YOUNG PEOPLES' EXPERIENCES IN EDUCATION AND LGBT+ YOUTH GROUPS: A CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

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1. ABSTRACT

There is a dearth of research exploring the experiences of young people (YP) in community youth group settings (Porta et al., 2017). In this study, five participants aged 14 to 18 were recruited from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) youth groups in the south of England. Intensive interviews were carried out and a constructivist grounded theory (CGT; Charmaz, 2014) analysis was conducted. Participants discussed experiences of being othered and excluded at school, which impacted their mental health and sense of belonging. There were several actions and inactions at a school level which indicated barriers to change and difference, which appeared to be driven by fear. Unmet learning and social needs in school partly influenced YPs' motivation to attend the LGBT+ youth groups. However, relational empowerment and containment were found in the youth groups and elsewhere, which empowered YP to advocate for themselves and engage in activism on individual and community levels. Despite the challenges faced, participants developed an increasing sense of fluidity and pride. The current findings, combined with the literature, indicate a significant need for greater reflection and training to address the potentially harmful rigidity in discourse and practice around gender and sexuality in the UK. The broader implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs), schools, and wider systems are considered.

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Finally to my partner Lily, thank you for your continual support throughout the writing of this thesis, for providing me with inspiration in times of doubt and ensuring that I had an outrageous amount of fun in the moments in between.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Nanny Miggs, who was born on 20th March 1931 and died on 16th April 2022, after a full life of love.

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GLOSSARY

Asexual (ACE): a person who does not usually feel sexual attraction towards other people (Dellenty, 2019).

Binary: a binary is something which is made up of two parts (Collins, 2022). A gender binary is a rigid assumption that there are only two genders: male/man, and female/woman, and may include certain assumptions about those two genders (e.g., that men are masculine; Keating, 2015).

Bisexual (Bi): a person who experiences emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards more than one gender. Bi people might also identify as pansexual (Dellenty, 2019).

Bullying / homophobia / biphobia / transphobia: Explicit expressions of prejudice or dislike towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or gender variant people, and also the silencing or ignoring of these people's identities or existence, either by individuals or institutions (Moffat, 2015).

Cisgender (cis): A person whose gender identity is the same as the sex which they were assigned at birth (Dellenty, 2019).

Dead name: this refers to a person's name assigned at birth after they have changed their name as part of their gender expression (Dellenty, 2019).

Gay: Homosexual, often used to describe men who have romantic, emotional or sexual attraction to other men but is also used to describe lesbian sexualities.

Gender-diverse: Individuals who have a current gender identity or expression which differs from the culturally-bound gender associated assigned at birth (Davidson, 2007).

Heteronormativity: The 'system which prescribes, enjoins, rewards and naturalises a particular kind of heterosexuality – monogamous, reproductive, and based on conventionally complimentary gender roles – as the norm on which social arrangements should be based' (Cameron, 2005).

Heterosexual: Romantic or sexual attraction or relations between people of the opposite sex and gender. The term 'straight' is sometimes used instead.

Lesbian: Typically used to describe a woman (but sometimes also a trans* or non-binary person) who is romantically and sexually attracted to other women.

LGBT+: People who have non-heterosexual and non-gender-conforming sexual and gender identities, which include but are not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) The '+' indicates the inclusion of additional identities not indicated within the acronym, such as pansexual, non-binary and questioning people.

Non-binary: A spectrum of identities for people whose gender doesn't sit comfortably with male or female (Dellenty, 2019).

Pansexual: An expression of potential attraction beyond gender identity and an embrace of fluidity beyond the constraint of a two-gender binary (Lapointe, 2016).

Pronouns: A word used to refer to people's gender conversationally, such as 'she', 'her', 'him', 'his'. Some people prefer gender-neutral pronouns such as 'they' and 'theirs' (Dellenty, 2019).

Queer: A term used to describe non-heterosexual and/or gender-diverse individuals. Queer is preferable to some as a more non-essentialist, fluid term (Jagose, 1996) but not to others as it was historically used pejoratively (Dellenty, 2019; Plummer, 2003).

Transgender (trans*): Individuals who have a current gender identity or expression which differs from the culturally-bound gender associated assigned at birth (Davidson, 2007). The term 'gender-diverse' or 'gender-variant' can be used instead of or interchangeably with 'transgender'.

Two-spirit: Typically refers to a Native American person who is deemed to have a masculine and feminine spirit (Oliver, 2022).

Victimisation: This term is used in some studies and can be used interchangeably with, or as an umbrella term for bullying/homophobia/biphobia and/or transphobia.

1. Introduction

This chapter provides a background to the current research, situating the study within its present and historical contexts. The terms and initialisms used throughout the thesis are introduced and defined. The experiences of LGBT+ children and young people (CYP) in education in the United Kingdom (UK) and internationally are discussed.

2.1. Overview of research

Qualitative research with LGBT+ YPs about their experiences within their environments is 'particularly rare' (Porta et al., 2017). The current research aimed to address this gap by exploring the experiences of YP aged 14 to 18 across two contexts: school/college, the mandatory context where education happens, and an LGBT+ youth group, a chosen context, where learning may also happen. A constructivist grounded theory (CGT; Charmaz, 2014) approach was employed to analyse participants stories shared in intensive individual interviews.

2.2. Key terminology

2.2.1. Defining gender and sexuality

LGBT+ YP have diverse gender and/or sexuality identities. Defining these terms is an important starting point. Sexuality, sometimes called sexual orientation, can be described as a person's physical and/or emotional attraction tendencies towards men, women and/or other genders (Dellenty, 2019). Sexualities include but are not limited to: gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, straight/heterosexual and asexual (see glossary). Sexuality is fluid or changing for some people whereas others experience their sexuality as more fixed (Diamond, 2015).

Gender identity can be described as a person's internal sense of their own gender, of being a woman/female, a man/male or a non-binary gender (GLAAD, 2015). To be cisgender means that a person's gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth (Tate et al., 2013); for transgender people, these do not correspond. Gender expression relates to how one's gender is expressed and/or perceived, which can relate to concepts such as femininity and masculinity. The

Gender Unicorn (Pan & Moore, 2014; see Figure 1), provides a helpful infographic depicting the diversity within gender and sexuality. The Gender Unicorn consists of five constructs: gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth, physically attracted to and emotionally attracted to. The 'sex assigned at birth' construct is the only one with fixed categories: assigned female at birth (AFAB), assigned male at birth (AMAB) or other/intersex; this is based upon a medical genital examination. The other constructs each have three dimensions but these are continuous, demonstrating the possibility of fluidity across the spectrum.

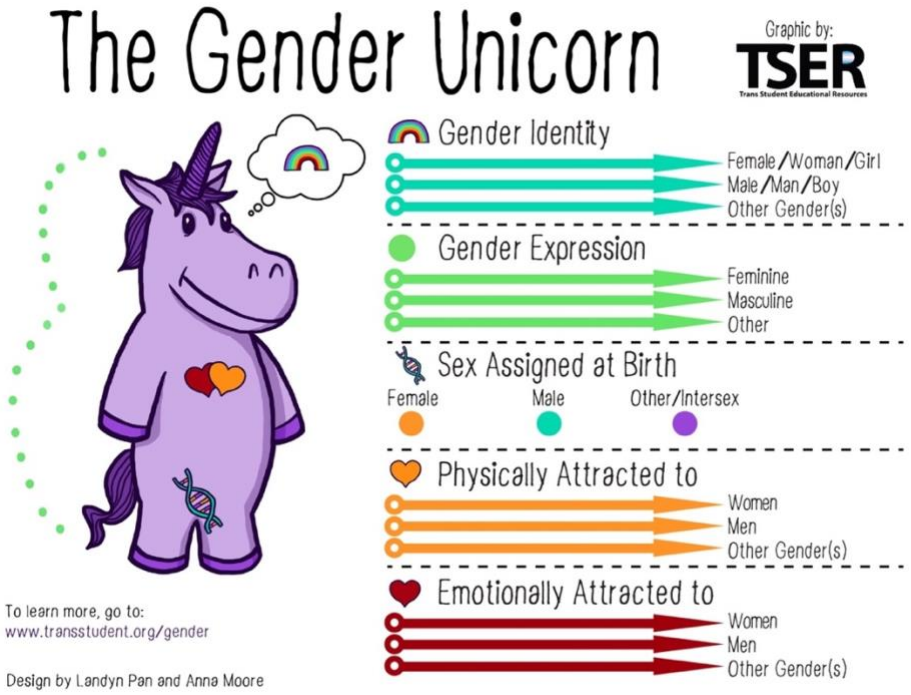

FIGURE 1. THE GENDER UNICORN (PAN & MOORE, 2014)

The Gender Unicorn is a helpful tool for describing gender identity and sexuality without reliance on pre-conceived labels or categories (Ho & Mussap, 2019). Further redrafts of the Gender Unicorn have included biological aspects of gendered sex such as gametes, external genitalia and hormone levels, in particular Estrogen, Progesterone and Testosterone, and chromosomes (e.g., Freidman, 2022).

2.2.2. HISTORY AND DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

The modern use of the term 'lesbian' to describe a woman who feels romantic or sexual attraction to other women, was first recorded in 1870 (Zimmerman, 2000). Around a similar time, in 1869, the use of the terms 'homosexuality', 'bisexuality' and 'heterosexuality' were first documented

by Karl-Maria Kertbeny, an Austro-Hungarian journalist who may have been a gay man (Blakemore, 2021). Bisexuality describes romantic, emotional and/or sexual orientation towards more than one gender (Dellenty, 2019). Any individual who falls on the continuum between heterosexuality and homosexuality could be described as bisexual (Callis, 2009).

'Gay' began to be used widely in the 1950s to describe men who love or feel attraction towards other men. This term was favoured by gay men themselves, perhaps due to the lack of reference to sex in the title, unlike 'homosexual' (White, 1980). The phrase 'gay and lesbian' was commonly used in the 1970s before bisexual and transgender people were recognised as part of the larger community (Swain, 2007). The LGB initialisation was used before the inclusion of 'T' for transgender (Blakemore, 2021). The term transgender was coined by psychiatrist John F. Oliven in 1965, replacing largely insulting words used to describe transgender people at the time. The initialism 'LGBT' has been in regular use since the late 1990s, with its first usage documented in the United States (US) in 1988 (American Educational Research Association, 1988). LGBT is often used as an umbrella term to refer to people who are non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender and is experienced by some as a positive symbol of solidarity and inclusion (Shankle, 2006). The term 'trans*' will be used throughout this thesis as an umbrella term to describe a range of identities other than cisgender man/woman. The Asterix represents the inclusion of a range of gender identities other than cis, including transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid and two-spirit people (Bragg et al., 2018; Gavin, 2020; Ryan, 2014). It is important to note that being trans* is not a singular experience (Frohard-Dourlent, 2016), and therefore listening to individual voices is imperative to enhance our understanding and practice with this group.

2.2.3. Use of LGBT+ initialisation

The term 'LGBT+' is one of various initialisms commonly used to describe groups of people who define as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and a range of other identities. LGBT+ is often used synonymously with 'LGBTQ' or 'LGBTQIA+' in which the 'Q' symbolises queer and sometimes 'questioning', the 'I' and 'A' represent intersex and asexual people respectively. It is complex and potentially problematic to combine diverse gender and sexual identities (Formby, 2012), however this grouping is frequently used in everyday practice and life in the UK. The current study adopted the short-hand term 'LGBT+' which also aligned with the language used by the youth organisation that participants were recruited from. 'LGBT+' will be used throughout this thesis to include all people with non-heterosexual and non-gender-conforming identities, which include but are not

limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual and trans* people (LGBT+). See the glossary for definitions.

Despite the multiple variations of the LGBT initialisation, the term is widely understood to be inclusive of more identities than those directly initialised (Shankle, 2006). I intend for the use of 'LGBT+' to be both inclusive and expansive, to include any other ways that people wish to describe their diverse gender and/or sexual identities.

2.3. Young LGBT+ population

Currently 1.4 million people aged 16 and over recorded themselves as lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) in the UK (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2021), including 6.6% of 16 to 24 year olds. This number may be higher and is increasing year on year (ONS, 2021). There is not currently any clear data on how many trans* people there are in the UK (Stonewall, 2022). The 2021 UK census included the question "is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?", but the response data is yet to be published. Stonewall (2022) estimated that approximately 1% of the population identify as trans*. If accurate, this would indicate that 600,000 people identify as trans* in the UK. CYP identifying as trans* has increased in recent years, which has in part been reflected in the rising numbers of CYP referred to the gender identity service (GIDS) within the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust who are experiencing difficulties related to the development of their gender identity (GIDS, 2022). The total number of CYP referred to GIDS in 2010-2011 was 134, whereas in 2019-2020, the number was 2565 (GIDS, 2021). This number had dropped to 2242 in the following year, possibly reflecting disruptions in referrals related to the Covid-19 pandemic rather than a decrease in need for the service. This number is likely to represents a small fraction of trans* CYP in the UK.

2.4. Historical and current legislation

2.4.1. Section 28

In 1988 the Thatcherian UK government passed a piece of legislation called Section 28, which made it illegal for homosexuality or same-sex relationships, described as 'pretended family relationships', to be mentioned in schools (Local Government Act, 1988). To teach or talk about same-sex couples was equated to 'promoting' homosexuality, which was perceived as dangerous

for CYP. This was presented to the public as a protective approach for CYP against the threat of homosexuality and sexuality more broadly (Greenland & Nunney, 2008). Whilst Section 28 was overturned in 2003, its impact has been longstanding (Dellenty, 2019; Formby & Donovan, 2020). The legacy has included a 'pervading silence' in schools about diverse sexualities and gender identities, or different types of relationships and family structures (Sauntson, 2018). Teachers report still feeling cautious and fearful about openly sharing their non-heterosexual identities and relationships in their school workplace (Ellis & High, 2004; Lee, 2019).

2.4.2. CURRENT UK POLICY

Section 28 was abolished in 2003. Since then, there have been several legislative changes towards the protection and equality of LGBT+ people in the UK. Relevant legislation includes the Equality Act (GEO, 2010), the Marriage Act (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2013), which gave same-sex couples the equal right to marry, and clear pledges of aims to protect LGBT+ CYP from discrimination (Department of Health (DoH), 2008; Government Equality Office (GEO), 2014). The Equality Act (2010) outlined ten characteristics which should be 'protected', including sexual orientation and gender identity although the act calls this 'gender reassignment', which is thought to be an outdated term which can be misinterpreted as implying a medical process, which is often not the case (Unison Equality, 2017). The Equality Act states that no school can discriminate against pupils or prospective pupils based upon any of the protected characteristics and that pupils must not be harassed or victimised (Department for Education (DfE), 2014). Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2021), states that schools must:

> 'Actively promote equality and diversity, tackle bullying and discrimination and narrow any gaps in achievement between different groups of children and promote all forms of equality and foster greater understanding of and respect for people of all faiths (and those of no faith), races, genders, ages, disability and sexual orientations, through their words, actions and influence within the school and more widely in the community'.

Schools and professionals who work with CYP including EPs carry statutory and ethical obligations to uphold the Equality Act (GEO, 2010), aiming to remove any barriers that exclude or disadvantage those who are part of minority groups (Dellenty, 2019).

2.5. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

2.5.1. AUSTERITY

The UK has faced significant austerity measures since 2010, which have included cuts to education budgets and other support services (Lee & Woods, 2017). Funding to LGBT+ organisations has also been reduced (Puffett, 2017) despite a rising need for such services. Such needs were in fact evidenced by the UK Government Equality Office (2014), which published a report aiming to tackle homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in schools, stating that 'far too many schools lack confidence to deal with this form of bullying, are unsure how to address it and feel under-resourced'.

General youth services have particularly suffered as a result of these cuts (Cox & Schmuecker, 2013) reportedly losing over £60 million funding between 2012-2014 (UNISON, 2014). As a result, specialist services have reported struggles to provide adequate support for CYP experiencing mental health difficulties (Young Minds, 2021). Since LGBT+ YP are at greater risk of needing such services, many may have been doubly disadvantaged by the austerity measures. Since mental health support is currently so limited in the UK, youth groups within the community are likely to be more needed than ever, as they can provide protective, supportive and/or educational functions for CYP (Formby & Donovan, 2020).

2.5.2. BREXIT

In 2016, the UK public voted to leave the European Union (EU), a process widely known as 'Brexit'. This has hindered progress towards equality for LGBT+ people, in part due to the subsequent loss of the EU human rights laws which protect LGBT+ people from discrimination in EU countries (Sauntson, 2018). In line with this, an online survey of 522 LGBT+ respondents led to estimations of a 147% rise in homophobic attacks in the UK in the three-month period following the Brexit vote (Antjoule, 2016). Politically divisive events often increase hate crime (Piatkowska & Stults, 2021) and official statistics indicated that hate crime rose by 15-20% following the Brexit vote (Carr et al., 2020). These findings may suggest that homophobic hate crimes in particular rose following the Brexit vote. Furthermore, typically only around 45% of hate crimes are officially reported (Home Office, 2021). The rise in discriminatory attacks following Brexit may be due to an increase in mainstream access to far-right views during the EU referendum campaign (Carr et al., 2020), stoking prejudice and violence.

2.5.3. COVID-19

The Covid-19 pandemic which affected the UK from March 2020 impacted education and opportunities to socialise in the community, outside of home and school contexts. During the Covid-19 lockdowns, organisations such as youth clubs and support groups were forced to halt or severely reduce their services (Power et al., 2020). There were many months in which youth groups were not able to meet in person, including the youth groups run by the LGBT+ organisation from which YP were recruited for this research. Group meetings held via telecommunication platforms such as 'Zoom' were not attended as regularly (personal communication, 2021).

A survey conducted in the first UK lockdown between March and July 2020, found that LGBT+ people were disproportionately affected by stress during that time (Kneale & Bécares, 2020), with young LGBT+ people being particularly affected. However, specific groups within this larger LGBT+ group were impacted differentially; trans* YP were most affected, reporting the highest levels of stress and depression during this time. Cisgender individuals who did not identify as gay/lesbian or straight, such as bisexual, pansexual and queer-identifying people, also reported very elevated stress and depressive symptoms. Ciswomen who identified as gay or lesbian were the least affected. This may be related to further findings of this study that trans* individuals were more at risk of experiencing discrimination, which can negatively impact mental health (Kneale & Bécares, 2020). This research highlighted the differential mental health risks experienced by groups within the LGBT+ assembly, which may relate to differing levels of discrimination and systemic inequalities faced by people within these groups.

2.6. DIFFICULTIES FACED BY LGBT+ CYP

2.6.1. UK FINDINGS

Data suggests that LGBT+ CYP face disproportionate difficulties in school (e.g. Stonewall, 2017) and homophobia and transphobia are still commonplace in schools (Bradlow et al., 2017). The UK Government conducted a 'National LGBT Survey' (Government Equalities Office, 2018) exploring the experiences of LGBT+ people in the UK across a range of domains, including health, crime and education. There were 108,000 respondents aged 16 and over. Young LGBT+ people reported feeling underrepresented within education, with 54% of 16 to 17 year olds reporting that neither gender identity or sexuality were ever discussed with them during their time at school. Of the 46% who did report having discussions, only 9% said they found them helpful in preparing them

for life as an LGBT+ person. Incidents of bullying were reported by a third of LGBT+ YP. Trans* YP reported the worst experiences of bullying and exclusion. This large-scale project is corroborated by findings that LGB YP are twice as likely to be bullied in secondary school than heterosexual YP (Robinson et al., 2013) and that 64% of trans* YP reported that they had been bullied due to their identity (Bradlow et al., 2017). In one survey, 99% respondents reported that they had heard homophobic remarks in school (Stonewall, 2015), demonstrating the gravity of everyday homophobia. Unfortunately YP report that bullying incidents mostly go unreported and that teachers often do not intervene when they are present during the incidents (Robinson et al., 2013).

These difficulties and discriminations may contribute to the higher incidents of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation in LGBT+ YP. Two in five trans* YP, and one in five LGB YP reported that they had attempted suicide (Bradlow et al., 2017). Factors contributing to mental health difficulties in this population include a lack of representation, support or formal education about diverse identities which resonate with the experiences of LGBT+ CYP (Formby & Donovan, 2020). An invisibility of LGBT+ identities in school and college curriculums, along with prejudicial attitudes from teaching staff (Bradlow et al., 2017), and a lack of positive LGBT+ role models and relationships within the media and wider society have been found to alienate CYP and negatively impact their self-understanding and expectations of relationships (Formby & Donovan, 2020).

2.6.2. Focus on bullying

Anti-LGBT language and bullying has decreased in schools since 2012 (Stonewall, 2017). However, research from the US suggests that whilst physical and direct forms of bullying have reduced, more tacit methods have increased, known as 'microaggressions' (Baricevic & Kashubeck-West, 2018). The reductions in overt forms of LGBT-based bullying may be associated with improved school policies for equal opportunities and anti-bullying, which often include strategies to counter homophobia (Warwick & Aggleton, 2014), and the discussion of LGBT+ people in anti-bullying week (Marston, 2015). Whilst these are important interventions, when LGBT+ people are discussed only in relation to discrimination or bullying, a narrative of vulnerability is created around them (Formby, 2015; Rofes, 2004). Framing LGBT+ people as 'at risk' and in need of protection or correction has its roots in a historical pathologising of non-heterosexual/cisgender identities as indicating mental illness (Clarke, 1996; Ferfolja, 2009). The pathologisation of LGB

people has occurred since the early 19th century, and was described by Foucault (1978) as a widespread 'discursive strategy', in which people are negatively presented when they are viewed as 'other', based upon an 'us and them' construction. Indeed, homosexuality was classed under 'paraphilia' in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-II) until 1980 (Sorrentino, 2017). Trans* people were diagnosed with 'gender identity disorder' until it was changed to 'gender dysphoria' in the DSM-V in 2013 (Peterson, 2014); with the explanation that "gender non-conformity is not in itself a mental disorder" but that associated distress could be experienced (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Furthermore, a primary focus on bullying when discussing LGBT+ identities in schools serves to maintain a false dichotomy between cis/straight bullies and LGBT+ victims (Ferfolja, 2009) which may reinforce power inequalities and ignore diversity in experience. Allen (2019) aimed to disrupt the victim/perpetrator story commonly present within research by interviewing straight YP about their experiences of witnessing homophobia within schools, which re-positioned them as the narrators of homophobic incidents. Looking beyond the individual, to other people and groups is an important step in expanding the focus towards the organisations and systems within which discrimination occurs. Rivers et al. (2009) described bullying as the 'product of complex interactions within a system of social relationships that cannot be changed by simply removing bullies or reinforcing victims'. Processes such as institutional racism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia work at institutional and systemic levels (Moffat, 2015), and thus responsibility should not be placed merely upon individuals, but rather on the systems that they operate within (Rivers & Duncan, 2013). This calls into question the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies, harsh punishments or exclusions for individual behaviours which may reflect wider and deeper levels of systemic prejudice and inequality.

Several studies have focused on positive aspects of life for LGBT+ CYP, such as highlighting the strengths and resilience factors within the population (Francis & Kjaran, 2020). Such research counters the dominant narratives around victimisation often present in research with LGBT+ CYP. On the contrary, the questions that participants were asked in the current research had neither a positive or negative focus. Instead, participants were invited to share a range of experiences of their choosing, across two contexts: their education setting and their LGBT+ youth group.

2.7. LGBT+ Education

2.7.1. Sex and Relationships Education (SRE)

In addition to a significant focus on bullying in research with LGBT+ CYP, many researchers have also focused on sex and relationships education (SRE), which has long been inadequate for CYP in the UK, but this is particularly so for those who are LGBT+ (Formby & Donovan, 2020). SRE has focused almost exclusively on cisgender, heterosexual couples who live in nuclear, normative and two-parented families (McNeill, 2013). Therefore, YP report that SRE is not inclusive, and is in fact excluding of many types of people, relationships and families (Formby & Donovan, 2020). In a large-scale survey, only 20% of LGBT+ respondents reported that formal SRE prepared them for happy and healthy sex or relationships (Metro, 2014), which has implications for both the sexual and mental health of LGBT+ YP. Overall, formal SRE in the UK has been found to be inappropriate and insufficient for all CYP (Abbott et al., 2015; Formby, 2011).

Government SRE guidelines were recently introduced in the UK, with a statutory expectation for the changes to be in place in all schools by 2022 (DfE, 2019). These guidelines include the teaching of LGBT identities and relationships. However, the guidance also states that schools are 'free to determine how they do [that]', which calls into question whether inclusivity will be achieved adequately across UK schools. This is perhaps more doubtful due to protests at schools in England who have delivered LGBT-inclusive curricula (Lightfoot, 2019), mostly led by parents citing religious-based concerns. These protests could be based upon misinformation about the content and aims of SRE (Smoke, 2021). Therefore, more work must be done to support community understanding about inclusive education in light of the Equality Act (2010). This is essential and benefits everybody, not just LGBT+ CYP, demonstrated in a recent US study which found that students attending schools with more inclusive SRE, were less likely to experience bullying, victimisation and adverse mental health, including depression and suicidality, whether they were LGBT or not (Proulx et al., 2019). Findings from the UK and the US (Formby & Donovan, 2020; Proulx et al., 2019) indicate the positive effect that LGBT-inclusive SRE could have for LGBT+ CYP and whole school communities.

2.7.2. Wider curriculums

Non-heterosexual relationships and diverse gender and sexuality have been absent from SRE and other parts of the curriculum, even where it is pertinent to include them. For example, knowing

that Carol Ann Duffy is a lesbian when teaching the work of the poet laureate in English lessons is undoubtedly important in the analysis of her poetry, and yet this is often omitted from teaching (Malmedie, 2012). A historic silence and invisibility of LGBT+ identities in school curriculums (Sedgwick, 2008) is likely to have propagated ignorance about topics of gender and sexuality, and contributed to experiences of marginalisation (Sauntson, 2018). Research from the US suggests that where whole curriculums include representations of LGBT+ people, key events and histories, LGBT+ students experience less discrimination, report greater feelings of safety and higher academic grades (Kosciw et al., 2010, 2013). This indicates the importance of inclusivity embedded within school life, rather than only mentioning LGBT+ people in SRE or related to an anti-bullying agenda.

2.8. LGBT+ YOUTH GROUPS

2.8.1. WHAT ARE YOUTH GROUPS?

LGBT+ youth groups are safe, non-judgemental and welcoming spaces in which YP can meet with like-minded peers and youth workers who may be LGBT+ role models. YP are able to discuss and explore issues in the groups with others who may share an understanding about their experienced identities (Formby 2013, 2015; Juetten & O'Loan, 2007).

2.8.2. GSAS

Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs), now often referred to as Gender and Sexual Orientation Alliances (GSAs) or rainbow alliances, are extra-curricular groups which take place in schools for LGBT+ CYP and allies (Griffin et al., 2003). GSAs are student-led groups which provide safe, supportive spaces where relaxing, mutual support, conversations and learning activities take place (Mayo, 2013). YP describe GSAs as a 'safe place' which fosters a sense of belonging (Lessard et al., 2020). A sense of belonging has been found to be a protective factor which can mediate the effects of victimisation or bullying from peers on depressive symptoms in LGBT adolescents (Hatchel et al., 2018). Some members of GSAs also participate in activism, advocacy and educating about LGBT+ identities within the wider school (Holmes & Cahill, 2004). CYP who attend GSAs are diverse in terms of their identities and intentions for attending (Kosciw et al., 2012; Mayo, 2013; Youdell, 2011). Research suggests that most YP who attend GSAs have 'come out' in school (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018) which means that they have shared their sexuality and/or gender identity within

that context. LGBT+ youth groups outside of school may be preferable for some YP, such as if they want to meet new people or if they do not want to be 'out' within their school community. There are GSAs in schools in at least 40 states in the US (GSA Network, 2022) but exact numbers are unclear. GSAs are less common in the UK, however in recent years there have been increases in groups being set up (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2017).

2.8.3. LGBT+ Organisation

There are many LGBT+ charities and organisations which aim to support YP across the UK (Stonewall, 2017). Participants from this study were recruited from a third-sector LGBT+ youth organisation in a coastal area in Southern England. The organisation will not be named in this thesis to protect the anonymity of the participants. The organisation is funded by a combination of Local Authoring funding, grants and donations. A detailed account of how this research was planned and contracted is provided in the methodology chapter. The organisation was founded in 2001 and works across two counties. There is a population of around 770,000 across these counties. 88% of the population are white British, and other ethnicities, in order of prevalence, include 'other white' (particularly Polish and Romanian people), Asian/Asian British, mixed/multiple ethnicities and black/African/Caribbean/black British people (Council Statistics, 2022). Across the counties there are great disparities in class and wealth, with areas of significant deprivation, and other areas of significant affluence. The Chief Executive (CEO) of the organisation reported that CYP who attend the youth groups largely reflect the demographics of the area, are mostly white, with large variation in socioeconomic circumstances.

There were nine groups running at the time of this research, including eight LGBT+ groups, and one group specifically for trans* CYP. The groups are held at various regular venues during the evening for up to three hours; some groups are weekly and others operate fortnightly. The organisation also supports the running of local LGBT+ Pride events and holds trans* family days. Staff deliver training in local schools and organisations (including child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and social care services) aiming to support the understanding and inclusion of LGBT+ CYP. The CEO reported that the organisation typically supports around 300 CYP in a face-to-face capacity annually, although this number reduced slightly in light of restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic. There is no lower age limit to attend the youth groups and the upper age limit is 25. CYP attending the groups mostly self-refer, although some attend following recommendations from parents, friends or teachers.

Participation in such groups is likely to be experienced diversely, with various meanings and functions for CYP, which may or may not be related to educational experiences. It is probable that YP also gain a similar sense of belonging in attending LGBT+ youth groups outside of school, as they do attending GSAs (e.g., Lessard et al., 2020), although the research into experiences in external LGBT+ groups is scarce. Youth groups may provide crucial spaces which support, protect and prevent mental health problems for LGBT+ YP. The current study aimed to explore the experiences of YP, both within the youth group, a setting they self-elected to attend and engage within, and in school/college, a mandatory setting.

'The youth group' is used throughout this thesis to refer to the LGBT+ youth groups attended by the participants in the current study.

