

In phase five, the seven themes were finalized and reviewed for the purpose of naming and defining with examples from incorporated codes and context from data extractions (Braun et al., 2006). Subthemes were identified for five of the seven finalized themes and were named and defined, with examples given from supporting codes and data extractions. Naming of themes and

sub-themes were completed with considerations of themes independently as well as in their relation to other themes, in order to ensure names were concise, clear, and interpretable for dissemination and discussion. Alterations to the initial themes table were made to include subtheme names. During these alterations, the focus remained on correctly grouping and categorizing codes under themes. Memos regarding the rationale of groupings were made throughout the process for reference in the narrative explanation of data analysis. Finally, in phase 6, themes, sub-themes, and their supporting codes and data extracts were written in narrative form for dissemination.

Chapter 3

Results

Based on the identified codes, seven themes were finalized, named, and described to represent the data set. The seven themes were: Knowledge, Skill, Impact, Environmental Factors, Emotions, Advisor Identity, and Social Influences. Alignment of the themes and subthemes to barriers and facilitative factors can be seen in Table 3. Based upon the inconsistency with which participants labeled factors as only barriers or facilitative factors as described before, further analysis and grouping of codes was completed in alignment with the Theoretical Domain Framework (Cane et al., 2012). The alignment of the current study themes is mapped in Table 4.

Table 3*Themes and Subthemes by Type of Factor*

| Theme | Subtheme | Type of Factor (Barrier, Facilitative, or Both) |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Knowledge | | Both |
| | Legal Knowledge | F |
| | Knowledge of Literature and Resources | F |
| Skills | Knowledge Held by Others | B |
| | Previous Experience | F |
| | Professional Development | Both |
| Impact Environmental Factors | | F |
| | Resources and Materials | Both |
| | Organizational Climate | B |
| Advisor Identity Emotions | Novel and Salient Events | B |
| | | Both |
| | | Both |
| Social Factors | Fear of Backlash | B |
| | Longstanding Emotions | F |
| | | Both |
| | Social Support | F |
| | Social Pressures | B |
| | Others | Both |

Note. For Type of Factor: B = Barrier, F = Facilitative Factor

Table 4*Mapping of Current Study Themes and the Theoretical Domain Framework (Cane et al., 2012)*

| Study Themes | TDF Domain (Cane et al., 2012) | TDF Domain Definitions (Cane et al., 2012) |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Knowledge | Knowledge | “An awareness of the existence of something” |
| Skills | Skills | “An ability or proficiency acquired through practice” |
| Impact | Beliefs About Consequences | “Acceptance of the truth, reality, or validity about outcomes of a behavior in a given situation” |
| Environmental Factors | Environmental Context and Resources | “Any circumstance of a person’s situation or environment that discourages or encourages the development of skills and abilities, independence, social competence, and adaptive behavior” |
| Advisor Identity | Social/Professional Role and Identity | “A coherent set of behaviors and displayed personal qualities of an individual in a social or work setting |
| Emotions | Emotions | “A complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements, by which the individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event” |
| Social Factors | Social Influences | “Those interpersonal processes that can cause individuals to change their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors” |

Theme 1: Knowledge

The first theme, Knowledge, was identified and defined as an awareness or understanding of important information. This information ranged in content and in reported impact both as a facilitator. Within this theme, three subthemes were identified: legal knowledge, knowledge of literature and resources, and knowledge of the environment. Codes, subthemes, and data extracts for this theme can be seen in Table 6 (Appendix D).

Legal Knowledge

Legal Knowledge as a subtheme was included in six participants' interviews and described a facilitative understanding of the legal protections and policies at district, local state, and federal levels for GSAs and similar clubs. This Legal Knowledge was often reported to be used as justification in establishing GSAs within schools in the face of either perceived or explicit resistance to establishment of the clubs. As Participant 3 reported when describing establishing the GSA at her school against her principal's questioning:

I was like, 'Fuck this.' I'm just gonna hand in the paperwork, and if he wants to say no, he can come and say it to my face and I'm going to have my little print out from, like, GLSEN about like federal mandates and discrimination, and all that.

Participant 8 expressed a similar sentiment in her interview when faced with administrative questioning about establishing their club:

I'm just going to stop asking for permission.... it's Constitution-protected. We have, you know, the First Amendment, the Title Nine we have. Virginia just passed model policies

for the treatment of transgender students that was supposed to be put in place in all Virginia schools by the school year. And we haven't done that, and I don't think that there's really a lot of effort going on, at least in our school to do that...

Knowledge of Literature and Resources

The Knowledge of Literature and Resources subtheme included knowledge of scientific research, academic publications, professional reports, and resource guides that existed to support logistical establishment of or justification for school clubs. Coding by the primary researcher identified this subtheme within seven of the ten participants' interviews. Citations of academic literature, research, and professional reports were cited across participants as being used to justify the establishment of the club within the school. This use of citations and the literature base was described by Participant 1:

I have shared in a meeting whole school meeting about a study that I read recently... that talked about a GSA being in a building and the students—knowing that they have support in the building and all the things—that increases in student success, not only does it not only is it life or death in some cases. It also increases academic performance. It increases attendance. It increases the desire to go to college, and, you know, I feel like, if I could just get them to hear me...

Knowledge of professional reports and available resource guides was additionally described as facilitative to advisors' understanding of basic functions of the club including student leadership, how to run meetings, the role of an advisor, and potential goals of GSAs. This

subtheme was identified in six of ten participants' interviews. Guides mentioned by name were reports from the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN), the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), GSA Network, and Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). These resources were noted to be very general by one participant, who reported that they did not always apply to the realities of club implementation. Particularly, the guides were critiqued by the advisor for assuming a level of mature and experienced student leaders that were not present within their schools. Previous experience by advisors indicated that these guidelines and expectations for clubs were limiting in some regards, particularly in context where student leadership was not well-developed or student clubs were not interested in or driven towards advocacy work as described by the guides.

Knowledge Held by Others

The final subtheme, Knowledge Held by Others, describes the level of knowledge surrounding GSAs, the LGBTQ+ community, and the needs of gender and sexual minority students. This subtheme was identified in the interviews of four participants and was listed as a barrier by all four participants, particularly as a lack of knowledge on behalf of school administrators. School administrators were described by these participants as not having knowledge of terminology related to sexuality and gender identity. This lack of knowledge was reported to make conversations around club establishment or activities difficult, as much teaching was required from advisors prior to action. This required teaching ranged from explaining what a GSA was to describing issues faced by LGBTQ+ students and why these supports were necessary or why certain practices may be harmful. Participant 1 described a barrier that kept the administrator from understanding the need for a club or even that the club was a potential support for students:

Well, it's funny. Our first principal, this year—when I sent her an email and asked if she could make a GSA announcement—she thought it was Girl Scouts of America.

Participant 7 summarized the lack of understanding of LGBTQ+ related issues and terminology in the following way:

None of our admin have, in theory, issues with gay people, LGBT people. They have lack of knowledge, okay? Our principal—who is gay—every time I say the word 'deadnaming,' I have to define it because he doesn't remember what it is, even though I keep complaining that teachers are doing it.

Theme 2: Skills

The second theme, Skills, refers to “abilities or competencies held by an individual.” This theme emerged in the form of codes but was not identified to contain subthemes. The three codes that comprised this theme were: *previous experiencing starting a GSA at another school*, *previous experience starting or advising another club at their school*, and *participating in professional development related to LGBTQ+ issues*. Codes and subthemes as well as their data extracts can be found for the Skills theme in Table 7 (Appendix D).

Previous experience starting a GSA at another school was identified in the interviews of two participants. Participant 1's previous experience was mentioned throughout her interview, often as a point of comparison between the processes of establishing the club and understanding the effort it would take for her to help establish the club at her school. She reported that her

continued effort and focus in the face of pushback or negativity had been important and was shown to be important based on the positive outcomes of her students. This previous experience and success of the club as she had described at her previous school allowed her to have expectations for what a successful club would look like in her school and what activities, events, or meetings may include and informed her approach to planning within her new school.

Participant 10 described his previous experience in establishing a GSA at his previous school as helping him understand necessary compromises and the experience of being “happy versus right”:

Oh, that was so this was not my first rodeo... So, the students didn't know I was gay, but the faculty did. So, when they ask the faculty member who didn't want to do it, the faculty member suggested me, and she approached me, and when she did, I said, 'Well, look, I have a history of doing this at another school.' So, I do have some background here, and I started giving her suggestions about and told her where the law was and wasn't going to be on her side in regard to this...and that there might be times when we're going to have to give up part of that and the happy-right thing.

Previous experience starting any club at their school was identified in the interviews of two participants and was only mentioned as a facilitative factor. This experience was used by advisors to understand the official and formal processes at their school in establishing student clubs and in recognizing the necessary components of the club such as student leadership, activities, meeting plans, and other club needs such as funding. Participant 5 described a desire

for that previous experience in this way when asked what additional facilitators she wished she'd had when establishing her school's GSA as the advisor:

I think just in general, knowing how to establish a club. Do you know... I don't think it's as simple as people think it is. Like, you know, you do have to do planning, and you have to sort of have an idea of how to recruit people. And how do you maintain it? ...And so, you know, that doesn't necessarily have to be a GSA club thing. That's any club.

The last of these codes was identified in the interviews of two participants. Participant 4 described *training and professional development* as being beneficial in providing common language for staff in addressing LGBTQ+ related issues. She also described the hope that seeing the school invest time and resources into providing a training on the issue would "set a tone" for how staff should expect to treat and support gender and sexual minority youth. Alternatively, Participant 6 described a mix of positive and negative experiences following professional development in her building:

One of the language arts teachers came into my room the next morning, and she goes, 'Hey do you have any more of those gender unicorn things that we got...yesterday? I said, 'Oh yeah. Here.' She goes all, 'These are so funny! I'm going to send one to my friend, because he's just gonna think it's funny' and I was kind of mad, but I gave it to her anyway, because I thought, you know, if she's sending it to somebody, maybe it'll educate them instead. Let's give it the benefit of the doubt...