2.9. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks act as structures which can hold and support the theory of a research study (Abend, 2008) and these can also be used as lenses through which to better understand the perspectives of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.9.1. Influencing theories

The following theories informed the development of this research:

- Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989, 2004)
- Queer theory (e.g., Butler, 1990, 2004, 2011)

2.9.2. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory explains the various interactive, environmental levels which influence development (see Appendix 1). This theory asserts that people are continually interacting within and between these levels. The 'microsystem' is the innermost system, containing close relationships and settings where CYP spend most of their time, namely home and school. The 'mesosystem' refers to the interactions between microsystems. The 'exosystem' describes indirect organisational influences such as from the workplace of their parents/carers, the media, national services (e.g. the NHS) and local authorities (LAs). The 'macrosystem' refers to societal factors including culture, dominant norms, values and ideologies, economic and governmental structures and the law. Bronfenbrenner (1989) later

added the concept of time to this theory, named the 'chronosystem'. According to the ecological systems theory, influences in the different levels can interact with one another and impact individuals both directly and indirectly. This theory was useful in situating the current research within YP's microsystem, and in the coding and analysis of intensive interviews as I kept in mind the various systems which interview data related to.

2.9.3. Queer theory and heteronormativity

Queer theories have been consistent in their cognizance and critique of heteronormativity (Sauntson, 2018). Heteronormativity refers to the societal view that the 'normal' or preferred way to be is heterosexual and cisgender (Evans, 2000). It has been described as the 'system which prescribes, enjoins, rewards and naturalises a particular kind of heterosexuality – monogamous, reproductive, and based on conventionally complimentary gender roles – as the norm on which social arrangements should be based' (Cameron, 2005). Heteronormativity privileges cisgender, heterosexual men who appear as masculine, paired with cisgender, heterosexual women who present as feminine, fuelling the idea that there is an 'ideal' configuration of sex, gender, and sexuality (Bryan, 2014). Those who do not fit within that norm are thus seen as deviations, or 'queer' (Butler, 2011), a term which was historically used as an offensive homophobic slur but was reclaimed by the LGBT+ community (Rand, 2014) in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Callis, 2009). The term queer began to be used as an umbrella term within which all non-heteronormative individuals and identities could reside (Jagose, 1996).

Compared with more explicit experiences of outright homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, the operations of heteronormativity can be more pervasive as they non-essentialise the victim/perpetrator dynamic, which means that such processes can occur subtly and continually, often going unnoticed and unchallenged (Ward & Schneider, 2009). For example, Epstein et al. (2003) found that heterosexuality was constructed as 'normal' in mainstream classrooms in the UK and that discussions of sexualities transgressing that norm were often avoided. CYP who express a want to explore their gender and/or sexuality are often dismissed as too young to know who they are or what they want, which is a common misconception (Savin-Williams, 2005).

In schools, dominant narratives around gender and sexuality tend to 'reflect and constitute the broader socio-political discourses in operation, including those that uphold the constructed superiority of heterosexuality' (Ferfolja, 2008) and cisgenderism. Butler (1990) states that gender is 'congealed' in various ways at school, including through the continuous categorisation of

children based on whether they are (or are perceived to be) a boy or a girl. Youdell (2005) argues that these norms are reinforced through sex-based regulations such as dividing CYP by gender in terms of where they can sit, which spaces they use, addressing them with different language, and through the tacit encouragements towards certain relationships, appearances and subject choices. Gendered sports, 'boy-girl-boy-girl' seating patterns, differences in mandatory uniform expectations, and differing communications about what is acceptable behaviour for boys and girls, are also likely to reinforce the binary. Butler (1988, 1990) discussed the performativity of gender, highlighting that there are negatively reinforced consequences for not 'correctly' performing the gender aligned with the sex assigned at birth, which leads to 'clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions'. These social consequences for diverging from gender-based expectations, may in part explain the findings that trans* YP have more difficulties than their LGB counterparts (Bradlow et al., 2017; Kneale & Bécares, 2020; Toomey et al., 2012). This 'policing' of gender and sexuality privileges cisgender, heterosexual and masculine norms and values (Wozolek, 2019), and disproportionately affects black, Asian and Hispanic LGBT+ people (Crenshaw, 1994).

Queer theory asserts that heteronormative societies 'project' the issues faced by LGBT+ people as being located inside them, as opposed to in other people, structures and systems (Linville, 2009). Individualising narratives around victimisation in schools (e.g. Marston, 2015) serve to reproduce isolation of these groups. To successfully educate LGBT+ YP, schools must recognise and respect their identities as valid (Butler, 2004).

2.10. Raising the volume of 'silenced' voices

Research which amplifies the voices of LGBT+ YP, creates 'noise where there has been silence' and is a step towards equality (Ferfolja, 2005). Some emancipatory research has been conducted with this population, such as Savin-William's (2001) study which demonstrated that YPs' experiences of fluidity in their sexuality were characterised not by vulnerability, but a sense of freedom. Robinson (2010) worked with gay and lesbian YP who highlighted the need for more inclusive practices in schools. Qualitative methods are well placed to provide a platform for the perspectives of LGBT+ CYP, with the goal being 'excavation and inclusion' (DeVault, 1999). Work which values and amplifies the voices of LGBT+ people, counters any attempts to exclude or inhibit them in society (Wozolek, 2019).

2.11. Relevance to the role of the EP

Educational psychology is concerned with social justice, striving for equal opportunities, inclusion and ethical practice (Billington, 2000). The aims of this study were to understand YPs' experiences at a LGBT+ youth group and in education, to raise awareness and enhance professional knowledge around working with LGBT+ CYP, and to positively impact on the practice of schools, colleges and Educational Psychologists (EPs). In line with the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE, 2015), the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018) and practice guidelines (BPS, 2017) the current study is concerned with listening to and valuing the voices of CYP. EPs have a role in upholding the Equality Act (2010), striving towards equal opportunities and improving CYP mental health (DoH & DfE, 2017) and CYP voice is imperative in achieving that.

2.12. Reflexive approach

I engaged in self-reflexivity throughout the research process, which can be described as a deep reflection on one's own feelings, values and beliefs (Totsuka, 2014), constructions and prejudices (Pote et al., 2000). A consideration of multiple aspects of identity, which can be demonstrated in the Social GRACES (Burnham, 1992, 1993; Appendix 2). This tool supports the understanding that people hold many similarities and/or differences to one another, which may be voiced or unvoiced and visible or invisible (Burnham et al., 2008). These processes impact and influence communication and interpretation (Burnham, 1992). I aimed to engage in a curiosity about what was communicated by participants, and how that was then interpreted, coded and analysed. A focus on reflection is essential when engaging in CGT research (Charmaz, 2014). Reflexive processes were documented through the writing of diary entries, examples of which are included throughout this thesis.

2.13. The researcher

I identify as a queer, cisgender woman who uses she/her pronouns. At the time of conducting the research, I was a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and 3rd year student on the Child, Community and Educational Psychology Doctorate at The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. My motivations for conducting the study are further explored in the methodology chapter.

2.14. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided a contextual and historical overview related to this research and key theories were introduced for their application in this study, namely Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, and Queer theories (e.g., Butler, 1990). The current experiences of LGBT+ CYP in the UK were also explored, including the tendency for research with this group to focus on bullying experiences or SRE. An overall rationale for the importance of this study was argued and aims were outlined. The following chapter will present the methodology employed in this research.

3. Methodology

3.1. Chapter overview

This chapter outlines the purpose and aims of the current research. My ontological and epistemological positioning is discussed and the selection of qualitative and grounded theory methodologies are explained. The recruitment and interviewing of participants and thereby the collection and analysis of data are described. Ethical issues and the prior assumptions will also be explored, and the need for reflexivity within this research will be argued.

3.2. Research aims

The present research aimed to explore the experiences of YP in their participation in a LGBT+ youth group, and at school. The research question pursued was:

What are young peoples' experiences within an LGBT+ youth group and at school?

To strengthen the inductive element of this study, one research question rather than two or more was decided upon. Several, separate questions could have imposed a hierarchy of participant's experiences. The research question encompasses various questions which were asked flexibly in the interviews (see guide interview schedule in Appendix 3), to enable the participant's most pertinent experiences to emerge in the way most suited to them.

A further aim of the research was to consider how the experiences of participants and the subsequent analysis and theory development could inform the practice of EPs and school staff.

3.3. Research purpose

Robson (2002) proposed that social science research can be distinguished by area of purpose, arguing that four categories exist:

1. *Exploratory*: to gain an understanding of under-researched phenomena.
2. *Descriptive*: to describe people, events or phenomena.
3. *Explanatory*: to explain something, such as clarifying relationships, mechanisms or patterns.

4. *Emancipatory*: to create opportunities to empower participants or effect change or social justice.

The current research aimed to be exploratory, and potentially emancipatory. I strived to understand and explore the stories of participants, through a thorough data analysis. There may be an emancipatory element within the research as the participants were part of groups which have faced prejudice and oppression. Participating in this research involved discussing experiences and thus contributing to the data analysis, the emerging theory and the completion of this thesis.

Conducting the participant interviews, analysis process and research process greatly increased my knowledge in this area, providing implications for EPs and other educational professionals who work with LGBT+ CYP. The research will be disseminated to other TEPs, EPs, and other educational professionals, including teachers. I will share the findings in presentations within schools, Educational Psychology services and at conferences. If the impact of this enhanced knowledge and awareness in professionals contributes to positive changes for LGBT+ CYP, then an emancipatory component within this research will have been achieved.

3.4. Philosophical positions

3.4.1. Ontology

Ontology is concerned with people's beliefs about the nature of reality, and can be simply described as how one views the world (Mertens, 2015). Ontology is arguably the starting point of all research (Blaikie, 1993), logically followed by epistemology, research design and methodology. Ontological positions range from relativism to realism (Smith et al., 2014). Realism asserts that there is an objective world that can be measured and analysed if the most appropriate and accurate instruments are utilised (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Realism is linked with a Positivist world view and paradigm, which dominated social sciences throughout most of the 1900s; whereas the post-positivism era was more associated with a relativist ontology. Relativism assumes that there are as many perspectives about the world as there are people (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Mostly social science researchers are not so polarised, sitting somewhere between these extremes (Dennett, 2003). One such ontological stance placed somewhere between realism and relativism is critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975; Bhaskar et al., 1998), which is the position assumed in the current research.

3.4.2. Critical realism

Critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975; Bhaskar et al., 1998) has been described as providing a "third way between" realist and relativist perspectives (Sayer, 2000). Critical realism draws together certain elements of both positivist and social-constructivist positions (Matthews, 2010). Critical realists believe both in an external reality, and diverse experiences and interpretations of that reality which are influenced by a range of contextual factors, such as a person's socio-political environment, culture and personal experiences (Bhaskar et al., 1998). Critical realist research assumes that reality is comprised of actual events, the way that people perceive them and by intangible societal power structures (Bhaskar & Lawson, 1998). In acknowledging the role of power, critical realism aligns with the Foucauldian recognition of the interconnecting impact of power on knowledge (Foucault, 1981). The current research is anti-oppressive in its positioning which in itself acknowledges the reality of oppression for certain groups of people, both historically and currently, including those who do not conform to norms around gender and sexuality (Linville, 2009).

Under this lens, human knowledge can never be purely objective, instead only understood through an individual perspective, which is fraught with bias and complexity (Maxwell, 2012). Therefore, alternative accounts of any given phenomena are accepted and viewed as inevitable and valid. In line with critical realism (Bhaskar & Lawson, 1998), I perceived the participants' stories as reflections of their actual experiences and their interpretations of those experiences.

3.4.3. Epistemology

Whilst ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, epistemology refers to how knowledge is sought, gained or constructed to understand that reality (Tuli, 2010).

3.4.4. Symbolic interactionism

The epistemological position of this study is symbolic interactionism (SI), which originated with Blumer (1969). SI claims three main assumptions:

1. Human behaviour is based upon interpretations and constructed meanings.
2. Meanings are generated through social interaction, language and experience.
3. Meaning-making and understanding are comprised of ongoing, interpretive processes which evolve and change over time.

According to SI, people understand themselves and their realities through their dynamic, interactive relationships within the world. Meanings are created through interactions which in turn influence actions, which then further impact upon interactions and experiences. SI compliments critical realism by providing an epistemological, mechanistic explanation of how knowledge can be generated. SI provides a framework for how knowledge and meaning are gained, and essentially how people become and maintain what they do and who they are.

The development of grounded theory methodology was strongly influenced by SI (Charmaz, 2014). SI asserts that processes of action and interpretation are reciprocal and interlinked (Blumer, 1969), which fits with grounded theory research, in which data collected in interviews (action) is inseparable from its analysis (interpretation). Blumer (1969) argued that researchers using SI epistemology should abide by the following methodological injunctions:

- Gain 'intimate familiarity' with the research phenomenon.
- Bring 'sensitising concepts' to the fore of their inquiry.
- Respect the participants.

3.4.5. Upholding Blumer's injunctions

The current research aimed to uphold Blumer's (1969) three injunctions. To gain intimate familiarity, I was committed to 'looking, listening and learning about studied life' (Charmaz, 2008). This involved experiencing wonder about the worlds of participants, being open to the unknown, and holding space for uncertainty. Charmaz (2002) argued that we must go beyond what is said, and grapple with meanings, actions, inactions, stories and silences. Throughout data collection and analysis, I intentionally maintained an open, uncertain and curious stance. Familiarity with participants was increased through attending youth groups and meeting YP and youth workers there. This provided a foundation which supported the generation of a rich account (not an objective report) of the experiences shared (Charmaz, 2008).

Participants were regarded and respected as complex human beings who would inevitably tell and teach me things that I did not and cannot have already known. Approaches to gaining full informed consent, discussions with participants prior to interviews and the active, listening stance employed in interviews, all indicated respect for them (Charmaz, 2008).

For Blumer (1969), 'sensitising concepts' are understandings, insights and knowledge about social culture related to the research area, which allow the researcher to be sensitive to issues and processes within the data. Charmaz (1995; 2003) argued that sensitising concepts provide a good start or 'points of departure' for forming interview questions, listening to participants and considering and analysing the data. However, Charmaz (1990) argues that a 'delicate balance' must be struck between having an awareness of existing knowledge (or sensitising concepts) without being wedded to them, instead being open to new concepts and ideas arising.

I struck this balance by considering what I already knew, including knowledge gained through literature and social understandings developed through my own personal and professional experiences. In striving to comprehend my existing knowledge, I was able to consider how this could impact my ways of being with or interpreting participants. This consideration aided both interest in exploring sensitising concepts and the mitigation of this through a commitment to remaining present with the participants and their unique experiences.

3.5. Methodology selection process

3.5.1. Qualitative research

Qualitative research methods are well placed to elicit and explore various meanings ascribed to an array of experiences (Morse & Field, 1995). Qualitative interviewing was suited to the current research which was designed to explore YPs' subjective understandings of their experiences within LGBT+ youth groups and education settings. The current study contributes to a wider body of research which highlights the 'everyday lived experiences' of LGBT+ people (Plummer, 2003), aiding a developing understanding of these lives, which has the potential to inform policy and practice (McDermott et al., 2013).

3.5.2. Choosing grounded theory

Various qualitative methodologies were deliberated before deciding upon grounded theory. The psychosocial interviewing approach (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012) was particularly considered due to its acknowledgement of the psychoanalytic within interviews, such as the emotional and unconscious dynamics between researcher and participant. Content analysis (Berelson, 1952) was also contemplated, given the importance of language in the way people construct, understand and explain their experiences (Sauntson, 2018). Narrative interview approaches were also considered and I was aware of studies with LGBT+ CYP which explored social influences using

story-telling and narrativization both in written and verbal forms (Bond & Loewenstern, 2014; Trocki et al., 2013).

Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) methodology was ultimately deemed most appropriate for exploring unchartered waters of research; I was aware of no other research in the UK about CYP experiences in LGBT+ youth groups. In addition, I had little previous experience with qualitative research methods, having only conducted quantitative studies previously. Related to this, grounded theory methodology was appealing because a clear structure and guidance was available (e.g. Charmaz, 2014), which is somewhat lacking in other qualitative approaches. Furthermore, the structured advice provided by grounded theory does not forfeit the flexibility and rigour of the approach (Calloway & Knapp, 1995), increasing its appeal.

3.5.3. The origins of grounded theory

Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) whilst conducting research with terminally ill patients. These researchers questioned the appropriateness of using traditional scientific research methods in their work with this population. They developed the 'constant comparative method' inherent in grounded theory, in which concepts or codes are compared and contrasted to others in an iterative process. Concepts found repeatedly or intensely are given explanatory power and form categories. Through continued reflection and analysis, these become interweaved and a theory is generated (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The reflection process in grounded theory is formalised by specific coding procedures, including the writing of theoretical 'memos' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or extended notes.

In grounded theory research, data collection and analysis take place simultaneously (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). An inductive approach is utilised; rather than testing hypotheses, researchers do not have initial hypotheses, supposedly not having enough knowledge of the research area. Instead, they observe, listen and develop theories based on collecting and systematically analysing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therefore, grounded theory provides a method for exploring under-researched phenomena. Since its genesis, there have been several versions of grounded theory, including Glaserian (Glaser, 1978), Straussian (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998) and Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT; Charmaz, 2006, 2014). Table 1 outlines the approaches which converge across grounded theory methodologies (Charmaz, 2010; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014):

1	Data collection and analysis, which occurs simultaneously in a structured process, using a constant comparative method.
2	Actions and processes, rather than themes, are coded and analysed.
3	Codes are drawn upon to develop new conceptual categories.
4	Inductive categories are developed through systematic data analysis.
5	Theory construction is emphasised over descriptions or applications of current theories.
6	Researchers engage in theoretical sampling.
7	Researchers search for variation in the studied categories or process.
8	Categories are pursued and developed.

TABLE 1. GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

3.5.4. CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY

CGT (Charmaz, 2003) emerged through criticisms of original grounded theory as being too set within the positivist era which dominated the social sciences at the time of its genesis. Although Glaser and Strauss (1967) criticised this dominance, they also emulated it by arguing that grounded theory had scientific legitimacy, stating that objective data can be obtained and biases can be corrected, such as through coding with another researcher (Glaser, 1994). CGT fits well for research in which the ontological position is somewhere in between realist and relativist (Charmaz, 1995). CGT researchers assume an 'obdurate reality' whilst acknowledging the wild diversity in human experience and the influence of power structures in society (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). This aligned with the critical realist ontology of the current study.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that data could be 'discovered' and that a single, generalisable theory could be established. This implied that the theory already existed, yet to be revealed by a neutral researcher. Early grounded theorists asserted that researchers could and should enter inquiry as a 'tabula rasa' or clean slate (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The possibility of a completely neutral, observing researcher has been heavily disputed (e.g. Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2000, Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). CGT acknowledges that researchers cannot enter inquiry with an empty mind (Wolcott, 2001) and emphasises the importance of the relationship between researcher and participants which develops before and during the interviews. CGT recognises that the researchers' biases, assumptions and experiences are inevitably brought into the research.

CGT accepts that an interview cannot entirely represent a participant's reality. However, the way participants choose to describe their experiences in interview is valued, considered to relate to numerous inter and intrapersonal factors, including social, cultural, political and historical contexts. Participants are also likely to be influenced by how they think and feel about the researcher. Their responses may be impacted by how they believe she might interpret their narrative. CGT is a form of enquiry that resembles the worlds of participants, aiming to include 'multiple voices, views and visions in the rendering of lived experience' (Charmaz, 2003). However, CGT also acknowledges that researchers are social beings whose experiences contribute to the way that they understand the processes they observe (Baker et al., 1992); the allowance for reflection around the role that researchers play in hearing, understanding and interpreting these experiences, contributed to the appeal of CGT within the current research.

3.5.5. Researcher as the instrument

In grounded theory, as in many qualitative approaches, the researcher is the central instrument within the research (Sanjari et al., 2014). Humans are highly competent research tools; as responsive, perceptive inhabitants of the social environment, we are able to interact with participants whilst simultaneously analysing the content of the conversation. In line with critical realism ontology, I was aware that my approach to the research interviews and my interpretation and coding of them would be integral to the research. A core element of grounded theory, which adds to the ethics of the approach, involves striving to understand participants' experiences as they are telling them so that codes and analyses represent their stories rather than those that the researcher imagines they will tell (Charmaz, 2008). Ultimately grounded theory data is co-constructed between participant and researcher in interviews (Charmaz, 2009), but the more that the researcher can be reflexive and aware of their own ideas and biases, the better they will be able to hear and understand the particular experiences shared by participants.

3.5.6. Reflexivity

The concept of 'reflexivity' has various meanings in qualitative research (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). A reflexive researcher is capable of conscious and critical consideration of their role in the research process (Guillemin & Gillman, 2004). In the current study, I engaged in continual reflection upon my values, feelings and beliefs (Totsuka, 2014), curiously examining my assumptions (Pote et al., 2000).

Since researchers are central to data collection and analysis in CGT studies, aiming for awareness around role and impact is important for the research (Sanjari et al., 2014). I developed an understanding of my role and assumptions in regular reflective supervision sessions in which pre-conceived ideas were helpfully challenged. Individual reflection through writing in a research diary also supported a stance of reflexivity. I repeatedly returned to the question of 'why':

W*hy this research? What am I hoping for? What am I expecting*?

Allowing space for this questioning enabled clarity and supported me to view and experience pre-conceived ideas more curiously and tentatively. Henwood and Pigeon (2003) called this stance 'theoretical agnosticism', in which a 'not knowing' position is favoured. When feeling stuck in the data analysis, this concept supported the development of flexibility (see figure 2).

5th November 2021

Initially I kept feeling this sense of immovability in the data analysis – that I was so present with it and almost stuck within it – that my assumptions and prior experiences were interwoven in the data… this may be true, but am I really immobile in this process? Would a more apt way of looking at it be that I am a resident, a permanent lodger, in this house of analysis. I can move. I can move into different rooms, stay on the inside or go outside, and look in. I can look in the morning, when it is light and I can wait up in the darkness, and see things differently, less of the walls, more of the candlelight.

Figure 2. Research diary extract (5/11/21)

3.5.7. Researcher's ideas

Grounded theory is an inductive process, meaning that researchers embark upon their investigations without hypotheses, seeking to explain phenomena through generating a theory based on the data gathered rather than on previous findings. However, inevitably researchers enter their work with certain experiences, expectations and ideas about the world. For example, I was more interested in research with LGBT+ YP topic due to my own experiences. The use of a research diary supported an interrogation of my intentions in conducting the current research (see figure 3).

29th August 2021

It feels important to really assess the why of this project – to be self-reflexive around why I have chosen to research this and what my hopes are. Maybe a lack of consistent LGBT+ 'community' in my own adolescence increased my want to understand those who may have that – therein my assumption that they do have that. Also that 'community' in our EP job title – what does that mean? How can we be community psychologists if we don't seek out community spaces? I wanted to do that in this research. I began with an assumption, that perhaps what YP gain in the groups may be unavailable to them in school, and maybe this could become more available. Maybe through listening I could understand what is important in supporting these CYP in schools and beyond, and then do something with that – share it with others, pass it on in some way. I am conscious though of avoiding a hyper solution-focus; so much of our work is about so what, what next, intervention, provision, etc. So whilst I have high hopes for my learning and possible impact, right now the challenge is just to listen, and sit with the questioning, curious, open unknown.

FIGURE 3. RESEARCH DIARY EXTRACT (29/07/21)

Processes of reflexivity heightened my ability to be present with participants during interviews. Being aware of my first thoughts and assumptions did not necessarily mean that these were disregarded. In fact, following 'gut feelings' and intuitions is essential in CGT (Charmaz, 2014).

Interpersonal skills of the researcher are of significance in qualitative research (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). My social skills were utilised as in-the-moment decisions had to be made such as when to probe or ask more about a topic, and when best to move on from certain topics, such as if the participant appeared to be defended or finished talking.

Diarising helped me to reflect in the coding/analysis stage. As demonstrated in figure 3, the concept of community was important for me. When, in the initial and focused coding phases, codes related to 'community' were generated, I recalled my reflections around community in the diary. This encouraged a challenging of the language used (e.g., '*Did that come from me? Or was it grounded in the participant data*?'), and a returning to original interview recordings and transcripts. Re-engagement with the original data allowed me to identify that the 'community' codes were more representative of the data when described in other ways (e.g., 'belonging in groups').

3.6. PARTICIPANTS

3.6.1. FINDING THE LGBT+ YOUTH ORGANISATION

I contacted the CEO of an LGBT+ youth organisation in September 2020. Various emails and telephone calls were exchanged, in which the research proposal was discussed. The CEO was consistently supportive of the project and confirmed her support in writing in October 2020 (Appendix 4).

3.6.2. PARTICIPANT INCLUSION CRITERIA

The participant inclusion criteria included:

- YP aged 14 to 19 who attended or were members of an LGBT+ youth club run by the link organisation. This age range included YP in Key Stages 4 and 5 in the UK education system. This age range was selected to enable a varied range of young people to participate. The cap of a five year range was chosen to ensure that participants had some commonality in their experiences, including that all participants attended an LGBT+ youth group and had been in at least ten years of mandatory schooling in the UK.
- Orally fluent in the English language.
- Since I was also interested in education experiences, participants had to be either attending a school or college at the time of recruitment or have been attending at some time in the 18 months previously. Electively home educated YP were excluded as their distinct education experiences did not involve school/college settings.

3.6.3. RECRUITMENT

I initially considered recruiting participants by asking the CEO and youth workers at the LGBT+ organisation to nominate potential participants, as has been done elsewhere (Asakura, 2016). However, I decided that it would be more ethical to offer participation to all YP at the youth groups who met the inclusion criteria. A flyer (Appendix 5) promoting participation in the research was initially sent to YP via email. One YP emailed to register participation interest following this.

3.6.4. ATTENDING GROUPS

In a further attempt to recruit participants, I attended three LGBT+ youth groups run by the organisation in different locations. The groups were mixed sizes, with approximately 7, 12 and 30

CYP attending in the respective groups. Within the groups, I discussed my research aims, and outlined what participation would involve. I also shared aspects of my role and identity that I deemed relevant to introducing the research, including my pronouns, sexuality and that I was a Trainee EP at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. YP had the opportunity to ask questions and those who were interested in participating were asked to give their contact details. Eleven YP provided their contact details, and four of these resulted in participation.

3.6.5. Participant demographics

Five YP participated in the study. At the time of the interviews, participants had been attending their LGBT+ youth group for diverse lengths of time, from one month to five years. See table 2 outlining the participants' pseudonyms, ages and the descriptions of their pronouns, gender and sexuality provided at interview. Participants mostly described their gender and sexuality using labels not explicitly covered within the LGBT+ initialism. Please note that Jay and Kit's preferred pronouns were they/them and therefore those pronouns will be used throughout this thesis, just as Liam, for example, will be referred to with he/him pronouns. Participants were all White British.

Participant Pseudonym	Age at interview	Pronouns	Gender	Sexuality
Orla	15	She/her	Unlabelled	Unlabelled
Lacey	17	She/her	Girl	Lesbian
Kit	14	They/them	Non-binary	Lesbian
Liam	17	He/him	Male but questioning	"All over the place"
Jay	18	They/them	Gender fluid	Pansexual

Table 2. Participant pseudonyms and information

Some of my own experiences aligned with those of the participants, such as being a queer, White British person who attended school in the south of England. These experiences may have heightened the level of awareness, attunement and sensitivity that I could have of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). However, it was important that I was also aware of my differences from the participants, such as being a cisgender researcher, and over a decade older than all participants.

3.6.6. Interview locations

Participants were provided with the option of conducting the interview remotely or in person. Three of the five interviews took place using Zoom Video Conferencing; online interviewing has been demonstrated as an effective qualitative research method with LGBT+ youth elsewhere (McDermott et al., 2013). One interview was conducted over the telephone, and the other was in person. The in-person interview took place in a small room at one of the youth group venues. Flexibility around this was deemed important in light of the Covid-19 pandemic which persisted throughout the current research.

The participants who interviewed in person and via the telephone explained that Zoom meetings increased their anxiety, one preferring to talk over the telephone and the other preferring to meet in person. Participants are likely to be more open and responsive when in comfortable settings, and adapting to the needs of CYP when meeting with them is central to good EP practice (Frederickson et al., 2015). Furthermore, offering and responding to the participants' choice around interview location promoted their agency and aimed to redress the power differential between YP-participant and adult-researcher (Morrow & Richards, 1996).

When conducting the interview over the phone, I could not see the participant's movements, body language or facial expressions, which had been visible in the other four interviews, although in the three interviews which took place on Zoom only a section of the participant was seen. Whilst visual information may have unconsciously influenced lines of questioning and analytic approaches, I was not aware of this. Overall, allowing for varied interview locations was not viewed as being problematic as the analysis only pertained to the participants' verbal communications.

3.7. Ethical considerations

3.7.1. Regulatory approval

Before commencing the study, ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust in March 2021 (see Appendix 6). The research complied with the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018) and the HCPC standards of ethics (2016).

3.7.2. CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Gaining informed consent requires a thorough explanation to potential participants, including about how data will be used and handled (Hoeyer et al., 2005). Participants were sent written information via email about the research at least one week prior to their interviews, which included the information sheet (Appendix 7) and consent form (Appendix 8). Written parental consent was also required for participants who were younger than 16. The parental consent form (Appendix 9) was sent via email, and provided simple information asking for parent/carer consent for their child to participate in a study about their experiences in school and in a group. The group being for LGBT+ youth was not stated in the parent consent form, so as not to disclose the participants sexuality and/or gender identity to their parent/carer in the event that this had not been discussed. Two participants were under 16; their parents provided consent on the phone and via signing the consent form, respectively.

At the start of each interview, prior to recording, I checked that participants had read the information sheet, and offered to read this again, using the 'share screen' function on Zoom. Participants had completed the consent forms prior to the interview and were given the opportunity to ask questions. I reminded participants that the interview would be recorded and that their quotes may be documented within a thesis and likely elsewhere, such as in a poster or a journal article. Participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used to increase confidentiality and that all other identifiers, such as names of locations and schools would be removed. To ensure privacy, I was the only person to know who the pseudonyms related to and all transcripts were entirely pseudonymised. I also reminded participants of my safeguarding duty to pass on any significant concerns around harm to the CEO of the organisation who is also the Designated Safeguarding Officer. The location provided in this thesis has been generalised and the name of the organisation has not been stated. Once the thesis is completed, the audio recordings and transcripts will be deleted.

Taking part was entirely voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time without stating a reason. However, participants were advised to withdraw before or within three weeks after their interview as it would have become more difficult to untangle the codes related to their data from the developing analysis. Clear, comprehensible language was used in these conversations. Aiming to completely inform participants is one of the key responsibilities of a qualitative researcher when seeking consent (Sanjari et al., 2014). Participants were also aware that they could choose

not to answer any questions for whatever reason and could also terminate the interview at any time should they have wanted or needed to.