Theme 3: Advisor Identity

The third theme identified was labeled as Advisor Identity and was defined as “personal factors related to the advisor’s personal qualities.” This theme was composed of two separate codes, *advisor lived experience as part of the LGBTQ community* and *lack of lived experience of cisgender-heterosexual advisors* (see Table 8 in Appendix D for codes and data extracts). The first code includes ways in which their own personal identity, beliefs, and experiences surrounding membership to the LGBTQ+ may have influenced their own behavior and motivation and the behavior and motivation of others related to the establishment and installation of their school’s GSA. This code was identified across the interviews of four of the participants. Participant 10 described his difficult experience as a gay man in school to explain the necessity of a GSA as a support for LGBTQ+ youth within his school and to finally break through to those within his school who opposed the establishment of a club:

There were a couple of people who I think just gave in to shut me up. And finally, I went personal with it. I said, ‘Look out.’ And I went through the history that I had in school, and I said, ‘Look, you know, I nearly committed suicide because my school was that bad. And I will not sit here as a teacher and have that happen. That—when I can do something about it, I’ve got power here, and I’m going to use it.’ And that did it finally...Admittedly took me a long time before I was willing to open up to that. But that’s when...even the hardest heart said, ‘Okay, we’re going to go and do this.’ But it took me a long time to get that done.

Participant 3 described her experience as a queer woman growing up as being a continued motivation in the face of push back or negative discussion related to the club:

I want to create the middle school experience I never had. I want to give them what I was denied, and if I can do that, and think of like—you know, what did little 12-year-old [me] need? This is what I needed. Like, I want to provide that.

The second code that fell within this theme was labeled *lack of lived experience of cisgender-heterosexual advisors*. This code was defined as the “generally missing knowledge, understanding, experiences, and related behaviors of advisors who did not identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community.” This code was identified across the interviews of two participants. Both Participant 5 and Participant 7 described frustration and difficulty relating to their students who attended the GSA due to their identity and lack of similar experience. Both reported being unsure at times of the validity of their own responses to student statements and concerns due to this factor. As Participant 5 expressed,

You asked me all about myself. I’m a 49-year-old white woman who’s straight. I don’t know what’s going on. I just know that I want to give these kids an opportunity to talk to each other and feel supported. And so, I guess, that’s another barrier is...I don’t know the life. I don’t. I haven’t experienced it. I don’t know how to encourage them to open up a little bit more in that safe space and yet respect them. And I don’t even know if there’s any answer for that, but do you understand what I’m saying?

Theme 4: Environmental Factors

The fourth theme identified in the data through coding was labeled Environmental Factors and was defined as “organizational and community factors that influenced the implementation of GSAs or support of LGBTQ+ students within the schools.” The theme consisted of nine codes that were organized into three subthemes. The three subthemes were Organizational Climate and Culture, Resources, and Novel and Critical Events (see Table 9, Table 10, and Table 11 in Appendix D for codes and data extracts by subtheme).

Organizational Climate and Culture

The first subtheme, Organizational Climate and Culture, included two codes. The first of these codes was *staff and administrator turnover*, which was identified in the interviews of two participants. Staff and administrator turnover was described as a barrier to implementation and sustainment of GSAs through either loss of staff or administrative support or through loss of advisor for the club altogether by the person leaving the school or district. This loss of support was identified as being particularly difficult when advisors stayed consistent, often requiring the work of justifying the club or explaining the need for the GSA to be completed again each time new administration was introduced, as described by Participant 1:

But it wasn't the easiest process... It's only my third year and we've had five principals. You know so that's—and that's how it's gone and then he was only there for the remainder of that year... Well, it's funny, our first principle, this year, when I sent her—if she could make a GSA announced what she thought it was girl scouts of America. Yeah. So, then I had to straighten her out on that.

Additionally, staff turnover was described as being detrimental to club sustainment in situations in which the turnover affected the GSA advisor. Participant 1 described her frustration with her school's club ending after she left her district as "frustrating" when she knew it would not continue without an advisor.

The second code under the subtheme of Organizational Climate and Culture was identified as the *lack of affirming professionals in schools*. This code encompassed the experiences of advisors who identified unsupportive or unaware school staff whose actions created a difficult or even hostile environment for students who were members of the LGBTQ+ community and established a culture within the school. Participant 7 described their experiences with counselors as being detrimental to overall school climate and work, even as the counselor did not oppose the GSA directly:

So, if Bobby has chronic depression, Bobby's not going to go visit the counselors on a regular basis to deal with it... I don't feel completely comfortable with all of our counselors. I remember when we had a different counselor as our Student Assistance Program counselor, the counselors would send all the gay kids to her... That's the counselor I was saying, who dead names... She's the new SAP counselor. That they're still doing that, to a degree.

As these actions were shared by participants, they were described as having more influence on school climate and culture of the school staff and students as it related to feelings of affirmation and belongingness for LGBTQ+ youth. These actions were separate and described by

participants as not being related to opposition of LGBTQ+ issues or to social pressures against GSAs or supports for gender and sexual minority youth within the schools.

Resources

As the second subtheme within Environmental Factors, the subtheme of Resources described material or non-material means that were available to advisors and students that were used to support GSA activities. The Resources subtheme was comprised of five codes: *funding*, *student transportation to and from club*, *spatial accommodations for meetings*, *an official co-advisor*, and *lack of time as an advisor*. *Funding* was coded in the interviews of three participants and included instances in which monetary support for events, materials, or other needs were beneficial to advisors or a barrier to club activities or meetings. Participant 9 described her club's needs for funding as a barrier to creating a cohesive, more positive environment:

Because we don't have a budget for our GSA and, while some of the parents have been great about offering to make things for us, or whatever it will be so great if we just had a couple hundred dollars to spend on—I don't know—t-shirts or art supplies, or whatever it is that the kids need, and so none of our clubs have budgets. That's not against GSA. That's just the way our school works...

Student transportation to and from club activities was a code identified in the interviews of two participants who identified the distinct lack of transportation as a barrier to students' participation in the GSA. According to advisor report, students who were without this way home did not attend their GSA because they had no other option to return home at the end of their day. In their interview, Participant 7 described students being unable to provide their own

transportation after school without utilizing school buses as a factor that they could not work around:

Transportation is a huge problem. We are a Title One school. It is high poverty. Very few of the kids have a way home...

Identified among the interviews of two participants was the facilitating impact of having adequate *spatial accommodations for club meetings*. Participant 4 described a benefit of having multiple spaces based on student needs in the moment to hold club activities and to allow students to attend GSA while still meeting their additional needs:

We just started just recently kind of splitting the club into to, like if, today, you need to blow off steam you go to the gym and one of the sponsors is there. If, today, you want to work on a project, you know, make the school better place, and have conversations you go into this classroom that's right next to the gym...

This opportunity to divide the group and diversify among spaces was identified as providing a more supportive environment for students and was described by the advisor as providing a positive benefit to students. In addition to multiple spaces of different purposes, Participant 5 described having the two classrooms of the two co-advisors as always meaning that "we have a space." This surety in space to meet allowed for more consistent and meaningful meetings, according to her report.

An additional code, *having an official co-advisor*, was identified among the interviews of six participants as a facilitative factor. The role of a co-advisor was described by participants as diverse and important, often allowing for additional meeting spaces in classrooms, emotional support in facing setbacks and challenges, assistance in planning events and meetings, covering meetings and activities if they could not be present, and in general management of students during club activities. Participant 5 described her experience with her co-advisor in the following way:

I had a co-teacher, a teacher in the school who was willing to join me in co-facilitating. So that's very nice because it's nice to have another body there. And it also provides, if one of us can't be there—we can continue to have the meetings.

Lack of time as an advisor was the final code identified within the subtheme of Resources and was identified among three interviews. Advisors described a limited time in their days and weeks as a barrier to planning club activities and hosting meetings. Participant 8 described her experience as being a first-year teacher, planning a wedding, and the general experience of balancing a personal life with holding club meetings as difficult and said that club meetings only occurred every other week “for [her] own sanity.” In her own interview, Participant 9 reported that her own schedule was a barrier to holding more frequent and consistent GSA meetings:

So, we had originally planned on meeting twice a month after school. Due to my own schedule, we had to go down to once a month. So, right now, when we meet, it's kind of random.

Novel and Critical Events

The third subtheme within Environmental Factors was labeled Novel and Critical Events. This subtheme was composed of two identified codes, limiting state and “parental rights” legislation and COVID-19 impact. This subtheme described events in which advisors found difficulty continuing or establishing their GSA based upon sudden or unexpected environmental factors outside of their own control, particularly those with which they did not have previous experience with such as the COVID-19 pandemic and newly introduced legislation.

The *limiting state and “parental rights” legislation* code encompassed staff, administration, and student concerns related to what impact proposed and passed bills on the state and local level would have or had on GSA activities and protections for LGBTQ+ students within the school setting. This code was identified in the interviews of two participants. These bills were described as participants as being recently introduced during the legislative session and were in varying stages of introduction to legislative chambers though none had been voted into law as of the time of interview completion. These laws were often recognized as having potential harm though advisors described a feeling of uneasiness and lack of surety in specifically how they would affect GSA activities if enacted as law. These concerns were described as inhibiting GSA activities due to an increased caution in planning activities that may be questioned under the proposed bills should they pass. As Participant 2 described,

We have a lot of a lot of laws in the works right now that are very much for parental rights. And so, what the parents want to happen is what they are going to cave in and let happen. I mean, to the point where they’re talking about if a parent even complains about

something being mentioned about the LGBTQ community, they are allowed to file a lawsuit with no proof.