3.7.3. WELLBEING

The CEO and the youth workers running the groups were aware of which YP were being interviewed. Participants were provided with the option to spend some reflection time with me following the interview although none took up this offer. They were advised that they may wish to discuss the interview and any feelings that may have arisen with their youth workers at their group. I was aware of various local and national organisations for signposting, if, for example, participants had discussed current mental health difficulties during their interview, although this did not occur.

Participants were asked if they would like to be updated on the research. They all responded affirmatively and thus I will contact them via email on the completion of the thesis, informing them that this will be available for them to read in the following months.

Within the interviews, I was conscious of signs of fatigue in participants. In the two cases when the interview length exceeded an hour, I verbally noted this within the interview and aimed to conclude the interview shortly.

3.7.4. GIDS LINK

In initial discussions with the CEO of the LGBT+ organisation, she told me that her decision to endorse the research had been encouraged by my traineeship at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. The CEO reported that she regularly receives research requests, which are mostly declined. However, the link with the Tavistock was appealing due to its links with the Gender Identity Service (GIDS) for CYP being at the Tavistock and Portman. I clarified that I did not work within GIDS, and had no relation to the service. The doctoral course in Child, Community and Educational Psychology was connected to GIDS only in location. The CEO was happy to proceed with supporting the research following this conversation. The link with GIDS came up again in one of the youth group visits; two of the YP shared being on waiting lists for GIDS. I also explained there that there was not a link between GIDS and the current research.

3.8. Data collection

3.8.1. Intensive interviews

The rapport between interviewer and participant is important as the quality of this relationship is positively correlated with participant disclosure (Josselson, 2007). Although I did not know the participants well, I had met four of them in person at youth groups prior to their interviews. Furthermore, there was time at the beginning of interviews to chat and ask any questions, which also aimed to build rapport and put participants at ease.

Data was collected through semi-structured, intensive interviews. Intensive interviews are 'gently guided, one-way conversations that explore research participants' perspectives on their personal experience with the research topic' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56). Participants were asked open-ended questions which aimed to elicit in-depth responses representing their perspectives. An interview schedule (Appendix 3) was used to guide interviews and ensure some consistency in questioning across participants.

Robson (2011) suggests that interview schedules should include an initial 'warm-up' question to initiate the research topic, the main body of the interview which covers the research area, and a concluding question which is less emotionally demanding. I went through a process of evolving and editing the interview schedule with the support of research supervision prior to the first interview. The number of questions initially listed on the draft interview schedule were reduced, to allow for more flexibility in participant responses. At the beginning of the recorded interview, I gave an overview of the topics of interest (experiences at school/college and in the LGBT+ youth groups), and then invited participants to start where they wished. Similarly, the final question asked participants whether they wanted to talk about anything else that had not yet been mentioned. Whilst this guide was followed, the interviews took a mostly conversational approach to encourage elaboration about the experiences most pertinent for participants.

Within the interview, extending and clarifying questions were asked, such as "what does that mean to you?" and "can you say a little more about that?". At times I paraphrased or repeated participants' words or phrases to ensure understanding. However, I was careful not to overuse this, in case participants perceived the paraphrases as indicative of what I wanted to hear. The interview style aimed to enable participants to share their experiences without the constraints of subtle directing. Open questions, such as "what happened next?" and "how was that for you?" were favoured over leading questions.

At times I followed lines of interest, but at others I resisted, when I felt it veered too far away from the research question. I felt more anxious in the first interview than I did in later ones, where I felt more free in asking questions without so much self-consciousness of my role and influence in the interviews. I felt some of my initial responses had been rather robotic whereas over time my interviewing style became more relaxed, slightly less formal. I felt that this enhanced the rapport, although participants' stories did not appear to become deeper over time. Perhaps my increased sense of confidence within interviews impacted the participants and data less than I had anticipated…the process of thinking about my role and the content and the coding of interviews, was a repetitive and taxing process. As Glaser (1999) warned, this grounded theory work has required a tolerance of confusion, tedium and hard work… in the perseverance and patience in hoping and waiting for significant theoretical concepts to emerge, whilst engaging in reflexivity in the process.

Figure 4. Research diary extract (15/03/22)

3.8.2. Recording and transcribing

The length of interviews ranged between 28 and 82 minutes with an average of 51 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded using Zoom and 'Otter', a transcribing and recording application; I recorded interviews on two applications to protect the data in case of a failed recording. Otter also provided automated transcriptions of the interviews. However, the Otter transcripts were imprecise and so these were edited during my first listen of the recordings. Transcribing, such as where to insert punctuation, is a subjective process (Bailey, 2008), relating to participants words, my interpretations and additional aspects such as pauses in speech.

3.8.3. Data storage

Data was stored in password protected folders on my laptop and was never handled or accessed using public computers, drives or clouds. Other strategies which aimed to protect participant information (Orb et al., 2001) included immediately applying pseudonyms to the data files and removing all identifiers from transcripts.

The data was also stored on a computer-assisted analysis program for qualitative data called 'NVivo', which was also used to sort, organise and code the transcribed interviews. All data in the Otter app was deleted as soon as the other recording method had been checked, and once the transcripts had been uploaded into NVivo.

3.9. Data analysis

The data analysis took place in an iterative process, occurring simultaneously with data collection, during, between and following the interviews. During interviews, although I intended to remain present with the participants, some initial analysis was occurring, which formed the foundations for later memo writing. Following each interview, and once transcripts were finalised, the recordings were listened to again at least twice whilst I generated initial codes. After the first three interviews, focused codes had been generated and I had these in mind during the final two interviews. This aided some of my thinking in interviews, which likely influenced lines of questioning and the direction of interviews. Following the completion of interviews, focused codes were developed and organised into categories, which were populated with properties and relationships, which eventually comprised a theory. During the theory development stage of analysis, the interviews were listened to again to ensure that the theory reflected the original data. In line with Charmaz (2014)'s guidance, the present research used three phases of coding: open/initial, focused, and theoretical coding.

3.9.1. Initial coding

Initial codes were labelled using gerunds (verbs which function as nouns, ending in 'ing') to explain what was happening either within the participants narrative (e.g. "attending a pride parade") or within the interview (e.g. "arguing the importance of education"). Initial coding for action helps the analysis to stay close to the data (Charmaz, 2014). Line-by-line coding was conducted, in that every sentence or segment of participants speech was coded using a gerund. There were 793 initial codes in total across participants. Whilst I was aware of my unavoidable residence in the data analysis, I did not want to misrepresent the participants voices, which is a risk in qualitative research (Warunsznski, 2002). To encourage representation, I aimed to 'stay close' to the data in the initial coding phase, which perhaps explains the large number of initial codes. I listened to the interviews at least two times each within the initial coding phase, reading and re-reading the transcripts.

3.9.2. Focused coding

During focused coding, I retained the importance of justifying emerging codes to increase representation of the data. However, the focused coding phase involved more analytical processes, searching for meaning and connections and engaging in more reflexivity around the

coding. Focused coding involves further organisation of data and the emerging analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Initial codes which had most reach, direction and centrality were brought forward to become focused codes.

3.9.3. Theoretical coding

The theoretical stage of coding involved considering the patterns and relationships between categories that were formed through an analytical process of clustering pertinent focused codes (Charmaz, 2014). During this stage of analysis, I visually mapped the developing theory using post-it notes labelled with focused codes. This was a dynamic, back-and-forth process involving several weeks of shifting the categories and focused codes around and considering relationships between them. This also involved returning to the original interview transcripts and listening to the interview recordings again, to examine the accomplished theory against the original data.

3.10. Theoretical sampling

Engaging in theoretical sampling involves reviewing data and exploring alternative avenues in which codes and categories emerge, to ensure the analysis is refined and expansive (Charmaz, 2014). To support this process, I studied each transcript following the initial coding of every interview, searching for threads to explore in the next interview. During this study of transcripts, the emerging focused codes and categories were re-examined and checked for evidence for and contrary to these understandings. Following the coding of each interview, the previous transcript was returned to and further amendments and analyses took place. In this stage, exceptions to emerging categories were discovered, which informed the key findings.

3.11. Memos

Memos are analytic notes which serve diverse purposes, and play a vital role in grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2014). Memos were used in this research to explore ideas, intuitions and inklings (see Table 3). Memo writing took place from the day of the first interview, and throughout all phases of data collection, coding and analysis. As suggested by Charmaz (2014), 'free writing' was adopted in memo writing, which aims to get ideas written down as quickly and freely as possible. Memos were often circuitous, linking together incomplete and emerging ideas, which could be helpfully returned to later.

Segment from interview	Associated memo
"It was the group of people I'd gone through primary school with, so it was like these people I've known forever have kind of pushed me to the side now. And you feel kind of lost because when it gets to that point where you're pushed out, everyone else has formed their own solid groups. So you kind of don't really have anywhere to fit in, because everyone's blocked themselves in already. And so finding a new place to be a part of is really stressful." (Orla)	Place seems to be important…to the side, pushed out, blocked in. "Solid", full-up friendship groups with barriers around them. The more she presented as different, the more she fell short of the norms or expectations of the group, and the more she got pushed out. I'm also wondering about place in schools. How friendship groups tend to have different spaces and places to inhabit at breaks and lunchtimes. When you are "pushed out" of a group you not only have to find different friends (or be alone) but you also have to find a different place to hang out, maybe even different places to sit in lessons. [The LGBT+ youth group] maybe represents that new place for young people to be, firmly inside and within a group.

TABLE 3. INTERVIEW SEGMENT AND ASSOCIATED MEMO

3.12. THEORETICAL SUFFICIENCY

The ultimate aim of grounded theory studies is to reach theoretical saturation (Glaser, 1992), referring to the point in analysis when no new meaningful data emerge. Saturation can be difficult to reach as each participant can offer subjective insights which broaden previous analysis. Instead, Dey (1999) proposed that theoretical 'sufficiency' can be sought, which refers to the point when the data is rich and sufficient enough for theoretical claims to be legitimately made.

I had initially hoped for higher participant numbers although ultimately the five interviews provided such richness that this was not necessary. Over the interviews, fewer initial codes were ascribed each time. Furthermore, the fifth interview did not glean any new focused codes, although some new information was added into existing categories. It is possible that further interviews would have garnered a wider breadth of data, although it is not certain that this would have led to a greater depth of analysis. Due to these considerations, theoretical sufficiency (Dey, 1999) was accepted.

3.13. Trustworthiness

3.13.1. Overview of trustworthiness

The criteria of trustworthiness has been attributed to qualitative research to provide parallel criteria for the validity, reliability and objectivity commonly sought for in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986). According to Guba (1981), trustworthiness is achieved within research when the following four constructs are obtained:

1) Credibility
2) Dependability
3) Confirmability
4) Transferability

The current research aimed to achieve 'trustworthiness' across the above constructs in a number of ways.

3.13.2. Credibility

Credibility refers to the authenticity of participant accounts, the extent to which they were telling the truth in interviews. To ascertain this, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that researchers should be occupied in 'prolonged engagement' with their phenomena or participants. This was achieved in the current research through intensive interviews in which I asked clarifying questions to check any inconsistencies and gain a deeper understanding of participants' realities. A persistent observation was obtained through the iterative process of data collection and analysis; as the initial and focused codes were developed between interviews, I entered interviews with ideas about previous codes. Interpretation testing was conducted during the interviews, when I asked participants to clarify or extend their answers if unsubstantiated interpretations were suspected. Negative case analysis was engaged with, identifying exceptions and inconsistencies within interviews and across participants. Lincoln and Guba (1986) argued that this equated to an 'assiduous' search. Peer debriefing was to some extent engaged with in research supervision, which supported the development of a less involved lens, which supported the developing working hypotheses, coding and eventual theory. The constant comparison approach within CGT allowed for exploration of any discrepancies within the data.

3.13.3. Dependability and confirmability

Dependability is the qualitative parallel for the concept of reliability. If research is dependable its methodology could be repeated and the same findings could be found (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability refers to the extent that the researcher has eliminated their bias from the research. In line with CGT (Charmaz, 2014), I accepted that bias could not be eliminated in this study. However continual open-mindedness, awareness and reflection throughout the research enabled an examination of my thoughts, feelings and experiences. The resulting theory was thus grounded in participants' words, rather than my pre-conceived assumptions. The dependability and confirmability was promoted in consistent engagement in reflexivity and an in-depth 'audit trail' (Robson, 2011), through the writing of research diary entries and memos throughout the research process.

3.13.4. Transferability

Transferability refers to the relevance, usefulness and applicability of research to other people and contexts. The transferability is likely increased for settings that are more similar to those in which the research is conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This suggests that the current findings could be transferable to other schools and LGBT+ youth groups or organisations in the UK. The small sample size could impact transferability of the proposed theory. However, the current participant population were varied in terms of experiences, age, gender, sexuality and school type (college/school, mainstream/special needs, 'single sex'/mixed genders). However all participants were white British and from southern England which raises questions about transferability to other populations in the UK. The theory outlined in the findings chapter is highly contextualised. However it provides a promising starting point for understanding experiences of LGBT+ YP across youth club and education contexts which can be used to inform practice and shape future research. Whilst the perspectives of five participants will not resemble the views of all LGBT+ YP about these settings, and nor was this the intention, their experiences can be learned from. In this sense the findings are transferable because they can be utilised for reflection and learning by EPs, schools and all professionals working with LGBT+ CYP.

3.14. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlined this study and my ontological and epistemological positions. The purpose and aims were discussed, and ethical considerations and methodological processes employed were explored.

4. Research findings

4.1. Aims of the chapter

This chapter aims to describe and analyse the findings of the current constructivist grounded theory study of participants' experiences in education settings and LGBT+ youth groups. These findings are grounded in data from intensive interviews. Participant quotes have been selected to illustrate the findings but do not exhaustively comprise the data which contributed to the categories of the theory.

4.2. The wheel of action and inaction

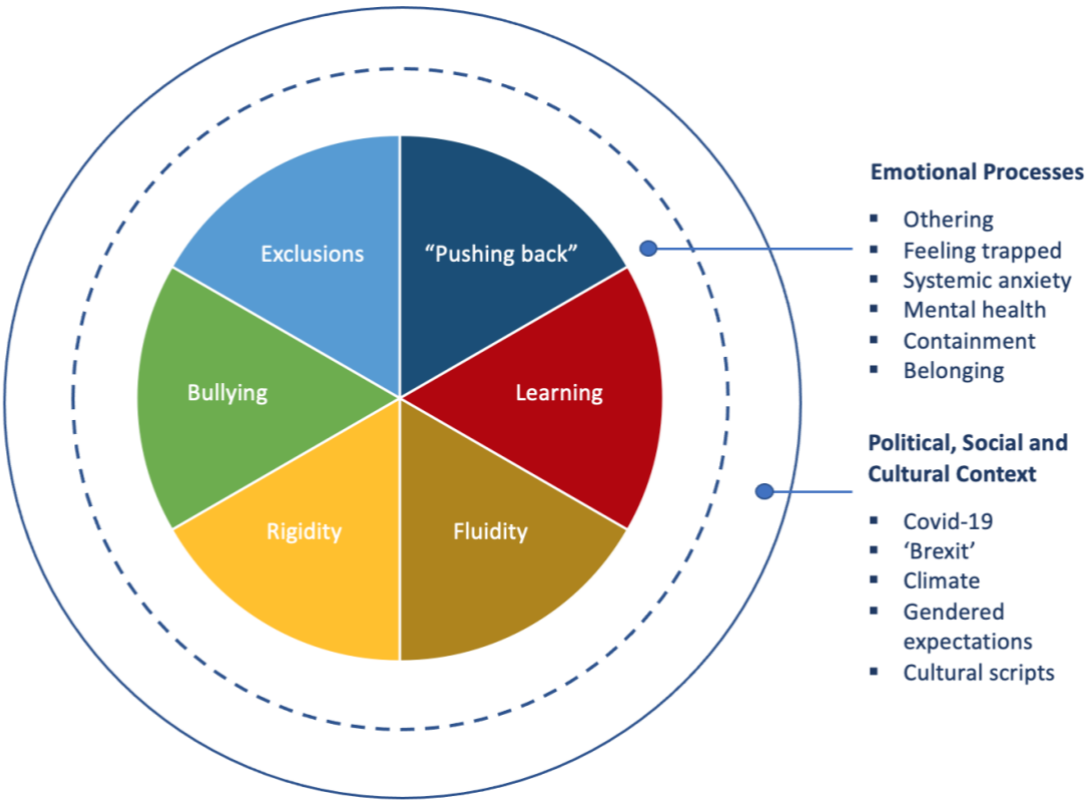

Figure 5. The wheel of action and inaction, and its mediating elements

4.2.1. Overview of the wheel

'The wheel of action and inaction' (Figure 5) visually depicts the findings of this study. Actions and inactions were categorised into the following groups: bullying, exclusions, rigidity, fluidity,

"pushing back" and learning. The actions and inactions were influenced and mediated by the emotional processes surrounding them. The dotted line in the visual indicates the permeating boundary and multi-directional impact of the emotional processes, (in)actions and contexts. The distinct political, cultural and social environments in which experiences were positioned were the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK's exit from the European Union (EU; colloquially known as 'Brexit'), climate change and rigid societal expectations. This chapter explores the action components within the wheel, the contexts surrounding them and the interrelating emotional processes.

4.3. Political, social and cultural context

4.3.1. Contextual factors

The context was comprised of wider environments and events which impacted participants' realities, hence the representation of everything taking place within those contextual parameters (Figure 5). The outer layer of the present theory is similar to Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2004) 'macrosystem', also incorporating dominant cultural norms and other societal and interpersonal factors.

4.3.2. Covid-19 pandemic

Jay (they/them), Liam (he/him) and Kit (they/them) mentioned the impact of Covid-19 in their interviews. Jay and Liam were both in Year 11 during the first wave of Covid-19, which affected the UK from March 2020. They both said that their time at secondary school was abruptly terminated due to this.

> "*Year 11 was just obviously like COVID and everything. So that was kind of cut short and then I left…I went back for my GCSE results and got my artwork and I never looked back again…it was amazing, I hated that school.*" (Jay)

> "*When Corona hit we never got taught again anyway, because of, I dunno, they were teaching all the other kids, not us…they just gave up on us. They didn't teach us".* (Liam)

Jay and Liam had different responses to similar situations; Jay experienced the change as a welcome, early escape from a school they "*hated*", whereas Liam felt uncared for and let down

by the lack of support and education provided by his school at the time. Kit commented that the pandemic affected their participation in education and at the LGBT+ youth group. Kit started attending the youth group just before the first Covid-19 lockdown. They then stopped going whilst the groups took place online.

> "*There was zooms for it, but I don't like zooms. I didn't really do any of the school ones. I think I did all of them to begin with for subjects, and then I ended up only doing one subject at the end, with my favourite teacher, and I just couldn't. Especially when I didn't really know anyone [at the youth group] at the beginning anyway, so I just didn't want to go on a zoom and go 'hey' because I didn't know anyone… I think it got to the point for school, where I was having a panic attack before every zoom, where I was like yeah I can't do this."* (Kit)

Kit found online sessions highly anxiety provoking and their strong preference was to attend school and the youth group in person. This highlighted that statutory education and out-of-school youth groups were inaccessible for some YP during periods of the Covid-19 pandemic even when remote alternatives were offered. Covid-19 essentially terminated access to education for Kit, Jay and Liam, although their emotional experiences of this were diverse, ranging from relief to considerable impacts on mental health.

4.3.3. Brexit

Lacey (she/her) posited that the EU referendum directly impacted online discourse and a rise in racism and transphobia. She had been 12 years old at the time.

> *"I remember back during the whole like Brexit thing. This is probably one of the most insane things that happened in my school when I was there is that we had a fucking Brexit march of like a bunch of like 12 year olds, like sort of going around the school, yelling 'keep them out' over and over again, and occasionally yelling it at like, you know, at like, like the brown kids, and then like the teachers are just all like oh alright you know".* (Lacey)

Lacey felt that the racist bullying she observed in school was directly related to Brexit. Indeed, public and media discourse during the Brexit campaign included exclusionary, othering and racist

attitudes (Virdee & McGeever, 2018), which may have impacted on children's behaviours in school. The teachers' inaction and perceived detachment within this incident was particularly stark, and was juxtaposed with Lacey's feeling that this was "*one of the most insane things that happened*". This inaction was mirrored in the school's response to Lacey's experience of being bullied and bullying others.

> *"School, they very much don't really do anything to sort of stop people from being massive, massive assholes, you know. I mean, I was a massive bully, but I also got bullied a lot too, you know, and um school didn't do anything".* (Lacey)

This may reflect a wider lack of societal consequence or response to racist tactics employed by the 'Leave' campaign (Virdee & McGeever, 2018). Interestingly Lacey felt that the discourse she was aware of impacted her personal views:

> *"Anyone who's known me when I was like 12 would be very, very surprised to what I'm like now because let me tell you, 12 year old me, was the most just horrendous dipshit you know, I hated, I hated, you know, I hated gay people. I hated trans people…"* (Lacey)

> *"And can you say a bit more about that then, that kind of process of holding some of the, that hatred towards gay people or trans people?"* (Louisa)

> *"Oh, well, it's simple. It was like, you know, it's 2016 in the height of Brexit…I suppose that like a lot of the time there was a lot of kids who were sort of like dragged into that, you could watch someone on YouTube was sort of like you know, he'd be like 'Oh yeah by the way I think all trans should kill themselves' and stuff it was basically like you know that was sort of where everything was".* (Lacey)

Lacey described Brexit as a divisive event which led to "*an uptake of right-wing beliefs*" which she observed at school and on the internet. Lacey reflected that these experiences may have contributed to an internalised hatred in her towards groups that she later realised she was a part. Lacey's stories relating to Brexit demonstrated the considerable power that political events can have on discourse and actions observed, experienced and engaged in by CYP.

4.3.4. Climate emergency

Jay explained their intense awareness of the global climate emergency, and the impact of this from an early age. In Year 7, Jay spent considerable time arguing with their peers about the importance of action against climate change. Jay then felt *"really, really angry"* when they were not taken seriously.

> "*This is a thing that's happening but you guys are so like, focused on what's inside your screen, that you're not seeing what's like actually going on in the world…I just, I wanted people to see the world the way I saw it but nobody did. Which is just like really frustrating…all this natural beauty that is around us, but you don't care if you'd rather the person who is beautiful when they've had so much work done on them and like photoshopping it's like that's not real beauty. Look up and look around you. That's the stuff that really matters*". (Jay)

Jay's care for the environment felt in contrast with the interests of their peers, highlighting differences in the way they viewed the world. Jay also commented on dominant cultural ideas around beauty, and about how it can be difficult to be heard when voicing views which fall outside of the norm. This emphasised how arguably the most pressing environmental event (global warming) can take place outside the dominant sphere of attention, with a minority of people feeling overwhelmed with climate anxiety. Jay demonstrated courage in using their voice in attempt to enact change, although they seemed isolated in this experience. Jay felt that these differences contributed to them being bullied (explored further in section 4.4).

4.3.5. Cultural scripts and expectations

Jay explained that their school had promoted a "*traditional*", milestone-focused 'script' for life.

> "*First school, and then you do secondary school, then you do sixth form, then you do university, then you get a job. Then you get a house and then a mortgage and have a family like this is things that society expects you to do*." (Jay)

Jay resisted conforming to this life script, which involved planning not to attend university and studying a vocational course at college despite expectations of them to study academic subjects. Jay described their own choices in life as feeling "*right. Like I've never done what I'm expected to do. Like I've been taught to always do what I want to do, and not what society tells me to do."* Jay was able to refuse the script prescribed by formal education systems, which was perhaps supported by these expectations not being reinforced at home.

Byng-Hall (1985, 1986) explained intergenerational patterns of behaviour with the concept of 'family scripts' which are acted out recurrently in families. Jay proposed a similar phenomenon of a cultural script, in which societal messages normalise and promote certain ways of living. Jay's refusal to 'obey' the script represents a fluid way of being and a responsivity to what feels "*right*" rather than fitting into rigid expectations projected onto them.

Kit discussed the expectation to wear school uniform at school, compared with the freedom to wear clothes of their choosing at the youth group.

> "*I can be myself [at the youth group] whilst at school I have to put on school uniform and pretend to be like everyone else…whilst now I'm in my own clothing…and then you can also be yourself*." (Kit)

This demonstrated the importance for Kit having agency and freedom to self-express in their appearance. Kit equated the freedom around dress in the youth group context to a greater ability to be themself, whereas restrictive uniform rules contributed to a pressure to conform at school. Kit also alluded to an expected behavioural conformity in school, in that they felt a pressure to "*pretend to be like everybody else*".

4.3.6. Gender-based expectations

All participants discussed binary socialisations and expectations based on gender. Jay talked about not fitting into gender-based expectations for appearance.

> "*I got really bullied in year seven for just being who I was just being myself. I had like really, really short hair. So a lot of people called me a boy and at the time it really, really bothered me because it was like well, I'm clearly not so can you just like not do that.*" (Jay)

Jay's peers were in a sense enacting a policing of gender norms; Jay was perceived as a girl who did not fit into gender stereotypes for hair length, and as a result they were called a boy. This was experienced as an insult, and may have been intended as such. This indicates that the boundary of what is deemed gender transgressive is reliant on seemingly minor aspects of appearance, suggesting limited and rigid parameters around gender. Lacey also described different gender stereotypes for appearance:

> *"A girl can like you know dress like a guy and no one gives a shit, like no one really cares. If a guy went to school wearing a skirt one day, he'd get, he'd get bullied forever and he'd get called a faggot and stuff. It's, you know, it's in terms of like that regard it is, it is very much you know, shitty for guys. And you know, I mean, even though I'm not a guy, I do recognise that I have a lot of experience, you know, as a guy, you know, even I'm not gonna like you know deny that."* (Lacey)

Lacey perceived rigid expectations for masculinity and appearance for boys, whereas she felt that girls did not have the same difficulties. Lacey drew upon her "*experience as a guy*" in her understanding of how difficult it is for boys to present outside of appearance-based expectations for their gender. Lacey argued that children socialised as girls may be culturally allowed to explore and experiment more with androgenous or masculine dress, whereas boys wearing clothing regarded as feminine would be "*bullied forever*". Lacey may not have felt freely able to experiment with her gender expression prior to coming out as trans. This added to the data referring to gender binary norms, which can be policed and maintained by peers in acts of bullying.

> *"I always had issues with you know, masculinity because when I was younger, say 12, 13, I decided that the solution to it was actually the opposite to what I actually want and I was like ok the issue is I'm really short and I need to be more masculine and I need to work out and be ripped and stuff and thank god I didn't actually do that*". (Lacey)

Lacey initially felt she could resolve former issues with masculinity by further presenting within societal stereotypes for her assumed male gender, to appear more muscular and therefore be seen as more masculine. This presents the idea that in altering how one looks on the outside, people can change their internal feelings about their gender. This was demonstrated in Lacey's idea that the "*solution*" to her internal "*issues*" with masculinity could be sought through changing her body shape, although she was later relieved about not pursuing this. Lacey further exhibited her belief in the rigidity of gender norms in arguing that women face societal expectations around sexuality.

> "*I wanna say you know if you are 100% trans no questions asked…typically speaking lesbian women tend to have a pretty different relationship with femininity because women are so often sort of tied into liking men…and so a lot of people you know women who don't like men would go 'oh yeah I have, I feel slightly disconnected from being a woman because I don't like men and therefore that means I am not a woman' and that sort of mindset…a girl will be like 'I'm a girl but I wanna be more masculine' and stuff and you know people will be like 'oh yeah you're definitely a trans guy' when you know they're not they just prefer things to be different. There's a lot of this. That being said though I do tend to just trust people when they say they're something".* (Lacey)

Lacey noted the importance of believing others when they share that they are trans*, a crucial lesson for professionals working with CYP. She also argued that women are "*tied into*" cultural expectations for them to be feminine and heterosexual. Lacey felt that those who do not fit into these gender stereotypes, may feel disconnected with their gender identity. Lacey also suggested a possible dynamic in which identifying as trans could be propositioned or confirmed within social relationships. However, it is pertinent to note that this particular experience was not one that Lacey described experiencing herself, rather one that she had interpreted.

4.4. Othering

4.4.1. Responses to difference

Orla (she/her) proposed that being different is often met with othering, rejection and exclusion, even when the difference represents something positive, such as maturity or psychological growth. 'Othering' can be defined as a set of processes which marginalise and exclude people,

producing and maintaining inequalities, based upon any of a range of human differences often related to group identities (Powell & Menendian, 2016). The process of othering can occur at individual and group levels.

> "*When you're growing up you're, you're acting different and you mature, but a lot of people don't see that as growing, but more as changing for the negative, so you kind of get pushed out."* (Orla)

On a personal level Orla felt that the changes in her behaviour were positive, although since they did not align with the typical behaviours of her social group, they were perceived as negative, and she was "*pushed out*". The process of othering can lead to acts of bullying, which were discussed by all participants. Orla, Liam and Kit experienced bullying which was directly related to their LGBT+ identities whereas Jay and Lacey were bullied for not fitting in more generally. Therefore, all bullying experiences appeared to be rooted in exclusionary and discriminatory responses to difference, otherness or queerness.

> *"If you weren't perceived as normal, you would not get on very well in school so thinking about not fitting into a standard is quite stressful…if you don't fit into a group…it kind of leaves you quite vulnerable".* (Orla)

Orla's assertion aligns with Jay's experience of being perceived as different due to their appearance and interest in tackling climate change, which Jay felt led to:

> "*A lot of people bullied me. I wasn't, I didn't fit in. I've never fitted in. I've always been like, on the outside*." (Jay)

> "*If you're a bit different then you're doomed to have no friends…I didn't really make any friends in secondary school and in year, I wanna say either like year nine or like the very beginning of year ten I ended up getting expelled because over the course of my time at that school I'd been suspended a total of 18 times so they expelled me and then I was out of school for fucking a year and a half. A year and a half I had no school."* (Lacey)

Lacey experienced othering and acts of exclusion on interpersonal and institutional levels. The latter left her outside of the school system for 1.5 years, despite education being a statutory right for all children (Human Rights Act, 1998). When Lacey returned to school, she attended a specialist provision for CYP with SEND. Of this she said, "*it's not like you can bully someone for being a bit different because they're all different as well*." When difference was normalised, othering and bullying were reduced. In line with this, all participants felt a sense of acceptance, inclusion and belonging in the youth groups that they attended (explored further in section 4.9). However, Liam shared an experience in which certain aspects of him were othered or unwelcome in the youth group, a setting that was predominantly described as inclusive.