Finally, the code *COVID-19 impact* was utilized in the interviews of four participants and was used to label the difficulties described by advisors operating and establishing clubs during COVID-19 related interruptions to instruction and school activities. These issues often distilled down to a complete interruption of club meetings when school was held in an all-virtual format or to staff difficulties hosting hybrid meetings and managing students who were both online and in the room while having productive meetings or events. In addition to these concerns, Participant 10 described his own difficulties communicating club activities without the benefit of seeing students and staff in-person in line with more traditional methods of communication,

You know, COVID, it was a huge problem that basically ground us to a halt.

And yet, it was what it was. I mean, it wasn't like we could really do anything about it. I couldn't even reach out to people effectively. Like, you know, normally you would put flyers around the school or whatever. We couldn't even really do that because the kids weren't in school. Especially the high school level, even when we opened up to hybrid, most of them were staying home...

Theme 5: Impact

The fifth theme identified among the data was labeled Impact. This theme comprised two codes with no subthemes and described the belief about the positive outcomes, either potential or actual, as a motivating and facilitative factor related to implementation and adoption of GSAs

within schools. These effects of implementation as they applied to students within their school were described by advisors as the reason and motivation for persisting through difficult periods or in the face of negativity. Codes and data extracts for this theme can be found in Table 12 in Appendix D.

In this theme, the first code of *increased positive student outcomes* was identified in the interviews of three participants. These outcomes were most described in broad language, with advisors noting students' excitement and happiness at having a GSA. Participant 2 described seeing her students at meetings as the reason she has ensured that the club as continued at her school:

You know, I really just think it's the kid's willingness to be as open as they are. That has kept it going. That's—that's really what it is, the fact that they want this. They want to have a space where they can come together and just be as honest as possible, just be the queer weirdos that they are. They're all middle schoolers, so they're all crazy, and some of them are just—they're just wacky, and it's fun for me because it's such a great energy to be around, especially at the end of the week. So, I really think that that's what's keeping it going. I think that's very cool.

When asked to describe what factors made her work against administrative pushback easier, Participant 4 responded:

How happy they are to be there... How they most of them say it's the best part of their

week or the only good part about their week. It's sad but like it makes it worth it, it makes all the—the, you know, crap we've gone through, it makes it more worth it.

Recent suicide of a student was a code identified as an additional code contributing to the theme of Impact. This code was identified among the interviews of two participants and was described by participants as an unfortunate motivation for establishing GSAs within their schools. It was the belief of the advisors, according to their report, that having the right supports could prevent future suicides of LGBTQ+ youth within their schools and that the urgency and emotionality associated with the loss of a student to suicide drew attention to the need for a club. Participant 7 described the death of an LGBTQ+ student in their school from suicide as the final event to push her towards establishing their school's club despite previous years spent believing their students may benefit from it:

We had a suicide. Okay, and the next year, we had a murder. So, when I was talking about the students—that's part of it, you know? When she committed suicide, I was like, 'I ain't playing anymore,' you know? The—this is it. It wasn't a wake up call. It was a push me out of the bed call. You know, I was already awake I just wasn't out of the bed.

Both advisors who discussed the suicide of a student described hesitancy and difficulty discussing the event as it related to GSA establishment and the apparent need for a club. One advisor candidly said during the interview that “[I] wasn't going to bring it up” but decided it was necessary to describe their school's context and the justification and need for a GSA within their school.

Theme 6: Emotions

The sixth theme, Emotions, described the affective factors that impacted advisors throughout their work with their GSA. These emotional and feelings-related codes encompassed participants' expressions of frustration, concern, anxiety, and other emotions related to their role, actions, and expectations. The theme was comprised of five codes which were divided into two subthemes, Fear of Backlash and Longstanding Emotions (see Table 13 in Appendix D for subthemes, codes, and data extracts).

Fear of Backlash

The first subtheme, Fear of Backlash included three codes: *advisor fear of termination or loss of job*, *student fear of non-safety for allyship*, and *fear of parent complaints to school about GSA*. Advisor fear of termination or loss of job was identified among the interviews of six participants and encompassed the concern, worry, and anxiety advisors felt related to job security and possible termination due to their alignment with their GSAs or advocacy to establish one within their school. Advisors frequently reported concern regarding termination when met with difficult situations or when faced with opposition from their supervisors and administration. Notably, Participant 1 described her experience of being fired from her previous district as impacting her desire to advise the GSA at her new school and as impacting the desire of other staff in taking over as the advisor when she was removed from her position:

But when I was packing my stuff up and leaving the teacher...said, 'I think you were fired because of the GSA.' And I said, 'What?' You know that that really hadn't crossed my mind... [Other staff] wisely read the situation, and there must have been enough reticence in the staff that none of them would do it the next year... So, when I came here,

I kept a close connection with the outreach people and the outreach director reached out to me that she had met a couple students from [school name] had told her that that they felt unsafe here... I said, 'Oh Lord.' You know I probably just lost my job because of that. So, I'm going to have to have a kid come to me and tell me they need me to be brave and make that fight. I can't just go at it.

Participant 10 described a similar experience in which previous termination of his employment at his previous school made him hesitant to establish a GSA at his new school, despite his recognition of the need:

I honestly feel that... being in charge of the club at the other school probably led to my being removed. You know, basically having to leave that school. Now, in fairness, it wasn't all that. I—my dad died in the same year ,and I had some other issues. So, it's a really, really rough year, the year I left that school, right? But my relationship with the administration started turning almost immediately when I [started the GSA]. So, I was pretty gun-shy... though I realized that it was something needed.

Advisor fears or concerns related to involvement were also encompassed by the *fear of parent complaints about the GSA* code which included advisor and administrative anxieties related to parent pushback, formal and informal complains, and conflict related to GSAs and GSA activities. This code was identified among the interviews of seven participants and described concerns regarding the potential for parent complaints rather than actual instances of complaint or pushback, which may or may not have occurred in their schools. This

apprehensiveness was described by advisors as affecting discussions of club activities and meetings as well as even the possibility of establishing a club within their school. Participant 4 described her experience with administration limiting GSA advertisement and recruitment by not allowing for public postings or for club meeting times to be sent out via email announcements:

I think they were concerned that parents would backlash. Parents will complain, and the parents in our district, they complain about something, and they get their way every time.

Participant 6 described feelings of anxiety related to parent complaints and feelings of inadequacy in potentially addressing them or responding to situations where parents may object to club activities or the GSA existence in general:

I do write down the stories of that, so that I kind of also remember and but as far as— yeah. I guess, it is taxing but it's more, like, anxiety provoking because you're like, 'Am I going to handle this, okay? Is it just me on the phone?'

The final code among the Fear of Backlash subtheme, *student fear of non-safety for allyship* was coded in three advisors' interviews. This code encompassed student reports of or advisor prediction of student fears regarding bullying, harassment, or victimization. These fears may have included concerns related to physical or emotional harm caused by students related to their allyship with the LGBTQ+ community, belonging to the GSA, or for their own identities.

Participant 2 described the actions of other students that increased student fear regarding allyship and joining GSA in this way:

But [club affiliation] also makes them easy targets, and, so, they get cat-called in the hallway or they get poked or they...get barked at or things like that. Food thrown at them.

Participants described students' fear of retaliation or negative consequences related to club involvement as a barrier to student participation and involvement, often reporting that this fear made students less likely to join the GSA or attend formal events. All advisors who described student fears recognized those fears as realistic and a legitimate concern within their setting. Notably, all three participants described their own fears related to students potentially being targeted or subjected to harassment based on identity and club affiliation when mentioning student fears.

Longstanding Emotions

The second subtheme, Longstanding Emotions, encompassed advisor's feelings-based and affective factors that persisted over long periods of time and were not related to fear of backlash for club affiliation. This subtheme was identified by the graduate student researcher as including two codes, *advisor and student resiliency* and *emotional weight student concerns*. *Advisor and student resiliency* was used to code instances of individual's' persistence and feelings of need to continue the work they were pursuing in the face of setbacks. Advisors described a need for continued action and a feeling of toughness, stubbornness, or persistence that was present in either themselves, other staff, or their students and consistently reported this

as a facilitative factor in their work. Participant 1 described a student's work alongside her for nearly an entire school year, noting that the student had a history of giving up easily and not pressing towards goals when met with frustration:

He was persistent, and he was beautiful, and I just—my pride knows no bounds at how he handled this because he was persistent.

Participant 10 described an experience of frustration and anger as a facilitative factor when met with resistance to implementation:

I was on the school improvement thing at a time, and that was the one thing I would harp on it every single meeting. I printed out our law here that says that sexual orientation is part of the anti-bullying. 'You've got all this going on. You've got a kid who left because of this. You've got another kid who's left. We need to do something about this, and we need to find out what the problem is.' And then it took me four months...Four months. I got to the point where I know I probably wasn't pleasant, and they did not want to hear me speak at the meeting anymore because I was consistently bringing that up.

The final code in the Longstanding Emotions subtheme, *emotional weight of student concerns*, as identified among the interviews of two participants. This code was used to identify instances in which participants expressed nervousness, sadness, and other difficult emotions toward responding to student concerns in their role as club advisor. These emotions and concerns were described by participants as being separate from and more intensive or different from

concerns would bring to them in their day-to-day role as teachers and school psychologists and were a barrier across both reports to supporting students and facilitating club activities.

Participant 9 described her own experience of emotional frustration and difficulty in advocating for students as weighing on her in situations where her emotions led to cursing or crying when discussing student needs with administration:

I didn't necessarily respond as eloquently as, as I would like to... I apologized for my tongue, crying, and all of that.

In addition, she expressed a difficulty in knowing how to respond directly to students' concerns and anxiety or concern related to having the appropriate response:

So, I don't mind being a different point of view, but, yeah, there are definitely times when they share something, and I think, 'Oh. I'm going to handle this the way I'm going to handle it, but I don't know if that's always what they need...'

As seen above, advisors reported worrying over correctly supporting students when faced with serious concerns or when confided in by students about events or experiences they may have. In one interview, an advisor expressed that her role wasn't to be a counselor, but that she felt she had taken on the responsibility by virtue of her role as the GSA advisor.

Theme 7: Social Factors

The final theme, Social Factors, described the larger interpersonal and ecological factors reported by advisors to either support or hinder their efforts in establishing and sustaining GSAs within their schools. These Social Factors were identified to have two distinct subthemes, Social Support and Social Pressures, as well as four additional codes that did not fit within a subtheme (see Table 14, Table 15, and Table 16 in Appendix D).

Social Support

The first subtheme, Social Support, included eight codes: *staff support of events*, *administrative recognition of importance*, *staff recognition of importance*, *parent affirmation of importance*, *staff sharing of emotional burden*, *staff wearing visible signs of support*, *staff referrals of club to students*, and *online communities of GSA advisors*. Each code within this theme was identified as a facilitative factor and supportive variable across interviews.

Staff support of events was coded among the interviews of seven participants and described the attendance of administration and school staff at club-sponsored events, activities, and meetings. Advisors reported this support as being valuable in multiple ways including in providing examples of other affirming and supportive adults to students, reducing the burden of planning and organizing events, and in helping manage the environment and students during activities. Advisors also expressed that simple attendance at events increased positivity and mood among students and lent emotional support to the event and club activities. For example, Participant 1 described a fellow teacher who helped her identify a guest speaker for her GSA:

And the teacher—the little spitfire old lady next door— ...she’s one that recommended my speaker because he was a graduate from that school who was a successful

businessman, and he was gay, and she thought he would be a great speaker, and, so, he came and, like, shared his experiences with us, and she connected me with him...

Administrative recognition of importance of GSAs was coded in five interviews and was used to identify instances of verbal affirmation and support from administration as described by participants. A similar code, *staff recognition of importance*, was coded in three interviews and included instances of verbal affirmation from other school staff. Finally, the code *parent recognition of importance* was identified in the interview of one participant. Advisors reported that positive affirmation and reassurance of the importance of GSAs was uplifting and contributed meaningfully to motivation for continued work, regardless of the source of this recognition. Participant 3 noted that support from school staff promoted resiliency and motivation in her own work:

Having these two counselors come to me and be like, 'You're the one to do this.' Like, 'This needs to be done' and 'You're doing a good thing' is honestly what keeps me doing it, right? It would be so easy to just be like, 'Oh, whatever. Like, I want to go home at the end of the day.'

Participant 5 described her administrator's acknowledgement of the role of a GSA in her school after years of not having a club as an important component in the early stages of re-establishing a GSA at her school:

I went to the principal, and he said that he's been there for six years. There was a GSA

club prior to him, but in the six years that he has been there, there has not been one since the person retired. And so, I, like, asked, and he goes, 'No, I think there's a place for it.' I definitely know that he also was surprised that there wasn't one.

Staff sharing of emotional burdens was coded as a facilitative factor in the interviews of two participants. This code identified instances in which advisors described gaining support from other staff in addressing student concerns, difficult emotional situations, or in responding to crises within their role as GSA advisor. Participant 8 described the support of her school counselor as being vital to her ability and confidence in responding appropriately to serious student concerns:

So, the guidance counselor and I established a rapport early on, where, you know, if I needed to make a CPS call, I could go to her, and she could, you know, be in there with me when I make it or whatever. Just to kind of help me be comfortable with that sort of thing. It was all new to me.

The code *online communities of GSA advisors* was identified among four interviews and was described as a facilitative factor in both the adoption and installation phases of implementation. Advisors reported that online groups held via the social media platform Facebook allowed for space to ask questions, express frustrations and emotions relate to negative pushback, and in sharing ideas. Support often was described as occurring when advisors asked their own specific questions through posts within the group and received responses from other advisors in the group. Participant 10 reported asking for club name suggestions when receiving

pushback from administration becoming an opportunity learning from other advisors about the rationale for avoiding the commonly used Gay-Straight Alliance name for his school's club due to the trans-exclusionary label:

The only reason I found out about that is when I went to an advisory group on Facebook and said, look, 'We can't use the Gay Straight Alliance.' And I said, 'I know we could fight it, but we're not going to. We need to figure out a name.' And that's what people said, 'Well, we don't use that anymore anyway,' and blah, blah, blah... They gave me a whole bunch of different possibilities which I brought back.

Staff displaying visible signs of support was coded among the interviews of two participants and described occurrences of school staff using visual components of allyship such as stickers, pins, signs, and flyers. These supports were often described as work as allies and support of LBGTQ+ youth in a broader sense and did not always relate to support of GSA activities or events specifically. Participant 6 noted several types of visual supports displayed by teachers in her school:

Other teachers were supportive by putting up safe space stickers once they find out what they are. I had some pins made that say 'Ask me about my pronouns' so that we could get the conversation going, instead of just seeing a pronoun. A lot of teachers put those on their name tags and like visible every day.

Advisors identified the support of school staff in the form of *staff referrals of club to students*, which was coded in three interviews. This method of support for the GSA was recognized by participants as helping to recruit students to the club and to gain participation in club activities and events from students who may not have otherwise become involved. Advisors consistently reported this support as a facilitative factor. As Participant 3 described, these referrals often allowed advisors to reach students they did not have in class and to make the club known to them:

Teachers are reaching out to me about, like, ‘Hey, if you have time, could you like swing by during homeroom and meet this kid? You know, they really want to come, but they’re feeling a little nervous.’ Um, you know, and teachers walking their kids down at the end of the day...

Social Pressures

The second subtheme, Social Pressures, was used to categorize codes that encompassed interpersonal relationships and social interactions between advisors and others that hindered their ability to work with their GSAs. This subtheme was comprised of five codes, all of which that were identified by advisors as barriers to implementation.

The first code, *conservative and religious local community*, included instances in which local community members or organizations created a negative environment for the GSA, LGBTQ+ youth, or their allies due to religious objections or conservative political viewpoints. This code was identified among the interviews of nine participants and was intrinsically related to the geographic location of the school and advisor’s place of work. Participant 3 described her

location as telling “everything you need” about the relationship the GSA had with the community beyond the school:

Well, so, we’re in Florida, and, in general, and that should tell you everything you need. The attitude towards the LGBTQ community is not positive...and its very small-town. Very conservative, very southern, where we are. So, just the kinda general feeling in the area around us is not positive.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Participant 3 in describing her local community in which she described it being expected that there would be complaints from most people due to the geographic location in which her school was located:

You know, if the vice principal makes announcement at lunch like, ‘Oh, Spectrum—the Gay-Straight Alliance is cancelled for today,’ inevitably, someone somewhere is going to start making homophobic remarks on it, and the community I work in is pretty blue collar.

More broadly, the code *political climate of the country* referred to instances in which advisors described the broader socio-political climate of the United States as being a notable barrier in their work with their GSAs. This barrier was coded in two interviews and notably described instances in which “debate culture” and tendency toward normalization of taking sides in the current political climate made it difficult to bridge gaps and build support for GSAs and

students. Participant 6 expressed her frustration with the barrier in this way when reporting on political and media discussions on LGBTQ+ youth in schools and the impact it had on her work:

I feel like people are just taking sides on everything right now... It just makes me sad. I don't—I don't get that. I just—they're so not educated in it, and I don't know how to fix it.

Participant 7 expressed a similar challenge with the normalization of doxing and attacks on school boards, educators, and public debates:

There are people who are doxing the equity office staff members. It's—it's ugly. You know, the whole CRT/anti-CRT movement... in full force. We are the capital city county. So, we were getting hit hard.

The code *administrative foot-dragging or passive-aggressive resistance* was identified as a barrier described in the interviews of six participants. The code was used to identify instances of administrator action that slowed or limited implementation and effectiveness of GSAs. To be coded, an event or description of action must have included advisor's belief that it was intentional on the part of administration to slow work or stop the GSA altogether. These acts were reported as often occurring without notifying advisors or in offering seemingly arbitrary (per advisor report) or newly created decisions or rules. Advisors frequently expressed frustration related to these acts, seeing them as intentional blockages to the GSA without the

direct denial of a club. As Participant 1 described when recounting her administration intentionally slowing club advertisement via announcements without directly speaking to her:

I sent it in to be read, and it wasn't read on the first day... So, then I reached out to the teacher who was in charge of it, and he said, 'I'll make sure it's read tomorrow. I'm sorry about that it.' It wasn't read the next day. So, I reached out to him again... He said, '[Administration] just told me I'm not allowed to. They didn't want it being read that much.' So that was already kind of showing, I think, that they were doing passive aggressive resistance.

Participant 4 described an experience in which her administration mandated her attendance at professional development related to LGBTQ+ issues in order to advise and establish a GSA at her school. In her interview, she reported her administration would not let the club begin meeting until the training was completed and that administration claimed that all club advisors went through similar extra training based upon their clubs, which the participant did not believe. When asked why she thought administration made this requirement, Participant 3 expressed her belief that administration was intentionally making starting the GSA more difficult than starting other clubs would be, though the legal right to the club was there. She said,

I know that the board knew they couldn't say no to our club legally. So, I knew that they knew. So, I think they were trying to make us jump through some extra hoop, hoping that we would give up... It was a lot of extra work.