> *"I can have tics or whatever, like recently I had a bad situation with [the youth workers] about that where they didn't, they were getting annoyed at me because of it, so I just walked out, I just got up and walked out because I just couldn't like stand it. So I think that [the youth] group, they're accepting of LGBT and whatever, but I think they just need to be accepting of everything, like disabilities and everything because people can't help stuff like that, and it really annoyed me…So with certain things they struggle to accept just like school struggle to accept certain things."* (Liam)

Liam had felt a lack of acceptance of his tics in both school and youth group settings. The response indicated that the staff believed that Liam was making a conscious choice to display his behavioural tics. This resonates with the common misconception that YP who exhibit tics are ultimately in control of them (Wadman et al., 2016). This highlighted the need to develop inclusivity of all difference, including neurodiversity and its associated presentations.

4.4.2. Experiences of homophobia

Orla talked about a normalisation of homophobia in her secondary school context.

> *"Homophobia has become so normalised. Saying like slurs like the 'F' slur or things like that…is so normal that sometimes you don't even realise it's wrong... so you kind of realise at that point that like this is what it actually means. And then it's also at that point where it starts getting used against you as a personal thing for the right reasons. Instead of like, oh you like drop their pen and they say it to you like as a joke. It's kind of at that point*

where they know what it means how it's used on you, and some more personal attack, as opposed to just like a funny thing to say." (Orla)

Orla shared that CYP saying "*ooh that's a bit gay*" to denote something bad was highly normalised in her school. Orla observed that it would often be "*boys to boys*" calling each other 'gay' as an insult if they were perceived as "*not inherently masculine*". In line with Lacey's comments around societal pressures on boys to be masculine, Orla saw the word 'gay' be used to punish and police 'non-masculine' behaviours. Such actions further imply a rigidity around acceptable and unacceptable behaviours based upon gender, the perspective that sexuality is entangled with gender, and the homophobic assumption that being gay (or LGBT+) is an undesirable position.

Learning took place implicitly, through hearing "*older kids making homophobic jokes, saying slurs or ablest things*". Orla explained that homophobic language was often used as a joke although she distinguished when comments were made with intent. She elucidated that a naïve joke became a personal attack once the bearers developed cognizance of its meaning, at the moment when subliminally learnt behaviour was replaced with actively delivered insult. Liam provided an example of the latter:

*"He was being like really like homophobic towards me, and one of my good mates that I've made that year just cos he was a boy apparently we were dating and all this and he was saying loads of horrible stuff about us and how he's going to kill both our families. Just because he thought we were dating." (*Liam)

Liam suffered overtly homophobic verbal abuse, and whilst this feels more severe than the subtle homophobic slurs discussed by Orla, a normalisation of one may feed into the increased incidence of the other.

4.4.3. Mental health impact

Orla described the impact of realising that homophobic comments were directed at her:

"You go through the stages of grief, where you kind of feel the shock of it, and then it kind of sinks in, and you're like, oh, that wasn't very nice. And then it kind of sticks with you…

you just keep thinking about, and then it turns into something that then becomes self-depreciating, as well as other people using it to put you down, you kind of use it on yourself like, oh, well, maybe they're right and then it ruins a lot of things, I think, definitely… when somebody says it to you, you think, oh, maybe it's bad or I'm bad or disgusting or, or maybe I should like, what I'm doing is wrong, what I like, identify as is wrong." (Orla)

Orla also said that the homophobia she experienced had made her "*feel quite strange, like an alien*". She described a process of negative internalisation, which impacted her self-esteem and view of herself. Similarly, Jay discussed the long-term impact of peer bullying on their mental health:

"I wasn't being bullied anymore, but anxiety and depression was like the aftermath of like all the bullying…it was a, mentally it was like a tough year. And like from a point I barely got through it." (Jay)

When Liam came out as trans at school, he faced bullying and barriers to acceptance, which exacerbated his existing mental health difficulties.

"I struggled with my mental health before anyway, but that just like, made it worse because it was really hard that year for me because…I had to move foster placements and I'd been there for four years…so it was like five years of mates that I just had to leave because I got kicked, well my foster carers kicked me out and refused to have me again…I think that like, it made it difficult because then I was a like, quite badly behaved in school. And I was always in detention or in trouble or whatever. And I think them just not accepting me, just like was the end of it. So I just stopped going." (Liam)

Liam eloquently explained that the behaviour at school which preceded him being "*always in detention or in trouble,*" was directly related to the painful losses and life changes that he had recently experienced. Liam ultimately endured multiple exclusions, in being *"kicked out"* by his previous foster carers, moving to a town and school far away from his former home and then in detentions in his new school. When Liam was not accepted after coming out, this was the 'final straw' that caused him to stop attending school.

4.4.4. School staff responses to mental health

Liam expressed that all of his previous schools had been inadequate in supporting his mental health difficulties.

> "*What would you have wanted? Like what did you need that they didn't give*?" (Louisa)

> "*Well just understanding really because I've got Complex PTSD. So like I zone out, I get flashbacks and everything, and certain things trigger me. I have somewhat learnt to control it now, but back then I didn't. I could have like outbursts and everything. But they wouldn't, I don't know, they just wouldn't accept that. It was all constantly told to put like my PTSD like the flashbacks, the images in a box and the boxes are important to the school. So it was school mental health and then your home life, but school they said was first before mental health*." (Liam)

Liam had been advised to mentally organise his trauma into a 'box'. This advice reflects the widely accepted belief that people with mental health difficulties can be supported to gain more control over how they think and feel (BABCP, 2021), which is a key tenet of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), the most commonly used therapy in the UK for mental health difficulties (UK Council for Psychotherapy, 2022). Liam's experience perhaps demonstrates how particular aspects of popular therapies can trickle down into everyday discourse in society and schools, heard in advice given by non-therapists. Despite helpful intentions, this was not received as supportive for Liam. This echoed Liam's experiences of others' responses to his tics, and adds to a picture of feeling misunderstood across contexts.

Liam experienced a more adequate level of support at college, where he felt that others accepted him and did not "*care [about] the past*". However, he also felt dismissed here when talking about his mental health with his college tutor.

> "*She said 'we all suffer with mental health because of Corona'. Mine isn't because of Corona thank you. It's worse because of Corona. But mine isn't because of that. So you can go that way.*" (Liam)

This highlights the problem with a 'blanket' approach to emotional difficulties and viewing one person's mental health through the lens of a collective experience (Covid-19). Whilst attempting to connect with and understand Liam, the tutor may not have had adequate training or time available to provide appropriate mental health support, which had the impact of Liam 'shutting down'.

4.4.5. Feeling trapped

The bullying that Orla experienced and observed changed in nature over time. Overt forms of bullying were replaced with "*microaggressions*" which were more difficult to challenge. Microaggressions can be defined as 'subtle snubs, slights and insults directed towards minorities, as well as to women and other historically stigmatised groups, that implicitly communicate or at least engender hostility' (Lilienfeld, 2017). Orla's attempts to "*[call] out*" microaggressions, had led to others putting her "*into the narrative of being sensitive or snowflake or something like that*". This caused a trap: either tolerate microaggressions, or challenge them and risk being accused of *"just making assumptions"* or being labelled as too sensitive.

This 'catch-22' resonated with other experiences of feeling trapped or stuck at school, suggested in Jay's relief when escaping a school they "*hated*" and Orla's description of school as a place "*where you don't want to be but you have to."* Lacey added:

> "*Oh great I'm stuck in here with a bunch of people who I, you know don't really belong with.*" (Lacey)

This sense of feeling trapped enhanced participants' need for support and education outside of the school context in places where they are by choice.

4.4.6. A group of outsiders

Orla found a silver lining to the difficult experiences of othering and social exclusions. She formed a new group with others who had also been pushed out of their groups.

> *"Those are normally like the gay people or the, yeah it's normally those types of people where they're changing or not conforming to eventually get enough where you're all kind of in this outside space. And you kind of start to realise there's, there's like common*

reasons as to why you've been pushed out. And then you tend to bond over that instead because it's never, it's never there in the start and then it always kind of near that, near the end of school, forms as a group of social rejects." (Orla)

Orla raised the notion that differences, including LGBT+ identities, are risk factors for being excluded or outcasted from social groups. She described finally being in a group *"of all these people that felt the same way, and you kind of realise that you don't have to feel like that anymore".* In this new group, Orla was liberated of previous feelings of rejection and exclusion and instead experienced a sense of belonging and unity.

4.5. Systemic anxiety

There were several actions and inactions undertaken by school staff which upheld structures of rigidity in schools. Whilst it was believed that school staff were trying to do the right thing, a pervasive, embedded systemic anxiety appeared to have a paralysing effect, fuelling delays, barriers, inactions and questionably unethical actions in school contexts.

4.5.1. Following the wrong rules

These delays and inactions were particularly characterised by barriers in the uptake of participants names and pronouns. In coming out as trans*, Kit, Liam and Lacey changed their names and pronouns so that these aligned with their gender identity. This required others to adapt their language when talking to and about them, which was met with many difficulties from school staff.

By law, parental consent is required for a child under the age of 16 to change their name by deed poll (Asquith, 2017). However, parental consent is not legally required for schools to change children's preferred name and pronouns on their system (Stonewall, 2019). This could be a simple process similar to when CYP ask to be called an abbreviated/'nick' name. However, Kit, Lacey and Liam were all incorrectly told that their schools legally had to inform or gain consent from their parent/carer before they could use their preferred name and pronouns in school.

"*[My headteacher] said they couldn't change my name unless I told my carer and everything and then that meant I had to come out to my carer, which didn't go well*." (Liam)

"*My school basically told on me to my parents because apparently that was like a thing that they legally have to do so yeah, and I mean I was like dreading that… but she was only doing it because she had to*". (Lacey)

This misinformation was later realised by Liam and Kit in attending the LGBT+ youth groups.

"I just agreed with them because I thought they knew". (Liam)

"*But when I checked with someone at [the youth group]. You don't have to get permission for teachers to call you your preferred name and pronouns like on school documents and stuff it would still go out as your birth name. Yeah, but you don't need parental permission so your parents don't even need to know about it*" (Kit)

Liam's school told him that telling his carer was legally required before they could recognise his name/pronouns at school. As a result, Liam came out to his carer, to which she responded that he must be ill and took him to the doctors, which was a terrible experience for him. Liam's carer's response reflects a widespread pathologisation of trans* and gender diverse people, in which those who do not present within the binary gender system are given psychiatric diagnoses and medical 'treatments' (Suess Schwend, 2020). A harmful experience for Liam could have been avoided if staff at his school had researched the law around this. Systemic anxiety appeared to be driving the inaction here.

Kit's school also said they needed parental consent before using their name and pronouns. Kit's mother had initially been hesitant in accepting their non-binary identity, which contributed to the delay. However, the change did not take place once Kit's mother gave her consent. At the time of the interview Kit's teachers were knowingly continuing to use Kit's 'dead name' and she/her pronouns despite them coming out at school over a year before.

"*It was my birthday and we sing happy birthday to each other, and my teacher stood up in front of everyone and said, 'we will not be calling 'her' Kit', used wrong pronouns, used*

wrong, used my dead name a lot… I was really disappointed, and I was very upset by it, and it just didn't help the situation whatsoever. And my, one of the other teachers was in the room at that time and she didn't say anything about it at all". (Kit)

Kit's experience was worsened by the observing teachers' silence, which was interpreted as an endorsement. Furthermore, Kit's head of house (HOH), a pastoral staff member, told Kit not to speak about their name or pronouns at school whilst they were 'considering' the process. This was a surprising and serious request; Kit was asked to actively exclude that part of themselves from their speech acts whilst at school.

"I told my drama teacher that I wanted to be called Kit and then she checked with my head of house which was a big mistake. I don't think she realised how bad it was because then when my head of house had a conversation with her, and then had a conversation with me and it left me literally wanting to, I just wanted to cry right then and there, because she was like you shouldn't have done that and, and it was in a very patronising way. And I feel like I would have rather she would have shouted at me because it was very patronising saying, 'oh, you shouldn't have done that' sort of thing and it was awful." (Kit)

Kit felt patronised and punished in this seemingly draconian measure to prevent them from talking about their preferred name. This demonstrates that aspects of trans* identities can become contended, debated or shut down in schools. When Kit spoke about their name with their Drama teacher, she reported this back to Kit's HOH, possibly out of concern, to share information or perhaps to ask for guidance or permission (e.g., to use Kit's name). Both staff members may have felt restricted by anxiety and uncertainty around their actions. Kit said that this experience was not unique to them, but that *"every single student who's using different pronouns and different names has experienced [this] at one point or another…on multiple occasions as well"*. This was supported by Liam.

"There was a teacher that straight up refused to call me Liam. And was like, 'no, that's not you. You're known as' my, my dead name and all this so yeah but then I just stopped going to school…I didn't want to have people calling me by my dead name. And I don't want people like constantly making fun of me and everything. So thought it'd just be easier to not go". (Liam)

The impact of these repeated, cumulative experiences seriously impacted Liam's education. Kit similarly described having significant difficulties with learning as a result.

> "*I just couldn't concentrate in any lessons afterwards…every time I was in a lesson, I just kept thinking about it… You then don't feel that you want to talk because you're like 'I'm gonna get misgendered, I'm gonna get dead named' and things. Like, I don't talk in certain lessons because… every time I put my hand up, she would excessively say my dead name… I would know the answers to questions and I'd want to interact, but then it was just kind of hold- holding me back because I just didn't want to because it's one of the worst feelings ever".* (Kit)

Refusals to use YPs names and preferred pronouns by school staff can clearly cause emotional distress and contribute to disengagement in education. However, these refusals appeared to happen under a guise of bureaucracy, a following of "*the rules*". Kit felt that their teachers were not *"trying to be transphobic or anything, [they] just took the rules too far*", demonstrating the belief that school staff were driven by anxiety about the rules. Lacey told a related story about her school counsellor telling her mother about her gender identity, which was also verbally justified as a legal requirement.

> "*One day my mum was like 'oh yeah this girl just told me to go to this meeting' and I was just like 'oh okay' and so I just like chilled in my room and then she was just like...'alright' and I was just like 'okay' so I went back in my room. It was easy you know she didn't really mention anything about it (*laughing*)*". (Lacey)

Lacey, who was 15 at the time, was essentially excluded from this meeting despite the information shared being fundamentally about her. Furthermore, Lacey's subsequent non-descriptive conversation with her mother did not inform her of what was discussed in the meeting or of her mother's response. The potential for Lacey's counsellor to have provided some mediation between Lacey and her mother during this conversation had not been realised. When Lacey said "*it was easy*", this appeared to convey that a difficult conversation had been avoided, which may have created further distance between her and her mother. Lacey's laughter when she said that

her mother did not "*mention anything*", may have obscured more uncomfortable emotions such as rejection.

> "*That's the thing with my family you know, I don't really, I don't really ever really have any sort of conversations with them. You know, I'd rather you know, the thought of any kind of serious discussion for me it's just like you know, fuck no*." (Lacey)

Lacey's counsellor may have inadvertently colluded with a familial pattern or script whereby difficult or emotive conversations are avoided. Whilst this was likely borne out of a well-meaning intention to do the right thing, the counsellor's seemingly prevailing anxiety to safeguard herself may have contributed to her lack of research and knowledge about what actions she "*legally had to*" take. It is possible that this meeting did more harm than good for Lacey's relationship with her mother.

4.5.2. Positive coming out stories

Despite difficulties around the parental consent issue, participants all spoke mostly positively about coming out more generally. For example, Lacey described coming out as imperative in facilitating improvements in her self-care and wellbeing.

> "*And then I just sort of became like a functioning human being. Like it was only after that that I started actually like showering and like looking after myself because before that I was just like I don't fucking care*." (Lacey)

This demonstrated that regardless of others' difficulties accepting Lacey, and her difficulties around transparency of her gender identity at home, overall she experienced coming out as crucially enhancing and functional for her life.

Kit shared their happiness when they did feel accepted by others, demonstrating the importance of acknowledging YP for who they are.

> "*[It was] the right thing to do, and I respect them for that and I'm like, they were the lessons I was happiest in and they may not have been my favourite but I was happier*

because they were calling me Kit, they weren't like using my dead name, and it was really nice…then some teachers just stopped doing the register, they just said "who's not here", because they knew I didn't want to be called my dead name." (Kit)

This illustrated how seemingly simple changes can have a substantial impact on YPs emotional state and motivation for learning. When compared with the difficult experiences they faced with school staff, Kit described other students as:

"The complete opposite. They've been very good with it. They've been very accepting. At my school there's a very large LGBT community in it like there's a lot of um students who are gay or trans or something…as soon as I changed my pronouns and name they got into it straight away sort of thing, they're always trying, it's always been very accepting among young people at school." (Kit)

Kit also attended the GSA in their school, which they called an "*educational*" and "*fun*" place to learn about LGBT+ people and identities. Kit also described similar experiences at the LGBT+ youth group:

"I'm more accepted at [the youth group]. So, I'm always called my right names and pronouns and stuff. And the adults, I can talk to the adults, and they'll call you right name and right pronouns and stuff." (Kit)

4.6. "PUSHING BACK"

4.6.1. UNMET NEEDS

All participants discussed having unmet needs in school, related to belonging in social groups (Lacey, Liam, Jay, Orla) or being accepted by school staff (Liam, Kit). In addition, Orla postulated that gender and sexuality were largely undiscussed topics in school, calling these "*touchy subjects*". She felt that these were largely avoided because schools "*don't want to be misinformed or some of the parents wouldn't be very pleased with having their children told about it*". If so, all YP, not only those who are LGBT+, may have unmet learning needs around topics of gender and sexuality.

> "*Yeah so like [we learn] through education, but obviously education isn't provided by the school, but by the people that have had to experience it and go through it themselves*." (Orla)

Orla described having to take things into her own hands, stating that the absence of such education in school "*kind of does leave you down, does leave it down to you*". Orla described being tasked not only with providing informal education to her peers but also with challenging discriminatory comments, which she responded to with:

> "*A lot of arguing…like it's the same with, there's a lot of racism in school. And so they'll say something and I'll go no, that's not right. You can't say that this is why you can't say that. Don't let me hear you say that again."* (Orla)

Orla's acts of "*pushing back*" against homophobia, transphobia and racism, with "*a lot of arguing*", demonstrated that CYP who learn about discrimination by going through it themselves can also be positioned as educators and social justice activists aiming to tackle such discrimination. Whilst this showed Orla's ability to challenge, it also highlighted the need for a responsive strategy to the bias-based bullying which appeared to be highly prevalent in her school. The existing school structures appeared to be unable to implement effective educative, preventative or responsive interventions to address homophobic and racist bullying. As a result the challenge occurred on an individual level, from CYP who were also at risk of experiencing discrimination, highlighting the need for a more systemic approach.

4.6.2. Starting a riot

Whilst Orla spoke of individual actions of "*push back*", other participants described this process on wider levels. Kit spoke of the continual "*fight"* that their GSA group had to engage in with school leaders to get resources, such as petitioning to be granted a noticeboard. Liam also shared a story of an occasion in an English lesson, where his actions led to a collective class response or "push back".

> *"I had a massive incident with an English teacher… Where I was like, quite bad with my mental health and…sometimes I can't, I wouldn't be able to hear anything. I won't be able to speak, I can't write and I just like, shut down. And she started shouting at me. So I got up started effing and blinding, shouting at her. That's not me but it's yeah, it's what I can get like. And I was like, 'ah this school don't care'. I didn't use that, I used worse language. 'This school don't care about my mental health' basically, along those lines. And she went, 'Oh, we always try to help'. And then that's when I basically started like a mini riot within the class. Because there's quite a lot of people that then started getting up to go 'oh you actually don't so can you stop making up these lies?' And then I felt bad because we were all getting, we all got put in isolation, which was quite funny, but just because we were trying to stand up against what they're saying."* (Liam)

Liam's message about students feeling unsupported with their mental health in school garnered social momentum in the classroom, enabling other students to also speak out. The student group was mobilised to act through speaking up about something they clearly wanted to change. The class were ironically reprimanded by being put into 'isolation' together. Although Liam *"felt bad"* about this, his description of the incident as "*quite funny"* suggested that the experience provided amusement and connection for the group. Whilst this story started with a difficult interaction between Liam and his teacher, and ended with the whole class in detention, Liam demonstrated an impressive ability to engage in activism which is taken up and joined by others around him. Ultimately, Liam's peers came to his aid, shared in his angst and activism and lightened his emotional load.

4.7. Experiences in the LGBT+ youth groups

4.7.1. Motivations and hopes in attending

Participants initial motivations for attending the youth groups were mostly linked with finding friends. Lacey described attending the youth group as her "*only hope at making friends before college*". Liam also started attending hoping to "*make friends that were similar to [him]*" and Jay shared a similar reasoning:

"*To have people I could relate to more, friends who are more LGBT sort of thing so like I have friends if I'm having a really bad day to do with that sort of topic and be like 'hey, can we just talk' or something. And just to kind of have fun which and like, all of them have been achieved. It's been really good here."* (Jay)

4.7.2. CONTAINMENT

Participants all described positive experiences of their youth group as a supportive place.

"*It's been amazing, like on some occasions, it will definitely be the highlight of my week, especially if I've had really bad days at school, I'll like to come here and then it's just chill…and in the nicest possibly way I forget straight people exist sometimes. I'm like oh we're all here, we're all chill and we all understand each other as well, so we can all talk about like the different issues and stuff we will all understand it…It's always fun here*." (Kit)

"*It was nice to have the community and the support and knowing that…it's always there…just being surrounded by the people that are part of the community was quite reassuring…being around all the people that are similar to you, obviously, like, I can say now, I'm part of the LGBT community*". (Orla)

Kit and Orla felt a sense of belonging being in the LGBT+ community in their youth group. Participants described a level of feeling accepted in their youth group, and for most this was felt much more than in school settings. Lacey however described similar experiences across settings:

"In terms of the college I was just at and [the youth group, they're] not at all very different. In there, I put up with the strangest people for a while and then I leave and that's pretty much it and another thing is that the teachers are pretty fucking cool." (Lacey)

Whereas other participants perceived the youth group as very different or separate to other settings in their lives:

"[Youth] group was a way for me to get away from everything, cause it was getting away from school which I hated and getting away from my foster placement which I struggle with." (Liam)

"*So like if I've got a lot going on at school or at home, I know that I can go there and I don't have to think about I don't have to worry about that until it's over, because nothing else is involved or entwined with it…it's a nice time to relieve from everything else*." (Orla)

The youth group provided a space of containment for all participants. The term 'containment' in this context is used in line with Bion's (1962) conceptualisation from his theory of the container/contained. Bion (1962) stipulated that primary caregivers contain their baby's anxiety by attempting to understand their communications, and 'digesting' their difficult emotions so that the baby can feel contained enough to feel and express them, making greater sense of their own experience. This is the process of containment, which can be applied to other relational dynamics. In attending the youth groups, participants found a space where they could express their concerns and needs and feel listened to, which aided a sense of understanding about themselves. This process is highlighted in Lacey's comments:

"*[The youth workers] are the ones I'd rather talk to because they actually have some sort of you know, it's not like I'm gonna go up to some random kid and just talk about my issues. With the staff or whatever I can say 'oh yeah I've got this problem' and they'll be like 'okay tell me all about it' and I'll just be like 'blahblahblahblah'.*" (Lacey)

From a place of being understood and contained within the youth groups, participants then described feeling that they had a safe community where they belonged (Orla, Kit, Jay), people to talk to who wanted to listen (All) and support and backing for activism around LGBT+ rights that they wished to engage in (Liam, Kit).

4.7.3. Community elsewhere

Although Lacey felt listened to by staff both at the youth group and at school/college, she did not find peer connection or belonging in either setting. Lacey described the internet as the only place she had found friendships.

> "*Offline I've never really met anyone who I can relate to, anyone who's sort of like me at all. But I can go online and there's just like five people I know who I can just talk to and I'll be like talking about a very specific experience and they'll be like 'oh yeah, me too'. It's like you know the internet is very important for people like me honestly*". (Lacey)

Despite being previously exposed to abuse online (discussed in section 5.3), the community Lacey had found on the internet was invaluable to her. Whilst measures must be taken to safeguard CYP from abusive and discriminatory language encountered online, the importance of online friendships for some cannot be overstated, especially for YP like Lacey who have struggled to connect with peers or make friends in other contexts.

4.7.4. Peer Support

Jay, Orla and Liam talked about a simultaneous giving and receiving of support that took place within their youth groups. Jay shared an example of the way they spoke to younger members of their group:

> "*I remember being your age and being like, 'where, where do I sit? Who am I?' So it's like nice to like sit and chat about going through what they're currently going through and being like 'well, look at me now. You will get to this point where you're just completely comfortable with who you are'. You can say that to them, and like surely mean it, and I never thought I would get to a point where I was like yeah this is who I am, if you don't like it, off you go*". (Jay)

In growing through and overcoming adversities, Jay was able to authentically provide support, inspiration and mentorship to younger people in a reliable way. Orla explained that the help initially comes from the youth workers, but then through building friendships CYP are then able to provide this for one another.

> *"It is a really nice thing because you can be there to help people if they want it. [The youth] group's there to help but they make the friendships so you can help each other, help each other through things."* (Orla)

Additionally Liam described providing support and activism on a systemic level, through speaking at trainings for schools and other professionals about his experiences in care and being LGBT+. Liam demonstrated his capacity to act by using his voice and sharing his story in the hope to make changes for other CYP like him.

> *"[We talked] to the kids and also [trained] the adults. We do training days and meetings, we go in and we tell them our personal stories, how they can change the way their school is to better help the LGBT+ community."* (Liam)

4.8. Fluidity

4.8.1. Unlabelled

Participants defined their gender and sexualities in diverse ways (see Table 2). Orla resisted categorising herself within an established label, describing both her gender and sexuality as "*unlabelled*".

> "*[Unlabelled means] not having to stick with anything specific. If I don't know what I am or how I'm feeling, I don't need to worry about changing anything because I'm not put under a specific identity. So if one day I feel one way, and then the next week, I feel a bit different, I don't have to worry about the whole idea of coming out as something else and then potentially that changing again. It just makes it a lot easier to explore and express my identity both like gender identity and sexuality. It makes it a lot easier to do that fluidly*." (Orla)

Orla suggested that describing herself using established categories (e.g., terms within the LGBTQIA+ initialisation) would be experienced as labelling herself and then being boxed into that label. Orla proposed that definitions of gender and sexuality can have significant social consequences, such as restrictive responses from others which could feel oppressive. Orla described her own fluidity, in which she is able to flexibly adapt to a shifting sense of gender and sexuality. Whilst Orla felt liberated from labelling, she also implied that this position necessitated a constant state of resistance to an external pressure to categorise herself.

4.8.2. It gets better (with time)

Despite a range of painful, difficult experiences that participants shared, they all described a sense of things getting better over time. This involved personal growth and development, including increased self-acceptance and contentment. This may have also reflected the benefits of the containment experienced in youth groups and greater acceptance from others over time. Orla explained that bullying reduced as she went through adolescence, which she explained as due to "*everyone kind of [maturing] a little bit*". Other changes also played a role, including leaving school and attending college; Liam, Jay and Lacey described their colleges as more accepting and inclusive than their previous schools had been.

> "*They're quite chill about [everything] and like, doing everything right I guess…so there's like no drama at all, and it's amazing*." (Jay)

Lacey had a similar experience at her specialist college, where she reported that staff and other pupils were "*really cool*" when she came out. Alongside these individual developments, there was also some hope of gradual, societal changes cited by participants. For example, Kit noted that the GSA in their school was growing in size, and that more Year 7s than ever before had recently joined. Despite this, there was also a prevailing sense of things staying the same and of cyclicity in school systems. Particular issues such as bullying, rigidity and othering appeared to be withstanding. Orla alluded to this when she talked about cliques in schools:

> "*You'll find that in schools, especially now, almost every year group will have the same kind of cliques, so you've got like the real, the really popular people, the ones that are not quite popular, but almost there, then all of like the prefects and the really smart people and then you've got kind of like the weird ones in the corner*". (Orla)

Orla's words "*especially now*" suggested her perception that things may have become more stuck. She also claimed discriminatory bullying as a continual feature of school life.

> "*It's like a cycle and there's not really a way to stop it or anything…it just doesn't stop. Like it's just something that you have to learn to live with…if you're going to get bullied, it's happened and it's been happening and you get used to it".* (Orla)

Orla's despondency about this indicated that some bullying experiences may have been so entrenched that she became desensitised to them, or learnt to tolerate them as a coping mechanism. Overall, pervasiveness and rigidity in school systems was experienced through multiple barriers to participants' diversities, and attempts to advocate for themselves.

4.9. Summary of findings

The 'wheel of action and inaction' theory posits that YPs actions and inactions, and those of others around them, are related to complex emotional processes which are embedded in political, social and cultural dynamics. Participants' perceived differences led to processes of othering, bullying, exclusions and microaggressions. The impacts of these experiences included exacerbated mental health difficulties and internalised homophobia. Inactions, such as delays or refusals to use YP names and preferred pronouns were driven by systemic, incapacitating anxieties in school systems arising from a desire to follow the 'rules' and do the right thing. This anxiety prevented ethical and appropriate actions as seen in Kit, Liam and Lacey's stories of their schools incorrectly citing legal reasons for requiring parental consent around name changes. Such experiences, along with social exclusions and a lack of education about gender and sexuality diversity, left YP with an array of unmet needs. Many of these were satisfied however through attending the LGBT+ youth groups, and through forming and belonging to groups found in schools or online (for Lacey). Containment and belonging also supported participants to speak up, advocate for themselves and challenge discrimination that they witnessed or experienced. Participants exhibited a remarkable ability to resist societal expectations and the 'status quo'. However, despite their own difference and fluidity, there was a sense of 'stuckness', or cyclical rigidity in school systems and wider society. Yet participants were mobilised both alone and in groups to act to create change and promote progression. Attempts at activism were not always supported by those with greater power (such as adult teachers), but these provided opportunities for creating social momentum and unity with peers. Overall, participants were able to act towards the change they wanted to see, despite facing barriers and exclusions within rigid school systems where action towards change felt stifled. Implications for these findings will be further explored in the Discussion chapter.