Another code, *staff actions against the GSA/LGBTQ+ youth*, was coded among five participants' interviews. This code was used to mark instances in which negative interactions of school staff with the advisor, LGBTQ+ students, or the GSA as a whole created a barrier to implementation. Participant 4 described specific instances in her building where staff would look in on GSA meetings and make complains about student noise levels that they did not otherwise make for other student clubs:

We have a little bit of teacher backlash where, you know, we'll have a teacher come by and just kind of look at the kids and we're like, 'Why are you here? You're kind of making us uncomfortable. You can leave now.' Or, like, complaining about us like, 'Oh, all they do is run around and scream.' ... Most of our clubs are loud, I mean my board game club is just as loud!

Participant 1 described staff complaints regarding school policy championed by the GSA to use preferred names as a barrier to supporting students within her building despite support from her principal:

The good character referrals were read over the morning announcements. A teacher in our building, instead of approaching that assistant principal, wrote a letter to the superintendent of our school saying you know, 'We have to use a child's legal name. How dare they do that? Blah blah blah blah blah.' And, and gave a lot of pushback...

The final code contributing to the Social Pressures subtheme was *attempts to make the club less offensive or more palatable* and was coded in six interviews. This code was used to identify instances in which administration, staff, or community members did not oppose the club entirely, but sought ways to limit club activities, actions, or processes to make them more tolerable. Often, advisors reported this pressure came most frequently from administration and stated that administrators were often in favor of the club in general, but expressed the need to “tone down” the club so as to not offend or anger others. Participant 9 described this as a limiting factor in holding one of her club’s main events, Day of Silence:

When it comes time to involve the rest of the school in events there’s a lot of, ‘Hold on. ‘Let me think about that.’ Or ‘Okay, I see you’ve got all these ideas, but let’s tone it down. Let’s bring it back a little bit.’ I just had a meeting this week with district administration trying to plan Day of Silence, and it turns out, we can’t actually be silent on Day of Silence. They won’t support that. They’re happy to say that it’s a thing, and we can wear rainbows, but to actually let the kids be silent all day for an entire school day is not something they’re willing to do quite yet.

Notably, Participant 5 described her own hesitancy and limiting of club activities out of fear of “pushing” a young club too quickly and losing support or acceptability that the club currently had. Her own actions, she reported, limited advocacy and educational work the club had been designed to do:

[I'm] hesitant to... I mean, the big white elephant is right now we're very polarized as a country. Yeah, there seems to be a lot of potential triggers to people and, ah, it being a very new club, I'm hesitant to sort of push boundaries in getting information out there, whether it's educating the community or presenting things...

Other Codes

The remaining four codes that make up the Social Factors theme were: *student leadership*, *student conflict or infighting*, *student's not being "out" to parents*, and *denial of need for club by school personnel*. The first code, *student leadership*, was identified by advisors as a facilitative factor in instances where students were able to take on responsibilities related to events, club activities, and meetings but as a barrier to implementation in situations where students did not have the necessary maturity. *Student leadership* was coded among the interviews of three participants, with only one describing student leadership as facilitative to club activities. Participant 1 described pride in her student's resiliency and seeing him take the first steps to discuss the club with administration:

I guided him. I helped him write emails. I helped him, you know? I would tell him to write it, and then I would help him fix it. I guided him, but I encouraged him to be the one to reach out and say he wanted to start this club and so—and fully expecting, to be honest with you, that he dropped the ball, because that had been my previous experience with him every single time... My pride knows no bounds at how he handled this because he was persistent. So, he sent the initial email.

Contrarily, Participant 5 described difficulty in adhering to Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) suggestions for implementation without strong student leadership for the club. Without student leadership, she reported difficulty following the expected model for GSAs and confusion regarding how to format club activities:

So, it's been a challenging piece because you look online, like, GLSEN or whatever, that website there. And it's very much—they sort of presented it as student-run, and that you'll have this person as a leader, and you're just basically that liaison between a group and the administrators, and my students are not there at all.

Student conflict and in-fighting was coded in two interviews and was identified as a barrier to successful implementation after clubs were already established in schools. This code was used to label instances in which student disagreements, fighting, or interpersonal difficulties impacted club activities. Particularly, advisors noted that student conflicts often limited attendance and led to students avoiding the GSA activities to avoid other students. Participant 7 described racialized conflict among students as limiting attendance at their school:

The race issue definitely has been an issue, and by that, there's multiple things. The founder was white and his brother was a member of a white nationalist gang so...there was some tension with that... There was, you know, the broader context of him, and when you have a predominantly Black and Hispanic school, they weren't reaching the majority of the kids because their friends were mostly white.

Participant 5 described student fighting among friends as a similar barrier in which not only students in conflict are not attending activities, but their friends and supports are also missing events for taking sides on the conflict:

Unfortunately, I have two students that were best friends, and they had gotten into a fight. And so now, you know, the one feels like they need to give up the group and, potentially, their coworkers or friends that are sticking with them...

Students not being out to their parents was coded across four interviews and was only identified as a barrier to club activities. Advisors reported that this barrier limited student participation in GSAs, often in situations where students were unable to or did not attempt to obtain permission to attend club meetings from parents. In fact, Participant 8 reported that students often lied about which clubs they attended after school in order to avoid negative interactions or pressure from their parents or guardians to leave the club:

I also have a lot of students who aren't honest with their parents about what club they are staying after with. That makes me then scared for, like... If I allow them to stay in this club, knowing that their parents think that they're in, like, robotics club or things, that they're staying after for 'Games, Snacks, and Activity,' as some of them tell their parents, the club is called.

Participant 4 described students not being honest and "out" to their parents regarding their identities as bringing conflict and difficulty to club activities and meetings. She described

instances in which students would forge parent or guardian signatures on club permission forms and the subsequent pressure and pushback against the club that came as a result when the forging was discovered:

We can usually ‘pretend we didn’t notice.’ We have had a parent come in, like, ‘Does this look like my handwriting?’ and yell at the office and we’re like, ‘We don’t know what your handwriting looks like, sir. I’m sorry, but I have never seen your handwriting before. So, how am I supposed to know that that’s not your signature?’

The final code, *denial of need for club by school personnel*, was coded in the interviews of three participants and described barriers in which school staff either did not believe in the need for a GSA or did not believe a GSA would be appropriate for their students. These instances did not include negative action, language, or pushback like codes within the Social Pressures, but rather described a neutral case in which staff determined such supports were not necessary or applicable. Participant 1 described a conversation with her school guidance counselor:

And my guidance counselor—this is crazy—but he looked at me and he goes, ‘Well, you know, I don’t think we have any gay students here.’ My God, we had, like, 500 and some students. Statistically that’s impossible, yeah?

Participant 6 experienced similar questioning from parents, denying that students could understand their identity in middle school:

I just remembered the biggest one that I got was basically a mom just being like, ‘Oh my gosh. Twelve years old, and you really think that they can identify already?’

Summary of Themes

Overall, thematic analysis identified a total of forty-two codes organized into seven major themes which described barriers and facilitative factors to GSA adoption and installation within schools: Knowledge, Skills, Impact, Environmental Factors, Advisor Identity, Emotions, and Social Factors. Themes and subthemes included a mix of both facilitative factors and barriers and individual codes were frequently described as both barriers and facilitative factors by advisors, leading to further interpretation based on theory rather than practical lines of facilitators and barriers.

Chapter 4

Discussion

Results of the current study add to limited research surrounding implementation and the reality of GSAs within schools. The purpose of the study was to examine the reported barriers and facilitative factors related to adoption and installation of school clubs for gender and sexual minority youth. While GSAs have been examined in the literature as a valuable practice in supporting LGBTQ+ youth, current rates of implementation across the United States are low and vary by region (Fetner et al., 2015; Kosciw et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2021; Merrell et al., 2008). Thematic analysis was used to analyze semi-structured interviews of 10 GSA advisors to examine the reported barriers and facilitative factors related to adoption and installation of school clubs for gender and sexual minority youth (Braun et al., 2006). Due to the exploratory nature of the study, no hypotheses were made prior to qualitative analysis.

Results of analysis indicated that factors influencing the implementation of GSAs split into seven distinct themes as informed by the Theoretical Domain Framework (Cane et al., 2012): Knowledge (knowledge of literature and resources, knowledge of legal knowledge, and knowledge held by others), Skills (previous experience and professional development), Impact (positive student outcomes and recent suicide), Advisor Identity (lived experience and lack of lived experience), Environmental Factors (resources and materials, organizational climate, and salient events), Emotions (fear of backlash and longstanding emotions), and Social Factors (social supports and social pressures).. A comparison and mapping of themes from the results and TDF can be seen in Table 3. The TDF is a theory-based and expert-validated tool utilized in behavior change and supporting implementation of practices across healthcare, education, and public service fields (Cane et al., 2012; Francis et al., 2012). The TDF has been utilized in

empirical research to inform research on behavior-change factors and to provide a framework for understanding the complex array of influences on implementation of practices and behavior change (Francis et al., 2012). Created to address the often atheoretical approach to intervention selection within behavior change research across domains, TDF consolidates a wide array of similar psychological and implementation science constructs and provides consistent labels of domains and their constructs in an attempt to eliminate barriers in choosing one theoretical perspective among many similar but differently-named theories (Cane et al., 2012; Michie et al., 2005). Mapping of the current study results onto this framework provides increased utility to results in informing practice and application to implementation of GSAs within schools and provides a theoretical understanding of study results without the ability to practically and simply describe factors as barriers and facilitative factors.