4.10. Reflections on writing the chapter

It was difficult to summarise these findings as they were diverse and complicated, perhaps eliciting the expected complexities of adolescence, which are only multiplied when navigating societies and systems which other and exclude differences, including core aspects of YP gender and sexuality identities. I struggled immensely to know which extracts of the interviews to include in the chapter, and which to remove. This seemed to mirror a presence of conflict between inclusion and exclusion threading through participants' stories. I hope that through my own actions (including writing this thesis), I can illuminate and learn from their experiences so generously shared. It was helpful to conceptualise this analysis (and thesis) as if it were one of my paintings; I could keep adding colour and texture almost forever, but at some point I had to pause, take a step back and decide what more I needed to add. In one of those pauses, in my stepping back, I had to decide "now, is the time that I stop". This is what I have found.

Figure 6. My reflections on writing the findings chapter

5. Literature Review

5.1. Overview of chapter

Consistent with the guidance for CGT studies (Charmaz, 2014), a literature review was conducted following the collection and analysis of the data. Literature related to the theoretical code and supporting focused codes around 'rigidity and inaction' were selected as the focus for the literature review. This chapter reviews literature around the barriers and facilitators to change in schools, with a focus on gender and sexuality.

5.2. Literature review question

The literature review sought to answer the following question:

> *What is known in the literature about the barriers and facilitators to change in schools regarding gender and sexuality?*

5.3. Rationale for literature review question

The findings in the current study were multiple and complex, and therefore it was necessary to select a specific avenue to pursue for the literature review. Through careful consideration and discussion in supervision, the direction was decided based upon what was deemed to be most pertinent and potentially helpful for application for professionals and organisations, including EPs and schools. As many of the issues discussed by participants pertained to barriers which appeared to be erected or maintained within school systems, it was decided that the review would focus on literature around the barriers and facilitators to change in schools related to gender and sexuality.

One of the core findings was the rigidity experienced in school systems, which was conceptualised as being rooted in anxiety. The resulting barriers included an inflexibility in response to YP needs, which had detrimental impacts. In exploring and reviewing the literature around factors which

support and prevent change in schools related to sexuality and gender, I hoped to gain a deeper understanding about change processes, and what helps and hinders them.

5.4. Search strategy

The following systematic approach was employed to locate and review the literature:

- Relevant psychology and education databases were selected, including the American Psychological Association (APA), PsycInfo, Education Source, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing Archives.
- Search terms were selected and pilot searches led to editing of these. The finalised search terms were 'change' and ('sexuality' OR 'orientation') and 'gender' and 'school'.
- A Boolean phrase search was conducted on the EBSCOhost platform in March 2022.
- Limiters were applied to the search and papers were excluded if they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria were then edited to increase number of papers.
- A further hand search was conducted.
- Papers were critically reviewed.

5.5. Inclusion criteria

Papers included in this review all met the following inclusion criteria:

- Qualitative methodology.
- Research explores one or more of the following:
    - implementation of change.
    - facilitators to change.
    - barriers to change.
- Based within a school or other educational institution.
- Related to gender and/or sexuality. Research which explored diversity and inclusion in a number of areas (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, position and role) were included if they also contained an exploration of gender and/or sexuality.
- Written in the English language.

The focus of this literature review was deliberately broad, to include papers exploring an aspect of change around gender and sexuality. These could focus on anything from approaches, policies, curriculums and education, and responses to or interventions around diversity, difference and discrimination. I initially sought to review papers based in the UK context, and expected to find several papers due to the potential breadth allowed in the search, but only one paper (Pilcher, 2017) was yielded. It was thus decided that international papers would also be included which then yielded an adequate breadth of research.

Some caution must be applied when considering the application of international findings to the UK context. However, it is argued that the reviewed papers described contexts which were comparable to those in the UK. For example, Makleff et al. (2020) explored the impact of sexuality education on attitudes about gender and sexuality, and the prevalence of intimate partner violence in YP in Mexico. In the UK, intimate partner violence is a documented problem in young LGBT+ relationships (e.g., Head & Milton, 2014). Furthermore SRE in the UK requires significant change (Formby, 2020) and ongoing issues surrounding sexuality and gender in schools, including recent findings of widespread sexual harassment (Ofsted, 2021), support the justification for the inclusion of papers in countries where similar problems are reported.

5.6. Results

The systematic search yielded a total of 172 unique title references. The titles and/or abstracts of these were reviewed against the inclusion criteria. Ten papers met the inclusion criteria and were included in the literature review. The reviewed papers (n=10; Appendix 10) were from the United States (US; Elliott, 2016; Theoharis, 2010; Valentine, 2020), Canada (Fantus & Newman, 2021; Surette, 2019; Wells, 2017), Australia (Ollis, 2010), Mexico (Makleff et al., 2020), the Balkans (Namy et al., 2015) and the UK (Pilcher, 2017).

The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2016) was selected as a critical assessment tool for systematically critiquing the literature. The qualitative studies CASP checklist was used, which provides a range of prompts to support the critique. Prompts include questions of the research aims, sampling, study design, data collection, analysis and findings. See completed CASP frameworks for each paper in Appendix 11. The CASP encouraged the highlighting of strengths

and limitations in key research areas. The questions on the CASP related to broad areas of validity, reliability and applicability.

I adopted a meta-ethnographic approach (Noblit & Hare, 1988) to reviewing the literature, which aimed to expand upon the findings of authors, offering new interpretations aided by all of the review process, rather than simply summarising studies. This was achieved through an approach of generating overarching themes by comparing and contrasting concepts arising within the papers. This process can effectively result in a 'line of argument' (Noblit & Hare, 1988). This approach is outlined in table 4.

1	Clarifying research area
2	Selecting appropriate studies
3	Reading the studies
4	Considering how the studies relate
5	Analysing the studies together
6	Synthesising translations
7	Expressing the synthesis

TABLE 4. NOBLIT & HARE'S (1988) SEVEN STAGES OF META-ETHNOGRAPHY

These processes do not necessarily occur within a sequential order, and tend to overlap and take place simultaneously. Noblit and Hare (1988) recommended making a list of themes and considering relationships between them. Key themes were identified, mapped across the papers and used to structure the review and writing of the current chapter. The following three overarching themes and subthemes were identified:

1) Pervasive heteronormativity
2) Avenues for action
    - Staff training
    - Shifting CYP perspectives
    - Education and curriculum
    - GSA
3) Role of school staff
    - Leadership

- LGBT+ educators

In addition to these themes, I also reviewed the barriers and facilitators to change identified in the papers, and these have been summarised at the end of this chapter in Table 6.

5.7. Review of literature

5.7.1. Pervasive heteronormativity

Change is most needed in the pervasive presence and normalisation of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in schools. Discrimination of LGBT+ YP can include physical assaults, isolation, exclusion, negative attitudes and unhelpful stereotypes, which are particularly severe for trans* YP; Fantus and Newman (2021) interviewed educational professionals with 3 to 15 years' experience working with LGBT+ youth, exploring the multi-level factors which contribute to positive school climates and reduce LGBT-based bullying. Schools were described as indirectly promoting discrimination due to a lack of action or any real repercussions for bullying and microaggressions. When interventions did occur, they often took place post-homophobic incident, through implementing punitive consequences which were either "too little, too much or too late" (Fantus & Newman, 2021, p. 14).

YP noted school cultures which encouraged heterosexuality and normative expressions of binary gender, with boys performing masculinity and girls performing femininity (Elliott, 2016). For example, boys and girls were differentially praised in schools, with boys being celebrated for sports and athletic achievements, and girls being more encouraged to focus on their appearance (Surette, 2019).

Surette (2019) interviewed six gender and sexuality-diverse YP across secondary schools in Canada about their experiences with heteronormativity. To recruit them, Surette distributed flyers in schools asking YP to consider being interviewed about heteronormativity. This terminology is arguably exclusive and potentially exclusionary of LGBT+ YP who are not familiar with the term 'heteronormativity', although they may be extremely impacted by its effect. As an example, the findings in the current study indicate experiences of heteronormativity at different levels, although none of the participants mentioned the word. A lack of access to this vocabulary could have averted potential participants from coming forward.

Nonetheless, six participants were interviewed about their stories of heteronormativity. One participant reported being called a “faggot” when they did not catch the ball in PE (Surette, 2019, p. 371), a homophobic slur supposedly indicating that they fell short of the heteronormative expectations for athleticism associated with their perceived male gender. As such, students regularly policed gender expression in one another, upholding rigid binaries and stereotypes which were oppressive for all but particularly LGBT+ students. Transphobia and homophobia were reported as commonplace in schools and words such as “faggot” were heard daily, and “that’s so gay” was frequently used to refer to something negative (Surette, 2019, p.368). Participants found this language harmful, however they felt that it often went unchallenged and that the school overall appeared to be desensitised.

YP discussed PE classes and toilets as consistently feeling like ‘vulnerable places’ in school (Surette, 2019). A trans* participant spoke about delaying their transition due to fears that she would not be safe in the boys changing rooms that she was made to use. The gender ‘split’ often used to separate students in P.E. was also described as very uncomfortable for trans* students. Participants also discussed toilets being an issue. Schools did not allow trans* students to use their bathroom of choice, and provided instead the option of the disabled toilet which was also used as a gender-neutral toilet. Participants voiced dissatisfaction with this because they defined as neither disabled nor gender-neutral. However, not all trans* students feel like this; the GSA in Elliott’s (2016) study petitioned for the creation of a gender-neutral toilet in their school.

Critical reflection of staff and students was vital for change. Ironically however, the authors themselves did not always present their own processes of reflection. Surette (2019) noted that she co-narrated the stories with participants in her narrative enquiry study, although she did not explore how her own role, biases and interactions with participants may have influenced the co-creation of these narratives. Furthermore, there was not an exploration of ethical considerations and possible risks involved in the study, which is potentially concerning given the interview focus on heteronormativity and Surette’s (2019) own findings that this can be harmful for YP.

Some researchers did consider how they impacted their research; Pilcher (2017) provided a commentary on her various identities. As a queer, white, working class woman and sociology lecturer, Pilcher acknowledged that her identity and theoretical positioning would have impacted

the recruitment and interview processes. Her research was also influenced by her 'commitment to disrupt normative and binary ways of conceptualising gender and sexualities', which involves questioning 'why heteronormative assumptions are reproduced even at the same time as they may be resisted' (Pilcher, 2017, p. 977).

5.7.2. Avenues for action

5.7.2.1. Staff training

Ollis (2010) examined the longitudinal impact of a one-day teacher training about gender and sexuality in Australia. The training highlighted historic and current discourses used to position minority genders and sexualities negatively and aimed to encourage teachers to view gender and sexuality diversity as a normal part of the spectrum. As part of this, the following discriminatory discourses surrounding LGBT+ people (Hillier & Harrison, 2004) were discussed:

1. Illness
2. Fear
3. Difference
4. Abnormality

The teachers in Ollis' (2010) study were supported to notice and deconstruct these associations and the heteronormativity driving them. Some teachers admitted relating to some of the above discourses themselves. Ollis conducted interviews with teachers and observed their classes to assess changes following the training. All 14 teachers demonstrated lasting changes in their improved ability to address CYP homophobia, greater inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity within their health education classes and changes in attitudes towards homosexuality. The latter were assessed through participants scores on Riddle's (1985) homophobia scale, which is a psychometric measure of the degree to which a person is or is not homophobic. The scale was adapted for transphobia by Drewlo & Manders (2011). I combined the Riddle (1985) scale with the transphobia scale (Drewlo & Manders, 2011) so that it could be used to consider individual positioning related to LGBT+ people more broadly (see Table 5), although considering varying positions related to specific groups within the LGBT+ umbrella would be an important element of this activity.

Level	Description
Repulsion	LGBT+ people are perceived as immoral, and any means available in order to change them are felt to be acceptable, including conversion therapy, negative reinforcement and punishment.
Pity	Heterosexuality and the gender binary are seen as the superior, more preferred way to be. LGBT+ people are thus viewed as lesser and are pitied for their inferiority.
Tolerance	Gender and sexuality diversity is seen as a phase, sometimes explored in adolescence and eventually grown out of. Therefore LGBT+ people are deemed to be immature and still developing.
Acceptance	This position often ignores the climate of discrimination for LGBT+ people and is characterised by phrases like "I just see you as a person", "what you do in your own time is your own business" and "it's fine as long as you don't flaunt it".
Support	In this position people work to safeguard the rights of LGBT+ people, and they are aware of the discriminatory climate, however they may still be uncomfortable themselves with certain aspects of LGBT identities.
Admiration	At this level people are taking the initiative to examine their own pre-conceived homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, and they acknowledge that being LGBT+ takes strength in our society.
Appreciation	Diversity is valued and LGBT+ people are perceived as a valid and welcome part of that diversity. At this level people are striving to combat homophobia in themselves and others.
Nurturance	LGBT+ people are viewed as an assumed and indispensable part of society. This level comprises people who are allies and advocates.

Table 5. LGBT+ Riddle scale, adapted from Riddle (1985) and Drewlo & Manders (2011)

The Riddle (1985) scale helpfully highlights that 'acceptance', a position often hailed as desirable, is fraught with issues as it may indicate the acceptance that LGBT+ people exist, without wanting to have anything to do with them. This position could explain why some teachers feel uncomfortable and stay silent when homophobia occurs in the classroom, which implicitly

communicates that it is acceptable, further entrenching discrimination and heteronormativity in school systems (Vega et al., 2012).

This was felt to be a helpful tool (Ollis, 2010), although the Riddle scale appears to assume that LGBT+ people themselves would not use or require the scale. Inevitably LGBT+ people would fall at all levels of the scale but the descriptors would require editing as they are exclusively aimed at non-LGBT+ people. The omission of access for LGBT+ people may add to a heteronormative assumption that most people are cisgender and heterosexual, or that LGBT+ people do not need to reflect upon their internal phobias and biases. Further nuance should be encouraged also because people may be at different levels on the Riddle scale regarding different identities. For example, someone may be at the level of 'acceptance' for bisexual people, at 'admiration' for gay men, but 'support' for gay/lesbian women and perhaps only at 'tolerance' for trans* people. Considering different identities under the 'LGBT+' umbrella when engaging in the Riddle scale activity is essential.

Teachers described considering their current positions on the Riddle (1985) scale as a pivotal task, which enhanced their awareness of areas for personal growth, and acted as a facilitator for change. At the initial training day, one teacher openly shared that his discomfort with same-sex relationships led to his avoidance of the sexuality and gender topics that he was supposed to teach as part of the health education syllabus. Ollis (2010) did not explore her own or others' emotional responses to this teacher's admittance, although these could be valid and significant to the session, perhaps especially for those who were LGBT+ themselves. It is impressive that Ollis (2010) facilitated a space in which this teacher could express his views and actions honestly, which may have allowed and contributed to his movement up the Riddle scale. However, neither Ollis (2010) nor Makleff et al. (2021) reported any difficult conversations or conflicts despite both reporting facilitated discussions in which diverse and contradictory views were voiced. Furthermore, participants in Ollis' (2010) study may have felt a range of emotions, such as shock, regret or defensiveness, when confronting some of their prejudices, perhaps for the first time. It is unlikely that offence, conflict or difficult feelings never occurred, and so the lack of exploration about these issues, and of any related ethical considerations, were a limitation of these papers.

Prior to the training, teachers reported that they had a lack of confidence in identifying and responding to homophobia, which served as a barrier to action against bullying. Following the

training, teachers' ability to identify and challenge homophobia increased significantly. However, little impact was made on teachers' ability to challenge homophobic comments from their colleagues, suggesting perhaps that a power balance can disable action, whereas the relative power imbalance between teachers and CYP enabled them to foster their new learning and movement up the Riddle scale, to act against homophobia. This indicated that a whole-school, leadership-led approach is essential for wider change and challenge to entrenched prejudice.

Ollis' (2010) findings suggest the potential effectiveness of one-day trainings to create meaningful, long-term shifts in staff attitudes and actions. However, the validity of these findings is questionable due to the possibility that the participants exhibited *response bias*, which refers to conditions or factors which affect the responses that participants provide (Lavrakas, 2008). Ollis both facilitated the training and conducted the research interviews, which would certainly affect participant responses and potentially impact their honesty. Furthermore, Ollis' observations of the teachers' lessons could have produced the *Hawthorne effect*, which refers to the tendency for participants to change their behaviour when they know they are being observed (Salkind, 2010). However, Ollis' (2010) findings are supported by other research indicating that staff training can equip teachers to challenge homophobia in the classroom (Hong & Garbarino, 2012). Overall, training which enables staff to reflect upon their biases and beliefs, recognise that microaggressions and bullying are a lived reality for some LGBT+ CYP, and understand the negative impacts of such experiences (e.g., poor health and mental health outcomes) could lead to more LGBT-inclusive action (McCabe et al., 2013; Zack et al., 2010).

Ultimately staff trainings are agreed by school leaders who have more control over budgets and therefore garnering leadership support is vital, especially as financial barriers are often cited reasons for not prioritising training (Fantus & Newman, 2021). School staff, including senior leaders, teachers and pastoral staff, require training to apply LGBT-affirmative policies in practice, which include the reforming of curriculums, resources and the school climate (Fantus & Newman, 2021).

5.7.2.2. Shifting CYP perspectives

Makleff et al. (2020) implemented an 'empowerment approach' to sexuality education in a large urban school in Mexico. This innovative SRE included reflective, interrogative discussions of power

and gender, which aimed to promote safe, equitable relationships. Content and vignettes which were relevant to YP were utilised, which promoted critical engagement in reflections around norms (Makleff et al., 2020; Namy et al., 2015). The programme led to shifts in attitudes or a 'change in thinking' about gender and sexuality, which was reported by YP themselves and staff working with them. YP felt more accepting and assured of their sexualities and developed self-respect and confidence in making decisions about their sex and relationships. YP were also taught how to seek help if they were in an abusive relationship; the course helped to prevent intimate partner violence in various ways, including increasing YP ability to spot 'red flags', identifying early signs of intimate partner violence (Makleff et al., 2020). Participants also reported greater acceptance of others including LGBT+ people. Promisingly, YP shared their learning with others in their communities, including partners and family members. This suggested that the impact of the programme may have been widespread, although views from people in the participant's wider circles were not ascertained as part of the study, highlighting an avenue for future research examining the community impact of empowerment approaches to SRE.

The success of the programme was attributed to the reflective nature of sessions, in which YP were empowered to talk about topics which had previously made them uncomfortable (Makleff et al., 2020). Through discussion, YP were able to clarify and understand their own perspectives, challenge previous ways of thinking and construct individual and collective narratives (Makleff et al., 2020). Group discussions allowed open dialogue between YP and facilitators in which diverse perspectives were shared and debates were encouraged. These discussions were deemed the most important part of the course for YP.

Challenging conversations require sensitive facilitators who are adequately trained and supervised for the role. The United Nations (UN) guidelines for sexuality education (UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018) noted that facilitators should be comfortable with SRE topics and prepared to engage YP with diverse views in a critical reflection process (Makleff et al., 2021). Facilitators must be conscious of response bias when holding space for these discussions. One teacher reported that in a classroom discussion about homophobia, many YP shared anti-homophobic views, although she suspected that some students may have been 'paying lip service' in this activity, reciting politically correct answers to appease her (Ollis, 2010), rather than reflecting on an interrogative personal level. An authentic reflection is likely to be necessary to create the shifts in thinking required for progression towards positive social

change (Pilcher, 2017). If appropriately facilitated, reflective debates can support the development of critical stances, which could encourage future engagement in analytical thinking leading to shifts in social norms. Ultimately, YP are crucial to the maintenance or destruction of the status quo. Sexuality education can elicit a reconsideration and shift in beliefs which can be taken back and assimilated in communities (Miller & Prentice, 2016). These findings suggest that effective SRE could lead to greater understanding and healthier sex and relationships in wider society.

Pilcher's (2017) UK study explored undergraduate students' ideas about teaching methods for learning about 'sensitive issues' related to gender, sexuality and sex. LGBT+ topics were identified as potentially 'sensitive' by the student participants, although they felt that exploring these in class was imperative. Instead of didactic teaching, creative, collaborative, conversation-based teaching and learning tools were successfully utilised. Posing questions to students in diverse ways allowed them agency in response (e.g., in the moment, in the next lecture, through writing or art), which encouraged greater engagement. As in Makleff et al.'s (2020) study, reflective discussions were the key catalyst for learning, articulated by one of Pilcher's (2017, p. 980) participants: "we don't solve anything by not talking about it, how would we advocate for change?"

Pilcher (2017, p. 977) encouraged her students to look 'through the lens of their own experience' (McLean & Abbas, 2009) and argued that 'the personal is political'. Through amplifying diverse perspectives, dominant norms are examined, critiqued and disrupted. When groups of people re-examine, replace or diversify their belief systems, this has the power to contribute to broader social change.

Namy et al. (2015) evaluated the implementation of a programme for adolescent boys in the Balkan countries, which aimed to shift their attitudes towards gender equity and non-violence. Attitudes towards gender norms, violence and sexuality tend to be solidified during adolescence (Kaufman, 2000) making this an appropriate time for intervention. The boys were encouraged to critically reflect upon gendered socialisation and the impact of discrimination through interactive techniques such as role-plays, brainstorming, discussions and games, rather than didactic teaching methods (Namy et al., 2015). Facilitators frequently asked provocative questions to encourage the boys to reflect on issues in four main areas: gender, violence, sexual health and

substance use/abuse. As Pilcher (2017) remarked, when discussions were connected to boys' personal experiences, this enhanced reflection and engagement, which helped to shift attitudes. Reductions in homophobia and greater acceptance of LGBT peers were reported by some participants, including one boy who discussed shedding previous fears and making friends with a gay peer. The boys also developed the ability to recognise gender norms as socially constructed and therefore changeable.

The positive relationships between the boys and facilitators, considerably contributed to the changes in attitudes reported in the study (Namy et al., 2015). Facilitators were honest about the previous discriminatory views they had held themselves, and the change journeys they had embarked upon. This enhanced their empathy of the boys, and communicated that change is possible. A sense of belonging with the facilitators and other YP allowed the boys to be able to share with honesty. The facilitators were clearly curious and competent, and able to hold space for discussions around potentially sensitive issues. Pilcher (2017) argued for the importance of a trusted and respected facilitator to mediate critical, reflective dialogue.

Since the programme explored by Namy et al. (2015) was exclusively for adolescent boys, it is unclear how applicable or supportive this would be for girls or trans* YP. Arguably YP of all genders would benefit from reflective spaces to consider cultural ideas around sexuality, gender, masculinity, femininity, societal expectations and stereotypes. The programme aimed to address gender inequality in the Balkans, encouraging adolescent boys to dismantle the sexist norms which upheld their positions of power and privilege. Although this is a plausible justification for the participant sample, it is possible that providing nurturing, relational programmes for boys could inadvertently advantage them further compared with girls and gender-diverse YP? A 'gender synchronised' approach in which YP of all genders learn together may be required for genuine, permeating transformation (Greene & Levack, 2010). This was supported by the fact that aspects of 'entrenched patriarchy' were still present in some of the boys' interviews following the programme, including homophobic views and sexist comments such as that girls need to be "[kept] under control" (Namy et al., 2015, p. 216). SRE and reflective learning spaces are likely to be most effective when implemented consistently over time, whilst also being embedded into school curriculums and cultures.

5.7.2.3. Education and curriculum

Since CYP are exposed to cultural norms throughout their lives, they will require more than one-off teaching sessions to disrupt them (e.g., Namy et al., 2015). Inclusive LGBT+ education weaves diverse gender and sexual identities into the school curriculum (Wells, 2017) which may require regular updates (Fantus & Newman, 2021). Wells (2017) argued that educators should teach about difference and diversity and how they link with power. LGBT+ discrimination can also be addressed preventively by incorporating inclusive creative-arts based approaches including picture books, novels, plays and classroom resources and library books (Fantus & Newman, 2021).

Since CYP spend much of their lives at school, they must learn some of their biases and prejudices within that context. Similarly, they can learn to include, affirm and celebrate difference. Schools must take responsibility for addressing their great power to guide these essential ways of thinking and being (Fantus & Newman, 2021). One way to do this is by intentionally normalising sexual and gender diversity in curriculums and classrooms. This would help to prevent LGBT+ discrimination and foster greater emotional and physical safety for all students (Fantus & Newman, 2021).

5.7.2.4. GSAs

GSAs are places of inclusivity, acceptance, belonging and peer support for LGBT+ YP (Fantus & Newman, 2021). Elliott (2016) conducted an ethnography into how YP used queer theory to inform their understanding of themselves and others in GSAs. Participants spoke of free expression and conversation within the GSA, where multiple understandings of gender and sexuality were welcome. The GSA helped YP to process and make sense of their own experiences, whilst supporting action against heteronormative discourses and hierarchies in their school. The work of the GSA included successfully petitioning for the creation of a gender neutral toilet. The GSA also conducted 'peer education presentations' which helped to create shifts in students' attitudes and behaviours around LGBT+ issues, which in turn shaped the school culture.

Surette (2019) argued that whilst LGBT+ YPs' individual school experiences have improved with the presence of GSAs, the root causes of LGBT-bullying have not been addressed through their existence, as these relate to deeper, institutional heteronormativity. In line with this, Elliott (2016)

noted that GSA activism was met with many challenges, especially as the GSA aimed to disrupt heteronormativity, whilst existing within an institution that reinforced it (e.g., favouring fixed and binary gender categorisation). Other barriers included a lack of support from teachers and leadership and hostility from peers. However, Elliott (2016) observed significant and subtle disruptions to heteronormativity in the GSA, such as the pronoun/sexuality check-in at the beginning of each session. Elliott reported that some members frequently changed their gender and sexuality descriptors. This was perceived as a disruption of heteronormativity as it communicated that we cannot always know or see somebody else's gender or sexuality, and that fluidity and change is possible. Curiosity and questioning were favoured over assumptive guess-making. The GSA moved away from dualistic categories towards a multiplicity of identity, to accommodate for the fact that categories typically used (e.g. L, G, B or T) do not always match how people feel.

In Elliott's (2016) intensive ethnographic study, she spent long periods of time in the school setting, particularly in and with the GSA, effectively acting as a member of staff. Rather than an observer, Elliott continually interacted with her participants and other CYP in the school. Her long-standing working relationships with the young participants raises questions about how informed consent and confidentiality were ethically and thoroughly negotiated. Furthermore, the extent to which Elliott's (2016) 'insider' experiences of the school and GSA contexts impacted her recruitment, formulations and analyses, were not explored adequately in the paper.

5.7.3. Role of school staff

School staff have a considerable role to play in working towards inclusivity through challenging LGBT-bullying in schools. Harassment should not be minimised as typical playground name-calling, and it is the responsibility of the whole-school community to address microlevel interactions, as these do influence the whole-school system (Fantus & Newman, 2021). One approach that all school staff could employ is to mention and address homophobic or transphobic incidents as soon as they happen, in classrooms, corridors and staffrooms. Immediately reinforcing that discriminatory language is not acceptable, rather than as a delayed consequence, is seen as a much more effective intervention (Fantus & Newman, 2021). This needs to happen in an exploratory, educative way as opposed to using punitive humiliation tactics (Fantus & Newman, 2021). One participant in Surette's (2019) study spoke about a teacher who verbally stated that

she would not tolerate homophobia in her classroom, which led to YP feeling safer and that their identities were viewed as valid. Greater consideration of the educational and restorative interventions which would be most effective if and when homophobic comments do occur would have strengthened the implications of this paper.

Pastoral staff may play a particular role in this process, including school counsellors who may be well placed to support the interruption of harmful gender norms and the discrimination of LGBT+ students (Surette, 2019). Counsellors could advocate for safer, more inclusive environments for diverse students, on individual and systemic levels. They could provide workshops and educative resources across the school to promote awareness of the importance of LGBT+ inclusivity. Counsellors are often valued and respected members of school staff teams, and so can act as bridges between teachers, school leaders and students. School counsellors can also support the facilitation of GSAs, as noted in other research considering the potential role for school psychologists in the US (Fisher et al., 2008), including facilitating or leading GSAs, providing psychoeducation, group counselling or interventions for LGBT+ students and advocating for these students to create safer whole-school environments. However, not all school counsellors or pastoral staff would feel able or equipped to adopt this role, and thus the training and support required to develop skills in these areas must be considered, a slight oversight of this paper.

A national US teacher survey found the following significant predictors of teachers' interventions to homophobic bullying: personally knowing LGBT people, being aware of LGBT harassment and bullying, and understanding how to be actively inclusive (Greytak & Kosciw, 2014). To develop the latter two areas, acknowledgment of the importance of this work, and financial and emotional support to embark on training and deliver interventions, is essential and needs to come from school leadership.

5.7.4. Leadership

School leaders have the power to make decisions about what is prioritised in spending school budgets. Anti-bullying programmes, systemic work, training, cross-curriculum inclusion of LGBT+ people, and LGBT-affirmative school policies are all interventions which support LGBT+ students and all students (Fantus & Newman, 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011). This work requires visible, vocal and continual support from headteachers and other school leaders.

Theoharis (2010) and Valentine (2020) both conducted qualitative research with leaders who strived for social justice in their schools and campuses. Theoharis (2010) conducted a year-long study in which he interviewed six headteachers in the US about the range of strategies they employed to advance their social justice agendas. Theoharis (2010) argued that headteachers are often traditional and bureaucratic, more likely to maintain rather than disrupt the status quo. He proposed that teachers who adhere to traditions are more frequently promoted to leadership positions, which has the impact of keeping schools 'stuck'. This added to the difficulties faced by Theoharis' (2010) participants, who aimed for different, fairer, progressive schools. The heads discussed a context of multiple, overlapping 'barriers and countervailing pressures' to the change proposed by their social justice work, which they felt from both inside their school communities and externally.

Although these barriers took a significant emotional toll on headteachers, they remained strong in their resistance to injustice, which helped them to build personal resilience. Strategies employed by heads to address issues of equity and race included incorporating social responsibility into the school curriculum, investing in staff professional development, supervising staff and recruiting people who were passionate about action towards equity. These strategies supported the purposeful creation of cultures of social justice. Active leadership was important, in which heads empowered their staff and trusted their efficacy without micromanaging them. These leaders prioritised building connections between marginalised families and the school community by creating warm, welcoming environments and intentionally reaching out to these families, viewing them as valued members of the school community (Theoharis, 2010).

Valentine (2020) worked with 12 LGBT+ US university leaders, exploring the impact of their LGBT+ identities on leadership and the factors which impacted their work towards inclusivity and positive change on their campuses. Their LGBT+ identities interacted with other identity aspects including race and gender to inform their leadership approaches. These university leaders articulated feelings of responsibility, obligation and privilege in being able to effect positive change for marginalised communities on their campuses (Valentine, 2020).