Results of the current study provide an updated perspective on the only previously known work to examine barriers to GSA implementation within schools (Watson et al., 2010). Previous work by Watson and colleagues (2010) identified three primary themes that affected the ability of advisors to advocate for their students: sociocultural factors, school-based factors, and individual factors. These broad themes examined labeled facilitative factors and barriers in relation to their distance or proximity to advisors rather than among common broad themes of types of sources of barriers. Results of the current study supported previous findings in that various access to knowledge and resources, social supports and pressures across parents/administrators/staff, political policies and legislation, and within-advisor factors were identified among advisors as common factors influencing their abilities to support students. These similarities indicate that, over ten years from the publication of the first study, similar barriers to implementation exist as they related to supports for LBGTQ+ youth. However,

organization of current results and their application of the Theoretical Domain Framework expand this work and provide more direct implications for current intervention and implementation work within the current realities of education (Cane et al., 2012).

Limitations

The current study expands the current literature related to GSA implementation in schools in examining reported barriers and facilitative factors related to adoption and installation of GSAs through qualitative analysis of advisor interviews. To date, only one study has sought to examine these factors as they related specifically to GSA implementation and school-based supports for LGBTQ+ youth and limited generalizations can be made from the available data (Watson et al., 2010). Results provide an updated examination of advisors' experiences and barriers related to practice within the sociopolitical context of the decade following increasing acceptance within the United States for LGBTQ+ individuals (Flores, 2021).

However, the current study is not without limitations. Firstly, though care was taken to obtain a sample of participants representative geographically of advisors across the United States, no participants were recruited from the West region. Current findings may not be representative of cultural or regional differences across the country. Additionally, recruitment from online Facebook groups for advisors may have impacted participant's report of online communities as a facilitative factor to their work, as all participants were members within at least one of these groups and participated frequently enough to read the advertisement post. It is possible that this facilitative factor would not be coded in the experiences and reports of a broader range of participants recruited in a different manner. Additionally, timing of the interviews may have influenced the reporting of COVID-19 and hybrid or distance learning as a barrier by participants. As interviews were conducted in the spring of 2022, school closures and

hybrid learning during the COVID-19 pandemic were still in place within the academic year for many schools at the time of data collection. It is possible that this code would not have been identified among the interviews of participants in interviews conducted at a later date or prior to the pandemic. Finally, as mentioned previously as a methodological limitation, while initial coding of the data set in thematic analysis was completed without reference to theory, it is impossible to completely remove theoretical biases or perspective of the coder.

Future Directions

The current study does much to inform practice in schools and provides context to the complex world of implementation of evidence-based practices in schools. Particularly, results indicate not only barriers to adoption of GSAs as a practice, but also installation barriers in which an existing GSA may be limited in its scope or impact to students. As highlighted in the interviews of participants, additional factors in the lives of students beyond LGBTQ+ identity influenced their ability to access GSA activities. In particular, students experiencing racial discrimination or socioeconomic disadvantage were reported by participants to have barriers to participation. Current literature indicates some positive impacts of GSAs for all students, whether or not they attend club, though a greater increase in school belongingness is associated with higher rates of GSA participation (Baams et al., 2020; Troung & Zongrone, 2021). In this, simple adoption and installation of GSAs in school may not be adequate in supporting LGBTQ+ youth who experience additional disadvantages based upon aspects of their identity and lived experiences. An intersectional approach and broader understanding of the unique and individual context in which access supports should be used in further research to examine the complex role of identity and access to GSAs as it relates to positive outcomes for students (Crenshaw, 1989). Notably, all participants self-identified as being white or Caucasian. Future research may seek to

examine the experiences of advisors who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color and the potentially differing barriers or facilitators to implementation within their schools compared to their white counterparts.

Future research should additionally examine key components of implementation including types of GSA activities, frequency of meetings, and rates of student participation to determine their relationship to student outcomes and optimize implementation for the most beneficial effects. This work should be done in tandem with identifying context-specific barriers and supports to inform an overall implementation model and practice model for GSAs that is more readily applicable than current expectations and guidelines set forth by national level organizations, which were described by some participants as being limited in their application to real-life context. All in all, future research should seek to identify evidence-based ways to address the barriers identified in the study and to leverage supportive factors within the seven themes to ensure successful adoption and installation of GSAs in schools. In this, a complex path in the literature exists to successful implementation of GSAs and their maximization as a school-based support for youth. It is not enough to simply identify beneficial practices in schools, but work must be done to identify gaps within implementation that limit the effectiveness of research-based practices (Durlak et al., 2008; Webster-Stratton et al., 2011). However difficult the work, continued expansion of the literature will inform practice within schools and provide meaningful support to gender and sexual minority youth within schools.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Posts for Social Media

Hello! My name is Maxwell Keller, and I am a doctoral candidate at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Under the supervision of my advisor, Dr. Kevin Filter, I am conducting research to better understand the experiences of advisors of Gay-Straight Alliance, Gender-Sexuality Alliance, and similar extra-curricular student organizations for gender and sexual minority youth. As part of the study, participants will first submit a short 5-minute online contact and consent form. Once the contact form is completed, participants will be contacted via email to schedule a 60-minute interview. Questions in the interview portion of this study will be related to participants' experiences in establishing or sustaining one of these student organizations. Completion of the interview portion will be compensated via \$40 Visa gift card. If you have any questions about the project, please feel free to contact me via email at maxwell.keller@mnsu.edu.

Link to Online Consent and Contact Information Form

https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3QQSi8xCXqqz3x4

Appendix B

Consent and Screening Information Form

Start of Block: Consent Form

Description of the study:

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Maxwell Keller, supervised by Dr. Kevin Filter in the Department of Psychology at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of advisors of Gay-Straight Alliance, Gender-Sexuality Alliance, and similar extra-curricular student organizations for gender and sexual minority youth. Questions in the interview portion of this study will be related to your experiences in establishing or sustaining one of these student organizations and factors influencing your experience. If you have any questions about the research, please contact Maxwell Keller at maxwell.keller@mnsu.edu. You have a right to a copy of this consent form. You will be [provided an electronic](#) copy prior to beginning the research interview. If you would like a paper version, please contact the researchers.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online interview (estimated time: 60 minutes) at a time of your choosing via Zoom, an online videoconferencing platform. In the interview, the researcher will ask you to reflect on your experience as an advisor in either establishing or sustaining a GSA or similar organization within your school(s). With your permission, the researcher will audio record your conversation. After the interview, the researcher will type a transcription of what was recorded and remove any mention of names. The sound recording will then be destroyed, immediately following.

Can I stop being in the study?

Participation in this research study is voluntary. The decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board, at (507) 389-1242.

You can decide to stop at any time. To withdraw from the study, simply inform the researcher of your desire to withdraw during the interview, or after the interview at the email address listed above. Please note that because the researcher does not collect any identifying information from you, there is no way to withdraw from the research once the interview recording has been transcribed and deleted.

Will I be compensated for taking part in this study?

Compensation will be provided to participants in the form of a \$20 Visa electronic gift card upon completion of the interview portion of the study. Gift cards will be emailed by the graduate student researcher to the provided contact email in the form below. Funding for the study is provided by South Central Minnesota Pride through the 2021 South Central Minnesota Pride Scholarship.

What risks can I expect from being in the study?

The anticipated risks for participating in this research are minimal but may include some emotional discomfort for reflecting on personal experiences. These risks are anticipated to be no greater than what you would be exposed to in your everyday life.

Are there benefits to me or others by taking part in the study?

Participation in the study will provide you with an opportunity to share your experiences about the establishment of school-based GSAs and similar student organizations. These experiences may also help in the establishment and sustainment of future GSAs within schools.

Will information about me be kept private?

We will do our best to make sure that the personal information gathered for this study is kept private. However, we cannot guarantee total privacy. If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used. Instead, a pseudonym will be assigned to you at the time of your interview and used in any reference to you in presentations or publications. Any identifying information will be removed from the data.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

Taking part in this study is your choice. You may choose either to take part or not to take part in the study. If you decide to take part in this study, you may leave the study at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits.

Who I contact if I have questions about the study?

If you have any questions regarding the study, you are encouraged to contact Maxwell Keller by email (maxwell.keller@mnsu.edu). If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board at (507) 389-1242.

Consent to Participate in the Research Study

Participation in research is voluntary. You have the right to decline to be in this study or to withdraw from it at any point without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise

entitled. Withdrawal from the study prior to the interview portion will result in forfeit of gift card compensation.

Selecting the “Yes, I consent to participate” option below signifies your willingness to participate in this research study and confirms that you are at least 18 years of age.

Do you consent to participate?

- Yes, I consent to participate in this study. (1)
- No, I do not consent to participate in this study. (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you consent to participate? = No, I do not consent to participate in this study.

What is your current role in your school or district?

- General Education Teacher (1)
- Principal (2)
- Special Education Teacher (3)
- School Counselor (4)
- School Psychologist (5)
- School Social Worker (6)
- Other (please describe) (7) _____

Are you currently or have you been an advisor in the last five years to a Gay-Straight Alliance, Gender-Sexuality Alliance, or similar student organization for LGBTQ+ students?

- Yes (4)
- No (5)

Please specify your gender.

- Male (1)
 - Female (2)
 - Non-binary (3)
 - I identify in a way not listed here. (Please specify) (4)
-

- Prefer not to say (5)

Which of the following best describes you?

- Hispanic/Latinx (1)
- Non-Hispanic/Latinx (2)
- Prefer not to say (3)

Which of the following best describes you?

- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- Native American or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- Other (Please specify) (6) _____
- Prefer not to say (7)

What is your highest degree earned?