LGBT+ leaders hold both insider and outsider positions in educational institutions; Valentine (2020) reflected upon her own complex positions of marginalisation and privilege as a white queer

researcher who works in University institutions, and how these intersected together to impact her intentions and biases in the study. Interestingly, Valentine's participants resisted naming some aspects of their identities, instead highlighting other important identity features, including family, religion, spirituality and their values, stating that these were more important to them than a social category or relationship (Valentine, 2020).

Valentine's (2020) participants worked towards inclusion in a number of ways, including hiring diverse staff, visibly disseminating inclusive messages, serving in social justice capacities, and encouraging education and staff development about equity, diversity and inclusion. Leaders communicated these goals to their institutions, and followed through with their commitments on such goals. Being visible as an LGBT+ person meant that they were pioneers, 'firsts' in their institutions, which helped them to break the 'mould' for leadership, push boundaries and 'chip away' at systemic heteronormativity, institutional patriarchy and structural racism. They served as mentors and role models to others, representing what is possible for marginalised people.

Although leaders hold power, they are also accountable to their own seniors, which may be local government or educational companies, who can also be traditional and rigid, erecting many barriers to change regarding LGBT+ inclusion (Theoharis, 2010). Therefore, exploring ways to encourage local and central government endorsements of LGBT+ inclusivity may be an important avenue for future research as this is likely important for widespread systemic change to occur in schools and the communities surrounding them.

5.7.5. LGBT+ EDUCATORS

Fantus and Newman (2021) did not specifically recruit for LGBT+ educators, although most of the participants who volunteered for their study were LGBT+. Valentine's (2020) LGBT+ university leader participants were ethnically diverse including African American and Latino participants. This suggests that work with LGBT+ youth can become a vested interest for queer professionals, and those who have racial identities which have been marginalised. This raises questions around how to broaden the interest in this work to whole staff teams in schools.

Leaders in Valentine's (2020) study felt that it was greatly important for them to be able to work and lead as their authentic selves. In line with this, coming out as an LGBT+ educator was

described as a formative experience for teachers, which supported their work towards inclusion, both individually and collectively (Wells, 2017). This has also been noted by LGBT+ educators in the UK (Brett & Brassington, 2022; Dellenty, 2019).

Wells (2017) carried out qualitative interviews with four LGBT primary-age teachers in Canada who were social justice activists. Participants were motivated to 'come out' in their schools, aiming to disrupt heteronormativity and represent difference as visibly gay teachers. This was part of their motivation to stay working in inherently discriminatory institutions: to effect change from within. They also wanted to be 'the teacher they never had' for LGBT+ children in their care. This was essentialised by participants' experiences of traumatic bullying in their own childhoods, which motivated them to create change, and fuelled their sense of professional resilience. Representation is important for CYP of all ages; Pilcher (2017) wrote that in openly discussing her sexuality with her undergraduate students, they viewed her seminars as safe spaces to talk about their own identities.

Whilst ultimately teachers reported feeling a deeper sense of belonging after coming out in their school communities (Wells, 2017), this was not without grave costs to their experiences of teaching. Parents requested for their children not be taught by them, deeming them somehow deviant or unfit for teaching. In one painful case, school leadership acquiesced to this parental request. Participants described feeling that they had to be stricter than other teachers to avoid children making fun of their sexuality. They endured homophobic death threats, abusive phone calls and insulting insinuations that their sexuality was related to paedophilia. Teachers also experienced colleagues who believed that their sexual orientation should be a private matter and they often witnessed colleagues overlooking and not challenging LGBT-bullying. This reflected the pedagogical silence and omission around gender and sexuality diversity, which conceptualises LGBT+ people as 'unimaginable others' (Wells, 2017, p. 283). An assumption of heterosexuality worked to increase internalised homophobia - a powerful force keeping LGBTQ educators invisible and 'closeted'.

Teachers reported a lack of safety in being themselves and required support from unions and the law. They felt that their LGBT+ 'agenda' threatened their job security and prevented them from being promoted into more senior positions, in line with Valentine's (2020) assertion that teachers who represent 'normativity' and the status quo are most likely to be endorsed for senior positions.

Overall, many institutional failings to tackle prejudice and support LGBT+ teachers were evident in the findings (Wells, 2017). Despite this, teachers continued to engage in activism on multiple levels and reported that being 'out' fuelled this, supporting Pilcher's (2017) argument that 'the personal is political'. Leaders who are openly and vocally inclusive can support educators to be able to come out and feel safe as their authentic selves in their workplaces.

Community networks, mentors and connections with colleagues who are also LGBT+ agents of change serve as important protection from systemic alienation that teachers can face in their activism (Wells, 2017). Ultimately, however difficult change may be, the hope and knowledge that it is possible, can and does inspire action that facilitates processes of change (Freire, 2004; Wells, 2017).

5.8. Summary of literature review

Overall, CYP and professionals described heteronormative, discriminatory school systems in which LGBT-based bullying was pervasive and normalised (Fantus & Newman, 2021; Surette, 2019). Implicit and explicit policing of gender norms were regularly experienced from both staff and CYP, which encouraged binary stereotypes and punished deviations from them (Elliott, 2016; Surette, 2019). Lack of appropriate action from schools to address such prejudice was deemed to perpetrate these patterns further (Fantus & Newman, 2021). Furthermore, schools can be difficult workplaces for LGBT+ educators and coming out in these institutions can be extremely challenging (Wells, 2017). For those staff and students working towards change in schools, community and peer support is vital (Elliott, 2016; Valentine, 2020) especially as systemic isolation can fuel silence around issues of gender and sexuality (Wells, 2017).

The effectiveness of school staff training (Ollis, 2010), empowering SRE (Makleff et al., 2020) and youth work (Namy et al., 2015) is dependent on experiences of deep, reflective discussion, in which dominant messages about gender and sexuality are critically interrogated. Whilst opposing and diverse perspectives can be voiced and learnt from (Makleff et al., 2020), these topics can be sensitive and therefore facilitators must be experienced, reflective practitioners (Pilcher, 2017). This is especially important given the potentially conflictual nature of these group discussions, although there was a lack of exploration of such dynamics in the papers (Makleff et al., 2020; Namy et al., 2015; Ollis, 2010). Relationships with facilitators were important especially when

they were able to be honest about their own identities and journeys, demonstrating empathy for the learners (Namy et al., 2015; Pilcher, 2017). One-off interventions or trainings are unlikely to be enough to alter entrenched discriminatory views (Makleff et al., 2020; Namy et al., 2015) and thus regular returning to these topics in ongoing training is required (Fantus & Newman, 2021).

Sessions which encourage reflective conversations about sex, gender, sexuality and relationships were transformative in shifting attitudes and effecting active, long-term changes (Ollis, 2010) which had the power to go beyond the school context, into the external community (Makleff et al., 2020). Engaging in reflection which connected the self to the content of discussion was deemed to mediate the most change (Namy et al., 2015; Pilcher, 2017). Teachers were particularly moved by the self-rating and reflection in the Riddle scale (1985) activity, which appeared to enable honesty and confronting of personal prejudice, through normalising the various positions and levels and providing a framework for growth up the scale (Ollis, 2010).

Whilst staff training was effective in shifting individual teacher attitudes and altering their responses to LGBT-discrimination, teachers' ability to challenge such views in their teacher colleagues was not changed (Ollis, 2010). Real cultural change must permeate throughout the system, and therefore a whole-school approach is necessary, which starts from school leadership. Leaders are powerful and it is essential that they are open to change and supportive of inclusive agendas (Fantus & Newman, 2021; Valentine, 2020). However, they are also managing several barriers to change, which can be emotionally demotivating (Theoharis, 2010), although perseverance can lead to successful change towards more inclusive institutions (Valentine, 2020). Leaders must preserve hope that whilst marginalisation may be maintained and reproduced in schools, so too can it be challenged and countered (Quinn & Meiners, 2009; Wells, 2017).

Key avenues for change towards greater inclusion of LGBT+ CYP in schools require whole-school approaches, including the development of inclusive curriculums, which not only include and normalise diversity in gender, sexuality and relationships, but also promote critical thinking about dominant norms, and how knowledge and power are constructed (Wells, 2017). GSAs provide a place where this critical and reflective learning takes place, whilst also fostering belonging and safety for LGBT+ CYP (Elliott, 2016). The work of GSAs can have significant impacts on wider school cultures, although unfortunately GSAs can experience multiple systemic barriers, including a lack of funding and hostility from staff and peers (Elliot, 2016). Creating change in traditional school

systems is a challenging feat, although inspiring students and educators continue to strive towards this, regardless of barriers (Elliott, 2016; Fantus & Newman, 2021; Theoharis, 2010; Valentine, 2020).

The barriers and facilitators to change regarding gender and sexuality in schools which were highlighted in this literature review have been outlined in table 6. This resource could have utility for school professionals and EPs in various ways. For example, the barriers and facilitators (table 6) could form a framework or checklist for school leaders to consider the current functioning of their schools regarding the inclusion and celebration of LGBT+ diversity. The various facilitators and barriers could form starting points for topics in consultations (e.g., within school staff teams or with EPs) aiming to promote positive change in these areas.

5.9. FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS TO CHANGE

Facilitators to change	Barriers to change
Teachers equipped to intentionally 'call out' everyday transphobia, homophobia and biphobia in schools (Surette, 2019), in curious, educative ways which promote a conversation.	Entrenched and limiting binary gendered norms, expectations and behaviours (Namy et al., 2015), individual discriminatory views and previous lack of reflection (Ollis, 2010).
Opportunities to openly discuss and reflect upon personal positions and experiences in relation to gender and sexuality (Namy et al., 2015) with sensitive and experienced facilitators (Makleff et al., 2021; United Nations, 2018).	Daily homophobia and transphobia experienced in schools and rarely challenged by staff or students (Surette, 2019). Working against heteronormativity in institutions that reinforce it can be very difficult even when this is done in GSA groups (Elliot, 2016)
The use of the Riddle (1985) scale (Ollis, 2010) as a self-reflection activity.	Uniform approaches to school anti-bullying policies and interventions (Fantus & Newman, 2021) without consideration of LGBT-specific discrimination. Financial obstacles are said to prevent the implementation of anti-bullying campaigns or LGBT-inclusive training (Fantus & Newman, 2021).
Discussions within the classroom (Ollis, 2010) or in SRE programmes (Makleff et al., 2020), which are relevant and engaging for CYP.	
Collaborative teaching and learning which provides creative agency in how to engage (Pilcher, 2017).	The consistent challenges when CYP and educators attempt to effect change can lead to emotional exhaustion (Valentine, 2020) and demotivation (Wells, 2017).
The presence of GSAs in schools which are supported and funded (Elliott, 2016).	Teachers' difficulty in challenging homophobic views of their teacher peers (Ollis, 2010).
Resilience and perseverance despite barriers (Theoharis, 2010), which is enhanced by strong peer relationships (Surette, 2019) and support from unions and the law (Valentine, 2020).	

Access to teaching resources and professional development (Ollis, 2010) which encourages the awareness and 'dismantling' of dominant discourses. LGBT specific anti-discrimination policies (Fantus & Newman, 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011). The hope that change is possible (Freire, 2004; Valentine, 2020; Wells, 2017).	Resistance to programmes of change (Namy et al., 2015). Fear of parental backlash (e.g., (Lightfoot, 2019) and lack of leadership support (e.g., (Smith-Millman et al., 2019), and being unaware of rights (Wells, 2017).

TABLE 6. BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO CHANGE REGARDING GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN SCHOOLS

6. Discussion

6.1. Statement of findings

Participants in the current study shared varied experiences which were embedded in complex environments influenced by socio-political events and heteronormativity. Being outside of expectations, particularly pertaining to gender but also regarding sexuality and other 'different' identity characteristics, led to othering, bullying and microaggressions. Participants spoke of rigidity, aversion to changes in systems, and confusion over the rules. This caused harm, isolation and disengagement. A lack of representation of LGBT+ identities and people in school contributed to poor mental health and unmet social and learning needs. However, over time these needs were met; containment and belonging were found in LGBT+ youth groups, as well as online and in college settings. These positive relational experiences encouraged participants to use their voices, advocate for themselves and challenge discrimination and bullying. Despite rigid responses to change in school systems, participants were able to challenge barriers, maintain their sense of selves and strive towards change, both for themselves and for wider causes.

6.2. Findings and literature

There were many overlaps between the current findings and the reviewed literature, which sought to outline facilitators and barriers to change regarding gender and sexuality in educational settings. Participants experienced rigid gender binaries which were policed by other CYP (e.g., Jay being bullied for having short hair). Peer-enforcements of gender stereotypes were also reported in Surette's (2019) study. This is in line with other findings that CYP learn about societal norms and values through interactions with peers and adults in school (Walton, 2005). Bullying and exclusions can also serve to reproduce and uphold heteronormativity and binary gender norms (Fantus & Newman, 2021; Kedley, 2015; Ng et al., 2019). This was seen in Kit being punishment for speaking about their gender diversity, and in teachers refusing to call Kit and Liam by their names. This aligns with findings that LGBT+ YP have reduced access to school environments free of discrimination (Kosciw et al., 2018; Theoharis, 2010; Toomey & Russell, 2016).

The current research found that LGBT+ youth groups provide safe spaces for YP, where belonging and containment can be found. Whilst none of the reviewed papers discussed LGBT+ groups

outside of school, those exploring GSAs shared similar reports from CYP. Participants in Elliott's (2016) research and the current study reported that the GSA/youth group helped them to make sense of their experiences. These groups empowered YP to use their voices to advocate for themselves and others and motivated action towards change and against discrimination within school systems. However, even when GSAs effected powerful changes, there were still struggles reported in working against heteronormativity in schools which reinforce it (Elliott, 2016), and many barriers to change, which were also found in the current research.

Leadership and teacher support is vital (Fantus & Newman, 2021) although even educational leaders face significant barriers and rigidity when striving for change and social justice (Theoharis, 2010; Valentine, 2020), indicating that systemic patterns can be deeply ingrained. These barriers were emotionally distressing for leaders (Theoharis, 2010; Valentine, 2020; Wells, 2017) and participants in the current study. This raises questions around who or what drives the maintenance of rigidity in systems, if it is not leaders or CYP themselves. It is possible that the unconscious workings of othering and fear, serve as defence mechanisms to change. Thus, collaboration in whole-school communities and energy from all levels of the hierarchy may be necessary to shift entrenched patterns and create movement for change.

Participants in Valentine's (2020) study aimed to avoid defining certain aspects of themselves, instead striving to emphasise other more important identities they held. For example, they wished to highlight key relationships, values and cultural factors which were important to them. This was a way of disrupting heteronormative binaries, instead of feeding into them. This resonates with the diverse ways that participants defined their identities in the current study, such as Orla's definition of her gender and sexuality as 'unlabelled'. Relatedly, Elliott (2016) observed that GSAs allowed for a multiplicity of identities. CYP were not 'boxed' in to assumed genders and sexualities but instead fluidity was welcome and anticipated through a gender/sexuality 'check-in' at the beginning of every session, arguably resulting in a disruption of assumption and rigid category.

The most pertinent finding from the literature review was that personal reflection was the greatest catalyst to change (Makleff et al., 2020; Namy et al., 2015, Ollis, 2010; Pilcher, 2017) both for CYP and teachers. Facilitated group discussions in which diverse views could be voiced, heard and considered, were revolutionary for creating the space and possibility for change. Across the

current findings and the literature, it appears apparent that reflection is an essential vehicle for change, whereas fear is the antithesis of it. Fear-driven action may relate to a desire to do the right thing and could even have some percieved benefits such as protection and the maintenance of homeostasis. It is vital that people have the space to express such feelings and their related (in)actions. Otherwise, their associated behaviours may cause harm and prevent the support and service YP deserve from schools. Supervisory spaces and reflective trainings could provide a platform for difficult emotions or rigid beliefs to be expressed. When fear is acknowledged, it can lessen, and room for personal growth can be realised (Ollis, 2010).

Combining the literature review with the current findings led to the conclusion that regular, reflective learning and training spaces for CYP and professionals could reduce some of the fear driving discrimination and barriers to change. Individual, group and systemic rigidity could be thawed through deep reflection, wherein transformative change could be evoked.

6.3. Significance of findings

Given the small participant sample (n=5), caution must be employed when considering the applicability of the current findings to other populations. The participants' views will not represent all LGBT+ YP who attend youth groups. However, key findings within this research are potentially transferable to other populations. For example, the current findings clearly indicate areas of promise and areas where systemic work is required. The extent of rigidity around change and difference, involving discrimination and exclusion is an important consideration for schools and EPs in diversity and inclusion work.

The current study highlighted the importance of positive relational dynamics with adults and other peers for belonging and containment, which improved learning, feelings of safety and mental health. Importantly, activism and work towards change, on individual, group and systemic levels, was empowered within relationships. Greater open-mindedness about where this community can be found may be necessary. For Lacey, the internet was an invaluable place of connection. Hillier et al.'s (2012) qualitative study found that LGB YP are explorative in their internet use, which included meeting friends online. This indicates the need to better understand internet use for this population to support safe navigation. In addition, ideas and narratives may need to be challenged to respect these valuable friendships that can be found online. Further

facilitation, support and understanding is also essential to support YP who struggle to integrate in settings such as youth groups and college. Also, the need for some CYP to access groups and spaces within the community should be acknowledged. For participants in the current study, the youth groups increased balance in their lives, providing the necessary difference from school or home. The youth groups provided agency in how YP used them; they could relax and "forget" their difficulties, or choose to talk about them and seek support. The importance of separation was perhaps demonstrated in Kit's choice to attend the youth group external to school although they also attended the GSA in school. Schools and colleges should be aware of local LGBT+ organisations and youth groups, signposting these across the school.

Interestingly, college systems and specialist provisions were described as more inclusive and accepting than schools, highlighting the need for diversifying the 'norms' which prevent inclusion and acceptance in school contexts, and learning from colleges who are more advanced in this work. EPs are often called 'agents of change' (Roffey, 2015). If inclusion is an aim in this change work, as is espoused (e.g. Frederickson et al., 2015), we must support schools to recognise the uniqueness and admirability of every CYP. Participants in the current study did not always feel appreciated, rather they felt that their diversities, related to gender, sexuality, and other attributes, such as SEN or specific interests (e.g., climate change), were rejected and unwelcome.

The current research has the potential to become 'activist research', which Fine (1994) proposed achieves at least one of the following:

- Breaking the silence
- Denaturalising what appears natural
- Contrasting what is to what could be
- Participatory activist research

Whilst the current research did not employ a participatory methodology, the other three categories may have been achieved. Firstly, there are no other studies about CYP experiences in LGBT+ youth groups in the UK which suggests that this research may have contributed to a breaking of the silence. Secondly, the study and its findings identified 'norms' as they were experienced and communicated, and in highlighting and critiquing these, a disruption or

denaturalisation takes place. Finally, through learning from participants, implications were generated in which a different, future reality was conceived.

6.4. Context

6.4.1. Current financial crisis

Schools are often cited as microcosms of society (e.g., Cowie et al., 2008), and if change or greater openness to change is what is required, as the findings suggest, then it is pertinent to consider the current state of the external society in the UK and beyond.

There is a current financial crisis nationally and globally, in which the cost of living, including energy, petrol and food prices has inflated exponentially without being mitigated by increased wages or government subsidies/support. The effect of this in the UK has included more people accessing food banks (Wood, 2022), switching off their electricity supply to avoid debt (Butler, 2022) and reducing food intake and skipping meals (Rimi, 2022). This has been significantly exacerbated by Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian war in Ukraine (Josephs, 2022). This is relevant to the current research because a higher cost of living, continual news about a nearby war, and related messages of threat towards the UK (e.g., Berkhead, 2022), all contribute to higher levels of stress which can permeate social systems. Stress reduces the capacity for cognitive flexibility (Girotti et al., 2018), which is important for adapting to change. Increased stress in the Covid-19 pandemic was also associated with greater levels of discrimination, stigma and othering (Bhanot et al., 2021). Such contextual factors are thus likely to keep systems more stuck and prevent change measures from being implemented.

Such stress factors may be reflected in the bullying experiences discussed by participants. However, just as schools are reflections of society, they are also part of that society. Whilst they are impacted by external context, they can also affect the context. Small, successful changes could have a ripple effect in wider society. If, as the current findings suggest, relational connection, containment and belonging can improve mental health and encourage activism in LGBT+ CYP, could implementing a reflective, relational approach towards developing openness to change regarding gender, sexuality and difference, reduce stress and increase inclusion in schools and society more broadly?

6.4.2. TRANS* CONTEXT

In 2014, the DfE wrote that pupils 'undergoing gender reassignment' should be allowed to attend the single sex class that accords with the gender role in which they identify. The government referred to trans* CYP with outdated language here, and a deeper consideration of why children need to be split up by gender in classes is likely required. Regardless, it appears that there are barriers to overcome before considering the DfE's aim, which is far from being achieved. In particular, three participants discussed their names and pronouns not being acknowledged, and their schools falsely citing legal reasons as to why parental consent was required to make these changes. Perhaps over the last 8 years, trans rights may have become less clear and more under attack.

This may have been evidenced in the UK government's recent announcement that it will not ban gender identity conversion therapy, whereas sexuality conversion therapy will be banned. This means that YP under the age of 18 will be protected from practices aimed at changing their sexuality, but not their gender identity. The government cited a "complexity of issues" in their reasons for this, including concerns that a ban may prevent exploratory therapeutic work. However, several clinicians reported that a conversion therapy ban which still allowed for therapies which explored gender identity was possible and had been enacted in other countries (Parry & Moss, 2022). The decision splits the rights of LGB people from trans* people, which may have the impact of dividing this community, leaving trans* people isolated and vulnerable to attempts at 'conversion' (Hinsliff, 2022). The decision to exclude trans* people from the ban has been condemned by the British Psychological Society (BPS News, 2022) and over 100 other organisations (BBC, 2022).

This reversal of the trans* conversion therapy ban was perhaps endorsed by recent media interest in trans* lives, often referred to as a 'culture war' (e.g., Taylor, 2019), framing the rights of trans* people, and the validity of their identities as up for debate, in both philosophical and practical ways, involving conversations about language, categories and meanings of gender, and also discussions about who should be allowed where (e.g., toilets, sports) and based upon what.

'Trans exclusionary' discourse in the media has risen in the UK in recent years (Wells, 2021), arguably contributed to by people termed as trans exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs), whose

arguments are often delivered under a guise of concern about women or children. Considerable controversy continues to surround GIDS at the Tavistock and Portman, and the service has recently been criticised by members of parliament (Allen, 2022). Some conservative writers have argued the gender-affirming practices of GIDS constitute a 'social experiment' reflecting the 'cowardice of our political class' (Bartosch, 2021). Butler asserts that radical, exclusionary views about trans* people are currently being presented as mainstream, falsely indicating that excluding trans* people from feminism is typical, rather than a marginal movement (Butler in Ferber, 2020).

The current findings support the importance of accepting the multiplicity of gender and gendered experience. The discourse of 'war' seems to have created opposing sides, perhaps entangled with politics. Progression towards inclusion and equality must involve conversations which invite diverse voices, crucially including those of trans* people themselves.

Achieving an LGBT-inclusive society which respects and celebrates difference, arguably must involve an examination and expansion of the rigid ways that gender is currently conceptualised. Expanding our vocabulary to describe the multiple experiences of gender and sexuality would likely contribute to a deepening understanding of varied human life without jeopardising the security of existing categories that people identify within.

6.4.3. Systemic barriers in the UK

The recent modelling of misogyny enacted by government figures provides an institutional barrier to progression towards an LGBT-inclusive society and reduces the hope of swift systemic action towards this. In the last ten months (between July 2021 and May 2022), behaviours of members of parliament (MPs) in the UK have included watching porn in the house of commons (Quinn et al., 2022), making sexist accusations against female politicians (Oppenheim, 2022), being found guilty of historic child sexual abuse (BBC News, 2022) and being arrested for rape and sexual assault (Mason, 2022). This indicates the extent of the work required regarding gender and sexuality in the UK. Change in this area may be challenging in the current climate, but the need for change is blatantly apparent.

6.5. LINKING TO THEORY

6.5.1. QUEER AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Queer theory (Butler, 1990) was influential in the current research. The participants were 'queer' in that they did not fit into heteronormative, binary positions. Participants defined themselves in various ways, but did not use the word queer; Jay referred to themself as 'fluid' and Orla described herself as 'unlabelled'. In this sense they resisted a different kind of binary: straight or gay. Queer theory challenges this, as did Orla, explaining that sexuality and gender labels can become attached to people and viewed as fixed, which does not always align with their realities (Sedgwick, 2008).

Key tenets from queer theory were present in the current findings, including a pressure to be heterosexual and 'perform' gender in rigid ways. The related discrimination was described as harmful in the current research. Elsewhere, it has been documented as catastrophic, in the most serious cases leading to murder (Butler in Buzareingues & Zajdermann 2006) and suicide (Clark et al., 2020; Day, 2012; Fieldstadt, 2021; Kilander, 2021; Padgett, 2021). It is important to be aware of such tragedies, occurring recently in the UK and elsewhere, as the necessity of this work can often be minimised.

The current findings indicate that rigidity and othering are powered by fear. This is echoed by Butler's words in Buzareingues & Zajdermann (2006):

> *"It seems to me that we are talking about a deep panic or fear, an anxiety that pertains to gender norms. And if someone says, 'you must comply with the norm of masculinity, otherwise you will die'… We need to then start to question the relationship between complying with gender and coercion."*

Unchallenged heteronormativity can result in the highest injustice. If reflection on prescribed gender roles can form some of the needed challenge, then working towards openness to fluidity beyond limited categories and expectations, may save lives. The intersectionality of other aspects of identity including race and ethnicity are also considered as imperative in this work (Crenshaw, 1994). Awareness of these intersections is particularly important as findings indicate that black LGBT+ youth are the least likely to feel safe at school and 89% of black LGBT+ CYP have

experienced suicidal thoughts, compared to 67% of white LGBT+ CYP (Just Like Us, 2021). Whilst both statistics are high, these findings do suggest differentially difficult experiences for black LGBT+ youth. Furthermore, youth groups and initiatives aimed at supporting LGBT+ YP often disproportionately benefit the white and middle-class (Grzanka & Mann, 2014). Considerable work is required to reach out to diverse LGBT+ youth and ensure that interventions are not inadvertently discriminating against CYP who may need support the most.

6.5.2. Psychoanalytic

When considering the potential mechanisms at play in processes of othering and barriers to change, I contemplated the role of 'splitting'. This felt pertinent as there were many 'splits' highlighted in the current findings, such as Kit being in an 'all-girls school', Jay being bullied for looking 'like a boy' and various other inclusions and exclusions. The psychoanalytic concept of 'splitting' refers to the sense of one thing being entirely bad and something else being completely good (Klein, 1957). Splitting is characteristic of the 'paranoid-schizoid' position, held by babies and some adults, in which the world is mentally split into good and evil (Klein, 1946). Typically this enables babies to view their caregiver as all good or all bad, depending upon whether they are meeting their needs in the moment. Over time, a more 'depressive' position is developed in which the baby can cope with the good and the bad co-existing in the same world or the same person.

This is relevant because splitting could be at play in behaviours of avoidance or restriction regarding change. Namy et al.'s (2015) research focused on an intervention for boys. Splitting and separating boys and girls could be related to a paranoid-schizoid position, characterised by a fear of difference and danger. This split also excludes non-binary CYP, could be uncomfortable for other trans* CYP (Surette, 2019) and unhelpful for everyone. Gender and its binarism become defended when their boundaries are provoked, such as when a YP asks to be referred to with they/them pronouns and is met with barriers or silence.

6.5.3. Stage-environment fit theory

The stage-environment fit (SEF) theory (Eccles and Midgley, 1989) proposes that as CYP progress through adolescence, their developmental need for autonomy and social connectedness increases. However, these needs are not met due to increasingly rigid education systems which

favour grades and league table positions over wellbeing (Finke, 2017). YP autonomy is reduced since what happens in the classroom is largely dictated and controlled by teachers. There is also less time for interacting with peers throughout the school day as break time reduces as CYP get older (Weale, 2019) and social interactions can be heavily monitored. This may explain why positive emotional and motivational factors decrease in the transition from childhood to adulthood (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2010). This aligns with the current findings that suggest an array of unmet needs of YP, perhaps resulting in the need to seek out another environment, such as an LGBT+ youth group. The SEF imbalance may be even more significant for LGBT+ CYP facing some of the difficulties described by participants in the current study. Aims to redress this balance can be successful in altering the gender climate in schools, which involves more quality relational time with peers and allowing YP to have more autonomy to express their gender identity (Ullman, 2014) and other aspects of themselves.

6.6. Application and implications

The current findings include factors within each of the systemic levels proposed in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. There are also implications of this research within the various levels. At a macrosystem, ideologies about gender and other 'norms' must be interrogated. The government and the media must also be held accountable for their role in perpetrating certain messages about gender and sexuality. The priorities and beliefs of these institutions have an impact on other exosystems such as youth services. The microsystem was the focus of this study and in line with this, most of the implications of the findings are related to individual, group and school levels.

The most pertinent of the implications is around tackling fear-driven (in)actions, which may be related to increased stress and reduced opportunities for reflection in schools and systems, including EP services. A reflection deficit may prevent change and maintain rigidity and harm for CYP. Addressing this must begin from a place of compassion and openness to difference. This is evoked through supervision, training, SRE, inclusive curriculums, sufficient policies, and a system-wide commitment to reducing discrimination and ensuring inclusion in schools.

The current research recommends reflective spaces as a learning and training tool, which can be used in sessions with CYP (such as in SRE or PSHE) and in training and/or supervision with adults.

Sufficient facilitation in these sessions is vital. The floor must be opened for honesty because when people are allowed to acknowledge where they 'are', they are then more able to move and change from there. Facilitators must be able to hold space for multiple perspectives and understandings. Whilst discriminatory views must be carefully challenged, welcoming different perspectives is essential as the more difficult voices to hear may also represent the greatest need for change. Facilitators must be aware to not engage 'splitting', in which one perspective is all good, and the other is all bad (Klein, 1957).

To support this, facilitators need ongoing supervision and reflective spaces themselves, especially because sex, sexuality and gender are changing topics, continually fluxing and growing more complex. What comes up may be challenging and emotional even for experienced facilitators who are required to respond appropriately in a vast range of possible discussions. Therefore, it is always useful to facilitate sessions in pairs. Any conflicts that do arise could also be supported through de-briefs before and after sessions.

The LGBT+ Riddle Scale (Table 5; adapted from Riddle, 1985 and Drewlo & Manders, 2011) may be a useful tool in reflective sessions for considering one's position regarding diverse gender and sexuality. This positioning activity was a significant facilitator of change in attitudes and responses to discrimination in teachers (Ollis, 2010), possibly due to its openness to the need for personal progress. However, this likely requires a more flexible and thorough use than indicated in Ollis' (2010) paper, including the acknowledgement that positions are not fixed. Consideration of other identity or behavioural characteristics and how they impact responses and attitudes is vital. Consideration of one's values, assumptions and biases may be part of this work. When are you appreciative and when are you tolerant? When are you at the level of 'pity' and when are you 'accepting'? What circumstances or factors impact this?

Creative and multisensorial learning resources can and should be used to make sessions more memorable (Pilcher, 2017). Considering one's own gender and sexuality using the gender unicorn (Pan & Moore, 2014) could be a helpful starting activity. Critically observing how the media portrays categories of people (e.g., men, women, gay people, trans* people) would also be important in this work. Other creative activities such as drawing or creating dolls to represent the self and others (as in Pilcher, 2017) may be beneficial for processes of highlighting, critiquing, disrupting and eventually diversifying dominant discourses around gender and sexuality.

6.6.1. Educational Psychologists

EPs are likely to work with LGBT+ CYP who may be experiencing exclusions and heteronormative, discriminatory environments, which can impact their mental health and sense of belonging. Tentative awareness of this possibility would be helpful for EPs, alongside the knowledge that every CYP is different and thus it is important to avoid assumptions and stay open, curious and listening.

The current findings highlighted that some schools may lack understanding of the law in terms of informing parents/carers of their child's gender diversity, and seeking their consent for using pronouns and names requested by CYP. Some schools may believe that it is good practice to speak with parents/carers before agreeing to acknowledge and use YP name and pronouns. However, as shown in Liam's experience, if CYP do not want this to happen it can cause significant harm. EPs could provide practical and psychological guidance to schools who are navigating or considering their responses to trans* YP. Names and pronouns are the tip of the iceberg, but they symbolise something significant about being seen and valued. EPs should take care to use the names and pronouns that CYP identify with, whilst encouraging others to do the same. It may also be helpful to be aware of real-world examples and practices of schools or colleges who are confidently providing supportive, responsive environments for LGBT+ CYP.

EPs, as change agents, are likely to be aware that barriers to change are common. They may also assume that such barriers could be fuelled by fear or defence mechanisms. EPs must also be aware of the current intensity of such barriers in the UK, including apprehension about LGBT-inclusive education from teachers and school leaders (Smith-Millman et al., 2019), and protests against this from parents (Lightfoot, 2019). Indeed, making queerness visible in educational spaces can lead to a range of adverse emotional responses including disgust, outrage, hostility and claims of inappropriateness (Quinn & Meiners, 2009). These feelings and ideas may contribute to the construction and maintenance of limited gender norms and behaviours (Dunne et al., 2006). EPs have relative power to support these change processes, which must begin with reflection. The understanding that the responses outlined by Quinn and Meiners (2009) may arise through fear of the unknown, offers a reminder for compassion.

Whilst support 'from the top' is important in change work, leaders cannot change cultures on their own (Wells, 2017), and therefore supporting whole systems to become more inclusive and reflective is essential. Considering how schools often favour conformity and uniformity over diversity, individuality and difference may form part of this work. Schools have a legal responsibility to uphold the Equality Act (2010). EPs can support this process, which might include devising an explanation for parents or others who denounce this work as to why it is imperative for children and whole school communities to learn how to accept, include and work with people who represent difference.

EPs may be able to offer facilitation of training or supervision for school staff and other professionals working with LGBT+ CYP. Sessions which are interactive and reflective, rather than purely didactic and informational, are likely to effect the most change. However providing more basic training, information and resources would also be helpful, such as outlining different gender definitions and the use of pronouns, which may be essential for adults working with CYP.

6.6.2. Schools

In the interviews, when asked where they would like to begin, all participants started by talking about their experiences in school, suggesting the pertinence of this context for YP. Schools have an 'ethical imperative' to teach about human diversity (Miller-Young, 2010) and must protect the characteristics outlined in the Equality Act (2010). This has implications for the importance of acknowledging, normalising and celebrating difference. This also requires an interrogation of fixed norms and narratives which are perpetuated and maintained within schools, including around ideas of gender and sexuality, and messages around what a 'good' life entails; Jay showed active resistance to this prescribed path for life. CYP would be best supported by school staff (and EPs) who can encourage a range of diverse routes and outcomes in their lives, based upon their desires and what is best suited to them.

The need for an overhaul of SRE has been argued elsewhere (Formby & Donovan, 2020). Creativity should be employed within these teachings and CYP should be given agency in how to engage. Successful SRE involves safe spaces and opportunities for CYP to discuss sex, consent, gender, sexualities, safe relationships, abuse and violence in intimate relationships (Makleff et al., 2020). These are all important topics for teenagers navigating diverse experiences. However, talking

about them may be novel, and a sense of security with teachers and peers is essential for engagement. SRE programmes delivered externally to school can also be utilised. For example, the 'Queer Sex Ed' online SRE programme, demonstrated the efficacy and feasibility of providing innovative and comprehensive SRE online for LGBT+ CYP (Mustanski et al., 2015). Schools should be aware of such resources, and be regularly signposting CYP to them, increasing equity and accessibility.

The DfE (2021) has recently announced funding for one leader per school to become trained as a 'designated mental health lead'. The current findings and other research indicate that a lack of inclusion and acceptance can worsen mental health in LGBT+ CYP. Therefore, arguably the training for this role should have a gender and sexuality component. In the UK, schools tend to have several pastoral members of staff, such as Heads of Houses or Heads of Years (Richardson, 2021). There is great potential for these staff to lead on training and reflection around gender and sexuality diversity both with staff and CYP. In the current study, Liam and Kit described difficulties and a lack of support from pastoral staff. This may have been related to staff being unsure of how to support them, possibly lacking supervision or training. This is likely to be extremely important in tackling the documented high levels of discrimination, sexism, misogyny, homophobia and harassment in schools (Ofsted, 2021). Pastoral staff must be able to engage in reflection around these topics. This is especially important as they may be the adults whom LGBT+ CYP are most likely to turn to with concerns, and the current findings indicate the importance of containment found in relationships. Furthermore, when support systems and safe adults are easily accessible, this helps to redress health and mental health disparities (Coulter et al., 2017) and increases LGBT+ CYPs' engagement in school (Seelman et al., 2015).

Training about sexuality and gender for pastoral and teaching staff should include the history and legacy of Section 28, which may to an extent explain the continuing secrecy and silence which surrounds LGBT+ identities in schools (Foucault, 1978; Sauntson, 2018). Teacher training programmes could also include reflective sessions around these topics.

Furthermore, anti-homophobia, biphobia and transphobia specific policies are important; when schools have these in place, YP are less likely to hear anti-gay epithets and more likely to report feeling safe (Taylor & Peter, 2011). These policies should steer away from punitive responses, which may have the impact of reproducing othering and exclusion. Instead, restorative and

educative approaches should be favoured which have been found to successfully reduce homophobic bullying whilst improving whole-school connectedness (Day et al., 2016). This indicates that increased inclusivity and school connectedness can be achieved through relational and exploratory responses rather than purely behaviourist approaches to homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in schools.

The current findings suggest that belonging, connection and containment can be found in LGBT+ youth groups, which can positively impact mental health, engagement in learning, and activism towards change. This may inspire schools to set up the provision of a GSA or rainbow alliance, especially as research suggests that these have the potential to influence the whole school population. For example, a large study of 15,965 CYP in the US found that having a GSA was associated with reduced truancy, smoking, drinking and suicide attempts for all CYP but with the greatest effect for LGBT+ youth (Poteat et al., 2013).

6.6.3. Wider systems and government

LGBT+ inclusivity on a government and policy level would increase LGBT+ integration in schools (Fantus & Newman, 2021). The BPS called for a reconsideration of the reversal of the proposed ban on trans* conversion therapy (BPS News, 2022). Psychologists and therapists should be respected as skilled enough to be able to support CYP to explore and question their gender identity if this would be helpful for them, without the persuasion and coercion characteristic of conversion therapy (BBC, 2022). The conversion therapy ban for trans* people would communicate a support of them, and demonstrate the belief on a government and policy level that trans* people and identities are valid and welcome.

6.7. Dissemination

One of the main aims in this research was to learn from the experiences of YP and use this learning to inform applications and implications for EPs, schools and wider communities. The findings will be disseminated in the following ways:

- Presentation to fellow Tavistock and Portman trainee EPs on June 15th 2022.
- Presentation for my current EPS team in July 2022.

- Presentation in September or October for my new EPS team.
- A further presentation at the Pride in Education conference in October (to be confirmed).
- Presentation of the study at the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) Trainee EP conference in January (to be confirmed).

I also intend to disseminate the research in the following ways:

- Presenting at other psychology conferences, such as the DECP conference in spring 2023 and the International LGBTQ Psychology Pre-Conference in Prague in summer 2023.
- Sending all participants a summary of the findings and encouraging them to share this with their educational settings should they so wish. A full copy of the thesis will also be offered for participants should they want to read this.
- Publishing the findings in relevant journals, such as 'Educational Psychology in Practice' or 'Journal of LGBT Youth'.

6.8. Conclusions

The experiences of LGBT+ YP in youth group and educational settings are complex and multi-faceted. Political, social and cultural contexts and events impact on CYP and the systems they are part of. If barriers to action are fuelled by fear and anxiety, understanding the impact of the current political and social context may be vital to engaging the compassion required for reflection and movement towards change. Change is especially needed in the heteronormativity and barriers to gender diversity in schools, which appears to pertain to a lack of understanding, training, awareness and a fear about doing and saying the wrong thing.

The theory of action and inaction demonstrated the various interacting categories of experiences discussed by participants. Bullying and discrimination were experienced as an impact of othering in response to difference. Participants described eventually being able to meet such discrimination with a "pushing back", which was sometimes a lonely venture, whereas for others it was aided by social momentum. Positive action and activism were ultimately empowered in relationships. A sense of containment and belonging was found in groups, especially the LGBT+ youth groups. Crucial relationships with adults at home and at school, and with peers online and at school were also highlighted.

EPs and other professionals must be aware of the work required for LGBT+ inclusivity to be achieved. The literature review enabled me to consider the link between the fear-driven rigidity highlighted by participants, and the lack of reflection afforded within school systems. This work must begin with an openness to growth. Whilst change and growth can be painful, the potential benefits are boundless. However, space and time for engagement in this reflective change work must be prioritised and supported by leaders. The current work will conclude with imploring schools, leaders, CYP, youth workers, and all those who can, to make the space, whether that be in supervision, training, SRE, debates, break times and whenever the opportunity arises.

6.9. Limitations

The 'hybrid' approach to interviewing employed in this study enabled flexibility in meeting YP needs in line with aims to be adaptable in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, this could have created inconsistency across participants as during the telephone interview there were no visual cues available. This was also partially the case in Zoom interviews where the view is restricted. Furthermore, the in-person interview was conducted within the youth group setting, which could have provided prompts within the physical environment related to the research interest (Garcia et al., 2012). However, YP may have been more relaxed in their own homes, and thus better able to reflect and engage in the interview, although in contrast, some YP are more relaxed in youth group settings (Eisenberg et al., 2018).

Two of the five participants were under 16 and thus had to ask for parental consent to be part of the study. Whilst the parental information did not include the nature of the research being related to LGBT+ youth groups, I made an assumption based on content within the interviews that the parents of both participants were aware of their child's attendance at the LGBT+ youth group. Cwinn et al. (2021) found that LGBT+ YP who would avoid participating in research if they needed parental consent, tended to have less family support, more negative attitudes about their gender or sexuality and lower levels of help-seeking. Could participating in research be seen as help-seeking? Participants in the current study may have had a level of acceptance of their gender/sexuality, which raises questions about the voices of CYP who were not heard in this study.

Whilst there was some diversity within the participant sample, including diverse LGBT+ identities, experiences of SEN, mental health needs, school exclusions and being LAC, there were some similarities between the CYP. They were all 'out', attending LGBT+ youth groups and willing to volunteer without payment to speak with me about their experiences. These factors may imply associations between the participants, such as a desire to talk about their experiences.

In general, recruitment was difficult; I attempted several methods but was not able to interview more than five participants in this study. This is in line with findings that it is difficult to recruit young LGBT+ people (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2006), especially those who are black or Asian (Martinez et al., 2014). All five participants were White British. Whilst this reflects the majority population in the area of study, this raises questions as to how accessible LGBT+ youth groups are for YP who are Black, Asian and other ethnicities. The experiences of these YP in LGBT+ youth groups and educational settings are an important area for future research.

Although the sample size was small, the data from the five participants was rich, and the current qualitative research aimed to ascertain "smaller parcels of knowledge", a study of society "in fragments, in its daily details" (Fontana, 2001, p. 161), rather than with a larger, more representative sample.

One consideration which could be framed as a limitation is that the first participant interviewed may have had the most power in guiding the data analysis and the direction of the findings. This is arguably a factor of all grounded theory studies, in which codes and analysis are built upon iteratively and cumulatively, and thus the first participant's data is at play for the longest, potentially having the greatest impact on analysis.

Finally, the data analysis, and to an extent its collection, would have been greatly influenced by my own views, experiences and prior knowledge. It is possible that unavoidable biases may have contributed to misinterpretations or over-focused lenses in areas of the analysis. This could have been somewhat mitigated through coding with another researcher or in participatory research in which YP support the analysis and provide feedback about my interpretations.

6.10. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study highlights the importance of belonging and positive relationships with peers and key adults for LGBT+ CYP's mental health and engagement in education. The current research focused only on YPs' experiences of youth groups and settings. Future research could expand the focus to include other people who were important to the participants in the current research, including:

- Youth workers at the LGBT+ youth groups
- Teachers and/or pastoral staff
- Leaders in schools

Further research with CYP who are not attending LGBT+ youth groups would also be recommended. It would be useful to consider the impact of CYP home locations on their experiences accessing community groups. Research in the US indicates that LGBT+ YP are significantly worse off when they live in rural areas, perhaps due to dearth of services, fewer visible LGBT+ people or communities and a struggle to access or attend LGBT+ meetings or groups without coming out to families (e.g., Pope & Sherriff, 2008; Wigmore et al., 2009).

Furthermore, future research is needed with CYP who do not define as LGBT+ or within the LGBT+ umbrella. There may be CYP who would benefit from community space or support around gender or sexuality without such labels or definitions being at play. Furthermore, exploring the experiences of people within the LGBT+ grouping who receive less attention, such as 'questioning' YP may be important, especially as difficulties with mental health and accessing education are reportedly higher in this population than for LGB YP (Williams et al., 2005). Further research could explore the impact of language and the need for categorisation, and the extent to which this contributes to developing inclusivity. It may be important to employ more covert recruitment and methodology approaches to gather the views of CYP who could be less willing or happy to attend youth groups, be 'out' or verbally discuss their experiences.

Research into how facilitators can best manage reflective discussions, with CYP, teachers, EPs or school leaders would be useful. Findings could support deeper understandings of the need for

continual reflection about these concepts, how this work can be kept alive in schools and the benefits of it across the community.

6.11. Reflective statement

The participants' stories have opened my eyes to the complexity of factors and influences at play in every CYPs' life and ignited my thinking on the work that is required to enhance flexibility in our curriculums and minds, so that inclusion, appreciation and nurturance of diversity in all of its forms becomes a more achievable reality.

Rigidity around categorising and conformity goes beyond binary gender boundaries, extending to the education system itself, broader society and cultural scripts about the 'right' path of life. The CYPs' motivation to engage in action and activism in spite of challenges, kept my own energy alive for this work. The multiple highlighted inactions led to an exploration of the facilitators and barriers to change regarding sexuality and gender in schools in the literature. Although many multi-faceted factors contributed to change work, one component was consistently crucial across studies: the experience of inner reflection taking place in groups. Creating space for this has become an important part of my work. Change starts within relationships and it is essential that we hold spaces in which reflection is possible and change is viewed as welcome and inevitable. It is important to remain aware that we all have the capacity to learn and develop our psychological flexibility through considering the multiple experiences of life.

There has been no expectation that we will know everything there is to know about Educational Psychology at the end of our training; this is neither possible nor aspired. The theory, frameworks and structures all have their helpful place. But what keeps the psychology alive is the process of openness, adaptability and continual growth. This cannot be done with walls up, whether these are intense rigid curriculums, emotional barriers, defence mechanisms, zero tolerance policies, heteronormative messages or binary gender stereotypes. In understanding the driving forces behind these: fear, stress and other systemic challenges, we can become open to our own capacity to facilitate change, from a place of reflective compassion.

Figure 7. Final reflective statement

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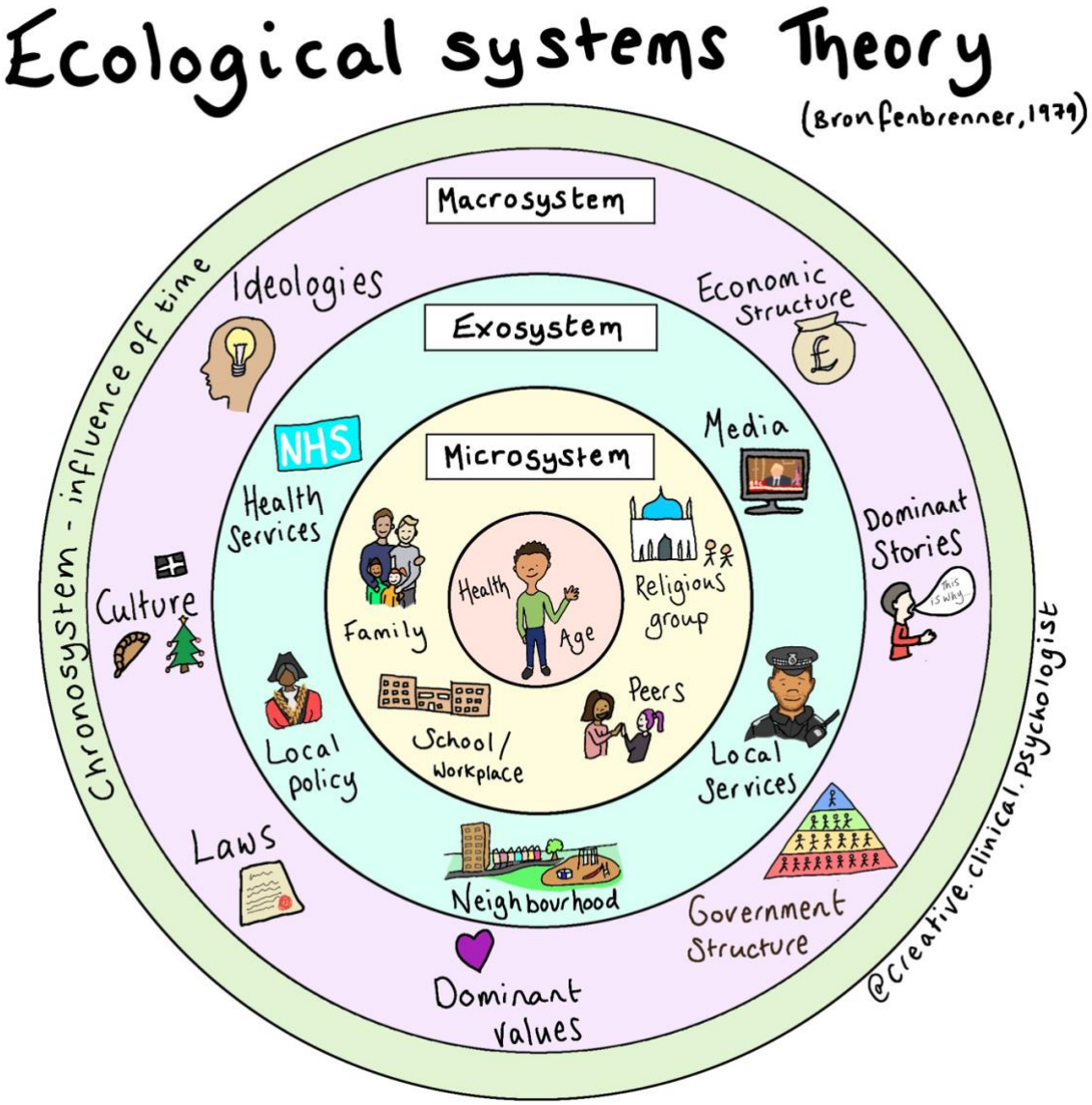
APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. BRONFENBRENNER'S (1979) ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS MODEL, DEPICTED BY YOUNG (2021)



Appendix 2. The Social GRACES (Burnham, 1992, 1993)

Appendix 3. Interview schedule

I am interested in hearing about your experiences in school and in the [youth] group you attend. Where do you want to begin?

- Can you tell me about school for you?
    - How was/is it for you? Has it always been like that?
    - What range of experiences have you had in school?
    - Different feelings about schools? What were you thinking about that? What did you do?

- Tell me about your time at [the youth group]?
    - How has it been for you? Has it always been like that?

- What were you hoping for when you started coming/attending the youth groups?
- How do you use the youth clubs?

- Are there any similarities between school and the youth groups? Any differences?

Appendix 4. CEO support in writing for the research involvement

Hi Louisa
It was good to talk to you too.
See below for my responses

If you require any further information please let me know.

> I'm currently writing my ethics application and I have to attach some evidence that I have spoken with you about the research and that you are happy to facilitate me asking young people from [redacted] to participate. If you could email me a sentence confirming that it would be greatly appreciated!

I write to confirm that I am happy to facilitate LouisaThomas' engagement with members of [redacted] in line with our policies and procedures.

APPENDIX 5. RECRUITMENT FLYER

Appendix 6. Letter confirming approval by the Ethics committee

Dear Louisa,

Re: Research Ethics Application

Title: Exploring the experiences of LGBT+ young people in school and community youth group contexts: a grounded theory study .

I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please note that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Paru Jeram

Appendix 7. Participant information sheet

Young peoples' experiences in education and LGBT+ youth groups: a constructivist grounded theory study

Who is doing the research?
Louisa Thomas is a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) in her second year studying a Doctorate in Educational, Child and Community Psychology. She works as a TEP three days a week and spends the other two days attending lectures, studying and planning this research project. She is carrying out this research as part of her doctoral training and the study is sponsored by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

What is the aim of the research?
The aims of this research are to find out about young people's experiences of attending school and being part of a youth club for LGBT+ young people. It intends to explore the impact of LGBT+ youth club membership for young people, whilst also exploring young people's school experiences.

Who has given permission for this research?
Before the research takes place, the Tavistock and Portman ethics committee, called TREC, will give ethical consent. Furthermore, [the CEO] at [the youth group] has also given consent for me to offer participation in this study to young people at [the youth group].

Who can take part in this research?
Louisa is looking for LGBT+ young people aged 14 to 19 who attend or are members of [the youth group] who have also attended a school or college recently (in the previous 18 months at the time of the interview).

What does participation involve?
Participation involves an interview with Louisa online via Zoom, in person, or on the telephone (if this is preferred or internet cannot be accessed). The interview will involve talking with Louisa for 30 minutes to an hour about your experiences of being part of [the youth group] and of school and/or college. Louisa will make audio recordings of the interviews and will listen back to them, writing down what you said. Once she has transcribed your interview, she will delete the recording. It is possible that Louisa may contact you again after the interview to ask a few more follow up questions on the phone or Zoom (taking around 10 minutes as an estimate) - like with all of this, participating in that would be up to you.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
There is not a lot of research in the UK with young people who are LGBT+ and even less asking young people to voice their experiences in qualitative research. There is a gap in research around LGBT+ experiences in a youth group and in school. The findings of this study could be used to benefit the Educational Psychology profession in being able to understand the needs and perspectives of young people. Since EPs work a lot with schools and colleges, these findings could also positively impact on teachers and their work with LGBT+ young people in schools. There may also be personal benefits experienced by the young people in being able to talk about their experiences both at school and at [the youth group].

What are the possible risks of taking part?
It is possible that the interview may raise some emotional topics for you, and you may feel that you need to get some support after the experience. Your youth worker will be aware that you are participating in this research and Louisa will be available for you for up to an hour after our interview if you would like to discuss anything further with me. You can also email me at any time with questions about the research.

As part of this research Louisa will be writing a thesis which will include some of the things you have said. She will give you a pseudonym (a fake name) in the thesis, so you will not be identified by name. However, this research will have a small sample size (around 10 participants) and direct quotations will be used in the thesis, so if something you say includes highly specific, identifiable information, this could reduce your anonymity.

What will happen to the findings from the research?
The findings will be typed up as part of Louisa's thesis which will be read by examiners and be available at the Tavistock and Portman library. These findings may also be published at a later date in a peer reviewed journal. You will have the option to read a summary of Louisa's findings and/or the full thesis once the analysis and writing has been completed.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with this research?
Participation in this research is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time up to or during the interview, and for up to three weeks following your interview. This is because by around three weeks after, I would have begun to analyse the data from your interview and it would be more difficult to remove this once that process is underway. You do not have to provide a reason for your withdrawal of participation in this study.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?
Yes. All records related to your participation in this research study will be handled and stored securely on an encrypted drive using password protection. Your identity on these records will be indicated by a pseudonym rather than by your name. The data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years. Data collected during the study will be stored and used in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations (2018) and the Tavistock Trusts Data Protection Policy, which can be found at https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures

Are there times when my data cannot be kept confidential?
Confidentiality may have to be broken if a disclosure is made, meaning that if you share something that worries Louisa (e.g. suggesting you may cause harm to yourself or others), she will have to pass it on to ---- (safeguarding lead at [the youth group]).

Further information and contact details

- If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of the research, please contact the researcher, Louisa Thomas: lthomas2@tavi-port.nhs.uk
- The research supervisor / investigator of this project is Dr Adam Styles, who can be contacted on astyles@tavi-port.nhs.uk
- If you have any concerns about the researcher or the investigator of this research project, please contact Simon Carrington (Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance) at academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Appendix 8. Consent form

Please read the statements below and put your initials in the box next to them if you agree with them:	**Initial here:**
1. I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.	
2. I understand this research project is part of Louisa's doctorate in Educational Psychology.	
3. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I am free to withdraw without giving a reason at any time up to and during the interview, and for up to three weeks post-interview.	
4. I agree for my interview to be audio recorded, so that Louisa can listen to it again afterwards and write down what we said so that she can analyse it as part of the research.	

5. I understand that my data will be anonymised so that I cannot be linked to the data. I understand that if Louisa writes about me in her thesis, she will not use my real name, but I understand that she may quote some things I say in the interview. Your name, any other names you say including the names of your school/college will all be changed in my write up.	
6. I understand that the number of participants in this study is small (around 10 participants in total), which may limit confidentiality of the anonymised quotes (although different names will always be used).	
7. I understand that there are limitations to confidentiality relating to legal duties (e.g. if I am worried that you will harm yourself or others).	
8. I understand that my interviews will be used for this research and cannot be accessed for any other purposes.	
9. I understand that the findings from this research will be published in a thesis and potentially in a presentation or peer reviewed academic journal.	
10. I am willing to participate in this research.	

Appendix 9. Parental consent form

Parental consent form for young people aged 14 and 15

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am writing to you because your child has expressed an interest in taking part in the research project I am currently carrying out. Since your child is not yet 16, we need to make sure that you are okay with them participating in this study. Please read the below statements, and if you are in agreement with them, please sign your name below. If you are not comfortable with any of these, or you would like to talk about this further, please email me on lthomas2@tavi-port.nhs.uk

- I understand that my child/young person is participating in doctoral research carried out by Louisa Thomas, a Trainee Educational Psychologist.
- I understand that this research involves an interview for up to an hour via Zoom or in person.

- I understand that this research will involve an interview where Louisa will be asking my child about their experiences at school and in the community.
- I understand that my child has the right to withdraw from this study at any time.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw my consent for my child to take part up until the point of the interview.

If you give consent for your child to take part in this research project, please sign below and return to me at lthomas2@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Name ……..

Date ……

Email …….

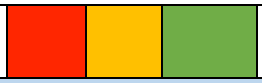
Contact number …….

Appendix 10. Papers included in the literature review

- Elliott, 2016
- Fantus & Newman, 2021
- Makleff et al., 2020
- Namy et al., 2015
- Ollis, 2010
- Pilcher, 2017
- Surette, 2019
- Theoharis, 2010
- Valentine, 2020
- Wells, 2017

Appendix 11. CASP critiques

Ollis, D. (2010). Reflections on the impact of teacher professional training on sexuality education.

		Comments
Section A: *Are the results valid?*		
Was there a clear statement of aims of the research? *Goal of research? Why is it important? What's the relevance?*		To explore teachers attitudes to homosexuality and following attendance at a professional development intervention, which aspects impacted their ability to include and affirm gender/sexuality diversity and address homophobia, as part of health education programmes (which may be comparable to PSHE programmes in the UK).