- ▼ High school diploma (1) ... Doctoral degree (7)

What state is your school or district located?

▼ Alabama (1) ... Wyoming (50)

What best defines the school or schools you work in?

- Elementary School (1)
- Middle School (2)
- High School (3)
- Combined Middle and High School (4)

Approximately how many students are in the school you work in? If you work in multiple schools, please total the approximate number of students across all schools.

The second phase of the study involves an audio-recorded interview with the graduate student researcher, Maxwell Keller. In order to schedule an interview time, please provide an email through which you can be contacted. This email will only be accessible to Maxwell Keller and Dr. Kevin Filter and will be used for distribution of the \$20 gift card upon completion of the interview portion of the study.

End of Block: Demographic Items

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Introduction Questions

1. Please remind me of your role within your school or district when you're not acting as a GSA advisor.
 - a. *Clarification [if they don't seem to understand the question]:* Are you a classroom teacher, school social worker, school psychologist, etc.?
 - b. *Probe:* Has this role changed within your career or your time at your current school or district?
2. When did you begin working at the school at which you were/are a GSA advisor?
 - a. *Probe:* Do you still work there?
3. At what point was the GSA established or started within your school or district?
 - a. *Probe:* Does your school call your GSA or student organization by another name?
 - b. *Probe (if GSA):* Can you tell me what the acronym "GSA" stands for in your school or district?
 - c. *Probe:* Is the GSA still in existence in your school? If not, was it ever officially established?
4. Talk me through your experience in becoming involved with your GSA? How did you become the advisor or staff leader of your school or district's GSA?
 - a. *Probe:* Was it something you nominated for or did you volunteer?
 - i. If you did volunteer, why? If you did not volunteer, why not?
5. Would you please describe some of the activities your student organization participates/participated in?

- a. *Probe*: How frequently do you meet as an organization?
- b. *Probe*: Do you host or throw any events?

Barriers and Things that Hurt Implementation and Sustainment

1. When thinking about your experience in either starting a GSA in your school or in working to support the existing GSA in your school, please describe experiences or factors that made your work more difficult.
 - a. *Probe (whenever barrier is identified)*: At what points was [barrier] impeding your work? Before the GSA was established, after, or both?
 - b. *Probe (whenever barrier is identified and only named; ex: “administration was a barrier” or “parents made it difficult”)*: Can you provide specific examples of how [barrier] made it more difficult?
 - c. *Probe*: Can you name any other barriers you have not already discussed?
2. Of the negative influences or barriers you’ve already identified, which do you feel had the most negative impact?
 - a. *Probe (if only names barrier but does not expand)*: In what ways were these experiences hindrances to your efforts?
3. Did you take any steps to overcome these negative factors or influences?
 - a. *Probe*: Which barrier did you attempt to overcome?
 - i. Were there other barriers you took steps to overcome?
 - b. *Probe [if “yes” but does not expand]*: Could you give an example of these steps?
 - c. *Probe*: Would you consider any of the steps you took to have been effective?
 - i. How do you know they were effective?

Facilitators and Things that Help Implementation and Sustainment

1. When thinking about your experience in either starting a GSA in your school or in working to support the existing GSA in your school, please describe experiences or factors that made your work easier.
 - a. *Probe (whenever facilitator is identified):* At what points was [facilitator] supporting your work? Before the GSA was established, after, or both?
 - b. *Probe (whenever facilitator is identified and only named; ex: “administration was a great support” or “my students motivated me”):* Can you provide specific examples of how this made it easier or motivated you to do the work?
 - c. *Probe:* Can you name any other supports or facilitators you have not already discussed?
2. Of the positive influences or supports you’ve already identified, which do you feel was the most important or had the largest impact?
 - a. *Probe (if only names facilitator but does not expand):* Why do you think that was so important to supporting your work compared to the others?
3. Are there other supports you wish you had?
 - a. *Probe (if names any additional supports of facilitators):* Why do you think this would have been beneficial to your work?

Closing Thoughts

6. Is there anything else you think is important to know about your school’s organization that you haven’t shared with me yet?
 - a. *Probe (if they say “yes” but don’t expand):* What would be helpful to know?
 - b. *Probe (if they answer with an example):* Is there anything else?

2. Is there anything else you think is important to know about your experience working with your school's organization that you haven't shared with me yet?
 - a. *Probe (if they say "yes" but don't expand):* What would be helpful to know?
 - b. *Probe (if they answer with an example):* Is there anything else?
3. Is there anything else you think is important to know about you that you haven't shared with me yet?
 - a. *Probe (if they say "yes" but don't expand):* What would be helpful to know?
 - b. *Probe (if they answer with an example):* Is there anything else?
4. What advice would you give to someone looking to establish a GSA or similar student organization in their school?

Appendix D

Table 6

Knowledge Subthemes and Codes

| Subtheme | Code | Number of Interviews Identified In | Example Extract |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|--|
| Knowledge Held by Others | | | |
| | Lack of Admin Knowledge on GSA/LGBTQ+ Issues | 4 | “None of our admin have—in theory—issues with gay people, LGBT people. They have lack of knowledge, okay? Our principal—who is gay—every time I say the word ‘deadnaming,’ I have to define it because he doesn't remember what it is, even though I keep complaining that teachers are doing it.” |
| Legal Knowledge | | | |
| | Legal Protections | 6 | "I was like, ‘fuck it. I'm just gonna hand in the paperwork,’ and if he wants to say no, he can come and say it to my face, and I’m going to have my little print out from, like, GLSEN about like federal mandates and discrimination, and all that.” |
| Knowledge of Literature and Resources | | | |
| | Citing Literature | 4 | “I have shared in a meeting whole school meeting about a study that I read recently... that talked about a GSA being in a building and the students—knowing that they have support in the building and all the things—that increases in student success, not only does it not only is it life or death in some cases. It also increases academic performance. It increases attendance. It increases the desire to go to college, and, you know, I feel like, if I could just get them to hear me...” |
| | National Organization Resources and Tools | 6 | "I went to high school and a very small town in Connecticut that was, again, very conservative, and there's kids one out. I mean, it just didn't happen...So for me it was super helpful to be able to go to that national organization and say, oh, this is, this is our setup. This is kind of a principle. These are the principles on which it's based and how it should be run and ideas. And so that, that made it a lot easier." |

Table 7*Skills Codes*

| Subtheme | Code | Number of Interviews Identified In | Example Extract |
|--------------------------|--|------------------------------------|---|
| Previous Experience | | | |
| | Previously Starting a GSA at Another School | 3 | "I was the school district went and moved my position from one school to another school and my original school, I was one of the co advisors of their GSA. ...So I came to this new school there wasn't a GSA and one of my co workers, who is a friend, had gay students and there were stuff going on and they he felt like we needed to have one...." |
| | Starting/Advising Another Club | 2 | "I think just in general, knowing how to establish a club. Do you know... I don't think it's as simple as people think it is. Like, you know, you do have to do planning, and you have to sort of have an idea of how to recruit people. And how do you maintain it? ...And so, you know, that doesn't necessarily have to be a GSA club thing. That's any club." |
| Professional Development | | | |
| | Staff Training/Professional Development on LGBTQ+ Issues | 2 | "One of the language arts teachers came into my room the next morning, and she goes, 'Hey do you have any more of those gender unicorn things that we got...yesterday? I said, 'Oh yeah. Here.' She goes all, 'These are so funny! I'm going to send one to my friend, because he's just gonna think it's funny' and I was kind of mad, but I gave it to her anyway, because I thought, you know, if she's sending it to somebody, maybe it'll educate them instead. Let's give it the benefit of the doubt..." |

Table 8*Impact Codes*

| Code | Number of Interviews Identified In | Example Extract |
|---|------------------------------------|--|
| Increased Positive Student Outcomes | 3 | <p>"You know, I really just think it's the kids willingness to be as open as they are. That has kept it going. That's-- that's really what it is. The fact that they want this they want to have a space where they can come together and just be a status as honestly as possible. Just be the queer weirdos that they are. They're all middle schoolers, so they're all crazy. And some of them are just they're just wacky and it's fun for me because it's such a great energy to be around, especially at the end of the week. So, I really think that that's what's keeping it going. I think that's very cool."</p> |
| Recent Suicide of LGBTQ+ Student to Highlight Necessity of Supports | 1 | <p>"We had a suicide. Okay, and the next year, we had a murder. So when I was talking about the students--that's part of it, you know? When she committed suicide, I was like, 'I ain't playing anymore,' you know? The--this is it. It wasn't a wake up call. It was a push me out of the bed call. You know, I was already awake I just wasn't out of the bed."</p> |

Table 9*Environmental Factors: Resources and Materials Code*

| Code | Number of Interviews Identified In | Example Extract |
|---|------------------------------------|--|
| Funding | 3 | “Because we don’t have a budget for our GSA and, while some of the parents have been great about offering to make things for us, or whatever it will be so great if we just had a couple hundred dollars to spend on--I don't know—t-shirts or art supplies, or whatever it is that the kids need, and so none of our clubs have budgets. That's not against GSA. That's just the way our school works...” |
| Student Transportation to and from Club | 2 | “Transportation is a huge problem. We are a title one school. It is high poverty. Very few of the kids have a way home...” |
| Spatial Accommodations | 2 | “We just started just recently kind of splitting the club into to, like if, today, you need to blow off steam you go to the gym and one of the sponsors is there. If, today, you want to work on a project, you know, make the school better place, and have conversations you go into this classroom that's right next to the gym...” |
| Official Co-Advisor | 6 | “I would say I had a co-teacher, a teacher in the school who was willing to join me in co-facilitating. So that's very nice because it's nice to have another body there. And it's also provides, if one of us can't be there, we can continue to have the meetings. We have a space.” |
| Lack of Time as Advisor | 3 | “So, we meet every other week...This being my first year teaching and I'm also planning my wedding right now, which is fine, but it's been really stressful in terms of, like, coordinating planning personal time with like school planning time. So, I have just kept it every other week for my own sanity.” |