Is qualitative methodology appropriate? *Is the research seeking to interpret/illuminate the actions or subjective experiences of ppts? Qual meets research goal?*		Yes – the research sought to explore any changes in attitudes and subjective actions and responses to scenarios (e.g., around homophobia or sexual diversity). Research goal is met through qualitative research.
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? *Decision making for which method to use?*		Triangulation approach of combining qualitative methodologies including observation, textual analysis of curricula and interviews with teachers. Explained that this should increase validity of data. Longitudinal study for up to 18 months to examine the process of change for health education teachers.
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? *How participants were selected, why they were the most appropriate for study and discussions around recruitment.*		14 teachers currently teaching health education, who undertook a PD to equip them for inclusive and affirming gender and sexual diversity. Positive that they were selected as they were already working with this. But limitation could be that all teachers come across these topics and could benefit from some training and reflection on discourses and narratives around LGBTQ+ people and identities. Some good resources used. How were these 14 selected? Recruitment process not discussed at all. 12 women and 2 men.
Was the data collection in a way that addressed the research issue? *Setting for data collection and methods justified, how data were collected (e.g., focus group), are methods explicit (e.g., interview guide?), if methods were modified mid study – how and why, form of data (e.g., audio recording), and whether saturation was discussed.*		Yes, the scenarios appeared to be a good approach to analysing possible changes in attitudes of the participants. Setting was in schools for observations of the teachers and interviews in an unstated setting. The interview guide or methods for interviewing were not explicit other than the use of school-based scenarios to explore which appeared to be randomised across three phases for participants, to see changes over a 12 to 18 month time period. The form of data was not stated. Saturation of data not discussed. Findings that were reported were mostly based on the interviews rather than what was seen in the classroom which is another limitation of this paper.
Has the relationship between researcher		The relationship between the researcher and participants was not explored at all which I feel is a limitation to this study because surely that would

and participants been adequately considered? *Has the researcher critically examined their own role, bias and influence in formulation of research questions, data collection, recruitment and location, and responses in study?*		have had an impact on how open teachers were to changes in attitudes and how effective the programme was in eliciting changes in them. Also the impact of having a researcher in your classroom? Surely this should have been explored. Also what was the researchers sexuality? What was her response when some of the participants shared homophobic views? One participant openly shared his homophobic views and discomfort with same sex relationships – what was the response about this? And the fact that he had ignored sexuality as part of the health education course, and focused on drug taking. Great he was honest but what was the response? Were there difficult feelings the researcher had to cope with?
Section B: *What are the results?*		
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? *How was research explained to participants? Informed consent? Confidentiality? Effects of study on participants? Ethics committee?*		No ethical issues have been discussed in the paper. Ethics committee approval not mentioned. Potential ethical issues could have arisen within the training e.g., when asking participants to place themselves on the Riddle scale: this could be difficult for some participants – what about if participants had same sex attraction themselves? There was an apparent assumption of heterosexuality – I'm sure this was checked with participants but there is no mention of this in the paper. Also when participants realised that they were behaving in homophobic ways that might have been unethical for the YP they worked with – was there any support or consideration around that? Could have been a difficult realisation for some teachers but no mention of that being thought about or supported.
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? *In depth description of analysis process? How were categories/themes were derived? How was data selected to demonstrate the analysis? Are sufficient data presented to support findings? Are contradictory data taken into account? Has the researcher critically examined their own*		Content analysis and discourse analysis. The TSH workshop demonstrates discourses which have been used historically to position minority genders and sexualities in negative or constraining ways. These included discourses of fear, abnormality, difference and illness (proposed by Hillier and Harrison (2004). The workshop instead encouraged the participants to deconstruct heteronormativity and instead position sexual diversity as a normal part of the sexuality spectrum. Discourse analysis was used to examine any changes in participants positioning regarding gender, diverse sexualities and schooling post-training. Type of analysis mentioned and brief rationale/definition given (different uses for Discourse and Content analysis) but the process of

role / bias / influence in the analysis?		analysis was not explored hence the amber rating. Themes and categories and how they were reached not really explored. But lots of quotations were used to back up the findings. Contradictory data discussed a little – different perspectives of various participants. No discussion of researcher at all or their role or bias within the analysis which is a limitation of the study.
Is there a clear statement of findings? *Are the findings explicit? Discussion for and against researchers argument? Has the researcher discussed credibility of findings? E.g. triangulation? Are findings related to research question?*		Yes there are clear findings around what was useful and the changes experienced in discourses and attitudes employed and felt by the participants following the training and in a longitudinal way. There were personal and structural barriers inhibiting change (in line with my findings). Professional development and access to teaching and learning resources could positively impact on teachers willingness and ability to include and affirm diverse sexualities in their teaching on health programmes. All participants were higher up on the Riddle scale and it was great that this was retained after 12 months. Overall the learning experiences discussed that challenged values and attitudes led to changes in attitudes and changes in responses to homophobia.
Section C: *Will the results help locally?*		
How valuable is the research? *Discussion of contribution of research to knowledge? are findings considered in relation to current practice, policy or literature? Have new areas for necessary research been discussed? Can findings be transferred to other populations?*		Different cultural context but health and sexuality education is probably what we would call PSHE. This is important and not just for health education (or PSHE) – it's relevant because teachers and school staff likely witness homophobia and discrimination regularly and this intervention appeared to positively impact their abilities within that.

Pilcher, K. (2017). Politicising the 'personal': the resistant potential of creative pedagogies in teaching and learning 'sensitive' issues.

		Comments
Section A: *Are the results valid?*		
Was there a clear statement of aims of the research?		Aim set out clearly – to ascertain which teaching methods students considered most appropriate for the teaching and learning of sensitive issues related to gender and sexuality. How can creative methods of teaching and learning help to forge social change?
Is qualitative methodology appropriate?		Constructivist approach links well with qualitative research, although this is not discussed. Qualitative was appropriate.
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?		Not sure this was discussed here. Not any talk about possible alternatives apart from conversation about why interviews rather than focus groups.
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?		Recruitment process was described fully and a reflexive account about why participants may have elected to volunteer to participate was discussed.
Was the data collection in a way that addressed the research issue?		Interviews with 8 undergraduate students studying Sociology. Rationale for interviews provided – that sensitive topics could be more easily discussed one to one than in groups. Setting for the data was discussed and rationale provided. Interview schedule also mentioned.
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?		Reflexivity around researcher's own position as a queer woman was explored. And her positionality as a feminist, queer approach and "a commitment to disrupt normative and binary ways of conceptualising gender and sexualities", which involves questioning "why heteronormative assumptions are reproduced even at the same time as they may be resisted".
Section B: *What are the results?*		
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?		Yes somewhat. E.g., found that students needed a heads up. Issues of harmful views and how students copes with them were mentioned. Ethical imperative discussed in terms of a moral obligation to discuss sensitive topics. But ethical committee not mentioned, effects of study not really discussed and neither was confidentiality or informed consent,
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?		Not clear what analysis process looked like at all or what methodology was used, or how findings were derived. However, contradictory data were mentioned and sufficient quotations were given to show findings, that was actually really good. But there isn't much

		consideration into the analysis process and why they found what they may have found, bias etc.
Is there a clear statement of findings?		Findings were that yes, creative methods could contribute to social change in that they encourage a challenging of dominant social discourse and through encouraging greater collaborative learning (rather than instrumental learning). LGBTQA experiences, amongst other topics, were deemed as potentially 'sensitive' by the participants, as were 'the intersection of religious beliefs with conceptions of appropriate sexualities'. Talking was key. Lovely quote by one of Pilcher's participants demonstrated this: "we don't solve anything by not talking about it, how would we advocate for change?" Hearing diverse perspectives in conversation was seen as a means to disrupt and critique dominant, normative ideas – in that way 'the personal is political' was argued. Representation was important (lecturer openly discussing their sexuality allowed others to feel like it was a safe space to talk about theirs) and to the openness to discussing any and all identities and what they mean (inc. het and cis). When these are not talked about and interrogated, they are likely just assumed as the norm. However, a careful line must be tread so that heteronormativity is not reinforced.
Section C: *Will the results help locally?*		
How valuable is the research?		Pilcher spoke about relevance for teaching around sensitive issues but not really in terms of changing policy or practice and didn't provide any possible research routes to go down. Pilcher (2017) interestingly highlights a dichotomy which exists between a narrative around liberal, sex-exposed CYP who have access to gender and sexuality diversity in the media (e.g., in Netflix drama, Sex Education), and another more conservative narrative around concern for young people, and a 'debate' about whether diverse genders and sexualities should even be spoken about (ref). This is still a highly contested issue, pertaining to the huge spectrum of diverse experiences youth have with these topics. Although Pilcher (2017) was discussing students at

		university level, it is comparable to consider the 'ethical imperative' (Miller-Young, 2010) to teach about diverse people who exist in society. In Pilcher's (2017) study she engages in teaching students through encouraging them to look 'through the lens of their own experience' (McLean & Abbas, 2009).

Theoharis, G. (2010). Disrupting injustice: principals narrate the strategies they use to improve their schools and advance social justice.

				Comments
Section A: *Are the results valid?*				
Was there a clear statement of aims of the research?				Aims were to explore headteachers strategies for advancing social justice in their schools. Theoharis (2010) co-ordinated and analysed interviews within the frame of looking for strategies to disrupt social injustices (a research aim which was co-constructed with the headteacher participants). The strategy categories were agreed by at least 3 of the 6 headteachers, and were later taken to the others for exploration. He argues that mainstream society (in the states – but feel it is applicable) are more bureaucrats than leaders with a social equity agenda – traditional leadership which maintains rather than disrupts the status quo.
Is qualitative methodology appropriate?				Yes it is.
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?				Not explored.
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?				Good description of purposive and snowball sampling. Appropriate because criteria was quite slim and they had 18 who agreed initially but only 6 ended up meeting criteria and choosing to continue.

Was the data collection in a way that addressed the research issue?		Data collection over one school year including interviews. These highlighted that the principals were using specific methods to disrupt injustice.
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?		Positioned participants their identity characteristics and motivations for taking part in study. Discussion about race and ethnicity intersections. Theoharis (2010) positioned himself in terms of identity characteristics (white, male, heterosexual, headteacher) and his commitment to seeking social justice and equity, and he also introduced headteacher participants in this way. However, he did not reflexively consider how his experiences, identities or biases impacted on the data analysis and findings.
Section B: *What are the results?*		
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?		No consideration of ethics whatsoever.
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?		Constant comparative analysis – triangulation was mentioned – in that at least 3 headteachers agreed to a strategy for it to be included in the findings. Also the strategy was then shared with the other headteachers for discussion – a good approach to elicit deeper understanding of what the approach would mean to each head, even if they hadn't used it. More information about the analysis would have strengthened this. There were solid descriptions of how they were derived. But no consideration of the influence the researcher had on the findings.

Is there a clear statement of findings?		The findings were thematic categories which conveyed the strategies headteachers used to disrupt injustice in their schools. The first was around doing so in the context of resistance: Mentions literature which explores the "barriers and countervailing pressures to school change", particular changes which involve equity-reform. Huge resistance to change described by leaders. The barriers to equity and social justice agendas came from two primary locations: inside the school system and from the 'district and beyond'. These resistances had emotional toll on the headteachers – despite this they continued with their approach and developed resilience. The leaders advanced social justice by disrupting four kinds of injustices in their schools. The work was difficult especially in light of the barriers faced, but heads resistance to this and their resulting resilience were essential in their social justice leadership.
Section C: *Will the results help locally?*		
How valuable is the research?		Author feels the study is transferable but does not explore this. No mention of relation to policy or literature. However recommendations for other heads in using strategies are made.

Fantus & Newman. (2021). Promoting a positive school climate for sexual and gender minority youth through a systems approach: a theory-informed qualitative study.

		Comments
Section A: *Are the results valid?*		
Was there a clear statement of aims of the research?		Fantus and Newman (2021) highlight that literature on tackling discrimination towards LGBT+ CYP tends to focus on either LGBT specific strategies or on whole school bullying approaches which overlook LGBT-specific concerns. To address this, Fantus and Newman explored the integration of LGBT- specific

		issues within the school system. The aim of the study was to identify the multilevel factors which contribute to positive school climate and reduce bias-based bullying of LGBT youth.
Is qualitative methodology appropriate?		Aim was to understand the ideas and experiences of a range of professionals working with young people regarding what good practice for improving school climate and reducing bias-based bullying looked like, with specific examples. Qualitative felt appropriate for this.
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?		Yes. Bronfenbrenner supported the conceptual framework – looked at different systemic levels. Although decision making process behind design was not outlined.
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?		Purposive (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 2009) and snowball sampling to recruit a range of professionals who have worked with LGBT communities for at least three years. 16 participants took part, 13 of whom were LGBTQ+ (3 did not self-identify) from a range of professions with 3 to 15 years of experience working with LGBT youth.
Was the data collection in a way that addressed the research issue?		Discussed the interview guide – it was designed to elicit experiences of bullying of LGBT youth, and any preventative measures they feel could be implemented to avoid this. Recorded and transcribed verbatim.
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?		Not any discussion of the role of the researchers, and the biases they were bringing to the interviews and what kind of responses they were giving or prompts. Or their sexualities and biases and how their experiences may have impacted.
Section B: *What are the results?*		
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?		Identifying words removed from transcripts to protect anonymity. Ethics approval granted by University of Toronto Research Ethics board. All participants provided written consent.
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?		Thematic content analysis employed and two layers of coding was implemented,

		conducted by two researchers and then discussed with a research team.
Is there a clear statement of findings?		Yes. The findings were thematically organised into the different levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, split into observations participants had made of LGBT youth in schools, and also their recommendations for support in this area.
Section C: *Will the results help locally?*		
How valuable is the research?		Really useful as the discussion around provisions which would be helpful in promoting a positive school climate and reducing bias-based bullying was really interesting and had a lot of breadth in the coverage of the levels which was supported by using the ecological systems model as an approach for outlining and organising the findings. The research was situated in the context of what it was offering. Further research was advised, around using different and more diverse research participants and school leaders.

Makleff, S., Garduño, J., Zavala, R., I., Barindelli, F., Valades, J., Billowitz, M., Márquez, V. I. S., & Marston, C. (2020). Preventing intimate partner violence among young people – a qualitative study examining the role of comprehensive sexuality education.

				Comments
Section A: *Are the results valid?*				
Was there a clear statement of aims of the research?				Makleff et al. (2020) carried out a longitudinal study which involved conducting interviews and focus groups with YP, educators and teachers in Mexico about the role of a 'comprehensive sexuality education' programme particularly in intimate partner violence in YP relationships. The programme has a range of topics including sexuality, gender and relationships, with participatory techniques which included and encouraged critical reflection on gendered social norms. Aims: to explore how the course contributed to views and responses around intimate partner

		violence and to discern the mechanisms of violence prevention. The findings suggest that the opportunity to critically reflect led to changes in YP views, beliefs, intentions and behaviours regarding sexuality, gender and violence.
Is qualitative methodology appropriate?		Yes – the exploration around participants' responses, and educators' views around the programme needed the detail that is elicited in qualitative research.
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?		Yes.
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?		39 participants who were involved in interviews and focus groups. Not enough information About how and why participants were selected.
Was the data collection in a way that addressed the research issue?		Various data collection methods included – observation, case studies, interviews and focus groups over the course of one year. No talk of interview schedule or any modifications which likely would have taken place over the course of the year as each participant was interviewed four times. Participants were split by gender in the focus groups although the intervention itself was mixed gender. There was no explanation as to why this split was decided or deemed necessary within the paper.
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?		Not enough information.
Section B: *What are the results?*		
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?		Consent discussed – YP aged 14 to 17, parental consent gained and they also provided informed consent. Ethic committee mentioned.
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?		Started with formal hypotheses which they called a "theory of change" about what the key mechanisms for change would be. Then transcripts and notes were reviewed related to the initial

		hypotheses. New codes were developed and data analysis was refined and added to and evolved over time. Longitudinal data helped to add to the understanding of change processes. Memo writing was used to aid the analysis process.
Is there a clear statement of findings?		Attitude shifts were found, resulting from in depth reflective discussions about sex, gender, sexuality and relationships.
Section C: *Will the results help locally?*		
How valuable is the research?		Good discussion about next possible steps for research and partners and parents of participants in the program could be involved in research and share their perspectives of the participants experiences on the program and the impacts for their beliefs and their responses or measures to protect them against intimate partner violence.

Namy, S., Heilman, B., Stich, S., Crownover, J., Leka, B., & Edmeades, J. (2015). Changing what it means to 'become a man': participants' reflections on a school-based programme to redefine masculinity in the Balkans.

				Comments
Section A: *Are the results valid?*				
Was there a clear statement of aims of the research?				Namy et al. (2015) Aims to explore how boys engaged with a program called young men initiative (YMI) which is designed to promote gender equitable nonviolent and healthy lifestyles and relationships for adolescent boys in four Balkan countries. The study aims to explore how boys experience different components of the why am I program and which elements were most effective in supporting the boys to transform their understanding of masculinity.
Is qualitative methodology appropriate?				Qualitative method was appropriate because they were seeking to explore the meetings and understandings of the program for the participants that adolescent boys who attended it and also the teachers who work within the school contacts and their facilitators of the program themselves. By conducting interviews and focus groups rich in-depth data was gathered.
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?				Information was provided about the program the theory behind it and how and where it was delivered. Including that it was targeted to adolescent boys specifically.

Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?		Participants were purposively selectors and this was not described in full it is likely that the boys who were most engaged and vocal within the program when the ones who was also selected for the interviews so there could've been more diverse views about the course but they weren't heard. There was a clear description about how teachers were selected. The youth facilitators were selected by the employing organisation which suggests that they also selected facilitators who were and perhaps the most engaged.
Was the data collection in a way that addressed the research issue?		Yes the data was collected in an adequate way for the research. There was a range of methods including focus groups and interviews. The interview question areas were highlighted which, for the participants, were understandings about how the program worked, the most and least memorable aspects of the course and motivations for participating. The focus groups with facilitators of the program focused on any challenges and innovations around implementing the program, particularly around where the young people engaged within the program and what supported this.
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?		Whilst the relationships between the facilitators and the young people attending the courses were explored in depth, the relationship between the researchers and the participants are not explored at all. There is no consideration of the bias, role or influence that the researchers may have had on the responses and findings within the study or the analysis process. There were several authors of this paper and yet the different roles were not identified and therefore this has not been achieved.
Section B: *What are the results?*		
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?		The paper noted the ethical principles that were taken into consideration including the emphasis on consent confidentiality and violence against children. The ethical committee approved this and a discussion around how individual consent was gathered took place. Researchers were trained to watch for signs of distress and respondents were also given referral services to consider should they need them. Pseudonyms were used.
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?		Contradictory data was taken into accounts and evidence which was good.

		Data were originally coded by two independent coders that was performed manually and then somatic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes across the respondents details are limited on exactly how the coding process took place and was completed. There is a limited understanding about how the coding and analysis process took place.
Is there a clear statement of findings?		The program was found to promote shifts in attitude towards greater acceptance gender equality and nonviolence generally. However some entrenched patriotic and heteronormative views and ideals were still present in the boys. The boys describes learning how to identify harmful gender norms and had experience in actively questioning the constructs. The facilitators had a non-judgemental stance which helped with the openness and the comfort felt by the boys in the sharing within the critical reflection and questioning they've used discussion part of the course.
Section C: *Will the results help locally?*		
How valuable is the research?		Some conversation around watch what else should be done in terms of the research has been noted including some limitations and considerations about the findings and what they mean. It may be that there was a slightly different approach with the way that men and women are socialised and considered within the Balkan islands however it was deemed that there were enough overlaps within the research for this to be relevant to the current contacts within the UK.

Wells, K. (2017). Sexual minority teachers as activist-educators for social justice.

				Comments
Section A: *Are the results valid?*				
Was there a clear statement of aims of the research?				Wells carried out qualitative interviews with four LGBT teachers who act as social justice activists within their primary age school jobs. The aims were to do answer questions around how to negotiate LGBT identities whilst being out as educators within systems that tend to oppress them. Questions also included how teachers were able to transcend such discriminatory environments to become leaders and stay

		teachers and be out at school. There were also questions around how these educators were able to overcome fears and be agents for LGBTQ inclusive education.
Is qualitative methodology appropriate?		Qualitative methodology approaches are appropriate here as well is was seeking to understand the nuances and emotional and actual experiences and stories of the activist educators that he spoke with.
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?		A critically queer ethnography was used within this study. Wells described this as a methodology which examines the messy production of an everyday life of those who are others in society through constructions like sexuality and gender where power sits in society and history. This research attempted to generate and illuminate counter narratives to dominant discourses such as heteronormativity. Qualitative interviews were conducted and a participatory approach to the analysis was employed.
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?		Participants were selected as part of a larger sample of teachers in Canada. Wells (2017) provided a rationale for why they had chosen each teacher mostly related to their significant activist work within their schools and communities towards the inclusion of LGBT people.
Was the data collection in a way that addressed the research issue?		They seem to be appropriate each teacher had to our open-ended interviews which enabled exploration of various complexities within the educational activism. As a piece of activist research this was using a participatory approach so once all the interviews have been recorded and transcribed each of the participants was invited to share their feedback so that the meaning and analysis was cocreated with the participants. As a means to disrupt the heteronormative and harmful environments that are so often taking place in society.
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?		There was some discussion about this the role of the researcher and the stance of the researcher as a queer theorist and somebody who just like their participants was intending to resist a normalisation and authority and the dominant discourses which tend to other and oppress through power, history, sexuality and gender.

		The impact and role of the researcher including his biases in terms of the data collection the recruitment and responses and analysis within the study were not explored which is a shame because the participants were introduced with so much detail about their prior experiences and motivations for being part of the project and their work more generally.
Section B: *What are the results?*		
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?		Wells asked the teacher participants if they would like to be identified using pseudonyms in the write up. However they all chose to be named which was a counter to their previous experiences of feeling oppressed and silenced as LGBT people. Wanted their participation within this research to indicate their voice is being heard rather than silenced.
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?		The findings of this study represent co-constructors narratives between the researcher and his participants. There was not an in-depth scription of the analysis process or an explanation of how the categories and themes were derived apart from that they were co-constructive with the researcher. It was not clear how the researcher selected certain data and extracts to devise their theory. However there are sufficient data and appropriate data used to support the findings in the line of argument that Wells makes. Some contradictory data is also taken into account although this is minimal possibly because participants appear to have quite similar experiences having been selected specifically for certain similarities from a pool of LGBTQ educators. Whilst the researcher has engaged in some reflection about their role there is not much exploration about how their particular experiences and biases impacted the data analysis.

Is there a clear statement of findings?		Yes the findings are clear. Wells (2017) found that the activist educators engaged in three types of educational activism. These were number-one a personal activism which involved creating a safe place in their classroom and developing inclusive curriculums. Number two, institutional activism which focused on policy procedure and cultural change. And number three judicial activism which involves challenging the education system and workings of state power and heteronormativity.
Section C: *Will the results help locally?*		
How valuable is the research?		These findings have not been considered in relation to current practice policy or literature neither has new areas or necessary parts for research been discussed. However I feel these findings can be transferred and translated to other populations and even other countries because Wells discusses a lot of the same issues that has been found within this current research but also findings of others as well. And exploration into how LGBTQ educators can disrupt and act against heteronormativity and harmful structures in school systems has been thoroughly explored here which is arguably transferable to other settings.

Elliott, K. O. (2016). Queering student perspectives: gender, sexuality and activism in schools.

		Comments
Section A: *Are the results valid?*		
Was there a clear statement of aims of the research?		Study in the US. The aims of the research were to explore the experiences of a group of young activists as they were challenging institutional and cultural homophobia and gender normativity in their school. Students for all members of the GSA in a large secondary school in Wisconsin USA most of them identified as LGBTQ and performed nonconforming gender identities. There was an introduction about the GSA and the work that it did however there was not a clear statement of aims of the research or why it was important.
Is qualitative methodology appropriate?		Elliott conducted an ethnographic study across the course of 18 months. Qualitative

		methodology is appropriate as her study focused on students own experiences. Engaged in observation in formal and informal spaces.
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?		She observed participants but also conducted in-depth interviews with 15 students and then also conducted shorter interviews with 30 additional students she also have many informal conversations and lots of informal data.
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?		Participants were mostly white and represented a range of gender sexual social class and national identities. Participants for all members of the GSA she speaks about the participants and how there are a homogenous group racially but involved a range of different sexual and gender identities social classes and backgrounds. She does not identify how she selected the participants out of the YP attending the GSA.
Was the data collection in a way that addressed the research issue?		Elliott's intensive data collection is adequately explained and very rigorous in nature. Elliot provided a thorough explanation of how she supported the GSA in the meetings and in their events which was very involved.
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?		Elliott adequately explores her own identity aspects for example being a white woman who performs a relatively gender identity conforming female presentation and how her identity more aligned closely with people with power within the high school than those of the GSA members which was an interesting reflection. She was an ally of the group she thinks about how her active participation at times in the GSA may have affected how students not in the GSA perceived her. There could have been more explanation about how this impacted her formulation of the research questions and how this impacted her analysis and also the relationship she actually had with the participants outside of the research and surely this would have impacted what she found but this is not explored.
Section B: *What are the results?*		
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?		There is not any discussion of ethics nor around informed consent or confidentiality which should arguably have been a big topic given that she was effectively a member of staff there for 18 months but also a researcher in action so a deeper exploration of how she communicated

		this and how she sought consent from participants.
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?		Elliot explained that she took her fieldnotes her data that she gain through interviews and observations to create the analytic codes she used initial codes to organise the data looking for patterns and also then to guide further observations and interviews so the analytic process was closely tied to data collection. This aims to immerse her in a deep contextual understanding through the data collection and analysis which is in line with the goals of ethnographic research.
Is there a clear statement of findings?		Elliott's research demonstrates how the GSA can have an impact on the school wide basis including their projects to establish a gender neutral bathroom and also peer education presentations within the GSA which helps to identify, challenge and shift in attitudes behaviours and dominant discourses around gender and sexuality. There were many challenges given that the institution tended to reinforce categorisations and pre-existing understandings of binary genders and the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy. However there was still activism that happened and that succeeded even though there was many barriers including a lack of support from teachers and some hostility from peers.
Section C: *Will the results help locally?*		
How valuable is the research?		These findings are relatable to the present research and in other research there. However, there were little discussions around what next or how this related to the practice of policy or other research. Elliot did not identify any further areas of research or consider how much these could be transfers to other populations.

Valentine, S. (2020). College leaders: challenges and insights on creating a more inclusive campus.

				Comments
Section A: *Are the results valid?*				

Was there a clear statement of aims of the research?		US study. The purpose of the study was to carry out qualitative interviews to explore how the multiple identities of LGBTQ presidents of universities inform their leadership. An aim of the study was to hear from diverse LGBTQ University leaders on the challenges and their insights in creating more inclusive campuses. The study explored how college presidents LGBTQ identities intersected with other identities such as race and gender on the challenges and insights for creating a more inclusive.
Is qualitative methodology appropriate?		Yes this is seeking to illuminate the subjective experiences of LGBTQ university presidents qualitative research meets this aim because it allows participants to describe their perceptions and experiences providing rich data.
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?		Design is a qualitative Interview study. Valentine uses the theoretical framework of Intersectionality to view how marginalised group scan identities can intersect with others which can further propel inequalities.
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?		Decision-making process behind selecting university presidents as participants was discussed due to them having great authority in making change. There were 12 presidents in the study. All were current or former college presidents a member of the LGBTQ community and openly out on campus. Presidents were recruited from across the United States although most were from California.
Was the data collection in a way that addressed the research issue?		Interviews were the primary source of data collection in the study and there was also a demographic questionnaire that participants were asked to fill-in. An interview guide was used which was shared in the thesis and the interview was separated into five main topic areas which were leadership and mentoring, Intersectionality and identity, power and privilege, campus climate and inclusivity and legacy.
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?		Valentine explore some of the assumptions that she brought into the study such as thinking that some people are more

		privileged than other people based on identity characteristics. Valentine gave a very thorough exploration of her experiences in the different groups and identities that she inhabits and considered what it means to be a lesbian white woman who is a faculty member in a university. Valentine (2020) provides a deep reflection of her various identities and how these may have impacted her work, and how she examined her initial assumptions prior to the study, and discussed these with a peer.
Section B: *What are the results?*		
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?		Ethical considerations included ensuring participants were fully aware of the study prior to participation. Confidentiality was increased through various appropriate handlings of the sensitive information providing pseudonyms and reducing any and identifiable information.
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?		Valentine described a very thorough data analysis process which included five analysis process stages Intersectionality was used as the theoretical framework and lens through which to analyse the data. This process was adequately and intensively described by Valentine.
Is there a clear statement of findings?		This study found the experiences of othering lead to improvements in aspects of the educators characters such as improving their advocacy in their presence. They were able to walk the walk as change agents on their campuses. Leadership qualities that were described by participants where they need to advocate for a vulnerable populations pioneering as firsts in their institution having the peasants to lead during conflict and engaging in inclusive leadership approaches that bring about change and include voices that are typically excluded from conversations.
Section C: *Will the results help locally?*		
How valuable is the research?		Yes Valentine thoroughly explores the what next in terms of research how this links to

		policy practice and the literature and how this links to other communities and campuses.

Surette, T. E. (2019). Interrupting institutional heteronormativity: school counsellors' role in advocating for gender and sexually diverse students.

		Comments
Section A: *Are the results valid?*		
Was there a clear statement of aims of the research?		Yes the paper describes qualitative research with sex gender and sexually diverse young people in Canada. The aims of the paper were directed at school counsellors whom Surette argues are in a unique position to support gender and sexually diverse young people and interact some of the processes of heteronormativity in schools. Paper aims to provide some guidance for school counsellors in affecting positive change for these young people on both an individual level and a more systemic school wide level.
Is qualitative methodology appropriate?		Qualitative methodology was appropriate here especially within the narrative approach that this study took. Surette argued that lived experiences are the source of knowledge in line with narrative approaches which would really only include qualitative research.
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?		The study was a multi method qualitative inquiry involving narrative interviewing with secondary school students and discourse analysis of curriculum materials from the health subjects.
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?		This study employed purposive sampling techniques To recruit participants across five schools. Students of all genders and sexualities bro invited to participate which required parental consent. Recruitment involves teachers reading a recruitment script in their classes and posters around the schools including in school counsellors offices, and students were required to contact the researcher directly.
Was the data collection in a way that addressed the research issue?		Surette provides a thorough explanation of the interview strategies questions including well at questions that she asked and how her interviews were conducted. Participants were invited to return for another interview of which five of the 6 engaged. Two of the six participants had a third interview. Second and third interviews were

		participant lad so they just came with whatever they wanted to come to talk about. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim.
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?		Surette discussed how she supported participants to become comfortable in the interview settings through warmup relaxed questioning. She talks about how the participants or at least five of six of the participants said that they felt very moved by her interpretation of their narratives. However the researcher did not adequately considering her paper about how the relationship between her and her participants was experienced. She did not talk about any biases or how her own role influence the study data collection or analysis.
Section B: *What are the results?*		
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?		Ethical issues like parental consent were noted which was in line with the Canadian code of ethics for psychologists. However other ethical considerations such as impact on the participants and how she supported the process of informed consent was not explored.
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?		Analysis processes were touched upon including that she use a narrative method for the analysis the constant comparison and that she coded and re-coded throughout the collection phase. However there was a lack of exploration around how the analysis process happened how she chose certain themes and any kind of cognitive or emotional processes that the research and engaging whilst doing this.
Is there a clear statement of findings?		The findings are organised around the following three themes number one and normalisation of name-calling number to vulnerable spaces are number three the harm of heteronormativity. Name-calling was commonplace in schools and it was rarely highlighted. Vulnerable spaces were described as PE changing rooms and subject and toilets.
Section C: *Will the results help locally?*		
How valuable is the research?		Surette considered how this could link in with other schools and especially what school counsellors could do as a result which was a strength of the paper. However, links to policy/potential areas of future research were not explored.