Table 10*Environmental Factors: Organizational Climate Codes*

| Code | Number of Interviews Identified In | Example Extract |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| Staff and Administrative Turnover | 2 | “The implementation was just frustrating the hardest part for me was knowing that after I left it did it didn't get to go on.” |
| Lack of Affirming Professionals in Schools | 1 | “So, if Bobby has chronic depression, Bobby's not going to go visit the counselors on a regular basis to deal with it...I don't feel completely comfortable with all of our counselors. I remember when we had a different counselor as our Student Assistance Program (SAP) counselor the counselors would send all the gay kids to her...That's the counselor I was saying, who dead names...She's the new SAP counselor. That they're still doing that, to a degree.” |

Table 11*Environmental Factors: Novel and Critical Events Codes*

| Code | Number of Interviews Identified In | Example Extract |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| COVID-19 Impact | 4 | “You know, COVID, it was a huge problem that you have to basically ground us to a halt. And yet, it was what it was. I mean, it wasn't like we could really do anything about it. I couldn't even reach out to people effectively...” |
| Limiting State Legislation | 2 | “We have a lot of a lot of laws in the works right now that are very much for parental rights... I mean, to the point where they're talking about if a parent even complains about something being mentioned about the LGBTQ community, they are allowed to file a lawsuit with no proof.” |

Table 12*Advisor Identity Codes*

| Code | Number of Interviews Identified In | Example Extract |
|--|------------------------------------|---|
| Advisor Lived Experience as Part of the LGBTQ+ Community | 4 | <p>“There were a couple of people who I think just gave in to shut me up. And I finally I'd went personal with it. I said, 'Look out.' And I went through the history that I had in school and I said, 'Look, you know, I nearly committed suicide because my school was that bad. And I will not sit here as a teacher and have that happen. That-- when I can do something about it, I've got power here, and I'm going to use it.' And that did finally, when I wrote it, admittedly took me a long time before I was willing to open up to that. But that's when...even the hardest heart said, 'Okay, we're going to go and do this.’”</p> |
| Lack of Lived Experience for Cisgender-Heterosexual Advisors | 1 | <p>“You asked me all about myself. I'm a 49-year-old white woman who's straight. I don't know what's going on. I just know that I want to give these kids an opportunity to talk to each other and feel supported. And so, I guess, that's another barrier is...I don't know the life. I don't. I haven't experienced it. I don't know how to encourage them to open up a little bit more in that safe space and yet respect them.”</p> |

Table 13*Emotions Subthemes and Codes*

| Subtheme | Code | Number of Interviews Identified In | Example Extract |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---|
| Fear of Backlash | | | |
| | Advisor Fear of Termination/Loss of Job | 6 | “But when I was packing my stuff up and leaving the teacher...said, 'I think you were fired because of the GSA.' and I said, 'What?' You know, that that really hadn't crossed my mind...They wisely read the situation, and there must have been enough reticence in the staff that none of them would do it the next year. So, I feel like probably a lot of people thought that was it.” |
| | Student Fear of Non-Safety for Allyship | 3 | “But [club affiliation] also makes them easy targets. And so they get cat called in the hallway or they get poked or they...get barked at or things like that. Food thrown at them.” |
| | Fear of Parent Complains to School About GSAs | 7 | “I think they were concerned that parents would backlash parents will complain and the parents in our district they complain about something and they get their way every time.” |
| Longstanding Emotions | | | |
| | Student and Advisor Resiliency | 3 | “And like I said, [this student] was very into getting the clubs started. She was she was a sophomore, I guess, maybe a freshman, when this started and then finally to get it started, it took six months. And then she was able to be in it for basically two years and a little bit and then graduated...” |
| | Emotional Weight of Student Concerns | 2 | “I tell the kids that I'm like more like a mom than a social worker. Like, so--but maybe that different point of view is not a bad thing. Sometimes so many of them already see social workers or therapists or other outside people that they talk to you, and so I don't mind being a different point of view, but, yeah, there are definitely times when they share something and I think 'Oh. I'm going to handle this the way I'm going to handle it, but I don't know if that's always what they need...” |

Table 14*Social Influences: Social Support Codes*

| Code | Number of Interviews Identified In | Example Extract |
|---|------------------------------------|---|
| Staff Support of Events | 7 | “For one event, I had a bunch of just little like rainbow buttons that people pick. And I think I bought 50 of them, and I just said, 'Anybody that wants one stop by.' They were gone in hours, and I had to order another 50, and I probably could have given away even more we just ran out of time, and so that was just so heartwarming..” |
| Administrative Recognition of Importance | 5 | “I went to the principal, and he said that he's been there for six years. There was a GSA club prior to him, but in the six years that he has been there, there has not been one since the person retired. And so, I, like, asked, and he goes, 'No, I think there's a place for it.'” |
| Staff Recognition of Importance | 3 | “...Heart breaking stuff that these kids are dealing with and like. Having these two counselors come to me and be like, 'You're the one to do this.' Like, 'This needs to be done' and 'You're doing a good thing' is honestly what keeps me doing it.” |
| Parent Recognition of Importance | 1 | “I do have some really supportive parents that have contacted me. One even signed up to come to conferences, because they just wanted to meet who their child was hanging out with after school. So, I think we don't give the parents, maybe enough credit sometimes...” |
| Staff Sharing of Emotional Burden | 2 | “...The guidance counselor and I establish a rapport early on, where, you know, if I needed to make a CPS call, I could go to her and she could you know, be in there with me when I make it...” |
| Online Communities of GSA Advisors | 4 | “The only reason I found out about that is when I went to an advisory group on Facebook and said, look, 'We can't use the Gay Straight Alliance.' ... And that's what people said, 'Well, we don't use that anymore anyway,' and blah, blah, blah. And then we they gave me a whole bunch of different possibilities which I brought back.” |
| Staff Displaying Signs of Visible Support | 2 | “I had some pins made that say 'Ask me about my pronouns' so that we could get the conversation going, instead of just seeing a pronoun. A lot of teachers put those on their name tags and like visible every day.” |
| Staff Referrals of Club to Students | 3 | “There are others that are like, 'I have a kid who I think would be good, but you know, would really like to do this. Can I give him or her your email?' and that's, like, great!” |

Table 15*Social Influences: Social Pressure Codes*

| Code | Number of Interviews Identified In | Example Extract |
|--|--|---|
| Conservative/ Religious Local Community | 9 | “Well, so, we're in Florida, and by general, and that should tell you everything you need. The attitude towards the LGBTQ community is not positive...and it's very small town, very conservative, very southern, where we are. So, just the kinda general feeling in the area around us is not positive” |
| Political Climate of Country | 2 | “I feel like people are just taking sides on everything right now... It just makes me sad. I don't--I don't get that. I just--they're so not educated in it, and I don't know how to fix it.” |
| Administrative Foot-Dragging/ “Passive- Aggressive Resistance” | 6 | “I sent it in to be read, and it wasn't read on the first day... So, then I reached out to the teacher who was in charge of it, and he said, 'I'll make sure it's read tomorrow. I'm sorry about that it.' It wasn't read the next day. So, I reached out to him again... He said [administration] just told me I'm not allowed to. They didn't want it being read that much. So that was already kind of showing I think the they were doing passive aggressive resistance.” |
| School Staff Actions Against GSA/ LGBTQ+ Youth | 5 | “We have a little bit of teacher backlash where, you know, we'll have a teacher come by and just kind of look at the kids and we're like, 'Why are you here? You're kind of making us uncomfortable.’” |
| Attempts to Make the Club Less “Offensive”/ More Palatable | 6 | “When it comes time to involve the rest of the school in events there's a lot of 'Hold on. 'Let me think about that.' or 'Okay, I see you've got all these ideas but let's tone it down let's bring it back a little bit.' I just had a meeting this week with district administration trying to plan Day of Silence, and it turns out, we can't actually be silent on Day of Silence. They won't support that. They're happy to say that it's a thing, and we can wear rainbows but to actually let the kids be silent all day for an entire school day is not something they're willing to do quite yet.” |

Table 16*Social Factors: Other Codes*

| Code | Number of Interviews Identified In | Example Extract |
|--|--|--|
| Student Leadership | 3 | “So, it's been a challenging piece because you look online like GLSEN or whatever, that website there. And it's very much, they sort of presented it as student-run, and that you'll have this person as a leader, and you're just basically that liaison between a group and the administrators, and my students are not there at all.” |
| Student Conflict/In- Fighting | 2 | “The race issue definitely has been an issue, and by that there's multiple things. The founder was white and his brother was a member of a white nationalist gang so...there was some tension with that... There was, you know, the broader context of him, and when you have a predominantly Black and Hispanic school, they weren't reaching the majority of the kids because their friends were mostly white.” |
| Students Not Being “Out” to Parents | 4 | “I also have a lot of students who aren't honest with their parents about what club, they are staying after with. That makes me then scared for, like, my job in a legal, where like ,you know--can I get in trouble? If I allow them to stay in this club, knowing that their parents think that they're in like robotics club or things that they're staying after for 'Games, Snacks, and Activity,' as some of them tell their parents, the club is called.” |
| Denial of Need for Club by School Personnel | 3 | “And my guidance counselor--this is crazy,--but he looked at me and he goes, 'Well, you know, I don't think we have any gay students here.' My God, we had, like, 500 and some students. Statistically that's impossible, yeah?” |